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ANAIS DE FILOSOFIA CLÁSSICA

ODYSSEUS'S REQUEST AND THE NEED FOR SONG *

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RESUMO: Como um caso teste para a tese de que os problemas mais importantes da poética grega (e não menos da 'poética das paixões') já estão criativamente reconhecidos na própria poesia grega, este artigo propõe uma reconsideração íntima de partes de um dos mais notáveis episódios na Odisseia de Homero: a cena na corte dos feácios no canto VIII, em que Odisseu escuta as canções do bardo cego Demódoco. Meu foco central está nas reações de Odisseu (lacrimando e chorando) às primeira e terceira das canções de Demódoco, que concernem eventos anteriores e durante a Guerra de Troia envolvendo o próprio Odisseu. Os estudiosos seguiram majoritariamente a perspectiva de que a intensa resposta emocional de Odisseu, diferentemente do prazer surtido na audiência feácia com as performances de Demódoco, mostra que seus sentimentos 'autobiográficos' impedem uma apreciação dos cantos, do mesmo modo que os sentimentos de Penélope com sua própria vida a levam, no canto I, a interromper o canto de Fêmio sobre o fatídico retorno de Troia dos gregos. Mas se tem dado insuficiente atenção ao profundo enigma sobre o comportamento de Odisseu (e uma expressiva diferença do comportamento de Penélope no canto I) que desafia tal leitura. Dado que Odisseu acha o primeiro canto de Demódoco tão emocionalmente arrasador, porque é que ele efetivamente solicita o terceiro canto – e precisamente embasado em sua admiração do primeiro? Por que ele escolhe se expor uma segunda vez às turbulentas emoções que o cantar de Demódoco sobre a Guerra de Troia provoca nele? Meu tratamento deste enigma presta uma atenção minuciosa a vários aspectos da cena, não limitado aos termos em que Odisseu faz a sua solicitação do terceiro canto. Eu mostro que em resposta a Demódoco, Odisseu apresenta uma necessidade de algo que os cantos lhe dão, mas que vai além da natureza das suas memórias em primeira pessoa. Como Aquiles e Helena na Ilíada, Odisseu parece considerar o canto como um recurso para transformar o terrível fardo de sua história de vida em um objeto de expressivo poder em si mesmo. A narrativa homérica é em si mesma um endosso dessa 'protopoética', mas de tal modo que desafia a redução em abstrações de poéticas teóricas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: imitação, mímesis, produção, falso, arte, natureza

ABSTRACT: As a test case for the claim that the most important problems in Greek poetics (not least 'the poetics of the passions') are already creatively recognised in Greek poetry itself, this paper offers a close reconsideration of parts of one of the most remarkable episodes in Homer's *Odyssey*: the scene at the Phaeacian court in Book 8 where Odysseus listens to the songs of the blind bard Demodocus. My central concern is with Odysseus's reactions (weeping and sobbing) to the first and third of Demodocus's songs, which deal with events before and during the Trojan War involving Odysseus himself. Scholars have mostly followed the view that Odysseus's intensely emotional response, unlike

* I am very grateful to Fernando Santoro for having invited me to participate in the Pathos conference in Rio de Janeiro in October 2008. A fuller version of this paper will form part of a chapter of my book *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Problems of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus*, to be published by Oxford University Press in 2010. I have deliberately kept documentation (including secondary literature) to a minimum in the present version of my text.

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the pleasure taken in Demodocus's performances by the Phaeacian audience, shows that his 'autobiographical' feelings impede an appreciation of the songs, just as Penelope's feelings about her own life lead her in Book 1 to interrupt Phemius's song about the fateful return of the Greeks from Troy. But insufficient attention has been paid to a deep enigma about Odysseus's behaviour (and a telling difference from Penelope's behaviour in Book 1) which undermines such a reading. Given that Odysseus finds Demodocus's first song so emotionally overwhelming, why is it that he actually requests the third song – and precisely on the basis of his admiration for the first? Why does he choose to expose himself a second time to the turbulent emotions which Demodocus's singing about the Trojan War arouses in him? My treatment of this enigma pays detailed attention to various aspects of the scene, not least the terms in which Odysseus makes his request for the third song. I argue that in his response to Demodocus Odysseus displays a need for something that the songs give him but which goes beyond the nature of his first-person memories. Like the Iliadic Achilles and Helen, Odysseus seems to regard song as a means of transforming the terrible burden of his life-story into an object of expressive power in its own right. The Homeric narrative is itself an enactment of this 'proto-poetics', but one which defies reduction to the abstractions of theoretical poetics.

