

CHEATING YOUR WAY BACK: ODYSSEUS' RETURN TO A REAL WORLD

In this article I argue that the considerable contribution of cheating to the development of the narrative of Homer's *Odyssey* (ca. 700 BCE) is the consequence of the epic's chaotic and precipitous start – so precipitous in fact that the *actorial motivation* and the *narratorial motivation* (De Jong 2004) are not automatically in sync. Faced with the sudden – and for many characters involved: unexpected – challenge to account for the choices made over the past ten years since the fall and destruction of Troy, the *Odyssey*'s main characters do not always justify their actions with plausible or coherent arguments. Especially Odysseus appears to cheat while mixing truth with falsehood as he introduces the reasons and the circumstances of his unexpected and rather belated return home. His wife Penelope equally struggles justifying her deeds: she appears to have been cheating, but her acts turn out to have been well-considered. Telemachus, their son, suffers from his inability to mask his true intentions (Heitman 2005); he still has to master what is presented as a highly valued skill in the *Odyssey*, the art of cheating. It is in fact, I will argue, so highly valued that all narrators, including Homer himself, allow for cheating and lying in order to bring the precipitously started *Odyssey* to a proper conclusion.

Introduction: actorial and narratorial motivation

Reception pieces that focus on the relationship between Odysseus and Penelope (e.g. Atwood 2005) often take for granted that Odysseus is a capable and goal-oriented liar (cf. Pucci 1998; Hall 2003), much like he is known in post-Odyssean literature (e.g. in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and Virgil's *Aeneid*). Scholarly literature on the Homeric epic, however, is much more hesitant to accept such a characterization of the hero from the content of the *Odyssey* (Heubeck & Hoekstra 1986; Richardson 1996; De Jong 2001; De Jong 2012). There is allowance, though, for some *ad hoc* invention on the level of actorial motivation (De Jong 2007), and Odysseus' 'autobiography' is considered to include inference in accordance with a gender specific way of storytelling (Minchin

2007). Overall, however, lying in the ancient Greek ‘original’, Homer’s *Odyssey*, is preferably not assumed.

I argue, however, that the intuition found in reception pieces – that Odysseus is a resourceful and purposeful cheater – cannot be so easily denied for the *Odyssey*. On the contrary, a socio-economic approach of Odysseus’ *nostos* (or ‘return home’) with regard for what the main characters stand to lose or gain, only fuels this intuition. In his attempt to come to grips with what seemed impossible for so long, his homecoming, Odysseus had to create a truth of his own – as has Penelope. Audience and poet seem to have trouble keeping up with them. The wake-up call that is the precipitous opening of the *Odyssey*, entices all – characters, audience, and poet – to re-evaluate the past ten years. I will show that this evaluation does not necessarily correspond with an acceptable truth.

In this contribution I will interpret the development and the outcome of Homer’s *Odyssey* (written down ca. 700 BC) as the consequence of its chaotic and precipitous start: the start of the *Odyssey*’s narrative is so sudden that it seems as if the intentions of the narrator, the poet Homer, do not correspond with those of his characters. In the development of the narrative, as I will show, Homer, the primary narrator, even appears to be unaware of his characters’ intentions, motives, and memories in the first half of the *Odyssey*. As a result of the sudden start, the poet and his characters seem to be telling different tales.¹ De Jong (2004) explains how such discrepancies may reflect differences between actorial and narratorial motivation: characters may ponder on their intentions and motives, and predict or claim action that will not be, or have not been, undertaken as predicted or claimed. Within the narrative, such discrepancies may have a function under the direction of the primary narrator, with the characters uncertain or unaware of the gap between their own intentions and their own acts – their behaviour would not qualify as cheating, or at least not as conscious cheating. What makes the *Odyssey* stand out, is that the cheating performed there is not only very conscious and deliberate on the actorial level, but also seemingly unnoticed and a surprise on the narratorial level: I will show that the poet Homer composes his narrative as if he had been unaware of various facts

¹ De Jong (2004) deals with *actorial motivation* and *narratorial motivation*, both *within* the tale, and *about* the tale. Characters’ intentions often appear to be clearer as they are made more explicit (though not necessarily realised or attained), where the intentions of the narrator are regularly left implicit. In a study that is to appear April 2018, Kretler explores the ‘suppressed voices’ that the performer of the Homeric poems ‘brings to the surface’.

until someone else, one of his characters, mentioned them. On top of that, all his characters feel forced to justify their behaviour over the past years – a justification that was not necessary as long as the situation seemed to be invariable, or, to some, hopeless – that is *before* the start of the *Odyssey*. Once the *Odyssey* has started, there is no going back, and everyone feels obliged to adapt to the new reality of an almost forgotten story having been restarted. It is no surprise that in a story that develops like this, from an unforeseen and unexpected new starting point without a proper introduction or lead-in, not everything can be readily accepted or believed by the listening audience. At times, modern narratological research acknowledges that there is falsehood or improvising in the *Odyssey*, and at others it remains reluctant to do so. With due regard for the arguments brought forward against the suspicion of characters' lying² in the *Odyssey*, I argue that there remains sufficient reason to leave room for the possibility that characters' intentions are presented as outrunning the poet's, or as out of his reach. That makes it hard for us with regard to certain elements in the story, to disprove that they mislead the listening audience.

The start of the *Odyssey* as a wake-up call

The start of the *Odyssey* functions like a wake-up call: following a 10-year period of what looks like negligence on the part of the gods, lack of interest on that of the poet, and pointlessness on the part of the story's characters, all concerned have to deal with a sudden and unexpected change of circumstances, from one moment to the next.³ After ten years of divinely orchestrated exile (of which we only hear afterwards, in flashbacks), Odysseus, the destroyer of Troy (details only provided in flashbacks) gets to return to his native country, the island of Ithaca, where his near and dear ones have had to struggle with the problems caused by his long absence (details are only

² As presented in e.g. Richardson (1996) and De Jong (2007).

³ Such a start, *medias in res*, is not uncommon for ancient Greek epic. The *Iliad*, allegedly composed by the poet responsible for the *Odyssey* but considered written down slightly earlier, equally starts 'in the middle' of what might have been presented as a linear, chronologically developing tale. The *Iliad* starts with the quarrel between two Greek chieftains, high-king Agamemnon and most-important-warrior Achilles, in the tenth year of the war for Troy. Its plot, Achilles' wrath because of the insult and the disastrous consequences, forms a coherent story, but the background, the war for Troy, is so all-important that every reader feels the urge to come to grips with the events of the first nine years, information on which is only sparsely distributed via retrospective elements like flashbacks.

provided afterwards in flashbacks). The audience enjoying the *Odyssey* finds itself *medias in res*, and depends for information and background on others who have trouble – demonstrably – with the sudden turn of fate. This holds true for the gods, for the poet, it equally holds true for the human main characters of the *Odyssey*. I will start my illustration of characters' trouble to adapt with this final category, more precisely with Odysseus and his wife Penelope.

When Odysseus and Penelope meet again after twenty years, they are practically strangers to one another. Roughly half their lives they have spent in separation: Odysseus returns in the twentieth year since he left for Troy. At the time of his departure for war, he had just become a father to the first-born son of his wife. At their reunion, twenty years later, in the second half of the *Odyssey* (books 17-23), they are both reunited with a partner who is no longer the man or the woman they remember. We hear that Odysseus, having returned to his palace on Ithaca and transformed into an unrecognizable beggar by the goddess Athena, marvels at the beauty and wit of Penelope, but he speaks to his wife in disguise, in lies and riddles. Penelope is looking for excuses to explain the evidently non-functioning household, with an adult son unfit to rule the palace, a mother unwilling to remarry and leave, and 108 suitors unable to behave properly in the house of their future spouse and her allegedly disappeared husband. In addition, and after Odysseus punished and killed all 108 suitors expecting to be happily welcomed by his wife, she is not easily convinced that the beggar who has entered her house with spectacular stories and murderous actions is indeed her long-lost husband as he claims to be. Having wasted so much time and having been woken so harshly, all characters have to adapt, head over heels, to the reality in which they find themselves. And they do, but the process requires misinformation, lies and definitely excuses – some of them in fact rather acceptable. With the listening audience realizing that the main characters of the *Odyssey* are facing a reality they could not have prepared themselves for, it is not so difficult to forgive Odysseus and Penelope for their behaviour.

When Odysseus finally reaches Ithaca after twenty years of war and wandering, he finds a mess in the house that he left well-ordered. His wandering may not have been pleasant, but coming home certainly is a shock. During crucial years, when he was needed home on Ithaca as a husband and as a father, he invested all his energy in the war against the Trojans. He fought in the service of the Greek commander Agamemnon, but the gratitude of his king did not benefit him much over the

subsequent ten years of absence from Ithaca, immediately following the ten years spent on the war for Troy. For ten years, Odysseus practically vanished from the surface of the earth, only to reappear as a prisoner of love on the remote island of a nymph who is longing for a lover. Meanwhile, at home, Penelope had to manage the household all by herself, raising Telemachus, the son from her marriage with Odysseus, on her own. She had some instructions from Odysseus to go by, but she did not follow them as close as she might have.

When husband and wife meet again after twenty years, they both spent half their lives without the other. They find each other because they apparently kept searching for the other without knowing whom they would encounter in the end. Odysseus and Penelope have both changed in the long process of separate development. They have experienced things that the other cannot, and does not need to, know about. With all their good intentions, however, both Odysseus and Penelope have also made slight mistakes: sometimes knowingly, and sometimes in what looks like an unconscious conviction that the other had disappeared from their life for good. The sudden change in seemingly hopeless circumstances, the start of the *Odyssey*, forces Odysseus and Penelope to defend, as good as they can, what they did and did not do during the long years of separation. A creative – or should we say, deceitful – handling of the past may then be required. In what follows, I will prepare for the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope by starting from the first lines of the *Odyssey*, encountering the tale's characters in the order of appearance presented by the poet Homer, the primary narrator; I will show that, when Odysseus and Penelope finally come eye to eye, a possible cheat stands against an excusable mess-maker. And the narrator did little to prevent it.

