

# THE TERRITORY WITHOUT A MAP: THE SEA AS A NARRATOLOGICAL FRAME AND COMPASS IN THE *ODYSSEY*

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RIASSUNTO: Il contributo intende dimostrare che il mare nell'*Odissea* non è tanto il territorio ricostruito dalla mappa del poema, quanto piuttosto la cornice narratologica che “tiene insieme” il poema: il mare, infatti, unisce le singole disavventure di Odisseo. Pertanto il mare nel poema omerico non è solo acqua salata e scura: è il continuum su cui si muove la mente del narratore, alla ricerca di punti di approdo per saldare tra loro racconti ed episodi. Cercando nello spazio virtuale della sua immaginazione, Odisseo presenta le sue disavventure e la loro collocazione remota come isole isolate, e utilizza parimenti il mare come spazio virtuale per inquadrarle. Per il tessitore di trame Odisseo il mare è la sua tela fittizia. E come ricorda l'ammonimento di Tiresia (*Od.* XI 121-137, ribadito in *Od.* XXIII 265-283), Odisseo deve in qualche modo fuggire da questa finzione per trovare la pace, anche se non potrà fuggire la morte che verrà proprio da lì.

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Odissea*, narratologia, *Apologo*, spazio virtuale, *storyworlds*

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I argue that the sea in Homer's *Odyssey* is not the territory suggested by its map, but rather an all-encompassing narratological frame: the sea keeps the isolated locations of Odysseus' misadventures together. As such the sea in the *Odyssey* is not just salty, dark-coloured water: it is the continuum in which the narrator's mind roams, looking for anchor points to which to attach tales and episodes. Searching the virtual space of his imagination, Odysseus presents his series of misadventures and their remote locations as islands in isolation, and uses the sea as an equally virtual space to frame them. For the story-weaving Odysseus, the sea is the fictitious tapestry. And as Teiresias' warning words show (*Od.* XI 121-137, repeated in *Od.* XXIII 265-283),



Odysseus somehow has to escape this fiction to find peace, though he cannot escape death coming from it.

KEY-WORDS: *Odyssey*, narratology, *Apologue*, virtual space, storyworlds

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## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In archaic Greek epic, the sea is omnipresent. Its importance reflects the world view of its audience: coastal regions, islands and the open sea made up the inhabitable and accessible space, far more than mountainous areas and the remote hinterland.<sup>2</sup> For centuries, both during the period in which archaic epic developed, and when it was written down, those listening to the stories recognized the characters' dependence on the salty ways, and the many dangers they presented. In Mycenaean times, allegedly the era in which the prototypes of archaic Greek epic narratives were orally conceived and transmitted, the Greek speaking population turned to the sea for trade and welfare.<sup>3</sup> Establishing an extensive maritime network ranging from Phoenicia to the Strait of Gibraltar, and possibly into the Atlantic Ocean as far as England, the Mycenaean Greeks improved their

<sup>1</sup> I thank the anonymous reviewers and the editor of «AOQU» for their helpful comments and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> This is at least partly due to Mycenaean 'negotiated peripherality', a relationship established between the Mycenaean coastal people and the indigenous inhabitants of the inlands, whereby Mycenaean success depended on the willingness of the people on the interior to participate in the winning and trade of raw materials, cf. GALATY 2016: 207-208. LESKY 1947: 6 famously stated that the Greeks, originally migrating from the north, were an inland-people, without a natural inclination towards the maritime they considered the realm of the divine (143-144), and a threat to human safety (58-87, 242-243, 295). He uses Odysseus to illustrate a similar concept of the sea in ancient Greek epic (53).

<sup>3</sup> TARTARON 2013: 1-11.

livelihood by means of overseas commerce, and their art testifies to a gradually growing dominance over the sea.<sup>4</sup> Allegedly, the downfall of Mycenaean civilisation and trade network also came from the sea: a purported seafaring confederation of naval raiders, the Sea Peoples, harried the coastal towns and cities of the Mediterranean region between c. 1276-1178 BCE, contributing to the Bronze Age Collapse.<sup>5</sup> Early Greek epic is seen as somehow reflecting the outlook on the world of the Mycenaean, as well as that of their Greek speaking successors during the Dark Ages, and the first generations of the Archaic period – including their view of the sea.<sup>6</sup> In Hesiod's *Theogony* (c. 750 BCE), the Sea is Earth's child (*Th.* 132). The Sea produces the goddess Aphrodite from the severed testicles of Sky (*Th.* 188-200), and, together with his mother Earth, a line of sea deities, nymphs, and monsters (*Th.* 233-239). The Titan Oceanus is Sea's half-brother, a son of Earth and Sky (*Th.* 133), himself father of 3.000 Oceanid nymphs, as well as all the rivers, fountains and lakes of the world (*Th.* 362-369). As soon as the Olympian gods took over,<sup>7</sup> the primordial power of the sea resided under the supervision of Zeus' brother Poseidon (*Th.* 15, cf. 885).<sup>8</sup> In Homer's *Iliad* (c. 800 BCE),<sup>9</sup> dealing with the first 51 days of the

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*: 12-47.

<sup>5</sup> BETANCOURT 2000; ARTZY 2013; WHITTAKER 2017; WACHSMANN 2020. MOREU 2003 argues that the Mycenaean were themselves partly to blame: having attacked Anatolian cities like Troy, they caused mass migration of the Sea Peoples to Palestine and the Egyptian borders.

<sup>6</sup> BEAULIEU 2016: 21-58. This view did not venture out on the Atlantic Ocean, cf. NESSELRATH 2005: 158-161.

<sup>7</sup> In the fight, both Sea and Oceanus are desiccated by Zeus' fiery power (Hes. *Th.* 695-696).

