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## Andres Polytropoi: Conceptions of Identity in Homer and Lucian

Ruby Alling Ostrow  
*Bard College*

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*Andres Polytropoi:*  
Conceptions of Identity in Homer and Lucian

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
Ruby Ostrow

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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To my parents, for nourishing my love of stories from the beginning.

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## Introduction

This is a project about the relation between multiplicity and unity in human identity and how that concept is developed in two different texts: Homer's *Odyssey* and Lucian's *A True History*.<sup>1</sup> The *Odyssey*, the beginning of Greek literature, is an obvious choice to discuss the idea of the multiplicity of identity—and, indeed, Odysseus, the “many-turned man” (πολύτροπος), is the prototypical identity-shifter, although I will argue the text presents at the same time an ultimate unity within him. But Lucian's work, written nearly a millennium later in the second century CE, is perhaps a less obvious choice. In fact, *A True History* is in certain respects a direct response to—and imitation of—the *Odyssey*, its hero, and his autobiographical tales, known to scholars as the *Apologoi*. But I will suggest that Lucian has his own, quite different view of identity, one which also emphasizes multiplicity but, in contrast to the *Odyssey*'s picture, forgoes altogether the notion of an underlying unity. By bringing these two different models into dialogue with one another, and also with a third model presented by Plato's *Republic*, I seek to reveal the philosophical underpinnings of both the *Odyssey* and *A True History*, as well as the richness of the notion of identity itself. I argue that the unity that is ultimately manifest in the character of Homer's Odysseus has a kind of proto-Platonic cast, whereas in Lucian, there is an anti-Platonic ideal of reveling in all the multitudinous marvels the world has to offer.

My project begins with the *Odyssey* and its hero Odysseus. Throughout this first chapter, I reveal the transformation Odysseus undergoes in the course of the poem, a transformation which brings to the fore the various contrasting selves we find within him—story-teller and

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<sup>1</sup> In this project, I have utilized the Greek texts from the Loeb Classical Library editions. Abbreviations for authors and reference works are according to the fourth edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own, although I have consulted published translations to confirm their accuracy.

actor, nomad and king, open-ended and fixed. Odysseus functions often as narrator, but he is also a character—the hero of the story; he is a particular man, with a particular name and lineage, but he is also the undefined, amorphous “nobody” who can shapeshift into any form. I show how the tension between these disparate selves creates continuous turmoil in his life, an inner battle that parallels his unsettled wandering. I consider particular moments that highlight this tension:

Eurykleia’s unwished recognition of him, his narration to the Phaiakians, and his encounter with Polyphemus. Ultimately in this chapter I argue that Odysseus’ inner conflicts are finally resolved through a shift in perspective represented by the so-called Test of the Bow (Hom. *Od.* 21.275-432). In this passage, I see a more fundamental harmony arising from apparent oppositions, in a manner that brings to mind the later writings of Heraclitus. Thus I show in this chapter how the *Odyssey*’s model of identity ultimately entails an integration where multitudes are brought into one.

Throughout this chapter, I pay particular attention to Odysseus’ role as narrator and spinner of tall-tales, focusing especially on his narratorship displayed during the so-called *Apologoi*—the account he gives the Phaiakians of his adventures on his journey home from Troy—rather than the Cretan tales. This needs some brief justification. The Cretan tales present an important series of moments of Odysseus disguising himself, playing with his identity, and, of course, lying, but his story-telling in them is more focused on the familiar and normal, his lies more prosaic. These lies are not designed to draw attention to themselves or give cause for disbelief. Because of this, these passages do not highlight the extraordinary inventiveness of Odysseus’ narratorship nor its challenges for conceptualizing his sense of identity; therefore, they are less useful for this study, although I will refer to them on occasion. Moreover, it is the

*Apologoi* that is the focus for Lucian himself and indeed are the stories he mimics in *A True History*. Notably, he entirely omits the Cretan tales. The emphasis on this part of the *Odyssey* thus brings our main texts in closer dialogue with one another.

My second chapter contrasts the Odyssean model of an ultimately unified identity with the one that Lucian presents in *A True History*. Modeling himself on Odysseus (among others), Lucian narrates his travels through foreign lands and highlights the fantastical creatures and people he meets along the way. Crucially, though, Lucian's travels do not terminate in a *nostos*, a homecoming. The open-endedness of Lucian's journey—and narrative—is essential for illuminating how his view differs from the *Odyssey*'s. At the same time, I argue that *A True History* is not only in dialogue with the *Odyssey* but also with another author greatly concerned with transformation, namely Plato, and in particular his famed Image of the Cave.<sup>2</sup> My study is the first to propose this connection. For while Plato has been seen in (very many) other places to be an important figure for Lucian, his Cave has not been suggested as a model with which Lucian is specifically concerned. But whereas Plato's image describes an ascent that terminates in an overarching vision of the truth, Lucian's text subverts this "ascent;" his narration of an escape from the cavernous belly of a whale presents a journey which leads only more deeply into illusion. We see through Lucian's interplay with the Cave and his broader attempts to confuse the reader about the line between truth and fiction how he has re-imagined both Plato's thought and the character of Odysseus. For Lucian, the ultimate aim is not to arrive at the truth of what "really is," as it is for Plato, but to help bring about in us the awareness of the open-ended,

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<sup>2</sup> Here I follow Howland 1986, Barberà 2010, and Ferguson 1963, among others, in referring to it as the Image of the Cave rather than the Allegory of the Cave because of Socrates' own language. He primarily uses the term εἰκὼν ("image") to refer to the scene he describes in the cave and does the same for the two key accounts in the central books of the *Republic*—the Sun and the Divided Line. The term "allegory" seems an extrapolation of the Greek that has misleading connotations.

unfixed nature of reality—to encourage the reader to realize that unbounded creativity is the aim of a human life. Eschewing the kind of resolution that we find in Plato and the *Odyssey*, Lucian presents us with a self that is irreducibly multiple, a world in which there is no ultimate ground.

An important background for my discussion in both chapters is the Greek notion of a cave. In fact, caves abound in my analysis—from Plato’s Cave to the Polyphemus episode in the *Odyssey* and, even, the belly of the whale in *A True History* (or so I shall argue). This setting shapes our understanding of these episodes in important ways. Polyphemus’ cave in the *Odyssey* is, in fact, the first instance of a cave in Greek literature.<sup>3</sup> The cave here appears, I argue, as a place of possibility, a strange space divided from reality that allows Odysseus to begin to come to terms with the more open and undetermined dimension of his self. These properties are crystallized by the name Odysseus uses to refer to himself here—*Outis* or “Nobody,” an appellation that I read as an embrace of the infinite possibilities inherent in his nature. Plato continues this same theme of illusion and separation from reality but he regards it as wholly negative, presenting the cave as a space where humans are trapped as prisoners and deluded about how things really are. Finally, I suggest that in *A True History* the whale’s belly echoes Plato’s image, acting as a quasi-cave. But in contrast to Plato, this cave is a very ordinary space and close to the “real” world; its “prisoners” (as he refers at one point to himself and his men) ascend not up to the true world, as in Plato’s telling, but into still greater fantasy.

All three texts thus play on similar themes in their reliance on the image of the cave. But it is in seeing how this image is twisted and taken in different directions that we begin to understand the very important differences that separate these texts. This indeed brings out a

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<sup>3</sup> There are in fact two caves, Kalypso’s, which comes first in the narrative, and Polyphemus’, which comes first chronologically. I will be focused on the latter given Odysseus’ adoption of the name *Outis* there.

further underlying philosophical aim of this study: namely, to illustrate how subtle shifts in the same or similar characters, events, and symbols serve to express such a fundamental variety of themes. With this symbol in particular, we see how the cave malleably becomes the space of possibility for Odysseus as *Outis*, the entrapping illusion for Plato's prisoners, and the glory of fantasy in Lucian's whale. But the same point is manifest in many other instances in my study as well.

\*       \*       \*

With this introduction to the arguments and themes of this study in mind, I should say a few words about my methodological approach, which can be largely situated within the field of narratology, particularly in respect to the *Odyssey*. Narratology is a literary theory that focuses on narrators and narrative structure. While this theory, which grew out of the schools of structuralism and formalism, has been around, in some form or other another, for more than fifty years (Tzvetan Todorov coined the term in 1969<sup>4</sup>), it was not widely used by classicists until the 1990s, when de Jong's pioneering work transformed the field.<sup>5</sup> In its most basic form, narratology provides the analytical tools to discuss how *fabula* (a chronological sequence of events) becomes, in the language used by Russian formalists, *sjuzhet* (the narrative presentation of those events). Narrative techniques such as narrative order, metaphor, perspective (sometimes referred to as "focalization") all contribute, on this theory, to the creation and shaping of narrative and meaning.

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<sup>4</sup> Todorov 1969

<sup>5</sup> De Jong's first publication was on the *Iliad* (1987). This was followed by a study of Euripides (de Jong 1991), the *Odyssey* (de Jong 2001), and a host of other writings.

In general, the world of classical narratology can roughly be divided into two camps. On one side, there are narratologists more concerned with the creation of technical models. Here we find scholars such as de Jong,<sup>6</sup> Nünlist,<sup>7</sup> and Hunter<sup>8</sup> who have created sophisticated theoretical frameworks. For these scholars, key subjects of study include the role in the *Odyssey* that Homer *qua* author plays as an “external, omniscient, and omnipresent narrator;”<sup>9</sup> the different types of narrators and narratees in the text and how that shapes the stories that are told; the ordering of the tale; and the significance of the myriad smaller stories told within the overarching story. All these topics are subject to an analysis, in which they are classified in terms of the authors’ own specialized vocabulary. On this approach, traditional concerns with textual meaning are then illuminated through this (admittedly technical) analysis. On the other side, there are scholars such as Peradotto,<sup>10</sup> Richardson,<sup>11</sup> and Winkler,<sup>12</sup> who examine many of the same aspects of the text—the various modes of narration, the ordering of the stories, and so forth—but their concern with the text’s acts of narration serves to shed light on a broader range of literary themes, including notions of truth, fiction, and character analysis.

My own approach in this study falls more into the second category. While structuralist, technical analyses can be very fruitful, I move away from the highly complex models and interpretive framework of the more “formalist” narratologists. My larger aim is to use a focus on the structure and form of narrative to illuminate central philosophical themes about human identity in the text rather than to examine the complexities of narrative as such. I therefore

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<sup>6</sup> de Jong 1987, 2001, 2004

<sup>7</sup> Nünlist 2014

<sup>8</sup> Hunter 2014

<sup>9</sup> de Jong 2004: 14

<sup>10</sup> Peradotto 1990

<sup>11</sup> Richardson 2006

<sup>12</sup> Winkler 1985

generally do not directly engage with the specialized terminology many of the important narratologists rely upon; nor (in the *Odyssey* portion of this study) am I concerned with an analysis of the author himself—his relationship to characters, his potential deceptions of the reader, his realm of knowledge—on which many of the accounts are focused.<sup>13</sup> Rather, Chapter 1 is focused on *Odysseus* as narrator. For even though we still have the distant, omniscient Narrator in the *Odyssey* to whom it might be more obvious to look to consider narratorship, our main character plays the part of the prototypical storyteller, and it is the significance of this role for his overall development that will be crucial for my study. Here I follow de Jong in considering Odysseus as the “secondary narrator,”<sup>14</sup> taking him as my focal point, but, unlike her, I will not be drawing such a sharp distinction between author and character. Homer’s acts of narratorship do remain important in my analysis, but these emerge primarily through considering how his role as narrator relates to Odysseus’.

In general, narratology seeks to show how narrative form relates to textual meaning. In recent decades, narratologists have focused on a wide range of questions, such as: What role do the narrator and narratees (to use de Jong’s terms) play? How can the narrator enter the world of his story (referred to as *metalepsis*)? What is the significance of nested stories? What effect does the order in which the tale is told have on its meaning? And how is the information relayed and left out or continually repeated?<sup>15</sup> These questions lie at the heart of my investigation of Odysseus, although, as shall become clear, my interest is less in the formal questions that dominated the field in its earliest years and more in showing how narrators and narrative form

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<sup>13</sup> Grethlein 2021, de Jong 1987, 2001, 2004, Richardson 2006, Peradotto 1990, etc.

<sup>14</sup> de Jong 2004: 19-20

<sup>15</sup> de Jong 2014

interact to raise more fundamental human and philosophical questions. In particular, I am interested here in how narrative works to create and conceal identity in these texts: put more simply, how do the stories (we tell) about ourselves not only reveal but also shape who we are?

Of course, there still remains a variety of ways in which Odysseus' role as narrator can be approached. For example, one might compare Odysseus' narrative style to Homer's, as Richardson does, finding both to be similarly unreliable,<sup>16</sup> or simply study the different types of narratives that he implements, a recurring narratological theme regarding Homer and Odysseus alike.<sup>17</sup> While my work in this chapter builds on the work of Richardson and others, I will take a different approach. Rather than focusing on classifying the kind of narrator that Odysseus may be, my emphasis will be on the integration of his roles as narrator and hero. Jonas Grethlein explores the narrator-character dynamic in a related way by trying to recreate how ancient readers would have understood it.<sup>18</sup> However, I go further than Grethlein in seeing the link between these two roles, suggesting that they may indeed become manifest in a single character, namely Odysseus.

With regard to *A True History*, while many of the same methodological considerations apply, the issue of narratorship is complicated in a different way. For much of the text, it would appear that we have a functioning secondary narrator, as we might infer a difference between the 'I' in the prologue and the 'I' undergoing the adventures. But this distinction we as modern readers have been taught to draw is not necessarily the same for ancient readers. Whitmarsh argues, in fact, the more immediate assumption for ancient readers would be to conflate the

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<sup>16</sup> Richardson 2006

<sup>17</sup> Peradotto 1990, Hunter 2014, Richardson 2006, Nünlist 2014, etc.

<sup>18</sup> Grethlein 2021



author and his first person narrator.<sup>19</sup> He suggests of an author's characters in general, "[p]erhaps it is better to say that all of those separate verbal identities are facets of the same person, different roles that are assumed in the performance of everyday life."<sup>20</sup> As I will show, this conception certainly seems in line with Lucian. To return to de Jong's terms, then, we could say that it is actually the primary narrator we are concerned with throughout. However, I depart from Whitmarsh in how I understand the recurring theme of Lucian the author blurring the division between his characters and himself. Ultimately, I see that blurring as more pointed than the simple lack of concern in the ancient world with separating author and character. Rather, I argue that it is part of a larger tactic on Lucian's part of intentionally confusing his readers, deceiving them but ostensibly revealing the deception. As we will see, these layers of illusion are used by Lucian didactically, as a means of effecting a fundamental transformation in the reader.

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<sup>19</sup> Whitmarsh 2013

<sup>20</sup> Whitmarsh 2013: 63



## Chapter 1

### The Bow and the Lyre: Harmonization of Tension in Odyssean Identity

“For who himself knows who his father is?” (Telemachus, *Odyssey* 1.216)

“My son, if ever he truly existed.” (Laertes, *Odyssey* 24.289)

In the *Odyssey*, a poem composed around 800 BCE, we are presented with a tale of grief and loss and homecoming, foreign lands and creatures and family, heroics and storytelling. Throughout the course of this story, we follow the hero Odysseus, the archetypal schemer, on his journey to reclaim his home on the rocky isle of Ithaka. Likewise, in this chapter, I will be considering this “many-turned man” (*Odyssey* 1.1), my rendering of Odysseus’ Homeric epithet *anēr polytropos*, and the role he plays within his own story. Odysseus is of course the hero of the *Odyssey*, driving the action, the adventures, and yet his true power stems from what we might consider a very inactive role—that of the storyteller. He achieves his ends through painting himself into new role after new role, often weaving a unique web for each captive audience. Utilizing this fluid sense of self, he crafts stories both of himself and of the personae he creates.

When we consider these aspects of Odysseus, though, a key question arises: can we view this multi-faced, ever-fluid Odysseus, a man who continually creates new stories and makes himself into other people, as a single, united individual? This has been a difficult enough question that some Homeric scholars, referred to as the Analysts, question if we can even view the *Odyssey* as having been a single poem.<sup>21</sup> Analysts read moments of tension within the text,

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<sup>21</sup> See the Oxford Classical Dictionary entry on Homer.

such as the odd interrupted battle that ends the poem, as being later additions rather than as intentional, authorial decisions. On the Analyst approach, part of the interpretive task is to separate out such moments from what these readers regard as the true story. As will become clear, my approach is more in line with another group of *Odyssey* scholars, the Unitarians, who see the strangeness of these sorts of passages as an intentional and important part of the text, one that may add to our larger understanding. In this way, the moments of tension and seeming incongruity, far from being dismissable as spurious, are what give us the most insight into this poem.<sup>22</sup> Such considerations, I suggest, are essential to understanding the character of Odysseus.

