

THE ODYSSEY

"Odyssey" is a familiar English word, meaning, according to Webster, "a series of adventurous journeys usually marked by many changes of fortune." The Greek word *Odusseia*, the form from which the English word is derived, means simply "the story of Odysseus," a Greek hero of the Trojan War who took ten years to find his way back from Troy to his home on the island of Ithaca, off the western coast of mainland Greece. Homer's *Odyssey* does indeed present us with "adventurous journeys" and "changes of fortune," but it is also an epic tale of a hero's return, to find at home a situation more dangerous than anything he faced on the plains of Troy or in his wanderings over uncharted seas.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle, writing in the fourth century B.C., gives us, in his treatise known as the *Poetics*, what he considers the essence of the plot. "A certain man has been abroad many years; he is alone, and the god Poseidon keeps a hostile eye on him. At home the situation is that suitors for his wife's hand are draining his resources and plotting to kill his son. Then, after suffering storm and shipwreck, he comes home, makes himself known, attacks the suitors: he survives and they are destroyed." This terse summary is the armature of an epic poem that consists of 12,109 lines of hexameter verse composed, probably, late in the eighth century B.C. or early in the seventh, by a poet known to later ages as Homer, for whose life and activities no trustworthy information has come down to us. The poem, in other words, is some 2,700 years old. How, the reader may well ask, did it survive through such an expanse of time? By whom, for whom, and how and in what circumstances was it composed? Perhaps the best way to proceed to an exploration of these questions (no one can promise a complete and certain answer) is backward—from the text of this book.

It is a translation, by Robert Fagles, of the Greek text edited by David Monro and Thomas Allen, first published in 1908 by the Oxford University Press. This two-volume edition is printed in a Greek type, complete with lower- and uppercase letters, breathings and accents, that is based on the elegant handwriting of Richard Porson, an early-nineteenth-

century scholar of great brilliance, who was also an incurable alcoholic as well as a caustic wit. This was of course not the first font of Greek type; in fact, the first printed edition of Homer, issued in Florence in 1488, was composed in type that imitated contemporary Greek handwriting, with all its complicated ligatures and abbreviations. Early printers tried to make their books look like handwritten manuscripts because in scholarly circles printed books were regarded as vulgar and inferior products—cheap paperbacks, so to speak.

Back to 1488, then, there is a continuous history of the printed text of Homer, differing a little from one editor to another but essentially fixed. Before that, Homer existed only as a handwritten book. Such handwritten copies had been in circulation in Italy for a hundred years or so before the first printed edition. Petrarch had tried to learn Greek but gave up; Boccaccio succeeded and also, in 1360, had a chair of Greek founded in Florence. But before Petrarch, Dante, though he put Homer in his limbo of non-Christian poets, had never read him, and could not have read him even if he had seen a text. For the best part of a thousand years, since the end of the Roman Empire, the knowledge of Greek had been almost lost in Western Europe. In the fourteenth century it was reintroduced into Italy from Byzantium, where a Greek-speaking Christian empire had maintained itself ever since Constantine made the city the capital of the eastern half of the Roman Empire.

The knowledge of Greek and the manuscripts of the Greek classics, Homer included, came to Italy just in time; in May 1453 Byzantium fell to the Ottoman Turks, and the Greek empire of the East came to the end of its thousand-year career. During its long life it had carefully preserved, copied and recopied a select number of the Greek masterpieces of pre-Christian times, Homer prominent among them. The immediate predecessors of the printed edition of Florence were bound manuscript books written on vellum or on paper in a cursive minuscule script complete with accents and breathings. These books were the final phase of the process of copying by hand that went all the way back to the ancient world. The new minuscule handwriting had been adopted in the ninth century; since it separated words, it was easier to read than its predecessor, a hand consisting of freestanding capital letters without word division—the standard writing of the ancient world. In the second to fifth centuries A.D., the form and material of the books had changed: parchment, with its longer life, had replaced papyrus, and the codex form, our book form—folded quires of paper sewn at the back—had replaced the roll. In the ancient world, the *Iliad* consisted of a number of papyrus rolls, the text written in columns on the inside surface. The rolls could

not be too big (or they would break when opened for reading); a long poem like the *Odyssey* might require as many as twenty-four—in fact, it is possible that the so-called books of our text represent an original division into papyrus rolls.

In this form the poem was known to the scholars who edited and wrote commentaries on it in Alexandria, the city founded by Alexander before he set out on his epic march to India in the late fourth century B.C. And it was in this form—though, before the Alexandrian scholars made a standard edition, with many variations from one text to another—that copies were to be found all over the Greek world of the fourth and fifth centuries B.C. There must have been texts in circulation in the sixth century too, for we hear of official recitations at Athens and find echoes of Homer in sixth-century poets. By the seventh century B.C., we are moving back into the dark. In the poets of this century (whose work survives only in fragments) there are epithets, phrases and even half-lines that are also common in Homer. Though these poets—Tyrtaeus, Callinus, Alcman and Archilochus—may be using tags common to a general epic tradition, it seems more likely that these echoes betray acquaintance with the work we know as Homer's. There is also a vase, discovered on the island of Ischia, off the coast of Naples, and dated to before 700 B.C., which has an inscription that seems to refer to the famous cup of Nestor described in the *Iliad* (11.745–53).^{*} And echoes in art are also found in the early seventh century—illustrations of scenes from the *Odyssey*, for example, on vases dated in the 670s.

But back beyond about 700 B.C. we cannot go. Evidence for this period is rare; in fact, we know very little about Greece in the eighth century, still less, if possible, about Greece in the ninth. We have only the archaeological record—geometric pots, graves, some weapons. It is the era of Greek history known, because of our almost total ignorance about it, as the Dark Age.

All we have is the tradition, what the Greeks of historical times believed they knew about Homer. Herodotus thought that he lived four hundred years, not more, before his own time; that would put him in the ninth century. The great Homeric scholar Aristarchus of Alexandria believed that he lived about one hundred forty years after the Trojan War; since the Trojan War was generally dated (in our terms) around 1200 B.C., Aristarchus' Homer was much earlier than the Homer of

^{*}The line numbers here and throughout, unless otherwise indicated, refer to the Fagles translations of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, where the line numbers of the Greek text will be found at the top of every page.

Herodotus. Men might disagree about his date, but everyone believed that he was blind, and though some thought he came from Chios (a so-called Homeric hymn mentions a blind singer from Chios), others traced his origin to Smyrna. It was also generally assumed that Homer, though he speaks of singing and probably did sing in performance, was a poet using the same means of composition as his fifth-century successors—that is, writing. Even those who thought that his poems were not combined into their present shape until long after his death (that, for example, the last part of the *Odyssey* is a later addition), even those who believed that different poets wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the so-called Separatists—all assumed that Homer was a poet who composed as all poets since have done: with the aid of writing. And so did all succeeding centuries down to the eighteenth. Pope, whose translation of the *Iliad* is the finest ever made, speaks of Homer as if he were a poet like Milton or Shakespeare or himself. “HOMER”—so begins his Preface—“is universally allow’d to have had the greatest Invention of any Writer whatever.” Homer, it is taken for granted, wrote.

There had been one skeptic in the ancient world who thought differently. He was not a Greek but a Jew, Joseph ben Matthias. He wrote in Greek (for which, as he admits, he had a little help) a history of the Jewish rebellion against Roman rule in the first century A.D. and its savage repression by the emperor Titus—events in which he had played a prominent role. But he also wrote a pamphlet, countering the claim of a Greek writer, Apion, that the Jews had no history to speak of, since they were hardly mentioned in the works of Greek historians. Besides defending the historicity of the Old Testament chronicles, Josephus (to give him his Greek name) counterattacked by pointing out that the Greeks did not learn to write until very late in their history. The heroes of the Trojan War were “ignorant of the present-day mode of writing,” he said, and even Homer “did not leave his poems in writing”; his separate songs were “transmitted by memory” and “not unified until much later.”

It is true that (with one remarkable exception, which is discussed later) no one in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* knows how to read or write. The Mycenaean scribes had used the complicated Linear B syllabary—eighty-seven signs for different combinations of consonant and vowel. It was a system only professional scribes could handle; in any case, all memory of it was lost with the destruction of the Mycenaean centers in the twelfth century B.C. The Greeks did not learn to write again until much later. This time, they took over an alphabet of fewer than twenty-five letters from the Phoenicians, a Semitic people whose merchant ships, sailing

from their cities Tyre and Sidon on the Palestinian coast, reached every island and harbor of the Mediterranean Sea. The Phoenician alphabet consisted of signs for consonants only. The Greeks appropriated their symbols (*alpha* and *beta* are meaningless words in Greek, but their Phoenician equivalents, *aleph* and *beth*, mean “ox” and “house”), but by assigning some of the letters to the vowels, they created the first efficient alphabet, a letter system that provided one, and only one, sign for each sound in the language.

Just when this creative adaptation took place is a subject of scholarly disagreement. Some of the letter shapes of the earliest Greek inscriptions look as if they had been copied from Phoenician scripts that date from as far back as the twelfth century. On the other hand, the earliest examples of Greek alphabetic writing, scratched or painted on broken pottery and found all over the Greek world from Rhodes in the east to Ischia, off the coast of Naples, in the west, are dated, by their archaeological contexts, to the last half of the eighth century B.C.

But it was not until the eighteenth century that the possibility of Homeric illiteracy was once again proposed. The English traveler Robert Wood, in his *Essay on the Original Genius of Homer* (1769), suggested that Homer had been as illiterate as his own Achilles and Odysseus. The German scholar F. A. Wolf elaborated the theory in a learned discourse entitled *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, and the Homeric Question was launched on its long and complicated career. For if Homer was illiterate, Wolf declared, he could not possibly have composed poems as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; he must have left behind him shorter, ballad-like poems, which, preserved by memory, were later (much later, in Wolf’s opinion) put together in something like the form we now possess. Wolf’s thesis was almost universally accepted as soon as published. It came at the right time. Almost a century before this, the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico had claimed that the Homeric poems were the creation not of one man but of the whole Greek people. The spirit of the age now sought to find works of untutored genius, songs and ballads, the expression of a people’s communal imagination—a contrast to the artificial culture and literature of the Age of Reason. The Romantic rebellion was at hand. Everywhere in Europe, scholars began to collect, record and edit popular song, ballad, epic—the German *Nibelungenlied*, the Finnish *Kalevala*, Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. And this was the age that saw the popularity, especially in Germany and France, of a fake collective bardic epic: the story of Ossian, a Gaelic hero, translated from the original Gaelic and collected in the Highlands by James Macpherson. In spite of the fact that Macpherson was never able to produce the originals,

"Ossian" was admired by Goethe and Schiller; it was the favorite book of Napoleon Bonaparte. They should have listened to Samuel Johnson, who called the book "as gross an imposition as ever the world was troubled with."

In such an atmosphere of enthusiasm for folk poetry, the discovery of a primitive Homer was more than welcome. And scholars, convinced that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* consisted of ancient shorter poems that had been sewn together by later compilers and editors, now addressed with gusto the task of deconstruction, of picking out the stitches and isolating the original "lays" or "ballads" in their primitive, pure beauty. The exercise continued throughout the whole of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

It continued because of course no two scholars could agree about how to take the poems apart. This was understandable, since the criteria they were using—inconsistency of character, imbalance of structure, irrelevance of theme or incident, clumsiness of transition—are notoriously subjective. At first the affair was a free-for-all; it seemed almost as if there were a competition to see who could find the greatest number of separate ballads. Karl Lachmann, in the mid-nineteenth century, after claiming that the newly discovered *Nibelungenlied* was a mosaic of short ballads (a theory now believed by no one), went on to divide the *Iliad* into eighteen original heroic songs. A similar theory of the origin of the *Chanson de Roland* was popular at about the same time. The idea was not as impossible as it now sounds; in fact, a contemporary of Lachmann, the Finnish scholar and poet Lönnrot, collected Finnish ballads on his travels as a country doctor in the most backward parts of the country and put them together to form the great Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*, a poem that has ever since been the foundation of the Finnish national consciousness. But Lachmann's analytical methods produced no agreement, only scholarly squabbles, conducted with the customary venom, about how long the pieces should be and exactly where to use the knife.

The *Iliad*, in which the action is confined to Troy and the Trojan plain and lasts for no more than a few weeks, lent itself less easily to such surgical operations than the *Odyssey*, which ranges over ten years and vast spaces. It was easy for eager analysts to detect originally separate epics and short ballads. There was a *Telemacheia* (Books 1–4), the tale of a diffident young prince's growth to full stature as a man and warrior. It contained what had originally been three separate ballads of the type known as *Nostoi* (Returns)—the voyages and homecomings of Nestor, Menelaus and Agamemnon. There was a long tale of a hero's voyage through far-off fabulous seas, like the saga of Jason's ship, the *Argo*, a song actually

mentioned in the *Odyssey* (12.77). Embedded in this travel tale was a short but brilliant song about a sex scandal on Olympus—Ares and Aphrodite caught in *flagrante delicto* by her irate husband, Hephaestus. It is one of the songs of the blind bard Demodocus, who at the Phaeacian court tells also the tale of the quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus and another of Odysseus and the wooden horse that brought about the fall of Troy. There was also a full-scale *Nostos*, the return home of Odysseus, the welcome he received, and his vengeance on the suitors.

The precise dimensions of these presumably once separate components and the stages of the process that led to their amalgamation were (and in the writings of many eminent critics still are) matters for speculation and dispute. Were there three main poets—one who composed the core of the epic (the wanderings and return of Odysseus), another who sang of the coming of age and travels of Telemachus, and a third who combined the two and forged the links that bind them? Or were there only two—the poet of the voyages and homecoming, and the other who added the *Telemacheia* and Book 24 (which many scholars consider a later addition in any case)?

One obvious weakness of this line of argument is that the story of Telemachus is no fit subject for heroic song; there is nothing heroic about it until Telemachus takes his place, spear in hand, by his father's side in the palace at Ithaca. As a separate epic poem, the material of Books 1–4 is something hard to imagine in the historical context—a *Bildungsroman*, the story of a young man from a poor and backward island who asserts himself at home and visits the sophisticated courts of two rich and powerful kingdoms, to return home a grown man. Such a theme is worlds apart from the songs offered by bards in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Demodocus at the Phaeacian court tells the tale of the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles, and later, at Odysseus' request, of the wooden horse that brought about Troy's fall. Phemius in the palace at Ithaca sings of the return of the Achaeans from Troy and the disasters inflicted on them by Athena, and when Penelope asks him to choose some other theme, she speaks of his knowledge of the "works of the gods and men that singers celebrate" (1.389). And in the *Iliad*, when the ambassadors from Agamemnon come to plead with Achilles to rejoin them on the battle line, they find him playing the lyre, "singing the famous deeds of fighting heroes" (9.228). A song celebrating the travels of Telemachus is not easy to imagine in the context of a male audience accustomed to tales of adventure and feats of arms. How would the bard begin? "Sing to me, Muse, of the coming of age of Telemachus . . ."? It seems much more likely that the *Telemacheia* was a creation of the poet who decided to

combine a tale of adventures in fabulous seas—a western voyage modeled on the saga of the *Argo's* voyage to the east—with a *Nostos*, the return home of a hero from Troy, in this case to face a situation as dangerous as that awaiting Agamemnon. For that decision forced on him a radical departure from the traditional narrative procedure of heroic song and confronted him with a problem for which the *Telemacheia* was a masterly solution.

Epic narrative characteristically announces the point in the story at which it begins and then proceeds in chronological order to its end. The *Iliad* opens with the poet's request to the Muse: "Rage—Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles"; he then tells her where to start: "Begin, Muse, when the two first broke and clashed, / Agamemnon lord of men and brilliant Achilles" (1.1–8). She does, and the story is told in strict chronological order until its end: "And so the Trojans buried Hector breaker of horses" (24.944). In the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus asks the Phaeacian bard Demodocus to "Sing of the wooden horse / Epeus built with Athena's help," the bard "launched out / in a fine blaze of song, starting at just the point / where the main Achaean force, setting their camps afire . . ." (8.552–61), and carries the story on until Troy falls. But the prologue to the *Odyssey* abandons this traditional request to the Muse or the singer to begin at a certain point. It begins, like the *Iliad*, with a request to the Muse to sound a theme—the wrath of Achilles, the wanderings of Odysseus—but instead of telling her where to start—"Begin, Muse, when the two first broke and clashed"—it leaves the choice to her. "Launch out on his story, Muse, daughter of Zeus, / start from where you will" (1.11–12). And she does. She begins, not with Odysseus' departure from Troy (which is where he begins when he tells his story to the Phaeacians), but in the twentieth year of his absence from home, as Athena starts Telemachus on his journey to Pylos and Sparta and arranges Odysseus' escape from his seven-year captivity on Calypso's island.