<sup>8</sup> Together with Hecate, cf. Hes. *Th.* 440-443.

<sup>9</sup> The dating of the Homeric poems is highly debated, as is their authorship: «some naively put him at the end of the Trojan War itself, overlooking certain passages which clearly treat the heroes as belonging to an era remote from the poet's. [...] Herodotus (2.53.2) opines that Hesiod and Homer lived "400 years before me, and not more", in clear opposition to earlier datings. [...] There were those who put him [...] in the time of Gyges and Archilochus. [...] But these preserved epics must date from an epoch when writing was available for their fixation: [...] it follows that no date before 800 BCE can be considered» (WEST 2011: 15). WEST 2012 argues that the Hesiodic poems predate the *Iliad*.

tenth year of the Trojan war, the sea has already lost its primal regenerative force as a divine being: it is still awesome as a force of nature, and as an instrument in the hands of a benign or vengeful god. The sea of the *Iliad* separates the Greek warriors from their home land for the duration of the war. They had to cross the waters to reach Troy, and they will cross it only once more: on their way home, a crossing that is considered final, and foreseen as irrevocable (*Il.* I 169-171, cf. II 134-141). In the *Odyssey*, composed roughly a generation after the *Iliad*,<sup>10</sup> the sea is a threat from the start (*Od.* I 4, I 11-12, I 20): Odysseus has had to wander its paths for ten years before the narrative starts, and, stuck on an island in unfamiliar waters, he has to venture out on the open sea again to reach his homeland Ithaca (*Od.* I 16-18).<sup>11</sup> Once he has reached Ithaca, talking to his subjects and his loved ones disguised by Athena as a beggar, the sea functions merely as the background of Odysseus' Cretan lying tales, a convenient frame of reference to explain his vague and hard-to-check, assumed identity, much like it did on Scheria: in his "autobiography" at the table of the Phaeacians, Odysseus equally uses the sea as an alternative world, explaining his disappearance from the moment he left Troy until his resurfacing on the island of the Phaeacians. In this article, I argue that the sea of Odysseus' alleged wanderings is not the territory suggested by its map, but rather an all-encompassing narratological frame: the sea keeps the isolated locations of Odysseus' misadventures together. As such, the sea functions as the tapestry into which the separate episodes are embroidered.<sup>12</sup> The sea in the *Apologue* is not just salty, dark-coloured water: it is the continuum in which Odysseus's mind roams, looking for anchor points to which to attach tales and episodes. Searching the virtual space of his imagination, Odysseus

<sup>10</sup> And often considered to be the work of the older poet Homer, though there is no evidence for common authorship (WILSON 2018: 23). The familiarity of the *Odyssey*'s composer with the *Iliad* is evident throughout the former epic narrative, though, cf. MINCHIN 2018.

<sup>11</sup> BONIFAZI 2009: 481 «In Homer, *nostos* means first and foremost 'return home from Troy by sea'».

<sup>12</sup> Much like Helen's «self-referential» weaving (*Il.* III 121-145), indicating «her readiness to take responsibility for the course of events' as "a vehicle of self-expression"», ROISMAN 2006: 9-11.

presents his series of misadventures and their remote locations as islands in isolation, and uses the sea as an equally virtual space to frame them.

## 2. NARRATORS AND THE SEA

In the *Odyssey*, the account of the final 31 days of Odysseus' ten-year journey home, the legendary poet Homer is the primary, but not the only narrator. Various other narrators take the stage to deliver direct speech narratives. In his "autobiography" at the table of the Phaeacians on their island Scheria, Odysseus speaks for approximately 2.200 lines (*Od.* IX 2-11.330, XI 378-XII 453), practically replacing Homer as the primary narrator.<sup>13</sup>

Various narrators speak of the sea. Primary narrator Homer opens with it, stating that his epic's hero 'suffered many setbacks at sea' («πολλὰ δ' ὄ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα», *Od.* I 4a),<sup>14</sup> 'trying to preserve his own life and his comrades' safe return home' («ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων», *Od.* I 5) – apparently both are threatened by the waters. A few lines later, the poet singles out Odysseus as the only Greek warrior who has not yet escaped war and sea:

ἐνθ' ἄλλοι μὲν πάντες, ὅσοι φύγον αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον,  
οἴκοι ἔσαν, πόλεμόν τε πεφευγότες ἠδὲ θάλασσαν:  
τὸν δ' οἷον νόστου κεχρημένον ἠδὲ γυναικὸς  
νύμφη πότνι' ἔρυκε, Καλυψὼ δῖα θεάων,  
ἐν σπέεσι γλαφυροῖσι, λιλαιομένη πόσιν εἶναι.  
(Hom. *Od.* I 11-15)

<sup>13</sup> BLANKENBORG 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Quotations from the *Odyssey* are taken from HOMERUS, *Odyssea* [West]. Translations are by the author.

‘At that time, all who had escaped horrible ruin were at home, safe from both war and sea. Him alone, longing for his return home and for his wife, a powerful nymph kept prisoner in her vaulted caves, Calypso, radiant goddess – she longed for him to become her husband’.

At the epic’s start, the war is over, but the sea is still a difficulty to overcome for the epic’s eponymous hero. And with it, or symbolised through it, the sea god remains a challenge for Odysseus:<sup>15</sup>

[...] θεοὶ δ' ἐλείπειν ἅπαντες  
νόσφι Ποσειδάωνος: ὁ δ' ἀσπερχές μενέαινε  
ἀντιθέω Ὀδυσῆϊ πάρος ἦν γαῖαν ἰκέσθαι.  
(Hom. *Od.* I 19b-21)

‘All the gods took pity save for Poseidon: he kept grudging against godlike Odysseus, endlessly, as long as the latter had not reached his homeland’.

