The *Odyssey* and the Desires of Traditional Narrative

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Taking its inspiration from Peter Brooks' discussion of the "narrative desire" that structures novels, this paper seeks to articulate a specific form of narrative desire that would be applicable to traditional oral narratives, the plots of which are generally known in advance by audience members. Thematic and structural features of the *Odyssey* are discussed as evidence for the dynamics of such a "traditional narrative desire".

Keywords: Narrative desire, Peter Brooks, *Odyssey*, oral tradition, oral literature

In a landmark 1984 essay entitled "Narrative Desire", Peter Brooks argued that every literary plot is structured in some way by desire.[1] In his view, the desires of a plot's protagonist, whether these are a matter of ambition, greed, lust, or even simply the will to survive, determine the plot's very readability or intelligibility. Moreover, for Brooks the various desires represented within narrative figure the desires that drive the production and consumption of narrative. He finds within the narrative representation of desire reflections of the desire that compels readers to read on, to keep turning pages, and ultimately of an even more fundamental desire, a "primary human drive" that consists simply in the "need to tell" (Brooks 1984, 61). The "reading of plot," he writes, is "a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text" (Brooks 1984, 37).

When he speaks of "plot", Brooks has in mind a particular literary form: the novel, especially as exemplified by 19th-century French realists like Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola. In elaborating a "textual erotics" (Brooks 1984, 39) that would elucidate the workings of desire in such plots, Brooks adopts a model that is explicitly Freudian. Just as Freud's Eros seeks "to combine organic substances

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1 Brooks 1984, Chapter 2; a slightly different version of this chapter appeared as a stand-alone essay in volume 18, issue 3 of *Style* (1984), pp. 312-27.

into ever greater unities", so, too, the desire hypothesized by Brooks centers on the "effort to construct meanings in ever-larger wholes, to totalize [the] experience of human existence in time, to grasp past, present, and future in a significant shape".[2] One of the most characteristic features of such a desire is its fixed orientation toward the end-point, the *telos*, of a narrative, for it is only from the point of view of the end that one gains a complete view of the narrative as a whole. Again, to quote Brooks, "If the motor of narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie *at the end*, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire *for* the end" (Brooks 1984, 52).

Brooks' model of desire is clearly well-suited to the experience of reading novels. As any reader of novels can attest, one's engagement with an unfamiliar text is often animated by a desire to know how the story ends; the temptation to flip ahead to the last page can at times be irresistible. But the novel is far from the only form of narrative; and it is, of course, a latecomer on the literary scene of Greco-Roman antiquity. We may therefore wonder whether and how Brooks' model of narrative desire should be modified in order to capture the dynamics of other forms of verbal art. In particular, we might wonder whether some alternative form of narrative desire must be posited for those literary forms in which the end is *already*, in some sense, known, as would have been the case for such texts as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, grounded as they were in oral tradition and shaped by, as well as experienced in, repeated performance.

In fact, the very text that Brooks selects as the principal illustration of his model points the way toward such a modification. The greater part of Brooks' essay is devoted to an analysis of Balzac's novel *La peau de chagrin*. In this analysis, Brooks pays special attention to a distinctive feature of the novel's structure: much of the first half is occupied by an embedded first-person analepsis in which the protagonist, Raphael de Valentin, recounts his life story—a story of thwarted desire. At the midpoint of the novel, Raphael's narrative catches up with the events reported by the master narrator at the start of the novel; and at this very moment Raphael realizes that he possesses, in the form of a magical talisman, the means to satisfy all the desires that had been hitherto frustrated. The remainder of the novel describes Raphael's efforts to defer not just the satisfaction of desire but even desire itself, for he discovers that the talisman, which shrinks with the fulfillment of every wish, determines also the duration of his life. For Brooks, this narrative structure is a mechanism for expressing and exploring what he calls "the paradox of narrative plot as the reader consumes it: diminishing as it realizes itself, leading to an end that is the consummation (as well as the consumption)

[2] Brooks 1984, 39; quotation from Freud on p. 37.

of its sense-making" (Brooks 1984, 52). From our point of view, however, what is most striking is that this structure is recognizably the same as the structure of the *Odyssey*, which also features, in Odysseus' Apologoi, an analepsis that catches up with the poem's starting point at the exact center of the poem. As in Balzac's novel, this moment of narrative synchronization is also the moment at which Odysseus's deepest wish, his desire to return to Ithaca, is fulfilled in magical fashion; and as in Balzac, the second half of the poem describes not so much the satisfaction as the deferral of a desire for reunion.

The parallels between these two texts are, in my view, too thoroughgoing to be accidental, although they pass unnoticed by Brooks (in spite of the fact that he invokes the *Odyssey* as an instance of narrative desire at the start of his essay). My aim, however, is not to draw out this comparison, but to examine what this distinctive plot structure—taken over by Balzac as a way of reflecting on the workings of *novelistic* narrative desire—may have to say about the operation of narrative desire in the context of a traditional narrative, one propagated, like the *Odyssey*, through repeated performance. There are surely many continuities between what I will call 'traditional narrative desire' and the dynamic described by Brooks. Tzvetan Todorov, for instance, in a famous essay on "Primitive Narrative", describes the desire that animates the *Odyssey* in terms strikingly similar to those of Brooks' analysis, that is, as a paradoxical desire for deferral.[3] And yet in the same essay Todorov identifies a quality that sets the *Odyssey*'s plot apart from modern narrative forms. To quote Todorov:

> The *Odyssey* contains no surprises; everything is recounted in advance, and everything which is recounted occurs. This puts the poem... in radical opposition to our subsequent narratives in which plot plays a much more important role, in which we do not know what will happen. In the *Odyssey*, not only do we know what will happen but we are told what will happen with indifference.[4]

[3] Todorov 1977: 62-63: "If Odysseus takes so long to return home, it is because home is not his deepest desire: his desire is that of the narrator (who is telling Odysseus' lies, Odysseus or Homer?). But the narrator desires to tell. Odysseus resists returning to Ithaca so that the story can continue. The theme of the *Odyssey* is not Odysseus' return to Ithaca; this return is, on the contrary, the death of the *Odyssey*, its end. The theme of the *Odyssey* is the narrative forming the *Odyssey*, it is the *Odyssey* itself. This is why, returning home, Odysseus does not think about it, does not rejoice over it; he thinks only of 'robbers' tales and lies'—he thinks the *Odyssey*."

