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The Hidden Effects of Trauma in Narrative:
Uncovering Odysseus' Story-truth

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Greek and Roman Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

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I. Introduction

To many modern readers of the *Odyssey* the epic's titular character, Odysseus, likely comes across as cruel, vengeful, and uncompromising. While his cleverness and intelligence set him apart from other characters, they do little to offset his deceitful and murderous behavior. Yet, to understand Odysseus' behavior it is vital to understand the trauma that plagues his character throughout the entirety of the *Odyssey*. While Homer explicitly acknowledges Odysseus' trauma through various sympathetic epithets such as "long-suffering" (3. 84) and the visible portrayal of Odysseus' grief, another deeper layer to Odysseus' trauma is exposed through the semi-autobiographical stories he composes. This deeper level to Odysseus' trauma reveals that nearly every interaction involving Odysseus and the exchanging of narratives within the *Odyssey* is an attempt for him to gain understanding and empathy from his audience, which he believes will allow him to shed a portion of the trauma he carries.

The intent of this project is not to justify Odysseus' actions, or even paint him in a more sympathetic light. Instead, I hope to highlight the extent of the burden Odysseus' trauma places upon him both during his adventures abroad and upon his eventual return to Ithaca. I wish to show Odysseus' desperation to relieve himself of his trauma and to analyze the method he develops to achieve this goal. In spite of his inexcusable behavior, examining Odysseus as a trauma survivor led me to admire both his tenacity and creativity as a storyteller. Though his stories often fail to garner empathy from their audience, his persistence in telling them signal the extent Odysseus' suffering and the strength of his desire to rid himself of his burden.

This project uses the translations of both Richard Lattimore and Emily Wilson. While my original intent was solely to use Wilson's translation for this project, I found that Lattimore's longer and fuller lines at times helped to better reinforce my arguments. Most of my use of Lattimore is found in Books V through XIII during Odysseus' visit to the island of Scheria, the site where he creates the famous fantastical stories that comprise the Wanderings.¹ Here, Lattimore's translation of Odysseus' stories shines through its vivid detail and powerful delivery. His translation tends to be more grandiose than Wilson's, which I feel is better suited to the often outlandish stories of the Wanderings. Alternatively, Wilson's translation does a better job capturing the emotional depth and weight of the consequences faced by Odysseus and the suitors while on Ithaca. Her short and to-the-point lines better capture both the rugged characters and the setting of Ithaca as well as the present danger Odysseus faces while on the island. However, despite its blunt nature, Wilson's translation nonetheless does an excellent job delivering the epic's complex narrative while not losing sight of the subtle but profound internal struggle of Odysseus as he navigates his burden of trauma.

I am by no means the first to suggest that trauma can be treated through storytelling. My understanding of Odysseus as a trauma survivor is heavily influenced by Tim O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried*. The novel creates a complex and beautiful connection between the art of storytelling and the coping with severe trauma induced by combat. I found that the O'Brien's philosophy of temporarily shedding the burden of trauma through storytelling to be nearly identical to the practices of Odysseus

¹ While this paper utilizes Lattimore's translation for majority of the quoted passages that take place on Scheria and during the Wanderings and Wilson for any encounters on Ithaca, there are instances where I use the other translator if I felt their translation provides text that better compliments my argument.

as a storyteller within the *Odyssey*, composed some 3,000 years prior. It was O'Brien that initially fueled my interest in examining Odysseus as a veteran and trauma survivor and I have extensively borrowed elements and themes from *The Things They Carried* to form a better understanding of Odysseus in this role.

I am also not the first to draw connections between therapeutic uses of storytelling and the *Odyssey*. VA psychologist Dr. Jonathan Shay's *Odysseus in America* explores the connection between Odysseus and Shay's Vietnam veteran patients. While *Odysseus in America* covers far more than storytelling, Shay sets the groundwork for many of the concepts this paper examines such as the veteran's quest to find an objective truth. The connections Shay draws between the ancient and modern further helped to unravel the complexity of Odysseus' character and reassure me when I questioned the link between O'Brien and the *Odyssey*. As Shay's work also utilizes the stories and testimonies of his own patients, it brought a sense real-world applicability to my research.

Other texts such as Irene De Jong's *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*, and Deborah Beck's *Odysseus: Narrator, Storyteller, Poet?*, greatly enhanced my technical knowledge of both narratology and the poems structure. De Jong's *A Narratological Commentary* served as a robust introduction to the study of narratology. De Jong is quick to point out the merits and limitations of first-person narrative. Her analysis helped me to better appreciate the difference between stories told by the epic's omniscient narrator and its stories in the first-person. Beck's work deals specifically with how the *Odyssey* introduces direct speech. Her conclusion that the Phaeacian bard Demodocus' songs far more closely resembles the speech of the

omniscient narrator rather than the speech of the epic's other characters profoundly shaped my analysis of the bard's character and his interactions with Odysseus.

In addition to the works mentioned above, my interpretation of the *Odyssey* was greatly benefited by a range of mentors. First and foremost, a special thank you goes to Dr. Rachel Friedman, who both patiently advised me throughout this project and co-instructed the class, "Homer's *Odyssey*", which served as my introduction to Homer. Dr. Friedman's instruction not only changed how I interpret the *Odyssey* but radically improved my methods for researching and writing. Another thank you is due to Dr. Joel Christensen, who, in addition to gifting invaluable advice on the writing process, provided me with an advanced copy of his book: *The Many-Minded Man: The Odyssey, Psychology, and the Therapy of Epic*, which allowed me to understand the modern practice of narrative therapy within the context of Homer. With the help of Dr. Christensen's work, I was able to take my interpretation of *The Things They Carried* and examine it under the framework of an established psychological treatment, which provided a sense of legitimacy and added layer of depth to my research. One final thank you is owed to the musician Joe Goodkin who was willing to discuss and share his wonderful, Homeric-themed album *The Blues of Achilles* with me. Goodkin's work largely centers around the characters of the *Iliad* and the trauma they bear. Typically, his lyrics take the voice of the song's subject as they attempt to process the trauma the Trojan War brought upon them. Our conversation primarily centered around the unique benefits a storyteller gains by narrating in the first-person which helped shape the way that I interpret the *Odyssey's* many narratives told in the first-person.

II. On Scheria

When the *Odyssey* first introduces its titular character, Odysseus, in Book V, he is found weeping on the shore of Calypso's island: ". . . he was sitting by the shore as usual, / sobbing in grief and pain; his heart was breaking. / In tears he stared across the fruitless sea." (5. 82-84). This initial description of Odysseus seems puzzling, as characters throughout Books I through IV of the epic constantly allude to Odysseus' bravery, strength, and toughness. However, references to Odysseus' grief and pain are common throughout the *Odyssey* and are often shown through epithets for Odysseus such as "long-suffering" (5.171) or "enduring" (17. 114). The world that surrounds Odysseus does not grasp the extent that his suffering plagues his character. While most of the characters encountered by Odysseus willingly recognize his many trials and tribulations, they fail to understand the impact and burden they leave upon Odysseus himself. Their failure leaves Odysseus misunderstood and devoid of meaningful connections.

