

## COMMENTARY

## BOOK ONE

At the beginning of the story the narrator announces the subject (Odysseus), the starting point (Odysseus detained by Calypso), and – vaguely – the ending (Odysseus will come home), and sets the action in motion in the form of a divine council in which Odysseus' return is decided. At this point, however, he launches a major retardation †: the *Telemachy*, Telemachus' meeting with Athena, private and public confrontations with the Suitors, and visits to Nestor in Pylos and Menelaus in Sparta (Books 1–4). Not until Book 5 will he return to his main hero, Odysseus. The briefing on Odysseus provides the narratees with more knowledge than Telemachus has; not until 4.556–60 will he learn what they knew all along, namely that Odysseus is with Calypso.

Deemed suspect by Analysts, the *Telemachy* is in fact well motivated.<sup>1</sup> In the first place there is the actorial motivation † of Athena, the goddess who involves Telemachus in the story: she wants him to win *kleos* (94–5n.). Telemachus' trip abroad is comparable to the youthful exploits of Nestor (*Il.* 11.670–762) and Odysseus (*Od.* 19.393–466 and 21.13–38), and indeed to Odysseus' own Wanderings.<sup>2</sup> Both father and son visit impressive palaces, converse for some time with their hosts before identifying themselves (cf. Introduction to 4), and meet with overzealous hosts (cf. Introduction to 15); cf. also 2.332–3 (the fates of father and son are explicitly compared) and 16.17–21 (in a simile Telemachus is cast in the role of a wanderer like

<sup>1</sup> Scott (1917–18), Calhoun (1934), Reinhardt (1960b), Clarke (1963, 1967: 30–44), Allione (1963: 9–59), Klingner (1964), Rose (1967), Sternberg (1978: 56–128), Jones (1988b), Hölscher (1989: 87–93), Patzer (1991), and Olson (1995: 65–90).

<sup>2</sup> Scholion *ad* 1.93, Hölscher (1939: 66), Clarke (1967: 40–3), Rüter (1969: 238–40), Powell (1970: 50–4), Hansen (1972: 48–57), Fenik (1974: 21–8), Austin (1975: 182–91), Apthorp (1980: 12–20), Thalmann (1984: 37–8), Rutherford (1985: 138), and Reece (1993: 74–83).

Odysseus). His search for news about his father is also a search for confirmation of his identity as Odysseus' son; various characters will remark upon his resemblance to his father (cf. 206–12n.). When he returns, \*Telemachus has matured and is ready to assist his father in the revenge scheme.

The first narratorial motivation † is to introduce the Ithacan cast, which is to occupy the stage in the second half of the story: Telemachus, the Suitors, Penelope, Laertes, Phemius, and Euryclea. The only important figure not yet mentioned is Eumaeus. With the exception of the Suitors, these are the people Odysseus is longing to return to, and, having made their acquaintance, the narratees can well understand that longing. They also learn of the deplorable situation on Ithaca (a host of Suitors wooing Penelope, consuming Odysseus' property, and threatening the life of his son, while the Ithacan population does not dare to stop them), which makes them share Athena's desire to get Odysseus home; cf. 5.1–42n.

A second narratorial motivation is to introduce a theme † which runs through the whole *Odyssey*, viz. the comparison of Odysseus' *nostos* with that of the other Greek heroes who fought before Troy, especially Agamemnon (32–43n.), Nestor (3.103–200n.), Menelaus (4.351–586n.), Ajax (4.499–511n.), and Achilles (11.482–91n.).<sup>3</sup> When the story begins, it looks as if Odysseus' *nostos* is the worst: he is the only one not yet to have returned. By the end, however, it will have become clear that his is the best: he at least has a *nostos* (unlike Achilles, who dies in Troy, and Ajax, who dies by drowning on his way home), which, because of its adventurous nature (unlike Nestor's swift but uninteresting return) and the riches which he assembles (like Menelaus), brings him *kleos* (which Achilles himself proclaims better than his own martial *kleos*); he has a faithful wife (unlike Agamemnon and Menelaus); he is not killed in his own palace by the suitor of his wife (like Agamemnon), but rather kills her suitors; he finds his adult son at home and fights with him shoulder to shoulder against the Suitors (Achilles dies before he can see Neoptolemus in action on the battlefield, Menelaus has no son by Helen, and Agamemnon is killed before he can greet Orestes).

