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Simon Goldhill

Excerpt

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1 The poet hero: language and representation in the *Odyssey*

Heavenly hurt it gives us –
 We can find no scar.
 But internal difference
 Where the Meanings are.

Emily Dickinson

The *Odyssey* is a central text in any discussion of ‘the poet’s voice’ in Greek poetry. Not only is Homer throughout the ancient world a figure of authority and poetic pre-eminence against whom writers establish their own authorial voice, but also the text of the *Odyssey* demonstrates a concern with the major topics that will recur throughout this book. For the *Odyssey* highlights the role and functioning of language itself, both in its focus on the hero’s lying manipulations and in its marked interest in the bewitching power of poetic performance. It is in the *Odyssey*, too, that we read one of the most developed narratives of concealed identity, boasted names and claims of renown, and the earliest extended first-person narrative in Greek literature. Indeed, the *Odyssey* is centred on the representation of a man who is striving to achieve recognition in his society, a man, what’s more, who is repeatedly likened to a poet.

In this opening chapter, I shall begin by looking at the fundamental issues of recognition and naming, and then discuss the interplay of the hero’s lying tales with the poet’s own voice as narrator. I shall be particularly concerned with the relation between representation in language (story-telling, naming, the exchanges of social discourse) and the construction of (social) identity.

RECOGNITION

First words

The proper study of mankind is . . .

ἄΝΔΡΑ: what is (to be) recognized in this first word of the *Odyssey*? The first question I wish to raise is how exemplary, how generalizable, a (male, adult) figure the subject of this epic is represented to be – a question focused in an English translation by the difficulty of choosing between ‘a man’, ‘the man’ or even ‘man’. For the uneasy tension between

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paradigmatic model and unique individual typical of the representation of heroes is especially marked in the case of Odysseus. On the one hand, recent critics have emphasized how Odysseus' reintegration is 'a return to humanity in the broadest sense'¹ – a paradigmatic representation of (a) man's reaffirmation of social identity. The boundaries and values of the *oikos* (household) are mapped by the transitions and transgressions of Odysseus' journey: Odysseus' travels leave behind both the extremes of civilization experienced among the Phaeacians, and also the extremes of violent transgression and distorted versions of human culture experienced in the non-human encounters leading to the Phaeacians, as the hero struggles to regain the *oikos*, disordered by his absence. Human social existence and man's place in it become defined through these different views of alternative or corrupted order. So, the normative thrust of the *Odyssey* is to be discovered not merely in the punishment of the suitors' wrongdoing but also in the projection and promotion of the norms of culture – an articulation of man's place. (And particularly since Vidal-Naquet's classic analysis of land, agriculture, food and sacrifice, many other aspects of this patterning of norm and transgression have been outlined – from the fundamental social institutions of marriage and guest-friendship to such diverse signs of the cultural system as trees, dogs, weaving, bathing . . .)² In *andra*, then, there is to be recognized a paradigmatic and normative representation of what it is to be a man in society, an announcement that the narrative to come will explore the terms in which an adult male's place is to be determined.

On the other hand, Odysseus is not an allegorical figure like Everyman. He is also *the* man whose special qualities allow him to survive a unique set of wanderings and sufferings and to make his return to a particular

¹ Segal (1962) 20. The paradigmatic qualities of Odysseus are also discussed by Taylor (1961); Segal (1967); Vidal-Naquet (1981 (1970)); Austin (1975) 81–238; Foley (1978); Niles (1978); Goldhill (1984) 183ff; Rutherford (1985).

