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WORDPLAY AND APPARENT FICTION IN THE *ODYSSEY*

FREDERICK AHL

Inclusion of the word “fiction” in the title of a paper on Homer may seem to indicate that, to paraphrase Gregory Nagy, I am starting my discussion of Homer from Ruth Finnegan rather than Lord and Parry.¹ In this paper, however, I am approaching the *Odyssey* as if it were the product of a seamster rather than a weaver: constructed from bits and pieces of material already in existence whose patterns do not necessarily match. This is the sort of “scholarly” model Aelian envisaged in his *Varia Historia* 13.14: an *Iliad* and *Odyssey* existing not as whole works but as separate narrative episodes, collected and put together under the auspices of a Lycurgus or Peisistratus. Fictive design has no place in it, other than in the arrangement of the patches.

I have deep reservations about such a model, even though it can be made to work, by and large, as an explanation of the larger “chunks” of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. For it runs, in my opinion, into problems when applied to some smaller segments, often only a few lines, that many would consider part of one of the pieces in the quilt. In short, I share the suspicion of my teacher, Malcolm Willcock, that there are fictional elements in these smaller passages.² Nonetheless, I assume, for the purposes of this paper, that all mythic variants occurring within a given section of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* suggest variant traditions rather than authorial fiction in order to see where this assumption leads.

1 Nagy 1996b.134. Cf. Finnegan 1977.2, Griffin 1980.xiv. All translations are my own.

2 Willcock 1977.41–53 and 1964.141–54. For recent discussion of the rhapsode and poetic patching, and a detailed survey of sources, see Nagy 1996b, esp. 78–96.

My discussion centers on Odysseus's claims, beginning in *Odyssey* 13, that he is a Cretan. It pays particular attention to his interchanges, in that guise, with Eumaeus and to how Eumaeus responds to Odysseus's Cretan persona and how he reports it to others. For Eumaeus is quite the master of narrative himself. The doubts he expresses about Odysseus's veracity lead him to interpret, or give the impression that he is interpreting, overt statements as disguising covert subtexts that require decoding.³ The swineherd has been doing well in Odysseus's absence, has his own agenda about what he wants from his master, and is bold enough to compete nose to nose with Odysseus with what look like fictitious narratives of his own.

Let me begin with a few observations about a very familiar passage: Odysseus's self-identification to Athena in *Odyssey* 13 when she approaches him, disguised as a shepherd, on the beach in Ithaca.

The text introduces Odysseus's words with these remarks (13.253–55):

καί μιν φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα
οὐδ' ὅ γ' ἀληθέα εἶπε, πάλιν δ' ὅ γε λάζετο μῦθον,
αἰεὶ ἐνὶ στήθεσσι νόον πολυκερδέα νομῶν ·

He spoke and addressed winged words to her; yet he did not say what was true, but bit back the narrative, always controlling his very cunning thought in his heart.

Odysseus's words are described first as ἔπεα, then as not true, and finally as μῦθος, which I have rendered as “narrative,” thus causing them to fall into a complex no man's land where Richard Martin's always perceptive distinctions among μῦθος and ἔπος, μῦθοι and ἔπεα, rub shoulders uncomfortably.⁴ Athena reacts at the end of Odysseus's tale by calling him, with apparent approval, a scheming, treacherous scoundrel who uses what I translate as “stolen” words rather than the usual “deceitful” words: μύθων τε κλοπίων, since the root of κλοπίων is clearly κλοπ-, κλεπ-, “steal” (13.293–95):

3 See the earlier discussion in Ahl and Roisman 1996, esp. 168–81.

4 Martin 1989.30 defines ἔπος as “an utterance, ideally short, accompanying a physical act, and focusing on message, as perceived by the addressee, rather than on performance as enacted by the speaker.” Cf. Nagy 1996b.121. In our passage, however, we have the plural ἔπεα, not the singular, “ideal” ἔπος.

σχέτλιε, ποικολομήτα, δόλων ἄτ', οὐκ ἄρ' ἔμελλες,
 οὐδ' ἐν σῇ περ ἐὼν γαίῃ, λήξειν ἀπατάων
μύθων τε κλοπίων, οἳ τοι πεδόθεν φίλοι εἰσίν.

You rogue, complex thinker, hungry for deceit, you had no intention, even in your own land, of stopping your guiles and your stolen narratives that are dear to the roots of your being.

