

HOMERIC ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS the hero and king is portrayed in the Homeric epic as a type of what it means to be *polytropic*, the fifth word of the poem and a word which only occurs on one other occasion when Circe welcomes him to her isle at x,331.¹²⁴ It is not simply his character however, but also the medium of poetry and the narrative itself which is polytropic for there are four fundamental modes of the journey of Odysseus, courses which supply differing kinds of awareness and temporal dimension to his person; about these models varying periods of time are attached.

What follows is a brief complement to what we have examined in the complex narrative form and edifice as delivered to us by the poets who composed the Mahābhārata narrative from a larger and more comparative perspective.¹²⁵ This chapter develops the conceptual model which we lightly portrayed in Chapter Three.

In Epic Mahābhārata more than half of the poem is essentially set at Kurukṣetra, either as a place of battle or as a place of oration, the rest of the narrative concerns other locations. The Great Bhārata demonstrates a density and convolution of narrative form or mode just as throughout the Odysseus poem the common unities of time are not observed in any degree at all: what exists are narrative *structures* not sequences. This is what I would assert as being for mnemonic purposes, transitions which once assisted the poets in their work. Only during the four Kurukṣetra Books is there any iteration of days presented, eighteen of them, otherwise human time in the Sanskrit epic's narrative is not a significant element of the poem, it is a vague and insubstantial quality, that is all.

This supernumary chapter directs our attention to the extraordinary narrative

¹²⁴ I am extremely grateful to my friend and colleague Aldo Bottino who shared with me some of his close readings of the many competing narratives of heroic Odysseus. I am also deeply grateful to Gregory Nagy for his comments on this chapter.

¹²⁵ The poem, when not being given in open narrative form, is generally composed of duets between two speakers: Zeus and Athena, Hermes and Calypso, Odysseus and various interlocutors, for instance. Duet is the usual mode of direct poetic speech in the Odyssey.

complexity of the Homeric Odyssey and, unlike the Homeric Iliad, there is no simple narrative constitution which accounts for the hero during an integral series of days.¹²⁶ The intricacy with which the plot is organised is akin to the vast canvas which the Great Bhārata presents, in terms of how the plot moves and the enormous amount of story which is attached to it. Let us now examine the narrative order of this Homeric poem as a counter-illustration which can fruitfully mirror the multifarious movements of the Great Bhārata. For us as modern close readers such compound narration offers a specific communication in which narrative form itself becomes ultimately metaphorical.

The cosmic economy of the Homeric epic is fundamentally composed of three systems: putative human volition, rituals of blood sacrifice, and of divine action and direction.¹²⁷ This is how the mortal and supernal worlds function together and there is a constant circulation between these registers wherein prophecy sometimes mediates and connects the hierarchies.¹²⁸ This economy obversely entails a sometimes *lack* of right human

¹²⁶ Time in the poem can be roughly calibrated as: Scrolls i-iv, six days; v-xii, twenty-eight days, within which ix-xii make up an interior nine years, seven of which are with Calypso; xiii-xxiv, six days, and within that there is xxiii,310-343, representing nine years. These periods of course are not in any timely succession, one does not follow another; rather, they are dimensions of temporal perspective. The overall master narrative thus occupies about forty days, which is akin to the over-arching master narrative of Homeric Iliad.

¹²⁷ Apollo has a favourable relation with Odysseus; it is the festival of Apollo when the archery contest is held in Scroll xxi and, in Scroll I of the Homeric Iliad Odysseus sponsors a formal sacrifice towards Apollo. He also says that he had once visited Delos (vi,162). Odysseus conducts several other rituals as at ix,231, and at ix,532 Odysseus sacrifices to Zeus and there is also an altar dedicated to Zeus in his palace on Ithaca. At i,60-2 Athena reminds Zeus about how frequently Odysseus used to perform rites for him whilst at Troy. In Scroll Eleven, Odysseus sacrifices to Hades and Persephone and later, he is instructed to sacrifice to Poseidon when his life approaches closure. In Scroll Two there is actually an annual sacrifice to Poseidon which is being sponsored by Nestor in which both Telemachus and Athena participate; in classical times this calendrical event occurred during the midwinter months, for which, see Parke, 1977.

¹²⁸ Prophecy connects differing moments in the narrative movement but in an irrational or atemporal fashion. One can see this in the Great Bhārata with the words of Vyāsa or of Nārada and such verbal proceedings or occasions supply internal strength to a complex narrative reticulation. Prophecy in the Homeric Odyssey happens when Zeus predicts the events in the narrative of Odysseus at v,29; this passage replicates the dialogue of Athena and Zeus in Scroll One, it is recursive. Zeus at i,35 tells of how, in a message, he had predicted the deaths of Aegisthus and Agamemnon. The Cyclops at ix,512 mentions a prophecy whereby Odysseus would arrive and cause his blindness and at x,331 there is a prophecy about Odysseus landing on the isle of Circe; similarly, the Sirens know that it is Odysseus who approaches their isle in Scroll Twelve. Theoclymenus prophesies the vengeful return of Odysseus at xvii,155 and such forecasts connect the narrative with an outer frame of imperative, one which is often even apart even from the principle and driving speech acts of Zeus. Concerning the bird auguries which Helen and then Theoclymenus interpret, it is as if the natural world is actually reflecting a reverse impulse from what will become the future narrative (xiv,172 and xv,531).

volition and a lack of right sacrifice, both of which play into this universal system but with negative import.

