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**SELF AS CIPHER:
LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN HOMER**

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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INTRODUCTION

Near the beginning of his second book, Herodotus notes a disagreement between himself and the Ionian Greeks concerning the geographical boundaries of Egypt. The Ionians believe that Egypt is confined to the area of the Nile Delta. Herodotus differs; he knows that the Nile Delta is alluvial land which has only recently appeared above water. The Egyptians, as is well known, are one of the most ancient of civilizations, and thus cannot have appeared on the earth so recently. But what is of interest to me is not the disagreement itself, but the manner in which Herodotus hints at a method of resolving it:

Εἰ ὧν ἡμεῖς ὀρθῶς περὶ αὐτῶν γινώσκομεν, Ἴωνες οὐκ εὖ φρονέουσι περὶ Αἰγύπτου. Εἰ δὲ ὀρθή ἐστι ἡ γνώμη τῶν Ἴωνων, Ἑλληνάς τε καὶ αὐτοὺς Ἴωνας ἀποδείκνυμι οὐκ ἐπισταμένους λογίζεσθαι, οἱ φασὶ τρία μόρια εἶναι γῆν πᾶσαν, Εὐρώπην τε καὶ Ἀσίην καὶ Λιβύην. Τέταρτον γὰρ δὴ σφεας δεῖ προσλογίζεσθαι Αἰγύπτου τὸ Δέλτα, εἰ μήτε γέ ἐστι τῆς Ἀσίας μήτε τῆς Λιβύης. Οὐ γὰρ δὴ ὁ Νεῖλος γέ ἐστι κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ὁ τὴν Ἀσίην οὐρίζων τῇ Λιβύῃ· τοῦ Δέλτα δὲ τούτου κατὰ τὸ ὄξυ περιρρήγνυται ὁ Νεῖλος, ὥστε ἐν τῷ μεταξὺ Ἀσίας τε καὶ Λιβύης γίνοιτ' ἄν. (II.16)

If, then, my judgement is correct, the Ionians are mistaken in their opinions about Egypt; if, on the other hand, the Ionians are right, I am ready to prove that neither they nor the rest of the Greeks know how to count: for they hold that the world consists of three parts - Asia, Europe and Libya - whereas it is obvious that they should add a fourth, namely the Egyptian Delta, since they do not include it in either Asia or Libya. According to their theory the Nile is the boundary between Asia and Libya; but the Nile splits at the apex of the Delta and flows round it, thus making it a separate tract of land lying between the two.

Herodotus appeals to a shared acceptance of the logic of counting. In a book which persistently explores the ways in which differing *nomoi* radically divide cultures, a common system of counting promises to provide a shared principle for Herodotus and the Ionians alike. *Logos*, in the form of quantification, seems to be

able to traverse cultural boundaries.¹ And yet Herodotus, in a rhetorical effort to emphasize the self-evidence of his position, uses a conditional phrase: *if* the Ionians are right, the Greek system of counting is wrong. This conditional opens up, for just a moment, a truly vertiginous possibility: what if the Greek system of counting itself, the cornerstone of the rule of *logos* is itself unreliable?² Herodotus opens up this possibility only to reject it out of hand. And yet things will not remain quite so simple; for if Herodotus takes the reliability of calculation for granted here, the workings of his own narrative of the Persian Wars will subvert his position. The Greek defeat of the Persians will not only be a victory for the numerically inferior forces of the Greeks; it will also be a victory for a certain sort of irrationality which willfully disregards any calculation of probability. Consider Demaratus' advice to the Persian leader Xerxes, when he elucidates the apparent madness of Spartan devotion to the law:

Ἄριθμοῦ δὲ περὶ μὴ πύθη ὅσοι τινὲς ἐόντες ταῦτα ποιέειν οἰοί τε εἰσι· ἦν τε γὰρ τύχῳσι ἐξεστρατευμένοι χίλιοι, οὗτοι μαχήσονται τοι, ἦν τε ἐλάσσονες τούτων, ἦν τε καὶ πλέονες... (VII.102.14ff)

Ἐλεύθεροι γὰρ ἐόντες οὐ πάντα ἐλεύθεροί εἰσι· ἔπεστι γάρ σφι δεσπότης νόμος, τὸν ὑποδειμαίνουσι πολλῶ ἔτι μᾶλλον ἢ οἱ σοὶ σέ· ποιέῃσι γῶν τὰ ἂν ἐκεῖνος ἀνώγει· ἀνώγει δὲ τούτῳ αἰεὶ, οὐκ ἔῶν φεύγειν οὐδὲν πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων ἐκ μάχης, ἀλλὰ μένοντας ἐν τῇ τάξει ἐπικρατέειν ἢ ἀπόλλυσθαι. Σοὶ δὲ εἰ φαίνομαι ταῦτα λέγων φλυηρέειν, ἀλλὰ σιγᾶν θέλω τὸ λοιπόν· (VII.104.17ff)

There is no use asking in asking if their number is adequate to enable them to do this [fight]; suppose a thousand of them take the field - then that thousand will fight you; and so will any number, greater than this or less..

¹For a useful summary of the importance of measurement in Greek culture, with particular emphasis on the Fifth Century B.C.E., see Lloyd 1989, chapter 5 *passim*.

²A question which lies at the heart of much of Platonic philosophy. Compare the apparent argument for the contingency of any act of quantification at *Phaedo* 10aff with the (seemingly) more optimistic faith in quantification at *Protagoras* 353aff (in the famous argument for a calculus of pleasures) and at *Republic* 525aff.

They are free - yes - but not entirely free; for they have a master, and that master is Law, which they fear much more than your subjects fear you. Whatever this master commands, they do; and his command never varies: it is never to retreat in battle, however great the odds, but always to stand firm, and to conquer or die. If, my lord, you think that what I have said is nonsense - very well; I am willing henceforward to hold my tongue.³

Not only do the Spartans pay no respect to questions of counting, they elevate this disrespect to the level of a law. Xerxes, of course, ignores Demaratus; he continues to place a confidence in his calculation of probabilities which proves to be misguided. What he seems to overlook is that there is something incalculable about human behavior which undermines any certainty in his own calculating skills. There are a range of complications, however. Demaratus' emphasis on the senselessness of the Spartan adherence to law, and therefore their incalculability, is itself made in the cause of calculability; he attempts to offer Xerxes rational advice in order to help him plan the future. More pointedly, the rigid adherence of the Spartans to their master, the Law, makes their behavior itself utterly predictable; but it is this predictability (they *always* fight, regardless of the circumstances), in the stupidity of its repetitiveness, which ends up undermining the attempts by their enemies to size them up rationally. The passage seems to suggest that adherence to any 'law' which promises a sense of order, when taken to a rigid extreme, begins to destabilize this rational, ordering aspect of the law. The stupidity of the Spartan adherence to order undermines any sense of order. I want to suggest that this questioning of the manner in which calculation, *logos*, functions is a fundamental feature of earliest Greek thought as it appears in the poems of Homer. For the Homeric poems not only question the reliability of any system of calculation, but also signpost the manner in which any system which tries to impose order, when

³Translation adapted from Sélincourt's Penguin edition.

rigidly adhered to for its own sake, begins to undermine the sense of order it promised to create.

But we can be more specific concerning the source of the disagreement between Herodotus and the Ionians concerning counting. It lies in the ambiguity of the Nile. For the Ionians, the Nile is merely a boundary separating Asia and Libya. For Herodotus, because of its Delta, it is a determinate area of land. Herodotus tries to resolve the ambiguous status of the boundary, presuming that it itself needs to be counted. Homer, I will argue, lingered over this ambiguity of the limit, and explored its significance. This has, in turn, crucial consequences for the Homeric conception of selfhood. For the ambiguity of the position of 'boundary' becomes a privileged metaphor for attempting to understand the difficulties of human agency within Homer. Should the agent who counts include him or herself as part of the field to be counted, or should she or he remain separate? One can 'calculate', rationalize certain aspects of the self, but what seems to remain outside of this calculation is the agent of calculation itself. This separation between the counter and the things counted implies a split in the Homeric self. It is possible to think of the self as an amalgam of predicates, a series of determinate qualities which constitute identity. But because the aspect of the self which calculates qualities remains separated from them, this determinate view of the self seems to be incomplete. Homer's implicit theory of the self, I suggest, has much in common with the rationalizing Herodotus. He too believes that a certain attitude toward counting can link human subjects across cultural divides. Yet they disagree on the essentials, for the link, for Homer, can only be a negative one. It lies in a collective ability to doubt the systems of counting which promise to regulate social norms. With this in mind, let us now turn to the Homeric self, and recent critical work on it.

An essential Homeric self?

Pietro Pucci has argued that the narrative of the *Odyssey* depends upon the notion of an 'immutable self': the poem 'dramatizes the voice of the inmost *being* in contrast with different *semblances*, and accordingly it displays semblances as momentary ways of disguising an immutable self.'⁴ Though his book makes use of a modern, Derridean critical vocabulary, this view of selfhood in the Homeric poems is quite conventional. Pucci bases his interpretation on Homer's belief in an irreducible kernel of the self which stays the same, regardless of the changes wrought by the outside world.

I argue that this view of selfhood is oversimplified. It overlooks the radically questioning nature of the Homeric poems, and the manner in which they challenge this notion of the self. Within the Homeric poems, such an 'immutable self' may be possible for immortals, but it is portrayed as impossible for mortals. What is constitutive of the human is not any belief in an immutable self, but rather the ability to doubt the validity and coherence of every external 'semblance'. The *Odyssey* suggests this by depicting a series of moments when quasi-divine beings - Proteus, the Cyclopes and Phaeacians - who most definitely do have a belief in an immutable self, begin to doubt its validity. They are left with a self which lacks any reliable, determinate characteristics - the revelation of a *ciphered self* - and in their loss of any sense of self, they experience what psychoanalysis calls 'subjective destitution'. This process is well described by Richard Rorty, in his discussion of the breakdown of Winston during torture in Orwell's *1984*. People go through

the ultimate humiliation of saying to themselves, in retrospect, 'Now that I have believed or desired *this*, I can never be what I hoped to be, what I thought I was. The story I have been telling myself about myself... no longer makes sense. I no longer have a self to make sense of. There is no world in which I can picture

⁴Pucci 1987, 81.

myself as living, because there is no vocabulary in which I can tell a coherent story about myself.⁵

It is this experience which, I argue, happens repeatedly in the *Odyssey*. The poem lingers over the moment when Homeric characters recognize the *contingency* of their identity, and thus are forced to face the fragile and ultimately illusory nature of any determinate notion of identity.

This is important for efforts to construct an ideology of Homeric society from the evidence of the poems themselves, a constructed 'ideology' which can then be too easily turned back on the poems to limit the parameters of critical debate. A typical 'historical' approach has generally consisted in attempts to construct (from the text) a 'real' society which forms the background against which the narrative of the poems are played out.⁶ A problem with such efforts at historical reconstruction is that they pay little heed to the complexities of the narrative of the poems; they proceed as if 'Homeric society' was a stable entity which the narrative (unthinkingly) describes, and thus try to avoid the difficult work of literary interpretation. But there is a deeper problem. For the working assumption of the influential text of Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, is that this stable world provides the context for a relatively stable (and comprehensible) Homeric self. Indeed Pucci's reliance on an 'immutable self', upon which the narrative supposedly depends and to which it always returns, is ultimately just a literary variation of the stable self fundamental to Finley's historical approach. If the stability of the self is granted, there is then an irresistible temptation to flesh out its details; it all too quickly becomes a biological self, which allows a fit with the aristocratic ideology which is certainly on display on the surface of the Homeric

⁵Rorty 1989, 179. Quoted in Zizek 1992, 162.

⁶Finley 1977 remains the most significant text, setting the parameters of debate for more recent attempts at finessing his insights; eg. Morris 1986. For an insightful discussion (and critique) of attempts at historical reconstruction of the poems, and the influence of Finley's model, see Wees 1992, Chapter 1.

narrative. We are now a short step away from seeing the poems as a 'mirror for princes'. By way of contrast, I want to suggest that Homer's narrative focuses on the instability of the self (an instability which ultimately depends on Homer's awareness of the impossibility of any self-identity for humans); this in turn destabilizes any determinate, stable social ideology which attempts to constitute that self.⁷

A much more sophisticated attempt at historical reconstruction of Greek society from the poems has been made by Wees.⁸ He emphasizes that the Homeric poems depict a coherent, *imagined* society of status warriors. He goes on to argue that this fantasy construction of a warrior society can still tell us much about the reality of Greek society in the eighth century B.C.E. The movement away from a dependence on determinate, real selves to fantasized selves is a significant advance. But we can take a further step. The Homeric narrative constantly questions the coherence of this social fantasy. It does so in two major ways. First, it lingers over the moment when an individual comes to doubt the sense of self which he/she previously relied upon, and thus confronts its ultimate contingency (demonstrated in chapter 2). Second, it shows how any ideology which attempts to provide complete, rational accounts of the functioning of a social world is doomed to failure (Chapters 3 and 4). I argue that Homer's working assumption is that there is certainly a temptation to believe in the coherence of this fantasized 'imaginary world' (the essence of the theory of Wees), but that this belief is ultimately illusory.

It is worth looking at an example of the critical 'slippage' from a stable self to a biological self, and then to an identification with aristocratic ideology. Consider Katz's remarks on the identity of Telemachus: '[T]he biological "fact" of his birth

⁷Of course it is not original to claim that the Homeric self is unstable, fragmented; Bruno Snell made the same argument long ago. I discuss Snell's views (and attempt to defend him from a powerful recent critique by Bernard Williams) in the following chapter.

⁸Wees 1992.

anchors his identity and provides the reference point for his assumption of the role of Odysseus' replacement'.⁹ Biology 'anchors' identity, which becomes the necessary reference point for the 'roles' which are played in the poem.¹⁰ There is an obvious tension here between biological 'fact' and 'role'. If, in order to be a son, Telemachus has to act out the role of a son, in what sense can this be *determined* by biology? One unhappy solution is to argue that, through the roles they play, aristocrats become what in some sense they already are. This is the working assumption of the work of Richard Martin, who reads the Homeric poems as an instruction manual for princes, who are meant to mimic the behavior of the *aristoi* on display in the poem so that they can follow in the footsteps of their fathers.¹¹ But if we sever the link between this acting out and the 'immutable self', a quite different picture of the ideology of the Homeric poems can emerge. For if the *aristoi* are engaged in a frantic effort to live up to an aristocratic ideal which they believe to be essential to themselves, but which the poem emphasizes is only contingently theirs, then we are forced to admit that the *aristoi* are engaged in an ongoing self-deception. It is worth emphasizing that, if my argument is right, this is not just an illusion structuring the lives of the Homeric heroes which can only be seen with a comfortable historical hindsight - a hindsight unavailable at the time of the Homeric poems themselves. Rather, the logic of Homeric narrative focuses upon the ongoing unraveling of this sort of self-deception - a subject's erroneous belief in a determinate, essential self.

This allows us to overcome the contradictions which lurk between Martin's overall theory of the implicit ideology in the poems and his subtle discussions of

⁹Katz 1991, 9.

¹⁰Katz's distrust of the term 'fact', placed in nervous quotation marks, I take to be evidence of a contemporary, postmodern distancing from what she takes to be a Homeric notion of 'biological identity'.

¹¹See Martin 1984, for an elegant elaboration of this idea.

individual episodes. Martin argues that the *Iliad* respects the 'mystery of divine speech', and portrays Zeus as the perfect rhetorician. This 'mystery' is ultimately what holds heroic ideology together. Yet, as Martin well realizes, Zeus' authority not only regularly fails (explained away as 'touches of realism') but is 'deconstructed'. As early as Book 2 of the *Iliad*, Zeus speaks with apparent accuracy to Agamemnon, telling him that the immortals have all agreed that he should sack Troy; in reality, there is utter discord among the immortals. Martin sensibly concludes that Homer 'demonstrates that *muthos* speech does not require truth so much as an effective representation'. But if the epic demonstrates the manner in which Zeus' power is itself nothing more than 'an effective representation', what room is left for mystery? Zeus' power is supposedly perfect, yet it often fails, and the audience knows that his supposedly 'authoritative' utterances are untrustworthy. At the very least, the narrative seems to be engaged in a questioning of the pretensions of power by explicitly staging its techniques and therefore inviting its readers to ponder why such deception might work.¹² But there is a deeper problem in Martin's argument, for what he presumes is evidence for the *success* of rhetoric (in the service of power) can just as easily be read as its *failure*. Consider the following comment on Zeus:

Zeus is above all the perfect rhetorician. His *muthoi* are precisely adjusted to his audience and, more remarkable, tend to vary in length depending on the distance they must travel, as if to compensate with increased detail for the greater potential of faulty transmission inherent in mediated messages.¹³

For Martin, the length of the messages makes up for the dangers of faulty transmission, and are therefore a sign of Zeus' power. But a simple change of

¹²An implicit invitation I accept in Chapters 4 and 5.

¹³Martin 1989, 51.

perspective can provide a different reading: why should a god *need* to lengthen his messages? The need of a supposedly all-powerful, perfect rhetorician to speak at length can just as easily be seen as an indicator of his own ultimate impotence, a lurking doubt that he is simply unable to control language. Even a god, insofar as he is in language, is immediately vulnerable to the possibility of deception.¹⁴ The increased distance between sender and receiver of a message merely makes this point clearer: the success of a message, regardless of the efforts of the speaker, is ultimately beyond his control.

We can improve on Martin's scheme. Though Zeus is not the perfect communicator, he believes himself to be so, and is engaged in an ongoing effort to appear as such. But because such perfect communication is impossible for any individual (for language is an irreducibly social phenomenon), his efforts can never be fully successful. For the ideal of 'perfect communication' will always depend on the efforts of others and thus be out of his control. Zeus' relation to language has wider implications for the poem as a whole, for every sense of self, every story told by a subject in an attempt to guarantee an identity, is ultimately vulnerable to the same possibility of deception. Since any story is necessarily a social story, any individual can only ever engage in an acting out of this socially constructed ideal. The Homeric poems, on my reading, not only showcase a series of attempts at effective self-representation by heroes, but critique those attempts by demonstrating their ultimate futility.

We have touched upon the central topic of the thesis, the relationship of language to identity. Chapter 2 explores this link in detail, and it forms the basis for the rest of my readings. I suggest that the *Odyssey* focuses on the moment when

¹⁴Indeed, as I explore, there is a contradiction between divine infallibility and the fallibility of language; to be in language, within the context of the Homeric poems, just means to be fallible. See in particular my discussion of Odysseus' encounter with the Cyclops in Chapter 2.

quasi-divine beings, who believed that they were immune to deception (and thus were not, in any significant sense, in language), are forced to question their infallibility and thus the immutability of their selves. But this is not just a temporary loss of self, which can later be recovered. Rather, it is part of a fall into human status which cannot be reversed. This loss of self-identity renders them vulnerable, both physically and mentally. Because of the depth of their yearning for a return to a (mythical) unity of the self, they can be easily manipulated. The *Odyssey* is, of course, a poem of deception; on my reading, deceivers play on the desire for wholeness, the self-identity of the deceived. Part of the paradox of 'being in language' is that one *desires* a self-identity, but that any belief that is self-identical is an illusion. Enlightenment in the Homeric poems comes at a high price; it involves a recognition of the contingency of what one believes is central to one's sense of self.

A concrete example from the *Odyssey*, discussed in detail later, clarifies my point. The Cyclopes are a species whose identity is centered upon the single eye on their forehead. When Odysseus blinds one of the species (Polyphemus), he is deprived of the feature which anchored his sense of self. The loss of the eye also coincides with a loss of Cyclopean immortality, and in turn renders the Cyclops vulnerable. In order to regain his eye, his sense of self, he is willing to do almost anything. It is this desperate situation which helps contribute to his eventual deception at the hands of Odysseus. This is an ongoing, identifiable pattern in the *Odyssey*.

Self-consciousness and enlightenment

Recent critical debates on the nature of the Homeric self have followed critical interest in the 'self-consciousness' of Homeric poetry.¹⁵ And yet despite a growing awareness of the literary subtlety and sophistication of the poems, there is still a critical reluctance to translate this poetic awareness into any ideological critique of Homeric society. 'Self-consciousness' would seem to offer the hope of a certain distancing from hegemonic ideological discourses, yet any such distancing is all too often denied. The influential work of Simon Goldhill is paradigmatic, for there is an uneasy fit between his acute critical awareness of the openness and complexity of the Homeric texts (and in particular the manner in which the reader is implicated in any construction of their meaning¹⁶) and his defense of their social conservatism. Here is his list of the aspects of hegemonic ideology which he believes are *not* challenged within the *Iliad*:

[T]hat the body is a sure sign of social worth; that social, intellectual and financial worth necessarily overlap; that authority over many is the prerogative of the few; that human agency is framed by divine control.¹⁷

I believe that all of these aspects of hegemonic ideology are challenged and my readings will try to prove it. But here, I will only suggest a theoretical approach which allows me to articulate this challenge. The challenge becomes possible if we see the Homeric poems as staging moments of self-consciousness within the narrative and then teasing out possible consequences which can ensue from these moments. Two questions are crucial here; what sort of 'self' is implied in any moment of 'self-consciousness', and what are the possible effects of this awareness of the self?

¹⁵The important work of Goldhill and Peradotto is symptomatic of this trend; I discuss both more extensively in the next chapter.

¹⁶See Goldhill 1991, Chapter 1, for a discussion.

¹⁷Goldhill 1995, 196.

Theodor Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey* in 'The Dialectic of Enlightenment' can help provide some answers:

Adorno had used the *Odyssey* to secure the almost lost traces of a primal history of subjectivity. The episodes in the wanderings of the one beaten in a double sense reveal the crises that the self, in the process of forming its own identity, experiences in itself and within itself. The cunning Odysseus escapes animistic charms and mythological forces; he evades ritually prescribed sacrifices by apparently subjecting himself to them. The intelligent deception of those institutions that uphold the connection between an overpowering nature and a mimetic, self-adapting, still diffuse self is the original Enlightenment. With this act a permanently identical I is formed and power is gained over a desouled nature. The I acquires its inner organizational form in the measure that, in order to coerce external nature, it coerces the amorphous element in itself, its inner nature. Upon this relationship of autonomy and mastery of nature is perched the triumphant self-consciousness of the Enlightenment. Adorno calls into question its undialectical self-certitude.¹⁸

The narrative of the *Odyssey*, for Adorno, turns on the effects of a moment of self-consciousness; Odysseus is able to separate himself from any organic link to the institutions which continue to link humans to nature, and this is the precondition for controlling nature. Adorno is interested in the dangers inherent to this moment. The joy and power of the moment of self-consciousness which separates humans from organic nature too easily turns into a triumphant, 'rational' self-affirmation which forgets that humans remain (for Adorno) organic creatures. The instrumental reason which initially promised to liberate the self from nature's barbarism ends up forgetting its own natural roots, and thus self-destructs.

Adorno's argument is implicitly based on a historical contrast; the wonder of self-discovery in Homer is contrasted with the destructive instrumental reason which dominates the ideologies of contemporary post-enlightenment societies, even

¹⁸Habermas 1983, 100.

as Adorno highlights their logical connection. But this split between control of nature and wanton destruction of it is also present within the Homeric poems themselves; we need only think of the contrast between the limited, regulated killing of Achilles before the death of Patroclus, and the transgressive, boundless slaughter he indulges in after the death. I suggest that we can understand the connection between self-consciousness and destructive self-affirmation if we see the latter as one reaction to the impasse of the former. Self-consciousness implies a doubting of one's determinate identity. In the case of Odysseus, he stands outside his determinate self and realizes that he can control it as well as nature. But this leads to a crisis precisely because it suggests that the determinate qualities of the self are ultimately contingent; to be aware that one can change the self is to be aware that any belief in an unchanging, determinate self is misguided. Exultation and crisis go hand in hand. Self-consciousness is simultaneously subjective destitution. Much of the fury Adorno detects in the fury of the affirmation of instrumental reason (and which, I argue in Chapter 5, can help us explain the wrath of Achilles) is a reaction to this crisis. The terrifying awareness of the incompleteness of the self (that one's identity is not *natural*, but constructed) can lead to a frantic attempt to make up for that incompleteness, which results in a savage parody of the promise of enlightenment. By lingering over this ambiguous moment of self-consciousness, the Homeric poems put on display both the contingency of social identities (and thus promise a distancing from hegemonic ideologies), and the dangers of the awareness of this. The majority of the dissertation provides readings of the Homeric poems which try to elucidate these points. But I begin, in the next Chapter, by grounding the analysis of identity in the Homeric poems with a discussion of recent critical work on the nature of the Homeric self.

CHAPTER 1

DUBITO ERGO SUM: HOMER'S DOUBTING SELF

The Homeric Greeks *doubted*. This is one common-sensical, but crucial consequence of Bernard Williams' philosophical examination of agency in the Homeric poems.¹ The poem does not lack a concept of intention, nor one of will - at least, not one which is philosophically tenable. Homer's heroes made decisions, which implies a moment of doubt prior to the decisions themselves. Williams' merit lies in the elegance of his defense of this simple proposition, and in the demolition of 'progressivist' writing on questions of selfhood in Homer which has sought to deny it. Progressivist critics, argues Williams, are caught in a vulgar, evolutionary mode of thinking. They judge the ethics of the Greeks by comparing them to what they believe (and here too, they are often mistaken) to be the more advanced ethics of the modern world. The presumed difference leads to a teleological narrative: the progressivists see in Homeric ethics the confused beginning of the long journey to contemporary enlightenment. It is this approach which leads to strange perversions of the evidence. Snell, for example, argues that Homer had no recourse to the concepts of 'choice' in decision-making: moments of indecision (where moderns expect acknowledgement of efforts of will) are supposedly described in terms of divine intervention.² Williams counters by noting that many decisions are made without divine intervention, that even intervening gods restrict themselves to the offer of advice while never deciding for the agent, and that the gods themselves make decisions without any external help.³

¹Williams 1993, Chapter 2, *passim*.

²Snell 20ff.

³Williams 28ff.

Williams' argument has the unsettling effect of returning us to what we share with the Greeks, in opposition to a contemporary critical trend which seeks to emphasize our difference.⁴ He seeks to chart the limitations of a certain historicizing criticism. His flattering remarks on Peter Brown's *The Body and Society* thus have the flavor of a manifesto: 'It is one of the merits of this remarkable book that its insight and learning enable one to understand what did happen, while preserving the sense that it might not have happened.' To preserve the sense of 'what might not have happened' is another way of affirming that the ancients doubted and made choices - a fact that unthinking, historicizing approaches ignore at their own peril. His discussion of the concept *akrasia*, weakness of will, underlines the danger. Williams questions the merit of categorizing an event in the past by use of the psychological category 'weakness of will':

The relevant descriptions of what happened are available, in many cases, only retrospectively, as part of an interpretation that establishes or reestablishes one's identifications and the importance of one reason rather than another. Consequently, whether an episode was an episode of *akrasia* at all may depend crucially on later understandings. A married man having an affair with another woman and trying to bring it to an end may find himself wavering in that attempt and seeing his lover when they had decided not to meet. If he ends up with his wife, he may well see those episodes as akratic. But if in the end he and his wife separate, and he goes to live with his lover, it may be that those episodes will count not as akratic, but rather as intimations of what were going to prove his truly stronger reasons.⁵

Here, *akrasia* functions as a retroactive attempt to obscure the contingency of the original moment of choice. We can add that it is the contingency of this moment of choice which provides the ongoing possibility of always re-explaining it in terms of

⁴Williams 15ff.

⁵Williams 45.

present identifications. Yet if Williams' philosophical examination of Homeric decision-making affirms Homeric subjects as doubting subjects, it stops short of examining the way the poem itself reflects on this doubt.⁶ Though Williams affirms that Homer's characters are, in philosophical terms, perfectly good agents who doubt, deliberate and then decide, he stops short of examining Homer's interest in the difficulties and problems of the process. Williams tries to demonstrate that there are a series of assumptions about agency which Homer takes for granted, and without which it is impossible to make any sense out of the poems. By way of contrast, I want to argue that these 'assumptions' about agency are not merely taken for granted, but reflected upon and critiqued. We agree that it is not a question of the conceptual moral terms Homer *lacked*; but I want to shift perspective, suggesting that we can read the poems as an exploration of the difficulties inherent to the moral vocabulary which is his backdrop. A crucial aspect of my argument, especially in the next chapter, is the importance of doubt in the process - as constitutive of the human. For an agent to reflect on his or her decision-making process, and its possible failure, is an implicit acknowledgement of a less-than-divine status.⁷

There is undeniable value in much of Williams' polemics against the progressivists; yet what he is in danger of missing is the validity of some of their more general observations, which somehow get lost in the force of his eloquent critique of them. He argues against Snell's view of the Homeric self as fragmented, a mere sum of body parts without any conception of unity.⁸ He claims that Snell

⁶This is hardly a criticism of Williams, as it is, explicitly, not his purpose.

⁷This seems to conflict with an obvious feature of Homeric poems: that the gods themselves deliberate, make choices. This is indeed an ongoing contradiction between divine pretensions of omnipotence and their physical and mental limitations; the interesting question, however, is to what extent Homer probed this contradiction. In the next chapter, I look in detail at the careful representation of a series of divine figures in an attempt to show that Homer was aware of the (mortal) fallibility on display in any choice.

⁸Snell chapter 1, *passim*.

misses the most obvious of unities, 'the living person himself',⁹ and seeks to explain Snell's error by his Cartesian prejudices; since Snell (in his progressivism) expects to find a soul/body dualism he looks for nothing else, and thus misses the more obvious unity of the person as such. But one can hold onto the idea of an agent without jettisoning the idea of a fragmented body; Snell's argument need not be followed in its entirety, but we can certainly pause over the lack of a single signifier for the 'body' in the Homeric poems, even as we agree with Williams that this lack is not because Homer was unaware of the concept. It is also significant that despite Williams' skepticism about dualistic theories of selfhood, his own language betrays a duality: 'If, then, Homeric man does not "decide for himself", it is not because he has no self to decide for, or from.' The phrase 'decide for himself' is placed in nervous quotation marks, and it is not difficult to see why. For the structure of the sentence already splits the individual into a 'self', and a (presumably separate) agency who decides on behalf of this self.¹⁰ It is this split which brings us uncannily close to the linguistic split in the nature of 'I' suggested by Benveniste, and later appropriated by Jacques Lacan.¹¹ This split differentiates between the speaking subject, subject of the enunciation, and the spoken subject, subject of the enunciated. The 'self decided for' coincides with the enunciated, the agent of decision coincides with the shifting 'I', the subject of enunciation. I argue that this split can be helpful for understanding the Homeric poems, and I will have recourse to it throughout. It allows us to salvage the merits of some of the observations of the progressivists, while rejecting their more patronizing aspects.

⁹Williams 24.

¹⁰Williams 28. Of course the quotation marks also signpost Williams' awareness of the difficulties of expressing his thesis of the unity of the person within our existing vocabulary (itself marked, he argues, by the dualist thinking he opposes). Much of Williams' other work is concerned with proving this 'unity of the person'. See in particular the opening chapters of Williams 1973.

¹¹Lacan 1977, 136ff.

Rather than dismiss the fragmentation of the body noted by Snell and its relationship to the lack of autonomy of a Homeric self, we can locate this fragmentation at the level of the enunciated. The Homeric mode of describing fragmented bodies would then enact (as it describes) a commonplace of contemporary critical theory: subjects are 'written', caught up in the competing discourses of the social world. This allows us to ask some very different questions from the ones posed by Williams; consider his concluding argument for the 'unity' of the Homeric person, which discusses the death of the hero Kebriones:

Above all [the implied psychology of the poems] depends precisely on the unity that I have been claiming for their characters: the unity of the person as thinking, acting, and bodily present; the unity of the living and the dead. It is all compressed into the death of the hero Kebriones, for instance, one of many, around whose body the battle raged on,

but he lay in the whirling dust, mightily in his might,
having forgotten all his horsemanship.¹²

Williams' example of Kebriones does indeed 'compress' a great deal of things which are central to the Homeric narrative; for this reason, it is perhaps worth trying to unpack this unity. At the point of death, there is a dissolution of Williams' unity of the person. And yet Homer here chooses to express this dissolution not in terms of a separation of body from soul, but by separating the body of the hero from the key symbolic quality which helped define him: the horsemanship left him. What is of interest is that this biological death does something which can, in principle, happen in social life: one can lose the qualities that made one's life meaningful, a situation which repeatedly recurs in Homer.¹³ The point is a simple one: the unity of the person which, in this example, dissolves in death, can also dissolve in life. There is a great deal at stake here; for, in an

¹²Williams 49.

¹³Again, discussed in the next chapter - though the self-doubt of Achilles is perhaps the most obvious example.

important sense, it is the hope of Homeric heroes that this link between symbolic qualities and person (of horsemanship to Kebriones, in Williams' example) will last beyond death: this is the allure of *kleos*, fame. Kebriones is split from his horsemanship in death; but this narration of the split continues to identify the two as it implicitly accepts a definition of the living Kebriones as a good horseman. Even as he dies and his person is dissolved, the narrative allows a certain unity to continue; it preserves a unified memory of him as 'Kebriones the horseman'. But the 'compressed' structure here provides the contours for a much more painful splitting of the living person. What if the loss of the symbolic quality occurs *before* biological death? What then would be left of Kebriones?

Williams seeks to subsume the fragmentation of the body of the agent - subject to the discourses of the social - under the rubric of the person rather too quickly. It is the significance of the interaction of these discourses with the Homeric agent which is the key theme in the work of Arthur Adkins.¹⁴ Adkins is far from an unsophisticated denier of the existence of a concept of choice in the Homeric world: he merely chooses to emphasize the relative fragility of the individual in the face of the social world. Consider the following comments on Homeric man:

He is always 'up against it', judged in terms of his successes and failures; further the sanction is overtly 'what people will say', and over this he has no control, and he cannot set his own consciousness of his self and its value against the estimation of his fellows, since his self has only the value which they put on it. In these circumstances he can and does have intentions, from plans, make choices, but these are not the most important aspect of the situation in his eyes (or anyone else's).¹⁵

¹⁴Adkins 1970, which reworks much of the material from his earlier book, *Merit and Responsibility*.

¹⁵Adkins 41.

In terms outlined above, Adkins (to translate into my terms of reference) emphasizes the subject of the enunciated, and plays down the importance of a subject of enunciation. The particular social circumstances in the Homeric world mean that the vast majority of life is 'non-reflective'; though people are capable of reflection, they rarely do reflect. Adkins does think the Homeric Greeks had some concept of agency, but because of the harshness of social conditions, it is emptied out of much of its significance. I think Adkins greatly underestimates the reflectiveness of the poem, and its exploration of the interaction between the social world and the subject. But his depiction of the single individual at the mercy of the multitude of social forces surely represents an important aspect of the Homeric world. Adkins sees a multiply written individual, subverting his status as an individual, a unified 'one'. In contrast, Williams argues for the autonomy of the self (in the 'living person'), while ignoring the relationship of this unified self to the multiple social forces which surround it.¹⁶ What follows is an attempt to reconcile these positions.

Self as cipher: the return of the invisible man

A solution to the enigma of the relation between the one person and the multiplicity of social forces is hinted at in a suggestive passage in which Williams critiques Snell's view of a fragmented body:

He is fond of saying, for instance, that if the Homeric Greeks did not recognise a certain item, then that item 'did not exist for them', a form of expression that is almost certain to produce some error or other. 'Of course the Homeric man had a body exactly like the later Greeks,' he writes, 'but he did not know it *qua* body, but merely as the sum total of his limbs. This is

¹⁶It is worth remembering, however, that Williams' disregard of this issue largely stems from his polemical stance against the progressivists.

another way of saying that the Homeric Greeks did not yet have a body in the modern sense of the word'; and one can only ask in what sense of the word Homeric man did 'of course' have a body. These unhappy formulations do play some role in the argument: they encourage the idea that since the body did not exist for Homeric man, a space is left where it should have been, and unless Homeric man was the Invisible man, this space must have been filled by something, and that what it was filled by was the set of its parts.¹⁷

Much of this is surely correct. There are deep problems in Snell's arguments from silence which too quickly posit the lack of ethical concepts. But the problem lies elsewhere. Once more, for all his protestations at the danger of dualistic, Cartesian thinking, it is far from clear what exactly this 'one' thing is which is a composite of parts. Is it, for example, just a 'body', or is it the 'whole person'?¹⁸ The Homeric Greeks, without the aid of Descartes, certainly had a working use of both concepts, and an ability to distinguish them, and it is not progressivist to say so. But more troubling is the ease with which Williams presumes that the 'single' thing (whether body *or* person) is logically prior to the parts that constitute it. There is now a rather long list of critiques of a humanist tradition which believed it could take for granted the 'one' thing that was the person; the critiques have relentlessly exposed that the supposedly neutral depiction of the 'one' thing that is the 'human' (a 'one' thing which can supposedly be universally agreed upon) involves a host of cultural and ideological assumptions. To mention but one aspect of this, which Williams' rhetoric replays, the 'person' has too often been conflated with 'man'. But yet more significant is the certainty with which Williams clings to this 'one' thing. In an argument which re-affirms the existence of doubt in the Homeric universe, what is the relationship of 'doubt' to

¹⁷Williams 1993, 25.

¹⁸Williams has elsewhere argued that the notion of personal identity depends upon the continuity of a single body: see the second chapter of Williams, 1973.

the single 'thing' that does double duty as both body and person? Can one have the working use of a concept (person, body) without being *sure* that it is an adequate representation of reality?

This moment of uncertainty is worth lingering over. For there is a tension between the ability of a person to doubt and the apparent certainty of the 'one' thing that is the unified person - a tension which runs throughout Williams' argument, causing a series of difficulties. In his efforts to elucidate the inconsistency of Snell's position, Williams unwittingly ascribes to Snell a logic which is unthinkable for his schema. He asks us to imagine a gap into which Snell's body fragments are inserted, only to dismiss this as heralding the return of the Invisible man. But this gap between parts and whole is unthinkable for Snell precisely because there is no room for *doubt* in his theory. To suggest anything prior to the parts suggests a moment of reflection by the agent describing them, a moment when the speaker realizes that his language is not neutral description, but performative. Rather than merely speaking of what was already there, the speaker would be *writing* the space where the body will only later (by this very act) come to be. Yet if the idea of an invisible man is impossible for Snell, it need not be for us; nor was it for Homer. For it is only through its preservation that a spirit of non-dogmatic contestation over what a self is can be maintained. To say anything determinate about the self (to say, for example, that it is unified) is to enter a contest in language. To return to the enunciation/enunciated split, it is to enter the realm of the enunciated and to abandon the indeterminacy of the shifting 'I' of enunciation, the realm of doubt. It is the indeterminacy of the latter which guarantees the inevitable failure of any ability to speak the unity of the self entirely. Accordingly, we can certainly speak of an invisible man prior to the discourses that constitute him, or more accurately, a self which is *not* one because it can never be fully spoken, attain the self-identity implied in one-ness. To rescue this invisible man is to affirm that any outcome of

the particular blend of competing discourses which constitute a person is subject to doubt.

It may also go some way toward understanding the lack of a signifier for the unified self, the 'person', in Homer. Homer did not make use of such a signifier because the view of selfhood explored in the poems has no need of one; for Homer, to say anything about the self is already to enter the competing social discourses which construct the self. The Homeric self becomes a blank page, upon which social discourses are written. This does not mean that Homeric subjects are merely victims of social discourses, for the possibility of a negative identity (a ciphered self) allows the possibility of reflecting back upon the discourses that construct such a self. This notion of negative identity is far from an anachronistic one. For I will argue that the *Odyssey* does indeed portray societies which have an immutable, fixed idea of the 'person': the Phaeacians and Cyclopes. It is precisely because of this immutable version of person-hood that they are civilizations without doubt, and thus not properly human. The poem also has a name for Williams' Invisible man: it lies in the complexities of the figure of Outis, the name 'No-one' which Odysseus adopts in order to trick the Cyclops.

To clarify, we can return once more to Adkins' influential thesis on the competitive aspect of Homeric culture. Adkins describes a zero-sum game of competition. Homeric heroes take part in a competition to be the best, *aristos*, knowing full well that only one can be the best. Two crucial modifications need to be made here; it should first be noted that the zero-sum game described by Adkins is a *patriarchal* game. The fight to be *aristos* coincides with a fight for paternal authority, to be the single head of the *oikos*. This zero-sum struggle is crucial for an understanding of much of the tension between the absent father Odysseus and Telemachus, who emerges as a potential father in the opening books of the poem. It is also important for an understanding of the civilizations of the Phaeacians and

Cyclopes which, I will argue, are fantasized societies where no tension exists between father and son. But it is also crucial to affirm the contingent nature of what *aristos* is. For whoever the 'best' man is, he is only ever a temporary representative of an absent ideal. If this were not the case, there could be no doubt, no reflection within the society. This unreflective situation, as we will see, also describes the civilizations of the Cyclopes and the Phaeacians before Odysseus' arrival. The Phaeacians' are supremely self-confident both in their belief that they are 'best', and that they know what it means to be best. The Cyclopes turn their back on the society where such values are contested. Neither species doubts.

The Man in the Middle Voice

The notion of self as cipher has been extensively explored in the work of John Peradotto. Peradotto's narratological reading of the *Odyssey* explicitly links the indeterminate, 'degree-zero' figure of Outis with a free self. It is because of the extensive overlap between my view of the poem and Peradotto's that his text (and critiques of it) require some discussion. In particular, I will try to argue that theoretical progress can be made by replacing Peradotto's narratological analysis with a psychoanalytical one. If I emphasize my disagreements in what follows, this should not obscure the magnitude of my debt.

Here are Peradotto's concluding remarks on the topic of selfhood in the *Odyssey*:

In the self-consciousness of his art, the story-teller creates a subject at once *polytropos* and *outis*, a secret base for open predication, rather than a determinate sum of predicates, and thus presents a paradigm of the

self as capable, dynamic, free, rather than fixed, fated, defined.¹⁹

Peradotto assimilates 'Outis' to the 'degree zero', the zero-point from which all narratives begin. It is this optimistic moment of pure possibility which forms such a crucial part in his Bakhtinian reading of the poem as a conflict between the realms of freedom and necessity. Forces within the narrative which Peradotto at first describes as 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' (which themselves correspond to somber narratives of 'myth' and happy-ever-after tales of 'fairy tale') become assimilated to the narratives of Odysseus as 'Outis' (No-one) and Odysseus as 'polytropos'. The latter seeks to inscribe the subject in discourse, in ideology, the former forever evades such inscription. The flexibility of this provocative formulation is more than able to deal with simplistic critiques; to provide one example of this, here is the objection of Crotty:

The definitionless individual Peradotto describes seems perfectly empty and without content: without memory, without deep and abiding desires, without loyalties or commitments. This is far indeed from the Odysseus who undertakes to return to Ithaca and Penelope.²⁰

This criticism misfires because the 'loyalties' and 'commitments' it seeks to impose upon Odysseus are already part of Peradotto's mythic narrative; for Crotty, these failings are unassailably genuine, unique to Odysseus, but for Peradotto they cannot be separated from the classifying realm of social discourse. Crotty cannot quite bring himself to sever Odysseus from the politics of the *oikos*, with all its implications for a hierarchized ideology of gender. He therefore backs away from Peradotto's split between *Outis* and *polytropos*. Such a reading (a denial of the power of the negative to put on hold every identity) is ultimately thoroughly conventional. Crotty clings to a determinate notion of desire; the adjectives 'deep'

¹⁹Peradotto 1990, 169.

²⁰Crotty 1994, 170.

and 'abiding' are hardly more than substitutes for 'conventional' masked as 'eternal' or 'natural', which in turn means that gendered identities remain firmly in place. Odysseus' 'deep' desire is, for Crotty, a desire for his *oikos*. But insofar as this desire is thoroughly conventional, it is far from clear why it is unique to Odysseus. Of course, it would be foolish to deny the importance of the dominant ideology of the *oikos* for an interpretation of the poem; Peradotto certainly does not, nor do I. The crucial question is the extent to which the 'centrifugal' narrative continually exposes this *as* an ideology.²¹

The difficulty of Peradotto's scheme lies elsewhere. It lies in his privileging of the synchronic over the diachronic; this privileging is defended in his introduction, and is adhered to throughout: 'The analysis of a system, or the synchronic approach, is logically prior to a diachronic approach because systems are more intelligible than changes.'²² The effect of this procedure can be seen in perhaps the most crucial phrase from the passage quoted above; for in what sense can any narrative depict a subject which is polytropic and *Outis at once*? This is contradicted by Peradotto's own language, as he talks of narratives which *develop from the degree zero*. Any co-existence of the narratives can only occur at *different* times; we can return to Williams' analysis of *akrasia* to illustrate this. Williams' argument exposed the manner in which a contingent decision is made to appear retroactively as irrational. There is thus a process of catching up, as language tries to assimilate a contingent act that was at first unassimilable. It is this 'catching up' which is necessary in order to maintain the utopian possibility of the narrative of 'Outis'. For insofar as anything is fully subject to language (narrative of *polytropos*) there can be no left-over. 'Outis' is dependent on a delay. It is this gap

²¹The suggestion implied by Peradotto's absorbing Bakhtinian reading of Demodocus' tale of Ares and Aphrodite is that the poem's challenge to sexual hierarchy runs deep. Peradotto reads Hermes' affirmation of a rank 'immorality' - adultery with Aphrodite - as part of the centrifugal narrative.

²²Peradotto 13.

which characterizes the relationship between language's attempts to classify and the 'utopian' impulse suggested by the unclassifiable. Language always seeks to catch up with that which remains unassimilable, and it is this delay which provides breathing space for a (doubting) subject.²³ The temporal gap guarantees that the split between the subject of enunciation and enunciated subject is constitutive.

The failure to take this into account leads Peradotto into an assortment of difficulties. For example, he quotes, with approval, Alcinous' claim (*Od.*8.552ff) that no-one is nameless: 'Everyone is born into a social context, named, classified, located in society before one has any say in the matter of his claim about Phaeacia'. I will later argue that this utterance of Alcinous, when viewed in its context on Phaeacia, is much more complex. For now, it is worth noting the uneasy manner in which such 'necessity' fits with Peradotto's evocation of freedom. Language's claim to omnipotence is *prima facie* implausible for psychoanalysis, which has a specific name for those who are impervious to the powers of language as a classifying system: psychotics. This will prove crucial for my later interpretation of Odysseus' interactions with the Cyclopes. There are also good reasons why it should seem implausible within Greek culture. In Plato's *Protagoras*, for example, there is reflection on the notion that the madman defines the limits of the shared discourse of society.²⁴ But there is also evidence in the peculiarities of the process of naming itself. The Greeks carefully preserved a gap between the birth of a child and its naming,²⁵ which in turn seems to be related to their obsession with the

²³The specific nature of this doubt, and its relationship to self-consciousness, will be considered in greater detail below, especially in my discussion of the tricking of Proteus in *Odyssey* 4.

²⁴See *Prot.* 323a-b, where Protagoras suggests that the person who does not even pretend to be just is considered mad.

²⁵On the Amphiromia, the ceremony of naming, see Vernant 1983, chapter 5. More generally, on the social anxieties on display at the birth of a child in the ancient world, Hanson 1994. There is further evidence for an obsessive interest in the origins of language in the *bekas* experiment of Herodotus (*Hdt.*2.2ff), where Psammetichus seeks an original language.

innocent world of the child before it has entered language.²⁶ Of course, Peradotto's description of this 'necessity' of language is meant to be countered by the utopian half of his scheme. But what is missing, and is sorely needed in order for the narrative levels of 'Outis' and 'polytropos' to co-exist, is a theory of their interaction.

This opens Peradotto up to deconstructionist objections, objections which need not prove fatal to his wider project. Consider the following attack on Peradotto by Lynn-George, which I quote at length:

While making much play upon that much turned term *polytropos*, Peradotto seeks to recuperate everything for one man. (In this process, as throughout, Peradotto elides a distinction between *many* and *any* meaning 'all'.) How do we arrive at a single metaphor in which we can see narrative's generative process? 'This will manifest itself in a variety of concrete ways, as for example even on a purely verbal and formulaic level, by endowing Odysseus, among all male figures, with a virtual monopoly of epithets in *polu-*' (155). In this comment it is a little surprising to find that a 'variety of concrete ways' in the linguistic text includes 'even' the 'purely verbal'. But why a 'virtual monopoly'? And why indeed a *monopoly* in a study which espouses and pursues *polytropy*? And why only 'among all male figures' ('all' and yet only 'male')? Once more there is a considerable reduction of all the epic work in language, particularly that specifically epic exploration of the resonances and significance of *polu-*, even when where the epic knows and yet so often refrains from *pan-*. And 'all' because for this mode of criticism, 'polytropy' must ultimately be the monopoly, the exclusive property, of the unique individual.

There is much of value in this criticism, together with much that is unfair.

The reason for the narrative's avoidance of 'pan-' conforms to the nature of language as an *indefinite* sequence. But it is the indefiniteness of this sequence (the

²⁶As evidence, consider only the interaction between Ajax and his child (Sophocles' *Ajax* 545ff.). Ajax suggests a link between a childish innocence and ignorance of the world of social discourse.

ongoing possibility of saying something more) which allows us to confirm the integrity of the negative, Outis. Here, I preview a classic Lacanian feint to which I will shortly return.²⁷ If Lynn-George is right to emphasize the way the realm of the 'many' of language falls short of the 'all', we can nevertheless make a definite judgement on the *impossibility* of totalizing. It is precisely because of the certainty of the inability to 'say it all' that we can conceive of a subject as 'Outis', which every 'one' in the sequence of signifiers (or *tropoi*) tries but fails to encapsulate. The epic avoids 'pan-', for if speaking 'all' was possible its characters would indeed have statuses as self-identical 'ones'. If Peradotto fudges this, it is in large part because of his privileging of the synchronic over the diachronic. Yet it is surely in the spirit of his work to see 'Outis' as a metaphor for the subject as such (or at least the subject's potential), rather than any unreflective privileging of the single hero.

Lynn-George does, however, latch onto a failure of nerve on the part of Peradotto as he seems to reduce the realm of the metaphor of Outis to *male* subjects. The equivocation carries with it the suggestion that for all the freedom from identity implied by the degree-zero of Outis, gendered identities stay in place. It suggests a further contradiction: how can an absolute lack of identity be equated with a specific, gendered identity? I will have much to say about the privileged relationship of gender and identity in chapter 7, where I argue that it is Penelope who ultimately comes closer to encapsulating the utopian figure of the negative identified with Odysseus-Outis by Peradotto.²⁸ But first, let us look in detail at the manner in

²⁷In my discussion of Proteus, below.

²⁸Though I leave the substantive arguments concerning gender in the Homeric poems until the final chapters, it is worth previewing my difference with Peradotto here. Peradotto implicitly thinks of gender as an attribute of the self, and as a sign of a determinate identity. In contrast, I argue that a competing Greek theory of gender (explicit in Hesiod, but also known to Homer) considered gender to be no more than the sign of the impossibility of self-identity of any subject, of a splitting of self from other.

which the *Odyssey* reflects upon the human construction of a self. In the following chapter I suggest that it does this by depicting the moment when quasi-divine, infallible figures doubt for the first time. Proteus, the Cyclopes and the Phaeacians are all species who have an unerring belief in their own symbolic identities; all three fall victims to tricks which cause them to question this. The narrative leaves them at the terrifying moment when the stories they told about themselves no longer make sense, when any determinate sense of self is replaced by the zero of a ciphered self. It is this moment which heralds their emergence as human subjects.

CHAPTER 2

THE ORIGINS OF SUBJECTIVITY

The subjectivization of Proteus

If the *Odyssey* truly has a conception of the self as cipher, an ability to question the assumption of any identity, is this also true for gender? Gender offers a particularly important test case insofar as one's gendered identity can easily appear certain, natural. We will discuss the ramifications of this more fully in Chapters 6 and 7. But we can begin to explore it by asking an unconventional question of a second, polytropic figure in the poem, Proteus. What gender is Proteus? At first look the answer is obvious: he is a man, the Old Man of the Sea, father of his daughter Eidothea. His appearance in *Odyssey* 4 appears equally straightforward. Eidothea deceives her father by persuading Menelaus and his men to disguise themselves as seals. Yet this obvious deception is far more complicated than meets the eye, and its complications will bring us back to the problem of identity. Driven off course to Egypt, Menelaus is at a loss how to continue his *nostos* until Eidothea suggests that Proteus himself will give him directions. The catch is that Menelaus must first capture this polytropic figure. As luck would have it, she herself has a suggestion as to how he should go about it:

At the time when the sun has gone up to bestride the middle of heaven,
 then the ever-truthful Old Man of the Sea will come out of the water
 under the blast of the West Wind, circled in a shudder of darkening
 water, and when he comes out he will sleep, under hollow caverns,
 and around him seals, those darlings of the sea's lovely lady,
 sleep in a huddle, after they have emerged from the gray sea,
 giving off the sour smell that comes from the deep salt water.
 There I will take you myself when dawn shows and arrange you
 orderly in your ambush; you must choose from your companions
 those three who are your best beside your strong strong-benched vessels.
 Now I will tell you all the devious ways of this old man.
 First of all he will go among his seals and count them,

but after he has reviewed them all and noted their number,
 he will lie down in their midst, like a herdsman among his sheepflocks.
 Next, as soon as you see that he is asleep; that will be
 the time for all of you to use your strength and vigor, and hold
 him there while he strives and struggles to escape you. (*Od.*4.400-416)

The tale raises a range of themes which are crucial for the poem as a whole.

There is the theme of deception, which structures Odysseus' interaction with both the Cyclopes and Phaeacians. But equally interesting is the parallel between the protean Proteus and Odysseus. For Proteus, like Odysseus, is polytropic; when attacked, he has the ability to alter his appearance in order to scare off his attacker (by turning into an array of wild animals, a lion, bear etc.). Yet polytropic Odysseus seems to be the deceiver *par excellence*, while Proteus is a victim of deceit in *Odyssey* 4. If the similarity of these episodes of trickery invites a comparison between the two polytropic characters, we are left with a troubling question: what is it that differentiates Odysseus from Proteus, deceiver from deceived?

Let us look more closely at the trick. Menelaus seems to elude the grasp of Proteus because Eidothea hides them with seal skins, a scheme in turn made possible by the ambrosia she gives them to help mitigate the terrible stench of the animals (*Od.*4.445ff). Proteus would then be fooled because he counts Menelaus and his companions as seals, not humans. However, this conventional interpretation fails to account for the emphasis the story puts on numbers: Proteus always *counts* his seals; Eidothea is careful to specify that Menelaus choose three companions. Further, the misrecognition of Menelaus and his men because of their disguises does nothing to explain a more obvious difficulty; for if Proteus is careful to count his seals as they come out of the water, why does he not notice that there are four extra, the disguised Menelaus and his men?

The answer lies in Proteus' arithmetic, and Eidothea's ability to manipulate it. First, we should note that Proteus counts in a specific manner, highlighted by Eidothea herself:

φώκας μὲν τοι πρῶτον ἀριθμήσει καὶ ἔπεισιν·
αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν πάσας πεμπάσεται ἠδὲ ἴδηται,
λέξεται ἐν μέσσησι, νομεὺς ὡς πάεσι μῆλων. (*Od.*4.411-13)

First of all he will go among his seals and count them,
but after he has reviewed them all and noted their number,
he will lie down in their midst, like a herdsman among his sheepflocks.¹

Proteus counts in *fives*.² When he calculates the presence/absence of his group of seals, he does not do so by cumulatively calculating their number (nor do we ever find out how many seals he has), but rather by ensuring that they make up a multiple of five. This might point toward an obvious way to trick Proteus: if five seals are added to his flock (or indeed if five are taken away), his form of counting would not help him detect this. Yet this is not the whole of the trick Eidothea uses; she is specific that Menelaus must choose only three other companions to join him. Her trick is more subtle, and will tell us much about the nature of *polytropy*. Let us look at the lines which highlight Proteus' counting of the mixture of seals and disguised seals:

ἔνδιος δ' ὁ γέρον ἦλθ' ἐξ ἀλός, εὖρε δὲ φώκας
ζατρεφέας, πάσας, δ' ἄρ' ἐπώιχετο, λέκτο δ' ἀριθμόν·
ἐν δ' ἡμέας πρώτους λέγε κήτεσιν, οὐδέ τι θυμῶι

¹Note how the simile, νομεὺς ὡς πάεσι μῆλων, signposts the connection to the tricking of Polyphemus in *Odyssey* 9, where a real shepherd will be deprived of his flocks. The similarity of the two tricks is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

²'πέμπε' is *Aeolic* for 'πέντε'. See Stanford, *ad loc*. The meaning of the word is obscure enough to merit comment by the scholiasts: 'κατὰ πεντάδας μετρήσι, ἀριθμήσει. πεμπάζειν γὰρ λέγεται τὸ κατὰ πεντάδας μετρεῖν. παρὰ δὲ τοῖς Δωριεῦσι πέμπε τὰ πέντε κατονομάζονται.' (A) κατὰ πέντε ἀριθμήσει. τὰ γὰρ πέντε πέμπε λέγουσιν Αἰολεῖς. (P.Q.) *LSJ* (*ad loc*) strengthens the likelihood that 'πεμπάσεται' means 'count in fives' by appealing to 'counting on one's fingers' - of which there are, for most people, five. There is no verb τεσσαράζω for 'counting in fours', though there is a verb τριάζω for counting in threes, which seems to be associated with wrestling and '3 falls' required for victory. This suggests that 'πεμπάσεται' does not mean 'number every 5th one'. I am grateful to Ann Hanson for pointing this out to me.

ώισθη δόλον εἶναι· ἔπειτα δὲ λέκτο καὶ αὐτός. (*Od.*4.450-453)

At noon the Old Man came out of the sea and found his well-fed seals, and went about to them all, and counted their number, and we were among the first he counted; he had no idea of any treachery. Then he too lay down among us.

What is important in these lines is the explicit pun on the Greek verbs 'lying' and 'counting', a pun noted by commentators.³ It is impossible to tell the aorist middle form of λέγω, meaning 'count', from the aorist of λέχομαι, meaning 'lie down'. But what is the significance of the pun? Proteus begins by counting his seals, only to find that there are four extra. At this point, Menelaus as narrator intervenes to insist that Proteus suspects nothing; because his own deception is inconceivable for Proteus, he needs to find another explanation for the apparently missing seal. In order to rectify the error, he simply *counts himself*: λέκτο καὶ αὐτός. Herein lies the subtlety of Eidothea's trick: she understands in advance that Proteus, faced with the problem of a missing seal, will simply count himself.

Yet this is not just a protracted joke on Proteus' poor arithmetic. For what is at stake is nothing less than how subjects are constituted. Indeed the story displays a pattern which will recur in Odysseus' encounters with the Cyclopes and Phaeacians; we witness the moment when an unerring, certain, god-like figure - in this case, Proteus - begins to doubt for the first time. Both the nature and moment of emergence of this doubt will need to be carefully explored. But let us first note that the creation of a doubting Proteus raises a further ideological problem; for though the unerring Old Man of the Sea had never previously given a second thought to either the number of his seals, or to his relations with the seals as group,

³S.West 1988 *ad loc.* Though the pun is noted, it is not interpreted. This follows the scholiasts, who merely note that Homer uses the same word to signify different things: 'ὅτι τῆι αὐτῆι λέξει παραλλήλως οὐκ ἐπὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ σημαϊνομένου κέχρηται.' (P.Q.)

his new status as a doubting subject invites us (and Proteus) to reconsider this relationship. What is the relationship of this doubting Proteus to (the language of) society?

In order to clarify Proteus' position, we can turn to a theoretical problem within structural linguistics. Though a contemporary problem, its relevance to the *Odyssey* will quickly become clear. Since Saussure, the problem of language's construction of meaning has depended on the relation between signifier and signified. How can we ever be sure that any signifier refers to any signified? For if we acknowledge (as we must) that the process of meaning is inexhaustible, that there will always be the possibility of the arrival of another signifier which will retroactively change all that went before, are we not confronted with an endless deferral of sense? A certain structuralism evades the problem by focusing attention on an arbitrarily frozen moment. By concentrating on an idealized moment in time, a closed system of signifiers is created; a signifier can then be linked to a signified precisely insofar as all the other (now finite) signifiers do not refer to it. Yet this solution, flirted with by Saussure, does nothing to evade the crucial paradox. Without such a totalizing system, there can be no guarantee that any signifier refers to its signified, yet such a system is by definition impossible; for there can always be another signifier, changing all that went before.⁴ In Lacanian terms, the question is one of the limits of the symbolic. For if the symbolic has no limit, then we would seem to be forced to admit the impossibility of sense. Yet any external limit to the symbolic is equally unsatisfactory, as it denies the obvious: the possibility of another external limit, *ad infinitum*.

Is there any way out of this dilemma? For Lacan, yes. He recognized the impossibility of any external limit to the symbolic, but nevertheless posited an

⁴On the manner in which Saussure grappled with the problem, see Porter 1986.

internal limit. If it is impossible to conceive of an external limit, it is possible (paradoxically) to conceive *this very impossibility*. Herein lies the internal limit to the symbolic, which provides us with the Lacanian concept of 'suturing':

Suture, in brief, supplies the logic of a paradoxical function whereby a supplementary element is *added* to the series of signifiers in order to mark the *lack* of a signifier that could close the set. The endless slide of signifiers (hence a deferral of sense) is brought to a halt and allowed to function "as if" it were a closed set through the inclusion of an element that acknowledges the impossibility of closure.⁵

It is this paradoxical function which creates the conditions of possibility for what Lacan calls a master-signifier. A master-signifier (which gives illegitimate retroactive sense to the chain of signifiers) is an external element which forcibly grafts signifier onto signified.⁶ Yet any master-signifier is logically parasitic on this prior moment which both highlights that the master-signifier is an external impostor (it's mastery can only work in the mode of 'as if' - there is no true 'master', only someone playing the role of a master), and which also preserves the possibility of 'one more signifier'. This logical possibility is precisely what guarantees a constitutive gap between signifier and signified, and it is in the gap between signifier and signified that Lacan locates the subject. The subject is, by (Lacan's) definition, that for which no signifier can account - and it is this unaccountable subject which I will refer to as the self as cipher. This is also a crucial ideological question; for what is at stake is the manner in which groups are constituted - in this case, what is at issue is the relationship of the seals to their 'leader' Proteus. The crucial difference lies between a group which is constituted by its allegiance to a 'real', empirical leader, and a group which is constituted by nothing other than the

⁵Copjec 174. Copjec herself is emphasizing the points made by Jacques-Alain Miller (1978) in his important article, 'Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)',.

⁶Cf. Žižek 1989, 87ff, for a discussion of the Lacanian concept of the master-signifier.

members' self-difference; i.e. a group whose center is nothing, a void, the surplus element marking the lack of a signifier.

The argument here has important ramifications; for what is at stake is the possibility of the critique of the violence imposed by the arbitrariness of numeration. Let us explore the relationship of Proteus to his seals within these terms of reference. In the Proteus tale, the 'real', empirical seals function as referents, the concept 'seal' functions as the signified, and the numbers allocated to the concept 'seal' function as signifiers. The obvious reading of the deception would be to explain in terms of a confusion of sign (signifier and signified combined) and referent. Thus Proteus would be fooled because his concept of a 'seal' is disrupted by Menelaus' disguise: he counts as 'seals' people who are not really seals. However, in my interpretation, this 'disguise' functions as a way to reveal that something more basic is at stake: the relation between signifier and signified.

The protean Proteus is evidently a figure who upholds the possibility of 'one more signifier': but insofar as he is perfectly protean, a figure of pure change, Proteus does not recognize the internal limit of the symbolic, which is the only way of ensuring the possibility of meaning. Eidothea's trick stages the moment when his system of counting fails, when a gap emerges between signifier and signified. But how does this trick effect Proteus? The first significant moment arrives when the Proteus counts his seals: οὐδέ τι θυμῶι / ὠίσθη δόλον εἶναι· ἔπειτα δὲ λέκτο καὶ αὐτός. When he realizes this seal is missing⁷, and finds a signifier with no signified corresponding to it, he tries to close up the gap with another signified. But the only signified available is himself; Proteus thus counts himself *for the first time*.

⁷Of course, it is a 'logical' seal which is missing. In reality, the number of Proteus' seals remains the same.

It is tempting to see this as his first moment of self-consciousness. But the text emphasizes that he remains unaware that this is a trick at all: οὐδέ τι θυμῶι / ὠίσθη δόλον εἶναι. Proteus' belief in his infallibility continues; he goes about with business as usual, and lays down among his seals: λέκτο καὶ αὐτός.⁸ This is at the conscious level. But unbeknownst to him, behind his back, something has changed. One seal has disappeared, and he himself has moved into the void where that seal once was. Proteus counts himself; but he does not do so consciously. The ambiguity of the signifier 'λέκτο' reflects the splitting of Proteus into what he does consciously and unconsciously; he consciously 'lies down' and unconsciously becomes self-aware, 'counts himself'. Freud argued that amusing slips of the tongue and punning jokes were evidence of the workings of the unconscious, of 'another place' which undermines our conscious universes.⁹ In Lacan's rewriting of Freud, it is the gap between signifier and signified which allows us to locate this 'other place'. Puns, word-plays point toward the unconscious as they continually affirm that we, as conscious subjects, are never fully in control of what we say. For Proteus, this other place is opened up by the loss of a seal, a logical place which guarantees that there is a constitutive gap between signifier and signified. The ambiguity of the signifier 'λέκτο' is evidence for the gap. Proteus' action of 'lying down' no longer means what it used to mean. Proteus acts out a pun, and as he does so he becomes an (unconscious) human subject.

Let us now turn to the second significant moment in Proteus' development. For though Proteus continues with business as usual by lying down with his seals, his unreflective existence does not last much longer. There is evidence of his own failure of nerve in his infallibility in his struggle with Menelaus. If Proteus remained protean, upholder of a symbolic without limit, representative of an infinite

⁸Reading λέκτο as from λέχομαι.

⁹The classic text is, of course, 'Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious'.

series of masks, there is surely no need for him ever to give in to Menelaus. Yet of course he does. Why? Because he belatedly comes to terms with Eidothea's trick (and the pun he unwittingly acted out), and is now aware of the possibility of halting language's deferral of sense; before the trick with the seals, Proteus would have never thought of giving in. But a worm of conscious doubt has now crept into his universe, which is itself confirmation of the earlier self-counting which occurred unconsciously. It is only at this moment that Proteus becomes self-conscious. He realizes that the seals were not naturally assigned numbers, but rather that he, Proteus, did the counting. He knows that signifier is attached to signified because someone - that is, 'Proteus' - made the attachment. Before this moment, we must assume that Proteus always counted correctly, but that he had no idea who was doing the counting. The emergence of Proteus as subject is thus correlative to the loss of the seal. The seal causes (for Proteus) a gap to emerge in the universe; his doubt functions as a belated recognition of that gap; his future ability to count seals will depend on a projection of a self into that gap.¹⁰ The tale therefore suggests that self-consciousness always arrives late on the scene. Proteus' finds out 'too late' what he himself was unconsciously doing all along; he is now conscious of an agency which has undermined his conscious existence. His self-consciousness is parasitic on his unconscious.