The *Odyssey* is, of course, many things, but at its core, I suggest, it is a story of the inner transformation of its central figure, a transformation focused on disparate aspects within Odysseus himself. While Odysseus shows great power and control in the course of his travels, key episodes reveal a tension within his character, a fundamental conflict between different aspects of himself. Particularly in his interaction with Polyphemus and his reunion with Eurycleia, it would seem Odysseus' shifting personae, story-telling, and free agency can be seen as standing in apparent opposition to his individuality, subject-hood, and lack of control. There are, I shall suggest, in fact a twin set of tensions here. On the one hand, we find a conflict between Odysseus' dual roles of "actor" and "narrator," in the sense pioneered by John J. Winkler in his study of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*,<sup>23</sup> and, on the other, a parallel opposition between his existence as a particular man rooted in a personal history and particular lineage and his rootless, amorphous mode of being (what I will term his *Outis* self). On my reading, then, the question of Odysseus' identity figures centrally in both of these dynamics; his journey home is

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<sup>22</sup> See the Oxford Classical Dictionary entry on Homer.

<sup>23</sup> Winkler 1985.

fundamentally a story of the hero coming to realize who he truly is. To this extent, I am in full agreement with Dimock and his claim that “the whole problem of the *Odyssey* is for Odysseus to establish his identity.”<sup>24</sup> Unlike Dimock, however, I suggest that Odysseus’ identity is not realized simply by living up to his name—that his name is in fact only one aspect of the larger self that eventually emerges. In a similar fashion, I diverge from Winkler’s model in refraining from regarding either key role—*actor* or *auctor*, as he terms them—as having supremacy. Instead, my ultimate aim is to show how it is through *harmonizing* both his roles of *actor* and *auctor* and likewise his existence as the fixed Odysseus and the amorphous *Outis* that a new and richer sense of identity emerges.

This harmonization is the ultimate goal, and most fundamental challenge, for Odysseus in the course of the *Odyssey*. We will see that these oppositions crucially limit his freedom and that he may not reclaim his family and his home until he has succeeded in this inner transformation. This then brings us to a question, in fact *the* central question of this chapter: How can these elements be harmonized or integrated with one another and Odysseus’ inner conflict thereby resolved? What exactly is Odysseus to do in order to achieve this end? As we will see, the eventual answer to this question is suggested in the famous Test of the Bow at the end of Book 21. Throughout this passage, the *Odyssey* emphasizes the relationship between Odysseus’ bow and a lyre. Rather than seeing the apparent opposition between these instruments as insurmountable, Homer suggests a more fundamental cooperation between them. This is a surprising anticipation of Heraclitus and his conception of unity as emerging out of difference and I suggest that this Heraclitean unity is at the core of the transformation we see Odysseus

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<sup>24</sup> Dimock 1956: 1.

undergo throughout the course of the *Odyssey*. Ultimately, we see how there can exist tension between opposing forces within a unified whole, like the bow or the lyre, and that this is the way our central character himself can become a whole, fully realized person. This underlying harmony between opposites gives way for the truest form of Odysseus—a multiplicity unified into one.

I will begin my discussion in this chapter with one of these moments of tension—Odysseus’ reunion with Eurykleia on Ithaka. Here our aim will be to begin to understand more fully the first of what I claim to be the two dimensions of Odysseus’ identity—namely his role as particular *actor*. This scene is significant for my argument because it strips away Odysseus’ powers of narrative, rendering him purely an *actor* within her story of him. In so doing, it shows that the tensions in Odysseus’ identity that I have described are, in fact, fundamental to his person and cannot simply be explained as an epiphenomenon of his own dazzling powers as narrator. After looking at Odysseus as purely an individual, I will move to look at his role as narrator in what is arguably his most explicit moment of storytelling—namely when he gives his account of his adventures to the Phaiakians. In particular, I will compare the beginning of his tale to the beginning of the poem and consider the role of the poet in relation to his work. From there, I will examine Odysseus’ meeting with Polyphemus to consider an episode which represents both the height of his freedom from constraint and fixed identity but also the moment in which the contradiction with his particularity is most pronounced. Finally I will consider Odysseus’ arrival on Ithaka and the episodes leading up to his ultimate self-revelation, in particular examining the moments leading up to and the moment of the Test of the Bow.

## Part 1: Odysseus & Eurykleia

Let us begin our study of Odysseus' journey in Book 19, nearly at the conclusion of his trials, in Book 19. Here he has returned to Ithaka and his home but has not yet vanquished the foes therein and thus is still in disguise. Up until this point, Odysseus has been ensconced in the house of Eumaios, figuring out what he has come home to and scheming to reclaim his rightful place. During this period, he has taken up different personae, hiding from those who knew him, and also enacted revelations, in particular revealing himself to his son Telemachus. If, in keeping with the approach to the text I have been describing, we imagine his ultimate aim to be one of achieving harmony between his role as an endlessly self-creating, fluid narrator, and his fixed identity as Odysseus, we might assume that he has here achieved that. But when we arrive at the important episode of Odysseus' reunion with his old nurse Eurykleia, that supposition is called into question particularly in relation to her recognition of Odysseus' childhood scar. We find that the harmonization entailed in Odysseus realizing his truest identity is a more complicated matter than simply manifesting different aspects of himself.

Other commentators have, of course, noted that the scar episode is fundamentally concerned with Odysseus' identity. Austin 1966, for example, remarks, "The digression on Odysseus' scar, for example, is not really on the scar at all. The scar is but the vehicle for the explication of the real subject, which is the name and identity of Odysseus" (310).<sup>25</sup> But for Austin, Odysseus' identity is to be understood in relation only to the disguise in which he now appears: "[Eurykleia] is grappling with two separate identities, that of the young Odysseus whom

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<sup>25</sup> Austin 1966: 310

she reared and that of the old and disreputable beggar before her. The scar is what binds the two disparities together and ultimately her assurance that this beggar is in fact Odysseus.” To be sure, the immediate context of the recognition is related to Odysseus’ appearance as a beggar. But my claim is that this scene at the same time raises the question of identity in a deeper sense, the question of who “the real Odysseus” ultimately is and what it would mean for him to manifest that true nature.

Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, arrives in his palace with Eumaios. In the course of his time there, he speaks with Penelope, seemingly convincing her of his false persona<sup>26</sup> and telling her a false tale of who he is, even inserting a false meeting with himself that he describes to her. After they have finished speaking, Penelope, wishing to be kind to the “beggar,” calls upon Eurykleia to come and give Odysseus a foot bath. Though Odysseus initially resists, the woman comes nonetheless. As she prepares, he becomes rightly concerned by the threat of being recognized:

Odysseus  
 Sat at the hearth, but he turned himself quickly away towards the darkness.  
 For suddenly he forbade in his heart, that, grasping him,  
 She would perceive his scar and his trick would be discovered.  
**But there and then she washed his feet coming quite close to her own master.**  
**Straightaway she knew the scar which once a wild boar inflicted upon him with its white tusk**  
**When he had gone to Parnassos to see Autolykos and his sons.**  
 (19.389-394)

As Odysseus feared, she does indeed recognize his scar, which he obtained when, on a visit to his grandfather, he was gored by a boar after a misstep during the hunt. This moment of

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<sup>26</sup> Whether or not Odysseus truly convinces Penelope of his false persona in this moment is a topic of debate but there is not a specific breakdown of his disguise in the course of the scene.



recognition leads to a digression where she recalls the whole incident and in the course of that tale lays out Odysseus' ancestry, referring to his grandfather Autolykos, and even his naming.

In her initial recognition of Odysseus she reveals their rich common history: she has known him from his birth and has cared for him throughout all of his young days. Having lived that history with him, she sees through his lying words and disguised visage to his true self. Similarly, in Book 24 Odysseus, after first spinning another tale to his father, ultimately shows Laertes the same scar as proof of his identity and connects it with the same story. Even his father cannot trust his son's words alone but seems to require a kind of physical proof. (Notably, though, there it is Odysseus who chooses the moment to reveal himself and who thus wields this exposing narrative.) Like his own father, Eurykleia has an intimate sense not only of Odysseus' mind, the side of himself which he is typically most concerned to present to the world, but also of his body and the vulnerabilities it betrays. Through guileful words, he can mask from others most everything about himself, including his weaknesses, and yet through sight and touch of his body she connects to something deeper that is not so easily hidden. She knew him at a time when he was younger and more prone to making mistakes, as in this instance where his misjudgment resulted in an injury. Indeed, the boar-hunt itself might be seen as a rite of passage for an adolescent male;<sup>27</sup> Eurykleia is therefore recalling the moment where Odysseus stood at the threshold between boyhood and manhood.

This moment, therefore, seems to exemplify his challenge in returning to Ithaka: Eurykleia holds his whole history, not just his grand adventures and triumphs but the mistakes he

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<sup>27</sup> Goff 1991 argues that this is in fact the significance of the boar-hunt in 5th Century Athenian society. She does not definitively assert that it played this same role in the Homeric world, and I offer this possibility only in a more speculative manner.

made as a child down to even the details of how he gained his name. She can read the signs on his body in a particular way given their connection, can use these signs to recount *her* story of Odysseus. She is rooted in everything that “Odysseus” comes from, even down to the origin of that name itself, as she recalls the episode that led to Odysseus’ wound:

And in turn Autolykos answered her and said:

**‘My son-in-law and my daughter, give him the name that I say.**

**For I have come here hated (ὀδυσσάμενος) by many people,**

**Men and women throughout the all-nourishing earth,**

**And so give him the name Odysseus.**

Then, when he is in the prime of his youth and comes to his great maternal home

At Parnassos, where there lay my treasures,

I will give him gifts—of this story and of my possessions—and send him off rejoicing.’

(19.405-412)

Through these details, we see the deep link she—even more than Penelope—represents between Odysseus and his roots. Not only does she know his ancestry and his youthful mistakes but she knows the story of the origin of his name, the very thing which is the locus of his identity as hero, as *actor*. Here she shows all the ties that a name has—to ancestry, to land, to one’s life and past achievements and mistakes. A name calls forth all these fixed details that root someone in a particular life and persona. In knowing that name, Eurykleia may take control of telling a narrative of Odysseus. While narratives still surround him here, he is now the *object* of one rather than the fully free creator of them. In this moment, the mystery of Odysseus’ identity is dissolved by someone with the power to read the story fixed on his skin and his own power as narrator thus seems to have evaporated. This disintegration of his ability to narrate in the presence of his name and origin crystallizes the question of how this metamorphosing, storytelling self might ever coexist with a rooted, historically situated individual.

This scene thus neatly encapsulates the problem Odysseus faces, the tension inherent in his current position: he has not yet found how to harmonize these twin dimensions of his being,

instead remaining caught in one or the other.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, from this interaction we can glean the overriding danger in his failing to integrate these disparate selves. Odysseus' success continually hinges on his ability to control a situation and shape it and fit into it with whatever role he must take up.<sup>29</sup> His plans demand total fluidity, freedom from the particularities of identity and the specific desires and pains of the man Odysseus. He cannot accomplish his ultimate aims when he can be recognized against his will and reduced to his historical self. He remains continually vulnerable. If Odysseus' greater task is indeed to have the ability to hold these disparate qualities in unity, it appears that that task has not yet been completed.

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<sup>28</sup> My approach is fundamentally at odds with Auerbach's (2003) well-known interpretation of the scene. Auerbach, in keeping with his thesis of "fully externalized description" in Homer—the idea that all events are part of the foreground and thus are treated equally—suggests that Eurykleia's recollection interrupts the main narrative. Indeed, on his reading the aim of this digression is only to "relax the tension" and make the reader "forget what had just taken place during the foot-washing." Far from an attempt at diversion, on my reading this scene is crucial to the larger transformation that Odysseus undergoes in the course of the poem.

<sup>29</sup> Sychterz 2009 suggests that Odysseus remains in control even in this moment, claiming that, "Odysseus covers the scar not only to hide his own identity, but also to control his own story until the proper time for its telling" (138). But this claim seems to run counter to the fact that Odysseus is worried about being recognized and seeks to avoid being given the bath. It is Eurykleia's choice, not his, for the story to be told at this time.

## Part 2: Odysseus as Narrator

With a better understanding of the disintegration of Odysseus' narrative power that may occur when his name is invoked before harmonization have occurred, let us now consider more closely the narrative aspect and the hero aspect of the Odyssean self, beginning with the former. Focusing on the episode in the court of Phaiakians, I shall suggest how a division within Odysseus again comes into view, in this case a split between a limited role as a removed "pure narrator" and the possibility of functioning as a creative actor/story-teller.

In Book 8, Odysseus has been brought to king Alkinous in the court of the Phaiakians by the king's daughter Nausikka. When the bard Demodokos is asked to sing for the crowd, he tells the tale of Odysseus and the Trojan horse. Upon hearing this account, the hero himself begins to weep, finally prompting Alkinous to question him about his identity which had been undisclosed up until this point. In response, Odysseus praises Alkinous and then prepares to tell of all the trials he has gone through prior to his arrival. And this will be no short, summarizing recitation. Odysseus goes through all that has come to pass since he left Troy, laying out the story with lush, detailed attention to each moment. Rather than hearing these stories through just the lens of the poem's narrator, "Homer," the character Odysseus is instead given the task of telling these stories within the greater tale, using his own words to lay out what he has experienced.

Now of course this could all be considered simply a device to move the whole poem forward. But when we look more closely, we begin to see the deeper significance of the fact that it is Odysseus who tells the story at this point. We might compare the beginning of this tale to that of the beginning of the poem itself to gain a better understanding of the role of the narrator

and what it inherently requires about their relation to the story they tell. So let us turn to the opening of the *Odyssey*.

Tell me, Muse, of the many-turned man (ἀνὴρ πολύτροπος), who wandered very many ways  
Since he sacked the holy citadel of Troy.

**Many were the towns of men he saw and came to know their minds,**

**Many were the pains he suffered in his heart at sea,**

**Striving for the souls and homecoming of his companions.**

(πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,

πολλὰ δ' ὃ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν,

ἀρνύμενος ἥν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων).

But he couldn't rescue his companions, though he desired to greatly;

For they destroyed themselves with their own utter recklessness—the fools!—

Who devoured the cattle of Hyperion Helios.

And he took from them the day of their return.

**Begin from some place or another (ἀμύθεν), Goddess, daughter of Zeus, and sing this tale to us.**

(1.1-10)

In the Main Narrator's introduction, he mainly focuses on the trials of Odysseus on his journey from Troy to Ithaka. He emphasizes in particular the “pains” (ἄλγεα) that he has undergone, treating them as a key aspect of the story on par with the foreign places and foreign peoples he encountered. He further highlights the pains by having the next clause and sentence describing them in particular. While this might appear a simple summary of events, one strange detail immediately stands out: there is no mention of any events besides those occurring on Odysseus' travels. There is no discussion of his crucial return to Ithaka or any other events that occur in the poem. This is particularly striking given that the journey from Troy to Ithaka is the one part of the *Odyssey* not told by the poet himself: it is instead told by Odysseus. A focus is thus immediately placed on our hero, not just for his actions but specifically on his act of storytelling. The Narrator points us right from the beginning to Odysseus' role as narrator, rather than focusing on the story he himself presents.