KEYWORDS: imitation, mimesis, production, false, art, nature.

The history of ancient Greek poetics, not least 'the poetics of the passions', begins inside not outside poetry. It is a remarkable feature of the entire 'song culture' of archaic Greece that in every major variety of poetry – epic, didactic, elegy, iambus, and the different types of lyric or melic – there is a place for explicit reflection on the workings and the values of poetry itself (or, to be terminologically a little more precise, of 'song' itself). It is the poets themselves, through the forms of thought and feeling to which they give expression, who set large parts of the agenda for the subsequent phases of more theoretically articulated poetics pursued by philosophers, critics and other intellectuals in Greek culture. As that way of putting the point already acknowledges, however, there are important differences of discursive status between the 'proto-poetics' found inside poetry and the more abstract plane of argument and conceptual analysis on which the later theory and criticism of poetry are located. There are two radically contrasting ways of construing this relationship between, so to speak, internal and external modes of poetics – between poetically embedded and poetically functional reflections on poetry, in the one case, and abstractly framed systems of poetic principles, in the other. One way is to think of the poets as preparing the ground, and in a sense helping to expose the need, for poetics: in a partial and inchoate manner, they voice ideas and sentiments which have the potential to be elaborated into independent paradigms of theory. But the other way of thinking about the relationship in question involves, as it were, a reversal of priorities. This alternative will prefer to believe (to state a complex point as concisely as possible) that poetic theory needs poetry more than poetry needs poetic theory. From this perspective, the poets are not so much forerunners of the theorists; rather, the critics

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are themselves 'latecomers'. And, on this view, the history of Greek poetics is not teleological: on the contrary, the most urgent and difficult problems of poetics were already there in poetry to begin with, creatively imagined and shaped by poets themselves.

I would like in this paper to explore an example or test case – perhaps the most challenging test case available to us – of what might count, on the second alternative just proposed, as early Greek poetry's own recognition of the deepest problems of poetics, above all the poetics of the passions. I am referring to the extended scene at Phaeacia in Book 8 of the *Odyssey* in the course of which the blind bard Demodocus sings a trio of songs for the Phaeacian nobles and their special guest, the (as yet) unidentified Odysseus. This much-discussed sequence of events is one of the most intricately designed and thematically subtle episodes to be found anywhere in Homer (and, therefore, anywhere in Greek poetry). It raises, needless to say, multiple issues of interpretation, even on the level of what I have called proto-poetics. There are several aspects of the passage which I do not intend to deal with here, including the nature of Demodocus's second song, the notorious account of the adultery between Ares and Aphrodite and the revenge taken on them by Aphrodite's wronged husband Hephaestus. I have recently offered a reading of this middle song in which I argue that its tone is more ambiguous and unstable than many critics have appreciated.¹ If that is right, its implications for the (proto-)poetics of the complete triad of songs sung by Demodocus are less straightforward than sometimes supposed. But I do not have space here to tackle that larger question. My concern in this paper will be almost exclusively with the reactions of Odysseus to the first and third of Demodocus's songs, i.e. the two songs in which Odysseus is himself a character (in the first case, *Od.* 8.73-82, involved in a bitter quarrel with Achilles which belongs somewhere in the build-up to the Trojan War, and in the other, 8.499-520, taking the leading part in executing the stratagem of the Wooden Horse which finally penetrates the Trojans' defences and brings about the sack of the city). Scholars have frequently noted and tried to explain the conspicuous contrast between the reaction of Odysseus and the reaction of the Phaeacians to these two songs. While the Phaeacians are described as taking undiluted pleasure in the songs, and therefore as eager for more (every time Demodocus pauses in his first song, the nobles urge him to continue: *Od.* 8.90-1; cf. 538), Odysseus covers his head and weeps (8.83-92, 521-31) – not wholly unlike the way, it is worth mentioning, in which Telemachus covers his eyes and weeps for his father at Sparta in

¹ S. Halliwell, *Greek Laughter: a Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 77-86.

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Book 4 (113-6), when emotionally overwhelmed by Menelaus's first, heartfelt reference to Odysseus's exceptional qualities and sufferings.