The reason for this startling departure from tradition is not far to seek. If the poet had begun at the beginning and observed a strict chronology, he would have been forced to interrupt the flow of his narrative as soon as he got his hero back to Ithaca, in order to explain the extremely complicated situation he would have to deal with in his home. The *Telemacheia* enables him to set the stage for the hero's return and to introduce the main participants in the final scenes—Athena, Telemachus, Penelope, Eurycleia, Antinous, Eurymachus—as well as a group of minor players: Medon, the servant who helped rear Telemachus; Dolius, the servant of Laertes; Halitherses and Mentor, two old Ithacans

who disapprove of the suitors; the suitor Leocritus; and Phemius, the Ithacan bard. And the accounts of Telemachus' voyages do more than chart his progress, under Athena's guidance, from provincial diffidence to princely self-confidence in his dealings with kings; they also offer us two ideal visions of the hero's return, so different from what awaits Odysseus—Nestor among his sons, Menelaus with his wife and daughter, both of them presiding over rich kingdoms and loyal subjects.

Division into separate songs by different poets was not the only approach to dissecting the body of the *Odyssey*. The nineteenth century was the age that saw the birth of the scientific historical spirit. And also of the history of language—the discipline of linguistics. All this had a bearing on the problem. If in fact some sections of the *Odyssey* were older than others, they should contain linguistic features characteristic of an earlier stage of the language than that to be found in the more recent additions. Similarly, the later parts of the poem should contain allusions to customs, laws, objects and ideas belonging to the later historical period, and vice versa. Toward the end of the century a fresh criterion emerged for gauging the antiquity of different sections of the poem—the archaeological criterion. For with Heinrich Schliemann's excavations at Troy and Mycenae, and those of Sir Arthur Evans at Cnossos, a previously unknown civilization was revealed. If there was any historicity to Homer's account of the Achaean world that organized the attack on Troy, it must be a reference to *this* world—a world of gold masks, bronze weapons, palaces and fortifications—not to the archaeologically poverty-stricken Greece of the Dark Age. Now, by finding in Homer descriptions of objects that corresponded to something excavated from a Bronze Age site, the scholar could date a passage, because it was clear that with the destruction of the Mycenaean and Minoan palaces, all memory of that age had disappeared in Greece. Schliemann and Evans had discovered things Herodotus and Thucydides had no idea of.

Of these three approaches, the linguistic seemed the most promising, the most likely to yield objective criteria. Studies of the origins of Greek in the Indo-European family of languages had progressed along generally agreed and scientific lines: the history of the Greek language and the Greek dialects had become an exact discipline. Surely the linguistic analysis of the text would confirm or refute theories of earlier and later strata in the poems.

THE LANGUAGE OF HOMER

The language of Homer is of course a problem in itself. One thing is certain: it is not a language that anyone ever spoke. It is an artificial, poetic language—as the German scholar Witte puts it, “The language of the Homeric poems is a creation of epic verse.” It was also a difficult language. For the Greeks of the great age, that fifth century we inevitably think of when we say “the Greeks,” the idiom of Homer was far from limpid (they had to learn the meaning of long lists of obscure words at school), and it was brimful of archaisms—in vocabulary, syntax and grammar—and of incongruities: words and forms drawn from different dialects and different stages of the growth of the language. In fact, the language of Homer was one nobody, except epic bards, oracular priests or literary parodists would dream of using.

This does not mean that Homer was a poet known only to scholars and schoolboys; on the contrary, the Homeric epics were familiar as household words in the mouths of ordinary Greeks. They maintained their hold on the tongues and imaginations of the Greeks by their superb literary quality—the simplicity, speed and directness of the narrative technique, the brilliance and excitement of the action, the greatness and imposing humanity of the characters—and by the fact that they presented the Greek people, in memorable form, with the images of their gods and the ethical, political and practical wisdom of their cultural tradition. Homer was thus at once contemporary in content and antique in form. The texture of Homeric epic was for the classic age of Greece like that of the Elgin Marbles for us—weathered by time but speaking to us directly: august, authoritative, inimitable, a vision of life fixed forever in forms that seem to have been molded by gods rather than men.

The language of Homer is the “creation of epic verse” in a strict sense too: it is created, adapted and shaped to fit the epic meter, the hexameter. This is a line, as its name indicates, of six metrical units, which may, to put it crudely, be either dactyls (a long plus two shorts) or spondees (two longs) in the first four places but must be dactyl and spondee in that order in the last two (rarely spondee and spondee, never spondee followed by dactyl). The syllables are literally long and short; the meter is based on pronunciation time, not, as in our language, on stress. But unlike most English verse, the meter does not allow departures from the basic norms—such phenomena as the Shakespearean variations on the basic blank verse line, still less the subtleties of Eliot’s prosody in *The Waste Land*.

Yet though it is always metrically regular, it never becomes monotonous; its internal variety guarantees that. This regularity imposed on variety is Homer’s great metrical secret, the strongest weapon in his poetic arsenal. The long line, which no matter how it varies in the opening and middle always ends in the same way, builds up its hypnotic effect in book after book, imposing on things and men and gods the same pattern, presenting in a rhythmic microcosm the wandering course to a fixed end which is the pattern of the rage of Achilles and the travels of Odysseus, of all natural phenomena and all human destinies.

The meter itself demands a special vocabulary, for many combinations of long and short syllables that are common in the spoken language cannot be admitted to the line—any word with three consecutive short syllables, for example, any word with one short syllable between two longs. This difficulty was met by choosing freely among the many variations of pronunciation and prosody afforded by Greek dialectal differences; the epic language is a mixture of dialects. Under a light patina of Attic forms (easily removable and clearly due to the preeminence of Athens as a literary center and then of the book trade), there is an indissoluble mixture of two different dialects, Aeolic and Ionic. But the attempts of the linguists to use this criterion for early (Aeolic) and late (Ionic) ran into the dilemma that Aeolic and Ionic forms sometimes appear inextricably tangled in the same line or half-line.

The attempts to dissect the *Odyssey* along historical lines were no more satisfactory (except of course to their authors). There are indeed passages that seem to imply different historical backgrounds, but they are not passages that are identifiable as early or late by the criteria of linguistic difference or structural analysis. All through the poem, weapons and armor are made of bronze—spearheads, arrow tips, swords, helmets and breastplates; men are killed by “pitiless bronze.” In superior palaces, like those of the gods or King Alcinous of the Phaeacians, bathtubs and cauldrons and even the threshold of the building are made of bronze. On the other hand, iron is used for axes and adzes; it is so familiar an item that it is constantly in use in metaphor and simile—“heart of iron,” for example. But there is no way to separate Bronze Age from Iron Age layers; the two metals lie cheek by jowl, and even the distinction between bronze for weapons and iron for tools is often ignored—“Iron has powers to draw a man to ruin” is a proverbial phrase twice quoted by Odysseus (16.327, 19.14), and a man who is dipping red-hot iron in water is called a *chalkeus*, a bronze or copper worker. Early in the poem, Athena, disguised as Mentis, says that she is sailing for Temese with a cargo of iron, which she intends to trade for bronze.

But archaeological ages are not the only matter to be handled by the Muse with careless abandon. There seem to be two different marriage systems in the world of the *Odyssey*: in some passages the bride's family settles a dowry on the bride, but in others the suitor makes valuable gifts to the bride's family. "It is most probable," says a recent commentator on the *Odyssey* (West, *Commentary*, I, p. 111), "that Homeric marriage-customs represent an amalgam of practices from different historical periods and different places, further complicated, perhaps, by misconception." They are obviously not much use for dating the passages in which they appear.

It is not surprising, in view of such frustrating results, that by the beginning of the twentieth century, opinion had begun to swing away from analysis and to concentrate on the qualities of the poem itself, to stress the unity of the main action rather than the digressions and inconsistencies, above all to explore the elaborate correspondences of structure that often link scene to scene. The architecture of the poem is magnificent, and it strongly suggests the hand of one composer, but it is true that there is a certain roughness in the details of the execution. The poem does contain, in an indissoluble amalgam, material that seems linguistically and historically to span many centuries. And it does contain long digressions, and some disconcerting inconsistencies, some weaknesses of construction. What sort of poet composed it, and how did he work?

The answer was supplied by an American scholar, whose name was Milman Parry. Parry, who came from California and was an assistant professor at Harvard when he was killed in a gun accident at an early age, did his most significant work in Paris; in fact, he wrote it in French and published it in Paris in 1928. It did not appear in English until 1971, when, translated by his son, Adam Parry, it formed part of a collection of all his Homeric studies. His work was not appreciated or even fully understood until long after his death, in 1935, but once understood, it completely changed the terms of the problem.

Parry's achievement was to prove that Homer was a master of and heir to a tradition of oral epic poetry that reached back over many generations, perhaps even centuries. Parry drew attention to the so-called ornamental epithets, those long, high-sounding labels that accompany every appearance of a hero, a place, or even a familiar object. Odysseus, for example, is "much-enduring," "a man of many schemes," "godlike" and "great-hearted"; the island of Ithaca is "rocky," "seagirt" and "clear-skied"; ships are "hollow," "swift" and "well-benched," to list only some of the often polysyllabic epithets attached to them. These recurring epithets had of course been noticed before Parry, and their usefulness

understood. They offer, for each god, hero or object, a choice of epithets, each one with a different metrical shape. In other words, the particular epithet chosen by the poet may have nothing to do with, for example, whether Achilles is "brilliant" or "swift-footed" at this particular point in the poem—the choice depends on which epithet fits the meter.

Parry pursued this insight of the German analytical scholars to its logical end and demonstrated that in fact there was an intricate system of metrical alternatives for the recurring names of heroes, gods and objects. It was a system that was economical—hardly any unnecessary alternatives were used—but had great scope: there was a way to fit the names into the line in any of the usual grammatical forms they would assume. Parry demonstrated that the system was more extensive and highly organized than anyone had dreamed, and he also realized what it meant. It meant that this system had been developed by and for the use of oral poets who *improvised*. In Paris he met scholars who had studied such improvising illiterate bards still performing in Yugoslavia. He went there to study their operations himself.

The Homeric epithets were created to meet the demands of the meter of Greek heroic poetry, the dactylic hexameter. They offer the improvising bard different ways of fitting the name of his god, hero, or object into whatever section of the line is left after he has, so to speak, filled up the first half (that, too, quite possibly, with another formulaic phrase). Odysseus, for example, is often described as "much-enduring, brilliant Odysseus"—*pōlūtās dīōs Ōdūssēus*—a line ending. In Book 5 Calypso, who has had Odysseus to herself on her island for seven years, is ordered by the gods to release him and tells him he can go. But he suspects a trap, and shudders. "So she spoke," says Homer, "and he shuddered"—*hōs phātō rīgēsēn dē*—and he ends with the formula "much-enduring, brilliant Odysseus"—*pōlūtās dīōs Ōdūssēus*—to form a hexameter line. A little later Calypso asks Odysseus how he can prefer his wife at home to her immortal charms, and his diplomatic answer is introduced by the formula: "and in answer he addressed her"—*tēn d' āpōmēibōmēnōs prōsēphē*. But the line cannot be completed with "much-enduring, brilliant Odysseus"; that formula is too long for this position. So Odysseus ceases for the moment to be "much-enduring" and "brilliant" and becomes something that conforms to the metrical pattern: "a man of many schemes"—*pōlūmētīs Ōdūssēus*. The hero's name is especially adaptable; Homer uses two different spellings—*Odusseus* and *Oduseus*—which give the hero two different metrical identities. Often, however, the poet has to use the name in a different grammatical case from the nominative—the genitive *Ōdūsēōs*, for example—and when that happens the hero

becomes "blameless"—*Ōdūsēōs āmūmōnōs*—or, with the longer spelling of his name, "great-hearted"—*Ōdūsēōs mēgālētōrōs*. In the dative case he becomes "godlike"—*āntīthēō Ōdūsēi*—or "quick-minded"—*Ōdūsēi dāīphrōnī*. The choice of epithet is dictated by the meter. So also the island of Ithaca is "rocky," "seagirt," "clear-skied" or "lying under Mount Neriton," depending on its grammatical case and position in the line; and under the same imperatives the Phaeacians appear as "great-hearted," "famous for ships" or "lords of the sea." As for the ships, objects as essential to the story of Odysseus as spears and swords are to that of Achilles, they are "hollow," "swift," "black," "well-benched," "well-oared," "well-worked," "scooped-out," "fast-moving," "scarlet-cheeked" and "black-prowed," to name only the principal epithets that enable the poet to use them in any grammatical case and metrical position.

This system, obviously the product of invention, refinement and elimination of superfluities over generations, could only be the work of oral bards, and in fact similar phenomena, though infinitely less sophisticated, are found in oral poetry, living and dead, in other languages. There was more to it, of course, than handy epithets. Whole lines, once honed to perfection by the bards of the tradition, became part of the repertoire; they are especially noticeable in recurring passages like descriptions of sacrifice, of communal eating and drinking. Such passages give the oral singer time to concentrate on what is coming next and, if he is a creative oral poet, to elaborate his own phrases mentally as he recites the formulas that he can sing without effort. He is helped, too, by the formulaic nature of whole themes, great type-scenes—the arming of the warrior for battle, the launching and beaching of ships. These are traditional patterns that the audience expects and the bard may vary but not radically change.

There is one aspect of Parry's discovery, however, that changed the whole problem of the nature of our Homeric text. The oral bard who uses such formulaic language is not, as scholars in the nineteenth century who struggled with the problem of illiterate bards all assumed, a poet reciting from memory a fixed text. He is improvising, along known lines, relying on a huge stock of formulaic phrases, lines and even whole scenes; but he is improvising. And every time he sings the poem, he may do it differently. The outline remains the same, but the text, the oral text, is flexible. The poem is new every time it is performed.

If Homer's poetry is the culmination of a long tradition of such oral composition, many of the problems that bedeviled the Analysts are solved. Over the course of generations of trial and error, formulas are introduced and rejected or retained for their usefulness in improvisation,

without regard to linguistic consistency or historical accuracy. The language of the poets becomes a repository of all the combinations that have proved useful. Small wonder that Aeolic and Ionic forms appear in the same line, that a Mycenaean boar-tusk helmet can turn up in a passage in the *Iliad*, full of late linguistic forms, that people in the *Odyssey* sometimes give dowries and sometimes demand payment for their daughter's hand, that cremation and inhumation are practiced side by side. As each new generation of singers re-creates the song, new formulas may be invented, new themes and scenes introduced; reflections of contemporary reality creep into descriptions of the fighting, especially into the similes. But the dedication of epic poetry to the past and the continuing usefulness of so much traditional phraseology will slow the process of modernization and produce the unhistorical amalgam of customs, objects and linguistic forms that we find in our Homeric text.

It is the fate of most new and valuable insights to be enthusiastically developed beyond the limits of certainty, or even of probability, and Parry's demonstration that Homeric poetry had an oral base has not escaped that fate. Phrases, even whole lines, that are repeated often enough to qualify as formulaic are indeed characteristic of the poet's diction, but they do not account for more than a part of it—about one third of the whole. In an attempt to raise the formulaic element to a higher level, Parry counted as formulas expressions whose metrical pattern and position in the line were identical and that contained one word in common: for example, *tēuchē ēthēkē*; *ālgē' ēthēkē*; *kūdōs ēthēkē*—he "put" the arms, the sorrows, the glory on. Not content with this, Parry went on to suggest, hesitantly, the inclusion in the system of similar expressions that, however, did not contain one word in common: *dōkēn hētāirō*, for example, and *tēuchē kūnēssin*—"he gave to his comrade," "he made [him prey] for the dogs." Some of Parry's followers have been less hesitant, and by this and other extensions of the meaning of "formula" have boosted the inherited content of Homer's verse to ninety percent. This of course leaves very little room for Homer as an individual creative poet. It seems in fact to be a return to the idea of Giambattista Vico: the poems are the creation of a people, of a tradition, of generations of nameless bards.