A third narratorial motivation is to initiate the characterization of \*Odysseus: people talk about him and recount anecdotes about him,

<sup>3</sup> Klingner (1964: 74–5), Lord (1960: 165–9), Powell (1970), Thornton (1970: 1–15), Thalmann (1984: 163–4), Rutherford (1985: 139–40), and Hölscher (1989: 94–102).

notably Athena (1.257–64), Nestor (3.118–29), Helen (4.240–64), and Menelaus (4.266–89).

Book 1 covers the first day of the *Odyssey* (cf. Appendix A), which brings a divine council (26–95), Athena's meeting with Telemachus (96–324), and a scene in which Telemachus first asserts himself as the young master of the house in meetings with his mother and the Suitors (325–444).

**1–10** The opening of the *Odyssey*<sup>4</sup> is marked explicitly (in contrast to its implicit ending, 23.296n.), in a way which is typical of oral narratives, viz. by calling attention to the act of storytelling and thereby marking the transition from the real world to the story world.<sup>5</sup> It takes the form of an invocation of the Muse, which is marked off by ring-composition †: μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα ≈ θεά . . . εἰπὲ καὶ ἡμῖν. The structure of the proem resembles that of the *Iliad* (and cf. 326–7; 8.492–5; 9.37–8; 11.382–4): substantive in the accusative, which indicates the subject of the story; verb of speaking; vocative; adjective and relative clause, which further define the subject; δέ-clauses, which give some idea of the action to come; and an indication of the starting point. On closer inspection, however, there are also striking differences: the indication of the subject is vague ('the man' instead of 'the anger of Achilles'); the starting point is unspecified ('from some point onwards' instead of the precise indication 'from the very moment when the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon started'); and mention is made of a specific episode, the 'Helios' incident (6–9n.). In addition, the events mentioned in the proem of the *Iliad* have yet to take place when the story begins, whereas those of the *Odyssey* already belong to the past.

The proem also introduces the agents involved in the presentation of the story: the narrator (μοι), the narratees (present, together with the narrator, in ἡμῖν; cf. *Il.* 2.486), and the Muse. The Odyssean narrator †<sup>6</sup> is (i) external, i.e., he does not himself play a role in the story he is recounting; (ii) omniscient, i.e., he knows how his story will end and has access to the inner thoughts of his characters; (iii) omnipresent; (iv) undramatized, i.e., we hear nothing about his personality; and (v) covert, i.e., apart from the proem, he does not refer to his own activities as a narrator and focalizer and rarely – but more often than the Iliadic narrator – openly expresses judgements (\*narratorial interventions). Despite his invisibility, his influence is great:

<sup>4</sup> Bassett (1923a), van Groningen (1946), Rüter (1969: 34–52), Clay (1976, 1983: 1–53), Lenz (1980: 49–64), Pucci (1982), Nagler (1990), Ford (1992: 18–31), Pedrick (1992), and Walsh (1995: 392–403). <sup>5</sup> Morhange (1995). <sup>6</sup> De Jong (1987a) and Richardson (1990).

we move through the story with the narrator ‘constantly at our elbow, controlling rigorously our beliefs, our interests, and our sympathies’.<sup>7</sup> The narratees † likewise are undramatized and nowhere explicitly addressed by the narrator; yet they are indispensable as the narrator’s silent partners, the object of narrative devices such as misdirection † or dramatic irony †.