² On marriage, see Hatzantonis (1974); Pomeroy (1975) 16–31; Gross (1976); Foley (1978); Forsyth (1979); Northrup (1980); Goldhill (1984) 184–95; Goldhill (1986a) 147–51; on guest-friendship, Finley (1954) 109–14; Gunn (1971); Stagakis (1975) 94–112; Stewart (1976); Edwards (1975); Bader (1976); Kearns (1982); Herman (1987) and Murnaghan (1987) 91–117, who rightly relates this institution to the problem of recognition; on trees, see Finley (1978) 78–9, who writes 168: 'Trees progressively mark his [Odysseus'] return.' On the olive, see Segal (1962) 45, 55 (with n. 31 and n.41). Vidal-Naquet (1981 (1970)) 60–1 notes that the tree under which Odysseus shelters on the beach at Scheria (as Odysseus returns from the wild travels to the civilized world of the Phaeacians) is half wild, half domestic olive! On dogs, Rose, G. (1979); Goldhill (1988c) 9–19 (both with further bibliography); on weaving, Snyder (1981); Jenkins (1985); Goldhill (1988c) 1–9; Segal (1967) 337–9; on bathing, Segal (1967) 329–34.

position. So, indeed, *andra* is immediately qualified by its (first and marked) epithet *polutropos*, 'of many turns'. Since antiquity, the ambiguity of this term has been debated.³ As Pucci has analysed at greatest length, *polutropos* is the first of a series of distinctive *polu-* epithets indicating Odysseus' 'chief characteristic: versatility, manyness of travels, resources, tricks, stories . . .'⁴ (So the proem goes on to emphasize Odysseus' 'many [*polla*] wanderings' (1), to see the towns of 'many [*pollōn*] men' (2), and to suffer 'many [*poll'*] pains' (3).) *Polutropos*, 'of many turns', implies both 'of many wiles' and 'of many journeys'; and the ambiguity is significant in that it is Odysseus' wily turns of mind that allow him to survive his wanderings: the many experiences of Odysseus and his quality of being *polutropos* are linked by more than the repetition of *pol-*. What's more, Pucci adds a third meaning, 'of many turns of speech', derived from *tropos* in its sense 'figure of speech', 'trope' – although there is no secure evidence for this sense of *tropos* before the fifth century. What can be said, however, is that it is a defining aspect of Odysseus' wiliness that he is the master of tricky language (and Hermes, the only other figure called *polutropos* in the Homeric corpus, is the divinity associated particularly with deceitful communication and the problems of exchange⁵). So, too, that Odysseus is the *object* of a multiplicity of (rhetorical) descriptions in the epic is an integral element not only of the many-sided representation of the hero, but also, more specifically, of the instantiation of his *kleos*, his renown – 'to be talked of by many'. ('Tell me, Muse . . .') There is, then, to be recognized in *andra*, especially as it begins its lengthy glossing with the specific and polyvalent

³ For modern discussion specifically on *polutropos*, see in particular Rüter (1969) 34–9; Detienne and Vernant (1978) 27–54, especially 39–43; Pucci (1982); Clay (1983) 29ff. See also Basset (1923); van Groningen (1946). Milman Parry singles out the word as his first example of a particularized epithet (1971) 154. Bekker (1863) inaugurates a lengthy discussion among Analytic scholars, for which Rüter has extensive bibliography. For ancient discussion, see e.g. Porphyry. Schol. ad *Od.* 1.1. = Antisthenes fr. 51 Declava Caizzi. At Plato *Hipp. Min.* 365c–d, Hippias, in discussing Homer, joins *πολύτροπον*, 'of many turns', and *ψευδῆ*, 'lying', as apparent synonyms, but Socrates says he will not discuss Homer since one cannot ask what he had in mind when he composed the lines. For the most interesting modernist treatment of *polutropos*, see Ellman (1982).

⁴ Pucci (1982) 51.

⁵ The only other example in the *Odyssey* is *Od.* 10.330, where Odysseus is recognized by Circe from an oracle as he tricks her. It occurs elsewhere in the Homeric corpus only in the *Hymn to Hermes* 13 and 439, applied to Hermes, for whose tricky qualities, see Kahn (1978). Hermes also helps Odysseus with Circe in particular (*Od.* 10.277ff) and supports Odysseus' grandfather, Autolycus (*Od.* 19.397ff).

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polutropos, the sign of a particular figure – ‘the (especial, inimitable, famous) man’.

As Odysseus struggles to reinstitute the norms of the *oikos*, and proves the only man capable of winning the struggle, this ambivalent paradigmatic status informs the narrative of *nostos* (return). And *andra* is programmatic of this.

