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Corinne Ondine Pache

Trinity University, cpache@trinity.edu

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Repository Citation

Pache, C. O. (1999). Odysseus and the Phaeacians. In M. Carlisle & O. Levaniouk (Eds.), *Nine essays on Homer* (pp. 21-33). Rowman & Littlefield.

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Odysseus and the Phaeacians

Corinne Ondine Pache

Two unique events occur in Book 11 of the *Odyssey* as Odysseus tells the Phaeacians about his visit to Hades: first, Odysseus includes a story known as the “catalogue of women” that seems to have nothing to do with himself and his own adventures or with anybody else in the *Odyssey*; second, there is an interruption, known as the “intermezzo,” in Odysseus’ story, and a conversation takes place among Odysseus, Arete, and Alkinoos before the narrative is resumed. These two occurrences have much to say about the interaction between Odysseus and the Phaeacians, and also about the interaction between the epic poet and his audience.

Some experts think that the whole or parts of Book 11 are later insertions, and the catalogue of heroines especially is often regarded as a later “interpolation.”¹ The very concept of interpolation is not one that is particularly helpful in dealing with a text that is the result of a long oral tradition rather than the original output of a single individual. It seems to me ultimately irrelevant whether the visit to Hades became part of the story later or when the catalogue of heroines was included in Book 11. My concern is with what is there, and how to interpret it. The *Nekyia* not only makes sense in the received text of the *Odyssey*, but it plays a very central and meaningful role in the story and has many ramifications throughout the narrative.

At Alkinoos’ court in Scheria, Odysseus recounts his adventures. Before he does so, he spends a day with the Phaeacians, feasting and competing in

1. Kirk 1962:239 and Page 1955:21-51 think the entire book is a later “interpolation.” Germain 1954:330-332 considers that parts of Book 11, including the catalogue of women, are later “insertions,” although he gives to the *Nekyia* itself a central place in the *Odyssey*. Cf. Heubeck and Hoekstra 1989:75-76, 90-91 for a survey of secondary literature on the subject.

athletic games. During the course of this day, Odysseus learns much about the Phaeacians. Before he even arrives at their court, Nausikaa makes it clear to him that her mother plays a central role in Scheria and that it is from her, rather than from Alkinoos, that he should ask for help (*Od.* 6.303-315). Odysseus hears the Phaeacians' singer, Demodokos, three times and is told by Alkinoos exactly what it is that makes the Phaeacians happy (*Od.* 8.246-249):

οὐ γὰρ πνυγμάχοι εἰμὲν ἀμύμονες οὐδὲ παλαισταί,
ἀλλὰ ποσὶ κραιπνῶς θέομεν καὶ νηυσὶν ἄριστοι,
αἰεὶ δ' ἡμῖν δαῖς τε φίλη κίθαρίς τε χοροὶ τε
εἴματα τ' ἔξλημφιβά λοετρά τε θερμὰ καὶ εὐναί.

for we are not faultless in our boxing nor as wrestlers,
but we do run lightly on our feet, and are the best seamen,
and always the feast is dear to us, and the lyre and dances
and changes of clothing and hot baths and beds.

The Phaeacians are a gentle people who delight in peaceful distractions and simple pleasures. Alkinoos' list of the Phaeacians' favorite things culminates with the three words εἴματα, λοετρά, εὐναί 'clothing, baths, beds', which all denote romantic love: εἴματα and λοετρά in the *Odyssey* are often the prelude to love, as is shown by Nausikaa's remark to her father that her three bachelor brothers are 'forever wishing to go to the dances in freshly washed clothing' (οἱ δ' αἰεὶ ἐθέλουσι νεόπλυτα εἴματ' ἔχοντες, *Od.* 6.64),² while for Nausikaa herself, washing—of both clothing and herself—is clearly part of wedding preparations (*Od.* 6.92-97).³ Whereas the Phaeacians enjoy all of the things mentioned by Alkinoos, I will argue that love occupies a special place in the list, not only as something that the Phaeacians like in and of itself but also as a favorite subject of storytelling. Alkinoos plainly discloses the Phaeacians' tastes to Odysseus, perhaps

2. It is interesting to note that Penelope has trouble recognizing Odysseus because of his κακὰ . . . εἴματα *Od.* 23.94.

