



The Devious Narrator of the "Odyssey"

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THE DEVIOUS NARRATOR OF THE ODYSSEY

Abstract: The narrator of the Odyssey, who appears objective and perfectly reliable, frequently misleads his listeners/readers by raising false expectations, making surprising shifts, concealing facts, leading them to believe inaccurate representations and leaving them in ambiguity. In this respect the narrator resembles his underhanded hero and puts his relationship with the audience on a footing similar to that between Odysseus and the other characters. This narrative strategy gives the audience the sense of uneasiness and insecurity that characterizes the world of the Odyssey.

The hero of the *Odyssey* is not noted for plain dealing. His words generally conceal more than they communicate, and he is not in the habit of introducing himself in a straightforward fashion. Among epic heroes, Odysseus is the con artist. Capable and effective also in the traditional heroic settings—field of battle, open sea, monster's lair, assembly, throne—he excels in getting others to believe falsities and in using their misplaced trust to steer the course of events in his favor. Much of our enjoyment comes from his fabrication and manipulation since, happily, we can watch his artistry from the outside without risk of falling victim to it ourselves. Like his patron Athena, to whom he tells a splendid impromptu whopper, we react to his practice of lying with a grin and even a commendation.

ὥς φάτο, μείδῃσεν δὲ θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη,
χειρί τέ μιν κατέρεξε....
καί μιν φωνήσας' ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα·
κερδαλέος κ' εἶη καὶ ἐπὶ κλοπῆς ὅς σε παρέλθοι
ἐν πάντεσσι δόλοισι, καὶ εἰ θεὸς ἀντιάσειε.

Thus he spoke, and the gray-eyed goddess Athena
stroked him with her hand....
And addressing him she spoke winged words:
"He would be a crafty one and sly who would surpass you
in all tricks, even if a god would encounter you."
(13.287–8, 290–2)

The readers and the goddess are in on the game as Odysseus dupes enemy and friend alike.

The narrator clearly delights in his artful hero, who himself, like a bard, creates fictions and impersonates other characters. Homer

even gives him the singular honor of the praise a bard would be pleased to hear after the skillful narrative in Books 9–12:

ὥς ἔφαθ', οἱ δ' ἄρα πάντες ἀκὴν ἐγένοντο σιωπῇ,
κηληθμῶ δ' ἔσχοντο κατὰ μέγαρά σκιόεντα.

Thus he spoke, and then they all fell silent
and were held in enchantment along the shadowy hall.
(13.1–2)

Odysseus, the protégé of the goddess of cunning, takes on the attributes of a professional storyteller in the Apologue and in his detailed Ithacan lies. The narrator in turn betrays something of his own hero's penchant for underhandedness. Homer appears to be an upright narrator, informative and aboveboard, our faithful guide through the story world of the *Odyssey*, a Nestor on whose candidness we can implicitly rely. It is disconcerting, then, to find that the narrator we depend on proves to be an Odyssean storyteller, one for whom clarity and total disclosure are not the prime virtues. He goes about his devious behavior quietly. Most of the instances cited and discussed below are discernible at a conscious level only upon reflection along with rereading, advantages unavailable to an ancient audience hearing the poem once.¹ Even so, the one-time listener or reader who might not be able to pinpoint any particular slippery move will still have been treated to a great number of them throughout the telling. The atmosphere of duplicity in the story world is reflected in and reinforced by the disingenuous nature of the narrative.

James V. Morrison (1992) has given a careful look at the instances of narratorial misdirection in the *Iliad*, to which this study might serve as a brief companion piece. Morrison (p. 8) contends that the strategy of misdirection actually has the effect of producing in the audience something of the characters' own dilemmas: "Ultimately Homer uses misdirection to draw the audience closer to the central problem faced by characters in the *Iliad*: mortal expectation and miscalculation." The narrator of the *Odyssey* likewise uses misdirection to give the audience a flavor of the atmosphere and ethos within its fictional world, and the types of misguidance in the *Odyssey* as well as their great frequency reflect the difference between the two epics in tone, heroic vision and character of the main figures.²

¹ Multiple opportunities to listen to the bard or, later, rhapsodes working with a relatively fixed text would, however, give one a chance to pick up consciously on subtleties much as a modern reader can with text in hand, rereading or flipping pages back and forth.

² Silk (2004) 40–1 associates deviousness with the feminine, both characteristic of the *Odyssey* as opposed to the straightforward, masculine *Iliad*: "Quite unlike the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* abounds in striking female characters, whose actions are frequently devious or unpredictable or both.... In this context, the deviousness of Odysseus

Morrison's analysis focuses on knowledge of upcoming events and the narrator's hand in misleading the audience. The narrator or a deity makes a prediction that turns out to be false or is fulfilled much later than we are led to expect or in a different manner. We are thereby put in the same position as characters who assume a future course of events that does not occur, and our similarity of perspective encourages the audience's sympathy with the mortal characters and their limited knowledge. The audience's expectations are frequently frustrated in the *Odyssey* as well, and the effect is kinship with the characters on the basis not so much of shared ignorance of the future as common participation in a world in which trust is a sign of naïveté and a generally unrewarded virtue, disguise and secrecy are the norm, and truth keeps well hidden. The steady barrage of false leads and other forms of dishonesty on the narrator's part give the *Odyssey's* audience a sense of the uncertainty and mistrust that pervade the world the characters inhabit. Achilles hates the one who says one thing but means another (*Il.* 9.312–13), the very form of communication generally practiced by the hero as well as the more thoughtful characters of the *Odyssey*. Odysseus' interlocutors tend to fall for his lies and obfuscations. The relationship between the narrator and his narratees will vary according to the listener's or reader's aptitude for picking up on inconsistencies and concealment, and repeated exposure will make one all the more attuned to the narrator's practice. Surely we all begin with a confidence similar to what the characters show Odysseus, but we, like them, keep getting hoodwinked, usually in small ways but occasionally in a manner noticeable to the most trusting of us.³

After he has demonstrated convincingly how the narrator "holds the attention of its audience in large part by baffling and misleading them" as to the manner in which the returned hero will vanquish the suitors, S. Douglas Olson (1995) 160 comments that, from Book 19 on anyway, "it is clear that he knows exactly what he is doing but does not intend to share his secret until he must."⁴ This narrative strategy

himself ... seems open to interpretation as an essentially feminine quality, and alien indeed to the manly simplicity of the *Iliad*.... In an important sense, the *Odyssey* as achieved epic poem is devious too."

³ Winkler (1990) 145 observes that the Odyssean narrator's surprises which demonstrate to us his cleverness betray a somewhat antagonistic posture: "The relation of the bard to the audience has at times a teasing, quasi-competitive aspect."