The four fundamental narratives depicting Odysseus which illustrate this situation are: the overall and master narrative of the poem itself in twenty-four scrolls; then, there is the present narrative of Scrolls Five to Eight which describes the hero alone and without crew who moves across the sea assisted by the mentoring deity Athena. Beyond this movement there is the past micronarrative performed by Odysseus himself which occurs in Scrolls Nine to Twelve: here Odysseus is in the company of his crews and is without guidance from Athena. Lastly, in Scroll xxiii, from line 310 onwards, there is a brief summary portrayal, spoken by the hero to his wife as they lie abed before sleep, in which he tells retrospectively of the complete journey, from Troy towards the island of Ithaca.

There are also many small internal instants of textual counterpoint, as when Telemachus—having travelled from Ithaca—meets Helen in Scroll iv, whilst Odysseus is at that moment arriving on the island having previously left Helen at Troy. Also, Ithaca is said to be an isle unfit for horses, unlike Troy, which is famed for its equines and equestrians. When Odysseus enters his own domain he is dressed as a beggar, just as when he entered the city of Troy he wore the impoverished and distressed clothing of a mendicant (iv,244-251). Likewise the Phaeacians live in a purely timeless world that is akin to the land of the Cyclops, and in fact, both peoples once lived together (vi,4-9 and vii,207). Finally, just before the king and his wife retire to bed for the first time in nineteen years the simile that the poets utilise is one where Penelope is a vessel being driven by stormy Poseidon and Odysseus is the land upon which the surviving mariners find life: which is a nice reversal of all previous imagery concerning Odysseus (xxiii,233-240). Such are just a few brief instants of inherent counterpoint in the poem, and in a like fashion of narrative symmetry Odysseus' time on Ithaca occupies the second half or hemisphere of the work. These kinds or instances of duality are what I would aver as being mnemonic devices in the art of the poets, small systems which facilitate the performance of the work or how the poem *came to mind* during presentation.

The basic terrestrial diagram of the poem would be: Troy > Isle of Cyclops > Calypso > Phaeacia > Ithaca, with Calypso in the central and focal position and the other four

situations diametrically grouped. These are the places which—apart from what the audience hear during Scrolls Nine to Twelve—occupy the master narrative and which are indicated by Zeus and Athena at the outset of the work. The ruling family of Phaeacia is—like the Cyclops—descended from Poseidon and, when Odysseus arrives and departs from Ogygia, the isle of Calypso, he is shipwrecked on both occasions thus stylistically emphasising this modelling of Cyclops > Calypso > Phaeacia.

Also, in the discourse of Zeus and Athena these five locations are the only ones to be mentioned as being places on the journey of the hero and king. This is the core narrative of the poem but it is one whose description is dispersed throughout the epic so that the plot is not overtly expressed but discreet within the story, just as a human skeleton is hidden by tissue and flesh.

For instance, Calypso is mentioned thirty-four times during the course of the Odyssey and it is as if she is the critical and original source for the travels of Odysseus; her island is the *omphalós*, the ‘navel’ of the poem (i,50).¹²⁹ In the same way, Vyāsa too, in that he originates with a speech act the hypothetical source of the Great Bhārata at the snake sacrifice of *rāja* Janamejaya at Takṣaśilā, is in an identical focal or pivotal position. Both Vyāsa’s proto-poem performed at that initial rite and Calypso’s isle not only mark the original point of departure for the respective works but both are actual figures in the corresponding poems which the poets repeatedly mention as if landmarks or mnemonic beacons. Neither poem actually commences with these original moments or places of the narrative sequence however, for they paradoxically occur only after the launch of the work.

I would argue that such elaborate and heterogeneous poetic formation is not simply a means of communicating a structured body of information but is also a medium of *aide-mémoire*—one that is structural rather than simply temporal—by which the poets were able to work with a prodigious mass of traditional poetry during a preliterate and premonetary period. Having these narrative *periods* to work with allowed the poets to bring involution to their art; this is not the case with the Heracles poem, the Argonautica,

¹²⁹ In the Hesiodic Theogony, 1011-1015, it is said that both Circe and Calypso bore sons to Odysseus. Odysseus is here unlike other mortals who come into tactile or sexual contact with divinities, for usually this presages death for the human. Likewise, this hero is unlike all other mortals as he is one to visit and return from Hades, alive and reminiscent.

nor the Rāmāyaṇa, all of which follow a single temporal series of events.

Let us now recount the distinct fashioning of Odyssean narrative and observe how this kind of plot and story reflect upon the narrative patterns of the cognate Great Bhārata; that is, what can the former can tell us about the latter?

As with the commencement of the Mahābhārata there is a voice other than the narrator which precedes the opening of the literal poem; here, in the Greek epic the poet addresses the Muse, requesting that she tell of the *versatile* hero. He cues her by mentioning the island of Thrinacia and immediately at line eleven the Muse commences the song by responding to the prompt and by beginning her narration with the statement that Odysseus was on the isle of Calypso: for it was after Thrinacia that Odysseus lost his final crew and then washed up sole upon the shore of Calypso's terrain. This is situated somewhere between Scylla and Charybdis and the isle of the Sirens. She also says that it was the anger of Poseidon that delayed the hero's *nostos* or 'return'. This is how the Muse commences her work, mentioning two principle *motifs* that recur throughout the telling of the Odyssey: Calypso and Poseidon.