3. See Seaford 1994:35-36 for bathing and putting on fine clothes as preparations for a wedding in the *Odyssey*.

thereby hinting at what his subsequent narrative should focus on. Similarly, Odysseus seems to react to Alkinoos' speech by offering the Phaeacians an account of his adventures that they will enjoy. Not that he needs to change the facts to please them but by emphasizing some details here and there he can adapt his story to suit this particular audience. In one case in particular, when he tells the Phaeacians about his encounter with the heroines of the past in Book 11, Odysseus steps out of his role as autobiographer and switches genre to become a genealogical poet to delight his host and, more particularly, his hostess.

Alkinoos tells Odysseus that the Phaeacians like stories, but he is also very clear that they do not care for deceivers and cheats (*Od.* 11.362-369):

τὸν δ' αὐτ' Ἀλκίνοος ἀπαμείβετο φώνησέν τε·
“ὦ Ὀδυσσεῦ, τὸ μὲν αὖ τί ο' ἔφοκμεν εἰσορώωντες
ἠεροππῆά τ' ἔμεν καὶ ἐπικλοπον, οἷά τε πολλοῦς
βόσκει γαῖα μέλαινα πολυπερέας ἀνθρώπους
μευδέα τ' ἀρτύνοντας, ὅθεν κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο·
σοὶ δ' ἐπι μὲν μορφῇ ἐπέων, ἐνὶ δὲ φρένες ἐσθλαί,
μῦθον δ' ὡς ὅτ' αἰοιδὸς ἐπιστοαμένως κατέλεξας,
πάντων Ἀργείων σέο τ' αὐτοῦ κήδεα λυγρά.”

Then Alkinoos answered him in turn and said to him:
“Odysseus, as we look upon you we do not imagine
that you are a deceptive or thievish man, the kind
that the dark earth breeds in great numbers, people
who wander widely,
making up stories, in which one could not see anything.
There is a grace upon your words, and there is
noble sense within you,
and expertly, as a singer would do, you have told the
story of your own dismal sorrows and of all the Argives.”

This is a fascinating passage that reveals much about Alkinoos' expectations, and maybe also about those of the audience, both internal and

external. Alkinoos starts by establishing that he does not consider Odysseus to be among the liars and tricksters who make up stories⁴ from which one could not learn anything. The criteria by which he judges Odysseus' tales, however, have nothing to do with their truth-value. He praises Odysseus for the grace of his words, μορφῇ ἐπέων, and for his noble mind, φρένες ἐσθλαί. Alkinoos is unquestionably more concerned with aesthetics than truth. Similarly, the catalogue of heroines as it is presented by Odysseus seems to be more concerned with satisfying the Phaeacians' desire for beauty rather than with quenching any thirst for perfect accuracy.

At the beginning of Odysseus' story in Book 11, Odysseus kills the sacrificial sheep and all the *psukhai* gather by the pit of freshly drawn blood (*Od.* 11.36-43):

αἱ δ' ἀγέροντο

ψυχαὶ ὑπὲξ Ἑρέβους νεκύων κατατεθνηώτων
 νύμφαι τ' ἠΐθεοί τε πολύτλιγοί τε γέροντες
 παρθενικαὶ τ' ἀταλαὶ νεοπενθέα θυμὸν ἔχουσαι,
 πολλοὶ δ' οὐτάμενοι χαλκῆρεσιν ἐγχείρισιν,
 ἄνδρες ἀρρήφατοι, βεβρωτώμενα τεύχε' ἔχοντες·
 οἳ πολλοὶ περὶ βόθρον ἐφοίτων ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος
 θεσπεοίη ἰαχῆ· ἐμὲ δὲ χλωρὸν δέος ἦρει.

and the souls of the perished dead gathered, up out of Erebus,
 brides, and young unmarried men, and long-suffering old men,
 virgins, tender and with the sorrows of young hearts upon them,
 and many fighting men killed in battle, stabbed with brazen spears
 still carrying their bloody armor upon them.
 These came swarming around the pit from every direction
 with inhuman clamor, and green fear took hold of me.