⁴ Earlier Olson (64) remarks, after describing Odysseus' practice of keeping characters wholly or largely in the dark about his presence and intentions, "The plan as a whole thus remains with Odysseus, or perhaps with Athena and the poet, and it is not the part of anyone else to know more than he or she must." That "anyone else" includes the narrative audience. His chapter called "The Story of the Return" (141–60) carefully works out the implications of Homer's and Odysseus' secrecy about the

is effective in keeping us unsettled and alert. At the same time, it puts us in the same position as Odysseus' interlocutors when he is holding back or lying, and his habit itself is a function of the world he lives in. We, like the story's characters so much of the time, follow the plot on a need-to-know basis, as though we too cannot be trusted with the full truth. The cloak-and-dagger secrecy, disguise, and misdirection of the story extend to the relationship between the narrator and audience, leaving us with a taste of what it is like to live in the world of the *Odyssey*.⁵

False Expectations

The most common of the narrator's double-dealing practices takes the form of leading the narratees to expect a certain action or occurrence and then either delaying that expected next step or depriving us of it altogether.⁶ Surprise is not an uncommon narrative strategy, indeed a staple of thrillers and Gothic romances, often effectively used in stories of all varieties. We delight in the prolongation of the steps the story takes before we discover, say, the identity of the murderer or of Tom Jones's mother, and our relationship with the narrator is on firm footing even while important facts are held from us. Suspense is built on protraction and false leads, and the pay-off of a surprise ending is greater after a series of red herrings, obstacles and delays. I am talking here, however, not of a plot twist or a sudden revelation that we did not see coming but rather of the narrator's implicit promise, or at least strong suggestion, of where he is taking us which turns out to be a misrepresentation. It is part of our contract that the narrator knows the whole story and will dole it out bit by bit, concealing crucial facts and events until the proper moment. It is not part of our understanding, however, that the narrator will pretend the narrative will go in one direction and then take

battle plan. Similarly, Scodel (2004) 53 observes, "By not telling the audience too much about Odysseus' plans, ... the narrator both keeps the audience wondering what will happen and shows Odysseus as a brilliant improviser." The audience, like the rest of the characters, experiences what it is to be ill-informed about the hero's plan for revenge, and we share the surprise with them. Olson (p. 158) describes this as a "process of keeping the poem's audience off-balance." Todorov (1971) 73 might be accurate in the strictest sense when he claims that the narrator of the *Odyssey*, unlike the characters, never lies ("les personnages mentent les uns aux autres, le narrateur ne nous ment jamais"), but his frequent misdirection barely distinguishes his behavior from the disingenuousness we meet so often in the characters.

⁵ For a description of the *Odyssey* in terms of the spy novel, see Richardson (2006).

⁶ See Appendix. A subtle form of false expectation not included in this list is mentioned, with examples, by Scodel (2004) 50-1: "Sometimes the narrative preparation seems out of proportion to the outcome," such as the long introduction to the relatively unimportant Theoclymenus (15.223-55) and his conversation with Telemachus (15.256-81).

us down another. Repeated instances of failing to deliver what we expect lead to a certain amount of distrust on our part toward our guide, an unusual tactic for a storyteller to adopt.

The tone is set and the practice of misleading begins at the very outset of the epic. The first nine lines announce the poem's subject, a man who wanders, loses his companions, and so on, and in line 10 the narrator asks the Muse at what point in the story we should break in. The answer comes immediately: when all the other Trojan War heroes are accounted for and it is time for this lone exception to be released from captivity by Calypso (1.11–19). The first scene, however, takes place not on the nymph's island but on Olympus, at a feast where Zeus is leading a conversation about a different man entirely, Aegisthus, and it takes Athena to interrupt and steer the topic abruptly to her favorite, Odysseus. She suggests the scheme to send Hermes to order the hero's release, so for a while we feel we are back on the right track after all, despite the Olympian detour. But no; at line 88 Athena suddenly announces her own parallel mission, and we end up following her to Ithaca rather than Hermes to Ogygia. The expected point of departure, the hero's deliverance from Calypso, which we infer from the explicit announcement of where we will begin the tale, is dropped and not picked up until Book 5, some 2200 lines later. By making an issue of where to start the story, the narrator primes us for a quick introduction to our hero, which he promptly frustrates.

Most of the false expectations lead us on for a shorter time and on a minor issue. The Phaeacians, for example, are presented as potentially threatening to Odysseus (6.1ff., 200–5, 262–315; 7.16–17, 30–6) but are not hard to win over, and their king is especially solicitous; Arete does not play the crucial role in Odysseus' reception that we are led to believe (6.303–15; 7.53–77).⁷ Twice Odysseus instructs his son on taking down arms in the hall (16.284–98; 19.5–13), but both the event and the second instruction deviate from the plan given first; he also tells him both times how to respond when caught taking down arms in the hall, but the occasion never arises.⁸ Telemachus awaits a signal from his father to begin the fighting, so he clearly expects (and therefore we do too) a regular pitched battle and knows nothing about the plan to use the bow-contest as a maneuver to initiate the battle (20.384–6). Homer's techniques of characterization and thematic development often take the form of deliberately misleading the audience. We expect, for example, Telemachus to call the assembly to order since he is the one who sent heralds to gather the people; but just as he sits in his father's seat, Aegyptius makes the opening

⁷ For a helpful discussion of Arete's delayed significance, see Fenik (1974) 105–30.

⁸ See Scodel (1998) 3–9 for a narrative analysis of this discrepancy.

speech instead, and even that speech is delayed by eight lines of background information on this very minor character (2.15–24); Telemachus' inexperience and diffidence are highlighted by Aegyptius' initiative to open the assembly. The passive and fumbling Menelaus says he will ask his visitors who they are after dinner, but before he works up to this question, the flirtatious Helen, who knows just how to talk to young men, intervenes with an identification of Telemachus (4.61–4, 116–46). The nubile Nausicaa does not in fact become Odysseus' love interest and her flirtation is curtailed without any remark (6.2–70, 139–315). Odysseus' encounter with her is a kind of mock preparation for his meeting with his actual true love on the next island he comes to, and the girl's balked interest shows us Odysseus' unwaning attractiveness. A *μεμνηρίζω*-scene, in which the character considers two alternative lines of action, regularly concludes with the second choice adopted, but twice neither is chosen: Odysseus considers two ways of killing Melanthius but then postpones his punishment (17.235–8), and Odysseus tries to figure out what to do first with the maids and then with the suitors but cannot decide on a plan of action (20.10–55). The hero's decision to choose neither method of killing Melanthius emphasizes his superhuman restraint when he is about to need it badly; the indecision about the maids reflects the anxiety of the real problem, how to kill so many suitors, about which Athena offers encouragement but no concrete solution, leaving both character and narratee unsatisfied. Penelope's suggestion to remove the bed from their chamber fools us along with Odysseus by looking like a discouraged end of the conversation (23.171–2), but when it turns out to be the solution to the impasse, we share in Odysseus' surprise at its true purpose and admiration of his wife's brilliance.⁹