A further point. The story provides us with a series of puns on Proteus' name, as we discover that the episode is replete with beginnings. Eidothea claims that Proteus will count his sheep first (*πρῶτον ἀριθμήσει*, 4.411), and later that

¹⁰Note also that Proteus' appearance, as a god, from the unknown realms of the sea occurs in the middle of the day (*Od.* 4.400ff), the time for epiphany (on this, see Hinds 1988). In this liminal time and space, the realms of the human and divine can encounter one another. If this is a time when gods can be seen, Eidothea's gift of 'ambrosia', the 'immortal' liquid allows the human companions of Menelaus to enter, temporarily, the realm of the god. Proteus is thus on display at a moment of vulnerability. Eidothea's trick takes advantage of this moment of vulnerability to drag him into the realm of mortals; once there is a gap in the universe for Proteus, he is no longer a god.

he will count Menelaus' men disguised as sheep *first* (πρώτους λέγε, 4.452). She encourages Menelaus to capture him when he *first* goes to sleep (πρώτα κατευνηθέντα, 4.414), and Proteus himself will begin his transformations by turning into a lion *first* (πρώτιστα λέων γένητ' , 4.456). What is the significance of this further punning? Before his subjectivization in *Odyssey* 4, Proteus' name must have been ironic; to borrow the terms of John Peradotto, it was an example of a significant name 'motivated by its contrary or contradictory [meaning].'¹¹ For if, before the trick, Proteus represented a language without closure, this must mean the positing of no end or *beginning* to the signifying chain. Before the trick with the seals, Proteus indulged in an impossible counting, a counting without a beginning or end insofar as he remained wholly within the symbolic. The trick stages the first time that Proteus truly counts. *Odyssey* 4 narrates the moment when Proteus finally lives up to his name by creating a limit, a beginning, to the signifying chain. Proteus now allows the last signifier to determine retroactively the first signifier ('as if' to close the set), and thus produces meaning.

We can now return to the question of the constitution of the group of seals. What should be emphasized is that the subjectivization of Proteus takes us to the very brink of the logic of the master-signifier, yet crucially stops short of it. For though I have argued that the story introduces Proteus to the status of subject, what needs to be emphasized is that Proteus at this point is a pure subject, not an empirical one; at this point in the narrative, there is no predicate that can be applied to Proteus; one can say nothing about him.

It is because Proteus is not an empirical subject that he has no ideological stakes involved in mastery over his seals; at this moment, the group of seals are constituted purely by their self-difference, with allegiance only to this 'nothing' that

¹¹Peradotto 113. Peradotto provides the example of Odysseus' dog Argus: motionless, dying, yet called 'Flash'.

is Proteus, and who lies in their midst: λέξεται ἐν μέσσησι. Yet by his awareness of this void, Proteus alerts us to the possibility of a master-signifier; any empirical subject can try to move (from outside) into this void, and thus illegitimately try to constitute a group through mastery of it. We already have here the necessary parameters for a theory of ideology; successful ideological strategies work by promising to heal the loss incurred on entrance to the social.

Let us try to explain this in terms of the relationship between Proteus and his seals from the perspective of both. Before the trick, Proteus never questioned his identity as master of his seals; in Lacan's terms, he was a fool. For Lacan, a fool is someone who believes that the role s/he plays is an actual property of themselves. He uses the example of a king who believes he *is* a king, rather than a contingent individual playing out the socially mandated role of king.¹² Proteus' self-counting allows him to establish a distance between the roles he plays and the subject who plays them. He thus experiences an emptying out of his empirical identity. But to understand the significance of this for a theory of ideology, we should pause over the effect of this 'emptying out' on his erstwhile subjects - the seals. Before the trick, Proteus' seals were grouped together as seals because of the performative nature of Proteus' counting. His counting of the seals coincided with the attribution of an identity (the identity of 'being Proteus' seals') to them. But the emptying out of the identity of Proteus also leaves a question mark over the identity of the seals. What will happen to them if their counter, Proteus, no longer counts them? They too will be faced with a choice; they can either confront their lack of identity (and come to terms with the contingency of the role of being Proteus' seals), or (try to) return to the safety of a fixed identity. Ideological strategies play on the fear which confronts subjects when they realize the contingency of their

¹² For a discussion of this Lacanian point, also well understood by Marx, see Žižek 1989 46ff.

socially mandated roles. They offer an alternative to doubt in the form of a fixed identity, hoping that this fixed identity is preferable to the abyss of doubt.¹³

Let me return (at last!) to the original question about Proteus' gender. Can we even properly call Proteus a he? This would be to undermine even his paradoxical self-awareness; he knows that 'he' is, but 'he' has as yet absolutely nothing more he can say about himself. To impose a fixed, gendered identity on Proteus is to have already said something about him. We do not know what gendered identity will be assumed any more than we know what sort of relationship will be forged with the seals.¹⁴ Proteus is left both 'in' and 'outside' language; introduced (via doubt) to the symbolic for the first time, Proteus is not yet subjected to language, insofar as nothing can be said about Proteus. He teeters on the brink of entrance to the symbolic, but is not yet *written*, inscribed in discourse. Proteus doubts, and therefore is: but is he a man or a woman?

This doubt returns us to the true deceiver in the episode, Eidothea. She might seem to ground the gender of the Old Man of the Sea insofar as she is his daughter. Indeed, the relationship between the two is mentioned twice in Book 4, by both Menelaus and Eidothea herself. Yet the difference is crucial. Menelaus refers to her as the woman who took pity on him at *Od.4.365-6*: 'Πρωτέος ἰφθίμου θυγάτηρ ἀλίιο γέροντος, / Εἰδοθέη·' ('Eidothea, daughter to mighty Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea'). Eidothea refers to herself and her relationship to her father a few lines later at *Od.4.387*: 'τὸν δέ τ' ἐμόν φασι πατέρ' ἔμμεναι ἠδὲ τεκέσθαι' ('And they say also that he is my father, that he begot me'). The periphrasis 'they say is' for 'is' may not always imply scepticism.¹⁵ Yet in the

¹³Chapters 4 and 5 explore the ramifications of such a notion of ideology for the interpretation of the Homeric poems.

¹⁴That is, if one works with the notion of gender as a fixed identity; this is not the only way to think of gender (both for the Greeks, and us), and this is explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

¹⁵As has been argued by Stinton 1990, chapter 14, among others. I argue more fully against one of his specific examples - doubt about the paternity of the Cyclopes - below.

context of the reading of Eidothea's trick, it is surely tempting to find scepticism here. Eidothea's trick introduces Proteus to doubt, a doubt which she already epitomizes in the scepticism concerning her own father, a scepticism already prepared for within the poem by Telemachus' scepticism concerning the possibility that anyone might know his father.¹⁶ This scepticism in turn raises the question of Eidothea's gender. Eidothea does not believe her father: so does she believe him when he tells her she is a woman?¹⁷

We can now tentatively explore how the tale of Proteus raises questions about Odysseus. For the duplicity in Proteus' own name duplicates the ambiguity in 'Outis'. As a 'protean' figure, illustrative of the infinity of the signifying chain, Proteus destroys any limit suggested by his name, 'First'. So too insofar as Odysseus is truly *polytropic*, 'Outis' can be read as just one more mask in an indefinite series. Yet allegorically, in the naming of Proteus, the tale points toward the (necessary) limits of language. So too we can read 'Outis' as the name given to the subject *not* in language, the subject about which nothing can be said. This can be demonstrated by a two very different readings of the poem's opening line. Goldhill has suggested that the lack of a proper name identifying *andra* (and the replacement instead with *polytropon*) functions as a *griphos*:

The surprising lack of a proper name in the first line(s) of the epic, then, prompts the question not simply of *to whom* does the opening expression refer, but of *what* is (to be) recognized in such a periphrastic reference. Indeed, the withholding of the name invests the proem with the structure of a *griphos*, a riddle, an enigma,

¹⁶*Od.* 1.215ff. I discuss this crucial episode in much greater detail below.

¹⁷The difference between Menelaus' reporting of the incident and Eidothea's (in his report) may also reflect badly on Menelaus-himself. The entire episode can be (unfavorably) contrasted with Odysseus' tricking of Polyphemus in Book 9; whereas Odysseus tricks Polyphemus himself, Menelaus is a helpless bystander as Eidothea exhibits her cunning. There is also a wider parallel between Menelaus' account of his trip home with Odysseus' *Apologoi* in Books 9 to 12. In this specific episode, he reports just enough to hang himself - by translating Eidothea's doubt about the father into certainty.

where a series of expressions (of which *polutropon* is the first) successively qualifies the term *andra* as the name 'Odysseus' is approached.¹⁸

One problem suggested by the *griphos* is the problem of closure.¹⁹ How can one ever fully define what a 'man' is when there is always one more predicate which can be attached to him, retroactively changing any essence. Yet there is a second possibility. The opening line seems to open up a division between the noun *andra* and the first in a series of adjectives, *polytropon*, which seeks to qualify it. But if the force of *polytropon* is to be inclusive of all (hitherto articulated) adjectives, all manners of description, does it not also subsume *andra*? For though *andra* (unreflectively) appears as a straightforward noun, it surely only functions as such because it harbors unquestioned descriptive power. It is both a reference to a person, as well as the (descriptive) imposition of gender (in this case, male) onto that person. On this reading *andra* is not neatly separated from *polutropon* but already a part of it. This leaves us with a tricky problem. If *andra* is already descriptive, then to whom (or what) does *polutropon* refer?

We can pose the same problem in a different way. We can read *polutropon* as representing language as such, an endless chain of signifiers. Yet from the opening word, *andra* is already spoken. Thus *andra* is different not in quality from *polutropon* but only in quantity; *andra* signifies something already spoken, while *polutropon* signifies everything that can be spoken. The problem now is to locate precisely who (or what) is doing the speaking. We are tellingly close to the difference between subject of enunciated and subject of the enunciation. The former is always already spoken, in language; the latter, speaking subject is far more mercurial and shifting. This helps crystallize the problem of the opening line. For

¹⁸Goldhill 1991, 4.

¹⁹On the allures and dangers of a teleological criticism, see Porter 1990.

the crucial division not so much between *andra* and *polytropon*, but between *andra* and the problem of the subject who speaks *andra*. The obvious answer to the dilemma only brings further problems. For the opening line is clearly a command made to the Muse, and it thus seems to be the Muse who speaks *andra*. The absent poet distances himself from any claim to be the subject of enunciation speaking *andra*, and passes the authority on to another. But if this seems to recognize the limit of the poet within language, it evades the crucial question: for is the Muse inside or outside of language? From where does she speak?

It is at this point that the critical work of Goldhill overlaps with that of Peradotto: for both inquiries end up appealing to the self-consciousness of the poet. Goldhill structures his criticism around the concept of 'the poet's voice', while Peradotto uses literary self-consciousness to allow his narratives of '*Outis*' and '*polytropos*' to share the same synchronous moment. Given the work that the term is asked to perform, it is worth pausing once more over what is meant by self-consciousness.²⁰ For what sort of 'self' does the Muse (or the poet) have? And what is the position *from where* the poet, or the Muse, reflects on this self? I would suggest that the tale of Proteus' emergence as subject, when a utopian moment emerges *outside* of language as every identity created by language is bracketed, is an answer to this question. The emergence of a radically doubting self, revealing the limit of the symbolic, finds its counterpart in the figure of the poet as limit to the tale told. But this is not an external limit which forecloses the need for interpretation, but the exact reverse; it is an internal limit which guarantees the need for interpretation. Criticism depends on the *absence* of any 'self' of the poet.

If the poem thus focuses on a moment of doubt, a certain ideology of gender can function as a limitation on that doubt, and thus occlude it. Proteus'

²⁰A term which Peradotto, in a work on conceptions of self, conspicuously fails to define.

doubt is (as we have argued) correlative to his discovery of his missing seal, and a corresponding gap in the universe. An ideology of gender which views man and woman as complementary opposites seeks (illegitimately) to close that gap by fantasizing that the opposite gender can fill it. It is precisely such an ideology which seems to be appealed to in the proem, as the un-named *andra* is said to lack a woman: νόστου κεχρημένον ἠδὲ γυναικός (*Od.*1.13). Yet once more we should pause over the withholding of *this* name. If a 'woman' holds out the possibility of literal fulfillment for the un-named hero, a return to a wholeness that is lacking, it is a conspicuously un-named 'woman'. The possibility of a successful sexual relationship which might put an end to doubt is alluded to, but the poem refuses to name the potential subjects of such a union. There is thus an implicit parallel drawn between the closure imposed on identity by naming, and the closure imposed by a union of man and woman; insofar as subjects can be named, fully classified, they can be (ful)filled, self-identical. Chapters 6 and 7 will explore this connection between gender and doubt in greater detail; for now, let us to some further tales which explore the relationship between language and subjectivity.

Polyphemus: the blinding of a Cyclops

When does Polyphemus become Polyphemus? When is Polyphemus named? The name of this Cyclops, the combination of the words 'Poly-phemus', does not appear until after his blinding by Odysseus, and it is far from clear that it even appears as a name at this point in the poem. We first hear 'Polyphemus' at line 9.403, when the blinded Cyclops has just called out for help, prompting a surprised response from the other Cyclopes:

Τίπτε τόσον, Πολύφημ' , ἀρημένος ὦδ' ἐβόησας
 νύκτα δι' ἀμβροσίην, καὶ ἀϋπνοὺς ἄμμε τίθησθα; (*Od.*9.403-4)

Why Polyphemos, what do you want with all this outcry

through the immortal night and have made us all thus sleepless?

This is the first time that the words 'Polyphemus' are associated with this Cyclops. It is only after the fellow Cyclopes call out 'Polyphemus' that the name 'Polyphemus' is applied to the single Cyclops blinded by Odysseus (9.407, 9.446). By contrast, within his narrative Odysseus never calls the Cyclops he blinds Polyphemus; in the run up to the blinding he always addresses him as 'Cyclops', suggesting that Odysseus reacts to the single eye in the middle of the forehead of his adversary. There is thus an important change in the nomenclature of the Cyclops within *Odyssey* 9: before the blinding, Odysseus' adversary is a 'Cyclops', after the blinding he is called Polyphemus.

We should look more closely at the words of surprise uttered by the Cyclopes in response to the cry for help from the fellow member of their species. Why are the Cyclopes so surprised by this cry for help? The most convincing answer is that they have never before heard such a cry for help from another Cyclops. It is this surprise which produces the naming of the Cyclops. We witness the moment when an adjectival cluster (poly-phemos) is first associated with the blinded Cyclops: why on earth, Poly-phemos, 'chatterbox', 'man of much speech', are you shouting? This cluster is only then grafted on by the narrator as a name to a referent, the helpless, blinded Cyclops. The Cyclopean surprise is a reaction to the first attempt at communication by one of their number, a breaking of a perennial Cyclopean silence. Their rude awakening by the blinded Cyclops is not merely evidence of a disturbed night's sleep, but of an awakening from a much longer sleep. Odysseus' tale stages the baptism of the first Cyclops, and the Cyclopes' entrance as a species into the realm of linguistic exchange.²¹ The crucial point here

²¹The reaction of the Cyclopes to Polyphemus' blinding can be contrasted with the reaction to adversity exhibited by the Kikonians earlier in Odysseus' narrative. When attacked by Odysseus' men, the Kikonians *immediately* come to each others help, calling out to each other: Κίκονες Κικόνεσσι γηγώνεον (*Od.*9.47). The immediacy of this response highlights their status as a

is that we must not assume that the plea for help of the blinded Cyclops is evidence of 'minimal civilizational norms.'²² For this can in no way help us explain the shock exhibited in their words at 403-4. Rather than repudiating the words of the narrating Odysseus about the Cyclopes, we should take them at face value:

τοῖσιν δ' οὔτ' ἀγοραὶ βουλευφόροι οὔτε θέμιστες,
ἀλλ' οἳ γ' ὑψηλῶν ὀρέων ναίουσι κάρηνα
ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι, θεμιστεύει δὲ ἕκαστος
παίδων ἢ δ' ἀλόχων, οὐδ' ἀλλήλων ἀλέγουσι. (9.112-115)

These people have no institutions, no meetings for counsels;
rather they make their habitations in caverns hollowed
among the peaks of the high mountains, and each one is the law
for his own wives and children, and cares nothing about the others.

The Cyclopes, before *Odyssey* 9, are perfectly monadic, a species of ones who are utterly self-sufficient, and whose self-sufficiency makes communication unnecessary. This all changes when a certain un-named Cyclops (though they are all unnamed, part of a species that has no need of names) meets Odysseus-Outis. After this meeting, in response to a cry for help, they no longer are heedless of each other. The phrase which once applied to them - οὐδ' ἀλλήλων ἀλέγουσι - no longer applies. In response to his blinding, one Cyclops resorts to an attempt to communicate with the others, which in turn functions as an attempt to gain help in healing his recent wound, the loss of his single eye.

The Cyclopes are one-dimensional beings who have no need for communication, and this is reflected in their most significant physical feature, the single big eye in the middle of their forehead. Accordingly, they form an entirely static community of ones, whose self-sufficiency, in its perfection, renders them

community linked by (a common) language. This is in marked contrast to the lack of such group solidarity exhibited by the Cyclopes.

²²This is the assumption of Austin (1980). He is eager to counter the notion of 'barbarism' attached to the Cyclops by structuralist-inspired criticism; accordingly he tries to emphasize both the brutality of Odysseus, and the aspects of Cyclopean civilization which appear to put them in a more charitable light: for Austin, the efforts of other Cyclopes to come to the help of Polyphemus is one such example.

oblivious to any meaningful historical change. It is through their meeting with Odysseus/Outis - a figure of negativity - that this is forever changed. Just as the one eye of the one-eyed Cyclops is removed, poked out by the stabbing Odysseus,²³ so too the monadic community of ones is destroyed, as the blindness leads the Cyclops to begin to forge a link with the fellow-members of his species. The blinding thus anticipates a future when the Cyclopes will no longer self-sufficient ones, alone on their separate mountain tops.

The blinding of the Cyclops thus destroys his 'oneness'; the removal of his central eye destroys his wholeness, and introduces him to a world beyond his previous self-sufficiency. An external negativity - in the shape of Odysseus as *Outis* - is transferred, in the act of blinding, into the center of the Cyclops. We can now see further significance in the new name of the Cyclops; because he has lost his one eye, *he is no longer a Kukl-ops*. His former singular identity as a monadic being is destroyed at the moment he is introduced into the realm of language. Though he is now a person of 'much speech' (Poly-phemos), there is as yet nothing determinate we can say about him.

We are now in a better position to reassess the most 'obvious' significance of the name Polyphemus; for scholars have noticed the appropriateness of the meaning 'much fame', inasmuch as it is the blinding portrayed in *Odyssey* 9 which will provide Polyphemus (and Odysseus) with *kleos*..²⁴ We should be more precise. Polyphemus' access to *kleos* depends upon his prior entrance to language, and this in turn is dependent on the his loss of his eye.²⁵ Here, by way of contrast, we can recall Lynn-George's insightful and moving analysis of *kleos* in the *Iliad*:

²³For this stabbing, and the importance of the word-play between Οὐτις/οὐτάω, Peradotto 1990, 143ff.

²⁴This 'significant' aspect of Polyphemus' name has been noted by both Burkert 33, and Ahl, 228.

²⁵For the elaboration of the concept of *kleos* as repeated speech, Pucci 1987 13ff.

For Lynn-George, the crucial question of the *Iliad* is to what extent *kleos* helps balance the inevitability of loss. This is Lynn-George, commenting on the 'language of Achilles' in *Iliad* 9:

In the space of ... [the] silence [of Achilles' language] the epic produces a statement which profoundly questions the conditions of its possibility as well as its worth. Hence it is here, beyond the limits of a restricted economy, beyond the achievements of plunder and the acquisition of possessions, that the language of Achilles finally confronts and tests the limits of language, life, and the music of the lyre - by questioning, implicitly, in relation to man's mortality, the possibility of any meaningful form of immortality in song, an epic 'song' which this 'language of Achilles' threatens to silence in the sailing for home. The *Iliad* thus structures itself as a question in celebration: does *kleos* ever balance the loss?²⁶

Odysseus 9 suggests the need for a radical inversion of this *Iliadic* question; rather than asking whether *kleos* balances loss, it demonstrates that without loss there can be no language, and therefore no *kleos*; for language, and consequently *kleos*, is based on this loss.²⁷

We can now turn to classic structuralist (and indeed post-structuralist) interpretations of the episode, and highlight what these interpretations overlook. Structuralists have emphasized that the Cyclopes violate a series of human laws, distinguishing them from the realm of the human. Burkert, for example, provides four : man with weapon against unarmed savage, the sober against the drunkard, the seeing against the blind, the master of language against the stupid. Vidal-Naquet has drawn attention to the perversion of sacrifice on the Cyclopes' island as

²⁶Lynn-George 1986, 122.

²⁷Lacan's term for the loss we all (men and women) suffer on entrance to language is symbolic castration. Lynn-George (1994 238ff) argues that it is significant that Peradotto ignores the name 'Polyphemus-poems', and suggests that 'some particularly disturbing aspects of language are unleashed in Odysseus' stratagem for survival'. The disturbing aspects of language referred to by Lynn-George is presumably the blinding, which in my reading of this episode functions as the basis of language. It is only this fundamental loss which produces passage into the realm of the contested field of language.

evidence of impiety, and in particular the Cyclopes' cannibalism.²⁸ The problem is that such criticism inevitably identifies (morally) with the position of Odysseus, which is in turn seen as representing Greek ethics as such. The Cyclopes are thus already judged by these ethical terms of reference, regardless of their position. But the Cyclopes reject these moral terms of reference *tout court*. What is overlooked in the tracing of this series of individual, broken laws is that the Cyclopes are quite simply outside *the* law - represented in Book 9 by their lack of concern for the supreme figure of authority, Zeus:

οὐ γὰρ Κύκλωπες Διὸς αἰγιόχου ἀλέγουσιν
οὐδὲ θεῶν μακάρων, ἐπεὶ ἡ πολὺ φέρτεροί εἰμεν.
(*Od.*9.275-6)

The Cyclopes do not concern themselves over Zeus of the aegis,
nor any of the rest of the blessed gods, since we are far better'

The rejection of this law cancels out any significance of the others, insofar it means that the Cyclopes are a law unto themselves: *θεμιστεύει δὲ ἕκαστος*. (*Od.*9.114) We are left with two possibilities. A critical identification with Odysseus and his moral universe is in and of itself not the problem; it is certainly a viable position. But not explicitly recognizing this position does lead to difficulties; for it too often brings with it assertions of an alleged morality of the 'poem' or 'poet' (or more ambitiously, of the human), and fails to notice that it is this moral system which is put into question by the completeness of the Cyclopes' rejection of it. This has meant that critics have generally ignored the significance of the words of the Cyclops about Odysseus - words which we will look at in detail in Chapter 5. For now, let us affirm that the Cyclopes' rejection of the law of Zeus is simply not of the same order as the others (cannibal vs grain/meat-eater, armed vs not-

²⁸Burkert 33, Vidal-Naquet, 18ff.

armed etc.), which are properly differences which are traced from an identification with perceived moral qualities of Odysseus. The rejection of the law of Zeus signposts the interchange between Odysseus and the Cyclops as a failed interchange, that they themselves have no common terms of reference by which their respective behavior can be judged.²⁹

The suggestion that the Cyclopes and Odysseus live in different moral universes is certainly less bold than my earlier suggestion - that the blinding of the Cyclops announced the entrance of the Cyclopes to language as such. For the stronger thesis meets with an obvious objection; is it not self-evidently the case that the Cyclopes do have access to language? After all, the Cyclops who is soon to be blinded by Odysseus appears to have no trouble communicating with him, and his fellow Cyclopes respond to his cry for help, regardless of their surprise. Even if there is a failure to communicate in moral terms, the failure itself seems to be registered in language. In what follows I try to defend the stronger thesis by taking a closer look at the Cyclopean language. For what sort of language can there be between members of a species which are self-sufficient, and without any needs? If the Cyclopes are speaking beings, it is only to the extent that they speak a language which is completely irrelevant to their lives. In short, a language which is not a social phenomenon can hardly be a language at all.

Cyclopes and Psychoses

²⁹This is noted by Crotty 146: 'To eat human flesh is so horrific as to be utterly beyond such codes [of hospitality]. To accuse Polyphemus of "not scrupling".. to eat "his guests".. is an unwarranted importing of one culture's ethics into another realm, where ethics can have no meaning.' Yet this insight (which suggests a bracketing of all that is 'civilized') is not explored by Crotty, and his reading of the episode drifts into a weak cultural relativism, and a condemnation of 'the kind of thing violence is'.

The deficiencies of this Cyclopean language will become clearer by contrast with the sort of words the Cyclops (now Polyphemus) utters after his blinding. But we can elaborate the deficiencies further by way of a theoretical detour into contemporary theories of naming, in particular the dispute between ‘descriptivism’ and ‘anti-descriptivism’. The relevance of such theory for critics of the *Odyssey* has been admirably demonstrated in the work of John Peradotto³⁰; it is from his book that I borrow a useful summary by John Searle of the essence of the descriptivist vs. antidescriptivist controversy:

According to the classical theory, names, if they are really names, necessarily have a reference and no sense at all. According to the Fregean theory, they essentially have a sense and only contingently have a reference. They refer if and only if there is an object which satisfies their sense. In the first theory proper names are *sui generis*, and indeed for Plato (in the *Theaetetus*) and Wittgenstein (in the *Tractatus*) they are the special connecting link between words and world; in the second theory proper names are only a species of disguised definite descriptions: every one is equivalent in meaning to a definite description which gives an explicit formulation of its sense. According to the first theory, naming is prior to describing; according to the second, describing is prior to naming, for a name only names by describing the object it names.³¹

At first glance, the naming of Polyphemus might seem to provide evidence for the descriptivist position. For the theory of the anti-descriptivists is dependent on an act of ‘primal baptism’, whereby a name is contingently grafted on to a referent; all names, the anti-descriptivist position argues, can be traced back to a series of such contingent baptisms. The baptism of Polyphemus, however, seems to suggest just the opposite. His name surely comes from a set of descriptive features *already there*: he is Polyphemus because of his effusive wailings. Before

³⁰Peradotto 1990, *passim*.

³¹Quoted in Peradotto 1990, 97. Originally, Searle 1967, 488.

giving in to the descriptivist position, however, we should look at the theoretical dispute a little more closely; let us do this by returning to a further argument on behalf of the descriptivist position by Searle himself, which we will follow with a psychoanalytic critique of it by Slavoj Žižek.³² In order to try to defeat the claims of anti-descriptivists, Searle constructs a hypothetical tribe where every use of names fits descriptivist criteria:

Imagine that everybody in the tribe knows everybody else and that newborn members of the tribe are baptized at ceremonies attended by the entire tribe. Imagine, furthermore, that as the children grow up they learn the names of people as well as the local names of mountains, lakes, streets, houses, etc., by ostension. Suppose also that there is a strict taboo in this tribe against speaking of the dead, so that no one's name is ever mentioned after his death. Now the point of the fantasy is simply this: As I have described it, this tribe has an institution of proper names used for reference in exactly the same way that our names are used for reference, but *there is not a single use of a name in the tribe that satisfies the causal chain of communication theory.*³³

Simply put, in this tribe, there is no act of 'primal baptism', no act which randomly attaches name to referent, but only determination of referents through the series of adjectival clusters. Because of this, Searle believes that he has proved that his descriptivist theory is *logically prior* to antidescriptivism. What is wrong with this argument? Žižek has emphasized that there is simply something *missing* in the this tribe's language:

If we are really concerned with language in the strict sense, with language as a social network in which meaning exists only in so far as it is intersubjectively recognized - with language which, by definition, cannot be 'private' - then it must be part of the meaning of each name that it refers to a certain object *because it is this name*, because others use this

³² Žižek 1989 89ff. My debt to Žižek's re-working of the debate will soon become obvious.

³³ Quoted in Žižek 1989, 92.

name to designate the object in question: every name, in so far as it is part of common language, implies this self-referential, circular moment.³⁴

The Lacanian term for this tautological moment is a 'master signifier', a signifier which itself has no signified but gives meaning to the other signifiers in the signifying chain by halting their slide. As Žižek argues, Searle's own example itself suggests an awareness of the need for such a master signifier in its prohibition on the naming of the dead. The prohibition is necessary in order to foreclose the entrance of such an 'anti-descriptivist' naming, a signifier whose signified is missing, the dead father. What this prohibition rules out, in short, is the replacement of the 'real', dead father, with his symbol, the 'Name-of-the-Father', which is precisely what provides entrance to the symbolic. Searle's tribe is accordingly a tribe of *psychotics*, 'madmen', as defined by Lacan, a tribe who are caught up in a collective refusal of the symbolic.

Here, we merely need to underline the similarities between Searle's tribe of psychotics and the Cyclopes. We can again note the denial of social institutions (the lack of assemblies), together with the paradox of a 'private' language; but equally interesting is the evidence that ancient commentators at least as early as the time of Aristotle were extremely anxious concerning the parentage of the Cyclopes, and particularly of Polyphemus: '[S]ince neither his father nor his mother is a Cyclops, in what sense can he be said to be one?'³⁵ The lack of generational normality is precisely what allows Polyphemus to remain oblivious of the law of Zeus; for the Cyclopean universe is a peculiar one. There are certainly fathers on the island - it is

³⁴Žižek 1989, 93.

³⁵S. West 1988, 84. The relevant fragment of Aristotle referred to by West is fr. 172, Rose, which comes from the H.Q. Scholiast *ad Od.* 9.106: ζητεῖ Ἀριστοτέλης πῶς ὁ Κύκλωψ ὁ Πολύφημος μήτε πατὴρ ὢν Κύκλωπος· Ποσειδῶνος γὰρ ἦν· μήτε μητρός, Κύκλωψ ἐγένετο αὐτός. 'Aristotle questioned how the Cyclops Polyphemus himself became a Cyclops, since he was neither born from a Cyclopean father (Poseidon was his father), nor from a mother.'

emphasized that their civilization is an amalgam of nuclear families - yet these fathers themselves have no fathers. There are thus only *real* fathers among the Cyclopes and no Name-of-the-Father - an ideal, symbolic figure of authority against which the Cyclopes could judge themselves. We can now return to the apparent 'descriptivism' suggested in the baptism of Polyphemus; for such a reading only works on a literal level. If we, instead, read the episode allegorically as announcing the entrance of Polyphemus (and then the Cyclopes) into language, we can emphasize that it is the blinding which provides the conditions of possibility for language, by creating the void at the heart of Polyphemus, and thus the possibility of a master-signifier. For, as we will soon see, it is the role of any master-signifier to try (but fail) to represent this (unsignifiable) void.

Need, demand, desire

Polyphemus, then, is introduced to language through his blinding. In order to help clarify the effects of this entrance, the well-known Lacanian triad of need-demand-desire - used initially to help describe the consequences of the entrance of the child into language - can perhaps be of help. For Lacan, need functions at the level of the biological, as a child depends on others for its most elementary biological need. 'Need', then, always relate to something specific, a particular item (for example, food) which can of course be satisfied. However, an important change occurs when this need is mediated by language, when the child enters the symbolic. At this point, the request for the fulfillment of need is accompanied by a *demand* of the subject, a demand for recognition. Beyond any biological need articulated by the child, there is the demand for the love of the mother. This demand, in Lacan's words, 'cancels out the particularity of anything which might

be granted by transmuting it into a proof of love.³⁶ The child asks for food, but wants the mother's love. At this point, at the failure of demand, desire appears, heralding an (unfulfillable) wish on the part of the subject for a (mythical) previous totality, wholeness; desire is a certain leftover of demand after all the specific, satisfied needs have been subtracted from it. With this terminology in mind, let us return to our blinded Cyclops. After the removal of his eye, Polyphemus produces a loud wail - a wail which is worth taking a close look at:

σεμρδαλέον δὲ μέγ' ὤμωξεν, περὶ δ' ἴαχε πέτρῃ,
 ἡμεῖς δὲ δεῖσαντες ἀπεσσύμεθ' . αὐτὰρ ὁ μοχλὸν
 ἐξέρυσ' ὀφθαλμοῖο πεφυρμένον αἵματι πολλῶι.
 τὸν μὲν ἔπειτ' ἔρριψεν ἀπὸ ἕο χερσὶν ἀλύων,
 αὐτὰρ ὁ Κύκλωπας μεγάλ' ἤπνεν, οἱ ῥά μιν ἀμφὶς
 ὤικεον ἐν σπήεσσι δι' ἄρκιας ἠνεμοέσσας. *Od.*9.395-400.

He gave a horrible cry and the rocks rattled
 to the sound, and we scuttled away in fear. He pulled the timber
 out of his eye, and it blubbered with plenty of blood, then
 when he had frantically taken it in his hands and thrown it
 away, he cried aloud to the other Cyclopes, who live
 around him in their own caves along the windy pinnacles.

What is crucial here is the move from the initial scream of pain to the cry to the other Cyclopes; the first is a shuddering reaction to his loss of his eye. For the Cyclops, something is now missing, and needs to be replaced; like a child, he recognizes his dependence. However, in his second cry to his fellow Cyclopes, this cry of pain immediately moves to an intersubjective level; he cries to the other Cyclopes. Any prior self-sufficiency is destroyed, and the Cyclops looks to others in an attempt to heal his wound. It is at this point that the Cyclopean cry for help functions as a demand.³⁷ This is the import of the Cyclopean reply:

³⁶Rose 1980, 81. For a general elaboration of these concepts, see Rose's introduction to the same volume, 32ff.

³⁷We can ask a further important question: who is the subject of this scream? It cannot yet be 'Polyphemus', because the act of naming has not yet occurred. Is it a Cyclops? Not if we define the Cyclopes in terms of their defining quality, their one eye. For this is a Cyclops who has just

εἰ μὲν δὴ μή τις σε βιάζεται οἶον ἔοντα -
 νοῦσον γ' οὐ πως ἔστι Διὸς μεγάλου ἀλέασθαι·
 ἀλλὰ σύ γ' εὖχεο πατρὶ Ποσειδάωνι ἄνακτι. *Od.*9.410-12.

If alone as you are none uses violence on you,
 why, there is no avoiding the sickness sent by great Zeus;
 so you had better pray to [your] father, the lord Poseidon.'

Several things need to be emphasized; first, the thing that had always been avoided (Zeus) can no longer be avoided. Polyphemus is now subject to the law, the law of the father (represented by Zeus' sickness). Further, there is a nuanced use of the adjective 'οἶος', 'alone'. For in a profound way, the Cyclops is alone for the first time. Since he is no longer self-sufficient, his loneliness - the possibility of needing help, and having it rejected - is real. Though before the blinding the Cyclops was always on his own, in the perfection of his self-sufficiency, it is only now that he is truly *alone*, in that he recognizes that he is apart from others upon whom he is dependent, in that he feels lonely. Finally, and most importantly, his new subjection to this 'sickness of Zeus' means that he must pray to his father. This needs to be considered in detail.

Fathers and fallibility

We can best understand Polyphemus' appeal to his fellow Cyclopes, his prayer to his father, and his recollection of the prophecy of Odysseus' arrival if we recognize their fundamental similarity. For they are all a series of attempts to patch over the loss of the eye, an attempt on the part of the Cyclops to stabilize himself. In the terms outlined above, they are demands. The fellow Cyclopes cannot provide Cyclopes with any help, and he looks elsewhere. Here, we encounter the problem

lost his eye, and is thus no longer properly a Cyclops. The subject of the scream is *no-one*, which announces the entrance of the subject *as such* to Cyclopean civilization.

of the father. The Cyclopes, in response to Polyphemus' cry, tell him to appeal to Poseidon, and this is exactly what he does:

ἀλλ' ἄγε δεῦρ' , Ὀδυσσεῦ, ἵνα τοι παρ' ξείνια θείῳ
πομπήν τ' ὀτρύνω δόμεναι κλυτὸν ἐννοσίγαιον·
τοῦ γὰρ ἐγὼ πάϊς εἰμί, πατήρ δ' ἐμὸς εὔχεται εἶναι.
αὐτὸς δ' , αἴ κ' ἐθέλῃσ', ἴησεται, οὐδέ τις ἄλλος
οὔτε θεῶν μακάρων οὔτε θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων. ' (Od.9.517-21)

So come here, Odysseus, let me give you a guest gift
and urge the glorious Shaker of the Earth to grant you conveyance
home. For I am his son, he announces himself as my father.
He himself will heal me, if he will, but not any other
one of the blessed gods, nor any man who is mortal.

Here, we should avoid any simple reading which would suggest that he merely turns to the father who was always-already there; rather, the blinding in a crucial sense *creates* this father. How?

I have already suggested that the universe of the Cyclopes is static. This now needs to be explained in terms of its relation to patriarchy. If the Cyclopes have no fathers, and do not talk to each other, they nevertheless do have families: θεμιστεύει δὲ ἕκαστος / παίδων ἢ δ' ἀλόχων, οὐδ' ἀλλήλων ἀλέγουσι. (Od.9.114-15) Since adult Cyclopes have no fathers, but do have sons, they are in the (impossible) position of being fathers but not sons. It is here that we should return to the zero-sum game of patriarchy. The Cyclopes are a fantasized solution to the patriarchal tension between father and son. There is no generational tension in their society because there is no generation; they represent a perfectly stable *oikos* frozen in time and place. Within this context, Polyphemus' appeal to Poseidon *as father* is yet another first. For it is the first time that one of the Cyclopes has ever played the subordinate role of son.³⁸

³⁸There is a further ambiguity. When confronted with Polyphemus' cry, they ask him to appeal to Poseidon: ἀλλὰ σύ γ' εὔχεο πατρὶ Ποσειδάωνι ἄνακτι. Lattimore (in a translation I earlier bracketed) translates this as pray to 'your' father. But the Greek does not explicitly say this. The Cyclopes response to their wounded brother merely suggests the need for *a* father figure - to help aid him in his loss. Is this a Cyclopean joke on his loss of independence, which Polyphemus takes

If this tells us that a Cyclops is a son for the first time, we still need to explore the relationship between father and son. Here, we can return to the relationship between Telemachus and Odysseus, and Telemachus' famous protestation about the impossibility of knowing one's father:

τοιγὰρ ἐγὼ τοι, ξεῖνε, μαλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω.
 μήτηρ μὲν τ' ἐμέ φησι τοῦ ἔμμεναι, αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ γε
 οὐκ οἶδ'. οὐ γὰρ πῶ τις ἐὼν γόνον αὐτὸς ἀνέγνω. (*Od.*1.215-7)

See, I will accurately answer all that you ask me.
 My mother says indeed I am his. I for my part
 do not know. Nobody really knows his own father.

Telemachus' words illustrate how the question of paternity has much wider symbolic significance; for this whole-hearted scepticism about the figure of the father tells us about the nature of paternal authority. For paternal authority does not in any way give the lie to Telemachus' scepticism; it is rather the other side of the same coin. For if scepticism functions as a pure challenge to all forms of authority, denying that authority any sustenance through rational argumentation (it doubts *everything*), paternal authority is, conversely, a pure authority which can not be justified through argument. Because one can never know who one's father is, any respect for the authority of a father *qua* father must be a complete leap of faith. This is clearly represented within the *Odyssey* through the uniqueness of the recognition between Telemachus and Odysseus. Though Odysseus can rely on tokens and scars to prove his identity to others, no such proofs can help him with Telemachus. The link between scepticism and paternity can help explain the recognition scene between Telemachus and Odysseus in Book 16, which is highlighted by a debate over whether or not Odysseus is a god. Here is Odysseus' denial:

literally? The Cyclopes suggest the need of Poseidon as a father figure: Polyphemus misrecognizes this as suggesting that Poseidon is his real father.

‘οὐ τίς τοι θεός εἰμι· τί μ’ ἀθανάτοισιν εἴσκεις;
ἀλλὰ πατήρ τεός εἰμι... (Od.16.186-8)

No, I am not a god. Why liken me to the immortals?
But I am your father...

The complex word-play in these crucial lines (in both θεός εἰμι / τεός εἰμι and οὐ τίς) has been perceptively noticed by Goldhill.³⁹ He suggests that the recognition by Telemachus is what is needed to restore the continuity of the *oikos*, and that the word-play emphasizes Odysseus’ status as mortal and his rejection of an immortal life (associated with his rejection of the offer of Calypso). But a quite different point can be made if we continue to identify with the position of the sceptic. The word-play on θεός / τεός highlights that an acceptance of one’s father is a leap of pure faith, in essence no different from recognizing Odysseus as a god.⁴⁰ Thus (*polytropic*, perfectly persuasive) Odysseus persuades Telemachus of the impossible: that he is really his father, and that he is not a god. But in so doing, he himself moves into an impossible position of pure certainty. Let us look again at Telemachus’ lines of scepticism: οὐ γάρ πώ τις ἐὼν γόνον αὐτὸς ἀνέγνω. There is not only a pun on ‘no-one’, but also a double meaning in *gonon*, which can signify both ‘begetter’ and ‘offspring’. In persuading Telemachus that he is his father, Odysseus thus assumes the position of super-human knowledge (the subject-supposed-to-know); he becomes this ‘no-one’ who alone knows his offspring. This suggestion can be highlighted in a rather different translation of ‘οὐ τίς τοι θεός εἰμι’. ‘No-one - I am a god’, or ‘I am the god, no-one.’⁴¹ The

³⁹Goldhill 1991, 10.

⁴⁰Goldhill notices the tautology in the following phrase which he italicizes: ‘*Recognition is part of the relationship (to be) recognized.*’ (p11) We merely need to take this a step further: in the case of father and son, it is not simply *part* of the relationship, it is the *essence* of the relationship. This is not the only instance of such word-play in the poem: cf Nestor’s words at Od.3.122-3: ‘πατήρ τεός, εἰ ἔτεόν γε / κείνου ἐκγονός ἐσσι’, which play on the credibility of assertion of paternity.

⁴¹And ‘no-one’ is a not uncommon name for gods in many cultures: see Lynn-George 1994, 231. Also note the force of the particle of assertion ‘τοι’ in the phrase ‘οὐ τίς τοι θεός εἰμι’. The

Odysseus of limitless *metis*, who always reaches his *telos*, is a figure of near omnipotence. Yet running in direct opposition to this is the working of the narrative on the island of the Cyclopes. In his guise as 'Outis' he introduces a gap, and thus a moment of doubt to the impossible, self-sufficient universe of the Cyclopes. Let us return to Polyphemus in order to explore this further.

His appeal to Poseidon begins with an identification with his position as son, followed by a reference to Poseidon's claim to be his father: 'τοῦ γὰρ ἐγὼ πάϊς εἰμί, πατὴρ δ' ἐμὸς εὐχεται εἶναι.' Polyphemus is introduced to doubt because he has lost his eye; he therefore appeals to his father to heal him, and thus return him to a doubt-free universe. But this is precisely what Odysseus declares is impossible:

ἄλ' γὰρ δὴ ψυχῆς τε καὶ αἰῶνος σε δυναίμην
 εὖνιν ποιήσας πέμψαι δόμον Ἄϊδος εἴσω,
 ὡς οὐκ ὀφθαλμόν γ' ἴησεται οὐδ' ἐνοσίχθων!
 Ὡς ἐφάμην· ὁ δ' ἔπειτα Ποσειδάωνι ἄνακτι
 εὐχετο χεῖρ' ὀρέγων εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀστερόεντα·
 Ἐκλῦθι, Ποσειδάον γαιήοχε, κυανοχαῖτα·
 εἰ ἔτεόν γε σός εἰμι, πατὴρ δ' ἐμὸς εὐχεαί εἶναι.
 (Od.9.523-29)

'I only wish it were certain I could make you reft of spirit and life and send you to the house of Hades, as it is certain that not even the Shaker of the Earth will ever heal your eye for you.' So I spoke, but he then called to the lord Poseidon in prayer, reaching both arms up toward the starry heaven: "Hear me, Poseidon who circle the earth, dark-haired. If truly I am your son, and you acknowledge me as my father..

Polyphemus' appeal is an appeal to a figure of authority to heal his wound. In brief, his appeal to his father, his recognition of his father, is a recognition of his entrance into the symbolic, a recognition of the law of the father. However, the father only is called upon after the destruction of the Cyclops' self-sufficiency. The appeal to the father is an appeal to an outside source to cover up an internal doubt.

particle's rhetorical effect is based on drawing the addressee into the illusion of a shared belief: 'I'm not a god, *as you know*'. It is an inextricable part of Odysseus' confidence game.

But the genie of doubt has now irrevocably left its bottle. This is the point of Odysseus' reply, which hands Polyphemus an elementary lesson concerning the consequences of his entry into the symbolic. For we should emphasize that Odysseus is quite right. Poseidon will certainly not heal his son, for his status as father is dependent on Polyphemus' entrance into the symbolic, which in turn comes from a recognition of his dependence on others. Odysseus demonstrates that the lack at the heart of the Cyclops is now constitutive, that his ongoing demands will remain unfulfilled. He introduces Polyphemus to his *desire*, beyond his demands. Polyphemus thus emerges as a mortal subject, and it is this passage from immortality to mortality which gives further point to Odysseus' wry reference to Hades; the certainty that Polyphemus' eye will not be healed is already a certainty that sooner or later he will make the trip to Hades.⁴² The Cyclops is pulled back from his psychotic refusal of (the language of) society, and now must face his mortality.

The beginnings of language among the Cyclopes thus coincides with the emergence of desire; and it is the convergence of language and desire which allows us to return to the difficulties of the name Polyphemus. For insofar as his name, after the primal baptism by the other Cyclopes, seems to stay forever the same in the poetic tradition, do we not have evidence for the antidescriptivist position? That is, do we not have evidence for 'Polyphemus' acting as a rigid designator, in antidescriptivist terms? Let us once more turn to Žižek, and his criticism of antidescriptivism:

⁴²Note that Polyphemus' cry for help dragged the other Cyclopes from their *immortal* night: *νύκτα δὲ ἄμβροσίνην* (*Od.*9.404). We should also note the symbolic importance of the wine given by Odysseus to the Cyclops in order to guarantee the success of his trick. The text is careful to stress its exceptionality (*Od.*9.196ff), and it quickly captivates the Cyclops. But what is crucial is that its strength causes the Cyclops to liken it to *ambrosia* (9.359). The ambrosian liquid allows the mortal hero to approach, and render vulnerable, a quasi-divine being.

The basic problem of antidescriptivism is to determine what constitutes the identity of the designated object beyond the ever-changing cluster of descriptive features - what makes an object identical-to-itself even if all its properties have changed; in other words, how to conceive the objective correlative of the 'rigid designator', to the name in so far as it denotes the object in all possible worlds, in all counterfactual situations. What is overlooked, at least in the standard version of antidescriptivism, is that this guaranteeing the identity of an object in all counterfactual situations - through a change of all its descriptive features - is *the retroactive effect of naming itself*: it is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of the object.⁴³

In the process of naming itself, in the act of baptism, we act *as if* there was an objective correlative of the rigid designator. What is forgotten is that it is the act of naming itself which creates the illusion of such a self-identical object. What connects rigid designator to self-identical object is the *desire* of the namer for such an object; and in the naming of the Cyclops in *Odyssey 9*, we see the emergence of a rigid designator - the name 'Polyphemus' - at the moment desire is introduced to their species. The other Cyclopes see a talkative, blinded, decentered Cyclops; they call him chatterbox, which a description of his qualities. But from this moment on, due to their (and our) desire, this is the name which will be grafted on to him, and stay the same in all possible worlds. The episode thus stages the moment when a descriptive cluster pertaining to the Cyclops is misrecognized as a 'rigid designator' signifying his identity; but this 'identity' is constituted by nothing other than the desire *for* identity by those who name him.

The Cyclopean split

⁴³Zizck 1989, 94.

There is a great range of representations of the Cyclopes in Greek literature, and scholars have long tried to explain the divergences.⁴⁴ Nevertheless it is possible to discern a basic split into two major types, a split which can tell us much more about the significance of the Cyclops' blinding. First, there is the idealized picture of the 'golden age' Cyclopes; we can see here the roots of the picture of the pastoral, peaceful Cyclops which appears in Bucolic poetry, together with its darker side, the myth of the noble savage. In opposition to this is the *homo faber* tradition of the Cyclopes, most obviously evident in the representation in Hesiod, where they forge the thunderbolts of Zeus.⁴⁵ From my previous remarks on Polyphemus' entrance into the symbolic, the crux of my argument as regards the opposition between *homo faber* and golden age Cyclopes is perhaps already evident. *Odyssey* 9 stages the point when the two traditions meet, the point where a golden age Cyclops becomes Polyphemus as *homo faber*. To substantiate this, we need merely emphasize the inquisitiveness of Polyphemus after the blinding. His blindness leads to a wandering, as he frantically searches for those responsible for his loss, and for allies to help him recover.⁴⁶ We can now better understand the point of the vivid depiction of the split Cyclopean home, which involves two islands; there is the island they actually live on, and the smaller island opposite, which is perfectly suited for cultivation, but which the Cyclopes - in their self-sufficiency - have no

⁴⁴For a brief summary of the problem, with bibliographical references to the debate, Heubeck 1988, 19ff.

⁴⁵Hesiod *Theog.* 139ff.

⁴⁶The connection between wandering/blinding is emphasized by underlying word-plays on 'wandering'/blinding/avoiding: ἀλύω, ἀλαόω, ἀλέομαι. Eg. 398, 411, 453, 516. This vocabulary of blinding/wandering is integrated into a wider vocabulary of *alterity*, connecting this wandering/blinding to Polyphemus' (recently discovered) dependence on *others*: ἄλλοι. Consider in particular 9.115, 129, 192. For the division between the blinded Cyclops and the others, 9.401, 493. Before his *blinding*, the Cyclops had no concept of *wandering* (because he lived in a universe without doubt) nor *alterity* (because he was perfectly self-sufficient). Both this very wandering, and Polyphemus' new status as a man of 'much speech' organized around a central loss, a nothing, should begin to remind us of Odysseus polytropos, endless wanderer and explorer *par excellence*.

need to cultivate. It is only a matter of time before Polyphemus' newly found curiosity causes him to build a boat, cross the strait, and discover the second island.

Or is it? Odysseus' picture of the second island certainly holds out a strong temptation. As Norman Austin has argued, the island is repeatedly defined by what it is not. It is not visited by hunters, nor farmed by farmers, nor held by flocks: 'It would be difficult to find in Homer, or indeed anywhere else in Greek, a passage of comparable lengths so richly sown with negatives as *Od.9.106-148*.⁴⁷ Austin also notes the shift from the indicative mood to the optative within the negative description: '[T]he Cyclopes had no shipwrights *who might have belabored* (to build) ships, *which might have brought to completion* the many things for which men cross the sea in ships. *They would have belabored* the island to make it also a good settlement.'⁴⁸ To imagine Polyphemus making *this* voyage is to swallow him up once more in the normative ethics of Odysseus, who projects a certain set of ethical values onto the island's emptiness. Yet though Odysseus' narrative offers this as a possibility, it stops crucially short of actualizing it. Polyphemus is left hanging. *We do not know* the values Polyphemus which Polyphemus will invent on the second island, or even if the Cyclopes will ever get there. Though he is on the verge of self-exploration (indeed, self-creation), at this point his self remains empty, unwritten. Odysseus' narration of his interaction with the Cyclops leaves us with the (utopian, as well as dangerous) possibility of a quite different world.⁴⁹

Phaeacia: the impossible choice of subjectivity

⁴⁷Austin 1980, 2.

⁴⁸Austin 1980, 26-7. The shift from indicative to optative starts at *Od.9.126*.

⁴⁹The world of Goat-island functions as a blank screen which allows fantasized self-projection - a screen which did not exist for the Cyclopes before the blinding.

The Phaeacians are both close relations of the Cyclopes, and yet opposites. Indeed it is their status as opposites which provides the key to what they have in common. Once, we are told, they shared a common home on Hypereia - 'land beyond the horizon', land of excess - next to the 'more than men' (ὑπερνηγορέωντων) Cyclopes,⁵⁰ until they fled because of the Cyclopes' strength. Their flight was a complete one. From the Cyclopean rejection of civilization, the new Phaeacian world is 'hyper-civilized'.⁵¹ Whereas the Cyclopes have no need to plant any crops, the Phaeacians have perfect crops, producing perfect yields without the possibility of failure. The Cyclopes reject the norms of *xenia*, the Phaeacians pass on every single guest (without failure) to his or her destination. The Cyclopes have no ships, nor the need for them, while the Phaeacians have perfect ships which always bring their guests to their destination automatically, without the need of a navigator. The lack of limits to the chain of guests passed onto their destination, together with the perfection of the Phaeacian ships suggest a certain affinity with Proteus. The endlessness of the chain of guests should remind us of the lack of limits in Proteus' system of counting. Proteus had no idea of who was counting (a figure of pure sense) until he lost one of his seals. His counting was in an important sense automatic; it went on without any doubt on the part of any subject. It thus resembles the relationship between the Phaeacians and their ships; the ships do not need to be steered, but go to their destination without any pause in response to the thoughts of the Phaeacians. There is no moment of indecision, no time when a Phaeacian seaman pauses to reflect where to go. The similarity to Proteus is reinforced in the name of their land, Scheria; the name

⁵⁰*Od.* 6.4-5: οἱ πρὶν μὲν ποτε ναῖον ἐν εὐρυχώρῳ Ὑπερείει, / ἀγχοῦ Κυκλώπων, ἀνδρῶν ὑπερνηγορέωντων.

⁵¹The opposition is now a commonplace. See Hainsworth 1988, 293.

appears related to *σχερός*, an adjective suggesting a line without limits.⁵² The Phaeacians live in a land without beginning or end: like Proteus, they are wholly inside the symbolic.

The similarity to Proteus also hints at the similarity to the Cyclopes. For, just as was the case with Proteus, neither species experiences *doubt*. This is suggested in their separate relations to both the gods, and to language. While the Cyclopes reject the gods outright, the Phaeacians are somehow too close to them. Alcinous tells us that the gods have always appeared clearly to the Phaeacians, and hide nothing from them, and goes on to mention that this ‘closeness’ to the gods is shared by the Cyclopes.⁵³ This is reflected in their respective relations to language. The Cyclopes reject language outright and the possibility of deception that goes with it. The Phaeacians have a perfect language, which also precludes the possibility of deception.

But if Phaeacian society is characterized by the perfection of their mode of exchange, it is not just any society. As with the Cyclopes, it is clearly a patriarchal one. This is evident in the obvious suitability of Nausicaa as a possible wife for Odysseus in a fantasized *oikos*. We will discuss the implications for the poem’s construction of gender later. For now, we should just note that the system of patriarchal exchange - the flawless passing on of skills from father to father - fits in well with the picture of the rest of Phaeacian society:

ἀλλ’ ἄγε νῦν ἐμέθεν ξυνίει ἔπος, ὄφρα καὶ ἄλλωι
εἵπηις ἠρώων, ὅτε κεν σοῖς ἐν μεγάροισι
δαινύηι παρὰ σῆι τ’ ἀλόχωι καὶ σοῖσι τέκεσσιν,
ἡμετέρης ἀρετῆς μεμνημένος, οἷ καὶ ἡμῖν

⁵²It is only extant in the dative, in the phrase ἐν σχερῶι, meaning ‘uninterruptedly, successively’. See *LSJ, ad loc.* and cf. *Pind.N.1.69*.

⁵³See in particular *Od.7.201-2*: αἰεὶ γὰρ τὸ πάρος γε θεοὶ φαίνονται ἐναργεῖς / ἡμῖν. ‘For always in time past the gods have shown themselves clearly to us.’ Also, *7.205-6*: οὐ τι κατακρύπτουσιν, ἐπεὶ σφισιν ἐγγύθεν εἰμέν, / ὡς περ Κύκλωπες... ‘They make no concealment, as we are very close to them, as are the Cyclopes..’

Ζεὺς ἐπὶ ἔργα τίθησι διαμπερὲς ἐξέτι πατρῶν. (*Od.* 8.241-245)

[C]ome then, attend to what I say, so that you can tell it even to some other hero after this, when in your palace you sit at the feasting with your own wife and children beside you, remembering our excellence and what Zeus has established as our activities, through time, from the days of our fathers.

Alcinous' words come at a particularly sensitive time; Odysseus has just defeated the Phaeacians in the games, and Alcinous is about to reaffirm (somewhat defensively) what he believes to be the essence of Phaeacian superiority: their skill at dancing, and transporting men homeward on their ships. But the superiority in the system of transportation affirmed by Alcinous is parallel to their skill in communication. The excellence of the Phaeacians has been passed on unchanged from the time of 'their fathers', and (we can safely assume) from father to father. Alcinous presumes that Odysseus' return will likewise be to an *oikos*. But what will the message passed on by Odysseus to his wife and children be? A message from a father to a wife and son about a society where messages are passed perfectly from father to son. For the Phaeacian society is the exact reverse of that of the Cyclopes. Whereas the Cyclopes' society circumvented patriarchal tension of succession between father and son by freezing the *oikos* in time, and thus eliminating generational conflict, the Phaeacians circumvent the tension by providing a utopian solution of a perfect transfer of power from father to son. The Cyclopes were fathers without fathers; there was no gap between the 'real' fathers and the symbolic representation of paternal authority, the Name-of-the-Father. On Phaeacia, because of the perfection of the relationship between father and son, each 'real' father does not fall hopelessly short of an idealized symbol of the father, but coincides with it. Both societies, for different reasons, lack a gap between real father and symbolic father.

Unfriendly Phaeacians

Yet if the society of the Phaeacians is an idealized, impossible version of a patriarchy, this perfection seems to have some complications. For alongside their ability to pass on every stranger to his destination is their now notorious 'unfriendliness' to strangers.⁵⁴ The key to their unfriendliness emerges after the games, when Alcinous recounts a tale told by his father, Nausithous, about the anger of Poseidon:

Tell me your land, your neighborhood and your city,
so that our ships, straining with their own purpose, can carry you
there, for there are no steersmen among the Phaiakians, neither
are there any steering oars for them, such as other ships have,
but the ships themselves understand men's thoughts and purposes,
and they know all the cities of men and their fertile
fields, and with greatest speed they cross the gulf of the salt sea,
huddled under a mist and cloud, nor is there ever
any fear that they may suffer damage or come to destruction.
Yet this I have heard once on a time from my father, Nausithoos
who said it, and told me how Poseidon would yet be angry
with us, because we are convoy without hurt to all men.
He said that one day, as a well-made ship of Phaiakian
men came back from a convoy on the misty face of the water,
he would stun it, and pile a great mountain over our city, to hide it.
So the old man spoke, and the god might either bring it
to pass, or it might be left undone, as the god's heart pleases.
(*Od.*8.555-71)

The Phaeacians are perfect hosts. But they also know that, sooner or later, one of their trips will entail the destruction of them and their society. The arrival is an accident waiting to happen, but as such it provides the context for the tension on Phaeacia. The Phaeacians are perfectly willing to pass any ordinary man along; indeed, their identity (as perfect hosts) depends on it. Yet they must also be on the look-out for the more-than-man, the out-of-the-ordinary man who will destroy their

⁵⁴Rose 1969 *passim*. His arguments have undermined the efforts by certain scholars to view the Phaeacians as one-dimensionally perfect.

perfection. This is the key to their strange mixture of suspicion and kindness. The Phaeacians have an impossibly perfect relation to exchange, and they (unconsciously) know that it is impossible; their entire existence as Phaeacians depends upon the disavowal of this possibility.⁵⁵ It is this unconscious knowledge which appears in their suspicious attitude toward others. It also helps explain their obsession with Odysseus' identity. The Phaeacians try to determine if Odysseus is any different from the succession of other guests transferred to their destinations. Their civilization is characterized by a constant questioning of the identity of the series of men who arrive, but a questioning (springing from the unconscious worm of doubt represented by Nausithous' prediction) which perennially proves that they have no need to doubt their superiority to others. Their identity is based on never having to think twice, on an absence of doubt in their transportation of strangers to their destination. Yet the appearance of every new stranger leads them compulsively to doubt the absence of doubt; and so they are unfriendly.

From the opposing perspective, Odysseus needs to prove to the Phaeacians that he is 'just another man' in order to escape Phaeacia, and reach his *telos* at Ithaca. The persuasive powers used by Odysseus in the *Apologoi* in order to get home have been carefully explored by Most.⁵⁶ Odysseus' rhetoric hints at the need for a safe passage home, and persuades the Phaeacians of the merit of this. In an important sense he fools the Phaeacians. But, from the perspective of the Phaeacians, could they not have been fooled?

⁵⁵There seems to be a difference between the form of disavowal of Alcinous and the rest of the Phaeacians. Alcinous is one of two Phaeacian men who do not have a name directly linked to their identity as seamen (the other is Laodamas, whom I discuss further below). He seems to have conscious access to the prediction of Nausithous (a knowledge implied in the meaning of his name, 'Strong-*noos*'), which makes his disavowal sharper; 'I know very well that we are destined to be destroyed, but still I go on as if I didn't..' The other Phaeacians seem to have repressed this knowledge, which re-appears in their unfriendliness.

⁵⁶Most 1989 *passim*.

The 'choice' confronting the Phaeacians is rather more complex. It is a forced choice, which we can again illustrate quite concisely by returning to Lacan. In Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan illustrates the paradox involved in entrance as subject into the Symbolic with the following 'choice': 'Your money or your life'. The choice is deceptive in that it *precludes* choice. One can only choose life - to choose money entails losing both money and life.⁵⁷ This is the sort of choice which faces the Phaeacians. The basis of Phaeacian society, their uniqueness, is their perfection as hosts. To refuse to pass on Odysseus is to refuse to be perfect hosts, and thus to give up on the very quality that makes them Phaeacians. They may unconsciously be suspicious of Odysseus, but to refuse to send him home is to allow that suspicion to effect their conscious existence. If Odysseus is refused passage, can they ever be sure that anyone else deserves safe passage? They eventually do 'choose' to send him on, which results in the loss of a ship, and the ongoing possibility of loss exemplified by the uncertainty produced by the mountain hanging over them. It is thus relatively unimportant whether or not the Phaeacians are able to escape Odysseus' rhetorical trickery. For sooner or later, they must be fooled. Odysseus merely plays out the role already carved out by Nausithous' prediction, and the loss which comes with his trick is their ticket to subjectivity. In what follows, I look more carefully at their emergence as subjects, and the price to be paid.

The creation of a limit

⁵⁷However, as Dolar (1993) has argued, the example may be misleading in that 'it suggests that one might actually have possessed 'life with money' before being presented with the choice'. The crucial point is that this possibility is retroactively produced by the choosing itself. It is this initial 'forced choice', which is precisely what opens up the possibility of 'choice' in general. The Phaeacians represent this impossible 'wholeness' of 'life and money' - of life without loss.

The impossible choice of the Phaeacians can help us show what is at stake in the games of Book 8. Laodamas and Euryalus invite Odysseus to participate in order to help assuage any doubt that he might be ‘out of the ordinary’. The task for Odysseus is more complex, for to win at the games is to risk self-exposure. If the strength of his *polytropic* abilities would seem to be what guarantees his eventual arrival at his *telos*, the situation on Phaeacia is quite different. For here, the exposure of his power is precisely what threatens to dissolve it; by winning the game, he runs the risk of giving the game away. The Phaeacian situation illustrates a crucial problem of ideological control, pin-pointed in the paradoxical phrase ‘the impotence of power’. Ideological power depends upon its invisibility. As soon as one is seen using that power, it begins to vanish, which means that the exercise of power is dependent on self-effacement. In the case of Odysseus and the Phaeacians, his control over them depends on his ability to appear as ordinary, just another voyager on the way to his destination. Odysseus’ ability (and need) to walk this tightrope can help us understand both the latent threat in Laodamas’ invitation to compete, and Odysseus’ reluctance. For in offering the invitation, Laodamas is quick to remind Odysseus that ships are waiting to take him home (*Od.8.151-2*). This reminder of Phaeacian control over Odysseus’ *nostos* hints at the potential cost of the failure to compete, and Odysseus assents only when his failure to compete would arouse even more suspicion. His eventual entrance is devastating:

Ἦ ῥα καὶ αὐτῶι φάρει ἀναίξας λάβε δίσκον
 μείζονα καὶ πάχετον, στιβαρώτερον οὐκ ὀλίγον περ
 ἢ οἴωι Φαίηκες ἐδίσκεον ἀλλήλοισι.
 τόν ῥα περστρέψας ἦκε στιβαρῆς ἀπὸ χειρός·
 βόμβησεν δὲ λίθος· κατὰ δ’ ἔπτηξαν ποτὶ γαίηι
 Φαίηκες δολιχήρετμοι, ναυσίκλυτοι ἄνδρες,
 λαὸς ὑπὸ ῥιπῆς. ὁ δ’ ὑπέρπτατο σήματα πάντων
 ῥίμφα θέων ἀπὸ χειρός. ἔθηκε δὲ τέρματ’ Ἀθήνη
 ἀνδρὶ δέμας εἰκυῖα, ἔπος τ’ ἔφατ’ ἔκ τ’ ὀνόμαζε·
 “καὶ κ’ ἀλαός τοι, ξεῖνε, διακρίνειε τὸ σῆμα
 ἀμφοφόων, ἐπεὶ οὐ τι μεμιγμένον ἐστὶν ὁμίλῳι,
 ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρῶτον. σὺ δὲ θάρσει τόνδε γ’ ἄεθλον·
 οὐ τις Φαιήων τότε γ’ ἵξεται οὐδ’ ὑπερήσει.” (*Od.8.186-98*)

He spoke, and with mantle still on sprang up and laid hold of a discus that was a bigger and thicker one, heavier not by a little than the one the Phaiakians had used for their sport in throwing. He spun, and let this fly from his ponderous hand. The stone hummed in the air, and the Phaiakians, men of long oars and famed for seafaring, shrank down against the ground, ducking under the flight of the stone which, speeding from his hand lightly, overflowed the marks of all others, and Athene, likening herself to a man, marked down the cast and spoke and addressed him: "Even a blind man, friend, would be able to distinguish your mark by feeling for it, since it is not mingled with the common lot, but far before. Have no fear over this contest. No one of the Phaiakians will come up to this mark or pass it."

This crucial interchange opens out into a wide variety of themes explored in the poem. For example, Athena's remark that 'even a blind man could distinguish Odysseus' *sema* both directly anticipates the inability of the blinded Polyphemus to detect the disguised Odysseus in Book 9. It also hints at what is at stake in the signs of another blind man, the songs of the bard Demodocus. These episodes will be commented upon in detail later. But let us first focus on the effect of Odysseus' *sema* on his fellow competitors. I earlier suggested that Phaeacian civilization was free of doubt. Every traveler who arrives is passed on effortlessly to his destination, becoming (for the Phaeacians) another sign in an indefinite series of signs without limit. We can also presume that each traveler took part in the games. But if previous guests participated, they surely lost, for Alcinous is quick to boast that the Phaeacians surpass others in the games (περιγιγνόμεθ' ἄλλων *Od.* 8.102ff). Herein lies the first indication that Odysseus is different; in the games, his discus is incomparably *beyond* those of the Phaeacians: ὁ δ' ὑπέρπτατο σήματα πάντων. The society of excessively successful communication is exceeded; it finds its limit in a discus which goes beyond its terms of reference. For the Phaeacians, Odysseus is not just another link in a chain to be superseded by another link. Instead, he opens up a gap between all the previous *semata* and his own, immeasurable *sema*. For the Phaeacians, Odysseus is

not any fellow-competitor, but is *unbeatable*, a figure of omnipotence. This is the point underlined by Athena: οὐ τις Φαιήων τόδε γ' ἴξεται οὐδ' ὑπερήσει. No-one of the Phaeacians can exceed this mark. Odysseus' throw has suggested to the Phaeacians the possibility of a game with quite different rules to the one they normally play, and has therefore opened up a gap between their society and an unimaginable other. Odysseus seems to be (as with the Cyclopes) the instigator of this gap.

The problems of the Phaeacians can be elaborated by returning to Proteus' counting, an episode which is replayed on Phaeacia. Proteus began to count, to impose a sequence with beginning and end on an indefinite series of numbers, at the very moment he was forced to confront the loss of one his seals. So too the Phaeacian 'games' will only truly begin when they recognize the possibility that they might *lose*. Before Odysseus an endless series of competitors arrived, and were unproblematically defeated. But what of the competitor *after* Odysseus? The next set of games on Phaeacia will be different. Odysseus therefore halts the Phaeacian games-without-loss. And it is this very role which is nicely highlighted by Athena before the games begin:

τῶι δ' ἄρ' Ἀθήνη
θεσπεσίην κατέχευε χάριν κεφαλῆι τε καὶ ὤμοις,
καὶ μιν μακρότερον καὶ πάσσονα θῆκεν ἰδέσθαι,
ὥς κεν Φαιήκεσσι φίλος πάντεσσι γένοιτο
δεινός τ' αἰδοῖός τε, καὶ ἐκτελέσειεν ἀέθλους
πολλούς, τοὺς Φαίηκες ἐπειρήσαντ' Ὀδυσῆος. (*Od.*8.18-23)

[A]nd upon him Athene
drifted a magic grace about his head and shoulders,
and made him taller for the eye to behold, and thicker,
so that he might be loved by all the Phaiakians, and to them
might be wonderful and respected, and might *bring to an end the
many contests* by which the Phaiakians tested Odysseus.⁵⁸

⁵⁸I modify the translation of Lattimore, which obscures the significance of the Greek: Lattimore translates the italicized words 'and might accomplish many trials of strength'.