Elpenor then approaches Odysseus, followed by Teiresias and Odysseus' mother, Antikleia. Elpenor comes to Odysseus with a special request, Teiresias gives him information, and Antikleia talks with her son on a variety

4. Cf. Carlisle (this volume) for discussion of *pseudea* as a genre and for a different interpretation of this passage.

of subjects. As Odysseus is talking with his dead mother, crowds of heroines suddenly approach him (*Od.* 11.225-234):

νῶϊ μὲν ὡς ἐπέεοσιν ἀμειβόμεθ', αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες
 ἤλυθον, ὄτρυνεν γὰρ ἀγαυὴ Περσεφόνηια,
 ὅσσα ἀριότηων ἄλοχοι ἔσαν ἠδὲ θύγατρεις.
 αἱ δ' ἀμφ' αἶμα κελαινὸν ἀσλλέεις ἠγερέθοντο,
 αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ βούλευον. ὅπως ἐ εἰμι ἐκάστην.
 ἦδε δὲ μοικατὰ θυμὸν ἀρίστη φαίνετο βουλή·
 οπασάμενος τανύηκες ἄορ παχέος παρὰ μηροῦ
 οὐκ εἶων πίνειν αἶμα πάσας αἶμα κελαινόν.
 αἱ δὲ προμνηστῖναι ἐπήϊσαν, ἠδὲ ἐκάστη
 ὄν γόνον ἐξαγόρευεν· ἐγὼ δ' ἐρέεινον ἀπάσας.

So we two were conversing back and forth, and the women came to me,
 for splendid Persephone urged them on.
 These were all who had been the wives and daughters of the best
 men,
 and now they gathered in swarms around the dark blood.
 I then thought about a way to question them, each by herself,
 and as I thought, this was the plan that seemed best to me;
 drawing out the long-edged sword from beside my strong thigh,
 I would not let them all drink the dark blood at the same time.
 So they waited and came to me in order, and each one
 told me about her origin, and I questioned all of them.

Odysseus says that the women are urged on by Persephone (ὄτρυνεν γὰρ ἀγαυὴ Περσεφόνηια). Persephone here appears for the first time in European literature. One scholar thinks that it is implied that Persephone has also summoned the other female shades who appeared previously, and none of the males, because there is some kind of segregation between men and women in Hades.⁵ It is far from obvious, however, that Persephone plays any role until she appears with the heroines. Moreover, I think that gender segregation is

5. Doherty 1991:153.

belied by the passage quoted above (*Od.* 11.36-43). Women and men, young and old, all approach the pit of blood together.

The first shades that approach Odysseus either know him or know something about him. Elpenor and Antikleia know Odysseus personally, and Teiresias has important information to impart to him. These three characters have good reasons to talk to Odysseus; the other women do not. There is need of a further justification for the encounter with the heroines, and Persephone's encouragement provides a plausible, though a little puzzling, explanation.

Just before the heroines approach, Antikleia asks Odysseus to remember everything so that he may tell his wife later on (*Od.* 11.223-224):

ἀλλὰ φώωσθε τάχιιστα λιλοίοιο· ταῦτα δὲ πάντα
ἴσθ', ἵνα καὶ μετόπισθε τεῆ εἴπησθα γυναικί.

But you must strive back toward the light again with all speed;
and remember all these things for your wife, so you may tell
her hereafter.

ταῦτα δὲ πάντα seems to introduce what follows, the catalogue of heroines, rather than what precedes.⁶ Antikleia does not tell Odysseus anything that would be of particular interest to Penelope. The only information she gives that Penelope would not already know is the passage about what happens to the ψυχαί (*psukhai*) after death. This ταῦτα δὲ

6. There is only one other attested instance of ταῦτα δὲ πάντα in the Homeric corpus, at *Iliad* 9.35. In this case, it seems to refer both to what precedes and to what follows, as Diomedes rebukes Agamemnon (*Il.* 9.34-36):

ἀλκὴν μὲν μοι πρῶτον ὀνειδίσας ἐν Δαναοῖσιν.
φῶς ἔμεν ἀπτόλεμον καὶ ἀνάλκιδα ταῦτα δὲ πάντα
ἴσσο' Ἀργείων ἡμὲν νέοι ἤδ' ἐ γέροντες.

He starts his speech by telling Agamemnon that he should not have treated him in such a way previously and then goes on to describe Agamemnon's faults and weaknesses. I think that the ταῦτα δὲ πάντα that all the Argives are supposed to know include both Agamemnon's first insult and his more general failings as described by Diomedes.

πάντα stands as a marker that whatever follows is of particular interest not only to Odysseus' wife but also to wives in general and to Arete in particular. As a matter of fact, Odysseus does not mention the women when he tells Penelope about his visit to Hades.