Furthermore, a special emphasis is placed on the action of framing and bounding the tale by the concluding appeal to the goddess. Homer asks her not simply to tell the story but to pick where it should begin and end, though we are notably not given a definitive answer to this query. Indeed, the word itself used here—*hamothen* (literally meaning “from some place or other”)—highlights the indefiniteness at this moment of where the bounds of the story will be placed. It marks that the act of storytelling is shown to not be just relaying the events and their details but specifically concerned with how to best lay them out and raises the question of what order they should be addressed. At the same time, this suggests that the Narrator exerts no definite choice over his story. After all, even if he asked the goddess for inspiration and to be an aid to his memory, surely he could have chosen where to begin and end his story and how to order the events in between. There is an implicit recognition of an essential indeterminacy in the tale that is to be told, as if it were an open possibility whose nature will only be fixed once the events are properly ordered. Ultimately the choice is still given to the Muse, the choice of how to bound and fix this story. She is given control over ordering this tale, particularly ordering it and beginning it as the conclusion is inherently set by the *nostos*. Given the striking arrangement of the *Odyssey*—we do not even meet our main character until Book 5 and we do not hear his famed adventures until Book 9!—this seems even more noticeable. The work of how to frame and organize a story is of such import that *that* is what must be left up to a divinity first and foremost.<sup>30</sup>

Given our better understanding of the way in which the Main Narrator opens his own tale, particularly the apparent lack of agency he has over directing his story, let us turn to the

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<sup>30</sup> Nagy 1979 and Richardson 1990 both note the import of the Muses in helping the narrator transcend the mortal realm of knowledge. They give him insight into times and places inaccessible to him and grant him an omniscient, omnipresent persona.

beginning the beginning of Odysseus' narrative in Book 9 so that we can come to understand what it means for him to be what I will call a "pure narrator."

But your heart turns to asking about my painful troubles,  
 So that I must lament and greatly **mourn** (ὀδυρόμενος) still.  
**What should I recite to you first, what later?**  
**For the troubles the heavenly gods gave me are many.**  
 (τί πρῶτόν τοι ἔπειτα, τί δ' ὕστιάτιον καταλέξω;  
 κήδε' ἐπεὶ μοι πολλὰ δόσαν θεοὶ οὐρανίωνες.)  
 But now first I will say my name, so that you may understand,  
 And then, escaping the day of ruthlessness,  
 I can be a guest-friend to you, though I dwell at a home far away.  
 I am Odysseus, son of Laertes, to all men  
 Well-known as cunning, and my fame goes towards the heavens.  
 (9.12-20)

There are crucial similarities between these two passages. In particular, Odysseus mirrors the Homeric narrator's question of where to begin. He opens by contemplating how to approach his story, asking what to say "first" (πρῶτόν) and what "later" (ὕστιάτιον), a more certain consideration of bounding than *hamothen* suggests. These are not the same words as used earlier but they likewise express an idea that the *fabula*, the underlying sequence of events, admits many retellings. Even as one who has lived these events, Odysseus recognizes their indeterminate and open-ended nature. Thus Odysseus appears to be performing the job of a bard, a narrator: he will not be relaying "the facts" in a dry, mechanical way but, in deliberately choosing how to tell this story, he will be determining its nature, its ultimate meaning. He will be crafting something, painting a portrait of his adventures to his audience on the basis of some inspiration beyond himself. And yet there is a key difference here, precisely expressed in the fact that, though this is a similar move to the Main Narrator's questioning for inspiration, Odysseus does *not* in fact appeal to the Muse. He more firmly asks what should be first and what later and then he himself answers the question of where to begin by giving his name which he had withheld up until this

point. Identifying himself in this way, he not only seems to exert greater agency over this story but also ties his name to the adventuring character he is about to portray in this tale. Inherently then he is divided from the flesh-and-blood man who moments ago sobbed due to the pain of another's recounting of his past.

This divergence colors another parallel we might find between these two passages. Both Odysseus and the Homeric narrator orient the story around Odysseus in a particular way: in both cases, theirs is a story focused on his pain and, here, “sorrows” (ὀδυρόμενος). While Odysseus uses a different word from the Homeric narrative, we still are presented with a story focused on suffering, the pain produced by longing for what is not in his grasp. In fact, Odysseus’ choice to describe his sorrows with the participle *odyromenos* hints at one of the two etymologies of the name “Odysseus.” He thus preempts his introduction with this etymological mark of his identity, one which like so many of Odysseus’ other qualities is, in fact, polyvalent. Indeed, G. E. Dimock focuses on the other etymological root of his name, *odyssamenos* meaning “distasteful” or “to cause pain” as Dimock takes it, which is the term used by Eurykleia in describing Odysseus’ naming by Autolykos. For Dimock, this “distasteful” name is what Odysseus must accomplish in the course of his travels; he must live up to that identity that Autolykos set up for him.<sup>31</sup> But I do not view his journey in such a negative light. For if we take the other potential etymological root here into consideration, the one which Odysseus himself refers to in this passage, we actually get an opposite meaning for his name. That is, if *odyssamenos* means to cause pain, *odyromenos* suggests being at the mercy of pain.<sup>32</sup> So just as with the ambiguity surrounding how to translate the crucial epithet *polytropos* in the proem of the *Odyssey*—the term can be translated actively or

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<sup>31</sup> Dimock 1956

<sup>32</sup> Alden 2017 notes that *odyssamenos* alone could be understood as either active or passive, so even in this name alone there seems to be this double meaning for Odysseus (11).



passively, “much-turned” or “much-turning”—, Odysseus’ nature is ever double and paradoxical. While Dimock emphasizes the irony of Odysseus being continually *caused* pain probably even more often than causing it,<sup>33</sup> I would stress that this reference goes beyond ironic; this two-sidedness is the key to understanding our main character. This will be a story of sorrows, sorrows both caused and undergone by the narrator. In playing on the etymology of his name in this way, Odysseus seems to be artfully weaving a narrative in which his own identity is tied into its larger meaning.

Considering Odysseus in this way brings up something essential about these kinds of narrators: there is a necessary distance from the story which they tell. Shortly before beginning his account, we hear how “Odysseus melted, and tears flowed down his cheeks from beneath his eyelids” (8.521-522) upon listening to Demodokos tell the tale of his triumph over the Trojans with the Trojan horse. In this moment, we can see his great pain in hearing of his past, even when the story is primarily one of triumph. And yet we are met with a cool and collected man when Odysseus is narrator—when he sets out to tell of everything that went wrong in his journey home. He tells us that “many are the sorrows” he has undergone but to the same effect as Homer’s initial presenting of the poem, not seemingly in the way of one who still actively feels that pain. Odysseus appears removed from these events, a sharp contrast to the weeping man from just before. This emotionally connected Odysseus from moments prior exemplifies the *odyromenos* etymology, the experiencer of pain, but the narrator Odysseus, as he narrates, is the *odyssamenos* one, an active agent as he in a way causes his past self pain anew.

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<sup>33</sup> Dimock 1956: 54

This question, “What should I recite to you first, what later?” seems to stress this distance yet more. While Odysseus is more definitive than the Main Narrator, he has *experienced* what he intends to relate and yet still does not fully hold the wherewithal and authority to immediately know what to tell first. Instead, just like the Narrator at the beginning, he seeks inspiration for a story he is familiar with but does not completely know.<sup>34</sup> He ultimately makes the choice but he still queries himself. He cannot fully tell this tale, it would seem, as “Odysseus,” as the hero of these adventures. He must step away from that part of himself—the one that is still there and still processing, the man weeping moments before—and take up the mantle of Narrator, in which he will sing of a historical event. The ability to determine the real meaning of that event is somehow not already fully realized, not set by his experience, but instead will be based in the very act of telling the tale.

This suggests a division within Odysseus. Storytelling is a key aspect of who he is and yet when he takes up this role in a more formal sense, lingering on his old heroics and unable to enact anything new, he is left in a rather passive, stagnant position: to be this “pure narrator,” he must inherently limit himself, not storytelling *while* he creates the story through action but rather retrospectively recounting a narrative with a fixed outcome. In taking up his role as Narrator he is thus relinquishing his role as actor. This is a role then that cannot accommodate his full self, as someone who not only relates but also alters events. By Odysseus’ own volition, “Odysseus” the character here has been set in a fixed course of events with a fixed outcome which Odysseus the narrator may shape, but cannot ultimately change.

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<sup>34</sup> Minton 1960 likewise categorizes these types of more general invocations with the direct appeals to the Muses such as we saw Homer use.

This limitation of Odysseus to a single aspect of himself runs deeply counter to how he is typically presented in the text. This is particularly evident when we consider the epithets that accompany him, and the prevalence of the prefix *poly* (“many”) in them. In the proem, we are met with the epithet *polytropos*, what I translate as “much-turned”; later, we find *polyphron* (“many-minded”)<sup>35</sup>, *polymetis* (“much cleverness”)<sup>36</sup>, and *polytlas* (“much-enduring”)<sup>37</sup>, among others. These terms all capture something central and important about Odysseus, namely that his essential nature is seemingly impossible to pin down. He is inherently multitudinous, a many brought into one. Yet in his role as pure narrator, he expresses only one of his many facets, suppressing the fullness of his nature. Odysseus’ approach to narrative here thus betokens a kind of inner conflict, a denial of the open-ended, indeterminate aspect of his identity.

But during Odysseus’ travels, we will also see a foreshadowing of the possibility of more fully incorporating this understanding of indeterminacy into his story-telling. In the next section, I will consider Odysseus’ encounter with the cyclops Polyphemus where we catch a glimpse of what Odysseus can be when he holds the roles of actor and narrator in harmony and at the same time see how this delicate balancing act has not yet been completed. From this, we will gain better insight into what exactly the tension between these aspects of himself entails.

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<sup>35</sup> See *Odyssey* 1.83, 8.297, 14.424, etc.

<sup>36</sup> See *Odyssey* 2.173, 4.763, 5.214, etc.

<sup>37</sup> See *Odyssey* 5.171, 6.1, 7.133, etc.

### Part 3: Odysseus as Hero

In the course of his adventures, we find Odysseus acting both as the hero, the instigator of action and fixer of problems as they arise, and as storyteller, weaving a tale as he enacts it. He is an active agent in creating events, rather than simply a bard who shapes past exploits, as he is with the Phaiakians: storytelling becomes a key part of his heroic activity. When he encounters the cyclops Polyphemus, though, we see a different persona, reflected by the name he adopts, *Outis* or “No one.” This passage is not lacking for interpreters. Richardson,<sup>38</sup> Loney,<sup>39</sup> and Nagy<sup>40</sup> all dwell on the importance of the Polyphemus scene, viewing it as revealing something key about his identity. But they differ on exactly what that key element is. I will argue that this is one of the most revealing scenes of Odysseus’ fundamental identity and state of development: in its course, Odysseus achieves the most fluid or indeterminate version of himself, what I will call his *Outis* self. But ultimately he cannot sustain this realization beyond the cave and reverts to his fixed, Odyssean identity.

In this episode, Odysseus and his men become trapped in the cyclops’ lair, resulting in the death of a few of the men. In order to escape, Odysseus puts into action a multi-pronged plan: he plies Polyphemus with wine and plans to blind him so he and his men can escape undetected. Crucially, when Polyphemus asks him about his identity, he says that his name is *Outis* (“No One”), undoubtedly one of his greatest deceptions:

Thus he spoke. Then again I gave him the sparkling wine.  
Three times I gave it and conveyed it, three times he drained it in folly.  
But when the wine had gone about the mind of the Cyclops,  
Then indeed I spoke to him with honeyed words:

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<sup>38</sup> Richardson 2006

<sup>39</sup> Loney 2018

<sup>40</sup> Nagy 2013

**‘Cyclops, you ask me for my renowned name, and I will tell you it.**

**But you, grant me a guest-gift, just as you promised.**

**No One is my name; No One they all call me—**

**My mother and father and all my other companions.**

(Κύκλωψ, εἰρωτᾷς μ’ ὄνομα κλυτόν, αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ τοι

ἐξερέω· σὺ δέ μοι δὸς ξείνιον, ὥς περ ὑπέστης.

Οὔτις ἐμοί γ’ ὄνομα· Οὔτιν δέ με κικλήσκουσι

μήτηρ ἢ δὲ πατήρ ἢ δ’ ἄλλοι πάντες ἐταῖροι).’

(9.360-367)

Unlike the Cretan tales and other instances where Odysseus pretends to be someone else, often with a fully developed background and ancestry, here he does almost the opposite: he pretends to be No One, fully divorcing himself from all that comes with a name. He begins in a way that echoes his introduction to the Phaiakians—he says he “will say [his] name, so that [they] may understand” (9.17) and even mentions as he does here guest-friendship with them. And yet swiftly he diverges. Rather than giving his name and bolstering it with his family lineage and his homeland as he does there, he instead says only that he is No One and his unnamed family and friends refer to him as such. He chooses definitively not to create a family, a land, or a history; nothing is specified. All he notes is that this is what he is called by all those around him, in a way that I would suggest breaks through the lies and highlights the deeper truth within Odysseus this name speaks to. In the cave, divorced from the anchors of the familiar world, Odysseus may be at once all possibilities.

In part, he is of course playing on the similarity in sound between his invented name and his real name. But there also seems to be a deeper truth to this trick. More fundamentally, the idea of being “No One” is in fact an integral part of Odysseus.<sup>41</sup> He is, as I have emphasized,

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<sup>41</sup> Nagy 2013 notes this *Outis* naming to be rather negative, as in the heroic context it works to erase all his past deeds. And yet this contrast to the heroic ideals is precisely why I would identify it as positive and important for Odysseus; this is key to who he is and the tension is present for precisely that reason that Nagy points out but this is exactly what has the potential to set Odysseus free in my reading.

constantly recreating himself to fit whatever mold the moment necessitates. Indeed, Odysseus' whole reputation flows much more from the stories born of his own imagination than from the facts of his actual accomplishments. He is famed for his craftiness and inventiveness. His defining characteristic is that he is always redefining himself, painting himself in some new light through his endlessly shifting narratives. This moment of one of Odysseus' most famous deceptions simultaneously seems also to be one of his most truthful moments, giving way to a self that is pure creation and possibility.

In the *Odyssey*, as we have seen, a crucial feature of being a narrator is acknowledging the inherent indeterminacy of the events that are being described, an acknowledgement which adds to the difficulty of the choice of how to bound the tale. While the Main Narrator allots this choice of where to begin to a divine power, Odysseus in the cave notably does not; the narrative decision is entirely his own. This moment is storytelling in action, creating a tale as he himself creates the events. Here it seems that Odysseus, for a moment, is aware of the same indeterminacy of an untold story, this same open possibility as his life is unfolding. He recognizes the absence of any ultimate fixed identity to his nature and yet still perpetuates action, crafting the tale. It is in fact precisely that recognition that makes possible his freedom, his ability to skillfully navigate his circumstances. Moreover, this is not simply some internal awareness on his part but is an external expression as well, the way he allows others to see him: his parents and his companions know him in this way, as he states, and so now too does Polyphemus. It is evident how powerful he is in this moment because he does in fact escape the cave and free himself and his men from Polyphemus' clutches.

Yet he ultimately cannot hold onto this realization of the freedom afforded by his choice to inhabit the persona of “No One.” Indeed, he abandons this identity in his final exhortation to the cyclops. It brings about his downfall:

Thus they spoke but they couldn't persuade my great heart,  
 And back again I addressed him with fury in my heart:  
**‘Cyclops, if anyone of mortal men asks you  
 About the unseemly blinding of your eye,  
 Say that Odysseus, sacker of cities, blinded you utterly,  
 The son of Laertes, who's ancestral home is in Ithaka.’**  
 (9.500-505)

While Odysseus often seems prideful, he typically does not name himself so explicitly for others' recognition—we never see him give his name to other gods and monsters on his travels unless they already know or it is part of a scheme and certainly when he is home on Ithaca all revelations are carefully planned. In this moment, though, his pride seizes him and he shouts his name and birthplace, an outburst which then leads to the hatred of Poseidon and the chain of events that makes his return home near impossible. In stark contrast to his unmoored, indeterminate existence in the cave, upon his exit he now clings to his name and his home and his family. Caught up in the impressiveness of his escape, he fails to leave the trick to be revealed by his own later storytelling. Instead he wants to establish his particular identity in Polyphemus' eyes (so to speak), desiring for others to immediately recognize it too. He tells Polyphemus to tell any person who might ask about his triumph, thus leaving it to others to decide what the name “Odysseus” means, giving them control over how to shape his legacy. In falling prey to pride, he cannot sustain this delicate combination of being No One *and* acting as a hero; he cannot continue to stand in the amorphous space that had helped him achieve this great feat but instead reverts to the comfort of attachment and a fixed identity.