As a result of Odysseus's own tears in Book 8, King Alcinous, sitting next to the hero and aware of his reactions to the songs, tactfully instructs Demodocus to stop singing (8.97-9). Many critics – following the lead, as it were, of Alcinous's action – have interpreted the contrast between the responses of Odysseus and the Phaeacians to be clear-cut and transparent in its implications: while the Phaeacians are able to find 'pure' enjoyment in the songs and thus to want the singing to continue, Odysseus finds the songs too painful to hear because of his personal involvement in the stories narrated. But even before we address a major difficulty with such a reading of the scene, one might wonder in more general terms whether the nature of the situation makes it safe to infer from it, as critics have tended to do, a kind of normative poetics of epic audiences. Can the Phaeacians, in their strangely enclosed, detached society (which has no direct connection with the world in which the Trojan War and its aftermath belong), really represent a model audience of epic song and its supposedly 'pure' pleasure? Or might they be thought to be *too* comfortably protected and distanced from the world in which the terrible upheavals of that war have occurred to be ideally placed to appreciate the full significance of the songs which Demodocus sings about it? Reservations of that kind have led a minority of scholars to find in this episode a more complicated message about poetic audiences. Colin Macleod, for instance, sees in it a tacit indication that an ideal audience of epic would somehow combine or synthesise the qualifications of both the Phaeacians *and* Odysseus, being 'pleased...but also moved'; George Walsh regards it as exhibiting a radical dichotomy between alternative states of mind ('impassive fascination' and personal involvement) in which poetry and its 'truth' can be experienced.²

It is preferable, I think, to be more hesitant about drawing normative inferences from this dimension of the scene. If anything, the episode suggests that epic does not stand in a static relationship to fixed audience types but can create (and/or discover) different audiences in the contingent circumstances of performance: even the 'same' audience can develop and change in its relationship to a song, as I shall argue happens with Odysseus himself. Part of the difficulty we face in trying to make sense of the contrast between audiences in *Odyssey* 8 is that the Homeric narrative provides only an 'external' glimpse of the Phaeacians' experience: we see them only from the outside as a collectively enthralled audience and are

² See C. Macleod, *Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 8-12; G. B. Walsh, *The Varieties of Enchantment: Early Greek Views of the Nature and Function of Poetry* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press), pp. 3-6, 16-20.

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not given any insight into what the songs might mean to them. Furthermore, the pleasure which marks their response, as denoted by the verb *τέρπεισθαι* need not be a 'simple and unmixed' experience, as George Walsh claims. Several Homeric passages clearly demonstrate that the verb is compatible with psychological complexity: it is applied to Telemachus's intense and certainly not impassive absorption in Menelaus's narrative of his Trojan and post-Trojan experiences (*Od.* 4.598), to Eumaeus's description of the gratification which he and his visitor (the disguised Odysseus) might find in listening to each other's recollections of the 'grievous woes' they have lived through (*Od.* 15.399, with the generalisation at 15.400), and (however opaquely) to Achilles' performance of his 'private' epic at *Iliad* 9.189. We are given no insight into the feelings that might befit a Phaeacian audience listening to songs about a world so separate and different from their own, but we should not assume that their response is depicted as necessarily free of emotional engagement. More importantly for my immediate purposes, however, the Phaeacians serve principally as background and foil to the extraordinary response of Odysseus himself. It is this response which poses a far larger problem of interpretation: indeed, a fundamental enigma.

The core of this enigma can be stated in the form of a question, a question which has received far less attention in the literature than one might have expected (certainly far less than the contrast between Odysseus and the Phaeacians). How, in the light of what leads up to it (not least, Alcinous's decision to interrupt Demodocus's performance at 96-9), are we to understand Odysseus's motive for actually *requesting* the third song? The first song, starting from his pre-war quarrel with Achilles (but expanding, so the combination of lines 90-92 with 489-90 surely suggests, into a narrative of parts of the war itself), comes as a kind of shock to Odysseus. Demodocus was summoned by Alcinous to contribute his divinely conferred gifts to the celebration of a feast in honour of the visitor. Odysseus (like first-time hearers of the *Odyssey* itself) is in no position to anticipate the theme of the first song or to prepare himself for how it will suddenly throw a dramatic spotlight on his own life of twenty years ago. As a result, it is as though he is caught emotionally off guard. Yet when the feast is reconvened later in the day (after the athletic games outside the palace, and Demodocus's song of the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite), Odysseus specifically asks the Phaeacian bard to sing the story of the Wooden Horse. This pregnant moment presents an audience of the *Odyssey* with an acute challenge of interpretation. Odysseus lavishly praises (as the product of 'teaching' by a Muse or Apollo, 8.488) Demodocus's ability to sing of events in a manner which has both formal beauty (*kosmos*: I shall come back to this point later) and an authenticity (some would

