

PEOPLE AND THEMES IN HOMER'S ODYSSEY

Agathe Thornton

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:
HOMER



ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:
HOMER

Volume 3

PEOPLE AND THEMES IN
HOMER'S ODYSSEY

This page intentionally left blank

PEOPLE AND THEMES IN HOMER'S ODYSSEY

AGATHE THORNTON

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1970

This edition first published in 2014

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 1970 Agathe Thornton

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-138-02308-6 (Set)

eISBN: 978-1-315-77609-5 (Set)

ISBN: 978-1-138-02137-2 (Volume 3)

eISBN: 978-1-315-77782-5 (Volume 3)

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this book but points out that some imperfections from the original may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and would welcome correspondence from those they have been unable to trace.

PEOPLE AND THEMES
IN HOMER'S ODYSSEY

AGATHE THORNTON

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
11 NEW FETTER LANE, LONDON, EC4

in association with

UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO PRESS
DUNEDIN

First published in 1970
© 1970 Agathe Thornton
SBN 416 16790 X
1. 1

Distributed in the USA
by Barnes & Noble Inc.

Printed in New Zealand by
John McIndoe Limited, Dunedin

CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	ix
PART I: THEMES AND COMPOSITION IN THE ODYSSEY	1
I. The Homecomings of the Achaeans Their Function in the Poem Their Narrative Structure	1
II. The Wanderings of Odysseus Calypso and Phaeacia A Hypothesis about their Origin in Shamanism	16
III. Guest-Friendship	38
IV. Testing	47
V. Omens	52
PART II: THE PEOPLE IN THE ODYSSEY	58
VI. Theoclymenus	58
VII. The Suitors	63
VIII. Telemachus	68
IX. Odysseus	78
X. Penelope Weaving Her Decision to Arrange the Bow Contest Her Position and Powers	93
XI. Laertes	115
CONCLUSION: THE STRUCTURE OF THE ODYSSEY	120
NOTES	129
INDEX	159
General	
Passages Cited	

ABBREVIATIONS

- Companion to Homer *A Companion to Homer*, ed. Wace and Stubbings (London, 1962)
- Cunliffe R. J. Cunliffe, *A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect* (London, 1924)
- Eliade Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Paris, 1951; transl. London, 1954)
- Essays on the Odyssey *Essays on the Odyssey*, ed. Charles H. Taylor, Jr. (Indiana Univ. Press, 1963)
- Finley M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (London, 1956)
- Kirk G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, 1962)
- Merry and Riddell W. W. Merry and J. Riddell, *Homer's Odyssey, Books 1 to 12* (Oxford, 1886)
- Monro D. B. Monro, *Homer's Odyssey, Books 13 to 24* (Oxford, 1901)
- Page D. Page, *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford, 1955)
- R.E. Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*
- Stanford W. B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer* (London, 1954)
- Webster T. B. L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer* (London, 1958)

PREFACE

I should like to acknowledge with warm gratitude my debt to Professor T. B. L. Webster who first suggested to me that I should collect my work on the *Odyssey* in a book, and whose interest and criticism have been invaluable to me over many years. He is, of course, not responsible for any errors that remain.

To those students of mine, who studied the *Odyssey* with me in their Honours year, I should like to give thanks for their companionship and enthusiasm and for the occasional helpful idea.

I thank the Editors of *AUMLA* for permission to use (with slight alterations) the paper on the Suitors, published in *AUMLA* 20, November 1963.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to my husband for his unfailing encouragement and patience, which made this work possible.

This page intentionally left blank

INTRODUCTION

In getting to know a work of poetry the first thing should always be to read it as a whole and to become acquainted with it intimately as a whole. This appears to be not as obvious as it sounds. Very early a fashion must have grown up of reciting portions of the Homeric epics, either in isolation or not in the right order. For we are told¹ that Hipparchus, tyrant of Athens, 'compelled the rhapsodes at the Panathenaea to perform them according to the cues, in due order', and we know from the orator Lysurgus that this rule was still adhered to in 332 B.C. Since then this postulate, which ought to be a matter of course in relation to a great poem, has often been neglected in favour of a very different approach connected with the so-called 'Homeric Question'. At least, this is the picture presented by the history of Homeric scholarship. It is probable that many people who have not been professional scholars in the Homeric field have read and enjoyed and intimately known the Homeric epics even since the fifth century B.C.; and this is once again the case today in the English-speaking world through Rieu's and Lattimore's translations.