In an attempt to remedy this disconnect, Odysseus frequently attempts to expand upon and explain his trauma, often through the creation of elaborate stories. These stories almost always center around themes of war, conflict, loss, and suffering. Though the stories told by Odysseus throughout the *Odyssey* vary greatly in terms of content, they should be viewed as an attempt to provide their audience with a better understanding of Odysseus' suffering. The *Odyssey* reveals Odysseus to a master in his ability to subtly weave his experiences within stories that outwardly appear to have an entirely different purpose. While it is never explicitly acknowledged by the epic, the

underlying message contained within Odysseus' stories, detailing his suffering, profoundly shapes his audiences' understanding of his character. Odysseus believes that if he is able to better connect with his audience by gaining their empathy, he will then be able to alleviate his own suffering.

Odysseus is far from the only trauma survivor to come to this conclusion. In his book, *Odysseus in America*, Jonathan Shay alleges that a veteran trauma survivor's ability to create a personal narrative containing their experiences is a central tenant on their road to recovery. He states:

In imparting fragments of trauma narrative to the group, veterans can start to believe that, for example, 'My story has meaning and value to others. I can trust them to understand and remember it. They are trustworthy witnesses to my grief, rage, and guilt and they experience enough of these emotions with me that I know I am understood.'²

However, this quote assumes that the veteran's audience is able to truly understand the trauma contained within the story. It is often the case that the trauma contained within a narrative, such as the trauma contained within Odysseus' stories, is incomprehensible to the story's audience. An individual that has not been subjected to the same or similar experience that a story relates will not be able to understand the nuances of the

² Shay 2002, 175.

emotion felt by the characters of the story. When the purpose of a story of this type is to pass trauma or emotion embedded within the story to the storyteller's audience so that they are able to better understand and empathize with the experience storyteller, a nonunderstanding audience leaves the storyteller at an impasse. Left with a need to tell their story but without an audience who understands their trauma and experience, many veterans feel ostracized from society after leaving the military.

This leaves the veteran with the task of composing a narrative that their audience is able to understand. In order to achieve this, a storyteller must be able to create a world that caters to the abilities of their audience. Often, this world is incompatible with reality or the facts of the event the story is attempting to describe. In the novel *The Things They Carried*, author Tim O'Brien argues that the separation of fact from story does not inherently remove truth from the story. Instead, a story which accurately depicts the emotion derived from a traumatic event but fails to follow the factual happenings of the event is said to contain "story-truth".³ Stories containing a story-truth that is legible to the audience allow for the audience to empathize with the storyteller, which in turn, allows for the storyteller to momentarily alleviate a portion of the burden derived from trauma that they bear.

In his quest to share his own story-truth, Odysseus encounters numerous obstacles, including audiences unfamiliar to the trauma caused by combat. Following his departure from Calypso's island, Odysseus is taken in by the inhabitants of the

³ O'Brien 1990, 180.

island Scheria, the Phaeacians. Despite the hospitality of the islanders, Odysseus conceals his identity, though Athena modifies his appearance to make him appear to be more heroic. The Phaeacians themselves are a rich and peaceful people, well-schooled in the art of seafaring and ruled over by King Alcinous. Scheria itself is a semi-magical land, far removed from any turmoil or trouble brought by the outside world. The *Odyssey* hints that the island's isolation from the outside world stripped the Phaeacians of their ability to conduct war or hone their physical abilities.

While Odysseus admires the grandeur of Scheria, his interactions with the Phaeacians reveal a deep and complicated divide between the two parties. When he is initially challenged to an athletics competition, Odysseus responds,

Laodamas, why mock me with this challenge?

My heart is set on sorrow, not on games,

since I have suffered and endured so much

that now I only want to get back home. (8. 154-159)

Odysseus' dismissal of Laodamas' challenge shows the difference in priority between the guest and his hosts. Intent on securing his return to Ithaca as soon as possible, which he believes will mark the end to his suffering, Odysseus forcefully declines Laodamas' offer. When he eventually accepts the challenge after being insulted, he easily bests even Scheria's most skilled athletes, further demonstrating the divide between the battle-hardened veteran and the peaceful civilian.

The difference in athletic capabilities only shows a small portion of the disconnect present between Odysseus and his hosts. The true extent of the divide between them is only revealed through a series of banquets presided over by the bard Demodocus. During the first banquet Demodocus sings of a quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles that took place at Troy (8. 75-85). The song garners applause and praise from the Phaeacians but leaves Odysseus in tears. The song forces Odysseus to relive trauma he faced during his tenure at Troy. When confronted by this trauma Odysseus is unable to reign in his emotions and breaks down.

. . . but every time he [Demodocus] began again, and the greatest of the Phaiakians would urge him to sing, since they enjoyed in his stories, Odysseus would cover his head again, and make lamentation. There, shedding tears, he went unnoticed by all the others, but Alkinoos alone understood what he did and noticed, since he was sitting next to him and heard him groaning heavily. (8. 90-95)

Odysseus' sorrowful reaction to Demodocus thoroughly contradicts the Phaeacians, who revel in Demodocus' song and demand the continuation of the story every time the bard pauses.

This is the first instance of a major disconnect between a storyteller and their audience. However, this time Odysseus' despair comes not from a lack of connection to his own audience but from his lack of connection to a storyteller telling his story for him. In other words, there is no way Demodocus can embed Odysseus' story-truth within his

song without intimate knowledge of Odysseus' experiences and trauma. Ideally, Demodocus would be able to use Odysseus' story-truth to create an understanding between Odysseus and the Phaeacians, leading to the Phaeacians' ability to empathize with Odysseus. Instead the song creates a scenario where he portrays an event behind a portion of Odysseus' trauma which leads the Phaeacians to celebrate rather than empathize, causing Odysseus' emotional breakdown.

At a later banquet, a similar scene occurs when Demodocus sings about the story of Odysseus and the Trojan Horse. Like the first song, this work completely leaves out any indication of Odysseus' story-truth. Instead, Demodocus uses his song to glorify war and create a highly stylized, unrealistic portrayal of what a warrior's experience may resemble,

. . . he sang how one and another fought through the steep citadel,
 and how in particular Odysseus went, with godlike
 Menelaos, like Ares, to find the house of Deiphobos,
 and there, he said, he endured the grimmest fighting that ever
 he had, but won it there too, with the great-hearted Athene aiding. (8. 516-520)

Demodocus' descriptions of Odysseus show him to be the archetypical hero, never lacking strength and dominating his surroundings. Of course, this depiction of Odysseus is entirely unrealistic and does not acknowledge the true traumatized Odysseus who was washed upon the shore of Scheria half-dead the previous day. As the real Odysseus had not yet revealed himself to the Phaeacians, Demodocus' heroic

description was the only account of Odysseus they encountered. In effect, Demodocus creates an entirely fictional version of Odysseus who the Phaeacians buy into completely. This jeopardizes Odysseus' ability to gain empathy from the Phaeacians for his suffering as he first needs to break the Phaeacians' understanding of him as a fearless war hero.