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say 'truth') comparable to eye-witness testimony (8.491). But given the tears and sobbing, with the concomitant sense of social embarrassment (the veiling of his head), which marked his response to Demodocus's first song, why should Odysseus *want* to hear another narrative about himself at all, a narrative which, as it turns out, will induce in him precisely the same upsurge of turbulent emotion as before? Since he has no need for its own sake to 'test' the powers of the Phaeacian bard, what is it about the experience of song which lures him into betraying such strong feelings in the presence of strangers? Certainly unsatisfactory is the mechanical and critically back-to-front explanation offered by the ancient scholia (on 8.43), namely that Odysseus's tears are needed (i.e. required by the plot) in order to cause Alcinous's question about his identity (8.577-86). Nor is it wholly adequate, I believe, to treat Odysseus's request as part of a process whereby he rebuilds confidence in his own identity and fame after all the sufferings and losses of his wanderings: this reading, which has been especially favoured in German scholarship on Homer, may fit the larger transitional pattern of what happens to Odysseus at the Phaeacian court, but it does not seem to me to do justice to the particular force of his response to Demodocus's songs.

The conundrum is all the more remarkable for being embedded in the only context in the entire poem where the remorselessly self-disciplined hero appears practically to lose control over his own emotions. Odysseus weeps freely in several other contexts: on the shore of Ogygia (5.82-4), for instance, or when encountering those dear to him in Hades (11.55, 87, 395, 466). But nowhere else is he overwhelmed by tears which he feels a pressure to try to conceal; very different is the way he 'easily' hides from Eumaeus a discreet tear for his old dog Argos at 17.304-5. The contrast is most pointed with those situations in which Odysseus calculatedly cloaks his own feelings in order to test others, as when, most poignantly, he induces Penelope to weep profusely while himself maintaining unflinching eyes 'of horn or iron' (*Od.* 19.203-12, where it is also intimated, however, in a trope which captures the characteristic workings of his mind, that he weeps *inwardly* with pity for his wife, 19.210/212). In *Iliad* Book 9 (186-9) Achilles, the last person to hide his emotions, surprisingly finds gratification in 'epic' song at the very moment when tumultuously at odds with his life-defining status as hero. How, then, can it be that Odysseus, the ultimate paradigm of self-mastery, is overcome by uncontrollable grief when contemplating, also in 'epic' song, his own past as a leading warrior and yet should ask to hear more? Elsewhere in the *Odyssey* we encounter the thought (on the lips of Eumaeus, as already mentioned: 15.400-1) that there can be a kind of solace in recalling times of sorrow from a later vantage point of tranquillity.

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But in *Odyssey* 8 we seem to have the puzzling reverse of this: the unforeseen arousal of sorrow by memories of former triumphs.

The puzzle is only compounded by assuming, with many critics, that Demodocus's first song reduces Odysseus to a state comparable to the distress of Penelope in Book 1 when she (over)hears Phemius's song of the disasters that befell many Greeks on their return voyage from Troy. The differences between the two scenes are actually more telling than the *prima facie* resemblances. In Penelope's case, the song is not explicitly about her own plight, at any rate if we exclude the hypothesis, to which some scholars subscribe, that it is to be imagined as containing the 'death' of Odysseus himself. But as she listens and reflects (φρεσὶ σύνθετο, 1.328: Penelope is an active interpreter of what she hears, not a passive recipient), Phemius's song induces her to *feel* that it is about her own life: ignorant of Odysseus's survival and Athena's positive role in it, she cannot dissociate her own unhappiness from the thought of the terrible deaths inflicted by Athena on some of the returning Greeks. Penelope's reaction, therefore, mixes emotional authenticity with (understandable) cognitive error, and it is this mixture which makes the experience unbearable for her – hence her decision to descend into the hall and to insist, tearfully, that Phemius stop the song. Odysseus, by contrast, knows at first hand the relationship of Demodocus's first song to his own life, so that his sobbing grief (γοάσκειν, 8.92) ought, unlike Penelope's, to be aligned with his understanding of what the song reveals about his past (and his present) situation. Here, however, the *Odyssey* itself partly occludes the vision of its own audience(s). We cannot be sure what it is that Odysseus feels grief for: is it the bitter quarrel with Achilles (with its exchanges of 'appalling words', ἐκπάγλοις ἐπέεσσιν, 8.77)? the deaths of his former comrades? the whole 'woe' (πῆμα, 81) of the war? the particular consequences of the war for his own separation from home and family? But whatever meaning might be projected onto his emotions (or onto the symbolism of his repeated libations, 8.89: the only libations in Homer, I think, where we are not told what kind of prayer accompanies them), Odysseus certainly does not ask Demodocus to stop singing. Nor can it simply be that, as a guest, he is not entitled to ask such a thing and depends on Alcinous (from whom in fact he tries to conceal his emotions) to give the instruction. An Odysseus who found the song unbearable, like Penelope in Book 1, could hardly be the Odysseus who makes an opportunity, later in the evening, to request from Demodocus a further song about himself – a song he has reason to expect will duplicate or renew his experience of the first. If we try to negate that expectation, as some scholars do, by supposing that in making his request Odysseus is looking for the uplift of praise or panegyric,