There are seven narrative *periods* during the narration of Odysseus in the poem, each of which offers a different dimension or perspective of the hero's travelling, a journey that is not so much geographical but *conscient* or conceptual; that is, one which concerns the movement of his consciousness and how it is that the *nóos* or 'mentality' of Odysseus becomes integrated into that of a psychically coherent individual. In that sense the narrative is a metaphor of all that goes to constitute and compose human awareness, implying that consciousness is formulated of diverse narrative events which become cognitively united. As with the travails of Heracles or the voyage of Jason and his Argonaut crew, the twelve stations on the way are not so much geographical as mental and emotional and in the case of Odysseus, these stages are nearly always meditated by women, by speech that is feminine.¹³⁰

There is no simple temporal sequence between these periodic aspects of the narrative and sometimes the movement of the poem moves forward whilst at other times it is analeptic or in *flash-back* form. Narrative structure is here what I would assert as being

¹³⁰ For Heracles, see Diodorus of Sicily IV,11,3 – IV,26,4. For the Argonautica, see Apollodorus.

employed by the poets as a system of mental stimuli rather than as a temporal narration that is ideally serial, for not only is there a steady disjunction of time but the perspective of these separate narrations is also taken from different angles and persons. Only at the end, when Odysseus sums up all his travels for his wife as they lie together in bed having just made love, is there any comprehensive and integrated serial transition to be found, and then, much is omitted from the telling in terms of its causality. For at that point king Odysseus is in complete command of his life's agency and its effects, a coherence that only becomes available at the resolution of the overall cycle. Having become master of his own narrative he can now ignore events which impinged upon his journey with such terrific necessity; now he pretends that they never occurred and that only Odysseus is and was both complete director and master narrator. His audience, Penelope, is of course, unconditionally attuned to her poet.

The initial period of narration occurs during the opening four scrolls of the poem which render many varying and cursory accounts given of Odysseus and his time at Troy. The deity Athena is the first to name Odysseus, she being then in colloquy with Zeus who owns the first voice in the poem; they are discussing the situation of the hero (i,48). Athena proposes that Hermes be sent to command Calypso to direct Odysseus homewards and Athena informs Zeus that she will oversee Telemachus' journey towards the Pylos of old Nestor; this is tacitly affirmed by Zeus and so, the initial speech act of these deities establishes the plot of the master narrative: that Odysseus should depart from Ogygia and return towards Ithaca (i,82, and referred to by Poseidon at xiii,131-133).¹³¹

It is at the point when Athena appears on Ithaca, that natural time or mortal time, which is just one component of narrative time, commences at i,113. She identifies herself as Mentis and tells of her friendship with Odysseus in words that are 'untrue' and

¹³¹ The poem opens and closes with an exchange being made between Zeus and Athena and similarly in the Homeric Iliad the poem begins and concludes with a verbal exchange between Zeus and Thetis. Both of these exchanges, in the Homeric Iliad and Odyssey, establish the basis of the plot; in the former this is categorised as the 'will of Zeus', what is in effect the 'anger' of Achilles translated *via* a speech act by the deity into what amounts to the overall narrative (I,528). In the latter it is the speech acts of Athena and Zeus which launch the plot. Let us recall that the patriline of Odysseus' family descends from Arkeisios who in turn is descended from Zeus (xiv,182).

fabricated: this is how the poem commences, *via* the medium of fiction or fallacy. Then she begins to advise and direct young Telemachus in the process of his Telemachy, and in the guise of Mentor she reappears on the evening of the second day and again specifically directs him (ii,270-295).¹³²

At this point many succinct mentions of Odysseus are given by Telemachus, Athena, Phemios, Penelope, Aegyptios, Halitherses, Eurymachos, Mentor, Leiocritos, Eurycleia, Nestor, Menelaos, Helen, and by Proteus, and tell of the *kléos* of the warrior and thus the audience hear of that earlier and martial time of his life. This is the first dimension of Odysseus' narrative, where his heroic past is described for its 'fame' through *hearsay* and retrospection.

The second transition or narrative period occurs when Odysseus actually makes his entry into the poem at the outset of Scroll Five, where he first appears sitting on the shore and is weeping in remembrance of Penelope; this takes place on Ogygia, the isle of Calypso and marks a second order of narration. At this point the poets are making a reversal in time, for earthly or poetic time—the temporal period of the master narrative—has returned to that point in Scroll One where Zeus was about to commission Hermes to visit Calypso. The five days contained in the first four scrolls are thus apparently cancelled or inverted as the poem begins anew, although Athena does say that Telemachus was then present at Sparta. There is an indistinct blurring of two narrative sequences here perhaps because worldly and diurnal time is unlike heavenly and immortal time and it is irrational to attempt to correlate precisely the two kinds of chronology.

Odysseus has been on this island for seven years and he is seen alone and without his men and is in the same immediate time as the audience: this is neither past nor future. Only in Scroll Nine does the audience begin to hear—from the retrospective words and narration of Odysseus himself—about how the hero fared when he was formerly accompanied by his initial twelve crews and vessels.

Scroll Five commences with a second dialogue between Zeus and Athena in which

¹³² She also directs him at i,420-424 and ii,14-28, and at ii,382-387 she actually impersonates Telemachus and recruits men for his voyage towards mainland Peloponissos. In Scroll Fifteen she again appears to the young prince, this time in his dream, and tells him to depart from Sparta and also to beware of the suitors who are waiting to kill him.

Zeus describes how Odysseus will return towards his isle, so establishing the narrative of the next eight scrolls with his speech act (v,28-42).¹³³ Zeus also tells of how Athena had been planning for the warrior to return to his island kingdom and to take his revenge (v,23-24). Odysseus—the hero now appearing as a technician—constructs his own craft from island timber using an axe, an adze, and an auger.¹³⁴ His voyage towards Phaeacia continues for seventeen days until he is wrecked by a wave sent by Poseidon and then he languishes in the water; a sea nymph, Ino, offers him succour and Athena redirects the winds and drives him towards his next destination (v,382).