Odysseus will, quite literally, bring an *end* to the *many* games at Phaeacia.⁵⁹ Before Odysseus arrived, the games were a series without limit, an indefinite string of 'many' individual contestants arrived, were defeated, and sent on their way. But because Odysseus will be the first external victor, the nature of these games (and Phaeacian society) will change. He will end one sort of games, but also inaugurate a new set of games; the finisher of one sort of Phaeacian society, he is the founder of another.⁶⁰ This is indicated in the poem by ongoing allusions to the tale of Proteus; for Alcinous promises Odysseus that he will provide him with a ship which will set off on its *first* voyage:

ἀλλ' ἄγε νῆα μέλαιναν ἐρύσσομεν εἰς ἄλλα δῖαν
πρωτόπλοον... (Od.8.34-35)

Come then, let us drag a black ship down to the bright sea,
one sailing now for the first time....

As with the name of Proteus before falling victim to Eidothea's trick, the reference to the 'first' ship only achieves its true meaning retroactively. For after Odysseus has departed, and the mountain hovers over Phaeacia as a reminder of the eternal possibility of loss, the ship which carried Odysseus to his destination and is later turned into stone will indeed be remembered as the first ship, founder of a new era.⁶¹ Never again will Phaeacian ships travel without a thought from the crew to the destination. From now on, they will always reflect on their decisions. Odysseus' *sema*, far beyond their *semata*, opens up the possibility of another place from where the Phaeacians can look at themselves. It is the awareness of such a

⁵⁹The verb retains some of its literal sense of 'bring an *end* to' rather than merely meaning 'accomplish'. Cf. *Od.*10.41.

⁶⁰Note the undermining of Alcinous' initial confidence: He begins by inviting the competitors to take part in 'all the games' in which the Phaeacians surpass others (*Od.*8.101ff). Alcinous quickly modifies this after Odysseus' victory, limiting his boast to games of speed.

⁶¹The aetiological aspect of Odysseus' interactions with the Phaeacians is mentioned in passing by Nagler, 1990. The importance of the theme of firstness - which returns us to the problems of the numerical sequence suggested in the tricking of Proteus - is emphasized by Athena's earlier remark about the discus throw, which is 'by far the first', 'πολὺ πρῶτον.'

place which creates the hitherto disavowed gap between real Phaeacian fathers and a symbolic father. For they are now aware of a hypothetical position outside Phaeacian society from where they can view themselves and their leaders as a whole, and thus evaluate themselves.⁶²

They are thus also left in the same position as Cyclopean society after Polyphemus' blinding, though for different reasons. Both the Cyclopes and Phaeacians become imperfect at the moment they endure loss (symbolic castration). But the Cyclops endure loss by having something removed which can never be healed (his eye), while the Phaeacians are rendered imperfect by the addition of an ideal which they realize they can never attain (suggested by Odysseus' discus throw). The loss suffered by one Cyclops opened a channel of communication to others and destroyed their self-sufficiency. Here, the perfect communication between Phaeacians made possible by their ongoing successes is shattered by Odysseus; they now each have an external ideal (an Ego-Ideal) by which to measure each one of themselves, which also allows them to bracket their symbolic identities. They are split; aware of their symbolic identities, they are now also faced with the possible awareness of something more than them. They face a difficult problem; harmony on Phaeacia between Phaeacians with a firm belief in the symbolic authority of fathers could be maintained with ease. But can such harmony exist when such authority is doubted?

The language of certainty

⁶²On this aspect of the symbolic, see Zizek 1991, 11. This opening of a gap allows the Phaeacians to become aware (self-consciously) of the impossibility of their society, something which they *already knew* unconsciously (exhibited in their unfriendliness). Of course, in the *Odyssey* they become self-conscious too late to preserve their identities as Phaeacians.

Despite Odysseus' success with the discus, the initial Phaeacian reaction is to continue their disavowal - and their suspicion. Alcinous persists in his quest to find out Odysseus' identity, which leads to Odysseus' *Apologoi*. Here, the reaction of the king to Odysseus' words, together with the manner of the question concerning Odysseus' identity can tell us a great deal about the language of the Phaeacians:

ᾧ Ὀδυσσεῦ, τὸ μὲν οὐ τί σ' εἴσκομεν εἰσορόωντες
 ἠπεροπῆά τ' ἔμεν καὶ ἐπικλοπον, οἷά τε πολλοὺς
 βόσκει γαῖα μέλαινα πολυσπερέας ἀνθρώπους
 ψεύδεά τ' ἀρτύνοντας, ὅθεν κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο· (Od. 11.363-66)

'Odysseus, we as we look upon you do not imagine that you are a deceptive or thievish man, the sort that the black earth breeds in great numbers, people who wander widely, making up lying stories, *from sources which no one could see for himself.*'⁶³

Alcinous' reaction to Odysseus' tales is a strange one. For his belief in Odysseus' stories runs against their obvious implausibility, commented upon since antiquity.⁶⁴ What can explain Alcinous' belief in Odysseus' truthfulness? It seems that this is another misrecognition of Odysseus. Alcinous denies that Odysseus is thievish, *epiklopos*, the very quality that Athena will affirm of him in Book 13.⁶⁵ Odysseus is defined by his ability to manipulate language, someone who tells 'lies like the truth.' Yet this by itself does not explain the misrecognition. For why would a species who mingle openly with the gods misrecognize anyone? The self-confidence betrays a certain naiveté, which we can detect by looking more closely at Alcinous' definition of lying. He begins by suggesting that lying is something that 'many' men do, and we can safely presume that the referents of the many men are the long list of voyagers who have passed through Phaeacia on their way to their

⁶³The italics indicate where I have changed the translation of Lattimore. For the problems of the phrase, see Stanford *ad loc.*

⁶⁴For extensive references to the debate in antiquity, together with discussion, see Most 1989, 15.

⁶⁵See Od. 13.291. Note the retroactive confirmation of Phaeacian concern about his status as a god.

respective destinations. But he is more specific; liars are those many men who make claims from a place which eludes verification: ὄθεν κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο. Let us ask a simple question. If liars tell stories which can't be verified, how does Alcinous *know* that they are liars? In short, why does he not concede the possibility that they may be telling the truth, but that it is merely a truth he is unable to verify? A reasonable conclusion is that Alcinous thinks he knows *more*. Liars are defined by their fantastical construction of the events which they have not experienced (where no-one might see); they are dismissed as liars because Alcinous believes himself to be in the position of the place 'where no-one might see'. This makes good sense; given that Alcinous and the Phaeacians pride themselves on their ability to travel *everywhere*, their reservoir of empirical knowledge is inexhaustible. It is because of the confidence which comes with such a position of (supposed) knowledge that Alcinous is fully equipped to divide his visitors into liars and truth-tellers. If their words correspond to his (greater) knowledge, they are truth-tellers, if they do not, they are liars.

Yet if Alcinous sees everything, he does not see that he has a blind spot. For the belief in his own knowledge means that he is quite unable to deal with a man who tells *lies like the truth*. The aspect of the *Apologoi* overlooked by Alcinous is that Odysseus' tales can be doubted, but not automatically disbelieved. Odysseus' story of his encounter with Polyphemus illustrates this nicely. Odysseus' blinding of the Cyclops coincides with the destruction of the former Cyclopean civilization. This is rammed home when Odysseus emphasizes that Polyphemus will never be healed, clarifying that his former, monadic society is gone forever. What matters for the narrative, however, is that the loss of the Cyclopean civilization means that Odysseus' tale is impossible to validate:

σχέτλιε, πῶς κέν τις σε καὶ ὕστερον ἄλλος ἴκοιτο
ἀνθρώπων πολέων; ἐπεὶ οὐ κατὰ μοῖραν ἔρεξας. (*Od.*9.351-2)

Cruel, how can any man come and visit
you ever again, now you have done what has no sanction?

No other will visit the Cyclopes again. Yet this is not just because of fear of their cannibalism. No-one else will visit them because they will no longer exist as Cyclopes. Odysseus' arrival coincides with the disappearance of their civilization. The *Apologoi* thus tell a tale which demands doubt, but which is constructed in such a way as to make its falsity unprovable.⁶⁶ For the possibility of access to truth disappears the moment Odysseus leaves. This explains Alcinous' difficulty: because he is unable to disprove Odysseus' tale, he makes the (unwarranted) presumption that he is telling the truth. The only alternative would be to *doubt*, to assume that Odysseus speaks 'from sources which no one could see for himself' (ὄθεν κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο), but this is simply not available in the Phaeacian universe. The *Apologoi* therefore function in a similar manner to the games; both Odysseus hurling of the discus and his tales are outside the terms of reference (the *semata*) of the Phaeacians. Yet because their civilization is based on a disavowal of this possibility, this aspect of Odysseus is ignored.

We can now understand why Alcinous can both recount the story of Nausithous concerning Poseidon's future destruction of Phaeacian society, and also the particular form that destruction takes:

φῆ ποτὲ Φαιήκων ἀνδρῶν εὐεργέα νῆα
ἐκ πομπῆς ἀνιοῦσαν ἐν ἠεροειδέι πόντῳ
ῥαίσεισθα, μέγα δ' ἡμῖν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψειν.
ὡς ἀγόρευ' ὁ γέρων· τὰ δέ κεν θεὸς ἢ τελέσειεν,
ἢ κ' ἀτέλεστ' εἶη, ὡς οἱ φίλον ἔπλετο θυμῷ. (*Od.*8.567-71)

He said that one day, as a well-made ship of Phaiakian
men came back from a convoy on the misty face of the water,
he would stun it, and pile a great mountain over our city, to hide it.
So the old man spoke, and the god might either bring it

⁶⁶It is worth adding that the *Apologoi* also tell the tale of the disappearance of any potential corroborating witnesses - the companions of Odysseus. This is extensively discussed in my examination of Odysseus' relationship to his companions in Chapter 5.

to pass, or it might be left undone, as the god's heart pleases.

Alcinous thinks that the prophecy will either be completed, or not completed. Yet this is of course not what happens. Alcinous remembers the prophecy of Nausithous, and announces that the perfect conveyance of men will stop. The poem abruptly leaves the Phaeacians at the point of divine indecision as they embark on prayers and sacrifice to Poseidon. Their story is halted mid-line, at a point of absolute doubt:

So he spoke, and they were afraid and made the bulls ready.
So these leaders of the Phaiakians and men of counsel
among their people made their prayer to the lord Poseidon,
standing around the great altar. But now great Odysseus awakened..
(13.184-87)⁶⁷

It is precisely this indeterminacy (a moment when it is unclear what will happen, a moment of crisis) which is inconceivable for Alcinous. His former reaction to Nausithous' prophecy was a deterministic one; the god would either bring it about or not, regardless of Phaeacian efforts. It is the deterministic outlook which is shattered. If Phaeacian society was formerly characterized by the absence of any blind spots (because the Phaeacians believed themselves to be all-seeing⁶⁸), the departure of Odysseus does not announce a simple reversal, the change from a world of light to a world of darkness. Rather, the mountain of Poseidon and Zeus casts a permanent shadow over Phaeacia.

We can now finally turn to Alcinous' famous remarks about naming:

εἴπ' ὄνομ' ὅτι σε κείθι κάλεον μήτηρ τε πατήρ τε
ἄλλοι θ' οἱ κατὰ ἄστν καὶ οἱ περιναϊετάουσιν.
οὐ μὲν γάρ τις πάμπαν ἀνόνημος ἐστ' ἀνθρώπων,
οὐ κακὸς οὐδὲ μὲν ἐσθλός, ἐπὴν τὰ πρῶτα γένηται,

⁶⁷On this, see the superb discussion of Peradotto 1990, 80ff.

⁶⁸Perhaps this is the point of line the cry of despair at the loss of sight of the ship at 13.169, which before its petrification was entirely visible: καὶ δὴ προϋφάνετο πᾶσα.

ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πᾶσι τίθενται, ἐπεὶ κε τέκωσι, τοκῆες. (*Od.*8.550-54)

Tell me the name by which your mother and father called you in that place, and how the rest who live in the city about you call you. No one among the peoples, neither base man nor noble, is altogether nameless, once he has been born, but always his parents as soon as they bring him forth put upon him a name.

The best of critics have pounced on Alcinous' words, noting the pun on Otis: 'To name oneself 'no one' is not to be without a name, then.'⁶⁹ Everyone is born into a social context, named, classified, located in society before one has any say in the matter..⁷⁰ In short, no-one is nameless. Yet though this maxim is repeated by critics as a universal truth, what is too easily overlooked is that it is a position enunciated *by a Phaeacian*. In a society which has not experienced doubt, whose identity depends on a disavowal of anything beyond their *semata*, everyone definitely, indubitably has a name. Yet because these are Alcinous' words, we should be less certain. For if everyone is given a name, to *what* is the name given? There is a subtle gliding over of the (temporally and logically) prior moment when a child is not yet inside language (and ideology). There are, one assumes, no naming ceremonies on Phaeacia, ceremonies which dramatize the terrifying (and utopian) moment when a child is not yet named. Alcinous refers to the moment of birth: ἐπὴν τὰ πρῶτα γένηται. The reference to firstness recalls the coming into being of Proteus. Proteus believed (for an eternity) that every one of his seals had a name ('named' 1,2,3,4,5). In his universe, as in the universe of the Phaeacians, there was no gap between signifier and signified. Yet can this stay the same once Proteus and the Phaeacians are introduced to doubt? Proteus loses a seal. The Phaeacians have been introduced to a figure outside their system of reference, see a ship turned to stone and await the fall of a mountain. Both are left hanging at moments of

⁶⁹Goldhill 1991, 35.

⁷⁰Peradotto 1990, 161.

radical doubt. They realize that there is nothing 'natural' about the imposition of names, but that it is contingent insofar as they themselves have created these names. At this point, can any Phaeacian confidently declare that anything has a name?

CHAPTER 3

FROM STONES TO STATEHOOD: THE ORIGINS OF SOCIETY

The previous chapters have suggested that radical doubt brought with it the Homeric suggestion of a ciphered self; this is an insubstantial self which emphasizes the incompleteness, imperfection of any determinate identity and yet acts as a fantasy screen against which the fantasy of a determinate identity becomes possible. In this chapter, I suggest that this conception of selfhood has important consequences for the Greek conception of human society. To doubt the perfection of one's identity is also to recognize that social discourses are unable fully to constitute such a self. Society itself is therefore 'incomplete'; there will always be something which social discourses cannot account for, a realm of the unsignified. In what follows, I suggest that one of the functions of stones, within Greek myth in general and the *Odyssey* in particular, is to signify this internal limit of society; stones, - and in particular the *colossos*, the massive slab of stone at the base of tombs - point toward 'another world' constitutively beyond the realm of society. The stones themselves are mute, incomprehensible, resistant to the attempts of rational discourse to gentrify their blank stupidity; they thus signify the limit of sense. In Lacanian terms, they function as sublime objects: though they are unable to tell us anything about the 'world beyond' which they point toward, they come as close as possible to signifying this world by representing the impossibility of such signification. They are material correlatives at the level of the social of the radical self-doubt (and consequent notion of self-as-cipher) which is constitutive, for Homer, of mortal subjects.

With this background we can begin to understand the significance of the well-known Greek etymology of 'people' (*laos*) from 'stone' (*laas*). A people

emerge as a people the moment something inexplicable - represented by stones - appears in the realm of the social. I will soon suggest that this link helps explain the importance of the appearance of stones within the worlds of the Cyclopes and Phaeacians, stones which emerge at the moment they doubt their symbolic identities. But before turning to the *Odyssey*, let us first look at the relevance of the best known mythic tale linking stones and people, that of Deucalion and Pyrrha

Pyrrha and Deucalion: acephalic subjects

Left alone on the earth after Zeus' flood, Deucalion and Pyrrha hurl stones over their shoulders which become people.¹ I will look at Apollodorus' suggestive summary of the tale and try to explain some of its puzzling features by comparing it to events on Phaeacia. A major point of comparison, in addition to the appearance of stones, will be the prominence of heads, *kephaloi*, in both the *Odyssey* and the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha. In order to help us through the complexities of the symbolic significance of 'heads' (which will in turn clarify the function of stones), let us turn again to Lacan. His discussion of the inter-relationship of what he calls the 'Imaginary' and 'Symbolic' can provide a useful grid for plotting the array of associations linked to *kephaloi*.

Throughout Lacan's second Seminar, which explores the Freudian theory of the ego, heads play a crucial role. In particular, he tries to describe the Freudian concept of the unconscious by developing a theory of what he calls the a-cephalic subject. He begins by outlining the narcissistic character of the identifications of the *ego*. The human perceives an assortment of objects in the outside world; but his perception of these objects is not innocent, for it enacts a prior tension which is

¹Cf. Scodel 1982, who argues for the importance of myths of 'natural disaster' for our understanding of the Homeric poems.

outlined in Lacan's theory of the Mirror stage. The child, brought too soon to the world, sees in his/her image in the mirror an image of ideal unity. This image of unity produces tension because it comes from outside the child, who remains stuck in 'motor incapacity and nursling dependence'; all that is fragmentary, incomplete in the child is conjured away in the image, but at the price of recognizing a fundamental gap between the image and the subject who perceives the image. Lacan's point is that this stage structures our perception of everything, of every object. There is nothing 'permanent' about any object; rather, in our perceptual system, the series of objects perceived are a series of momentary ego-identifications. The shadow of the ego haunts every act of perception. It is at this point that the terms 'polycephalic' and 'a-cephalic' are introduced; for the plurality of the identifications of the ego threatens the destruction of the subject as such, eclipsed by its external identifications: 'The subject transformed into this polycephalic image seems to be somewhat acephalic.'² Even at the narcissistic level of the Imaginary, the very failure of every ego-identification persistently points toward a subject who doesn't belong to the ego, a subject who is a-cephalic. Lacan then turns to the changes in the relationship to objects which occur on entry to language:

It is through nomination that man makes objects subsist with a certain consistence. If objects had only a narcissistic relationship with the subject, they would only ever be perceived in a momentary fashion. The word, the word which names, is the identical. The word doesn't answer to the spatial distinctiveness of the object, which is always already to be dissolved in an identification with a subject, but to its temporal dimension. The object, at one instant constituted as a semblance of the human subject, a double of himself, nonetheless has a certain permanence of appearance over time, which however does not endure indefinitely, since all objects are perishable. This

²Lacan 1991, 167.

appearance which lasts a certain length of time is strictly only recognizable through the intermediary of the name. The name is the time of the object. Naming constitutes a pact, by which two subjects simultaneously come to an agreement to recognize the same object.³

This pact of naming dissolves the narcissistic relationship to objects. It also invests objects with a certain permanence not allowed at the level of the Imaginary. But such permanence comes at a price. For to enter the pact of language is to render permanent the split described at the Imaginary level between ego-identifications and the agent of those identifications. Why? Because to enter into this pact is to enter a relationship outside oneself. It is a sacrifice of the image of a unified one (still problematically maintained in the narcissism of ego-identifications, which are a series of ones) for the fruits of the inter-relationship of these 'ones' in language. To enter into language, the realm of sense, is to accept this loss; we have returned to the concept of symbolic castration.

Yet if language destroys the possibility of a single subject, it cannot quite swallow up the subject as such. For though it tries to envelop everything in the realm of sense, it cannot efface the traces of the initial sacrifice required for entrance into the realm of sense. Language, to be sure, effaces any substantiality of the subject, and gives order to the chaotic spate of ego-identifications at the level of the Imaginary. But the moment of its emergence into this chaos is itself senseless, in that it emerges as language *as such*, independently of its meaning. It is in this emergence of in irreducible meaninglessness - 'a word [which] means nothing except that it is a word' - that we can locate a certain 'left-over' of the subject, despite its effacement at the level of (conscious) meaning. Despite its total effacement in sense, the subject *still* speaks, but speaks a signifier which cannot yet

³Lacan 1991, 169.

be assimilated to meaning; it is outside the system of signifiers. Lacan equates this subject of the signifier with the Freudian subject of the unconscious, and to help illustrate it, he uses the striking image of the head of a hydra which speaks at the moment its head is lost; the voice which emerges is 'the voice of no-one', *Nemo*.

We can now turn to the peculiar appropriateness of the 'head' in illustrating some of the complexities involved in symbolic castration. A 'head' is a sign of vulnerability, used metonymically in contexts which suggest the mortality of the individual: one 'lays one's head on the line'.⁴ Yet the head is also the place from where speech is articulated. Heads talk. Indeed in later Greek the head is used metaphorically to designate the crucial aspects of an argument.⁵ We could go further: it expresses not so much the 'sense' of a reasoned position, the manifold complexities of an argument, but what is 'essential' in that argument; the abstraction of the argument does not do injustice to it, however. Rather, it illustrates how language as a structure can always be reduced to something uncannily close to 'non-sense', to a dead letter. Cut off from the body that sustains it, there is nothing 'living', animated about such a head. A head as symbol of potential loss is a constant reminder of the loss sustained on entrance to language. Yet it also comes to figure language *as* dead: as a lifeless, disembodied structure.

⁴This is a Homeric phrase; see *Od.*2.237, where the suitors lay their heads on the line by continuing to court Penelope: 'παρθήμενοι κεφαλᾶς'. The *Iliad* describes the mass destruction caused by war as Zeus' hurling of heads to Hades: 'πολλὰς ἰφθίμους κεφαλᾶς Ἄϊδι προΐάπειν.' (*Il.*11.55). This passage is discussed in the next chapter. Consider also these words of Vernant on the importance of heads as an index of vulnerability: 'They also use the word *kara*, the head, with a metonymic value: a part for the whole. Even in this case, the head is not equivalent to the body; it is a way of saying "a man himself," as an individual. In death, men are called "heads," but they are heads shrouded in night, enveloped in darkness, face-less. Among the living, heads have a countenance, a face, a *prosopon*; they are there, present before your eyes just as you are present to their eyes. The head, the face is what one sees first in a human being, what is revealed of him (or her) on the surface; it is what identifies him and makes him recognize when he (or she) is present to the gaze of others.'

⁵See Ford 1994 *passim*, who discusses the relevance of the metaphor for Plato's *Theaetetus*. Though his discussion centers on the Platonic use of the verb 'κεφαλαίω', he cites the Hesiodic use of the expression 'ἐκκορυφώω', which seems to mean 'bring a tale to its peak', as evidence for the traditional nature of the association.

With this in mind, let us turn to the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha as related by Apollodorus; I provide it in translation, adding the Greek where relevant.

Though Apollodorus provides only a summary of the myth, doubtless collected from a range of sources, there are more than enough details to spark our interest:

Zeus by pouring heavy rain from heaven flooded the greater part of Greece, so that all men were destroyed, except a few who fled to the high mountains in the neighborhood (τὰ πλησίον ὑψηλά ὄρη). It was then that the mountains in Thessaly parted (τὰ κατὰ Θεσσαλίαν ὄρη διέστη), and that all the world outside the Isthmus and Peloponnese was overwhelmed. But Deucalion, floating in the chest over the sea for nine days and as many nights, drifted to Parnassus, and there, when the rain ceased, he landed and sacrificed to Zeus, the god of Escape. And Zeus sent Hermes to him and allowed him to choose what he would, and he chose to get men (ὁ δὲ αἰρεῖται ἀνθρώπους αὐτῶι γενέσθαι). And at the bidding of Zeus he took up stones and threw them over his head (ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς ἔβαλλεν αἴρων λίθους), and the stones which Deucalion threw became men, and the stones which Pyrrha threw became women. Hence people were called metaphorically people (λαοί) from λάας, 'a stone.'⁶

It is worth noting immediately some links in the story to the tales of the Cyclopes and Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*. There are two groups of survivors of the flood: those who escaped destruction by living on mountain tops, and Deucalion and Pyrrha, who lived because of their ability to construct a sailing vessel. Though the mountain survivors are mentioned only to be ignored, it is interesting that Apollodorus' tale links sea to mountain in his description of the trip of Deucalion and Pyrrha to Parnassus. Survivors on mountains, survivors at sea, a pairing which returns us to the two impossible civilizations of the sea-faring Phaeacians and the mountain-dwelling Cyclopes. The link is strengthened by the curious reference to a cataclysmic destruction in Phaeacian history; Nausithous, founder of Phaeacians who led their migration away from the Cyclopes, was born to Periboea. But her father, Eurymedon, had somehow destroyed his people:

⁶From Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*, Chapter 1, sections 47-8.

Ναυσίθοον μὲν πρῶτα Ποσειδάων ἐνοσίχθων
 γείνατο καὶ Περίβοια, γυναικῶν εἶδος ἀρίστη,
 ὀπλοτάτη θυγάτηρ μεγαλήτορος Εὐρυμέδοντος,
 ὅς ποθ' ὑπερθύμοισι Γιγάντεσσιν βασίλευεν.
 ἄλλ' ὁ μὲν ὤλεσε λαὸν ἀτάσθαλον, ὤλετο δ' αὐτός· (Od.7.56-60)

First of all Poseidon, shaker of the earth, and the fairest
 in form of women, Periboia, had a son Nausithoos.
 She was the youngest daughter of great-hearted Eurymedon,
 who in his time had been king over the high-hearted Giants.
 But he lost his recklessly daring people and himself perished.

The Phaeacians are clearly survivors of a loss which is alluded to, but not explained, just as are Deucalion and Pyrrha. But it is in the stone-throwing that the connection becomes more explicit. For the myth portrays both a choice, and a pact at the origins of humanity. There is a choice for a social world, which comes into being via the emergence of *anthropoi*. But this choice only comes after the enactment of a pact between Deucalion and Pyrrha (ratified by an absent third party, Zeus) to hurl stones. The manner in which they hurl these stones is crucial. First, they must turn their backs to the trajectory of the stones they throw. They 'create' people, but must remain blind to the origins of what they create; 'stones' become 'people', and this is in an important sense caused by their throw. Yet despite this, they remain blind as to how this happens. Human society emerges with the creation of a blind spot, where the gap between *laas* and *laos* is constitutively inexplicable, producing an irreducible doubt in the realm of the social. For all their choice of 'sense' there will always be something inexplicable, stone-like in the realm of the social. The stone functions as a reminder that the choice *for* language is inexplicable *within* language. It is a representation of the unrepresentable, and thus expresses an internal limit to the sense of any social pact. For Deucalion and Pyrrha, the origin of humanity coincides with a necessary doubting of those origins.

The *Colossos* as sublime object

This particular set of symbolic associations attached to stones in Greek thought has already been explored by Jean-Pierre Vernant, in his elegant essay on the *Colossos*, the dark, mute slab of stone which substitutes for corpses at the tombs of the dead:

When a colossos is used as a substitute for the corpse, in the tomb, it is not meant to reproduce the features of the dead man or to create the illusion of his physical presence. What it embodies in permanent form in stone is not the image of the dead man but his life in the beyond, the life that is opposed to that of living men as the world of night is opposed to the world of light. The colossos is not an image; it is a 'double', as the dead man himself is a double of the living man.⁷

Neither entirely in the realm of the human, nor yet in the world beyond, the silent stone of the colossus functions as a perpetual bridge between the two. As with the stones of Deucalion and Pyrrha, it does this by attempting to represent the unrepresentable; and this, according to Vernant, is the peculiar function of a religious sign:

The religious sign is not simply a piece of mental equipment. Its purpose is not limited to evoking in men's minds the sacred power to which it refers. Its intention is always to establish a true means of communication with this power and to really introduce its presence into the human world. But while it thus aims, so to speak, to establish a bridge with the divine, it must at the same time emphasize the gap, the immeasurable difference between this sacred power and anything that attempts to manifest it, perforce inadequately, to the eyes of men.⁸

The *Colossos* as a religious sign is unable to represent 'the world beyond', 'night', the realm of the unsignified. But it comes as close as is possible to signifying this by representing the impossibility in its own form: because it is mute,

⁷Vernant 1983, 306.

⁸Vernant 1983, 314-5.

senseless, inexplicable, it displays the impossibility of access to the world beyond. To return to Deucalion and Pyrrha, their social pact (emergence as a *laos*) coincides with the appearance of a mute stone, a sublime object.

But their throw is also made over their *heads*. Why this detail? It emphasizes the vulnerability of Deucalion and Pyrrha as they enter the realm of mortals. The stone causes them to ‘duck’, their heads disappear for a second only to reappear: but their reappearance coincides with an awareness of the prior absence into which the heads move. As they throw the stone, they symbolically ‘lose their heads’, become a-cephalic; entrance to the social coincides with this loss of their unchallenged individuality. They will no longer be monadic ones, unaffected by the social phenomenon of language.

Let us now compare this tale of origins to the specific form of the Phaeacian punishment, which signposts their entrance to subjectivity. For on Phaeacia, a ship is turned into stone, and the people are left with a much larger stone - a mountain - hanging over them. The text also explicitly alludes to the etymological link between ‘stones’ and ‘people’, λίθος and λαός.⁹ Here is Zeus’ suggestion to Poseidon concerning the Phaeacian punishment:

ὄπποτε κεν δὴ πάντες ἐλαυνομένην προΐδωνται
λαοὶ ἀπὸ πτόλιος, θείναι λίθον ἐγγύθι γαίης
νηὶ θοῆι ἴκελον.. (Od. 13.155-7)

When all the people are watching her from the city
as she comes in, then turn her into a rock that looks
like
a fast ship, close off shore..

The petrification of the Phaeacian ship is the climax to a series of highly significant references to stone both in Odysseus’ *Apologoi* and on his stay in Phaeacia, episodes which will be looked at in greater detail. What is of immediate

⁹The link between *laos* and *lithos* was clearly well established at the time of the composition of the Homeric poems. It is alluded to in the story of Niobe told at *Il.24.610ff.*

interest is the manner in which the action plotted by Zeus and Poseidon threatens to impose a limit on the perfect mobility of the Phaeacian ships. It is this imposition of a limit which can help us explain the manner in which Poseidon carries out the punishment:

βῆ ῥ' ἴμεν ἐς Σχερίην, ὅθι Φαίηκες γεγάασιν.
 ἔνθ' ἔμεν'· ἠ δὲ μάλα σχεδὸν ἤλυθε ποντοπόρος νηῦς
 ῥίμφα διωκομένη· τῆς δὲ σχεδὸν ἦλθ' ἐνοσίχθων,
 ὅς μιν λάαν θῆκε καὶ ἐρρίζωσεν ἔνερθε
 χειρὶ καταπρηνεῖ ἐλάσας· ὁ δὲ νόσφι βεβήκει. (*Od.* 13.160-4)

[H]e went off
 striding to Scheria, where the Phaiakians are born and live. There
 he waited, and the sea-going ship came close in, lightly
 pursuing her way, and the Earthshaker came close up to her,
 and turned her into stone and rooted her there to the bottom
 with a flat stroke of his hand. And then he went away from her.

Poseidon's action with his hand is more paradoxical than is generally noted.¹⁰ For the verb used, ἐλάύνω, has the basic meaning of 'set in motion', or 'drive'.¹¹ Thus he roots the Phaeacian ship to the ground with an act that seems simultaneously to set it in motion. The use of the verb is more striking in that it echoes the former description of the Phaeacian ship *in* motion: ἐλαυνομένην, driven. (*Od.* 13.155). As already argued, the motion of the Phaeacian ships is highly unusual because they lack helmsmen. It is this strange quality which can help explain Poseidon's gesture. Before this 'grounding' of a ship, the ships of Phaeacia moved, but no human agent caused their movement: they signified pure mobility.¹² Poseidon's gesture halts this mobility, but in doing so, he creates the possibility for an *agent* of movement. Poseidon fastens the ship to the ground and then leaves. His simultaneous presence followed by absence - 'he was (already) far

¹⁰For example, it is ignored in the commentaries of Stanford and Hockstra.

¹¹This is the basic meaning provided by *LSJ*.

¹²This is represented in the lack of an agent of movement in ἐλαυνομένην. The ship moves without a mover.

away'¹³ - follows a pattern which is a familiar one in the *Odyssey*. He opens a gap in the universe of the Phaeacians in much the same manner as the loss of a seal opened up a gap in the universe of Proteus. This constitutive gap heralds the emergence of a 'world beyond' the hitherto limitless land of the Phaeacians. It is this 'beyond', outside the newly created boundaries of Phaeacia, which the mute stone immediately tries to represent. Just as the Cyclopes are no longer Cyclopes after Odysseus' departure, so the Phaeacians will no longer live on a land without limits: Σχερ-ίη.

Yet Poseidon's behavior here is not unique; for it repeats the logic of Odysseus' arrival and departure, to which it is thematically linked. It is only after Odysseus has departed that the Phaeacians come to understand his symbolic role: he is the man who was destined to fulfill the prophecy of Nausithous. The last in the series of former voyagers passed on effortlessly to their destination, he is also the first in the new series. But just as interesting is the way that Poseidon's gesture of 'grounding' Phaeacian society is also previewed in Odysseus' earlier interactions with the Phaeacians during the games. For there too a stone appeared:

Ἦ ῥα καὶ αὐτῶι φάρει ἀναίξας λάβε δίσκον
 μείζονα καὶ πάχετον, στιβαρώτερον οὐκ ὀλίγον περ
 ἢ οἴωι Φαίηκες ἐδίσκεον ἀλλήλοισι.
 τὸν ῥα περιστρέψας ἦκε στιβαρῆς ἀπὸ χειρός·
 βόμβησεν δὲ λίθος· κατὰ δ' ἔπτηξαν ποτὶ γαίηι
 Φαίηκες δολιχῆρετμοι, ναυσίκλυτοι ἄνδρες,
 λαὸς ὑπὸ ῥιπῆς. (*Od.* 8.186-193)

He spoke, and with mantle still on sprang up and laid hold of a discus that was a bigger and thicker one, heavier not by a little than the one the Phaiakians had used for their sport in throwing. He spun, and let this fly from his ponderous hand. The stone hummed in the air, and the Phaiakians, men of long oars and famed for seafaring, shrank down against the ground, ducking under the flight of the stone..

¹³As Hainsworth (1988 *ad loc*) translates the pluperfect βεβήκει. Poseidon introduces a paradoxical moment of presence/absence. He arrives and is gone at the very moment he arrived. The phrase 'followed by' is thus in itself a little misleading.

Poseidon turns the ship into stone with a downward gesture of his hand.¹⁴ In so doing, he fixes the Phaeacian ship to the ground and thus provides a point of solidity, a foundation, for Phaeacian society as a whole. Odysseus hurls a stone with his hand, which causes the Phaeacians to cower in fear under the flight of the stone. We should not only note the further association of 'λίθος' and 'λαός',¹⁵ but the way the Phaeacians are forced to turn *toward the ground* - ποτὶ γαίῃ. As the Phaeacians duck under Odysseus' stone, they are given a preview of Poseidon's later rooting of their society to the ground. The ducking mirrors the ducking of Deucalion and Pyrrha. The discus whirs over their heads, making the Phaeacians aware of the vulnerability of their heads. Odysseus' discus throw is a symbolic decapitation, introducing them to the possibility of a real decapitation. They are confronted with the possibility of loss of life at the moment they confront their first loss in their games.

This importance of stones for Homer's narrative on Phaeacia can help us explain a further significant name on Scheria. All of the competitors in the Phaeacian games (listed at *Od.*8.111-119) have names which relate to their abilities as sailors.¹⁶ But there are only two exceptions to the series of 'sea-names' on Phaeacia: Laodamas and Alcinous, the most important of the Phaeacian men. Alcinous is king, Laodamas is the heir apparent. Let us concentrate on Lao-damas, who is singled out as the best of all the Phaeacians, surpassing even Euryalus (*Od.*8.116). Odysseus brings particular attention to Laodamas when he announces

¹⁴ *Od.*13.163-4: ὅς μιν λαῶν θῆκε καὶ ἐρρίζωσεν ἔνερθε / χειρὶ καταπρηνεῖ ἐλάσας· ὁ δὲ νόσφι βεβήκει.

¹⁵ In the passage, Odysseus' discus is first referred to as *lithos*, then *laos*, previewing the more explicit etymologizing play between stone/people in Book 13.

¹⁶ See Stanford *ad loc.*, who offers the translation of Rouse: 'Topship and Quicksea and Paddler, Seaman and Poopman, Beacher and Oarsman, Deepsea and Lookout, Go-ahead and Upaboard; there was Seagirt the son of Manyclipper Shipwrightson.'

that he will fight with all of the Phaeacians except him (πλήν γ' αὐτοῦ Λαοδάμαντος *Od.*8.207). At the moment the mass of the Phaeacians are introduced to the possibility of loss, one of their number is spared. And the name of that one, Lao-damas, brings us back to the verbal plays on stones/people. How can we explain the significance of this name, roughly translatable as 'people/stone-destroyer'?

Before Odysseus' appearance on Phaeacia, the men exhibited an internal solidarity. But this was dependent on the lack of an external challenger to their status as the 'best' of men. Each potential challenger to this status was defeated (in the games), and then despatched to his destination. Odysseus' arrival changes this, but it changes it in a very specific manner. For when introduced to Phaeacian society, he moves into the seat previously held by Laodamas:

ὤρσεν ἀπ' ἐσχαρόφιν καὶ ἐπὶ θρόνου εἶσε φαεινοῦ,
 υἱὸν ἀναστήσας ἀγαπήνορα Λαοδάμαντα,
 ὅς οἱ πλησίον ἴζε, μάλιστα δέ μιν φιλέεσκε. (*Od.*7.169-72)

[He] raised him [Odysseus] up from the fireside, and set him in a shining chair, displacing for this powerful Laodamas, his son, who had been sitting next him and who was the one he loved most.

Odysseus displaces Laodamas. As a man immeasurably better than any on Phaeacia, he opens up the possibility to all Phaeacians of the possibility of a certain version of 'manhood' beyond the current versions within their land. When he moves out of the throne of Laodamas (never to return), he leaves behind the image of an immeasurably better man. When Laodamas returns to his throne after Odysseus departs, it will not be the same throne. For if previously Laodamas fitted the throne perfectly - there was no need to question his right as 'best' man to occupy it - this will no longer be the case; he is now a poor imitation of Odysseus. This has crucial consequences; the previous solidarity of the Phaeacians was dependent on the impossibility of imagining such a superior man. Alcinous sits in

his throne without any worry, because he, as a Phaeacian, is organically linked to all other Phaeacians, and represents their collective belief in their invincibility as a species. His is a perfect authority and is not questioned because the Phaeacians have no way of imagining a man superior to him. From now on, the natural right of any Phaeacian to sit on the throne can now be questioned.

This can help us understand the significance of the humbling of all but Laodamas. Odysseus refuses to humiliate all of the Phaeacians in order to allow them to continue the possibility of belief in their continuing identity.¹⁷ He leaves the Phaeacians with the possibility that the best of their number might have defeated him. And yet by choosing not to fight Laodamas, Odysseus opens up the possibility that even the best of the Phaeacians is vulnerable. Laodamas is left in a position of power over the other Phaeacians, insofar as he alone has not suffered the loss the others experience; but they nevertheless have every reason to suspect that even he falls short of the ideal of manhood displayed by Odysseus. He will now wield a very different sort of power over the Phaeacians. No longer *primus inter pares*, his hold on power will appear rigid, limited, finite in comparison with the absent ideal, a power which may not be able to legitimate itself. He is thus stone-like, a representative of ideological rigidity, and because of this he is vulnerable. To translate this into the terms of Adkins, Laodamas functions as the initiator of the zero-sum game of inter-male competition on Phaeacia. In Lacanian terms, his introduction as leader of the people coincides with the appearance of a master-signifier. The origins of the Phaeacians as a mortal *people*, a 'λαός' coincides with the emergence of a pure authority which cannot be justified in symbolic terms, represented by a λαός - and Laodamas is the mortal representative of this senseless authority. The arrival of Odysseus sets in motion a crucial transfer

¹⁷The sophistication of Odysseus' tactics of self-presentation in the presence of the Phaeacians is the subject of the next chapter.

of power within Phaeacia from Alcinous to Laodamas. The authority of Alcinous was never challenged because there was no awareness of any limit to his *noos*. The law as Name-of-the-Father ran the show. The emergence of the mountain as sublime object sets a limit to the scope of this paternal law. If the rule of Alcinous was characterized by his monopoly on sense, the rule of Laodamas will be characterized by the nagging possibility of its senselessness. Accordingly, the appearance of Laodamas as ruler both destroys the former Phaeacian society - hence 'people-destroyer' - but also heralds the appearance of the Phaeacians as a new, mortal people.

If stones are of crucial symbolic importance in the *Odyssey's* narrative about Phaeacia, what is of equal interest is that the arrival of stones on Phaeacia coincides with the departure of stones from the island of the Cyclopes. The Phaeacians first see their ship turned to stone by Poseidon (ὄς μιν λᾶαν θῆκε *Od.*13.163) and then await the fall of the mountain (μέγα..ὄρος *Od.*13.167); Polyphemus hurls two rocks, the first of which is a large mountain, the second an even greater stone:

ἦκε δ' ἀπορρήξας κορυφήν ὄρεος μεγάλοιο,
κάδ δ' ἔβαλε προπάροιθε νεὸς κυανοπρώριοιο
τυτθόν..

'He broke away the peak of a great mountain and let it
fly, and threw it in front of the dark-prowed ship a little (*Od.*9.481-2)

αὐτὰρ ὃ γ' ἐξαὔτις πολὺ μείζονα λᾶαν αἰείρας
ἦκ' ἐπιδινήσας, ἐπέρεισε δὲ ἴν' ἀπέλεθρον·
κάδ δ' ἔβαλε προπάροιθε νεὸς κυανοπρώριοιο
τυτθόν..(*Od.*9.536-9)

Then for the second time lifting a stone far greater
he whirled it and threw, leaning into his cast his strength beyond measure,
and the stone fell behind the dark-prowed ship by only
a little

It is as if the arrival of stones on Phaeacia is a result of Polyphemus'
throws. They are also chiasmically reversed; his second, much stronger throw

arrives on Phaeacia first in the form of the petrified ship.¹⁸ But the first, weaker throw of the ‘big mountain’ does not quite arrive there. The near arrival of the mountain on Phaeacia coincides with the near departure of the mountain from the island of the Cyclopes. The mountain-top of Polyphemus falls tantalizingly short of its goal, just as the mountain which arrives on Phaeacia only threatens to destroy their society, without actually carrying out that threat.

This parallel between the arrival and departure of stones from these societies should encourage us to look for further symbolic significance in the function of stones on the Cyclopes’ island. The importance of the ‘head’ of the mountain already seems clear from our previous discussion of the vulnerability of heads. Polyphemus, having already lost his self-sufficiency because of the blinding, symbolically beheads himself, and announces his entrance to the social world. The loss of the top of the mountain is also the loss of the Cyclopean home: Polyphemus will no longer be able to return to his isolated, mountain-top home because he destroys that home as he attempts revenge on Odysseus. His status as monad is gone forever as he is forced toward the *agora*, the place of human assembly that the Cyclopes previously lacked. But what about the ‘much bigger’ stone he hurls?

There is one other stone which plays an important role in Odysseus’ interaction with the Cyclops. It is the rock which closes off the Cyclops’ cave from the outside world:

αὐτὰρ ἔπειτ’ ἐπέθηκε θυρεὸν μέγαν ὑπὸς ἁείρας,
ὄβριμον· οὐκ ἂν τὸν γε δῶ καὶ εἴκοσ’ ἄμαξαι
ἔσθλαι τετράκυκλοι ἀπ’ οὐδεὸς ὀχλίσσειαν·
τόσσην ἠλίβατον πέτρην ἐπέθηκε θύρησιν. (9.240-3).

Next thing, he heaved up and set into position the huge door stop,
a massive thing; no twenty-two of the best four-wheeled
wagons could have taken that weight off the ground and carried it,
such a piece of sky-towering cliff that was he set over his gateway.

¹⁸This throw crosses over the boundary, *πέρας*, into Phaeacia - ἐπέρεισε.

It is this stone which later prevents Odysseus from killing Polyphemos on the spot, as he realizes that neither he nor his companions could push it away. But we should once again be sensitive to the terminology used to describe the door. For at the beginning of Odysseus' narration of his encounter the 'door' is called a *lithos*:

οὐ γάρ κεν δυνάμεσθα θυράων ὑψηλάων
χερσὶν ἀπώσασθαι λίθον ὄβριμον, ὃν προσέθηκεν. (*Od.*9.304-5)

[O]ur hands could never have pushed from the lofty
gate of the cave the ponderous boulder he had propped there.

This is the *lithos* that Polyphemos will later remove from his doorway (ἀπὸ μὲν λίθον εἶλε θυράων, 9.416). The removal of the stone from the doorway of the cave is already significant. It suggests that the closed, isolated home within the cave is now opened up to wider Cyclopean society. But can we not add to this significance by suggesting that it is this very stone, left lying outside the cave by Polyphemos at 9.305 which is picked up and hurled by him at 9.537? There is also a change in terminology; previously termed a *lithos*, the stone is now called a *laas*. This foreshadows the etymological play on *lithos/laos* in the punishment of the Phaeacians in *Odyssey* 13. The door of Polyphemos' cave progressively becomes a *lithos*, and finally a *laas* at the moment it is hurled away forever, heralding the creation of the Cyclopes as a *laos*: the Cyclopes become a people the moment they open up their homes to the outside world. The stone is raised from the doorway for the final time, never to be placed back at the entrance.¹⁹ We can also describe the effect of this stone-throw in the terms used by Vernant in his analysis of the *colossos*. For the psychotic Cyclopes lived in the world beyond the human realm, the realm of darkness, of the unsignified, which the religious sign of the *colossos*

¹⁹Note also how Poseidon's positioning of the stone (ὅς μιν λάαν θῆκε καὶ ἐρρίζωσεν) verbally recalls the positioning of the stone by the Cyclops (ἐπέθηκε, 9.240,9.243, προσέθηκεν 9.305): there is a marked symmetry here. The stone from the doorway of Polyphemos' cave reappears as the petrified ship, the 'head' of Polyphemos' mountain is left hanging over Phacacia.

pointed toward. Perhaps this is why this second stone is 'much larger' than the top of the mountain. It is a stone which is the equivalent of the colossos, and its removal gives Polyphemus his first glimpse into the world of light.

A set of oppositions suggested by Vernant's analysis of the *colossos* can help pinpoint a further connection between events on Phaeacia and the island of the Cyclopes. He suggests that the correlative to the solidity of the *colossos* is the pure mobility of the insubstantial psyche:

Stone and the *psuché* of a dead man are both also contrasted with the living man, the former by reason of its immovability and the latter by reason of its elusive mobility. The living man moves about, upright on the surface of the ground, his feet remaining constantly in contact with the earth. The colossos, sunk into the earth, rooted deep into the ground, remains fixed and immobile... In the true sense of the term, colossoi are those who cannot move their legs in order to walk. As for the *psuché*, it moves about without ever touching the earth; it flits between the surface of the ground, forever in movement and forever elusive.

I suggested earlier that Poseidon's action in fixing the Phaeacian ship to the ground is doubled by Odysseus' discus throw. On the land of the Cyclopes, the loss of the stone from the entrance to the cave is doubled by the loss of Polyphemus' eye. Both are objects which are lost, and which are never to return: the stone goes into the sea to emerge on Phaeacia, the eye will never be healed. It is this link which helps explain the strikingly graphic description Odysseus provides for the blinding of the Cyclops:

πάντα δέ οἱ βλέφαρ' ἀμφὶ καὶ ὀφρύας εὖσεν αὐτῆ
 γλήνης καιομένης· σφαραγεῦντο δέ οἱ πυρὶ ρίζαι.
 ὡς δ' ὅ' ἀνὴρ χαλκεὺς πέλεκυν μέγαν ἢ σκέπαρνον
 εἰν ὕδατι ψυχρῷ βάπτῃ μεγάλα ἰάχοντι
 φαρμάσσων - τὸ γὰρ αὐτὲ σιδήρου γε κράτος ἐστίν -
 ὡς τοῦ σίζ' ὀφθαλμὸς ἐλαϊνέωι περὶ μοχλῶι. (*Od.*9.389-95).

[T]he blast and scorch of the burning ball singed all his eyebrows and eyelids, and the fire made the roots of his eye crackle. As when a man who works as a blacksmith plunges a screaming great ax blade or plane into cold water, treating it for temper, since his is the way steel is made strong, even

so Cyclops' eye sizzled about the beam of the olive.

The obvious point of comparison in the simile is between the sound of the sizzling eye as the olive beam enters and the sound of the water as the blacksmith's axe enters. Yet the image is much more suggestive.²⁰ Axes, throughout the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are sharpened in order to fell trees,²¹ and Odysseus' earlier description of the monstrously tall Cyclops emphasized his resemblance to a wooded peak of mountains (οὐδὲ ἐώικει / ἀνδρί γε σιτοφάγωι, ἀλλὰ ρίωι ὑλήεντι / ὑψηλῶν ὀρέων *Od.*9.190-2).²² The reference to the axe within the simile hints that the blinding of the Cyclops will also act as a felling of a tree-like giant. In this wider context of tree-felling, we should perhaps pause over the language describing the blindings; for it is the *roots* which crackle as the spear enters (ρίζαι). The Cyclops' eye is 'uprooted' by Odysseus' action, just as a tree falls when its roots anchoring it to the ground are destroyed.²³ This particular simile seems to emphasize the opposition between Cyclopes as a species of inhuman solidity and Phaeacians as a species of inhuman flux, representing stones and *psychai* respectively. But it does more. For there is a curious correspondence between the uprooting of the Cyclops and the way the Phaeacians are rooted to the ground. As its roots sizzle, the eye of the Cyclops finally breaks free from its enclosure, metaphorically releasing the Cyclopes from their eternal solidity into the flux of language. In turn, the actions of Poseidon emphasize that the flighty Phaeacians will now have *roots*: λαῶν θῆκε καὶ ἐρρίζωσεν ἔνερθε.²⁴ But the

²⁰For a good discussion of the complexity of Homeric similes, see Petegorsky 1982, chapter 1 *passim*.

²¹See, for example, *Il.*3.60ff, or *Od.*5.234ff, where Calypso provides Odysseus with an axe, which he uses to fell trees to make his raft.

²²'Nor was he like a man, an eater of bread, but more like a wooded peak / of the high mountains.'

²³That the solidity of a tree depends on its roots is of course well known to Homer: cf the description of the Lapiths at *Il.*12.134, who are compared to oak-trees because of their steadfastness in battle.

²⁴*Od.*13.163-4: 'He turned [the ship] into stone, and rooted it to the bottom.'

more intriguing correspondence is between the way the Phaeacians turn to the ground in response to Odysseus' discus throw. The perfect circle of the Cyclops' eye, the emblem of solidity which anchors his existence, is 'unrooted'. On Phaeacia, it is the trajectory of the circle of the discus which roots the Phaeacians to the ground, introducing a point of solidity to their universe. Indeed, it is not just the similarity in shape between the circular eye and discus which hints at a thematic connection, but also the peculiar reaction of Polyphemus to his blinding:

σμερδαλέον δὲ μέγ' ὤιμωξεν, περὶ δ' ἴαχε πέτρῃ,
 ἡμεῖς δὲ δείσαντες ἀπεσσύμεθ' . αὐτὰρ ὁ μοχλὸν
 ἐξέρυσ' ὀφθαλμοῖο πεφυρμένον αἵματι πολλῶι.
 τὸν μὲν ἔπειτ' ἔρριψεν ἀπὸ ἑο χερσὶν ἀλύων,
 αὐτὰρ ὁ Κύκλωπας μεγάλ' ἤπνευε.. (Od.9.395-99)

He gave a giant horrible cry and the rocks rattled to the sound, and we scuttled away in fear. He pulled the timber out of his eye, and it blubbed with plenty of blood, then when he had frantically taken it in his hands and thrown it away, he cried aloud to the other Cyclopes..

What is it that Polyphemus throws? At first, it would appear to be the *mochlos* by which he is blinded. But the referent for *ton* in 398 could just as easily be the *eye* which has been released from its socket by the burning. The verb used for Polyphemus' 'throw' is one that is commonly used for the throwing of discuses.²⁵ Polyphemus hurls a round object. But it is as if, within the logic of the narrative, it has symbolic repercussions on Phaeacia: for it is a continuation of this throw of the 'rootless' eye on the playing field which makes the Phaeacians duck and thus paves the way for their petrification. This link between an act of the blinded Cyclops and the discus throw on Phaeacia allows us to see further significance in the cryptic remarks of Athena about the discus throw:

καί κ' ἀλαός τοι, ξεῖνε, διακρίνειε τὸ σῆμα
 ἀμφοφόων, ἐπεὶ οὐ τι μεμιγμένον ἐστὶν ὀμίλωι,
 ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρῶτον. σὺ δὲ θάρσει τόνδε γ' ἄεθλον·

²⁵Cf. II.23.842.

οὐ τις Φαιήων τόδε γ' ἴξεται οὐδ' οὐδ' ὑπερήσει. (*Od.* 8.195-8)

Even a blind man, friend, would be able to distinguish your mark by feeling for it, since it is not mingled with the common lot, but far before. Have no fear over this contest. No one of the Phaiakians will come up to this mark or surpass it.

'Even a blind man' could recognize the *sema*. Athena's remark on Phaeacia might seem to point out the obviousness of the excellence of the throw. But we should remember that the Phaeacians are characterized by their ability to see *everything*; their (impossible) symbolic identity depended on the lack of a blind spot. The words are therefore paradoxical. A blind man, in his groping, could feel the mark, though he could not *see* it; and the thematic link between the *sema* of the discus and Polyphemus' hurling of his eye helps us see what the Phaeacians and Cyclopes now have in common. Because the *sema* is constitutively out of their reach, their attempts to discover it will resemble the hapless attempts of the Cyclops to re-find, and thus heal, his lost eye. Athena's remarks, triumphantly flippant as they at first seem, are a poignant commentary on the nature of the mortal condition: it is characterized by a perennial, blind wandering in search of a constitutively lost object, an attempt to heal a wound that cannot be healed. It is also significant that the mortal condition of the Phaeacians and Cyclopes are described in terms of their inability to read signs. The *sema* made by the discus lies outside the ken of both species. The kernel of their existence is now irreducibly outside of themselves. From now on, if any member of either species seeks his or her 'essence', he or she will have to go through language, the interplay of *signs*: διακρίνειε τὸ σῆμα.²⁶

²⁶The importance of the theme of blindness for the constitution of the social suggests a deepening of the 'verbal pyrotechnics' on display in *Odyssey* 8 and 9. The blindness of Polyphemus (ἄλαός) introduces his human *wandering* (ἄλαομαι, see *Od.* 9.253) a wandering which brings Odysseus to the island of the Cyclopes, but which their static civilization had hitherto lacked. Polyphemus exchanges a symbolic blindness (though he could see, he lived in a realm of total darkness) for a literal blindness; but is precisely this 'literal' blindness which announces his new found status as a mortal wanderer. In the entrance of the Cyclopes to the social, their emergence as a *laos*, we can see a further pun: their former blindness meant they were *not* a people: ἄ-λαός.

The Two Faces of the Father

There is one further crucial link between the Phaeacians and Cyclopes: their relationship to the god who acts as a father-figure for both, Poseidon. On Phaeacia, Poseidon is the patron god, responsible for their key symbolic quality: their seamanship.²⁷ On the island of the Cyclopes, Polyphemus appeals to a kindly father-figure who holds out the hope of an end to his pain. It is this link which can help us understand an aspect of the narrative which has long caused concern - the apparent viciousness of Poseidon's punishment of the Phaeacians.²⁸ For in what possible sense can the Phaeacians, who have treated Odysseus with respect and performed their allotted duty in transporting him home, deserve the petrification of their ship? There is symmetry between the pain Poseidon senselessly inflicts on the Phaeacians and the pain of Polyphemus which he is unable to heal. On Phaeacia, Poseidon acts as a cruel, senseless, punishing father. On the island of the Cyclopes, he promises (but only promises) to be an agent of healing. What can we make of this symmetry?

To find an answer, we must return to the fantasized nature of both societies. I have suggested that Phaeacia is an imagined world where paternal authority is unchallenged and benign. By contrast, the Cyclopes were a species of fathers who rejected paternal law, and whose authority was accordingly senseless. It is this split in the figure of the father (between sense and senselessness) which is so central to Lacan's understanding of the enigma of paternity:

²⁷Poseidon's precinct is at the heart of the Phaeacian assembly (*Od.*6.266ff); their seamanship is declared as a gift of Poseidon at *Od.*7.34ff.

²⁸Critical reactions, ancient and modern, to the action of Poseidon are explored by Peradotto, 1990 79ff.

[T]he non-coincidence of symbolic and real father means precisely that some 'non-father' (maternal uncle, the supposed common ancestor, totem, spirit - ultimately the *signifier* 'father' itself) is 'more father' than the (real) father. It is for this reason that Lacan designates the Name-of-the-Father, this ideal agency that regulates legal, symbolic exchange, as the 'paternal metaphor': the symbolic father is a metaphor, a metaphoric substitute, a sublation [Aufhebung] of the real father in its Name which is 'more father than father himself', whereas the 'non-sublated' part of the father appears as the obscene, cruel and oddly impotent agency of the superego.²⁹

The fantasized universes of the Cyclopes and Phaeacians isolate a single dimension of paternal authority. The Phaeacians, split off from their 'mad' neighbors the Cyclopes in the mythical past, live as if they were unaware of the obscene aspect of paternal authority, as if the non-sublated aspect of the father (which signifies the limit of its rule) did not exist; the Cyclopes reject symbolic exchange. With this as background we can understand how the actions of Poseidon introduce each of them to the dimension of the father that they disavow. Polyphemus' loss of an eye introduces him into the symbolic, and this coincides with an appeal to Poseidon as benign father, a father who promises to be the ideal agent who regulates symbolic exchange. In stark contrast, it is precisely the 'obscene' dimension of the father which is missing on Phaeacia. For the Phaeacians act as if there is no limit to paternal authority. Poseidon's petrification of the ship creates a limit (the 'beyond' which the stone represents) at the same time as he appears as the mad, senseless, punishing father who lurks beneath the surface benevolence of paternal authority.

We are now in a position to understand, and accept, the motivation for the senseless punishment of the Phaeacians provided by Poseidon himself; he claims he is angry at them for allowing Odysseus, the blinder of his son, to return home:

²⁹Zizek 1991, 134.

Father Zeus, no longer among the gods immortal
 shall I be honoured, when there are mortals who do me no honor,
 the Phaiakians, and yet those are of my own blood. See now,
 I had said to myself Odysseus would come home only after
 much suffering.. (*Od.* 13.128-32)

Poseidon seeks to punish the Phaeacians even as he recognizes that he is their ancestor. They are punished for helping Odysseus, whom Poseidon despises because he blinded his son Poseidon. But what is interesting about Poseidon's words is that this is the first time a blood connection between him and the Phaeacians is alluded to within the poem. Poseidon recognizes himself as their father *at the moment he punishes them*. This looks back to the earlier narrative on the island of the Cyclopes when Polyphemus had appealed to Poseidon as his father to heal his wound. On that occasion, Odysseus forcefully proclaimed that Polyphemus' wound could not be healed and therefore advertises the impotence of Poseidon as father. Is it not this awareness of his impotence which motivates Poseidon's senseless, vindictive attack? Poseidon's wrath toward Odysseus, which rebounds on his Phaeacian children, is the reactive anger of a father who is forced to witness the wounding of his son and yet is unable to help. His delayed reaction to the failure of his symbolic authority returns in the madness of vengeance.

There is also a marked similarity in the situations which the Phaeacians and Cyclopes are left to confront. Polyphemus is left hoping (against hope) for a father to cure his wound. The Phaeacians are left hoping (against hope) that Poseidon will temper his anger and that their sacrifices will suffice to prevent the mountain from obliterating their civilization. Both appeal to the authority of the Name-of-the-Father, but both are also aware - for the first time - that this authority provides no guarantees.

CHAPTER 4

METIS AND MYSTIFICATION

The following two chapters consider in detail the workings of *metis*, 'cunning', within the Homeric poems. I suggest that an understanding of this will enable us to construct a theory of the operation of ideology within the poems. The theory rests on a certain ambiguity inherent to the figure of the trickster. Successful trickery, mystification, is able to guarantee the smooth functioning of paternal law. But if this law fails, it can lead to mad, futile efforts to make up for this failure. Herein lies a certain dark side to the figure of the trickster. This chapter looks at a stunning example of the success of *metis*: the cunning used by Odysseus to procure a ride home from the Phaeacians. I suggest that the full range of Odysseus' sophistication as deceiver during his stay on Phaeacia has not yet been fully understood, nor have the mechanisms of his deceit. The next chapter contrasts this success with some consequences of the failure of paternal law to guarantee social cohesion. But first it is worth pre-empting the criticism of critical fascination with the workings of *metis* articulated by Michael Lynn-George. For Lynn-George this fascination betrays both an unwarranted optimism in the ability of *metis* to deceive, together with a certain critical arrogance:

Metis is construed as mastery of metamorphosis, the ability to assume every kind of form without being imprisoned within any; elusive, encircling but never encircled, the master of *metis* achieves mastery through metamorphosis. It is *the art of seeing without being seen*. Closed in on itself, the subject defined by *metis* nevertheless prefers to see itself as a limitless circular form: it no longer has a beginning or an end, it can seize anything and yet can be seized by nothing. Turning through rings "without limit," *metis* would embrace the unlimited. *Metis* has not only become a

form of the ideal, untouchable critic; it contains the promise of infinite knowledge.¹

In contrast to this lure of untouchability, Lynn-George emphasizes that there is no such unlimited success, and that every theft is necessarily open to the '*possibility of detection*'. As the last chapter suggested, the functions of stones within the Phaeacian narrative is to indicate a necessary limit to sense; this is what guarantees that there can be no certainty of meaning (or certainty in the success of mystification) without the '*possibility of detection*' mentioned by Lynn-George. I will shortly look at the significance of another stone, unceasingly pushed to the top of a hill by Sisyphus in the underworld, which emphasizes this. But if Homer is all too aware of the limits of sense, that there is no limitless, circular trickster, there is still critical work to be done in trying to understand how *metis* operates. In what follows, I suggest that it is not the deceiver who believes himself to be untouchable; rather, the deceiver manipulates the desires of those whom he deceives, desires which are ultimately desires to be whole, self-identical.² The Phaeacians trust Odysseus because they *want* to believe in their omnipotence, and thus ignore his threat. They are fundamentally narcissistic, believing Odysseus because his words coincide with the image of themselves they already have. In this sense, we can say that Odysseus is indeed 'self-occluded', unseen, but only from the perspective of the Phaeacians, who ignore any aspect of Odysseus that does not coincide with what they want to see.

I have argued that the particular nature of the symbolic identity of the Phaeacians means that they are already lost the moment Odysseus arrives. For if

¹Lynn-George 1994, 238.

²There is an immediate problem here, crucial to the *Odyssey*. What happens when the deceiver begins to have an infallible belief in his identity *as a deceiver*? I postpone this question until chapter 7, where I argue that in the later books, it becomes clear that Odysseus is guilty of precisely such self-deception, and is exposed by Penelope.

they refuse to send him home and thus avoid the wrath of Poseidon, they will just as surely destroy their identity as perfect hosts. But if the Phaeacians are already lost, the outcome of events on Phaeacia is still crucial for Odysseus. For what is at stake is nothing less than his *nostos*. The Phaeacians are both his potential ticket home and a possible obstacle to his journey home should they decide not to transport him to Ithaca. Should Odysseus be revealed as the agent of Phaeacian destruction alluded to by Nausithous, he would have no guarantee that his trip home would not be lost. He therefore needs the Phaeacians to perform one last function in their role as seamen, even as he destroys their identity as seamen; consequently, the logic of the narrative demands that the Phaeacians be fooled into thinking that he is harmless. Odysseus' rhetoric, which appeals to the unique excellence of the Phaeacians even as his actions undermine it, manages to accomplish this.

There are wider issues at stake in the deception. The ability of Odysseus to use his tales to deceive his listeners seems to betray a distrust in the function of song. In *Odyssey* 8, after all, the actions and words of Odysseus run parallel to the songs of the bard Demodocus, to which they are implicitly compared, and Odysseus' affinity with bards is a motif of the entire poem.³ But it is in the songs of Demodocus that we can see a different side to poetry. For if Odysseus' words and actions are intended to deceive the Phaeacians, the songs of Demodocus can be read as an antidote to this deception; they are a series of attempts to warn the Phaeacians of the danger posed by Odysseus. The interchange between Odysseus and Demodocus functions as a staged competition between bards, a competition which also outlines two possible uses for song; if poetry can mystify, it can also

³On the connection between Odysseus and bards, and the role of bards in general, see Segal 1994, chapters 6 and 7.

enlighten.⁴ Odysseus' rhetoric mystifies by providing the picture of a suffering, helpless hero, a picture which is attractive to the Phaeacians because they want to believe that Odysseus poses no threat to them: Odysseus' helplessness reinforces their own belief in their infallibility. Demodocus' songs, read allegorically, provide other, more disquieting alternatives to the picture of the hapless hero. I will look at each of their songs and their significance for events on Phaeacia in turn.

Demodocus' first song: πῆματος ἀρχή

Demodocus first tells a tale of origins, the quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus which brought about the 'beginning of woe', πῆματος ἀρχή.⁵ The traditional importance of such a quarrel has been explored in the work of Nagy.⁶ The quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus is caught up in the tension between *bie* and *metis*, force and cunning, with Odysseus the representative of *metis*, Achilles the representative of *bie*. It is the traditional importance of this tension between the two heroes of the major epics which allows us to see it as a latent narrative which lies behind much of the tension on display throughout books 8 to 13; we will return to it. Yet rather than follow the path of scholars who seek a specific mythic occasion for this original quarrel, this 'beginning of woe' which leads to the Trojan war,⁷ we should stress instead its appropriateness to the general theme of origins in the first half of the *Odyssey*. Demodocus sings of a beginning which coincides with a quarrel, a scission in the realm of the social which is described in terms of a

⁴The staging of separate songs which provide a different picture of the same event or person is clearly part and parcel of Homeric technique. The competing, indeed contradictory, songs of Menelaus and Helen about Odysseus in Book 4 of the *Odyssey* are the most obvious example. The competition between Odysseus and Demodocus is similar.

⁵*Od.* 8.72ff.

⁶Nagy 1979 42ff (Chapter 3 *passim*)

⁷For a discussion of the attempts, see Clay 1983, 98ff, Hainsworth *ad Od.* 8.75.

conflict between Odysseus and Achilles, *metis* and *bie*. In the (mythical) beginning, there is an *eris*, and it is the conflation of *eris* with origins in Demodocus' song which make it particularly relevant to Phaeacian society. Before the arrival of Odysseus, Phaeacia is an impossibly harmonious society, a society without *eris*.⁸ Yet within moments of the completion of Demodocus' song about an originary *neikos* between Odysseus and Achilles (*d.8.75*), a *neikos* occurs on Phaeacia. Odysseus is asked by Laodamas and Euryalus to take part in the games and refuses. This leads to taunting from Euryalus: *νεικεσε τ' αντην*.⁹ Odysseus' eventual decision to take part in the games, together with the particular form of his interaction with the Phaeacian men, is a belated attempt to impose damage control onto the effects of the *neikos* he has caused. Demodocus' song of an originary *neikos* is thus prophetic: it tells of one 'beginning of woe' while suggesting that he knows all too well that Odysseus is the figure who introduces 'the beginning of woe' to Phaeacia.¹⁰ We have a not unfamiliar mythic situation: a blind figure with insight who is ignored by his metaphorically blind audience. In this case, we can provide a clear explanation for the failure of communication. Demodocus' song demands to be read carefully (it is emphatically not mere entertainment), and understood allegorically, but the peculiar relationship to language of the Phaeacians means that reading allegorically is precisely what is not available to them. They believe that they are immune to language's powers of deception and that the meaning of poetry is self-evident.