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we will have to pay the price of rendering him grossly self-ignorant about his own emotions; and that, for me at any rate, is far too high a price to pay. We are left, then, with the nagging, awkward question: why does Odysseus choose to hear that further song?

The dramatic psychology of that choice and its consequences invites and yet also, in a sense, blocks interpretation. Neither narrator nor character offers a transparent explanation. Yet between them, I submit, they convey the compelling if mysterious impression that Odysseus *wants to repeat* the experience of the first song – wants to be exposed once more to the emotions which it made well up in him. This point not only parallels in its own more sharply focussed way the Phaeacians' calls for continued performances from Demodocus (8.90-1). It also makes Odysseus ironically and strangely emblematic of the irresistible 'longing' or 'desire' (ἰμερος) which song is characteristically thought to arouse in Homer (and elsewhere in archaic Greek poetry): the longing to hear more, to be drawn more deeply into the world conjured up by the song. What stamps Odysseus's case as exceptional is of course the personal and highly fraught memories which are touched by Demodocus's songs. But that does not make those songs *merely* a trigger for memory. I disagree here with Grace Ledbetter's suggestion that Odysseus (and likewise Penelope in Book 1) does not respond 'to poetry as such', only to 'associated memories', and does not have 'a genuinely *poetic* experience' (Ledbetter's italics).³ The phrases 'poetry as such' and 'a genuinely poetic experience' seem to presuppose a kind of aestheticism – a clean separation between the experience of poetry and the experience of life – to which the *Odyssey* itself is intrinsically and powerfully resistant.

Odysseus's request to Demodocus is directly linked to his admiration for the blind bard's exceptional command of song. Nor can that admiration be reduced to an awareness of song's capacity to trigger memories. On the contrary, the relationship between Odysseus's reaction to the first song and his request for the third indicates that he finds in the former and wants from the latter something which his own first-person knowledge of the events cannot alone supply. That difference surely consists in something other than 'factually' correct information, which many scholars have taken to be the chief quality highlighted in Odysseus's speech at 8.487-98: such information can hardly in itself make adequate sense of the emotional intensity of Odysseus's reactions. Although Odysseus's request to Demodocus, with its praise of the eyewitness-like immediacy of the bard's first song (8.491), is frequently

³ G. M. Ledbetter, *Poetics Before Plato: Interpretation and Authority in Early Greek Theories of Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 35-7.

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adduced by critics as prime evidence of a Homeric conception of epic as a kind of 'true history', the progression of the scene as a whole suggests that what affects Odysseus in the power of Demodocus's singing is something more than scrupulous accuracy. Odysseus can vouch independently for such accuracy. The Phaeacians, however, do not know that at this stage and therefore cannot understand his public praise of Demodocus in that light. Odysseus's desire to hear more – so different from Penelope's unbearable anguish in Book 1 – testifies 'silently' to epic's own audience that in the experience of song he seeks a value which can supplement and even transform his first-person memories of the past. Demodocus's inspiration offers Odysseus a means of contemplating his own life, but pictured outside himself, as it were, and 'objectified' in the special form of song. If the experience threatens nonetheless to overwhelm him, that is not because he is impeded from appreciating the songs in their own right, but because he can hear them more deeply than anyone else.