As the women crowd around the blood, Odysseus decides he wants to talk to them. He prevents them from drinking the blood all at the same time so that he may question each one separately. From this passage (*Od.* 11.225-234), the scene seems to be very orderly: Odysseus is standing by the blood with his sword, and the heroines come one by one, αἱ δὲ προμνηστῖναι ἐπήϊσαν, to tell their stories. Odysseus also makes clear that he questions all of them, ἐγὼ δ' ἐρέεινον ἀπάσας. After describing fourteen of these women, however, Odysseus stops his narrative and declares that he could not tell of all the heroines before the night would end, and that, besides, it is time for sleep (*Od.* 11.328-332):

πάσας δ' οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω,
ἄσας ἠρώων ἀλόχους ἴδον ἠδὲ θυγατρας·
πρὶν γάρ κεν καὶ νύξ φθίτ' ἄμβροτος. ἀλλὰ καὶ ὥρη
εὐδειν, ἢ ἐπὶ νῆα θοὴν ἐλθόντ' ἐς ἑταίρους
ἢ αὐτοῦ·

But I could not tell about all of them nor name all the women
I saw who were the wives and daughters of heroes,
for before that the divine night would give out. But it is time now
for my sleep, either joining my companions on board the fast ship,
or here.

The catalogue of women is a whole in itself, and, when Odysseus interrupts himself, saying that there is not enough time to tell everything, he has in fact concluded his own catalogue. There is a progression, both chronological and also "ethical," as one goes from Tyro to Eriphyle—from the very ancient past to more recent time and from a heroine who bears Poseidon's children to an unworthy wife who is bribed with a necklace. This progression makes the catalogue a complete entity. Although only fourteen heroines are actually mentioned, one is left with the sense that many

generations of women have come to Odysseus. When he breaks off, Odysseus has said all he intends to say about the women.

Odysseus interrupts his account on the pretext of lack of time and sleepiness. Although he may have completed the catalogue of heroines, Odysseus is in fact still in the middle of his own story when he breaks off. This interruption is the only one and stands at the very center of Odysseus' narrative.⁷ The catalogue of heroines, then, is Odysseus' gift to Arete, and he interrupts himself to check whether his storytelling is effective and pleasing to her and the Phaeacians.

The catalogue of women is obviously much to Arete's liking. She compliments Odysseus and calls for more gifts to be given to him. She thus seems to accept Odysseus' offering and to reciprocate it with material rewards.⁸

As we know from Alkinoos' speech (*Od.* 8.246-249), the Phaeacians love to listen to stories, and they also especially appreciate love stories, which in fact make up most of the catalogue. It is also very clear that both Arete's and Alkinoos' thirst for stories is not satiated and that they want Odysseus to go on and finish the story of his adventures.

After Arete expresses her delight in Odysseus' storytelling, Alkinoos speaks and asks Odysseus to go on and to tell if he saw any of his companions from Troy. And there Odysseus seems to change his story to accommodate Alkinoos. He could simply answer Alkinoos' question and say, "Oh yes, I did see Agamemnon and Achilles and Ajax," but instead he backtracks to the women. Suddenly, Persephone is back, and she scatters the heroines in all directions (*Od.* 11.385-386):

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ψυχὰς μὲν ἀπεισκέδασ' ἄλλουδ' ἄλλη
ἀγνὴ Περσεφόνεια γυναικῶν θιγλυτερᾶων.

Now after pure Persephone had scattered the female
psukhai of the women, driving them off in every direction.

7. Odysseus interrupts himself at verse 328, at which point the account of the *Nekyia* is halfway through the 640 lines of our received text.

8. As Calvert Watkins puts it, "poet and patron exist on a reciprocal gift-giving basis; the poet's gift is his poem." See Watkins 1994:536-543 for discussion of an Irish word for 'poem' and 'gift'.

Then, Agamemnon very conveniently shows up (*Od.* 11.387-389):

ἦλθε δ' ἐπὶ ψυχῇ Ἀγαμέμνονος Ἀτρεΐδου
ἀχνυμένη· περὶ δ' ἄλλαι ἀγηγέροθ', ὅσοι ἄμ' αὐτῷ
οἴκῳ ἐν Αἰγίοβοιο θάνον καὶ πότμον ἐπέοπον.

there came the soul of Agamemnon, the son of Atreus,
grieving, and the *psukhai* of the other men, who died with him
and met their doom in the house of Aegisthus, were gathered
around him.

Of course, Odysseus has to pick up his story at a later stage. After the exchange with Alkinoos, there would be no point in telling about the rest of the heroines, since his host has made it clear he wanted to hear about Odysseus' companions. Still, the transition is a surprising one. If Odysseus has indeed questioned each and every woman in turn, wouldn't they have left after telling their stories to him? Why would Persephone need to scatter them all? None of the other ghosts seem to stay around after they have spoken with Odysseus.