Athena once more participates in the narrative as a character—disguised as always—and directs the young princess Nausikaa towards where Odysseus has landed. Athena immediately reappears in another semblance and this time actually instructs the hero himself, telling him how to find the palace of Alcinous (vii,27); there he must supplicate queen Arete who is descended from Poseidon (vii,56). At last in the presence of king Alcinous, Odysseus narrates how he had arrived on the isle of Calypso and later departed thence until vexed by Poseidon’s bad weather he was soon to arrive on Phaeacia. Narrative time is thus moving forwards and backwards, depending on whose voice is delivering the poetry.

That is, in his speech to queen Arete, to whom he is a suppliant, Odysseus relates his voyage from the moment he became sole, when Zeus struck down his final ship; the first word of this micronarrative is ‘Ogygia’. He then tells of his time with Calypso and how it was that he arrived on Phaeacia and thus rehearses what the audience had essentially just heard in the previous two scrolls (vii,245-297).

In this second period we again observe Zeus initially impelling the narrative with his speech act and then Athena actually participating in the narrative, either supernaturally or in mortal disguise, and conducting to its onward motion. Let us repeat, from an audience

¹³³ The force of Zeus’ projection of the Odyssean narrative is later witnessed—in terms of augury—by Helen and Menelaos in Scroll iv and by the *mantis* Theoclymenus at xv,172, xv,531, and xx,351. The narrative thus possesses a certain external or cosmic drive, something auxiliary to what is simply occurring *within* the plot. This narrative connection between Zeus and Odysseus is affirmed by the latter’s invocation at xx,98.

¹³⁴ Trees are an important signifier in the poem and a great variety of them are specifically mentioned: they are always *indicators*.

point of view, that is, in the outer frame of the plot, Odysseus is described in the narration as only being on Ogygia, on Phaeacia, and soon, on Ithaca: that is all the audience perceives in the holding narrative. All the other places of his journey are given *via* internal narration by Odysseus himself in Scrolls Nine to Twelve and in his summary in Scroll Twenty-Three.¹³⁵

There is a transitory third period of narration in Scroll Eight when the ancient poet Demodocus performs two songs which tell of Odysseus: recounting an event which happened before the fighting at Troy and then speaking of events during the sack of Troy itself.¹³⁶ The first song speaks of a quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles (viii,75), then later in the day Odysseus himself commissions the poet to sing of the destruction of Troy (viii,492).

These two songs although they are essentially *story* or further ‘hearsay’ about the hero do cause Odysseus to experience extreme grief and hence he atones for some of the dreadful violence which he had perpetrated, experienced, and endured; and in this sense the songs—being efficacious in that his trauma is assuaged—can be said to constitute an oblique aspect of the plot concerning how the consciousness of Odysseus advances and develops during the course of the poem. Between the events of these two songs there is an occasion for athletic endeavour during which the prowess of Odysseus is mildly insulted and tested. He responds in a greatly *braggadocio* fashion, boasting about his excellence and how no one at Troy exceeded him in weaponry, except for Philoctetes in archery. He tells the Phaeacians how he was ‘the best’ of all men at that time (viii,223). This is a rare instance in the poem where Odysseus proclaims and vaunts his superlative nature and he does so again at ix,20; it is similar in manner to how he says that he spoke with the Cyclops (ix,502). Again, there is this symmetry between Phaeacia and the isle of the Cyclops. Usually the hero is never explicitly open and direct about himself but always

¹³⁵ That is, with the exception of the cursory mention of the destruction and consumption of the cattle of the Helios by the poet who is addressing the Muse at the outset of the poem; the location of this event is not stated. Odysseus himself—in his poem to the Phaeacian court—is the only other voice to tell of these cattle and he speaks the name of the island at that point. Thus outer poet and Odysseus, the inner poet, are equated, which is a pertinent and telling counterpoint. The Muse does tell of the anger of Poseidon at i,19-21, and Zeus does mention *en passant* the Cyclops at i,69-79.

¹³⁶ In the *Iliou Persis*, the penultimate summary of Proclus in his Epic Cycle, Odysseus is also described as he acts as a warrior in a thoroughly violent and intransigent manner.

guards his words and remains verbally undisclosed; he is generally emotionally veiled.

The fourth period in the *Odysseus* narrative begins in Scroll Nine when the hero, having announced his name, begins to tell—speaking like an inventive poet—of his travels and voyages; he is addressing the court of Alcinous and he talks in a performative fashion, imitating dozens of different characters in this long personal narrative that continues throughout a highly dramatic four scrolls. Athena had already, the day prior, gone about the town in another of her identities and summoned men of the community to attend the court of Alcinous so that Odysseus would have an audience (viii,7-25).

There are thus three fundamental *speakers* of the overall master poem: the poet who addresses the first eleven lines of the song to the Muse; the Muse who then performs the entire song, and within that, there is now Odysseus himself who in Scrolls Nine to Twelve sings his own *histoire* impersonating and imitating the voices of numerous *personae*.

This narration begins with his departure—a retrojection of nine years—along with twelve boats and crews from Troy, and then describes all his ordeals until he arrives on Phaeacia. Odysseus expounds about the events on the island of the Cyclops and of how the blinded son of Poseidon cursed the hero with a speech act, calling upon his father to cause Odysseus not to reach his destination until all his crews were dead and he needed the conveyance of another vessel (ix,526). These words are effective and so the plot moves to another trajectory although at the time this shift is not obvious and remains only in potential. Once again it is the speech act of an inhuman force that drives the basic impulse of the narrative or journey. He concludes his narration to the Phaeacian court with another reference to the isle of Calypso.¹³⁷

Apart from what happens subsequent to the curse of the Cyclops which invokes the wrath of Poseidon, and also this particular mention of Calypso, none of the events in the song of Odysseus have any bearing on the overall or framing plot of the poem, for the reason—so I would argue—that Athena is absent from the song. One might add the

¹³⁷ There are two small disjunctive moments in this micronarrative of Odysseus; one occurs when Hermes simply appears—without any obvious cause—before the hero at x,275. The other happens when Circe informs him that he must go to Hades. Both of these instants are without mediate narrative precedent and lack uniformity with what precedes them and it is as if the poem has made an unreasoned shift in disclosure for the moments lack regular or typical metonymy.

interdiction offered by Teiresias in Scroll Eleven in the Underworld concerning the cattle of the Sun as forbidden food, but this is in fact irrelevant as the prohibition is not respected.¹³⁸ These four scrolls thus represent what can be termed as *story*.