In this way, the scene with Polyphemus shows both the apex of what Odysseus can be—creation and action in harmony—but also that he has not yet come into his full nature: outside of the cave, where he is connected to his world again and thus to his fixed, Odyssean identity, he cannot sustain being storyteller and character in unity. This point is further underlined if we take a closer look at what *Polyphemus*' name means. In this scene which is so intensely interested in the importance of names, Odysseus' "enemy" has both a name that begins with *poly*—a prefix which I have previously discussed as being deeply important in describing Odysseus—and the stem linked to the verb *phemi* "to speak," which of course is what Odysseus is ever involved in as a narrator. So on the surface, this sounds as if it's a name fit to describe Odysseus himself quite well—"much-speaking one." And yet instead we are met with a somewhat dull creature who seems far from our scheming, word-twisting hero, a creature unable to see beyond his own immediate needs. Indeed, Polyphemus' identification with his own self is so complete that he fundamentally violates the norm of guest-friendship; he is very far from recognizing the kinship with others entailed by Odysseus' open sense of identity. In this way, Polyphemus seems to act rather as an anti-Odysseus,<sup>42</sup> set up to hold these same powers as he but ultimately failing. It is perhaps just the contrast between them that helps allow Odysseus to realize his indeterminate self more fully.

So in this strange space, within the cave and with this alternate version of himself, we see Odysseus hold these disparate parts of himself together, embracing his multitudes at once. In the Introduction, I discussed the significance of caves in Greek literature, their meaning as symbols of a strange space apart from reality that gives way for illusions to appear more true. With that in

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<sup>42</sup> Loney 2018 makes a similar point about the parallels between these two characters, though he is more interested in it with regards to their more monstrous attributes and the key stories that are told about them.



mind, we can see how the illusory world of the cave allows Odysseus the freedom to divorce himself from his identity that is fixed in his homeland and family, most encapsulating the freedom to be gained as a stranger in foreign lands. He names himself No One and, released from attachment to land and people, still manages to act as a hero, enacting this grand escape rather than just telling of it. Yet when he leaves this unfamiliar domain of the cave and re-enters the real, familiar world, he cannot sustain it. We can see a deeper point in this moment of change: the cave is a space almost apart from the real world.<sup>43</sup> Under duress, in this strange dark place, Odysseus can achieve what he cannot yet hold in the full light of reality.

We might consider this on a broader scale as well. Odysseus in his travels has been residing in foreign lands where; even if people may have heard tell of him, he isn't truly known and he is free to shape his identity as he chooses—sometimes revealing, other times concealing his name and his identity. All this is possible because he is divorced at this point from his land and his family and his ancestral home, all those things that most strongly link him to his name. It is thus striking that when he identifies himself in this scene, he calls on his name, his father's name, and his homeland. These are the elements that establish him in his particularity, what we saw him call upon at the beginning of the *Apologoi* to give credence to himself in telling this tale. This moment brings into focus a broader point about the relationship between Odysseus' journey and his identity: it has a similar result to that which we see in miniature in the cave, when he takes up the name *Outis*. It allows him to act in a way that would be much more difficult if he were continually surrounded by reminders of his links to the world all around him. He is a

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<sup>43</sup> Nagy 2013 notes the importance of this “annihilation of the hero's identity” occurring in this strange, dark space and parallels it to the conception held in Greek myth of the potential for the absence of identity in the dark. Similarly, he notes that we find Odysseus in another dark cave, that of Calypso, at the outset of the poem, further marking the importance of this scene.

nomad, having spent years away from home and family, away from everything that would fix his identity. But that means that when he returns to the daylight world and sees his ships and his men, it becomes much more difficult not to fall back into his old familiar self-understanding. To achieve his full potential and power, he needs to achieve the harmonization between particularity and indeterminacy, between form and formlessness, no matter the external factors.

And this brings us to what we must ultimately examine to see the transformation that occurs in Odysseus: his return to Ithaka. We cannot see a full integration within him until he has faced his greatest challenge to remain simultaneously in his particular Odysseus self and his fluidly shifting No One-ness. With Polyphemus, we are shown what can happen if Odysseus fails—it promises doom and great hardship in finding his way home. So we proceed to examine what progression Odysseus undergoes when he returns to Ithaka and works towards his final return to his ancestral home.

#### Part 4: *Outis* and Odysseus—A Process of Integration

Now we have finally circled back around to where we began, with Odysseus on the verge of his battle against the suitors and ultimate triumph. With the final inner challenge he faced with Eurykleia conquered, the final, physical challenge, the Test of the Bow, remains. In Book 13 of the *Odyssey*, at the midpoint of the poem, after twenty years of wandering our hero finally reaches the shores of his beloved Ithaka. The Phaiakians deposit him upon the beach asleep, devoid of his men and ships; it is only now, after losing everything, that he can awaken and regain his home and family. Ostensibly, his final challenge is to overcome the suitors who have taken over his house and lands and seek to marry Penelope. As I have been suggesting, there seems to be a more subtle, internal task to fulfill as well—a kind of integration of the two sides of Odysseus, his *Outis*-self and his identity as a particular individual, “Odysseus.”<sup>44</sup> This is, as we have seen, at the same time a synthesis of his roles as narrator and that of actor. It seems we cannot have a full manifestation of who Odysseus is until this whole complex fabric has been somehow stitched together—when he becomes a multiplicity brought into one. In Polyphemus’ cave, we seem to have caught a glimpse of what this would mean, how he could weave a tale at the same time as he enacts it. But I suggest that it is only in the test of the bow that we see his full integration of *Outis* and Odysseus and thereby his achievement of his utmost power. The importance of the test of the bow often is brought up in regards to a study of Penelope<sup>45</sup> or as a

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<sup>44</sup> Rutherford 1986 and Nagy 2013 likewise see Odysseus in a state of flux, one to be resolved throughout the poem. Rutherford, however, describes this transformation in moralistic terms—as if the poem revolves around Odysseus’ movement from a state of distrust and overconfidence to one of thoughtfulness and stoicism. Nagy is more concerned (as indeed I am) with the Odyssean sense of self and consciousness (Nagy 2013: 299-307).

<sup>45</sup> Alden 2017, Combella 1973, Schmidt 2006, Doherty 1991

way to parallel Odysseus with Heracles<sup>46</sup> rather than as a way of studying the character of Odysseus, as I am doing here. There also seems to be minimal focus on the moment of stringing the bow itself, which is of the utmost importance to my argument of how this instrument represents the man himself. To hold the full manifestation of these disparate aspects of himself in concert is his greatest challenge: he must sustain the tension like the bow itself, holding this *Outis* side while in his ancestral home, the root of his family and lands and heritage—all that defines the man “Odysseus.”

During this period on Ithaka we find Odysseus at the height of his craftiness—he takes on a plethora of characters to enact his schemes, primarily telling the Cretan Tales in which he pretends to be a Cretan merchant who hosted Odysseus at his home.<sup>47</sup> With this, he seems to exemplify the qualities we’ve looked for thus far of both narrating and acting. But he is, as I have previously suggested, also at his most vulnerable. When he meets Eurykleia, he is placed in the passive role of the source and object of the story rather than the teller. It is again important to recall that his meeting with her occurs during the build-up to his confrontation with the suitors and his self-revelation as Odysseus. Eurykleia may have been his final hurdle in recognizing the importance of his Odyssean self but now he must truly bring those together in taking up the bow and besting the suitors as both Odysseus *and* the storyteller.

Odysseus’ active revelation of his own identity comes not at once, but gradually. After the suitors fail to string the great bow, Odysseus declares himself in word and sign—but not action—to the swineherd and goatherd after he questions them and deems them trustworthy:

**‘At home, here indeed, I am he** (ἔνδον μὲν δὲ ὅδ’ αὐτὸς ἐγώ). Having suffered many evils,  
I have come to my fatherland in the twentieth year.  
And I know that for you two alone of my slaves there was a wish that I might return.

<sup>46</sup> Alden 2017, Chrissy 1997, Schein 2001

<sup>47</sup> I have discussed in the Introduction why I am refraining from specifically discussing these tales in this study.

Of the others I haven't heard anyone praying that  
I, returning, might come home again...

**But come now indeed, and I will show a clear sign,  
So that you may know me well and trust me in your hearts:  
The scar, which once a wild boar inflicted upon me with its white tusk  
When I had gone to Parnassos with the sons of Autolykos.'**  
Speaking thus, he pushed back his rags from the large scar.  
When the two men beheld it, each knew him well...  
(21.207-222)

At first, this seems in line with what we would expect from a revelation: he says that "I am he" and that he has come home and references his familial connection to the land and its past rulers. And yet there seems to be something very notably missing: any specific reference to the name "Odysseus." There are indirect references—his family, his lands, the indirect reference to himself by means of the "he" in the first line. But there is very oddly no specific calling upon his own name. Rather we are given a different kind of reveal, a different marker to denote himself: his scar.

We previously saw in his interaction with Eurykleia all the knowledge this held of him for her, so much so that she recognized him against his will. Here, Odysseus does not attempt to hide his scar but rather utilizes it as a definitive, physical proof of his identity. Rather than feeling the need to completely recraft his story in this moment, as he did with the Cretan Tales and his encounter with Polyphemus, he uses what is inscribed into his own skin so that these men will see the story. He enacts this revelation but doesn't ultimately need to tell the tale himself; he doesn't even state directly the conclusion that is supposed to be drawn ("I am Odysseus"). He lets the scar speak for itself. Indeed, the Greek here is virtually the exact same formulation that Eurykleia called to mind for the story of the scar.<sup>48</sup> This is neither a moment of pure narration nor

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<sup>48</sup> The Greek is: οὐλήν, τήν ποτέ μιν/με σὺς ἤλασε λευκῶ ὀδόντι/ Παρνησόνδ' ἐλθόντα...

pure action—nor even the kind of live storytelling and heroics as we saw with Polyphemus.

Rather, Odysseus *steps into* his identity of “Odysseus” now that he has returned home. Indeed he does not simply say “I am he;” rather he first places himself in this location, his ancestral lands, with the deictic words *endon* and *hode*. He is once again tied to his familial line and thus can become fully his (particular) self. In this context, his name is not necessary; his scar, made manifest in *these* surroundings, by itself announces his identity. Seamlessly he also weaves this into a call to battle, ushering in the action to come.

And thus unfolds the Test of the Bow, where Odysseus marries symbol to action, word to deed. The suitors have already tried their hand at stringing the great weapon and all failed in their task. And so, under the guise of being an old man posing no threat but simply interested in his own strength, Odysseus asks for leave to attempt this feat himself:

‘Hear me, suitors of the renowned queen,  
While I say the things that my heart in my breast urges.  
And especially Eurymachus and godlike Antinous  
I beg, since the word he said was also good.  
For now cease trying the bow, and entrust it to the gods.  
In the morning, the god will give victory to whomever he wills.  
**But come and grant me the gleaming bow, so that amongst you all  
I may try my hands and might, if either for me  
There is still strength of the sort there formerly was in my supple limbs,  
or if by this time my wandering and lack of care have destroyed it in me**  
(ἀλλ’ ἄγ’ ἐμοὶ δότε τόξον ἐϋξοον, ὄφρα μεθ’ ὑμῖν  
χειρῶν καὶ σθένεος πειρήσομαι, ἥ μοι ἔτ’ ἐστὶν  
ἶς, οἷα πάρος ἔσκεν ἐνὶ γναμπτοῖσι μέλεσσιν,  
ἣ ἤδη μοι ὄλεσσαν ἄλλη τ’ ἀκομιστὶν τε).’  
(21.275-284)

In saying all this, Odysseus is of course attempting to deceive, acting as an old beggar whom the suitors might humor in his patheticness. And yet, as with much of what the man says, there seems to be a deeper level, a hidden truth within the lies. We might find this particularly in the last line which strikes a certain resonance with what we have seen Odysseus undergo. He

questions whether his strength of old remains or whether “[his] wandering and lack of care have destroyed it in [him].” While we have not heard Odysseus express this concern previously, this would seem a genuine consideration, after his years of wandering and hardship—whether he may live up to what it is to be Odysseus. Particularly at this moment, where he will put his plan into action so that he might reclaim his homeland or lose everything after trying so long, we might imagine that such a worry would be on his mind. Thus, in a moment reminiscent of his use of the name *Outis* with Polyphemus, we see, through his lies, a glimpse of the real Odysseus and his struggle with his identity more apparent than when he acts as himself; his lies are in a way more true to who he is than his “truths.”

After a series of complaints by the suitors, Odysseus is given leave to take up the bow and try his hand at this seemingly impossible task. He must finally face this last great trial and bring to fruition what it is to be Odysseus. When he takes up the weapon it seems almost transformed, manifesting a two-fold power:

Thus the suitors spoke, but Odysseus of many wiles,  
 When in a moment he had lifted the great bow and looked over all of it,  
**As when a man skilled in the lyre and in song**  
**Easily stretches a string round a new peg,**  
**Grasping the well-twisted sheep gut cord on both ends,**  
**Just so without difficulty Odysseus strung the great bow.**  
 There and then taking it up in his right hand he tried the string,  
**And it sang back a beautiful sound like the song of a swallow**  
 (δεξιτερῇ ἄρα χειρὶ λαβὼν πειρήσατο νευρῆς·  
 ἢ δ' ὑπὸ καλὸν ἄεισε, χελιδόνη εἰκέλη αὐδῆν).  
 (*Odyssey* 21.404-432)

In this way, a second power of the bow is revealed when Odysseus handles it: it is not simply a weapon of war but also an instrument of music. Via this simile, we are given an image of him handling the bow as if it were a lyre, readying to play it as one who understands this task well,

that is, as if he were a singer and a bard.<sup>49</sup> This is Odysseus' ultimate heroic moment, where he will release his family and land from the outrages of the suitors and regain his rightful place, and yet here he is treated as equal parts storyteller, singer, and warrior.

In this way, the bow seems to act as an object representation and distillation of who Odysseus is. On the surface, it is a weapon and functions as such, as we see right after this scene when Odysseus uses it to massacre the suitors, just as the name "Odysseus" designates a great hero and warrior to all those who hear it. And yet there is a more subtle but no less powerful undertone to the bow: it is also a musical instrument, an aid to the story-telling of a bard. Only in the hands of someone who recognizes this dual nature can it function properly. The suitors' insistence on viewing it simply as a weapon ironically entails that it cannot fulfill its utility in this way (or in any way). Odysseus, on the other hand, recognizes the fundamental indeterminacy in this tool and therefore the full range of its possibilities. He handles it as a familiar singer would, with care and aesthetic delight, not solely as one ready to use it for violence. There is a recognition in him that *both* aspects exist simultaneously—that the bow's nature, like his own, is not single or fixed, that indeed it is only when the seeming oppositions it represents are brought into balance that it can perform its proper function.

We might further consider the way in which the bow and lyre are paralleled in this simile: both work through the creation of tension, the stringing of the bow and the tightening of a string, an idea that anticipates the Ionian philosopher Heraclitus. The two opposing forces themselves

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<sup>49</sup> Alden 2017 emphasizes this, along with a few other moments, paralleling Odysseus with the god Apollo, who is typically associated with both bow and lyre. Furthermore, she notes two important meanings of this comparison: Apollo is associated with purification and new beginnings and the importance of Odysseus' positions on thresholds and boundaries (e.g. shooting at the suitors from the doorway). In this way, she shows how this moment is ushering in a new era. Building on this parallel, we could consider how this enhances the theme of Odysseus emerging into a new identity.



serve to achieve the function of both the instrument and the weapon; by creating tension, opposition, beautiful music can be played and arrows can be loosed. And here one is reminded of one of Heraclitus' best-known fragments: "They do not understand how that which differs with itself is in agreement: harmony consists of opposing tension, like that of the bow and lyre (οὐ ξυνιᾶσιν ὅκως διαφερόμενον ἑωυτῷ ὁμολογέει· παλὶν τροπος ἀρμονίη ὅκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης)" (Heraclitus, translated by Freeman 1983, 51). Again using this analogy of the bow and lyre, Heraclitus points to the necessity of opposition for harmony. To get rid of the tension, to simply collapse the disparate elements into one, would be to lose the power of these instruments altogether. Instead there must be a recognition of the "agreement" in opposition.