Each case of this sort would produce in us a momentary twinge when we recognize that our expectation, raised deliberately by the narrator, is not fulfilled. Readers might turn back to check that they were correct in expecting something different from what was delivered, but I suspect that most note the inconsistency at some level and move on as a listener must. The accumulation of expectations disappointed or frustrated, however, colors the listening or reading experience and fosters a certain amount of distrust toward our underhanded guide, a feeling reinforced by the more prominent instances of false expectations such as the underworld episode and the first conversation between Odysseus and Penelope.

Circe tells Odysseus in no uncertain terms that he must have Teiresias' guidance and directions if he is to find his way home

⁹ Winkler (1990) 130 calls this "the extraordinary epiphany of Book 23 in which Odysseus and we the audience simultaneously realize that we had underestimated Penelope and that she has richly earned her reputation (*kleos*) for cunning (*mêtis*)."

(10.490–5, 538–40), so we assume he will seek out Teiresias quickly, hear the prophet's instructions on getting to Ithaca, leave the dreaded underworld immediately and head for home armed with these directions. The visit turns out far differently. Instead of Teiresias, the first ghost to accost Odysseus is Elpenor (11.51), whom Odysseus does not even know to be dead. We knew it from 10.552–60 and are surprised now to learn that Odysseus is ignorant of his death. After their conversation, Odysseus awaits the approach of Teiresias but first spies the ghost of his mother, with whom, unlike Elpenor, he does not speak (11.84–9). Finally the prophet comes along and delivers what is supposed to be directions home, as Circe promised:

ὁδὸν καὶ μέτρα κελεύθου
νόστον θ', ὥς ἐπὶ πόντον ἐλεύσεαι ἰχθυόεντα.

the road and measures of the way
and the return, how you would go along the fishy sea.
(10.539–40)

As a guide to Ithaca he fails almost completely, giving no directions and touching on only one stop along the way, instead concentrating on events subsequent to landing (11.100–37). When he finishes, Odysseus does not react at all to this speech, however, neither to ask about promised details of the journey nor to comment on the instructions he did receive, nor does he rush back to his ship. Instead, he asks about speaking to his mother (11.139–44), and after that conversation he stays for a series of encounters with women of yore, his former war-comrades, and legendary criminals and heroes. He returns to Circe's island (not what he had planned upon leaving), ostensibly to bury Elpenor, but in fact the primary function of the return is to hear from Circe the sort of details he (and we) expected of Teiresias about the journey home, the directions she knew all along (12.37–141).

The underworld detour turns out to give Odysseus an opportunity to take stock of his impasse after a year's voluntary delay with Circe. He sees in his mother's ghost a concrete image of the suffering his prolonged absence is causing loved ones back home. Ajax snubs him, and his conversations with Agamemnon and Achilles focus on wives, fathers and sons, not on the Trojan War, an episode in his life which he must now put in the past so that he can concentrate on his journey forward toward his life again as a family man and peacetime ruler. He confronts the unsavory nature of existence after death, so when he rejects the immortality offered him by Calypso (5.215–24), he knows full well what he is choosing. The visit to the underworld propels him resolutely toward home, so it proves to be a beneficial, perhaps vital, journey at a deeper level than the mere travel instruc-

tions we were expecting.¹⁰ Homer cons us, as Circe cons Odysseus, in a way that we cannot mistake or ignore. Now we know, if we have not consciously admitted it yet, that we cannot trust our narrator to follow through with his announced intentions. The trade-off in this case is an encouragement to look beneath the surface for unstated intentions and truths.

The interview between wife and husband that comprises most of Book 19 also takes us beyond a momentary surprise at an unexpected move in the narrative. Already postponed from the invitation earlier that day (17.508–11) until the evening, the increasingly intimate conversation keeps teasing us with Penelope's imminent recognition of Odysseus. The ambience is fitting for their joyful reunion; she keeps demonstrating her loyalty and longing, and he keeps nudging his way closer to self-revelation. Odysseus appears to be giving way soon after his false autobiography:

αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
θυμῷ μὲν γοόωσαν ἔην ἐλέαιρε γυναῖκα,

Then Odysseus
pitied in his heart his lamenting wife,

(19.209–10)

but he steels himself. Penelope and Eurycleia mention the stranger's resemblance to Odysseus and seem to have recognized him (350–60, 377–81), and the narrator takes us to the verge of certainty with the tantalizing formulation of Penelope's order to Eurycleia: "wash your master's..." (νίψον σοῖο ἀνακτος), and we expect "feet" but instead get the disappointing "age-mate" (ὁμήλικα, 358). When Eurycleia spots the scar and knows him without a doubt, the bronze of the spilled bucket clangs and she is about to announce her discovery to her mistress, but Athena has distracted the grieving wife and Odysseus has stifled the old woman (467–90). Even the announcement of the bow-contest to settle the suitor problem once and for all gets no rise out of the husband. He sticks with his masquerade and goes off to sleep on the floor (570–604).¹¹ The interview is over, there has been

¹⁰ The inconsistencies of the underworld episode have led some scholars to dismiss it as a careless interpolation; see Page (1955) 21–51 for a typical reaction along these lines. Those who have looked carefully at the structure of the Apologue, however, show it to be integral to Homer's narrative plan and the characterization of Odysseus; see, for example, Whitman (1958) 288, 309; Niles (1978); Most (1989).

¹¹ The popular debate over Penelope's actual knowledge has no bearing on the discussion at this point. Here I am interested only in the overt presentation of the situation, the failure of Penelope to recognize Odysseus openly and of Odysseus to reveal his true identity. We have reason to expect what does not in fact occur until Book 23, a tearful embrace. The issue of how much Penelope actually knows falls under the category of ambiguity discussed later. Some of the more prominent arguments for Pene-

no reunion, and it would appear that the audience is more frustrated than Odysseus.