Athena's comments imply that one might expect Odysseus to abandon what she considers his habitual practice of deceit, treachery, and use of stolen myths now that he is home. But if it is his habitual practice, where else has he been practicing such narrative in the *Odyssey* if not, ironically, at the court of the Phaeacians? Whoever the Phaeacians are and wherever they may live, they belong on no genuine map of the Mediterranean world and are curiously disconnected from the other mythic characters of the epic. Yet it is clear that the Phaeacian king, Alcinous, has some doubts about Odysseus's veracity. He voices those doubts with polite skepticism when Odysseus tries to end his narrative with a tale of the famous dead he claims to have conjured up at the very limits of the world (11.363–70):

ὦ Ὀδυσσεῦ, τὸ μὲν οὐ τί σ' εἴσκομεν εἰσορόωντες
 ἡπεροπῆά τ' ἔμεν καὶ ἐπὶ κλοπον, οἷά τε πολλοὺς
 βόσκει γαῖα μέλαινα πολυσπερέας ἀνθρώπους
ψεύδεά τ' ἀρτύνοντα, ὅθεν κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο·
 σοὶ δ' ἐπὶ μὲν μορφὴ ἐπέων, ἐνὶ δὲ φρένες ἐσθλαί,
μῦθον δ' ὥς ὅτ' ἀοιδὸς ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας,
 πάντων Ἀργείων σέο τ' αὐτοῦ κήδεα λυγρά.

Odysseus, while we don't for a moment, as we look at you, think that you are an imposter and inclined to thievery, the kind of human whom the dark earth breeds, sown liberally all around, shaping lies out of what no one could see. In your case, the words are well formed, the heart is good. You have told your narrative with understanding, as a bard would, the painful sufferings of all the Argives and of yourself.

Odysseus's narrative from book 9 onwards, however, has had little to do with the sufferings of *all* the Argives—even though that is what Alcinoos had asked him to set forth at the end of *Odyssey* 8. It begins as a tale of the improbable adventures he and his contingent from Ithaca had on their return from Troy. By the time he announces his story is over, it has moved away from this topic into a Hesiodic catalogue of famous women of past generations, whose ghosts he says he has seen. Each name in his catalogue could explode into its own detailed narrative at the slightest prompting—as such names do in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Procris, Tyro, Phaedra, and the others Odysseus names are not within the range of his (or any of his contemporaries') experience in "real" life. They are the stuff of traditions sung by others before him: in short, potentially "stolen" myths.

If we look back now at Odysseus's meeting in Ithaca with the disguised Athena, Athena's claim that his μῦθοι are stolen rather than false suggests that they properly belong to another context, another epic tale—what the authorial voice has narrated as Odysseus's actual adventures in books 9–12. While Phaeacians have become Phoenicians, there are certain areas in which his Cretan narrative mirrors what the authorial voice had told us about Odysseus's return. If Odysseus's tale to Athena is meant as a disguise, it is an odd disguise. He makes no attempt to hide the treasure given him by the Phaeacians. He has, rather naively, spread it all out on the shore and started to inventory it when the goddess appears. And when he speaks, he draws attention to his treasure, though such a confession would have potentially dangerous consequences at night on a lonely beach. True, there is a thinly veiled threat to the interloper in Odysseus's announcement that he has killed from ambush, λόχος, (268: ἐγγὺς ὁδοῖο λοχησάμενος σὺν ἐταίρῳ) a man who tried to rob him (as his present visitor might). He describes that man as a fast runner, a son ("otherwise unattested," as the scholarly parlance runs) of Idomeneus, king of Crete, who was angered at the narrator's unwillingness to serve under Idomeneus's command at Troy.⁵

Since the elements of Orsilochus's name mean "The one who excites an ambush" as surely as Pindar's ὀρσινεφής means "the one who stirs up clouds" (*Nemean* 5.34) or Bacchylides' ὀρσιβάκχας means "the one who excites Bacchants" (18.49), the effect is something like: "I ambushed Bushwack, son of Idomeneus." The wordplay is so patent that most listeners

5 Müller-Graupa 1942.1420 and Ahl and Roisman 1996.157–61, 307.

would suspect improvisation here.⁶ When Odysseus goes on to claim that his treasure is booty from Troy, where he served as an independent commander, he is coming perilously close to breaking cover. All the other Achaeans have, we are told in *Odyssey* 1, returned home, many with Trojan plunder. Only Odysseus is still missing.

Odysseus adds that he paid Phoenicians to transport him to Pylos or Elis, but that adverse winds drove them to his present location. When he fell asleep there, the remarkably honest Phoenicians offloaded his treasures and sailed back to Sidon. Again, if we change the proper nouns, the story resembles what the authorial voice claims had occurred with the Phaeacians. In fact, Odysseus says little that precludes his being Odysseus. And if, as is claimed at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, all the other leaders from the Trojan War have returned, an independent commander of sufficient stature to have refused to be Idomeneus's lieutenant during the Trojan War, and who is still traveling around with his Trojan booty almost ten years after the war's end, is likely to be Odysseus.