The poet has Zeus explain the reason behind Poseidon’s – and the sea’s – hindrance:<sup>16</sup>

ἀλλὰ Ποσειδάων γαίηρος ἀσκελὲς αἰεὶ

<sup>15</sup> As, in principle, for everyone crossing the sea, cf. Peisistratus’ incentive to Athena and Telemachus to pray to Poseidon upon arrival in Pylos (the sacrifice in progress happens to be specifically for the god of the sea). In her reply, Athena, disguised as Mentor, links the notion of travelling over sea with Poseidon’s particular care for the safe return: ‘Allow Telemachus and me to return safely after concluding our affairs, since we arrived here in a fast, black ship’ («δὸς δ’ ἔτι Τηλέμαχον καὶ ἐμὲ πρήξαντα νέεσθαι, οὐνεκα δεῦρ’ ἰκόμεσθα θοῆ σὺν νηὶ μελαίνῃ», *Od.* III 60-61). Cf. the interpretation of the crossing of the sea as a *rite de passage* in the quest for parental recognition and political leadership in BEAULIEU 2016: 59-89.

<sup>16</sup> MORRISON 2014: 9-29 argues for a structural role for Poseidon’s shipwrecking of Odysseus, as each opportunity forces Odysseus to fight to regain his identity; cf. the sea’s supposed «cathartic working» in PATTON 2007: 55-78.

Κύκλωπος κεχόλωται, ὄν ὄφθαλμοῦ ἀλάωσεν,  
ἀντίθεον Πολύφημον, ὃο κράτος ἐστὶ μέγιστον  
πᾶσιν Κυκλώπεσσι· Θόωσα δέ μιν τέκε νύμφη,  
Φόρκυος θυγάτηρ ἄλδος ἀτρυγέτιοι μέδοντος,  
ἐν σπέεσι γλαφυροῖσι Ποσειδάωνι μιγεῖσα.  
ἐκ τοῦ δὴ Ὀδυσῆα Ποσειδάων ἐνοσίχθων  
οὐ τι κατακτείνει, πλάζει δ' ἀπὸ πατρίδος αἴης.  
(Hom. *Od.* I 68-75)

‘Poseidon the Earth-shaker, however, is still, and endlessly, enraged because of the cyclops, whom Odysseus deprived of his eye, godlike Polyphemus, whose strength is greatest of all cyclopes. The nymph Thoosa, daughter of Phorcys, lord of the infinite sea, begot him having had sex with Poseidon in vaulted caves. That is why Earthquaker Poseidon tries, but cannot kill Odysseus, though he makes him wander far from his native land’.

Odysseus is not the only one, though, who suffered from the sea, in addition to the turmoil of war. In his own account as a narrator, Menelaus attributes a large part of his and Helen’s sufferings on their way home from Troy to the gods. It took them eight years to return to Sparta (*Od.* IV 82), and their journey home brought them to Cyprus, Phoenicia, Ethiopia, and Libya.<sup>17</sup> Menelaus used his long voyage to gather wealth, but in the eighth year he discovered that there was a reason behind his extended journey home – and that there were consequences. Stuck on the island Pharos for twenty days, and unable to find the way home, Menelaus takes Eidothea’s advice to force her father Proteus, the ‘old man of the sea’, to tell him how to return to Sparta. From Proteus Menelaus learns that he should have sacrificed to the gods before departure from Troy; it is their doing that he will not return before having brought proper sacrifice in Egypt (*Od.* IV 772-480).

<sup>17</sup> His journey sketches an alternative for the “alternative world” Odysseus himself presents in his *Apologoi*, cf. VAN NORTWICK 2009: 121-126.

Meanwhile, so Proteus informs him, Menelaus' brother Agamemnon has been murdered, without his brother present to help him (*Od.* IV 90-92).<sup>18</sup>

Disguised as a beggar in his own house, Odysseus deliberately uses the sea to frame his lying tales in order to hide his true identity. As he cannot pose as an indigenous Ithacan, his presence as a beggar on the island implies having arrived by ship. Remarkably enough, he chooses another island as his alleged homeland: Crete.<sup>19</sup> In his constructed identities, Odysseus carefully duplicates the requirements of his arrival on Ithaca: anyone arriving on an island must have come from overseas, and be prone to resorts to travel by ship as he originates from an island himself.<sup>20</sup> The obviousness of sea travel is emphasized by mentioning episodes from personal history that equally imply naval routes and voyages by ship. In Odysseus' lying tale upon arrival on Ithaca to Athena, for example, he not only claims descend from Crete, but also refers to his participation in the Trojan war (*Od.* XIII 262-266), and his dependency on others (*i.e.* Phoenician sailors, *Od.* XIII 272-286) to escape Crete. To Eumaeus, he confesses to a preference for ships and seafaring (*Od.* XIV 224-231): having returned from the Trojan war, so Odysseus claims, he embarked on a sea journey to Egypt. There, his mutinous crew was slain by the locals. Odysseus himself stayed with the king for seven years. Then a Phoenician took him on board to Phoenicia, and on to Libya. Shipwrecked he landed in Thesprotia where he

<sup>18</sup> The parting of Agamemnon and Menelaus immediately after leaving Troy for Greece was apparently due to a quarrel, traces of which may be discerned in the *Iliad*, the cyclic *Nostoi*, and some dramas of Euripides, cf. SAMMONS 2014.

<sup>19</sup> To Athena, *Od.* XIII 256-286; to Eumaeus, *Od.* XIV 191-359; to Penelope, *Od.* XIX 165-202, XIX 221-248, XIX 262-307, XIX 336-342. Recurrent elements of his speeches are, next to the focus on Crete as his homeland, his relationship to Idomeneus, his Cretan family, his reason for leaving (or having to leave), his arrival on Ithaca, and an account of the "real Odysseus", cf. HAFT 1984; REECE 1994; VAN NORTWICK 2009: 45-64.