His invocation of the Muse<sup>8</sup> characterizes the narrator as a professional singer, comparable to Phemius and Demodocus. Singers are said to be ‘taught/loved’ by the Muses (cf. 8.63–4n.) and they claim that the Muses are actively involved in their singing (cf. 1.1: ‘Muse, tell me about the man’). The relation between narrator and Muse is best understood in terms of double motivation †: both god and mortal are involved (cf. 22.347–8n.). Rather than turning the narrator into the mouthpiece of the Muse, the invocation of the Muse subtly enhances his status; the gods assist only those who, by their own merits, deserve to be assisted. The Muse’s cooperation guarantees the ‘truth’ of his story, which in fact contains a great deal of invention (cf. 8.487–91n.), and her teaching/gift of song camouflages the tradition and training which must in fact be the basis for his song.<sup>9</sup> After the proem the Muses will no longer be invoked (as they are in the *Iliad*). In comparison to the *Iliad*, the narrator of the *Odyssey* is more self-conscious,<sup>10</sup> advertising his own profession and song in various subtle ways: of the many ‘*nostos*’ songs (cf. 325–7n.), he offers the ‘latest’ (8.74n.), which is always liked best (351–2n.); he presents an idealized picture of his profession in the singers Phemius and Demodocus (Introduction to 8); and compares his main hero to a singer (11.363–9n.).

1–5 The stress put on the magnitude of the subject (thrice repeated πολλ-) is typical of openings (cf. 7.241–3; 9.3–15; 14.192–8; and *Il.* 1.2–3); it serves to win the attention of the narratees. The fact that Odysseus has wandered and suffered much will be stressed throughout the *Odyssey*, and, when voiced by Odysseus, it will serve as a form of self-identification; cf. 16.205–6n.

1 The opening with ἄνδρα indicates that the *Odyssey* is not just a story about the individual Odysseus and his *nostos*, but about Odysseus as ‘man’, i.e., leader, husband, father, son, master, and king.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Booth (1961: 4).

<sup>8</sup> Minton (1960), Klotz (1965), Barmeyer (1968: 34–48), Harriott (1969: 41–5), Häußler (1973), Svenbro (1976: 11–45), Pucci (1978), Murray (1981), Thalmann (1984: 134–56), de Jong (1987a: 45–53), and Ford (1992: 57–89). <sup>9</sup> Ford (1992: 90–101).

<sup>10</sup> Maehler (1963: 21–34). <sup>11</sup> Goldhill (1991: 1–5).

Whenever we find verse-initial ἄνδρα,<sup>12</sup> it refers anaphorically to Odysseus (here; 8.139; 10.74; 13.89; 24.266) or else he is invoked, even though the reference is general or concerns another person.

The epithet πολύτροπος,<sup>13</sup> which combines an active ('with many turns of the mind') and a passive ('much tossed about') sense, is used (here and in 10.330) only for Odysseus, who, in general, has many πολυ-epithets (πολύαινος, 'of many tales', πολυάρητος, 'much prayed for', πολύμητις, 'of many devices', πολυμήχανος, 'of many resources', πολύτλας, 'much enduring', πολύφρων, 'highly ingenious'). It therefore immediately identifies 'the man' as Odysseus, while the information provided in the sequel (long wanderings, Helius' cattle, Calypso, Ithaca, and Poseidon's wrath) also points to him. Nevertheless, his name will not be mentioned until 21. The **suppression of Odysseus' name** is a common Odyssean motif: cf. 96–324n. (Telemachus speaking); 5.43–148n. (Hermes and Calypso); Introduction to 14 (Eumaeus); and 24.216–349n. ('the stranger' and Laertes).<sup>14</sup> By inserting this motif into his proem, the narrator signals his story's preoccupation with (the concealing of) names; cf. also the \*'delayed recognition' story-pattern.