The narrator maintains his practice of disappointing our expectations throughout the *Odyssey*. The pattern of making false implications, suggestions and promises puts him outside the mainstream in the history of narrative. Many narrators like to steer readers astray on occasion and make us think that Lolita, for example, is Humbert Humbert's murder victim or that Smerdyakov has a genuine epileptic fit at the crucial moment of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Indeed, it is the duty of a detective-story narrator to give us cause to think that any of a number of suspects could be the culprit. Most narrative misleads, however, involve facts and circumstances which turn out to be inaccurate despite appearances, whereas the Odyssean narrator's habit described here has to do with expectations he raises about how he plans to proceed in the telling of the story: the next stage in the narrative, the character who is going to take a particular action, a matter of importance that will be taken up later. The next stage is significantly postponed or dropped, a different character takes that action, and what looks important fades away. The effect is not, then, suspense or intrigue but rather the sense that our narrator is not a reliable guide. An external, objective narrator typically provides reassurance to the narratees, even if the world of the story rests on an uncertain foundation. Homer's strategy in narrating the *Odyssey* makes his audience uneasy participants in the mistrustful atmosphere of the story.

Unexpected Moves

Related to false expectations arising from explicit or suggested plans for the course of the narrative are narrative moves that surprise us without any misleading set-up, such as unexpected eventualities or sudden shifts away from significant events.¹² Several such instances resemble what has become a standard narrative feature of breaking a chapter at a crucial juncture, leaving the listener or reader in suspense until we return later to that plot-strand. Telemachus, eager to return home, is trying to find a polite way to refuse Menelaus' offer of a lengthy stay in Sparta, but before the matter is resolved, the scene abruptly shifts to Ithaca and the discovery of the boy's absence (4.625), and we do not return to Sparta until Book 15. Book 23 closes with the armored Odysseus, Telemachus, Eumaeus

lope's prior knowledge can be found in Harsh (1950); Whitman (1958) 303–4; Amory (1963); Austin (1975) 200–38; Stewart (1976) 100–47; Russo (1982); Emlyn-Jones (1984); Winkler (1990); Russo (1992) 9–12. For a similar case of early recognition with Eumaeus, see Roisman (1990).

¹² See Appendix.

and Philoetius departing for the country under divine cover to seek out Laertes and to prepare for the revenge of the suitors' families. Out of nowhere Hermes emerges at the beginning of Book 24 to lead the suitors' souls to Hades, where they encounter Agamemnon and Achilles in conversation, which Amphimedon interrupts to tell of the suitors' demise. We resume the main plot of Odysseus and his men at line 205.

On a few occasions we do not return to the previous plot-strand and we miss a significant event. At the end of Book 4 the suitors decide to ambush Telemachus upon his return and even put their men in place. With the sudden scene shift to Olympus and the beginning of the Odysseus plot-strand (5.1), their ambush drops out of sight until Book 15 when Athena warns the boy of the plot against him and suggests a way to avoid it (28–35). Later on he sails from Pylos toward home, ὁρμαίνων ἢ κεν θάνατον φύγοι ἢ κεν ἀλώῃ, "pondering whether he would escape death or be captured" (15.300). Without warning in the next line we find ourselves back with Odysseus at Eumaeus' hut. How will Telemachus escape the suitors' ambush that has been built up and held in suspense for the duration of his stay in Sparta? We do not know; this vital event occurs outside our view. The next thing we hear on the subject is Telemachus' safe arrival on the Ithacan shore (15.495)—we have been left out of that part of the story.

Unlike the following example, however, we at least know the result of the ambush even though we are not given the chance to watch the scene. The Phaeacians have long known of Poseidon's irritation at their habit of conveying strangers home on magic ships, which will lead him someday to destroy a ship returning from such a mission and surround their island with a mountain (8.564–9). It is natural to suspect that, because Alcinous brings it up, the voyage to Ithaca will mark the occasion when Poseidon has had enough, and indeed after Odysseus has been dropped off we hear a long conversation in which Zeus accedes to Poseidon's demand for retribution (13.125–58) and the first curse is fulfilled (159–69). Now Alcinous prays that they be relieved of the second, the encircling mountain (172–83), and the leaders make sacrifices and add their own prayers (184–7). We are on tenterhooks over the effectiveness of their plea when, in the middle of a line, Odysseus wakes up on shore and we lose all sight of the Phaeacians, never to return to learn their fate.

Suspense, delays in imparting information or finishing a sequence, and unexpected turns in the plot or conversation help to create the tension that is part of the enjoyment of listening to a narrative. With Homer, however, we cannot count on finding our way back to an interrupted scene or topic, nor can we be certain that the prepared action or reaction will be followed through as we expect. Combined

with the practice of misleading the audience deliberately, the unexpected moves unsettle us much as the deceptions and surprises keep the characters on edge in their world of uncertainty.

Concealment

When Theoclymenus approaches Telemachus for conveyance, the audience hears his story and his prophetic background (15.223–58), so we are aware of his authority when he makes his prophetic pronouncements and has his eerie vision (16.152–61; 20.347–72); but Telemachus and Penelope, deprived of this knowledge, have no special reason to put faith in his view. The narratees' superior knowledge of facts, backgrounds, traits and the workings of characters' minds comes from the omniscient narrator, our guide and tutor whom we expect to keep us abreast of all pertinent information even when crucial facts are held from characters. Athena, the image of the omniscient narrator in the text, could tell Telemachus what the narrator has told us, that his father is about to be freed from seven years of captivity and will be home before long. But instead she sends him on a journey in search of out-dated news, for which Odysseus later berates her (13.417–19).

Ignorance of important facts is a normal state for fictional characters, as it is for real people. When we know something crucial that others do not, we feel we understand the whole situation in a way the less aware cannot, and when we are party to the words of an all-knowing narrator, we rise almost to the level of omniscience ourselves. In a linear narrative external narratees rarely achieve full knowledge of the story world prior to the end because we must generally acquire our information through time; that is, we learn of events as they occur rather than having foreknowledge of what the narrator knows now and will tell us when the time comes. In many narratives, especially those with mysteries or secrets, such as detective stories or Gothic romances, we do not at present know key facts about the past or about events that occur in our absence that we will learn only later. Even in these, however, an omniscient narrator generally keeps us informed as we go along of each incident or significant detail of the scenes that are narrated to us.

The *Odyssey* is not a mystery, and its narrative pull does not depend on keeping facts hidden from the audience that we are eager to learn. On the contrary, we know the general nature of the ending all along. From early assurances, we have no doubt that Odysseus will return home and the suitors will be punished.¹³ How he gets to Ithaca from Calypso's island and how he manages to rescue his family from their predicament are open questions that produce some ten-

¹³ 1.16–19, 76–9, 82–7, 253–69; 2.281–4; 5.30–42, 113–15; 9.532–5; 11.112–20.

sion and suspense; but the narrator does not have big secrets to conceal such as the identity of the murderer or the protagonist's parents. We know who all the characters are, we understand their loyalties, their personal qualities are an open book to us, and there are no unknown facts about their pasts that will be revealed at a crucial moment. Still, the narrator periodically hides pieces of information from us and pops up with them later on,¹⁴ teasing us with the point that we do not in fact have the omniscience we might assume from his apparent open-handedness. He may be our mentor but we are not privy to all he knows.