In support of this way of reading the scene, it is worth reconsidering two particular phrases in Odysseus's speech to Demodocus, both of which have received repeated emphasis from scholars. The first is *κατὰ κόσμον* (489), which refers back to (part of) what impressed Odysseus about Demodocus's first song; unlike a majority of critics, I would here translate it as 'beautifully' or 'fittingly'. The second phrase is *κατὰ μοῖραν* (496), which refers to the quality which Odysseus hopes for in the song of the Wooden Horse. It is misguided to hang an interpretation of the scene, in all its psychological drama, on a rigid construal of these two phrases, neither of which carries a simple or perspicuous meaning in the present context. All four of the other Odyssean occurrences of *κατὰ κόσμον* are qualified by a negative: they categorise words or actions as *inappropriate*, out of place, or in some respect unfitting, but they do not direct attention to narrative sequence or accuracy *per se* (which is what a majority of critics have taken the phrase to refer to in the present passage). Iliadic usage also bears out the broad inference that *kosmos*, whether observed as present or regretted as absent, signifies an attractive congruence of elements (made or shaped by someone's action, not simply given), varying in nature according to the particular domain and setting concerned: Thersites' words, for instance, are branded by the narrator as 'disorderly' or 'ugly' (*ἄκοσμα*) and 'unfitting' (*οὐ κατὰ κόσμον*, *Iliad* 2.213-14) because they breach decorum, not because they are false; and of the other seven Iliadic occurrences of (*οὐ*) *κατὰ κόσμον*, none concerns speech acts at all, but (im)proper, (un)seemly, or skilfully controlled behaviour of other

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kinds.⁴ Odysseus's praise of Demodocus, in close proximity to his description of the Wooden Horse itself as ἵππου κόσμον.../δουρατέου, 'the fine design(ing) of the wooden horse' (8.492-3), is therefore evocative of something richer and less clear-cut than the strictly sequential, 'point-by-point' account of events which Margalit Finkelberg and others have seen as the crucial implication of the passage.⁵ This is particularly so given that the *kosmos* of the song itself is placed by Odysseus in piquant juxtaposition to its grim subject matter:

λίην γὰρ κατὰ κόσμον Ἀχαιῶν οἴτον ἀεῖδεις,
ὅσσ' ἔρξαν τ' ἔπαθόν τε καὶ ὅσσ' ἐμόγησαν Ἀχαιοί,
ὥς τέ που ἢ αὐτὸς παρεῶν ἢ ἄλλου ἀκούσας. (8.489-91)

You sing so beautifully of the doom of the Achaeans,
Their numerous deeds and sufferings and toils,
As though you somehow had been present yourself or had heard from another.

Since this sentence follows Odysseus's laudatory suggestion that Demodocus must have been taught (i.e. his abilities as a singer, not the particular contents of this song) by either a Muse or Apollo (8.488), the result is an inescapable paradox: a song of (quasi-)divine beauty about the bleakest of human events.⁶ It is also important to say that the eyewitness-like authenticity of line 491 does not justify us in limiting the criterion of Odysseus's praise to that of sequential conformity to the 'facts' of the events concerned. The quality implicitly predicated of an eyewitness account might itself be taken to be at least as much a matter of vivid immediacy of depiction and feeling as one of factual accuracy. 'Eyewitness' authenticity does not in any case obscure the suggestion in κατὰ κόσμον of something not just passively reproduced but actively shaped or enhanced by the singer's own mastery of words, including the beauty of the musical performance. Finally, it bears reiterating that to the addressee Demodocus, as to the rest of the listening Phaeacians, the force of κατὰ κόσμον cannot intelligibly signify an ascription of 'factual' accuracy, since the identity of Odysseus and therefore his credentials for making such an assertion are as yet unknown to them.

Given the direction of Odysseus's thought in his praise of Demodocus, it is reasonable to hear the thrust of κατὰ κόσμον in this passage as carrying over to κατὰ μοῖραν (496) as well. The latter phrase is itself widely used in Homer to mark approval of speech acts which

⁴ The idea of *active* arrangement of materials conveyed by *kosmos* terminology is also clear in Homeric use of the verbs διακοσμεῖν (e.g. *Il.* 2.476, *Od.* 22.457), κατακοσμεῖν (*Il.* 4.118, 'fitting' arrow to bowstring).

⁵ See M. Finkelberg, *The Birth of Literary Fiction in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 124-30.

⁶ I believe, without being able to pursue the point further here, that this is an idea latent more generally in the proto-poetics of Homer and other archaic Greek poetry: the Muses, to put the point succinctly, are not indefeasibly truthful, but their songs are indefeasibly beautiful. See my book (n. 1 above) for further discussion.