6 Concern for his men is characteristic of \*Odysseus.

6–9 The narrator mentions the episode of Helius' cattle<sup>15</sup> (told in full in 12.260–425), because (i) it is of thematic relevance (the ἀτασθαλίησιν, 'reckless behaviour', of Odysseus' companions connects them to Aegisthus and the Suitors; cf. 32–43n.), and (ii) it is the adventure in which Odysseus loses his last companions, after which he is alone. The narrator will begin his story after this major caesura.

This is one of the places where the narrator authenticates Odysseus' *Apologue*; cf. Introduction to 9.

10 The suggestion of an arbitrary beginning ('from some point onwards') is a rhetorical ploy. In general, the starting point of songs is a conscious choice (cf. 8.73–82n.), and in the specific case of the *Odyssey* the point of attack, i.e., the starting point of the main story † as opposed to the fabula †, is chosen very carefully. The story begins *in medias res*;<sup>16</sup> compare the *Iliad*

<sup>12</sup> Kahane (1992).

<sup>13</sup> Stanford (1950), Rüter (1969: 35–7), Clay (1983: 25–34), Pucci (1987: 24–5), and Peradotto (1990: 115–17).

<sup>14</sup> Austin (1972), Clay (1983: 26–9), Peradotto (1990: 114–16), and Olson (1992b).

<sup>15</sup> Andersen (1973), Rijksbaron (1993), and Walsh (1995).

<sup>16</sup> Sternberg (1978: 36–41), Meijering (1987: 146–7), and Hölscher (1989: 42–8).

and Demodocus' song of the Wooden Horse (8.499–520) and contrast the *ab ovo* life stories of Eumaeus (15.403–84) and 'the stranger'/Odysseus (14.192–359). Thus it begins when Odysseus is destined to return home at last (16–18), in the twentieth year of his absence (2.175), the third year of the Suitors' 'siege' of his palace (2.89–90), at the moment Telemachus has come of age (296–7). All that precedes this starting point will be presented in the form of embedded stories, above all Odysseus' long *Apologue* (Books 9–12).

For the fabula of the *Odyssey*, cf. Appendix A.

**11–26** The transition to the opening scene of the story is different from that in the *Iliad* (1.8–16). There the narrator spirals *back* in time (starting from Achilles' wrath mentioned in the proem until he reaches the start of the sequence of events leading up to it); here he moves *forward* in time (continuing from where he left off in the proem, the moment when Odysseus lost all his companions): Odysseus is with \*Calypso – the year has come for him to return, but though the other gods pity him, he has still not returned because of Poseidon's wrath – now Poseidon is away and the other gods are assembled (in other words, an ideal situation for the stalemate around Odysseus' return to be broken and the action to begin).

**11–15** An instance of the '(all) the others . . . , but X (alone) . . .' motif; cf. 2.82–4; 4.285–7; 5.110–11 = 133–4; 6.138–40; 7.251–3; 8.93–4 = 532–3, 234–5; 11.526–30, 541–6; 14.478–82; 16.393–8; 17.503–4; 20.109–10; 22.42–4; 24.173–5 (and the variant in 17.411–12). This motif serves to focus pathetically (here) or negatively (in most of the other instances) on the situation or activity of one person. In the case of Odysseus, οἶον, 'alone', has a two-fold significance: he is the only Trojan war veteran who has not yet returned and the only survivor of the 'Helios' incident (cf. 5.131; 7.249). On Ithaca he will again be 'alone' (μῶνός), one man facing a multitude of Suitors; cf. 16.117–21n.

**13** Odysseus' desire to return home is specified in several places, the emphasis depending on the situation:<sup>17</sup> longing for Penelope (here, to contrast with Calypso's longing to make him her husband: 15; 5.209–10), Ithaca (57–9; 9.27–36), his palace (7.225), his servants (7.225), or his parents (9.34–6).