<sup>20</sup> In the opening of Book 4 of his *Laws*, in a discussion concerning the relationship between constitution and natural terrain, Plato has the Stranger argue that isolated (island) location and agricultural self-dependence facilitate the development of virtue in new cities (as well as close-minded stances towards what comes from outside, cf. FAGAN 2013: 105-107).



allegedly met the “real Odysseus”. Having set sail for Dulichium, he is taken prisoner but escapes his guards and floats to Ithaca. Lying to his wife, Odysseus claims to have taken a similar island-hopping route, via Thesprotia and Dulichium to Ithaca. Hiding his identity from Penelope, Odysseus suggests that the “real Odysseus’s” return is delayed because the hero keeps on sailing (via Dodona, *Od.* XIX 296) looking for opportunities to gather more possessions (*Od.* XIX 282b-286). In all the Cretan lying tales, the sea is consistently used to make individuals’ origins and their wanderings harder to trace: not surprisingly, of course, as Odysseus has to carefully mix truth with falsehood to both convince his audience on specific points (especially with regard to the route taken by the “real Odysseus” to and from Troy, and his encounters with detectable individuals) while simultaneously erasing any traceable clues to his own identity.<sup>21</sup> Given the dangers and limited opportunities for sea travel, and the vague notions of overseas lands the internal audience (Eumaeus, Penelope) has never visited, references to rather unknown and practically unreachable locations mystify the narrator’s antecedents – the more as he envisions a sequence of stages and some island-hopping to further conceal the truth. The sea is thus Odysseus’ «storyworld».<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Though he knowingly unveils too much from time to time, thus endangering his hidden identity: his old dog Argos recognizes him (*Od.* XVII 291-327) due to its strong sense of smell and hearing. His nurse Eurycleia recognizes Odysseus’ scar (*Od.* XIX 390-393b), immediately after her own alarming statement that the beggar’s appearance, voice and feet are more like Odysseus’ than anyone’s she had ever met (*Od.* XIX 380-381). LOUDEN 2011: 80 argues against the intuition that mortals are in principle capable of seeing through Odysseus’ god-imposed disguise.

<sup>22</sup> RYAN 2019: 63 regards «storyworlds as totalities that encompass space, time and individuated existents that undergo transformations as the result of events. Worlds can be thought of in two ways: as containers for entities that possess a physical mode of existence (events can be considered such entities because they affect solid objects and are anchored in time and space) and as networks of relations between these entities. By insisting on existents, events, and change, this conception of worlds links them to the basic conditions of narrativity».

### 3. THE SEA OF THE *APOLOGUE*

Not every storyworld is automatically a fictional world, despite the overlap between the two. A storyworld has to ensure narrativity through the image of a world that needs to be distinguished from the world being represented; a fictional world creates its own world in addition to narrativity.<sup>23</sup> In the storyworld of the Cretan lying tales, the narrator Odysseus carefully refers to events and location his audience will, or may, have heard of: Crete, Troy, Dulichium, Phoenicia, Lybia, Thesprotia, Dodona, Egypt. In his *Apologue*, it is less obvious whether he is still applying a storyworld as his narratological frame, or rather a (partly) fictional world.<sup>24</sup> Modern consensus tends to consider the *Apologue's* geography “imaginative renderings of actual places”.<sup>25</sup> Most states that «within the fiction of the *Odyssey*, the *Apologoi* are described as true»,<sup>26</sup> but such a claim is not explicitly made for every episode.<sup>27</sup> Parry argues that the original external audience of the *Odyssey* accepted the *Apologue* as truth.<sup>28</sup> De Jong considers the episodes of the *Apologue* sufficiently authenticated to be true.<sup>29</sup> In my view, most of the adventures are not since they are only “authenticated” after, and because, Odysseus relates them.<sup>30</sup> His *Apologue* serves purposes similar to the Cretan lying tales, and is equally tailored to its internal audience: between its first and its last port of call there is no need for truthfulness. Both Odysseus’ starting point (Troy, Thrace, Cape Malea, Goat Island) and his last port of call (Ogygia) are real enough for the *Apologue's* internal audience: the Phaeacians on

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*: 62-63.

<sup>24</sup> RICHARDSON 1996 assumes that the balance between truth and fiction depends on the audience identity.

<sup>25</sup> DOUGHERTY 2001.

<sup>26</sup> MOST 1989: 19.

<sup>27</sup> LANE FOX 2008: 165-184 presents a recent overview of scholarly views that deny historical or geographical accurateness in the *Apologue*.

<sup>28</sup> PARRY 1994.

<sup>29</sup> DE JONG 2001.

<sup>30</sup> BLANKENBORG 2019.

Scheria.<sup>31</sup> They have heard of Troy and the Trojan war, and will have recognized the dwellings of both the cyclopes and Calypso. The latter two, Goat Island and Ogygia, are both known to the Phaeacians (cf. *Od.* VI 4-6, VI 172, XII 447-453). The remaining alleged misadventures of Odysseus appear to belong to a storyworld that is a fictional world in the eyes of the internal audience as well.