Now if this tale told by Odysseus is a stolen Cretan tale rather than a fiction fabricated by Odysseus, it clearly comes in several versions. For what Odysseus tells Eumaeus later is quite different: that is the tale of a stolen Cretan (14.199ff.). In this story, he is not an anonymous murderer of a royal prince but someone further up the social ladder: the son of a wealthy Cretan, Castor, and a slave woman Castor had purchased as a whore. Though given only a paltry portion of Castor's estate on the latter's death by the legitimate sons, he contracts a good marriage with a rich woman.⁷ He is a man who likes war, and who led nine piratical expeditions before joining, at the people's request, the expedition to Troy—along with Idomeneus. He mentions his own name before that of Idomeneus, as if he were, say, Meriones, Idomeneus's companion in arms in the *Iliad*.

On his return, after a month with his wife and children, he reaches Egypt with nine ships, after six days of feasting and five days of sailing. His

6 Words compounded with ὄρσι are more common in lyric than epic contexts. Curiously enough, Athenaeus (*Deipnosophists* 14.629C) mentions a Cretan dance called the ὀρσίτης. For further discussion of the name Orsilochus (and its variant in the *Iliad*, if the favored reading of editors is correct, Ortilochus), see Willcock 1970.175 (note on *Iliad* 5.546–47). For additional comment on the motif of Cretan dance, see Rabel 1997.192–93.

7 Oddly enough, when Helen is naming the Greek warriors outside Troy, she notes, just after mentioning Idomeneus, that she cannot see her own brothers, Castor and Polydeuces (*Il.* 3.228–38).

men, however, go on a rampage, killing men and abducting women and children until the Egyptians strike back, defeating his forces, killing many, and enslaving the survivors. He himself escapes by surrendering to the king of Egypt, who protects him. And he stays in Egypt for seven years. At this point, a criminal Phoenician gulls him into going with a cargo to Libya (Carthage, perhaps?) in the hopes of selling him as a slave. A storm forces the ship's company ashore at Crete (but, strangely, our Cretan narrator does not abandon the vessel in his homeland). Another storm wrecks the ships and he is left clinging to a mast borne on the sea for nine days.

At this point he comes ashore at the land of the Thesprotians, where the king, Pheidon, whose name is appropriately "Sparing," takes him in after his son rescues him. There he learns of Odysseus who had visited Thesprotia on his way home. Pheidon, he claims, even shows him the huge treasure Odysseus has brought. Odysseus himself, however, has gone on to Dodona to ask about how he should return to Ithaca, openly or in secret. Pheidon swears that Odysseus is on the verge of returning home, his ship already prepared. But the disguised narrator claims that he himself was sent on to King Acastus in Doulichion, robbed en route, and tied to the ship when they reached Ithaca—though he slipped from bondage with the help of the gods.

Theocritus would probably call this lengthy tale of adventures, which at some points reflects Odysseus's narrative to Alcinous, an epic in its own right. But let's still postulate that it is not a fiction but perhaps part of some kind of lost *Merioneia*; in short, that it is another of Odysseus's stolen myths, μύθων κλοπίων, centered on Meriones or someone like him. The tale seems designed to establish much sympathetic common ground with Eumaeus, as Hannah Roisman and I argue in our 1996 study.⁸ For Eumaeus's own tale of royal birth, kidnap, and subsequent sale into slavery are to follow later. Yet Eumaeus reacts with a show of skepticism and offers Odysseus, as an excuse, a mini epic tale of his own about an Aetolian man who (like the character Odysseus presents to the disguised Athena) is a murderer and who, during his wanderings round the world, claims to have seen Odysseus among the Cretans at the house of Idomeneus: Ἰδομενῆϊ ἰδέσθαι (14.382), mending his ships. This Aetolian said that Odysseus would be back by

8 Ahl and Roisman 1996.186–88; cf. Trahman 1952.31–43. Malkin 1998.124–32 has an excellent discussion of the Aetolian and Cretan elements in the νόστοι.

summer or fall with lots of treasure and with his comrades. “So don’t try to beguile me with lies and to charm me,” Eumaeus warns Odysseus: μήτε τί μοι ψεύδεσσι χαρίζεο μήτε τι θέλγε (14.387). There is a nasty undertow in Eumaeus’s association of Odysseus with Idomeneus: Idomeneus returns with all of his men (*Odyssey* 3.191–92):

πάντας δ’ Ἰδομενεὺς Κρήτην εἰσήγαγ’ ἐταίρους,
οἳ φύγον ἐκ πολέμου, πόντος δέ οἱ οὐ τιν’ ἀπηύρα.