**16–18** The first of \*many prolepses of Odysseus' return. The Homeric narrator tends to disclose beforehand the outcome of his story or part of it,

<sup>17</sup> Stanford (1965).

an outcome which is often known to the narratees anyway, because the core – but no more than that – of the story was part of the tradition. This does not, however, mean that there is no **suspense**:<sup>18</sup> (i) the how and when of the *dénouement* are not disclosed (in the present instance, the narratees are not told how Odysseus is going to come home); (ii) the narratees can temporarily ‘forget’ their prior knowledge and identify with one of the characters, who have a much more restricted vision (e.g., when in Book 5 the shipwrecked Odysseus is convinced that he is going to drown); (iii) the narrator can create false expectations (misdirection †, e.g., concerning Arete’s rôle in Book 7); (iv) the expected outcome can be delayed (retardation †, e.g., in Book 19, when the narratees expect to see husband and wife reunited); and (v) even real surprises are not excluded (e.g., when in Book 22 Odysseus uses the bow of the shooting contest to kill the Suitors).

It is **Odysseus’ fate** (ἔπεκλώσαντο) to return home; cf. 5.41–2, 113–15; 9.532–5; 11.139; and 13.132–3; and cf. also 2.174–6 (Halitherses’ prophecy at the moment of his departure); 11.113–15 (Tiresias’ conditional prophecy); and 13.339–40 (Athena’s remark that she always knew he would come home). His Wanderings are also fated; cf. 9.507–12 (meeting with Polyphemos); 10.330–2 (meeting with Circe); and 5.288–9 (stay with the Phaeacians). In a sense, Homeric fate is the tradition, the elements of the ‘Odysseus’ story which are given.<sup>19</sup> In part Odysseus incurs his fate himself (not by committing a ‘sin’, but by making the mistake of blinding Polyphemos and thereby incurring the wrath of Poseidon; cf. 9.551–5n.), and in part he shares in the misery brought on by others (the wraths of Athena and of Helios; cf. 1.19–21n.); but above all he must simply endure his allotted portion of suffering (cf. 9.37–8: ‘Zeus made my *nostos* full of sorrows from the very moment I left Troy’). In the council of the gods which opens the story Athena will advance the argument that he has now suffered enough and is in danger of exceeding his allotted portion, something which Aegisthus deserves but not Odysseus.

**19** φίλος, ‘dear’, ‘friend’, belongs to the character-language †: 132 times in speech, twice in embedded focalization (13.192; *Il.* 19.378), and twice in simple narrator-text (here; *Il.* 24.327). The word adds to the pathos with which the narrator describes Odysseus’ plight: all the others are *at home*,

<sup>18</sup> Duckworth (1933), Hellwig (1964: 54–8), Hölscher (1989: 235–42), Richardson (1990: 132–9), Reichel (1990), Morrison (1992), and Schmitz (1994). No suspense according to Auerbach (1953: 4) and Schwinge (1991: 18–19). <sup>19</sup> Eberhard (1923).



*free from* the toils of war and travel, but Odysseus, when the year has come for him to come *home*, even then is not *free from* toils and back among his *philoí*.<sup>20</sup>

**19–21** In the *Odyssey* there are several instances of the ‘**divine anger**’ motif †:<sup>21</sup> the wrath of Athena, striking all the Greeks on their return home from Troy (cf. 325–7n.); of Helios, striking Odysseus’ companions in the third year of their return home (cf. 12.260–425n.); and of Poseidon (*bis*), hitting Locrian Ajax (4.499–511) and Odysseus.

**Poseidon’s wrath** against Odysseus originates from the latter’s blinding of his son Polyphemus (9.526–36 and 11.101–3); it prevents him from returning home (1.19–21, 68–75); and when the ban on his return is finally lifted, it postpones that return once again by shipwrecking him before the coast of Scheria (5.279–387). In 6.329–31 the narratees are reminded that Poseidon is still angry, and indeed in 13.125–87 he punishes the Phaeacians for bringing Odysseus home. The wrath comes to its prescribed end, when Odysseus has come home (cf. 1.20–1; 6.330–1; 9.532–5). It has an epilogue in the form of Odysseus’ ‘pilgrimage’ after his return to Ithaca (11.119–31).