In the 20th year . . .

At first sight, the *Odyssey* seems an attempt to wake a story that had gone to sleep a long time ago. What happened to Odysseus, the man who 'sacked Troy' according to the poem?

ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ
 πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν·
 πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,
 πολλὰ δ' ὃ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν,
 ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.
 ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὧς ἐτάρους ἐρρύσατο, ἰέμενός περ·
 αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρῃσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὄλοντο,
 νήπιοι, οἳ κατὰ βοῦς Ὑπερίονος Ἥελίοιο
 ἤσθιον: αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν ἀφείλετο νόστιμον ἦμαρ.
 τῶν ἀμόθεν γε, θεά, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπέ καὶ ἡμῖν.
Od. 1.1-10

*Tell me about the man of many ways, Muse, who wandered
 wide and far, after he sacked the holy citadel of Troy.
 Of many men he saw the dwellings and got to know their way of thinking.
 Many sorrows he suffered at sea in his heart,
 in an attempt to save his own life and the homecoming of his comrades.
 But he was not able to protect his friends this way despite his wishes:
 they perished because of their own, personal mistakes -fools!-,
 who ate the cattle of the Sun God, son of Hyperion.
 It was he who took from them the day of their safe return home.
 Start somewhere, anywhere from here, Goddess, daughter of Zeus, and
 inform us also.⁴*

The proem (*Od. 1.1-10*) shows that no one knows exactly at which point of the story we are: the poet requests the Muse to ‘start somewhere, anywhere’ (1.10), but provides no more but an elliptic summary of what has happened during the ten ‘overslept’ years. Contrary to the poet of the *Iliad*, who presents a short preview to the story he is about to begin,⁵ the proem of the *Odyssey* offers little more than a few

⁴ The Greek text is taken from the Oxford-edition by Allen-Monro (1920). All translations are the author’s.

⁵ The *Iliad*’s proem:

μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
 οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρὶ’ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε’ ἔθηκε,
 πολλὰς δ’ ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν

incoherent remarks on events that are already in the past when the epic starts: Troy has been destroyed and the man responsible has been wandering ever since. When these events resurface later in the narrative, it is not the poet who refers to them, but Odysseus himself who presents them as facts from his own past, in his explanation to the Phaeacians at a dinner party. In the lines immediately following the proem, the poet of the *Odyssey* alludes to what awaits Odysseus when he will reach Ithaca, especially in line 18,

ἐνθ' ἄλλοι μὲν πάντες, ὅσοι φύγον αἰπὸν ὄλεθρον,
οἴκοι ἔσαν, πόλεμόν τε πεφρευγότες ἠδὲ θάλασσαν:
τὸν δ' οἶον νόστου κεχρημένον ἠδὲ γυναικὸς
νύμφη πότνι' ἔρυκε Καλυψὼ δῖα θεάων
ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι, λιλαιομένη πόσιν εἶναι.
ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ ἔτος ἦλθε περιπλομένων ἐνιαυτῶν,
τῷ οἱ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ οἴκόνδε νέεσθαι
εἰς Ἰθάκην, οὐδ' ἐνθα πεφυγμένος ἦεν ἀέθλων
καὶ μετὰ οἴσι φίλοισι. θεοὶ δ' ἐλέαιρον ἅπαντες
νόσφι Ποσειδάωνος: ὁ δ' ἀσπερχὲς μενέαινε
ἀντιθέω Ὀδυσῆι πάρος ἦν γαῖαν ἰκέσθαι.

Od. 1.11-21

ἠρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τεύχε κύνεσσιν
οἴωνοῖσι τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή,
ἐξ οὗ δὴ τὰ πρῶτα διαστήτην ἐρίσαντε
Ἀτρεΐδης τε ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν καὶ δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.
τίς τ' ἄρ σφωε θεῶν ἔριδι ζυνέηκε μάχεσθαι;
Λητοῦς καὶ Διὸς υἱός
Il. 1.1-9a

*Sing, Goddess, the wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus:
so destructive, it brought countless pains for the Greeks.
Many outstanding souls of heroes it sent to Hades' house,
and turned their bodies into prey for all the dogs
and birds; the plan of Zeus came to fulfilment,
from the moment they first rose against each other in anger,
Atreus' son, the lord of men, and godlike Achilles.
Who of the gods brought them together in strife?
It was the son of Leto and Zeus.*

*At that time, all the other were at home, as far as they had escaped
gruesome death, saved from war and the sea.
Him alone, longing for his return home and for his wife,
a powerful nymph kept prisoner in her high caves, Calypso,
Zeus' equal among goddesses, wanting him to be her husband.
But when finally the year came in the revolving of the seasons,
when the gods had ordained for him to return home,
to Ithaca, not even there was he free from hardship,
not even among his own near and dear ones. All the gods took pity on him
except Poseidon: relentlessly, he kept fostering his anger
against godlike Odysseus until the latter reached his homeland.*

but he does not comment on the relation cause-consequence in his narration.⁶ This too is a remarkable difference when the proem of the *Odyssey* is compared to the start of the *Iliad*, where the poet chooses to begin his story with what he considers to be the cause of his central theme, the wrath of Achilles (see n. 5).

The gods, especially the muse (μοῦσα, *Od.* 1.1; θεά, θύγατερ Διός, 1.10), are the ones to wake both the story and the poet, but they need a wake-up call themselves: during the gods' gathering with which the first book opens, Athena mentions the issue 'Odysseus':

*ἀλλά μοι ἀμφ' Ὀδυσῆι δαΐφροني δαίεται ἦτορ,
δυσμόρω, ὃς δὴ δηθὰ φίλων ἄπο πήματα πάσχει
νήσω ἐν ἀμφιρύτη, ὅθι τ' ὀμφαλός ἐστι θαλάσσης.
Od. 1.48-50*

⁶ The first lines of the *Odyssey* do talk about the causes behind Odysseus' wanderings: the relentless anger of Poseidon. Poseidon's anger does not affect most of what will happen in the course of the *Odyssey* – the visit to the Phaeacians, the homecoming on Ithaca, Odysseus' stay in the palace disguised as a beggar, and his slaying of the suitors of his wife Penelope: it merely influences events until Odysseus has 'reached his homeland' (1.21). During his visit to the Netherworld, Odysseus learns from the seer Tiresias that he will have to appease Poseidon after returning to Ithaca, and after having killed his wife's suitors in his house (11.115-134a, see below). Nowhere, however, is a relation made explicit between Poseidon's anger and the difficulties to be overcome by Odysseus in his own house.

*But my heart is torn apart with concern for clever Odysseus,
victim of fate, who suffers trouble without end, far from his near and dear
ones, on an island surrounded by water, where the navel of the sea is.*

She is offered the opportunity to bring up Odysseus as her uncle Poseidon, a known adversary of Odysseus' homecoming, happens to be out for dinner with the Ethiopians, a mythical people dwelling in the south. Athena interrupts her father, who has just started a monologue on the misbehaviour of Aegisthus and his rightful punishment by the hands of Orestes,⁷ in order to point out to him and the other gods, that Odysseus' situation is hopeless: Odysseus is stuck on the isolated island of the nymph Calypso, and considers death as the only means to escape her enchantment. Surely Odysseus did not deserve such lack of interest from the gods ("τί νύ οἱ τόσον ὠδύσσαο, Ζεῦ;" - *Why have you treated him with such resentment, Zeus?*, 1.62b). Zeus agrees with his daughter and, as Poseidon is absent, the other gods may act as seems

⁷ For a moment, the listening audience will be under the impression that, instead of an *Odyssey*, an *Oresteia* is about to begin when they hear Zeus' introductory remarks at the assembly:

*ὦ πόποι, οἷον δὴ νῦ θεοὺς βροτοὶ αἰτιόωνται:
ἐξ ἡμέων γάρ φασι κάκ' ἔμμεναι, οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ
σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὑπὲρ μόρον ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν,
ὡς καὶ νῦν Αἴγισθος ὑπὲρ μόρον Ἀτρεΐδαο
γῆμ' ἄλοχον μνηστήν, τὸν δ' ἔκτανε νοστήσαντα,
εἰδὼς αἰπὸν ὄλεθρον, ἐπεὶ πρό οἱ εἶπομεν ἡμεῖς,
Ἑρμείαν πέμψαντες, εὐσκοπον ἀργεῖφόντην,
μῆτ' αὐτὸν κτείνειν μῆτε μνάσθαι ἄκοιτιν:
ἐκ γὰρ Ὀρέσταιο τίσις ἔσσεται Ἀτρεΐδαο,
ὀππότε ἂν ἠβήσῃ τε καὶ ἦς ἱμείρεται αἴης.
ὥς ἔφαθ' Ἑρμείας, ἀλλ' οὐ φρένας Αἰγίσθοιο
πεῖθ' ἀγαθὰ φρονέων: νῦν δ' ἀθρόα πάντ' ἀπέτισεν."*
Od. 1.32-43

*"Shame on them, now that mortals voice accusations against the gods!
They say that evil things originate from us, but they bring trouble
upon themselves as well, more than what was fated, through their own wrongdoings.
Take as an example Aegisthus who married the lawful wife of Atreus' son Agamemnon –
more than was fated for him! He killed Agamemnon upon his return home,
while knowing of his own subsequent gruesome death: for we told him in advance,
by sending Hermes, the sharp-sighted slayer of Argos,
not to kill him, and not to woo his spouse.
Revenge for all this would come from Agamemnon's son Orestes,
once he would have reached adulthood and long for his homeland.
That has been Hermes' message, but he did not persuade the mind of Aegisthus
despite these good intentions. Now Aegisthus has paid in full for his deeds."*

fit upon this situation. Athena is being facilitated by her father and the other Olympians to procure Odysseus' return. She already knows what to do:

*Ἑρμείαν μὲν ἔπειτα διάκτορον ἀργεῖφόντην
νῆσον ἐς Ὠγυγίην ὀτρύνομεν, ὄφρα τάχιστα
νύμφη εὐπλοκάμῳ εἴπη νημερτέα βουλήν,
νόστον Ὀδυσσεύος ταλασίφρονος, ὥς κε νέηται:
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν Ἰθάκηνδ' ἐσελεύσομαι, ὄφρα οἱ υἱὸν
μᾶλλον ἐποτρύνω καὶ οἱ μένος ἐν φρεσὶ θείῳ,
εἰς ἀγορὴν καλέσαντα κάρη κομόωντας Ἀχαιοὺς
πᾶσι μνηστήρεσσιν ἀπειπέμεν, οἳ τέ οἱ αἰεὶ
μῆλ' ἀδινὰ σφάζουσι καὶ εἰλίποδας ἔλικας βοῦς.
πέμψω δ' ἐς Σπάρτην τε καὶ ἐς Πύλον ἡμαθόεντα
νόστον πευσόμενον πατρὸς φίλου, ἣν που ἀκούσῃ,
ἣδ' ἵνα μιν κλέος ἐσθλὸν ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἔχησιν.*

Od. 1.84-95

*Let us send Hermes, the guide of souls and slayer of Argos,
to the island Ogygia, that he may deliver
our clear message to the fair nymph soonest:
the return home for much-challenged Odysseus, that he may finally come
back. I will go to Ithaca myself, to encourage his son
once more and to provide him with courage in his heart
to call the Greeks with long hair to the assembly
and to issue a warning for all the suiters, who are now constantly
butchering his fat sheep and his cows with curly horns and heavy hoof.
I will send him to Sparta and sandy Pylos
to gather information on his father's return, should he by chance hear
something, and to build a good name for himself under the people.*

She will send Hermes to Calypso to deliver the decision made in the gods' gathering. In order to prepare the ruler's return to his island, she goes to Ithaca herself. There she will focus on someone who has remained backstage for twenty years, Odysseus' son Telemachus. The audience knows practically nothing about the first twenty years of

his life, except that he has been raised without his father around. For a young adult in the world of Homer, where fathers initiate their sons in the various aspect of male life (compare the story of Odysseus' initiation during the boar hunt with his father and grandfather, cf. n. 8 below), the absence of a father turns out to be a serious threat to a boy's emotional development: Telemachus does not rule his father's household on Ithaca, but is merely tolerated by his mother's 108 suitors. Acknowledging this, Athena *ex improviso* decides to initiate all sorts of activities to compensate for the boy's 'overslept' years: under the pretext of the need to gather information concerning his father's return she sends him on a trip to Pylus and Sparta, knowing though that the twenty-year-old lad will not receive much useful information. By making the trip Telemachus will not bring about the return of his father: Athena will arrange for a meeting of the father and his son later on Ithaca (in book 16). The trip around the Peloponnese has another purpose: Telemachus will make up for some of the detriment caused by his inactivity over the past twenty years. He will activate the network of relations and friendships to which his father ought to have introduced him as a teenager (thus becoming a threat for the suitors),⁸ and he will, in the words of Athena, 'build a name for himself under the people', something he should, and could, have done much earlier, preferably under his father's guidance. In the twentieth year, Athena finds a young man without a cause whom she repeatedly has to encourage to take action. Telemachus tries to act as the 'lord of the household' as good as he can, when Athena/Mentes makes his way for him through the feasting and drinking suitors (1.113-124). At exactly that same time, Telemachus fantasizes about his father's return (*ὄσσόμενος πατέρ ἐσθλὸν ἐνὶ φρεσίν, εἴ ποθεν ἔλθὼν μνηστήρων τῶν μὲν σκέδασιν κατὰ δώματα θείη* - *having his father in mind, if he would come from somewhere and cause a scattering of the suitors in the palace*, 1.115-116).

The arrival of a friend presents Telemachus with an opportunity to ask questions about his father. Telemachus' words (*“ἀνέρος, οὗ δὴ που λεύκ' ὅστέα πύθεται ὄμβρω κείμεν' ἐπ' ἠπείρου, ἢ εἴν ἀλὶ κῶμα κυλίνδει”* – *“a man, whose white bones lying on a beach will be washed clean by heavy rain, or maybe the current of the sea takes them further”*, 1.161-162) make clear, though, that he considers his father dead. When Mentes assures him that Odysseus will return soon (*“οὗ τοι ἔτι δηρὸν γε φίλης ἀπὸ*

⁸ Cf. the story of the boar hunt in 19.392-466 where we learn how Odysseus received the wound on his heel that betrayed his identity to the old nurse Eurycleia. The reason for youthful Odysseus' presence at this event is reminiscent of the notion of 'introduction into a network of relations'.

πατρίδος αἴης ἔσσεται, οὐδ' εἴ πέρ τε σιδήρεα δέσματ' ἔχῃσιν: φράσσεται ὧς κε νέηται, ἐπεὶ πολυμήχανός ἐστιν” – “he will not stay away from his native country for much longer now, not even if iron chains would hold him: he will find a way to return, since he is a very resourceful man”, 1.203-205), Telemachus doubts the idea that Odysseus is his father at all. After all, it is only his mother, Penelope, who claims Odysseus to be Telemachus’ father (“μήτηρ μὲν τέ μέ φησι τοῦ ἔμμεναι, αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ γε οὐκ οἶδα” – “my mother claims that I am his, but to be honest, I don’t know”, 1.215-216a). Thus, Penelope enters the narrative: yet another character to whom no reference had been made so far, not by the poet nor by the gods.⁹ Concerning her situation in the past decade we learn that she has become the prize in the contest of suitors (“ἦδ' ὅσσοι κραναὴν Ἰθάκην κάτα κοιρανέουσιν, τόσσοι μητέρ' ἐμὴν μνῶνται, τρύχουσι δὲ οἶκον” – “and all who exercise power here over rough Ithaca, all wish to marry my mother, and they eat what is mine in the house”, 1.247-248). Now, in the twentieth year of Odysseus’ absence, Athena breathes new life into the lingering household that is Odysseus’ palace: not only does she send Telemachus on a trip to become a man (in order to ‘endure yet another year’ waiting for his father, or to allow for his mother to remarry if Odysseus is reported dead, and, in that case, to allow for her to pass the household to her son and his wife), but she also informs him of duties he could have considered earlier as ‘lord of the household’. In *Od.* 1.274-278, she orders the boy to send the suitors back to their homes, and Penelope to her father, so that the competition of the suitors may be resumed at the more appropriate location:

μνηστῆρας μὲν ἐπὶ σφέτερα σκίδνασθαι ἄνωχθι,
μητέρα δ', εἴ οἱ θυμὸς ἐφορμᾶται γαμέεσθαι,
ἂψ ἴτω ἐς μέγαρον πατρὸς μέγα δυναμένοιο:
οἱ δὲ γάμον τεύζουσι καὶ ἄρτυνέουσιν ἔεδνα
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα ἔοικε φίλης ἐπὶ παιδὸς ἔπεσθαι.
Od. 1.274-278

*Order the suitors to spread out and return to their own houses,
and tell your mother that, should her heart encourage her to remarry,
she should go to the palace of her mighty father immediately:*

⁹ Save for a reference to ‘wife’ (γυναικὸς) in 1.13.

they will organize the wedding contest there and present him with many wedding gifts, as many as is appropriate to be offered for his daughter.

From what follows it becomes clear that the suitors are not very likely to listen to the order to leave, nor will Penelope listen to her son. Were Telemachus to discover that his father is no longer alive, he might kill the unwilling suitors with his own hands – freed from the shadow of his father of whom he cannot yet be completely sure he’s no longer alive.¹⁰ If Odysseus is still alive, his physical presence on Ithaca is required to account for Telemachus’ position in his own house and on the island. If proper research establishes that Odysseus has passed away, Telemachus needs to fight for his position in the house, and, according to verses 1.384-404, even his seat in the island’s council. Ten years’ negligence by the gods (save for Poseidon who tries to stop Odysseus, and Athena who does not dare to interfere) and waiting by the human characters have resulted in damage that cannot be amended or done away with by one simple divine act of interference.

Meanwhile on Ogygia . . .

Speaking of waiting: when the *Odyssey* starts, Odysseus resides already for a long time on the island of Ogygia, without much hope for an opportunity to resume his journey back home to Ithaca. Now that the story and the characters have been woken, all concerned rid themselves of the indolence caused by the long waiting, to finally take initiative and take matters in their own hand. Just like Penelope and Telemachus, Odysseus has been waiting, hoping for things to miraculously take a turn for the better. Just like Penelope and Telemachus, he could have been more proactive sooner, taking the initiative. He could have done as ordered and expected by Calypso (‘who wanted him to become her husband’, *Od.* 1.15), exactly as Penelope could have remarried in accordance with Odysseus’ order as he left for Troy (‘If I do not return

¹⁰ Heitman (2005) 40.50-62 draws attention to the situation of an epic young man without his father. In Telemachus’ case, so he notices, the most important omission in his education has been the lack of someone able to teach him how to lie effectively.

by the time ...’),¹¹ thus leaving the palace and vacating the house for her son to take over his father’s inheritance. All of this could have become possible once she allowed her actions to be counted as the formal confirmation of Odysseus’ death: as long as Odysseus is not officially ‘declared dead’ by Penelope, the household on Ithaca can derail in a manner Odysseus could not have foreseen, regardless of the duration of his absence. Repeatedly, Penelope refers to her son’s attitude as her reason not to remarry yet: she might have assented to a new marriage the moment Telemachus was physically mature. Speaking to her husband disguised as a beggar (books 18-20), Penelope links the need to remarry to her son’s mature behaviour – there is no more use for tricks like the shroud for Laertes (19.137-140) to further postpone what seems inevitable:

*νῦν δ' οὐτ' ἐκφυγέειν δύναμαι γάμον οὔτε τιν' ἄλλην
μῆτιν ἔθ' εὐρίσκω: μάλα δ' ὀτρύνουσι τοκῆες
γῆμασθ', ἀσχαλάα δὲ πάϊς βίοντον κατεδόντων,
γγνώσκων: ἤδη γὰρ ἀνὴρ οἴός τε μάλιστα
οἴκου κήδεσθαι, τῶ τε Ζεὺς κῦδος ὀπάξει.
Od. 19.157-161*

*Now I can no longer run away from marriage nor can I think of another
trick; my parents encourage me to remarry,
and my son has a hard time watching them consuming his inheritance.*

¹¹ Heitman (2005) 48-49 describes Odysseus’ orders (18.266b-270) for his wife as ‘common sense’. Penelope quotes her husband’s orders as follows:

*“σοὶ δ' ἐνθάδε πάντα μελόντων.
μεμνησθαι πατρὸς καὶ μητέρος ἐν μεγάροισιν
ὡς νῦν, ἢ ἔτι μᾶλλον ἐμεῦ ἀπονόσφιν ἐόντος:
αὐτὰρ ἐπὶν δὴ παῖδα γενειήσαντα ἴδῃαι,
γῆμασθ' ᾧ κ' ἐθέλησθα, τεὸν κατὰ δῶμα λιποῦσα”*

*“All things inside must be your concern,
to look after my father and my mother in the house,
as you do now, or even more when I will be far away from here.
But as soon as you will notice that our son starts growing a beard,
you must marry whomever you will have chosen, and leave this home of yours behind.*

De Jong (2007) 23-24 assumes that Penelope’s plan to remarry in this passage is sincere, but considers the details of the ‘order’ as an invention of her own.