Insofar as Zeus has—with his speech act—indicated that the Phaeacians will convey Odysseus to his island kingdom, and that Alcinous has already—with another speech act—publically vowed to do this, the lengthy song of Odysseus has no consequence upon the larger enclosing poem except to magnify and amplify the greatness of the hero for enduring terrific trials, including an entry into and retreat from Hades itself. This micronarrative of Scrolls Nine to Twelve is the first occasion when Odysseus gives voice to his own journey and it is here that he first demonstrates his own unguided volition and moral or intellectual autonomy. Instead of hearsay now the audience receives knowledge of this hero directly through his own words.¹³⁹

Let us repeat that this is almost all story and is not plot. What one can aver is that it is a portrait of a warrior-hero, Odysseus, as given in his own voice; but this has no bearing upon the narration of his journey, apart from—as we have already observed—the speech act of the Cyclops and the presence of Odysseus on Ogygia.

There is one curious moment in this song of Odysseus where he quotes a dialogue between Zeus and Helios. Cleverly, he tells his audience that this is something which he heard from Calypso who had heard it from Hermes. Such use of report or hearsay by poetic Odysseus himself is unique during these scrolls and amplifies the irrational complexity which binds the elements of the poem into an inclusive unity and compellingly plausible whole (xii,389-390).¹⁴⁰ It also qualifies the authority and verbal consciousness of our hero as advancing towards greater competence and narrative autonomy: *he* is the one to know about what Zeus has been saying.

¹³⁸ Teiresias also knows of the speech act or curse of the Cyclops (xi,100) and he repeats the wording of the Cyclops which was made at x,530, but now connects it with the breach in prohibition concerning the cattle of the Sun, thereby rendering the curse his own speech act and applicable to a different event (xi,110). Circe likewise draws upon these words of the seer, warning Odysseus about the interdiction (xi,139-141). This kind of internal repetition and reticulation of language binds the narrative periods most firmly. Remember also that Odysseus is both the poet and the speaker of all these voices who repeat such statements.

¹³⁹ The first hemisphere of the poem ends with these *summary* four scrolls, just as the second half of the work similarly concludes in summary form with the small compressed song that commences at xxiii,310.

¹⁴⁰ These lines were athetised by Aristarchus.

The fifth period of narration concerns all the second half of the Homeric *Odyssey* when the hero has at last returned to his kingdom of Ithaca, although his consciousness is such that he does not recognise the land of his kingdom and needs to be informed by Athena as to the place. She calls him *nēpiós*, ‘foolish’, for his lack of awareness. (xiii,237). Then, until the outset of Scroll Twenty-Two, he remains *incognito* due to the magic of Athena, for even though he is king his position is generally anonymous until he has caused the death of the one hundred and eight suitors. Curiously, at one point Odysseus is uniquely described by the poets as being ‘blonde’ (xiii,431).

Here, in the second half of the epic, the first occasion occurs where Odysseus appears in a non-supernatural setting, for descriptions of him during the first hemisphere of the poem always portray him in situations that are not completely mortal. These second twelve scrolls are thoroughly natural apart from the intermittent presence and steady direction of Athena and the thunder and lightning-bolt of Zeus in Twenty-Four. Also, with Scrolls Fourteen and Fifteen, the two narratives of Odysseus and Telemachus at last begin to intersect and conjoin.

Once Odysseus enters the palace in Scroll Seventeen the dramatic tension of the song suddenly increases as violence begins to develop, at first in terms of insult, provocation, and threat, until Scroll Twenty-Two and the killings are made. Even the serene and melancholic Penelope makes a speech act, cursing Antinoos to die from an arrow, and this is of course successful (xvii,493-494). As part of this process of surging emotional tautness the poets often address Eumaios in the vocative during Scroll Seventeen, which is a most effective way of drawing the audience further into the gathering and charged affect of the drama as it becomes increasingly graphic and immediate.

There are five instances of attentive duplicity in this second half of the poem, verbal occasions when the hero dissembles about his identity: to Athena, to Eumaios, to Antinoos, to Penelope, and to his father, although Odysseus does not make any pretence to his son about his personality.¹⁴¹ To Eumaios Odysseus tells of events at Troy and how

¹⁴¹ To Eumaios, his tale is about Troy and Egypt and is akin to the tale which Menelaos tells Telemachus in Scroll Four, although in the Eumaios story Odysseus spends much more narrative and historical time in Egypt (xiv,99-354). In this fabled account Odysseus makes use of many events and phrases that have already occurred in his long *histoire* to Alcinous and his court. Egypt is an important landmark in the narrative of the overall poem and receives more description than Troy itself. Odysseus also tells another tale to the swineherd about an event at Troy in which Odysseus appears, described in the third person

he had acted there; when he speaks with Penelope he likewise tells of how he encountered Odysseus in earlier times.¹⁴² So the audience returns to a situation of hearsay, with the rider that the speaker on these occasions is Odysseus himself, disguised and not disclosing his true subjectivity.