⁸Cf. Nagy 1979, chapter 19 *passim*, on 'Strife and the Human Condition', which argues that *eris* is constitutive of human society.

⁹The link has been noted by Braswell 1982. His article notices much of the thematic significance of the songs of Demodocus; my additions and modifications to his important insights are largely based on the assumption of the aetiological significance of Odysseus' stay on Phaeacia.

¹⁰*contra* Martin 1984, 43ff., who argues that Odysseus' victory in the games completely resolves the *neikos*. By contrast, I suggest that Odysseus' victory opens the possibility of a *neikos* without resolution on Phaeacia by introducing them to *loss*, even as his rhetoric fools them into thinking no such loss has occurred.

His song produces a peculiar reaction on the part of Odysseus. He cries, but also covers his head. It is elaborately described: the moment Demodocus begins his song, Odysseus' head disappears behind his head. This highly symbolic act by Odysseus is commonly understood as a spontaneous emotional reaction to the reference to the Trojan war. But given the importance of Odysseus' strategy of self-occlusion on Phaeacia, and the significance of heads in the poem, this seems unlikely. Suspicion is increased when we compare this description of head-hiding with another tale of a hidden head which is strikingly similar; Odysseus later describes the attempts of Sisyphus to push his rock to the top of the hill. I juxtapose the episodes:

τότε γάρ ῥα κυλίνδετο πήματος ἀρχή
 Τρωσί τε καὶ Δαναοῖσι Διὸς μεγάλου διὰ βουλᾶς.
 Ταῦτ' ἄρ' αἰοῖδος ἄειδε περικλυτός· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
πορφύρεον μέγα φᾶρος ἑλών χερσὶ στιβαρῆισι
κὰκ κεφαλῆς εἴρυσσε, κάλυψε δὲ καλὰ πρόσωπα·
 αἶδετο γὰρ Φαίηκας ὑπ' ὄφρῦσι δάκρυα λείβων.
 ἦ τοι ὅτε λήξειεν αἰδῶν θεῖος αἰοῖδος,
δάκρυ' ὁμορξάμενος κεφαλῆς ἀπο φᾶρος ἔλεσκε
 καὶ δέπας ἀμφικύπελλον ἑλών σπείσασκε θεοῖσιν·
 αὐτὰρ ὅτ' ἄψ ἄρχοιτο καὶ ὀτρύνειαν αἰεῖειν
 Φαιήκων οἱ ἄριστοι, ἐπεὶ τέρποντ' ἐπέεσσιν,
 ἄψ Ὀδυσσεὺς κατὰ κράτα καλυψάμενος γοάσκειν. (*Od.* 8.83-92)

[F]or now the beginning of the evil rolled on, descending on Trojans, and on Danaans, through the designs of great Zeus.

These things the famous singer sang for them, but Odysseus, taking in his ponderous hands the great mantle dyed in sea-purple, drew it over his head and veiled his fine features, shamed for tears running down his face before the Phaiakians; and every time the divine singer would pause in his singing, he would take the mantle away from his head, and wipe the tears off, and taking up a two-handed goblet would pour a libation to the gods, but every time he began again, and the greatest of the Phaiakians would urge him to sing, since they joyed in his stories, Odysseus would cover his head again, and make lamentation.

Καὶ μὴν Σίσυφον εἰσεῖδον κρατέρ' ἄλγε' ἔχοντα,
λᾶαν βαστάζοντα πελώριον ἀμφοτέρησιν.
 ἦ τοι ὁ μὲν σκηριπτόμενος χερσίν τε ποσίν τε
λᾶαν ἄνω ὠθεσκε ποτὶ λόφον· ἀλλ' ὅτε μέλλοι
ἄρκον ὑπερβαλέειν, τότε ἀποστρέψασκε κραταίς·
 αὐτίς ἔπειτα πέδονδε κυλίνδετο λᾶας ἀναιδής.

αὐτὰρ ὃ γ' ἄψ ὤσασκε τιταινόμενος, κατὰ δ' ἰδρῶς
ἔρρεεν ἐκ μελέων. κονίη δ' ἐκ κρατὸς ὀρώρει. (*Od.*11.593-600)

Also I saw Sisyphos. He was suffering strong pains,
and with both arms embracing the monstrous stone, struggling
with hands and feet alike, he would try to push the stone upward
to the crest of the hill, but when it was on the point of going
over the top, the force of gravity turned it backward,
and the pitiless stone rolled back down to the level. He then
tried once more to push it up, straining hard, and sweat ran
all down his body, and over his head a cloud of dust rose.

The 'rolling' out of evil is echoed in the rolling of the rock. Odysseus' suffering, which is on display as Demodocus recounts his tale, mirrors the suffering of Sisyphus. But most intriguingly, the persistent efforts of Sisyphus in pushing the rock have the effect of generating a cloud of dust which obscures his head. Odysseus also constantly struggles to cover his head with his robe in response to the song. We can begin exploring the significance of the parallels by looking at the suggestive connection between Odysseus and Sisyphus made by John Peradotto at the end of his book on the *Odyssey*. For Peradotto, the persistent efforts of Sisyphus mirror Odysseus as a 'degree-zero' figure, from which new stories can always be generated:

To what does the name 'Odysseus' refer? In the final analysis, it refers in a sense to no one, to nothing, but nothing in the rich sense of the zero-degree, which signifies not simply nonbeing, but potentiality, what it means for the empty subject of narrative to take on any predication or attribute, for Athena to simulate anyone (13.313), for dormant Proteus to become anything that is, for Outis to become *polytropos*. It is the point where Sisyphus, true progenitor of Odysseus, unlike his immobilized companions Tityrus and Tantalus, rebounds against failure, forever resilient even in the realm of death to face Krataiīs, the ruthless power of necessity. It is the zero-point where every story ends, rich with the possibility of another beginning.¹¹

¹¹Peradotto 1990, 170.

To understand the significance of Sisyphus' toils for the situation on Phaeacia, we need to reverse the terms of Peradotto's optimistic picture. For though Sisyphus is indeed a relentless toiler against necessity's hard rock, it is the existence of the rock which provides the conditions of possibility necessary for Sisyphus' attempts to master it. It is the necessary point of failure for every attempt at trickery: it can only be temporarily, never permanently, effaced. We return once more to the relationship between rocks and the social, the significance of *laos/lithos* puns. The rock functions as the constitutive limit of the social. This is more than sophistry, for it enables us to understand that the rock Sisyphus pushes is precisely what is lacking on the limitless society of Scheria.¹² Odysseus' story of Sisyphus is a further preview of the shadow of the mountain which is soon to introduce the Phaeacians to mortal society. But this matter has already been explored. What is more significant for my present purpose is the self-occlusion engineered by Sisyphus: it is through the insistence of his efforts, and the dust that arises from them, that he obscures his head: κονίη δ' ἐκ κρατὸς ὀρώρει. To return to Peradotto's reading of the pushing of the stone as metaphor for the workings of narrative, Odysseus' 'stories' are indeed told and re-told; but in the process of the telling the agent of the telling seems to disappear, 'lose his head', his identity. It is not *just* a story told, followed by a return to a new beginning. The telling of the tale itself seems to have the ability to efface the identity of the teller, as if to provide the illusion that the tale is innocent. The interaction between Demodocus and Odysseus

¹²Does it not also show what is lacking on the island of the Cyclopes? The emphasis is on pushing a rock to a peak (λόφον), and transcending the summit (ἄρκον ὑπερβαλέειν). This is usefully glossed by Scholiast B at *Od.* 11.593, who explains the punishment in terms of the failure to reach the top of a mountain. (593: ἡ τιμωρία τούτου ἦν ἵνα λίθον μέγαν ἀναβιβάσῃ ἐν κορυφῇ ὄρους.). The effort to attain the missing 'peak' of a mountain is unnecessary for the Cyclopes, until the first mountain-top is broken off by Polyphemus' throw at Odysseus. The story of Sisyphus can thus be seen as an attempt to *return* to the mountain the peak that was severed from it - but which, as with the Cyclops' failure to heal his wounded eye, is destined never to be returned to its former wholeness.

seems to reverse the process; as Odysseus tries to hide his role as creator of *eris*, the song of Demodocus attempts to make this public knowledge. In response, Odysseus continues to try to shield himself. It is as if the simultaneous appearance of Odysseus' head with the words of Demodocus would make it easier for the Phaeacians to make a connection between the two. Odysseus hides because he tries to evade the truth of Demodocus' song.

The reaction of the Phaeacians to Demodocus' song is itself interesting, and comes close to replaying the narrative pattern traced in the story of Achilles' quarrel with Odysseus. The Phaeacians first rejoice in his tears (τέρποντ' ἐπέεσσιν *Od.8.91*), but this joy is later tempered as King Alcinous sees that all is not well with Odysseus.¹³ However, he makes no effort to find out what Odysseus hides, but instead is bewitched by what he sees on the surface, the tears of Odysseus. His emotional identification with the sufferings of Odysseus not only prevents him from considering what he hides; it also leads to the cessation of Demodocus' song as the herald takes him away (*Od.8.105ff*). If Alcinous is a bad interpreter of the actions of Odysseus as well as a bad interpreter of Demodocus' song, it is interesting that Demodocus' tale itself also hints at Agamemnon's poor interpretation of the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles:

Μοῦσ' ἄρ' αἰδὸν ἀνῆκεν αἰδόμεναι κλέα ἀνδρῶν,
οἴμης, τῆς τότε ἄρα κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἴκανε,
νεῖκος Ὀδυσσεύος καὶ Πηλεΐδew Ἀχιλλεύος,
ὡς ποτε δηρίσαντο θεῶν ἐν δαιτὶ θαλεῖη
ἐκπάγλοισ' ἐπέεσσιν, ἄναξ δ' ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνων
χαῖρε νόω, ὅ τ' ἄριστοι Ἀχαιῶν δηριῶντο.
ὡς γάρ οἱ χρεῖων μυθήσατο Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων
Πυθοῖ ἐν ἡγαθέη, ὅθ' ὑπέρβη λάϊνον οὐδὸν
χρησόμενος. τότε γάρ ῥα κυλίνδετο πῆματος ἀρχή.. (*Od.8.73-81*)

[T]he Muse stirred the singer to sing the famous actions
of men on that venture, whose fame goes up into the wide heaven,

¹³*Od.8.93ff.*

the quarrel between Odysseus and Peleus' son, Achilleus, how these once contended, at the gods' generous festival, with words of violence, so that the lord of men, Agamemnon, was happy in his heart that the best of the Achaians were quarreling; for so in prophecy Phoibos Apollo had spoken to him in sacred Pytho, when he had stepped across the stone doorstep to consult; for now the beginning of evil rolled on..

There is a marked contrast between the joy felt by Agamemnon in reaction to the prophecy and the description of the toil which will ensue. Because of this, G.M.Calhoun argued long ago that Demodocus' tale is a 'story based on the motif of the misunderstood oracle'.¹⁴ Calhoun argues that the oracle referred to the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles (with which the *Iliad* begins), and not the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles. Agamemnon is thus fooled, feeling joy at an event which predicts massive suffering. We can strengthen Calhoun's argument by noting its significance for the Phaeacians. For there too the initial joy at the song will soon turn to grief, when their civilization is destroyed; there is also a misreading of the situation by a naive king, whose pity for Odysseus blocks the possibility of an understanding of the impending disaster.

The victory of *metis*: Demodocus' second song

Alcinous halts the song of Demodocus, and suggests the Phaeacians turn to the pleasure of the games. Euryalus immediately invites Odysseus to take part, which forces him to walk a rhetorical tightrope: he must display enough prowess to end the Phaeacian taunts, but not so much that he destroys Phaeacian belief in their identity as perfect transporters of guests, which would destroy his *nostos*. Accordingly, he both boasts of excellence in all sports, but also tempers these claims by professing modesty with regard to the speed of his feet. It is this modesty

¹⁴Calhoun 1939, 11ff.

which allows Alcinous, after a humiliating Phaeacian defeat in the discus throw, triumphantly to proclaim that the real Phaeacian virtues are those which involve the feet, including swift transportation and later dancing:

οὐ γὰρ πυγμάχοι εἰμὲν ἀμύνονες οὐδὲ παλαισταί,
ἀλλὰ ποσὶ κραιπνῶς θέομεν καὶ νηυσὶν ἄριστοι· (*Od.*8.246-7)

For we are not perfect in our boxing, nor yet as wrestlers,
but we do run lightly on our feet, and are excellent seamen..

Alcinous' words betray him here, for they are a patent contradiction of his earlier statement before the games commenced that the Phaeacians surpass others in both their speed of foot *and* in boxing and wrestling (ὅσσον περιγιγνόμεθ' ἄλλων / πύξ τε παλαιμοσύνηι..*Od.*8.102-3). Alcinous takes the scraps offered by Odysseus, retreating to an affirmation of what he believes to be the crucial quality which distinguishes the Phaeacians from others.¹⁵ It is this Phaeacian feature which Poseidon will later destroy. Because Odysseus does not utterly destroy their belief in their identity, he buys himself the time to escape. Yet by a series of allusions, the narrative suggests that the modesty shown by Odysseus is far from genuine, and Demodocus' second song reinforces this. Let us consider some possible reasons to doubt his sincerity.

Odysseus first claims that he is vulnerable in the foot-race, and then goes on to suggest that Philoctetes is a superior archer to him. The first claim seems to receive backing from the *Iliad*. For in Book 23 Odysseus actually runs in a foot-race against Antilochus and Ajax, and the poem makes it quite clear that he is up against superior performers: Antilochus is the best of the youth (νέους ποσὶ πάντας ἐνίκα, 'he was superior to all the youths in his speed of foot' *Il.*23.756), while Ajax leads all the way until the race's end. But it is here that a complication

¹⁵The Lacanian term for this irreducible prop upon which the consistency of one's identity depends is the *trait uniaire*.

occurs; Odysseus prays to Athena for help, who then upsets Ajax' balance, causing him to slip and fall into the cow dung. The fastest man in the footrace loses out to Odysseus because of a trick. The lesson of the footrace in Book 23 of the *Iliad* seems to be that Odysseus is quite capable of winning a foot-race *despite* the greater foot speed of others.¹⁶ This in itself might be enough to suggest that Odysseus' words in Book 8 allude to the other epic tradition. But there is an even more marked resemblance: after Odysseus' success, Antilochus claims that he is from an earlier generation:

εἰδόσιν ὕμῃ ἐρέω πᾶσιν, φίλοι, ὡς ἔτι καὶ νῦν
 ἀθάνατοι τιμῶσι παλαιότερους ἀνθρώπους.
 Αἴας μὲν γὰρ ἐμεῖ' ὀλίγον προγενέστερός ἐστιν,
οὗτος δὲ προτέρης γενεῆς προτέρων τ' ἀνθρώπων·
ὠμογέροντα δὲ μὴν φασ' ἔμμεναι· ἀργαλέον δὲ
ποσσὶν ἐριδήσασθαι Ἀχαιοῖς, εἰ μὴ Ἀχιλλεῖ. (Il.23.787-92)

'Friends, you all know well what I tell you, that still the immortals continue to favour the elder men. For see now, Aias is elder than I, if only by a little, but this man is out of another age than ours and one of the ancients. But his, they say, is a green old age. It would be a hard thing for any Achaian to match his speed. Except for Achilles.'

Antilochus' remarks thus contradict those of the Odysseus of *Odyssey* 8, who explicitly refused to compare himself to earlier generations:

τῶν δ' ἄλλων ἐμὲ φημι πολὺ προφερέστερον εἶναι,
 ὅσσοι νῦν βροτοὶ εἰσὶν ἐπὶ χθονὶ σίτον ἔδοντες.
ἀνδράσι δὲ προτέροισιν ἐριζέμεν οὐκ ἐθελήσω... (Od.8.221-3)

But I will say that I stand far out ahead of all others such as are living mortals now and feed on the earth. Only I will not set myself against men of the generations before...

The remarks to the Phaeacians are belied by the remarks made about him in the *Iliad*. Not only is he perfectly capable of winning a foot-race despite his inferior

¹⁶There is a close parallel between Odysseus' false modesty here and his later treatment of the beggar Iros. When forced to fight Iros, he chooses to hit him lightly in order to ensure that the suitors do not suspect his identity and thus entertain the possibility of destruction (*Od.*18.93ff) Both the Phaeacians and the suitors choose to continue to believe in their own infallibility, which makes them want to believe in the relative weakness of Odysseus.

ability, his presumed humility in comparison to earlier generations is undermined by the words of Antilochus, who emphasizes that Odysseus is not a stranger to those generations, but a card-carrying member of them.

Let us now turn to his modesty regarding archery, which is almost more complex than it first appears.¹⁷ Philoctetes' ability at archery was of course necessary for the fall of Troy. But if this is an event which makes Troy's sack inevitable, it is also one of a series of such events which are ultimately facilitated by Odysseus.¹⁸ For Philoctetes is only brought to Troy through the intervention of Odysseus, who recovers him from Lemnos. If Philoctetes is the 'best' archer, then Odysseus' intervention in bringing him to Troy clarifies that he is in control of whether Philoctetes is allowed to exhibit that prowess. In all three cases of Odysseus' alleged inferiority produced in Book 8, we thus find alternate stories which suggest that he is already one step ahead. Though he refuses comparison to earlier generations, he is already one of them; though an incompetent runner destined to lose, he nevertheless can still win; though inferior in archery to Philoctetes, without his intervention Philoctetes' potential would never have been realized. The narrative therefore hints at a string of reasons why Odysseus should be doubted, even as the Phaeacians want to believe him - a belief which allows them to cling to their own belief that they are 'best' at transportation.

Let us now turn to Demodocus' second song, which can be read as a commentary on Odysseus' rhetoric. In response to Odysseus' dubious protestations of vulnerability because of his slowness of foot, Demodocus tells the story of how the lame Hephaestus tricked the faster Ares:

οὐκ ἀρετᾶι κακὰ ἔργα· κιχάνει τοι βραδὺς ὤκύν,

¹⁷*Od.*8.219: 'There was Philoctetes alone who surpassed me in archery..'

¹⁸See Haft 1990, 52, who mentions Odysseus' theft of the Palladium, his capture of the prophet Helenus, his bringing Neoptolemus to Troy and the killing of Rhesus in the Doloneia.

ὥς καὶ νῦν Ἥφαιστος ἐὼν βραδὺς εἶλεν Ἄρηα,
ὠκύτατον περ ἐόντα θεῶν, οἱ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσιν,
χωλὸς ἐὼν, τέχνησι τὸ καὶ μοιχάγρι' ὀφέλλει. (*Od.* 8.329-32)

No virtue in bad dealings. See, the slow one has overtaken
the swift, as now slow Hephaistos has overtaken
Ares, swiftest of all the gods on Olympos, by artifice,
though he was lame, and Ares must pay the adulterer's damage.

The tale of guile defeating speed looks back to Odysseus' actions in defeating Ajax in *Iliad* 23. Demodocus knows very well that Odysseus slowness of foot is no obstacle to him defeating the Phaeacians with his *metis*, and that the last vestige of their self-belief is about to be destroyed. But this song also returns to the theme of conflict between *bie* and *metis* opened up in his first song. The quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles, is followed by a tale of victory of (Odyssean) guile over (Achillean) speed. We can identify Odysseus with the guile of Hephaestus, Achilles with the swift of foot Ares. If Demodocus' song is a veiled warning to the Phaeacians, it also pays a backhanded compliment to Odysseus; he seems to know that Odysseus' *metis* can overcome the *bie* of Achilles.¹⁹

¹⁹On the identification of Hephaestus with Odysseus, cf Braswell 1982, Newton 1987. Critics normally take it for granted that Achilles and Odysseus have separate qualities, suggested by their epithets; consider the following words of Lowenstam, 1993, 44: 'As is often pointed out, we have "fleet-footed" Achilles, on the one hand, who hates deceit as much as the gates of Hades and whose greatest deed in the epic tradition is achieved with the aid of his swift feet. On the other hand, Odysseus "of the many wiles" is renowned for his shrewdness while he admits his limitation in running.' Lowenstam seems to presume that because Odysseus lacks the speed of foot of Achilles, this constitutes a fundamental limitation to his powers. But it is part and parcel of his *metis* that it can make up for the speed he lacks. Any Achillean 'victory' which Achilles' swift feet promises to provide will be a hollow one - Demodocus' song suggests. Consider also the following suggestion by Zeitlin, 1995, 150fn.42, on the funeral games in the *Iliad*: 'Achilles, of course, is best known for his swiftness of foot, and if Odysseus wins the footrace in *Iliad* 23, it is because Achilles presides over the games.' What this misses is that Odysseus defeats Ajax in the race, a figure who *already* surpasses Odysseus in his swiftness of foot; he does this through Athena's trick. The suggestion is surely that Achilles' speed would be useless against Odyssean guile. This episode also looks back to the previous book, which depicted Achilles' greatest heroic act, the killing of Hector. It is often noted that there is a certain appropriateness to the chase scene which precedes Achilles' killing of Hector, since it showcases the key quality of his major epithet, *podarkes*, swift-footed (and, as Nagy 1979, 326ff demonstrates, swiftness is thematically linked to *bie*). But what is generally ignored is that *Iliad* 22 also showcases the *limitations* of his speed; for Achilles is unable to catch Hector until Athena intervenes to trick him into giving up his flight. She persuades him to give up his attempt to escape; this gives added significance to the link between *bie* and speed suggested by Nagy; I quote the relevant lines, with Nagy's translation:

Yet this far from exhausts its thematic significance. Hephaestus finds out about the adultery of Aphrodite and Ares, but he finds out too late, after the act is completed. What is of especial interest is that the adultery is both 'hidden', and occurs 'at first':

Αὐτὰρ ὁ φορμίζων ἀνεβάλλετο καλὸν αἰεῖδεν
 ἄμφ' Ἄρεος φιλότητος εὐστεφάνου τ' Ἀφροδίτης,
ὡς τὰ πρῶτα μίγησαν ἐν Ἥφαιστοιο δόμοισι
λάθρηι: πολλὰ δ' ἔδωκε, λέχος δ' ἤισχυνε καὶ εὐνήν
 Ἥφαιστοιο ἄνακτος· (Od.8.266-70)

Demodokos struck the lyre and began singing well the story about the love of Ares and sweet-garlanded Aphrodite, how they first lay together in the house of Hephaistos secretly; she gave him many things and fouled the marriage and bed of the lord Hephaistos.

Hephaestus' naive faith in Aphrodite is irretrievably broken. But it is broken 'in secret', and this emotional wound dealt to Hephaestus occurs 'at first'. This sin which shatters Hephaestus' unreflective belief in his wife's fidelity is an *original* sin. Hephaestus' reaction to this loss replays a common Odyssean theme:

βῆ ῥ' ἴμεν ἐς χαλκεῶνα, κακὰ φρεσὶ βυσσοδομεύων·
 ἐν δ' ἔθετ' ἀκμοθέτῳ μέγαν ἄκμονα, κόπτε δὲ δεσμοὺς
 ἀρρήκτους ἀλύτους, ὄφρ' ἔμπεδον αὐθι μένοιεν.
 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ τεῦξε δόλον κεχολωμένος Ἄρει,
 βῆ ῥ' ἴμεν ἐς θάλαμον, ὅθι οἱ φίλα δέμνι ἔκειτο,
 ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρ' ἐρμῖσιν χεε δέσματα κύκλωι ἀπάντη·
 πολλὰ δὲ καὶ καθύπερθε μελαθρόφιν ἐξεκέχυντο,
 ἦύτ' ἀράχνια λεπτά, τὰ γ' οὐ κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο,
 οὐδὲ θεῶν μακάρων· πέρι γὰρ δολόεντα τέτυκτο. (Od.8.273-281)

[He] went on his way to his smithy, heart turbulent with hard sorrows, and set the great anvil upon its stand, and hammered out fastenings

ἦθεϊ' ἦ μάλα δὴ σε βιάζεται ὡκὺς Ἀχιλλεὺς
 ἄστῃ περὶ Πριάμοιο ποσὶν ταχέεσσι διώκων. (Il.22.229-30)

Dear brother, indeed swift Achilles uses bie against you,
 as he chases you swift feet around the city of Priam.

The *bie*, strength, of Achilles succeeds only because Athena tricks Hector into thinking that this strength is irresistible. Until her intervention, Hector was happily holding his own. Athena's later intervention, which sends Ajax into the dung and wins the footrace for Odysseus, is thematically linked to her intervention here. In both cases, her trick undermines the pretensions of speed. *Metis* overpowers *bie*, even in the *Iliad*.

that could not be slipped or broken, to hold them fixed in position. Now when, in his anger against Ares, he had made this treacherous snare, he went to his chamber where his own dear bed lay, and spun his fastenings around the posts *in a perfect circle*, while many more were suspended overhead, from the roof beams, thin, like spider webs, which not even one of the blessed gods could see. He had fashioned it to be very deceptive.²⁰

Hephaestus reacts to the wound caused by Aphrodite's adultery by turning to technology, and his trickery ensues from his technological skill. The sequence is reminiscent of Odysseus' later tale of his interaction with the Cyclopes; there too, the Cyclops turns to the (the trickery of) language in an attempt to heal the wound caused by Odysseus' blinding.²¹ But the apparent perfection of Hephaestus' trick returns us to the question of the limits of ideological power. For the care of Hephaestus' craft suggests that his guile has the near omnipotent ability to check the transgressive desire of Ares and Aphrodite; not only does the trick of the bindings betray no trace of his construction of those bindings (not even the gods can see them), but Ares and Aphrodite are enclosed in a perfect circle: ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρ' ἐρμῖσιν χέε δέσματα κύκλωι ἀπάντηι (he spun his fastenings around the posts in a perfect circle). The workings of guile appear invincible, creating a symbolic important 'circle' ensnaring the transgressors. Yet the particular words used to describe this apparently perfect closing of a circle betray its later failure. For the encirclement of the bed-posts (ἐρμῖσιν) previews the later twist in Demodocus' tale as the god Hermes (Ἑρμείας) declares that he would still be willing to sleep with Aphrodite despite Hephaestus' punishment.²² The success of the trick in forming a

²⁰I change Lattimore's 'from every direction' to the more literal 'complete circle'. I discuss the importance of the circle imagery later.

²¹Indeed Hephaestus' trip to his forge may remind us that the Cyclopes will become his helpers at the forge after they are introduced to the realm of the social by Odysseus.

²²*Od.* 8.339ff. Hermes is of course the god of the liminal, the preserver of doorways, but he performs this role because he himself is the thief, transgressor of boundaries *par excellence*: 'In the house, his place is at the door, protecting the threshold, repelling thieves because he is himself the thief... for whom no lock, no barricade, no frontier exists. He is the wall-piercer who is pictured in the 'Hymn to Hermes' as 'gliding edgeways through the keyhole of the hall like autumn breeze, even as mist'. Vernant 1983, 129. Vernant explores the transgressive role of Hermes in his

perfect circle creates the possibility for breaking the circle. Whatever the effort in the construction of circular, self-sufficient ideological systems, they always create a limit which can then be transgressed.

The arrival of a *telos*: Demodocus' final song

Demodocus closes his trio of songs by telling the tale of the Wooden horse. This in itself forms a fitting climax to the series of tales on the theme of *bie* and *metis*. For despite Achilles' martial prowess, it is this trick of Odysseus which will eventually lead to the fall of Troy.²³ But the tale is of particular significance for the situation on Phaeacia, as Demodocus' song is again prophetic. The city of Troy 'covers over' the horse (ἀμφικαλύψη, *Od.*8.511) as the land of the Phaeacians will soon be covered over by the shadow of the Cyclopean mountain.²⁴ The disaster on Troy foreshadows the coming disaster on Phaeacia. But there is a more significant parallel between the quandary of the Trojans with regard to the wooden horse and the quandary of the Phaeacians with regard to Odysseus. Odysseus' stay on Phaeacia is characterized by persistent attempts by his hosts to discover who he is. In continually seeking the identity of the man in their midst, the Phaeacians hope to assure themselves that he is not the agent of their destruction. Their quest soon comes to halt when Odysseus tells them his name at the start of the *Apologoi*, a label of identity they believe far too easily. But it is in the persistence of these attempts that they replay the key aspect of the story of the Trojan horse; the Trojans also need to find out what is inside the Trojan horse in order to save their city, and

relationship to Hestia throughout chapter 5. See also the Bakhtinian reading of Peradotto, 56ff. The similarity between Odysseus and Hermes is discussed further in the next chapter.

The word used for bed-post here, *hermis*, only occurs at one other point in the poem: the crucial scene where Penelope and Odysseus confront each other over the mutability of Odysseus' bed. This scene, and its relationship to the song of Ares and Aphrodite, is discussed further in Chapter 7.

²³Haft 1990 *passim*.

²⁴Cf. 13.152, 13.158: μέγα δέ σφιν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψαι. '[I would] cover over their city with a great mountain.'

they ultimately fail to do this. Both the horse and Odysseus are objects of enchantment which have captivated the desire of their beholders; both bring a disastrous end to the civilizations they pierce. This 'end' has particular significance for the Phaeacians; for their limitless society depends on a disavowal of any *telos*: Scher-ie.

But despite the similarities, there is an equally interesting difference. In the either/or world of Phaeacia, where there is no place for ambiguity, the Phaeacians believe that there is no puzzle, trick which cannot be rationally explained. Odysseus' trick fools the Phaeacians for the first time, and thus makes them aware of their vulnerability; but there is more to the trick than this. For even when they later discover that Odysseus is indeed the agent of their destruction, they still have no rational way of explaining *why* he tricked them.²⁵ This gives added significance to a further aspect of Odysseus' rhetoric of modesty:

ξεῖνος γάρ μοι ὄδ' ἐστί· τίς ἄν φιλέοντι μάχοιτο;
 ἄφρων δὴ κείνος γε καὶ οὐτιδανὸς πέλει ἀνὴρ,
 ὅς τις ξεινοδόκῳ ἔριδα προφέρηται ἀέθλων
 δῆμῳ ἐν ἀλλοδαπῷ· ἔο δ' αὐτοῦ πάντα κολούει. (*Od.*8.209-12)

[F]or he his my host; who would fight with his friend? Surely
 any man can be called insensate and a nobody,
 who in an alien community offers to challenge
 his friend and host in the games. He damages what is his.

Because the Phaeacians live in a world where everyone is a friend, and where their status as hosts is not challenged, Odysseus has no trouble persuading them that only a madman would choose to bring an *eris* to society. But his words also trace the limits of Phaeacian society. For it is precisely the possibility of the act of a psychotic which has been disavowed as the founding gesture of Phaeacian society: in the beginning, they fled the force of the psychotic Cyclopes. Odysseus

²⁵As suggested in the last chapter, their eventual punishment at the hands of Poseidon appears to the Phaeacians as utterly senseless.

also suggests that such a man would be a 'no-one', a pun which will play such an important role in the trick of the Cyclops.²⁶ But it is in his rejection of such a man that Odysseus describes the effect his presence will later have on the Phaeacians. The Phaeacians believe they understand Odysseus' motivations when he tells them his name: he is Odysseus, and his identity centers on his desire to return home. But after they transport him home, and they find that he was the agent of their destruction all along, they will be forced to reconsider this. His identity will then become a puzzle, an unanswered question: why on earth did he bring an *eris* to our land? For the Phaeacians, he will indeed function as a 'no-body'; they can no longer believe his innocent stories, but yet have no way of finding out anything determinate about him. The appearance of 'stone' on Phaeacia (both in the form of the overhanging mountain, and in the retroactive significance given to Lao-damas' name) is just a substantiation (for the Phaeacians) of this pure ignorance, an object signifying their incomprehension, reminding them of the puzzle of Odysseus' lack of identity.²⁷

Odysseus' role as agent of destruction allows us to see a darker aspect to his reaction to the last song of Demodocus. In response to the tale of the Trojan horse, he pines away with grief, and is then likened (in a famous 'reverse simile') to a woman about to be dragged off to slavery:

ταῦτ' ἄρ' ἀοιδὸς ἄειδε περικλυτός· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
 τήκετο, δάκρυ δ' ἔδευεν ὑπὸ βλεφάροισι παρειάς.
 ὡς δὲ γυνὴ κλαίῃσι φίλον πόσιν ἀμφιπεσοῦσα,
 ὅς τε ἔῃς πρόσθεν πόλιος λαῶν τε πέσῃσιν,
 ἄσπευτε καὶ τεκέεσσιν ἀμύνων νηλεὲς ἦμαρ·
 ἢ μὲν τὸν θνήσκοντα καὶ ἀσπαίροντα ἰδοῦσα

²⁶*Od.*9.460.

²⁷In terms of their process of reading, they again read the *Apologoi* of Odysseus too literally. They read these tales as part of an identifying description which is to be attached to the name 'Odysseus'. They fail to read the tale of the blinding of the Cyclops allegorically, as the tale of symbolic castration as the *sine qua non* of language but also its point of failure, because their symbolic identity depends on their belief in language's infallibility, its lack of ambiguity.

ἀμφ' αὐτῷ χυμένη λίγα κωκύνει· οἱ δέ τ' ὄπισθε
κόπτοντες δούρεσσι μετάφρενον ἠδὲ καὶ ὤμους
εἴρρον εἰσανάγουσι, πόνον τ' ἐχέμεν καὶ οἴζυν·
τῆς δ' ἔλεεινοτάτῳ ἄχει φθινύθουσι παρειαί·
ὥς Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔλεεινὸν ὑπ' ὀφρύσι δάκρυον εἶβεν. (*Od.*8.521-31)

So the famous singer sang his tale, but Odysseus
melted, and from under his eyes the tears ran down, drenching
his cheeks. As a woman weeps, lying over the body
of her dear husband, who fell fighting for her city and people
as he tried to beat off the pitiless day from city and children;
she sees him dying and grasping for breath, and winding her body
about him she cries high and shrill, while the men behind her,
hitting her with their spear butts on the back and the shoulders,
force her up and lead her away into slavery, to have
hard work and sorrow, and her cheeks are wracked with pitiful weeping.
Such were the pitiful tears Odysseus shed from under his brows.

Usual critical reaction has involved recognizing the breadth of poetic vision employed in the identification with the loser, the quiet articulation of the destructive, non-heroic aspect of war.²⁸ Odysseus (now believed to be a genuine sufferer) is identified with a victim in the sacking of the city which, more than any other, earned him his epithet, *ptoliporthos*. Yet what such a reading is in danger of obscuring is both the relevance of the image of destroyed city for the Phaeacians, and the particular effect of Odysseus' tears. Odysseus, let us remember, has to be believed to be an ordinary, mortal man in order to gain his *nostos*. The Phaeacians trust the sincerity of his emotional reaction, and accordingly identify with him as a mortal man, a figure of suffering, but in doing so they misrecognize him as agent of Nausithous' prediction. The suffering worn by Odysseus externally is no guarantee of his identity. In a poem where deception is rife, where every 'natural' human quality is persistently questioned, the 'natural' emotions which promise to strengthen social bonds between people are all bonds which can be played upon by the trickster. To experience unreflective, 'natural' emotion is to fall prey to the

²⁸See Foley 1978, p20, who talks of Odysseus' 'special ability to comprehend and respond to the female consciousness', and his affinity with 'non-masculine' heroism'. Cf Goldhill 1991, 53ff.

possibility of being fooled. If Odysseus is conventionally regarded as a figure who endures suffering, it is worth remembering that he is also a figure who deliberately inflicts suffering on himself in order to fool others; the blows inflicted on the woman by her captors recalls Helen's description of an Odyssean spying raid into Troy, where part of his disguise as a beggar depended upon his self-flagellation:

αὐτόν μιν πληγῆσιν ἀεικέλιησι δαμάσσας,
 σπεῖρα κάκ' ἄμφ' ὤμοισι βαλὼν, οἰκῆϊ ἐοικώς,
 ἀνδρῶν δυσμενέων κατέδου πόλιν εὐρυάγυιαν. (*Od.*4.244-6)

He flagellated himself with degrading strokes, then threw on
 a worthless sheet about his shoulders. He looked like a servant.
 So he crept into the wide-wayed city of the men he was fighting.

The suffering he self-inflicts is done in order to inflict further suffering upon the Trojans. Helen's description here previews Odysseus' fight with the suitors, where his disguise as a beggar is so crucial. But the Phaeacians too are beguiled by the harmlessness of Odysseus' appearance as a hapless victim of war. Because they pity him, they cast aside the warning of the destruction of the city alluded to in Demodocus' final song.

CHAPTER 5

THE LIMITS OF HEROISM

On the verge of sending Patroclus back into the midst of the battle, Achilles fantasizes about the possibility of the mass-destruction of Greeks and Trojans:

αἴ γὰρ Ζεῦ τε πάτερ καὶ Ἀθηναίη καὶ Ἄπολλον,
μήτε τις οὖν Τρώων θάνατον φύγοι ὅσσοι ἕασι,
μήτε τις Ἀργείων, νῶϊν δ' ἐκδύμεν ὄλεθρον,
ᾧ φρ' οἴοι Τροίης ἱερὰ κρήδεμνα λύωμεν. (*Il.* 16.97-100)

Father Zeus, Athene and Apollo, if only
not one of all the Trojans could escape destruction, not one
of the Argives, but you and I could emerge from the slaughter
so that we two alone could break Troy's hallowed coronal.

Achilles' fantasy articulates a certain truth of this poem of war. It is a fantasy which pursues the 'competitive' virtues, exhibited in their ultimate form in warfare, to their logical conclusion. But the fantasy also evokes a theme which recurs throughout the *Iliad*: the motif of natural disaster. Scodel has demonstrated that the narrative of the *Iliad* shows an awareness of traditional myths of destruction, while reworking them for its own purpose.¹ Though Scodel persuasively argues that passages of the *Iliad* allude to a range of disaster myths (including that of the Flood), of especial interest to me are the parallels drawn between the massive loss of life forecast in the proem of the *Iliad* due to the anger of Achilles, and the explanation for the Trojan War suggested in the *Ehoëae*. The *Ehoëae* seems to explain the war as a cataclysmic event planned by Zeus to separate gods from men; but it does so in such a way as to uncannily recall aspects of the *Iliad*. Let me list the relevant passages listed by Scodel, juxtaposing them to the relevant lines of the *Iliad*'s proem:

Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος

¹Scodel 1982.

οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρί' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε,
πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν
ἡρώων..

Sing, goddess, the accursed wrath of Peleus' son Achilleus
 and its devastation, which put pains thousandfold upon the Achaians,
and hurled forth many strong souls of heroes to Hades..

π]ολλὰς Ἄϊδι κεφαλὰς ἀπὸ χαλκὸν ἰαψ[ει]ν
ἀν]δρῶν ἡρώων ἐν δῆιοτῆτι πεσόντων. (Eh.fr.204, 118-119 M-W)

[Zeus intended] to send with bronze many heads of
 heroic men who had fallen in the turmoil to Hades.

Scodel also notes that a related formula at *Il.* 1.1.53-5 also is suggestive of mass-
 destruction:

Κρονίδης, κατὰ δ' ὑψόθεν ἦκεν ἑέρσας
 αἶματι μυδαλέας ἐξ αἰθέρος, οὐνεκ' ἔμελλε
πολλὰς ἰφθίμους κεφαλὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψειν.

And the son of Kronos.. from aloft cast
 down dews dripping blood from the sky, since he was minded
 to hurl down man heads to the house of Hades.

Scodel persuasively argues that the parallels can be attributed to a common
 tradition on which the *Iliad* draws, rather than simply to later imitation of the *Iliad*'s
 poem. The *Iliad* thus creatively reworks a story of cosmological disaster into one
 of human loss; the series of references to the cosmological tradition becomes a
 means of establishing the gravity of the destruction of life in the Trojan War. But
 there remains a key difference between natural destruction and the war: 'A war, no
 matter how long and now bitter, does not seem calamitous enough to have been an
 original form of the myth of destruction; it is, moreover, a normally human and
 local activity, to be explained historically, rather than a divine visitation.'² Nature is
 replaced by culture as historical narratives of the Trojan War commence. But
 Achilles' fantasy of a union with Patroclus in a world bereft of humans seems to
 blur this distinction. Achilles' fantasy suggests an act which is certainly not natural

²Scodel 1982, 42-3.

- if the fantasized mass destruction is beyond human power, the desire for it is clearly human, within the realm of culture - and yet because of the scale of the loss it is hard to locate in the realm of sense: though articulated all too lucidly, it has a thoroughly irrational feel. He fantasizes that he is in the exact situation which faced Deucalion and Pyrrha after the flood, in an asocial, isolated, frozen universe - a universe reminiscent of the isolated *oikoi* of the Cyclopes. It is an inhuman fantasy for destruction on a cosmological scale, for destruction *of* the human. This chapter will be a sustained attempt to come to terms with this complex, shady realm between 'sense' and 'nature', and to ponder its effects for the question of an ideology of the Homeric poems.

We can begin by returning to the Bakhtinian reading of Peradotto: what is the relation of Peradotto's 'dynamic self' to Achilles' fantasy? In the willful destructiveness of this Achillean wish we can detect an aspect of a free self that seems to be missing from Peradotto's optimistic picture. Peradotto remarks that '[I]ndividuation escapes predication, and can only be signified by the negative judgement implicit in *Outis*', and then concludes (from this reading of Odysseus-as-Outis) that the *Odyssey* depicts a self which is 'capable, dynamic, free'. But what is lost (in Peradotto's translation) are the destructive possibilities open to this 'capable, dynamic' self. Achilles' fantasy certainly transgresses the realm of public law - 'the heroic code'. But is not this shocking, unpalatable desire the desire (within Peradotto's own terms) of a 'capable, free' self? Achilles' fantasy, together with the untrammelled slaughter leading to the death of Hector which he later indulges in, are clearly not any simple obedience to social dictates. So are we forced to conclude that here too Achilles is 'free, dynamic'? Not quite.

Peradotto is right to note a split in the subject between its predicates and a certain 'nothing' which evades them. Freedom becomes, for Peradotto, that which escapes the dictates of social discourses, and which accordingly can only be

negatively defined. But in order to come to terms with the sadism rendered explicit in Achilles' fantasy, we need to consider a consequence of this failure of the law to account for social subjects. For this failure of social discourses (which I will call the 'public law') means that there is also a failure at the level of predication itself - that is, the public law itself is incomplete. The negative subject which escapes predication brings with it, as a necessary correlate, the knowledge that the law itself is not all-powerful: it too is haunted by lack, signified by its inability to account for the subject.³ It is this failure at the level of the law which opens up more than the possibility of transgression in the name of a liberating freedom. What Peradotto's complex, insightful analysis seems to miss is the possibility of transgression of the law as the ultimate identification with the law itself:

As has been shown by numerous analyses from Bakhtin onwards, periodic transgressions are inherent to the social order, they function as a condition of the latter's stability. (The mistake of Bakhtin - or, rather, of some of his followers - was to present an idealized image of these 'transgressions', i.e. to pass in silence over lynching parties and the like as the crucial form of the 'carnavalesque suspension of social hierarchy'). The deepest identification which 'holds together' a community is not so much identification with the Law which regulates its 'normal' everyday circuit, as rather *identification with the specific form of transgression of the Law, of its suspension* (in psychoanalytic terms, the specific form of *enjoyment*.)⁴

The Law (in the psychoanalytic terms of Žižek) is split into 'ego-ideal' - the 'normal', everyday realm of the pacifying, civilizing law of the symbolic order - and a hidden, transgressive reverse; the psychoanalytic name for this dark side is superego. The realm of the superego involves a seamy 'enjoyment' because it is not

³Cf. Dolar 1993, who provides a Lacanian critique of Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation. A subject is confronted with a seemingly all-powerful force (the realm of the law) which demands his obedience. But there remains the possibility of a questioning of this power; for if it is truly all-powerful, then why does it need the subject's obedience? The command to obey is in itself evidence of its failure.

⁴Žižek 1994, 98. For a good discussion of the 'carnavalesque' aspect of Bakhtinian reversals, and relationship to studies of Old Comedy, Goldhill 1991, 176-85.

constrained in the dead system of rules and regulations which characterize the public law. Sadism can be understood as both a transgression of the public law, and also as a simultaneous identification with its necessary support, its superegoic reverse. This distinction can help clarify the complexity of the position of Achilles: his sadistic fantasy appears wantonly destructive, yet it is not a simple break with heroic ideology. Instead, it speaks its hidden truth, its unpalatable dark side. His initial rejection of Agamemnon suspends the workings of the public law, and much of the poem continues with this (utopian) question mark hanging over the heroic ethos. But Achilles' awareness of the incompleteness of the law turns into a superegoic fury - as suggested by the fantasy in book 16. Before the quarrel in book 1, the Greek *aristoi* were united as a community around the authority of Agamemnon, a symbolic father. An equal renunciation was imposed on each warrior in order to establish a stable community.⁵ Accordingly, the everyday, public battles continued within the well structured parameters of an ethos epitomized by Agamemnon, and which scholars have termed the 'heroic code'. In the quarrel, Agamemnon's symbolic authority is demolished in the eyes of Achilles, which leads to his *menis*. This does indeed open up a moment when the law is suspended in its inadequacy. But Achilles' recognition of the failure of the symbolic father does not lead him to a rejection of the warrior code, a 'centrifugal' resistance to it. Instead, Achilles' fantasy involves an open, sadistic identification with its superegoic dark side. With the point of symbolic authority gone, Achilles dreams of making the law complete, of being faithful to it in a way that is unthinkable for Agamemnon. But what should not be missed is that this very 'transgressiveness' exposes the hidden, renounced enjoyment which structures the

⁵Let us recall the pun lurking in the 'Nom de la Père', and utilized by Lacan. The 'Nom' of the father is also the 'Non' of the father. Paternal authority's ability to structure a group rests on common renunciation of individual desires, on the obedience to this 'Non'.

world of epic. The heroic ethos always depended on this unspoken/unspeakable superegoic fantasy of total destruction.⁶

Far from being irrelevant to the *Odyssey*, I will later suggest that this split in the law is fundamental in order to understand the two separate mass deaths depicted in the poem, those of the Ithacan companions of Odysseus and the suitors. The former die because of their ongoing attachment to the principles of the civilizing, symbolic law: though they persistently doubt their allegiance to Odysseus, his *metis* always manages to persuade them of his qualities as leader. The manner of their deaths is appropriate to the hesitant manner of their questioning of his authority; as their number dwindles with each passing disaster, the troops intermittently doubt Odysseus' leadership, but are always won over by his persuasive powers. In marked contrast, the mass killing of the suitors has the hallmark of superegoic destruction. But before turning to the *Odyssey*, I want to look at two interventions of Odysseus in the *Iliad* which can help illustrate the complexities of this splitting of the law (and Odysseus' complex relationship to it for the Homeric poems).

The splitting of the law in *Iliad* 2 and 10

After the humiliations suffered at the hands of Achilles in books 1 and 9, Agamemnon's authority is twice supplanted in the following books by Odysseus. The structural links between *Iliad* 2 and 10 have been analyzed by Haft: the Doloneia 'bears the same relationship to Book 9 as *Iliad* 2 does to its preceding book: the Embassy and *Iliad* 1 focus upon Achilles; in his absence, the Doloneia

⁶Let me be explicit: the social order is built on the premise that the spoils of war must be shared. The Greeks kill in a controlled manner because they have given up (on entrance to the social pact under Agamemnon) the right to kill without control. Achilles strips away the spirit of renunciation. It matters little whether the Greeks, in the cold light of day, would be horrified at these superegoic acts. The crucial point is that, in their everyday deeds, they act *as if* this is what they want. Achilles' actions provide the fantasy structure which regulates their everyday behavior.

and *Iliad* 2 thrust his 'rival' Odysseus into prominence.⁷ Haft also points out that books 2 and 10 highlight the power of Odysseus' *metis*, and convincingly argues that both books foreshadow Odysseus' eventual sack of Troy.⁸ There is an explicit narrative connection.⁹ Both books begin with Agamemnon in bed. In book 2, Agamemnon is asleep, and receives a dream from Zeus which sets in motion the action of the book. In book 10, we again begin by Agamemnon's bedside, though this time his concern for his troops keeps him awake, and leads him to set in motion the series of events that make up the Doloneia. But if these are similarities, what will most concern us here is the different manner in which the symbolic authority of Agamemnon is supplanted in books 2 and 10.

In *Iliad* 2, Odysseus' intervention remains at the level of reinforcement, via his persuasive powers, of the public law. As the army begins to flee, Athena appears to Odysseus and commands him to address 'each man' (φῶτα ἕκαστον, 2.180), in order to persuade him to return. Consequently, Odysseus addresses 'what ever' of the kings is skulking ("Ὀν τινα μὲν βασιλῆα καὶ ἔξοχον ἄνδρα κηχεΐη. 2.188) and then what ever of the men of the people he saw ("Ὀν δ' αὖ δήμου τ' ἄνδρα ἴδοι βοόωντα τ' ἐφεύροι 2.198). Here, the emphasis on the two groups of people illustrate Odysseus' rhetorical power: he has the ability to manipulate his speech to satisfy each individual in the army. But this power is used on behalf of Agamemnon's weakened symbolic authority. This is suggested by Odysseus' appropriation of Agamemnon's scepter, the emblem of symbolic power *par excellence* (*Il.*2.188-6)¹⁰, which in turn leads to his marshaling of the troops in the name of the king's right to lead:

⁷Haft 1990, 38.

⁸Haft argues that the expression πτολίπορθος Ὀδυσσεύς, used at *Il.*2.278 and *Il.*10.363, is proleptic, anticipating Odysseus' role as sacker of Troy. She also argues that the Doloneia looks forward to the *dolos* of the Trojan horse.

⁹On this connection, see Hainsworth's introduction to Book 10, 152ff.

¹⁰On the symbolic importance of the scepter, cf. Lynn-George 1988, 47-9.

οὐ μὲν πως πάντες βασιλεύσομεν ἐνθάδ' Ἀχαιοί·
 οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη· εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω,
 εἷς βασιλεύς, ὃν δῶκε Κρόνου πάϊς ἀγκυλομήτεω
 σκῆπτρον τ' ἠδὲ θέμιστας, ἵνα σφίσι βουλεύησι.
 Ὡς ὃ γε κοιρανέων δέπε στρατόν· (II.2.203-7)

Not in any way will all we Achaeans be king here;
 A multitude of lords is not a good thing: let there be one lord
 one king, to whom the crooked-counselling son of Kronos
 has give the sceptre and judgments, so that he may advise them.'
 So he ranged through the host, lording it over them.

The epithet 'πολυκοιρανίη', and in particular the contrast with the 'one' king hints at the symptomatic polytropic ability of Odysseus; his persuasive powers allow him to mediate between the one (Agamemnon) and the many (his subjects). Yet what is extraordinary is that Odysseus' verbal deference to Agamemnon is performatively contradicted by his actions. While championing the right of 'one king' to lead the troops, it is Odysseus himself, not Agamemnon, who plays the role of that king; though he claims that Agamemnon has the sole right to wield the scepter, Odysseus himself wields it.¹¹ Odysseus functions as the figure of perfect symbolic authority Agamemnon can only ever dream of being - as Agamemnon's ego-ideal. He restores confidence in the realm of public law after Achilles' desertion, but in such a way as to demonstrate the inadequacy of the king. But this inadequacy is demonstrated by the implicit comparison to what a 'good king' would be.

The only one of the Greek warriors who remains impervious to Odysseus' persuasive powers is Thersites. For my present purposes, it is not necessary to examine his complex interaction with Odysseus. Yet it is worth making some brief remarks. Odysseus sends him howling out of the assembly with the aid of the

¹¹Haft notes that the Odysseus of *Iliad* 2 'blends a keen understanding of his men..with a genuine concern for Agamemnon's reputation' (43ff), but she seems to miss the irony of Odysseus' supplanting of the 'one' king.

scepter, and thus reinforces its symbolic power. This helps cement the consent to authority on the part of the troops, who claim that this is the best of acts:

νῦν δὲ τὸδε μέγ' ἄριστον ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἔρεξεν. (*Il.*2.274)

'Now this is by far the best thing he has done among the Argives'

Immediately after the rhetorical battle between Agamemnon and Achilles over precisely who is the 'best' of the Achaeans in the first book of the *Iliad*, and Odysseus' salvaging of the whole expedition by his persuasion of every member of the host, the use of 'ἄριστον' here is suggestive; Odysseus acts out what it would mean for a leader to be *aristos* at the same time he proclaims his deference to the leader. The possibility of a centrifugal reading of this episode rests in the elaboration of this 'acting out'. Agamemnon, as leader, is always engaged in a performance, an attempt to live up to an impossible ideal - an ideal in this case instantiated by Odysseus. Odysseus' actions open up the manner in which the person of the king himself is contingent. He merely tries to represent a series of interconnected symbolic qualities, qualities which in principle could be located in the person of anyone, but which can be fully represented in no-one. The short-term consequence of Odysseus' actions is clear; the challenge to the symbolic authority which cemented the Greek warriors is overcome, and it is overcome by reinforcing their belief in the symbolic strengths of an ideal king.

The Doloneia: the unspeakable realm of the trickster

The reinforcement of Agamemnon's symbolic authority in Book 2 can be contrasted with the Doloneia. Agamemnon's situation is now more desperate. The embassy to Achilles has failed, and the war continues to go badly. A shadow continues to hang over his leadership. The gravity of the challenge to his symbolic

authority explains the marked vocabulary linking the one and the many in the opening lines of book 10. These lines are worth quoting at length:

Ἄλλοι μὲν παρὰ νηυσὶν ἀριστῆες Παναχαιῶν
 εὐδον παννύχιοι μαλακῶ δεδμημένοι ὕπνω·
 ἀλλ' οὐκ Ἀτρεΐδην Ἀγαμέμνονα ποιμένα λαῶν
 ὕπνος ἔχε γλυκερὸς πολλὰ φρεσὶν ὀρμαίνοντα.
 ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἂν ἀστράπτῃ πόσις Ἥρης ἠϋκόμοιο
 τεύχων ἢ πολὺν ὄμβρον ἀθέσφατον ἢ ἐχάλαζαν
 ἢ νιφετόν, ὅτε πέρ τε χιῶν ἐπάλυνεν ἀρούρας,
 ἢ ἐποθὶ πτολέμοιο μέγα στόμα πευκεδανοῖο,
 ὡς πυκὶν' ἐν στήθεσσιν ἀνεστενάχιζ' Ἀγαμέμνων
 νειόθεν ἐκ κραδίης, τρομέοντο δέ οἱ φρένες ἐντός.
 ἦτοι ὅτ' ἐς πεδίον τὸ Τρωϊκὸν ἀθρήσειε,
 θαύμαζεν πυρὰ πολλὰ τὰ καίετο Ἴλιόθι πρὸ
 αὐλῶν συρίγγων τ' ἐνοπὴν ὀμαδὸν τ' ἀνθρώπων.
 αὐτὰρ ὅτ' ἐς νῆάς τε ἴδοι καὶ λαὸν Ἀχαιῶν,
 πολλὰς ἐκ κεφαλῆς προθελύμους ἔλκετο χαίτας
 ὑψόθ' ἐόντι Δίι, μέγα δ' ἔστενε κυδάλιμον κῆρ. (Il. 10.1-16)

Now beside their ships the other great men of the Achaians slept night long, with the soft bondage of slumber upon them; but the son of Atreus, Agamemnon, shepherd of the people, was held by no sweet sleep as he pondered deeply within him. As when the lord of Hera the lovely-haired flashes his lightning as he brings on a great rainstorm, or a hail incessant, or a blizzard, at such time when the snowfall scatters on ploughlands or drives on somewhere on earth the huge edge of tearing battle, such was Agamemnon, with the beating turmoil in his bosom from the deep heart, and all his wits were shaken within him. Now he would gaze across the plain to the Trojan camp, wondering at the number of their fires that were burning in front of Ilion, toward the high calls of their flutes and pipes, the murmur of people. No as he would look again to the ships and the Achaian people, he would drag the hair from its roots from his head, looking toward Zeus on high, and his proud heart was stricken with lamentation.

Agamemnon is the only leader awake, while all the rest of the army sleep. As the only one awake, he ponders many things in his heart. He goes on to notice the many fires of the Trojans, hinting that it is not only the pressures of his own soldiers that trouble him, but those of the masses of the enemy as well (10.12ff). He is a leader whose command of the *aristoi* is under the microscope - especially after the humiliating rejection of his gifts by Achilles. This one/many theme even

provides symbolic weight to his action of pulling the many hairs from his head (10.14).

It is at this crucial juncture that we can see the splitting which Žizek has argued is inherent to the law. Žizek again:

Where does this splitting of the law into the written public Law and its 'unwritten' obscene reverse come from? From the incomplete, 'non-all', character of the public Law: explicit, public rules do not suffice, so they have to be supplemented by the clandestine 'unwritten' code aimed at those who, although they do not violate any public rules, maintain a kind of inner distance and are not truly identified with the 'community spirit'.¹²

In contrast to book 2, where Odysseus' actions were all performed in public, in the Doloneia Agamemnon opts for a night-time spying mission. At the time when his open-air, day time authority is under the closest scrutiny, a solution is sought from trickery, *metis*. Such a night-time mission is already a subversion of heroic, Iliadic warfare; it functions as an attempt to shore up Greek confidence in both their situation and leader at a time when conventional strategies of warfare are clearly insufficient. Yet if this is Agamemnon's strategy, he himself is unable to carry it out. The narrative draws attention to his helplessness in the hours of night. He sends out his brother Menelaus to wake the troops, who then asks what is to be done when he has completed this task. Should he return to Agamemnon to tell him of this?

αὖθι μένειν, μή πως ἀβροτάξομεν ἀλλήλοισιν
ἐρχομένω· πολλὰ γὰρ ἀνὰ στρατόν εἰσι κέλευθοι. (Il. 10.65-66)

Better wait here, so there will be no way we can miss one another
as we come and go. There are many paths up and down the encampment.

¹²Zizek 1994, 98.

Much of the significance of the Doloneia lies in Agamemnon's recognition of the possibility of this failed encounter. Agamemnon's fallibility in locating his brother under the cover of night previews the later, successful meeting between Dolon and Odysseus. Odysseus and Dolon too will have problems recognizing each other, as they meet in the no-man's-land between the Greek and Trojan camps on their respective spying missions. But Agamemnon's marked inability to see through the darkness contrasts with the powers of perception of Odysseus. It is well known that, though Odysseus appears to be a hero second to Diomedes in the Doloneia, it is his powers of perception which trigger the success of the pair. Odysseus first becomes aware of the presence of Dolon, a recognition necessary for the continuation of the episode.¹³ Odysseus alone is able to give direction to the night-time wanderings. But there is something ominous in the contrast between Agamemnon's inability to see and the powers of Odysseus in the darkness of the night. For, as we will shortly explore, a *katabasis* motif runs throughout the Doloneia. Agamemnon's failure is a sign of his mortal fallibility, a fallibility which will soon be supplanted by the uncanny abilities of the trickster Odysseus - who can somehow traverse the barrier which separates life from death. Agamemnon realizes that, as a mortal, he might miss an encounter under the cover of darkness; this points toward an important question in our understanding of Odysseus: what sort of figure is it who never misses an encounter?

There is a further perversion of ruling ideology in the Doloneia. In response to Nestor's request for a spy, Diomedes immediately volunteers. Diomedes suggests that two might perform the mission with greater success, and expresses a desire for a companion. If this is all quite predictable, Agamemnon's next intervention is not:

¹³On this ability of Odysseus, Haft 1990, 52.

μηδὲ σύ γ' αἰδόμενος σῆισι φρεσὶ τὸν μὲν ἀρείῳ
καλλείπειν, σὺ δὲ χεῖρον' ὀπάσσεαι αἰδοῖ εἴκων,
ἔς γενεὴν ὀρόων, μηδ' εἰ βασιλεύτερός ἐστιν.

You must not, for the awe that you feel in your heart, pass over the better man and take the worse, giving way to modesty and looking to his degree - not even if he be kinglier. (*Il.* 10.237-9)

The leader of the *aristoi* gives Diomedes a free choice of his spying companion. The prevailing aristocratic, genealogical privileges which would normally shackle choice are suspended by the leader whose own authority is genealogically based. The king asks for a judgement of merit which he immediately recognizes might undermine someone who is 'kinglier'. A hidden, night-time expedition of deceit in order to allow the open, regulated warfare of the daytime to continue; a king's night-time suspension of the hierarchy of genealogical authority in order for the hierarchy to survive during the day. At a time when the pacifying, civilizing law of the symbolic order (represented by Agamemnon) is under threat, an underground, seamy plan is put into operation to compensate for its visible weakness. A marked turnaround differentiates this episode from Book 2. There, Odysseus shored up Agamemnon's authority by helping create a public identification with his symbolic strengths; here the action suggests a common identification around his points of weakness. Because Agamemnon is weak, the ethos holding the Greeks together tenuous, there is a sense of the need to do anything (even the anti-heroic ambush of a trickster) to restore the fragile workings of heroic ideology. If the message of *Iliad* 2 is 'obey your leader, his symbolic powers remain in place despite Achilles' histrionics', the message of the Doloncia is quite different: 'Now is the time to show your ultimate solidarity with your leader, at the time he seems to have lost any right to rule'. Yet why should such a strategy work?

It all hinges on the manner in which the night-time events of the Doloneia already provide a fantasmatic support for the ideology of the day-time. Consider the strange response of Odysseus to Diomedes, when he is chosen to accompany him:

τούτου γε σπομένοιο καὶ ἐκ πυρὸς αἰθομένοιο
ἄμφω νοστήσαιμεν, ἐπεὶ περίοιδε νοῆσαι.
τὸν δ' αὖτε προσέειπε πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς·
Τυδείδη, μήτ' ἄρ με μάλ' αἶνεε μήτε τι νείκει·
εἶδοσι γὰρ τοι ταῦτα μετ' Ἀργείοις ἀγορεύεις.

Were he to go with me, both of us could come back from the blazing of fire itself, since his mind is best at devices.'
Then in turn long-suffering brilliant Odysseus answered him:
'Son of Tydeus, do not praise me so, nor yet blame me.
These are the Argives, who know well all these matters you speak of. (*Il.* 10.246-250)

The importance of the specific form of Diomedes' praise, with its suggestion of the uncanny abilities of the trickster Odysseus (περίοιδε νοῆσαι) to return 'from blazing fire', will be dealt with below. For our present purpose, let us focus on the response of Odysseus to Diomedes' praise. He censors Diomedes, halting his effort at listing his qualities. How can we explain this silencing?¹⁴ What 'everyone knows' but no-one mentions is that the hidden, night-time operations of the Doloneia can only succeed in their purpose of shoring up the deficiencies in public law if they remain hidden. Diomedes comes close to speaking aloud the hidden, shared guilt of the Greeks which acts as a fantasmatic support for order for the heroic ideology of the daytime. Everybody knows that such actions as occur in the Doloneia go on throughout the war, and yet they cannot be publicly acknowledged; the 'civilized' ground rules of the game of heroic conflict (the pacifying law, law of the ego-ideal) are there to cover over the destructive stupidity

¹⁴Stanford 1963, 15 believed that these words epitomized Odysseus' polytropic tact - of his ability to act in a socially cohesive manner by avoiding any excess of praise or blame. Though I agree that Odysseus' words help solidify the realm of the social, they do so in a much more perturbing manner than Stanford believed.

involved in the winning of the conflict. Odysseus' censorship is a reminder that the actions of the Doloneia itself are quintessentially unheroic, and therefore not to be publicly articulated. There is nothing heroic about the deliberate lying to Dolon in order to gain information, the manner in which Diomedes *enjoys* the killing of the unarmed, sleeping Thracians. The episode puts on display the seamy underside of the day to day activities of the heroic world. The no-man's-land between Greeks and Trojans is a sea of corpses: Diomedes and Odysseus hide among the corpses in order to capture Dolon (*Il.* 10.349), the Greek leaders manage to find a spot free of corpses for the council which leads to the spying expedition (*Il.* 10.199-200). These images are a far cry from the ideology of 'a beautiful death' provocatively explored in the work of Vernant.¹⁵ It is not difficult to understand why this must remain hidden, unacknowledged in everyday life: recognition of the merit of choices based outside genealogical boundaries, or an acceptance of the workings of deceit in open battle would subvert beyond repair the ideology of the heroic ethos. Yet it is the ultimate wager of Odysseus that because everyone (consciously or unconsciously) knows of this 'unheroic' dark side of the conflict, a certain solidarity-in-guilt will prevail. Odysseus' actions as trickster can neither be praised (openly subverting the public law), nor blamed (undermining the fantasmatic support of the public law).

We are now in a position to re-evaluate the relationship between Odyssean trickery, his *metis*, and the open, aristocratic form of warfare which characterizes the day-time battles of the poem - and which is often assimilated to the realm of *bie*, individual fights performed in order to establish the respective strength of the warriors. The first thing to notice is that the split in the law between Books 2 and 10 suggests a split in the functioning of *metis*. In *Iliad* 2, *metis* acts at the level of persuasion, or mystification. The troops are cunningly persuaded by Odysseus to

¹⁵Vernant 1991, 50ff.

obey their betters; it is exercised on behalf of symbolic values. In the Doloneia, the uncanny powers of Odyssean *metis* are exercised for their own sake, producing a success which is simultaneously exhilarating and unsavory. If killing is normally performed in the name of the law, and in a manner faithful to it, Odysseus' *metis* in the Doloneia complicates the picture: it guarantees a much needed success to the faltering authority of Agamemnon, but in an action that transgresses the public code in which that authority speaks. Odysseus (and the Doloneia) implicitly ask the Greeks the following question: how far are you willing to go to be faithful to the law? This suggests that *metis* is not a later ethos which overcomes and replaces an earlier heroic ideal - as the nostalgia of Sophocles' Ajax would have it. It is the hidden, fantasmatic support of the heroic ethos itself, capitalizing on the solidarity-in-guilt of its followers.

But there is further significance here. If this *metis* is not a later perversion of heroic ideology, it is equally misleading to dismiss it as 'primitive' behavior in a rhetoric of evolution. Consider the following passage from Peradotto, which tries to chart the relationship between the 'civilized' Odysseus of the *Odyssey* and Odysseus-as-trickster:

It is..reasonable to assume that the *Odyssey* had the effect of stabilizing a tradition characterized by inconsistency and plurality, of stabilizing, in effect, a multiplicity in the denotation of Odysseus' name, the way a historian's work might stabilize a polymorphous and inconsistent theogonic tradition, in which the divergent narratives vie for something like canonical ideological dominance. Herodotus seems to be reading his mythic narrative tradition in this light when he attributes the character and form of the Greek pantheon largely to the work of Homer and Hesiod. We are encouraged in this view by the *Odyssey*'s deliberate silence (if suppression is not a better word) when it comes to those of Odysseus's unflattering characteristics and acts which, though they surface more conspicuously later in Greek literary evidence, are more at home in more primitive tales of a trickster-

type out of which Homer's urbane and civilized Odysseus can readily be inferred to have developed.¹⁶

The difficulty lies in the conflation of a vocabulary of evolution (the civilized Odysseus *develops from* an uncivilized trickster) and one of repression (the deliberate silence about the trickster). Is the realm of the trickster an archaic one which the civilized present renders obsolete, or does it act instead as the constitutive dark side of the civilized? There seems to be much at stake in the refusal to speak this aspect of Odysseus out loud, and the eerie silence which ensues. For if it was merely an irrelevant archaism, why the anxiety? Odysseus' words of censorship to Diomedes in the Doloneia cannot help but draw attention to this silence in the realm of the civilized, marking its function as concealer of something repressed. It is this silence which casts a shadow over the evolutionary narrative of development from 'trickster' to civilization. The rhetoric of evolution participates in the denial of this dark side of the public law - a denial which ultimately is complicit in strengthening its inherent weakness.