*He has finally become a man, and he is able
to take care of the household, and Zeus grants him wealth.*

It appears that what kept her from obeying Odysseus' orders, has been the fact that Telemachus has kept a boyish ignorance for a long time. Only very recently he appears to confront his mother in a more assertive and grown-up way (*ὡς ἄρ' ἐφώνησεν, τῇ δ' ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος* - *thus he [Telemachus] spoke, and for her the reply remained unspoken*, 17.57 / *ἡ μὲν θαμβήσασα πάλιν οἴκόνδε βεβήκει: παιδὸς γὰρ μῦθον πεπνυμένον ἔνθετο θυμῷ* - *she was impressed [by Telemachus' words], and returned to her quarters; she took the wise words of her son to heart*, 21.353-354). Finally, Penelope can envisage her son as 'lord of the house':

*παῖς δ' ἐμὸς ἦος ἔην ἔτι νήπιος ἠδὲ χαλίφρων,
γῆμασθ' οὐ μ' εἶα πόσιος κατὰ δῶμα λιποῦσαν:
νῦν δ' ὅτε δὴ μέγας ἐστὶ καὶ ἤβης μέτρον ἰκάνει,
καὶ δὴ μ' ἄρᾶται πάλιν ἐλθέμεν ἐκ μεγάροιο,
κτήσιος ἀσχαλόων, τὴν οἱ κατέδουσιν Ἀχαιοί.
Od. 19.530-534*

*As long as my son acted like a child without taking responsibility,
he left me no room to remarry and leave my husband's house behind.
But now that he has grown into a man and reached adulthood,
now he urges me to return home and remove myself from the palace,
as he worries about his inheritance that the Greeks keep consuming.*

Apparently, her tricks to delay the new marriage (like the shroud for her father-in-law Laertes, *Od.* 19.141-145) were not only signs of her loyalty to Odysseus, but also of her concern for the lack of responsibility and maturity shown by their son. There is some fault with Telemachus here: he could have explored, as a teenager, the network of his father's relations and friendships, as Orestes, Agamemnon's son, had done (*“τῷ δέ οἱ ὀγδοάτῳ κακὸν ἦλυθε δῖος Ὀρέστης ἄψ ἀπ' Ἀθηνάων, κατὰ δ' ἔκτανε πατροφονῆα, Αἰγίσθον δολόμητιν, ὃ οἱ πατέρα κλυτὸν ἔκτα. ἦ τοι ὁ τὸν κτείνας δαίνυ τάφον Ἀργείοισιν μητρός τε στυγερῆς καὶ ἀνάγκιδος Αἰγίσθοιο”* - *but in the eighth year godlike Orestes came straight from Athens to his (Aegisthus) doom, and killed the*

murderer of his father, cunning Aegisthus, who killed his famous father. Having killed him he organized a funeral banquet for the people of Argos in honor of his hated mother and the coward Aegisthus, Od. 3.306-307); in that case, provided he had received confirmation of his father's death, he could have had his father's death officially recorded, and subsequently acted more firmly in dealing with his mother and her suitors:

*εἰ μὲν κεν πατρὸς βίοντα καὶ νόστον ἀκούσης,
ἢ τ' ἂν τρυχόμενός περ ἔτι τλαιῆς ἐνιαυτόν:
εἰ δέ κε τεθνηῶτος ἀκούσης μηδ' ἔτ' ἐόντος,
νοστήσας δὴ ἔπειτα φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν
σῆμά τέ οἱ χεῖραι καὶ ἐπὶ κτέρεα κτερεῖζαι
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα ἔοικε, καὶ ἀνέρι μητέρα δοῦναι.
αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν δὴ ταῦτα τελευτήσῃς τε καὶ ἔρξης,
φράζεσθαι δὴ ἔπειτα κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμὸν
ὅπως κε μνηστῆρας ἐνὶ μεγάροισι τεοῖσι
κτείνῃς ἢ ἐ δόλω ἢ ἀμφοδόν: οὐδέ τί σε χρὴ
νηπιᾶς ὀχέειν, ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι τηλίκος ἐσσι.
ἢ οὐκ αἰεὶς οἶον κλέος ἔλλαβε δῖος Ὀρέστης
πάντας ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους, ἐπεὶ ἔκτανε πατροφονῆα,
Αἴγισθον δολόμητιν, ὃ οἱ πατέρα κλυτὸν ἔκτα;
καὶ σὺ, φίλος, μάλα γάρ σ' ὀρώω καλὸν τε μέγαν τε,
ἄλκιμος ἔσσο', ἵνα τίς σε καὶ ὀψιγόνων ἐδὲ εἴπῃ.
Od. 1.287-302*

(Mentes' advice to Telemachus:)

*If you receive news about your father's whereabouts or his return,
then you will be able to hold on for another year, tough as this may be for
you. If you hear that he has passed away and that he is no longer to be
found, then you must return to your homeland, and build him a tomb,
and bring many offerings to the soul of the deceased
as is appropriate; and you must also give your mother in marriage to a man.
Once you accomplished and finished all that,*

*you really need to consider in your mind and in your heart
how you may kill the suitors in your palace –
either using a trick or confronting them in the open. There is no need for you
to keep this boyish ignorance, since you are not that young anymore!
Have you not heard what reputation godlike Orestes gained for himself
among all men, by killing the murderer of his father,
cunning Aegisthus, who killed his famous father?
Dear boy, I see that you are both handsome and strong:
you too must be your own man, so that one of those who will live after us,
in the future, will speak highly of you.*

The *Odyssey* never fails to remind us that Orestes had already set a convincing example to follow for all these stages of personal development (Marks 2008). It need not surprise us that Telemachus is behind in his development and his mental progress when compared to other boys his age, but even without a father around a young man in his teens could well have taken on a more mature posture.

And what about Odysseus? As already mentioned, he could have answered the wishes of Calypso, marry her and become immortal (*ἐνδυκέως ἐφίλει τε καὶ ἔτρεφεν ἠδὲ ἔφρασκε θήσειν ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀγήραον ἤματα πάντα: ἀλλ' ἐμὸν οὐ ποτε θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ἔπειθεν* - *she [Calypso] loved me dearly and she nourished me [Odysseus], and she kept saying that she would turn me immortal and free from aging all my days. But never was she able to persuade my heart in my body, 7.256-258*). He had no reason whatsoever to hope for anything else though at that time. When he met the soul of Tiresias (*Od.* 11.90-149), the deceased seer told him that only when he managed to restrain himself and his men on the island of the cattle of the Sun god, could he still hope for his return home to Ithaca:

*νόστον δίζηαι μελιηδέα, φαίδιμ' Ὀδυσσεῦ:
τὸν δέ τοι ἀργαλέον θήσει θεός: οὐ γὰρ οἴω
λήσειν ἐννοσίγαιον, ὃ τοι κότον ἔνθετο θυμῷ
χωόμενος ὅτι οἱ υἷὸν φίλον ἐξάλαῶσας.
ἀλλ' ἔτι μὲν κε καὶ ὥς κακά περ πάσχοντες ἴκοισθε,
αἶ κ' ἐθέλης σὸν θυμὸν ἐρυκακέειν καὶ ἑταίρων,
ὁππότε κε πρῶτον πελάσῃς ἐνεργέα νῆα*