In terms of *nóos*, of how the consciousness of Odysseus is operating and becoming aroused, such practical dubiety illustrates an awareness on the part of the hero and his mental capacity for recognising and displaying the utility of fiction. Consciousness that is able to secure worth from fiction is greater than a consciousness that is limited by known truth or compulsive mendacity.¹⁴³

Athena directs Odysseus as to what he should next do, promising him that the suitors will be eventually killed (xiii,392).¹⁴⁴ Again, the audience perceives how the deity oversees the narrative evolution and how omniscient she is about what is occurring in the poem, just like the omniscient and predictive Vyāsa. Yet she is always disguised in some mortal envelope and is simultaneously directing the movements of Telemachus as he travels to and from Sparta as well as having oversight in how Penelope behaves and speaks. As with the Great Bhārata, the Homeric Odyssey is not simply about a singular hero but about the dynamics of a family and how this social group is ‘moved’ by divine agency.

Meanwhile there is often declaration of and allusion to Odysseus in these scrolls by Eumaios, by the suitors, by Telemachus, and by Penelope, and his name is constantly

(xiv,462). Let us recall that Odysseus’ maternal grand-father, Autolycus, was famed for theft and deceit (xix,396); and conversely and as a rider to this, both Arete and Alcinous both publically question the veracity of what Odysseus has been telling them ‘like a poet’, yet they are keen to continue listening to his amazing song (xi,336-337 and 362-376). Similarly, Eumaios tells Odysseus not to be ‘dishonest’ in his accounts (xiv,386).

¹⁴² The poets themselves refer to his *pseúdea*, ‘deceit’, at xix,203.

¹⁴³ In Hesiodic Theogony even the Muses—whose consciousness or awareness is absolute—are said to know how “to speak *pseúdea*, ‘deceit’, like the truth” (26).

¹⁴⁴ The theme of guest-host relations is constantly iterated throughout the poem; that is, how important for the plot is the goodness of both guest and host as they accomplish the correct reciprocal protocols of hospitality and when these rules of commensality are not sustained the plot or story becomes thoroughly disordered. The first scene in the Homeric Odyssey in an earthly temporal setting is one of equable communal dining (i,136). This theme is akin to how the degradation of Draupadī in the Sabhā *parvan* completely destabilises the kingdom as does the disordering of propriety in the *rājasūya* rite when Śiśupāla is decapitated. Right protocol is not simply social but also is an important dynamic in the causal order of poetic narration; it is metaphor pointing at how the narrative is either presenting right or wrong conduct.

passed—like currency—throughout the palace scenes; even Odysseus, masquerading as he is, tells stories about his fictional past. This hearsay simultaneously activates differing views and aspects of Odysseus for the audience and is a constant subtext in the poem making the *past* Odysseus actually *present* for the two kinds of narrative now combine. Also, during this final quarter of the poem, by invocation and by recollection, the presence of Zeus in the life of Odysseus becomes more pronounced and intimate as the narrative which has been generated by the speech act of Zeus comes to conclusive fruition. The audience perceives how, in the ritual economy of sacrifice, devotion and blood ceremonies actually *do* activate the particular deity who is being addressed and there then occurs a significant divine reciprocity. The suitors, of course, never perform any ritual action.¹⁴⁵

Soon, in Scroll Seventeen, the king-hero himself appears at the *mégaron*, ‘palace’, moving closer and closer towards Penelope in the veneer of an old vagabond and thus the long final scene of the epic commences during which time Odysseus has verbal exchanges with various members of the suitors, the household, and field staff. Repeatedly, there are these small incidents, verbal ‘snapshots’ of the hero in brief and testy communication.

Thus, simultaneously there are three ‘characters’ functioning at once: the Odysseus of hearsay, the Odysseus in disguise, and Odysseus disclosed who engages with Telemachus and Athena and later with a few of his domestic people. Again, such is the extensive polytropic quality of our hero, but, as we have argued, this is an emblem of the marvellous versatility of the narrative itself and its many dimensional periods.

Then occurs the magnificent slow recognition scene in Scroll Nineteen where Odysseus and Penelope twice interview each other in enigmatic terms, neither proclaiming their true emotional awareness nor revealing any overt intimacy. This instant culminates on the next day with the archery contest—proposed by Penelope who by now appears to have guessed the identity of the surreptitious vagrant—and the merciless death of the suitors, twelve servant women, and of a goatherd who is mutilated and left to

¹⁴⁵ Sacrifice is of course another aspect of cosmic commensality, or, what some would call a *sacrificial cuisine*; the three nutrients being smoke, cooked meat, and blood which sustain the tripartite registry of the cosmos: aerial deities, terrestrial mortals, and subterranean deceased heroes.

haemorrhage fatally. After the mayhem there is another scene where king and queen try each other verbally until, at last convinced of each other's love and also of their blameless mutual consciousness, they kiss and retire to their inimitable and climactic bedchamber.¹⁴⁶

In the penultimate event of the poem where the deceased suitors speak together in Hades with Agamemnon and Achilles about what Odysseus had done to them, Achilles is silent during these moments and only Agamemnon responds.¹⁴⁷ Thus the poem comes to its terminus with the hero being named and discussed in the Underworld, hearsay being the medium of expression once more but by this time the audience themselves are privy to the reports, having actually *witnessed* them in the preceding scrolls; so it is at this moment that the audience themselves participate, albeit mutely, in the accounts.