For example, the suitors pay no attention to Athena when she comes to the palace as Mentes, and Telemachus takes her away from the hubbub of the encroachers; but they have in fact noticed the arrival, as we learn only when Eurymachus requests information about the visitor (1.405–11). The suitors' secret plotting against Telemachus' life turns out not to be so secret after all, since Medon, without our knowledge or that of the suitors, has been spying on them (4.675–9). Telemachus fetches weapons from the storehouse during the battle (22.109–15) but we do not learn until later the important detail that he left it unlocked (154–6).

Because the narrator of the *Odyssey* comes across as an expansive and candid presenter of the story world, it is something of a shock when we discover that our guide has been holding out on us. At these moments we experience the surprise so frequently felt by most of the epic's characters, who generally accept appearance as reality and statement as truth and learn only later that they have been fooled. With our superior knowledge, we see through disguises and lies, and sudden revelations to characters are no surprises to us. The instances of narratorial concealment put us periodically in the position of these characters, who live in a world where no facts are certain and no knowledge authoritative.

Inaccuracies

A narrator might present a scene or situation in a way that we perceive to be inaccurate, usually subsequently. Like false expectations, which imply or promise a future eventuality that does not

¹⁴ See Appendix. Besides the type of concealment I describe here, see Scodel (2002) 155–60 for a strong case that the delayed naming of Eumaeus and the epithet δῖος, “divine,” when it seems inappropriate are “part of the narrator’s general refusal to inform the audience too fully of the course of the action” (160). The importance of Eumaeus’ participation in the battle is hinted at but not made plain until the battle actually begins. Scodel observes that this strategy makes the audience experience the shock of the unforeseen just as the characters so often do in the second half: “One of the themes of the Ithacan books is precisely the unpredictability of human affairs ... and the narrator encourages the audience to appreciate this unpredictability by making his tale surprising” (160).

occur, statements, portrayals and suggestions of the current scene which turn out to be off the mark mislead the audience and undermine our confidence in our guide's plain dealing. When the inaccuracy pertains to a major secret whose delayed revelation provides a pleasurable jolt of surprise, this narrative strategy can be effective and we happily forgive the narrator's deception: the virtuous helper turns out to be the real villain, the innocuous crate in the attic holds the missing will, the attentive maid is actually the hero's mother. The narrator has the right, according to our contract, to withhold secrets and maintain mysteries until the proper moment, even if it means that we have an erroneous view of the situation for the time being and believe, say, that Miss Havisham is Pip's benefactor in *Great Expectations* or Jane Eyre's Rochester is a bachelor.

The *Odyssey*, however, does not depend for its effectiveness on big secrets or surprise endings. We know all along the true identity of Odysseus and Athena in disguise, the relative moral worth of all the characters, and even the certainty of Odysseus' ultimate success in regaining his position at home. The inaccurate presentations come, rather, in a series of minor instances,¹⁵ the cumulative effect of which is the repeated reminder that the narrator likes to throw us off.

Twice Odysseus makes what clearly looks like a farewell speech to an important female, Calypso at 5.215–24 and Nausicaa at 8.464–8, suggesting that he is about to depart; but he spends four days in company with Calypso while he builds his raft and he tells the entire Apologue (Books 9–12) before leaving Scheria. When Telemachus arrives at Sparta, he finds Menelaus

δαινύντα γάμον πολλοῖσιν ἔτησιν
υἱέος ἥδ' ἐ θυγατρὸς ἀμύμονος ὧ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ,

giving a marriage feast for many relatives
in honor of his son and excellent daughter in his home,
(4.3–4)

which sounds for the moment as though they are marrying each other. We quickly learn that the daughter is being sent to marry Achilles' son, so it is in fact a double wedding, but only one of the couples is present and the second wedding will take place later at Neoptolemus' home. Athena advises Odysseus on his course of action now that he has arrived at Ithaca (13.393–415), and it sounds as though we are hearing the entire plan: she will disguise him as a decrepit pauper so that he would appear ugly (402–3); he will make his first call at Eumaeus' hut and ask questions; she will fetch Telemachus from Sparta. The reference to his child in 403 suggests that

¹⁵ See Appendix.

Telemachus will not be party to the disguise, so we are surprised at the early self-revelation in Book 16 immediately upon their first meeting, and we hear nothing about a bow-contest.¹⁶ The narrator rarely uses indirect discourse except when rendering Demodocus' three songs in Book 8 (73–82, 266–366, 499–520), but even there, despite the occasional reminders of indirect speech, we lose sight of the external narrator and have the impression that we are listening to Demodocus himself, especially in the long middle song, which soon takes on a life of its own and makes extensive use of direct speeches that sound like Demodocus' impersonations, not Homer's.¹⁷

For the moment we see the situation somewhat differently from what it is and are straightened out sooner or later. In a narrative that foretells the main incidents of the plot, these inaccurate presentations have no grand function in a strategy of surprise. They rather serve to provoke us with the reminder that the narrator does not play straight with us, and we are thereby made to feel treated much like many characters in the *Odyssey* when toyed with or lied to. Things are not always what they seem for the uninitiated characters nor for the first-time listener or reader who expects appearance to match reality.

Ambiguity

Virtually all the instances of narratorial misdirection discussed so far eventually right themselves, and the audience comes to realize the true nature of the scene, situation or plot-line. The *Odyssey* presents a few cases, however, which do not get resolved in the end, and we are left with an unclear understanding of exactly what has happened. Ambiguity is a time-honored narrative device but one that usually proves temporary.¹⁸ Is Valancourt the secret admirer who once wrote a sonnet to Emily in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*? Did Briony identify the culprit correctly in the middle of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*? Has Tom Jones just bedded his own mother? Is Mrs. Hayward in Michael Frayn's *Spies* really a German spy as she appears? Is it really his old flame Hartley whom Charles sees early in Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea*? Can Gandalf really be dead? Is the returning man Martin Guerre or an impostor? Our uncertainty, which lasts for various lengths of time, sometimes for most

¹⁶ The narrator often uses direct speech to mislead the external narratees though the character is not party to the deception. Athena, however, often serves as an image of the narrator as plot manipulator, so the speaker here is treating the character to the same inaccurate portrayal of the situation as the narrator is treating us to. On the surprise twist of the bow-contest, see Olson (1995) 157–60.