Despite the song's high praise for the action and bravery of the story's version of Odysseus, the Odysseus located on Scheria again cannot suppress his anguish. When Demodocus finally concludes, the pure emotion pouring out of Odysseus leads to one of the epic's most powerful analogies:

So the famous singer sang his tale, but Odysseus
melted, and from under his eyes the tears ran down, drenching
his cheeks. As a woman weeps, lying over the body
of her dear husband, who fell fighting for her city and people
as her tried to beat off the pitiless day from city and children;
she sees him dying and gasping for breath, and winding her body
about him she cries high and shrill, while the men behind her,
hitting her with their spear butts on the back and the shoulders
force her up and lead her away into slavery, to have
hard work and sorrow, and her cheeks are wracked with pitiful weeping.
Such were the pitiful tears Odysseus shed from under
his brows, but they went unnoticed by all the others . . . (8. 521-533)

The comparison of Odysseus to weeping wife widowed by war drives home how impactful the trauma he derived from Troy is on his psyche. Within the analogy lies Odysseus' story-truth. Its portrayal of a helpless, lost, and unnoticed Odysseus gives a far more complete picture of his character than a factual retelling of an event he participated in at Troy.

However, what really makes this analogy stand out is its stark contrast to the Odysseus of Demodocus' songs. If Demodocus' story of the Trojan Horse contains elements of factual truth, then Odysseus is indeed a true war hero returning from Troy.⁴ But Homer's analogy strips Odysseus of all the glory, honor, and courage that the Phaeacians associate with heroism. Instead of being portrayed as the valiant war hero portrayed by Demodocus is no more and he is replaced by a newly enslaved woman uncontrollably weeping after the death of her husband. The profound difference of Odysseus' description, from archetypical hero to groveling widow about to be taken into slavery, can hardly be overstated. It serves as a testament to how deeply rooted and impactful Odysseus internal trauma is. In essence, this passage, which directly follows Demodocus' song, offers a side-by-side comparison of an objectively told, fact-based story and a passage centered around a story-truth. While the fact-based story is worthy of the Phaeacians' praise and admiration, it completely fails to provide the emotional context crucial to understanding the experiences of the characters the story portrays.

Demodocus' songs also distort the Phaeacians' perception of Odysseus by typecasting him as an archetypical hero, capable of divinelike behavior. However, reality sits far closer to Odysseus' story-truth than to the hero version of Odysseus. When

⁴ In Book IV Menelaus tells a similar story regarding Odysseus' role with the Trojan Horse. (4. 272-289)

Odysseus washes upon the shores of Scheria after drifting across the sea for two days he is worn-out, weak, and helpless. "His legs cramped up; / the sea had broken him. His body / gushed brine from mouth and nostrils. There he lay / winded and silent, hardly fit to move."(5. 452-455) While this passage is meant to describe the rebirth of Odysseus following his escape from Calypso, it also gives the audience an idea of just how helpless Odysseus truly is.

Yet, despite his weakness, after a day's sleep and a brief encounter with the princess Nausicaa, Athena cures Odysseus of his weakened appearance,

. . . Athena made him look
 Bigger and sturdier, and made his hair
 grow curling tendrils like a hyacinth.
 As when Athena and Hephaestus teach
 a knowledgeable craftsman every art,
 and he pours gold on silver, making objects
 more beautiful - just so Athena poured
 attractiveness across his head and shoulders. (6. 229-336)

Athena's gesture to aid Odysseus in his ability to woo his new hosts works; Odysseus is easily able to charm both Nausicaa and her family. However, the outward appearance of competence does little to change Odysseus' physical and emotional needs. Even as he skillfully maneuvers to gain the favor of the Phaeacian royalty and people of Scheria,

he was far closer to the pathetic marooned Odysseus of the day prior than his strong, competent appearance suggests.

Despite his initial troubles in obtaining understanding from the Phaeacians, Odysseus, as Shay astutely notes, realizes that the lack of sorrowful reaction from the Phaeacians may hinder them from empathizing with him when it came time to reveal his identity and tell his story.⁵ Odysseus understands that the Phaeacians' utter lack of exposure to trauma derived from warfare means that they are incapable of understanding his story-truth. If he told a fact-based story, similar to the songs of Demodocus, the Phaeacians would have a similar joyous reaction. They may praise Odysseus' story and admire his courage in battle, but they would ultimately fail to realize why he wept. To remedy the Phaeacians' potential lack of understanding, Odysseus develops the story now known as the "Wanderings", to contain his story-truth in a format the Phaeacians can understand.

Fortunately for Odysseus, the emotional and experiential gap between he and the Phaeacians is not unfixable. To effectively connect with his hosts Odysseus must be able to translate his story-truth in a way that they are able to understand the complexities of his trauma. However, often when creating a narrative with the intent of enlightening an audience inexperienced with trauma, changing the facts of the story alone is not enough to gain understanding and empathy. By default, emotions derived from the chaos of combat are strong and complex. A storyteller may feel the intensity

⁵ Shay 2002, 15.

behind an emotion must be brought out for an audience to truly understand their story. This creates a problem; if an audience has never experienced an unabridged bout of emotion similar to the intensity of emotion brought on by combat, how can they be expected to feel that same type of intensity after simply hearing a story? Additionally, the audience is likely not to understand that they are incapable of processing such strong emotion, thus their understanding of their emotional capacity is capped by their own perspective. Therefore, the storyteller is left with the complicated question - how can I get an audience to understand the intensity of a feeling if they are unaware or even do not believe that emotion of that depth can be felt?

Many storytellers find that by incorporating surrealist elements within their stories their narratives are better equipped to translate their story-truth to an audience uninitiated in the nature of trauma. The goal of these surrealist stories is to cause the audience to understand the depth of emotion the characters feel. By placing the audience in impossibly frightful or dangerous situations the audience is left to question how they might feel when confronted with such a trial. Combining the real with the surreal allows for a storyteller to remove the bounds of reality while keeping their own perspective and emotion at the story's center. By removing reality from the equation, the audience's concerns for how emotions are realistically felt may be dropped or at least lessened. Such stories can best be described as using magical realism to enhance the audience's understanding of the truth associated with the story.

Odysseus' Wanderings are filled with elements of surrealism and, at points, outright fantasy. After Odysseus comes to understand that the Phaeacians are incapable of understanding his true emotions, he is left with the task of crafting a

narrative capable of both embedding his true emotion and convincing his hosts of the emotion's validity. Through incorporating surrealism and fantasy into his stories, he has success in both regards. In fact, the entirety of the Wanderings is a collection of surrealist and fantasy stories designed to show the Phaeacians that Odysseus is not the superhuman war hero as Demodocus' stories makes him out to be. In other words, the Wanderings' divergence from the reality portrayed by the rest of the poem is intentionally implemented by Odysseus to help translate his story-truth to the Phaeacians.

Odysseus' use of surrealism and fantasy casts away his forced identity as a war hero by using his setting and supporting characters to minimize his strength, agency, and invincibility. Though Odysseus' character eventually bests or escapes all the challenges set before him, he is not unaffected by his experiences. For instance, after his encounter with the King Aeolus and being forced back to sea after being in sight of Ithaca, Odysseus briefly contemplates suicide,

A sudden buffet seized us
And hurled us back to sea, the wrong direction,
Far from our home. They screamed and I woke up,
And wondered if I should jump off the ship
And drown, or bite my lip, be stoical,
And stay among the living. (10. 48-53)

Though he decides to carry on with his seemingly endless journey, Odysseus' decision to include his suicidal thoughts within his story to the Phaeacians is another indication of his insistence of inserting his story-truth within the story.