But the argument for full formulaicity has feet of clay. A poet composing in a strict, demanding meter is bound to repeat syntactical combinations in identical positions, and the stricter the meter, the higher the incidence of such repeated patterns. English has no meters as precisely demanding as Homer's, but Alexander Pope, to take an example, is rich in lines that by rigid Parryite standards would qualify him as an illiterate bard:

*The Smiles of Harlots, and the Tears of Heirs
The Fate of Louis and the Fall of Rome*

*Proclaim their Motions, and provoke the War
Maintain thy Honours, and enlarge thy Fame*

*The shining Helmet, and the pointed Spears
The silver Token, and the circled Green*

*Weak was his Pace, but dauntless was his Heart
Lame are their Feet, and wrinkled is their Face*

Samuel Johnson, in fact, wrote a description of Pope's technique that has more than a little resemblance to Parry's conception of the oral poet. "By perpetual practice, language had in his mind a systematical arrangement; having always the same use for words, he had words so selected and combined as to be ready at his call."

Extravagant claims for the predominance of formula in Homeric poetry have now been generally discounted, and even Parry's basic theses have been shown to need modification in the light of later examination. There are many cases, for example, where a truly formulaic epithet does in fact seem to be poetically functional in its context. There are cases where verbal repetition is so poetically effective that it must be the result of poetic design rather than the working of a quasi-mechanical system. Careful investigation of the type-scenes—the ceremony of sacrifice, the arming of the warrior, and so on—has revealed that although sometimes whole verses are repeated from one scene to another, no two scenes are exactly similar. "Each occurrence," to quote a recent evaluation (Edwards, p. 72), "is unique, and often specifically adapted to its context." Even the basic concept of economy, the strict limitation of the epithets for one god or hero to those needed in different cases and positions, has been questioned: a recent study shows that in his analysis of the epithets for Achilles, Parry considered only the phrases containing the hero's name, ignoring other ways of identifying Achilles, such as "Peleus' son" (Shive, *passim*). All this, together with the monumental scale and magnificent architecture of the *Iliad*, the complex structure of the *Odyssey*, makes the image of Homer as an illiterate bard, totally dependent on ready-made formulas and stock scenes for improvised performance, hard to accept.

There is nevertheless fairly general agreement that Parry was right in one thing: Homer's unique style does show clearly that he was heir to a

long tradition of oral poetry. There is, however, one problem that Parry raised but did not solve: Homer may or may not have been as illiterate as his forerunners, but at some time the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were written down. When, by whom, for what purpose and in what circumstances was this done?

The most likely date for the composition of the *Iliad* is the fifty years running from 725 to 675 B.C.; for the *Odyssey*, somewhat later in the period. That is also the time to which the earliest examples of Greek alphabetic writing can be dated. Did Homer take advantage of the new technique to record for future singers the huge poems he had composed without the aid of writing? Did writing perhaps play a role in its composition? To both these questions Parry's collaborator and successor, Albert Lord, gave an emphatically negative answer. "The two techniques are . . . mutually exclusive . . . It is conceivable that a man might be an oral poet in his younger years and a written poet later in life, but it is not possible that he be *both* an oral and a written poet at any given time in his career" (p. 129). Lord based this assertion on his experience with Yugoslav oral poets who, when they came in contact with literate urban societies, lost their gift for improvised recitation. He envisaged a Homer, an oral bard at the height of his powers, who dictated his poem to a scribe, one who had mastered the new art of writing. This was of course how the songs of illiterate Yugoslav bards had been written down (sometimes with the aid of recording equipment, sophisticated for its time) by Parry and Lord.

This scenario did not satisfy everyone. The analogy with modern Yugoslavia, for example, was flawed. When the bards there learned to read and write, they were immediately exposed to the corrupting influence of newspapers, magazines and cheap fiction, but if Homer learned to write in the late eighth century, there was little or nothing for him to read. Lord's generalization about the incompatibility of the two techniques has been questioned by students of oral poetry; in other parts of the world (particularly in Africa), they find no such dichotomy. "The basic point . . . is the continuity of oral and written literature. There is no deep gulf between the two: they shade into each other both in the present and over many centuries of historical development, and there are innumerable cases of poetry which has both 'oral' and 'written' elements" (Finnegan, p. 24). Furthermore, the extant specimens of alphabetic writing of the eighth and early seventh centuries B.C. make it hard to believe in a scribe of the period who could take dictation at or, for that matter, anywhere near performance speed: the letters are freestanding capitals, crudely and laboriously formed, written from right to left, or

from right to left and left to right on alternate lines. One critic, in fact, irreverently conjured up a picture of Homer dictating the first line (or rather the first half-line) of the *Iliad*: "*Mênin aeide thea . . . You got that?*"

A different scenario for the transition from oral performance to written text was developed by Geoffrey Kirk. The epics were the work of an oral "monumental composer," whose version imposed itself on bards and audiences as the definitive version. They "then passed through at least a couple of generations of transmission by decadent and quasi-literate singers and rhapsodes" (Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, I, p. xxv)—that is, performers who were not themselves poets. Lord's objection to this, that memorization plays no part in the living oral tradition, was based on Yugoslav experience, but elsewhere—in Somalia, for example—very long poems are recited from memory by professional reciters who are themselves, in many cases, poets.

What neither of these theories explains, however, is the immense length of the poem. Why should an oral, illiterate poet, whose poetry exists only in its performance before an audience, create a poem so long that it would take several days to perform? For that matter, if his poetry existed only in performance, how *could* he create a poem of such length? If, on the other hand, he delivered different sections of it at different times and places, how could he have elaborated the variations on theme and formula and the inner structural correspondences that distinguish the Homeric epics so sharply from the Yugoslav texts collected by Parry and Lord?

It is not surprising that many recent scholars in the field have come to the conclusion that writing did indeed play a role in the creation of these extraordinary poems, that the phenomena characteristic of oral epic demonstrated by Parry and Lord are balanced by qualities peculiar to literary composition. They envisage a highly creative oral poet, master of the repertoire of inherited material and technique, who used the new instrument of writing to build, probably over the course of a lifetime, an epic poem on a scale beyond the imagination of his predecessors.

The last half of the eighth century was the time in which writing was coming into use all over the Greek world. Homer must have known of its existence, but the traditional nature of his material naturally forbade its appearance in the relentlessly archaic world of his heroes, who belonged to the time when men were stronger, braver and greater than men are now, a world in which men and gods spoke face-to-face. Even so, Homer does show, in one particular instance, that he was conscious of the new technique. In Book 6 of the *Iliad* Glaucus tells the story of his grandfather Bellerophon, whom Proetus, king of Argos, sent off with a message to

the king of Lycia, Proetus' father-in-law; it instructed the king to kill the bearer: "[He] gave him tokens, / murderous signs, scratched in a folded tablet" (6.198–99). There has been much discussion about the nature of these signs, but the word Homer uses—*grapsas*, literally "scratching"—is later the normal word used for "writing," and *pinax*—"tablet"—is the word used by later Greeks to describe the wooden boards coated with wax that were used for short notes.

If Homer could write, what did he write on? Obviously, "tablets" would not be adequate. We do not know when papyrus, the paper of the ancient world, was first available in Greece, though we do know that it came at first not from its almost exclusive source, Egypt—which was not opened to Greek merchants until the sixth century B.C.—but from the Phoenician port the Greeks called Byblos (the Greek word for book was *biblion*—our "Bible"). Archaeological evidence for Phoenician imports into Greece dates from the ninth century B.C., and Phoenician traders are mentioned in the *Iliad* (23.828) and their operations described with a wealth of detail in the *Odyssey*. But even if papyrus was not available in quantity, there were other materials, such as animal skins. Herodotus, writing in the fifth century B.C., says that in his time the Ionian Greeks still used the word *diphthera*—"skin"—when they meant "book."

The crudity of the script in the eighth century meant that writing was a laborious business. If Homer did use writing in the composition of the poem, it is likely that the process extended over many years. Episodes from the Odyssean voyages (the one-eyed giant) or from the return of Odysseus (the slaughter in the hall) would be brought to near perfection in oral performance, perhaps combined with other episodes to form longer units for special occasions (Odysseus among the Phaeacians, the beggar in the palace) and eventually committed to writing. Gradually a complete text would be assembled, to be refined in detail and extended by insertions, the longer sections welded into unity by connecting links. It was inevitable in such a process, with writing a newly acquired skill and writing materials, papyrus or leather, not convenient for cross-reference, that the final version should contain inconsistencies. No one has ever, in spite of repeated and ingenious efforts, been able to produce a totally convincing ground plan of the palace of Odysseus; people enter and emerge from rooms that seem to shift position from one episode to the next. There are also inconsistencies in the location of the characters. In Book 15, for example, when Telemachus and Theoclymenus, the fugitive he has taken under his wing, arrive at Ithaca, they go ashore and Theoclymenus sees a hawk carry off a dove, a bird sign that he interprets as a prophecy of victory for Telemachus. But later, when he refers to this

incident, he says that he saw the hawk as he "sat on the benched ship" (17.175).

These are inconsistencies typical of poetry improvised in dramatic presentation; the wonder is that there are not many more of them in so long and complex a poem. Though pointed out in scholarly commentaries, they rarely disturb the ordinary reader today, and of course Homer's original audiences, even if they had been critically disposed, would have been hard put to cite chapter and verse for their objections. But in fact the poet's listeners were not in a critical frame of mind. The word Homer uses to describe audience reaction to the longest epic recital in the *Odyssey*—the hero's tale of his wandering course from Troy to the court of the Phaeacian king, where he now sits at the banquet table—is *kêlêthmos*, "enchantment." "His story [held] them spellbound down the shadowed halls" (13.2). Many centuries later, in Plato's dialogue *Ion*, a rhapsode, a professional reciter of the Homeric epics, echoes Homer's words as he describes the audience's reaction to his performance. "I look down on them weeping, gazing at me with an awe-struck look, joining me in my astonishment at the words I am speaking."

The surprising thing is that the inconsistencies stayed in the text. If Homer, as in Lord's model, had dictated his poem, the scribe could hardly have failed to notice and correct them. In fact, Lord records such corrections in the course of dictation in Yugoslavia. And it seems hard to imagine the lines going uncorrected in Kirk's scenario of a monumental poem preserved by recitation for a generation or two before being written down. Any rhapsode (and in the earlier generation he would have been an oral poet himself) could have corrected the lines without effort and would have seen no reason not to do so. There seems to be only one possible explanation of their survival in the text: that the text was regarded as authentic, the exact words of Homer himself. And that can only mean that there was a written copy.

This is of course pure speculation, but so are all other attempts to explain the origin of the text that has come down to us. We shall never be able to answer the questions it raises with any certainty and must rest content with the fact that a great poet marshaled the resources of an age-old traditional art to create something new—the tales of the wrath of Achilles and the wanderings of Odysseus that have been models for epic poetry ever since.

THE ODYSSEY AND THE ILIAD

It has always been assumed that the *Odyssey* was composed later than the *Iliad*. One ancient critic, the author of the treatise *On the Sublime*, thought that the *Odyssey* was the product of Homer's old age, of "a mind in decline; it was a work that could be compared to the setting sun—the size remained, without the force." He did, however, temper the harshness of that judgment by adding: "I am speaking of old age—but it is the old age of Homer." What prompted his comment "without the force" is clearly his preference for the sustained heroic level of the *Iliad* over what he terms the *Odyssey's* presentation of "the fabulous and incredible" as well as the realistic description of life in the farms and palace of Odysseus' domain, which, he says, "forms a kind of comedy of manners." His judgment is of course determined by the conception of the "sublime" which is the focus of his book, one that did not welcome scenes like those offered by Book 18 of the *Odyssey*—a fistfight between two ragged beggars, for example, or the award of a sizzling-hot goat's-blood sausage full of fat to the winner.

On the Sublime was written sometime in the first century A.D., but a different scenario for the relation of the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey* had already been proposed in the second century B.C. A number of scholars, known as *chorizontes*—"separators"—recognized that the *Odyssey* was composed later than the *Iliad* but suggested that it had a different author. This is the position taken also by many modern scholars, who find significant differences between the two poems not only in vocabulary and grammatical usage but also in what they consider development from the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey* in moral and religious ideas and attitudes. Estimates of the validity of such evidence vary, however, and there are those who find it hard to accept the idea of the emergence of two major epic poets in such a short span of time.

That the *Odyssey* was composed later than the *Iliad* can hardly be doubted. For one thing, though it takes for granted the audience's knowledge not just of the Trojan War saga but of the particular form it has been given in the *Iliad*, it carefully avoids duplicating its material. Incidents from the tale of Troy are frequently recalled, sometimes in detail and at length, but they all fall outside the time frame of the *Iliad*, occurring either before or after the period of forty-one days that began with the wrath of Achilles and ended with the burial of Hector. Demodocus at the Phaeacian court sings of the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles (an incident not mentioned in the *Iliad* or, for that matter, anywhere else in extant Greek literature) and later of the wooden horse that brought the siege to an end. In the palace at Ithaca, the theme of the minstrel Phemius

is the sufferings of the heroes on their way home from the war. Nestor at Pylos tells Telemachus how Agamemnon and Menelaus quarreled after the fall of Troy and took separate routes home. Helen and Menelaus at Sparta tell stories about Odysseus at Troy, neither of them familiar from the *Iliad*. Even when Odysseus meets the shades of his comrades Agamemnon and Achilles in Hades, Iliadic material is avoided: Agamemnon tells the story of his death at the hands of his wife and her lover, Odysseus tells Achilles about the heroic feats of arms of his son Neoptolemus and later talks to Ajax about the award of the arms of Achilles.

That the poet of the *Odyssey* knew the *Iliad* in its contemporary form is strongly suggested also by the continuity of character delineation from one poem to the other. In the *Odyssey* they are all older, those of them who are still alive, but they are recognizably the same men. Nestor is still regal, punctilious and long-winded. Menelaus' generous reaction to Telemachus' tactful refusal of his gift of chariot and horses recalls his princely response to young Antilochus' apology for his unsportsmanlike maneuver in the chariot race at the funeral games for Patroclus. Helen is still, at Sparta as she was at Troy, the poised mistress of a difficult situation. And Odysseus is still the spellbinding speaker Antenor remembered in Book 3 of the *Iliad*, whose "words came piling on like a driving winter blizzard" (3.267); he is still "the man of twists and turns" Helen identified for Priam in the same passage (3.244). And he is still the man "who says one thing but hides another in his heart" (9.379)—Achilles' description of the kind of man he hates (he is addressing Odysseus, who has come as Agamemnon's ambassador). Odysseus is still the quick-thinking and resourceful leader who by prompt action stemmed the rush for the ships caused by Agamemnon's foolish decision to test the morale of the troops by suggesting that they go home.

But in the *Odyssey* he is no longer one of many heroes fighting between the beached ships and the walls of Troy. He is on his own, first as admiral of a small fleet, then as captain of an isolated ship, and finally as a shipwrecked sailor clinging to a piece of wreckage. The scenes of his action and suffering widen to include not only the coasts and islands of the Aegean Sea and continental Greece but also, in the false travel tales he spins in his disguise as a beggar, Crete, Cyprus, Phoenicia and Sicily, and, in the stories he tells the Phaeacians at their feast, the unknown world of the western seas, full of marvels and monsters. Those ships that in the *Iliad* lie beached behind a palisade and, with Achilles out of the fighting, face the fury of Hector's assault, return in the *Odyssey* to their natural element, the wine-dark sea.

THE WESTERN SEAS

Many centuries after Homer, the Florentine Dante Alighieri, who had not read Homer and whose information about Ulysses (the Latin form of Odysseus' name) came from Virgil and Ovid, saw in the Greek hero a vision of the restless explorer, the man who, discontented with the mundane life of that home he had longed for, set off again in search of new worlds. "Neither the pleasure I took in my son," he says in the *Inferno*, "nor reverence for my aged father, nor the love I owed Penelope that should have made her joyful, could prevail against the passion I felt to win experience of the world, of human vice and worth." He sets sail for Gibraltar and launches out into the Atlantic, following the sun "to the world where no one lives." This theme was taken up in Tennyson's "Ulysses," where the hero announces his purpose "to sail beyond the sunset, and the baths / Of all the western stars . . ."

But these visions of Odysseus as the restless explorer, hungry for new worlds, have little to do with Homer's Odysseus, who wants above all things to find his way home and stay there. It is true that, as Homer tells us in the prologue, he saw "many cities of men . . . and learned their minds" (1.4); once afloat in uncharted seas, he has a thoroughly Greek curiosity about the inhabitants of the landfalls he makes, but the voyage was none of his choosing. He was "driven time and again off course, once he had plundered / the hallowed heights of Troy" (1.2–3), and far from seeking "experience of the world," he was "fighting to save his life and bring his comrades home" (1.6).