And it seems that this is likewise the case for Odysseus. On the surface, as I have shown, there appears to be a central opposition between his roles as narrator and actor, and, similarly, his being as nobody and as somebody, that prevents him from being able to sustain either one. It seems as if the tension itself needs to be taken away for him to live as one united or unified entity. But harmony necessarily arises from opposition—is made possible through it—as Heraclitus underlines. Odysseus stringing the bow shows precisely what must be done for him to gain his full power (and what in this moment he is doing): rather than dismissing the tension, he must accept and skillfully utilize it. He is not just one or the other, not just storyteller or just actor, *Outis* or Odysseus; he is inherently both, a multiplicity that cannot be collapsed into one aspect alone. So as Odysseus strings the bow, he takes up his true mantle, realizing the fullness of his identity. He is *this* man, with a particular name and history and ancestry, but he is also no man in particular. It is indeed just because of his ultimate indeterminate nature that he can fully manifest as the conquering hero. He is both an individual actor, having suffered through war and

the endless obstacles blocking his return home, and an endlessly creative storyteller, fluidly moving from persona to persona to shape the world around him. Through the tension, the string of Odysseus' identity is taut and a sound like the voice of a swallow<sup>50</sup> emerges.

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<sup>50</sup> Losada 1985 and Borthwick 1988 both note the allusion to the swallow's cry for the swallow's mythological connection to a return and to spring, similarly to Alden 2017 emphasizing how this phrase marks a new beginning and a moment of rebirth.



## Chapter 2

### The Cave, the Whale, and the Liar

Γνῶθι σεαυτόν (Know thyself) -Oracle at Delphi

‘There’s no use trying,’ [Alice] said. ‘One can’t believe impossible things.’ ‘I daresay you haven’t had much practice,’ said the Queen. ... ‘Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.’ -Lewis Carroll

Leaving the Homeric vision of the world behind, let us traverse through time nearly a millennium ahead to the second century CE to consider the author, Lucian of Samosata. In Lucian we find a response to the *Odyssey*, an author who takes that text’s obsession with narrative in a new direction, and presents us with a quite different model of human identity. Lucian was a Syrian satirist, dialogist, Platonist, and fiction writer, a dabbler in many areas of literature, rhetoric, and philosophy. His writing is generally comedic and satirizing of both his contemporaries and of ancient figures, though I would (and will) argue that there is a larger intent in his “comedy” beyond mere pleasure.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, his continual play with narrative, with the tension between what the narrator asserts and how he actually operates, suggests a deep concern with meaning and paradox. Importantly, then, we find in Lucian’s work an obsession with the theme of truth and lies. His narrator overtly expresses both his hatred of lies and their corruptive effects, while at the same time continually relying upon falsehoods and fantastical stories. What are we to believe—what the author says or what he does?

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<sup>51</sup> Anderson 1993 highlights more so the performative nature of Lucian’s writing along with his contemporaries but, while I do find there certainly to be a kind of performance throughout his works, there seems to be a larger intent through his kind of writing.

These questions about the elusive, Odyssean role of Lucian in his own texts and this paradoxical relationship with lies will constitute our point of departure in this chapter. While I will briefly examine *The Lover of Lies*, my main focus here will be on *A True History*,<sup>52</sup> a text in which the aforementioned questions figure especially centrally. As we shall see, not only does Odysseus play an important role in this text, but so too does Plato; Plato and Odysseus, I will argue, are the two key figures with whom Lucian is engaged in implicit dialogue.

But it is not only the topic of lies that is drenched in paradox. A similar but more subtle tension is seen in Lucian's invisibility as author. It is in this respect that Lucian responds perhaps most directly to Odysseus, the *anēr polytropos*. The casts of Lucian's characters in his texts vary—from common people to mythological heroes, from the Greek gods to fully fantastical creatures of Lucian's own creation—but there is one character who is largely absent: Lucian himself, an authorial absence that seems particularly marked given how present he is in indirect ways. We sense him throughout, weaving himself into his writings, peeking around the edges, masked in a variety of ways but for a solitary moment here and there.<sup>53</sup> And his characters, although the personae vary,<sup>54</sup> all seem to espouse the same viewpoints as one another, leading scholars to suppose that they are “cutouts” for Lucian himself.<sup>55</sup> Yet, as for direct references to Lucian, there are curiously only five usages of his name in his whole corpus, two of which are

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<sup>52</sup> Kim 2010 notes how, especially in this work, Lucian may be seen as a “new Odysseus” as “his ship is equipped with fifty rowers and steersman, just as in the *Odyssey*, and the double role of Odysseus as traveler and as (lying) narrator of his own travels is similarly assumed by Lucian” (142-143).

<sup>53</sup> His play with these various personae has been discussed a fair amount with a multitude of conclusions drawn. Dubel 1994 interprets it as an act of self-fictionalization, Goldhill 2002 is concerned with how it is a way for Lucian to think on “what it might mean to be a somebody in Empire culture” (66), and Whitmarsh 2001 sees it as being representative of the sense of continually failing to find absolute truth, a “comedy of nihilism” (252).

<sup>54</sup> Some examples include Tychiades in *The Lover of Lies*, Lycinus in *Symposium*, and The Syrian in *The Double Indictment*.

<sup>55</sup> Some examples include a hatred of lies, specific witticisms, and the telling of tall tales.

letters in which his name appears in the introductory greeting.<sup>56</sup> In addition to this tally, there is one dialogue in which he is not named in the text but is labelled as one of the interlocutors. In other cases, he is sometimes implicitly present (even if not named), particularly in *To One who said, "You're a Prometheus in Words,"* a defense of his writing.

Given their rarity, Lucian's few moments of self-naming thus stand out all the more sharply.<sup>57</sup> For instance, in Lucian's *Letter to Nigrinus*, which appears at the beginning of his dialogue *Nigrinus*, Lucian is named in the letter he himself addresses "from Lucian to Nigrinus" (Luc. *Nigr.*, section p, line 1). Whitmarsh considers how this in and of itself draws attention to the lurking presence of Lucian.<sup>58</sup> Throughout the text, Nigrinus is presented as a Lucianic persona, espousing Lucian's specific style of humor and his focus on truth over lies, despite our knowledge from the letter that the two are separate people.<sup>59</sup> Through what we might term his present absence, Lucian continually plays (with) roles and brings the tension between his absence and ever-presence into the story itself. He is, as I will suggest, a quasi-Odysseus.<sup>60</sup>

This chapter focuses on *A True History*, a first-person narrative with the implied narrator being Lucian himself—a point made clear late in the text by a rare moment of self-naming. The

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<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, both letters use the same greeting construction—Λουκιανὸς... εὖ πράττειν—which is a standard phrase in Greek philosophy as well as a greeting between philosophers, an interesting detail to note about Lucian given this chapter's interest in his relationship to Platonic ideas.

<sup>57</sup> Goldhill 2002 talks at length about the oddity of the lack of Lucian's name throughout his texts and thus the marked importance of the instances in which he uses it. He considers how this topic pertains to the larger question of "self-representation as an embodiment of cultural value" (61). He is concerned with tracking how Lucian is used by others and, ultimately, intrigued by how "Lucian engages you in the politics of the person" (107). So there is likewise a concern for Goldhill with Lucian's play with his audience but he interestingly brushes off Odysseus at the beginning as a correlate for what Lucian does, though does note the importance of Plato.

<sup>58</sup> Whitmarsh 2001

<sup>59</sup> Whitmarsh 2001: 270-271

<sup>60</sup> This picture of Lucian is strikingly reminiscent of the character of Odysseus—shifting between roles, authorial presence in tension with its absence. It is further strengthened by Lucian's continual interest in lies I have earlier alluded to, which I will consider at greater length later. This becomes even more of a present interest when considering his *A True History*, since Lucian essentially takes up his own Odyssey. I will examine this important parallel between Lucian and Odysseus in the first section of this chapter.

text details the various fantastical adventures of Lucian and his men: travels to islands with strange women made up of vines, battles between the people of the moon and the sun, encounters with a land “peopled” by lamps. The work is often understood as a kind of fictionalization of paradoxography, the scholarly term for ancient collections of wonders (*thaumata/paradoxa*) from around the world. Significantly, paradoxography is a literary form which takes the *Odyssey* and Odysseus’ tales in particular as its model.<sup>61</sup> *A True History* presents these adventures always from Lucian’s perspective, whether the account concerns things he had seen himself or things that he knew of through others’ apparently trustworthy accounts. In this way it also parallels the type of travel writing done by historiographers at the time. Lucian mentions exact measurements and distances, cites where he learned certain information, and even at times chooses to withhold certain details due to their unbelievability to the reader. This level of concern with sustaining belief is also another connection with paradoxography, which values citing sources, underlining their trustworthiness, and giving details such as the above to prove these things the authors describe.

And yet, there is a crucial difference between *A True History*, the *Odyssey*, and paradoxography: Lucian claims that he “write[s] about things which [he] neither saw nor experienced nor learned from others,” (Luc. *Ver. hist.* 1.4).<sup>62</sup> Thus, as he himself puts it, everything in *A True History* is a lie. Lucian, therefore, negates not only the usual words used by historiographers to give proof of their findings but also the words he himself will go on to use in “proving” the validity of his own experiences. Further underlining the point, he then warns the reader “not to believe at all in these things” (1.4). As if this were not enough, Lucian even asserts

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<sup>61</sup> Schepens and Delcroix 1996

<sup>62</sup> I will be using my own translation for the passages from Lucian’s *A True History*.

that his comedy will be directed “towards those of the poets old in years and the historians and the philosophers, those who have written many monstrous and legendary things” (1.2) and declares them all liars, the greatest of all being Odysseus himself, “the founder of them and the teacher of such buffoonery” (1.3).<sup>63</sup> And yet immediately after all this he takes up his most explicitly Odyssean role—traveling to strange lands and meeting foreign people—and he most directly criticizes Odysseus’ act of telling these (tall) tales.

These incongruities and paradoxes permeate the entire text. But they are brought into especially sharp focus in the episode in *A True History* where Lucian and his men are trapped within a whale. This episode will be the focus of my discussion here. I claim that the whale (which appears near the middle of Lucian’s extant text) is central in helping resolve the Lucianic paradoxes and, at the same time, reveals his larger aims in the text. Its centrality becomes especially apparent when it is brought alongside another famous episode concerning reality and illusion—namely Plato’s Image of the Cave from Book VII of the *Republic*.<sup>64</sup> As is characteristic of Lucian, the relationship is not a simple parallel. Instead, Lucian’s whale episode both mirrors Plato’s Cave and subverts it.<sup>65</sup> Just as the Cave (arguably) provides the key to the entire *Republic*, these adventures in the whale present in miniature the—or, at least, a—real purpose of the text as a whole. I argue that there is a fundamental transformation in this episode that epitomizes the

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<sup>63</sup> Kim 2010 notes this phrase as interesting especially given how it comes in this passage that places the agency of the lying upon Odysseus rather than at all directing it towards Homer and this phrase—“founder” and “teacher”—would be most reminiscent of Homer and yet it is also directed towards Odysseus (152).

<sup>64</sup> Ní Mheallaigh 2005 notes the deep links we can find between Lucian’s writings and its Platonic inspiration. Particularly in reference to his “identity games,” she says that they should not be separated from their origin in Plato himself. Therefore we can already recognize that there is consideration of a connection between these two beyond even a simple reference here and there or a one-time parody; rather, if we are to believe Ní Mheallaigh, it is another influence on Lucian’s very character (101).

<sup>65</sup> Lucian’s play with Plato generally and specifically in *A True History* is already widely discussed (Karen Ní Mheallaigh 2005, 2014, Andrew Laird 2003, and Karin Schlapbach 2010 are a few notable examples especially concerning *True History*) but there is little to no other reference to Plato’s Cave, especially not as this model for Lucian that I am suggesting in this chapter.



overall effect that Lucian aims to have upon the reader: as the author, he intentionally leads us into a state of confusion about what is true and what is false and how much trust to put in his book.

My study builds on a recent interest in Lucian's own relationship to truth, reality, and fiction. For instance, Karen Ní Mheallaigh, while not specifically focusing on the whale episode, similarly notes Lucian's intentional confusion of the reader and how he may be seen to lay a trap for him, luring him in on one pretense and "convert[ing] him, through the process of engaging with the text, into a reader of another sort."<sup>66</sup> She suggests in some instances this serves to make the reader more knowledgeable—taking him "from dupe to accomplice"<sup>67</sup>—but in other instances it is the other way around. While I am in agreement with her about Lucian exerting some change upon the reader, I also believe that *A True History* goes beyond making a point only about fiction. Lucian's aim is to shift our whole orientation to the world, transforming the reader not simply from one type of textual interpreter to another, but from someone who passively accepts received knowledge to one who actively questions what he is told. Such a transformation provokes a process of reflection that is quite reminiscent of the effect of a Platonic dialogue. But, as we shall see, its aim, unlike Plato's, is not thereby to lead the reader to a glimpse of an underlying, true reality. The larger vision of the text is thus not at all Platonic but one which more directly recalls Odysseus, the other key figure at the heart of *A True History*. For in this text Lucian more fully takes up the Odyssean persona that teases at the edges in his other works—the character holding supreme power in the ability to actively craft a tale right on the spot. In so

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<sup>66</sup> Ní Mheallaigh 2014: 124

<sup>67</sup> Ní Mheallaigh 2014: 141

doing, Lucian ultimately seeks to inculcate in us a concern with imagination and creativity rather than the philosopher's focus on discovering the truth.

My discussion in this chapter begins with an examination of the parallels between Lucian and Odysseus. In particular I consider all the instances in Lucian's corpus in which Odysseus is mentioned, so that we may understand Lucian's framing of the character he models himself on. I argue that lies are a central mode through which Lucian establishes an important connection between himself and Odysseus, a connection especially important for *A True History*. The importance of this theme goes beyond Odysseus, however, since, as we shall see, it is also essential to understanding the strange balance of truth and falsehood in the text's whale episode. Here the key point of connection is to Plato rather than the *Odyssey*. Through a careful linguistic study, I show that the whale episode forges strong parallels with, and ultimately subverts, Plato's Cave. I conclude by reflecting on Lucian's larger ideas about the role of narrative, putting the "Image of the Whale" in dialogue with the preface to examine in detail the way in which Lucian addresses the reader and the promises he makes. Finally I turn to important moments during Lucian's time on the Isle of the Blessed, looking in particular at his interactions with Homer and Odysseus, his moment of departure, and the curious absence of Plato, to ultimately understand what transformation Lucian seeks to facilitate within the reader of his text.

## Part 1: Lucian & Odysseus

Odysseus is a recurring presence, a continual reference and, in one instance, a character in Lucian's work. He is also, as I have previously mentioned, a personality that Lucian seems to emulate in his writings—slippery, multi-faced, at times sliding between the roles of author and character, the model paradoxographer. This parallel is both further strengthened and further complicated by Lucian's strange interaction with lies. This section examines the instances where Odysseus is mentioned in his corpus; it gives us a sense of the way Lucian shapes Odysseus to his liking, what aspects of the hero he focuses on and which he obscures or wholly omits. Ultimately, through this examination, we may gain better insight into what Lucian wishes to teach to and inculcate in his readers.

Odysseus is named 42 times in Lucian's work<sup>68</sup> and referred to more generally in 41 episodes.<sup>69</sup> Lucian highlights only a very specific set of aspects of Odysseus' personality, all of which derive from his *Apologoi*: his nomadic self, untethered from family and homeland that, as I argued in the previous chapter, allows him great personal freedom; his interest in forbidden knowledge as we can see in the Sirens, the Lotus Eaters, and in a difference sense, the Underworld; and finally his cleverness. The emphasis on Odysseus' journey to the Underworld is particularly significant for my focus in this chapter. In the *Odyssey*, this episode features a descent into a strange, foreign world, interaction with heroes of the past, and, like Plato's Cave and Lucian's whale, an *anabasis* and a *katabasis*, an image often associated with transformation.

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<sup>68</sup> As found in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*.

<sup>69</sup> As found in the Loeb Classical Library's Lucian volumes.