We can now return to the superegoic fantasy of Achilles with which I began this chapter. Achilles' fantasy is ultimately the fantasy which Odysseus acts out in the Doloneia. After Patroclus' death, Achilles will fight in such a way as to render obsolete any heroic rules of warfare; he will not receive ransoms for suppliants, he refuses to return the body of Hector for burial¹⁷ - that is, he will replay the 'hidden' activities of the Doloneia in broad daylight. The superegoic act which was performed to solidify the authority of the weakening public authority of the king will, with Achilles, no longer remain hidden. Achilles will fall victim to the superegoic aspect of the law, while remaining oblivious to any of its pacifying, symbolic aspects.

¹⁶Peradotto 1990, 100-101.

¹⁷On the transgressive aspects of Achilles, see Goldhill 1991, 89ff.

All this is not to deny an egalitarian aspect to Odysseus. This already seems apparent in the momentary suspension of the public law, the bracketing of power of genealogical identity. There is much here to remind us of Peradotto's centrifugal figure of the negative; but further exploration of this will require a closer look at Odysseus' spying mission, and his meeting with Dolon.

The Doloneia as a drama of desire

Lynn-George's analysis of *Iliad* 9 as a 'drama of desire' focuses on the ambiguity of the word 'χρέω', 'need'. Achilles expresses a 'need', yet it is notoriously difficult to specify exactly what Achilles needs. Lynn-George suggests that this need is not for any object, but is intersubjective. Achilles needs others to need him; his striving for autonomy from the social is a striving for social recognition. It is this broader argument which frames the following suggestive remark on the Doloneia:

Agamemnon's very first word in the following book is that which was never to be found in his discourse rejected in book IX, *khreo* (x.43), a word which then reverberates throughout that book in the disturbed wandering about the camp at night (cf. x.85, 118, 142, 172). In one respect it would seem that the approach constructed by Agamemnon in IX is found wanting by Achilles precisely in the inadequacy of its articulation of want.¹⁸

Agamemnon's 'articulation of want' occurs under the cover of night; the weakness of his symbolic authority rendered visible by Achilles is supplanted through the night-time actions of the trickster. When Nestor awakens Odysseus in the Doloneia, he immediately echoes Agamemnon's 'need', asking 'what great need has come upon you' (τι δὴ χρεῖώ τόσον ἵκει; 10.142). Yet the relationship of the

¹⁸Lynn-George 1988, 88.

trickster to this 'drama of desire' is complex, and can provide insight into the situation of Achilles. Let us first return to the words which escaped from Diomedes' lips before Odysseus' censorship intervened:

τούτου γε σπομένοιο καὶ ἐκ πυρὸς αἰθομένοιο
ἄμφω νοστήσαιμεν, ἐπεὶ περίοιδε νοῆσαι.

Were he to go with me, both of us could come back from the blazing of fire itself, since his mind is best at devices. (*Il.* 10.246-7)

Diomedes' remarks on Odysseus' ability to return from 'the blazing of fire' evoke the theme of descent to Hades and the 'quest for immortality' in the Doloneia explored by Wathelet.¹⁹ Wathelet has argued that the capture of the brilliant chariot of Rhesus hints at other mythic tales of descent into darkness in order to locate the chariot of the Sun, which also descends from the sky into the realm of darkness at day's end.²⁰ The trip seeks to plummet into the depths of darkness in order to find this burning light, and thus to bridge the gap between the world of mortals and the unknown beyond. It is in this sense a 'quest for immortality', an attempt to master the mystery of an eternal beyond. Diomedes' suggestion is that the trickster Odysseus is the only person able to achieve this impossible act. His *noos* allows a return from 'blazing fire'.²¹ He can defy death, an ability which is the equivalent of the brightest, most impossible mortal desire: the desire to avoid death. Yet if Odysseus as trickster appears able to overcome the limit separating life and death, and thus to render an impossible desire possible, this ability has its dark side. For it is the uniqueness of this ability which guarantees that the gap is constitutive. This becomes clear in the killing of Rhesus. Later sources tell us that Rhesus himself would have become invincible had he but survived his first night at Troy and fought

¹⁹Wathelet 1989 *passim*.

²⁰Wathelet 227ff explores the connection between Rhesus, Odysseus and Sun god.

²¹On the linkage between *noos* and the trickster, Nagy 1979, 51.

for one day.²² Odysseus' intervention thus forcibly keeps the mortal Rhesus from reaching immortality, and preserves the limit between the two. As a figure who protects the absolute status of this limit for others, he takes on the role of a figure without limits: the trickster who crosses every boundary is the person who preserves the sanctity of those boundaries. Odysseus functions as a virtual double of the god Hermes - a crosser of boundaries, but also guardian of the liminal;²³ and within the Homeric poems, Hermes is most prominent in his role as *psycho-pompos*, preserver of the limit between life and death.

The death of the near-invincible Rhesus casts a shadow over the optimistic words of Diomedes, who spoke of a return (ἄμφω νοστήσοιμεν) from blazing fire with Odysseus. If Odysseus is viewed as a savior, it is a paradoxical savior whose ability to cheat death only ends up guaranteeing its ultimate sovereignty. The return to life (*nostos*) from Hades is a temporary one, only delaying the inevitable journey back to Hades. So too the successful capture of the blazing horses of Rhesus (which provided the allure of the satisfaction of an ultimate desire) is limited by the words of Odysseus as he drives them back into the Greek camp. There, Nestor greets him, and praises their extraordinary brightness (they 'shine terribly like the rays of the sun', *Il.*10.547). Here is Odysseus' response:

ὦ Νέστορ Νηληϊάδη μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν
 ῥεῖα θεός γ' ἐθέλων καὶ ἀμείνονας ἢ ἐπερ οἶδε
 ἵππους δωρήσασαίτ', ἐπεὶ ἢ πολὺ φέρτεροί εἰσιν. (10.555-7)

Son of Neleus, Nestor, great glory of the Achaians:
 lightly a god, if he wished, could give us horses even better
 than these, seeing that the gods are far better than we are.²⁴

²²See Euripides' *Rhesus* 600-6, Schol L *ad.* 10.435. See also Haft 1990, who explores the relevance of this myth for interpretation of the Doloneia. She argues that the defeat by Odysseus of Rhesus - a warrior destined to be superior to Achilles if he survives for one day - is part of the traditional battle waged between Achilles and Odysseus over the title of *aristos* throughout the Homeric poems. I comment on this further, below.

²³On Hermes, cf. Vernant 1983 chapter 3 *passim*, Kahn 1979.

²⁴I modify the Lattimore translation of 'φέρτεροι' from 'stronger' to 'better' - a translation of the word which Lattimore uses elsewhere. See below.

These words have far-reaching significance. We can consider them an answer to the problem of desire which has dominated the book, and which sets the machinations of the Doloneia in motion. Diomedes believed in Odysseus' ability to satisfy the ultimate desire. The capture of horses which evoke the horses of the sun-god seems to fulfill that. Yet Odysseus' words have the effect of deflating the earlier spirit of optimism. The specific task of the Doloneia has been accomplished, but this is not any ultimate satisfaction of their 'want'; there are 'even better' horses.²⁵ These words provide a twist to the events in book 10 (and 9), and it is only with them that we reach the centrifugal aspect of the narrative. There will always be something beyond the classifiable wants of the Greeks; superegoic attempts to fulfill those needs are destined to remain helpless, and ultimately self-defeating.²⁶

It is Odysseus' affirmation of the manner in which desire lies beyond every effort to fulfill it which provides the parameters for understanding Odysseus' encounter with Dolon. Wathelet has perceptively noticed that Dolon resembles the god Hermes. Dolon has much wealth (he has 'much gold, much bronze'), he is ugly, and involves himself in a non-heroic form of warfare (*Il.* 10.315ff). So too Hermes is a god associated with commerce and in particular the riches of the earth, a trickster figure in contrast to the ideal of the heroic warrior.²⁷ Yet, as already suggested, the resemblance to Hermes is also shared by Odysseus. Dolon is a near double of Odysseus. The epithets 'πολύχρυσος' and 'πολύχαλκος' recall the *polu-* epithets shared by Hermes and Odysseus, most notably *polytropos*. But the

²⁵The horses, which are 'far better' (πολὺ φέρτεροί εἰσιν) recall the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, where the significance of Achilles as the 'better' man lies at the center of their argument.

²⁶Note the parallel between Odysseus' words here, and his words to the Cyclops at *Od.* 9.525, where he emphasizes that it is useless for the Cyclops to expect his father to cure the problem of his desire.

²⁷Wathelet 218ff.

most significant parallel is their mutual association with the figure of the 'lone-wolf'. Dolon wears a wolf-skin, and a cap of marten's hide. Significant attention is drawn to the caps worn by Diomedes and Odysseus. But while Diomedes' helmet is a conventional 'skull-cap', Odysseus' helmet emphasizes his links to the realm of the trickster:

Meriones gave Odysseus a bow and a quiver
and a sword; and he too put over his head a helmet
fashioned of leather; on the inside the cap was cross-strung firmly
with thongs of leather, and on the outer side the white teeth
of a tusk-shining boar were close sewn one after another
with craftsmanship and skill; and a felt was set in the centre.
Autolykos, breaking into the close-built house, had stolen it
from Amyntor, the son of Ormenos, out of Eleon,
and gave it to Kytherian Amphidamas, at Skandeia;
Amphidamas gave it in turn to Molos, a gift of guest-friendship,
and Molos gave it to his son Meriones to carry.
But at this time it was worn to cover the head of Odysseus. (*Il.* 10.260-71)

The importance of the symbolism of the 'lone-wolf' in the Doloncia has been explored both by Gernet and Davidson.²⁸ Davidson notes the double characteristics of the wolf - 'tour à tour vainqueur et vaincu', victor and victim.²⁹ She points out that the 'lone-wolf' is the figure who 'strays off alone' and is consequently an outlaw (the old German word *friedlos* means both 'outlaw' and wolf). As such, the wolf clothing is relevant to the wider theme of 'trickery' outside the boundaries of the law that is on display in book 10. Dolon's disguise as a wolf is complemented by the evocation of Odysseus' Autolycean background in the description of his cap; Autolykus, 'self-wolf', is the enemy of society *par excellence*, and is also the figure who has the closest relationship to the trickster-god Hermes.³⁰

²⁸Davidson 1979, Gernet 1981, chapter 6.

²⁹These are Gernet's terms.

³⁰On the relationship between Hermes and Autolykus, Stanford 1963, chapter 2. Jeanmaire (400ff) has noted the similarity between this Autolycean cap worn by Odysseus in the Doloncia and the 'Cap of Hades', which renders the wearer invisible, and which is worn by Athena to help defeat Ares in *Iliad* 5.845ff.

Davidson has also drawn attention to a similarity between the appearance of the wolf motif in the Doloneia, Arcadian myth and cult of Zeus Lykaios. Here too, the emphasis is on the figure of the wolf at the fringes of the social:

In the myth, Lykaon sacrifices a child and is punished for it by being turned into a wolf. What he does as a wolf is re-enacted in the cult of Zeus Lykaios, which can be considered as a rite of separation for an initiation. The participant in the initiation, having made a sacrifice, leaves human society and takes up the life of a wolf. He *hangs his clothes up on a tree*, crosses a lake, and after a period of separation while he lives like a wolf, finally becomes initiated.³¹

The importance of this initiation rite lies in the striking parallel to the behavior of Odysseus in the Doloneia; for he too strips Dolon of his wolf-skin and hangs it up on a tree after Diomedes has killed him:

ὥς ἄρ' ἐφώνησεν, καὶ ἀπὸ ἔθεν ὑψοσ' αἰείρας
θῆκεν ἀνὰ μυρικήν· δέελον δ' ἐπὶ σῆμά τ' ἔθηκεν,
συμμάρψας δόνακας μυρικής τ' ἐριθηλέας ὄζους,
μὴ λάθοι αὐτίς ἰόντε θοῆν διὰ νύκτα μέλαιναν. (10.465-8)

So he spoke, and lifting the spoils high from him he placed them upon a tamarisk bush, and piled a clear landmark beside them, pulling reeds together and the long branches of tamarisk that they might not miss them on their way back through the running black night.

Yet despite the parallel, Davidson confesses to a certain difficulty in 'fitting this lore into the context of *Iliad X*.' She concludes that 'we may see Dolon as a *friedlos* figure whom Diomedes and Odysseus have the freedom to kill, masked in their animal skins.' Yet this does not explain the success of Odysseus; why isn't Dolon equally free to kill Odysseus? If both are 'lone-wolves', what differentiates the successful Odysseus from the loser Dolon? There is also a striking difference between the actions of the initiation rite and those of Odysseus. For in the ritual, one becomes a wolf when one is divested of one's clothing; Dolon, however, is

³¹Davidson 1979, 64. Emphasis in the original.

stripped of his clothing after he has been killed. If we are to follow the logic of the initiation fully, we are left with the paradoxical conclusion that Dolon seems only truly to become a wolf, an outcast, when he is divorced, separated in death from the trappings of wolf-ness. How can this be explained?

The answer lies in their differing relationship to desire. I have already discussed the importance of Odysseus' words to Nestor, suggesting the constitutive unfulfillability of the *chreō*, need, of the Greeks; it is this which provides us with an opportunity for retroactively understanding the vulnerability of Dolon. He agrees to the spying mission on the condition that Hector will provide him with the horses of Achilles should he be successful (*Il.* 10.321). The epithets 'πολύχρυσος' and 'πολύχαλκος' emphasize that he has no need of material wealth; instead, he yearns for pure prestige, to earn the elusive title of *aristos*. His desire is thus thoroughly reflective - in Lacanian terms, it exemplifies how desire is always mediated, how desire is always 'desire of the other'. Dolon doesn't simply desire an object, but desires the object he believes others desire. His desire remains at the level of envy. It is because his actions are performed in order to gain prestige (the recognition of his symbolic community) that he is not truly a *friedlos*, an enemy of society. The trappings of wolfness are only a tactical disguise worn in order to win prestige, not the mark of a true outsider. It is because of this that Dolon is vulnerable: he is ultimately dependent on the society he seems to reject.

In order to highlight the importance of this vulnerability, we can return to another motif in the Doloneia. The earlier depiction of the head-wear of the combatants is part of a wider motif of 'heads'. Gernet has pointed out that 'there are a goodly number of lopped-off heads in this tale'.³² In the *Iliad* Dolon ends up losing his head. In the later version of the tale in Euripides' *Rhesus*, the symmetry

³²Gernet 1981, 128.

is highlighted further: both seek each other's head (*Rh.254*). I have already suggested a connection between the weakness of a finite, encapsulated argument and the mortal fallibility of humans as displayed in the vulnerability of their heads. In *Iliad* 10, the vulnerability of Dolon's head is directly related to the ultimately determinate nature of his desire. Dolon wants prestige, which is embodied for him in the possibility of winning the horses of Achilles; his identity is determined by this want, for which he is willing to risk his life. He accordingly lays his head on the line. Odysseus' role in the episode demonstrates the ultimate futility of Dolon's pursuit and of the quest for prestige in general: he therefore lies beyond every determinate need. He is a pure trickster, not a tactical one. He is not vulnerable to death because, as a pure trickster and double of Hermes, he functions as the limit itself between life and death.

We can now turn to Odysseus' erection of the spoils of Dolon as a *sema*. In Wathelet's discussion of the *katabasis* motif, Dolon's death is the act which marks the descent of Diomedes and Odysseus into Hades. But of what are the spoils a sign? They first signify the death of Dolon and thus function as a replacement of his tomb. That the spoils of Dolon should be described as a *sema* is thus quite appropriate: Diomedes and Odysseus follow the soul of Dolon into an unknowable beyond, just as the *sema* of a tombstone represents the unrepresentable beyond. But the particular aspect of this *sema*, which involves the external trappings of Dolon, is also appropriate as a marker of the world to which Diomedes and Odysseus return. They descend into a realm of death, but this realm, because it is outside the reach of the public law, allows the protagonists to indulge in a seamy enjoyment, a superegoic carnage more 'alive' than anything that occurs in the highly regulated warfare of the daytime. The spoils of Dolon, his outer trappings, his shell, indicate a return to the classifying arena of the public law, of the clashing of external identities already determined by the ideological parameters of the heroic code.

Nagy has persuasively argued for a semantic connection between ‘*sema*’ and ‘*noos*’.³³ A *sema* is meaningless unless *read*, noticed. The ability to make sense out of the differential realm of ‘*semata*’ is what characterizes a person who has ‘*noos*’. Nagy also notes the etymological link between *nostos* and *noos*, explored at length in the work of Douglas Frame.³⁴ *Noos* helps guarantee a *nostos*. The theme occurs in Diomedes’ words about Odysseus: he knows how to use his ‘*noos*’ (περίοιδε νοῆσαι 10.247), and thus can guarantee a return from the expedition of *Iliad* 10. Later, Odysseus will mark the boundary between the no man’s land of the Doloneia and the camp of the Greeks by the *sema* of the trappings of Dolon’s body, which cut off the world of the dead from that of the living. The powers of the trickster here seem to exceed any human abilities; he can not only read the differential realm of signs, but is able to look into the ‘beyond’ of the other world, to where the *psychai* of the dead depart.

We can now begin to understand the specific manner in which the Doloneia perverts the initiation rite of Zeus Lykaos. The rite involves a temporary, symbolic loss of identity (the hanging up of one’s external trappings on a tree) in order to gain eventual entrance to society. A temporary loss of identity is eventually recuperated by the acceptance into society, the attainment of a social identity. The Doloneia suggests a much more radical loss of identity, for which there is nothing in return. Dolon has his clothes ‘hung up’ by Odysseus as he is severed from his symbolic trappings in death. It is as if the logic of the rite makes the same mistake as Dolon; his temporary, ‘tactical’ adoption of the guise of wolf is ultimately a hoax, performed for a determinate desire, a social affirmation. And it is the danger of this optimism which Dolon’s death highlights.

³³Nagy 1990, chapter 8 *passim*.

³⁴Frame 1978, chapter 1 *passim*.

‘Obscurest of all’ is what Achilles wants³⁵

If we have so far traced Dolon’s similarity to (and difference from) Odysseus, we should also note the marked similarity to Achilles. Dolon’s complex relationship to his desire replays the ‘drama of desire’ of *Iliad* 9.³⁶ Dolon was rich in bronze, rich in gold, but yet fought on for prestige. So too Achilles vehemently rejects Agamemnon’s offers of material goods (bronze, gold), seeking instead the pure prestige which only Agamemnon’s ‘articulation of want’ might provide.³⁷ Yet Odysseus’ actions in the Doloneia provide us with the possibility of a retroactive reading of the drama of *Iliad* 9. Achilles’ desire, like Dolon’s, is certainly for something beyond that held appropriate within the terms of heroic ideology. Ajax’ blunt response to his rejection of the embassy is more than enough to confirm this.³⁸ Yet before his language suggests a shift to a desire for prestige, before his later superegoic fury, there remains the utopian moment when the public law is laid bare in its inadequacy:

ληϊστοὶ μὲν γάρ τε βόες καὶ ἴφια μῆλα,
κτητοὶ δὲ τρίποδες τε καὶ ἵππων ξανθὰ κάρηνα,
ἀνδρὸς δὲ ψυχὴ πάλιν ἐλθεῖν οὔτε λειστή
οὔθ’ ἐλετή, ἐπεὶ ἄρ κεν ἀμείψεται ἔρκος ὀδόντων. (*Il.*9.406-9)

Of possessions
cattle and fat sheep are things to be had for the lifting,
and tripods can be won, and the tawny heads of horses,
but a man’s life cannot come back again, it cannot be lifted
nor captured again by force, once it has crossed the teeth’s barrier.

The uselessness of the winning of the heads of horses previews the Doloneia, which cost Dolon his life. He desired horses, risked his life, and lost it.

³⁵The phrase is culled by Lynn-George (1988, p123) from Hainsworth.

³⁶This phrase is Lynn-George’s.

³⁷Agamemnon’s offer of the bronze and gold occurs at *Il.*9.137, and is repeated by Odysseus at *Il.*9.279. Achilles rejects this at 9.365. See Lynn-George, 115ff.

³⁸*Il.*9.624ff.

For the briefest of moments, Achilles seems to flirt with Odysseus' answer in the Doloneia to the question of desire - that there will always be better horses to be won. If Achilles' later threat of a return home, modified by a series of vacillations, can be seen as astute self-positioning in his fight for prestige, this earlier, utopian, Odyssean moment remains. It is a moment when Achilles has demolished unquestioned acceptance of the public law, but has not yet succumbed to a superegoic fury. If the fury remained at the level of fantasy at the beginning of *Iliad* 16, after the death of Patroclus, Achilles' return to warfare is an attempt to realize the fantasy. He returns to battle, but no longer has time for the conventions of warfare. He will no longer respect the appeals of suppliants, as he did before; he refuses to return the corpse of Hector. In short, is not Achilles' obscene *enjoyment* of the slaughter he performs after returning to battle a dragging of the night-time enjoyment of the killing of the Doloneia into the daytime? If the Doloneia is a narrative enactment of the dark side of heroic warfare, Achilles' fury turns the heroic world upside down, bringing about the sort of carnage earlier witnessed in the killing of the sleeping Rhesus and the Thracians: as Diomedes killed men asleep, so Achilles kills men who are helpless in comparison to him.

Malevolent neutrality

Lacan characterized the superego by its 'malevolent neutrality'; it is neutral because it encourages an identification with the law itself once its public, symbolic support has failed. Instead of believing in the law because of its morality, its beneficial social consequences, one fanatically believes in it because it is the law. This neutrality allows us to chart the key development of Achilles' thinking in the *Iliad*. Achilles' famous speech in response to Odysseus in *Iliad* 9 acts as the final

nail in the coffin of the public law, and of Agamemnon as the symbolic father who guarantees it:

Fate is the same for man who holds back, the same if he fights hard.
We are all held in a single honour, the brave with the weaklings.
A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much.
(*Il.*9.319-21)

Any symbolic difference between the *esthlos* and the *kakos* is eradicated as Achilles contemplates his mortality. Attempts to distinguish them will no longer work; attempts to articulate a rationale for war based on the difference between 'good' and 'bad' no longer make sense. The shattering of confidence in Agamemnon, the symbolic father, coincides with a lack of faith in the public law. Yet there is no sign as yet of any superegoic dimension to the rejection of the public law. In sharp contrast, Achilles' words to the supplicating Lycaon in book 21 recall the rhetoric of radical leveling of Book 9. Here, the words are no longer part of a challenge, a questioning of authority, but exult instead in the certainty of an answer:

In the time before Patroklos came to the day of his destiny
then it was the way of my heart's choice to be sparing
of the Trojans, and many I took alive and disposed of them.
Now there is not one who can escape death, if the gods send
him against my hands in front of Ilion, not one
of all the Trojans and beyond others the children of Priam.
So, friend, you die also. Why all this clamour about it?
Patroklos also is dead, who was better by far than you are.
Do you not see what a man I am, how huge, how splendid
and born of a great father, and the mother who bore me immortal?
Yet even I have also my death and my strong destiny..

Achilles' encounter with Lycaon has received significant critical attention.³⁹

For now, I merely want to show how the encounter suggests the manner in which

³⁹Two recent treatments are those of Crotty 1994, 84-5, and Lynn-George 1988, 201-7. Crotty argues that Achilles addresses Lycaon as friend to recognize a shared bond in the 'community of death', a phrase borrowed from Burkert. The idea of this 'deeper' friendship is an idea of Griffin, 1980, 55ff. This sort of humanist criticism, glorifying 'shared humanity' in death while implicitly glorifying the vision of Achilles, can only end up weakly apologizing for the destructive, superegoic dimensions of Achilles' actions. Griffin (55) at least makes this unfortunate apology explicit, suggesting that 'Achilles kills in a passionate revenge, but not in blind ferocity. He sees

the law is split. Let us first note that the poem portrays the death of Lycaon as a second death. Achilles had captured him once before and sold him into slavery. When Achilles sees him, he complains that Trojans are returning from death to fight a second time.⁴⁰ The second killing of Lycaon promises to be final. These 'two deaths' suggest the two realms of the law. Lycaon was first killed at the time when Achilles still obeyed the public law; but because the public law is deficient, inadequate, he has returned. His second death is at the hands of a superegoic Achilles, a figure who wants to follow through the logic of war all the way in an attempt to make up for its symbolic inadequacies. Any desire for *kleos* - the prestige of intersubjective recognition which binds the community - is gone. This is now the context for the radical leveling of social rank apparent in his words to Lycaon: with any symbolic system which separates humans into *esthlos* and *kakos* gone, Lycaon is just another mortal hastened on the path to death. There is a crucial difference between this leveling of social rank, and that of the Achilles of *Iliad* 9. His former rhetoric in *Iliad* 9 suspends the working of the symbolic law, and lingers over the utopian possibility of a return home. His logic can be roughly summarized as follows: 'The public law is a sham, its attempts to differentiate the good from the bad are futile: so let us all go home'. His words to Lycaon, after the intervening death of Patroclus, take the logic of the argument a crucial step further: 'The public law is a sham, incomplete. Its rhetoric of differentiating the good from the bad has done nothing to protect men held to be 'good' in its own terms. Even Patroclus has

his action in the perspective of human life and death as a whole, the perspective which puts slayer and slain on a level.'

⁴⁰Note Achilles' words at *Il.*21.54ff: 'Here is a strange thing that my eyes look on. Now the great-hearted Trojans, even those I have killed already, will stand up and rise again out of the gloom and the darkness..' Note also the marked similarity in the argument of Diomedes who rejects the supplication of Dolon in *Iliad* 10.447ff: 'Do not, Dolon, have in your mind any thought of escape, now that you have got in our hands, though you brought us an excellent message. For if we let you get away now, or set you free, later you will come back again to the fast ships of the Achaians either to spy on us once more, or to fight strongly with us.' Diomedes' words once more subvert the public law, but can do so because they are uttered under the cover of darkness.

died. Therefore, I must do everything in our power to render the law complete, to pursue warfare with an indifference to the code regulating its performance.'

Achilles obeys the dictates of the superego.

We now can contrast this neutral, superegoic aspect of Achilles in the open air with Odysseus' remarks to Diomedes: for Odysseus too asks neither to be praised nor blamed. That is, there is the suggestion that his actions as a trickster cannot be registered 'bad' or 'good' at the level of the symbolic law. Why? Odysseus' actions obey the spirit, not the letter, of the law. As such, he is merely fulfilling by night the (unspoken/unspeakable) desire of the Achaeans. His actions are thus 'neutral', he just follows (silently understood) orders, orders which form a superegoic injunction. But this superegoic aspect must be contrasted with Odysseus' final lesson - that such superegoic attempts to render the law whole are ultimately futile: there will always be 'better horses'; desire will remain unfulfillable, the (public) law will remain incomplete. The actions of the Doloneia thus 'traverse', work through, a superegoic fantasy which will later be acted out on a much larger scale when Achilles returns to battle. Achilles, not privy to the lessons of the Doloneia, does not understand the futility of his superegoic fury.

The splitting of the law in the *Odyssey*

Pucci has provided the following, influential summary of the differences between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: 'The *Iliad* is the poem of total expenditure of life and the *Odyssey* is the poem of a controlled economy of life.'⁴¹ I think this judgement obscures much more than it clarifies; in particular, it glosses over the

⁴¹Pucci 1982, 42.

deeply troubling aspects of the mass of deaths of the *Odyssey*. But if we set aside this judgement on the difference between the poems, the contrast between a 'controlled economy' and 'total expenditure' is helpful for understanding the gulf separating the Odysseus of Books 2 and 10 of the *Iliad*. These books highlight two possible ways of killing and being killed. At the level of public law, the Greeks maintained allegiance to a symbolic master, Agamemnon. They played the game of war by the rules he represented, and died in a similar manner. At the level of the superegoic reverse of the law, all symbolic restrictions are lifted; a 'cowardly' killing ensues, which is unheroic, destructive and evocative of the hidden, dark form of warfare associated with the trickster. I have also argued that these forms of killing and being killed are not antithetical; rather, the latter is an open acknowledgment of the hidden truth of the former. If the former is a 'controlled economy' of death, the latter is an instance of 'total expenditure'. The different manners of deaths produce corresponding changes in Odysseus' *metis*. We change from a *metis* exercised on behalf of public law (Odysseus' ability to persuade each of the troops to stay at Troy to complete their mission under the mandate of Agamemnon) to a seamy *metis* which seems to transgress the public law even as it shores it up. The uncanny success of this *metis* is both terrifying and enlightening. Odysseus participates in a slaughter which suggests the inevitability of death, but he also underlines the impossibility of fulfilling desire. His (perfectly) successful execution of the law goes hand in hand with a demonstration of the possibility of a reflective distance from it.

These separate forms of death recur in the two separate spheres of death in the *Odyssey*: the deaths of Odysseus' crew and the deaths of the suitors. Nagler has claimed that the death of the suitors is a 'grim inversion' of the deaths of Odysseus' crew. While the proem of the *Odyssey* emphasizes the hero's efforts to save his men, 'his "effort", his *aethlos* is precisely the *slaughter* of the suitors, the exact

equivalent of the companions in the domestic world.' The 'passive loss' of the crew is contrasted with the 'active destruction' of the suitors.⁴² Nagler eloquently argues for a deep ethical anxiety present in Odysseus' killing of his own social group; the energy properly directed toward outsiders is targeted inward. But instead of Nagler's contrast between 'active' and 'passive', I want to suggest that the distinction between a 'controlled economy' of death (for the companions) and 'total expenditure', between a death at the level of public law and a superegoic death is more appropriate. Further, rather than affirming the separation, the latter death announces the truth of the former - as in the case of *Iliad* 10 and 2. The obscene *enjoyment* on show in the killing of the suitors clarifies the manner in which the fantasy of his companion's death structures Odysseus' interactions with them. The death inflicted on the suitors lurks as a hidden threat behind the symbolic authority of Odysseus as leader of his troops. The companions die because of their allegiance to Odysseus, and his ability (through trickery, mystification) to persuade them of the benevolence of his leadership.

Metis and the control of the many

The problem which Odysseus continually confronts as he plots to kill the suitors is a simple one, yet in its simplicity it raises themes which are central to any leader's ability to exert ideological control. How can one overcome many?⁴³ The suitors' rebellion against Odysseus' authority as head of the central *oikos* at Ithaca forces Odysseus to confront this problem openly. But if Odysseus faced no similar question in his interactions with his companions, this is only because his control of

⁴²Nagler 1989, 344-5.

⁴³*Od.* 20.29ff: '[S]o he was twisting and turning back and forth, meditating/ how, though he was one alone against many, he could lay hands on/ the shameless suitors.'

them is largely taken for granted. Odysseus does not openly think of the need for new measures to control his companions because his symbolic authority remains in control and the companions challenge to him (as we shall see) never quite reaches the point of open defiance. Faced with the suitors, however, Odysseus seems to doubt his ability to defeat them. But at the moment his doubt is at its most acute, Athena intervenes to assure his success. She does so in a manner which links the defeat of the suitors with the key successes in Odysseus' *Apologoi*:

σχέτλιε, καὶ μὲν τίς τε χερεῖονι πείθεθ' ἑταίρω,
ὅς περ θνητός τ' ἐστὶ καὶ οὐ τόσα μῆδεα οἶδεν·
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ θεός εἰμι, διαμπερὲς ἢ σε φυλάσσω
ἐν πάντεσσι πόνοισ'. ἐρέω δέ τοι ἔξαναφανδόν·
εἴ περ πεντήκοντα λόχοι μερόπων ἀνθρώπων
νῶϊ περισταῖεν, κτεῖναι μεμαῶτες Ἄρηϊ,
καὶ κεν τῶν ἐλάσαιο βόας καὶ ἴφια μῆλα. (*Od.*20.45-51)

Stubborn man! Anyone trusts even a lesser companion than I, who is mortal, and does not have so many ideas. But I am a god, and through it all I keep watch over you in every endeavor of yours. And now I tell you this plainly: even though there were fifty battalions of mortal people standing around us, furious to kill in the spirit of battle, even so you could drive away their cattle and fat sheep.

Athena describes Odysseus' ability to defeat the suitors as if it was just another *aethlos*. The goal is to 'drive off cattle and sheep', and the stealing (and consumption) of livestock is the crucial theme in two of the most important tales of the *Apologoi*, the tricking of the Cyclops and the consumption of the cattle of Helios on Thrinacia. But the abruptness of Athena's response is disconcerting. Odysseus' former tales of his *metis* in the *Apologoi* lingered over them, and took delight in their ingenuity. Athena confronts him with the inevitability of victory. In contrast to the tricks of *metis*, which classically remain hidden, Athena tells him openly of a perfect success. Though Odysseus is a polytropic hero, a victor in an ongoing series of encounters which preserves the possibility that each time he might lose, he is here confronted with the inevitability of victory in all his trials. Athena's pronouncements suggest a very different *metis* from the one normally associated

with Odysseus. Her words signal the split between the two forms of *metis* suggested in my analysis of *Iliad* 2 and 10. If *metis* is performed with specific goals in mind (in the *Odyssey*, the stealing of sheep), there is nevertheless a certain delight in the stratagem itself, in the means used to procure the end. The effect of *metis* seems not merely to be bound up in its successful pursuit of a goal, but in the manner in which such a goal is attained. As an example, we need look no further than the subtlety of the word-play in Odysseus' interaction with the Cyclops. Athena's *metis*, however, seems to short-circuit the workings of *metis* by going straight to the goal. The result within the *Odyssey* is perturbing enough: the grisly death of the suitors who stand in the way of the 'sheep and cattle'. But Athena's rhetoric suggests the ability to dispose of even greater numbers of men if necessary, 'fifty battalions'. This ability of *metis* to send masses to their death returns us to the fantasies of mass destruction with which I began this chapter, and which are so much a part of the Homeric tradition. But if there is indeed a contrast between Athena's harsh picture of *metis* and a kinder, gentler one, I want to stress once again that the former provides insight into the dark side of *metis*. Odysseus' destruction of the suitors renders explicit what was already implicit in Odysseus' interactions with his companions. In both cases, *metis* leads to death.

In what follows, I trace this doubled structure of *metis*: the 'public' aspect of trickery and mystification (expounded upon at length by Vernant and Detienne) together with its superegoic reverse. The companions, caught in the dead structures of the symbolic law, fall victim to the mystifying powers of Odysseus' *metis*. The suitors suffer a superegoic destruction - previewed in Athena's words quoted above - in exchange for their own superegoic enjoyment on show as they consume the goods of the *oikos* without restraint. But though I believe this division is a useful and helpful one, the complexity of the narrative lies in the manner in which they overlap. The companions, who for the most part remain loyal to Odysseus, are not

completely alien to enjoyment, nor are the suitors entirely able to divorce themselves from the public law. We will soon trace some of these complexities. But first, we should pause over the deadly aspects of both forms of *metis*, and the predominance of the theme of death in the *Odyssey* as a whole.

Death in the poem of life

In the *Iliad*, Achilles' vision of mass-destruction (though there will be plenty of victims of his fury) remains at the level of fantasy: many, not just Patroclus and himself, will survive the war. But the fantasy makes us ponder the quite different level of destruction depicted in the *Odyssey*. For if some of the adult male population survive the Trojan War, *none* of the young adult men on Ithaca will survive: the 'many heads' in the *Iliad* (πολλὰς ἰφθίμους κεφαλὰς) who are destroyed are replaced by the Cephallenians. Not one of the crew or suitors will escape destruction: the troops die on the way home, the suitors are killed to a man. This unpalatable reality is too easily overlooked by the advocates of a poem of life.⁴⁴ Yet it has a fundamental importance for the reading of the poem. For we can add two highly significant passages from the *Odyssey* to the passages which link the *Iliad*'s proem to disaster motifs.

The first is the introduction to the second Nekyia, which reads as a bitter roll call of the 'πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς' whose death was anticipated in the proem of the *Iliad*. Hermes leads the mass of *psychai* of the suitors to Hades, but on arrival they meet a series of *psychai* who died in the Trojan War.

⁴⁴Alongside Pucci, perhaps Segal is perhaps the most influential of such critics - though it is interesting that he does not dismiss the dark side of the poem. See the concluding remarks to his collection of essays on the *Odyssey*, 1995, 224ff. These concluding remarks (as he well realizes) cannot help but complicate his general praise of Odysseus as an 'everyman' figure, an ethical hero. My analysis begins where Segal's suggestively ends.

Ἑρμῆς δὲ ψυχὰς Κυλλήνιος ἐξεκαλείτο
 ἀνδρῶν μνηστῆρων· ἔχε δὲ ῥάβδον μετὰ χερσὶ
 καλὴν χρυσεῖην, τῆι τ' ἀνδρῶν ὄμματα θέλγει
 ὧν ἐθέλει, τοὺς δ' αὐτε καὶ ὑπνῶντας ἐγείρει·

αἶψα δ' ἵκοντο κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα,
 ἔνθα τε ναίουσι ψυχαί, εἶδωλα καμόντων.
 Εὖρον δὲ ψυχὴν Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
 καὶ Πατροκλῆος καὶ ἀμύμονος Ἀντιλόχοιο
 Αἴαντος θ', ὃς ἄριστος ἦν εἶδος τε δέμας τε
 τῶν ἄλλων Δαναῶν μετ' ἀμύμονα Πηλεΐωνα. (*Od.*24.1-4, 13-18)

Hermes of Kyllene summoned the souls of the suitors to come forth, and in his hands he was holding the beautiful golden staff, with which he mazes the eyes of those mortals whose eyes he would maze, or wakes again the sleepers.

[They] presently arrived in the meadow of asphodel. This is the dwelling place of souls, images of dead men. There they found the soul of Achilles, the son of Peleus, the soul of Patroklos, and the soul of stately Antilochus, and the soul of Aias, who for beauty and stature was the greatest of all the Danaans, next to the blameless son of Peleus.

.Any narrative of return to a 'controlled economy of life' on Ithaca is put on hold, and we are provided instead with a catalogue of death. The recent Cephallenian victims of Odysseus join the most illustrious victims of the Trojan war. But if this 'abruptly transfers the scene of the action' away from events in Ithaca, it provides a grim conclusion to the proleptic tale of death begun in the poem of the *Iliad*.⁴⁵ There is a strange solidarity between Odysseus and Hermes. Hermes, the guardian of the liminal, takes on the role of ψυχοπόμπος, accompanying mortals on their final journey to the underworld, completing the earlier toil of Odysseus as killer; it is a link which was already apparent in the poem's proem:

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ

⁴⁵The phrase is Heubeck's, (1992, 356). Note too that there appears to be no effort made to distinguish the supposedly ethically evil suitors from the heroes. Agamemnon treats them as heroes, and makes no unfavorable comment on their behavior. Rather it is suggested that the best young men of Ithaca are quite at home with the victims of the war.

πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε·
 πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,
 πολλὰ δ' ὅ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν,
 ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.
 ἄλλ' οὐδ' ὥς ἐτάρους ἐρρύσατο, ἰέμενός περ·

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven
 far journeys, after he had sacked Troy's sacred citadel.
 Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of,
 many the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea,
 struggling for his own life and the homecoming of his companions.
 Even so he could not save back his companions, hard though he strove to...

Hermes and Odysseus are linked by the epithet 'πολύτροπος', which they alone share. The ease of Odysseus' movement across lands and seas suggests an affinity with the boundary-crosser Hermes, and underlines the appropriateness of the epithet.⁴⁶ But Hermes' appearance as *psycho-pompos* in Book 24 suggests the possibility of a darker reading of a proem which is already suffused with a spirit of ethical anxiety because of Ithacan deaths.⁴⁷ For it is the completeness of the destruction of the young men of Ithaca which links Odysseus as agent of destruction to Hermes as transporter of souls to Hades.

There is a further suggestion of death in the proem's evocation of 'many' tropoi encircling an un-named subject. For *polu-* epithets are associated with Hades. The god of death is both 'πολυδέγμων', the host of many as he receives the souls of mortals one by one, and 'πολύωνυμος', the person of 'many names'.⁴⁸ The many names are euphemisms, repeatedly conjured up in order to

⁴⁶See Hymn to Hermes 13: παῖδα πολύτροπον, αἰμυλομήτην. Also, 439. Peradotto (116) remarks that it is 'no accident that, in our extant evidence, the only other bearer of the epithet *polytropos* is the volatile divine crosser of boundaries, Hermes.' A link between Hermes and Odysseus is suggested by Pucci 1982 50ff. He notes that the proem may attribute 'some divine, Hermes-like power' to Odysseus. The crucial question remains: what sort of power is this?

⁴⁷On this, see Nagler 1990 *passim*. Nagler argues for a split between the deaths of suitors and the deaths of Odysseus comrades, in order to emphasize the 'transgressive' aspect of the latter killings as Odysseus crosses a fatal boundary into his own *oikos*. This leads Nagler to find 'ethical anxiety' in the proem. I agree with the diagnosis of ethical anxiety, but, as will become clearer, I see no reason to affirm the split between deaths inside/outside Ithaca. The relationship between Odysseus and his men is analyzed further in section 2.

⁴⁸For both epithets, see *Hymn to Demeter*, 9, 17, 18 and many others. See also Richardson, *ad loc.*

avoid mention of his 'unmentionable' essence as the bringer of death, a paradoxical essence which coincides with the nothingness of an unknowable beyond. The failure to name here is appropriate: it is because this 'beyond' is unknowable that it is radically unassimilable to sense, to language. A similar process is at work in the proem of the *Odyssey*; the marked vocabulary of the many avoids the classifying name 'Odysseus', but it also fails to mention the hero's most famous 'tropos', Odysseus as 'Outis'. Outis is as close as language can get to signifying the unsignified; it signifies only the lack of descriptive features.⁴⁹ It is therefore much more than one more descriptive term categorizing the hero; it signifies the realm of the unspeakable that the many *tropoi* of language encircle without quite reaching. The failure to name Odysseus hints at that which resists classification in the hero, which returns us to the senseless realm of death. In a proem which already strains to emphasize the innocence of its hero with regard to the destruction of his men, mention of the hero as a figure of the negative is conspicuously avoided. The proem constantly equates the hero with death in its ongoing, euphemistic failure to equate them.

It is the structure of taboo which allows us to reformulate what Michael Nagler has called the "effort/contest" theme in the proem of the *Odyssey*.⁵⁰ Nagler points to a marked vocabulary of conflict which will characterize the ensuing narrative. I quote the proem once more, with the words highlighting the "effort/contest" theme noted by Nagler:

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε·
 πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,
 πολλὰ δ' ὃ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὄν κατὰ θυμόν,

⁴⁹It is precisely this aspect of Outis which Peradotto fails to (or chooses not to) explore, and for which Lynn-George has criticized him.

⁵⁰Nagler 1990, 337ff.

ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.
 ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὥς ἐτάρους ἐρρύσατο, ἰέμενός περ·
 αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο,
νήπιοι οἱ κατὰ βοῦς Ἵπερίονος Ἡελίοιο..

He notes that this theme is replayed on Phaeacia, and then later in the 'contest' of the bow which destroys the suitors. For Nagler, the contrast lies between the regulated contests, and the perverse effort of destruction involved in killing the suitors. But in light of our reading of the contests on Phaeacia, Nagler's split (between suitors and crew, between 'normal' and 'perverse' games) is complicated by the universality of the theme of loss. Odysseus' victory in the games on Phaeacia introduced the Phaeacians to the possibility of loss, to the notion of a game that could not be won. It is this unwinnable game which forces the civilization of the Phaeacians to reflect on loss, and thus introduces them to their mortality. A society without limits, where every voyage could be made to every destination without risk, without loss, is destroyed by the introduction of an absolute limit. All struggles, efforts, can only be understood against the backdrop of this mortal limit.

This reading of Odysseus' interaction with the Phaeacians can help us with a further problem of the proem. It is well known that the pointed reference to voyages to cities of many men, and the knowledge of their 'ἡοοσ' (πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω) seems curiously inappropriate because these journeys do not seem to occur in the narrative of the *Odyssey* itself.⁵¹ But effortless traveling to a plurality of destinations perfectly characterizes the Phaeacians *before* the arrival of Odysseus. There is something grimly foreboding about the ultimate success of Phaeacian transportation: each mortal traveler arrives

⁵¹Indeed Peradotto (76 fn17) remarks that the lying tales Odysseus provides to Penelope and Eumaeus (*Od.* 14.314ff, 19.269ff) seem far more appropriate to the promise of the proem than anything that occurs in the actual narrative.

on Phaeacia, and is passed on to his ultimate destination, his *telos*, by a society which remains unaware of the concept of limit. The inevitability of this arrival at a destination hints at the inevitability of that final voyage - the voyage which involves the accompaniment of Hermes *psycho-pompos*.⁵² Phaeacia, a society where the idea of a boundary in itself is unthinkable within its own terms of reference, duplicates the qualities of the god who performs the same function: Hermes travels everywhere, and is a figure for whom boundaries are irrelevant. But though a boundless figure, he preserves the notion of limits (as guardian of the liminal) for the mortal world, limits which are in turn dependent on his guardianship of the ultimate limit keeping mortals from the unknowability of the 'life beyond'. In book 8, Odysseus takes over this function; he relegates the Phaeacians to the level of mortals as he replaces them as limitless guardian of the limit. Once more, we need to supplement the insights of Peradotto into Outis: if it signals 'individuality', that which escapes predication, this notion also refers to a realm free of boundaries, the 'beyond' of the *sema* which is death.

Let us now return to the third line of the poem. What can it mean to 'know' men's minds (νόον ἔγνω)? The arrival of Odysseus introduced doubt to the minds of the Phaeacians. This doubt coincided with an emergence of freedom, with the ability to act as a moral agent. But this freedom came at a price - the necessary acknowledgment of loss, of mortality. Once more, Nagy's insight into the semantic relationship between *sema* and *noos* is helpful. The Phaeacians had a perfect *noos* before the arrival of Odysseus, suggested in the name of their king, *Alcinous*. Every sign was understood, there was no doubt in their universe. Defeat at the hands of Odysseus introduces doubt via the realization of an unwinnable game, a

⁵²On this notion of 'ultimate destination', see the famous discussion of Lacan 1991 on Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, with his closing claim that a letter always arrives at its destination. For an elaboration of the deathly aspects of the phrase, see Žižek 1992, chapter 2 *passim*.

constitutive beyond which is unknowable. The limit imposed on their ability to read signs signifies their mortality. But it also testifies to a newly discovered Phaeacian *freedom*. Self-reflection, doubt, means that the Phaeacians are now able to make free choices. Thus to know the minds of mortals (νόον ἔγνω) means to be unable to know fully the minds of mortals; because there is something unclassifiable about mortals, their actions cannot be predicted because they, as subjects, exceed their predications. Herein lies the possibility of a 'free self' suggested by Peradotto. But it is also to know that the prospect of mortality, the basis for this unclassifiability, haunts their conscious existence.

What of the wanderings through cities? Odysseus' defeat of the Phaeacians suggests that he takes over their role as a sender of humans on to their *telos*. The poem's conflation of Odysseus with Hermes *psycho-pompos* (and the unmentioned, unmentionable Hades) suggests the universality of death, a universal wanderer, who descends into the multitude of cities, picking off mortals one by one. If Odysseus here seems to be in dark company, it is perhaps worth first recalling the death, one by one, of his companions, and then the all-at-once slaughter of the suitors. The poem mentions the sacking of Troy, before listing a series of other cities to be visited, suggesting the vulnerability of every city to the fate meted out to Troy. The *Iliad* reflects on this theme in a dark interchange between Hera and Zeus. Hera demands the sack of Troy, but concedes Zeus' right to take other cities:

Of all cities there are three that are dearest to my own heart:
 Argos and Sparta and Mykenai of the wide ways. All these,
 whenever they become hateful to your heart, sack utterly.
 I will not stand up for these against you, nor yet begrudge you.
 Yet if even so I bear malice and would not have you destroy them,
 in malice I will accomplish nothing, since you are far stronger. (*Il.*4.51-56)

Troy takes its place as one in a series of cities to be sacked. Odysseus role as 'city-sacker', suggested in the reference to the sack of Troy in the poem's second

line, goes with him as he visits 'many' other cities. The universal explorer brings death in his wake.

Homeless Journeys

The *Odyssey* begins where the *Iliad* ended, with Hermes *psycho-pompos*. Hermes accompanies Priam to the tent of Achilles 'as if he went to his death' (24.328).⁵³ He returns to Troy with a corpse, a poetic rendering of what Michael Lynn-George has called a 'homeless journey':

While this homeless suppliant achieves his goal, the *Iliad* accentuates the final homelessness of this journey. Unlike in the *Odyssey*, this will be the homecoming of the dead - for the dead a homeless return, the reception one of lamentation and enduring farewell.

'Unlike in the *Odyssey*'. Lynn-George joins the chorus of those who see only life in the *Odyssey*, who focus on the (supposedly) successful *nostos* of Odysseus and ignore the massive weight of death which haunts the poem, and which darkly reappears in the second Nekyia.⁵⁴ If there is something utopian about Odysseus as a survivor, it is a survival which is dependent (in complex, still to be explored ways) on the failure of others to survive. The 'homeless' journey Lynn-George describes is the rule, not the exception, for this poem; the 'naturalness' of the universality of deaths swallowed in myths of disaster is replayed in a 'historical' narrative whose consequences are universal enough to have halted most critical

⁵³ For the motif of death - 'the homeless journey' - in *Iliad* 24, Lynn-George 233ff ('The Homeless journey'), Whitman 217ff.

⁵⁴ Herein lies the real weakness of Lynn-George's critique of Peradotto's work on the *Odyssey*. The power of his criticism of Peradotto's dismissal of the "*Iliad*'s great achievement" (as a poem which self-reflects on death) is undermined by his own underestimation of the ethical anxiety present in the *Odyssey*.

efforts at explaining them. The un-named subject of the proem struggles for his *psyche* and the *nostos* of his companions

ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.
ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὥς ἐτάρους ἐρρύσατο, ἰέμενός περ· (Od. 1.5-6)

Struggling for his *psyche* and the *nostos* of his companions.
Even so he could not save his companions, hard though he strove to..

The problem of this phrase is greater than any irony implied by a contrast between the *nostos* won by Odysseus and a *nostos* so conspicuously missing for his comrades. It is rather the question of the unspoken reverse of this *nostos*: the 'return to light and safety' is premised upon the wider backdrop of death, of a journey to Hades. In the Doloneia, Odysseus' abilities as a trickster crossed the boundary between life and death, but in such a way as to emphasize its inevitability. The second Nekyia portrays a different journey of the suitors, but suitors who are now *psychai* on a 'homeless journey'. Even the apparent innocence of the emphasis on Odysseus' 'companionship' of his men has a somber connotation, returning us to the identifying description of the god who 'loves' to accompany men:

Ἑρμεία, σοὶ γάρ τε μάλιστ' ἄ γε φίλτατον ἔστιν
ἀνδρὶ ἐταιρίσσαι.. (Il. 24.334-5)

Hermes, for to you beyond all other gods it is dearest
to be man's companion..

A dear companion to his men? The ultimate effect of the companionship between Odysseus and his men will be their descent on a final journey to Hades, the obverse of the return to light. The fight to win 'his own *psyche*', conventionally attributed to Odysseus' fight for life, is a fight for life against the background of death, of the multitude of souls which belong to Hermes/Hades: Hades, the god of death, wins every soul in an endless, indeterminate succession. Hermes guides them on this final destination.

Mystifying the Masses

In what follows, I will look in detail at the interactions between Odysseus and his companions as described in selected passages from the *Apologoi*. I want to begin by returning to Odysseus' encounter with the Cyclops, but with a different aim in mind. I earlier described the event from the perspective of the asocial Cyclops; Odysseus' blinding of him introduced him to the social, and to the paradoxes of paternal power. Now I shift perspective, and try to find out what the tricking of the Cyclops can tell us about Odysseus and his companions. I will concentrate on two aspects of Book 9. First, I consider the words of the psychotic Cyclops before he has been blinded. Because the Cyclops has no concern for the law, his language collapses the distinction between the 'public' and 'superegoic' aspects of the law which structure the workings of ideology in the poem. His rhetoric, in effect, challenges the workings of the law as a whole; it is because of this that the language of the Cyclops has much in common with the language of Achilles in *Iliad* 9 - a parallel I explore. Because the Cyclops collapses the distinction between the public, civilizing aspects of the law and the superegoic fantasy which structures it, his words call into question the motivations of Odysseus as leader of his companions. In order to explore this, I look in detail at the trick engineered by Odysseus which allows the companions to escape from the Cyclops' cave; rather than a simple case of a heroic act of rescue, I will suggest that the trick exemplifies the symbolic control Odysseus has over them. The effect of Odysseus' ability to maintain the allegiance of his companions throughout the *Apologoi* is their ultimate destruction.

Achilles and the Cyclops

In the asocial behavior of the Cyclops, it is easy to detect much of the kernel of the plot of the *Iliad*. The profoundly asocial character of the Cyclopes recalls Achilles' rejection of the society of his Greek companions at the start of the *Iliad*, and his prayer for their destruction. Ajax, part of the Embassy in book 9, accuses him of savagery in words which come close to repeating the language of Odysseus against the Cyclops:

αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς
ἄγριον ἐν στήθεσσι θέτο μεγαλήτορα θυμὸν.
σχέτλιος, οὐδὲ μετατρέπεται φιλόττος ἐταίρων
τῆς ἧ μιν παρὰ νηυσὶν ἐτίμεν ἕξοχον ἄλλων
νηλῆς· (Il.9.628-32)

Achilleus has made savage the proud-hearted spirit within his body.
He is hard, and does not remember that friends' affection
wherein we honoured him by the ships, far beyond others.
Pitiless.⁵⁵

The cannibalism of the Cyclops is reflected in the fantasy of cannibalism revealed by Achilles over the corpse of Hector.⁵⁶ The Cyclops' rejection of the realm of the gods with regard to his own 'betterness' (*Od.*9.275-6) recalls Achilles' rejection of authority and self-affirmation in the opening book of the *Iliad*, and the fight with Agamemnon over who is 'better', φέρτερος. But most striking of all is the manner in which Odysseus' taunt to Polyphemus after the loss of his eye (the taunt which affirms that his lost eye cannot be recovered, and thus heralds his

⁵⁵ ἄγριος' is an adjective used throughout *Odyssey* 9 of the Cyclops. Note especially 9.215. The Cyclops is also 'harsh', σχέτλιος (*Od.*9.295, 9.351). For the separation of one Cyclops from another, 9.113ff, and my discussion in Chapter 1.

⁵⁶ Il.22.346-7:

αἶ γάρ πως αὐτόν με μένος καὶ θυμὸς ἀνήη
ᾧμ' ἀποταμνόμενον κρέα ἔδμεναι, οἶα ἔοργας..

I wish only that my spirit and fury would drive me
to hack your meat away and eat it raw for the things that
you have done to me..

entrance to the social) recalls a warning made by Odysseus to Achilles in the ninth book of the *Iliad*:

ἀλλ' ἄνα εἰ μέμονάς γε καὶ ὀψέ περ υἷας Ἀχαιῶν
 τειρομένους ἐρύεσθαι ὑπὸ Τρώων ὀρυμαγδοῦ.
 αὐτῷ τοι μετόπισθ' ἄχος ἔσσεται, οὐδέ τι μῆχος
 ῥεχθέντος κακοῦ ἔστ' ἄκος εὐρεῖν· ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρὶν
 φράζεο ὅπως Δαναοῖσιν ἀλεξήσεις κακὸν ἦμαρ. (*Il.*9.247-51)

Up, then! if you are minded, late though it be, to rescue
 the afflicted sons of the Achaeans from the Trojan onslaught.
 It will be an affliction to you hereafter, there will be no remedy
 found to heal the evil thing when it has been done. No, beforehand
 take thought to beat the evil day aside from the Danaans.

Odysseus' words are typically prescient. Achilles' fevered attempts to gain sufficient recompense for loss will lead only to further loss: the incurable loss of Patroclus. The indeterminacy of the language of Achilles in *Iliad* 9, his desire for something more than anything Agamemnon can provide is - as Lynn-George has described - a confrontation with this 'lack' which structures language: Achilles does not know what he wants, but merely that he wants. From a humdrum heroic existence played out on the playing field of *kleos*, Achilles confronts the problems of his desire. But, as with the Cyclops, he is far from learning the Odyssean lesson, which is emphasized in a significant pun: there is no cure, ἄκος, for grief, ἄχος.

Cecic Whitman has elegantly summed up the substance of Achilles' impossible desire: 'Personal integrity in Achilles achieves the form and authority of immanent divinity, with its inviolable, lonely singleness, half repellent because of its almost inhuman austerity, but irresistible in its passion and perfected selfhood. Yet the scale is not weighted in favor of this gleaming vision.'⁵⁷ 'Integrity', 'perfected selfhood' mixed with 'almost inhuman austerity': this is a dream for a

⁵⁷Whitman 1958, 182. Whitman's treatment of Achilles remains deeply insightful, and is especially sensitive to the hero's savagery.

self without loss, an impossible longing for a world where entrance to the social did not involve loss. In short, Achilles seeks to be a Cyclops - a perfect, whole being. His is a paradoxical desire to be a being without desire, an asocial, monadic one. His desire for a perfect autonomy coincides with the loss of the possibility of freedom, the loss of desire - which is based on lack.

Yet there are deeper similarities between the two. Achilles' speech in *Iliad* 9 was suffused with a rhetoric of radical leveling; with the credibility of the public law (in the person of the king, Agamemnon) suspended, the speech demolished the social codes which differentiated people into categories of noble and evil, *esthlos* and *kakos*. We should pay particular attention to the position of enunciation of the speech. Achilles' reflection on his mortality leads him to speak, for a moment, from an imaginary position *outside* the heroic world. So too the first words of the Cyclops to Odysseus are made by a figure who is outside human society:

ὦ ξεῖνοι, τίνες ἐστέ; πόθεν πλεῖθ' ὑγρὰ κέλευθα;
ἢ τι κατὰ πρῆξιν ἢ μασιδίως ἀλάλησθε
οἶά τε ληϊστῆρες ὑπεῖρ ἄλλα, τοί τ' ἀλόωνται
ψυχὰς παρθέμενοι, κακὸν ἄλλοδαποῖσι φέροντες; (*Od.*9.252-55)

Strangers, who are you? From where do you come sailing over the watery ways? Is it on some business, or are you recklessly roving as pirates do, when they sail on the salt sea and venture their lives as they wander, bringing evil to alien people?

The Cyclops addresses the men as *xeinoi*. He will soon declare that he cares nothing for Zeus or his laws, so what can such a word mean from the lips of a Cyclops? It can only be a mocking rejection of the entire system of *xenia*. He continues by drawing a distinction between wandering pirates and those travel with a purpose; but again, an important distinction within human society is meaningless to a Cyclops, who rejects such distinctions. The common-sense aspect of the good/bad distinction between piracy and civilized law, between what is *esthlos* and *kakos*, is leveled in the eye of a figure of pure lawlessness. The self-same words used by the Cyclops' are earlier used by Nestor as he greets Telemachus

(*Od.*3.7174). But if this seems to be a conventional use of the formula by a law-abiding hero, his later account of his return home once more complicates the distinction between piracy and civilization:

ὦ φίλ', ἐπεὶ μ' ἔμνησας οἰζύος, ἣν ἐν ἐκείνῳ
 δῆμῳ ἀνέτλημεν μένος ἄσχετοι υἱες Ἀχαιῶν,
 ἡμὲν ὅσα ξὺν νηυσὶν ἐπ' ἠεροειδέα πόντον
 πλαζόμενοι κατὰ ληΐδ', ὅπη ἄρξειεν Ἀχιλλεύς,
 ἡδ' ὅσα καὶ περὶ ἄστῳ μέγα Πριάμοιο ἀνακτος
 μαρνάμεθ'· ἐνθα δ' ἔπειτα κατέκταθεν ὅσσοι ἄριστοι· (*Od.*3.103-8)

Dear friend, since you remind me of sorrows which in that country we endured, we sons of the Achaians valiant forever, or all we endured in our ships on the misty face of the water cruising after plunder wherever Achilles led us, or all we endured about the great city of the lord Priam fighting; and all who were our best were killed in that place.

The journey described by Nestor is not performed with a purpose, κατὰ πρῆξιν; it is a wandering without direction, a series of piratical expeditions. It also mirrors the actions of Odysseus in approaching the island of the Cyclopes: for within the narrative of return, this is an unmotivated encounter.⁵⁸ We can now ponder the significance of the mocking words of the Cyclops; it not only blurs the distinction between law and transgression of the law. It points toward the violence inherent to the public law, to the manner in which the law itself is a form of piracy.⁵⁹ Let us continue the parallel between the Cyclops and Achilles as figures of *bie*. The words of the Cyclops reverse the common-sensical opposition between crude 'violence' opposed by pacifying 'law'. The ultimate violence is not in 'force' but in the symbolic system which is the backdrop for every act of force, not in the

⁵⁸The comments of Austin (1980, fn9) are apt: 'Any anthropological analysis of the Cyclopeia, structuralist or otherwise, which ignores the person of the central actor in the episode must do injustice both to the story and to its particular shaping of the concepts of barbarism and civilization. The trickster-hero violates every code of civilized behavior, as nowhere else in the *Odyssey*, and does so before the Cyclops demonstrates any deviant behavior.'

⁵⁹On the violence of the law, see Salecl 1994. Note also the remarks of Pucci 1987, 175ff, on the ambiguity of *Od.*17.287-89, where Eumachus is told by Odysseus that 'on account of the destructive stomach, well-benched ships are fitted out for the barren sea to bring evils on one's enemies'. The reference can be both to pirates, and to the Trojan war. Cf Crotty, 137ff.

transgression of law implied by 'piracy', but in the actions performed in the name of the law. It is not enough to point out that the psychotic Cyclops 'mocks' social codes: the codes are suspended, and laid bare in the randomness of the violence they cause. This commentary on Odysseus is deeply insightful: he seems to be both civilizer and marauder, a figure who subverts the law as he carries it out.⁶⁰

The language of the Cyclops points toward a hidden truth structuring the travels of Odysseus. From a land of darkness, an immortal night, he sees. But the actions of the episode itself also epitomize the entire *Apologoi*. Odysseus' leadership of his troops comes under the closest scrutiny. They show a deep distrust of him, but are unable to break with his authority. The selected men who accompany him to the cave of the Cyclops die one by one, just as the wider narrative of the journey home will portray the death, one by one, of the crew. With this in mind, let us look in closer detail at some more significant words of the Cyclops. In response to the revelation of the name 'Outis', the Cyclops promises Odysseus a reward:

Οὐτιν ἐγὼ πύματον ἔδομαι μετὰ οἷσ' ἐτάροισι
τοῦς δ' ἄλλους πρόσθεν· τὸ δέ τοι ξεινήϊον ἔσται. (*Od.*9.369-70)

⁶⁰We should pause over this seemingly paradoxical aspect of Odysseus, which is, I think, crucial to his status in myth. Let us return to the heritage of Autolycus: Autolycus is both the 'enemy' of society *and* the trickster. The association brings with it a major problem. How can one ever tell them apart? The ability of a leader to cement (via *metis*) the realm of the social is precisely what renders him an 'outsider'. This takes us to the heart of the relationship between superego and ego-ideal - the ego-ideal is not separate from superego (as if they had nothing to do with each other). Rather, the very success of the operations of the public law renders it superegoic - just as Athena's offer to kill the suitors all at once is obviously connected (an extension of) Odysseus' desire to kill them with *metis*. The situation of Autolycus on the cusp of the civilized - his ability to exercise the power of the defining element of civilization (*metis*) turns him into an enemy of civilization - provides a matrix with which we can understand three of the figures considered in detail so far, Dolon, the Cyclops and Achilles. Dolon's trickery remains attached to the pursuit of prestige: he is not yet an 'enemy' of society, an outsider. Achilles lingers with the possibility of rejecting the law entirely (that is, he flirts with psychosis) before giving in to a superego imperative, and thus becomes fanatically devoted to the law. The Cyclops is perhaps most Autolycean of all, in that he simply rejects society (though this means that he has no opportunity to exercise *metis*); we should note that the Cyclops lives as Autolycus does on the top of a mountain, they are both *agrioi*, and both have no concern for the gods. But this rejection in effect means that he is not a figure of *metis*, because his rejection of society is complete.

Then I will eat Nobody after his friends, and the others
I will eat first, and that shall be my guest present to you.

In return for the gift of the name, the Cyclops offers his gift - the leader will be eaten last. But underneath the humor lies a grimmer reality. For Odysseus will indeed be the last and only survivor of the voyage after his companions have all perished. The words recall the proem, where the lost *nostos* of the *hetairoi* contrasted with the uneasy ability of Odysseus to escape death. His is a death-rite deferred; the final welcome at the gates of Hades is postponed for him but not his companions. The somber connection I have suggested between Odysseus and the gods associated with death, Hades and Hermes, provides a strange connection between Odysseus and the Cyclops' words; for, as a figure who represents the limit between life and death, he is indeed the last figure left over after the deaths, one by one, of the many. If the Cyclops functions as a figure of death, symbolically consuming humans one at a time, there is also a certain affinity to Odysseus. The joke of the Cyclops is prophetic.

But there is another sense in which this prophetic remark is substantiated. For after he speaks these words, he will not consume any other of the companions. The next thing the Cyclops will 'consume' is the sharp stake which is driven into his eye.⁶¹ The effect of this blinding, as argued, is to drag the psychotic, god-like Cyclopes into the mortal realm of the social. The 'eating of Outis' signifies precisely this; after the blinding, he will no longer be a 'one', but a being in language (Poly-phemus) who has incurred an irrecoverable loss, a 'nothing' driven into the one-ness of his being which renders him mortal. In the exchange between Odysseus and Polyphemus, Odysseus brings mortality to the Cyclops by appropriating the destructive role of the Cyclops as a bringer of death.

⁶¹On the punning on *Outis* and οὐτάω, Peradotto 149ff.

Circles of death: Wrapping up the Cephallenians

The Cyclops' 'gift' to Odysseus splits him from his companions: they will die first, he will die last. It is a split which recurs throughout *Odyssey* 9, and indeed the entire *Apologoi*.⁶² It occurs later in the peculiar, dual nature of Polyphemus' curse after he believes he has discovered Odysseus' identity. He first prays that Odysseus will not reach home, but then amends the curse; if this is not fated, at least he should lose his companions and find troubles at home (9.529-35). Of course only the second part of the curse will be completed. But the significance of the split between the 'many' troops and their leader Odysseus is attached to the wider issue of ideological control the episode raises. Odysseus begins his first speech to the Cyclops by identifying himself as just one of the host of Achaeans:

ἡμεῖς τοι Τροίηθεν ἀποπλαγχθέντες Ἀχαιοὶ
παντοίοισ' ἀνέμοισιν ὑπὲρ μέγα λαῖτμα θαλάσσης,
οἴκαδε ἰέμενοι, ἄλλην ὁδὸν ἄλλα κέλευθα
ἦλθομεν· οὕτω που Ζεὺς ἤθελε μητίσασθαι.
λαοὶ δ' Ἀτρείδew Ἀγαμέμνονος εὐχόμεθ' εἶναι,
τοῦ δὴ νῦν γε μέγιστον ὑπουράνιον κλέος ἐστί· (Od.9.259-64)

We are Achaeans from Troy, beaten off our true course
by winds from every direction across the great gulf of the open
sea, making for home, by the wrong way, on the wrong courses.
So we have come. So it has pleased Zeus to arrange it.
We claim we are of the following of the son of Atreus,
Agamemnon, whose fame now is the greatest thing under heaven..