Odysseus' wanderings in the west have inspired many attempts to plot his course and identify his ports of call. This wild-goose chase had begun already in the ancient world, as we know from the brusque dismissal of such identifications by the great Alexandrian geographer Eratosthenes, who said that you would be able to chart the course of Odysseus' wanderings when you found the cobbler who sewed the bag in which Aeolus confined the winds. This of course has not deterred modern scholars and amateurs from trying; their guesses run from the possible—Charybdis as a mythical personification of whirlpools in the straits between Sicily and the toe of the Italian boot—to the fantastic: Calypso's island as Iceland. According to one investigator of the subject, "There have been some seventy theories proposed since Homer wrote the *Odyssey*, with locations bounded only by the North and South Poles and ranging within the inhabited world from Norway to South Africa and from the Canary Islands to the Sea of Azov" (Clarke, p. 251).

But even identifications that are not obviously ridiculous seem implausible in the light of Homer's confused geographical notions of areas much nearer home. He knows the Asia Minor coast and the Aegean islands: Nestor on the alternative routes from Troy across the Aegean sounds like an expert seaman. But Homer's notion of Egypt, where Menelaus was delayed by contrary winds and where Odysseus in his lying tales often lands, is, to put it mildly, vague. Menelaus describes the island of Pharos, which is one mile off the coast, as distant as far as a ship runs in a whole day with the wind behind her. And when Homer's characters move to mainland Greece and its western offshore islands, confusion reigns. His description of Ithaca is so full of contradictions that many modern scholars have proposed Leucas or Cephallenia as the real home of Odysseus rather than the island that now bears the name. Homer also displays total ignorance of the geography of mainland Greece: his Telemachus and Pisistratus go from Pylos on the west coast to Sparta in a horse-drawn chariot over a formidable mountain barrier that had no through road in ancient times.

But Homer's hazy notions of any area outside the Aegean is only one of the objections to the idea of assigning western locations to Circe's island and the land of the Lotus-eaters. A great many of the incidents in Odysseus' wanderings are obviously based on a different voyage, the voyage of the *Argo*, which, with a crew of heroes captained by Jason, sailed not the western but the eastern seas. The Laestrygonians who attack Odysseus' ships with rocks have their counterparts in the Argonauts' saga; Circe is the sister of Aeetes, keeper of the golden fleece, and Homer himself locates her island not in the west but in the east—where the sun rises. The Clashing Rocks are also a feature of Jason's voyage, and the poem that celebrates it is specifically mentioned by Homer at this point. And the Sirens appear in Apollonius' poem the *Argonautica*, which, though written in the second century B.C., certainly drew on the earlier poem to which Homer refers. What Homer has done is to transfer episodes from a mythical epic journey in eastern waters to the western seas.

It was of course a geographical imperative that if Odysseus was to be blown off course on his way home, the wind would take him west. But that imperative must have been eagerly welcomed by Homer and his audience, for the early years of the eighth century B.C. saw the beginnings of what was to become a large-scale movement of Greek traders and, later, colonists into the western Mediterranean. Odysseus, when he declines the invitation of a young Phaeacian to compete in an athletic contest, is contemptuously dismissed as no athlete but

"some skipper of profiteers,
roving the high seas in his scudding craft,
reckoning up his freight with a keen eye out
for home-cargo, grabbing the gold he can!"

(8.186–89)

The traders were soon followed by the colonists. The first settlement seems to have been Pithecusae, on the island of Ischia in the Bay of Naples; it was not a city but a trading station and is dated by archaeological evidence not later than 775 B.C. By 700 there were Greek cities in Italy: Cumae, on the mainland opposite Ischia; Rhegium (Reggio Calabria), on the toe of the Italian boot; and the proverbially wealthy city of Sybaris, on the instep, as well as Taras (Taranto) in the same area. On the neighboring island of Sicily, Syracuse and Zancle (Messina) were founded around 725. Still later were to come settlements on the southern coast of France: Massilia (Marseilles), Antipas (Antibes) and Nicaea (Nice), as well as Cyrene on the coast of what is now Libya.

Long before the first colonists set out, there must have been many voyages of trader-explorers, who no doubt brought back tales of wonders and dangers that improved in the telling. Charybdis, for example, may possibly be a fantastic version of the currents and whirlpools that are sometimes encountered in the straits between Sicily and the mainland. And though the Cyclops' gigantic size and one eye mark him as mythical, his pastoral economy and ferocity toward strangers may be a memory of the indigenous populations who opposed the intruders landing on their shores—a demonized vision of the native, like Shakespeare's Caliban. *The Tempest* was written in a similar age of exploration, and though Prospero and Ariel have powers that are not of this world, there can be no doubt that the wonders of the play are an imaginative reworking of the tall tales of the sailors and pirates who for half a century had sailed the Central American seas in search of land to settle, Spanish ships to board, Spanish towns to sack, or Spanish buyers for their cargoes of African slaves. We know, in fact, that Shakespeare must have read some of the accounts of the shipwreck of the *Sea-Venture*, the flagship of a fleet on its way to the Virginia colony, in a "dreadful and hideous storm" off the island of Bermuda, and the company's survival and eventual arrival at the colony—a series of events that one of the accounts calls "a tragical comedy."

And there is one passage in the *Odyssey* that is a clear reminiscence of Greek voyages of exploration in the west. When Odysseus comes to the land of the Cyclops, he sees a small island offshore, which is fertile and

well stocked with wild goats, but uninhabited. The Cyclops, he explains to his Phaeacian audience,

"have no ships with crimson prows,
no shipwrights there to build them good trim craft . . .
Such artisans would have made this island too
a decent place to live in . . . No mean spot,
it could bear you any crop you like in season.
The water-meadows along the low foaming shore
run soft and moist, and your vines would never flag.
The land's clear for plowing. Harvest on harvest,
a man could reap a healthy stand of grain—
the subsoil's dark and rich." (9.138–49)

It is the authentic voice of the explorer evaluating a site for settlement.

VOYAGER

Odysseus' voyage to the fabulous western seas begins in the everyday world, as he leaves the ruins of Troy homeward bound, his ships loaded with booty from the sack of the city. As if that booty were not enough for him, he attacks the first settlement he comes to on his way, the town of Ismarus on the Thracian coast opposite Troy:

". . . I sacked the city,
killed the men, but as for the wives and plunder,
that rich haul we dragged away from the place—
we shared it round . . ." (9.45–48)

It is sheer piracy—Ismarus was not a Trojan ally—but it is obviously an action not unusual in its time and place; one of Odysseus' epithets is in fact *ptoliporthos*, "sacker of cities." Nestor at Pylos politely asks Telemachus and Pisistratus if they are

"Out on a trading spree or roving the waves like pirates,
sea-wolves raiding at will, who risk their lives
to plunder other men?" (3.81–83)

And Polyphemus asks Odysseus the same question (9.286–88). Thucydides, writing in the fifth century B.C., was probably thinking of passages

like these when, speaking of the measures taken by Minos to suppress piracy in the Aegean, he pointed out that in ancient times "this occupation was held to be honorable rather than disgraceful. This is proved . . . by the testimony of ancient poets, in whose verses newly arrived visitors are always asked whether they are pirates, a question that implies no disapproval of such an occupation on the part of either those who answer with a disclaimer or those who ask for the information." Piracy was endemic in the Aegean—a sea of islands large and small, of jagged coastlines full of hidden harbors—whenever there was no central sea power strong enough to suppress it. Long after Minos, in the fifth century, an Athenian fleet under the command of Cimon cleared out a nest of pirates on the island of Scyros. Many centuries later the young Julius Caesar was captured by pirates near the small island of Pharmacusa off the Ionian coast and held for ransom. The seas became so unsafe that in 67 B.C. Cnaeus Pompeius was given the overriding authority to deal with the problem and did so by manning 270 warships and mobilizing 100,000 troops. Whenever there was a power vacuum in the Aegean, piracy reappeared; as late as the 1820s Arab corsairs carried off the inhabitants of the Greek island of Cythera to sell in the slave market at Algiers.

Cythera is the island off Cape Malea past which Odysseus, trying to turn north toward Ithaca, was blown west for nine days, off the map, into a world of wonders and terrors, of giants and witches, goddesses and cannibals, of dangers and temptations. The tales of his landfalls and the welcomes he received differ widely in content and scope, but they are connected by a common theme, on which they are all variations. It is a theme fundamental for the *Odyssey* as a whole, pervasive not only in the wandering voyage of the hero but also in the opening books, which deal with Telemachus at home and abroad, and in the last half of the poem, which presents us with Odysseus, disguised as a ragged beggar, home at last in his own house. This theme is, briefly stated, the relation between host and guest, particularly the moral obligation to welcome and protect the stranger, an obligation imposed on civilized mankind by Zeus, one of whose many titles is *xeinios*, "protector of strangers." "Zeus of the Strangers," says Odysseus to the one-eyed giant in his cave, "guards all guests and suppliants" (9.304).

Zeus is invoked as the divine patron and enforcer of a code of conduct that helps to make travel possible in a world of piracy at sea, cattle raiding and local war by land, of anarchic competition between rival families—a world with no firm central authority to impose law and order. In such a world, a man who leaves his home depends on the kindness of

strangers. Without a universally recognized code of hospitality, no man would dare travel abroad; its observance is therefore a matter of self-interest. One of its almost ritual components is the parting gift offered by the host. So when Athena, in the shape of Mentès, takes leave of Telemachus, he tells her to go back to her ship "delighted with a gift, . . . something rare and fine . . . The kind of gift / a host will give a stranger, friend to friend" (1.357–60). Athena does not wish to be burdened with the gift now; she asks him to save it for her so that she can take it on her way back. "Choose something rare and fine, and a good reward / that gift is going to bring you" (1.365–66). The reward is not a cash payment; it is the reciprocal hospitality and gift Telemachus will receive when he goes to visit Mentès. So Odysseus, in his false tale to Laertes at the end of the poem, pretends to be a man who entertained Odysseus once on his travels and loaded him with gifts. He has stopped at Ithaca now to visit Odysseus. The old man tells him Odysseus has never returned and must be dead.

"But if you'd found him alive, here in Ithaca,
he would have replied in kind, with gift for gift,
and entertained you warmly . . .
That's the old custom, when one has led the way."

(24.315–18)

The host's gift is so fixed a feature of the relationship that the guest can even ask for something else, if the proffered gift is not suitable. So Telemachus, offered a splendid chariot and team of horses by Menelaus, declines the offer. "Those horses I really cannot take to Ithaca," where there is "No running-room for mares . . . no meadows." His island is "Goat, not stallion, land" (4.676–82). Menelaus, far from being taken aback, recognizes his frankness as the mark of aristocratic birth and breeding—"Good blood runs in you, dear boy"—and offers him instead "a mixing-bowl, forged to perfection— / it's solid silver finished off with a lip of gold" (4.688–93). The bowl, he goes on to explain, was itself a gift from a host, Phaedimus, king of the Phoenician city of Sidon, with whom he stayed on his wandering course home from Troy.

Throughout his voyage, Odysseus will be dependent on the kindness of strangers, their generosity as hosts. Some of them, like the Phaeacians and Aeolus, king of the winds, will be perfect hosts, entertaining him lavishly and sending him on his way with precious gifts. Others will be savages, threatening his life and taking the lives of his crew. Still others will be importunate hosts, delaying the guest's departure—an infraction of the code. "I'd never detain you here too long," Menelaus says to Tele-

machus. "I'd find fault with another host . . . too warm to his guests." And taking a leaf from Pope's translation, he formulates the golden rule: "Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest!" (15.74–81, see note 15.80–81). Many of Odysseus' hosts seem to have heard only the first half of that injunction. Circe is a charming hostess, but she charms her guests out of human shape and keeps them forever. Calypso too would have kept Odysseus forever, but in his own shape, perpetually young. The Sirens would have kept him forever also, but dead. Calypso and Circe, however, when the time comes to speed the parting guest, provide the requisite gifts. Calypso sends a fair wind to send his raft on its way, and Circe gives him precious instructions—how to deal with the Sirens, the warning not to kill the cattle of the Sun. Telemachus also has to deal with an importunate host. On his way back from Sparta to Pylos, he manages to evade what he fears will be an intolerable delay if he goes to Nestor's palace. "Your father's old," he says to his companion Pisistratus,

". . . in love with his hospitality;
I fear he'll hold me, chafing in his palace—
I must hurry home!"

(15.223–25)

Telemachus will return to a house where the suitors of Penelope represent an unusual infraction of the code: they are uninvited guests who abuse and waste their reluctant host's possessions. Showing their utter contempt for the idea that wanderers, beggars and suppliants are under the special protection of Zeus, they offer insults and physical violence to Odysseus, the ragged beggar who, as they will eventually find out to their cost, is their unwilling host.

Odysseus' first landfall after passing Cape Malea is the country of the Lotus-eaters, who offer three of his men food that would have kept them as permanent guests—

"[they] lost all desire to send a message back, much less return,
. . . all memory of the journey home
dissolved forever."

(9.107–10)

—if Odysseus had not dragged them, weeping, back to the ships. The Lotus-eaters, as he reports, "had no notion of killing my companions" (9.104), but his next host, the Cyclops, not only kills but also eats six of them. Odysseus' invocation of Zeus as protector of strangers is met with scorn—"We Cyclops never blink at Zeus . . . or any other blessed god"

(9.309–10)—and Odysseus' request for a guest-gift is met with the concession that Odysseus will be eaten last, after all his crew. Odysseus makes his escape only because of the resourcefulness for which he is famous, but in order to trick the Cyclops he has to suppress his identity and give his name as Nobody.

Deceit is indispensable if he and his crew are to escape, but though he is master of all the arts of deceit, this particular subterfuge is one his whole nature rebels against. It is for his name and all that it means to him and his peers that he struggles to go on living and return to the world where it is known and honored. When, later, at the court of King Alcinous, he reveals his identity, he tells the banqueters, and us, not only his name but also the renown it carries. "I am Odysseus, son of Laertes, known to the world / for every kind of craft—my fame has reached the skies" (9.21–22). He speaks of his fame in an utterly objective manner, as if it were something apart from himself; his words are not a boast but a statement of the reputation, the qualities and achievements, to which he must be true. Once free of the Cyclops' cave, he insists, at great risk to himself and his ship, on telling the Cyclops who has blinded him: "Odysseus, / raider of cities, *he* gouged out your eye, / Laertes' son who makes his home in Ithaca!" (9.560–62). And this enables Polyphemus to invoke the wrath of his father, the sea god Poseidon, and ensure that Odysseus will "come home late / and come a broken man—all shipmates lost, / alone in a stranger's ship," to "find a world of pain at home" (9.592–95).

With Odysseus' next port of call, however, it begins to look as if Polyphemus' prayer will remain unanswered. Aeolus, the keeper of the winds, is a generous host and sends his guest on a magical ride—the West Wind blowing steadily toward Ithaca and all the other winds imprisoned in a bag aboard his ship. In sight of home—"we could see men tending fires" (10.34)—Odysseus, who has been at the helm for the entire voyage, finally relaxes. But the deep sleep he falls into allows the crew, suspecting that the bag contains treasure, to open it and let loose the winds. As his ships are blown back into the unknown, Odysseus faces the first of his temptations—"should I leap over the side and drown at once?" (10.56)—but resolves to stay alive, even though the hurricane winds are hurrying his ships back to Aeolus, where his plea for further aid is indignantly rejected. His next encounter is with the gigantic cannibals, the Laestrygonians, from whom he makes a narrow escape, but with the loss of all his other ships and crews. Circe's island confronts him with another danger, from which he escapes with the help of the god

Hermes, but then she turns into a temptation. Circe, after she has renounced her plan to change him and his crew into swine, becomes a perfect hostess, entertaining Odysseus in her bed and his crew at the banquet table. Odysseus, if not bewitched, is certainly charmed, for at the end of a whole year of dalliance he has to be reminded by his crew of his duty: "Captain, this is madness! / High time you thought of your own home at last" (10.520–21). Circe, unlike Calypso, is willing to release him, but tells him that he must first go down to the land of the dead to consult the ghost of the blind prophet Tiresias.