And yet we cannot help but notice that this presentation of Odysseus is rather narrow; Lucian is assuredly portraying a curated version of this hero. There is the occasional reference to Odysseus at Troy but these moments are generally quite fleeting and less Odysseus-specific (often occurring with a list of Homeric heroes). There are also a few general comments linking him obliquely to Ithaka, two references to his feigned madness prior to the war and two references to Penelope. But otherwise Odysseus' homeland and his life there are completely omitted by Lucian. Odysseus and his travels were often invoked by historians and paradoxographers of the Hellenistic and Roman imperial period,<sup>70</sup> but this is an especially striking omission in Lucian's account, especially given its overriding importance to the *Odyssey*: there is essentially no mention of Odysseus' return to Ithaka, his *nostos*.<sup>71</sup>

It seems that Lucian is content to present Odysseus as the wayfaring stranger, the mysterious man with the freedom to take up many disguises and tell many lies. If Odysseus' identity is complete only when he returns home, as I argued in the previous chapter, Lucian's selective portrayal raises a fundamental question about the figure that he invokes. What role does this place Odysseus in? As I have previously shown it is during his travels that he is divorced from his home and family and left in a space ripe for change and innovation, as he is a mystery to all he meets and thus unconstrained by the truth. So too this is the part of the *Odyssey* narrated solely by Odysseus and the part of his journey in which he has the most ability to tell and invent stories. To return to Winkler's terms, I would suggest that Lucian's approach conceives of

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<sup>70</sup> Johnston 2019 mentions Polybius, Posidonius, Asclepiades, and Strabo as important historians and geographers using the character of Odysseus with this kind of emphasis.

<sup>71</sup> This claim has to be qualified, as there is, in fact, one mention of his return, in a letter to Calypso written by Odysseus himself in Lucian's *A True History*. But here Odysseus proclaims he made a grave mistake in returning home and now wishes to escape the Isle of the Blessed at his next chance to join her on Ogygia. I will discuss this episode and its importance at greater length later.

Odysseus solely as *auctor*—as narrator of his story—and never as *actor*. He places Odysseus in a space of pure possibility where he has the most ability to tell tales, while removing the conclusion to his journey—the point we might see as fixing the story and ending that process of creation.<sup>72</sup> By invoking Odysseus, then, Lucian would seem to be introducing the notion of story-telling itself as of fundamental importance in his work. He distills this quality of the hero to implicitly focus the reader on what he is most concerned with and seems to mark this as of utmost importance by using Odysseus as a model for his own behavior within his texts.

These parallels between Odysseus and Lucian become even more evident when we consider one of the most central themes throughout Lucian's writing: the telling of lies, specifically fantastical tales. Lying, dissembling, the continual creation of imaginary personae are, as we know, central to the character of Odysseus. But while these habits forge a clear connection between Lucian and Odysseus, the connection is complicated by Lucian's ostensible hatred of untruths, his continual insistence throughout his work that he despises lies, liars, and particularly the fantastical sights that people claim to have a first-hand account of. Lucian, not for the last time, presents his readers with a paradox: his hatred of lies seems at odds with his deep interest in and interaction with this lying hero.

This paradox is, of course, recognized by Lucian himself; he indeed develops an explicit theory of falsehood in his *The Lover of Lies*, one of his dialogues most focused on the practice of lying.<sup>73</sup> Here we can better see the strange kind of celebration of the centrality of untruth, the

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<sup>72</sup> Both Ní Mheallaigh 2014 and Romm 1990 note Lucian's concern with the active creative process, Romm's piece particularly concerned with Lucian's reply to one who had called him a "Prometheus in words" (*To One who said, "You're a Prometheus in words"* 1), seemingly denoting that he worked in ever-remoldable clay. And thus it seems to me he hopes to encourage the same here for Odysseus.

<sup>73</sup> When considering Lucian's relationship with Odysseus, this text strikes an interesting contrast with how Odysseus' lies are viewed by Lucian: here they are excused as being utilized fairly for the preservation of both himself and his men and Homer instead is given the blame of being a liar for no good cause whereas in *True History*

ever-present possibility of deception, that Lucian engages in. At the outset of this dialogue, we meet Tychiades, an apparent Lucianic persona, who sets out the question central to this text: “Can you tell me, Philocles, what in the world it is that makes many men so fond of lying that they delight in telling preposterous tales themselves and listen with especial attention to those who spin yarns of that sort?” (*Lover of Lies*, 1).<sup>74</sup> He goes on to make his low opinion of these men quite clear and tells Philocles about his horror at hearing preposterous tall tales from a friend whom he had thought to be quite reliable. Throughout the dialogue, the whole group attempts to convince Tychiades of the truth of a series of increasingly fantastical events, ironically adhering to the key intent in paradoxography. And yet the way in which he does this muddles the purported purpose of this dialogue: he recounts all the stories in detail, thus now himself telling all these lies and passing them on to a new audience.

The issue is raised at the end of the dialogue. Once Tychiades is finished with his account of these events, Philocles understandably complains that they have now both been inflicted by the pleasures of lies: “having been bitten yourself by a multitude of lies..., you have passed the bite on to me; you have filled my soul so full of spirits!” (*The Lover of Lies*, 40). In response, Tychiades says that they need not worry given that they have “a powerful antidote to such poisons in truth (ἀλήθειαν) and in sound reason brought to bear everywhere” and “as long as [they] make use of this” they will have no issue with such lies (*The Lover of Lies*, 40). Ultimately, Lucian suggests that while there is pleasure in telling and hearing lies, their

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Homer is left out utterly of the blame for lies and Odysseus is the one critiqued. Kim 2010 notes this as an interesting choice but focuses on how it is due to Lucian benign focused in *True History* on those who tell tall tales as if they had first-hand experience of them, though this seems to me to ignore that *The Lover of Lies* is likewise concerned with these first-person narratives of experienced marvels.

<sup>74</sup> The Greek is as follows: Ἐχεις μοι, ὦ Φιλόκλεις, εἰπεῖν τί ποτε ἄρα ἐστὶν ὁ πολλοὺς εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν τοῦ ψεύδους προάγειται, ὥς αὐτοὺς τε χαίρειν μηδὲν ὑγιὲς λέγοντας καὶ τοῖς τὰ τοιαῦτα διεξιούσιν μάλιστα προσέχειν τὸν νοῦν; The translations of *Lover of Lies* are A. M. Harmon's.

pernicious effect can be counteracted by utilizing truth (or reality, another translation of *alētheia*) and “sound reason” everywhere.

The act of “mak[ing] use” of these tools is especially important here. Rather than simply assuming that the truth proves the lie false, Lucian advocates instead a kind of active dialogue between truth and fiction. These lies are not a permanent stain but rather, in his medical metaphor, a poison whose negative effects can be counteracted by the truth. It is important to note that this is not an antidote that only needs to be taken once; it is an ongoing practice, as demonstrated in the dialogue itself. Tychiades began by complaining about the ever-presence of lies; in the process, the lie, like a disease or poison, moved from his lips to his interlocutors’ ears (and the readers’ by extension).<sup>75</sup> But he has also offered the answer of how to deal with this difficulty: ongoing doses of the truth. On this model, then, like Tychiades, Lucian in his writing repeats lies, infecting his audience with them, but at the same time always provides the antidote—even (or especially), as I shall argue, in his “falsest text,” *A True History*. He crafts his texts in such a way as to provoke the reader’s use of innate reason and understanding of reality, thereby enabling her to ultimately escape deception. These considerations help lay the groundwork for grappling with the role of lies in *A True History*, though the approach here is more subtle and involves further complications, as we shall see.

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<sup>75</sup> Jones 1986 notes how in this dialogue “Lucian artfully links one tale to another, leading the reader on until most of the well-known superstitions have been exposed.” (47) So he likewise considers there to be a kind of education and leading of the reader in this dialogue, more akin to what I propose for *A True History* but nonetheless also seeing a larger intent directed at the reader behind Lucian’s play.

## Section 2: Lucian & Plato

If *A True History* presents the biggest and boldest set of lies in Lucian's dialogues, it also presents, I argue, the most philosophically profound response through a detailed engagement with the Cave, as put forward in his narrative of the journey into the belly of a whale in Book One. While it is true that Plato never appears as a character in *A True History*, his absence is notable and is, indeed, explicitly noted. When Lucian and his men arrive on the Isle of the Blessed in the second book, Lucian tells us that "Plato alone was not there: it was said that he was living in his imaginary city under the constitution and the laws that he himself wrote" (2.17). Plato is singled out particularly, not for his character but for his absence from the text and with a reference to the city he creates for himself in the *Republic*. This reference is particularly pointed and directs us to precisely this model for Lucian's own work: the Isle of the Blessed is explicitly mentioned at 519c in the *Republic* in the course of Socrates' elaboration of the Cave.<sup>76</sup> In general, such allusions are not unusual in Lucian's work, given how important Plato is in his thought. As Karen Ní Mheallaigh asserts, "When Lucian decided to innovate the genre of the philosophical dialogue, he chose Plato as his model" and suggests that his subtle understanding of Plato is shown throughout his writing.<sup>77</sup> But if Ní Mheallaigh is correct, as I think she is, it is all the more likely that the philosopher and, in particular, the Cave, may be very much on Lucian's mind at critical episodes in the work as well, specifically in the scene with the whale.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Jones 1986 picks out the *Republic* in particular as well as a text that Lucian parodies in both *A True History* and *The Lover of Lies* but, while he does not further explain this, it appears based on the episodes in *True History* he cites (2.17, 29-31) that it is more to do with the characters used and the relationships than the more substantive subversion of Platonic form and themes that I argue for.

<sup>77</sup> Ní Mheallaigh 2005: 91

<sup>78</sup> Chapman 1931, discussing the relationship between Lucian and Plato, notes the contrasting personalities of the two authors—Lucian as a realist, interested in people and ultimately some form of reality, and Plato as a fantasist,



Yet, no one to my knowledge has proposed such a connection. In what follows, I argue for parallels between the two works at the levels of structure, language, and content and then turn to their wider implications.

Firstly, the episodes of the Cave and the whale both appear in the middle of these authors' respective works. This architectural parallel is notable given the import such placement often lends to an episode in ancient texts.<sup>79</sup> While this fact, in and of itself, does not necessarily link these two particular scenes, it reminds us of the significance the middle episode might have on the structure and plot of the work as a whole. Both episodes thus would appear to be key to their respective texts.

There are also crucial shared details between both sets of passages. The Cave begins as an analogy proposed by Socrates: "See (ἰδέ) human beings as living in an **underground cave-like (σπηλαιώδης) dwelling** having an entrance, **a long one, open to the light across the whole cave's width**" (Pl. *Resp.* 514a). In this account of Platonic education, humans are seen as prisoners (δεσμῶται) in bonds forced to face a cave wall, not able to turn their heads at all to see anything else. There is a fire behind them, the only source of light in the cave, while puppets held above by puppet-masters (θαυματοποιοί)—literally "wonder-workers"—cast shadows on the wall that the prisoners take to be reality. Notice the peculiar position of the "wonder-workers": they are apart from the rest of the chained prisoners but remain in the cave; they apparently know

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dreaming up big ideas. And I would say that I agree with this in part, insofar as it seems to me that Lucian subverts the Platonic, unrealistic transcendence into a medium that would hope to have some utility, a functioning vehicle for his own kind of transformation of the reader.

<sup>79</sup> We might note the much-studied chiasmic structure in ancient literature which places great importance on the central episode with mirrored events on either side. We can take the *Iliad* as a good example of this. While we may not see a chiasmic structure throughout the whole of *A True History*, the beginning and end certainly mirror each other in this way. Lucian begins with saying how he will write this tale and then setting off is carried off in a storm; in the end his travels are interrupted by another storm carrying him and his men away and he concludes by saying he will narrate these stories next.

of the falseness of the cave's world and are intentionally taking part in the deception. Speculation as to their identity has typically centered on the poets, given the *Republic*'s focus on their deceptive *mimesis*, or the sophists, given Plato's critiques of them in other works, or possibly both.<sup>80</sup> We will return to this issue in its relation to Lucian later.

Next, Socrates asks Glaucon, his interlocutor, to consider one prisoner being released from their bonds and forced to turn around and look at the puppets and the fire, which he would initially be unable to see for his eyes' lack of acclimation (515c-d). He describes the prisoner being brought up the passage to the outside world and his discomfort and dislike of being forced to leave. When he enters the upper world, he cannot initially comprehend all that is around him but slowly is able to see and understand, to recognize the superiority of his new circumstance. Further, Socrates describes how, if the prisoner were to once more descend back into the cave and share his new-found knowledge, the other prisoners would laugh at him and not understand; from their impoverished perspective, the existence of a three-dimensional, colorful outside world is simply inconceivable.

Now, while Lucian's scene is not parallel in every way to Plato's, important similarities are evident. Upon the entrance of his group into the whale's belly, Lucian notes:

First there was darkness and we saw nothing, and later with [the whale] opening his mouth, we saw a great cavity (κύτος) wide and high in every place, one sufficient for a city with 10,000 inhabitants dwelling within.  
(*True History*, 1.31)

Like Plato's analogical cave, Lucian's whale contains a circular, hollow space with a great breadth and an opening to the outer world. It is notable that neither space is given a precise characterization. Plato uses the word *spēlaiōdēs*—"cave-like"—to describe this *oikēsis* (or

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<sup>80</sup> See Howland 1993: 137-144; Wilberding 2004

“dwelling”) (*Republic* 514a). He does not state that this space precisely *is* a cave but rather describes it as *resembling* one. Likewise, Plato also uses the word *hoion* to refer to the human beings in the cave, again likening them to people in a cave rather than strictly saying they *are* such beings. In formal terms, Plato has appropriated the tools of simile for his image, a technique heavily used by Lucian as well, in his comparisons between his familiar world and the fantastical. (This also raises links to Homer, given the importance of simile in the Homeric epics.) To take just one example from *A True History*, after the battle in the clouds between the Sun and Moon peoples, Lucian says the blood-drenched clouds “seemed to us like (οἷα) when the sun sets” (1.17).<sup>81</sup>

Returning to Lucian’s hollow space, we may note that he uses the word *kutos* to describe the belly of the whale, thus likening it to a cavity of sorts. While Plato does not utilize this word in his cave, he often does so elsewhere in the dialogues.<sup>82</sup> Especially notable, the Liddell & Scott Greek lexicon presents a variant on this word occurring in Plato’s *Laws* as “a metaphor of the *polis*.” Here, *kutos* is used to represent a head, with its various aspects being representative of various functions of the *polis*—the eyes are the young and intelligent “wardens” who watch from the top, the “organs of memory” are the elder wardens whom the young report to (*Laws* 964e).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *True History* 1.15, 1.22, and 2.5 are a few other examples.

<sup>82</sup> His *Timaeus* and *Laws* are especially notable examples. A few specific passages include *Timaeus* 44a, 67a, and 78c and *Laws* 964e.

<sup>83</sup> The whole passage is as follows: “Evidently we are comparing the State (τῆς πόλεως) itself to the skull (τοῦ κύτους); and, of the wardens, the younger ones, who are selected as the most intelligent and nimble in every part of their souls, are set, as it were, like the eyes, in the top of the head, and survey the State all round; and as they watch, they pass on their perceptions to the organs of memory,—that is, they report to the elder wardens all that goes on in the State,—while the old men, who are likened to the reason because of their eminent wisdom in many matters of importance, act as counsellors, and make use of the young men as ministers and colleagues also in their counsels, so that both these classes by their cooperation really effect the salvation of the whole State” (964e-965a).

Thus, particularly in the context of Plato, this space has the metaphorical sense of functioning as a kind of *polis*.<sup>84</sup>

Such a layered meaning of *kutos* makes particular sense here given the strange reality of the inside of the whale. For in contrast to the bizarre places they have seen, this place is strikingly *normal*. Lucian describes how “towards the middle there was land and hills on it” and “a forest and trees of all sorts had grown on it and vegetables had sprouted, and everything seemed to have been worked out” and how “it was possible also to see birds of the sea, seagulls and kingfishers, nesting in the trees” (1.31). The inside of the whale then appears to be a natural landscape, one quite similar to the world they came from. Furthermore there are shrines to Greek gods (a “sanctuary of Poseidon”), recognizable graves, and even something they could “liken to a farmhouse” with a garden too (1.32-33). There are various settlements of people as well, though strange people indeed, each in their own territory throughout the whale (1.35). Thus the usage of *kutos* here appears to particularly call upon the Platonic meaning, bringing up the conception not only of the natural world, but also of a metaphorical city, another polis in miniature. Like Plato’s cave, then, it is a version of reality, though slightly skewed.