It is has been noted that this refusal to name himself as leader is a necessary part of the deception of the Cyclops, and the Outis trick.⁶³ But it is also another instance of Odysseus 'modesty'. In the Doloneia, he refused to take any credit for

⁶²In Nagler's words (1990, 344): 'A refrain that punctuates the Adventures in mantic space could be paraphrased: "We got out, regretting the loss of our companions but grateful to have escaped with our own skins." The 'we' is inexorably reduced to Odysseus.

⁶³See Austin 1972, Peradotto 1990, 117.

his action. But more relevant for the supposed deference to Agamemnon shown here are his actions in *Iliad 2*, where he supplanted the symbolic authority of Agamemnon (appearing as an ego-ideal) as he subverted it. Here, the attribution of glory to Agamemnon for the sacking of Troy is opposed by his own status as 'city-sacker', in particular through the stratagem of the wooden horse. But it is the ideological effect of this melding into the masses which is crucial. The ability of a leader (at the symbolic level of the public law) to control his many followers depends on his ability to let the masses identify with the ego-ideal he represents: he must not be viewed as an outsider with his own interests, using power for his own personal ends. Rather, the ability to control the many occurs when there is a short-circuit between the qualities displayed by the leader, and the qualities the troops believe to be their qualities. Should this happen, the leader then becomes 'one of them' (or us). The weakness of Agamemnon in *Iliad 2* comes from the general feeling that he acts not on behalf of the community, but for his own narrower wants (the abduction of the wife of Menelaus, a family matter). Because of this perception, he is no longer *primus inter pares*, an *aristos* leading a community of *aristoi*, but a selfish outsider. Odysseus' intervention returns the troops to an identification with broader symbolic goals. The disappearances (and appearances) of Odysseus as leader in Book 9 are important for the workings of power. Briefly put, if he appears as leader at all (as he indeed does), it is evidence of a weakening of his authority.

The clearest instance of the symbolic control exercised by Odysseus over his men comes at the time when they are dependent on him: it is during their escape from the cave, attached to the sheep of the Cyclops. The episode has much in common with the tricking of Proteus, and we can use the earlier trick to help us understand this one. As earlier argued, that trick opened the question of the relationship of the one to the many. Before his deception, the Proteus seals were

constituted as a group by Proteus' counting. But as Proteus doubts for the first time, the naturalness of that relationship is questioned (as a gap is opened between signifier and signified). The seals will no longer simply be a group centered around a leader, but will (or will not) be made a group by the performative action of the counter. The seals become a group of seals because Proteus counts them as a group. He imposes an end and a beginning to the numerical sequence. In *Odyssey* 9, Odysseus' trick reveals the manner in which his metis controls the constitution of Odysseus' crew as Odysseus' crew.

As with the Proteus trick, the crucial aspect of the trick lies not at the level of sign and referent, but at the level of signifier and signified. The conventional reading of Polyphemus' deception rests on the assumption that he is fooled by the disguise of Odysseus and his men hidden beneath the rams (just as the conventional reading of the Proteus deception seems to depend upon the disguise of seal skins). Yet this does nothing to explain the different disguise used by Odysseus (attached to one ram) and his men (each tied between three). The description of the split into a ram which is 'by far the best' and an array of other rams which are excellent, but of a clearly inferior order duplicates the difference between a man who is 'by far the best', and thus a leader of men, and a community of *aristoi*. If Polyphemus misses the general disguise of the rams, it is his failure to make a distinction between the group and their leader which is ultimately far more important.

τὸ δὲ νήπιος οὐκ ἐνόησεν,
 ὡς οἱ ὑπ' εἰροπόκων οἴων στέρνοισι δέδεντο.
 ὕστατος ἄρνεϊὸς μῆλων ἔστειχε θύραζε,
 λάχνῳ στεινόμενος καὶ ἐμοὶ πυκινὰ φρονέοντι.
 τὸν δ' ἐπιμασσάμενος προσέφη κρατερὸς Πολύφημος·
 'κρίε πέπον, τί μοι ὦδε διὰ σπέος ἔσσυο μῆλων
 ὕστατος; οὐ τι πάρος γε λελειμμένος ἔρχεται οἴῳν,
 ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρῶτος νέμειαι τέρεν' ἄνθεα ποίης
 μακρὰ βιβιάς, πρῶτος δὲ ροὰς ποταμῶν ἀφικάνεις,
 πρῶτος δὲ σταθμόνδε λιλαίειαι ἀπονέεσθαι
 ἐσπέριος, νῦν αὐτε πανύστατος, ἢ σύ γ' ἄνακτος
 ὀφθαλμὸν ποθέεις; τὸν ἀνὴρ κακὸς ἐξαλάωσεν

σὺν λυγροῖσ' ἐτάροισι, δαμασσάμενος φρένας οἴνω,
 Οὔτις, ὄν οὐ πῶ φημι πεφυγμένον ἔμμεν ὄλεθρον.
 εἰ δὴ ὁμοφρονέοις ποτιφωνήεις τε γένοιο
 εἰπεῖν, ὅππῃ κείνος ἐμὸν μένος ἤλασκάζει·
 τῷ κέ οἱ ἐγκέφαλός γε διὰ σπέος ἄλλυδις ἄλλη
 θεινομένου ῥαίοιτο πρὸς οὔδει, κὰδ δέ τ' ἐμὸν κῆρ
 λωφήσειε κακῶν, τά μοι οὔτιδανὸς πόρεν Οὔτις·
 ὥς εἰπὼν τὸν κριὸν ἀπὸ ἔο πέμπε θύραζε.
 ἐλθόντες δ' ἠβαιὸν ἀπὸ σπείους τε καὶ αὐλῆς
πρῶτος ὑπ' ἀρνειοῦ λυόμεν, ὑπέλυσα δ' ἐταίρους,
 καρπαλίμως δὲ τὰ μῆλα ταναύποδα, πίονα δημῶ,
πολλὰ περιτροπέοντες ἐλαύνομεν, ὄφρ' ἐπὶ νῆα
 ἰκόμεθ'· ἀσπάσιοι δὲ φίλοισ' ἐτάροισι φάνημεν,
 οἱ φύγομεν θάνατον· τοὺς δὲ στενάχοντο γοῶντες. (*Od.9.442-67*)

in his guilelessness [he] did not notice
 how my men were fastened under the breasts of his fleecy
 sheep. Last of all the flock the ram went out of the doorway,
 loaded with his own fleece, and with me, and my close counsels.
 Then, feeling him, powerful Polyphemus spoke a word to him:
 "My dear old ram, why are you thus leaving the cave last of
 the sheep? Never in the old days were you left behind by
 the flock, but long-striding, far ahead of the rest would pasture
 on the tender bloom of the grass, be first at running rivers,
 and be eager always to lead the way first back to the sheepfold
 at evening. Now you are last of all. Perhaps you are grieving
 for your master's eye, which a bad man with his wicked companions
 put out, after he had made my brain helpless with wine, this
 Nobody, who I think has not yet got clear of destruction.
 If only you could think like us and only be given
 a voice, to tell me where he is skulking away from my anger,
 then surely he would be smashed against the floor and his brains go
 splattering all over the cave to make my heart lighter
 from the burden of all the evils this nidding Nobody gave me."
 So he spoke, and sent the ram along from him, outdoors,
 and when we had got a little way from the yard and the cavern,
 first I got myself loose from my ram, then set my companions
 free, and rapidly then, and rounding them up, we
 drove the long-striding sheep, rich with fat, until we reached
 our ship, and the sight of us who had escaped death was welcome
 to our companions, but they began to mourn for the others.

The tricking of Polyphemus recalls a number of motifs already commented
 upon. He notices that the rams leave the cave in an unusual order. In particular, his
 favorite ram sticks out. Normally he is the first to leave and first to return home, but
 he now is the last of all to leave. If the escape from the cave is traditionally viewed
 as an escape from death for Odysseus' crew, the manner of the escape has somber

overtone; for Odysseus is the last to emerge from the cave, just as he alone will survive the journey to Ithaca. The manner in which the crew are sent out 'first' also reflects much of the structure of the *Apologoi*; in a series of other adventures, the leader Odysseus sends out a series of men to find out about the situation, treating them as virtual guinea pigs. As the men discover an assortment of evils, Odysseus then intervenes to save a part of them (it is the reluctance to be treated as a 'guinea pig' which motivates the resistance of Eurylochus).

The form of the trick also illustrates the complete dependence of the crew on their leader. Odysseus, attached to the ram who is 'by far the best' (ὄχ' ἄριστος, 9.432) is the last to leave the cave; but after the escape, he is the first to untie himself, and is then responsible for untying his companions. The crew, as a group attached to sheep, are symbolically encircled by the actions of Odysseus. The crew are caught up between Odysseus as 'first' and Odysseus as 'last'. He wraps them up. For this reason this 'counting' of the men-as-sheep is a significant step beyond the counting of Proteus. Proteus was introduced to the concept of limits, of 'wrapping up' a sequence by introducing a beginning and end to the chain of numbers, the narrative left the relationship between Proteus and his seals open. Here, the 'sheep' of Polyphemus (and Odysseus' men) are encircled by Odysseus' counting. We can also recall the trickery of Hephaestus in the second song of Demodocus: the spiders webs wrapped up Ares and Aphrodite in a perfect circle: (χέε δέσματα κύκλωι ἀπάντη·). The circle is perfect, and yet imperfect: for it remains a circle constructed by Hephaestus, an agent external to the circle as such. Odysseus' trick saves his companions, but at the same time as he encircles them, demonstrating an ideological control over them which is a crucial theme of the *Apologoi*.⁶⁴

⁶⁴This is not an Odyssean technique limited to the *Odyssey*; his persuasive tactics in *Iliad* 2 repeat the gesture. At the time when the men are on the verge of returning home, he looks back in time

The irony of the disguise of the men as sheep is that it is utterly appropriate to the behavior of the men. Odysseus' men behave like sheep, following their leader through thick and thin. The parallel between the sheep and men is neatly indicated by the description of the rounding up of the sheep after the men are released: *πολλὰ περιτροπέοντες*. We follow Stanford in taking the verb as transitive, meaning 'round up' the many sheep.⁶⁵ But in this rounding up we should note a pun on the most famous epithet of Odysseus, *polytropos*. The sheep are encircled by the 'many turns' of the men, just as the men themselves were earlier encircled by the man of many turns, Odysseus. This is the context for the later remarks of the crew, when they rebuke Odysseus for endangering their lives (*Od.9.498ff*). His taunting of Polyphemus does indeed put all of their lives at risk, but only insofar as they collectively pledge allegiance to him.

But if the trickery of Hephaestus was successful, it was not the trick of an invincible trickster. It was in response to an act of adultery he was helpless to prevent. Further, as soon as the circle of the web is complete, Hermes suggests a desire to transgress it, break its bonds. We can also recall the head of Sisyphus, which sticks out even as it is hidden by the dust which his efforts create. A trickster ultimately relies on his ability to disguise himself as the agent of the trick. It is this which allows us to explain the conclusion of the trick of the sheep - their consumption:

[W]e ourselves stepped out onto the break of the sea beach,
and from the hollow ships bringing out the flocks of the Cyclops
we shared them out so none might go cheated of his proper
portion; but for me alone my strong-greaved companions
excepted the ram when the sheep were shared, and I sacrificed him
on the sands to Zeus.. (*Od.9.547-53*)

to the beginning of the expedition to Troy; he then recalls a prophecy of Calchas that Troy would be taken in the 10th year. His memory and prediction (which take over the role of the prophet) restore the faith of the Greeks in the mission; but they also are an instance of controlling them. Odysseus allows them to identify with a certain story told of the Trojan war - a story of a beginning and end which he himself constructs. When the troops identify with this story, they then play their (scripted) parts as loyal soldiers in it.

⁶⁵Stanford *ad loc.*, who notes the parallel in Hymn to Hermes 542.

Burkert has confessed a certain unease at Odysseus' sacrifice of the 'good ram to whom he owes his life.'⁶⁶ He overcomes his queasiness by reminding himself that the entire purpose of the 'quest' was to find food. However, the theme of the relationship between the leader and his troops adds a further significance to the consumption of the ram. The companions are happy to give the ram, 'by far the best' of the flock, to Odysseus. It is thus a recognition of his status as 'by far the best'. But this sign of his superiority is immediately consumed; the leader disappears with the flock at the end of the trick, and Odysseus merges back into the midst of his men, the position he had located himself at the beginning of the episode by denying any special role for himself in the sacking of Troy.

There is one further aspect of the tricking of Polyphemus which is worthy of note. Polyphemus fails to notice the significance of the 'best' ram being out of place, last instead of first. If he is first fooled through the blinding by expecting someone big and strong, and only encountering a 'niggardly no-one', the situation is now reversed; he notices the single big ram which sticks out from the rest, but fails to note its significance. But the reason for this failure is of especial interest. Polyphemus is fooled because of a certain emotional vulnerability: he believes the ram to have come out last out of a sense of solidarity with his blinded master. The moment Polyphemus presumes an emotional bond between himself and his beloved ram coincides with the moment he is fooled. The initial wound signaled his dependence on others; he now discovers that dependence opens up the possibility for self-deception.

Blind Eyes

⁶⁶Burkert 33.

It is a common critical story that the companions of Odysseus deserve to die. They choose to eat the cattle of the sun, for which they are morally culpable.⁶⁷ This view coincides with the apparent judgement of the proem: αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο (*Od.* 1.7). But the ability of Odysseus to encircle, control his men makes the matter more complex. For what can it mean to speak of the moral errors of a group of men who are always identified with their leader? It is highly significant that when Eurylochus produces the only open challenge to Odysseus' leadership, he does so in words which echo the proem. He claims that the victims of the Cyclops died because of Odysseus:

τούτου γὰρ καὶ κείνοι ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο. (*Od.* 10.437)

[F]or it was by this man's recklessness that these too perished.

Eurylochus' position is quite clear. He does not hold Odysseus and the companions mutually responsible for the disasters that befall them. He presumes that the men themselves, insofar as they follow the leader's orders, are at the mercy of the leader's judgements. This might seem irrelevant for the responsibility of the crew in eating the cattle of the sun. In this specific case, Odysseus' men disobey Odysseus' command: he tells them not to eat the cattle, and they eat the cattle behind his back as he sleeps. This returns us to the surface reading of the proem; Odysseus could not save his men, sorely though he tried. But we have already seen that Odysseus' rhetoric of modesty about his failures is not above suspicion; it often points toward the subtler ruses of Odyssean power. For if it is true that the companions are wrapped up by Odysseus' ideological control of them, might not the most convincing display of that power involve having them perform tasks of his

⁶⁷ Eg. Segal 1994, chapter 10, Nagler 1990.

choosing at the time they believe they are acting autonomously? I want to suggest that the narrative signposts this possibility. I then compare the story of the cattle of the sun with other *aethloi* of Odysseus, with which it has much in common.

The narrative pointer comes at the beginning of the episode. Odysseus tells his men of the warning of Circe to avoid the island of Helios, but is countered by Eurylochus; tired by wandering, he asks for the opportunity to have supper on the island. This is Odysseus' reply:

ὡς ἔφατ' Εὐρύλοχος, ἐπὶ δ' ἦνεον ἄλλοι ἑταῖροι.
καὶ τότε δὴ γίνωσκον, ὃ δὴ κακὰ μῆδετο δαίμων,
καὶ μιν φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδων·
Εὐρύλοχ', ἢ μάλα δὴ με βιάζετε μῶνον ἐόντα.
 ἀλλ' ἄγε νῦν μοι πάντες ὁμόσσετε καρτερὸν ὄρκον·
 εἴ κέ τιν' ἠὲ βοῶν ἀγέλην ἢ πῶϋ μέγ' οἰῶν
 εὕρωμεν, μὴ πού τις ἀτασθαλίῃσι κακῆσιν
 ἢ βοῦν ἢ τί μῆλον ἀποκτάνῃ· ἀλλὰ ἔκηλοι
 ἐσθίετε βρώμην, τὴν ἀθανάτη πόρε Κίρκη. (*Od.* 12.294-302)

So spoke Eurylochus, and my other companions assented.
 I saw then what evil the divinity had in mind for us,
 and so I spoke aloud to him and addressed him in winged words:
 "Eurylochus, I am only one man. You force me to it.
 But come then all of you, swear a strong oath to me, that if
 we come upon some herd of cattle or on some great flock
 of sheep, no one of you in evil and reckless action
 will slaughter any ox or sheep. No, rather than this, eat
 at your pleasure of the food immortal Circe provided."

Odysseus gives in to the argument of Eurylochus, even as he is careful to point out that he knew that this would guarantee an evil outcome: καὶ τότε δὴ γίνωσκον. Most figures of Greek myth could utter these lines and persuade, but there is something perplexing about Odysseus uttering them. The hero of trickery, who has spent most of his time on Phaeacia exhibiting the ability of his *metis* to overcome any *bie*, now claims to be subject to the 'force' of Eurylochus. This force, which must refer to the ability of the many companions to overcome him, has its own roots in the persuasive powers of Eurylochus: it is *bie* once more dependent on a previous act of *metis*. It is not a simple act of force at all. The alleged force

exerted on Odysseus also echoes the most famous lines of the poem exemplifying his *metis*:

ἦ μάλα δὴ με βιάζετε μῶνον ἔόντα.

εἰ μὲν δὴ μή τις σε βιάζεται οἶον ἔόντα,
νοῦσόν γ' οὐ πως ἔστι Διὸς μεγάλου ἀλέασθαι.. (Od.9.410-11)

The Cyclops believed he was blinded by a someone called 'no-one'. In the encounter with the cattle of the sun, this named figure of anonymity is replaced by an anonymous *daimon* who is plotting evil behind the scenes: κακὰ μήδετο δαίμων. It is worthy of note that the verb μήδομαι is etymologically connected to *metis*. Odysseus, the master of *metis* hints at the workings of a hidden *metis*, even as he professes helplessness because he claims he is the victim of force. With this in mind, Odysseus' own reference to the *atasthalia* which will lead to the companions' destruction becomes less straightforward. It is as if he refuses to exercise his *metis* at the time it is most necessary for a caring leader, and so gives them every opportunity to show their infamous *atasthalia*. The refusal to show *metis* begins to look like another ruse of *metis*. How can this be of help in understanding the episode?

Rather than viewing the episode as one of pure impiety, explaining the loss of the crew, we can view the episode as another one of the 'tricks' performed by the ultimate trickster, which reworks many of the themes of *metis* already considered. Douglas Frame has explored the connections between the stealing of the cattle of the Sun and the theft of the flocks of the Cyclops; he argues that the adventures of the *Apologoi* share features of solar mythology, and are linked to the hero's evasion of death. The cave and flock of the Cyclops are common features of solar mythology, as the Sun also owns cattle and sheep located within a cave. The

most likely etymology of the name of the Cyclops points to his status as a sun god: 'The Cyclops, as "circle-eyed," would originally have symbolized the sun itself.'⁶⁸ Let us lay out the parallels: in both episodes, a herd of animals who are the privileged possession of divine figures and who are characterized by their powers of sight are stolen and then consumed. The consequence in both cases is a demand for a similar recompense by the aggrieved parties - the death of the crew of Odysseus.

The comparison runs deeper. In both cases, there is a deception of a supposedly omnipotent being. The contempt of the Cyclops for Odysseus is matched by the 'all-seeing' nature of the Sun:

These are the cattle and fat sheep of a dreaded god, Helios, who sees all things and listens to all things. (*Od.* 12.322-3)

What is extraordinary about the episode is that this god who 'sees and hears all' will not witness the actions of the companions of Odysseus. He finds out about it when it is too late, from a message from Lampetia (*Od.* 12.374ff).⁶⁹ The theme of knowledge arriving 'too late' is common in the *Odyssey*. Hephaestus discovered the crime of Ares and Aphrodite too late; the Sun saw the crime, but he could not prevent it. The Cyclops remembered the prophecy of Telemus after his circular eye had been punctured. Because the companions are able to consume the cattle, their action in and of itself suggests a symbolic blinding of the Sun; the trick reveals that the Sun, along with the Cyclops, has a blind spot. Far from an all-seeing being, he is a vulnerable one. But what is intriguing is that this temporary blindness of Helios

⁶⁸Frame 69.

⁶⁹The inconsistency of this weakness of the omniscient god led Aristarchus to reject lines 12.374-90. But rejecting the lines does nothing to explain the failure to prevent the killing of the cattle. Stanford (*ad loc*) defends the lines, noting that 'omniscience is anomalously treated elsewhere in Homer', and refers to the tricking of Proteus. The treatment is not so much 'anomalous' as a sustained exploration of the manner in which humans are defined in their relationship to omniscience.

coincides with a temporary blindness of Odysseus. He claims he is lulled to sleep by the gods. When he wakes up, it is 'too late':

καὶ τότε μοι βλεφάρων ἐξέσσυτο νήδυμος ὕπνος·
βῆν δ' ἰέναι ἐπὶ νῆα θοὴν καὶ θίνα θαλάσσης.
ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ σχεδὸν ἦα κιῶν νεὸς ἀμφιελίσσης,
καὶ τότε με κνίσης ἀμφήλυθεν ἠδὺς αὐτμή·
οἰμῶξας δὲ θεοῖσι μετ' ἀθανάτοισι γεγώνευν·
'Ζεῦ πάτερ ἦδ' ἄλλοι μάκαρες θεοὶ αἰὲν εἶόντες,
ἦ με μάλ' εἰς ἄτην κοιμήσατε νηλεῖ ὕπνω,
οἱ δ' ἔταροι μέγα ἔργον ἐμητίσαντο μένοντες. (*Od.*9.366-73)

At that time the quiet sleep was lost from my eyelids,
and I went back down to my fast ship and the sand of the seashore,
but on my way, as I was close to the oar-swept vessel,
the pleasant savor of cooking meat came drifting around me,
and I cried out my grief aloud to the gods immortal:
"Father Zeus, and you other everlasting and blessed
gods, with a pitiless sleep you lulled me, to my confusion,
and my companions staying here contrived a great deed.⁷⁰

This coincidence of moments of blindness between Odysseus and the Sun suggests a near identification. The cattle are eaten because neither Odysseus nor the Sun sees. The obvious suggestion is that the episode portrays the limits of Odysseus' *metis*. But can we be so sure? There are once more reasons for doubt. *Metis* returns in the action of the companions, who 'contrive a great deed'. Odysseus' ability to perform acts of *metis* is transferred for this one and only time to the companions, who both perform the deed, and pay for their status as direct agents of this act of *metis*. The companions are also allowed to venture on ahead to meet their doom, a scenario which is repeated throughout the *Apologoi*.⁷¹ But most intriguing is the parallel with the Cyclops, where the *metis* of Odysseus involved his *noos*, his ability to outwit the pseudo-omnipotence of the Cyclops. The result was the consumption of the sheep. In the encounter with Helios, the result is the same: the

⁷⁰I modify the translation of Lattimore, who translates 'μέγα ἔργον ἐμητίσαντο' as 'dared a deed that was monstrous'. There is no hint of either 'monstrosity' or 'dared' in the Greek, and Lattimore's translation was presumably influenced by his belief in the moral error of the companions.

⁷¹On this pattern, once more Nagler 1990, 344.

acute powers of perception of the divine being are unable to prevent the consumption of his livestock. The only difference is that the loss of the cattle occurs because of Odysseus' failure to see. Odysseus' ultimate *metis* perhaps lies in his ability to turn a blind eye to the events he knows his companions will perform, and, as a result, to escape the revenge of the aggrieved victim who focuses his wrath on the immediate agents of the *mega ergon*.

There are significant other details which can help us clarify the complexity of the situation. In response to the eating of the cattle, Helios threatens to shine in the realm of the Hades:

Unless these are made to give me just recompense for my cattle,
I will go down to Hades' and give my light to the dead men. (*Od.*12.382-3)

The consumption of the cattle threatens to collapse the boundary between day and night, between the realm of life and light and darkness and death. The guarantee of the death of the companions given to Helios preserves this limit. This preservation of a limit recalls the actions of Odysseus in the Doloneia. The successful capture of the blazing horses of Rhesus is an act of *metis* which promises (but only promises) to be the ultimate act of trickery satisfying every desire. But as soon as the horses are captured, they already point towards something better beyond them. The perfection of Odysseus' *metis* functioned to highlight the constitutive aspect of human desire. Any attempt to achieve the impossible goal of capturing the Sun fails, for as soon as the impossible goal is achieved, it is no longer impossible. It points towards a further impossible goal beyond the one achieved. If the Doloneia suggested a necessary unfulfillability in every human attempt at achieving one's desire, the events of *Odyssey* 12 suggests that this human failing is built into the divine world. To capture the chariot of the Sun is to be identified with an 'all-seeing' being. But the loss of his cattle, together with his agreement not to shine in Hades, suggests that this 'all-seeing' god does not see everything. Hades is left untouched by light, a region beyond Helios' ken

which continues to function as a blind spot. Even the Sun can be fooled, because of the darkness which lies outside of his realm. The power of the Sun to see everything has a limit.

The agreement between Zeus and Helios is symbolically significant. In exchange for the death of mortals, Helios agrees to his own fallibility. Indeed, he has no choice in this matter. For if he were to shine in Hades, the limit separating the realm of the mortals and immortals would be smashed, and thus the crew of Odysseus could not be punished with death. In order to satisfy his desire, he must recognize a limit to his powers. It is the recognition of this blind spot (associated with the darkness of Hades, and thus death) which provides the conditions of possibility for *metis* to function. It introduces an irreducible element of doubt into human affairs. The lesson of the eating of the cattle of Sun is that no-one sees everything, not even all-seeing gods. The functioning of *metis* is parasitic on this blind spot. But there is a further implication. *Metis* can not be reduced to powers of perception. It is instead related to an ability to manipulate powers of perception (to turn, or not to turn a blind eye). It is dependent on the uncertainty as to which is which. An act of apparent stupidity can be *metis* at its most cunning, just as the most self-evidently rational action can be the action of a fool.

The similarity between the tricking of the Cyclops and the tricking of Helios stages this uncertainty. If the tricking of the Cyclops is a straightforward case of powers of perception defeating a counterpart, the Helios episode hints that apparent blindness can itself be feigned. Any simple attempt to distinguish the acts of a 'good', all-seeing Odysseus who cares for his men, and the blunder of a leader who provides them with the rope to hang themselves are complicated by the same outcome that both events guarantee: the death of the companions. We can ask which is more harmful to his men: his perception, or the failure of that perception? But if this must remain a question without answer (it is left open to doubt), it is worth

pondering a final connection between the two episodes. After the companions consume the cattle, Odysseus tells of the consequences:

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥ' ἐπὶ νῆα κατήλυθον ἠδὲ θάλασσαν,
 νεῖκεον ἄλλοθεν ἄλλον ἐπισταδόν, οὐδέ τι μῆχος
 εὐρέμεναι δυνάμεσθα· βόες δ' ἀποτέθνασαν ἤδη. (*Od.*12.391-4)

But when I came back again to the ship and the seashore,
 they all stood about and blamed each other, but we were not able
 to find any remedy, for the oxen were already dead.

The impossibility of finding a ‘cure’, a ‘μῆχος’ for the deed which has been completed recalls the words of Odysseus to the Cyclops after his blinding. In that episode, the Cyclopean appeal to his father was a recognition of his dependency on others. The prayer looked to a separate figure of authority to cure the loss of the eye which had made the Cyclops a social being. Odysseus’ reply had reminded the Cyclops that no appeal to a father could help him. In *Odyssey* 12, the impossibility of finding a cure signals the imminent deaths of the companions. It seems to suggest the failure of Odysseus as a father figure for his men. It is as if the men themselves remained oblivious to the lesson about fathers Odysseus himself had acted out in the blinding of the Cyclops. There are connections to other episodes. There is a quarrel, a νεῖκος, among the crew. *Odyssey* 8 staged the first ‘νεῖκος’ on Phaeacia, which in turn heralded the entrance of that civilization to the social as a contested space. The first ‘quarrel’ among the companions of Odysseus divides them into a group of individuals with competing beliefs. No longer followers of orders, they now stage a *neikos* in order to come to terms with their situation. Previously, they had always acted as a collective, obeying the orders of Odysseus. There is one exception. They ate the cattle of the Sun of their own volition. But regardless of the role of Odysseus’ *metis* in this event, it is notable that they still acted as a collective persuaded by a leader. This quarrel in response to the consumption of the cattle is the first time the companions of Odysseus have

involved themselves in the struggles of the social world; at this point of contestation, they can no longer be defined by their allegiance to Odysseus. But the irony is that this occurs too late. This provides a special significance to Odysseus' words confirming the death of the cattle: βόες δ' ἀποτέθνασαν ἤδη. The obvious referent is the cattle of Helios. But the companions are also in an important sense 'already dead'. They are already dead because, until it was too late, they had always acted like livestock, cattle (or sheep) following their master.

Though it is possible to trace the tension between Odysseus and his men throughout the *Apologoi*, let me finish by considering the moment of greatest crisis, when the companions are closest to rebellion. Here too the motifs of 'heads' and 'livestock' coincide. When Odysseus finds out from Eurylochus about the disappearance of the group of men who entered the house of Circe, he decides to try to rescue them. Once he has succeeded, he is ordered by Circe to return to the other companions, and bring them to her home. At this point, he encounters the resistance of Eurylochus. Eurylochus tries to persuade the companions not to return with Odysseus to the house of Circe, warning them that they will be turned into wolves or lions (*Od.*10.431ff). There is a well-known inconsistency in the narrative here. Earlier, Odysseus had informed us that Eurylochus had no idea what had happened to the men. He followed the companions into the house of Circe, but because he suspected treachery he decided not to enter. He waited patiently outside for them, but they never re-appeared (*Od.*10.251ff). How can Eurylochus know that there is a danger of metamorphosis into animals if he has no idea of the fate of his companions, nor of the powers of Circe?

Heubeck has suggested that the inconsistency can be explained away by Eurylochus' intuition of what happened to other victims of Circe.⁷² When they had

⁷²Heubeck *ad Od.*10.431.

earlier approached the house of Circe, a crowd of animals had approached them.

Yet once again I suggest the apparent narrative inconsistency should make us look for wider significance in the episode. Here is the description of Circe's victims:

In the forest glen they came on the house of Circe. It was
in an open place, and put together from stones, well polished,
and all about it there were lions, and wolves of the mountains,
whom the goddess had given evil drugs and enchanted,
and these made no attack on the men, but came up thronging
about them, waving their long tails and fawning, in the way
that dogs go fawning about their master, when he comes home
from dining out, for he always brings back something to please them..
(*Od.*10.210-17)

The wild animals are compared to dogs fawning. Any individual strength is gone, and is replaced by pathetic attempts to please a master. A similar simile occurs later in book 10, as the remainder of the companions greet Odysseus as he returns from Circe's house:

And as, in the country, the calves around the cows returning
from pasture back to the dung of the farmyard, well filled with grazing,
come gamboling together to meet them, and the pens no longer
can hold them in, but lowing incessantly they come running
around their mothers, so these men, once their eyes saw me,
came streaming around me, in tears, and the spirit in them made them
feel as if they were back in their own country, the very
city of rugged Ithaca, where they were born and raised up. (*Od.*10.410-17)

Odysseus' relationship to his companions is likened to the dependence of calves on their mother. But the simile does not stop there; if Odysseus is likened to the mother of the companions, he is also identified with their father-land. The identity of the companions as members of a father-land, Ithaca, is parallel to their obedience and dependence on Odysseus as a father figure, the leader of the community on Ithaca.⁷³ This is the point of the poem when the companions are revealed as being utterly at the whim of Odysseus as their master and it is this

⁷³Compare the famous words of Andromache to Hector in *Iliad* 6.429-30, which illustrate her pathetic dependence on him:

'Hektor, thus you are father to me, and my honoured mother,
you are my brother, and you it is who are my young husband.'

situation which recalls the earlier appearance of Circe's victims, fawning dogs who are controlled by the scraps from the table of the master (*Od.*10.242ff). As it happens, feasting plays a prominent role in Odysseus' interactions with Circe. He had refused to dine with Circe until the companions who were victim of Circe had been changed back into their human form:

Oh, Circe, how could any man right in his mind ever endure to taste of the food and drink that are set before him, until with his eyes he saw his companions set free? So then, if you are sincerely telling me to eat and drink, set them free, so my eyes can again behold my eager companions. (*Od.*10.383-7)

One set of the companions are freed in order to be able to take part in the feast. Once freed, Circe encourages Odysseus to gather the rest of the companions, who are (excessively) over-joyed to see him, compared to dependent farmyard animals. This is the context for the challenge of Eurylochus:

Εὐρύλοχος δέ μοι οἶος ἐρύκακε πάντας ἐταίρους
καί σφεας φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα·
ἄ δειλοί, πόσ' ἴμεν; τί κακῶν ἰμείρετε τούτων;
Κίρκης ἐς μέγαρον καταβήμεναι, ἢ κεν ἅπαντας
ἢ σῦς ἢ λέγκους ποιήσεται ἢ λέοντας,
οἳ κέν οἱ μέγα δῶμα φυλάσσοιμεν καὶ ἀνάγκη,
ὡς περ Κύκλωψ ἔρξ', ὅτε οἱ μέσσαυλον ἴκοντο
ἡμέτεροι ἔταροι, σὺν δ' ὁ θρασὺς εἶπετ' Ὀδυσσεύς·
τούτου γὰρ καὶ κείνοι ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο. (*Od.*10.429-437)

Only Eurylochus was trying to hold back all my other companions, and he spoke to them and addressed them in winged words: 'Ah, poor wretches. Where are we going? Why do you long for the evils of going down into Circe's palace, for she will transform the lot of us into pigs or wolves or lions, and so we shall guard her great house for her, under compulsion. So too it happened with the Cyclops, when our companions went into his yard, and the bold Odysseus was of their company' for it was by this man's recklessness that these too perished.'

Eurylochus addresses the companions, not Odysseus. He argues that a descent into the house of Circe will turn them into the fawning animals witnessed earlier. His rhetoric is extremely interesting. He compares the act of the collective

descending into this house with the earlier entrance into the cave of the Cyclops. Prevalent in both examples is a rhetoric of encirclement. The companions entered the 'μέσσαυλος' of the Cyclops, the place which is normally associated with the pen in which cattle are enclosed at night for their greater safety.⁷⁴ Yet this 'enclosing' leads not to safety, but to death. This encirclement is directly performed by the 'circle-eyed' Cyclops, who pens them in.⁷⁵ But the following line makes it clear that Odysseus is not a part of this encircled crowd of men, and that he too is responsible for the deaths. He enters together with them, but Eurylochus' emphasis on this suggests a separation from the men (σὺν δ' ὁ θρασὺς εἶπετ' Ὀδυσσεύς), and that he is responsible for the entrance. The underlying argument of Eurylochus is, I think, that in entering the cattle-enclosure of the Cyclops, the men themselves are acting as cattle, beholden to a master. The same motif of encirclement occurs in the Circe episode. Frame has already suggested that Circe's name may be etymologically linked to *krikos*, the Greek word for 'ring'.⁷⁶ At any rate, the pattern described by Eurylochus is the same. An entire group of men descend into a house as a collective under the leadership of Odysseus, where they will be encircled by a quasi-divine being whose name signifies the encirclement. Consequently, can we not see an irony in the metamorphosis described by Eurylochus? The companions will be turned into the fawning animals earlier seen, victims of Circe's magic. But in the act of entering this house as a group, under the leadership of Odysseus, they are already acting as livestock. The irony of the metamorphosis is that in its depiction of the fantastic, it displays the underlying truth of the relationship between Odysseus and his men.

⁷⁴Cf. *Il.* 11.548, for μέσσαυλος in this sense, and the definition of *LSJ*.

⁷⁵As Stanford *ad loc* argues, with the agreement of Heubeck, ἔρξ' is best taken from ἔργω, meaning 'confine'.

⁷⁶Frame 50ff.

Eurylochus' verbal attack on Odysseus' leadership is an attempt to break the circle of his authority. He first refuses to follow the first group of companions into the house of Circe and then refuses to accompany Odysseus back to eat the (scraps of the) feast. It is accordingly an identification with the position of Odysseus as leader, the forger of the circle who himself remains outside the circle. It may be more; in his failure to fall in with the his joyful Cephallenian companions who greet Odysseus 'as if they had returned to their fatherland', Eurylochus questions his identity as a Cephallenian. The challenge to Odysseus' authority produces the following reaction:

So he spoke, and I considered in my mind whether
to draw out the long-edged sword from beside my big thigh,
and cut off his head and throw it on the ground, even though
he was nearly related to me by marriage. (*Od.* 10.438-41)

Odysseus' provides us with apparent biographical information about Eurylochus; he is a very close relation. This affirmation of closeness is a pointer toward the symbolic closeness of Eurylochus to Odysseus. He rebels against Odyssean authority, and challenges it. He also has much in common with another protagonist of Odysseus, Dolon. His name signifies a strength in the activity for which the trickster Odysseus is famous, just as Dolon's name signifies trickery. He also came to the brink of losing his head for this challenge, as Dolon lost his head. Odysseus' threat against Eurylochus clarifies what is at stake in the encounter; his right to 'wrap up', encircle his troops as master-signifier. Eurylochus utters words suggesting that he is not a man who will silently follow his leader. But if Eurylochus shows disobedience, Odysseus does not need to use force to put down the minor uprising; the threat of force itself is sufficient. In the end his symbolic authority (witnessed by the manner in which the rest of the companions fall in behind his leadership, with Eurylochus himself eventually following) is sufficient to keep the companions together. The exercise of power remains at the level of the

Name-of-the-Father. Yet the threat itself is revealing: lurking behind this threat of force is a father just as deadly for the companions as the Cyclops or Scylla.

The Suitorial Superego

The obliviousness of the suitors to the social conventions structuring the life of the *oikos* has received a great deal of critical attention.⁷⁷ Though much of this criticism has overlooked the perturbing, transgressive manner in which the suitors are killed and implicitly justified their murders, the seamy aspects of their death have been well brought out by Nagler. There is much truth in both: the suitors do violate social conventions, and yet there is something unsavory about their deaths at the hands of Odysseus. I want to suggest (with Nagler) that there is a close connection between the form of the suitors transgressions and the form the revenge of Odysseus eventually takes. A comparison with the authority Odysseus exercises over the companions can be of help here.

The suitors have no concern for the public law, the symbolic authority of the father. If the workings of paternal law (the Name-of-the-Father) depends on its absence, its status as an unused threat, the situation on Ithaca provides one scenario of what can happen when this symbolic authority ceases to function. Odysseus accuses the suitors of lacking *aidos*, the sense of shame which structures a community (*Od.*20.171). *Aidos* functions as the recognition of the impossibility of pure enjoyment, of having it all; one's place in the social is determined by a sacrifice, and *aidos* - the 'shame' felt before others - reminds each social individual of that sacrifice which is constitutive of the social. It functions as an injunction of

⁷⁷Said 1977, Recce 1993, chapter 8.

restraint.⁷⁸ When Odysseus accuses them of a lack of *aidos*, he accuses them of losing such a sense of restraint. On Ithaca, Odysseus' departure coincides with the loss of a symbolic father who can structure the renunciation of enjoyment. Further significant commentary on the situation of the suitors comes from Penelope, as she talks to the disguised Odysseus:

οὐτ' Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔτι οἶκον ἐλεύσεται, οὔτε σὺ πομπῆς
τεύξῃ, ἐπεὶ οὐ τοῖσι σημάτωνρές εἰς' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ,
οἷος Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔσκε μετ' ἀνδράσιν, εἴ ποτ' ἔην γε,
ξείνους αἰδοίους ἀποπεμπέμεν ἠδὲ δέχεσθαι. (*Od.* 19.313-6)

Odysseus will never come home again, nor will you be given conveyance, for there are none to give orders left in the household such as Odysseus was among men - if he ever existed - for receiving respected strangers and sending them off on their journeys.

There are no leaders, σημάτωνρες, 'givers of signs' left in the house who might be able to regulate patterns of exchange. What is missing from Ithaca is not Odysseus in and of himself, but instead the symbolic role Odysseus had formerly played. Ithaca misses not his person, but his *word*.⁷⁹ Ithaca lacks the *semata* (uttered by Odysseus) around which the community was formerly structured.⁸⁰ The failure of Odysseus' symbolic authority over the suitors sharply differentiates them from the companions; with them, the Name-of-the-Father ran the show. This helps us understand other key differences. Whereas the companions acted as if they were livestock - meekly following a master - the suitors consume the livestock of the

⁷⁸I have much more to say on *aidos* in the following chapter, when I consider the complications of the *aidos* of Nausicaa.

⁷⁹And this word is ultimately 'no', the 'non' de-la-père.

⁸⁰Though it is worth noting the difficulties of Penelope's words. How are we to understand 'εἴ ποτ' ἔην γε'? Penelope looks back to a time of perfect authority, but it is unsure if such an Odysseus (as symbolic father) ever existed. It is tempting to suggest that Penelope is quite right: Odysseus as Name-of-the-Father had no ontological existence, because the power of any real father depends on his ability to play the role of the idealized, symbolic father, (which is why the Name-of-the-Father is a *metaphor*, a constant displacement of any real father). Insofar as Odysseus functioned as Name-of-the-Father, he didn't exist.

But again, there may be a darker side to Penelope's words. She refers to the ability of Odysseus to receive and pass strangers on to their destination, returning us to the Phacacians, but also looking forward to the destination to where the suitors will be despatched. In this regard, it is interesting to recall that one of the epithets of Hades is *poly-semantic*.

absent master. The companions' obedience to Odysseus involved a constant deferral of enjoyment. Enjoyment is what they expected to receive at the end of their journey, an end which is forever postponed. The death, one by one, of the companions corresponds to what can be understood as a series of sacrifices in the name of an ever-receding enjoyment: 'Obey me one more time, and through your sacrifices I will finally bring you what you desire'. The suitors' behavior is the exact opposite of this. They simply *enjoy*; with no concern for an economy of renunciation. But this is not a complete rejection of the law in and of itself, for they remain attached to what his symbolic authority demanded that they renounce. Odysseus is gone, and the workings of the public law are put on hold; as a consequence, the suitors are stuck in a seemingly indefinite period of consumption. They indulge themselves in the fantasy of consumption which is the ultimate support of the public law regulating the *oikos*.

Thus though Odysseus is gone, the suitors are not free from the law, but rather obey (as a collective) its superegoic dimension. This makes ethical evaluation of the behavior of the suitors more complex than critics have generally noted. The suitors have been condemned as immoral because of their perversion of the economy of the feast, and disregard for the public laws which govern a community. This goes in hand with a black and white moralizing narrative: the 'bad' suitors are killed because of their evil by the 'good' Odysseus who restores order. But what is interesting is that the suitors are not condemned by Odysseus within the terms of the public law; they are condemned for ignoring it. Here is his summary on the suitors' behavior after their death:

τούσδε δὲ μοῖρ' ἐδάμασσε θεῶν καὶ σχέτλια ἔργα·
οὐ τίνα γὰρ τίεσκον ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων,
οὐ κακὸν οὐδὲ μὲν ἐσθλόν, ὅτις σφραγείσθαι
τῷ καὶ ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐπέσπον. (*Od.*22.415-9)

These were destroyed by the doom of the gods and their own hard actions,
for these men paid no attention at all to any man on earth

who came their way, no matter if he were base or noble.
So by their own recklessness they have found a shameful death.

The suitors are not classifiable within the terms of the public law. If their actions are in some sense evil, *kakos*, this is not the crucial question. The suitors suspend the workings of the public law as such. If the public law (under Odysseus, before he left) categorized behavior into noble and base, the suitors render such a distinction meaningless: they do not care if anyone is noble or base, *esthlos* or *kakos*. The situation is similar to the one on the island of the Cyclops; to dismiss the Cyclops as evil within the system of ethics imparted to his adversary misses the crucial point. It implies a set of rules by which both protagonists play when one of the pair rejects those rules outright. We can also draw a parallel to Odysseus' remark to Diomedes in the Doloneia that he should neither 'be praised or blamed' (*Il.* 10.259-60). In the *Iliad*, praise or blame was irrelevant to the actions of the trickster because his actions revealed the 'spirit' of the law, the fantasy of winning at all costs which is hidden in the daytime *ethos* of the heroic code. The 'heroic code' is a series of open, everyday laws which regulate renunciation; but such regulations are suspended in the enjoyment of the unregulated killing which takes place in the Doloneia.⁸¹ So too the suitors merely do what the 'spirit' of the law demands. The public law proclaims the need for renunciation, but it does so in the name of a deferred enjoyment: 'preserve the livestock and property of the *oikos* in order to guarantee a fair share for all!' The suitors, in the absence of a father to regulate renunciation, consume. Accordingly, they render inoperative the symbolic values (*esthlos* or *kakos*) which are ultimately nothing other than terms used to regulate this renunciation.

⁸¹Note the significance of Diomedes' words (which themselves preview the later *aristeia* of Achilles) to Dolon at 10.448.

We can now turn to the manner of the suitors' death. The companions were victims of Odysseus as symbolic father: they were 'encircled' by their attachment to the symbolic values he represented, and died passively. Odysseus never had to use force against them, but instead remained a figure of reason, of persuasion. Obedience to the public law brings death at its hands. The suitors identify with the superegoic imperative to enjoy, and consequently arouse the superegoic dimensions of Odysseus' authority. Rather than a kindly, pacifying father, his murder of the suitors bears witness to the obscene, terrifying father that always acted as a support to the public image. The suitors are killed *en masse* at a feast in the hall; they die as they consume. They are also encircled by the actions of Odysseus, just as the companions were encircled. Odysseus enters the hall first and ensures that the doors behind him will be closed, thus wrapping them up.⁸² The significance of the encirclement in the hall is flagged in the text by the warning given to the suitors by Theoclymenus:

ᾶ δειλοί, τί κακὸν τόδε πάσχετε; νυκτὶ μὲν ὑμέων
εἰλύαται κεφαλαί τε πρόσωπά τε νέρθε τε γούνα,
οἰμωγῇ δὲ δέδηε, δεδάκρυνται δὲ παρειαί,
αἵματι δ' ἔρράδαται τοῖχοι καλαί τε μεσόδμοι·
εἰδώλων δὲ πλέον πρόθυρον, πλείη δὲ καὶ αὐλή,
ἰεμένων Ἐρεβόσδε ὑπὸ ζόφον· ἥελιος δὲ
οὐρανοῦ ἔξασπόλωλε, κακὴ δ' ἐπιδέδρομεν ἀχλύς. (*Od.*20.351-7)

Poor wretches, what evil has come on you? Your head and faces
and the knees underneath you are shrouded in night and darkness;
a sound of wailing has blazed out, your cheeks are covered
with tears, and the walls bleed, and the fine supporting pillars.
All the forecourt is huddled with ghosts, the yard is full of them
as they flock down to the underworld and the darkness. The sun
has perished out of the sky, and a foul mist has come over.

⁸²See *Od.*21.231ff, for Odysseus' plans to trap them within the hall. Note also that as they are wrapped up, they too are likened to livestock. See *Od.*22. 229ff, where the suitors hunted down by Odysseus charge around like stampeding cattle.

Theoclymenus' words are particularly vivid, and demand close attention. They prophesy the deaths of the suitors, and preview the second Nekyia. But they also recall the death of the companions. The 'hall' (αὐλή) is full of the *eidola* of the suitors, who exist in a strange world between day and night, the time of a solar eclipse. Many of the companions died in the *messaulos* of the Cyclops, while the last of them died because of the eating of the cattle of the Sun (an episode, as we have seen, closely associated with the tricking of the Cyclops) at a time when the Sun did not see them. Let me emphasize two points. First, in both series of deaths, the victims are encircled because of their common point of identification: the companions identify with Odysseus as symbolic father, the suitors with the enjoyment this father prohibited. This identification leads to their collective deaths. But what is of particular interest in Theoclymenus' description of the suitors is that his description of their coming death is a picture which itself is saturated with uncanny forms of *life*. Not only are 'animate' beings depicted with the shadow of death hanging over them, but inanimate objects come to life. In the absence of the Sun, the walls and pillars begin to bleed, as if they have miraculously come to life. The metaphor used of their wailing reinforces this: their wailing *blazes*, as if the darkness and death of the scene is lit up by the blazing life of the men who are pictured in it.⁸³ It is no coincidence that the closest parallel to this vocabulary mixing life and death occurs in book 12, as the cattle eaten by the companions miraculously refuse to die:

The next thing was that the gods began to show forth portents before us.
The skins crawled, and the meat that was stuck on the spits bellowed,
both roast and raw, and the noise was like the lowing of cattle. (*Od.* 12.395-6)

⁸³On the unusual 'synaesthetic' metaphor, see Stanford *ad loc.* The 'blazing' of the wailing occurs in the absence of the fire of the sun: cf Odysseus' alleged ability to return from 'blazing fire' in the Doloncia. I have changed Lattimore's translation of οἰμωγή δὲ δέδηγε (Lattimore renders it 'a sound of wailing has broken out) to reflect the metaphor.

The picture is horrific and vivid. The supernatural portents are generally explained in terms of the threat they pose to the moral order of the mortal world. Though this is far from an error, I think a more complete explanation can be given by analyzing these events through their relation to the two forms of paternal authority so far considered. Both the crying of the cattle who refuse to die, and the life-in-death of both the suitors and the banquet hall evoke a challenge to the death of symbolic authority:

[T]he father *qua* Name of the Father, reduced to a figure of symbolic authority, is "dead" (also) in the sense that *he does not know anything about enjoyment*, about life substance: the symbolic order (the big Other) and enjoyment are radically incompatible. Which is why the famous Freudian dream of a son who appears to his father and reproaches him with "Father, can't you see I'm burning?" could simply be translated into "*Father, can't you see I'm enjoying?*" - can't you see I'm alive, burning with enjoyment? Father cannot see it since he is dead, whereby the possibility is open to me to enjoy not only *outside* his knowledge, i.e., unbeknownst to him, but also *in his very ignorance*.⁸⁴

The consumption of the cattle of the Sun goes on outside the knowledge of two fathers, both Odysseus and the Sun itself. In particular, the vulnerability of the Sun (the all-seeing 'big Other' of the *Odyssey*, privileged representative of the symbolic order) testifies to the weakness of the symbolic order. I suggested earlier that this gap in the Sun's authority was necessary for *metis* to function. We can now suggest a second reading. Behind the backs of Odysseus and the Sun, the narrative stages an uncanny episode of enjoyment. If it is customary to evoke the sense of death which the consumption of the cattle evokes, what also needs to be emphasized is that this is the one episode of the *Apologoi* where the companions are really alive. They are not constrained by the dead authority of the symbolic law.

⁸⁴Zizek, 1992.

This can also help understand the suitors. Theoclymenus merely articulates a truth which has always characterized them. Though 'death' enshrouds them, they nevertheless are 'alive' in this death; they are not mortified in the realm of the symbolic.

The consumption of livestock is the point where companions and suitors merge in their enjoyment; it is no coincidence that the companions appear to give the slip to symbolic authority by way of an act which recalls the most significant aspect of suitorial behavior. Yet I have suggested the death of the companions is more complex; for the difficulty lies in ascertaining the relationship between Odysseus and the companions at the moment of their death. Does he turn a blind eye? It remains unclear (indeed, undecidable) if the moment of enjoyment is not the most subtle form of symbolic control. A similar complexity lingers over the final actions of the suitors. For the suitors seemed to be characterized throughout by a complete disregard for symbolic authority. They ignore rhetorical appeals to the figure of the absent father, Odysseus. More importantly, at the time when Telemachus is approaching the moment of manhood and thus threatens to replace Odysseus as head of the *oikos*, they plot to murder him because of the threat he poses to their enjoyment. But things are not so simple. For though the murder of Telemachus seems to suggest the ultimate failure of symbolic authority, the suitors show ongoing hesitations, both in their attempt to murder him and in their attitude to his growing symbolic authority. Indeed, they eventually call off their attempted ambush of him:

ὡς οἱ μὲν τοιαῦτα πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀγόρευον·
 μνηστῆρες δ' ἄρα Τηλεμάχῳ θάνατόν τε μόρον τε
 ἤρτυον· αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν ἀριστερὸς ἦλυθεν ὄρνις,
 αἰετὸς ὑψιπέτης, ἔχε δὲ τρήρωνα πέλειαν.
 τοῖσιν δ' Ἀμφίνομος ἀγορήσατο καὶ μετέειπεν·
 "ὦ φίλοι, οὐχ ἡμῖν συνθεύσεται ἦδε γε βουλή,
 Τηλεμάχοιο φόνος· ἀλλὰ μνησώμεθα δαιτός. (Od.20.240-6)

Now, as these men were conversing thus with each other,

the suitors were compacting their plan of death and destruction for Telemachos, and a bird flew over them on the left side. This was a high-flown eagle, and carried a tremulous pigeon. Now it was Amphinomos who spoke forth and addressed them: 'O friends, this plan of ours to murder Telemachos will not ever be brought to completion; so let us think of our feasting.

The fact the prophecy is interpreted as having a meaning in and of itself shows a failure of nerve on the pattern of the suitors. The heed Amphinomos pays to this bird-sign is in marked contrast with the famous sceptical rejection of bird signs espoused by Eurymachus in the second book in response to Halitherses' prophecy of the return of Odysseus:

ὦ γέρον, εἰ δ' ἄγε δὴ μαντεύεο σοῖσι τέκεσσιν
οἴκαδ' ἰών, μὴ πού τι κακὸν πάσχωσιν ὀπίσσω·
ταῦτα δ' ἐγὼ σέο πολλὸν ἀμείνων μαντεύεσθαι.
ὄρνιθες δέ τε πολλοὶ ὑπ' αὐγὰς ἡλίουιο
φοιτῶσ', οὐδέ τε πάντες ἐναίσιμοι· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
ᾤλετο τῆλ', ὡς καὶ σὺ καταφθίσθαι σὺν ἐκείνῳ
ᾤφελες· οὐκ ἂν τόσσα θεοπροπέων ἀγόρευες,
οὐδέ κε Τηλέμαχον κεχολωμένον ᾧδ' ἀνιείης,
σῶ οἴκῳ δῶρον ποτιδέγμενος, αἶ κε πόρησιν. (*Od.*2.178-86)

Old sir, better go home and prophesy to your children,
for fear they may suffer some evil to come. In these things
I can give a much better interpretation than you can.
Many are the birds who under the sun's rays wander
the sky; not all of them mean anything; Odysseus
is dead, far away, and how I wish that you had died with him
also. Then you would not be announcing all these predictions,
nor would you so stir up Telemachos, who is now angry,
looking for the gift for your own household, which he might give you.

Penelope later complained of the lack of 'σημάντορες' in the household. The failure of signs from a father-figure corresponds to the failure of the cosmic realm of the sky and gods to provide clear signs (the failure of the Lacanian 'big Other'). Halitherses' prophecy is an attempt to restore the big Other, to validate the rule of the father over the suitors. It is this which is rejected: Halitherses' paternalism is to be exercised over his own children alone, and he is not to treat others as children. But it should also be noted that with the realm of the big Other

suspended, every action of agents around the suitors performed in the name of the public is transformed into a vulgar pursuit of personal gain. Halitherses' real agenda is to procure gain for himself, through the eventual success which will come of stirring up Telemachus; in short, the suitors merely do openly what Halitherses (and others, when the public law functions) do behind the veneer of symbolic authority. The later acceptance of the bird-sign in book 20 announces a return in the faith of the functioning of the big Other. Amphinomos interprets the bird-sign, and the interpretation itself is of secondary importance to the fact that Amphinomos believes that there is a need for interpretation. The sign is, in a sense, interpreted before the actual interpretation occurs. The specific interpretation of the interplay between the pigeon and eagle merely plays out what one would have already expected from the implicit restoration of the big Other as guarantee to meaning. Amphinomos suggests that the attempt to kill Telemachus, the emerging replacement to Odysseus, must be given up. The appearance of a meaningful *sema* coincides with the suitors' abandonment of their plan to kill the figure who is about to become a new *semantor* - this is the veiled purpose of Halitherses' prophesy of encouragement, as Eurymachus realizes. Herein lies the failure of nerve of the suitors. At a crucial point, the suitors equivocate about the power of the public law. Their enjoyment is tempered by a gnawing doubt - a doubt that can be traced from the wonder they experienced at the first 'fatherly' speech of Telemachus in the assembly of Book 2 to their consent to Telemachus' command to allow the disguised Odysseus to take part in the contest of the bow. If the companions die at the moment when a question hangs over their obedience to the symbolic authority of Odysseus, the death of the suitors occurs when their apparent rejection of this authority in their ongoing enjoyment is punctured by ongoing doubts. It is as if in the topsy-turvy world of the suitors the everyday relationship between public law

and its superego dark side is reversed: their enjoyment is sustained by an unconscious, unspoken belief in the symbolic power of the father.

We can now provide some brief remarks about Odysseus' slaughter of the suitors. Nagler is surely correct in suggesting that Odysseus' transference of the bow out of the contest and against the suitors is highly significant:

Clearly the boundary Odysseus is about to cross with his next bowshot will not only precipitate outright fighting but the killing of one's own retainers, the most illegitimate kind of violence, brought right into the *oikos* from the outer world, where it is problematic enough. This moment is a kind of Rubicon, by crossing which the hero simultaneously declares his identity and brings "Iliadic" combat back into the epic, and his household.⁸⁵

The reference to the 'Iliadic' aspect of the killing is quite conventional, and returns us to the contrast suggested by Pucci between the *Iliad* as poem of 'total expenditure' of war and the *Odyssey* as poem of economy of life.⁸⁶ We need to be more precise. The killing of the suitors does not evoke the everyday battle scenes of the *Iliad*, the 'controlled economy' of death; it recalls the superegoic aspects of them, the 'total expenditure' of death. In particular, in a few hundred lines it retells the story of the *menis* of Achilles. Let us look in detail at the offer of recompense by Eurymachus (*Od.*22.45-67) and the supplications of Leodes and Phemius (*Od.*22.310-25, 343ff). As Odysseus embarks on the slaughter, Eurymachus tries to prevent him by first suggesting that Antinous was the major figure responsible for the looting, and then offering to compensate Odysseus in full for all the suitors' expenditures:

σὺ δὲ φείδες λαῶν
σῶν· ἀτὰρ ἄμμες ὄπισθεν ἀρεσσάμενοι κατὰ δῆμον,
ὅσσα τοι ἐκπέπεται καὶ ἐδήδοται ἐν μεγάροισι,
τιμὴν ἀμφὶς ἄγοντες εἰκοσάβοιον ἕκαστος,

⁸⁵Nagler 1990, 351.

⁸⁶On the killing of the suitors as 'Iliadic', see also Segal 1994, 224ff.

χαλκόν τε χρυσόν τ' ἀποδώσομεν, εἰς ὃ κε σὸν κῆρ
 ἰανθῆ· πρὶν δ' οὐ τι νεμεσσητὸν κεχολῶσθαι."
 τὸν δ' ἄρ' ὑπόδρα ἰδὼν προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς·
 "Εὐρύμαχ', οὐδ' εἴ μοι πατρώϊα πάντ' ἀποδοίτε,
 ὅσσα τε νῦν ὑμῖν ἐστὶ καὶ εἴ ποθεν ἄλλ' ἐπιθείτε,
 οὐδέ κεν ὥς ἔτι χεῖρας ἐμὰς λήξαιμι φόνιοιο,
 πρὶν πᾶσαν μνηστῆρας ὑπερβασίην ἀποτεῖσαι.
 νῦν ὑμῖν παράκειται ἐναντίον ἢ ἐμάχεσθαι
 ἢ φεύγειν, ὅς κεν θάνατον καὶ κῆρας ἀλύξῃ·
 ἀλλὰ τιν' οὐ φεύξεσθαι οἶομαι αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον. (*Od.* 22.54-67)

Then spare your own
 people, and afterward we will make public reparation
 for all that has been eaten and drunk in your halls, setting
 each upon himself an assessment of twenty oxen.
 We will pay it back in bronze and gold to you, until your heart
 is softened. Till then, we cannot blame you for being angry.
 Then looking darkly at him resourceful Odysseus answered:
 'Eurymachus, if you gave me all your father's possessions,
 all that you have now, and what you could add from elsewhere,
 even so, I would not stay my hands from the slaughter,
 until I had taken revenge for all the suitors' transgression.
 Now the choice has been set before you, either to fight me
 or run, if any of you can escape from sheer destruction.'

The offer of fair and fitting recompense of recalls the offers of Agamemnon to Achilles in *Iliad* 9. Eurymachus offers gold and bronze, as Agamemnon famously did, which was in turn spurned by Achilles.⁸⁷ Odysseus' rejection of the fair bargain of Eurymachus in the name of something more which is unquantifiable returns us to the vexed problem of 'what Achilles wants'. The wording of each rejection is strikingly similar:

οὐδέ κεν ὥς ἔτι θυμὸν ἐμὸν πείσει' Ἀγαμέμνων
πρὶν γ' ἀπὸ πᾶσαν ἐμοὶ δόμεναι θυμαλγέα λώβην. (*Il.*9.386-7)

Not even so would Agamemnon have his way with my spirit
 until he had made good to me all this heartrending insolence.

οὐδέ κεν ὥς ἔτι χεῖρας ἐμὰς λήξαιμι φόνιοιο,
πρὶν πᾶσαν μνηστῆρας ὑπερβασίην ἀποτεῖσαι.⁸⁸

⁸⁷See above on the bronze/gold motif as raised by the Doloncia.

⁸⁸Nowhere else in either epic does a line begin οὐδέ κεν ὥς ἔτι.

For all the talk of the restoration of 'economy' to the *oikos* at Ithaca, Odysseus here acts out the Achillean insight of the insufficiency of material goods in the intersubjective realm of pure prestige. His action also demonstrates how a return to the regime of the public law - the essence of Eurymachus' proposal - is somehow not enough, just as Achilles' *menis* had wounded beyond repair the symbolic authority of Agamemnon. Odysseus' next words to Eurymachus are just as striking. The ultimatum of 'fight or flee', followed by a prophecy of death for all regardless of the choice echoes the choice between two deaths articulated by Achilles in *Iliad* 9 (a long life but 'social' death in Phthia or death and *kleos* at Troy).⁸⁹ The possibility of this choice to flee or fight is then played out on a larger scale in the choice which confronts the Greek host in Books 2 and 10. But Odysseus' quick decision for an all-embracing death for the suitors moves us swiftly away from the indeterminacy of the embassy scene of *Iliad* 9, and into the superegoic fury which drives Achilles in the later books. With this in mind, let us now look at the supplication of Leodes. Achilles ignores the appeals of suppliants in the frenzied killing of books 20 to 22; any appeal to him made in the name of the public law is rejected. So too Leodes is represented as an exception to the general recklessness of the suitors; he never violated the women of the house, and he made very effort to halt the actions of the suitors (*Od.* 22.313ff). His appeal falls on deaf ears, as Odysseus kills him along with the others. Here are the last words of Leodes:

ἀλλά μοι οὐ πείθοντο κακῶν ἄπο χειρας ἔχεσθαι·
 τῷ καὶ ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐπέσπον.
 αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ μετὰ τοῖσι θυοσκόος οὐδὲν ἑοργῶς
 κείσομαι, ὡς οὐκ ἔστι χάρις μετόπισθ' εὐεργέων. (*Od.* 22.316-9)

But they would not listen to me and keep their hands off evil.

⁸⁹The choice between two deaths for Achilles is echoed by the impossible choice confronting the suitors - to flee and die, or fight and die.

So by their own recklessness they have found a shameful death, but I was their diviner, and I did nothing; but I must fall, since there is no gratitude for past favors.

Leodes speaks the language of *charis*, which is the language of suppliance, an aspect of the public law. Dolon's suppliance in *Iliad* 10 involves the claim that his father will render *charis* to Diomedes and Odysseus if he is spared.⁹⁰ The failure to render proper *charis* is also the reason proffered by Achilles for his quarrel with Agamemnon: he received no *charis* from the Greeks, despite his incessant fighting on their behalf (*Il.*9.317-8). It is as a consequence of the failure of *charis* that Achilles turns to his rhetoric of leveling: the indifference of death to the fate of the *kakos* and *esthlos* man (9.319-21). Leodes speaks the language of exchange across time, of the need to repay debts incurred for good services; this is rejected by a supererogatory Odysseus who comes close to the blind fury of Achilles. But the words of Leodes take on further significance when considered alongside the later, successful suppliance of the bard Phemius. Phemius will also ask for Odysseus' pity, but once more in a particular manner:

αὐτῷ τοι μετόπισθ' ἄχος ἔσσεται, εἴ κεν ἀοιδὸν
πέφνης.. (*Od.*22.345-6)

You will be sorry in time to come, if you kill the singer
of songs...

Phemius' reference to the grief soon to come to Odysseus repeats the prophetic warning Odysseus himself had given to Achilles during the Embassy:

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ἔστι γὰρ ἔνδον
χαλκός τε χρυσός τε πολύκμητός τε σίδηρος,
τῶν κ' ὑμῖν χαρίσασαίτο πατήρ ἀπερείσι' ἄποινα
εἴ κεν ἐμὲ ζῶν πεπύθοιτ' ἐπὶ νηυσὶν Ἀχαιῶν. (*Il.*10.379-81)

In my house
there is bronze, and gold, and difficulty wrought iron,
and my father would make you glad with abundant ransom
were he to hear that I am alive by the ships of the Achaians.

αὐτῷ τοι μετόπισθ' ἄχος ἔσσεται, οὐδέ τι μῆχος
 ρεχθέντος κακοῦ ἔστ' ἄκος εὐρεῖν· (*Il.9.249-50*)

It will be an affliction to you hereafter, there will be no remedy
 found to heal the evil thing when it has been done.

It is as if the bard has access to the poetic tradition about Odysseus which has momentarily escaped the notice of the protagonist himself, who is lost in his fury. As the slaughter of the suitors approaches, Odysseus repeatedly refers to the harm inflicted on him by their consumption in terms of an 'ἄχος' - the pain involved in the affront to public law which is the driving force behind Achilles' rejection of the public law.⁹¹ He acts as if unaware of his own lesson to Achilles: he embarks on a hopeless, superegoic quest to make up for the grief he suffered, forgetting that there can be no sufficient cure (ἄκος) for this. With his symbolic authority revealed to be insufficient, Odysseus launches a destructive attempt to make up for its self-evident failure. We can perhaps now see a hint of the futility of Odysseus' fury in the earlier words of Leodes: οὐκ ἔστι χάρις μετόπισθ' εὐεργέων. Phemius' intervention thus has something of the feel of damage control. Odysseus is on the brink of turning into an Achilles, as he acts out the same errors he so brilliantly diagnosed for Achilles during the Embassy.

With this superegoic aspect of Odysseus in the foreground, it is worth looking more closely at his remarks to Eurycleia after the slaughter is complete:

"ἐν θυμῷ, γρηῦν, χαῖρε καὶ ἴσχεο μηδ' ὀλόλυζε·
 οὐχ ὀσίη κταμένοισιν ἐπ' ἀνδράσιν εὐχετάσθαι.
 τούσδε δὲ μοῖρ' ἐδάμασσε θεῶν καὶ σχέτλια ἔργα·
 οὐ τίνα γὰρ τίεσκον ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων,
 οὐ κακὸν οὐδὲ μὲν ἐσθλόν, ὅτις σφραεὶς εἰσαφίκοιτο·
 τῷ καὶ ἀτασθαλίησιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐπέσπον. (*Od.22.411-6*)

Keep your joy in your heart, old dame; stop, do not raise up
 the cry. It is not piety to glory over slain men.
 These were destroyed by the doom of the gods and their own hard actions,

⁹¹On Odysseus' 'ἄχος', *Od.18.348, 20.256*. On the association of Achilles with 'ἄχος', Nagy 1979, chapter 6.

for these men paid no attention at all to any man on earth
 who came their way, no matter if he were base or noble.
 So by their own recklessness they have found a shameful death.