The surprising lack of a proper name in the first line(s) of the epic, then, prompts the question not simply of *to whom* does the opening expression refer, but of *what* is (to be) recognized in such a periphrastic reference.⁶ Indeed, the withholding of the name invests the proem with the structure of a *griphos*, a riddle, an enigma, where a series of expressions (of which *polutropon* is the first) successively qualifies the term *andra* as the name ‘Odysseus’ is approached. The rhetorical strategy of gradual revealing (that is also a continuing (re)defining) provides a programmatic model for the narrative of Odysseus’ gradual re-establishment on Ithaca, where each encounter successively and cumulatively formulates the character and *kleos*, ‘renown’, of the hero, as his recognition is approached.

This nameless opening expression, however, does not merely set up the mapping of *andra* (as man, adult, male, husband . . .) but also poses the question of what is at stake in a (proper) name, of what is the difference between saying *andra* and saying ‘Odysseus’: from the Cyclops’ cave to standing in the hall before the suitors, speaking out the name of Odysseus is replete with significance. *Andra*, then, also announces the concealment and revealing of the name that plays a crucial role in the *kleos* of Odysseus’ return. Yet, as Pucci also notes, the name is displaced by an adjective, *polutropon*, that itself expresses the very quality of deceptive wiliness that is seen most strikingly in Odysseus’ constant disguises, which, precisely, withhold the proper name.⁷ *Polutropon*, in other words, both marks Odysseus’ capability to manipulate language’s power to conceal and reveal, and, at the same time, *enacts* such a revealing and concealing. There is to be recognized here, then – another pro-

⁶ The lack of name has often been commented on. The modern Analytic debate begins with Bekker (1863) (see n. 3). Wilamowitz in a fine example of Analytic rhetoric regards it as a ‘carelessness’ (*Unbedachtsamkeit*) that the poet ‘forgets to name the man of many turns’ (*‘den άνθρω πολύτροπος zu nennen vergisst’*) (1884) 16. For an extensive bibliography, see Rüter (1969) 34–52, to which can be added the important works of Dimock (1956); Austin (1972); Clay (1976); Clay (1983) 10–34.

⁷ Pucci (1982) 49–57.

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grammatical gesture – how the *Odyssey* in a self-reflexive way highlights, first, words and their use as a concern.

There is, then, in these first words a multiform programmatic expression. The question of what is (to be) recognized in the first word(s) of the *Odyssey* is itself framed to emphasize how, in responding to this narrative which progresses through a series of defining recognitions, the reader or audience is necessarily implicated in a process of drawing out significances, connotations, relations between words (phrases, lines, scenes) – inevitably implicated, that is, in a process of defining and recognition. (And in Greek *anagnōskein* means both 'to read' and 'to recognize'.)⁸ There is, then, also to be recognized in the first words of the *Odyssey* the (self-)involvement of the reader or audience in comprehending the narrative of recognition – which, as we will see, is fundamental to the normative project of the *Odyssey*.

Like its hero, the opening words of the *Odyssey* are canny in what they reveal and in what they conceal. They are programmatic not merely by the opening of a thematic concern but also by the very way that such an opening is formulated. This very brief opening discussion is intended not only to sketch the *Odyssey's* programmatic beginning by way of introduction to the argument that follows, but also explicitly to emphasize the critical problems that – from the first – arise from the interplay between a reader's or audience's activity of recognition and the narrative of Odysseus' recognitions. So, let us turn now to the narrative of recognition by which Odysseus makes his return to Ithaca.

Seeing the pattern

That anonymity which overhangs a man until his context is complete

R. Frost

Recognition is not merely a perceptual process. It also involves authorization, power, legitimacy, as in the recognition by one country of an-

⁸ Although *anagnōskein* is a Homeric term, there is depicted, of course, no scene of 'reading' in a narrow sense. There are, however, innumerable scenes that revolve around the difficulties of interpretation and communication. Hence my phrase 'reader or audience': it is used to avoid two chimaeras of Homeric criticism: the speculative reconstruction of necessary restrictions for the audience's comprehension of an oral performance; the presupposition that an oral performance necessarily requires clarity, transparency or ease of comprehension. For the implications of such a privileging of the spoken word, see the famous discussion of Derrida (1976), well used specifically for Homer by Lynn-George (1988).