Finally in Scroll Twenty-Four, Odysseus meets with his father and they dine together, just as in the Homeric Iliad the poem closes with Achilles meeting with Priam in a commensal situation. The poem ends with both Athena and Zeus causing a cessation of hostilities between the family of Odysseus and the various clan members of the slain suitors and so the conditions of *vendetta* or *lex talionis* in the plot and narrative are closed.¹⁴⁸

As we noted earlier there is a putative seventh period of narration that is brief, summary, and retrospective, beginning at Scroll Twenty-Three, line 310. In this synopsis of his

¹⁴⁶ The Seventeenth Century composer Monteverdi with his opera *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*, slightly changed the final recognition scene which takes place between husband and wife; in the *libretto* by Badoaro the hero is able to describe the design and patterning of his queen's bedlinen to her, thus proving his intimacy and identity. They then sing a *duet*, 'My sun long sighed for, my light renewed'. See, Rosand and Vartolo, 2007.

¹⁴⁷ There is an indication of the contempt which Achilles holds for Odysseus in the Homeric Iliad, IX,308, and, of course, we have seen how in the first song of Demodocus there is another moment of profound contention occurring between these two heroes who both appear in each other's poem where they unambiguously oppose each other. The worlds or poetry of Odysseus and Achilles are immiscible and when Odysseus portrays Achilles in Scroll Eleven, mimicking his speech in Hades, Achilles is caused to appear as thoroughly diminished and abjected.

¹⁴⁸ As we observed above in Chapter Three, the legal qualities of the Homeric Iliad are likewise founded upon a complex system of *mutual vengeance*, where *ápoína*, 'ransom', and *poinē*, 'blood price', are exchanged. The initial statements of this moral economy are represented by the movement of women and the reciprocal offering of moveable wealth: these women being Helen, Chryseis, and Briseis. Patroclus and Hector are likewise essential to this metaphor of exchange or what is in fact a metonymy of violence.

travels there is no mention of the antagonism of Poseidon nor of the constant collaborative agency of the deity Athena. This retrospect is given in the voice of king Odysseus and is addressed to his queen and the mother of his son, as husband and wife lie abed together, at last intimately and politically united and before they fall asleep; the consciousness of this nuclear family has been integrated and has been in fact *sealed* by an act of terrific and retributive bloodshed.¹⁴⁹

There is finally, the overall poem writ large, the Homeric Odyssey, which can be construed as the eighth and complete order of narrative, insofar as it contains all the previous seven periodic perspectives of the song in their complicated and interstitial coherence.

It is appropriate that the Muse, Zeus, and Athena, all mention how the anger of Poseidon delays and causes deviation in the return of Odysseus and in Scroll Two the poets—given in the voice of the Muse—mention those awful events which occurred with the Cyclops, the son of Poseidon, an occasion when the protocols of hospitality were doubly violated.¹⁵⁰ To repeat the above point, the hero himself, in his account of his voyage in Scrolls Nine to Twelve, makes reference to the cause of Poseidon's wrath, but in his retrospective summary of the whole voyage in Scroll Twenty-Three, lines 310-343, he ignores the agency of this deity, just as he does not mention the overruling and determinative influence of Athena on his travels.

It is noteworthy that in Scroll Thirteen of the Homeric Iliad Poseidon is a deity who assumes several differing identities and speaks with different voices; that is, he is profoundly polytropic and personably various and fully mimetic of other subjects.¹⁵¹ Like Odysseus, he is a figure whose consciousness and voice are able to change at will.

¹⁴⁹ At this point all the narrative periods have converged and met: *Le Temps Retrouvé*, as it were.

¹⁵⁰ In Scroll Two there is another instance where the proto-poet or outer poet says something which is only otherwise mentioned by Odysseus in his song to the Phaeacian court; this is a reference to the Cyclops at ii,19. Again, we observe the symmetry between outer poet and 'inner' Odysseus. Also in Scroll Two there is what must be the unique occasion where a deity invokes another deity and delivers a speech act: this occurs where Athena in the guise of Mentor prays to Poseidon (iii,55-61). Athena is here present at a formal and magnificent sacrificial rite which Nestor is offering at the feast of Poseidon. Let us recall that Nestor is the grand-son of Poseidon through Neleus (xi,254).

¹⁵¹ Proteus is another figure—like Poseidon, Athena, and Odysseus—who is polymorphic. He, almost like a narrator himself, is aware of the trials and travails of Odysseus including his long sojourn with Calypso (iv,383-569).

There are thus three levels or internal cycles in the epic narrative of king-hero Odysseus. There is the basic plot as evinced by the dialogues of Zeus and Athena; there is the *hearsay* which tells of the hero's actions in varying times and places; and there is the individual story extolled by Odysseus himself in Scrolls Nine to Twelve and in micronarrative form in Scroll Twenty-Three. One might argue that these three dimensions concern the supernal and divine perspective, the mortal world of 'hearsay', and the heroic self-aggrandising personal narrative which is expressed by the returning warrior himself. The latter two narrations tend towards story rather than plot.

Somewhat like Vyāsa, Athena is both a generator of the poem and a constant agent within its working. As an actual voice, she appears in the fourth place, after the first words of the poet, after the Muse has begun to sing, and after Zeus offers the first dramatically expressed words of the poem: poet > Muse > Zeus > Athena, this is the sequence. She is the primary character to physically name 'Odysseus'. As we have noted, she too is polymorphic and is able to change her form, appearance, voice, and to appear in the *persona* of numerous and diverse characters; she too is a master of fiction.

The final words of the poem mention this labile quality and how it was Mentor, the companion of Odysseus, whom she was really most *like*. Pertinently, it was the mortal and human Mentor to whom Odysseus had entrusted the care of his palace and kingdom when he departed for Troy (ii,225-226). This figure of Mentor is the one whom the poets say that Athena is most comparable; and so again, the audience perceive another dimension to the pliable and malleable deity and her uniquely narrative force, as well as another aspect of kinship or amity between the divine and mortally heroic. Odysseus chose well when he selected Mentor to be his guardian agent or domestic *factotum*.