Homer's picture of the lower world is of course the model for all later Western geographies of Hell, through Virgil's sixth book of the *Aeneid* to that greatest of all visions of the life to come, the *Divina Commedia* of Dante. Quite apart from the consultation with Tiresias, the visit has a special significance for Odysseus. All through the trials of his voyage home, the temptation to find release in death has always been at hand—by suicide, as in his despair off Ithaca, or, more subtly, at any moment of tension, by simply relaxing momentarily the constant vigilance, the quick suspicion, the inexhaustible resilience and determination, that keep him alive. Anyone who has been under a continual strain in action and especially in command knows the weariness that can tempt a man to neglect precautions, take the shortcut, let things go for once; it is a mood in which the death that may result seems for the moment almost preferable to the unending bodily fatigue and mental strain. But when Odysseus sees for himself what it means to be dead, he loses any illusions he may have had that death is better than a life of unbroken tension and hardship. Homer's world of the dead is dark and comfortless; it is no place of rest and oblivion. The shades crowd round the sacrificed animals, yearning for a draft of the blood that will for a moment bring them back to life, restore memory and the power of speech. Achilles reads the lesson to Odysseus, who had congratulated him on reigning like a king over the dead:

"No winning words about death to *me*, shining Odysseus!
By god, I'd rather slave on earth for another man—
some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive—
than rule down here over all the breathless dead." (11.555–58)

The land of the dead has been hospitable, but perhaps Odysseus has overstayed his welcome, for as he waits to see still more shades of famous heroes,

"... the dead came surging round me,
hordes of them, thousands raising unearthly cries,
and blanching terror gripped me..." (11.723-25)

He heads for his ship and returns to Circe, who proceeds to plot them "a course and chart each seamark" (12.28) for their voyage home.

They have yet to face the Sirens, make a choice between Scylla and Charybdis, and land, against Circe's advice and Odysseus' opposition, on Thrinacia, the island where the crew will slaughter the cattle of the Sun and so seal their own fate. The Sirens are another temptation for Odysseus, perhaps the most powerful of all, for if he had not been bound to the mast, he would have gone to join the heaps of corpses that surround them. "Come closer, famous Odysseus," they sing. "We know all the pains that the Greeks and Trojans once endured / on the spreading plain of Troy" (12.200-6). Odysseus is a veteran of a ten-year war; he is on his way back to a society in which a new generation has grown up in peace. There will be no one to understand him if he talks about the war—it is significant that once home and recognized, he does not mention it to Telemachus or Penelope. Only those who shared its excitement and horrors with him can talk about it. That is perhaps why Menelaus says he would have given Odysseus an estate in his own lands if he had come home: "how often," he says, "we'd have mingled side-by-side! / Nothing could have parted us" (4.197-98). The bonds forged by fellowship in dangerous action and suffering are very strong. And that is the strength of the Sirens' appeal: "we know all the pains that Achaeans and Trojans once endured / on the spreading plain of Troy." He orders his sailors to untie him, let him go. But of course the Sirens' song is an invitation to live in the past, and that is a kind of death; the Sirens' island is piled with the bones of dead men. It was in the land of the dead that he could relive the saga of Troy, with his fellow-veterans Achilles and Agamemnon. Those days are over, and he must look forward to the future, not backward to the past.

The choice between Scylla and Charybdis is still to be made, but Odysseus will have to face both—Scylla as a ship's captain on his way to Thrinacia, and Charybdis as a lone shipwrecked sailor clinging to a piece of wreckage on the way back. Rescued by the goddess Calypso (whose name is formed from the Greek word that means "cover," "hide"), Odysseus spends seven years a virtual prisoner on her island, "unwilling lover alongside lover all too willing" (5.172). He rejects her offer to make him immortal and ageless, her husband forever. Ordered by Hermes to let him go, she reminds him of the offer and foretells the trials and tribulations that still await him on the voyage home:

"... if you only knew, down deep, what pains
are fated to fill your cup before you reach that shore,
you'd stay right here, preside in our house with me
and be immortal." (5.228-31)

But he refuses.

Calypso's offer and Odysseus' refusal are an exchange unique in Greek literature and mythology. Immortality was a divine prerogative, grudgingly conferred. Heracles had to die a fiery, agonizing death to win it, and when the Dawn goddess obtained it for her mortal lover Tithonus, she forgot to ask also that he should never grow old. Now as she sets out on her route every morning, she leaves him behind in bed, where he lies inert, shriveled with age. But Calypso has offered to make Odysseus "immortal, ageless, all his days" (5.151) and invited him to live with her in a paradisaal environment so enchanting that

... even a deathless god
who came upon that place would gaze in wonder,
heart entranced with pleasure (5.81-83)

—a place before which Hermes, messenger of Zeus, "stood... spell-bound" (5.84). All this Odysseus rejects, though he knows that the alternative is to entrust himself again, this time alone and on a makeshift craft, to that sea about which he has no illusions. "And if a god will wreck me yet again on the wine-dark sea," he says,

"Much have I suffered, labored long and hard by now
in the waves and wars. Add this to the total—
bring the trial on!" (5.244-48)

One more offer to forget his home and his identity is made and refused before he reaches Ithaca. In the land of the Phaeacians, where he is welcomed and honored, he is offered the hand in marriage of a young and charming princess and a life of ease and enjoyment in a utopian society. The offer is made not only by the king her father—

"... if only—
seeing the man you are, seeing we think as one—
you could wed my daughter and be my son-in-law
and stay right here with us" (7.356-59)

—but also, earlier, by the girl herself, in the subtle hints contained in her instructions to him about his approach to the city. She makes a final appeal to him as he goes to the banquet hall for the feast at which he will later identify himself and tell his story. She reminds him how much he owes her:

"Farewell, my friend! And when you are at home,
home in your own land, remember me at times.
Mainly to me you owe the gift of life."

(8.518–20)

This is not quite the resigned farewell it sounds like. The word she uses for what Odysseus owes her—*zôagria*—is an Iliadic word: "the price of a life." Hephaestus uses it when Thetis comes to ask him to make new armor for Achilles; he will do anything for her, since she saved his life once—he owes her *zôagria*. Three times in the *Iliad*, Trojan warriors, disarmed and at the mercy of the victor, use the verb from which this noun is formed to offer rich ransom in exchange for their lives. Nausicaa is pressing Odysseus hard, with a word he fully understands; he had heard his captive Dolon use it to him in an appeal for his life, which was refused (*Iliad* 10.442–43). But now, reminded of how much he owes her, he tactfully evades the issue by taking her request literally; when he reaches home, he will pay to her as a deathless goddess all his days.

Loaded with treasure greater than all he had won at Troy and lost at sea, Odysseus, in a deep sleep, is transported in the magical Phaeacian ship to the real world and landed, still asleep, on the shore of Ithaca. When he wakes up, he does not recognize his own country, for Athena has cloaked the shore in a mist. Afraid that the Phaeacians have betrayed him, he repeats the agonized questions he has asked himself on so many strange shores—

"... whose land have I lit on now?
What *are* they here—violent, savage, lawless?—
or friendly to strangers, god-fearing men?"

(13.227–29)

He has in fact reached the most dangerous of all his landfalls. To survive this last trial, he will have to call on all the qualities that mark him as a hero—the courage and martial skill of the warrior he was at Troy, but also the caution, cunning, duplicity and patience that have brought him safe to Ithaca.

HERO

"I hate that man like the very Gates of Death / who says one thing but hides another in his heart." These are the words of Achilles, the hero of the *Iliad* (9.378–79), the *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche* of the Greek aristocratic tradition. He addressed them to Odysseus, who had come as leader of a delegation charged by Agamemnon and the Achaean chieftains to persuade Achilles to rejoin them in the attack on Troy. These are strange words with which to open an answer to what seems like a generous offer of compensation for harsh words uttered in anger, but Achilles knows his man. Odysseus has told no lie, but he has concealed the truth. He has repeated verbatim the bulk of Agamemnon's message—the long list of splendid gifts, the offer of the hand of a daughter in marriage—but he has suppressed Agamemnon's reiterated claim to superiority, his relegation of Achilles to inferior rank. "Let him bow down to me! I am the greater king, / . . . the greater man" (9.192–93).

For Achilles a lie is something utterly abhorrent. But for Odysseus it is second nature, a point of pride. "I am Odysseus," he tells the Phaeacians when the time comes to reveal his identity, "known to the world / for every kind of craft" (9.21–22). The Greek word here translated "craft" is *dolos*. It is a word that can be used in praise as well as abuse. Athena uses the word when, in the guise of a handsome young shepherd, she compliments Odysseus on the complicated lie he has just told her about his identity and his past, and it is with this word that Odysseus describes the wooden horse he contrived to bring Troy down in flames. On the other hand, Athena, Menelaus and Odysseus use it of the trap Clytemnestra set for Agamemnon when he returned home, and it serves Homer as a description of the suitors' plan to ambush and kill Telemachus on his way back from Pylos. But whether complimentary or accusing, it always implies the presence of what Achilles so vehemently rejects—the intention to deceive.

Odysseus has the talent necessary for the deceiver: he is a persuasive speaker. In the *Iliad* the Trojan prince Antenor, who had listened to Odysseus when he came with an embassy to Troy, remembered the contrast between his unimpressive appearance and the powerful magic of his speech. "When *he* let loose that great voice from his chest / . . . then no man alive could rival 'Odysseus!'" (3.266–68). And in the *Odyssey*, in the palace of Alcinous, he holds his host spellbound with the story of his adventures. When he breaks off, pleading the lateness of the hour, Alcinous begs him to go on: "what grace you give your words, and what

good sense within! / You have told your story with all a singer's skill" (11.416-17). In his travels on the way to Phaeacia, Odysseus has not had much occasion to give rein to his eloquent persuasion; his skill in deception will be needed and fully revealed only when at last he reaches the shore of Ithaca, where in order to survive he has to play the role of a penniless, ragged beggar. The tales he tells, to Athena, Eumaeus, Antinous, Penelope and Laertes are brilliant fictions, tales of war, piracy, murder, blood-feuds and peril on the high seas, with a cast of rogue Phoenician captains, Cretan adventurers and Egyptian Pharaohs. They are, as Homer says, "lies like truth," thoroughly convincing, true, unlike the tale he told in Phaeacia, to the realities of life and death in the Aegean world, but nonetheless lies from beginning to end. And Homer reminds us of the contrast between Odysseus and Achilles by making Odysseus, just before he launches out on a splendidly mendacious account of his background and misfortunes, repeat the famous words Achilles addressed to him at Troy: "I hate that man like the very Gates of Death who / . . . stoops to peddling lies" (14.182-83).

The repetition of that memorable phrase makes the contrast between the two heroes explicit, but Odysseus is still, as he was in the *Iliad*, a warrior faithful to the martial ideal. He will gladly employ deceit to win victory, but if necessary he will confront mortal danger alone and unafraid. On Circe's island, when Eurylochus returns to report the disappearance of his companions inside the witch's palace and implores Odysseus not to go to their rescue but to set sail at once, he is met with a scornful refusal:

"Eurylochus, stay right here,
eating, drinking, safe by the black ship.
I must be off. Necessity drives me on."
(10.299-301)

This necessity is his fidelity to that reputation, that fame among men, for which Achilles accepted an early death. This is the Odysseus of the *Iliad*, who, finding himself alone and outnumbered in a desperate struggle with the Trojans, rules out the thought of flight:

"Cowards, I know, would quit the fighting now
but the man who wants to make his mark in war
must stand his ground . . ."
(11.483-85)

Odysseus shares with Achilles another characteristic of the heroic mentality: a prickly sensitivity to what he regards as a lack of respect on the part of others, an irrepressible rage against any insult to his standing

as a hero. This was the motive of his near-fatal insistence on revealing his real name to Polyphemus: he could not bear the thought that the blinded giant would never know the identity or the fame of his conqueror. More cautious among the Phaeacians, he carefully remains anonymous but comes close to revealing the truth when, scorned by a young Phaeacian for his lack of athletic prowess, he hurls the discus a prodigious distance and then challenges them all—at boxing, wrestling, racing and archery. "Well I know," he tells them,

"how to handle a fine polished bow . . .
Philoctetes alone outshot me there at Troy
when ranks of Achaean archers bent their bows."
(8.246-51)

The most painful insult to his honor is of course the conduct of the suitors: their three-year-long occupation of his house is an intolerable affront, compounded by their brutal treatment of him as he plays the role of Nobody once again. And their sublime confidence that even if he did return he would meet a humiliating death fighting against their superior numbers stirs in him an Achillean wrath. When he finally kills Antinous, the most violent of the suitors, and identifies himself at last—"You dogs! you never imagined I'd return from Troy" (22.36)—Eurymachus, the most deceitful of the suitors, offers full compensation and more for the damage they have done. Odysseus fiercely rejects it:

"No, Eurymachus! Not if you paid me all your father's wealth—
all you possess now, and all that could pour in from the world's end—
no, not even then would I stay my hands from slaughter
till all you suitors had paid for all your crimes!"
(22.65-68)

We have heard this note sounded before, in the voice of Achilles in the *Iliad* rejecting Agamemnon's peace offering:

"Not if he gave me ten times as much, twenty times over, all
he possesses now, and all that could pour in from the world's end—
. . . no, not even then could Agamemnon
bring my fighting spirit round until he pays me back,
pays full measure for all his heartbreaking outrage!"
(9.464-73)

In the event, Achilles exacts full measure not from Agamemnon but from Hector, who has killed his friend Patroclus and now wears Achilles' armor. One after another he cuts down Trojan warriors, drives them into

the river to drown or die under his merciless sword, until he meets and kills Hector, whose corpse he drags back to his camp, to lie there unburied while he sacrifices captured Trojans to appease the spirit of Patroclus dead. Odysseus' vindication of his honor is no less bloody and merciless. Backed by his son and two loyal servants, he kills all the one hundred and eight young aristocrats who have besieged his wife; his servants savagely mutilate and kill the faithless shepherd Melanthius, who had insulted Odysseus; and Telemachus, ordered to dispatch the disloyal maids with his sword, chooses to deny them this "clean death" (22.488) and hangs them. All scores are paid. With interest.

Achilles' revenge ends with a compassionate gesture, the return of Hector's body to his father, Priam, but at the end of the *Odyssey* more blood is spilled. Eupithes, Antinous' father, leads the suitors' relatives against Odysseus and his men, but is killed by Laertes when the battle is joined. "They would have killed them all," says Homer (24.581), if Athena had not ordered Odysseus back and allowed the Ithacans to run for their lives. The description of the final battle is phrased throughout in Iliadic phrase and formula, and as Odysseus encourages his son and receives assurance that Telemachus will not disgrace his lineage, old Laertes sounds the authentic heroic note: "What a day for me, dear gods! What joy— / my son and my grandson vying over courage!" (24.567–68).

This aspect of the *Odyssey* has often been overlooked or underemphasized. Much, perhaps too much, has been made of Achilles' bitter rejection of Odysseus' attempt to comfort him in the world of the dead: "I'd rather slave on earth for another man— / . . . than rule down here over all the breathless dead" (11.556–58). His words have been interpreted as a rejection of the heroic code of which in the *Iliad* he was the great exemplar. But it is not so much a rejection of the everlasting glory for which he consciously and deliberately traded his life as it is an angry reproach to Odysseus for contrasting his own "endless trouble" (11.547) with Achilles' great power among the dead. Achilles knew what he was giving up when he chose an early death with glory over long life, and it is understandable that Odysseus' specious words of comfort should provoke an angry response. In any case, he goes on to ask for news of his son Neoptolemus: "Did he make his way to the wars, / did the boy become a champion—yes or no?" (11.560–61). When Achilles hears Odysseus' answer—"scores of men he killed in bloody combat. / How could I list them all . . . ?" (11.587–88)—and hears the tale of his aggressive courage in the wooden horse and his safe return home, Achilles goes off

"loping with long strides across the fields of asphodel,
triumphant in all I had told him of his son,
his gallant, glorious son."

(11.614–16)

G O D S

Unlike the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* is an epic with a thoroughly domestic base. Except in the wanderings—and sometimes even there—we are down to earth, whether in the full and frequent meals in the palace (Fielding called the *Odyssey* the "eatingest epic") or in the rural domesticity of Eumaeus' hut. Yet the poem is firmly set in what might be called "heroic time," a time when men were stronger, braver and more eloquent than they are now, women more beautiful, powerful and intelligent than they have been ever since, and gods so close to human life and so involved with individual human beings, in affection or in anger, that they intervened in their lives and even appeared to them in person. The inclination of modern critics to emphasize the unique aspect of Odyssean heroism at the expense and often to the exclusion of the recognizably Achillean aspects of the heroic vengeance that concludes the epic is paralleled by a tendency to find new developments on Olympus, in the nature and action of the gods, especially of Zeus. What has happened—according to Alfred Heubeck in his thoughtful and valuable introduction to the Oxford Commentary on the *Odyssey*—is nothing less than an "ethical transformation": "With perceptiveness and wisdom Zeus now directs the fate of the world according to moral principles, which alone create and preserve order. The father of the gods has only a little way to go to become the just ruler of the world" (I, p. 23).