Another example of Odysseus using his story's setting to showcase his vulnerability, through surrealism and fantasy, is Book X's story of the Laestrygonians. In one of the most brutal scenes of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus tells the Phaeacians how a gigantic race of men destroyed his entire fleet, save his own ship, and in detail describes the gruesome deaths of his men as they taken from the water and devoured.

. . . The powerful Laistrygones came swarming up from every direction,
tens of thousands of them, and not like men, like giants.
These, standing along the cliffs, pelted my men with man-sized
boulders, and a horrid racket went up by the ships, of men
being killed and ships being smashed to pieces. They speared them
like fish, and carried them away for their joyless feasting.
But while they were destroying them in the deep-water harbor,
meanwhile I, drawing from beside my thigh the sharp sword,
chopped away the cable that tied the ship with the dark prow,
and called out to my companions, and urged them with all speed
to throw their weight on the oars and escape the threatening evil,
and they made the water fly, fearing destruction. Gladly
my ship, and only mine, fled out from the overhanging
cliffs to the open water, but the others were destroyed there. (10. 119-132)

The brutality contained in this story does not involve any sense of heroism or glory that the Phaeacians were accustomed to through Demodocus' songs, but instead represents violence in its purest form. The giant's victims are given no quarter and all the ships, outside of Odysseus', which is moored in a different location, are doomed from the outset. Odysseus uses the beginning of the passage to describe the horrifying stature of the Laestrygonians, this lets his audience know his own feelings concerning the foe he faces. By describing the powerful, imposing nature of the giants, he signals that he was powerless to the domineering enemy. There was no chance for avenging his men and the only tangible effect of his cleverness was his decision not to moor in the harbor with the rest of the ships.

The massacring of his men only reinforces the theme of helplessness. There is no time or room for heroic last stands. Instead, Odysseus claims that his men are speared from the water "like fish", not exactly the kind of valiant death portrayed in Demodocus' songs presented. Furthermore, the men are not simply killed by the Laestrygonians, they are eaten, another allusion to the sheer size of the giants and the pitiable fate of those affected by extreme violence.

The harsh and brutal nature of this imagery is not unintentional, Odysseus needs the Phaeacians to understand the hopelessness of the situation. He needs them to understand his fear and to sympathize with his decision to only draw his sword to cut the rope securing his ship to the Laestrygonians' island. If the story did not broach the repulsiveness of violence, it is likely the Phaeacians would have questioned and harshly judged Odysseus' decision to flee. Therefore, Odysseus fashions the story of the

Laestrygonians as a means to relay the depth of his fear to his audience. He creates them as monsters to ensure that the Phaeacians understand how powerless he feels at the time of confrontation. While the retreat of Odysseus may not have appeared heroic to his audience, even after hearing the story, the audience would at least understand that the story did not have room for heroics. Furthermore, they may understand that Odysseus' fear was rational and not the product of cowardice.

The example of Odysseus' tale of the Laestrygonians demonstrates that, by using surrealism and fantasy as a medium for his story, Odysseus is able to create a world that could be understood by an uninitiated audience. Ironically, the story helps the Phaeacians understand the nature of realistic warfare by creating a totally unrealistic scenario. Odysseus needs them to understand that his narratives are stories of survival and loss, not heroics. By presenting them with the depth of emotion that he experienced from the real-world events that shaped his stories, he creates a bridge of understanding and empathy.

The limitations of an audience are far from the only struggles storytellers face while developing their narratives. Trauma survivors often hope to fully erase the burdens they carry by uncovering an objective truth behind their experience, or what O'Brien calls a "final-truth".⁶ However, in their pursuit for a final-truth, trauma survivors are constantly hindered by the fact that their personal-truth is constantly evolving. Personal-truths are constantly distorted by new information, outside perspectives, or an

⁶ O'Brien 1990, 84.

internal breakthrough in the personal understanding of a traumatic experience. This forces survivors to constantly process and adapt their perceptions of their own experience. Once story-truth evolves to a point where it no longer fits within the narrative created for its previous state, a new narrative must be crafted.

The discovery of a singular truth behind their experience is akin to the holy grail for many veterans affected by trauma. They believe that if they are able to discover the complete and objective truth behind their trauma, they will be able to completely shed the burden it bestows upon them. Odysseus is no exception. During the Wanderings he describes an encounter with the Sirens, mythical creatures who entice doomed sailors to approach them with their beautiful voices and songs. As instructed by the goddess Circe, Odysseus approaches the Sirens bound to the mast and with his men temporarily deafened by wax covering their ears to ensure they were not lured to the creatures. (12. 175-179) In full the Sirens' song is as follows:

Come this way, honored Odysseus, great glory of the Achainans,
and stay your ship, so that you can listen here to our singing;
for no one else has ever sailed past this place in his black ship
until he has listened to the honey-sweet voice that issues
from our lips; then goes on, well pleased, knowing more than ever
he did; for we know everything that the Argives and Trojans
did and suffered in wide Troy through the gods' despite.

Over all the generous earth we know everything that happens. (12. 184-191)

The Sirens' claim to know everything that happened during the Trojan War signals to Odysseus that they are aware of his true experience and will have the ability to empathize with and even explain his trauma. This equates to a promise to give Odysseus an unabridged and objective truth of his experience at Troy. However, as an objective version of Odysseus' own personal-truth does not exist, their promise is a trap.

Yet, the promise of a complete understanding of his experience is so enticing to Odysseus that he attempts to force his men to free him so he can join the Sirens, despite a prior warning from Circe who cautioned:

. . . If anyone goes near them [the Sirens]
in ignorance, and listens to their voices,
that man will never travel to his home,
and never make his wife and children happy
to have him back with them again. The Sirens
who sit there in their meadow will seduce him
with piercing songs. Around about them lie
great heaps of men, flesh rotting from their bones,
their skin all shriveled up. (12. 39-47)

From Circe's warning it is possible to infer that Odysseus' same unabashed desire to hear the objective truth behind his trauma was felt by countless sailors who fell victim to the Sirens, all of whom likely shared some form of trauma caused by conflict.

In light of this, it is possible to see that the Sirens' song promised Odysseus a final-truth behind his trauma and a chance to relieve himself from the constant evolution of his personal truth. Of course, the Sirens' promise was a trap, as a final version of the truth is unobtainable by a mortal such as Odysseus. Like those killed at the hands of the Sirens before him and many of Shay's Vietnam veteran patients, Odysseus had undertaken a task that he was doomed to fail from the start. Shay neatly summarizes Odysseus' doomed quest to find an objective truth: "Complete and final truth is an unachievable, toxic quest, which is different from the quest to create meaning for one's experience in a coherent narrative."⁷

Though Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens is notably short, under 50 lines in total, the Sirens' claim to know "everything the Greeks and Trojans suffered in wide Troy" is a pivotal moment for how Odysseus may be understood as a victim of trauma. While he characterizes the entirety of his wanderings to the Phaeacians as a tale of his enormous suffering, the episode with the Sirens serves as an example of Odysseus' inability to cope with his past trauma. Despite knowing that approaching the Sirens would result in his death, their promise to deliver Odysseus his final-truth and the chance to finally relieve himself of his trauma proves too enticing to resist.