The sea forms the background for Odysseus' *Apologue* in various ways, starting with his undisputed voyage to Troy, and his leaving the city after victory in war. The sea is also the opposite of the *nostos*, the safe return home Odysseus longs for (*Od.* I 13). During the ten years of war at Troy, the sea kept him irrevocably separated from his loved ones: a separation referred to as 'following Agamemnon to Troy' (e.g. *Od.* XIX 125-126). Following the war, as long as his whereabouts are unknown, his being far away at sea equals death (*Od.* II 182-183: for the suitors, Telemachus' venturing out to the sea equally suggests that others [especially Penelope] may accept his death more easily [*Od.* II 332-336, IV 669-672]).<sup>32</sup>

In his *Apologue*, Odysseus immediately applies the sea as his setting: «Ἰλίοθεν με φέρων ἄνεμος Κικόνεσσι πέλασσαν» 'From Troy the wind got hold of me and drove me to the Cicones' (*Od.* IX 29). Others, notably Nestor (*Od.* III 157-164) and Menelaus, state that Odysseus left Troy together with Agamemnon after performing a sacrifice, though,<sup>33</sup> Odysseus himself claims to have attacked the city of the Cicones without mentioning the leader of the Greek army (*Od.* IX 39-40). His account is suggestive, though, of the presence of other Greek commanders (*Od.* IX 43-44), and possibly of an entire Greek

<sup>31</sup> And thus contribute to the *Apologue*'s pragmatic purpose, *vis-a-vis* the stakes set by Odysseus' interaction with the Phaeacians, cf. PUCCI 1998; HOPMAN 2012: 21-23; BLANKENBORG 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Despite the unavoidable uncertainty that makes it virtually impossible for near and dear ones to officially proclaim his death (*Od.* II 218-223); cf. the reliability and official status of the 'death on land' (*Od.* I 197).

<sup>33</sup> At first, Odysseus left with Nestor and Diomedes and sailed to Lesbus, but in second instance he decided to return to Troy to join Agamemnon (*Od.* III 153-163). CERVENY 1993: 1027 suggests that Odysseus' return to Troy has to do with a more favourable return to Ithaca via Thrace.

armada (*Od.* IX 59).<sup>34</sup> Both Odysseus and Agamemnon reached Cape Malea, (nearly) the southernmost tip of the Peloponnese, and both were vexed by storm there: Agamemnon was blown of course to Aegisthus' house (*Od.* IV 514-522), Odysseus was driven to the south, 'away from Cythera' (*Od.* IX 81).<sup>35</sup> Presumably, judging by Odysseus' account, he and Agamemnon did not reach Cape Malea together: had they both been blown to Thyestes' land, Odysseus might have helped to save Agamemnon's life! Instead, he did not see land for nine days and nights, venturing into a landscape that cannot be traced on the map.<sup>36</sup> It is inhabited by monsters and nymphs, some of whom Odysseus' internal audience is familiar with, though most must have appeared to be products of the imagination, even in the eyes of the entertainment-seeking Phaeacians (*Od.* XI 362-369).<sup>37</sup>

Odysseus' journey through the fairy-tale world of the *Apologue* is made by ship, and the various ports of call seem to be accessible only from the sea. Having been blown from Cape Malea, Odysseus reaches the land of the Lotus-eaters after nine days of continuous sailing, an impossibly long stretch for seafarers used to sail via a succession of islands and promontories whose main function was to direct maritime routes.<sup>38</sup> Though the Lotus-eaters mean them no harm, it is clear that their hospitality is both exotic and potentially dangerous. Odysseus does not explain where the land of the Lotus-eaters is

<sup>34</sup> According to *Il.* II 846 and XVII 73 the Cicones were allies of the Trojans.

<sup>35</sup> If Odysseus and Agamemnon did not sail together, Agamemnon may have taken an island-hopping route southwards from Chius, bringing him to Cape Malea on the sixth day of his voyage home. The storm that drove him to Aegisthus' land was then the same cyclonic event that killed Ajax, and forced Odysseus to land his fleet for repairs (*Od.* IX 70-75). Odysseus approached Cape Malea three days later, driven by a strong wind from the north and rather large waves. Today, Cape Malea is still known for its storminess, especially in early summer (CERVENY 1993).

<sup>36</sup> Despite many attempts to do so, the first already in antiquity, cf. HEUBECK - HOEKSTRA 1989: 4-5; HALLER 2011; ROMM 2011.

<sup>37</sup> PUCCI 1998; BALLABRIGA 1998; GRETHLEIN 2017; BLANKENBORG 2019.

<sup>38</sup> MAURO 2019: 32.

located, but from there it is only a short trip to Goat Island, the advance natural harbour of the land of the Cyclopes (*Od.* IX 105-106). With the eye of an expert colonist, Odysseus immediately acknowledges the potential of the island:<sup>39</sup> had the Cyclopes, who do not build ships themselves, not been around, men could have made a prosperous settlement there (*Od.* IX 119-130). Out of curiosity, Odysseus visits the land of the Cyclopes, visible from Goat Island, only to find violence and destruction. Having escaped the monster, and after taunting his defeated enemy, he is cursed by the blinded cyclops, a son of Poseidon. Polyphemus' curse emphasizes the sea's threat to one's life and possessions, particularly a ship:

δὸς μὴ Ὀδυσσῆα πτολιπόρθητον οἶκαδ' ἰκέσθαι  
υἷὸν Λαέρτεω, Ἰθάκῃ ἐν οἴκῳ ἔχοντα.  
ἀλλ' εἴ οἱ μοῖρ' ἐστὶ φίλους τ' ἰδέειν καὶ ἰκέσθαι  
οἶκον ἐυκτίμενον καὶ ἐὴν ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν,  
ὄψε' κακῶς ἔλθοι, δόλεσας ἄπο πάντας ἑταίρους,  
νηὸς ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίης, εὖροι δ' ἐν πῆματά οἴκῳ.  
(Hom. *Od.* IX 530-535)

'Grant that the city-destroyer Odysseus, son of Laertes, never reach his home, which he holds on Ithaca. But if it is fated that he sees his dear ones and reaches his well-build house and native country, may he then arrive late, after losing all his comrades, on a ship that is not his own, and find nothing but sorrow there'.