Quite apart from the fact that it may be doubted whether Zeus ever went that little way (even in the *Oresteia* his justice is problematic), it is hard to find in the *Odyssey* evidence for this ethical transformation. In the meeting on Olympus with which the poem opens, Zeus discusses the case of Aegisthus, who, disregarding a warning delivered by Hermes, has seduced Clytemnestra and, with her help, murdered Agamemnon. "Ah how shameless," says Zeus,

"the way these mortals blame the gods.
From us alone, they say, come all their miseries, yes,
but they themselves, with their own reckless ways,
compound their pains beyond their proper share."

(1.37–40)

There is, as Heubeck himself points out, "nothing new in this moralizing." Zeus admits that much of humanity's suffering is the responsibility of the gods; what he is complaining about is that they compound it by reckless initiatives of their own.

This council on Olympus presents us with a situation all too familiar from the *Iliad*: gods bitterly opposed to each other over the fate of mortals. In the *Iliad* Hera and Athena are ferociously bent on Troy's destruction because of an insult to their pride and preeminence—the Judgment of Paris, the Trojan prince, which awarded the prize for beauty to Aphrodite. Poseidon, brother of Zeus, is equally intent on Troy's destruction, because the Trojan king Laomedon cheated him of payment for building the walls of Troy. Apollo, whose temple stands on the citadel of Troy, is the city's champion, and Zeus, the supreme arbiter, is partial to Troy because of the devotion of its inhabitants to his worship. The fate of the city and its women and children, as well as the lives and deaths of the warriors on both sides, are determined by the give-and-take of these divine wills in opposition, by the pattern of alliance, conflict, deceit and compromise that form their relationships.

The conflicts rarely take violent shape; on the few occasions when they do, the divine opponents are not equally matched. Athena fights Ares and Aphrodite, and easily defeats both, while Hera spans Artemis as if she were a little girl. But among the major powers—Zeus, Hera, Athena, Poseidon, Apollo—the struggle takes different forms: retreat, deceit, compromise. When, in the climactic battles that lead up to the death of Hector, Apollo is challenged to fight by Poseidon, he declines:

"God of the earthquake—you'd think me hardly sane
if I fought with you for the sake of wretched mortals . . .
like leaves, no sooner flourishing, full of the sun's fire,
feeding on earth's gifts, than they waste away and die." (21.527–30)

Gods may favor a hero or a city, but if that favor threatens to create a rupture between major powers, one of them may withdraw. Or they may bargain, as Zeus does with Hera when he reluctantly consents to let Troy fall. He consents, but with a proviso:

"One more thing . . .
Whenever I am bent on tearing down some city
filled with men you love—to please myself—
never attempt to thwart my fury . . ." (4.46–49)

And Hera accepts; in fact, she offers him three cities instead of one:

" . . . The three cities that I love best of all
are Argos and Sparta, Mycenae with streets as broad as Troy's.
Raze them . . . I will never rise in their defense . . ." (4.60–63)

Gods may also get their way by deceit, as Hera does when she seduces Zeus and puts him to sleep so that she and Poseidon can rally the Achaeans against Hector's assault.

All three of these modes of Olympian diplomacy reappear in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus, by blinding Polyphemus, Poseidon's son, has incurred the vengeful wrath of the god who rules the waves. When the hero meets Athena on the shore of Ithaca he asks her rather brusquely why she had abandoned him during the course of his wanderings:

" . . . I never saw you,
never glimpsed you striding along my decks
to ward off some disaster." (13.361–63)

Her reply, short, obviously embarrassed, and sandwiched between fulsome compliments and the lifting of the mist to show Odysseus that he really is home, is an avowal of concession made to superior force. "I could not bring myself," she says, "to fight my Father's brother, / Poseidon" (13.388–89). And even this apology is evasive: she makes no attempt to explain why she did not help Odysseus *before* he incurred Poseidon's wrath. Not until she secures the agreement of Zeus does she take the steps that lead to Odysseus' return home. She proposes to Zeus that Odysseus be released from his seven-year confinement on Calypso's island, and she does this at a meeting on Olympus from which Poseidon is absent; he is far away, at the ends of the earth, enjoying the homage of the Ethiopians. Poseidon is, in effect, deceived; when he returns and sees Odysseus on his raft approaching the Phaeacian shore he is furious. "Outrageous! Look how the gods have changed their minds / about Odysseus—while I was off with my Ethiopians" (5.315–16). Athena would not challenge him openly; she acts behind his back.

Poseidon knows that once Odysseus reaches Phaeacia he is "fated to escape his noose of pain" (5.318), and in the event, the Phaeacians send him home on a supernaturally fast ship, loaded down with treasure greater than all he had acquired at Troy and lost at sea. Poseidon's power has been defied, his honor slighted, and someone must pay. Odysseus is

now beyond his reach, but the Phaeacians are another matter. "I will lose all my honor now / among the immortals," he complains to Zeus,

"now there are mortal men
who show me no respect—Phaeacians, too,
born of my own loins!" (13.145–48)

Zeus assures him that there is no loss of respect for him on Olympus, and as for mortal men—

"If any man, so lost in his strength
and prowess, pays you no respect—just pay him back . . .
Do what you like. Whatever warms your heart." (13.162–65)

Poseidon explains his purpose: to sink the Phaeacian ship that took Odysseus home as it sails into the harbor and to "pile a huge mountain round about their port" so that "They will learn at last / to cease and desist from escorting every man alive" (13.171–73). Zeus approves, and suggests a refinement: to change the ship and, incidentally, its crew of fifty-two young men—"the best in town" (8.42)—into a rock as the Phaeacians watch it approach the harbor. Poseidon swiftly does so, and at that sight King Alcinous recognizes the fulfillment of a prophecy, which also predicted that the city would be surrounded by a great mountain. He leads his people in sacrifice and prayer to Poseidon, hoping for mercy and promising that the Phaeacians will never again give sea passage to men who come to their city.

This is the end of the great Phaeacian tradition of hospitality and help for the stranger and wayfarer. This action of Zeus casts a disturbing light on the relation between human ideals and divine conduct. If there is one stable moral criterion in the world of the *Odyssey*, it is the care taken by the powerful and well-to-do of strangers, wanderers and beggars. This code of hospitality is the one universally recognized morality. And its divine enforcer, so all mortals believe, is Zeus himself, Zeus *xeinios*, protector of stranger and suppliant. His name and title are invoked time after time, by Odysseus and also by Nausicaa, Echeneus the Phaeacian elder, Alcinous and Eumaeus.

Of all the many hosts measured by this moral standard, the Phaeacians stand out as the most generous, not only in their regal entertainment of Odysseus but also in their speedy conveyance of the hero to his own home, a service they provide for all wayfarers who reach their shore. And now they are punished by the gods for precisely this reason,

since their magnanimity has made Poseidon feel that his honor—the touchy sensitivity to public opinion that in Achilles brought ten thousand woes on the Achaeans, and drove Ajax to suicide and fueled his sullenness in the underworld—has been dealt an intolerable blow. The offenders must be punished, even if their punishment displays utter indifference to the only code of moral conduct that obtains in the insecure world of the *Odyssey*. Faced with Poseidon's rage against the Phaeacians, Zeus the protector of strangers enthusiastically joins his powerful brother in his denunciation. Not only does he suggest the refinement of turning the ship to stone; he also approves of Poseidon's intention to cut the Phaeacians off from the sea forever by piling a huge mountain around the city.

This has shocked some modern translators and editors, who have accordingly followed the lead of the ancient editor Aristophanes of Byzantium. By changing three letters in the Greek, he made Zeus end his speech with the words "but do not pile a mountain round the city." The suggested petrification of the ship is a sop to gratify Poseidon and compensate him for a concession—the Phaeacians will not be cut off from the sea. Zeus *xeinios* lives up to his title; he is a Zeus who has undergone an ethical transformation.

We have no record of the reasons Aristophanes gave for his reading; though they must have been spelled out in his commentaries on the poem, our manuscript tradition preserves only the fact that he proposed it. But it does give us one more important piece of information. "Aristarchus," we are told in the same note that recorded Aristophanes' emendation, "argues against him in his dissertations." Aristarchus was the pupil of Aristophanes and was regarded as the most critical and correct of the Alexandrian editors—readers of Pope's *Dunciad* will remember that his target Richard Bentley was portrayed as "that awful Aristarch." So the suggestion was already contested in antiquity by Homer's most respected editor. And though we are told nothing about Aristophanes' reasons for suggesting the change, we may guess at them by comparing other examples of his textual criticism. He was much concerned, for example, with decorum and suspected the authenticity of lines in which royal characters fell below the level of etiquette maintained at the court of the Ptolemies. In Book 6, where Homer has Nausicaa bring her washing out of the house—"the princess brought her finery from the room / and piled it into the wagon's polished cradle" (6.84–85)—Aristophanes, with a slight alteration, produced: "Meanwhile the maids brought the finery from the room . . ." Princesses do not carry their own laundry.

He shows a similar concern for propriety when dealing with the conduct of the gods. In Book 11, when Odysseus sees the shade of Ariadne, he identifies her as

"daughter of Minos, that harsh king. One day Theseus tried to spirit her off from Crete to Athens' sacred heights, but he got no joy from her. Artemis killed her first on wave-washed Dia's shores . . ."

(11.365-68)

For *ekta*, "killed," Aristophanes adopted *eschen*, "detained," thus unburdening Artemis of a killing for which no reason is given. So in that dialogue between Zeus and Poseidon, by introducing a negative, Aristophanes made Zeus, the greater god, more merciful than Poseidon.

But there is no warrant for this alteration. There is indeed a very good reason—quite apart from the fact that Aristophanes' motive is obvious—to reject it out of hand. If Homer's Zeus had really urged such a radical revision of Poseidon's plan, some sort of reply on Poseidon's part—acceptance, rejection or at least acknowledgment—would be indispensable. But he says not a word. Furthermore, if the Phaeacian city was never to be cut off by a mountain, we are left with something unprecedented in Homer, an unfulfilled prophecy—Alcinous twice mentions the prophecy of his father that one day Poseidon would ring their city with a mountain. Homer does not tell us what happened: when we see the Phaeacians for the last time, they are about to engage in sacrifice and prayer to Poseidon, hoping that he will spare them. But one thing is clear: they are done with generous hospitality and conveying strangers to their destinations. A god has forced this decision; his vindictive punishment has been fully approved by Zeus. Zeus may sometimes act as the protector of suppliants, beggars and wanderers, but human concerns and conceptions of justice fade into insignificance when the maintenance of a powerful god's prestige is the issue. Odysseus meanwhile, left asleep on the Ithacan shore with all his treasure laid out beside him, wakes to find a landscape he does not recognize—Athena has covered it in mist. He jumps to the conclusion that the Phaeacian crew has dumped him on some foreign shore. "They never kept their word," he cries,

"Zeus of the Suppliants
pay them back—he keeps an eye on the world of men
and punishes all transgressors!"

(13.241-43)

He does not realize it, but Zeus of the suppliants has already paid them back. Not for breaking their word, but for keeping it.

Poseidon and Zeus are not the only Olympians to display indifference to human codes of conduct and sense of justice. Later in the poem Athena joins them. There is among the suitors one decent man, Amphinomus, who "pleased Penelope the most, / thanks to his timely words and good clear sense" (16.441-42). It is he who persuades the suitors to reject Antinous' proposal to waylay and murder Telemachus on Ithaca, now that he has evaded the ship waiting for him in ambush and returned safe home. And it is Amphinomus who, after Odysseus' victory over Irus in the boxing match, drinks his health in a golden cup and says,

"Cheers, old friend, old father,
saddled now as you are with so much trouble—
here's to your luck, great days from this day on!"

(18.141-43)

Odysseus tries to save him from the imminent slaughter. He warns him solemnly that Odysseus will soon return, is now very near home, and that blood will be shed. This is dangerous ground. He calls Amphinomus by name; how could this ragged beggar who has just arrived know it? He goes even further. "You seem like a man of good sense to me," he tells him. "Just like your father." It is a slip he tries to cover at once, adding quickly, "at least I've heard his praises" (18.145-46). Homer has made it clear what a great risk Odysseus is running in his attempt to save Amphinomus' life, and he emphasizes his sincerity by having him pray for divine intervention on the suitor's behalf:

" . . . may some power save you,
spirit you home before you meet him face-to-face
the moment he returns to native ground!"

(18.167-69)

Far from spiriting him home, a divine power has already passed sentence on him: "Even then Athena had bound him fast to death / at the hands of Prince Telemachus and his spear" (18.178-79). Amphinomus is the third of the suitors to die, immediately after the two principal villains, Antinous and Eurymachus.

When they are not deciding the fate of mortals, the gods live a life of their own, on Olympus, where, they say,

... the gods' eternal mansion stands unmoved,
 never rocked by galewinds, never drenched by rains,
 nor do the drifting snows assail it, no, the clear air
 stretches away without a cloud, and a great radiance
 plays across that world where the blithe gods
 live all their days in bliss.

(6.46–51)

We are given a sample of their life of pleasure in one of the tales told by the minstrel Demodocus in the great hall of the Phaeacian palace—the entrapment of the adulterous pair Ares and Aphrodite in the golden net fashioned by the wronged husband Hephaestus, and their exposure to the prurient gaze and “uncontrollable laughter” (8.369) of the gods whom Hephaestus has summoned to witness his wife’s perfidy. (The goddesses, we are told, stayed modestly at home.) Hephaestus himself, when he summons the gods, refers to the spectacle he offers them as “a sight to make you laugh” (8.349), and the comic aspect of the tale is made plain when Apollo asks Hermes if he would like to change places with Ares and receives the reply:

“Oh Apollo, if only! . . .
 . . . bind me down with triple those endless chains!
 Let all you gods look on, and all you goddesses too—
 how I’d love to bed that golden Aphrodite!”

(8.381–84)

This glimpse of the private lives of the Olympians has a parallel in the *Iliad*: the episode (14.187–421) in which Hera, armed with all the charms and magic of Aphrodite, seduces Zeus, who is watching the battle from a mountaintop, so that she can put him to sleep and then, with Poseidon, rally the Achaean fighters against Hector’s victorious assault. Zeus is overcome with desire for his wife; his lust, he tells her, is greater than anything he has felt in his mating with mortal women, whom he proceeds to list in a long speech that has been aptly named the “Leporello catalogue,” after the famous aria in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*.

In both epics the gods enjoy their pleasures and pursue their intrigues on Olympus, while on earth they decide the fate of mortals and their cities with scant regard for human conceptions of divine justice, whenever what is at stake is the interest or prestige of a major god. Human beings may indeed, like the suitors and Odysseus’ crew, bring disaster on themselves “beyond their proper share” (1.40), but disaster may still come to those who, like the Phaeacians and Amphinomus, are by human

standards admirable, and in each case it is a god who serves them their “proper share.”

WOMEN AND MEN

The two Homeric epics are alike in their vision of the Olympian gods and their affirmation of the heroic code, but there is one striking difference between them. The *Iliad* celebrates the action and suffering of men at war; it is only in the poem’s similes and on the shield of Achilles that we are given occasional glimpses of a world at peace. The few women who make an appearance—Briseis, Andromache, Hecuba, Helen—are secondary figures, who play no significant part in the main action. But the *Odyssey*, though its climax is a scene of furious combat and mass slaughter, presents us with a world at peace: a secure and settled peace at Pylos and Sparta, a troubled and threatened peace on Ithaca, and, in the dangers and temptations of Odysseus’ voyage, intervals of peace—temptingly restful with Circe, oppressive with Calypso, and beneficent on Scheria. And almost everywhere in this peaceful world, women, human and divine, have important roles.