There is also a similarity between the authors’ usage of light, darkness, and sight (or, rather, blindness). Lucian mentions their failure to see upon entering the whale—that they need time for their eyes to adjust—saying, “And when we were inside, first there was darkness (*σκότος*) and we saw nothing, and later with him opening his mouth we saw a great cavity (*κύτος*) wide and high in every place” (1.31). Likewise, Plato brings up two moments of the lack of sight: the moment of exiting the cave (515c) and the moment of re-entering (516e), one going

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<sup>84</sup> We also might note with this potential allusion to the *polis* the comments of Bowie 1970 on Lucian’s pattern of using the Athenian setting for his writing, particularly mentioning this in the context of Plato.

from darkness to light (τὸ φῶς) and the other from light to darkness (τὸ σκότος). Indeed, it is evident in general how sight is particularly important in both of these accounts. Both authors are creating a story, an image, for their readers. Lucian creates it out of things he sets out as if he has actually seen. It is not a story that arises from any source but Lucian's own eyes and the recounting of what others' eyes have seen (despite the fact that we seem to know from the preface that this is all false). While Plato could have chosen to foreground thinking as the way to call to mind this conception of the human experience, he instead focuses on the language of sight, with Socrates telling Glaucon to *see* (ἰδέ) the image that he describes. In this way, both Plato and Lucian make a very active choice to focus on vision in contexts where sight is not the obvious medium. Thus for both the moment of loss of sight is also critical, further emphasized in Lucian by the absence of mention of light and the reference to darkness, which he refers to by the same word as Plato, *skotos*.

Finally, and perhaps most concretely, Lucian evokes the famous passage from the *Republic*, when he literally refers to himself and his men as “wholly resembl[ing] those living luxuriously and those having been freed in a great prison from which none escape” (1.39). Thus we are presented in this scene with humans *resembling* prisoners living under the false impression that they have a free life full of good things, drawing the strongest connection with the Cave. This raises two important questions: in what way are they prisoners and how might they escape? While on the surface this may appear very obvious—they are prisoners because they are trapped within the whale and they may escape by exiting in some way—I believe that Lucian is presenting something more subtle here. Firstly, they have been trapped in many situations prior to this and never before have we seen this kind of language of self-reflection on

the nature of their circumstances. Secondly, there is something particularly interesting about their first ascent out of the whale that leads them to launch a full escape. Hearing what sounds like a battle raging outside, Lucian and some of his men creep up into the mouth of the whale to look out. Lucian says, “We began observing the most incredible (παραδοξότατον) thing of all the spectacles which I saw” (1.40) and continues on to describe giants sailing on islands engaging in a naval battle. Certainly, this is an incredible, fantastical scene, but given the scope of what he has seen thus far—the extraordinary things he has encountered—it is not immediately obvious why this is the *most* incredible.

What might make it so, it seems, is a lack of the expected outcome occurring. Indeed, the word used here, *paradoxotaton*, is the superlative of *paradoxos*, which most literally means “contrary to expectation.” Of course, this is exemplary of their recent, fantastical experience. They have been dwelling in a miniature, false world and thus may have gotten out of the practice of seeing fantastical things, so the contrast in this moment is especially striking. But there appears to be a deeper failure of expectation for both Lucian and the reader. The parallels with Plato’s Cave lead us to expect that, in ascending from a false or illusory reality, a true reality would be found. Instead, Lucian and his men are met by something that seems even more unreal and more bizarre than the belly of the whale. It is this unanticipated twist that leads this sight to be the *most* paradoxical thing yet. In other words, then, the importance of this moment lies precisely in its striking subversion of the Platonic ascent, its subtle way of turning the story of the escaped prisoner’s liberation on its head.

### Section 3: Lucian & the Reader

We then are led to wonder what exactly Lucian is doing through this subversion of Plato's Cave. We might consider that he is simply parodying Plato, turning his ultimate, true reality into ridiculousness. Indeed Ní Mheallaigh describes what she sees is Lucian's essentially humorous take on Plato in his dialogues *Symposium* and *The Lover of Lies*, referring to his "playful re-casting of Platonic works."<sup>85</sup> But she also recognizes this is not the end of the matter, going on to note that there is something more than comedy afoot and that "these works reveal Lucian's sensitivity to many of the subtleties of Plato's literary technique."<sup>86</sup> I would suggest we can go still further with this point though. That is, I claim that Lucian's concern with Plato goes beyond an awareness of literary technique—that Platonic *themes* of rational reflection on the fundamental nature of reality (the same sort of reflection we saw being urged in *The Lover of Lies*) deeply inform his intent in writing this work of fiction. We have already begun to see, through the use of *paradoxotaton* in the whale episode and the continued usage elsewhere of *paradoxos*, how Lucian is inherently playing with the Platonic-informed expectations of the reader. What is the outcome of this process? I suggest that it leads us to question our fundamental expectations, and ultimately to embrace an approach to the world that, while owing its roots to Plato, directly challenges a Platonic world view and instead leads us back in the end to the example of Odysseus—that is, Lucian's *nostos*-less Odysseus. Moreover, it returns us to the question of Lucian's naming and the strange appearance of a rare instance of it late in the proceedings of *A True History*.

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<sup>85</sup> Ní Mheallaigh 2005: 96

<sup>86</sup> Ní Mheallaigh 2005: 97

To begin to elaborate this point, I will turn to two scenes—the beginning of *A True History* and the Isle of the Blessed in Book 2—before returning to the Whale. At the very outset of the text, Lucian addresses who he sees his readership to be. He speaks about the importance of relaxation for athletes and how the same should be true for academic students. He says, “So indeed for students I consider it to be fitting after reading more serious books to relax to prepare more vigorous thought for subsequent toil” (1.1). While he initially claims that his aim is simply to provide relaxation for the reader (the “student”)—“amusement (ψυχᾶγωγία) based on the urbane and the beautiful” (1.2)—he notes that this book’s importance lies in also providing matter that they must think about (1.2). Thus he has already made us question the initial promise of relaxation if the content will also bring up matters to think about.

Further issues arise with taking Lucian’s initial words at face value if we turn our attention to his use of the term *psychagōgia*. This word means “amusement” or “entertainment” but also, more literally, something akin to a leading of the soul. Calum Alasdair Maciver notes how Lucian’s usage of this word “alerts the reader to the possibility of further rhetorical sub-text, or meta-commentary on the function of rhetoric,” particularly given its placement in a passage considering writing.<sup>87</sup> It seems we are presented with a contrast between the pure entertainment the word suggests and a more thought-out experience. This implication is particularly strong due to the Platonic resonance of this word, calling to mind the key term used in Plato’s *Phaedrus* to describe the proper function of rhetoric (although Maciver does not make the terminological connection explicit).<sup>88</sup> Indeed, we might expand on Maciver’s apparent allusion to the *Phaedrus* and the dialogue’s well-known passage criticizing the written word, as this serves to further

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<sup>87</sup> Maciver 2016: 224

<sup>88</sup> It is used particularly at *Phaedrus* 261a and 270b-274b.



underline his point of how the term *psychagōgia* “directs the reader to previous philosophical debates, debates which are most likely to be foregrounded in this preface given that it is a discussion of the history of writing and of the representation of truth through those writings.”<sup>89</sup> For if we take Maciver’s claim to heart, it would seem that, beyond simply raising questions about Lucian’s trustworthiness, Lucian’s opening remarks introduce the possibility of understanding his work as a kind of philosophical inquiry. Even more to the point, we should note that *psychagōgia* is also etymologically and conceptually linked to the term *periagōgē* (a turning around), which is the pivotal term in the Image of the Cave—Plato’s way of characterizing the radical shift in orientation that comes when the prisoner turns away from the cave shadows to begin learning about the true world. Through invoking this term at the outset of his writing, Lucian thus brings to mind a specifically Platonic philosophical process and presents it as an important aspect of his larger aim.

This point is further developed and clarified when we consider what Lucian describes as the target of his comedy. It is directed, he claims, “towards those of the poets old in years and the historians and the philosophers, those who have written many monstrous and legendary things... I would write them by name if I should not think that they would appear to you yourself from reading” (1.2). Thus we learn that this work is directly concerned with literary history and engaged with it, in Lucian’s particular comedic way, but that Lucian leaves it up to his readers to identify whom he means. His engagement with the past is further highlighted by yet another definition of *psychagōgia*, which is, in fact, the main definition given by the Liddell & Scott Greek lexicon, namely the “evocation of souls from the nether world.” Thus, not only might

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<sup>89</sup> Maciver 2016: 224

Lucian's work entertain, not only might it lead us on a kind of quasi-Platonic philosophical inquiry, but it will also be literally related to calling up the spirits of the dead. We see in this yet more of his concern with re-animating these past authors. At the same time, of course, it also brings to mind the forays various heroes have made to the Underworld, most notable here being of course Odysseus himself.

Beyond understanding his concern with the past, there is also an implicit challenge directed at the reader. She is expected to already be familiar enough with the material referenced to understand his clever jokes; he will not name these authors he references as he believes "they would appear to you yourself from reading." In reading *A True History*, then, rather than relaxing and enjoying comedic fantasy, the reader will be expected to actively engage with the text as an educational exercise, an engagement necessary at least for them to be in on the joke and understand who Lucian is poking fun at. Through leaving these names out, through testing the reader's memory with simply using evocative words such as *psychagōgia*, Lucian is forcing the reader to exercise a new way of engaging with the literary past.

This engagement is further complicated when Lucian unfolds his view of many classic authors. In essence he declares that they are all liars, the greatest of all being Odysseus himself, "the founder of them and the teacher of such buffoonery" (1.3)—the problem that we began

with.<sup>90</sup> In short, he criticizes those authors of the very books Lucian's readers would presumably be studying and learning from. And yet shortly after this, we again meet his odd dynamic with lies, still more explicit than in *The Lover of Lies*, as Lucian acknowledges that he himself is also not telling the truth. He states:

Moreover I myself, also vainly eager to leave something behind to our people, lest I alone am without a share of freedoms in telling legends, because I couldn't record true things—for I hadn't experienced anything noteworthy—, I turned (ἐτραπόμην) myself to lies much more (πολύ) considerably than others; for if I will ever speak the truth (ἀληθεύω), it's saying that I lie. (1.4)

Even this statement is hard to take at face value when we look more closely at his language and keep Odysseus in mind. The word *etrapomēn* comes from *trepō*, a verb meaning “to turn.” Juxtaposed in the Greek with *poly*,<sup>91</sup> it certainly seems to call to mind the adjective stemming from *trepō*, namely *polytropos*, “much-turned,” the famous epithet of our greatest deceiver, Odysseus. This is appropriate given that Lucian has just described him as the teacher of all liars; he is underlining the fact that he is following him. But if Lucian is truly following Odysseus, to the point of drawing on this epithet which encompasses Odysseus' slippery, ever-changing nature, it certainly also seems to call into question the trust we might put in Lucian, even in his act of laying out his intentions in writing. Yet, again his opening urges us to ask how he can be in close engagement with Odysseus when he proposes to hate lies and liars.

We might suppose that the solution from *The Lover of Lies*—that if we actively engage with lies with knowledge of *alētheia*, then we're on firm ground—is applicable here. But, while

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<sup>90</sup> We might note for a moment the oddity of Lucian's placing of blame on Odysseus rather than Homer. In a list of authors, he instead chooses a character of Homer's to blame for the lies of these tales. While it makes some sense due to the concern with those who lie in first-person accounts, it still seems odd. Ní Mheallaigh 2005:166 explains this by considering that this lifts the blame from Lucian himself in telling this falsity-filled account in the first person: “With scrupulous precision in the proem, the author Lucian identifies Homer's *narrator*, Odysseus, as the liar, without impugning the honesty of the author, Homer himself.” This would seem plausible to me if it weren't for the notable naming of Lucian in the latter half of *A True History*. That event of course associates the author and the narrator and does not seem to me to allow a clear diversion of blame from Lucian the author to Lucian the narrator.

<sup>91</sup> The line in Greek is as follows: ἐπὶ τὸ ψεῦδος ἐτραπόμην πολὺ τῶν ἄλλων εὐγνωμονέστερον.

the idea of actively using reason indeed carries through into this context—this idea is critical to the whole text—the fundamental problem here is that the nature of *alētheia* remains unknown in Lucian’s fantastical world. After all, as a true follower of Odysseus, he leaves us nothing at all that can be taken at face value.

The point is further underlined by the fact that, as soon as we enter the story, Lucian acts as if his whole account is fully based on his own experience, which we know cannot be the case. Indeed, Lucian at times seems to be actively engaged in deceiving his readers, diverging from the form of paradoxography we saw in *The Lover of Lies*, since here it is utterly unclear what the reader should believe. As I mentioned above, he even gives specific measurements, distances, and times for the absurd sights he describes. For example, he recounts the numbers of each group of strange creatures in the army of the Moon people (1.13), the counts as hyperbolic as Herodotus, and he measures giants to be “as much as half a stade tall” and the islands which they ride “as much as 100 stades in circumference” (1.40). (None of these, of course, can reflect reality.) Furthermore he even mentions that he leaves certain things out because he himself did not see them or thinks it is too preposterous. For example, when describing the eyes of a certain race of men on the moon, he says, “I hesitate to say, lest someone think that I lie because of the

unbelievability<sup>92</sup> of my story” (1.25).<sup>93</sup> With all these contradictory elements at play, confusion for the reader seems inevitable.<sup>94</sup> It is simply unclear which of Lucian’s claims are to be believed.

To begin to gain clarity on Lucian’s ultimate intent, we need to first consider the Isle of the Blessed episode and then return to Plato’s image and the episode of the Whale. I argue that this will better illuminate Lucian’s ultimate focus: continual innovation and creation to avoid stagnation. Very shortly after leaving the whale, a similarly central episode (encompassing most of Book 2) is that of Lucian and his men’s time on the Isle of the Blessed. They arrive in this famous land where many dead heroes and authors are said to reside. Here, we see a scene of writers and their characters all mixed together, some pushing the boundaries of what they did in life but the vast majority of them playing out their same old tasks: Socrates annoys people with his questioning, Achilles fights in a war, and Homer writes the stories of heroes. Homer is critical here; he seems to hold the key to this idea of being fixed in one’s approach to life. Lucian tells us that Homer wrote a new epic on the battle between the dead heroes but that he lost it in his adventuring. All that remains is the first line: “And this time (vñv) sing to me, O Muse, the battle of the shades of the heroes” (2.19). Ultimately, this sounds like just a repetition of his other two poems, the same appeal to the muse to sing to him. This rather boring quality is emphasized by the *nun*. It reminds us that this has all been asked for before and now he is simply replaying

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<sup>92</sup> Whitmarsh 2013 notes the added layer of trouble Lucian causes in this moment with the use of the word “unbelievable.” He notes how supposedly Lucian, “the real, flesh-and-blood author,” appears to *assure* us of the truthfulness of the account but at the same time this word brings us back to the supposed flesh-and-blood author in the prologue also warning us not to believe. In this way, Whitmarsh says that he “does not guarantee truth but double-dares us to disbelieve” (73), though he still doesn’t fully suggest to what end Lucian does all this.

<sup>93</sup> This is likely in reference to Ctesias, a historian that Lucian specially mentions in the prologue as an example of those authors who portray themselves as truthful while actually lying. According to Photius in his summary of Ctesias’ *Indica*, Ctesias explained, similarly as Lucian does here, that he left out various other tales because he thought them too unbelievable (*Bibl.* 72.45a51 = *FGrH* 688 F 45).

<sup>94</sup> Whitmarsh 2001 notes how these continual paradoxes present a variety of challenges for the reader at every turn. As I have suggested, they are forced into continual activeness in the reading process.

his past action. There is a sense of going through the motions and imitating his living self. This idea of imitation seems to capture the ultimate problem at work here: this is the old literary canon that, if allowed to reign unchanged and unquestioned, simply brings stagnation and imitation. It is quite literally dead and cannot by itself produce anything genuinely new. So too Lucian is stuck there, entrenched in the work of others, with no motivation to move forward, to create. The alluring power of this place is seen in the fact that it is the only one he struggles to leave. He describes how he “began to cry aloud and weep because [he] had to leave such blessings behind [him] and resume [his] wanderings” (2.27). His inertia and unwillingness to take up the task of exploration is mistaken for contentment.

This sense of stagnation is further emphasized by a curious moment: the single instance of Lucian being named in *True History*. Before he leaves the Isle, he seeks a boon from Homer:

On the following day, going to Homer the poet, I asked him to write an epigram of two lines, and when he made it, setting up a block of beryl near the harbor, I inscribed it. And the epigram was such:

This Lucian, much beloved to the blessed gods,  
Saw this place and left back towards his dear homeland.