Odysseus is massively successful in his ability to craft a story that allows the Phaeacians to better understand his experience and sympathize with the emotions he endured. Despite their joyous earlier reaction to the heroic ballads of Demodocus the

⁷ Shay 2002, 87.

Phaeacians are left in silence at the conclusion of the Wanderings, “So he [Odysseus] spoke, and all of them [Phaeacians] stayed stricken to silence, / held in thrall by the story all through the shadowy chambers.” (13. 1-2) While their initial reaction to the Wanderings may seem at first seem odd or rude, the contrast between the Phaeacian’s silent reaction to the Wanderings and their overjoyed reaction to Demodocus’ songs indicate that Odysseus’ story, at the very least, did not fall into the trap of simply entertaining an audience uninitiated in the trauma associated with combat.

Furthermore, the use of the word “thrall” implies that Odysseus’ story causes him to hold some sort of power over the Phaeacians.⁸ While the specific emotions felt by the Phaeacians following the Wanderings are not explicitly stated, it is clear that the stories are successful in changing the dynamic of their relationship with Odysseus. As the Phaeacians likely gather from the Wanderings that they never experienced the kinds of trauma and intense emotion that Odysseus embeds within his tale, they immediately feel more compelled to help their guest. This is supported by Alcinous, who breaks the Phaeacians’ silence and states, “Odysseus, now that you have come to my house, bronze-founded / with the high roof, I think you will not lose your homecoming, / nor be driven back from it again, for all your sufferings.” (13. 4-6) It is incredibly telling that the first reaction of the Phaeacians after the Wanderings is to immediately give Odysseus exactly what he asks for over the course of his entire stay on Scheria.

As soon as Alcinous and the Phaeacians develop a more complete understanding of Odysseus’ desire to return home, they instantly resolve to not the delay Odysseus’ homecoming any further.

⁸ Thrall is take from Lattimore’s translation. Wilson states the Phaeacians were “spellbound”.

Odysseus' ability to contain his self-truth within his story proves to be invaluable in gathering the support of the Phaeacians. Though he is consistently praised for his ability to lie and even describes himself to the Phaeacians as "known for my [Odysseus'] clever tricks and lies." (9. 21), it is Odysseus' ability to tell his own story-truth through lying which sets his character apart. The true artistry behind Odysseus' storytelling ability means that it is irrelevant whether the Phaeacians believe the Wanderings to be factual, as their understanding of Odysseus' story-truth would remain the same despite the factual truthfulness of the story. The Wanderings earn Odysseus obscene amounts of treasure and a free, direct ticket home not because of the inherent generosity of Alcinous and the Phaeacians but because Odysseus is able to change how they understood his character.

Of course, the gifts from the Phaeacians are not the only reward Odysseus receives from the Wanderings; the Phaeacians' newfound ability to empathize with his experience help him to temporarily relieve a portion of his own trauma. Despite Odysseus never outwardly acknowledging that the Phaeacians' empathy have any effect on how he carried his trauma, there is clearly a weight relieved following the conclusion of the Wanderings. When Odysseus finally boards the ship that will take him back to Ithaca, he almost immediately falls into a deep sleep. "They pulled, / leaning back hard; the oar blades splashed the water. / A sound sweet sleep fell on his [Odysseus] eyes, like death; / he did not stir". (13. 78-81)

To Odysseus this is no ordinary sleep. Though there are other instances where Odysseus falls asleep, these instances are detrimental to his journey. For example, on

the journey home from King Aeolus' island Odysseus' sleep allowed his men to mutiny and prevented Odysseus from reaching Ithaca for another seven years. (10. 45-55) Though it could be argued that Odysseus' "death like" sleep on the Phaeacians' ship was brought on by exhaustion or knowledge of his impending arrival home, this would mean Odysseus ignored the lessons learned on the journey home from Aeolus' islands. Instead, it seems that Odysseus' sleep was brought on by relief, not from the prospect of returning home, but by the shedding of pain brought on by trauma. The poem states,

. . . She [the ship] bore a man [Odysseus]
 whose mind was like the gods', who had endured
 many heartbreaking losses, and the pain
 of war and shipwreck. Now he slept in peace,
 and he remembered nothing of his pain. (13. 88-92)

As outlined in Shay, peaceful sleep is something that is commonly elusive to combat veterans to the point of being cliché.⁹ Odysseus' restful and unencumbered sleep following his telling of his story may be indicative of the reduced burden of his trauma after successfully telling his story.

The encounter with the Phaeacians and the narratives Odysseus crafts for them serve as the foundation for understanding how narrative can be used to shed the

⁹ Shay 2002, 39.

burden trauma bestows upon its survivors. Odysseus' ability to create the Wanderings is a testament to cleverness and ingenuity. By the time he leaves Scheria the Phaeacians understanding of Odysseus has radically changed. The Wanderings also prove that incredibly complex and deep emotions derived from trauma can be translated to an audience with no prior experience with such emotions. Odysseus ingenious solution of removing the confines of reality from his stories allow the Phaeacians to shed their prior ideas about the kind of emotion felt by heroic characters. This allows them to finally empathize with Odysseus' suffering and return him to Ithaca.

III. On Ithaca

Following Odysseus' successful encounter with the Phaeacians, he is finally returned to his home island of Ithaca. With his homecoming comes a new series of challenges; he must deal with an entirely new cast of characters, evolve his stories to fit his new persona, and come to grips with how his own truth has changed after arriving home. While the latter half of the *Odyssey* on Ithaca is most famous for Odysseus' violent victory over the suitors, it is far more than just an epilogue to Odysseus' story. Odysseus' homecoming reveals how, why, and the extent to which a story can change while still containing a centralized story-truth. In addition, it also uncovers how Odysseus' story-truth evolves after disappointing circumstances shape his perceptions of what his homecoming means. In essence, Odysseus' return to Ithaca serves as a reminder that every aspect of story-truth is subject to evolution, from the story it is bound within to the contents of the truth itself.

To understand Odysseus' behavior after his arrival on Ithaca, it is perhaps important to examine the major change of setting between the islands of Scheria and Ithaca, as it radically alters the stakes, motivations, and potential rewards Odysseus faces. In a way, Odysseus' arrival on Ithaca is not a so much a homecoming, as new trial. The home he left behind 20 years prior, for the most part, no longer exists. Ithaca's political and social landscape has been completely redefined since his departure for Troy 20 years prior. Unlike the island of Scheria, an idyllic place where Odysseus is in

no immediate danger, Ithaca is a far more unforgiving site. While the stories he tells the Phaeacians are invaluable in establishing a connection with his hosts and arguably lead his hosts to return him to Ithaca sooner, they do little in terms of ensuring his physical security. After Odysseus' return to his homeland, his storytelling develops much more immediate consequences, and his very survival is largely dependent on his ability to legitimize the newfound identity as a harmless beggar given to him by Athena.

Furthermore, to highlight the immediate danger, Athena covers the island's physical geography in a mist prior to Odysseus' return in order to delay his ability to recognize his homeland. This ensures the immediate moments following Odysseus' arrival would not be a joyous conclusion to a 20-year journey, but rather another arrival on a foreign land filled with fright, confusion, and despair. The realization that his homecoming does not mark the end of his suffering heavily dictates the emotions, behavior, and storytelling of Odysseus during the last half of the epic.