These lines have been conventionally understood as being 'human and compassionate', and therefore 'out of tune with the archaic ferocity of the rest of the Book'.⁹² Wise Odysseus prevents over-zealous Eurycleia from indulging a hubristic desire to gloat over dead enemies. But rather than see this as a typical gesture of restraint from a *sophron* Odysseus, I suggest we should understand a darker meaning.⁹³ The crucial parallel to this warning to Eurycleia are the words to Diomedes in the Doloneia; just as those acts were outside the realm of the public law, and therefore neither to be praised nor blamed, so too the killing of the suitors. Odysseus' silence is not a mark of his breath-taking humanity as much as it is an attempt to cover up the transgressiveness of his obscene act. The killing of the suitors, together with the killing of the Thracians in the Doloneia, must remain unspoken if the realm of public law is to continue to function. Accordingly, Odysseus tries to write himself out as agent of the story. The suitors, themselves participants in a regime of enjoyment which cared nothing for the difference between *esthlos* and *kakos*, die in a similar manner. Odysseus acts as if their deaths, inexplicable within the terms of public law (articulated in the speech of Eurylochus), are almost a natural occurrence, brought about by no-one.⁹⁴

⁹²The words of Heubeck, *ad loc*. Because of the incongruity, the lines have been thought spurious. Heubeck provides a good defense of their authenticity.

⁹³See Segal, 223ff for the view that it is Odyssean restraint, and thus part of his moral rectitude.

⁹⁴Crotty has recently argued for the precise opposite of my position. For him, the words to Eurycleia are not a 'denial of responsibility', but rather evidence that Odysseus 'seems to understand the troubling features of his slaughter, and to give expression - above all, by his call for silence - to his understanding of the complexity of the suitors' deaths.' (155) This quickly leads Crotty to proclaim that Odysseus 'expresses the viewpoint not of the victor but of the slain.' Crotty's rhetoric here closely resembles the humanistic rhetoric of Griffin concerning the supposed ethical depth of Achilles in the midst of his killing spree. This rhetoric (of both Crotty and Griffin) tries as best it can not only to apologize, in terms of the moral development of the hero, for indiscriminate, superegoic slaughter, but also to allow the slaughterer to take the moral high ground by illustrating the lessons learnt. For some astute remarks on the ability of contemporary humanist criticism to justify mass slaughter within a rhetoric of ethical and aesthetic complexity,

Let me end by appending some comments to Nagler's excellent discussion of Odysseus' vital remarks which end the contest of the bow and begin the slaughter of the suitors:

"οὗτος μὲν δὴ ἄεθλος ἀάατος ἐκτετέλεσται·
νῦν αὖτε σκοπὸν ἄλλον, ὃν οὐ πῶ τις βάλεν ἀνὴρ,
εἴσομαι, αἶ κε τύχωμι, πόρῃ δέ μοι εὖχος Ἀπόλλων." (*Od.*22.5-7)

Here is a task that has been achieved *aaatos*.
Now I shall shoot at another mark, one that no man yet
has struck, if I can hit it and Apollo grants me the glory.

Though the meaning of *aaatos* is uncertain, Nagler persuasively argues that it should be taken as a negative prefix attached to the stem *ate*. For Nagler, the phrase suggests a distinction between the contest of the bow as a peaceful method of conflict resolution and the chaotic fight with the suitors 'under the influence of destructive passion.' Though I quite agree with this, I think this reading can be improved by understanding the situation of the suitors (and companions) in terms of the social orders of the Cyclopes and Phaeacians. I have argued that the public law, the Name-of-the-Father, functioned perfectly within Phaeacian society. Because of the perfect working of the law, Phaeacia was therefore a society without *enjoyment*. By contrast, the Cyclopes were oblivious to the Name-of-the-Father: they did nothing but enjoy (epitomized in their cannibalism), oblivious to any social renunciation. We can therefore be quite precise about the effect of Odysseus' discus throw on Phaeacia, which brings an end to those games. But the introduction of a limit also renders the public law on Phaeacia incomplete, and necessitates a fantasmatic support for it. The place occupied by Odysseus' discus is the place where the Phaeacians will structure their enjoyment as a support for their law. As soon as Odysseus leaves, the public law, the workings of the Name-of-the-Father, will be incomplete; behind it will lurk an obscene father, representing a superegoic

see Said 1983, 2ff. Nevertheless I agree with Crotty that Odysseus' silence once again (as in the *Doloneia*) speaks volumes.

imperative to enjoy - a Cyclops. And of course vice versa. The enjoyment of the Cyclopes will now be regulated by a collective renunciation of enjoyment imposed by way of symbolic castration. What is the importance of this for the suitors and companions?

At first glance, the companions resemble the Phaeacians, the suitors the Cyclopes. The former inhabit a world without enjoyment, attached to Odysseus as Name-of-the-Father, the latter inhabit a world of Cyclopean enjoyment. But the elaborate description of the staging of the contest of the bow lingers on the moment when these two disparate aspects of the law meet. Odysseus, the winner of games, upholder of the symbolic control of his men through the public, 'civilized' aspects of *metis*, now embarks upon a superegoic revenge: the 'contest' he now begins will be one that lacks any social niceties and instead proceeds straight to the death of the adversaries. The contest with *ate* is a contest where Odysseus *enjoys*. We see here the moment when the threat of force upon which his symbolic authority depends explodes into an orgy of violence. From the perspective of the suitors, the staging of the contest of the bow indicates the manner in which their enjoyment never broke with the law; they enjoyed in an indefinite, interim period when Odysseus was absent, for as long as Penelope lingered over the choice of a replacement and Telemachus had not yet reached manhood.⁹⁵ The world of Phaeacians and Cyclopes were fantasy worlds, illustrating two impossible relations to the law. Yet the clarity of these fantasies provides a matrix with which we can understand the two sets of deaths around which the poem is structured.

⁹⁵I look more closely at the vacillations of Penelope in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6

GENDERED DOUBT

I now turn to the question of gender, and its relationship to the radical doubt which heralds the emergence of the subject within the *Odyssey*. I begin by looking at the changes in the patriarchal society of the Phaeacians brought about by Odysseus' arrival. I suggest, in the following chapter, that this provides a useful framework for understanding the *Odyssey*'s representation of women as a whole, and in particular the relationship between Penelope and Odysseus. Once more, however, I will not approach the problems of gendered identities on Phaeacia directly. First, I want to look briefly at two further Greek myths of origin, which have important similarities to the situation on Phaeacia and help clarify it. The first is the mythic tale of origins employed by Protagoras in Plato's *Protagoras*, which seeks to explain the origins of justice, and thus persuade Socrates that justice can be taught. The second is the myth of emergence of the first woman, Pandora, as recounted in Hesiod's *Theogony* and as analyzed by Nicole Loraux.

Protagoras relates his myth to Socrates in order to explain why all in a community share in justice.¹ In the beginning, as Protagoras tells the tale, men were equipped with fire by Prometheus which allowed them to survive the elements. However, when they later tried to live together in cities they were unable to interact peacefully with each other; they lacked any sense of justice and self-restraint, *aidos*. Because Zeus feared the utter destruction of humanity in these fights, he decided that he had to endow humans with justice in order to facilitate civilized interaction between them. But he instructs Hermes to distribute justice in a particular manner:

¹The myth is related at *Prot.*320c7ff.

Now Hermes asked Zeus about the manner in which he was to give conscience (*aidos*) and justice to men: 'Shall I distribute these in the same way as the practical crafts? These are distributed thus: one doctor is sufficient for many laymen, and so with the other experts. Shall I give justice and conscience to men in that way too, or distribute them to all?' 'To all,' said Zeus, 'and let all share in them; for cities could not come into being, if only a few shared in them as in the other crafts, And lay down on my authority a law that he who cannot share in conscience and justice is to be killed as a plague on the city.'²

The distribution of justice to all seems to guarantee social harmony. But there is a curious limit to this harmony. For despite Zeus' gift, there remains the possibility of someone who cannot share in this justice. Zeus demands that this person be banished from society. Protagoras will later suggest that a community views any man who does not partake of justice as an utter madman.³ The possibility of the existence of the madman seems to suggest a certain weakness of justice. Though it is given to all, the madman is a person who seems not to have been given justice; he is an exception to its universal rule. This is of particular interest to the events on Phaeacia: the community of the Phaeacians was set up at the moment they fled the Cyclopes - creatures who were brutish, of extraordinary strength, heedless of the constraints imposed by justice.⁴ I have also argued that the Cyclopes are madmen, psychotics. Protagoras' myth, then, seems to provoke a key question: what is the relationship between madness and the rule of law?

We can describe the situation in psychoanalytic terms. The community of law is founded on the prohibition of a desire, an exception to its functioning. Let us turn once more to Lacan's play on words in the phrase 'Nom(Non)-de-la-père'.

²*Prot.*322c4ff. The translations are those of Taylor, 1976.

³*Sec Prot.*323a6ff: 'In the case of the other skills, as you say, if anyone says he's a good flute-player or good at anything else when he isn't, they either laugh at him or get angry at him, and his family come and treat him like a madman. But in the case of justice and the rest of the excellence of a citizen, even if they know someone to be unjust, if he himself admits it before everyone, they regard that sort of truthfulness as madness, though they called it sound sense before.'

⁴*Sec Od.*6.5-7.

The rule of the father (the reign of his symbolic control) is dependent upon a shared renunciation, an acceptance of his 'No'. The madman is someone who refuses this 'No'. But what is relevant for my present purposes is the relationship of women to this political community. It is clear in Protagoras' tale that the public sphere of politics rendered possible by the distribution of justice is a male space. The attitude of men to justice depends upon their belief that they have received something in exchange for the initial renunciation (the political power at work in the *agora*, the realm of justice). The madman must be expelled from the community in order to preserve the workings of justice, the rule of the father. But because women gain nothing from the renunciation, their relationship to the community of justice is markedly different. They have less reason to be anxious about the expulsion of a madman because they (know they) have nothing to lose from the collapse of the workings of justice. If the madman who cares nothing for renunciation poses an external threat to the community, women, insofar as they have less reason to observe the spirit of renunciation upon which the law depends, are an internal threat; they are a 'mad' element in the heart of the community. As an internal reminder that male rule depends upon an arbitrary renunciation of desire, they also hint that the rule of law is an imposture - this renunciation of desire itself cannot be justified in rational terms. The person who refuses to acknowledge it simply *is* a madman. Homer's narrative on Phaeacia depicts the moment when Nausicaa emerges as a 'mad', internal challenger to the rule of paternal law, when the arrival of Odysseus signals the return of the banished 'madman' to Phaeacia.

Let us now turn to Hesiod's tale of Pandora, and Loraux's superb commentary on it.⁵ I have already suggested that a belief in a natural, gendered identity is the privileged manner in which a subject can avoid the doubt which

⁵ Loraux 1993, chapter 2, 'On the Race of Women'.

suggests the failure of identity. Let us call this ideology of gender a belief in *sexual symmetry*: 'man' and 'woman' are viewed as fixed, determinate identities which compliment each other. Woman compliments man (and vice versa) insofar as she is believed to make up for man's incompleteness: together, man and woman make a whole. But this is not the only way of thinking about gender. Loraux has drawn attention to something unexpected in Hesiod's tale of the origin of women. The myth of Pandora in the *Theogony* (*Theog.*570-612) seems unconcerned with women's role as producer of children. Indeed, the theme of fertility is notably absent, and there is no effort to elucidate any determinate characteristics of a feminine identity. Further, women and men are not portrayed as constituent parts of the greater whole, 'humankind'. Pandora is not a complimentary partner to 'man' within the more general category of *anthropoi*. Instead, the appearance of Pandora shatters the previous unity of the human species. This is an *asymmetrical* theory of gender. Though I will shortly examine Loraux's analysis more closely, it is worth pointing out at the outset a major point of disagreement - a disagreement which is central to the claims of this chapter. Loraux contrasts an asymmetrical theory of gender in Hesiod with a symmetrical theory of gender said to prevail in the Homeric poems; 'In Homer.. everything is simpler' and there is a 'relationship of happy complementarity between the two sexes: the *philotes*, or sexual love, that unites men and women.'⁶ *Prima facie*, the claim is reasonable. Neither the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* seem concerned with the origins of women, and an alleged *philotes* between Penelope and Odysseus continues to be the basis for criticism of the later books of the epic. Loraux's judgement certainly seems to have been followed by the vast majority of feminist criticism of the *Odyssey*, which has for the most part accepted that a theory of gender symmetry lies behind the poem. In sharp contrast,

⁶Loraux 76.

my first claim is that the *Odyssey* provides its own tale of the origins of gender, which separates the ‘race of women’ from men. This tale repeats, in significant ways, much of the asymmetry which forms the basis for Loraux’s elegant reading of the myth of Pandora. The tale of the origins of gender occurs on Phaeacia and in particular as a result of Odysseus’ interactions with Arete and Nausicaa. My interpretation of this interaction will have important consequences for the understanding of Odysseus’ later interactions with Penelope.

Let us now go to the heart of Loraux’s argument about gender in the *Theogony*:

ἐκ τῆς γὰρ γένος ἐστὶ γυναικῶν θηλυτεράων,
τῆς γὰρ ὀλοῖόν ἐστι γένος καὶ φύλα γυναικῶν (*Theog.*590-1)

The race of women and all femininity come from her (the first woman)
From her comes that cursed race, the tribes of women.⁷

Loraux makes the following, apt remark on these lines: ‘[W]omen are descended from womankind alone, produced originally as Pandora, a solitary sample, in contrast to the collectivity that is already an established principle of mankind.’ Pandora is not mother of humanity, as might be expected in such a myth of origins, but of women: ‘The tradition is born in heterodoxy, and the founding text situates the race of women in an original state of separation.’ Before the arrival of Pandora, it was not ‘men’, *andres*, who existed, but *anthropoi*, humanity. Not just humanity, however, but ‘men and gods’ whose happy partnership is shattered by the arrival of the *genos gunaikon*: ‘As the instrument of this rift, woman separates men from gods. Better yet, she separates them from themselves, since she introduces sexuality, that asymmetry of self and other.’⁸ Loraux here follows Pucci, who sees in the ambiguity of the first woman, a *kalon kakon*, the sign of

⁷The translation is from Loraux 73.

⁸Loraux 77.

humanity's fall.⁹ Yet we should be precise. If woman is a sign of the fall of humanity, of its separation from a happier time when it was closer to the gods, this does not make woman the *cause* of that fall. If, in Hesiod's tale of origins, it is easy to conflate the two, it is nevertheless important to note that woman arrives on the scene too late to function as cause; the rift between men and gods has already happened (through Prometheus' tricking of Zeus) and she is no more than the figure which represents that rift. It is in this misrecognition of sign as cause which is the source of much of Greek misogyny; it is the patriarchal error *par excellence*, and it will be important for my later analysis of the *Odyssey's* most famous misogynist, Agamemnon. For now, let us continue to follow Loraux.

If Pandora separates humans from the gods, she does so by an association with artifice and culture. Zeus creates her, but her birth is also due to the craft of Hephaestus and Athena, the goddess of *Metis*:

γαίης γὰρ σύμπλασσε περικλυτὸς Ἀμφιγυήεις
 παρθένῳ αἰδοίῃ ἴκελον Κρονίδεω διὰ βουλᾶς·
 ζῶσε δὲ καὶ κόσμησε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη
 ἀργυφῆ ἔσθῃτι· κατὰ κρήθεν δὲ καλύπτρην
 δαιδαλέην χεῖρεςσι κατέσχεθε, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι·
 [ἀμφὶ δὲ οἱ στεφάνους νεοθηλέας, ἄνθεα ποίης,
 ἱμερτοὺς περίθηκε καρῆατι Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη·]
 ἀμφὶ δὲ οἱ στεφάνην χρυσέην κεφαλῆφιν ἔθηκε,
 τὴν αὐτὸς ποίησε περικλυτὸς Ἀμφιγυήεις
 ἀσκήσας παλάμησι, χαριζόμενος Διὶ πατρί. (*Theog.*571-80)

The very famous limping god fashioned from earth
 the likeness of a shy maiden, in accordance with the will of Cronos' son.
 The bright-eyed goddess Athena girded and beautified her
 with shining clothing; she spread down from her head an
 embroidered veil, a wonder to look at.
 And Pallas Athena put around her head lovely garlands,
 flowers of newly-grown herbs.
 She also put on her head a golden crown
 which the limping god himself made
 working it with his own hands, doing favor to father Zeus.

⁹Pucci 1977, chapter 4, *passim*.

The trappings of Pandora suggest a figure of deception. But, as Loraux argues, we can not quite dismiss the 'evil' of woman as the consequence of a 'trap of simple appearances', as if 'woman' persistently and deceptively hid a secret of woman. We need first to pose a further question:

[W]hat makes women into a wholly exterior being in the first place? Certainly the notion of disguise is an essential part of the veil, and likewise a part of the word *kaluptre* (the word for veil, from the verb 'to conceal'). Yet.. the creature in the *Theogony* is no hidden form beneath a deceitful disguise. Her veil does not conceal anything other than a woman: not a god, a demon, or a man. It hides nothing, because the woman has no interior to conceal... the first woman *is* her adornments...¹⁰

Much of her later analysis follows from this shrewd observation. Pandora, as a *parthenos*, is in no way a fixed identity: rather, because she is mask without original, she signifies the failure of every identity. She stages determinate identities, but she does not do so in the name of any determinate identity - she has no fixed interior to conceal. This disturbing aspect of the *parthenos* effectively undermines any discourse about gender which would seek to anchor the representation of woman in natural, biological language. This provides an important twist to the importance attached within Greek culture to the passage from unwedded virgin to wife, from *parthenos* to *gyne*.¹¹ Within the Greek discourse which seeks to impose a natural identity on women, the shift from *parthenos* to *gyne* signals the shift between two fixed identities: a single, virginal girl becomes a *gyne* through marriage. But the depiction of the *parthenos* as a challenge to every identity means

¹⁰Loraux 81.

¹¹For a fine description of the cultural significance of this moment in Greek representations of women, and its complexities, see King 1985. The terminology is complicated because *parthenos* both signifies 'maiden', referring to a biological status, and the role of woman as 'mask-wearer'. The latter undermines the naturalness of any biological definition of a young woman by suggesting that this is a social role. In what follows, I try to use 'virgin maiden' when referring to the biological *parthenos*.

that this process is undermined - there is always the possibility that any natural identity of woman is no more than the mask of the *parthenos*. The distinctness of the *gyne* is potentially challenged. It is this ambiguity which, Loraux suggests, is created by Zeus' fabrication of Pandora:

πρῶτος γάρ ῥα Διὸς πλαστήν ὑπέδεκτο γυναῖκα
παρθένον. (*Theog.*513-4)

He [Epimetheus] first received the *parthenos gyne* from Zeus.

Epimetheus receives Pandora; but he receives her as woman who is both a *gyne* and a *parthenos*.¹² Any separation of the two into 'natural' roles is a denial of the ambiguity which is present from the moment of her creation. Phaeacia, I suggest, is a fantasized society which seeks to deny this ambiguity and to impose perfect, unquestioned, gendered identities on its subjects. Odysseus' arrival irrevocably changes this.

Gyne

Let us turn to the women on Phaeacia. I argued earlier that Demodocus' tale of the originary *neikos* between Achilles and Odysseus looked forward to the *neikos* between Odysseus and Euryalus which lured Odysseus into the games on Phaeacia. Odysseus' victory introduced the Phaeacians to loss; before his arrival, every traveler had been defeated and passed on to his destination, preserving the internal solidarity of Phaeacian society. Odysseus destroys their feeling of omnipotence. The quarrel with Odysseus leads to a scission in Phaeacian society, which is ultimately made permanent by the mountain which is left hovering over their island. Yet it is not accurate to say that there was never a *neikos* before

¹²Loraux 82.

Odysseus' arrival. Those quarrels, however, were resolved by Arete, the idealized wife of Alcinous. Here is the disguised Athena's description of her:

Ἄρητην· τὴν δ' Ἀλκίνοος ποιήσατ' ἄκοιτιν
καὶ μιν ἔτισ' ὡς οὐ τις ἐπὶ χθονὶ τίεται ἄλλη,
ὅσσαι νῦν γε γυναῖκες ὑπ' ἀνδράσιν οἶκον ἔχουσιν.
ὡς κείνη περὶ κῆρι τετίμηται τε καὶ ἔστιν
ἔκ τε φίλων παίδων ἔκ τ' αὐτοῦ Ἀλκινόοιο
καὶ λαῶν, οἳ μὴν ῥα θεὸν ὡς εἰσορόωντες
δειδέχεται μῦθοισιν, ὅτε στείχησ' ἀνὰ ἄστν.
οὐ μὲν γάρ τι νόου γε καὶ αὐτῇ δεύεται ἐσθλοῦ,
οἷσί τ' ἐὺ φρονέησι, καὶ ἀνδράσι νείκεα λύει. (*Od.7.66-74*)

..Arete, and Alkinoos made her his wife, and gave her
such pride of place as no other woman on earth is given
of such women as are now alive and keep house for husbands.
So she was held high in the heart and still she is so,
by her beloved children, by Alkinoos himself, and by
the people, who look toward her as to a god when they see her,
and speak in salutation as she walks about in her city.
For there is no good intelligence that she herself lacks.
She dissolves quarrels, even among men, when she favors them.

Arete is the perfect *gyne*. She keeps house for her husband, but remains subservient to him. In return for this, she is honored. As an idealized *gyne* she represents the whole of her sex on Phaeacia, where there is a perfect division of sexual roles: just as Phaeacian men are skilled in sailing ships, so the women are 'skilled in weaving and dowered with wisdom bestowed by Athene, to be expert in beautiful work, to have good character' (*Od.7.109-10*). Because Arete and the other Phaeacian women epitomize a certain ideal of womanhood, there is no reason for Phaeacian men to doubt them; the dangers represented by the *parthenos* are nowhere to be found.

It is this idealization of women on Phaeacia which can help explain Arete's ability to resolve quarrels. There is a system of competition on Phaeacia, as exemplified in the games. Yet these are games which the Phaeacians never lose. Their constant victories over outsiders preserve an internal solidarity. But what of quarrels between Phaeacians? Quarrels occur because of jostling for positions

within a hierarchy, because one member of the society seeks to win regardless of the cost for social cohesion. It is precisely such asocial figures who have been successfully banished from Phaeacian society: the Cyclopes. The Cyclopes care nothing for *aidos*, the spirit of collective renunciation which structures the social. This banishing of figures who want to win at all costs might suggest that there would be no desire at all for competition on Phaeacia, yet the Phaeacians continue to play their painless series of games. How can they do this? Any quarrel which might arise from the playing of the games is immediately ironed out by the tension-resolving qualities of Arete. The Phaeacians try to have it both ways: they wish to banish the destructive aspects of competition (which undermine the harmony of social life), but still want to continue to play the game. Arete appears as a symptom of this indecision - a symptom in the precise Freudian sense of a compromise formation.¹³ She allows the Phaeacian men to play the games without the destructive aspects of quarrels which result from games. She helps preserve the illusion that games can be played without any of the destructive social consequences normally associated with loss.

Arete's status as compromise formation is also evident in her quasi-divine status. She is honored 'like a god'. The Phaeacians have a peculiar relationship to the gods. Though they sacrifice to them, it is unclear why. Sacrifice, as a particular mode of communication between humans and gods, depends, in human society, on the possibility of its failure. The gods inhabit a world exterior to the human one, yet which is believed to have a relation to it. Sacrifice attempts to bridge the gap. Yet the Phaeacians interact openly with the gods; there is no mystery in these

¹³Freud provides a useful example of the manner in which a symptom works as a compromise formation in *Moses and Monotheism*. A boy, when a small child, heard his parents having sex. Later, after his first semen emission, he is unable to get to sleep: 'This disturbance was a true compromise symptom: on the one hand the expression of defense against his nocturnal observations, on the other hand the endeavor to re-establish the wakefulness which had enabled him to listen to those experiences.'

interactions, no unknown world beyond that of Phaeacia. But the Phaeacians themselves are not gods. They live in a half-way house between humans (who are split off from gods) and gods (who are not subject to human life-cycles). Once again, it is Arete who allows them to preserve this position. They worship her *as if* she was a god. She has a paradoxical presence in the world of Phaeacia: though part of the Phaeacian *genos*, she nevertheless is worshipped as if she was superior to it. Though 'one of them', her qualities are nevertheless incomprehensible, god-like.¹⁴

Zizek has provided the following succinct definition of a symptom which can help us further clarify the relationship between Arete and the Phaeacians. A symptom is 'a formation whose very consistency implies a certain non-knowledge on the part of the subject: the subject can "enjoy his symptom" only insofar as its logic escapes him.'¹⁵ To interpret the symptom correctly is to dissolve it. On Phaeacia, the existence of Arete as idealized woman (resolver of quarrels) is correlative to Phaeacian non-knowledge concerning the possibility of loss (represented by their ongoing success in the games). Her status as quasi-divine is correlative to Phaeacian non-knowledge concerning the inscrutability of the world of the gods, their separation from mortals.

From *parthenos* to *gyne*

If there is no trace of the untrustworthiness of the *parthenos* on Phaeacia, there are certainly virgin maidens. For the episode on Phaeacia lingers over the

¹⁴We can contrast the power of Arete to heal wounds in the social with Odysseus' barbed remark to the blinded Cyclops that his eye (the wound incurred on entrance to the social) could never be healed by his father. Arete functions as the (non-existent) figure of authority who promises to heal this wound for the Phaeacians.

¹⁵Zizek 1989, 21.

status of Nausicaa, a young girl on the verge of marriage. Because of the absence of untrustworthiness of women in this society (the lack of the mask-wearing *parthenos*) we must imagine a world in which the transfer from *parthenos* to *gyne* passes without a hitch, and without any anxiety on the part of the ruling men. It is precisely such an idealized succession from virginity to woman-hood which the *Odyssey* begins to depict for Nausicaa - until the arrival of Odysseus complicates matters. He explodes the harmony that had previously characterized her relationship to her parents.

At the beginning of book 6, Nausicaa is approached by Athena in disguise; she suggests that she should do the Phaeacian washing, but in such a manner as to emphasize the status of Nausicaa as *parthenos*: she will not stay unmarried long, and is being courted by the best of the Phaeacians (6.34-6). When Nausicaa relays the message of Athena to her father, she does so in euphemistic terms which tell us much of the situation on Phaeacia:

ὡς ἔφατ'· αἶδετο γὰρ θαλερὸν γάμον ἐξονομῆναι
πατρὶ φίλῳ· ὁ δὲ πάντα νόει καὶ ἀμείβετο μύθῳ·
"οὔτε τοι ἡμιόνων φθονέω, τέκος, οὔτε τευ ἄλλου. (*Od.* 6.66-69)

So she spoke, but she was ashamed to speak of her joyful marriage to her dear father, but he understood all and answered:
'I do not begrudge you the mules, child, nor anything else...

Nausicaa's actions and words are governed by *aidos*, shame. She does not speak openly about her desire for marriage. But this deference on her part is immediately recognized by her father; there is nothing unexpected or deceitful in the desire of this *parthenos*. The father Alcinous, whose name itself indicates the strength of his *noos*, understands everything: πάντα νόει.¹⁶ It is this ability to

¹⁶On the significance of the name of Alcinous, Nagy 1990, 205.

understand everything which undermines the possibility of any 'feminine' deceit on Phaeacia: the reason the passage from *parthenos* to *gyne* is unproblematic is because it is regulated under the all-knowing *noos* of the father. This infallible paternal power should cause us to pause over the *aidos* shown by Nausicaa, for it has the effect of emptying out the significance normally associated with the concept. *Aidos* is, as we have seen, a reflective behavior which lingers on the necessity of a recognition of a common loss in order to preserve the social. It depends on a shared renunciation. This renunciation opens up the (illusion of the) possibility of a satisfaction of desire outside of the realm of the social: it is thus an indication of the limit of paternal authority (which only polices the realm of the social), not part of the limitlessness of paternal authority. In Nausicaa's case, the possibility of desiring something external to Phaeacian society is short-circuited by Alcinous' remarks. The desire not spoken is already known by her father. Nausicaa renounces nothing; Alcinous wants to help bring to fulfillment the desire she does not speak. We can explicate this paradoxical desire further by returning to the Lacanian definition: 'desire' is what is left over after every need enunciated in a demand has been satisfied. For Nausicaa, no such leftover exists. Her demand for a husband is understood by her father, and will be satisfied. Nothing remains, which suggests that her desire is not a true, human desire. Her feeling of *aidos* is equally paradoxical; insofar as she is aware of nothing outside the parameters of paternal law, it is an unreflective 'shame' - that is, not shame at all.

Enter Pandora

Let us now turn to the fateful meeting between Nausicaa and Odysseus. Their meeting is elaborately prepared within the narrative. Odysseus is asleep, and the Phaeacian maidens are playing catch with a ball. At this point, Athene intervenes with a stratagem:

ἔνθ' αὐτ' ἄλλ' ἐνόησε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη,
 ὡς Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔγροίτο, ἴδοι τ' εὐώπιδα κούρην,
 ἣ οἱ Φαιήκων ἀνδρῶν πόλιν ἡγήσαιο.
 σφαῖραν ἔπειτ' ἔρριψε μετ' ἀμφίπολον βασίλεια·
 ἀμφιπόλου μὲν ἄμαρτε, βαθείη δ' ἔμβαλε δίνη.
 αἱ δ' ἐπὶ μακρὸν ἄϋσαν· ὁ δ' ἔγρετο δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς..(Od.6.112-17)

[T]hen the grey-eyed goddess Athene thought what to do next;
 how Odysseus should awake, and see the well-favored young girl,
 and she should be his guide to the city of the Phaiakians.
 Now the princess threw the ball toward one handmaiden,
 and missed the girl, and the ball went into the swirling water,
 and they all cried out aloud, and noble Odysseus wakened..

Is this a simple narrative maneuver to begin the episode, or does it have more symbolic significance? We will find out later in the poem that one of the Phaeacian skills which is unsurpassed (and, as they believe, unsurpassable) is dancing. In book 8, after their defeat in the games, Odysseus marvels at the Phaeacian dancers, who also play catch with a ball, a *sphaira*:

οἱ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν σφαῖραν καλήν μετὰ χερσὶν ἔλοντο,
 πορφυρέην, τὴν σφιν Πόλυβος ποίησε δαίφρων,
 τὴν ἕτερος ρίπτασκε ποτὶ νέφεα σκιόεντα
 ἰδνωθεὶς ὀπίσω· ὁ δ' ἀπὸ χθονὸς ὑψὸς ἄερθεὶς
 ῥηϊδίως μεθέλεσκε, πάρος ποσὶν οὐδας ἰκέσθαι. (Od.8.372-6)

These two, after they had taken up in their hands the ball, a beautiful thing, red, which Polybos the skillful craftsman had made them, one of them, bending far back, would throw it up to the shadowy clouds, and the other, going high off the ground, would easily catch it again, before his feet came back to the ground..

The Phaeacians are perfect dancers who *never* drop the ball. Yet Odysseus' arrival on Phaeacia coincides with a Phaeacian game of catch in which a ball is dropped. It is not only dropped, but dropped in a particular manner. Nausicaa's throw misses its target and the ball disappears into the sea out of her reach.¹⁷ The

¹⁷The scholiasts, at *Od.6.116*, nicely confirm this in their commentary on the significance of 'βαθείη': the detail emphasizes the fact that the ball is out of the reach of the person who threw it, irretrievable.

ball escapes from the limits of Phaeacian society, and points toward a realm beyond their boundaries, out of reach of Nausicaa. This throw not only contrasts with the perfection of the later throws during the Phaeacian dance, but is also parallel to Odysseus' discus throw. In the games with the Phaeacian men he too makes a throw which travels to a point beyond the frame of reference of the Phaeacian competitors. That throw opened up the possibility of loss to the Phaeacians, as does the missed throw of Nausicaa. The loss of the ball makes Nausicaa aware of a limit on Phaeacia; this coincides with the appearance of Odysseus. If the missed throw opens a wound in Phaeacian society, signaling its limitations and the possibility of something different (better) beyond that limit, this wound is immediately covered over by Odysseus. The loss of the ball introduces Nausicaa to desire: she seeks something 'out of reach', unattainable. Odysseus then appears as the first person to move into this realm of the 'beyond' opened up by the loss of the ball. Odysseus' later success in the discus can be seen as a confirmation of the effects of the dropped ball of Nausicaa. Before his appearance on Phaeacia, there had only been a string of heroes who competed with the Phaeacians but who were defeated. Odysseus proves himself to be an outsider who is better than the *aristoi* on Phaeacia, and consequently Nausicaa desires him as the first outsider who is better than the representatives of her own *genos*. Because the earlier arrivals had been inferior to the Phaeacians, there was no reason for Nausicaa to desire them. The throw of the ball into the unknowable beyond opens up a space for Nausicaa's fantasies, a place from where Phaeacia, as a complete society, can be judged.¹⁸ Odysseus is the first to move into that fantasy space, which now structures her perception of the world. Odysseus will of course leave, but the society of the Phaeacians is transformed by this departure. Nausicaa will no longer unreflectively

¹⁸The hurling of the discus by Odysseus will later perform the same function for the Phaeacian men.

desire the men of her *genos*. She will always want something more than they have to offer. In short, she becomes a true *parthenos*. If she is later to play the role of *gyne*, professing allegiance to a single adult male on Phaeacia, the male will constantly appreciate that her allegiance to him is undermined by the unspoken desire for something more. Despite all future protestations of fidelity, Nausicaa will now remain untrustworthy, suspicious.

The ‘fall’ of the Phaeacians, their entrance to the realm of mortality, is thus intimately associated with the emergence of Nausicaa’s desire. For as soon as the Phaeacians become aware of the limits of their society, they are immediately torn asunder from their happy, open relationship with the gods. With this in mind, let us look more closely at Nausicaa’s initial trip to the shore to wash clothes, and linger over some of its darker aspects. The time and place of the encounter of the Phaeacian maidens is elaborately described. Though they initially appear to be going to a river, it later becomes clear that it must be the mouth of a river by the sea-shore.¹⁹ When Odysseus later recounts the tale to Arete in the following book, we discover that he fails to mention the maidens’ screams; instead, he claims to have been awoken by the rays of the mid-day sun.²⁰ These features in themselves duplicate the scenario in which Proteus was tricked by Eidothea; he emerged from the sea onto the shore at mid-day. In *Odyssey* 6, we find ourselves once more in a situation which evokes epiphany, an in-between time which facilitates the merging of the human and divine worlds, but which also renders non-reflective immortals vulnerable. The tricking of Proteus dragged the immortal god into the reflective realm of mortals; so too Nausicaa will lose her unreflective innocence, and enter the mortal world of desire. The vulnerability of the Phaeacian maidens (which they

¹⁹6.94-5. The clothes are dried by the sea-shore, where pebbles are washed ashore.

²⁰Though I have stated (without discussion) that Odysseus is woken by the sun, I should acknowledge that there are deep textual difficulties at 7.288. I discuss these problems in detail below.

themselves are blissfully unaware of) is highlighted in the manner of their dance; before it begins, they remove their veils. If this helps create a mood of eroticism, there is also the darker motif of a possible rape.²¹ This general atmosphere of vulnerability and death is enhanced by the striking similarity, long noted by commentators, between the careful packing of the wagon and mules with the paraphernalia required for the washing and another famous epic journey with a wagon into the darkness of night: Priam's descent into the tent of Achilles in *Iliad* 24.²² The *katabasis* motif is replayed here, as Nausicaa and the maidens enter a liminal realm between the mortal and immortal worlds; as with Proteus, the ensuing events will definitively split them off from their unreflective, carefree, universes.

But perhaps most interesting of all is the manner in which the arrival of Odysseus replays the moment of the 'original split' which separated the Phaeacians from the Cyclopes. When Odysseus arrives, his appearance horrifies the Phaeacian maidens. This is quite understandable, as the narrative emphasizes his bestiality in an important simile:

ὡς εἰπὼν θάμνων ὑπεδύσετο δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς,
 ἐκ πυκινῆς δ' ὕλης πτόρθον κλάσε χειρὶ παχείῃ
 φύλλων, ὡς ῥύσαιτο περὶ χροῖ μήδεα φωτός.
 βῆ δ' ἴμεν ὡς τε λέων ὄρεσίτροφος, ἀλκι πεποιθώς,
 ὅς τ' εἶσ' ὑόμενος καὶ ἀήμενος, ἐν δέ οἱ ὄσσε
 δαίεται· αὐτὰρ ὁ βουσί μετέρχεται ἢ οἴεσσι
 ἢ μετ' ἀγροτέραις ἐλάφουσι· κέλεται δέ ε' γαστήρ
 μήλων πειρήσοντα καὶ ἐς πυκινὸν δόμον ἐλθεῖν·
 ὡς Ὀδυσσεύς κούρησιν εὐπλοκάμοισιν ἔμελλε
 μείξεσθαι, γυμνός περ ἑών· χρεῖώ γάρ ἴκανε.
 σμερδαλέος δ' αὐτῆσι φάνη κεκακωμένος ἄλμη,
 τρέσσαν δ' ἄλλυδις ἄλλη ἐπ' ἠΐονας προύχουσας.
 οἴη δ' Ἀλκινόου θυγάτηρ μένε· τῇ γὰρ Ἀθήνη

²¹But perhaps not any rape, but rather a specific mythical one. The innocence of the dancing maidens recalls the innocence of another maiden, Persephone. Her rape by Hades is another mythical tale of origins, which seeks to explain the changing of the seasons - and therefore the entrance of mortality - to the human world.

²²See, for example, Hainsworth's discussion *ad Od.* 6.71-84.

θάρσος ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε καὶ ἐκ δέος εἴλετο γυίων. (*Od.*6.127-40)

So speaking, great Odysseus came from under his thicket,
and from the dense foliage with his heavy hand he broke off
a leafy branch to cover his body and hide the male parts,
and went in the confidence of his strength, like some hill-kept lion,
who advances, though he is rained on and blown by the wind, and both
eyes kindle; he goes out after cattle or sheep, and his belly is urgent upon
him to get inside of a close steading and go for the sheepflocks.
So Odysseus was ready to face young girls with well-ordered
hair, naked though he was, for the need was on him; and yet,
he appeared terrifying to them, all crusted with dray spray,
and they scattered one way and another down the jutting beaches.
Only the daughter of Alkinoos stood fast, for Athene
put courage into her heart, and took the fear from her body..

They all flee, believing something bestial, inhuman, has arrived on Phaeacia. The peace now prevalent on Phaeacia was instituted when Nausithous fled the monstrous Cyclopes, who had harmed them because of their greater might (6.5ff). The surprise and terror of the maidens can be explained by the success of the former split; since Nausithous led the Phaeacians away from Hyperia and the Cyclopes, no such monstrous man has appeared on Scherie. Yet on this occasion, the flight is not total; Athene intervenes to take away the fear from Nausicaa, and she alone refuses to flee (*Od.*6.139-40). She then tries to persuade the other girls not to flee, but in a significant way: she argues, in effect, that the original split from the Cyclopes holds good, and that it is inconceivable for a violent man to intrude into Phaeacian society:

"στήτέ μοι ἀμφίπολοι· πόσε φεύγετε φῶτα ἰδοῦσαι;
ἢ μή πού τινα δυσμενέων φάσθ' ἔμμεναι ἀνδρῶν;
οὐκ ἔσθ' οὗτος ἀνὴρ διερός βροτῶς οὐδὲ γένηται,
ὅς κεν Φαιήκων ἀνδρῶν ἐς γαίαν ἵκηται
δηϊοτήτα φέρων· μάλα γὰρ φίλοι ἀθανάτοισιν.
οἰκέομεν δ' ἀπάνευθε πολυκλύστῳ ἐνὶ πόντῳ,
ἔσχατοι, οὐδέ τις ἄμμι βροτῶν ἐπιμίσγεται ἄλλος. (*Od.*6.199-205)

Stand fast, girls. Where are you flying, just because you have looked on a man? Do you think this is some enemy coming against us? There is no such man living nor can there ever be one who can come into the land of the Phaiakians bringing warlike attack; we are so very dear to the immortals, and we live far apart by ourselves in the wash of the great sea

at the utter end, nor do any people mix with us.

Nausicaa's words seem persuasive. After all, Odysseus, the civilized hero of the poem, is certainly not a Cyclops. But if Odysseus is not himself a Cyclops, he does function as one - that is, he plays the role of a Cyclops to perfection. The Cyclopes had earlier been described as creatures with far greater *bie* than the Phaeacians, and who were hostile to them. Odysseus' discus throw will soon show that he is far greater in *bie*, and his presence is destined to destroy Phaeacian society. The result of the total flight from the Cyclopes was the creation of a self-enclosed, endogamous society, where paternal law functioned perfectly because there was no individual man not subject to it, and where external visitors were inferior to the Phaeacians. Nausicaa argues as if this situation was destined to continue forever. But the dropping of the ball, and the entrance of Odysseus into her fantasy frame, has already changed this.²³

We can explain this in the terms of the story of origins of Protagoras; if the perfection of the social is created by the renunciation of all (adult, male) citizens, rendering anyone who refuses the renunciation a madman, the encounter between Odysseus and Nausicaa heralds the return of the (banished) madman to the world of Phaeacia. Nausicaa will never be content with the attentions of Phaeacian men again, but will always want something more, something beyond the limits of Phaeacian civilization. From the perspective of Phaeacian men (caught within the constraints of paternal law), this desire will seem inexplicable, mad. The return of Odysseus thus functions as the return of a Cyclops, a reappearance of that which had been disavowed.

²³Nausicaa's initial desire of Odysseus also heralds the end of Phaeacia as an endogamous society. Note, in particular, the possible sexual connotation of 'ἐπιμίσγεται' at 6.205 (and later at 6.241).

This provides a very different context for Odysseus' words of praise to Nausicaa, words which Loraux provided as evidence for the 'conventional' depiction of complementary gender identities in the *Odyssey*.²⁴ Odysseus first compares her to a god, but then lists her human attributes:

εἰ δέ τις ἐσσι βροτῶν, οἱ ἐπὶ χθονὶ ναιετάουσι,
 τρὶς μάκαρες μὲν σοί γε πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ,
 τρὶς μάκαρες δὲ κασίγνητοι· μάλα πού σφισι θυμὸς
 αἰὲν εὐφροσύνησιν ἰαίνεται εἵνεκα σεῖο,
 λευσσόντων τοιόνδε θάλος χορὸν εἰσοιχνεῦσαν.
 κείνος δ' αὖ περὶ κῆρι μακάρτατος ἔξοχον ἄλλων,
 ὅς κέ σ' ἐέδνοισι βρίσας οἰκόνδ' ἀγάγηται.
 οὐ γάρ πω τοιοῦτον ἴδον βροτὸν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν,
 οὔτ' ἄνδρ' οὔτε γυναῖκα· σέβας μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωντα. (*Od.*6.153-61)

But if you are one among those mortals who live in this country, three times blessed are your father and the lady your mother, and three times blessed your brothers too, and I know their spirits are warmed forever with happiness at the thought of you, seeing such a slip of beauty taking her place in the chorus of dancers; but blessed at the heart, even beyond these others, is that one who, after loading you down with gifts, leads you as bride home. I have never with these eyes seen anything like you, neither man nor woman. Wonder takes me as I look on you.

Odysseus describes Nausicaa as a woman of extraordinary beauty, but in the quiet reference to a competition between males for her hand in marriage, there is, I think, an implicit comparison to Helen. We can compare this description of Nausicaa with the later description of Arete. If Arete dissolves the quarrels between men, Nausicaa looks suspiciously like a woman whose beauty creates those quarrels. Odysseus describes her as if she was more than a simple virgin; rather, she now embodies the darker characteristics of a *parthenos*. It is perhaps this which accounts for Odysseus' strange praise of her as surpassing any man *or* woman he has seen. The crucial feature of the *parthenos* is that she challenges the identity of woman; she is neither unproblematically a virgin maiden, nor a *gyne*, but plays the

²⁴Loraux 76.

role of both. To return to the definition of Loraux, the *parthenos* is a series of representations hiding nothing, providing a challenge to every identity, but (necessarily) on behalf of no particular identity. Before Odysseus' entrance to Phaeacia, gender roles had been perfectly distributed: it was a world where everyone's gendered identity was fixed. On Phaeacia, gender was not the sign of a 'fall' from an original state of grace. Nausicaa changes this because she begins to desire, which in turn casts a shadow over the perfection of Phaeacian society. She will no longer be content with the Phaeacian man apportioned to her as husband, which will in turn destroy any complementarity between the sexes. Her desire introduces sexual asymmetry. Rather than 'equal', symmetrical gendered identities of man and woman, who play complementary roles, the situation becomes different; men will continue to play games in order to impress the woman on Phaeacia, but the women will never be satisfied with their efforts. Before Nausicaa's emergence as *parthenos*, the Phaeacian women, epitomized by Arete, were both the motivators of the games and those who helped resolve the destructive aspect of the competitions. After, they lose their trustworthiness as arbitrators because there is the constant danger of their dissatisfaction with Phaeacian society. When Odysseus leaves the Phaeacians, he abandons them at the exact point that Proteus was abandoned by Menelaus. Their previous gendered identities have been radically undermined; they are about to embark on a world where those identities, no longer certain, will be contested.

There is one other curious detail in Odysseus' description of Nausicaa which is worth pausing over. Odysseus talks of the delight a man might take in looking at Nausicaa, who will be 'warmed', as Lattimore translates 'ἰαίβεται'. The sense of this verb is difficult. Though it is commonly used in the sense of

'warmed'²⁵, it also seems to be linked to the verb *ιάομαι*, 'to cure'.²⁶ Given the importance of the motif of healing during Odysseus' stay on Phaeacia, the possibility of a latent sense of 'cure' here is intriguing. In effect, Odysseus would be suggesting that Nausicaa might function as a 'cure' for a wounded man. Odysseus will later tell a tale of the wounding of a Cyclops, and his consequent entry into the symbolic. Polyphemus' later appeal to his father to cure him was shown by Odysseus to be futile: his father promises (but can only promise) to heal the wound. Odysseus' description of Nausicaa suggests that she too can perform the same function as Poseidon. In the society of Phaeacia (and the Cyclopes) after their introduction to loss, Nausicaa (and all women) will promise, but only promise, to render complete the identity of men.

Aidos as reflection

I have already suggested the importance of the reflective nature of *aidos*, and the problem of Nausicaa's initial shame before her father, which he immediately sees through. But things become more complicated after the meeting with Odysseus. When Odysseus tells Alcinous of his encounter with Nausicaa, he suggests that Nausicaa was at fault for not bringing the suppliant straight to him. In response, Odysseus notoriously lies on Nausicaa's behalf:

"Ξεῖν', ἧ τοι μὲν τοῦτό γ' ἐναΐσιμον οὐκ ἐνόησε
 παῖς ἐμή, οὐνεκά σ' οὔ τι μετ' ἀμφιπόλοισι γυναιξίν
 ἦγεν ἐς ἡμετέρου· σὺ δ' ἄρα πρώτην ἰκέτευσας."
 τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς·
 "ἦρωσ, μή μοι τοῦνεκ' ἀμύμονα νείκεε κούρην·
 ἡ μὲν γάρ μ' ἐκέλευε σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισιν ἔπεσθαι,

²⁵As it is used later, at *Od.*8.426. I refer to the definitions of *LSJ*.

²⁶The link is certainly attested in later usage, and is made explicit by Quintus Smyrnaeus. See also Chantraine, *ad loc.*

ἀλλ' ἐγὼ οὐκ ἔθελον δείσας αἰσχυνόμενός τε,
 μή πως καὶ σοὶ θυμὸς ἐπισκύσσαιτο ἰδόντι·
 δύσζηλοι γάρ τ' εἰμὲν ἐπὶ χθονὶ φύλ' ἀνθρώπων." (*Od.*7.299-307)

'My friend, here is one proper thought that my daughter was not aware of, when she failed to bring you, with her attendants, here to our house. It was she to whom you first came as suppliant.' Then resourceful Odysseus spoke in turn and answered him: 'Hero, do not for my sake find fault with your blameless daughter. She did urge me to follow along with her serving maidens, but I for embarrassment and dread was not willing, for fear that something in this might stir your spirit to anger seeing us. For we who are people upon this earth are jealous in judgement.'

Odysseus' lines here are usually explained in terms of his tact. He accepts the blame for Nausicaa's failed concern for his supplication. But things are more complex. For the truth, at first glance, hardly seems detrimental to Nausicaa. Her earlier refusal to accompany him was justified in terms which would seem to epitomize social propriety. She feared the reproaches of the Phaeacian men, who would be jealous of Odysseus as a rival. But, as a chaste maiden, she agreed that their words would be perfectly appropriate: a woman should not be seen in public with a man before marriage without the permission of her father (6.285ff). Odysseus 'apologizes' for Nausicaa by transferring the *aidos* shown by her to him. It was he who felt shame, not her. What is so disquieting about the action of Nausicaa that Odysseus chooses to repress it?

We should contrast this show of 'shame' and the shame exhibited at the start of book 6. There, the *aidos* shown by Nausicaa was immediately understood: nothing occurred behind the back of the all-knowing father. She had exhibited 'desire' for men on Phaeacia in complete accordance with Alcinous' wishes. But the new situation is quite different. For Nausicaa has been confronted (for the first time) with the desire for a non-Phaeacian man. Her feelings of propriety are now opposed to the real possibility of transgression. The failure to bring Odysseus straight to Alcinous suggests that she is aware of this possibility; her shame now works to control this. Before, there would have been no need to reflect on the

dangers of bringing a stranger straight to her father, because she would have felt nothing inappropriate in so doing. Such transgression was literally unthinkable for Nausicaa. She articulates her first disapproval for the ‘mixing’ with an outsider only once she dwells on the possibility of transgressing the prohibition. She tells Odysseus of the inappropriateness of an encounter with a man before marriage without her father’s knowledge. The problem is that such an encounter with Odysseus has already happened behind her father’s back. Her words of shame are too late: the totality of her father’s knowledge is irrevocably punctured. Odysseus’ ‘tact’ now takes on a new light. If Alcinous were to find out that his daughter had refused to bring Odysseus to him because of shame, he would have to confront the fact of her desire for Odysseus which occurred behind his back; he would thus stare at the limits of his *noos*. Odysseus allows Alcinous to believe that the shame which occurred during the episode was exhibited by him, an outsider, and not by one of his subjects. He accordingly delays recognition of a wound already opened up on Phaeacia: he persuades Alcinous, and delays the effect of the first *neikos* which materializes as Nausicaa becomes a *parthenos*.

If critics have pounced on this particular Odyssean lie in book 7, they have been silent about another which is just as significant:

εὐδον παννύχιος καὶ ἐπ’ ἠῶ καὶ μέσον ἡμαρ·
 δείλετό τ’ ἥελιος, καὶ με γλυκὺς ὕπνος ἀνῆκεν.
 ἀμφιπόλους δ’ ἐπὶ θινὶ τεῆς ἐνόησα θυγατρὸς
 παιζούσας, ἐν δ’ αὐτῇ ἔην εἰκυῖα θεῆσι.
 τὴν ἰκέτευσ’ ἢ δ’ οὐ τι νοήματος ἡμβροτεν ἐσθλοῦ..(Od.7.288-92)

I slept nightlong, and into the dawn, and on to the noonday,
 the sun had passed its mid-point,²⁷ and then the sweet sleep released me.

²⁷I provide my own translation of line 7.289, reading ‘δείλετό τ’ ἥελιος’ (the reading of Aristarchus) rather than the MSS δύσετο. As Stanford (*ad loc*) points out, δύσετο makes little sense because so much happens between Odysseus’ waking and nightfall. One problem with Aristarchus’ reading is that δείλετο is not attested elsewhere. It does, however, seem to refer to the Homeric division of the day into morning, mid-day and evening (Stanford quotes *Il*.21.111, ἠὼς ἢ δείλη ἢ μέσον ἡμαρ). If correct, the time of Odysseus’ awakening would be particularly

Then I was aware of your daughter's attendant women playing on the beach, and she, looking like the goddesses, went there among them. I supplicated her, nor did she fail of the right decision...

Odysseus' story focuses on the moment of his awakening, a moment already described in book 6. But he is conspicuously silent about the reason why he woke up. The sequence of events in book 6 is clear: Nausicaa drops the ball, the maidens cry out aloud, and Odysseus hears them (*Od.*6.116ff). Odysseus fails to mention the maidens' cries - the most important part of Athena's contrivance to waken him. But if this part of the tale is suppressed, Odysseus' words also cannot help reminding us of them: for he tells Alcinous of the perfection of Nausicaa's *noos*: ἡ δ' οὐ τι νοήματος ἤμβροτεν ἐσθλοῦ ('Nor did she miss the noble thing to think'). He repeats the most significant word used to describe the event which he chooses not to narrate: Nausicaa misses her target with the *sphaira*: ἀμφιπόλου μὲν ἄμαρτε. Odysseus' 'tact' prevents Alcinous from finding out about this incident of failure on Phaeacia. He portrays Nausicaa as if she remained a non-desiring woman, and is silent about the act which introduced her to desire. Why?

The events on Phaeacia all occur with a shadow hanging over the civilization. The disavowal of the possibility of harm from Nausicaa is equivalent to Odysseus' denial of the emergence of self-reflective *aidos*, or indeed the Phaeacian flight into believing that their loss in the games was not utterly destructive of their society. The disaster has already happened, and the Phaeacians are living on borrowed time, yet they do not recognize this until after Odysseus leaves and the mountain arrives. This occurs both because of their own disavowal of the change (eg. Nausicaa's denial of the entrance of a Cyclops-like figure of *bie*) and because

significant. He would have been awakened the moment after the time for epiphany had passed - the moment after the dropping of the ball by Nausicaa signaled her descent into mortal society.

of the persuasive powers of Odysseus: Odysseus' *nostos* depends on the ongoing Phaeacian disavowal of the loss of their civilization.

CHAPTER 7

PENELOPE AS PARTHENOS

It is all too easy to read the *Odyssey* teleologically, as the inevitable progression of the hero Odysseus homeward, toward his own *oikos*, his home.¹ Accordingly, the poem is often read as an adventure story, with the hero overcoming every external obstacle which hinders his path homeward. But Odysseus' return is not only to a home, but to a wife; this wife is Penelope, the epitome of fidelity. If we agree that Penelope is thus the goal of Odysseus' *Odyssey*, the perfect representation of 'Woman' in her normativity, then a teleological reading of the poem as a slow progression toward this normative goal of woman can be effortlessly constructed. It goes something like this: 'Odysseus is detained by lots of women on his way home, but insofar as they fall short of Penelope, his partner in his *oikos*, homestead at Ithaca, he cannot be satisfied by them for very long. Calypso detains him on her island, but because she is a goddess their union is a sterile one, incapable of producing the children that are so essential to an *oikos*. Accordingly the union is barren, lacking in human meaning. The most alluring possibility is the appearance of the Phaeacian princess Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6; their interaction suggests a mutual attraction, and indeed her father explicitly suggests Odysseus should stay in Phaeacia to marry - yet if this is an offer of an *oikos*, it is not *Odysseus'* *oikos*, it is not a full replacement for the wife and son he already lacks.² The narrative depicts the satisfaction of Odysseus' desire, the filling of the lack of homecoming and wife emphasized in the proem: νόστου κεχρημένον ἤδ' ἔ γυναικός (*Od.* 1.13).'

¹In the words of Goldhill 1995, 196, it is the 'most teleological of epics'.

²See Goldhill 1984, 183ff for a longer, persuasive version of this structuralist-inspired thesis.

If this is a story of the failures of women Odysseus actually meets, there is a subtler - though fundamentally similar - reading of the poem which emphasizes Penelope's differentiation from other women who have subverted the return, *nostos*, of other heroes. Crucial here is the importance the poem lays on the figures of Clytemnestra and Helen. This supplementary story, the basis of the book by Katz, is constructed in roughly the following manner: 'Clytemnestra subverts Agamemnon's return, murdering her husband on his return home.'³ Helen is a figure who remains the epitome of infidelity, who left her husband Menelaus for Paris and caused the Trojan War. These figures are important insofar as they provide alternative sub-plots which threaten to undermine Odysseus' return home. Though Penelope remains faithful, she still might yield to the desires of the suitors, become a Helen. Though Odysseus hopes to return to a faithful, waiting Penelope, there lurks the possibility that she will have changed into a murderous Clytemnestra. With the same points of reference, Odysseus' prolonged encounter with the souls of the 'wives and daughters of princes' in the Underworld can be explained. Insofar as they provide alternative (per)versions of women's role in the *oikos*, they aid in Odysseus' understanding of what a normal woman is. This helps us understand the happiness of the ending, for the safe return of Odysseus to Penelope carries the force of a certain relief. Odysseus returns to a faithful Penelope, not any of *them* (not a murderous Clytemnestra, an adulterous Helen.. or from book 11, an incestuous Epicaste who slept with her son Oedipus, a hateful Eriphyle, who sold her husband's life for gold etc..).'

The problem with both of these readings of the poem is that they take into account only one of the Homeric views of gender outlined in the previous chapter. They depend on the symmetrical theory, with woman playing a complementary role

³In fact, the poem is unclear as to whether Clytemnestra or her lover Aegisthus is the actual murderer. See Katz, *esp.* chapter 1, for a discussion of the implications of this.

to man, and pay no heed to the asymmetrical one. The figure of the *parthenos*, who acts out gendered roles in such a way as to demonstrate their contingency, is ignored, which means that much of the complexity of Homer's narrative is also missed.⁴ In order to demonstrate this, let us look closely at where the teleological interpretations end: Penelope.

The logic which allows Penelope to function as the poem's *telos* is dependent on a moralizing divide of the category of woman into good and bad: a return to Penelope can only make sense if she is morally differentiated from others, if she is deemed worthy to return to. But this division of women into good and evil is explicitly collapsed inside the poem by a pair of speeches delivered by Agamemnon. The words of Agamemnon have generally been dismissed as unthinking misogyny and of course the speeches are misogynist, yet this should not stop us from examining their logic. The first speech is delivered by him to Odysseus as part of an exchange between them during Odysseus' trip to Hades. There, Agamemnon first tells of his murder at the hands of his wife and her lover Aegisthus. Though Aegisthus seems at first to be the primary agent of murder, as Agamemnon recounts the tale it is Clytemnestra's responsibility which comes to the fore. This leads to a sweeping condemnation of all women:

ὡς οὐκ αἰνότερον καὶ κύντερον ἄλλο γυναικός,
 [ἢ τις δὴ τοιαῦτα μετὰ φρεσὶν ἔργα βάλῃται·]
 οἶον δὴ καὶ κείνη ἐμήσατο ἔργον ἀεικές,
 κουριδίῳ τεύξασα πόσει φόνον. ἦ τοι ἔφην γε
 ἀσπᾶσιος παίδεσσιν ἰδὲ δμῶεσσιν ἐμοῖσιν
 οἴκαδ' ἐλεύσεσθαι· ἢ δ' ἔξοχα λυγρὰ ἰδυῖα ὕψι
 οἶ τε κατ' αἰσχὸς ἔχευε καὶ ἐσσομένησιν ὀπίσσω
 θηλυτέρῃσι γυναιξί, καὶ ἦ κ' εὐεργὸς ἔησιν. (*Od.* 11.427-435)

So there is nothing more deadly or more vile than a woman
 who stores her mind with acts that are of such sort, as this one

⁴The bibliography on Penelope is immense. I concentrate on the recent books of Katz and Felson-Rubin, who themselves provide useful surveys of the literature.

did when she thought of this act of dishonor, and plotted the murder of her lawful husband. See, I had been thinking that I would be welcome to my children and thralls of my household when I came home, but she with thoughts surpassingly grisly splashed the shame on herself and the rest of her sex, on women still to come, even on the one whose acts are virtuous.

What is interesting here is Agamemnon's refusal of the separation of women into categories of good and bad. Rather, even those whose acts are virtuous are already evil. For Agamemnon women just *are* evil. Odysseus replies by tacitly agreeing, mentioning the evil of Helen in addition to that of Clytemnestra:

ὦ πόποι, ἦ μάλα δὴ γόνον Ἄτρεος εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς
ἐκπάγλως ἤχθηρε γυναικείας διὰ βουλάς
ἐξ ἀρχῆς· Ἑλένης μὲν ἀπωλόμεθ' εἵνεκα πολλοί,
σοὶ δὲ Κλυταιμνήστρη δόλον ἤρτυε τηλόθ' ἔόντι. (*Od.* 11.437-41)

Shame it is, how most terribly Zeus of the wide brows from the beginning has been hateful to the seed of Atreus through the schemes of women. Many of us died for the sake of Helen, and when you were far, Klytimestra plotted treason against you.

Odysseus' apparent affirmation of the guilt of women as a whole - Helen is added to Clytemnestra - remains conspicuously silent about Penelope, the obvious exception. The failure to mention Penelope prompts Agamemnon to qualify his misogyny; he modifies his earlier remarks by assuring Odysseus that he will never be murdered by his wife, for Penelope is 'all too virtuous and her mind is stored with good thoughts' (*Od.* 11.445ff). But despite this apparent *volte-face* - which seems to assure Penelope entrance into the realm of virtue - Agamemnon produces a further surprise, which reinforces his previous argument. For despite Penelope's virtue, he goes on to emphasize that Odysseus should beware of her on his voyage home. Penelope, *as a woman*, cannot be trusted:

κρύβδην, μηδ' ἀναφανδά, φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν
νῆα κατισχέμεναι, ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι πιστὰ γυναιξίν. (*Od.* 11.455-6)

When you bring your ship in to your own dear country, do it

secretly, not in the open. There is no trusting in women.

One could perhaps try to explain Agamemnon's words in terms of the narrative progression of the poem. Though Penelope is given the benefit of the doubt and assumed to be virtuous, at this point in the narrative - with Odysseus still stuck on Phaeacia - her virtue remains unproved. Odysseus is thus forced to consider the possibility that Penelope might indeed turn out to be another Clytemnestra. Yet there is another twist to Agamemnon's misogyny. For he repeats the condemnation of all women in almost exactly the same terms in the final book of the *Odyssey* as he converses with the souls of the suitors murdered by Odysseus. At this point in the poem there is no question about the success of Odysseus' return, nor that Penelope has proven herself to be virtuous. Yet though Agamemnon's words display an even more marked contrast between Penelope's virtue and the evils of women in general, Penelope is still tarred with the same brush as her species:

ὄλβιε Λαέρταο πάϊ, πολυμήχαν' Ὀδυσσεῦ,
ἦ ἄρα σὺν μεγάλῃ ἀρετῇ ἐκτήσω ἄκοιτιν·
ὡς ἀγαθαὶ φρένες ἦσαν ἀμύμονι Πηνελοπείῃ,
κούρη Ἰκαρίου, ὡς εὖ μέμνητ' Ὀδυσῆος,
ἀνδρὸς κουριδίου. τῶ οἱ κλέος οὐ ποτ' ὀλεῖται
ἧς ἀρετῆς, τεύξουσι δ' ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἀοιδῆν
ἀθάνατοι χαρίεσσαν ἐχέφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ,
οὐχ ὡς Τυνδαρέου κούρη κακὰ μήσατο ἔργα,
κουρίδιον κτείναςα πόσιν, στυγερὴ δέ τ' ἀοιδὴ
ἔσσειτ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους, χαλεπὴν δέ τε φῆμιν ὀπάσσει
θηλυτέρησι γυναιξί, καὶ ἦ κ' εὐεργὸς ἔησιν. (*Od.*24.192-202)

'O fortunate son of Laertes, Odysseus of many devices,
surely you won yourself a wife endowed with great virtue.
How good was proved the heart that is in blameless Penelope,
Ikarios' daughter, and how well she remembered Odysseus,
her wedded husband. Thereby the fame of her virtue shall never
die away, but the immortals will make for the people
of earth a thing of grace in the song for prudent Penelope.
Not so did the daughter of Tyndareos fashion her evil
deeds, when she killed her wedded lord, and a song of loathing
will be hers among men, to make evil the reputation
of womankind, even for one whose acts are virtuous.'

What is significant about Agamemnon's remarks is that they give the lie to any teleological reading of the poem based on the split of women into good/bad: 'good' Penelope as end to be aimed for, bad Helen/Clytemnestra as end to be avoided. For however noble, virtuous, faithful Penelope is, it matters not one jot to Agamemnon. Insofar as she is a woman, she remains untrustworthy, inherently capable of evil. It is tempting to suggest that Agamemnon's words lay bare a hidden secret of patriarchal ideology, a secret spoken more clearly here than in any other part of the poem: for its power lies not in its unfair denigration of good women, but in the unquestioned assumption of its ability to construct a separate morality of women (necessitating a determinate identity of woman) in the first place. We should therefore beware of dismissing his words as clumsy misogyny, and realize that they contain an important insight: try as anyone might to valorize a good Penelope, to produce an array of good feminine qualities with which to defend her, such a procedure will always run the risk of valorizing the process of categorization which assigns women virtues *as women*.

Agamemnon's words, together with the more general problem of Penelope's 'exception' to the feminine rule, have produced interesting critical responses. In general, the more rabid the denunciations of Agamemnon, the less the willingness to appreciate the more salutary parts of his logic. The forcefulness of the moral denunciation of Agamemnon acts as a shield, protecting critics from a serious engagement with the anxiety Agamemnon exhibits. I will look at this in more detail below, suggesting that one of the reasons his words have been ignored is that his insight about Penelope is fundamentally correct: she indeed cannot be so easily separated from the 'evil' women in the poem. Lurking beneath the apparent identity of 'virtuous women' there are persistent narrative hints that this 'virtue' is merely acted out for the sake of men; Penelope remains as untrustworthy as

Clytemnestra and Helen. But first, it is instructive to examine three separate ways in which critics have chosen to skip over Agamemnon's logic.

The classic approach is to fetishize his words, treating them as if they were the only examples of misogyny in the poem. Let us consider the words of W.B.Stanford: 'Generalizing from his personal experience...as men are apt to do, he condemns the whole sex in words that are the first in a long series of anti-feminist gibes in Greek literature.'⁵ The problem with the argument here is relatively obvious; in the self-satisfaction generated by the moral denunciation of Agamemnon, any general questioning of the ideology of gender in the rest of the poem is (perennially) put on hold. Such criticism can hardly avoid succumbing to the dominant ideology of the poem, which itself rests on the process of constructing a 'good', 'faithful' woman.

A more recent approach of Felson-Rubin moves even further along the critical path of Stanford by explicitly valorizing Penelope as a faithful wife against Agamemnon, who in turn displays 'a flagrantly negative attitude toward womankind':

[B]y the end of the performance, an invitation is extended to all listeners to transcend Agamemnon's limited perspective and adopt that of Odysseus.... If eventually *even he* is converted, then all skeptical males in Homer's audience can be cajoled into a kindly attitude toward faithful Penelope (and perhaps toward their own faithful wives).⁶

Felson-Rubin's book is itself explicitly indebted to ego-psychology, and in her reading of Agamemnon's misogyny this is very much in evidence.⁷ What drives her critique of Agamemnon is a belief in the complementary roles of man and

⁵Stanford *ad Od.* 11.441ff.

⁶Felson-Rubin 93.

⁷Ego-psychology, a form of psychoanalysis which seeks to reinforce the ego of the analysands in order to integrate them better into society, was persistently attacked by Lacan; for Lacan, such reinforcement of the ego could only mean a caving in to the dominant ideology of the day, and thus is deeply complicit in a conventional, quietist politics.

woman, of womankind as separate from 'mankind', yet playing a (separate but) equal role in the creation of a couple, a 'one'.⁸ Her reading not only fails to find any awareness of a challenge to the construction of a 'feminine' identity, but eagerly acquiesces in this project. It affirms the 'feminine' qualities of mothering and fidelity which are already on display on the poem's surface. But equally important is the way such an approach undermines any possibility of resistance; it rules out in advance a feminist agency which is not always already the product of the social discourse that constructs women *as* women. For Felson-Rubin, Penelope's 'agency' lies in her active assumption of the role as 'faithful wife', her ability to play a full part in the voyage toward the 'oneness' with Odysseus that is the apparent *telos* of the poem. We will need to return to the problem of assessing Penelope's agency. For now, it is enough to note that agency, for Felson-Rubin, is always already at the mercy of ideology - dancing to the tune of the signifier - which means that it can hardly be an agency at all.⁹

A third reaction to Agamemnon, by Murnaghan, is much more nuanced. It places Agamemnon's praise of the 'faithful' Penelope in its patriarchal context:

While the *Odyssey's* portrait of Penelope is one of the most sympathetic in Greek literature, that portrait is also placed in wider context of misogyny through the self-representation of

⁸Even the brief quote provides telling hints at Felson-Rubin's perspective. Her valorization of 'womankind', as a separate species from 'mankind', for example. The valorization of 'womankind' in the poem explicitly mirrors her critical approach, which advocates a 'female', more 'emotional' approach to reading literature: 'I have come to accept my own willingness to be in a dialogue with the text rather than "playing it cool" and distancing myself, postmodern-fashion, from its emotional content', which for Felson-Rubin is an approach which is characteristic of male ideology. This vision of 'emotional' women, not quite at home in the 'male' world of 'rational discourse' is a staple of patriarchal ideology.