Up until this point, the identity of our narrator has been unconfirmed, only potentially referring to the author of this text due to its being first person. But at this moment, in this rare usage of Lucian’s name, it is confirmed that it is he who is on these travels.<sup>95</sup> This is quite an odd moment for such confirmation. Up until this point, we have been led through this tale by Lucian and Lucian alone: like Odysseus in his Phaiakian tales, he is author and narrator, the creator of his

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<sup>95</sup> Kim 2010 comments on the importance of this moment where the author and narrator of *A True History* are shown to the reader to be the same and simultaneously the “Lucianic narrator (and thus the Lucianic author as well?) is literally inscribed into Homer’s poetic world,” thus making him a Homeric character (173). So we might say at the same moment the reader is brought in the know, suddenly their guide through this story is made simply a character, subjugated to Homer. Ní Mheallaigh 2014 likewise mentions this moment and suggests that, while the naming associates the author and narrator, the inscription by Homer essentially separates the narrator away from Lucian the author as now this Lucianic narrator is a character of Homer’s. She adds though that, in a way, this brings the narrator closer to the reader herself, more real.

adventures both with active engagement in the events and with the external crafting of the events into a narrative.<sup>96</sup> But in this moment where his name is used, there is a change of power, of authorship: this is a poem written by Homer, not by Lucian. Homer, a character in Lucian's story, suddenly is given the chance to write and craft a story of his own author (Lucian), one of the yet unwritten events including his return home again. Crucially, Homer gives Lucian a *nostos*, effectively bringing an end to his adventures by bringing him home and giving this story a succinct conclusion.<sup>97</sup> This act fixes Lucian in time and place, no longer in a position where creation is possible because the story is ended. If we consider Odysseus' revelation to the goatherd and cowherd (discussed in Chapter One), we may recall that in this moment he prefaces saying that "I am he" (21.207) by calling to my mind his location—at home, in his ancestral lands. This placement and his name bind him to his particular self of "Odysseus," an aspect that is key for him but anathema to Lucian. As Lucian says at the outset of this text, there are "freedoms in telling legends." But with the story concluded, his freedom no longer remains; he is quite literally written in stone, his name inscribed, and thus stagnated like the rest of those on the Isle of the Blessed.

Thus we see this fate is possible even for our intrepid author. He warns of the great allure of the past, of fixedness, with his desire to stay and shows how he easily could have been trapped. But, as will become evident in the "conclusion" to *his* story, he prioritizes the need for

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<sup>96</sup> Winkler 1985 comments generally on this dynamic between Lucian and his role in the text, saying, "Lucian and his roles form an asymmetric pair whose performances are simultaneous and indissolubly linked—the speaker [the character] and his silent partner [the author]. In listening to a single voice we hear both persons talking" (275). This strikes me as especially apparent in this moment, this coming most marked coming together of the two as the character (the narrator in *True History*) is named as Lucian too.

<sup>97</sup> Kim 2010 likewise mentions how, in this moment, Homer essentially narrates the end of Lucian's tale and he has thus "been enclosed in the poet's literary universe," this space of stagnation (173). And yet I would say, to foreshadow, it is very notable that this is not in fact where Lucian's story ends nor does the conclusion *he* writes ultimately align with Homer's.

innovation, the revisioning of the old, to stay free. It is an approach that he seeks to instantiate in his own literary life as well, as we have seen, with his insistence on authorial anonymity, his refusal to allow the name “Lucian” to be once and for all inscribed as the author of his texts. And ultimately, this is just the dynamic that Lucian presents to the reader of his book, the reminder to continually question and investigate and create. Lucian keeps his tale elusive and confusing enough, with questions about truth and lies, that he doesn’t allow his readers to be fully settled. He keeps them in a state of active participation in the tale.<sup>98</sup> Just as in the critical episode of the Whale, he presents the essence of his vision of a transformative ascent: it is the ascent from a false, easy world to a world not of blissful truth, but of paradox.

This then presents us with the fundamental difference between Lucian and Plato. On the one hand, Lucian seems to deeply respect Plato and his creative genius, which we can see in his imitation and in his deliberate move to separate Plato from the stagnant has-beens on the Isle of the Blessed. But Lucian also rejects the philosophical vision Plato puts forward in the Cave. He rejects what he sees as philosophy’s passive pursuit of the truth, what he might regard as its willingness to subsist perpetually in imitative activity (even if its aim is to produce better and better imitations of reality). Truth, in the ordinary sense, is never the aim for Lucian, as is made evident from the start by the paradoxical position he occupies as author and his celebration of deception. Instead, he prizes creativity; in the ancient (Platonic) quarrel between philosophy and poetry, he is, it would seem, firmly on the side of the poet. Exiting the whale does not bring him

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<sup>98</sup> Branham 1989 notes the demands Lucianic dialogue places upon its audience and how, in particular, “the text is less an attempt to create convincing illusions than to engage the audience in an ‘occasion for imaginative activity,’” one that has no limits placed upon it by believability (20). Thus, from another angle, he also notes in Lucian this interest in creating an open space of creation not simply for himself but also for his readers.



and his men to a truer world but to a more fantastical one, a world which breaks their expectations and demands of them a new more imaginative inquiry.

But, still, we should be careful not to misrepresent Lucian's relationship to Plato. For while it is true that he rejects philosophy and sides with poetry, it is important to recognize that this is *Lucian's* conception of philosophy and poetry, not Plato's. Consider again the role of the *thaumatopoiōi* in the Cave. For Plato, these individuals—the poets (or sophists)—are involved in *actively* deceiving the prisoners; poetry is focused on *mimesis* as opposed to a truth which is out there to be discovered. In one sense, Lucian takes up the role perfectly of the *thaumatopoiōs*, as himself a sophist and storyteller, the “wonder-worker” *par excellence*. But this is not Platonic imitation that Lucian practices. Rather he perhaps better captures the more basic meaning of one of the roots of the word “poetry,” the verb *poieō* meaning “to do” or “to make.” This verb indicates an utterly active process, an active production of wonders. (Plato's *thaumatopoiōi*, we recall, are only imitating phenomena from the outside, “true” reality.) Such activity is possible because Lucian rejects altogether the idea of an underlying fixed reality: “poetry” for him does not stand in opposition to truth but *replaces* it.

But even this point needs to be qualified. Lucian may indeed reject Plato's truth—the idea of a fixed, underlying reality that we can come to discover—but nonetheless he endorses an approach of what we could call “truthfulness.” After all, we have seen from the start Lucian's hatred of lies and falsity, a stance from which he never wavers. For him, being truthful does not necessarily entail avoiding misrepresentation of “the facts.” Rather it simply means living in accord with the fundamental recognition that there is no underlying reality in the first place: to

adopt the creative stance, in his sense, is to fully align oneself with the open, continually shifting nature of *alētheia*.

With this in mind, we can return both to the Isle of the Blessed and to Odysseus and his lack of *nostos*. Odysseus is on the Isle of the Blessed, as I have mentioned, in his only appearance as a character in Lucian's works. He is seen as the lawyer for Homer (2.20) and losing to a descendent of Heracles in wrestling (1.22), but most notably he steps forth as Lucian is leaving the Isle and gives him a letter, asking him to pass it onto Calypso. The letter goes as follows:

“Odysseus to Calypso, greetings!

Know that, as soon as I sailed away from you after equipping a raft, having suffered a shipwreck I was scarcely saved by Leukothea and brought to the land of the Phaiakians, by whom I was sent home where I came upon many suitors of my wife living luxuriously in our home. After I killed all of them, later at the hands of Telegonus my son from Circe I was killed. And now I am on the Isle of the Blessed deeply regretting leaving my way of living beside you and your offer of immortality. So if I get an opportunity, when I've escaped I will come to you.” (2.35)

This is the single mention of Odysseus' return home in Lucian's whole corpus of works and, as with the naming of Lucian by Homer, we have another change of author for this important moment: Odysseus takes up his story himself. Lucian grants this character the power to tell his story but, even more, grants him the freedom to *change* it. In this moment, Odysseus does not retrospectively change what Homer has told about him but he does propose to take away Homer's conclusion and write a new one for himself. He shows more autonomy than Lucian himself has in this stagnant place—the deep desire to continue in an innovative way, to clearly depart from his choices in life and not simply repeat them. Lawrence Kim reads this moment as but another proposed escape that will not in fact happen, as we see with Helen and Cinyras

earlier.<sup>99</sup> But it seems to me that it is very notably different given that it is not a repetition of Odysseus' actions in life; in fact it is in direct opposition to his goal throughout the whole *Odyssey*. And by making this change to Homer's narrative's end, Odysseus would be re-entering the space where he is a stranger in a strange land, untethered and free to have the story go on. He himself, not Lucian, reclaims his role as *actor* in addition to *auctor*, exacting new adventures as he creates this story he sends to Calypso. This moment is not a conclusion at all but a continuation.

If we consider the end of *A True History* with this in mind, we can now see perhaps most clearly what Odysseus ultimately represents for Lucian. At the conclusion of the text, rather than returning to his homeland or the point from which he began, Lucian and his men are again swept up in a storm. Lucian "concludes" his tale as follows:

Therefore I have told these things I have suffered up until this other land: in the sea and during the voyage among the islands and in the air and what happened in the whale and after we got out of it, both alongside the heroes and the dreams and, finally, besides the Bullheads and the Asslegs. And what happened in the other land in the next volumes I will narrate (διηγέσονται). (2.47)

In this way, he briefly summarizes his adventures thus far and then goes on to allude to yet more coming, as the storm carries them to some new world. Thus there is no neat ending to this story; the story simply continues, the space for creation stretching forth. Indeed, the final word in the Greek is *diēgēsomai*, "I will narrate." Just as Odysseus has done, Lucian changes the conclusion Homer has written for him. He does not head towards home at all but is taken even further from what he knows by yet another bizarre storm—taken to new oddities, new stories to be told.

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<sup>99</sup> Kim 2010. Furthermore, Kim notes that Danielle van Mal-Maeder, among others, focuses on this scene, along with Helen and Cinyras' attempted escape, for its gesture towards creative innovation of Homer, the idea of rewriting his tales. I would find myself more in line here with her than with Kim, though I would in particular draw out this Odysseus letter as revisionist since Helen seems to be more so repeating her Iliadic actions.

In this way, Lucian's Odysseus models for him the way to escape stagnation and continually engage in innovation. Both Lucian and his Odysseus hold the power to even take away their endings, their *nostoi*, from the great Homer himself and embrace creation and creativity. While Lucian is drawn into the world of the Isle of the Blessed and finds it deeply alluring, neither he nor Odysseus stay trapped with the dead authors, the lifeless characters, repeating again and again their same ideas and actions previously written for them. As authors they force their character selves to return to wandering, to venturing forward into the unknown, into paradox.

*A True History* thus builds on Plato's ideas of the importance of questioning and inquiry, but melds that approach with the Odyssean model of continual transformation. Again and again, we see how any sense of a stable ground underneath our feet is just an illusion. Lucian presents this as a lesson that Odysseus and he as character must learn, but ultimately it is a lesson that we as readers are meant to learn as well—or, better, a fundamental shift we are meant to undergo. Through Lucian's provocations in the prologue, through his continual invitations to both enjoy and question his fantastical adventures, we are drawn into the same dynamic as his characters. We come to imbibe the habit of taking nothing for granted, of seeing reality as fundamentally an open space of possibility. In the end, what Lucian offers the reader is the challenge of a life of ceaseless self-inquiry and re-invention rather than the reassuring Platonic vision of a fixed truth.



## Conclusion

In the course of this project I have examined themes of identity, freedom, and transformation in the *Odyssey* and Lucian's work, particularly *A True History*. I began with Odysseus and the *Odyssey*. Here, I considered the transformation we see Odysseus undergo throughout this poem, a process of integration of his fixed and indefinite dimensions. I argued that Odysseus is limited when he inhabits either of these roles alone but that ultimately, because he is inherently the *anēr polytropos*, the many-turned man, he is able to manifest fullest power and freedom when he holds these seemingly discordant aspects in union—a Heraclitean synthesis of seeming oppositions. I then turned to Lucian of Samosata, who presents us with another shape-shifting storyteller but a different model of transformation and of the nature of identity. Focusing especially on *A True History*, I look at the key roles played by Plato and Odysseus in Lucian's thought—the seemingly orthogonal philosophical models that he can be understood as bringing together. Freedom for him is found not in the discovery of an underlying realm of truth, but in unfettered creativity, an Odyssean vision of continuous self-creation and innovation. Ultimately I claim that Lucian has the intention of inculcating these qualities in the reader themselves by continually challenging them with paradox, provoking them to refrain from accepting assertions and stories at face value.

To more fully understand the two different philosophical visions that Homer's *Odyssey* and Lucian's *A True History* present, I want to end, appropriately enough, by focusing on the respective conclusions that they offer us. The *Odyssey* (famously) gives its central character a “day of return” (νόστιμον ἡμᾶρ, Hom. *Od.* 1.9), which ends the story literally and figuratively.

Odysseus' journey has been completed; the suitors have been defeated; another potential war is avoided by divine intervention; and, ultimately, Odysseus is reunited with Penelope and holds his throne once again. He no longer adventures and thus we might assume would have less life-preserving need for his customary wiles. This accomplishes what we might expect from such a text as the *Odyssey*—the audience has heard the trials and tribulations of Odysseus in his struggle to regain his homeland and now it is given a well-earned finale of the transformed hero home once again. While remaining mortal, he has reached the pinnacle of human attainment.

And yet for Lucian, this finality is exactly the type of conclusion to be resisted. As I have noted, he very pointedly removes Odysseus' *nostos*, not only by omitting any mention of it but even more explicitly by having the hero himself forgo it, when he chooses to leave the stagnant Isle of the Blessed for the free creative space he found on his travels. Furthermore, when Lucian “ends” his own tale, rather than giving himself his own *nostos*, like the one Homer writes for him, he instead describes how he was carried away on yet another adventure, concluding with the word *diēgēsomai* (“I will narrate”), extending the sense of continuous creation. Lucian sees the ending Odysseus obtains in the *Odyssey* as giving way to a comfortable passivity, the sort of stagnation that we see on the Isle of the Blessed among the old heroes and authors. For Lucian, by the end of the *Odyssey*, both the narrating poet and Odysseus himself have lost their vitality, their capacity to lead a fully human existence.

Clearly, then, Homer's *Odyssey* and Lucian differ in their view of whether a final end to human development is to be found. But that difference is only possible given two very conceptions of human identity. While Odysseus has the ability to play many different roles, it does not seem that there are truly endless possibilities for what he can ultimately become. The

roles he might inhabit, the end he might attain—these are all fundamentally constrained by the existing forms of what a human identity might assume. It would seem that the possibility of the integration of the fixed, particular self and the indeterminate, *Outis* self is somehow already given from the beginning. Within such a framework, it makes sense to imagine that the task of being fully human could, in principle, be completed. Lucian's emphasis, by contrast, is on the *absence* of constraints on any fixed notion of what it means to be human. For him, the task of being human consists not in reaching some pre-given end (indeed, given the infinite number of possibilities of human existence, such a goal is inconceivable) but in full engagement in the process of self-development itself. It is this type of continuous self-reflection that Lucian attempts to inculcate in his readers; it is solely through this approach he believes we may obtain freedom.

With these considerations in mind, I would propose that we can now understand the *Odyssey's* relation to Plato, and Lucian's view of his own project, in a new way. Conceptions of freedom and identity are, it seems, inexorably linked. On this topic we find the *Odyssey* and Plato to be unlikely bedfellows. While Homer's *Odyssey* certainly represents a stance opposed to Platonic philosophy in many ways—an opposition quite apparent in Plato's own frequent criticisms of Homer—, it would seem that they fundamentally are united in recognizing an underlying fixed reality, an ultimate identity to human beings and to the world. Despite his capacity to endlessly morph into different forms, in the end Homer's Odysseus can, like Plato's prisoner, leave the cave and ascend to a more true and fundamental world. But in Lucian's work, even this possibility is denied. We can never leave the cave; we can only recognize more and more fully its illusory nature, only come to luxuriate more comfortably in its incongruities. If



there is no pre-given, ultimate “true” world, there is no limit on creation and innovation. Lucian’s Odysseus, with his vestiges of Platonism now torn away, operates always with this recognition in mind. For Lucian and likewise for the *Odyssey*, our path to the deepest understanding is found not through the linearity of philosophical argument but through the continually shifting renewal of story.



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