**22–6** The Ethiopians offer a conventional means of motivating a god’s absence (cf. *Il.* 1.423–4). It is only when Poseidon is ‘far away’ – the detailed description of the Ethiopians’ location, which occurs only here, stresses this crucial fact twice: τηλόθ’, ἔσχατοι – that Athena dares to bring up Odysseus’ case. For her circumspection towards her uncle Poseidon, cf. 6.323–31n.

**26–95** The first council of the gods. In the *Iliad* divine scenes abound; the *Odyssey* has only five instances: three plenary sessions (here, 5.1–42, and 12.376–90) and two dialogues between Zeus and one other god (13.125–58 and 24.472–88). This council has three functions: (i) practical: it starts off the action, by breaking the stalemate around Odysseus’ return (cf. 11–26n.); (ii) structuring: it informs the narratees about the first stages of the story to follow (cf. 81–95n.); and (iii) expositional: it amplifies the narrator’s earlier brief remarks on Odysseus’ stay with \*Calypso (14–15), and Poseidon’s anger (20–1).

The dialogue displays the domino form †, which allows for the introduction of an unexpected topic at the end:

<sup>20</sup> In this interpretation the semicolon after ἀέθλων should be removed.

<sup>21</sup> Woodhouse (1930: 29–40), Irmscher (1950: 52–64), Fenik (1974: 208–30), Segal (1992a), and Yamagata (1994: 93–101).

Zeus	A	( <i>general proposition</i> ) Mortals incur more suffering than is meted out to them, because of their own reckless behaviour (32–4).
	B	( <i>example</i> ) Take Aegisthus (35–43).
Athena	B'	You are right about Aegisthus (45–7),
	C	but I feel sorry for Odysseus, whose prolonged suffering is not justified (48–62).
Zeus	C'	This is not my doing but Poseidon's (64–75).
	D	But let us arrange for Odysseus' return (76–9).
Athena	D'	If everyone agrees that Odysseus should return, let us send Hermes to Calypso (81–7).
	E	And I will go to Ithaca, to stir up Telemachus (88–95).

Athena's plans (D'–E) will be executed in reverse order †: first, she goes to Telemachus and sets in motion a chain of actions (Books 1–4), and then, after a new divine council, Hermes visits Calypso (Book 5); for the effectiveness of this order, cf. 5.1–42n.

This scene shows us **Athena**<sup>22</sup> for the first time in her role of Odysseus' helper. Whereas in the *Iliad* many of the gods regularly intervene in the action, in the *Odyssey* only this goddess is active. Athena earlier supported Odysseus during the Trojan war (3.218–24, 13.300–1, 314–15, 387–91; 20.47–8) and, as she herself explains, she helps him because of his intelligence and shrewdness (cf. 13.221–440). During his Wanderings she did not help him, for her own private reasons; cf. 6.323–31n.

So much for the actorial motivation † of Athena's constant support. But there are also narratorial motivations †. (i) Athena's interventions turn her into an instrument of the narrator in the orchestration of his story.<sup>23</sup> (ii) The repeated revelation of her plans and intentions in the form of embedded focalization †, informs the narratees about the course which the story is going to take; cf. 3.77–8n. (iii) Her unfailing support encourages the narratees to sympathize with Odysseus (even at the moment he takes his bloody revenge) and to side with him against the Suitors; cf. 224–9n.

**29–31** Zeus's opening speech is preceded by embedded focalization † (shifter: 'he recalled'), which informs the narratees in advance about its topic; cf. 4.187–9; 5.5–6; 10.35–6; 14.51–2. Zeus *recalls* the demise of Aegisthus, because it took place three years ago; cf. Appendix A.

<sup>22</sup> Stanford (1963: 25–42), Müller (1966), Clay (1983), Doherty (1991a), Yamagata (1994: 35–9), and Murnaghan (1995). <sup>23</sup> Richardson (1990: 192–4) and Olson (1995: 142).