Idomeneus brought all his companions who escaped the war back to Crete. The sea didn’t take one.

The “real” Odysseus, surely, would be expected to do the same, rather than to arrive alone and with Phaeacian rather than Trojan treasure.

Jack Peradotto notes something interesting about Idomeneus’s name (1990.109–10, emphasis in original):

In a section of the *Eoiai* devoted to the suitors of Helen (fr. 204.56–63 Merkelbach and West), the following is devoted to Idomeneus:

ἐκ Κρήτης δ’ ἐμνᾶτο μέγα σθένος Ἰδομ[εν]ῆος
Δευκαλίδης, Μίνωος ἀγακλειτοῖο γενέ[θ]λης·
οὐδέ τινα μνηστῆρα μ[ε]τάγγελον ἄλλ[ον] ἔπεμψεν,
ἀλλ’ αὐτὸς [σ]ὺν νηὶ πολυκλήϊδι μελαίνῃ
βῆ ὑπὲρ Ὠγυλίου πόντου διὰ κῦμα κελαιν[όν]
Τυνδαρέου ποτὶ δῶμα δαΐφρονος, ὄφρ[α] ἴδοιτο
Ἀ[ρ]γείην Ἑλένην, μηδ’ ἄλλων οἶον ἀκ[ού]οι
μῦθον, ὅς] ἤδη πᾶσαν ἐπὶ [χθ]όνα διᾶν ἵκαν[εν].

(And from Crete mighty Idomeneus wooed her, he the son of Deucalion and offspring of famous Minos. And he sent no proxy as suitor in his place, but came himself with his black, many-benched ship over the Ogylian sea through the dark wave to the house of shrewd Tyndareus *to see* Argive Helen for himself, not merely *to hear* from others the *story* that had already spread all over the land.)

“Is it merely coincidental,” Peradotto asks, “that, in a series of very brief vignettes allowing for little more than a genealogical reference, this particular distinctive feature—the desire to witness for oneself (ἴδοιτο) rather than trust to hearsay (μῦθον)—should be associated with a character whose name gives the appearance of containing the root for vision (Ἰδομενεύς)? It seems a lot less arbitrary when we realize that the character comes from Crete, where traditionally little trust resides in μῦθος. Is there some connection between this and the fact that disguised Odysseus chooses the court of Idomeneus as the site of his fictitious eyewitness account of Odysseus?”

I like this idea. For, in *Iliad* 13.330, we find a similar play on Idomeneus and ἴδον: Οἱ δ’ ὥς Ἰδομενῆα ἴδον φλογὶ εἵκελον ἀλκὴν, “And these, as they eyed (ἴδον) Idomeneus like a flame in his might.” During the chariot race in *Iliad* 23, in fact, Idomeneus’s eyesight is precisely what gives him the first clue among the spectators that Diomedes is winning (23.462–64). I have tried to keep a crude sense of that wordplay in my translation:

ἦτοι γὰρ τὰς πρῶτα ἴδον περὶ τέρμα βαλούσας,
νῦν δ’ οὐ πῆ δύναμαι ἰδέειν· πάντα δέ μοι ὄσσε
Τρωϊκὸν ἄμ πεδίον παπταίνεται εἰσορόωντι·

For those I eyed running in the lead as they made the turning post I can’t identify anywhere now, though I keep watch, both eyes alert, observing everywhere around the plain of Troy.

Idomeneus encourages others to look for themselves (23.469–72):

ἀλλὰ ἴδεσθε καὶ ὕμμες ἀνασταδόν· οὐ γὰρ ἔγωγε
εἶ διαγιγνώσκω· δοκέει δέ μοι ἔμμεναι ἀνὴρ
Αἰτωλὸς γενεήν, μετὰ δ’ Ἀργείοισιν ἀνάσσει
Τυδέος ἵπποδάμου υἱὸς κρατερὸς Διομήδης.

But stand up and identify them for yourselves; I cannot make it out clearly, but it seems to me that a man who is Aetolian by birth, but a lord among the Argives, the son of Tydeus breaker of horses, strong Diomedes is in the lead.