In Odysseus’ wanderings they help, tempt or delay him. Calypso offers him immortality and keeps him for seven years but sends a favoring wind when he departs; Circe tries to keep him forever in her pigpen, does keep him for a year as her lover, but finally helps him on his way; the Sirens are his most dangerous temptation, but the sea-nymph Ino helps him land on Scheria, where Arete and Nausicaa smooth his path. There are female presences even among the monsters he has to face: Scylla, Charybdis and the gigantic wife—“huge as a mountain crag” (10.124)—of the Laestrygonian cannibal king. On the Egyptian island of Pharos, Menelaus is rescued by the minor goddess Eidothea, daughter of the Old Man of the Sea, and at Sparta, Helen gives a dazzling performance. On Ithaca, Penelope, enigmatic to the last, is the object of the suitors’ desires and her son’s suspicions, and it is she who precipitates the final crisis by offering to marry whichever of the suitors can string the bow of Odysseus and shoot an arrow through the axes. Eurycleia too is never far from the limelight and gets full exposure when she washes her master’s feet and recognizes the scar he carries on his thigh. Meanwhile the goddess Athena encourages and supports Telemachus on his journey, and from Scheria onward she is Odysseus’ helper and then fellow-conspirator in deceit and ally in battle. Besides these principal

players there is a plentiful cast of female extras: the Sicilian woman who looks after old Laertes; the Phoenician nursemaid who kidnaps the young prince Eumaeus to sell him as a slave; Eurynome, Penelope's housekeeper; Melantho, the disloyal maid, lover of Antinous; Iphthime, Penelope's sister, who appears to her in a dream; and the long list of famous women Odysseus sees among the dead—Tyro, Antiope, Alcmena, Epicaste, Chloris, Leda, Iphimedeia, Phaedra, Procris, Eriphyle. It is a vision that has echoed down the centuries, that lies behind Propertius' magical line *sunt apud infernos tot milia formosarum*—"so many thousands of lovely women among the dead"—and Campion's "shades of underground . . . White Iope, blithe Helen, and the rest."

Only when the *Odyssey* turns Iliadic, as Odysseus and his son and two loyal servants face the suitors in the hall, are women offstage, and even there Athena is at hand, sustaining the morale of the hero and his party, diverting the suitors' spears from the target. Elsewhere in the poem women's voices are heard at frequent intervals and sometimes at length. Hostile critics might well be tempted to cite the defense of his tragedies Aristophanes put in the mouth of "Euripides" in the *Frogs*: "They all stepped up to speak their piece, the mistress spoke, the slave spoke too, / the master spoke, the daughter spoke, and grandma spoke." In the *Iliad*, scenes that present men in contact with women, though memorable, are rare—Helen and Paris, Hector and Andromache, Hecuba and Priam—but in the *Odyssey*, the rare exception is the scene from which women are excluded—the battle in the hall, the Cyclops in the cave. What historical reality, if any, lies behind this imagined world, so far removed from the peasant misogyny of Hesiod's near-contemporary *Works and Days*, we shall never know; perhaps it reflects an aristocratic Ionian culture like that which, a century later, saw the birth of Sappho on Lesbos.

The *Odyssey* owes much of its power to enchant so many generations of readers to its elegant exploitation of something that war temporarily suppresses or corrupts—the infinite variety of the emotional traffic between male and female. In his treatment of these relationships Homer displays an understanding of human psychology that many critics, especially those who believe in multiple authorship, but even some of those who accept a sole author yet deny him literacy, have been reluctant to recognize. A case in point is the first encounter between human beings of the opposite sex in the poem, the exchange between Telemachus and Penelope in Book 1. She has just told the bard Phemius, who is entertaining the suitors with a song about the return of the Achaeans from Troy, to change his tune, since this one pains her to the heart. Telemachus intervenes, to remind her that Phemius is not to blame for her sorrow; it is

Zeus who allots to mortals whatever destiny he pleases. But he concludes with some words that have rightly been characterized as "harsh":

". . . mother,
go back to your quarters. Tend to your own tasks,
the distaff and the loom, and keep the women
working hard as well. As for giving orders,
men will see to that . . ."

(1.409–13)

These same words, with "bow" replacing "giving orders" (*muthos*), recur much later in the poem, in Book 21 (389–93), where Penelope insists, in opposition to Antinous, that Eumaeus should give the bow to Odysseus; and of course they are an echo of Hector's words to Andromache in their last interview in the *Iliad*—"As for the fighting, / men will see to that" (6.587–88). In Book 21 Telemachus' words are obviously essential, for Penelope has to be removed from the hall before the fighting starts, as it will do as soon as Odysseus strings the bow. But critics have thought them out of place in Book 1; in fact, Aristarchus condemned them as an interpolation. Some modern translators (Fitzgerald, for example) have omitted them, and a recent commentator has expressed uneasiness about Telemachus' "callousness" and "adolescent rudeness." The lines have often been defended as the first manifestation of the new fighting spirit that Athena's visit has instilled in Telemachus, and though this is true, the fact is that his harshness here is consistent with the tone of nearly all the other remarks Telemachus addresses to his mother throughout the poem and of much of what he says about her to other people.

His first reference to her is, at the very least, ambiguous. Asked by Athena if he is the son of Odysseus, he replies: "Mother has always told me I'm his son, it's true, / but I am not so certain" (1.249–50). Commentators have tried to explain his remark away as "curious but perhaps conventional" and "an idea that must already have been a commonplace," but they produce little or no evidence for such a case. Telemachus is not, of course, suggesting that his mother is an adulteress but merely expressing a doubt that he is a worthy son of his great father. But he could have done so without mentioning his mother; there is a resentful tone in his voice, which sounds again when he describes for Athena the situation he faces in Ithaca:

"she neither rejects a marriage she despises
nor can she bear to bring the courting to an end—
while they continue to bleed my household white."

(1.290–92)

Telemachus has grown to manhood without the correction and support of a father, an absence poignantly evoked in the words he addresses to Athena when, in the person of Mentès, she urges him to call an assembly, defy the suitors and take ship in search of news of his father. "You've counseled me with so much kindness now, / like a father to a son" (1.353–54). He has been raised by women, Eurycleia and Penelope, and it was almost inevitable that his normal adolescent rebellion would be against his mother. The first result of Athena's move to rouse Odysseus' son "to a braver pitch, inspire his heart with courage" (1.105) is this stern dismissal of his mother as he asserts his mastery in the house. Penelope has given orders to Phemius: to "break off this song" (1.391) and choose some other theme. "As for giving orders" (*muthos*), says Telemachus, "men will see to that." And as soon as she leaves, he announces that he will call an assembly where he will give his "orders" (*muthos*) to the suitors: "You must leave my palace! See to your feasting elsewhere" (1.430).

Much later, at Sparta, Athena comes to hasten his return to Ithaca; she does so by suggesting that Penelope may decide to marry, and take some treasure with her:

"You know how the heart of a woman always works:
she likes to build the wealth of her new groom—
of the sons she bore, of her dear, departed husband,
not a memory of the dead, no questions asked." (15.23–26)

Athena is not a dream, for Telemachus is awake; she is not in disguise, as she was on Ithaca. But Telemachus makes no reply to the goddess, no acknowledgment of her presence—it is as if he had never seen or heard her. This unusual treatment of a divine epiphany may have been Homer's attempt to suggest that Athena was only enhancing in Telemachus' mind the fears and suspicions that were already there. He had, as Homer tells us, been sleepless all night, "tossing with anxious thoughts about his father" (15.9). And when he gets back to Ithaca the first thing he says to Eumaeus shows how deeply rooted are his suspicions of his mother's intentions. "I've come," he says,

"... [to] learn the news—
whether mother still holds out in the halls
or some other man has married her at last,
and Odysseus' bed, I suppose, is lying empty,
blanketed now with filthy cobwebs." (16.36–40)

At his meeting with Penelope, who weeps as she speaks of her fears that he would never return alive—she knew about the ship the suitors had sent out to waylay him—he is brusquely ungracious; he does not even answer her questions about news of Odysseus but tells her not to stir up his emotions and sends her off to her room to bathe and pray; he has business to attend to, men's business. She has to ask him later, and hesitantly, before he tells her what he learned at Sparta about her husband.

But she is not always so submissive. When she comes into the great hall after Odysseus has won his fight with Irus, she rebukes her son for exposing a stranger-guest to the risk of bodily harm. In her speech we can hear the tone of maternal reproof that Telemachus must often have heard and resented in his boyhood and adolescence:

"Telemachus,
your sense of balance is not what it used to be.
When you were a boy you had much better judgment.
Now that you've grown and reached your young prime . . .
now your sense of fairness seems to fail you." (18.243–49)

Telemachus' reply is, for once, conciliatory, even apologetic. He no longer feels the need to assert himself against her; his father is home, and he has been assigned a principal role in the final reckoning with the suitors. But he can still speak unflatteringly of her behind her back, as he does to Eurycleia after the nightlong interview between husband and wife:

"Dear nurse, how did you treat the stranger in our house?
With bed and board? Or leave him to lie untended?
That would be mother's way—sensible as she is—
all impulse, doting over some worthless stranger,
turning a good man out to face the worst." (20.145–49)

And he rebukes her to her face when she stubbornly refuses to recognize the bloodstained ragged beggar sitting opposite her as Odysseus. "Oh mother," he says,

"cruel mother, you with your hard heart!
Why do you spurn my father so—why don't you
sit beside him, engage him, ask him questions?
What other wife could have a spirit so unbending? . . .
your heart was always harder than a rock!" (23.111–18)

Penelope answers him gently but firmly; she denies him any competence in the matter at hand: "... if he is truly / Odysseus ... we two will know each other ... we two have secret signs" (23.121–24). And Odysseus, with a smile, sends Telemachus away.

Penelope's attitude to both the suitors and her disguised husband has given rise to much controversy and diverse interpretation. That she is faithful to Odysseus we are assured several times, as Odysseus is assured by Anticleia and Agamemnon in the world of the dead and by Eumaeus in the land of the living. On this score even Telemachus can have no doubt. It is also clear that she has done everything she can to avoid the marriage the suitors are trying to force on her. In his indictment of her before the Ithacan assembly, Antinous pays reluctant tribute to the subtlety of her delaying tactics—the shroud for old Laertes that for three years she wove at her great loom by day and unraveled by torchlight at night. Yet though her resolve to avoid marriage is firm, she would not be human if she did not feel flattered by the suitors' infatuation with her; a woman whose husband has been away for twenty years, and for whose return she has almost given up hope, could hardly remain indifferent to the ardent courtship of so many young princes. When, in Book 18, Athena inspires her with a longing "to display herself to her suitors, fan their hearts, / inflame them more" (18.183–84), she is prompting impulses that lurk dormant below the surface of Penelope's conscious mind, just as she played on Telemachus' deep suspicions of his mother's intentions in Book 15. That same hidden layer of Penelope's emotions is revealed in the dream about the pet geese slaughtered by the eagle, which she describes for Odysseus. In the dream the eagle identifies himself as Odysseus and the geese as the suitors, but not before Penelope has spoken of her delight in watching the geese and her unbridled sorrow at their destruction. In these few lines Homer shows more understanding of how dreams work than is to be found anywhere in the four books of the *Interpretation of Dreams* written by Artemidorus of Daldis in the second century of the Christian era.

None of these feelings affects Penelope's refusal to choose a husband from among the suitors, but during her long interview with Odysseus she suddenly tells him that she has decided to do so: she will marry the suitor who can string the great bow of Odysseus and shoot an arrow through the twelve axes lined up in a row. There are good reasons for yielding to the suitors' pressure at this point, and she states them clearly. After the betrayal of her delaying tactics with the shroud, she can think, she says, of no further expedient. Her parents are pressing her to remarry, and her son broods impatiently as the suitors devour his inheritance; he too, she

says, beseeches her to leave. She has previously told Eurymachus what Odysseus had said to her when he left for Troy:

"... once you see the beard on the boy's cheek,
you wed the man you like, and leave your house behind.'
So my husband advised me then. Now it all comes true ..." (18.303–5)

For the plot of the *Odyssey*, of course, her decision is the turning point, the move that makes possible the long-predicted triumph of the returning hero. But why, critics have asked, does she make up her mind to do it now, when her dream clearly announces the return of Odysseus and the slaughter of the suitors, when the disguised Odysseus has convinced her that he saw Odysseus in person long ago on Crete and assured her that Odysseus had lately been seen in nearby Thesprotia and was now on his way home; when, even earlier, the prophet Theoclymenus had assured her that Odysseus was actually in Ithaca, planning destruction for the suitors? Many critics have found her decision utterly implausible. "The poet," writes one learned and influential scholar (Page, p. 123), "could not possibly have chosen a worse moment for Penelope's surrender." For those who suspect multiple authorship of the poem a simple explanation lies ready to hand: Penelope's decision comes from an alternate story line, in which husband and wife join in conspiracy to entrap the suitors. They find support for the theory in Book 24, where the shade of the suitor Amphimedon tells Agamemnon that it was Odysseus, "the soul of cunning," who "told his wife to set / the great bow and the gleaming iron axes out" (24.184–85). But it was only natural that the suitors should think so, since Penelope, at a critical moment, had argued strongly against Antinous that Odysseus should be allowed to try his hand at stringing the bow.

One modern critic (Harsh) has developed a subtly argued theory that she does in fact recognize her husband in the course of their long night interview and, while forwarding his purpose, withholds from him her realization of his identity. This reading, however, runs into an immovable obstacle in Book 23, where, to Telemachus' disgust and Odysseus' frustration, she refuses to recognize him as her husband and tests his knowledge of those "secret signs" she had mentioned before, signs "known to us both but hidden from the world" (23.124–25). Other critics have suggested that without recognizing the stranger's identity, she has been profoundly impressed by him and deeply moved by his proof that, unlike so many others who have come to her with sightings of Odysseus, he really has seen her husband. The disguised Odysseus, in the words of

a recent sensitive interpreter (Russo, *Commentary*, III, pp. 11–12), “has come to mean much more to Penelope than would normally be possible in a relationship between a famous queen and a wandering stranger . . . an unusual and almost improper intimacy.” When they go off to their separate beds, each dreams of the other. “Homer is showing us that Penelope has some kind of intuitive awareness of her husband’s presence but . . . it is active on a less than conscious level.” All this prompts her “to take a risk, to commit herself to life and to life’s chances after years of defensive, calculated maneuvering.”

This is a brilliant and attractive reading, but like many other interpretations, it does not take full account of the fact that Penelope does not have a choice in the matter. She has eloquently stated the reasons why she must decide now—pressure from her parents and her son, compounded by the threat to her son’s life, demand a decision at this point. But what she proposes is not a “surrender.” What the suitors have been demanding is that Penelope, or her father, choose one of them for her husband, “the best man in Achaea,” the one “who offers her the most [gifts]” (16.85–86). But she faces them with something quite different: a challenge, a test in which each of them must measure himself against Odysseus by stringing his bow and shooting an arrow through the twelve axes. She is, of course, running a risk. As she tells Odysseus of her decision, she speaks as if the outcome will be the marriage she has so long avoided, and later, in her bed, she prays for death to save her from having to “warm the heart of a weaker man” (20.92). Yet she must have foreseen the possibility that none of these inferior men, youths who spend their days and nights feasting, playing board games, dancing, hurling javelin and discus, would have the strength to string the bow of Odysseus and the skill to shoot an arrow through the line of twelve axes. Antinous, in fact, though he secretly hopes to succeed, expresses a fear that they may all fail to pass the test Penelope has imposed on them:

“No easy game, I wager, to string *his* polished bow.
Not a soul in the crowd can match Odysseus—
what a man he was . . .”

(21.105–7)

Failure on the part of all the suitors might free her from their attentions; both Leodes and Eurymachus, the two suitors who try their hand and fail, speak of wooing other women elsewhere. In any case, failure would, as Eurymachus says, demonstrate their inferiority to Odysseus—“A disgrace to ring in the ears of men to come” (21.285). It would be a fatal

blow to the suitors’ prestige and might well turn opinion in Ithaca against them. Penelope’s surprising move looks more like a counter-offensive than a surrender. She told Odysseus that after her work on Laertes’ shroud was exposed as a fraud, she could not think of another “deft way out” (19.177). The word so translated is *mêtis*; it is the word that characterizes Odysseus—he is *polumêtis*, a man of many twists and turns. Penelope is from the same mold as her husband, a worthy partner—and adversary. As she demonstrates by the *mêtis* she deploys against him before she will accept him fully as her husband.