[4] Todorov 1977, 64-65. Strictly speaking, Todorov is incorrect to state that "everything which is recounted occurs", since the prophecy of Teiresias includes events that happen after the conclusion of the poem's primary *fabula* (to use the terminology of the Russian Formalists). The fact, however, that these events do not occur within the *fabula* is itself indicative of one of Todorov's larger points: the events predicted to occur after the conclusion of the poem's plot are precisely those that culminate in Odysseus' death. Odysseus' actual death is thus deferred in much the same way as the 'death', or end, of the *Odyssey* (see previous note).

The indifference to which Todorov refers is a consequence of the traditional character of the *Odyssey*; the text as we have it has clearly evolved in the context of performance before audiences who were largely familiar with the broader tradition. My hypothesis, inspired by Brooks, is that the plot of the *Odyssey* reflects not only aspects of narrative desire in general, but also features peculiar to 'traditional narrative desire', the desire that makes the performance of a familiar narrative a compelling experience for performers and audiences alike. I offer here some preliminary thoughts on this traditional narrative desire as it is inscribed within the plot of the *Odyssey*, organizing my remarks under four general headings: 'centripetal and centrifugal desires', 'recollection and amnesia', 'difference and recognition', and 'integration and fragmentation'.[5]

Before entering on these topics, however, I wish to make one final introductory observation, and that concerns what I regard as one of the most fascinating features of the *Odyssey*. In spite of the fact that the *Odyssey* is a demonstrably traditional text, it nevertheless betrays a certain fascination with the performance of narratives that exist independently of tradition. The best and clearest example is provided by Odysseus' own Apologoi. As a first-person narrative based on his own experience, this is a tale that could be told, in this form at least, by no one else.[6] It is narrated, ostensibly for the first time, before an audience of Phaeacians who, in spite of a general familiarity with the story of the Trojan war, have no prior knowledge of the events Odysseus relates. As though to underscore the singularity of the narrative as a performance event, when Odysseus finally reaches a point in his story that is already known by his audience, he concludes his tale by declaring that "it is hateful to me to relate again things that have already been clearly told" (*Od.* 12.452-53). And since the Phaeacians will be permanently cut off from the rest of the world as a result of their hospitality to Odysseus, we can be certain that whatever incipient tradition might be carried on there by singers

[5] The tentative and provisional remarks in the pages that follow share with Grethlein 2017: 43-47 an interest in the ways in which the *Odyssey* differs from other, characteristically modern narrative forms. Pointing out that the *Odyssey* appears to presuppose knowledge of its ending, Grethlein groups the poem with many Attic tragedies and imperial Greek novels as examples of narratives that privilege tension or suspense ('Spannung') arising from uncertainty as to how a known end will be achieved, as opposed to suspense over the ending itself. Grethlein views this narrative modality as typical of ancient literature, as undoubtedly it is (and as we would expect of a literature that derives much of its material from traditional myths). His perspective, however, remains fundamentally text-based, insofar as he consistently thinks in terms of the *Odyssey*'s effect on a reader. Indeed, the reader Grethlein imagines for the *Odyssey* seems implicitly to be a first-time reader. My approach represents an arguably more radical rethinking of narrative paradigms to the extent that I attempt to reframe those paradigms in terms of a narrative that is not only performed but re-performed, that is to say, experienced iteratively by audiences familiar not just with the broad outlines of the story but also with the manner in which it is traditionally presented.

[6] See Elmer 2013, 227-28.

such as Demodokos, it will reach no further than the lost island of Skheriē. Odysseus' narrative is thus a narrative without a tradition—except, of course, as part of the tradition of the *Odyssey*—and the performance that takes place in Alkinoos' palace is a strictly one-off event. A similar interest in the performance of unfamiliar material may be detected in Telemakhos' famous assertion that "men approve more the song that comes newest to their ears" (1.351-52), which may strike us as a distinctly untraditional sentiment to the extent that it seems to denigrate traditional poems.[7]

What are we to make of these intimations of songs without traditions? It would be rash, I think, to find in them an expression of artistic self-consciousness on the part of an innovative *Odyssey* poet.[8] Regardless of how we conceptualize the composition of the *Odyssey*, the simple fact is that, in early stages of its existence, the poem was perpetuated through reperformance by traditional performers. I would prefer to see in these scenes the conjuring of a foil that is meant to illustrate something about the nature of traditional poetry by imagining its opposite. I will eventually suggest ways in which Telemakhos and the Phaeacians embody perspectives that differ in significant ways from those we must ascribe to the poem's traditional audience. For now, let me note simply that Telemakhos' endorsement of the "newest" song can be understood as an index of the fact that he is not yet fully integrated into the kind of social group that is necessary for the sustaining of poetic tradition. As a young man just on the cusp of maturity, he is, to an extent, innocent of the workings of tradition.