Ajax, however, abuses Idomeneus’s eyesight (23.474–78):

Ἰδομενεὺ τί πάρος λαβρεύεαι; αἰ δέ ἔτ' ἄνευθεν
 ἵπποι ἀερσίποδες πολέος πεδίοιο δίενται.
 οὔτε νεώτατός ἐσσι μετ' Ἀργείοισι τοσοῦτον,
 οὔτε τοι ὀξύτατον κεφαλῆς ἔκ δέρκεται ὅσσε·
 ἀλλ' αἰεὶ μύθοις λαβρεύεαι·

Idomeneus, what was all this boasting talk? The light-footed horses are still far off as they rush across the great plain. You aren't the youngest among the Argives by that much. The eyes in your head don't have the sharpest vision. But you are always boastful in your narratives.

Idomeneus, in reply, mocks Ajax's slowness of mind.

The dispute is quite fascinating because one of the earliest pieces of hard evidence we have for different versions of Trojan War myths found (or not found) in the *Iliad* is the François Vase, discovered near Chiusi but made in Attica (the work of Ergotimus and Cleitias). It is datable to the time of Solon or Peisistratus, the very same period and place to which many scholars attribute the earliest recension of the Homeric texts.⁹ The vase shows, in addition to the tale of Troilus (not found in Homer), a group of competitors for the chariot race that is, with the exception of Diomedes, entirely different from that in *Iliad* 23. The vase identifies Odysseus, Automedon, Damasippus, Hippothoon, and Diomedes as the five competitors (two of whom are not mentioned in Homer), not the Homeric Eumelos, Menelaus, Antilochus, Meriones, and Diomedes. So it's interesting that Homer's Locrian Ajax should get so upset with what Idomeneus's eyes identify: the victory of the Aetolian born Diomedes. Indeed Ajax and Idomeneus are on the verge of coming to blows when Achilles intervenes and says that the outcome of the race will establish who was right. Yet once the race is over, Achilles proceeds to distribute prizes that further confound the issue as to who the real winner is. The vase-painter, Cleitias, seems intent, since he provides the names of the contestants, in textualizing a very different race with a different outcome. Not all eyes saw the great chariot race in the same way.

9 See Johansen 1967.90–92, 266–67, Jensen 1980.104, Carpenter 1991.13–21 and plate 1, Nagy 1996b.107–08.

What this suggests to me is that whoever put *Iliad* 23 into the shape it currently has was fully aware of conflicting mythic accounts of the games and that his version is not simply an account of the games but an account of the partisan dispute as to which city-state's heroes participated and who won. It is the Cretan Idomeneus who is the eyewitness to the Homeric version. Now, since the Attic François vase has, among its other illustrations, Theseus's expedition against Crete and the Minotaur, Cleitias might be, arguably, using the medium of painting to present a version deliberately opposed to what was becoming, in Athens, the official version of various Homeric and other epic tales.

In the *Iliad*, however, as elsewhere in the epic tradition, Locrian Ajax comes out with the short end of the stick. The Cretan eyes of Idomeneus put the lie to Ajax's certainty that Eumelos's horses will win the day.

Wordplay, then, may offer us an under-explored window into many aspects of the Homeric tradition. For, in the *Odyssey*, it is the Cretan versions of Odysseus's, and perhaps other heroes', travels and return journeys, νόστοι, that are relegated to the sidelines. Indeed, one of the leitmotifs of the *Odyssey* is the various competing return narratives, νόστοι, alluded to. Phemios is singing the νόστοι of the heroes when Penelope enters and tries to shut him up, but she is countermanded by Telemachus who has a vested interest in the νόστοι continuing. Menelaus tries to usurp the narrative with his own νόστος in book 4. And lurking in the background is the unhappy νόστος of Agamemnon. So what Odysseus seems to be doing, if we assume that there is no fiction, is creating a false identity for himself by, as it were, plagiarizing other νόστοι that would have had similar structural elements.

Let's look a little more closely at Eumaeus's tale of an Aetolian meeting Odysseus in Crete and finding him in the company of Idomeneus. Eumaeus is now attacking Odysseus's story on its own narrative terms. Odysseus's allegedly Cretan guest has talked only of hearing about Odysseus. But Eumaeus claims that his Aetolian had a much better (though still incredible) tale: he had actually seen Odysseus in Crete along with Idomeneus. And he hammers his rhetorical advantage home by juxtaposing the name Idomeneus to ιδέσθαι in the now familiar punning manner (14.382–83): φῆ δέ μιν ἐν Κρήτεσσι παρ' Ἰδομενῆϊ ιδέσθαι νῆαξ ἀκείόμενον, "He says he eyed him in Idomeneus's company refitting his navy." We note the further wordplay on the syllables that sound like the Greek word for ship at the end of Idomeneus's name in the dative case. Eumaeus here may be echoing Odysseus's own use of "ship" wordplay on Idomeneus's name in his narrative (14.237–39):

δὴ τότε ἔμ' ἦνωγον καὶ ἀγακλυτὸν Ἰδομενῆα
 νῆεσσι ἡγήσασθαι ἐς Ἴλιον· οὐδέ τι μῆχος
 ἦεν ἀνήνασθαι,

Then they told me and glorious Idomeneus to lead the
navy to Ilium nor was there any way to say them nay
 (ἀνήνασθαι).