Even when he has bathed, exchanged the filthy rags of the beggar for splendid raiment, and been given the grace and beauty of an immortal by Athena, she still sits apart from him, silent. He reproaches her for her coldness, using words that recall what Telemachus said to her earlier: “She has a heart of iron in her breast” (23.192). He orders Eurycleia to prepare a bed for him, apart and alone. Penelope’s response shows that she is almost convinced: “You look—how well I know—” she says, “the way he looked, / setting sail from Ithaca” (23.195–96), but nonetheless she insists on testing his knowledge of those “secret signs” she mentioned when she answered Telemachus’ angry outburst. She orders Eurycleia to move Odysseus’ bed out of the room. For the first and only time in the poem, Odysseus is taken aback. Up to this point he has always been the calculator, the manipulator, the dissembler, who played on the emotions of others, whether to win sympathy or to provoke hostility, but now Penelope has usurped that role. In a furious emotional outburst—“Woman—your words, they cut me to the core!” (23.205)—he tells the story of the bed’s construction, and even though he realizes that he has given her the sign that she was seeking, he ends nevertheless with an accusing speculation:

“Does the bed, my lady, still stand planted firm?—
I don’t know—or has someone chopped away
that olive-trunk and hauled our bedstead off?”

(23.228–30)

Penelope is convinced at last; in tears of joy she embraces him as she explains her hesitation. “In my heart of hearts I always cringed with fear / some fraud might come, beguile me with his talk” (23.242–43). Homer and his audience had not heard of Martin Guerre, but they knew the story of Alcmena and Amphytrion (both mentioned in the *Odyssey*)—how Zeus assumed the appearance and personality of Amphytrion, who was away at the wars, to lie with Alcmena and beget Heracles. In the lower world, Odysseus hears a similar story from Tyro, deceived by Poseidon, who took the form of her lover, the river Enipeus. Penelope, in

fact, when Eurycleia brought her the news that the stranger was Odysseus and that he had killed all the suitors, had replied, "the story can't be true, not as you tell it, / no, it must be a god who's killed our brazen friends." (23.69–70).

Even among those who believe that the *Odyssey* is the work of one poet there may be those who doubt that an oral poet, using writing to construct, over the course of many years, a poem on the scale of the *Odyssey*, could deploy so effectively so subtle an understanding of the emotions that drive men and women together and apart. But this same sympathetic understanding of the human, especially the female, heart is at work not just in the scenes set in Ithaca but everywhere throughout the poem. Calypso, for example, when she starts Odysseus on his journey home, does not tell him that she does so under duress, on orders from Zeus, but takes credit for the action herself. And even when it is clear that he is determined to go, she cannot refrain from asking him how he can possibly prefer Penelope to her own divine person. Nausicaa on Scheria manages, with exquisite tact but in unmistakable terms, to offer her hand in marriage to Odysseus without committing herself. And at Sparta, behind the splendid facade of marital harmony in the royal palace lies the reality of subdued but barely repressed embarrassment and resentment. The embarrassment is revealed obliquely in the self-exculpatory story Helen tells of her encounter with Odysseus during the war that was fought for her sake. He came into Troy, she says, disguised as a beggar; she recognized him but helped and protected him:

"... my heart had changed by now—

I yearned

to sail back home again! I grieved too late for the madness
Aphrodite sent me . . ."

(4.292–94)

The resentment is clear in Menelaus' story of Odysseus at Troy; Odysseus was the one who saved their lives in the wooden horse by holding them back when Helen, imitating the voices of their wives, called on them by name to come out. What is more, she was accompanied by Deiphobus, the second Trojan prince she had married, after the death of Paris.

There are two remarks which Alexander Pope made about Homer that readers of the *Odyssey* should bear in mind. The first is that "Homer is frequently eloquent in his very Silence." And the second: "Homer has taken in all the inward Passions and Affections of Mankind to furnish his Characters."

THE END OF THE ODYSSEY

At the Greek line 296 of Book 23 of the *Odyssey*, husband and wife go joyfully to bed, the bed that served Penelope as the test of Odysseus' identity. We know Aristophanes and Aristarchus said that this was the "end" of the poem. We do not have their own statements, and our sources cite two different Greek words for "end." One of them, *peras*, means something like "limit" or "boundary," and the other, *telos*, besides meaning "end" in the temporal or spatial sense can often mean something more like "fulfillment," "consummation"—"end" in the Aristotelian sense. Some modern scholars have taken the words literally and pronounced the remainder of Book 23 and all of Book 24 a later addition composed by a different, and inferior, poet. They cannot, however, claim Aristarchus as their authority, for we know that he excluded the Greek lines 310–43 of Book 23 (in which Odysseus tells Penelope the tale of his travels) and lines 1–204 of Book 24 (the arrival of the shades of the suitors in the lower world). There would have been no point in doing so if he had already decided that the original poem ended at the line which put Odysseus and Penelope to bed.

In any case the poem cannot end there; too many loose ends remain to be tied up, like the consequences of the slaughter of the suitors; too many scenes have been carefully prepared for, like the meeting between Odysseus and Laertes. The first of these themes was introduced as far back as Book 20, when Odysseus discussed with Athena the plan to kill the suitors. He was appalled by the odds, one man against so many, but that is not all. "There's another worry," he tells her,

"that haunts me even more.

What if I kill them—thanks to you and Zeus—
how do I run from under their avengers?"

(20.43–45)

It is with this in mind that later, in Books 22 and 23, with the corpses of the suitors cluttering the hall, he tells Telemachus to have it cleared and to organize music and dance so that passersby will guess that Penelope has at last chosen a new husband. No rumor of the truth will get out before Odysseus and his followers leave for his father's farm in the country—where Homer will stage the last of a series of recognition scenes. It is a scene for which audience expectation has been expertly aroused: in the opening book Athena-Mentes describes Laertes

mourning for his son in isolation in the country, a theme taken up later by Anticleia in the world of the dead and by Eumaeus in his hut. The poem cannot end without a meeting between father and son; their reunion is in fact one of the three large units of which the final book consists.

The first, the descent of the suitors to the lower world, where they meet Agamemnon and Achilles, was condemned by Aristarchus as an interpolation. For once, we have some information about an Alexandrian editor's reason for such an opinion: the *scholia*, comments written on the margins of the medieval manuscripts, give us a selection. Some of them seem trivial; the fact that elsewhere in the poem Hermes is not called Cyllenian, for example, or the claim that a White Rock is not an appropriate landscape feature for the world of the dead. Others are more serious, such as his assertion that elsewhere in Homer the shades of the unburied are not allowed to cross the river into Hades, and the suitors' bodies are still in the hall of Odysseus' palace. It is true that in the *Iliad* the ghost of Patroclus, appearing to Achilles in a dream, tells him he cannot cross the river until Achilles gives him burial. But in the *Odyssey*, Elpenor begs Odysseus to bury his body, which has been left behind on Circe's island, and he is in Hades and makes no mention of a river. The laws and the terrain of Hades are obviously not strictly defined; they remain somewhat vague even in Virgil—it was Dante who gave Hell strict logic and a fixed geography.

Quite apart from such considerations, the descent of the suitors' ghosts to the lower world has already been foreseen in the terrifying vision that comes to Theoclymenus in the great hall in Book 20: "Ghosts, look, thronging the entrance, thronging the court, / go trooping down to the world of death and darkness!" (20.395–96). And Plato, who lived long before Aristarchus, quoted the Greek lines 6–9 of Book 24 in the *Republic*:

[and the ghosts trailed after with high thin cries]
as bats cry in the depths of a dark haunted cavern,
shrilling, flittering, wild when one drops from the chain—
slipped from the rock face, while the rest cling tight . . .
So with their high thin cries the ghosts flocked now . . . (24.6–10)

Like Aristarchus, he proposes to suppress them, but not because he thinks Homer did not write them—on the contrary. It is one of a list of passages Plato objects to because they will sap the morale of young men

training for battle. "We shall ask Homer . . . to forgive us if we delete all passages of this kind. It is not because they are bad poetry . . . in fact the better they are as poetry . . . the less suitable they are for an audience of boys and men on whom freedom places the obligation to fear slavery more than death."

The long scene in which Odysseus reveals his identity to his father has been roundly condemned by many modern critics. The last of his autobiographical fictions, the skillfully crafted tale he tells Laertes has been described as a "bizarre plan," as "pointless cruelty" and as a product of Odysseus' "habit of distrust." There is of course no question of real distrust; he has nothing to fear from Laertes, as he might have suspected he had from Penelope. But all these judgments should be assessed in the light not only of the difficult psychological situation Odysseus is faced with but also of Homer's imperatives as a narrative poet.

The last half of the *Odyssey* is a drama of identity disguised and revealed, a series of artful variations on the recognition scene. The first, and in some ways the strangest, of these scenes occurs in the first half of the poem, when Odysseus, waiting for the prophet Tiresias to appear, sees the ghost of his mother, Anticleia, who had still been alive when he left for Troy. He bursts into tears, but following Circe's instructions to the letter, he will not allow her to drink the sacrificial blood that would give her a semblance of life until he has heard from Tiresias. During the prophet's long speech the ghost of Anticleia sits there in silence, making no sound, showing no emotion. But once she is allowed to drink the blood, memory returns. "She knew me at once," says Odysseus, "and wailed out in grief" (11.175). Back on Ithaca, he reveals his identity to his son, but since this involves his transformation by Athena from a ragged beggar to a magnificently dressed and handsome man, Telemachus at first (like Penelope later) is reluctant to accept him as Odysseus and thinks that he must be a god. The next recognition is one Odysseus had not planned on and that might have aroused suspicions, but his old dog Argos, recognizing his master after twenty years, is too feeble to approach him and can do no more than let his ears droop and wag his tail and then die. The next recognition, Eurycleia's discovery of the scar, might have disrupted his plans, but he forces her to keep silent. Just before the climactic moment when he gets his hands on the bow, he reveals his identity to Eumaeus and the shepherd Philoetius, enlisting them on his side, and the next revelation is also his initiative: after killing Antinous, he tells the suitors who he is and what will happen to them. "You dogs! you never imagined I'd return from Troy— / . . .

your doom is sealed!" (22.36–42). Penelope, in her turn, is unable to accept the revelation of his identity, but after he passes her test she clasps him joyfully in her arms. Only the recognition by Laertes remains.

It comes as no surprise. Not only does Odysseus tell Penelope of his intention to confront his father, but Laertes' overwhelming grief for his missing son and his withdrawal from society have been described in harrowing detail by Athena-Mentes, Anticleia and Eumaeus. The theme has been building to a climax, and something more than a simple declaration and joyful acceptance is required by the laws of storytelling. The poet's dilemma is in fact reflected in the text, put in the mouth of Odysseus. Catching sight of his father, "a man worn down with years, his heart racked with sorrow" (24.258), Odysseus

halted under a branching pear-tree, paused and wept.
Debating, head and heart, what should he do now?
Kiss and embrace his father, pour out the long tale— . . .
or probe him first and test him every way?

(24.259–63)

Like his hero, Homer decides on the second alternative.

But the choice makes sense also in terms of the persons involved. Laertes is a man to whose burden of old age has been added the loss of his only son—missing in action, no word of when, where, how or even if he died. Laertes has become a hermit, never coming into town, Athena-Mentes says in the opening book of the poem, suffering as he drags himself along the slope of his vineyard. Anticleia, his dead wife, rounds out the picture of his renunciation of civilized life: he sleeps with slaves in the ashes by the fire in winter and on fallen leaves in the summer, nursing his overwhelming grief. Eumaeus tells Odysseus that the old man prays for death as he grieves for his son and his wife, and that his reaction to the news that Telemachus has sailed off to Pylos is to refuse food and drink.

Clearly this is a case that calls for careful handling if Laertes is to be extracted from the prison of grief and self-humiliation in which he has closed himself off from the world. What Odysseus does is to bring him back to consciousness of his own dignity as a man and a king before making any mention of his son. The first part of his long, adroitly structured speech consists of what Homer calls "reproachful words." The adjective *kertomiois* is usually translated as "bantering" or "mocking," and it does often carry that meaning, but from what follows here it clearly in this case means "reproachful," as its cognate noun does in the first book

of the *Iliad* (line 539 in the Greek), where it describes Hera's angry accusation that Zeus is, as usual, conspiring against her.

Odysseus' reproaches are far from gentle. He takes note of Laertes' patched and miserable garments, his fieldhand's leather shin guards and gloves, his goatskin cap. Though he starts by commending him on his work, and pays him the compliment of detecting the lineaments of royalty under his sordid appearance, he ends the first part of his speech with a question deliberately phrased for its shock effect: "whose slave are you? whose orchard are you tending?" (24.284). Nothing could more swiftly bring Laertes to a realization of the degraded condition into which he has allowed himself to fall, and Odysseus now asks another question—whether he is indeed in Ithaca. For he once befriended and helped a man from Ithaca, the son of Laertes. "By posing questions, awaking memories, and stirring long-repressed feelings," Heubeck writes in his masterly commentary on Book 24 (III, p. 390), "Odysseus forces his father not only to answer the questions put, but to ask questions in return, and so, step by step, to emerge from his self-inflicted isolation and apathy." Finally, told that the man he is talking to is Odysseus in person, he asks for a sign and is given not only the scar that Eurycleia recognized but Odysseus' enumeration of the trees his father had given him when he was a little boy—"thirteen pear, ten apple trees / and forty figs" (24.379–80). Laertes flings his arms around his long-lost son and the two of them go off to the farmhouse to join Telemachus.

There is little more to be told. The fathers of some of the dead suitors—in spite of Medon's caution that he had seen a god helping Odysseus in the fighting and old Halitherses' reminder that they were themselves to blame for not restraining their sons—arm and set out, led by Eupithes, Antinous' father, to exact vengeance from Odysseus and his party. Only one man is killed: Eupithes, at the hand of a Laertes rejuvenated by Athena. The goddess puts an end to the fighting and then, in the shape of Mentor, administers oaths to both sides as a guarantee of reconciliation and peace.

The poem ends here, but like the *Iliad*, it has already charted the future of its hero. Achilles has been told by his mother, Thetis, that his death will come soon after Hector's, but he will not renounce his passionate resolve to avenge Patroclus' death. As he prepares to take Lycaon's life, he foresees the end of his own—"There will come a dawn or sunset or high noon / when a man will take my life in battle too" (21.125–6). In the *Odyssey* the hero's death is foretold by Tiresias in the underworld. After he has killed the suitors, Tiresias tells him, he must

make his peace with the god Poseidon by traveling inland, carrying an oar on his shoulder, until he reaches a people utterly ignorant of the sea and ships. When one of them asks him why he is carrying a winnowing fan on his shoulder, he is to fix the oar in the ground and make an extraordinary sacrifice—a bull, a ram and a boar—to Poseidon. Once returned home, he is to sacrifice to all the Olympian gods in turn. "And at last your own death," says Tiresias,

"will steal upon you . . .

a gentle, painless death, far from the sea it comes
to take you down, borne down with the years in ripe old age
with all your people there in blessed peace around you." (11.153–56)

THE SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION OF HOMERIC NAMES

Though the English spelling of ancient Greek names faces modern poet-translators with some difficult problems, it was not a problem at all for Shakespeare, Milton, Pope and Tennyson. Except in the case of names that had through constant use been fully Anglicized—Hector, Helen, Troy—the poets used Latin equivalents of the Greek names, which they found in the poems of Virgil and Ovid that they read in school. These are the forms we also are familiar with, from our reading of English poets through the centuries: Circe, Scylla, Sirens.

Recent poet-translators have tried to get closer to the original Greek and have transliterated the Greek names directly, not through the medium of their Latin adaptations. One translator, for example, presents his readers with Kirkê, Skylla and the Seirênês. Another shares several of these spellings but will strike a compromise at times—Circe, Skylla. All translators compromise when it comes to such fully naturalized forms as Helen, Trojans and Argives (*Helenê*, *Trôes* and *Argeioi* in the Greek), and they also retreat from strict transliteration in cases like Odysseus (*Odusseus*), Priam (*Priamos*) and Thrace (*Thrêikê*).

This is an area in which no one can claim perfect consistency: we too offer a compromise. Its basis, however, is a return to the traditional practice of generations of English poets—the use of Latinate spellings except for those names that have become, in their purely English forms, familiar in our mouths as household words.

Rigid adherence to this rule would of course make unacceptable demands: it would impose, for instance, Minerva instead of Athena, Ulysses for Odysseus, Jupiter or Jove for Zeus. We have preferred the Greek names, but transliterated them on Latin principles: *Hêrê*, for example, is Hera in this translation; *Athênê* is Athena. Elsewhere we have replaced the letter *k* with *c* and substituted the ending *us* for the Greek *os* in the names of persons (*Patroklos* becomes Patroclus). When, however, a personal name ends in *ros* preceded by a consonant, we have used the Latin ending *er*: Pisander for *Peisandros*. The Greek diphthongs *ai* and *oi* are represented by the Latin diphthongs *ae* and *oe* (Achaean for *Akhaian*, Euboea for *Euboia*).

This conventional Latinate spelling of the names has a traditional