1. CENTRIPETAL AND CENTRIFUGAL DESIRES

I turn now to the subject of 'centripetal and centrifugal desires', the first of the four headings under which I will discuss the ways in which a traditional form of narrative desire is inscribed within the plot of the *Odyssey*. In contrast to many of the texts noted by Brooks, the plot of the *Odyssey* is structured not by a single univalent and unidirectional desire, but by a set of criss-crossing and

[7] Cf. Ford 1992, 109 and Elmer 2013, 229; see also Grethlein 2017, 58, who argues that, while the remark may be aimed in part at elevating the status of the *Odyssey* vis-à-vis other traditional poems, it must "sooner or later" put the value of the *Odyssey* itself in question. For another perspective on Telemakhos' use of the term *neos* 'new', see Nagy 1990, 69. It should be noted that the notion of 'approval', expressed by the verb *epikleiein*, suggests the possibility that the 'newest' song will be perpetuated in subsequent tradition. (See Elmer 2013, especially pp. 204-24, for discussion of the relation between audience approval and poetic tradition.)

[8] For the view that the Apologoi represent an innovation on the part of the *Odyssey* poet (or a predecessor), see West 2014, 96.

often conflicting desires.[9] Odysseus' homeward progress is of course directed by his ultimate desire for *nostos*, but it is repeatedly thwarted and delayed by countervailing impulses. The resulting dynamic is neatly encapsulated by Teiresias in the Nekuia, when he advises Odysseus that, in spite of everything, "even so you might come home, though suffering evils, if you are willing to restrain your *thumos* and that of your companions" (11.104-5). The term *thumos* is glossed by Egbert Bakker as "conventionally what drives the epic hero in his quest for glory".[10] It coincides, in other words, with a modality of desire. In the context of his prophecy, Teiresias has a very specific desire in mind: hunger, specifically the hunger that he predicts will afflict Odysseus and his men on the island of Thrinakiē. But his warning may be taken as a more general indication of the forces that shape Odysseus' halting homeward journey. Bakker has demonstrated that, in the *Odyssey*'s poetic system, *thumos* stands in a close relationship with the *gastēr* or 'belly', the physical embodiment of hunger. And hunger—for the lotus flower, for the Cyclops' cheese, for the feast hospitably laid by Circe, and ultimately for the cattle of Helios—is one of the chief impediments to Odysseus' return. Hunger is an immediate need—a localized desire—that temporarily supersedes the more global desire for return. It is 'centrifugal' insofar as it is not centered on Ithaca, and often diverts the hero from his homeward journey. Nor is hunger the only appetite that operates in this centrifugal fashion: desires for sleep and sex likewise distract Odysseus from his ultimate goal. The circuitous path of his return is the result of the conflict between centripetal and centrifugal impulses.

If we take seriously Brooks' claim that the desires structuring a plot reflect the desires of those who produce and consume it, how should we map the *Odyssey*'s centripetal and centrifugal desires onto the experiences of performers and audiences? At one level, they correspond to the tension inherent in any narrative between the desire for resolution and the necessity of some intervening complication for the creation and sustaining of interest. 'Centrifugal desire' is just another way of speaking of the deferral that is fundamental to any satisfying narrative. In the context of a traditional medium of oral performance, however, we may correlate the tension between centripetal and centrifugal impulses with the phenomena of *compression* and *expansion*, which are widely-observed features of narrative presentation in oral performance traditions from around

[9] More precisely, the *fabula* of Odysseus' return is so structured, since the dynamic outlined here is expressed primarily in terms of the events of Odysseus' return journey.

[10] Bakker 2013, 140. Aristotle later adopts the term *thumos* as a designation for a subspecies of *orexis*, 'desire' or 'appetency'. For an account of *thumos* in Aristotle's theory of desire, see Pearson 2012, 111-139. (I am grateful to the anonymous referee for this reference.)

the world.[11] A traditional medium, in which audiences are generally aware of the broad outlines of the narrative under way, permits the performer to play against the audience's anticipation of narrative climax by either compressing the narration, and thereby proceeding more directly toward its conclusion, or by expanding an episode—for example, by introducing embedded speeches or lengthy descriptions—and thereby obstructing forward progress. Odysseus' 'centripetal' desire for *nostos* can be seen as a projection, within the narrative, of an impulse that would favor compression, or accelerated progress toward ultimate resolution, while the poem's 'centrifugal' desires can be correlated, conversely, with the impulse to divert the narration from its ultimate goal in favor of further narrative complications. These centrifugal desires, especially the desire for food, routinely appear in the Apologoi as the motivation underlying such complications.[12]

Homeric poetry in general shows a marked preference for expansion, so much so that Richard Martin has been able to articulate an "expansion aesthetic" characteristic of that poetry.[13] His analysis concentrates on the *Iliad*; in the *Odyssey*, the most striking illustration of the tension between compression and expansion can be observed in the remarkable difference in pace between the poem's first and second halves, and especially between the Apologoi, which cover ten years in just four books, and the narrative of Odysseus' time among the Suitors, which takes twice as many books to recount just two days. To the extent that Odysseus' disguise as a beggar is a strategy for delay while he observes the state of affairs in his palace, it is noteworthy that *hunger* is a crucial component of his disguise.[14] The hunger connected to his assumed identity is doubtless multifaceted,[15] but one of those facets is surely connected to the way that hunger motivates narrative deferral throughout the poem.

In at least one instance, hunger is connected quite explicitly to narrative deferral. In Book 7, shortly after landing on Skheriē, Odysseus responds to

[11] See, e.g., Bachvarova 2016, 39-40 (Anatolia), Smith 1989, 33-35 (Rajasthan), Johnson 1980, 318-19 (West Africa), Okpewho 1979, 179-94 (Africa).

[12] In the case of the Cattle of the Sun, the Companions' desire for food is indirectly the cause of the single longest delay in terms of the chronology of the *fabula*.

[13] Martin 1989, 196, 205-30.

[14] As demonstrated by Levaniouk 2000, the pseudonym, Aithōn, adopted by the disguised Odysseus is itself an expression both of the hunger proper to his disguise as beggar and of the "unrelenting desire" (34) that characterizes Odysseus more generally.