¹⁷ See Richardson (1990) 71–7, 83–8.

¹⁸ Moral ambiguity, very common, is an entirely different matter, as is the uncertainty over how the narrator assesses (and would like the reader to assess) the events described. At issue here is fact, what is actually the case in the fictional world.

of the narrative, forces us to read with a split consciousness, as it were. One part of each reader's mind works with the assumption that, say, the boys really have found a German spy, whereas the other part dismisses it as the product of children's lively imagination. We must allow for each possibility and follow the story simultaneously on parallel tracks until we get a firm answer that settles us back into one unequivocal plot line.

It is relatively rare that a narrative ends with the ambiguity intact. Dostoevsky arguably preserves ambiguity in *The Double* because he does not explicitly state that Golyadkin is mad and does not really see his double, but the hints accumulate and we can feel reasonably certain that there is no double. John Fowles, however, for whom answers are death and questions are life, on principle leaves us with many of the driving questions unanswered. Ambiguity is the hallmark of *The Magus*, whose unsolved mysteries have left many a reader frustrated at the end, and the author will not tell us authoritatively what is going on in Sarah Woodruff's head in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* nor even which of its endings is the "real" one. We will never know who or what "V." is, nor even whether Pynchon's Stencil is correct in seeing a meaningful pattern involving characters and places beginning with a "V." What actually happened in the Sutpen family's past in *Absalom, Absalom!* can never be known because the story comes to us mediated by four narrators, two of them born long after the events and indulging in speculation. Henry James perpetrated perhaps the most famous narrative ambiguity in *The Turn of the Screw*, leading critics and readers to debate over the existence of the ghosts seen by the governess. If they do exist in this fictional world, the novella can be read as a sophisticated ghost story; if not, the young woman's psychological state becomes the central issue.¹⁹

Along with concealed facts and misleading expectations and presentations which we at some point realize were obfuscations, the narrator of the *Odyssey* leaves us with a number of unanswered questions, most of them intriguing only for the scene at hand, a few of great significance to our interpretation of the plot and the leading couple.²⁰ Five bird similes might not actually be similes (1.319–22; 3.371–3; 5.51–4, 337–53; 22.239–40). Athena departs quickly from the hall like a bird and Telemachus knows now that his visitor was a deity. Does he figure it out because he has witnessed a metamorphosis? We will never know. Theoclymenus has a macabre vision of

¹⁹ Even this classic instance of ambiguity was unintentional. James claimed that he meant the matter to be unmistakable and would be surprised at the critical discussion over the existence of the ghosts. See Booth (1961) 311–16 for an intelligent discussion of ambiguity in this tale and of James's intention.

²⁰ See Appendix.

ghoulish laughter, bloody meat, teary eyes and groaning spirits, which he proceeds to describe, adding other details about bloody walls and a courtyard full of ghosts (20.345–57). Does he see what is objectively there or what his inner vision shows him? Do the suitors hear him at all or does their laughter drown out his pronouncement? The narrator does not help us out. Did Penelope actually dream about an eagle killing geese (19.535–53), and if so, did she have the dream just now while napping during the foot-washing scene or at another time since Odysseus' return, or when? We cannot tell. These unanswerable questions probably do not have any lasting effect on our reading beyond that particular scene except insofar as they reinforce our sense that this narrator likes to toy with us. As in the world of the story, an appearance of transparency and candor cannot be trusted.

The great ambiguity of the *Odyssey*, however, colors our entire reading of Books 17–23. Perhaps, like Henry James, Homer meant us to have no doubt about the crucial fact, the point when Penelope first recognizes Odysseus or realizes the possibility that the beggar in the palace is her husband. The standard reading still takes the narrator at his word that Penelope ascertains his identity only after the bed-trick that prompts Odysseus' indignant speech at 23.183–204.²¹ Controversy has nonetheless arisen over the question of her knowledge or suspicions prior to the slaughter of the suitors.²² Some apparent inconsistencies would be explained if we accept early suspicion or recognition which she keeps to herself, most notably the appearance before the suitors in Book 18 and her decision at the end of the Book 19 interview, after many signs and outright assertions that Odysseus is alive and will come home soon, to succumb at this crucial moment to the suitors' pressure and agree to marry the winner of the bow-contest which she has just thought of.²³

²¹ De Jong's commentary on Book 19 (2001) 458–82, with explicit comment on 460, reflects the dominant view in granting Penelope no prior knowledge and in dismissing those conjectures that give her beforehand anything from subliminal intuition to certainty. Olson (1995) 153 n. 30 dismisses such conjectures even more forcefully.

²² Harsh (1950) is usually credited with the first serious argument for Penelope's suspicion previous to Odysseus' explicit self-revelation, spawning serious rebuttals but also a number of variations on the contention that at some level of consciousness Penelope sees Odysseus in the stranger and even that she is working in cahoots with him at different levels of mutual awareness. See n. 11.

²³ The principal arguments, pieces of evidence and conclusions stemming from observed inconsistencies in Books 18 and 19 are skillfully summarized, categorized and assessed in Katz (1991) 77–113. Doherty (1995) 32–63 reviews the major scholarship on the "Penelope Question," including Katz, in the context of her feminist approach to external audiences. See also Russo (1992) 104–5 on approaches to the bow-contest question; he observes, "We must concede that Homer keeps us from fathoming Penelope's mind completely: we cannot estimate the mixture of expectations that prompts her decision, and so it remains mysterious". Olson (1995) 157 n. 40 offers a sensible explanation of Penelope's decision to hold the bow-contest at this juncture.

The lively scholarly discussion of Penelope's level of awareness is similar to the controversy over the truthfulness of Odysseus' tales in Books 9–12, some arguing that we take Odysseus at his word, some that we have no reason to believe anything he tells the Phaeacians unsubstantiated elsewhere by the text.²⁴ Odysseus' demonstrable tendency to lie persuasively to his advantage makes many readers leery of accepting the Apologue as anything but a device to ensure the Phaeacians' benevolence, and indeed he does gain valuable gifts after his storytelling as well as a trip home. If Squire Allworthy, the venerable and unimpeachable Nestor-figure of *Tom Jones*, were telling the Apologue, we would have no trouble believing every word. But Homer has chosen to place these tales in the mouth of a notorious liar without backing him up beyond a couple of passing references, so it is reasonable for listeners and readers to accuse the Phaeacians of gullibility. It would be presumptuous to make an assertion about Homer's intention in giving his liar-hero the narration of Books 9–12 and in leaving clues and inconsistencies that lead many to believe in Penelope's witting participation in Odysseus' plot. The result, however, is a text that lends itself to reasonably conflicting interpretations of basic facts, and that spells ambiguity. If we were dealing with a trustworthy narrator, one at pains to make the events and actions in the fictional world clear and explicit, one with the integrity of Squire Allworthy, we would not be thinking in terms of reading beneath the surface for what is really taking place. But our narrator is sly, misleading and devious like his hero, and I am not inclined to dismiss the controversies as products of overactive modern readers' imaginations. We will each have our own gut feeling, backed up by key features of the text, about Penelope's knowledge or the truth of Odysseus' narrative, but few readers can claim certainty once the doubt is planted. Homer has achieved lasting ambiguity, so we cannot in the end settle on one track with confidence but must maintain a simultaneously dual or multiple reading which cannot be resolved.