Homeric scholarship, on the other hand, has pursued for the most part the 'Homeric Question'. This is concerned with the history of the two epics. A historical bias is of course characteristic of the spirit of the nineteenth and the latter part of the eighteenth century. In many fields of inquiry the question of how something has come to be, that is the question of genetic or historical development, has taken precedence over the question of what something is like, how it is constructed, how it functions. Both these questions, namely what some-

thing is like, and how it came to be what it is, are perfectly legitimate with reference to any subject-matter. But the investigations pursued to answer these two questions cannot be substituted for each other. If you try to trace the history of one of the Homeric epics from internal evidence, you are not thereby describing the structure and functioning of that poem, although you may be able to suggest reasons for some strange features in it by these means. Again, if you describe the poetic stuff and shape of the poems, you do not thereby trace their history or development; and any oddities which may be remnants from that history must at least be presumed to have some function within the whole in which they appear, even if this function is no more than to add the charm of a strange antiquity. I shall call the two different approaches 'diachronic' and 'synchronic', terms introduced by De Saussure into linguistics: 'diachronic' referring to what 'goes through time', that is what develops or changes historically or genetically, and 'synchronic' referring to what is 'together in time' or 'contemporaneous'.

What has very largely happened in Homeric criticism is this, that synchronic investigation, that is the investigation of the poems as they stand, has been given very short shrift, or—and this is worse—it has been pursued with inadequate criteria. The consequence has been the discovery of a famous series of 'inconsistencies' or 'anomalies' which have then been made starting-points for the most extravagant speculations about the diachronic genesis of the two poems.

There are two criteria which are often applied uncritically and which are quite pernicious in their effect on Homeric criticism. The first is what we from our twentieth century point of view call 'logical'; the second is what we call 'first-rate poetry', or again 'second-rate'. The first type of judgement is rationalistic, the second aesthetic. Both are in the form in which they usually appear firmly anchored in modern forms of thought, and quite the wrong sort to use in relation to Homeric epic: in fact they are 'anachronistic'. What is needed instead of an unbridled 'historicism' is real historical sense, namely the realization that in the Homeric world not only houses, weapons, and customs were very different from our

own, but also forms of thought, judgements on conduct, beauty, excellence, social institutions and so on. Much has been done on this kind of line: Jaeger's *Paideia*, Finley's *World of Odysseus* are examples. Books such as these, while they have their own intrinsic interest, are in relation to the synchronic investigation of the poems tools only, but important tools. For they describe no more than the presuppositions which underlie the poet's work. Partly he is not conscious of them, but works in terms of them as a matter of course. Partly he uses them as material to be moulded into poetry. It is the interpreter's or literary critic's task to find out how he has used them.

The relationship between synchronic and diachronic investigation in Homeric criticism is complicated by the fact that the critics are, for the most part, divided into two camps: the Analysts and the Unitarians. The Analysts, starting from inconsistencies and other difficulties, construct a hypothesis concerning the genesis of this difficulty and of the parts of the epic in which it occurs, the underlying assumption being that of a number of authors, 'multiple authorship', as it is called. The work of Analysts is often brief and uncritical in the way described above as far as synchronic investigation is concerned, and often highly ingenious in the construction of diachronic theories. The Unitarians work synchronically when they try to show by interpretation of the work as it stands that those 'inconsistencies' or other difficulties do not in fact exist. Hereby they deny that the particular passage under discussion offers any foothold for diachronic investigation. This does not mean of course that a Unitarian today necessarily denies the possibility of diachronic work. Both archaeology and linguistics are now supplying criteria which can be used with some confidence, if with caution, in diachronic investigation.

But, quite apart from criteria of this external sort, the nature of the Homeric Question has been changed fundamentally by Milman Parry's and A. B. Lord's conclusive demonstration that the Homeric epics were composed in the tradition of oral poetry, whether they were in fact written down by the poet or dictated by him, or handed down orally by the 'Sons of Homer'. If the Homeric epics are oral poetry, the old

alternative between single authorship and multiple authorship has disappeared. To the diachronic point of view, multiple authorship is certain: for four to five centuries at least each bard standing in the tradition of oral epic poetry would take over from his teachers and colleagues anything that they offered in their songs and use it according to his own taste and ability. To the synchronic point of view, each bard, at any one performance, composed anew in his singing what had been handed down to him. Therefore single and multiple authorship are no longer an either-or, but they are both true and—one must add emphatically—inextricably wrought into each other. We may sometimes feel that we can see the hand of the last great poet, Homer himself, but we can never be sure. Let us consider the kind of thing that must happen in oral traditional poetry.

Let us take a young singer producing his song at a specific occasion before a particular audience as the starting-point for our thinking. A year later he may sing a song on the same subject a little more elaborated in part. Twenty or thirty years later his song on this subject may be highly complex and dramatic, while in parts it may be brief to the point of being unintelligible, because he has lost interest in these particular parts. Suppose we had the written text of the three versions without name of author, could we decide how many authors there were? It is very doubtful. Supposing again that this man's pupil has a good ear and memory, but little spontaneous imagination and initiative, might not the pupil's versions, particularly his earlier ones, be closer to his master's late versions than the master's late versions to those of his youth? We might be tempted to assign the early version of a great singer to one person and his later version and that of his follower to another. The conclusion from all this must be I think that to determine conclusively earlier forms of our epics is beyond our reach. This conclusion holds for a poem that is composed within or directly derived from a tradition of oral poetry, and consequently holds for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the traditional oral character of which has been demonstrated by Parry and Lord.