[15] Cf. Bakker 2013, 137 on the *gastēr* motif in the second half of the poem: "Odysseus' *gastēr* period is also a time in which elementary survival instinct can give way to desire and longing, desire first to get home, and, once there, to take revenge on the Suitors. Odysseus' 'belly' begins to develop real cravings precisely when food is neither a lack nor a temptation. The *gastēr* in the Odyssey, it seems, craves something other than mere food."

Alkinoos, who has been gently probing the stranger's identity, by indicating that he could speak at length about his many sufferings—if he were not prevented from doing so by hunger. "For", he says, "there is nothing more shameless than the hateful belly (*gastēr*), which compels even a man much distressed, bearing woe in his heart, to remember it, just as I bear woe in my heart, but my belly compels me always to eat and drink, and makes me forget everything that I have suffered, and demands to be filled" (7.216-21). With this appeal to hunger, Odysseus delays until Book 9 the tale of his past sufferings.

2. RECOLLECTION AND AMNESIA

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the passage I have just cited is the connection it makes between hunger and memory, which brings me to the second of my headings: "recollection and amnesia". The connection between hunger and memory is deeply embedded in Homeric poetics; to eat is, according to a frequently-attested Homeric turn of phrase, to "remember food".[16] As Bakker (2008) has stressed in an essay on *Epic Remembering*, the concept of memory reflected in expressions such as these is radically different from our own. In the first place, it has a pronounced performative dimension: to "remember food" is to eat, to "remember battle" is to fight, and to "remember *aoidē*" is to perform epic song. Furthermore, the epic vocabulary of memory has as well a notably corporeal dimension. This vocabulary includes the noun *menos*, conventionally, but reductively, glossed as 'might' or 'spirit', and indicates, in Bakker's words, "a very physical memory, a strong desire for the repetition of a pleasurable sensation. The drive is to infuse one's *menos* with something that itself possesses *menos*, so that one is able to *embody* it and so have *menos* oneself" (Bakker 2008: 69). In this respect memory, as the drive to acquire and incorporate *menos*, converges with hunger, which is the drive to incorporate the *menos* contained within food and drink. But, notes Bakker, "for all that it embodies remembrance... [*menos*] also causes forgetfulness". Thus the warrior infused with *menos* forgets his pain (*Il.* 15.60) just as Odysseus forgets his sufferings when satisfying his hunger.[17]

Transferring Bakker's insights to the domain of traditional oral performance, we can characterize recollection as the satisfaction of a desire or drive to call to mind, and thus embody and perform, the tradition. This embodiment is, however,

[16] Cf. Il. 19.231, 24.601; Od. 4.213, 10.177, 13.280, 20.246. See also Bakker 2013, 146-47 on the "performative" aspect of remembering in this and other contexts.

[17] Thus, too, according to Hesiod in the Theogony's 'Hymn to the Muses', a grieving man forgets his sorrows when infused with the poetic memory channeled by the epic *aoidos* (Th. 98-103).

necessarily selective. Only a small part of the tradition can be made present at any given time, and in the not infrequent situation in which the tradition includes multiforms, the recollection of one variant will mean momentary 'amnesia' with regard to others.

With all this in mind, one notes with interest the insistence with which the plot of the *Odyssey* is delimited and articulated by acts of recollection and forgetting. Indeed, the first action of the narrative proper—after the invocation of the Muses and the narrator's framing of the story's background—is precisely an act of memory: at line 29 of Book 1, Zeus "remembers" "blameless Aigisthos", and this memory causes him to speak out among the gods (1.31). Superficially, at least, the recollection of Aigisthos leaves Odysseus in oblivion—although I will have more to say on this point in a moment. In any case, Athena uses the memory of Aigisthos to call to mind Odysseus. She stresses that Kalypso seeks to beguile him "so that he will forget Ithaca" (1.57), but that Odysseus' thoughts and desires remain firmly fixed on his home. Zeus' reply—"how could I forget godlike Odysseus?" (1.65)—affirms his own recollection of Odysseus, and this alignment of divine and human memory sets the plot in motion.[18]

Just as the plot is initiated by these acts of memory, so too is it concluded by a signal act of forgetting: I mean the remarkable *eklēsis*—literally, an 'amnesia' or 'amnesty'—imposed by Zeus and Athena as a way of putting to rest the conflict between Odysseus' household and the families of the suitors he has killed (24.484-85). This final oblivion deserves some further comment; but first it is worth noting that the intervening narrative is further shaped and articulated by memory and its opposite. Zeus' memory of Odysseus is balanced and countered by that of Poseidon, who is unable to forgive or forget the blinding of his son Polyphemos.[19] In this pair of gods we can detect 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' forms of memory: if Zeus' memory is the *sine qua non* for Odysseus' return, Poseidon's is the principal obstacle. Something similar could be said for Odysseus himself. If his memory of Ithaca is what draws him homeward, his memory of his more immediate past has the potential to keep him away, at least at the level of the audience's experience of the narrative. Odysseus' recollections of his sufferings in Books 9 through 12 may take up just a single evening of a ten-year journey home, but for the audience they represent a four-book delay of the moment of return. When he finally does board the Phaeacians' ship, Odysseus falls into a deep sleep

[18] Cf. Saussy 1996, 322, who remarks, "The whole poem is not only begun but contained by anticipation in this one mental act."