Odysseus' ability to craft a story in the face of danger is almost immediately tested by a disguised Athena following his arrival. After she informs Odysseus that he is in fact on Ithaca, she pauses to present him with a chance to react. Though Odysseus seems to be overjoyed by the revelation that he has finally reached his homeland, he stops short of revealing his true identity. ". . . he [Odysseus] answered her [Athena] again and addressed her with winged words; / but he did not tell her the truth from the outset, / forever using to every advantage the mind that was in him" (13. 253-255). Instead of revealing himself as the rightful king of Ithaca, Odysseus claims to be a stranger to the land and pretends to be a refugee from Crete. He goes on to claim that he fled from Crete after killing the king's son and then went on a trip with the

Phoenicians, who left him stranded on Ithaca with his treasure following a storm. Athena is delighted by his response and reveals herself to him. She exclaims, “You clever rascal! So duplicitous, so talented at lying! You love fiction and tricks so deeply, you refuse to stop even in your own land.” (13. 295-298) Athena’s positive reaction not only rewards Odysseus’ impulse to lie, but also signal that Odysseus’ stories would remain of use to him on Ithaca.

Odysseus’ tall tale to Athena marks the entry to a section of the *Odyssey* known as the “Lying Tales” - a series of stories told by Odysseus to a variety of characters across Ithaca. When compared to the Wanderings, the Lying Tales are short, to the point, and largely grounded in reality. The nature of the Lying Tales is largely dependent on Odysseus’ immediate surroundings and the dangers that occupy them. Because of the need to use his stories as a defense against his surroundings, Odysseus no longer has the luxury of forming free flowing narratives as he so enjoyed on Scheria. Yet, when closely examined, the Lying Tales reveal a strikingly similar, intricately disguised story-truth as the one found within the fantastical stories of the Wanderings. Odysseus’ short story to Athena reveals his surrogate character to be the same error-prone, conflicted, and lost character as his surrogate character from the Wanderings, and by the end of the story he again is left alone and grieving (13. 285-286).

What truly sets Odysseus apart as a storyteller is not his ability to quickly form a narrative to hide his identity or remove himself from danger, it is his remarkable ability to craft such a story that also contains his story-truth. This nuance of Odysseus’ ability as storyteller is seemingly lost on Athena, who reacts positively to Odysseus’ story because she thinks of it as a way to protect Odysseus’ identity and shield himself from

outside forces that may want to hurt him. In her mind, Odysseus' tendency to outwardly hide his physical identity is admirable, as it shows extreme cleverness despite the overwhelming emotion he felt when she revealed that he was on Ithaca.

Ultimately Athena's interpretation is incomplete because, like his stories to the Phaeacians, a major goal of Odysseus' story is to make himself vulnerable to his audience to translate his inner trauma. One way to interpret the *Odyssey* is to imagine there are two primary levels to Odysseus' storytelling; at the surface, his stories serve as protection against his surroundings; underneath that a separate level exists, where the aim of Odysseus' storytelling is to relay his story-truth to his audience. O'Brien's novel, *The Things They Carry*, perfectly demonstrates this deeper level to telling a war story. In the chapter "Good Form", O'Brien, a Vietnam veteran, explicitly lays out his reasoning for sharing his story-truth through stories:

I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening truth . . . What stories can do I guess is make things present. I can look at things I never looked at I can attach faces to grief and love and pity and God. I can be brave. I can feel myself again.¹⁰

O'Brien's logic rings true for Odysseus. As trauma survivors, both Odysseus and O'Brien seek to expose their story-truth through the stories they tell their audience.

The story Odysseus composes for Athena succeeds in its surface mission of protecting him from physical danger but fails miserably in the deeper goal of passing on

¹⁰ O'Brien 1990, 181-182.

his story-truth. It is possible to see Odysseus react to his failure through his dialogue with Athena following her positive reaction to the story. Once Athena reveals herself to Odysseus as goddess, he doubles down on his effort to describe his pain and tells her:

But when we Greeks had sacked the town of Priam,
and we embarked, and gods dispersed our fleet,
I did not see you there on board my ship,
daughter of Zeus. You gave me no protection.
Lost and confused, I waited for the gods
to free me from my pain. (13. 317-322)

Here, Odysseus acknowledges the failure of his original story to relay the nature of his suffering and misery to Athena. Essentially, it is a last-ditch effort to get the goddess to acknowledge his suffering, as she is unwilling to hear the story-truth contained within his original story.

Unfortunately for Odysseus, his lament finds little to no outward sympathy with the goddess, who instead continues to dote on him over his cleverness and instinct. However, his failure to share his story-truth with the goddess does not stop him from continuing his attempt to gain understanding from his audiences. The Lying Tales are chock full of Odysseus' attempts to pass on his story-truth and the minor falls and major lifts that come with his successes and failures.

The harsh realities of Odysseus' situation on Ithaca are reinforced by the island's rowdy cast of characters, none more so than the swineherd, Eumaeus. Old and heartbroken by Odysseus' prolonged absence, Eumaeus lives a life of subsistence and reluctant subservience to the suitors that occupy Odysseus' house. Despite his condition, he has not forgotten Odysseus and maintains a steadfast loyalty to his former king. Though Eumaeus' loyalty wins him the admiration of Odysseus, ultimately it is his innate ability to understand his master's story-truth that wins Odysseus' trust.

Though Eumaeus is not a direct survivor of combat like Odysseus, he later reveals the extent of his own suffering brought on by a traumatic past. Eumaeus' trauma means he has the same need to share his story-truth and same desire to be understood and empathized with as Odysseus. Knowledge of a shared burden forms a connection between the two men. Before Eumaeus tells Odysseus about his trauma he tells Odysseus,

. . . But let us, you and I,
sit in my cottage over food and wine,
and take some joy in hearing how much pain
we each have suffered. After many years
of agony and absence from one's home,
a person can begin enjoying grief. (15. 397-403)

Eumaeus' statement acknowledges both he and Odysseus are survivors of trauma. It also shows that, unlike the Phaeacians, Odysseus can put his faith in Eumaeus as an

audience and expect him to be able to understand his story-truth without much translation. His traumatic childhood and experiences as a slave are enough to allow him to understand Odysseus' story-truth and provide empathy through sharing his own experience.

As a result, Odysseus' story to Eumaeus is heavily abridged and is free of the translation devices, such as magical realism, that heavily inundated the Wanderings. Odysseus' trust in Eumaeus eventually leads to the creation of a triumvirate between Eumaeus, Odysseus, and Telemachus. Though Eumaeus' role in the triumvirate is undeniably subordinate to both Odysseus and Telemachus, he becomes one of Odysseus' most useful mortal allies in both his attempts to regain control of Ithaca and gain sympathy from an understanding audience.