The question then arises as to whether Eumaeus's story is a case of the rhapsodic tradition patching in yet another variant of Odysseus's sojourn on Crete or just Eumaeus's way of using Odysseus's own story against him in a rhetorical tour de force. In other words, is Eumaeus's earlier, tricky, Aetolian visitor also part of a tradition?

Why, in the first place, is the stranger Aetolian? Well, Aetolia is not too far across the sea from Ithaca. And Diomedes, Odysseus's frequent associate in the *Iliad*, is an Aetolian by birth, though ruler in Argos. Further, tradition had it that Diomedes fled his home after the Trojan war and settled in Italy (see Malkin 1998.234–57). Is Odysseus stealing from an Aetolian νόστος here? It doesn't even have to be Diomedes' own νόστος, it could be that of the Aetolian commander at Troy, Thoas. In *Iliad* 2.631–40, in fact, Odysseus is mentioned directly before, and Idomeneus and the Cretans directly after, the Aetolian contingent led by Thoas. Thus Odysseus is introduced into the *Iliad* alongside the very Cretans and Aetolians associated here with allegedly false νόστοι.

Odysseus's next rhetorical step in *Odyssey* 14, when he appears to make no headway with his Idomeneus story and is trumped by Eumaeus's Aetolian, is to put his disguised self right next to, and on a par with, Odysseus: co-leader with Menelaus and Odysseus of an ambush near Troy on a cold night. He tells how “Odysseus” managed to help him acquire a cloak since he had forgotten to bring one. Odysseus's way of dealing with the situation is, in this account, remarkably subtle. He saves our narrator's face not by asking some lesser officer to give up his cloak but by asking for a volunteer to take an urgent message to Agamemnon for reinforcements. And the man who volunteers and throws off his cloak for the shivering guest is none other than Thoas, the leader of the Aetolians (*Odyssey* 14.462–506). But Odysseus's aim in *Odyssey* 14 is, at least partially, to create a contrast between Odysseus's great consideration for him then and Eumaeus's lesser consideration for him now, and to give, as it were, an “Aetolian” reply of his own. For Odysseus points out that he has to ask Eumaeus for a cloak in front

of a group of lesser herdsmen. Eumaeus has been matching wits with the stranger before an audience, and, clearly, Odysseus is somewhat less than pleased by this performance.

But back to the puns. If there is punning on Idomeneus and ἴδοιτο, are there other puns in these dueling interchanges between Odysseus and Eumaeus in *Odyssey* 14? Well, earlier, Odysseus had suggested he might know something about Eumaeus's lost master since "he had wandered far": ἐπὶ πολλὰ δ' ἀλήθην (14.120). Eumaeus had answered (14.122–25):

ὦ γέρον, οὔ τις κείνον ἀνὴρ ἀλαλήμενος ἐλθὼν
ἀγγέλλων πείσειε γυναῖκά τε καὶ φίλον υἱόν,
ἀλλ' ἄλλως κομιδῆς κεχρημένοι ἄνδρες ἀλήται
ψεύδοντ' οὐδ' ἐθέλουσιν ἀληθέα μυθήσασθαι.

Old man, no man who has come wandering here with news of him could persuade his wife and dear son. On the contrary, men who are in need and wanderers tell random lies and don't want to tell the truth.

Eumaeus is playing on the similarity in sound between Odysseus's possible claims to knowledge as one who has wandered far, ἀλήθην, and ἀληθέα, "truth," when, in fact, wanderers tell lies. After Odysseus's mini epic, Eumaeus declares how touched he is by his guest's sufferings and wanderings (ὅς' ἀλήτης), but how unpersuaded he is by the talk of Odysseus. Why must a man like you lie, he asks (14.361–65):

ᾧ δειλὲ ξείνων, ἦ μοι μάλα θυμὸν ὄρινας
ταῦτα ἕκαστα λέγων, ὅσα δὴ πάθες ἡδ' ὅς' ἀλήτης.
ἀλλὰ τὰ γ' οὐ κατὰ κόσμον, οἴομαι, οὐδέ με πείσεις,
εἰπὼν ἄμφ' Ὀδυσῆϊ· τί σε χρὴ τοῖον ἐόντα
μαψιδίως ψεύδεσθαι;

Ah, wretched stranger, you really stirred my soul when you set out each of these statements about how much you suffered and how much you wandered. But I think you spoke out of order, and you won't persuade me, when you talked about Odysseus. Why does a man like you have to lie to no purpose?