In Scroll Twenty-Four Zeus comments that it was Athena who devised the plot of the poem, that is, the narrative of Odysseus when he had returned to the isle of Ithaca (xxiv,487-482). He had also said this earlier, at v,22-24. Certainly, Athena is constantly directing Telemachus, Penelope, and Odysseus as the poem progresses, and—as we know—she does at times literally originate the plot. In this I would argue that divine Athena is akin to the *ṛṣi* Vyāsa in that they both initially generate and then participate in and manage events of the plot which, in the case of Homeric Odyssey, presents to an audience and nowadays to a modern reader, the organised and integrated consciousness

of *diogenès oduseüs*, ‘divine Odysseus’. Without her presence and direction there is only story.

ACHILLES

As a short supplement to the above let us offer a cursory outline of the narrative form of the Homeric Iliad, a poem which is far more linear in movement than the song of Odysseus.¹⁵² The epic opens by beginning with an indefinite moment in the past and then the narrative moves forward until it reaches the textual present nine days later at I,53. Then there is another pause of twelve days before Thetis visits Zeus and the *will of Zeus*—derived from a speech act of Thetis, itself partially derived from a speech act of her son Achilles—takes effect and establishes the plot; Zeus himself reiterates the core of this at XV,52-77.¹⁵³

The first day of battle then continues from the beginning of Scroll Two until half way through Scroll Seven. Thus serial time is amplified and compressed by the poets and is not given in a simple uniform sequence of hours and days. The next day, the second day of fighting, in terms of poetry only lasts from VII,433-482. Scroll Eight is one day in itself, the third, and Scroll Nine is the evening and night of that day, a darkness which extends into Scroll Ten and the ambush scene where Odysseus and Diomedes cross the lines of battle. Scroll Eleven begins the great fourth day when the Trojans reach the beached Greek fleet, and this time continues until Scroll Sixteen when Patroclus is felled and the warriors struggle over his corpse. His death marks the conclusion of general combat.

Thereafter follows a period which concerns Achilles and his grief for Patroclus and his vengeance upon Hector. Scroll Nineteen commences with the fifth day, where the mourning and despair of Achilles are delineated; this day continues with certain deities themselves participating in the contention of warriors in Scroll Twenty and Twenty-One and with Achilles returning to the combat. Once Hector has been slain in Scroll Twenty-

¹⁵² The summary of the epic of heroic Rāma, as given in Book Five of the Great Bhārata, V,258-276, similarly partakes of a generally singular and unified narrative.

¹⁵³ It can be argued that—with the speech act of Thetis, itself founded upon Achilles’ own words and then given force by Zeus himself—Achilles, until Scroll XVIII, is staging his own epic and makes his own *kléos*.

Two the fifth day closes and Achilles at last sleeps again. On the sixth day lamentation is performed by the Greeks and the obsequies for Patroclus are accomplished. On the seventh day the funeral games are performed and on the eighth Thetis and Zeus again confer, for the will of Zeus as committed in Scroll One has now come to term and the central and master narrative—the plot—of the epic begins to close. On the night of that day Priam visits Achilles and claims the body of Hector and then follow eleven days before his funeral rites are accomplished; there the poem concludes with the implication of a renewal of warfare.

Different heroes receive varying focus from the poets at different moments in this formal narrative: Achilles, Diomedes, Odysseus, Hector, Aias, Patroclus, and others receive the narrative concentration as the aim of the poem pauses for a while, favouring the character and deeds of a particular hero until it moves toward another figure in the drama. This is part of the narrative form, this shifting of attention and visual focus that individually highlights a warrior's *aristeía* or 'valour'.

There are also timeless interludes in the narration as when the world and lives of the deities are being described as if in changeless capsules which run parallel to the earthly and temporal world. Such a moment, for instance, also occurs in Scroll Eighteen when the poets portray the divine Shield whose imagery lacks all timely transition and is similarly undecaying and immortal. Thus this Iliadic narration is extremely different from and *unlike* what occurs in the Homeric Odyssey, which, for its irrational complexity is much more akin in form to what we as readers today can perceive in the multitudinous narrative dimensions, perspectives, and sequences of the Great Bhārata.

There is one irrational element in the Homeric Iliad and that concerns how Thetis and Zeus both repeatedly announce that the death of young Achilles is imminent. No reason underlines this fact and it is as if the demise of Achilles is a *null point* in the poem, an hypothetical instant which does not occur and yet which drives the movement of the narrative forward; for this comprehension which Achilles receives from his mother informs and influences all events in the poem, insofar as the narrative is activated by the speech act of Achilles to Thetis in Scroll One which is then conveyed to Zeus and cosmically affirmed.

As we have seen, this becomes the plot of the poem and the knowledge of the youthful hero's impending demise is something which actually precedes all narrative exposition and is rationally inexplicable: it has no metonymical nor causal origin. Both the death of Achilles and that of Odysseus are predicted throughout their respective poems yet neither occasion occurs within those songs for both epics cleverly evade perfect closure. In a way this is akin to how the hypothetical *ur*-poem of Vyāsa supplies the motive zero which facilitates the generation of the plot.

What is remarkable is how similar in fundamental narrative structure are the Homeric *Odyssey* and *Iliad*: in terms of the primary nature of the narrative generated by a speech act of Zeus in company with a feminine deity, and in terms of the time lapsed in both poems. The editors of these two works obviously prepared their texts with a similar template in mind.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ For the concerned reader I would urge them to see, McGrath, 2016, pp.179-189, *Appendix on Epic Achilles*; and, McGrath, 2017, pp.207-224, *Appendix on Epic Preliteracy*.