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other, the recognition of legitimate children by a father.⁹ Both aspects are central to Odysseus' return. On the one hand, the need for disguise and concealment of his identity emphasizes the danger of a premature realization by the suitors of his presence in Ithaca. On the other hand, to be recognized as Odysseus is to reassert his role as head of the *oikos*, and as king. The aim of Odysseus is recognition in both senses. Each act of recognition is at one and the same time a perception of identity and an assertion of role. The *nostos* is not complete without recognition.

I wish first to consider the various moments of recognition for Odysseus in Ithaca – an interrelated series of encounters – and I will begin with a scene that has all too rarely been discussed in detail but which offers an instructive model of the process of recognition in the *Odyssey*. When Odysseus is delivered by the Phaeacians to Ithaca, he is left on the beach, the very edge of the island, asleep. Once before, blown by the winds of Aeolus, he had reached close enough to see people tending fires on the island, but then sleep had come to his eyes, exhausted as he was by nine days at the rudder (10.28ff). It is a nice irony that, as the moment of return to the fatherland is achieved, Odysseus fails to do what has been his repeated expression of desire, precisely, to *see* his country.¹⁰ When he awakens, however, recognition is still delayed. For Athene has surrounded the island in mist, and Odysseus, alone on a shore again, fails to recognize the fatherland (13.187–94):

But when godlike Odysseus awoke,
from his sleep in his fatherland, he did not even recognize it,
so long had he been away. For the goddess, Pallas Athene
daughter of Zeus, poured a mist around, so that she might
make him unrecognizable, and tell him everything,
and not have his wife and citizens and folk recognize him
before he had punished the suitors for every outrage.

After his constant desire to see the homeland, it is a further irony that even after he wakes up, it is seeing (and recognizing) that is impossible for Odysseus. The goddess' deception masks the moment of arrival. She makes the island *unrecognizable* for him (οὐδέ μιν ἔγνων 188) in order that she might make him *unrecognizable* (ἄγνωστον 191) to prevent *recogni-*

⁹ I have found Bourdieu (1977) especially 164ff particularly stimulating on recognition, and two books which appeared after this chapter was written but which I have attempted to incorporate: Cave (1988); Murnaghan (1987).

¹⁰ E.g. in Odysseus' mouth 5.220; 8.466; 9.28; and from others, 5.41; 5.114; 6.314; 7.76; 8.410; 9.532. On 'sleep' as a motif, see Segal (1967) 325–9.

tion (μή γνοίη 192) by his wife (*alokhos*), by his fellow countrymen (*astoi*) and by his own people (*philoï*).¹¹ The triple repetition of words of 'recognition' stress both the thematic focus of the scene, and also the different perspectives of recognition – that is, both Odysseus' recognition of the island and the recognition of Odysseus by his wife, the citizens and his *philoï*, who make up three different aspects of the *nostos*. The word for 'wife', *alokhos* (rather than *gunē*, as at 1.13), is etymologically connected with the word for (marriage-)bed, *lekhos*, and is often translated 'bed-fellow'. The full significance of this term is realized not merely in Odysseus' rejection of his previous bed-fellows, Calypso and Circe (and the offer of Nausicaa as a bride) but also in Odysseus' journey towards the bed at the centre of the house. The 'citizens' will be the figures with whom Odysseus is finally depicted as making a truce; and the varying reactions of Odysseus' *philoï* (from Eumaeus to Telemachus, Eurycleia to Laertes) form the substance of the successive encounters of the returning king. What's more, as we will see, for each of these figures the process of (mis)recognition of Odysseus is different; and for each something different depends on Odysseus' return. As Odysseus opens his eyes on Ithaca, then, both the process of recognition and what is at stake in recognition for Odysseus are immediately highlighted.