[19] Note the wording of Teiresias' prophecy with regard to the obstacle posed by Poseidon: οὐ γὰρ ὀΐω / λήσειν ἐννοσίγαιον (11.101-2). Cf. Saussy 1996, 323: "Zeus' memory collides with Poseidon's, who cannot forget godlike Odysseus either."

that brings with it forgetfulness of all his past hardships (13.92). In a very real sense this forgetfulness is necessary for the onward progress of the narrative, for it is only when Odysseus has fallen silent that the narrator can continue the tale.[20]

The narrative as a whole, as I have said, is brought to a conclusion by an *eklēsis*, an 'amnesty' or 'amnesia'. This final manifestation of memory as a structural principle has significance on multiple levels. At the level of the poem's *fabula*, the amnesty is of course the necessary precondition for the restoration of stability on Ithaca: unless the Suitors' families 'forget' Odysseus' killing of their kinsmen, the violence will continue. And if the violence continues, so must the poem: the *eklēsis* is thus equally necessary in order to bring the narrative to a conclusion. There is a broader sense, however, in which the 'forgetting' of the violence perpetrated by Odysseus is necessary for the constitution of the *Odyssey* specifically as a poem celebrating the return of its eponymous hero. I have argued elsewhere that the poem permits us to catch glimpses of an alternative view of Odysseus, an unfavorable view according to which he has more in common with Aigisthos, as a man who slaughters rivals at a feast, than with Agamemnon, the victim (Elmer 2015). Aigisthos, too, we should remember, was attempting to reclaim his ancestral property. In this light, the poem's initial act of memory—Zeus' recollection of Aigisthos—seems less like the momentary forgetting of Odysseus and more like the recollection of an aspect of Odysseus' persona that the poem as a whole would prefer to consign to oblivion. The poem's final *eklēsis*—the forgetting of Odysseus' Aigisthos-like violence, on the part of the Suitors' kinsmen, to be sure, but also, implicitly, on the part of the poem's audience—provides an antidote to Zeus' initial recollection. Like the Suitors' kinsmen, we *must* forget some aspects, at least, of Odysseus' violence if we are to understand the poem as a celebratory one.[21]

To remember Odysseus is, then, to remember a certain *version* of Odysseus, one among many available within the broader stock of tradition. Not all of these versions would have been in harmony with the particular version of Odysseus called to mind by the *Odyssey*. Wolfgang Kullmann, for example, suggested that the poem knowingly suppresses the uncomplimentary story that Odysseus was fathered not by Laertes but by Sisyphos—a story that nevertheless leaves its trace within the poem in the emphasis laid on the cunning of Odysseus' maternal

[20] As noted by Bakker 2013, 7: "the hero's forgetting becomes the necessary condition for the poet's remembering and the continuation of the tale."

[21] Cf. Barker 2009, 132: "Zeus asks us all to forget." For other instances in which a negative aspect of the broader Odysseus tradition is (possibly) suppressed, see Danek 1998, 89 and 476-78, with reference to possible 'citations' of the tradition of hostility between Odysseus and Palamedes. 'Citations' such as these of course evoke the traditions to which they refer as much as they suppress them.

grandfather, Autolykos.[22] This is far from the only place where a careful reader can catch glimpses of potential variants and alternative traditions. Most notoriously, perhaps, the scholia to the *Odyssey* report that in Zenodotos' text, Athena directed Telemakhos to travel not to Pylos and Sparta, but to Pylos and *Crete*.[23] Steve Reece, Martin West, and others have taken this testimony as evidence for the existence of alternative traditions regarding the return of Odysseus, traditions that would have included time spent in Crete; the so-called 'Cretan lies'—the deceptive tales told by the disguised Odysseus in Ithaca—have accordingly been understood as allusions to or traces of this alternative, 'Cretan' *Odyssey*.[24] These and other indications that behind our *Odyssey* lies what Albert Lord would have called a 'multiform' tradition lead me to my third rubric, "difference and recognition".

3. DIFFERENCE AND RECOGNITION

In the context of a traditional medium, every performance unfolds against the backdrop of the broader tradition. The tradition encompasses a wide range of previous performances exhibiting a greater or lesser degree of 'multiformity'. In such a context, part of the pleasure of performance—part of what the audience desires—consists in the recognition of the current performance as an instantiation of something familiar from the tradition.[25] Each performance is something new, and so different from all previous performances; but the traditional audience is nevertheless called upon to acknowledge what is recognizably the same. Adopting Brooks' perspective, and citing again words I quoted at the beginning of my paper, we may say that such an audience, in 'recognizing' sameness and thereby forging connections between past and present experience, satisfies a desire "to construct meanings in ever-larger wholes, to totalize [the] experience of human existence in time, to grasp past, present, and future in a significant shape".[26]

I suggest that this desire to recognize sameness in the midst of multiformity is reflected within the plot of the *Odyssey* in the sequence of recognitions that defines the arc and the end-point of Odysseus' return. Indeed, I would go so

[22] Kullmann 1956, 41n1; cf. Philippson 1947, 18. For the connections between Autolykos and Sisyphos, see Dümmler 1896.

[23] Σ 1.93, 3.313.

[24] See Reece 1994, West 2013, 249; further references at West 2005, 60-75. Marks 2003 makes a similar argument with regard to the beggar's tale of Odysseus and Thoas at *Od*. 14.469-502. For further indications of alternate versions, see Barker and Christensen 2014.

[25] On this kind of recognition as fundamental to the dynamics of oral tradition, see Saussy 1996, esp. pp. 314 and 318. A recent psychological study has concluded that, while storytellers may prefer to tell novel stories, audiences typically find familiar tales more pleasurable: see Cooney et al. 2017.

[26] Brooks 1984, 39 (quoted above).

far as to suggest that the prominence of recognition as a motif in traditions of oral narrative from around the world is at least partially due to the fact that recognition in the sense I have described is a fundamental aspect of the experience of traditional narrative.[27] The *Odyssey* can be seen to intertwine that experience in a strikingly intricate way with its own treatment of the recognition motif. For if, as Steve Reece and others have argued, Odysseus' 'Cretan lies' evoke alternative traditions, the poem has deployed those traditions precisely in order to obscure the identity of Odysseus as hero of the *Odyssey*. For characters within the narrative, these tales serve to conceal Odysseus' identity behind a Cretan persona. For the audience steeped in tradition, they serve as a reminder of the existence of many possible Odysseuses, and an invitation to reflect on which Odysseus may be recognized in the performance under way.