But there is still the possibility that our poems may contain

minor alterations or additions stemming from a time later than the probable date of composition, which is the end of the eighth century B.C. On the other hand, it can no longer be assumed that any considerable portion of a book or a whole book, like Book 24 in the *Odyssey* or Book 10 in the *Iliad*, was not part of the poet's plan for his poem, since that plan seems to imply from the beginning the present number of books. For J. A. Davison² has shown for the *Iliad* that while single books vary considerably in length (Book 5: 909 lines, Book 19: 424 lines), groups of four books vary proportionately much less, the lowest number of lines being 2304 for Books 17 to 20 and the highest being 2927 for Books 13 to 16, one sixth of all the lines of the *Iliad* (15683) being 2614. On the basis of experimentation, Davison assumes that a 'reasonable speed for the public recitation of Greek hexameters to a continuing audience is about eleven lines a minute'. The average recitation of a 4 book group from the *Iliad* would take just under four hours. Davison suggests that the epic would be recited over three days, with two sessions each day, by a team of four reciters, each reciting one book in each session. However that may be, corresponding numerical relations obtain in the *Odyssey*. The figures of the six groups are

Books	1 to 4	2222
	5 to 8	1757
	9 to 12	2233
	13 to 16	2011
	17 to 20	2032
	21 to 24	1855

The average number of lines is 2019, and would take just over three hours to recite. Davison notes the following: 'Odysseus breaks off his narrative in *Od.* 11.330 after the equivalent of 1,470 hexameters; being adjured to go on, he then continues for a further 714 lines (or at about eleven lines to the minute, approximately 3h. 20m. actual narration, with a short break for general conversation just after two-thirds of the whole story)'.³ This means that the narrative of the wanderings of Odysseus himself, which fills the best part of

four books, takes about a quarter of an hour longer than the average of the six groups of four books each. This seems to make it certain, so far as number of lines and time go, that the division into groups of four books is right in relation to a bard's or reciter's performance. Davison is hesitant about attributing too much importance to such purely numerical findings, but if an analysis of the content of the epic leads to the same grouping, then the matter becomes incontrovertible. Such an analysis will be attempted at the end of this book, when I hope that a number of crippling difficulties in interpretation will have been removed.

The Studies which form the body of this book are, for the most part, synchronic. Only the second part of chapter II on the origins of the wanderings of Odysseus is strictly diachronic. In all the others attention is concentrated on the poet's work as it comes to meet us in the texts which we have.

Two lines of interpretation in particular have been pursued, determined both of them by the sort of poetry that the Homeric epics are. The first is concerned with the way in which certain themes are used in the composition of the poem; the second arises from the primarily dramatic quality of the *Odyssey*.

A. B. Lord⁴ says that a Yugoslav singer told him 'that when he learned a new song he made no attempt at word-for-word memorization but learned only the "plan" of the song, which he explained as "the arrangement of the events"'. This plan he then proceeded to fill in with the themes which he already knew.' In Part I a number of themes that occur in the *Odyssey* are described. The themes of 'omens', 'guest-friendship' and perhaps also 'testing' are both social institutions and bardic themes. The wanderings and returns of the Achaeans and the wanderings of Odysseus are certainly traditional themes of the singers. Where necessary the theme is analysed in detail in order to show the traditional pattern of its sequence. In all five chapters the manner of poetic presentation is investigated. Some themes run through the whole epic illuminating the action at key-points, others are 'ornamented', as the Yugoslav singers would say,⁵ with great variety. Most of them are also important for the presentation

of the characters in Part II. In the description of the characters, I have aimed rather at removing obstacles to understanding and at indicating specific aspects than at completeness. This is particularly true of the chapters on Telemachus and Odysseus. The manner of interpretation is largely determined by the highly dramatic character of the *Odyssey*. Plato says about epic in general that it stands midway between tragedy and comedy on the one hand, and the poet himself telling a story, as for instance in dithyrambs, on the other.⁶ In tragedy and comedy the actions and utterances of people are 'imitated' directly; in dithyrambs they are narrated by the poet. Epic partakes of both. Aristotle, speaking specifically about Homer, praises him in contrast to other epic poets for commenting little himself, but narrating instead how his characters act and speak.⁷ This means that the Homeric epics have to be interpreted to a considerable extent, like plays. Only occasionally does the poet show his mind and intention directly. Mostly, the audience or reader has to infer what is intended from the actions and speeches of the characters in their relations to each other; and—I must add emphatically—not only in one scene at a time, but always in relation to all that precedes the scene under discussion. This is obvious of course in drama; it also applies to Homer's *Odyssey*.

Polemic is largely kept out of the text, and relegated to the notes. But much that is discussed owes its original stimulus to 'anomalies' pointed out by scholars of the 'analytical' school.

This page intentionally left blank