Θρινακίη νήσω, προφυγῶν ἰοειδέα πόντον,
βοσκομένας δ' εὔρητε βόας καὶ ἴφια μῆλα
Ἥελίου, ὃς πάντ' ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντ' ἐπακούει.
τὰς εἰ μὲν κ' ἀσινέας ἐάας νόστου τε μέδῃαι,
καὶ κεν ἔτ' εἰς Ἰθάκην κακὰ περ πάσχοντες ἴκοισθε·
εἰ δέ κε σίνῃαι, τότε τοι τεκμαίρομ' ὄλεθρον,
νηί τε καὶ ἐτάροις. αὐτὸς δ' εἴ πέρ κεν ἀλύξῃς,
ὄμῃε κακῶς νεῖαι, ὀλέσας ἄπο πάντας ἐταίρους,
νηὸς ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίης· δῆεις δ' ἐν πῆματα οἴκῳ,
ἄνδρας ὑπερφιάλους, οἳ τοι βίοντον κατέδουσι
μνώμενοι ἀντιθέην ἄλοχον καὶ ἔδνα διδόντες.
ἀλλ' ἦ τοι κείνων γε βίας ἀποτίσσαι ἐλθῶν·
αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν μνηστῆρας ἐνὶ μεγάροισι τεοῖσι
κτείνῃς ἢ ἐ δόλω ἢ ἀμφοδὸν ὄξει χαλκῶ,
ἔρχεσθαι δὴ ἔπειτα λαβῶν ἐνῆρες ἐρετμόν,
εἰς ὃ κε τοὺς ἀφίκηαι οἳ οὐκ ἴσασι θάλασσαν
ἄνδρες, οὐδέ θ' ἄλεσσι μεμιγμένον εἶδαρ ἔδουσιν·
οὐδ' ἄρα τοί γ' ἴσασι νέας φοινικοπαρήους
οὐδ' ἐνήρε' ἐρετμά, τὰ τε πτερὰ νηυσὶ πέλονται.
σῆμα δέ τοι ἐρέω μάλ' ἀριφραδές, οὐδέ σε λήσει·
ὀππότε κεν δὴ τοι συμβλήμενος ἄλλος ὀδίτης
φήῃ ἀθηρηλοιγὸν ἔχειν ἀνὰ φαιδίμῳ ὤμῳ,
καὶ τότε δὴ γαίῃ πῆξας ἐνῆρες ἐρετμόν,
ῥέξας ἱερὰ καλὰ Ποσειδάωνι ἄνακτι,
ἀρνεῖον ταῦρόν τε συῶν τ' ἐπιβήτορα κάπρον,
οἴκαδ' ἀποστείχειν ἔρδειν θ' ἱερᾶς ἑκατόμβας
ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὸν ἔχουσι,
πᾶσι μάλ' ἐξείης. θάνατος δέ τοι ἐξ ἄλδος αὐτῶ
ἀβληχρὸς μάλα τοῖος ἐλεύσεται, ὃς κέ σε πέφνη
γῆραι ὑπο λιπαρῶ ἀρημένον· ἀμφὶ δὲ λαοὶ
ὄλβιοι ἔσσονται. τὰ δέ τοι νημερτέα εἴρω.
Od. 11.100-137

*You seek sweet return, famous Odysseus?
A god will make this difficult! For I do not think
that Poseidon will forget, who fostered a grudge against you:
he is angry because you blinded his son.
But even like this you may all reach home despite horrible suffering,
if you are willing to control your own heart and that of your comrades,
from the moment you turn your well-built ship towards the island
Thrinacia, seeking refuge from the dark sea,
and you will encounter the grazing cows and fat sheep
of Helios, who sees everything and hears everything.
If you leave them untouched and only mind your journey home,
you may still reach Ithaca despite horrible suffering.
If you touch them, I predict the loss
of your ship and your comrades! Even if you manage to escape,
you will only return home after a long, long time, having lost all your
comrades, on the ship of someone else. In your house you will find an
embarrassing situation: arrogant men who consume your means of living,
woo your godlike wife, and present her with wedding gifts.
Upon your arrival, however, you will punish them for their misbehaviour.
But once you have killed the suitors in your palace
either by trick or in open battle with the brazen sword,
you must then leave again and take a well-made oar with you,
and keep travelling until you run into men
who have no knowledge of the sea
and eat their food without the addition of salt;
men who do not know about ships with dark-painted sides
nor well-made oars, that constitute the ship's wings.
I will provide you with a clue that cannot be misunderstood: make sure you
remember it! When you meet a fellow traveller along the way
who claims that you are carrying a winnowing-fan on your shiny shoulder,
then and there you must thrust the well-made oar in the ground
and perform appropriate offerings for lord Poseidon:
a ram, a bull, and a boar, ascender of sows.
Then you must return home and complete holy hecatombs*

*for the immortal gods who hold the broad sky,
all of them, in the correct order. Death will come out of the sea for you,
but very gently, and it will take your life
when you are well-arranged, in old age. The people around you
will then be prosperous. This is my unfailing prophesy for you.*

But Odysseus failed on Thrinacia and ended up on Ogygia, Calypso's island. Why would he succeed in managing that other thing, the return to Ithaca? Tiresias added to that: in the unlikely event of Odysseus reaching Ithaca all alone, without his comrades, he would find his household a mess. And even if he were to succeed in repairing this mess by himself, there remained the obligation to somehow appease Poseidon.

Odysseus longs for his home and for his wife (1.13), that is, the way he left both behind twenty years earlier. Does Odysseus, whom we find searching his mind on Ogygia's beach at the *Odyssey's* start, really long to travel on to the nearly impossible challenge and the hopeless situation Tiresias painted for him during his alleged visit to the Netherworld some seven years earlier?¹² To appeasement of Poseidon? To the 'death from the sea' that the long-deceased seer predicted him? How much longer must his captivity on Ogygia linger on before he accepts Calypso's offer of immortality (*Od.* 7.257)? At the start of the *Odyssey*, it looks like Calypso's wishes do not run counter to those of the other gods who, save for Athena, have forgotten about Odysseus, and left it to Calypso to do as she wants.

What was Odysseus' conviction during the long years on Ogygia? That he will return home one day? Tiresias' prediction already showed how unlikely a return to Ithaca is. More important than Tiresias' prediction (that is being repeated by Circe at

¹² In his reaction to the rather unexpected (and possibly dangerous) question by the Phaeacian queen Arete (*τίς τοι τάδε εἴματ' ἔδωκεν*; - *who has given you these cloths?*, *Od.* 7.238), Odysseus explains where he comes from, how he met Nausicaa, and why the girl is not to be blamed for her reticence about the encounter with a naked stranger (*ἦ δ' οὐ τι νοήματος ἤμβροτεν ἐσθλοῦ* - *she made excellent use of her noble intelligence*, *Od.* 7.292). In passing, he gives the Phaeacians, and the listening audience, an impression of the time spent on Ogygia: (*ἐνθα μὲν ἐπτάετες μένον ἔμπεδον, εἴματα δ' αἰεὶ δάκρυσι δεύεσκον, τά μοι ἄμβροτα δῶκε Καλυψώ: ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ ὀγδόατόν μοι ἐπιπλόμενον ἔτος ἦλθεν, καὶ τότε δὴ μ' ἐκέλευσεν ἐποτρύνουσα νέεσθαι Ζηνὸς ὑπ' ἀγγελίης, ἢ καὶ νόος ἐτρέπετ' αὐτῆς* - *there I remained for seven years, practically a prisoner, and all this time I wasted away in tears while Calypso gave me food like the gods eat. But when finally the eighth revolving year had come, at that moment she encouraged me and bade me to return home, either on Zeus' command, or her own thoughts had taken a turn*, *Od.* 7.259-263). His visit to the Netherworld must have taken place sometime before his arrival on Calypso's island.

the start of book twelve, 39-141, enlarged with practical information for the journey) is the information Odysseus allegedly received from the soul of his mother Anticleia. Her soul was the first to appear at the gate of the Netherworld, and it pains Odysseus greatly to have to give priority to the soul of the seer Teiresias, as Circe instructed him to do. Obviously, Odysseus is only little attentive to Tiresias' words; without asking further information concerning the vague allusions regarding the end of his life, Odysseus considers his conversation with the seer as ended as soon as the seer falls silent. He immediately focuses on the soul of his deceased mother. Answering his mother's question whether he has by now, in the period after her passing, returned to Ithaca and met his wife (*οὐδέ πω ἤλθες εἰς Ἰθάκην οὐδ' εἶδες ἐνὶ μεγάροισι γυναῖκα;* - *have you not been to Ithaca yet, and did you not meet with your wife in the palace?*, 11.161b-162), Odysseus replies with a question concerning the cause of his mother's death and the well-being of his father, his wife, and his son. Anticleia's answer deals with these four issues in reverse order, saving the first question for last. Penelope, she declares, is still in the house, mourning (*μένει τετλήοτι θυμῶ* - *she waits patiently*, 181), in other words: Penelope did not yet remarry. According to Anticleia, Odysseus' role as king of Ithaca had not been taken by someone else (*σὸν δ' οὐ πω τις ἔχει καλὸν γέρας* - *no one holds your privileged position yet*, 184a). He need not worry about the possessions and the position of his rightful heir: Telemachus has the position in society commensurate with his age and status (*ἔκμηλος Τηλέμαχος τεμένη νέμεται καὶ δαῖτας εἴσας δαίνονται ἅς ἐπέοικε δικάσπολον ἄνδρ' ἀλεγύνειν πάντες γὰρ καλέουσι* - *Telemachus has a firm hand on the royal estates, and he shares in the palace banquets, as appropriate to enjoy for a law-administering man. All invite him over for dinner*, 184b-187a). Odysseus' father Laertes withdrew to the countryside (*πατὴρ δὲ σὸς αὐτόθι μίμνει ἀγρῶ οὐδὲ πόλινδε κατέρχεται* - *your father stays there, in the countryside, and he does not come down to the city*, 187b-188a) and lingers away in grief. Like she did herself, Anticleia expects Laertes to die from longing for Odysseus (*ἔνθ' ὃ γε κεῖτ' ἀχέων μέγα δὲ φρεσὶ πένθος ἀέξει σὸν νόστον ποθέων χαλεπὸν δ' ἐπὶ γῆρας ἰκάνει. οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ἐγὼν ὀλόμην καὶ πότμον ἐπέσπον* - *There he lingers in sorrow. A great pain has broken his heart, as he longs for your homecoming. Old age has reached him as something difficult. In a similar way I too lingered away and met my end*, 195-196).