From Goat Island it appears to be only a short trip to the island of Aeolus, the god of winds (again there is no mention of a night's sailing, *Od.* X 1). Apparently, the winds from Cape Malea brought Odysseus to the west, as it is a western wind that takes him back to Ithaca from Aeolus, a sea voyage that, again, takes nine days and nights (*Od.* X

<sup>39</sup> REINHARDT 1996: 78; RINON 2007: 108-110; LANE FOX 2008: 73-88.

28). There is a difference, however between the nine days of sailing from Cape Malea, and the nine days of sailing from Aeolia: the latter was with a steady, but favourable wind, the former due to storms. It is therefore likely that the distance covered from Cape Malea to the west constituted many more sea miles than the journey from Aeolia to Ithaca. Odysseus does not reach Ithaca this time: a storm takes him back to Aeolia, presumably in less days than it took to reach his home land.<sup>40</sup> From there, Odysseus and his men travel for six days before they reach Telepylus, the land of the Laetrygonians (*Od.* X 80-82), and another to reach Circe's island Aeaea (*Od.* X 134-135). From Aeaea it takes only a day to reach the edge of the world, the rim of Oceanus (*Od.* XI 11-13), and a night to return (*Od.* XII 1-7). The short distance to the world's edge, in southern direction (*Od.* X 507), may strike an audience as peculiar, but it only underlines the proximity to the rim of Oceanus of all the other fairy-tale adventures. Departing from Circe's island for the second time, Odysseus sets sail for Ithaca again, having received instructions for a successful return journey from both the soul of the deceased seer Teiresias in the Netherworld (*Od.* XI 104-115), and from Circe (*Od.* XII 39-110, 127-138). The latter links Odysseus' perilous sea voyage to a remarkably successful ship («Ἄργῳ πᾶσι μέλουσα» 'the Argo, dear to all', *Od.* XII 70) from the mythological (and her personal)<sup>41</sup> past, thereby leaving only one option open for Odysseus: he cannot imitate what the world's first ship accomplished (negotiating moving rocks in a distant, mythical sea),<sup>42</sup> so his route to Thrinacia is via Scylla and Charybdis.

<sup>40</sup> This storm differs from the first one (from Cape Malea) in that it is a punishment rather than a natural phenomenon, cf. REINHARDT 1996: 67.

<sup>41</sup> Circe is the sister of Aetes (*Od.* XII 70), the mythological king of Colchis where Jason had to go to obtain the golden fleece.

<sup>42</sup> Homer's version may well be derived from a pre-Homeric *Argonautica* referenced here; WEST 2005 argues that all the misadventures are somehow modelled on a pre-Homeric *Argonautica*, relocating the adventurous journey, originally in the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, to the still lesser known western waters. Originally, Jason may have caused the rocks to stand still due to his successful passage. The poet of the *Odyssey*

It is therefore reasonable to estimate Odysseus' voyage home from Circe at roughly seventeen days and nights, with a "favourable wind" from the west (cf. *Od.* XII 149-150). His account is not very precise, though: 'soon' after departure from Aeaëa, he reports, they pass by the Sirens (*Od.* XII 166), and 'immediately after leaving them behind' (*Od.* XII 201-202) Odysseus' ship enters the small strait between Scylla and Charybdis. 'Right after that' (*Od.* XII 261) they reach Thrinacia, the island where the Sun God herds his cattle. Odysseus' men eat the cows, against Teiresias' and Circe's warning,<sup>43</sup> and board the ship when the breeze is calm, but as soon as land is out of sight, a storm destroys the ship and drives the floating Odysseus over the course of the night back to Charybdis (*Od.* XII 429-430).<sup>44</sup> Keeping himself from being swallowed by clinging on to a branch for the whole day (*Od.* XII 439-441), Odysseus finally lets go and then keeps floating for nine days before reaching Ogygia, the island of Calypso. Seven years later, he leaves the island again and reaches Scheria after sailing for seventeen days on a calm breeze, and a shipwreck (*Od.* V 278); keeping Ursa Major on the left (*Od.* V 272-277), Odysseus continuously progressed to the east. From Scheria to Ithaca takes one night (*Od.* XIII 93-95) on the magical Phaeacian ship, whose rowers make it cross the sea's paths faster than the fastest bird. Even for us, the external audience of the *Odyssey*, it proves impossible to fathom the distances that keep the imaginary world of the Phaeacians and the "real" world of the *Odyssey*'s Ithaca apart.

The landscape of the *Odyssey*'s secondary narrator's wanderings - that is: Odysseus' - fits in with what his internal audience is used to, or willing to imagine: a

«borrowed the motif of a dangerous passage between hazards, and attempted to outdo the older version with the option Odysseus chooses, steering between Scylla and Charybdis» (HEUBECK - HOEKSTRA 1989: 121).

<sup>43</sup> On the special status of cattle in epic narrative, see MCINERNEY 2010: 74-96.

<sup>44</sup> This storm is meant as punishment too, though both contrivers, Zeus (as the executioner) and the Sun God (as the commissioner), have no direct ties with Poseidon, whose area of power is used to exact the retribution, in the matter; cf. SEGAL 1994: 195-228; ALLEN 2006: 22-23.

landscape that is consistently hard (or virtually impossible) to travel in.<sup>45</sup> This landscape consists not of a geographical continuum, but of a limited number of main points of interest that are isolated and remote. The remote, island-like anchor points can only be reached by ship, just as the Phaeacian land Scheria, home to Odysseus' hosts, and Ithaca can only be reached by ship. The sea keeps the isolated locations together within a frame of danger and the threat of death and punishment; the individual stops are all as isolated and remote as are the events tied to them. Searching the virtual space of his imagination, Odysseus presents his series of misadventures and their remote locations as islands in isolation, and uses the sea as an equally virtual space to frame them. Doing so he answers the Phaeacians implicit question («if you really are Odysseus, the legendary hero we know fought and triumphed in Troy, why have you washed up on our shores without comrades and possessions?») by making it impossible to follow his trace – exactly as he does when disguising his identity in the Cretan lying tales.