It is just after this rebuke that Eumaeus introduces his story about the lying Aetolian wanderer (14.379–82):

ἐξ οὗ δὴ μ' Αἰτωλὸς ἀνὴρ ἐξήπαφε μύθῳ,
ὅς ῥ' ἄνδρα κτείνας πολλὴν ἐπὶ γαῖαν ἀληθεὶς
ἦλυθ' ἐμὸν πρὸς σταθμόν· ἐγὼ δέ μιν ἀμφαγάπαζον.
φῆ δέ μιν ἐν Κρήτεσσι παρ' Ἰδομενῆι ιδέσθαι.

. . . since that time an Aetolian man tricked me with a narrative. He'd killed a man and had wandered over much of the earth and came to my place. I received him warmly. He said he had seen him among the Cretans around Idomeneus.

We now notice that Eumaeus is using the word μῦθος to mean a false story, in much the same way that Nagy observes about Pindar's usage in *Olympian* 1.29–30 and *Nemean* 7.23–25.¹⁰ We note further that not only is Eumaeus playing on Idomeneus and ιδέσθαι but on what he believes to be the false notion that the world traveler is necessarily telling the truth: ἀληθεὶς, “wandering,” is now, in its aorist participial form, even accented on the same syllable as the word “true.”

We might do worse than remind ourselves of what Plato's Socrates says at *Cratylus* 421B: ἀλήθεια is “heavenly wandering,” θεία ἄλη. ἀλήθεια yields not merely an etymologizing figure, but an anagrammatizing one too:

ἢ δ' “ἀλήθεια,” καὶ τοῦτο τοῖς ἄλλοις ἔοικε· ἡ γὰρ θεία
τοῦ ὄντος φορὰ ἔοικε προσειρηῆσθαι τούτῳ τῷ ῥήματι,
τῇ “ἀληθείᾳ,” ὥς θεία οὖσα ἄλη. τὸ δὲ “ψευδός”
τοῦναντίον τῇ φορᾷ·

And the word “truth” is like the others. For the divine motion of the universe is, I think, called by this name because it is a divine wandering. But falsehood is the opposite of motion.¹¹

10 Nagy 1990b.65–68, 134, 203, 423–24; 1996b.122–30.

11 Ahl 1985.47, 321–22; 1988.17–43; 1991.87–88, 245–46.

Those who take the *Cratylus* as a kind of sick Platonic jest should remember that the *Republic* concludes with the return of the wanderer Er across the river Lethe. His failure to drink its waters gives that traveler the absence of λήθη, “forgetfulness,” that is, recollection, truth.

Eumaeus, it appears, is the wily Odysseus’s most formidable rhetorical antagonist until he has to deal with Penelope. And when he summarizes Odysseus’s Cretan tale for Telemachus, the story becomes, despite Eumaeus’s insistence that it is “the entire truth,” ἀληθέα πάντ’ (16. 61), a bald five-line summary (16.61–67):

τοιγάρ ἐγώ τοι, τέκνον, ἀληθέα πάντ’ ἀγορεύσω.
 ἐκ μὲν Κρητάων γένος εὔχεται εὐρειάων,
 φησὶ δὲ πολλὰ βροτῶν ἐπὶ ἄστεα δινηθῆναι
 πλαζόμενος· ὥς γάρ οἱ ἐπέκλωσεν τά γε δαίμων.
 νῦν αὖ Θεσπρωτῶν ἀνδρῶν παρὰ νηὸς ἀποδράς
 ἦλυθ’ ἐμὸν πρὸς σταθμόν, ἐγὼ δέ τοι ἐγγυαλίζω.
 ἔρξον ὅπως ἐθέλεις· ἰκέτης δέ τοι εὔχεται εἶναι.

So, I will state the whole truth to you. He boasts that he’s from Crete, he’s traveled around among many cities of men, as the result of some divine lot, and that he has run away from the ship of some Thesprotian men. He’s come to my farm. I’m making him your responsibility. Do as you wish: he boasts that he is your suppliant.