Odysseus' protecting divinity continues her manipulative trickery. She arrives in disguise, and in answer to Odysseus' question as to where he has arrived, she withholds the name of 'Ithaca' until the very last line of her speech of reply (13.236–49). She begins: νήπιός εἰς, ὃ ξεῖν', ἢ τηλόθεν εἰλήλουθας, 'You are foolish, stranger, or come from far' – if he does not recognize this island. With the same line with which the Cyclops dismisses the possibility of guest-friendship's obligations, Odysseus is introduced (as a stranger) to his homeland.¹² At the mention, finally, of the name of Ithaca, Odysseus silently rejoices at the recognition that he is in 'his own fatherland' (251); but in response defensively spins a tale about who he is – the first of the Cretan lies that I will discuss in depth later. Odysseus may know he is in Ithaca, but Ithaca is not yet to know

¹¹ Pucci (1987) 100, alone of modern scholars, takes *ἄγνωστον* as active, 'unrecognizing' (*αὐτόν μιν* = 'himself'). On this conversation of Odysseus and Athene, see the good comments of Clay (1983) 186–212 (whose overall theory of the role of Athene's wrath in the epic is difficult to accept, however); Maronitis (1981). Murnaghan (1987) calls this scene 'pivotal', but fails to discuss it in any detail.

¹² See 10.273. In different ways, the Cyclops and Athene both treat Odysseus as a foolish child (*νήπιος*, 'foolish', etymologically means 'not capable of speaking'); both bring forth, however, Odysseus' qualities of *mētis* precisely in speech.

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that Odysseus is home. The (mutual) process of recognition is far from complete.

Athene reacts to Odysseus' deceit with a speech famous for its ironic banter as well as its description of Odysseus as master of deceit – I shall discuss this also further below. But for Odysseus the recognition that he is faced with (a previously disguised) Athene brings a sudden suspicion. To what extent has she been tricking him? Is this really Ithaca (13.324–8)?

Now I entreat you by your father – for I do not think that
I have come to bright Ithaca, but turned off course
to another land. I think you are teasing me,
when you tell me this, to beguile my mind.
Tell me if it's really true that I have reached my dear fatherland.

The recognition of the name of Ithaca that caused Odysseus' earlier joy is turned to doubt by the recognition of the goddess who spoke the name. Is he in fact home yet? Or is it some other land? He needs assurance against his suspicion of deception that he has truly reached his 'dear fatherland', the land with a history that gives him his proper place.

Athene now clears the mist sufficiently so that Odysseus can finally recognize his homeland and its topography. He rejoices again in his land and kisses the grain-giving soil (13.352–4):

As she spoke, the goddess dispelled the mist; and the land
was visible. Then godlike, much enduring Odysseus
rejoiced, delighting in his land, and he kissed the grain-giving soil.

The addition of the act of kissing the soil to the expression of joy that had also been provoked by the earlier announcement of the name of Ithaca not only marks a heightening of expression after the hesitation of doubt but also qualifies the significance of this point of *nostos*: it is to the grain-giving land of Ithaca, after his journeys in the wild and uncultivated lands, that Odysseus has finally returned.¹³

The point of return to Ithaca itself – when exactly is there achieved the fulfilment of the desire for *nostos*? – is fenced with hesitations and the ironies set in play by the goddess' powers of disguise. The confusion of perception, the dangers of deceptive language, the mutual testing and the interplay of doubt and joy, all ironically defer and manipulate the regularly expressed desire 'to see the fatherland'. This complex and ironic treatment of recognition as a mutual *process*, veined with the uncertainties

¹³ On the significance of the term 'grain-giving', see Vidal-Naquet (1981 (1970)) 45.'

of (verbal) exchange, is paradigmatic of scenes of recognition in the *Odyssey*.

Hesitation and deferral are integral to Odysseus' relation with Eumaeus, whose farm marks the edge of Odysseus' property – to where he travels from the edge of the island. As Odysseus approaches the farm, the dogs run out barking – a significantly different reception from that offered around Circe's palace (10.216–17) where the animals 'fawn like dogs fawn on their master when he is returning from a feast' (14.29–32):

Suddenly, the baying dogs saw Odysseus.

They ran at him with a great outcry. But Odysseus
with cunning sat down. His staff dropped from his hand.