Of the several recognitions staged in the last third of the *Odyssey*, one in particular stands out with regard to the connection I am making between recognition as represented within the poem and recognition as an aspect of the traditional audience's experience of performance. In Book 16, Odysseus reveals himself to Telemakhos, who 'recognizes' him—if that is the right word—but not on the basis of any memory of his father, for Telemakhos has none. In his case alone, the recognition takes place without *sēmata*, tokens of recognition based on a shared past. Telemakhos is initially reluctant to believe that the stranger in the swineherd's hut is his father, but he finally acknowledges him as his father on the basis of Odysseus' authoritative performance of his own identity. Echoing the words of the master narrator in the proem, Odysseus declares (16.204-6):

> οὐ μὲν γάρ τοι ἔτ' ἄλλος ἐλεύσεται ἐνθάδ' Ὀδυσσεύς,
> ἀλλ' ὅδ' ἐγὼ τοιόσδε, παθὼν κακά, πολλὰ δ' ἀληθείς,
> ἦλυθον εἰκοστῷ ἔτεϊ ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν.
>
> You can be sure that no other Odysseus will ever come here,
> but I, the one before you, such as I am, after suffering evils and wandering much,
> have come in the twentieth year to my homeland.[28]

This assurance suffices—and must suffice—for Telemakhos, who has no past experience of Odysseus against which to measure the stranger's claim. As in Book 1, when he offers his extraordinary endorsement of "the newest song", Telemakhos appears again as a young man lacking in knowledge of tradition—an

[27] Of particular interest in this regard are those scenes in which the hero disguises himself as a performer of traditional song as a prelude to his recognition. For examples, see Lord 1991, 239-43 (Central Asiatic and Balkan examples). Reynolds 2017 notes that in the epic of the Bani Hilal it is a "common motif" for the hero to pose as an epic poet.

[28] With the phrase παθὼν κακά, πολλὰ δ' ἀληθείς, compare 1.3-4, 5.377, and 15.176.

ignorant audience for Odysseus' performance of identity. For such an individual, there can be no proper recognition, only an acceptance of the performance based on the performer's personal authority.

4. INTEGRATION AND FRAGMENTATION

I have suggested that the traditional audience's recognition of what is familiar in a traditional performance satisfies a desire "to construct meanings in ever-larger wholes". Brooks' formulation can be connected to John Miles Foley's characterization of traditional oral poetry as an "immanent art", in which the present instance, the moment of performance, always connects metonymically to the totality of the tradition, from which it derives its meaning (Foley 1991). Part of the pleasure offered by such an art consists in the reconstitution of a sense of wholeness out of the fragments of the tradition that are presented in performance. The tension between the whole and the part, between the integrity of the tradition as a whole and the fragmentary nature of performance, is, I now suggest, inscribed within the very structure of the *Odyssey*'s plot. I consider some aspects of that structure under my fourth and final heading, "integration and fragmentation".

Writers on the *Odyssey* regularly note the remarkably disjointed manner in which the poem recounts the story of Odysseus' return. The narrator's request in the proem that the Muse begin the story "from any point whatsoever" (ἁμόθεν γε, 1.10) suggests that the starting-point for the narrative is in some sense arbitrary; and, indeed, when we first encounter Odysseus, it is in the very last stage of his journey home. Earlier events are related by Odysseus himself in the Apologoi, in narratological terms an analepsis that itself contains a prolepsis in the form of Teiresias' prediction of the future.[29] The narrative of Odysseus' return is thus told in a manner that seems to demand a certain amount of reordering and reintegration. That demand is finally met in Book 23, when Odysseus himself, in what might be called a second *apologos*, narrates the entire tale, complete and in order, for Penelope (23.310-41).[30] This act of narrative reintegration follows

[29] Bergren 1983 stresses the sometimes overlooked fact that prolepsis is as central and significant a feature of the *Odyssey*'s plot as analepsis.

[30] Significantly, this second *apologos* is in indirect speech, suggesting that the act of narrative reintegration belongs as much to the master narrator as it does to Odysseus. Compare the remarks of Bakker 2013, 11: "It is as if the poet and the hero are vying for the same space in the presentation of the poem. But they also head toward the same goal." Penelope also narrates her own trials for Odysseus, so that the scene as a whole integrates the narrative of Odysseus' journey with the narrative of events on Ithaca in his absence.

immediately on the final reunion of Odysseus and Penelope and their return to their marriage bed—the moment that Alexandrian critics had designated as the *telos*, the 'end' or 'fulfillment', of the poem.[31] The fulfillment of Odysseus' desire for return—the centripetal desire around which the plot is organized—is thus marked by the final constitution of an authoritative whole out of the narrative's discrete parts.

We might take this correlation as an indication of the nature of narrative desire in general, a desire "to construct... ever-larger wholes" that applies as much to traditional oral narratives as to the products of literate culture.[32] Elsewhere, however, the *Odyssey* stages a much more complex interaction between the forces of integration and fragmentation, one that is suggestive of dynamics that are indeed specific to traditional narrative. At the center of this interaction is, again, Odysseus as a master of integration. When the narrative at last takes up his story in Book 5, Odysseus' first substantive action on Kalypso's island is to construct a *skhediē*, literally, an 'improvised ship'.[33] The narrative describes the shipbuilding process in considerable detail, thus underscoring Odysseus' ability to construct a harmonious whole out of scattered and disorganized parts. It is, I think, significant that the Kalypso narrative provides the 'join', so to speak, between the primary narrative and the analepsis of Odysseus' Apologoi, which conclude with his stay on Kalypso's island. The conclusion of the Apologoi is, as I pointed out at the beginning of my discussion, a critical moment in terms of the *Odyssey*'s narrative desires; as in the case of the analogous moment in Balzac, the catching up of the analepsis with the primary narrative's starting point provides a measure of satisfaction for narrative desire by establishing a narrative totality. It is entirely appropriate that Odysseus' skill as a joiner and integrator of complex material objects should be demonstrated precisely at that point in the primary narrative to which Odysseus as narrator will eventually join his tale—thus providing for the external audience a sense of completion and wholeness.[34]

[31] The scholia at 23.296 indicate that Aristophanes of Byzantium and Aristarchus identified that line as the *peras* (in some manuscripts) or *telos* (in others) of the poem. On the interpretation of these controversial remarks, see Grethlein 2017, 259-62.