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are deemed to do full justice to the needs of their context, most typically in the form of insight or advice rather than narrative statements; even when coupled, as here, with the verb *καταλέγειν* (to 'recount'), the semantics of the phrase are not narrowly fixed.⁷ Applied to song, both the phrases in question might be thought to presuppose control and shaping of narrative structure, but there is no reason to take either of them to suggest any one particular kind of narrative ordering. As it happens, the Homeric narrator's synopsis of the third song indicates something other than a temporally linear narrative presentation: it involves the description of simultaneous or overlapping actions (the 'fake' departure of the Greek fleet and the concealment of Odysseus and others inside the Wooden Horse, 500-3), both *analepsis* (a reversal of chronological order, 503-4) and *prolepsis* (anticipation of a later event, 510-13), and further simultaneous actions (in the sack of the city, 516-18).⁸ Between them, then, *κατὰ κόσμον* and *κατὰ μοῖραν* convey a sense that Odysseus finds in Demodocus's singing not just a correct recapitulation of events in some particular sequence, but an arrangement of those events into an expressively compelling form: a new object of experience even for Odysseus himself, who in the third song at any rate hears a narrative which extends beyond the scope of anything his first-person testimony could encompass (certainly in the details of other warriors' exploits inside Troy, at 514-16, and perhaps, though this is rather imponderable, in the details of the Trojan debate at 505-9). To Homer's audience, therefore, but not to the Phaeacians, Odysseus displays an *emotional recognition* (a Homeric intuition of one kind of poetic *katharsis*?) that the songs give him something more than the contents of his own memories. They seem to do so not by erasing the sorrows he (now) associates with those memories but by making them somehow more concentrated (hence his surge of barely controllable weeping and sobbing) but also more meaningful (hence his desire to listen further to Demodocus) within the ordered yet transfixing *kosmos* of the story. We are left to infer that Odysseus has no need to hear a merely faithful reminder of what he lived through: he needs, in a way which even so threatens to overwhelm his long-suffering mind, to hear his life transfigured into the quasi-divine beauty that he discovers in Demodocus's singing.

The resulting paradoxes of the scene are brought to a piercing climax by the simile which describes Odysseus's response to the third song, 8.523-31. The simile compares his tears to those of a woman collapsed over the body of her dying warrior husband while enemy soldiers jab her in the back with their spears and prepare to take her into slavery. This

⁷ I leave on one side here some technical issues about formulaic expressions; these will be treated, once again, in the fuller version of my argument to be presented in my book.

⁸ *Analepsis* and *prolepsis* were also signalled as features of the structure of Demodocus's first song, at 8.79-82.

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unforgettable passage has understandably received sustained attention from critics. Many of them have read it as containing an intimation that Odysseus himself is brought by Demodocus's song to feel pity for the *losers* of war. The woman in the simile, on this reading, is perceived as a surrogate for Troy, or even for the victims of war in general, and Odysseus, though himself a victor, now sees beyond his original partisanship to the universality of human suffering. This interpretation is, I believe, both tempting and yet less than fully cogent. It is tempting because the simile itself so unmistakably condenses into a plangent image of tragedy the consequences of defeat in war. The harrowing vividness of the woman's collapse – shrieking with grief and slumped over the body of her husband convulsed by the gasps of his death-throes (526), while the victors jab her with spears and start to pull her away – is remarkable for a specificity of visualisation which, however Iliadic its connotations, is never quite matched anywhere in the *Iliad* itself.⁹ The Odyssean simile itself, that is to say, is a penetrating song of pity. But this should not induce us to elide the difference between the expressiveness of the Homeric image and what we are told about Odysseus himself. The simile states unequivocally that Odysseus weeps *like* the shrieking woman, with tears precisely as 'pitiful' (ἐλεινόν...δάκρυον, 532) as her anguish (ἐλεινοτάτω ἄχει, 531); the impression is intensified by the fact that the verb τήκομαι (522), when used elsewhere of weeping in Homer, refers only to women. Odysseus's state of mind is aligned, then, with that of the captive woman, making it difficult to avoid the inference that he now feels himself to be more of a victim than a victor of war. That chimes, moreover, with the evidence of other parts of the poem – most proximately in his answer to Alcinous at the start of Book 9 (12-13) but also in a series of earlier passages – that Odysseus does indeed see his own life in retrospect as a story of κήδεα, 'woes'.¹⁰

That dimension of the simile reinforces the paradox of Odysseus's psychological state at this juncture. It does so not just in virtue of its startling 'feminisation' of the most hard-bitten of Greek heroes, but also by exhibiting the capacity of song to draw Odysseus compulsively (this is the implication of his request) into an experience to which he knows that emotional turmoil is unavoidably attached. Odysseus weeps as pitifully as the woman

⁹ The most instructive Iliadic comparison is Briseis's remarkable lament for Patroclus in Book 19: slumped over his body (19.284; cf. *Od.* 8.527, a close correspondence), she remembers seeing her own husband and brothers cut down in front of their city, and recalls how instead of being simply dragged off into captivity, like the Odyssean woman, she was consoled and treated gently by Patroclus – something she now feels as tragically ironic in the light of Patroclus's own death (19.295-300). The whole scene, as it happens, is observed by Odysseus: *Il.* 19.310.