By describing the scattering of the heroines by Persephone and by specifying that his encounter with the heroes happened right after the one with the women, Odysseus makes his own narrative somewhat suspect. It seems that he is changing his story to make it more agreeable to Alkinoos, just as the catalogue of women seems to be included to please Arete.

Although the content of the catalogue is meant mainly to please Arete, Odysseus has to incorporate it in his narrative in a realistic manner. Since the heroines have no direct ties to him, there is need for an outside explanation. And here enters Persephone: the women approach Odysseus because Persephone encourages them to do so, and, when Odysseus wants to go on with other adventures, here comes Persephone again, to do exactly what Odysseus needs. Odysseus uses Persephone as a device to introduce a special kind of performance.

By telling these heroines' stories, Odysseus steps outside his role of autobiographer and switches genre to become a genealogical poet.

Catalogues form a genre in themselves and are found both as independent entities and included in other narratives.⁹ Although this is the only formal catalogue in the *Odyssey*, there are several such lists in the *Iliad*. The catalogue of ships (*Il.* 2.484-760) is the most famous example. One also finds Zeus' list of his lovers (*Il.* 14.317-328) and the catalogue of Nereids (*Il.* 18.39-49). In the *Theogony*, we are told that the Muses delight Zeus with genealogies (44-52), much in the same way that Odysseus delights Arete.¹⁰

Odysseus as a poet seems to do precisely what the poet of the *Odyssey* as a whole avoids. Typically, epic avoids references to particular locales or audiences and tends toward as universal an appeal as possible. Odysseus in the *Odyssey* tailors his tale to his audience and introduces elements that are particularly adapted to it in terms both of content and of form.¹¹ This is particularly noticeable in the stories immediately preceding and following the *intermezzo*.¹²

There is a wonderful symmetry on both sides of the *intermezzo*. The catalogue of women is balanced by Odysseus' encounter with the Greek heroes. Stories of wives and husbands are told by heroines and heroes for the delight of Arete and Alkinoos. This symmetry has been noted before and likened to that of geometric vase painting.¹³ Odysseus ends his catalogue with Eriphyle and resumes the narrative with Agamemnon telling about Clytemnestra: on each side of the *intermezzo* stands a bad wife who has killed her husband. The *intermezzo* is at the center of the *Nekyia*, with its

9. See West 1985 on genealogical catalogues and on the Hesiodic catalogue of women.

10. And just as the Muses tell Zeus about his own genealogy, Odysseus starts his narrative with Poseidon, to whom Arete and Alkinoos are both related. As West 1985:9 notes, the relationship between catalogues and audiences is generally implicit rather than explicit.

11. Although Odysseus somewhat subverts epic narrative rules, he is also appropriating the medium in much the same way Achilles does in the *Iliad* by becoming the epic poet, as it were. Martin 1989:222 notes that Achilles' use of language is unique and that "the 'language of Achilles' is none other than that of the monumental composer." Is there a sense in which the hero of an epic poem has to be an epic poet?

12. For more on audience conditioning and the dependence of performers on their audiences, see Nagy 1995:171-172.

13. See Myres 1952:1-11 for a comparison between epic and geometric art. See Webster 1954:259-260 for a discussion of the symmetry of the *Nekyia*.

different episodes carefully arranged around it, while the *Nekyia* itself lies at the center of Odysseus' adventures.¹⁴

Clearly, then, Odysseus takes the Phaeacians' taste into account as he relates his adventures. Not only do his stories reflect the themes Alkinoos praised in his speech (*Od.* 8.246-249), but he also echoes the very words Alkinoos used. By looking closely at the visit to Hades, one starts to see how Odysseus tailors his tale to his audience. Odysseus gives the Phaeacians what they like and what they ask for.

I would argue that the catalogue of women is mostly about love, εὐναί. The catalogue describes the οὐκ ἀποφώλιοι εὐναί of the gods (*Od.* 11.249). Εὐναί is a recurrent theme throughout the *Odyssey* and Greek literature, and an interesting parallel is found in Mimnermus 1:

τίς δὲ βίος, τί δὲ τερπνὸν ἄτερ χρυσῆς Ἀφροδίτης;
 τεθναίην, ὅτε μοι μηκέτι ταῦτα μέλοι,
 κρυπταδίη φιλότης καὶ μέλιχα δῶρα καὶ εὐνή,
 οἷ' ἴβης ἄνθεα γίγνεται ἀρπαλέα ἀνδράσιν ἠδὲ γυναῖξιν·

What life, what delight is there without Golden Aphrodite?
 May I die when I care about such things no more,
hidden love and honey-sweet gifts and bed,
 such as are the alluring flowers of youth for both men and
 women.