In terms of his ability as an audience to serve as an audience for Odysseus' story, Eumaeus is nearly the exact opposite of the Phaeacians. As opposed to Odysseus' former hosts, Eumaeus' troubled life and suffering aid his ability to decipher Odysseus' story. For one, Eumaeus did not share the Phaeacians' illusion of Odysseus as the archetypal war hero described in Demodocus' songs; his suffering does not allow for the belief in such fantasies. Instead, he believes the real Odysseus to be long dead. After the undercover Odysseus tells him that his master was set to return to Ithaca, he both strongly resists any temptation to believe the disguised old beggar and instead curses Helen and Agamemnon for allowing so many to die on behalf of their own squabbles. He states to the disguised Odysseus ". . . He [Odysseus] must be dead by now. / Damn Helen and her family! So many / have died for her sake. Master went to Troy, / to win back Agamemnon's honor, fighting / the Trojans." (14. 68-72) Eumaeus'

bleak outlook separates him from the Phaeacians, who would have no reason to doubt the claim of Odysseus' return, and, as shown through their reaction to Demodocus' song, would welcome claims that represent Odysseus as the archetypical war hero.

Eumaeus' reluctance to believe the prophecy confirms to Odysseus, who was likely already aware of Eumaeus' story, that the swineherd was under no illusions about the realities of war. Eumaeus understands that characters such as the hero described by Demodocus are fantasies and only believable to those untouched by trauma. This means that any story Odysseus crafts for Eumaeus which contain his story-truth would not require the same extensive translations as his stories for the Phaeacians had required. Instead, Odysseus could craft a much simpler tale which does not have to incorporate elements of magical realism to emphasize the emotion behind the story. Altogether, Eumaeus' unyielding loyalty, and ability to understand trauma inform Odysseus that he is safe from immediate danger and provides him insight on the type of his narrative he must craft to reveal his story-truth to the swineherd.

Similar to the Lying-Tale to Athena, Odysseus' story to Eumaeus again depicts Odysseus' surrogate character as a Cretan veteran of Troy whose story is engulfed by death, grief, and betrayal. Throughout the story Odysseus' surrogate character pirates his way around the Mediterranean in search of glory and treasure. Though he claims to be an accomplished and skilled warrior, he is unable to keep his men alive and before arriving on Ithaca he ends up the captive of a Thesprotian trading vessel and is only able to escape through an intervention of the gods. (14. 191-359) Outside of the changing factors that lead to the emotional crippling of Odysseus' surrogate characters in his Lying Tale to Eumaeus and the Wanderings, the most profound difference

between the two stories lies in their respective settings. The Wanderings take place in a near fantasy world, filled with witches, monsters, and fantastical lands, whereas Odysseus' story to Eumaeus takes place in the real-world late Bronze-Age Aegean. The difference in the two stories can best be explained by the varying ability levels of their audience. Following Demodocus' heroic portrayal of Odysseus in his songs, the real Odysseus knows that the Phaeacians would never be able to understand his story-truth if it was not shrouded from reality. However, by marking himself as a fellow trauma survivor, Eumaeus proves he is capable of processing a less-filtered version of Odysseus' story-truth.

Odysseus' story to Eumaeus also shows an evolution of Odysseus' story-truth contained in the Wanderings and the story-truth embedded in the Lying Tales. Though the majority of the narrative's story-truth mirrors the story-truth found in the Wanderings, Odysseus' story uncovers a major change in his psyche that takes place after his arrival on Ithaca and drastically alters how he understands his own trauma. This change is best shown in a passage that reveals that, unlike in the Wanderings, his surrogate character was able to return home following the war. He tells Eumaeus:

I stayed for just one month at home [after the war], enjoying
 my children and my wife and my possessions.
 Some impulse made me want to sail to Egypt,
 with nine ships and a godlike crew. I rushed
 to get the fleet prepared and gather up
 the men. . . (14. 242-247)

In this version of the story Odysseus' ability to return home directly after the war only to leave again after a month, suggests that his actual homecoming did not cure his desire to continue his travels and explorations. It is likely that, prior to his arrival at Ithaca, Odysseus perceived his homecoming to be the time and place where his journey would end and his trauma would no longer affect him. Upon the realization that he is still plagued by the same trauma following his homecoming, he alters the facts behind his story to Eumaeus to better reflect the evolution of his personal truth. Though "some impulse" seems to be a weak excuse for Odysseus' surrogate character to leave his family, it is really his need to discover an inner peace and a desire to find an unobtainable "final truth" that fuels his desire to continue his journey and not a longing to return to Ithaca.

The reality contained within Odysseus' Lying Tale to Eumaeus definitively shows that Odysseus has infinitely more confidence in Eumaeus as an audience. This confidence leads to the inclusion of passages such as Odysseus' fight with the Egyptians, which depicts the harsh realities of warfare and how it affects Odysseus' surrogate character.

. . . The news [of Odysseus' raid]
soon reached the city; people heard the screaming,
and right away at dawn they all arrived.

The plain was filled with warriors on foot,
 and chariots and gleaming bronze, and Zeus,
 the Lord of Lightning, caused my men to panic.
 They dared not keep on fighting; danger lurked
 on every side. Then many of my men
 were killed with sharp bronze spears; the rest were taken
 as slaves to work for them [the Egyptians]. I wish I too
 had died in Egypt! But more pain remained. (14. 264-274)

Odysseus' detailed description of the brutality of warfare in the mortal world would have been lost on the Phaeacians, who would have likely interpreted the story as the tale of a daring raid and heroic escape by Odysseus. Only the trauma survivor Eumaeus can sympathize with Odysseus' experience and even his desire for death at the passage's culmination. Furthermore, the passage demonstrates how the story-truth he constructs within this particular Lying Tale requires far less translation, as he clearly feels Eumaeus would be able to successfully interpret and empathize with his pain.

Initially, it seems that Odysseus' trust in Eumaeus' ability to successfully interpret his story may be misplaced, as his reaction following the culmination of the tale is rather subdued. Though he states, "O sorrowful stranger, truly you troubled the spirit in me, / by telling me all these details, how you suffered and wandered" (14. 361-362), he quickly changes direction and challenges a portion of the story where Odysseus' unnamed surrogate character claimed to know Odysseus' whereabouts. Despite the lackluster reaction, Eumaeus' hyper-focus on any potential news of the return of his

beloved king is understandable and his ignorance of the fact that the beggar who tells him the story is really Odysseus means that any concern about the old man in front of him is secondary to any mention of Odysseus' return.

However, Odysseus is not the only character with a story-truth to share. As a trauma survivor Eumaeus shares a similar burden to that of his master. After telling his own story, Odysseus asks Eumaeus to share his story about how he was taken from his parents and became a slave. The swineherd reveals that he was born the son of the King of the island Syria. As a child he was kidnapped and sold to a band of Phoenician merchants by an unnamed female slave who formerly served as his caretaker. Following his kidnapping, the Phoenicians sold him to King Laertes, Odysseus' father (15. 404-484). Though Eumaeus' story lacks the vivid imagery and imagination of Odysseus' stories, the pain of Eumaeus can still be felt, especially when he references the death of the woman who served as his caretaker. He laments, "She crashed into the ship's hold like a seagull. / They threw her overboard to feed the fish / and seals, and I was left there, brokenhearted." (15. 478-481) This short passage may be interpreted as Eumaeus' story-truth; the pain he describes at the loss of the woman and the gruesome detail in how he describes her fate mirrors portions of Odysseus' own story-truth. Despite their differences in background, the shared burden of trauma builds the mutually beneficial connection between the master and his servant and cements Odysseus' trust in Eumaeus.