This confrontation with his deceased mother may be moving, but it provides Odysseus with information that should have left him relatively reassured. Possibly his

mother painted a picture that was more positive than the real situation at the time.¹³
According to Anticleia, Odysseus' absence did not yet result in a dysfunctional

¹³ Tiresias' words have provided Odysseus with a radically different picture: of a household where chaos and threats are imminent, possibly even now. In addition, it looks like Telemachus' position has been under pressure for quite some time on Ithaca; the suitors felt free to humiliate him (1.245-251; 2.85-88, 243-256; 16.121-127):

*ὄσσοι γὰρ νήσοισιν ἐπικρατέουσιν ἄριστοι,
Δουλιχίῳ τε Σάμῃ τε καὶ ὑλήεντι Ζακύνθῳ,
ἢ δ' ὄσσοι κραναὴν Ἰθάκην κάτα κοιρανέουσιν,
τόσσοι μητέρ' ἐμὴν μνῶνται, τρύχουσι δὲ οἶκον.
ἢ δ' οὐτ' ἀρνεῖται στυγερὸν γάμον οὔτε τελευτήν
ποιῆσαι δύναται: τοὶ δὲ φθινύθουσιν ἔδοντες
οἶκον ἐμόν: τάχα δὴ με διαρραΐσουσι καὶ αὐτόν.
Od. 1.243-251 = Od. 16.121-127*

(Telemachus complaining)

All who rule over the islands

*Doulichion, Same, and Zakynthos rich in wood, as noblemen,
and all who rule over steep Ithaca,*

woo my mother, and they devour the means of the household.

*She does not object to the unpleasant idea of remarrying, nor is she able
to punt an end to this situation. They will keep eating until they have depleted the means
of my household! Soon they will also do away with me.*

*Τηλέμαχ' ὑσαγόρη, μένος ἄσχετε, ποῖον εἶπετε
ἡμέας αἰσχύνων: ἐθέλοις δέ κε μῶμον ἀνάμναι.
σοὶ δ' οὐ τι μνηστῆρες Ἀχαιῶν αἴτιοί εἰσιν,
ἀλλὰ φίλη μήτηρ, ἣ τοι πέρι κέρδεα οἶδεν
Od. 2.85-88*

(Telemachus complained about the suitors' behaviour in the assembly. When nobody dears to speak or come to his aid, he throws down his sceptre in anger and frustration. The leader of the suitors, Antinous, replies:)

*Telemachus, you bigmouth with little self-restraint, what is this you were saying,
trying to insult us? It looks like you are asking for disgrace for yourself.*

The Greek suitors are not the ones responsible here,

but your own mother, who is better than anyone when it comes to clever tricks.

*Μέντορ ἀταρτηρέ, φρένας ἠλεέ, ποῖον εἶπετε
ἡμέας ὄτρυνων καταπαυέμεν. ἀργαλέον δὲ
ἀνδράσι καὶ πλεόνεσσι μαχήσασθαι περὶ δαιτί.
εἴ περ γάρ κ' Ὀδυσσεὺς Ἰθακήσιος αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν
δαινυμένους κατὰ δῶμα ἐὼν μνηστῆρας ἀγαυοὺς
ἐξέλάσαι μεγάροιο μενοιήσει' ἐνὶ θυμῷ,
οὐ κέν οἱ κεχάροιο γυνή, μάλα περ χατέουσα,
ἐλθόντ', ἀλλὰ κεν αὐτοῦ ἀεικέα πότμον ἐπίσποι,
εἰ πλεόνεσσι μάχοιτο: σὺ δ' οὐ κατὰ μοῖραν εἶπετε.
ἀλλ' ἄγε, λαοὶ μὲν σκίδνασθ' ἐπὶ ἔργα ἕκαστος,
τούτω δ' ὄτρυνέει Μέντωρ ὁδὸν ἢ δ' Ἀλιθέρης,
οἳ τέ οἱ ἐξ ἀρχῆς πατρώιοι εἰσιν ἐταῖροι.*

household on Ithaca. Telemachus, she claims, is safe in his position as ‘lord of the house’. Penelope did not yet remarry, but she still has time. Laertes lives a secluded yet impoverished life, but his claims to any authority in the palace are past and do not hinder his grandson in taking over the household. Odysseus’ kingship has not yet been taken by someone else. In case Odysseus’ return home is further delayed, there is no direct threat for his wife, his son, or his father. If we trust Odysseus’ own account in *Odyssey* books 9 to 12, it will take another seven years of wandering and captivity before he will finally set foot on Ithaca (7.259). Then he will find the situation as predicted by Tiresias – the description of Telemachus’ situation as it was painted by Anticleia will then turn out to have been too positive. Was Anticleia mistaken at the time? Has too much time elapsed between her passing and Odysseus’ visit to the Netherworld? Does Odysseus not remember his mother’s words precisely enough?

*ἀλλ' οἴω, καὶ δηθὰ καθήμενος ἀγγελιάων
πεύσεται εἰν Ἰθάκῃ, τελέει δ' ὄδον οὗ ποτε ταύτην.
Od. 2.243-256*

(Having tried to rally the participants in the assembly of Ithaca against Penelope’s suitors, in aid of her son, Mentor receives the following reply from Leocritus, one of the attending suitors:)

*Stubborn Mentor, you fool! What is this with you speaking
to encourage them to stop us? Even over a meal it would be difficult
to fight against men who outnumber you.
If Odysseus of Ithaca where to arrive himself
and pound in his mind on a way to disparage from his palace
the noble suitors who are now feasting in his house,
his wife may well be unhappy with his arrival, though she longs for it,
and he may die at the spot if he had to fight against many. You have not spoken in an
appropriate manner! But you, all others, disparage to your tasks, each of you!
Mentor and Halitherses encourage this boy to go on a trip,
as they are his father’s friends from old. I think that he will receive the news on Ithaca as
well, if he sits and waits long enough, but that he will never complete a trip like that
successfully!*

and the population of Ithaca readily leaves him to his own resources:

*νῦν δ' ἄλλω δήμῳ νεμεσίζομαι, οἷον ἅπαντες
ἦσθ' ἄνεω, ἀτὰρ οὗ τι καθαπτόμενοι ἐπέεσσι
παύρους μνηστῆρας καταπαύετε πολλοὶ ἔόντες.
Od. 2.239-241*

(Mentor reproaches the assembly of Ithaca:)
*Now I find fault with the rest of the population: look at how you all
sit here in silence! Not even with words do you challenge
these few suitors and stop them, though you are with many!*

Who benefits from this ‘too positive’ sketch? Whose interest does it serve? It is time to take a closer look at Odysseus’ first-person rendering of his wanderings.

The narrator and his reality

The *Odyssey*’s primary narrator, Homer, has a lot to explain now that his story has been woken. It is remarkable that he allows for other narrators, who do not necessarily fall in with his version, to contribute to the story. The position of Odysseus as (secondary) narrator calls for special attention. The tale of Odysseus’ wanderings (including the meeting with the souls of deceased) and his captivity on Ogygia in books 9 to 12 is Odysseus’ own account, an ‘autobiography of the past ten years’. In answer to the question of the Phaeacians concerning his identity, his origin, and why the song by the royal performer Demodocus about the sack of Troy moves him so deeply (8.550-586, esp. 577-578 spoken by the Phaeacian king Alcinous *εἶπε δ’ ὁ τι κλαίεις καὶ ὀδύρεαι ἔνδοθι θυμῷ Ἀργείων Δαναῶν ἰδὲ Ἰλίον οἴτον ἀκούων* - *Tell me why you weep and mourn in your heart when you listen to the death of the Greeks and the Trojans, and the destruction of Troy*), Odysseus narrates the past ten years of his autobiography up until and including his stay with Calypso. The complete episode of the autobiography (books 9-12) is sometimes called¹⁴ *Apologoi* ‘reasoning’. Odysseus ‘reasons’ on all sorts of things, but exactly what is it that he claims?¹⁵

Face to face with Alcinous and Arete, Scheria’s royal couple, Odysseus has more to explain than merely who he is and who his parents are. For Odysseus, the memory of Troy, woken by Demodocus and enjoyed as an artistic achievement – not as personal experience – by his audience, is more than coincidental praise for his own heroic deeds. First and foremost, it is a painful confrontation with the pace of time: it

¹⁴ For the first time in Plato *State* 10.614b2 and Aristotle’s *Poetica* 16.1455a2 and *Rhetorica* 16.1417a13.

¹⁵ Pucci (1998) states that there are two practical reasons behind Odysseus’ tale: 1) to provide the Phaeacians with an example, 2) to entertain and elicit gifts. Pucci points out that at times Odysseus seems to fail to understand his own actions: according to his own account, he fell asleep twice (Aeolus and the cattle of the Sun god) at crucial moments. In his own tale, the gods play a modest part. Odysseus, narrator 2, lives in a reality that differs from that of Homer, narrator 1. Ahl and Roisman (1996) argue that Odysseus’ tale is carefully tailored to the hearers and to the need of the situation, as are his lying tales on Ithaca. They maintain (p. 176) that ‘the manipulative power of language is, virtually, the central theme of the *Odyssey*’.

is by now ten years since a mortal man has heard anything, be it positive or negative, about Odysseus. As Menelaus' words to Telemachus in book 4 make clear, the last thing heard about Odysseus is that he, like the other Greek leaders, left Troy behind for Greece with his men, his fleet, and his possessions.¹⁶ For the Phaeacians the memory of Odysseus is no more than the echo of a story, a fairy tale from the realm of myth and legend: at this point, when he is about to start his autobiography at the Phaeacian court, Odysseus realizes that this may well be the case for others too. Any other audience may 'take pleasure in stories', as do the Phaeacians (*ἐπεὶ τέρποντ' ἐπέεσσιν* - *after they had enjoyed the tales*, 8.91b) without thinking more of it. The moment Odysseus reveals his identity to his hosts, for them it must have been as if a fairy-tale character all of sudden appeared in their own, real, world. The Phaeacians experience a turning point in a process similar to the process Odysseus himself goes through. Like them, he needs to leave the world of nymphs and beasts, the 'stuff for tales', behind, and reclaim his position in the real world, the world in which his family

¹⁶ In the story of his own difficult journey home, Menelaus describes to Telemachus how he had to fight and subdue the 'old man from the sea', Proteus, in Egypt, in order to receive the information necessary to return to Sparta. In *Od.* 4.550-560, after having heard about the murder of his brother Agamemnon by his wife, and the revenge by Orestes on his mother for his father's death, Menelaus claims that he has asked Proteus about Odysseus, and that he got an answer:

*“τούτους μὲν δὴ οἶδα: σὺ δὲ τρίτον ἄνδρ' ὀνόμαζε,
ὃς τις ἔτι ζωὸς κατερύκεται εὐρέι πόντῳ
ἢ ἔθάνων: ἐθέλω δὲ καὶ ἀχνύμενός περ ἀκοῦσαι.”
ὣς ἐφάμην, ὁ δὲ μ' αὐτίκ' ἀμειβόμενος προσέειπεν:
“νῖδός Λαέρτεω, Ἰθάκῃ ἐν οἰκίᾳ ναίων:
τὸν δ' ἴδον ἐν νήσῳ θαλερὸν κατὰ δάκρυ χέοντα,
νύμφης ἐν μεγάροισι Καλυψοῦς, ἣ μιν ἀνάγκη
ἴσχει: ὁ δ' οὐ δύναται ἦν πατρίδα γαῖαν ἰκέσθαι:
οὐ γάρ οἱ πάρα νῆες ἐπήρετμοι καὶ ἑταῖροι,
οἳ κέν μιν πέμποιεν ἐπ' εὐρέα νῶτα θαλάσσης.
Od. 4.550-560*

*“I know now about these two. There was a third man, you claimed,
who is still being held back alive somewhere in the broad sea,
or maybe he is dead already – give me his name! I want to hear it, even it pains me.”
So my words, and he replied to me instantly and said:
“Laertes' son, who has his palace on Ithaca!
I saw him on an island, shedding sweet tears,
in the palace of the nymph Calypso, who holds him prisoner.
He is not able to reach his native land:
there are no ships for him with proper oars, not are there friends
who may accompany him over the broad paths of the sea.”*

From the reactions to that part of the story, both by Menelaus and Telemachus, it does not become clear that they consider Proteus' information relevant or even interesting.

lives. All concerned find themselves suddenly confronted with serious questions. Where has Odysseus been all these years? What has distracted him for so long? Where are all his brothers in arms, his travel companions, his fellow islanders? The men who trusted him to lead them through war and sea? What gave him the idea to step back into the real world after ten years? Where and when did Odysseus leave the realm of fantasy behind? Or did he still not leave it behind?

If we follow Odysseus' own account of events, it is not so hard to point out where he entered that realm. After leaving Troy, so he tells the Phaeacians and us, Odysseus and his men have done what every expedition member does: robbing and pillaging they have followed the outline of the coast, expecting to reach their homeland this way (*Od.* 9.40-61). Unfortunately, their first plunder went wrong: Odysseus' selected victims, the Cicones, got assistance from their neighbours, and managed to drive the Greeks off their shores. Forced by the natural elements, the Greeks took shelter on a beach elsewhere for two full days (*Od.* 9.74-75). Then the ships from Ithaca are driven off course, and the sailors are at the mercy of the waves for nine days (*ἔνθεν δ' ἐννῆμαρ φερόμην ὀλοοῖς ἀνέμοισιν πόντον ἐπ' ἰχθυόεντα* - *from there I was swept over the sea full of fish by the horrible winds for nine days*, 9.82-83a). For sailors used to navigating by day within view of the coast and spending the night on the beach, nine days and nights at sea is no less than a nightmare. Any sailor in such circumstances would consider himself outside the known inhabited world. Until the present day, the location of this alternative world Odysseus finds himself in, remains a mystery. Despite the attempts to trace Odysseus' journey over the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean, it seems unlikely that we will find the footsteps of the wanderer on the beaches of North Africa, on the island of Sicily, or in the fjords of Norway. The topography of the Mediterranean was sufficiently known to the poet of the *Odyssey* and to his audience,¹⁷ and after the 'nine days at sea' Odysseus never refers to spots familiar to his audience, at sea or in the landscape.

¹⁷ West (2005) argues that Odysseus' wanderings are to be located in unknown territory, but that they are reminiscent of locations in, and around, the Black Sea. He links these to the story of the *Argonautica* in a version that predates our *Odyssey* (cf. 12.59-72, a reference to the 'Wandering Rocks' [Plangktai] that feature prominently in the *Argonautica*-story, but are literally 'mentioned in passing' in Odysseus' account), with adventures taking place in the 'mythical' Black Sea. When the poet of the *Odyssey* decided to copy these adventures for another hero while retaining the 'mythical' and the 'untraceable', (but realising that the Black Sea had gradually become well-known territory), he relocated the adventurous episodes 'further towards the supposed West', in areas that were still largely unknown at the time of the composition of the *Odyssey*.

Only within reach of Ithaca, are we able to find him on the map, and follow him in his final miles towards home. The realm of his wanderings, the untraceable trip from nymph to beast, is regularly labelled¹⁸ a ‘fairy tale world’, a world out of our reach, a world no poet expects us to find. I argue that there is sufficient reason to consider this world as existing only in Odysseus’ imagination.

So far, Odysseus has given his audience, then as well as now, the impression that he wants to erase his footsteps from the past ten years. The first stop in the realm of imagination is best suited to achieve this: the visit to the Lotophagoi, the ‘Lotos-eaters’ (9.82-104). Odysseus sends two comrades and a messenger to the Lotophagoi, but later he has to have them brought back to the ships by force; whoever tasted the lotos, will want to stay with the lethargic Lotophagoi, forgetting about the return home. As the tale progresses, we never hear of the miserable comrades who ate the lotos again. Apparently, the effect of the lethargy is temporary, and the three sailors will have gotten back to their senses. Had Odysseus wanted to give a short explanation for his long absence, a visit to the Lotophagoi, with a meal added, would have sufficed. Time would then have passed rather less ‘unnoticed’ than it has with Circe or Calypso. But as an explanation he did not consider it sufficient. Following the visit to the Lotophagoi, there is a confrontation with a Cyclops (9.166-542), the god of winds Aeolus (10.1-76), the cannibalistic Laestrygones (10.81-132), the nymph Circe (10.135-540), the souls of the deceased in the Netherworld (book 11), Sirens (12.153-200), Scylla and Charybdis (12.235-259, 431-446), the cattle of Helios (12.262-402), and Calypso. This series of miraculous confrontations does not only explain why, over the course of ten years, Odysseus transformed into a humble and patient character, compared to his behaviour and attitude in the *Iliad*; it also makes clear why there is not a single human witness to back up Odysseus’ account of events. There is not a single comrade left who has endured what Odysseus endured, no human being to fall in with his story, or to falsify it. Not even when the gods appear to Telemachus (1.133-224; 15.9-43) or send dreams to Penelope (4.795-839; 20.87-90;

¹⁸ Summary of arguments and counterarguments in Heubeck & Hoekstra (1989). De Jong (2012) 36-38 sees no reason to go along with the notion (from antiquity) that Odysseus’ wanderings cannot be traced. She follows Richardson (1996) who states that the poet nowhere suggests that Odysseus is lying; she also falls in with the observation that the primary narrator, ‘Homer’, is aware of several of Odysseus’ adventures (the Cyclops, the cattle of Helios, the nymph Calypso). She does not mention Richardson’s doubts concerning the origin of Odysseus’ information, especially the information he apparently received in the Netherworld.

mother and son will obviously have many questions to ask), do the divine messengers mention the many encounters that kept Odysseus away from home for so long.¹⁹ The gods do not support Odysseus in providing excuses opposite his loved ones.²⁰ That is something he can equally do himself. The stories he tells them, however, are not the same as the ones he told the Phaeacians.

Narrators and realities

It is noteworthy to assess the differences in knowledge between the different ‘narrators’ in the *Odyssey*.²¹ the ‘omniscient’ narrator Homer, narrator 1, is not as well informed as narrator 2, Odysseus; that is, not *until Odysseus shares his knowledge with the Phaeacians*, his audience. In this respect, the *Odyssey* deviates from the pattern that is more familiar from literature, the pattern in which the intentions of the primary narrator encompass, or, if he so chooses, annuls, those of his characters. The *Odyssey* does not work like that: the poet, the primary narrator Homer, seems to take (or be allowed?) his time to gradually digest what is reported by Odysseus to have happened in the past ten years. Until his arrival on Scheria, the island of the Phaeacians, Odysseus has kept all kinds of information secret from the omniscient Homer and his gods, provided of course that everything he tells the Phaeacians is true.²² The *Odyssey*’s proem evidences that Homer knows about the events on the island of the sun god.²³ He is also the narrator who introduces Calypso.

¹⁹ With the exception of Proteus mentioning Odysseus’ stay with Calypso, recounted by Menelaus to Telemachus in *Od.* 4.554-557, cf. n. 16 above.

²⁰ Addressing the other gods, Zeus does mention the blinding of the Cyclops Polyphemus as the reason for Poseidon’s anger (*ἀλλὰ Ποσειδάων γαιήοχος ἀσκελὲς αἰεὶ Κύκλωπος κεχόλωται, ὃν ὀφθαλμοῦ ἀλάωσεν, ἀντίθεον Πολύφημον* - *but Poseidon, who shakes earth, is always and relentlessly mad at him over the Cyclops, whom he robbed of an eye, godlike Polyphemus*, 1.68-70a).

²¹ De Jong (2001) identifies two narrators, Homer and Odysseus. The gods and the Muse are the equivalent of the poet of the *Odyssey*.

²² De Jong (2001) 221-222 (with references) sees no reason to assume that Odysseus’ tale is a lie. See n. 18 above.