#### 4. EXPANDING THE FRAME

In both the Cretan tales and the *Apologue*, Odysseus mixes truth with falsehood. Usually, both the start and the completion of the tale contain elements from reality that are considered as well-known to the internal audience (e.g. since the audience mentioned the element beforehand, as the Phaeacian king Alcinous mentions the cyclopes), or, alternatively, relatively easy for them to check (e.g. the mention of Idomeneus as king of Crete). The episodes that make up the body-text of the tale, isolated, random visits to remote location without reliable indications of distance, travel time, and route, are explicitly labelled as lies by the primary narrator, or too fantastic to be believed by even

<sup>45</sup> CHIARINI 1991 argues for the overall labyrinthine pattern of the journey described in *Odyssey* IX-XII as reminiscent of ritual dance movements.



the most credulous audience. The landscape evoked in the body-text of the tales is hence both a storyworld and a fictional world. De Jong allows for what she labels «focalized space» in Odysseus' elaborate “Cretan” lying tales: she uses the label to account for the notion that Odysseus' description of places and events merely serves to highlight his own objectives when telling a story.<sup>46</sup> These objectives include, of course, hiding his true identity and creating an interesting but untraceable background to his story and his origins. In my view, Odysseus' *Apologue* equally serves as «focalized space»:<sup>47</sup> for the story-weaving Odysseus, the sea is the fictitious tapestry.<sup>48</sup>

Within the *Apologue*, reported speakers appear to use the sea as a framing narratological device in ways that resemble Odysseus'. The cyclops Polyphemus equals new arrivals in his land as pirates,<sup>49</sup> as they must have come over the sea:

ὦ ξεῖνοι, τίνες ἐστέ; πόθεν πλεῖθ' ὑγρά κέλευθα;  
ἧ τι κατὰ πρῆξιν ἧ μαψιδίως ἀλάλησθε,  
οἶά τε ληιστήρες, ὑπεῖρ ἄλλα, τοί τ' ἀλόωνται  
ψυχὰς παρθέμενοι κακὸν ἀλλοδαποῖσι φέροντες;  
(Hom. *Od.* IX 252-255)

‘Strangers, who are you? From where do you sail the watery paths? For commercial reasons? Or do you wander randomly over the sea, like pirates who go to and fro risking their lives, bringing trouble for those dwelling elsewhere?’.

<sup>46</sup> DE JONG 2012: 27.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. HOPMAN 2012: 21-25, and the «formative role of Odysseus as an eyewitness» in BASSI 2016: 64-105.

<sup>48</sup> HEATH 2011: 71-72; cf. NOSCH 2014. DOUGHERTY 2001: 13, 21-25 underscores the similarities between poetic composition and shipbuilding.

<sup>49</sup> On the difficulties in distinguishing trade from piracy in Homeric epic, see PEACOCK 2011: 9-15.

Blinded by Odysseus, and unable to destroy him by force, Polyphemus tries to lure the escaping hero back by promising him a safe sea journey («πομπήν τ' ὀτρύνω δόμεναι κλυτὸν ἐννοσίγαιον» 'I will urge the famous Earthquaker to grant you safe passage', *Od.* IX 517), only to curse him when Odysseus refuses. Several episodes further, Circe, like the cyclops, refers to the prediction of Odysseus' fatal arrival to her land from the sea (*Od.* X 330-331).<sup>50</sup> The Sirens present their isolated location as an inescapable oracle, remarkably enough only providing knowledge with regard to what happens on dry land (*Od.* XII 184-191). When Odysseus urges his men to avoid Thrinacia, Eurylochus, Odysseus' kinsman who has criticized him before, comments on the perils of their stay at sea: 'from the night time difficult winds arise, causing the destruction of ships' («ἐκ νυκτῶν δ' ἄνεμοι χαλεποί, δηλήματα νηῶν, γίγνονται», *Od.* XII 286-287a). As mentioned earlier, Zeus chooses to punish the comrades' transgressive behaviour on Thrinacia by 'hitting their swift ship with a shining thunderbolt when they are at high seas' («τῶν δέ κ' ἐγὼ τάχα νῆα θοὴν ἀργήτι κεραυνῶ τυτθὰ βαλὼν κέασαιμι μέσῳ ἐνὶ οἴνοπι πόντῳ», *Od.* XII 387-388).

Odysseus also reports the words of the deceased seer Teiresias, uttered at the entrance to the Netherworld. In addition to his warning words with regard to the risk and dangers that Odysseus needs to avoid if he wants to return to his home, his wife, and his kingship (partly repeated by Circe in *Od.* XII 127-141), Teiresias speaks of the sea, and its particular meaning to Odysseus' life after his return to Ithaca:<sup>51</sup>

ἔρχεσθαι δὴ ἔπειτα λαβῶν ἐυῆρες ἐρετμόν,  
 εἰς ὃ κε τοὺς ἀφίκηται οἱ οὐκ ἴσασι θάλασσαν  
 ἀνέρες, οὐδέ θ' ἄλεσσι μεμιγμένον εἶδαρ ἔδουσιν:  
 οὐδ' ἄρα τοί γ' ἴσασι νέας φοινικοπαρήους

<sup>50</sup> In addition to her description of the route that will bring Odysseus to Thrinacia, see footnote 42 *supra*.

<sup>51</sup> MANGUEL 2010: 141-148 argues for Teiresias' prophesy as a 'possible fate'.