¹⁰ Compare especially *Od.* 6.165, 7.147, 152, 242, 297, 8.154; cf. Alcinous's echo of κήδεα at 11.369, 376. Menelaus had already used the same word of Odysseus's post-Trojan life at 4.108.

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widowed by war, yet he *chose* the song which has this effect on him. His frame of mind, in a way which the narrative evokes while leaving tantalisingly hard to decipher, seems to lie beyond a pure dichotomy of pleasure and pain, a point he half-articulates himself at the start of Book 9 when he comments again on the beauty of Demodocus's singing. It is legitimate to see at least an oblique connection between that frame of mind and two widely discussed moments in the *Iliad*: one, Helen's premonition at 6.357-8 of future songs about the terrible events in which she herself is implicated ('Zeus imposed a terrible destiny on us [Paris and myself], so that we might become a subject of song for future generations': οἴσιν ἐπὶ Ζεὺς θῆκε κακὸν μόνον, ὡς καὶ ὀπίσσω/ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ' ἀοίδιμοι ἔσσομένοι); the other, Achilles' own singing of 'epic' in Book 9 (186-9) against the backdrop of his bitter estrangement from the Greek army at Troy (and even, shortly afterwards at least, from the very idea of heroic warfare). Each of these three cases has, for sure, its own subtle particularity. But they convey a kindred sense of figures who have not only a capacity but also a kind of *need* to contemplate the turning of their own lives (and the worlds they belong to) into song. Helen half-desolately, half-wistfully imagines as something in the future the process by which suffering becomes the material of song. She does so in a spirit of self-accusation (twice calling herself 'this bitch', ἐμεῖο κυνός) which leaves her remark delicately poised, I think, between a negative insinuation (that future song will itself condemn her and Paris) and the hint of at least a partial, proleptic consolation in the thought of a posthumous counterbalance to her suffering, a hint given moving fulfilment by the Homeric moment itself. Achilles goes further: he starts to *perform* the conversion of his life into song in his own consciousness, though the quasi-solipsism of his action (since he sings for himself alone: Patroclus is present but is not directly engaged) is mirrored in the veiling of the contents of his song from the Homeric audience. Odysseus, finally, finds that the passage from life to song has already taken place: it overtakes him, and catches him emotionally unprepared, amidst hospitable strangers (a profoundly receptive audience, yet looking in, as it were, from the outside) whom he will soon leave behind for ever. But once he has been exposed to the process, Odysseus himself chooses, in the depths of his own grief, to repeat and embrace it.

These three figures, then, betray a shared awareness that song is a necessary means of coming to terms with, and in some degree of helping to redeem, the burden of their stories – song in which 'truth' is not a self-sufficient matter of preserving a record, but something more like an intensification and clarification of what was at stake, what was won and lost, in the actions and sufferings of those concerned. The narrative functions of song, in other words,

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transform and organise the unique particulars of lived experience into highly charged but renewable patterns of meaning and feeling: they offer all-engrossing, soul-changing perspectives in their own right. The scenario of *Odyssey* 8 magnifies and complicates the core of this transformation by placing Odysseus in the ambiguous position of being simultaneously the subject and audience of song, thereby collapsing the distinction later drawn by critics like Gorgias (in his *Helen*) and Plato (in *Republic* Book 10) between poetry's dramatisation of the 'lives of others' and the inward nature of poetry's impact on the soul of its own hearers.¹¹ Far from excluding Odysseus from access to the authentic power of song, the Homeric narrative uses him as the ultimate demonstration of that power. The *Odyssey* thereby frames and at the same time enacts a conception of poetic value. Yet it does so, I conclude, in a manner whose own expressiveness defies translation into the abstractions of a formalised poetics.

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¹¹ That poetry is on one level about the lives of 'other people', yet on another an intimate event inside the soul of the hearer, is the *aperçu* of Gorgias *Helen* 9, subsequently taken up at Plato *Rep.* 10.606b.