We often sense an author's affection for the main character. Huck Finn, David Copperfield, Tom Jones, Emma Woodhouse and Don Quixote, for all their foibles and shortcomings, clearly receive their authors' blessings. Homer's unmistakable affection for his hero comes through in the plot, dialogue, tone and interplay among the characters, yet he goes further than most in honoring his protagonist by creating a narrator who has a lot in common with him. Both practice a number of techniques to keep in control and to throw their

²⁴ Some of the participants in this debate are Griffin (1980) 48–9; Murnaghan (1987) 172–3; Peradotto (1990) 92–3; Alden (1992); Parry (1994); Richardson (1996).

interlocutors off guard. They feign straightforwardness while unobtrusively engaging in misdirection, concealment and obfuscation. After a fashion, Homer has created a narrator in his hero's image and has thereby developed a devious relationship with his audience that mimics that between Odysseus and the people he encounters, even those he appreciates and loves. As our expectations are frustrated and our sense of understanding and clarity frequently undermined, we enter the instability and unreliability that characterize the world of the *Odyssey*.

APPENDIX

False Expectations

I identify 56 instances in which the narrator raises false expectations. In some cases the narrator uses a character's speech (and Odysseus' narrative voice in the Apologue) to mislead us; I ascribe the misdirection to the narrator when the character is not trying to mislead another character but rather when the mastermind behind the whole action is using a speech or a character to guide the reader astray (the duplicity of characters is also legion, but that is a different topic). 1.1–95 (misleading story beginning); 1.260–4 (poisoned arrows will not play a part in the revenge); 2.15–24 (Telemachus does not call the assembly to order but rather Aegyptius, and even he does not start his speech immediately); 2.35 (Telemachus takes the blessing as an omen favorable to the success of the assembly); 2.257–66 (the assembly accomplishes nothing); 3.103–200 (Nestor is not helpful at all in the search); 3.382–4, 418–73 (the long sacrifice sets up nothing); 4.3–14 (the double wedding is dropped); 4.61–4, 116–46 (Helen, not Menelaus, asks Telemachus for his identity); 4.104–12 (Menelaus implies he knows nothing of Odysseus); 4.194–5, 214–15 (the stories to be delayed are started now); 4.555–60 (Menelaus says only these few lines about Odysseus in his very long tale); 4.786 (the ambush is not sent off now); 4.791–3 (Penelope, not Telemachus, is the lion in the simile); 5.81–4 (Odysseus is not at Calypso's grotto on Hermes' arrival); 6.1ff., 200–5, 262–315; 7.16–17, 30–6 (the Phaeacians are not a threat to Odysseus); 6.2–70, 139–315 (Nausicaa will not be Odysseus' love interest); 6.50–51 (Nausicaa does not tell her parents of her dream); 6.303–15; 7.53–77 (Arete's status as key to Odysseus' safety is not justified); 7.153ff. (neither Arete nor Alcinous but a retainer responds to Odysseus); 7.233–9 (the happy scene is spoiled by Arete's question); 7.241ff. (Odysseus avoids answering Arete's question of his identity); 7.298 (Alcinous, not Arete, replies); 7.318 (Odysseus is promised to sail the next day); 8.30–38, 48–55, 387–468 (an immediate send-off is implied); 8.73–82 (Demodocus' song leaves several unanswered questions); 8.93–103 (Alcinous sidesteps a direct

questioning of Odysseus); 9.216–17 (the Cyclops is not in his cave on Odysseus' arrival); 10.490–5, 538–40 (Circe stresses a significance to the underworld visit that it does not have); 11.51 (Elpenor, not Teiresias, first addresses Odysseus); 11.84–9 (Anticleia, not Teiresias, now appears to Odysseus but does not speak); 11.100–37; 12.37–141 (Teiresias tells Odysseus almost nothing about his journey to Ithaca, but Circe subsequently supplies lengthy instructions); 11.139–44 (Odysseus does not leave Hades at the end of Teiresias' speech but stays, nor does he react to that speech); 13.44–6 (Odysseus' blessing on the Phaeacians is answered by Poseidon's punishment); 16.99–101 (Odysseus looks as though he is about to identify himself); 16.284–98; 19.5–13 (Odysseus creates a cover speech for Telemachus to deliver when caught taking arms down from the walls, a circumstance that will not arise in 19.14–52); 17.235–8 (contrary to practice, Odysseus does not choose the second option in the *μερμηρίζω*-scene—he chooses neither method of killing Melanthius but lets him live for now); 17.508–11 (Penelope's invitation to Odysseus for an interview is refused for now); 18.166–8 (on appearing in the hall Penelope does not speak on the topic she mentioned before going down); 19.53–101 (the interview does not begin immediately); 19.103–599 (the interview does not lead to Odysseus' self-revelation to Penelope); 19.209–12 (Odysseus looks as though he is about to identify himself); 19.350–60, 377–81 (it looks as though both Penelope and Eurycleia have identified Odysseus); 19.390–1, 467–79 (Eurycleia does not announce Odysseus' identity); 19.468–70 (the noise of the spilled bucket does not attract Penelope's attention); 20.10–55 (the *μερμηρίζω*-scene does not lead to a decision, and there is no firm plan given by Athena); 20.384–6 (Telemachus' expectation of a signal conceals the use of the bow-contest to start the battle); 21.263–73 (Antinous' refusal to participate seems to put the bow-contest to an end); 22.205–40 (Athena's arrival suggests the finale of the battle, but she is just testing the warriors); 23.115–16 (Odysseus believes it is his filth that keeps Penelope from recognizing him); 23.171–2 (Penelope's suggestion to remove the bed sounds like the end of the conversation, not the resolution of the problem; the trick itself is Penelope's but she shares with the narrator the impression made that the scene is over); 23.233–40 (in the simile the shipwrecked victims represent Penelope, not Odysseus); 24.191 (Agamemnon responds to Amphimedon's tale not by addressing him or offering sympathy but by apostrophizing Odysseus); 24.216–18, 315–17 (Odysseus' lie to Laertes is not the expected test); 24.502–9 (on Athena's arrival Odysseus says nothing about divine help); 24.516–32 (Athena does not, as we expect, stop the battle immediately).