²³ Although he provides another explanation for the death of Odysseus’ comrades. According to Homer, they die because of their own mistakes: for that reason, the sun god takes away their return to Ithaca (1.7-9). When Odysseus tells the story to the Phaeacians, he emphasises that the situation was hopeless (*μῆνα δὲ πάντ’ ἄλληκτος ἤη Νότος [...] ἔπειρε δὲ γαστέρα λιμός* - *for a whole month the wind blew without ceasing from the south [...] and hunger took its toll on the stomach*, 12.325, 332b), that his comrades had been reasonable (they agree to eat the provisions from the ship and leave the cattle untouched, and resort to catching birds and fish when provisions run out), and that his own falling

The gods enter the story when Odysseus has already been with Calypso for quite some time, but they know, like the poet Homer, about the blinding of the Cyclops and its consequences for Odysseus' return home. Circe is also known to the gods.²⁴ All other adventures, as Odysseus presents them in his account to the Phaeacians in books 9 to 12, are as new and unexpected for them²⁵ as they are for the audience: the Cicones, de Lotophagoi, Aeolus, the Laestrygones, the Netherworld, the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis overwhelm the Phaeacians as they do the audience, as a surprise. In his craftily built tale, Odysseus presents an account of his trip, minding a catalogue-resembling structure, the coherence between the episodes, and the elements that tie the different episodes together.²⁶ From one episode to the next, it becomes ever clearer that Odysseus, in his own account, is not only fighting natural elements, but also his comrades, and, ultimately, himself. Step by step he loses his status and his position, his possessions and his ships, his comrades, his dignity and his values. In the end, alone and bereft, he washes upon the shore of Calypso, and after that, still (or again) alone and bereft, of Scheria. There he finds an eager audience with the Phaeacians. It is never suggested in the *Odyssey* that Odysseus' tales are ordinary, nor that they are lies.²⁷ A narrator like Odysseus should of course be able to tell his tales in an attractive manner, and maybe exaggerate a little in the cultural exchange of tales and gifts, but the Phaeacians surely accept a lot from their guest, even if Odysseus' tales are his own inventions. Then again, why would they not? The Phaeacians enjoy the tales by their guest, whose real achievements (the Trojan horse, *Od.* 4.271-289; *Od.* 8.499-520) are as much part of the realm of stories for them as are all the other alleged encounters in the alternative world of nymphs and beasts. To the Phaeacians,

asleep goes without explanation (though Odysseus blames the gods: *οἱ δ' ἄρα μοι γλυκὴν ὕπνον ἐπὶ βλεφάροισιν ἔχευαν* - *they surely poured sweet sleep over my eyelids*, 12.338). He claims that it was not the sun god, but Zeus who killed the comrades (*Ζεὺς δ' ἄμυδις βρόντησε καὶ ἔμβαλε νηὶ κεραυνὸν* - *but Zeus thundered all around and struck the ship with lightning*, 12.415) – that is, so he understood from Calypso (*ταῦτα δ' ἐγὼν ἤκουσα Καλυψοῦς ἠκόμοιο* - *these things I understood from fair Calypso*, 12.389), breaking 'Jørgensen's Law' in 'stepping out of the limited perspective of the first-person experiential narrator' [Bakker 2013: 122]. Bakker (2013) 101-113 explains the death of the comrades as the result of their lack of restraint when confronted by the lure of meat, and the subsequent 'travesty of sacrifice' (p. 106). In his view, the death of the suitors (book 22) is a parallel for that of the comrades, as they equally consume meat 'as a systematic perversion of the heroic feats' (p. xii).

²⁴ Mention of the adventures by Homer or the gods 'authenticates' Odysseus' autobiography; De Jong (2001) 221.

²⁵ De Jong (2007) 28 leaves room for surprises from the primary narrator, for example, Odysseus' usage of his bow, the instrument for a competition, as murder weapon.

²⁶ De Jong (2001) 222-226.

²⁷ Cf. Richardson (1996).

Odysseus is ‘stuff for stories’, someone who entertains rather than distributes truths.²⁸
No one ever asked him to do so.

This observation sheds a special light on the account of his adventures. Homer, the primary narrator knows from the start of the *Odyssey* about the blinding of the Cyclops, the death of the comrades, the stay with Circe, and the long years on Calypso’s island. Narrator 1, in other words, is aware of the event that hindered Odysseus’ homecoming, the reason for his solitude, and the two *liaisons* that kept Odysseus away from home for a long time. At the end of the *Odyssey*, now that Odysseus has drawn up his own autobiography, and after telling several lying tales about his origin to Penelope and to others,²⁹ he presents his autobiography again, this time to Penelope,³⁰ after having been recognized by his wife and reunited with her. Once again narrator 1 emphasizes that this session, this retelling, takes a lot of time, but he does not allow narrator 2 to do his own story-telling. Narrator 1 summarises the events of the past ten years, smoothing over Odysseus’ *liaisons*: concerning Circe and Calypso, Homer only mentions the aspects that were harmful for Odysseus – Nausicaa is completely absent from the summary.³¹ At this point in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus himself, narrator 2, is not allowed to speak. We do not get to hear if he

²⁸ Hall (2008) 45.363-369.

²⁹ In *Od.* 13.256-286 Odysseus lies to the disguised goddess Athena about his origin from Crete and his abandonment on the shore of Ithaca by Phoenician sailors. Homer explicitly qualifies this tale as a lie in *Od.* 13.254; Athena enjoys the tale *because* it is a lie, *Od.* 13.291-295. In *Od.* 14.191-359 and *Od.* 14.462-506, Odysseus tells the shepherd Eumaius and other servants that he comes from Crete and that he has met Odysseus in person. The servants quickly understand the purpose of this tale and hand the disguised Odysseus a cloak. In *Od.* 17.419-444, Odysseus tells Antinous, the leader of the suitors, that he has reached Ithaca after an unsuccessful raid on Egypt and time spent as a prisoner on Cyprus. Face to face with his wife Penelope, Odysseus tells her a tale built from the stories he told others (Levaniouk 2011): that he comes from Crete, and that he met Odysseus there (*Od.* 19.165-202). Homer adds that this story mixes falsehoods with truth (*ἴσκει ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα* - *he was good at telling many lies that closely resembled what was real*, *Od.* 19.203). When Penelope wants to test the value of the story by asking her guest about details in Odysseus attire, Odysseus, still disguised as a beggar and unrecognizable for Penelope, provides her not only with many details (221-248) but also with a prediction concerning his own return (262-307): here he mixes stories told to others (about the Thesprotes, where he ‘heard rumours about Odysseus’) with elements from his own autobiography (the island of the Sun god and the Phaeacians, but no mention of Calypso!). He claims that he has been sent to announce Odysseus’ homecoming on Ithaca, but that Odysseus himself left for Dodona first, to consult the oracle on the best way to return home.

³⁰ Atwood (2005) is a good example of a reception of *Od.* 24.167-168 where the suitors in the Netherworld claim that their doom was prepared by Odysseus and Penelope *together*. In Atwood’s novel, Penelope constantly assumes that Odysseus is lying. True or not, Odysseus’ tales in the *Odyssey* consistently meet the gender-specific characteristics that Michin (2007) 245-281 lists for tales told by men: it was long ago, it was far away. the ‘I’ is in the centre of everything.

³¹ De Jong (2001) 563.

again makes use of the ‘reassuring words’ of his deceased mother – ‘everything is fine on Ithaca so far’ –, as mitigating circumstances for his long absence, the way he used those circumstances, haphazardly, with the Phaeacians.

An excusable reality

Against the intuitive inclination to fall in with the ‘truth within the tale’, the listening audience is confronted with several disquieting remarks in the *Odyssey*; disquieting, as they are unexpected, and overshadow the beautiful story about all-conquering love. For such is not the scheme of the *Odyssey*; there is no concept for a tale about spouses who see their lifelong efforts to reach the other rewarded. Rather it is a story whose sudden, unexpected start puts an abrupt end to a lingering and hopeless situation that has nearly robbed the main characters of the willpower and the hope to bring about some change for the better. Only one character has a clear vision on how to change the situation actively: Athena. Her actions shake the gods out of their lethargy, together with the poet and the Muse. As soon as all concerned are awake again, everyone tries to reorient. With the start of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, Penelope and Telemachus, out of their free will or forced to do so, take a stand against the developments that up until that moment (and to an extent *because* of their own actions) have lingered on without anyone able to bring about change. Suddenly, a story that had fallen asleep, has woken again, and the poet, the Muse, the gods, and all the characters seem to realise that time has spilled away.

At first possibly voluntarily, in due course forced to do so, Odysseus has wasted his time on nymphs. As a mortal, he is alone and at the mercy of immortals. During his visit to the Netherworld, so he tells the Phaeacians, he has been reassured that things on Ithaca were fine, with or without him there. Sent on his way home again by the immortals, he feels obliged to answer the implicit question why he is alone, why he has not brought a single companion to sheer his rich loot with. Once on Ithaca, he has to work hard to repair the damage in his household: his son is not the master of the house (let alone of the island), and his wife failed to remarry and leave the palace. Penelope is awake after Telemachus’ network-trip: her son’s manly behaviour comes as a surprise to her – up until now she considered him a boyish child. She is well aware that the situation with the suitors has become intolerable, even dangerous, for

her and her son. Dreams and confidential conversations with mysterious strangers do not change the fact that is awake now: her son has turned into a man, and she will choose and marry one of the suitors.³² Telemachus is woken by a god: he makes up for the education that he missed due to the absence of his father and the indecisiveness of his mother, and journeys to Pylus and Sparta. Upon his return home he makes his father's acquaintance, and together they take rigorous measures.

In the *Odyssey's* second half, no one slumbers, in the real or the alternative world. Everyone acts, decides, speaks, and conceals with his or her own clear purpose at mind; a purpose that only became clear and attainable through a wake-up call. The sudden need to react, the unexpected opportunity to realize original, almost forgotten plans, forces all concerned to re-evaluate the past ten years, and to adapt the evaluation somewhat to the reality of new opportunities and challenges. The same holds true for Odysseus' autobiography: enough reasons remain to not yet rule out the possibility that, apart from acting and decision-making, there is considerable cheating there as well.

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³² Penelope's decision in *Od.* 19, to finally remarry and to organize a bow contest in order to select her new husband, has regularly been considered to have come as a surprise to the audience. Attempts have been made to analyze this decision and the organization of the contest as reflecting Penelope's options and the leeway given to her to explore varying and possibly contradicting future courses of action, including those based on her conscious or unconscious recognition of her husband (Blankenburg 1995). Her remarks concerning Telemachus' former immaturity and her surprise about his rapid maturation due to his network-trip show, however, that her decision to remarry now is well-considered and in accordance with the instructions Odysseus gave her twenty years earlier.

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