[32] The (1st c. CE?) novelist Chariton of Aphrodisias, quoting *Od*. 23.296 (the Alexandrian *telos* of the poem), appropriates the device of the final reintegrative narrative as a closural strategy at the beginning of the eighth and final book of his novel (8.1). I discuss the relationship of this scene to its Odyssean model in a forthcoming essay on Chariton.

[33] For *skhediē* as 'improvised ship' rather than simply 'raft', see Casson 1964.

[34] For a somewhat different perspective on the metapoetic aspects of Odysseus' *skhediē*, see Dougherty 2001, 32-37. Dougherty emphasizes metaphorical connections between boat-building and song-making. For her, the subsequent wrecking of Odysseus' boat "captures the contingent nature of oral poetry, in which bits of songs are put together in interesting and useful ways to fit a specific occasion... oral performances get taken apart and reassembled in a different order" (35). This

If, however, Odysseus' 'improvised ship' represents a certain integral wholeness, it is not a durable wholeness, for the *skhediē* is very soon destroyed—disintegrated into its individual parts by a wave sent by Poseidon. To the extent that the ship serves as an icon of narrative integrity, we may see in Poseidon's action yet another indication of the 'centrifugal' impulse he embodies. As a representative of forces that deflect Odysseus from his goal, Poseidon is a disruptor of the narrative totality represented by the *Odyssey*. His disruptive and 'centrifugal' influence extends even beyond the end of the poem, for, as Teiresias predicts, it is on account of Poseidon's wrath that Odysseus will eventually have to make another journey, one that will take him so far away from the territory of his own epic of maritime wandering that he will find himself among people who mistake an oar for a winnowing-shovel.[35] Nevertheless, in spite of this disruption of the totality of the story of return, the sign indicated by Teiresias—the oar mistaken for a winnowing-shovel—establishes another, larger totality by pointing back to Odysseus' ship. At the moment of its destruction by Poseidon's wave, the disintegrating *skhediē* is compared to a pile of chaff scattered by the wind (5.368-70):

ὡς δ' ἄνεμος ζαὴς ᾖῶν θημῶνα τινάξῃ
καρφαλέων, τὰ μὲν ἄρ τε διεσκέδασ' ἄλλυδις ἄλλῃ,
ὣς τῆς δούρατα μακρὰ διεσκέδασ'…

As a strong wind stirs a heap of dry chaff,
which it scatters here and there,
so [the wave] scattered the timbers of the ship…

This is the only simile in the *Odyssey* to draw on the act of winnowing grain; in fact, this and Odysseus' 'winnowing-shovel' are to my knowledge the only two

characterization of oral poetry, however, exaggerates the element of improvisational recombination: in fact, the underlying 'order' of a traditional narrative can be and most often is highly stable across different performances, in spite of variations in wording or differences arising from expansion and compression. Below, I ascribe a different significance to the disintegration of Odysseus' boat.

35 See Purves 2006 for analysis of the way in which the inland journey dictated by Teiresias represents a journey beyond the boundaries of the Homeric tradition. Speaking of the scene in which Odysseus relates Teiresias' prophecy to Penelope (23.239-96), Purves remarks, perceptively, "the meditation on boundaries at the end of the poem only serves to thematize the possibility of a story's (endless) expansion within the context of an oral performance that the audience of an epic poem will experience in a way that readers of texts—who can count pages—will not" (17). It will be clear from what follows that I differ somewhat from Purves in my understanding of the oar mistaken for a winnowing-shovel. Purves sees this transformation of the oar's significance as a sign of a complete break with the Homeric tradition: "For the Inlanders," she writes, "the object on Odysseus' shoulder... is stripped of the symbolic value that it exhibited in Homer's world" (13). I prefer to see the oar-turned-winnowing-shovel as an index of a totality that escapes the limits of a single narrative instance.

references to winnowing in the poem.[36] The collocation, at two critical moments in Odysseus' life-story, of two radically incommensurate spheres—ship-craft and agriculture—cannot be coincidental.[37] The oar-as-winnowing-shovel clearly looks back to the destruction of Odysseus' ship—not unreasonably, since both are manifestations of Poseidon's anger. Both, too, are 'centrifugal' moments in Odysseus' life story; and yet the connection between them establishes an integrated totality at a large scale that stands in tension with the fragmentation associated with such 'centrifugal' moments at the local level.