Now Eumaeus is not telling any untruths here, other than by omission. But he does suppress his earlier wordplay on ἀληθ-, substituting πλαζόμενος (which is closer in sound to πλασσόμενος, “contriving” or “feigned”) for his earlier use of ἀλήθης. He certainly trivializes the man and his story. He talks of the visitor’s boasting, but does not indicate the substance of the Cretan boasts, only the rather threatening declaration that he is Telemachus’s official suppliant, and thus Telemachus’s responsibility. Telemachus is given no inkling that the stranger claims to have news of Odysseus’s impending return or of the treasure he has with him. If Telemachus were to hear the story himself, his curiosity might well be piqued, especially by the details about Dulichium and King Acastus. For, as Telemachus points out in 16.123, all the princes of Dulichium (as well as Same and Zakynthos) are suitors to Penelope. And he adds in 16.249–50 that twenty-five suitors are young men from Dulichium, twenty-four from Same, and twenty from

Zakynthos. There would be a chance to test the veracity of the stranger's claims.

When Eumaeus summarizes Odysseus's second Cretan tale for Penelope, who is interested to know if the stranger has any news of Odysseus, Eumaeus is more complimentary and slightly fuller in his reporting—he allocates an additional two lines beyond what he told Telemachus (17.512–27). This passage illustrates a couple of points Jack Peradotto raises in this volume about character. For it is clear that Eumaeus, though careful to protect the young Telemachus from false hopes, thinks the visitor might tickle Penelope's female fancy:

Sure he'd charm the very heart of you; he certainly charmed me as would a minstrel. He said he is an ancestral friend of Odysseus (ξείνος πατρώιος) and that he lives in Crete the land of Minos. He has come here in his wanderings and insists (στεῦνται) he has news of Odysseus in Thesprotia and that he is coming home bringing treasure with him.

Here Eumaeus has added a detail not in Odysseus's version, namely that the stranger claims to be an ancestral friend of Odysseus, which the stranger has not claimed.

Eumaeus is, in sum, a rather more complex figure than is generally supposed, a master of mythic quilting, an intelligent and shrewd editor of oral texts—an oral poet in his own right, as Alcinous realizes Odysseus is. And fundamental to Eumaeus's narrative technique is his use of wordplay to shore up the changes he is crafting.

Testing the quilt theory, then, made me rethink several previous conclusions. I now believe it quite likely that the so-called Cretan lies of Odysseus may be the traces of other rival νόστοι or returns of heroes that the Odyssean tradition has, in a sense, systematically reduced to lesser status, in much the same way as the Iliadic funeral games leave Ajax (and possibly Cleitias, the painter of the François vase) squirming. It is the process, with which we are all familiar, of making our rivals our footnotes, representing them as misinformed, wrongheaded, or simply stupid. And presumably there was a time when the Homeric audience would have been entertained by the notion of Odysseus hiding under the stolen version of someone else's νόστος. We find much the same in later epic, most notably the *Aeneid*, where Vergil represents Aeneas as glossing over the numerous other versions of

what exactly he was doing when Troy fell and as leaving loopholes through which we discern rival versions (Ahl 1989.1–31).

Yet I am still left with the sense that this suppression of different traditions is a little too complete for comfort in the *Odyssey*. Just one sexual encounter with a god usually produces children in most Greek mythic traditions. But the Homeric Odysseus shares with the age-crumpled Tithonus the mythically atypical distinction of being a mortal whose sexual encounters with goddesses don't produce children. Seven years with Calypso and one with Circe leave no Homeric Nausithooses and Telegonuses to continue the saga. Similarly, Penelope is ever faithful. There are no children by Pan, Hermes, Eurymachus, or all of the more than one hundred suitors in this tradition. Similarly, Phaeacia, which despite the efforts of the Corcyran tourist board and Apollonius's tongue-in-cheek *Argonautica*, belongs on no credible map. The only other named Greek who, we are told by Alcinous in the *Odyssey*, did actually visit Phaeacia is Rhadamanthus, from, of all places, Crete, who is really in the wrong generation to have traveled there at all since Phaeacia has only been in existence for a generation. The first settlers were led there by Alcinous's father. And no one, we are told, will be able to visit Phaeacia again because Poseidon will seal the place off with a ship turned into a mountain. The Odyssean bardic league is definitely saying: this is all ours. We want no progeny, no successors. This must be sequel proof.

There is thus, I suspect, a sly smile on their lips when they tell us how Odysseus, after nineteen years away, finally goes to bed with Penelope only to tell her—well, there's one problem. We'll talk about it in the morning. We'll talk about it now, says Penelope. Well, there's this prophesy of Teiresias about subsequent wanderings (though I won't be away nearly so long this time). But if any poets wanted to come up with that sequel, they were challenged to take that hero of the sea away from his element and march him off, like Lucan's Cato or Apollonius's Jason, through the desert.

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