The relationship established between Odysseus and Eumaeus through the sharing of their stories is not unique. Though it is often beneficial for combat veterans to seek audiences of other combat veterans, it is not always necessary to achieve the goal

of passing on one's own story-truth. Many of the Vietnam veterans Shay quotes throughout *Odysseus in America* share similar stories of creating communities of trauma victims to help support the pain they endure. One such veteran highlights a disconnect between himself and his wife, he notes, "She [his wife] could not comprehend what happened to me, because she had never been beaten up. If she had been raped, abused, beaten, scared, or starved she could understand. I am glad she wasn't."¹¹. The veteran's admission that his wife could never understand the depth of his trauma unless she was a trauma survivor herself, keys onto the critical difference between Eumaeus and the Phaeacians as an audience. The fantastical worlds that are necessary for the Phaeacians to understand Odysseus' story-truth are no longer necessary when he presents his story-truth to a fellow trauma survivor.

While the differences between Eumaeus and the Phaeacians as an audience are profound, they share a key similarity in that they are both willing to listen and accept Odysseus' stories. Though the Phaeacians represent an uninitiated audience, in that Odysseus' story-truth requires translation to be understandable, they do not protest Odysseus' long and sad story. On Ithaca, Odysseus encounters an audience that is not quite so welcoming when he ventures to his palace and meets the leader of the suitors, Antinous. Though Antinous allows the beggar version of Odysseus to tell a heavily abridged version of the story he gives to Eumaeus, after the story's conclusion he makes it immediately clear that Odysseus is not welcome and that his story has had no

¹¹ Shay 2002, 74.

effect. Antinous' rejection of Odysseus marks the first time in the epic where one of his narratives containing his story-truth is met with open hostility. Essentially, the interaction between Odysseus and Antinous creates a third category of audience outside of the initiated and uninitiated - the unwilling.

It is impossible to fully grasp the gravity of Antinous rejection without understanding the role of *xenia*, or the Greek customs of hospitality. As the *Odyssey's* omniscient narrator generally refrains from explicitly telling the audience how to view a particular character, it may be argued that adherence to the principles of *xenia* is the epic's closest indicator of whether the audience is meant to view an individual or group in a positive or negative light. *Xenia* dictates that all guests, regardless of stature, must be protected and treated with dignity and this often takes the form of the hosts presenting the guests meals and gifts. Before Odysseus attempts to tell his story, he begs for food from the suitors and is only refused by Antinous. Antinous' outright defiance of the basic tenants of guest-host relationship norms starkly contrast both with Eumaeus and with the Phaeacians, who subtly signal to Odysseus early in their relationship that they will adhere to these principles during his tenure as a guest. For example, after inviting him to his house Eumaeus states "What I have to give is small, but I will give it gladly". (15. 57-58)

Antinous' rejection of *xenia* can be interpreted as the poem's method of casting him as a villain. Yet, despite his initial refusal to provide food to the beggar, Odysseus seemingly presents Antinous with a second chance by allowing him to hear his story-truth. After Antinous' first refusal the poem states:

. . . Odysseus
 had finished with his test; he could have walked
 back to the threshold, no harm done. Instead,
 he stood beside Antinous and said,
 'Friend give me something. You must be the best
 of all the Greeks. You look like royalty,
 so you should give me more food than all the rest . . .' (17. 413-420)

Odysseus then proceeds to tell Antinous his story which ends in the typical "Such is my tale of woe." (17. 445) Unmoved, Antinous exclaims to the room full of suitors, "What god imposed this pest to spoil our feast? Stay over there, not near my table - or you can get lost! Get killed in Egypt or enslaved in Cyprus! You barefaced beggar!" (17. 446-450) His outright rejection of Odysseus' story marks his final nail in the coffin as Odysseus gives him no further opportunities to redeem himself.

It is interesting that Odysseus allows Antinous to listen to his story despite his refusal to adhere to the principles of *xenia*. Though his attempt to present Antinous with his story-truth is a failure in every regard, Odysseus' willingness to share his story-truth with his greatest adversary is indicative of the importance he places upon relieving the burden of his trauma. This is especially evident as the entire story given to Antinous is essentially unnecessary in moving the story forward since the suitor's refusal to provide Odysseus with food already establishes him as a villain-like character. Yet the inclusion of this mini-Lying Tale shows that the Homeric poets thought it necessary to further reinforce the negative view of Antinous by casting him as an unwilling audience. It is not

made clear whether Antinous has the ability to interpret Odysseus' story-truth, but it is evident that he does not care to hear Odysseus' stories for entertainment or empathy.

Antinous' lack of hospitality and unwillingness to listen to Odysseus' story mark him as one of the few mortal characters with no visible redeeming qualities. While Eumaeus and the Phaeacians demonstrate that both initiated and uninitiated audiences may be viewed positively within the *Odyssey*, the singular unwilling audience of Antinous is an unquestionably negative presence within the poem. Of course, this does not go unpunished and Antinous is brutally killed by Odysseus after he reveals his true identity, becoming the only audience to Odysseus' stories to be killed within the epic.

In regard to storytelling, Odysseus' time on Ithaca highlights the differences between the initiated and uninitiated audience. The profound differences in the Lying Tales to Eumaeus and the stories to the Phaeacians demonstrate the great lengths a storyteller must go through to customize a narrative based on the ability of their audience. Odysseus' close relationship to Eumaeus also keys in on the importance of the mutual understanding shared between trauma survivors. Their relationship allows Odysseus to receive the benefits of an empathetic audience despite his hidden identity and failure to translate his story-truth to Athena. Furthermore, as he had already met both success and failure with his stories to Athena and Eumaeus, Odysseus' decision to persevere with his Lying Tales, through his story to Antinous, signal that his quest to pass on his story-truth will never end. Odysseus must forever continue to modify his stories and repeat his story-truth as he encounters new audiences.

IV. Conclusion

Throughout the epic, Odysseus' stories paint his audiences a picture of a broken man. This is the case from his time on Scheria all the way through his final Lying Tale given on Ithaca. Despite his best attempts to unload the burden that his trauma bestows upon him, Odysseus cannot cure his suffering. The *Odyssey* shows that while it is possible to successfully pass on story-truth through narrative, as Odysseus achieved in the Wanderings and in his Lying Tale to Eumaeus, the relief provided by the understanding and empathy of an audience is merely temporary. In order to have any sustained reprieve from his trauma Odysseus must keep sharing his story-truth.

As Odysseus' audience, surroundings, experiences, and understanding of his own truth change, the stories in which he embeds his personal truth must adapt to match his own evolving story-truth. Over the course of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus demonstrates that he has all the necessary skills and tools as a storyteller to adapt to nearly any situation. His ingenious methods to translate his story-truth to the Phaeacians using surrealism and fantasy are diametrically opposed to the bluntness of his Lying Tale to Eumaeus. However, both stories perfectly fit their audience and Odysseus is able to gain empathy because of their sound construction. Of course, not all of his stories are so successful, as seen in his Lying Tales to Antinous and Athena, but it is Odysseus' determination and tenacity that allow him to persevere through his failures and recraft his stories for new audiences in a way more likely to see him succeed. While the knowledge that Odysseus will never truly cure himself of his trauma is disheartening, his successes reveal that the trauma he bears is not a death sentence.

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