Love is delightful to both men and women, and so are poems about love. We know that the Phaeacians find εἶματα, λειτρά, εὐναί particularly delightful. Such are the things they care for, and about such subjects are the best songs made. And in the *Odyssey*, the Phaeacians delight in the love stories told not only by their guest Odysseus but also in the one told by their own singer, Demodokos.

Shortly after Alkinoos' speech about the Phaeacians' tastes, Demodokos sings his second song, about the illicit love of Aphrodite and Ares (*Od.* 8.266-366). Here again, the song picks up not only the themes dear to the Phaeacians but also the very words Alkinoos just used. Demodokos uses the

14. Germain 1954:333.

word “bed” at the beginning of the song, λέχος δ’ ἤσχυνε καὶ εὐνήν ‘he disgraced his (Hephaistos’) marriage and bed’ (*Od.* 8.269). The song then goes on to detail the love affair between Ares and Aphrodite and its discovery by Hephaistos. At the end of the song, Demodokos again uses one of the words just uttered by Alkinoos, ἀμφὶ δὲ εἶματα ἔσσαν ἐπήρατα, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι ‘they put delightful clothing about her, a wonder to look upon’ (*Od.* 8.366). Although words like εὐνήν and εἶματα are common enough in the *Odyssey*, I think that there is some significance in finding them in a song that follows so closely upon Alkinoos’ speech.

The same phenomenon can be detected in Odysseus’ narrative. During the intermezzo, Alkinoos asks Odysseus to tell him more about the other Greek heroes and about his own deeds. He ends his request with (*Od.* 11.374)

σὺ δέ μοι λέγε θέσκελα ἔργα

but tell me about wondrous deeds.

θέσκελα is an old epic epithet found mostly in the formula θέσκελα ἔργα in the Homeric corpus.¹⁵ In the *Odyssey*, the formula is used once by Alkinoos in the passage above and once by Odysseus in his answer to Alkinoos. He describes Herakles’ sword-belt (*Od.* 11.610):

ἵνα θέσκελα ἔργα τέτυκτο

where wondrous works had been figured on it

It is striking that Odysseus chooses to use these very same words. It seems as though he was adapting not only the content but also the form of his stories to his audience. Alkinoos asks for stories about heroes and θέσκελα ἔργα, and his guest literally answers those wishes: Odysseus tells of the ghosts of

Greek heroes, and, short of describing actual θέσκελα ἔργα, he puts them on Herakles’ sword-belt.

Aversion to liars and cheats, such as those described by Alkinoos, reverberates throughout the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Just as Achilles hates a man who speaks one thing while hiding another thing in his heart (*Il.* 9.312-313), Eumaios abhors as the gates of Hades the man who speaks ἀπατήλια ‘deceptive things’ (*Od.* 14.157). Whether Odysseus is inventing or modifying his adventures is ultimately a moot question, and to try to determine the veracity of his tale is about as productive as trying to retrace his travels on today’s Mediterranean. Loathsome as lies are in Homeric epic, their opposite is found not in truth but in beauty, in μορφῇ ἐπέων and φρένες ἐσθλαί (*Od.* 11.367).

Odysseus’ description of his visit to Hades and the intermezzo throw a fascinating light on the art of storytelling and on the relationship between poet and audience. The intermezzo lies at the very center from which Odysseus’ adventures radiate symmetrically. Just before the interruption, Odysseus switches genre to include the catalogue of women, which stands out as his gift to his hostess. The intermezzo shows Odysseus’ audience reacting to his story, and, similarly, one can observe Odysseus responding to the desires of his audience. In Book 11, one can see Odysseus performing as an epic poet, while he also—as he is wont to do—breaks the very rules of the medium of which he is a creation, by switching to another genre in the middle of his narrative.

15. The adjective occurs twice in the *Iliad* and twice in the *Odyssey*. At *Il.* 3.130, the formula θέσκελα ἔργα is used by Iris to describe the deeds of the Trojans and the Greeks to Helen and, at *Il.* 23.107, the adjective θέσκελον is used by Achilles to describe Patroklos’ ghost.