⁹The issue of 'Penelope as Moral Agent' is also discussed, in a fundamentally similar manner, in Foley 1995, *passim*. For Foley, Penelope makes 'a fully conscious choice and autonomous decision' to reject 'hope and desire for obedience to social responsibilities'. There are numerous difficulties here, not least in the problem of the compatibility of 'autonomy' with responsibilities that are emphatically social. In what follows, my opposition to this position will become clear; in particular, I am more interested in Penelope's *unconscious refusal* of social dictates, rather than her conscious obedience, and in the way she tries to refuse to make any moral choice, and thus undermines the categories implied in 'social responsibilities'.

Penelope as an exception to the general rule. The poem self-consciously depicts the formation of a tradition of misogyny even as it places a counterexample at the center of its story.¹⁰

Murnaghan shows an awareness of a broader patriarchal strategy:

Penelope's 'virtue' is always already contained in a wider discourse that posits her as exception. As such, her sympathetic portrait is beside the point. Yet even here, what is noticeable is the rejection of the explicit words of Agamemnon. Murnaghan reacts to Agamemnon as if he had argued that though most women were bad, Penelope is a notable exception. Of course, this is not his argument; he argues that any exception is irrelevant, undermined by the untrustworthy status of women as women. Further, in giving in to the 'sympathetic' portrait of Penelope, there is already a yielding to the patriarchal logic that Murnaghan seeks to undermine. For Penelope is only sympathetic to the extent that she conforms to the notion of 'good' woman, to the extent that she plays the role which is already carved out for her in the symbolic.

In contrast to these critics, I will suggest that Agamemnon is right: Penelope is fundamentally similar to Helen and Clytemnestra. But rather than directly providing evidence for the resemblance, let us first consider the reason for Agamemnon's anxiety. An obvious answer lies in his personal misfortune: murdered by his own wife, he is naturally suspicious of other women. Yet this in itself does not explain the particular form his misogyny takes, which emphasizes not so much the cruelty or murderousness of women, but their deviousness, the impossibility of ever being able to completely trust them. Felson-Rubin suggests that Agamemnon fears an 'autonomous female other'¹¹, and I think she is at least partly correct. She is incorrect insofar as his fear has nothing to do with the

¹⁰Murnaghan 124.

¹¹Felson-Rubin 107.

'female' *per se*, but correct in that he is terrified by the prospect of a certain freedom in and of itself, a freedom which happens to be exhibited by Penelope. What terrifies Agamemnon is the possibility of Penelope's subjectivity, for she represents the possibility of a force which cannot be explained within his (or anyone's) ideological terms of reference. The problem with Penelope is not that she is 'good', or that she is 'bad', but that she is unpredictable, and it is this unpredictability which terrifies Agamemnon about women in general. Despite every system constructed to explain them, they still elude explanation and escape the parameters of the ideology that tries to ensnare them. In the terms of the last chapter, Agamemnon is aware of the possibility of Penelope as *parthenos*. Penelope's masks, as with the *parthenos*, seem to hide nothing; there is no motivation for them. It is this 'nothing', the possibility of a ciphered self stripped of every determinate identity, and with it the possibility of an act performed on behalf of no particular ideological system, which causes Agamemnon's anxiety.

Penelope as Nausicaa, Penelope as Arete

Let us now look at the manner in which the narrative signals Penelope as *parthenos*. Penelope becomes the figure Nausicaa is on the point of becoming for the Phaeacians as Odysseus leaves. We leave Phaeacia at the moment when the emergence of Nausicaa's desire threatens to disrupt the two roles assigned to females by patriarchal Phaeacian ideology: virgin maiden and *gyne*. Before Odysseus' appearance, Nausicaa had functioned as an idealized virgin maiden, Arete as an idealized *gyne*. Much of the complexity on show in Penelope's williness and apparent ambivalence toward Odysseus can be explained if we see her as a composite of both figures. For Odysseus, she appears to be a faithful wife and is treated as if she was an idealized *gyne* - like Arete. For the suitors, she appears as a

virgin maiden, who teases the best of her suitors as she withholds the promise of marriage; she is treated as if she was a beautiful, alluring virgin - like Nausicaa. It is because Penelope embodies both Arete and Nausicaa that complexities arise; the passage from virgin to *gyne* is meant to be a natural and progressive one. Young girls grow up to become what they naturally should be, wives. Marriage resolves the uncertainty implied in the moment of transition. Penelope undermines this transition. But she does this not simply by lingering on the point of indeterminacy when she is not fully either; rather, she is emphatically *both*. She appears as virgin and *gyne* to different people simultaneously, and thus clarifies that these are not natural states of being, but roles which can be played out, masks to be worn.

Let us look at each of these roles in turn. In the closing books, as the scene is set for the slaughter of the suitors at the contest of the bow, Homer's narrative persistently draws attention to the parallels between the situation of Penelope and that of Nausicaa. On Phaeacia, the emergence of Nausicaa's desire led to a quarrel (*neikos*) between the young Phaeacian men and Odysseus; the quarrel then leads to the games of book 8, which are implicitly staged as a competition between the men for the right to marry Nausicaa. So too the gathering of the suitors around Penelope is described in terms of its potential for strife. Eurymachus, early in the poem, describes the gathering as an *eris* for the sake of Penelope's virtue (εἴνεκα τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐριδαίνομεν, 'we quarrel for the sake of her excellence' *Od.*2.206). Later Antinous suggests that the disguised Odysseus' desire to try the bow is due to drunkenness and compares the possible outcome to the legendary fight between the Centaurs and Lapiths at the marriage ceremony of Peirithoüs; the fight was provoked by the attempt of the drunken Centaur Eurytion to carry off Peirithoüs' bride. His reference to this *eris* over a woman anticipates the slaughter which will

soon erupt after the bow contest.¹² More generally, the fears of the Phaeacians that Nausicaa might prefer to marry a stranger, and therefore put into question their status as *aristoi*,¹³ mirrors the concern of Eurymachus as he fails in his attempt to string the bow:

Oh my sorrow. Here is a grief beyond all others;
it is not so much the marriage I grieve for, for all my chagrin.
There are many Achaian women besides, some of them close by
in seagirt Ithaka, and some in the rest of the cities;
but it is the thought, if this is true, that we can come so far short
of godlike Odysseus in strength, so that we cannot even
string his bow. A shame for men unborn to be told of.¹⁴ (*Od.*22.249-255)

Just as the suspicion that Nausicaa was not interested in any of their number haunted the Phaeacians, so the suitors are threatened by the possibility that the bow contest will humiliate them. Further, it is not Penelope's worth which is in question; their humiliation comes from the manner in which her tricks constantly devalue their status as *aristoi*. She constantly undermines their claim to excellence.

But if the suitors see a Nausicaa, a woman who always threatens to become the source of a conflict, Odysseus sees an Arete - a figure of perfect virtue, whose qualities resolve quarrels rather than create them. This is the point of the 'reverse simile' used to describe her in Book 19, a simile which looks back to Arete:

ὦ γύναι, οὐκ ἄν τις σε βροτῶν ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν
νεικέοι· ἦ γάρ σευ κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἰκάνει,

¹²The poem continually portrays the possible victory over the suitors as the victory of Odysseus as athlete. Menelaus associates the successful punishment of the suitors with the image of Odysseus as a wrestler (4.343ff), and Menelaus' words are later repeated by Telemachus for Penelope (17.134ff).

¹³*Od.*6.282ff.

¹⁴It is worth noting in passing how Eurymachus' logic here alludes to the famous arguments against the Trojan War made by Achilles, and in an important sense surpasses them. Achilles realizes the surface stupidity in the fight over a single woman, when there are 'many others'. The rejection of the war for Helen is reinforced in his rejection of the symbolic importance of the daughter of Agamemnon as wife (*Il.*9.388ff. Cf his remarks at 9.340-2). For Eurymachus, however, the women in and of themselves are of no importance. They are merely the pretext for the battle for prestige between men.

ὥς τέ τευ ἦ βασιλῆος ἀμόμονος, ὅς τε θεουδῆς
 [ἀνδράσιν ἐν πολλοῖσι καὶ ἰφθίμοισιν ἀνάσσω]
 εὐδικίας ἀνέχησι, φέρησι δὲ γαῖα μέλαινα
 πυρούς καὶ κριθάς, βρίθησι δὲ δένδρεα καρπῶ,
 τίκτη δ' ἔμπεδα μῆλα, θάλασσα δὲ παρέχη ἰχθῦς
 ἐξ εὐηγεσίης, ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ. (*Od.*19.107-14)

Lady, no mortal man on the endless earth could have cause
 to find fault with you; your fame goes up into the wide heaven,
 as of some king who, as a blameless man and god-fearing,
 and ruling as lord over many powerful people,
 upholds the way of good government, and the black earth yields him
 barley and wheat, his trees are heavy with fruit, his sheepflocks
 continue to bear young, the sea gives him fish, because of
 his good leadership, and his people prosper under him.

The simile seems to be 'reversed' because the would-be king, Odysseus, portrays Penelope in that role.¹⁵ But this strangeness can be explained if we understand it as looking back to the peculiar social harmony which existed on Phaeacia. Alcinous, to be sure, is a classic example of the good king that Odysseus describes, but the harmony of his rule on Phaeacia was dependent on Arete's ability, as an idealized *gyne*, to resolve the quarrels between men formed in the competition for maidens: *νείκεα λύει* (*Od.*7.74).¹⁶ The simile provides insight both into the sort of kingdom which Odysseus believes to be ideal, and into the gender relations he imagines to be at work - the idealized relations he describes elsewhere as *homophrosyne*, like-mindedness.¹⁷ It is a world which resembles that of the Phaeacians, where gender identities are fixed and the tensions created by marriageable maidens are resolved by the actions of *gynaikes*. Odysseus' ideal is thoroughly nostalgic; he seeks to return to an idealized society which the narrative of his intervention on Phaeacia has already demonstrated as impossible.

¹⁵See Foley 1978, 11ff.

¹⁶This thematic reference to Arete is backed up by the pun on her name at 19.114: *ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ*.

¹⁷See his words to Penelope, outlining an ideal of marriage at *Od.*6.181ff.

It is this motif of nostalgia which lies behind Penelope's description of the actions of the suitors to the disguised Odysseus in Book 18:

νῦξ δ' ἔσται, ὅτε δὴ στυγερὸς γάμος ἀντιβολήσει
 οὐλομένης ἐμέθεν, τῆς τε Ζεὺς ὄλβον ἀπηύρα.
 ἀλλὰ τόδ' αἰνὸν ἄχος κραδίην καὶ θυμὸν ἰκάνει·
 μνηστήρων οὐχ ἦδε δίκη τὸ πάροιθε τέτυκτο,
 οἳ τ' ἀγαθὴν τε γυναῖκα καὶ ἀφνειοῖο θύγατρα
 μνηστεύειν ἐθέλωσι καὶ ἀλλήλοισ' ἐρίωσιν·
 αὐτοὶ τοί γ' ἀπάγουσι βόας καὶ ἴφια μῆλα
 κούρης δαίτα φίλοισι, καὶ ἀγλαὰ δῶρα διδοῦσιν·
 ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀλλότριον βίον νήποιον ἔδουσιν. (*Od.* 18.272-280)

And there will come that night when a hateful marriage is given to wretched me, for Zeus has taken my happiness from me. But this thing comes as a bitter distress to my heart and spirit: the behavior of these suitors is not as it was in time past when suitors desired to pay their court to a noble woman and daughter of a rich man, and rival each other. Such men themselves bring in their own cattle and fat sheep, to feast the family of the bride, and offer glorious presents. They do not eat up another's livelihood, without payment.

Penelope looks back to a time of a good *eris*; suitors vied with each other (*ἐρίωσιν*) in giving presents for a woman, a behavior in stark contrast to the present behavior of suitors. Penelope's reference to this good *eris* comes close to the famous discussion of 'two Strifes' made by Hesiod in the *Works and Days*: for Hesiod, a praiseworthy *eris* encourages hard work through competition, while a shameful *eris* leads to the toil and suffering of war.¹⁸ But Penelope's nostalgia for a former, trouble-free society can help clarify the difference between the two. We have already seen a version of an idealized, conflict-free society from the mythical past dreamed of by Penelope: Phaeacia before the arrival of Odysseus. And as it happens, there too there is a showcasing of a 'good *eris*' as the Phaeacian women vie with each other in washing the clothes:

εἶματα χερσὶν ἔλοντο καὶ ἐσφόρεον μέλαν ὕδωρ,

¹⁸Hesiod, *Works and Days* 11ff.

στείβον δ' ἐν βόθροισι θοῶς, ἔριδα προφέρουσαι.
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πλῦνάν τε κάθηράν τε ρύπα πάντα..*Od.6.91-3*

[They] lifted the wash in their hands and carried it to the black water,
and stamped on it in the basins, making a race and a game of it
until they had washed and rinsed all the dirt away..

The conflict-free, playful competition is soon followed by the actual game played with the *sphaira*. But this game is complicated by the dropping of that ball engineered by Athena, an event which introduces the Phaeacians to the possibility of loss.¹⁹ We now have at least one reason why the initial *eris* over the washing is a good one; the competitors did not face the possibility of losing. So too Penelope looks back to a mythical past, when games could be played honorably without any fear of defeat. Odysseus' later slaughter of the suitors is made in the hope of a return to this mythical past.

Penelope's desire

If the notion of Penelope as *parthenos* - an amalgam of masks, *gyne* and virgin maiden, hiding nothing - can help explain her interactions with the suitors and Odysseus, we still need to consider the motivation for the wearing of these masks - the problem of her desire. The book of Marilyn Katz deals with the issue directly.²⁰ The title of the fourth chapter, which attempts to make sense out of Penelope's actions in Books 18 and 19, poses the key question: 'What does

¹⁹It also previews the 'bad *eris*' which will arise from the games. Odysseus' later attempt to patch up the effect of his discus throw involves a denunciation of any man who would bring *eris* to the games. His language, uttered at the moment when the possibility of innocent competition disappears on Phaeacia, recalls the *eris* between the washers (ἔριδα προφέρουσαι):

ἄφρων δὴ κείνός γε καὶ οὐτιδανὸς πέλει ἀνὴρ,
ὅς τις ξεινοδόκῳ ἔριδα προφέρῃται ἀέθλων...(*Od.8.210-1*)

Any man can be called mad and a nobody
who brings forth an *eris* in the games to his host..

²⁰Katz 1991.

Penelope want?' Here Katz echoes the question that plagued Freud, and which he meekly confessed he was unable to answer. But before looking at Katz' answer, it is worth briefly affirming why it is a question in the first place.

Penelope's actions in these books are notoriously difficult to fathom. At the moment of Odysseus' return, she seems to give up her patient, twenty year wait for him; she gives in to the demands of the suitors by instigating the contest of the bow. Her attitude to the suitors is itself complex. Though professing disapproval of them, there is the ongoing suggestion that she might be willing to marry the 'best' of them, and in a famous dream which she recounts to the disguised Odysseus there is a suggestion that she sexually desires them:

ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τὸν ὄνειρον ὑπόκριναι καὶ ἄκουσον.
 χῆνες μοι κατὰ οἶκον εἴκοσι πυρὸν ἔδουσιν
 ἐξ ὕδατος, καὶ τέ σφιν ἰαίνομαι εἰσορόωσα· ὕψι
 ἐλθὼν δ' ἐξ ὄρεος μέγας αἰετὸς ἀγκυλοχήλης
 πᾶσι κατ' ἀυχένας ἤξε καὶ ἔκτανεν· οἱ δ' ἐκέχυντο
 ἀθρόοι ἐν μεγάροισ', ὃ δ' ἐς αἰθέρα διὰν ἀέρθη.
 αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ κλαίον καὶ ἐκώκυον ἐν περ ὄνειρῳ,
 ἀμφὶ δέ μ' ἠγερέθοντο εὐπλοκαμίδες Ἀχαιαί,
 οἴκτρ' ὀλοφυρομένην, ὃ μοι αἰετὸς ἔκτανε χῆνας.
 ἄψ δ' ἐλθὼν κατ' ἄρ' ἔζειτ' ἐπὶ προύχοντι μελάθρῳ,
 φωνῇ δὲ βροτῆ κατερήτυε φώνησέν τε·
 'θάρσει, Ἰκαρίου κούρη τηλεκλειτοῖο·
 οὐκ ὄναρ, ἀλλ' ὕπαρ ἐσθλόν, ὃ τοι τετελεσμένον ἔσται.
 χῆνες μὲν μνηστῆρες, ἐγὼ δέ τοι αἰετὸς ὄρνις
 ἦα πάρος, νῦν αὐτε τεὸς πόσις εἰλήλουθα,
 ὃς πᾶσι μνηστῆρσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσω.'
 ὣς ἔφατ', αὐτὰρ ἐμὲ μελιηδῆς ὕπνος ἀνήκε·
 παπτήνασα δὲ χῆνας ἐνὶ μεγάροισ' ἐνόησα
 πυρὸν ἐρεπτομένους παρὰ πύελον, ἦχι πάρος περ. (*Od.* 19.535-551)

But come, listen to a dream of mine and interpret it for me.
 I have twenty geese here about the house, and they feed on
 grains of wheat from the water trough. I love to watch them.
 But a great eagle with crooked beak came down from the mountain,
 and broke the necks of them all and killed them. So the whole twenty lay
 dead about the house, but he soared high in the bright air.
 Then I began to weep - that was in my dream - and cried out
 aloud, and around me gathered the fair-haired Achaian women
 as I cried out sorrowing for my geese killed by the eagle.
 But he came back again and perched on the jut of the gabled
 roof. He now had a human voice and spoke aloud to me:

“Do not fear, O daughter of far-famed Ikarios.
This is no dream, but a blessing real as day. You will see it
done. The geese are the suitors, and I, the eagle, have been
a bird of portent, but now I am your own husband, come home,
and I shall inflict shameless destruction on the suitors.

The striking aspect of the dream which cries out for interpretation - and which has been steadfastly avoided by classicists intent on preserving a pure, faithful, Arete-like Penelope - is the strength of her affection for the geese. Can this mean anything other than an unconscious sexual desire for the suitors, which can only contradict her professed intolerance of them? We will return to this dream in due course. For now, it is worth pointing out that the difficulties in understanding the meaning of the dream parallels the difficulty in finding the motivations behind Penelope's actions; for she is emphatically a figure who does one thing while 'her own mind has other intentions.'²¹

What is Katz' answer to the question? Her first step is to reject all readings that rely upon 'psychological verisimilitude', readings which try to piece together out of the plethora of inconsistencies a 'unified' character of Penelope. Instead (and it is easy to agree) she emphasizes the need for an approach that recognizes the inconsistencies. For her, such an approach is narratological: the exigencies of fiction far outweigh the importance of psychology.²² Yet her narratological frame of reference has itself something to say about Penelope's character:

It will be the burden of my reading overall, by contrast, to suggest that the indeterminacy around which the character of Penelope is constructed undermines this notion of a coherent, essential self and presents us with a notion of the

²¹The formulaic phrase here is 'νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοινᾷ.' Specific examples of the phrase include 18.281ff, 13.381 (where the description is Athena's) and 2.90ff (where Antinous describes the famous ruse of the weaving - Penelope promises to marry the suitors when she has finished weaving a shroud for Laertes. She then weaves during the day, but undoes her work during the evening).

²²p11: '[T]he long-standing problem of Penelope's character is better addressed from the perspective of narrative fiction than from that of psychological verisimilitude.'

person instead as constructed - invented on the spot, as it were - and ultimately brought into being as such by time, place, and circumstance.²³

It is easy enough to detect a post-structuralist influence here. Rather than a naive notion of 'unified character', there is the suggestion of a plurality of subject-positions. In effect, there is no single Penelope, but a multiplicity of Penelopes, whose desires change in order to fit in with the narrative construction of the poem. Katz therefore answers the question of Penelope's desire by simply denying its validity as posed. In order to solve the paradox of Penelope's desire, we need to stop thinking of a 'single' Penelope. 'Penelope' wants different things precisely insofar as she is a multiplicity of changing identities. The obvious value of Katz' thesis is that she refuses to provide any superficial resolution to the paradox constructed by Penelope's inconsistency. In short, she recognizes that all attempts to find an answer to the question 'What does Penelope want?' by explaining away the empirical inconsistencies of what she desires are doomed to failure. I readily concede that 'what' Penelope wants is inconsistent, but I think a more convincing answer to the problem can be found by looking more carefully at the 'wanting' itself.

Here again, I will turn to psychoanalytic terminology for help. For the figure of the *parthenos*, as a wearer of masks hiding nothing, closely resembles the psychoanalytic definition of the hysteric. Hysteria, in psychoanalytic terms, involves the external display of the inconsistency of one's desire. In Lacan's words, 'I demand that you refuse my demand, since it is not *that*.' Hysterical desire appears as theater; the hysteric stages her desire, but when it is on the point of being satisfied, she changes her mask, plays a new role.²⁴ An apposite example is

²³Katz 1991, 94.

²⁴It should be emphasized that men can also be hysterical (as both Freud and Lacan emphasized). Indeed, Odysseus himself, insofar as he is polytropic, a wearer of masks, seems at first glance to have something in common with the hysteric. I will argue against this below, suggesting that the

provided by Slavoj Žižek, who narrates the painter Edvard Munch's encounter with hysteria at the turn of the century:

In 1893 Munch was in love with the beautiful daughter of an Oslo wine merchant. She clung to him, but he was afraid of such a tie and anxious about his work, so he left her. One stormy night a sailing-boat came to fetch him: the report was that the young woman was on the point of death and wanted to speak to him for the last time. Munch was deeply moved and, without question, went to her home, where he found her lying on a bed between two lighted candles. But when he approached her bed, she rose and started to laugh: the whole scene was nothing but a hoax. Munch turned and began to leave; at that point, she threatened to shoot herself if he left her; and drawing a revolver, she pointed at her breast. When Munch bent to wrench the weapon away, convinced that this too was only part of the game, the gun went off and wounded him in the hand... Here we encounter hysterical theatre at its purest: the subject is caught in a masquerade in which what appears to be deadly serious reveals itself as fraud (dying), and what appears to be an empty gesture reveals itself as deadly serious (the threat of suicide).²⁵

What is of significance for us here is the relation of the hysteric to the symbolic. The hysteric is certainly *written* by social discourses. But the crucial aspect of hysteria is that it is suggestive of something more than this inscription. Though the body is written, this does not mean that the subject is merely the effect of discourse.²⁶ For what is significant about the hysteric is not the way she conforms to social dictates, but rather the challenge provided by hysterics to social identity, the way she fails to conform. Why is this so? In all her acting out, in all the displays of masks, the hysteric fails to find a perfect image of herself. In this theater, the subject is cut off from the body, forced to recognize the alienation involved in the playing of social roles: 'The fact that she is constructed by society's language means *to the hysteric* that part of her body will *not* be visible, or present to her.'²⁷ The staging illustrates perfectly the way the subject is split; we can return

effect of the bed scene is to show that Odysseus' role-playing was always supported by his fantasy of Penelope, and thus *for him* was always performed with a determinate goal in mind.

²⁵Žižek 1994, 150.

²⁶Here, I follow the argument of Copjec 51ff, and chapter 2 *passim*. Rose 1982, 28ff makes the same point.

²⁷Copjec 51.

here to the distinction between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciated. The 'masks' work at the latter level, as the hysteric acts out roles that are in an important sense already there, in the symbolic; and it is precisely insofar as they are roles already there that they tell us nothing about the 'I' that is the (hysterical) subject. In the insufficiency of these roles, in their inability to represent her, she stumbles upon a certain vanishing point of the subject that precedes these symbolic identifications, the shifting, mercurial 'I', the subject of the enunciation.

'I demand that you refuse my demand, since it is not *that*.' Is this not a perfect description of Penelope? She is constantly identified with a range of competing wants which, in the realm of the social world she inhabits, are quite clearly fulfillable. She could give in to any one of the suitors, or she could flatly reject them and await Odysseus. Instead, she shows an extraordinary willingness to procrastinate. Why? In the rejection of the multiplicity of possibilities that could fulfill her specific wants, she manifests desire for something beyond these wants. Her desire is not for any one thing, but is purer: what Penelope wants is, simply, *to want itself*. Here, we can return to an analysis of the dream of the geese, and Penelope's affection for them. A classic psychoanalytic interpretation - in itself quite unbearable for the majority of Homeric literary critics - was provided long ago by George Devereux:

In fact, it is hard to understand how literary critics could have overlooked the obvious fact that a rapidly aging woman, denied for some twenty years the pleasures of sex and the company and support of a husband, would be unconsciously flattered by the attentions of young and highly eligible suitors, which is precisely what the chief suitor accuses her of in public.²⁸

²⁸Devereux 382. Peradotto has recently defended Devereux's insight.

Devereux' analysis continues to cause a scandal insofar as it pulverizes the simplicity of any picture of a faithful, chaste Penelope. Yet we can take it a step further. For what is crucial about Penelope's interactions with the suitors is her ongoing refusal of their attentions. So despite the over-hasty rejections of Devereux' analysis by literary critics, what we should emphasize that is that Penelope's attraction to the suitors is quite obvious, that there is nothing 'unconscious' about it (as Devereux himself points out, she is accused of desiring the suitors *in public*). If Penelope cries for her geese, it is not because the death of the suitors takes away the possibility of limitless sexual satisfaction; it is rather because the death of the suitors threatens to disrupt the economy of her desire. The suitors' deaths, to the extent that they entail the return of Odysseus, endanger her hysterical theater; they threaten to disrupt the purity of her desire by removing her fellow-actors from her stage. Penelope cries because Odysseus' return - made explicit in the dream - promises the death of her desire.

If we understand Penelope as a hysteric, then it is possible to see how both suitors and Odysseus alike misread her. The suitors correctly read that her actions betray a sexual interest in them. What they fail to understand is that, despite this attraction, she is not remotely interested in ending the game of courtship by marrying any one of them. Here is Penelope's most forceful rebuke of the suitors:

κέκλυτέ μεν, μνηστήρες ἀγήνορες, οἳ τόδε δῶμα
 ἐχράετ' ἐσθιέμεν καὶ πινέμεν ἐμμενῆς αἰεὶ
 ἀνδρὸς ἀποικομένοιο πολὺν χρόνον, οὐδέ τιν' ἄλλην
μῦθου ποιήσασθαι ἐπισχεσίην ἐδύνασθε,
ἀλλ' ἐμὲ ἰέμενοι γῆμαι θέσθαι τε γυναῖκα. (Od.21.68-72)

Hear me now, you haughty suitors, who have been using this house for your incessant eating and drinking, though it belongs to man who has been gone for a long time; never have you been able to bring any other saying before me, but only your desire to make me your wife and marry me.

The suitors, for Penelope, tell the same old story. They have no other *mythos* to offer her than the story so central to patriarchal Greek culture: the tale of the passage from virgin maiden to *gyne*. But it is this tired story which Penelope resists. With the suitors, she acts out the role of maiden, while promising (but only promising) to be a *gyne*. With Odysseus, the situation is fundamentally similar. She plays out the role of faithful *gyne*, but does so with her husband safely away from Ithaca. She desires to be Odysseus' *gyne*, but only *in his absence*. His arrival poses the same threat to her as marriage to the suitors: the determinate identity of the *gyne*.

If Penelope's complaints to the suitors are double-edged, so too are her professions of faith to Odysseus. Zeitlin has suggested that competition for Penelope over the bow is a classic example of 'mimetic' desire. Odysseus' desire for Penelope is increased because others desire her.²⁹ But this brings with it an important consequence. It suggests that there is nothing 'objective' about Penelope which makes her desirable; rather, her attractiveness is merely the *effect* of male desire. The contest for Penelope takes place under the illusion (on the part of the suitors and Odysseus) that they are fighting for *something*. But Penelope as hysteric comes to the brink of disrupting this illusion. Once more, this is not because she offers any alternative to what the men who compete for her want. Quite the opposite. It is because she conforms all too exactly to what they want, raising the possibility that, with their fantasy construction of her removed, there will be nothing left of the 'real' Penelope. Let us look at one of her protestations of fidelity:³⁰

"Ξεῖν', ἦ τοι μὲν ἐμὴν ἀρετὴν εἶδος τε δέμας τε
ὤλεσαν ἀθάνατοι, ὅτε Ἴλιον εἰσανέβαινον
Ἄργεῖοι, μετὰ τοῖσι δ' ἐμὸς πόσις ἦεν Ὀδυσσεύς.

²⁹Zeitlin 1995, 141.

³⁰These lines to the disguised Odysseus are a near repetition of her earlier lines to Eurymachus at *Od.*18.251ff.

εἰ κείνός γ' ἔλθων τὸν ἐμὸν βίον ἀμφιπολεύοι,
 μεῖζόν κε κλέος εἶη ἐμὸν καὶ κάλλιον οὔτω. (*Od.*19.124-8)

Stranger, all of my excellence, my beauty and figure,
 were ruined by the immortals at that time when the Argives took ship
 for Ilion, and with them went my husband, Odysseus.
 If he were to come back to me and take care of my life, then
 my reputation would be more great and splendid.

Penelope's beauty, in her own words, is in itself nothing. It depends entirely on the quality of the men who vie for her. With Odysseus competing for her, she is beautiful, but the beauty disappears as soon as the competition of the best man disappears. But there is a further disquieting note. If her beauty disappears with Odysseus, there is a suggestion that her beauty is *staged* for him. When Odysseus is not present, Penelope's virtue vanishes, suggesting that she merely acts out the vision of virtue Odysseus already expects to see; Odysseus' Penelope disappears from Ithaca the moment Odysseus leaves. With this shadow hanging over the virtue of Penelope, let us now turn to the difficulties of the most significant moment of the reunion, the scene of the bed.

From Proteus to Penelope

Any simple happiness in the final recognition scene between Odysseus and Penelope is haunted by a moment of doubt; Odysseus asks the maid Eurycleia to make up a bed, the emblem of sexual fidelity between the husband and wife. Infamously, Penelope tests him by hinting that this fixed *sema* of her fidelity to him has been moved. The return to a faithful Penelope promises to set the final seal on Odysseus' return to his *oikos*, and thus re-establish him as head of an ideal *oikos*. This moment of doubt, engineered by Penelope, poses a huge threat to Odysseus' sense of identity. It opens the possibility that the entire premise of the *nostos* - the return to a faithful wife, the bedrock of a stable *oikos* - is an illusion. If Penelope's

fidelity turns out to be a lie, what was the point of the *nostos*? But what has not been noticed about this scene, and the promise of self-identity it provides, is that it recalls an earlier episode in the poem which examines the difficulties of any concept of self-identity - the tricking of Proteus:

ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι, μαῖα, στόρεσον λέχος, ὄφρα καὶ αὐτὸς
λέξομαι: ἦ γὰρ τῇ γε σιδῆρεον ἐν φρεσὶν ἦτορ."
 τὸν δ' αὐτε προσέειπε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
 "δαιμόνι', οὐ γάρ τι μεγαλίζομαι οὐδ' ἀθερίζω
 οὐδὲ λίην ἄγαμαι, μάλα δ' εὖ οἶδ' οἷος ἔησθα
 ἐξ Ἰθάκης ἐπὶ νηὸς ἰὼν δολιχηρέτμοιο.
ἀλλ' ἄγε οἱ στόρεσον πυκινὸν λέχος, Εὐρύκλεια,
ἐκτὸς εὖσταθέος θαλάμου, τὸν ῥ' αὐτὸς ἐποίει·
 ἔνθα οἱ ἐκθειῆσαι πυκινὸν λέχος ἐμβάλετ' εὐνήν,
 κώεα καὶ χλαίνας καὶ ῥήγεα σιγαλόεντα. (*Od.*23.171-80)

'Come then, nurse, make me up a bed, so that I myself
 will lie on it; for this woman has a heart of iron within her.'
 Circumspect Penelope said to him in answer:
 'You are so strange. I am not being proud, nor indifferent,
 nor puzzled beyond need, but I know very well what you looked like
 when you went in the ship with the sweeping oars, from Ithaka.
 Come then, Eurykleia, and make up a firm bed for him
 outside the well-fashioned chamber: that very bed that he himself
 built. Put the firm bed here outside for him, and cover it
 over with fleeces and blankets, and with shining coverlets.'

The narrative of Proteus' deception depended on the ambiguity between the aorist middle form of λέγω, meaning 'count', from the aorist of λέχομαι, meaning 'lie down'. The lying down of Proteus coincided with a moment of self-counting: in order to replace his lost seal, Proteus lay down among them at the same time that he counted himself: λέκτο καὶ αὐτός (*Od.*4.453). The possibility of identity is premised on the loss of a seal: Proteus' belief in his identity is a fantasy, played out against the background of the void created by the disappearance of the seal. Proteus' later doubt about his polytropic capacity shows an awareness of the contingency of any notion of identity. Odysseus, when confronted with the moved bed, is forced into facing this possibility. We discover that the series of tricks used to help him get back to Ithaca (his *metis*) and the many disguises used for self-

preservation (his *polytropy*) were all premised on his trust in his role as husband to the faithful Penelope; the immovable bed is a symbol, for Odysseus, of the infallibility of their bond. His desire to 'himself lie down' (ὄφρα καὶ αὐτὸς λέξομαι) is also a desire to count himself, to ensure that he is the husband of Penelope. The bed (λέχος), fixed at the center of Odysseus' home, functions as the correlative to Odysseus' own fantasized belief that he has a centered, fixed identity.

The possibility of the removal of the bed cannot help but undermine this belief of Odysseus; more accurately, it clarifies that it always was a fantasy. Just as Proteus' self-counting, his belief in himself, becomes a fantasy projected onto the blank space opened up by the loss of the seal, so too Odysseus' belief in Penelope's fidelity against the background of the impossibility of knowing whether she has been faithful or not. Underlying the shifting boundaries implied in the movement of the bed lies the attempt to find fixed parameters for the self, which provides added significance to the form of Penelope's test. She tells Eurycleia to move the bed outside her bed-chamber (ἐκτὸς ἐϋσταθέος θαλάμου). The bed which Odysseus believed to be at the center of his world, and which is the linchpin of his sense of self, is removed. The sense of autonomy provided by Odysseus' own construction of the bed (τόν ῥ' αὐτὸς ἐποίηι - 'which he himself made') is shown to be illusory because of the ruse of Penelope. Fidelity is a social relationship, irreducibly dependent on the actions of others. No amount of effort or toil from Odysseus can guarantee it. But it is precisely because fidelity is the social relationship most clearly dependent on a leap of faith that it illustrates an important truth about any sense of self; there is no determinate identity, no unchanging kernel of the self, which can be separated from the external realm of social discourses. Nevertheless all determinate identities are constructed against the background of this impossibility; they fill the blank screen of a ciphered self. Penelope's action provides Odysseus with a glimpse into this ciphered self, the void behind the series

of *tropoi*, masks, he has worn (a self which his victims on Phaeacia and the island of the Cyclops had already glimpsed).

But it is not only the tricking of Proteus which is alluded to in the bed scene. Odysseus replies to Penelope by describing at length the efforts he expended in constructing the bed, this 'great sign' of their fidelity:

ὦ γύναι, ἦ μάλα τοῦτο ἔπος θυμαλγὲς ἔειπες.
 τίς δέ μοι ἄλλοσε θῆκε λέχος; χαλεπὸν δέ κεν εἶη
 καὶ μάλ' ἐπισταμένῳ, ὅτε μὴ θεὸς αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν
 ῥηϊδίως ἐθέλων θείῃ ἄλλῃ ἐνὶ χώρῃ.
 ἀνδρῶν δ' οὐ κέν τις ζωὸς βροτός, οὐδὲ μάλ' ἠβῶν,
 ῥεῖα μετοχλίσειεν, ἐπεὶ μέγα σῆμα τέτυκται
 ἐν λέχει ἀσκητῶ· τὸ δ' ἐγὼ κάμον οὐδέ τις ἄλλος.
 θάμνος ἔφυ τανύφυλλος ἐλαίης ἔρκεος ἐντός,
 ἀκμηνὸς θαλέθων· πάχετος δ' ἦν ἡύτε κίων.
 τῶ δ' ἐγὼ ἀμφιβαλὼν θάλαμον δέμον, ὄφρ' ἐτέλεσσα.
 πυκνησιν λιθάδεσσι, καὶ εὐ καθύπερθεν ἔρεψα,
 κολλητὰς δ' ἐπέθηκα θύρας, πυκινῶς ἀραρυίας.
 καὶ τότε ἔπειτ' ἀπέκοψα κόμην τανυφύλλου ἐλαίης,
 κορμὸν δ' ἐκ ρίζης προταμῶν ἀμφέξεσα χαλκῶ
 εὐ καὶ ἐπισταμένῳ καὶ ἐπὶ στάθμῃ ἴθυνα,
 ἐρμῖν' ἀσκήσας, τέτρηνα δὲ πάντα τερέτρω.
 ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ἀρχόμενος λέχος ἔξεον, ὄφρ' ἐτέλεσσα,
 δαιδάλλων χρυσῶ τε καὶ ἀργύρῳ ἠδ' ἐλέφαντι·
 ἐν δ' ἐτάνυσσ' ἰμάντα βοὸς φοῖνικι φαεινόν.
 οὕτω τοι τόδε σῆμα πιφάυσκομαι· οὐδέ τι οἶδα,
 ἦ μοι ἔτ' ἔμπεδόν ἐστι, γύναι, λέχος, ἦέ τις ἤδη
 ἀνδρῶν ἄλλοσε θῆκε, ταμῶν ὑπο πυθμέν' ἐλαίης. (*Od.* 23.183-204)

What you have said, dear lady, has hurt me deeply. What man has put my bed in another place? But it would be difficult for even a very expert one, unless a god, coming to help in person, were easily to change its position. But there is no mortal man alive, no strong man, who lightly could move the weight elsewhere. There is one particular feature in the bed's construction. I myself, no other man, made it. There was the bole of an olive tree with long leaves growing strongly in the courtyard, and it was thick, like a column. I laid down my chamber around this, and built it, until I finished it, with close-set stones, and roofed it well over, and added the compacted doors, fitting closely together. Then I cut away the foliage of the long-leaved olive, and trimmed the trunk from the roots up, planing it with a brazen adze, well and expertly, and trued it straight to a chalkline, making a bed post of it, and bored all holes with an augur. I began with this and built my bed, until it was finished, and decorated it with gold and silver and ivory.

Then I lashed it with thongs of oxhide, dyed bright with purple.
 There is its character, as I tell you; but I do not know now,
 dear lady, whether my bed is still in place, or if some man
 has cut underneath the stump of the olive, and moved it elsewhere.

Rick Newton has already argued that the elaborate description of the bed-making is modeled on the craftsmanship exhibited by Hephaestus; in particular, it looks back to the trap he constructed for the adulterous Ares and Aphrodite in the second song of Demodocus in Book 8. Newton also notes that Odysseus' skills as a craftsman are on show in his blinding of the Cyclops in Book 9. But despite my general agreement that these passages are alluded to in Odysseus' description of the making of the bed, the significance of the allusion is much more complex than Newton believes. For Newton, the fidelity displayed between Odysseus and Penelope in Book 23 contrasts with the infidelity of Ares and Aphrodite:

But amidst the many echoes between Demodocus' 'Lay of Hephaestus and Aphrodite' and Homer's 'Lay of Odysseus and Penelope' lies one essential difference: the Phaeacian song ends in the alienation and separation of Hephaestus and Aphrodite, while the Ithacan episode ends in the physical and spiritual reunion of husband and wife.³¹

The problem with this conclusion is that it fails to take adequate account of the peculiar nature of Odysseus' rhetoric of building in Book 23, and the consequent strength of the parallels to the other episodes of craftsmanship. Odysseus' speech is markedly self-contradictory; he begins by suggesting the impossibility of any other mortal man moving the immovable bed post he has so laboriously constructed. The elaborate description of the construction is then provided as evidence for this position. But he ends by recognizing that he *does not know* if a mortal has moved the bed. There is thus a shift from certainty to doubt - a shift which exactly mirrors the narrative pattern of the lay of Hephaestus and

³¹Newton 1987, 18.

Aphrodite. Hephaestus is certain that the humiliating punishment he has so elaborately contrived for the lovers will ensure that no act of adultery will ever occur again. But this is quickly undermined by the remark of Hermes to Apollo: Hermes would still sleep with Aphrodite, regardless of the punishment. I have already noted that this shift from boundary construction to boundary transgression is indicated by a pun on Hermes' name: for the word for bed post is *hermis*.

Hephaestus' efforts to construct a perfect circle around the bed post (ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρ' ἐρμῖσιν χέε δέσματα κύκλω ἀπάντη. *Od.8.278*) foreshadow the imminent failure of his enterprise suggested by Hermes. Odysseus' efforts to construct a similar, infallible bed post (ἐρμῖν' ἀσκήσας) cannot help but suggest the futility of his efforts, a futility his subsequent doubt acknowledges.

The relevance of the allusion to the theme of construction in *Odyssey 9* is also more complex. The construction of the bed post from olive wood does indeed mirror the effort involved in the sharpening of the olive wood stake used to blind Polyphemus. But the olive wood plays a different role on each occasion. In Book 9, Odysseus makes use of the stake to remove the eye of the Cyclops: the act deprives him of his symbolic identity, creating a void in the center of his being. This act transformed the asocial Cyclops from an asocial monad into a *homo faber*: technological expertise is turned to in an attempt to find a cure for the incurable wound that is at the heart of mortal existence. Odysseus' illusion, in Book 23, lies in his apparent belief that Penelope can guarantee his identity, and thus cure this wound. Odysseus' response to Penelope's trick, suggested in the movement away from certainty toward the doubt expressed in the phrase 'οὐδέ τι οἶδα', 'I don't know', is thus not only a recognition of the lesson taught by Penelope, but of the lesson he has taught others, including the Cyclops. Here, it is worth noting that Odysseus' initial claim that no mortal has the strength to move the immovable bed

looks back to another immovable object - the boulder at the mouth of Polyphemus' cave which Odysseus' *metis* succeeds in moving.³²

Finally, Penelope's lesson is also a lesson in the nature of signs; for Odysseus' construction of the bed is also a construction of a 'great sign' (μέγα σῆμα) which promises, for him, to ground the constantly shifting, indeterminate masks he has worn throughout the poem. This 'μέγα σῆμα' functions as a master-signifier for Odysseus; his allegiance to Penelope promises to make sense of all his other actions; for every action throughout the poem is performed in the name of his relationship to Penelope. But does not the size of the sign point toward that other religious sign, the *colossos*? The thematic link between the bed as immovable and the immovable stone guarding the cave of the Cyclops already suggests a connection. The bed itself is also 'large', covered over with stones (πυκνήσιν λιθάδεσσι), and supposedly fixed (ἔμπεδόν). We are close to the identifying features of the senseless objects *par excellence*, the mute, massive stones which emerged as sublime objects in the world of the Phaeacians and Cyclopes at the moment they doubted. The *mega sema* which at first seemed to guarantee Odysseus' identity is perilously close to the *sema* which signifies nothing.

The doubt acknowledged by Odysseus seems to be resolved by Penelope's later acceptance of him, as she seems to take back her suggestion that the bed could have moved. But her words of acceptance contain a host of complications of their own. She begins by identifying with Helen, the most important example of 'evil', untrustworthy womanhood, and the adulteress *par excellence*:

αἰεὶ γάρ μοι θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλοισιν
ἔρριγει, μή τις με βροτῶν ἀπάφοιτ' ἐπέεσσιν
ἐλθῶν· πολλοὶ γὰρ κακὰ κέρδεα βουλευούσιν.

³²There is, once more, a verbal parallel: *ῥεῖα μετοχλίσσειεν* (*Od.*23.188), οὐκ ἂν τὸν γε δύω καὶ εἴκοσ' ἄμαξαι/ ἐσθλαὶ τετράκυκλοι ἀπ' οὐδέος *ὀχλίσσειαν*. (*Od.*9.241-2)

οὐδέ κεν Ἀργεΐη Ἑλένη, Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα,
 ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἄλλοδαπῶ ἐμίγη φιλότητι καὶ εὐνῇ,
 εἰ ἦδη, ὅ μιν αὐτίς ἀρήϊοι υἴες Ἀχαιῶν
 ἀξέμεναι οἰκόνδε φίλην ἐς πατρίδ' ἔμελλον.
 τὴν δ' ἦ τοι ῥέξαι θεὸς ὤρορεν ἔργον ἀεικές·
 τὴν δ' ἄτην οὐ πρόσθεν ἔῶ ἐγκάτθετο θυμῶ
 λυγρῆν, ἐξ ἧς πρῶτα καὶ ἡμέας ἵκετο πένθος. (*Od.*23.215-24)

For always the spirit deep in my heart was fearful
 that some one of mortal men would come my way and deceive me
 with words. For there are many who scheme for wicked advantage.
 For neither would the daughter born to Zeus, Helen of Argos,
 have lain in love with an outlander from another country,
 if she had known that the warlike sons of the Achaians would bring her
 home again to the beloved land of her fathers.
 It was a god who stirred her to do the shameful thing she
 did, and never before had she had in her heart this terrible
 wildness, out of which came suffering to us also.

Lines 218-224 have often been athetized by critics who want to preserve the image of a chaste Penelope. It is not difficult to see why. The comparison to Helen, and the implicit defense of her, is quite unbearable.³³ There is also a parallel with Clytemnestra; for in Nestor's rendition of her adultery with Aegisthus, it is the tenuousness of the barrier separating the shameful, modest Clytemnestra from her 'shameless' dark side which is emphasized.³⁴ But what is most striking, especially as Penelope is supposedly demonstrating her fidelity, is the incoherence of the picture of Helen provided by Penelope. She ends her remarks by suggesting that Helen was in no way responsible for her actions - the 'external' arrival of a god deprived her of her senses, took away any 'choice' she might have had in the matter. Yet this is in stark contradiction to the first half of the defense of Helen, which emphasizes her initial *choice* to sleep with Paris. It is true that Helen's choice

³³These lines are central to the argument of Devereux, who sees them as further indication of the simmering, unconscious sexual desire of Penelope which is only barely kept under wraps in the poem itself. While agreeing, once more, that Penelope displays a sexual desire here, once more I would emphasize that there is nothing unconscious about this.

³⁴See *Od.*3.265ff. Nestor emphasizes both that *at first* Clytemnestra was faithful - 'for her own nature was honest' - and that she only gave in to Aegisthus after he had murdered a singer, appointed by Agamemnon to look after her.

is then partially exonerated insofar as, with hindsight, Penelope claims she would not have made such a choice; yet even this exoneration is undermined by its utilitarian air. It is only wrong in hindsight, because she was finally dragged by force back to the house of Menelaus. The split between pure agent and pure victim displayed in Penelope's words is characteristic of the whole myth of Helen.³⁵ But we can make more sense out of the description if we see it as another hint at the difficulties of understanding the motivations of the *parthenos*. The split marks the divide between Helen as player of roles, wearer of masks (to the extent that she merely fills roles that are always already created for her in the symbolic, she is pointedly not free, a victim of the 'gods'), and something of Helen that evades these masks (what is left over is an inexplicable decision that manages to defy any of the roles allotted to her in the symbolic). In this way, we can understand the attribution of a 'divine' cause for her actions as a necessary afterthought, covering over the horror of the possibility of the power of Helen's agency. If so, then the scandal of Penelope's lines here has little to do *per se* with her identification with the sexual longings of Helen. They are scandalous insofar as Penelope aligns herself with a Helen who is something more than the multitude of masks she wears; even after the Trojan War, Helen can not be fitted in to any pre-conceived categories. Could the same be true of Penelope?

Penelope's allusion to the complexities of Helen as agent at the end of Book 23 is also related to the difficulties of determining Penelope's responsibility for the actions of the suitors - a theme which underlies the Ithacan narrative. For the verbal battles between Telemachus and the suitors center on the question of Penelope's control of the situation. When Antinous defends himself and the suitors against

³⁵Cf. Porter 1993 *passim*, but in particular his remarks on Homer's Helen, 278.

Telemachus' charges by diverting the blame onto Penelope, he does so in a way that recalls a crucial scene in *Iliad* 3 where Priam absolves Helen of blame:

σοὶ δ' οὐ τι μνηστῆρες Ἀχαιῶν αἵτιοί εἰσιν,
ἀλλὰ φίλη μήτηρ, ἣ τοι περὶ κέρδεα οἶδεν. (*Od.*2.87-8)

And yet you have no cause to blame the Achaian suitors,
 but it is your own dear mother, and she is greatly resourceful.

οὐ τί μοι αἰτίη ἐσσί, θεοί νύ μοι αἵτιοί εἰσιν
οἳ μοι ἐφώρμησαν πόλεμον πολύδακρυν Ἀχαιῶν. (*Il.*3.164-5)

I am not blaming you: to me the gods are blameworthy
 who drove upon me this sorrowful war against the Achaians.

Helen flits between being viewed as the cause of the Trojan war, and one of its innocent victims.³⁶ So too Penelope appears to the suitors as cause of the situation on Ithaca (in that she wears the mask of Nausicaa for the suitors) and to Odysseus as an innocent victim (the mask of Arete). But equally interesting is the way that the one/many motif which is central to the role of Helen in the Trojan War - the war is fought by many for the sake of one - is replayed in the *Odyssey*.³⁷ At the moment when the killing of the mass of suitors is about to begin, Athena encourages Odysseus by referring back to the war fought over Helen:

ὥς φάτ', Ἀθηναίη δὲ χολώσατο κηρόθι μᾶλλον,
 νείκεσεν δ' Ὀδυσῆα χολωτοῖσιν ἐπέεσσιν·
 "οὐκέτι σοί γ', Ὀδυσσεῦ, μένος ἔμπεδον οὐδέ τις ἀλκή,
 οἷη ὅτ' ἀμφ' Ἑλένη λευκωλένῳ εὐπατερεῖη
 εἰνάετες Τρώεσσιν ἐμάρναο νωλεμές αἰεῖ,
 πολλοὺς δ' ἄνδρας ἔπεφνες ἐν αἰνῇ δηϊοτῆτι,
 σῆ δ' ἦλω βουλή Πριάμου πόλις εὐρυάγυια.

³⁶Note also the similar streak of self-destructiveness which both seem to show, as suggested in their mutual desire for death. Penelope's desire to be snatched off by stormwinds rather than face an inferior husband at *Od.*20.61ff, looks back to Helen's desire not to have been born, but rather snatched away by a stormwind at *Il.*6.345ff. In Helen's case, of course, this desire is tempered by her willingness elsewhere to sleep with the worse man, Paris, which in turn cannot help but call into question Penelope's fidelity.

³⁷On Helen and the one/many motif, cf Porter 1993, *passim*. The parallel between Penelope and Helen as women who are fought over by many men is suggested by Nestor at *Od.*3.212 - 'many suitors are in your palace for the sake of your mother.' Cf Achilles words on Helen at *Il.*9.343ff.

πῶς δὴ νῦν, ὅτε σὸν γε δόμον καὶ κτήμαθ' ἰκάνεις,
ἄντα μνηστήρων ὀλοφύρεαι ἄλκιμος εἶναι; (*Od.*22.224-32)

He spoke, and Athene in her heart grew still more angry,
and she scolded Odysseus in words full of anger, saying:
'No longer, Odysseus, are the strength and valor still steady
within you, as when, for the sake of white-armed, illustrious
Helen, you fought nine years with the Trojans, ever relentless;
and by your counsel the wide-wayed city of Priam was taken.
How is it now, when you have come back to your own possessions
and house, you complain, instead of standing up to the suitors?'

Athena's scolding leads to the eruption of the long anticipated, destructive *eris*. A long war over Helen is replayed in the short, violent massacre of the suitors over Penelope. Of course, the teleological reading of the poem depends on what Zeitlin has recently called the one 'crucial and obvious difference' between the two: 'Helen went away; Penelope did not.'³⁸ But surely what is more significant is the similarity between these two wars, not the difference: one war is fought in the name of Helen's infidelity, the other in the name of Penelope's fidelity. But both are clearly wars fought as part of a futile attempt to *guarantee* fidelity - that is, they are inter-male fights over the fantasy of what a woman should be.

If Penelope's identification with Helen casts a shadow over her fidelity, her next rhetorical move brilliantly diverts us from the implications:

νῦν δ', ἐπεὶ ἤδη σήματ' ἀριφραδέα κατέλεξας
εὐνής ἡμετέρης, τὴν οὐ βροτὸς ἄλλος ὀπάπει,
ἀλλ' οἷοι σὺ τ' ἐγὼ τε καὶ ἀμφίπολος μία μούνη,
'Ακτορίς, ἦν μοι δῶκε πατήρ ἔτι δεῦρο κιούση,
ἢ νῶϊν εἴρυτο θύρας πυκινοῦ θαλάμοιο,
πείθεις δὴ μευ θυμόν, ἀπηγέα περ μάλ' ἐόντα." (*Od.*23.225-230)

But now, since you have given me accurate proof describing
our bed, which no other mortal man beside has ever seen,
but only you and I, and there is one serving woman,
Aktor's daughter, whom my father gave me when I came here,
who used to guard the doors for us in our well-built chamber;
so you persuade my heart, though it has been very stubborn.

³⁸Zeitlin 1995, p144.

Through the trick of the bed, Penelope manages to reverse the roles the two of them play. Before the trick, the narrative centered on the question of Penelope's fidelity, but the possible movement of the bed shifts our attention to the ability of the skills of Odysseus as bed-maker to guarantee her fidelity. We shift from concern with the referent of the *sema* (Penelope's fidelity) to the fidelity of *semata* in and of themselves. Odysseus no longer plays the role of accusing husband, and is instead is portrayed as someone engaged in persuading Penelope of his identity (πείθεις δὴ μὲν θυμόν), which is turn dependent on his ability to make the bed as a sign of a safe, mutual pact. But the allure of this possibility is also undermined. Penelope's speech of recognition exhibits the same pattern as the speech of Odysseus over the bed: she begins by arguing that no other mortal could have seen the bed (just as Odysseus believed no other mortal could have moved it), but undermines this certainty by the mention of a serving woman who shares the knowledge - a woman who appears nowhere else in the poem, and whose identity is a complete mystery.³⁹ Because another mortal *has* seen the bed, its secret is potentially available to anyone; Penelope's mention of Aktoris can only emphasize the tenuousness of the bond linking her to Odysseus. There is also significance in the anonymity of the serving woman; their reunion ultimately depends on their mutual belief in the good will of an unknown other. They thus act out the 'leap of faith' into the social made by Deucalion and Pyrrha, for their pact also depended on their faith in the benign auspices of an absent other, Zeus. For all the supposed clarity of the signs interpreted by Odysseus and Penelope, their pact is built around nothing more than what they *believe* they signify - in Lacanian terms, upon their belief in the big Other.

³⁹See Stanford *ad loc* for a discussion of the problem.

The reversal of roles engineered by Penelope's trick of the bed paves the way for another well-known reverse simile which describes their recognition scene:

ὥς φάτο, τῷ δ' ἔτι μᾶλλον ὑφ' ἡμέρον ὤρσε γόοιο·
 κλαῖε δ' ἔχων ἄλοχον θυμαρέα, κεδνὰ ἰδυῖαν.
 ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἂν ἀσπᾶσιος γῆ νηχομένοισι φανήη,
 ὧν τε Ποσειδάων εὐεργέα νῆ' ἐνὶ πόντῳ
 ῥαίσιη, ἐπειγομένην ἀνέμῳ καὶ κύματι πηγῶ·
 παῦροι δ' ἐξέφυγον πολιῆς ἀλὸς ἠπειρόνδε
 νηχόμενοι, πολλή δὲ περι χροῖ τέτροφεν ἄλμη,
 ἀσπᾶσιοι δ' ἐπέβαν γαίης, κακότητα φυγόντες·
 ὥς ἄρα τῇ ἀσπαστὸς ἔην πόσις εἰσοροῶση,
 δειρῆς δ' οὐ πῶ πάμπαν ἀφίετο πήχεε λευκῶ. (*Od.*23.231-40)

She spoke, and still more roused in him the passion for weeping.
 He wept as he held his lovely wife, whose thoughts were virtuous.
 And as when the land appears welcome to men who are swimming,
 after Poseidon has smashed their strong-built ship on the open
 water, pounding it with the weight of wind and the heavy
 seas, and only a few escape the gray water landward
 by swimming, with a thick scurf of salt coated upon them,
 and gladly they set foot on the shore, escaping the evil;
 so welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him,
 and she could not let him go from the embrace of her white arms.

After an epic poem of Odyssean wandering, it is Penelope, not Odysseus, who is compared to the sailor who finally reaches dry land. The reversal underlines the power of Penelope's earlier rhetoric which put Odysseus' faith under the spotlight, and suggested that the relief at the moment of recognition was all hers. But it does more. The reversal underlines the contingency of gender roles; if the *Odyssey* is the tale of a (male) wandering in search of a truth which rests upon the knowledge of a woman, there is no reason why these gender roles could not be played by either sex. In the reversal of the simile, it happens to be Odysseus who occupies the (female) position of truth, and Penelope who looks to him for a guarantee of her identity. The contrast between the certainty of land which promises to set a limit on the flux of the sea also returns us to the fantasized worlds of the Cyclopes and Phaeacians. The Cyclopes lived a static existence on mountain tops, and remained unaware of travel by sea; the perfection of Phaeacian ships meant that they had no concept of a limit to their ability to travel. They are both

introduced to the aspect of society which they themselves had lacked, which leads to the creation of a constitutive desire. For should they fully identify with the mode of existence they lack, this can only come at the price of losing their current mode of existence, and to deny the desire for this alternate world is to enter the impossible, inhuman fantasized universes they had inhabited before Odysseus' arrival. So too with Penelope and Odysseus; both hold out to each other the promise (but only the promise) of the satisfaction of desire. Just as the stones which appeared between the civilizations of the Phaeacians and Cyclopes were a signifier of a division between the two societies, opening up the vision of what the other lacked, so we can see the *mega semata* of the bed as a divider as much as a uniter. For to look toward *semata* for a guarantee of unity between two selves is also to recognize that *semata* need to patch up a division already present.

Odysseus as Proteus, Penelope as Pandora

There is a further puzzle which haunts the reunion of Penelope and Odysseus. For shortly after the recognition scene, and before they turn to love-making, we find that this much anticipated end of the *Odyssey* is not to be *the* end. Instead, Odysseus remembers the prophecy of Teiresias that he must soon embark on another journey. Though I will not attempt to resolve the numerous problems associated with the specific form of Teiresias' prophecy,⁴⁰ some further parallels between Odysseus and Proteus, Penelope and the figure of the *parthenos*, can help us gauge what is at stake.

Proteus' initial reaction to the trick which undermines his system of counting is to go on with business as usual. It is only later (when he gives in to

⁴⁰For a discussion of the problems, see Peradotto 1990, Chapter 3 *passim*.

Menelaus) that he comes to see (retroactively) that his system of counting was always contingent, dependent on his arbitrary imposition of closure on the numerical chain. So too the challenge to Odysseus' ability to self-count, and thus impose a sense of closure on his travels, is undermined by Penelope's trick. Though this provokes initial doubt, the recognition scene continues *as if* his doubt was not justified, *as if* the sign of the bed is certain. But in his later recollection of the prophecy of Teiresias, can we not see a belated understanding of the significance of Penelope's trick? Odysseus' belief in the bed as sign of Penelope's fidelity coincided with his belief in his own identity. Penelope functioned as the *telos* of his voyage, which in turn promised to guarantee that he was the person he always thought he was. But just as Proteus came to realize that any *telos* imposed on the counting sequence was only a *telos* insofar as it was imposed by him, so too Odysseus (belatedly) realizes that the *telos* of Penelope is ultimately his own fantasy construction. It is perhaps for this reason that Odysseus' recollection of the prophecy of Teiresias not only denies the possibility of closure, but emphasizes that his future toils will be *immeasurable*:

ὦ γύναι, οὐ γάρ πω πάντων ἐπὶ πείρατ' ἀέθλων
ἦλθομεν, ἀλλ' ἔτ' ὀπισθεν ἀμέτρητος πόνος ἔσται.
πολλὸς καὶ χαλεπός, τὸν ἐμὲ χρὴ πάντα τελέσσαι. (*Od.*23.249-51)

Dear wife, we have not yet come to the limit of all our trials. There is immeasurable labor left for the future, both difficult and great, and all if it I must accomplish.

The 'immeasurable labor' not only looks forward, it looks back to Odysseus' previous failure to measure the scope of his toils. His former belief that Penelope would be the *telos* of his journey, which in turn promised to guarantee the logic of his system of beliefs (all performed on her behalf) is swept aside. He is left at the same terrifying moment that confronted Proteus; his belief in himself is gone because the system upon which his calculation of toils depended is undermined.

Penelope's fidelity, together with his sense of self, is *incalculable*, and it is the recognition of this prompts him to recall Teiresias' prophecy.⁴¹

Odysseus' words are thus much more disturbing than has been realized; they hint at the destruction of his belief in his former world, and replace it with the worrying chaos of an incalculable world. Penelope's response is motivated by an awareness of this problem:

εἰ μὲν δὴ γῆράς γε θεοὶ τελέουσιν ἄρειον,
ἐλπώρῃ τοι ἔπειτα κακῶν ὑπάλυξιν ἔσεσθαι. (*Od.*23.286-7)

If the gods are accomplishing a more prosperous old age,
then there is hope that you shall have an escape from your troubles.

She first latches onto the apparent optimism implied in the old age prophesied by Teiresias. This single aspect of his highly enigmatic pronouncements then forms the basis of a message of hope - ἐλπώρῃ. The final words uttered by Penelope are in stark contrast to her actions as *parthenos*, which destroyed Odysseus' self-belief. The destruction of any belief in any system of counting, of language's ability to guarantee identity, is replaced by the *hope* that nevertheless meaning can be constructed. And in the appearance of hope following in the wake of destruction, it is possible to detect a story familiar from the mythical tale of the first *parthenos* - Pandora.⁴² For in Hesiod's tale, though Pandora lets loose evils from Zeus' jar upon the world of the mortals, 'Ἐλπίς', 'Hope' is allowed to

⁴¹Here, it is worth noting the similarity of the prophecy of Teiresias to the prophecies of Nausithous to the Phaeacians and of Telemus to the Cyclops. All three prophecies are ignored by their listeners, and all three are remembered 'too late' at the time when their victims confront the loss of their identity. Odysseus, after he reaches the *telos* of Penelope, recalls the prophecy of Teiresias which had already predicted that Penelope was *not* his ultimate *telos*. Throughout the poem, Odysseus acts *as if* he had ignored this prophecy, as if Penelope was his *telos*. The destruction of his identity enables a new reading of a prophecy which former sense of self prohibited. Odysseus *re-reads* the prophecy of Teiresias; in this regard, it is interesting that Teiresias himself makes no mention of 'immeasurable toil': these are the words of Odysseus. The 'truth' of the prophecies in each case is created by the specific reading their victims provide.

⁴²On Pandora as *parthenos*, Loraux, 1993, 74ff.

remain.⁴³ The narrative of the *Odyssey* uses the figure of the *parthenos* to highlight the logical difficulties involved in the presumption of a fixed, calculable identity (and accordingly the difficulties of the social systems which promise to confer such identity), and yet also leaves open the hope that some sense can be constructed out of the human condition.

⁴³Hesiod, *Works and Days* 94ff. The meaning of this passage is notoriously difficult to fathom. For a discussion of the problem, see West *ad loc.* For my present purposes, I go along with West's suggestion that *Elpis* must be intended as a good thing, countering the evils emitted from the jar (however paradoxical this 'good' may be)

CONCLUSION

Bernard Williams, in the preface to *Shame and Necessity*, modestly suggests that philosophers may have some role to play in correcting the bad philosophy of historians and literary critics alike. Yet he readily acknowledges that his philosophical reflections on the Homeric texts hardly exhausts their interest; because of this, he is willing to leave open a space for 'imaginative criticism' to re-evaluate our conception of the poems. I have tried to take up this invitation to literary critics, but in such a way as to signpost (however tentatively) some philosophical consequences. Williams suggests that some literary scholars are 'closed to the idea that reflections might involve some bad philosophy.'¹ I have tried to show that a sensitivity to the workings of Homer's narrative helps raise a series of complex philosophical questions.

Williams has argued that though Homer has no terms with which to refer to the 'unity of the person', this unity is the poem's working assumption, and the basis for a coherent psychological theory. I agree that this is Homer's working assumption, but suggest that the narrative of the poems is structured in such a way as to challenge the assumption's coherence. Williams discovers, within the poem, all the parts which are necessary to make up a 'unified self': the Homeric agent thinks, deliberates, acts, and eventually dissolves at the point of death. But the logic of the narrative reverses Williams' procedure of unification; it picks apart the unity of the person in order to question the assumption of that unity. The person is carved up into its constituent parts as a way of reflecting back upon the psychological complexities which arise from the fantasized social situations the narrative creates. The Homeric poems do not merely *have* a working psychological theory, they

¹Williams 1993, x.

question the limits of such a theory in a series of complex ways which still need further exploration. Homeric agents act; yet it is never clear if they quite know what they are doing, and this in turn calls into question the possibility of conscious agency as such. Homeric heroes deliberate; but the narrative is alive to the possibility that autonomous deliberation is an ideological illusion, an acting out of a predictable fantasy which leaves the agent open to manipulation.

The literary readings themselves are an exploration of what might be gained from questioning the critical assumptions which still dominate readings of Homeric epic. Perhaps most important of these is the belief that the epics are profoundly teleological; for Goldhill, the *Odyssey* is 'the most teleological of epics'. Peradotto claims that "'The end justifies the means" could never be truer than in the art of story telling.' A dependence on just such a teleology underlies many of the feminist readings of the character of Penelope. Yet quite different readings of the poems emerge when one allows the possibility that the poems are involved in an ongoing critique of a certain sort of teleological thinking. In the *Odyssey*, the narrative does not simply look forward to its own closure; it demonstrates that this narrative of closure is ultimately the fantasy of the protagonist, Odysseus, a prop which has sustained an illusory belief in his self-identity. But by the time the illusory nature of this fantasy of Penelope's fidelity has been laid bare, we are left to reflect upon the sea of corpses (of suitors and companions) which were the price to be paid for the ability to sustain the fantasy. The poem ends not with a self-identical, centered Odysseus at home with Penelope, but rather with an Odysseus whose self is in tatters, about to embark on a further, obscure journey he shows no sense of understanding, and away from a marriage- bed (and marriage) whose stability has been irrevocably undermined. In the *Iliad*, Achilles' wrath is not a perversion of the heroic ideology which sustains the poem; rather, it provides an insight into its repressed truth by following the logic of battles for status among warriors to their

natural *telos*. In both cases, the poems offer an invitation to witness the dangers of teleological thinking rather than identifying with it, and ultimately force us to question the sorts of teleological fantasies which structure our reading of these poems. What do we have at stake in continuing to believe in Penelope's fidelity, trustworthiness and chastity? What do we have at stake in explaining away Achilles' barbarity in terms of a descent into 'bestiality', and thus ignoring its specifically human dimension?

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