The tension I have described between integration and fragmentation seems to me to speak to the distinctive nature of the experience of totality provided by a traditional performance medium. In contrast to the sense of wholeness experienced by the reader of a novel, who can indeed grasp the entirety of the text as a closed and complete whole, the audience of a traditional performance typically experiences wholeness as something immanent and virtual, something graspable only through metonymic connections between the performance and the tradition as a whole. Simply put, a single performance can never encompass or present the entirety of tradition. Even the entirety of our own text of the *Odyssey* far exceeds the limits of a single performance.[38] All this is to say that the sense of totality offered by a traditional performance is an evanescent one, attainable momentarily by some attentive listeners as they call to mind all that may be implied by or immanent in a motif such as Odysseus' winnowing-shovel. The experience of performance involves an ever-present tension between the fragmentary nature of the performed narrative and the integral tradition it evokes.[39]

[36] The *Iliad* has two similes referring to the act of winnowing grain: Il. 5.499-503 and 13.588-92. Note that the *tertium comparationis* is somewhat different in these two cases: while the common ground in the *Odyssey* simile centers on the scattering of discrete parts, in the *Iliad* similes the emphasis is on the whitening effect of the dust raised in battle (5.499-503) or the bouncing motion of an arrow that glances off its target (13.588-92). In both these cases, then, the winnowing image is connected to battlefield violence. A similar connection would seem to underlie the poetic kenning for 'winnowing-shovel' that Teiresias offers as a *sēma*: *athērēloigos* (*Od*. 11.128, 23.275), literally, 'destroyer of chaff'. The martial connotations of this term (*loigos* is a frequent Iliadic designation for the destruction of war) may indicate that the totality embraced by this *sēma* encompasses the *Iliad* as well as the *Odyssey*.

[37] In characterizing these two spheres as "radically incommensurate," I am thinking above all of the distaste for sailing exhibited by the agriculturally-oriented persona of Hesiod in the *Works and Days* (see especially 649-51).

[38] The performance of the *Odyssey* at a festival like the Panathenaia must be imagined as extending across multiple days, likely featuring multiple performers; we may reasonably wonder whether even the most attentive listener at such a festival could have absorbed the entire thing.

[39] For a brief discussion of such a tension in the performance of the Rajasthani epic of Pābūjī, see Smith 1986, 53.

If the desire that inhabits traditional narrative is a desire "to construct meanings in ever-larger wholes", I hope to have suggested some ways in which those 'wholes' differ from those that determine the experience of reading a novel. No doubt these differences can all be accounted for in terms of straightforward and uncontroversial observations about the nature of traditional narrative. In the first place, the experience that is 'totalized', to use Brooks' terms, is based not on the acquisition of new information in the course of an encounter with a single, unitary text, but on the recognition of elements familiar from prior experience and the activation in memory of connections to previous performances. Insofar as this mode of engagement exploits more intensively the resources and structure of memory, it is arguably closer than Brooks' own account to the Freudian and Lacanian theories of desire on which he relies, since those theories place a great deal of stress on "memory traces".[40] Moreover, while Brooks' account emphasizes the *sequential* acquisition of information by the reader,[41] the experience of traditional narrative is characterized by a distinctive relationship between part and whole—or between performance and tradition—that imposes a distinctly non-sequential way of comprehending narrative. It is for this reason that the construction of Odysseus' ship can stand as an icon of integral totality at the *outset* of the narrative, looking forward proleptically to the moment when a narrative totality will be realized in the course of Odysseus' Apologoi.[42]

These general observations should be uncontroversial. Many, if not most, of the observations put forward in this essay are doubtless matters of common sense. My goal has been to indicate ways in which a form of narrative desire specific to traditional narrative can be traced in the *Odyssey*'s structure and plot. By way of conclusion I note again how remarkable it is that the internal audience for a significant portion of the tale cannot enjoy the kind of traditional narrative desire I have described. I am thinking of course of the Phaeacians who listen to Odysseus' Apologoi. They have no memory of previous performances to which to connect Odysseus' story. Furthermore, forever unaware of how the story ends, they are unable to construct the larger whole that is available to the poem's external audience. For them the story remains a mere sequence of

[40] Brooks 1984, 55: "Desire is inherently unsatisfied and unsatisfiable since it is linked to memory traces."

[41] As in the first sentence of his essay: "Plot as we have defined it is the organizing line and intention of narrative... a structuring operation elicited in the reader trying to make sense of those meanings that develop only through textual and temporal succession" (Brooks 1984, 37).

[42] The metonymic nature of traditional narrative, in which the whole is always implied by the part, likewise explains Tzvetan Todorov's observation about the "indifference" with which "everything is recounted in advance" in the *Odyssey*. The poem's complex anachronism should also be seen in connection with this metonymic relationship.

episodes, without any ultimate teleology. In this regard, the episodic character of the Apologoi, so different from that of the rest of the narrative, seems to suggest something of the difference between a 'Phaeacian' experience of the narrative and that of the external audience. The Phaeacians' experience, it must be emphasized, is not devoid of desire or pleasure: they forego sleep to hear more of Odysseus' tale, and at its conclusion they are "enthralled by enchantment", as the narrator tells us (κηληθμῷ δ' ἔσχοντο, 13.2 = 11.334). And yet they are unable to see or understand the tale in a broader context. If such a perspective had been available to them, perhaps they would have seen more clearly the nature of their own involvement in the story—perhaps Alkinoos would have recalled sooner his father's dire prediction that Phaeacian hospitality would one day invite Poseidon's wrath. When we last see the Phaeacians, they are gathered around an altar praying to Poseidon not to destroy their city (13.184-87). Their peril is arguably a reminder to the *Odyssey*'s audiences to gather all the resources of memory and tradition as they endeavor to grasp fully the totality of the tale's significance.

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ODISEJA I NARATIVNA ŽELJA U TRADICIONALNOME PRIPOVIJEDNOM DISKURSU

Sažetak

Inspirirajući se raspravom Petera Brooksa o „narativnoj želji" koja oblikuje pripovijedanje, u ovome se radu nastoji artikulirati specifični oblik narativne želje koji bi se mogao primijeniti na tradicionalni usmeni pripovijedni diskurs, čiji su zapleti obično unaprijed poznati slušateljima. Raspravlja se o tematskim i strukturnim značajkama *Odiseje* kao o dokazu za dinamiku upravo takve „tradicionalne narativne želje".

Ključne riječi: narativna želja, Peter Brooks, *Odiseja*, usmena tradicija, usmena književnost