οὐδ' ἐυήρε' ἔρετμά, τά τε πτερά νηυσὶ πέλονται.  
σήμα δέ τοι ἔρέω μάλ' ἀριφραδέες, οὐδέ σε λήσει·  
ὄππότε κεν δῆ τοι συμβλήμενος ἄλλος ὀδίτης  
φήη ἀθηρηλοῖγον ἔχειν ἀνά φαιδίμῳ ὤμῳ,  
καὶ τότε δὴ γαίῃ πήξας ἐυήρες ἔρετμόν,  
ρέξας ἱερὰ καλὰ Ποσειδάωνι ἄνακτι,  
ἀρνεῖον ταῦρόν τε συών τ' ἐπιβήτορα κάπρον,  
οἴκαδ' ἀποστειχέιν ἔρδειν θ' ἱεράς ἑκατόμβας  
ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσι,  
πᾶσι μάλ' ἐξείης. θάνατος δέ τοι ἐξ ἄλδος αὐτῷ  
ἀβληχρὸς μάλα τοῖος ἐλεύσεται, ὅς κέ σε πέφνη  
γῆραι ὑπο λιπαρῷ ἀρημένον· ἀμφὶ δὲ λαοὶ  
δλβιοὶ ἔσσονται. τὰ δέ τοι νημερτέα εἶρω.  
(Hom. *Od.* XI 121-137)<sup>52</sup>

‘Next you must pick up a broad oar and march until you will reach men who do not know the sea, and eat their food without the addition of salt. Obviously, they also know nothing about ships with purple sides, or broad oars, the ships’ wings. I will predict you a sign that cannot be misunderstood, and it will not escape your attention: when another traveller, coming your way, notices that you carry a sheaf over your shoulder, at that moment you must hammer the broad oar in the ground, perform beautiful sacrifice for Lord Poseidon – a ram, a bull and a boar, that covers the pigs -, and return home and offer holy hecatombs to the immortal gods, who hold the wide sky: all of them, in due order. For yourself death will come from the sea, a very mild death, that will finish you when you will have grown old in good health. The people around you will be prosperous. This I predict you as undisputable’.

<sup>52</sup> Repeated by Odysseus to Penelope in *Od.* XXIII 265-283.

Having escaped the sea, Odysseus has to embark on an inland journey that equally resembles an errand: like the sea, the territory of this inland journey is unmapped.<sup>53</sup> Odysseus risks getting lost, like he did at sea, until he receives the prophesized sign. Just like Zeus punished an offence on land with a thunderbolt at sea, so Odysseus has to appease the sea god in a context where the god's power is irrelevant: the logic of Odysseus' own fictional storyworld in his *Apologue* equally applies in the speeches he reports. This time around, however, the narratological frame of the storyworld is expanded beyond the *Apologue*, and even beyond the *Odyssey*: having escaped his own fiction - his virtual death in the perception of the rest of world - by finally leaving the sea behind and arriving on Ithaca, Odysseus temporarily finds *nostos* and peace, only to be haunted by the threatening sea again. The 'mild death from the sea' will eventually overtake the fugitive hero:<sup>54</sup> he cannot escape what the storyworld sea always symbolized, death. Coming from the sea, death extends what up until this point belonged to Odysseus' self-created storyworld: having been adopted by the primary narrator Homer, the virtual 'death-that-is-the-sea' has now been appropriated by the external audience of the *Odyssey*.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In archaic Greek narrative epic, the sea is the poet's storyworld: a vast territory suggestive of peril, separation, and unmappable distance. In Homer's *Iliad*, the sea is what keeps the warriors at Troy from their near and dear ones: a final obstacle to be faced in the future, after the fall of Troy that still has to be accomplished. At the start of the *Odyssey*, most

<sup>53</sup> PURVES 2006: 10-11. CIANI 2014: 13 states that much of the later development of Odysseus as a mythological figure is based on the notion that Teiresias' prophecy urges the hero to «pick up the oar again».

<sup>54</sup> In other accounts (Hes. *Th.* 1014; Ps.-Apollodorus *B.epit.* IV 7, 16, IV 7, 36-37; Hyg. *Fab.* 127, 125) Odysseus is accidentally killed by Telegonus, his son with Circe. The story was told in the epic narrative (now only available in summary) *Telegony*, cf. TSAGALIS 2014.

warriors successfully took this final obstacle; the epic focusses on those that have not yet, or found it difficult to overcome the final hindrance to a successful *nostos*. Both the primary and the secondary narrator of the *Odyssey* refer to a storyworld sea: Homer makes Telemachus sail it from Ithaca to Pylus and back, and Odysseus from Ogygia, via Scheria, to Ithaca. The secondary narrators Menelaus and Odysseus describe their departure from Troy, and their arrival home; disguised as a beggar in his own palace, Odysseus claims Cretan origin. In between departure and arrival, however, both make their storyworld sea develop into a fictional world. Both in his Cretan lying tales and in his *Apologue* at the table of the Phaeacians, Odysseus envisions a series of episodic stops and misadventures to bridge the gap between his departure from the traceable route (Cape Malea / Crete) and his resurfacing (on Scheria / Ithaca). The secondary narrator uses the unmapped territory of the sea to hold the isolated and hard-to-reach locations of the fictional world together, without regard for veracity: in an attempt to erase his steps and make his identity untraceable, Odysseus deliberately creates a mix of acceptable truth with enjoyable falsehood. Presenting his series of misadventures and their remote locations as islands in isolation, he uses the sea as a virtual space to frame them: a narratological device reflecting the virtual space of his imagination. In front of the *Odyssey*'s internal audience on Scheria, Odysseus makes the sea synonymous to threat and death, a fiction that he strives to leave behind when he reaches his native land. For the external audience, however, the narratological frame that is the fictional sea expands beyond Odysseus' *nostos*. And as Teiresias' warning words show, Odysseus somehow has to escape this fiction to find peace, though he cannot escape death coming from it.

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