Unexpected Moves

4.625 (a sudden switch from Sparta to Ithaca); 5.1 (the Telemachus plot abruptly closes with the preparation of the suitors' ambush, and we turn to the plot of getting Odysseus off the island); 8.521–34 (Odysseus cries at the story of Greek victory and is compared to a female Trojan victim); 13.179–87 (a sudden switch to Ithaca just as we are to see whether Poseidon inflicts his curse on the Phaeacians); 14.115–20 (when it is natural for Eumaeus the host to ask after Odysseus the guest, the latter asks the former for his story); 15.184–92 (the symmetry of Telemachus' return journey is foiled by his announcement of omitting a visit to Nestor); 15.223–83 (Telemachus' urgency in departing is interrupted by Theoclymenus' arrival); 15.301 (switch from Telemachus' ship back to Odysseus on Ithaca, dropping the ambush plot, whose failure occurs out of our view); 15.361–79 (what is supposed to be Eumaeus' reply about Odysseus' parents turns out to be his life story); 16.406–8 (after the suitors decide in council to consult the gods on killing Telemachus, they return to their seats in the hall without any mention of following up on their plan); 19.390–1 (when Eurycleia recognizes her master's scar and we expect her to announce her discovery, we hear the long story of Odysseus' youth); 24.1 (instead of following Odysseus and company to Laertes' hut, we follow the suitors' ghosts to Hades).

Concealment

Genette's (1980) term for leaving out events or details when they occur is "paralipsis." In her narratological glossary, de Jong (2001) xvi explains paralipsis as an instance when "the speaker provides *less* information than he actually has; details or events are left out, to be told at a later, more effective place." I see eleven incidents of concealment in the *Odyssey* by the main narrator: 1.21 (after referring to a "man" for twenty lines, his name is finally given); 1.405–11 (after we gather from 106–52 that the suitors have paid no attention to Athena/Mentes, Eurymachus asks for information about Telemachus' visitor); 4.675–9 (Medon has been eavesdropping during the suitors' council about ambushing Telemachus); 7.233–9 (Arete has been suppressing since Odysseus' arrival her discomfort over his wearing clothes he must have received from Nausicaa); 13.322–3 (Odysseus apparently did recognize Athene when she appeared in disguise at the beginning of Book 7); 15.495–7; 16.356–7, 364–70 (Telemachus escapes the notice of the ambushing suitors); 19.535–53 (if she has just had this dream, it seems that Penelope must have dozed off when Eurycleia spilled the bucket at 468–70 and Athena diverted her attention at 479); 20.33–55 (Athena conceals from us and Odysseus details of the battle to come which she now knows); 20. 144–6 (we do not know anything about Telemachus' visit to the agora);

22.154–6 (we learn now that Telemachus has left the storehouse door open at 109–15); 23.85–95 (despite her protestations against the possibility that Odysseus has returned at 59–68 and 81–4, we now hear that Penelope is of two minds about the identity of the man who has killed the suitors). On four occasions when Odysseus is the narrator we as well as the Phaeacians are kept in the dark: 10. 348–59 (in concentrating on the maids' preparations, he conceals the lovemaking going on simultaneously in Circe's bedroom); 10.383–5 (we now learn what he was brooding about at 374); 12.37–141 (here we learn that Circe knew all along the information which she implied in 10.490–5 and 538–40 could be learned only from Teiresias); 11.60–80 (the fact and significance of Elpenor's unburied state are told here rather than when he died at 10.551–60).

Inaccuracies

1.1–9 (the Thrinacian episode attains a greatly disproportionate importance, dominating the table of contents of the proem); 2.2–14 (Telemachus appears now all grown-up after the visit from Athena, but the maturation is only just beginning); 3.76–8 (Athena's purpose in getting Telemachus to Pylos is not really, as we are told here, to inquire about his father); 3.435–6 (Athena comes to the sacrifice but apparently not visibly); 4.3–4 (the double wedding is not at all clear; at first it sounds incestuous, and then we see that only one of the two couples is getting married now and the other groom is not present); 4.122 (Helen is compared to the virginal Artemis); 5.215–27 (Odysseus' farewell speech to Calypso occurs four days before his departure); 7.82–135 (Alcinous' orchard is focalized by Odysseus, as usual with scenes of physical description, but it turns out that it is focalized by the narrator; see Richardson (1990) 55 and de Jong (2001) 175–7); 8.73–82, 266–366, 499–520 (Demodocus' songs are told in indirect speech but often, especially in the middle song, appear to be directly quoted; see Richardson (1990) 83–8); 8.448, 452 (a parallel is falsely suggested of the virginal Nausicaa with Odysseus' divine mistresses); 8.457–68 (Odysseus' farewell conversation with Nausicaa implies his immediate departure); 13.393–415 (we think we are getting the whole plan against the suitors); 15.10–42 (we are not told that Athena is disguised when speaking with Telemachus); 23.171–2, 177–81 (Penelope's bed-trick does not appear to be a test); 24.216–18, 315–17 (the lie to Laertes is not really a test).

Ambiguity

1.319–22; 3.371–3; 5.51–4, 337–53; 22.239–40 (fives times a deity is likened to a bird, which could be the literal truth or a simile); Books 9–12 (we cannot be certain how much of the Apologue is true); 18. 250–83 (we do not understand Penelope's real motivation in appear-

ing before the suitors and delivering this speech, and we do not know why Odysseus finds something to smile about or whether he is right to do so); 18.344–5 (we are not told what other things Odysseus is contemplating that will not go unfulfilled); 19.343–8 (it is a matter of speculation why Odysseus asked for an old woman to bathe his feet, whether because he forgot about the scar problem or because he at some level wants her to discover him); 19.350–60, 377–8 (it almost looks as though Penelope and Eurycleia know who the stranger really is); 19.535–53 (we cannot be sure when or even if Penelope dreamed the eagle dream she tells Odysseus); 19.570–81 (Penelope's motivation for the bow-contest at this juncture is notorious for its ambiguity, causing us to wonder whether Penelope knows or has an inkling who the stranger is and when, if at all yet, it has occurred to her that he might be or certainly is her husband); 20.92–4 (it is unclear whether Odysseus is having a dream or a waking fantasy about Penelope standing by him and recognizing him); 20.345–57 (we cannot tell who else, if anyone, sees the vision described from Theoclymenus' point of view and in his direct speech).

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