There, by his own steading, he might have suffered an outrageous
mauling . . .

The return of the master to his own property is made dependent on his slave's observance of the proprieties of guest-friendship, as Odysseus is forced to hesitate – to sit down – at the moment of entrance. Yet the hesitation is also represented as a typically Odyssean move – performed with 'cunning', κερδοσύνη – and the dropped staff, *skēptron* – which means both a beggar's stave and a king's royal sceptre – also hints at the double role of king and beggar.¹⁴ A return in disguise, which contains signs of recognition (a veiled hinting that will be seen again and again, particularly between Odysseus and Penelope).

It is in Eumaeus' hut that Odysseus first allows himself to be recognized – not by the swineherd, for whom revelation is deferred by a long testing, but by Telemachus. That this is the first act of mutual recognition is important not merely for the workings of revenge – Odysseus needs Telemachus' support – but also for the thematic stress on the relations between father and son in the patriarchal and patrilineal *oikos* (which can scarcely be overstressed). To return to the fatherland is to return to the role of father. Here, too, however, the recognition is not effected without its hesitations. After he has viewed Telemachus from the vantage of his disguise – Telemachus, who calls Eumaeus ἄττα, 'daddy' (e.g. 16.31) – Odysseus returns from outside the house in his undisguised splendour. Telemachus is amazed and assumes the stranger is a god, and, very properly, prays to be spared. Odysseus responds (16.186–9):

¹⁴ On this scene, see Finley (1978) 168; Rose (1980); Williams (1986). Lilja (1976) 20 has extensive bibliography on whether it really is cunning to sit down before angry dogs.

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Τὸν δ' ἡμείβετ' ἔπειτα πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς·
 'οὐ τίς τοι θεός εἰμι· τί μ' ἀθανάτοισιν εἰσκήεις;
 ἀλλὰ πατήρ τεός εἰμι, τοῦ εἵνεκα σὺ στεναχίζων
 πάσχεις ἄλγεα πολλά, βίας ὑποδέγμενος ἀνδρῶν.'

Then much enduring, godlike Odysseus responded.
 'I am not a god. Why do you liken me to the immortals?
 But I am your father, for whose sake you grieve and
 suffer many pains, as you entertain the violence of men.'

The echo *theos eimi*, 'I am a god', and *teos eimi*, 'I am your', at the same metrical position in the line, and the question 'Why do you liken me to the immortals?' stress the importance of the rejection of immortality with Calypso and the return to the (human) relationship with his son with all the implications of maintained generational continuity as opposed to immortality. It is as 'father' and not as 'Odysseus' that the returning hero introduces himself to his son – without using his proper name (and *ou tis* ('no one', 'not a'), the words with which he begins this assertion of identity perhaps recall Odysseus' most famous concealment of his proper name?). Moreover, the assertion that Telemachus has suffered many pains for his father further constructs a link between the two figures. Odysseus, who is so often termed 'much enduring' (as in the introductory line to this address to his son) and who so often comments on how he 'suffered many pains' (as the poem describes it (1.4)), recognizes that his son too 'suffers many pains' (189).¹⁵ As the narrative is turned so that Telemachus and Odysseus make parallel returns from abroad and come together at the farm of Eumaeus, so the father recognizes the parallel experience of the son. 'Like father, like son . . .', the essence of patrilineal generational continuity.

Telemachus, however, remains unconvinced (16.194–5):

You are not Odysseus, my father, but a divinity who is
 beguiling me, so that I may mourn with still more grief.

Telemachus uses the proper name to deny that the stranger is Odysseus, his father. Both the reintroduction of the name and the use of 'my father' are relevant. For Telemachus, since his opening exchange with the disguised Athene, has shown an uncertainty about Odysseus as man and as father. Telemachus is first seen imagining the arrival of Odysseus in the hall in full military splendour (1.113–8) – an arrival quite different from

¹⁵ Cf. *Od.* 13.310, where Athene says, precisely, that Odysseus will have 'to suffer many pains entertaining the violence of men', *πάσχειν ἄλγεα πολλά, βίας ὑποδέγμενος ἀνδρῶν.*