

THE UNFRIENDLY PHAEACIANS

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Exhausted and worried, Odysseus prepares a rustic bed along the Phaeacian riverbank (end of *Odyssey* 5). Gazing with pleasure at his finished creation, he lies down and covers his body with a quilt of leaves. The poet compares him to a shepherd who carefully covers his torch so as to keep the fire alive through the night. Protective Athena helps him to fall quickly asleep and escape the weariness. But when he awakes Odysseus will find a beautiful princess, who will generously invite him to her father's magnificent home, where he will receive hospitality, gifts, an offer to marry the princess, and a safe return to Ithaca. Most impressive of all is the fact that the king will grant a passage home in spite of his own clear recollection that this very beneficence may bring Poseidon's wrath down upon his people (8.564-71). And so, as Odysseus sleeps on that Phaeacian riverbank, what greater contrast between past and future could there be? The man who escaped Poseidon's raging sea, who before that had spent ten years in grueling combat and an equal number encountering the dangers of giants, witches, and a mutinous crew, is securely alive at last and about to rejoin civilization.

Such indisputable facts as these have produced a near unanimity among Homeric scholars that, as one has phrased it, Odysseus "has reached a haven where uncertainty and hostility are suspended." He refers to "the calm, and perfect safety Odysseus finds among the Phaeacians."¹ Another states that "Phaeacia, the land blessedly

¹ C. P. Segal, "The Phaeacians and the Symbolism of Odysseus' Return," *Arion* 1.4 (1962) 59, note 10. I wish to thank Thomas G. Rosenmeyer and Anne Amory Parry for many helpful comments on this article, which is adapted from my dissertation (below, note 28).

remote from all enemies, is a windless paradise."² And yet, in response to the author of a third claim that the Phaeacians "are charitable to strangers,"³ F. M. Combellack gives the following rebuttal: "He must, I suppose, tacitly assume that when Athena, disguised as a Phaeacian girl, says precisely the opposite (7.32-33), she is either ignorant or lying":⁴

οὐ γὰρ ξείνους οἶδε μάλ' ἀνθρώπους ἀνέχονται,
οὐδ' ἀγαπαζόμενοι φιλέουσ' ὅς κ' ἄλλοθεν ἔλθῃ.

How, then, are we to reconcile Athena's warning with the fact that Odysseus does receive from the Phaeacians the succor he needs? Perhaps Athena means to imply that only the common people, and certainly not the royal family, abuse strangers.⁵ Alcinous does claim that no stranger in his house fails to be given an escort home (8.31-33). Furthermore, Athena would not be likely to encourage Odysseus to enter the home of a man who is utterly inhospitable. Against this twofold interpretation is the fact that Odysseus' problems definitely are not at an end when he successfully eludes observation by the townspeople. Both Nausicaa and Athena emphasize his need to win Arete's approval (6.303-15, 7.53-77), and this does not happen, as we will see, until Odysseus has been in Phaeacia for two whole days. During that time, moreover, he finds himself among a people whom he mistrusts, and not only because they mistrust him; what is more, his host is not entirely the sort of person upon whom he would wish to

² C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass. 1958) 121; others who express general agreement: E. Abrahamson, *The Adventures of Odysseus: Literary Studies* (St. Louis 1960) 4; C. R. Beye, *The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition* (Garden City, N. Y. 1966) 197; H. J. Kakridis, *La Notion de l'Amitié et de l'Hospitalité chez Homère* (Thessaloniki 1963) 93; G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge 1962) 363.

³ G. Lord, "The *Odyssey* and the Western World," *Essays on the Odyssey*, ed. C. H. Taylor, Jr. (Bloomington 1963) 46.

⁴ Combellack, review of *Essays on the Odyssey* (above, note 3) *CP* 59 (1964) 119. The scholium on this passage suggests that most ancient critics regarded the Phaeacian people as *philoxenōtatoi*, though this passage puzzled some.

⁵ A scholium on 7.16 calls the Phaeacian leaders *philanthrōpoi* unlike their subjects. Also in agreement are Eustathius 1566.10-15; W. W. Merry and J. Riddell, *Homer's Odyssey*² (Oxford 1886) 284; and W. B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer* 1 (London 1947) 322, note on 7.33. G. W. Nitzsch, *Erklärende Anmerkungen zu Homer's Odyssee* (Hannover 1826-1840) 2.137-38, dissatisfied with this explanation, claims that Athena here merely represents Odysseus' own worries, not objective reality.

be dependent. Finally, the warm acceptance which Odysseus eventually finds comes only in stages, each stage of which he must attain by his own efforts.

Still, one could attempt to explain away the difficulty by claiming, as M. I. Finley does, that the Phaeacians move from one pole of the regular Greek attitude towards strangers to the other—that is, from “fear, suspicion, distrust of the stranger” to “the general human obligation of hospitality” and even “lavish entertainment.”⁶ What, however, is the evidence in the *Odyssey* itself, apart from the Phaeacian episode, for the view that the Phaeacians simply resemble the Greeks generally in this matter? The only other proper (Greek) hosts are Telemachus in Book 1, Nestor and his son Peisistratus in Book 3, Menelaus in Book 4, and Eumaeus the swineherd in Book 14. Now Telemachus, Menelaus, and Eumaeus are exemplary in the promptness of their grace and warmth, so that in at least three of the four cases suspiciousness is totally absent, which would suffice to render Finley’s generalization inapplicable to the *Odyssey*. Even Nestor’s inquiry as to whether Telemachus and Athena might be merchants or pirates (3.72–74) probably betrays curiosity rather than suspicion. For, unlike Polyphemus, who asks Odysseus the same question (9.253–55), Nestor has already entertained his guests appropriately; his question comes at the properly hospitable moment. And Telemachus’ reply does not suggest that he has been placed on the defensive; on the contrary, he now finds the courage to speak up and to speak at length. Furthermore, it is Nestor’s son Peisistratus who greets the guests, and his attitude and behavior are impeccable.

The Phaeacians, then, rather than exemplifying the regular reaction toward strangers by the Greeks of the *Odyssey*, are really an exception, if it is true, as it certainly is, that they begin with “suspicion” and “distrust” and move gradually toward “lavish entertainment.” In the tendencies of scholars to regard the Phaeacians either as excellent hosts or as exemplars of the regular Greek attitude toward strangers, a close consideration of many details has been lacking. The entire Phaeacian episode is actually a demonstration of the hero’s ability to

⁶ M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York 1954) 106. Kakridis (above, note 2) 88, agrees.

gain the loyalty of a people who are far from ready to offer "a haven where uncertainty and hostility are suspended."

Regardless of how one evaluates Alcinous' hospitality—a complex matter to be discussed below—the Phaeacian commoners are undoubtedly hostile to foreigners. Nausicaa provides the earliest hints when she says, firstly, that her people are securely isolated from the rest of mankind (6.204–5).⁷ Even under the best of circumstances this would tend to inspire nervousness in Odysseus, for the whole poem demonstrates that friendly relations with foreigners were a valued and expected feature of civilized Achaean society. In the present situation, however, the fact of isolation is the more disturbing, since it is utterly necessary that the Phaeacians become committed to Odysseus.

More worrisome still is the insight that the common people are simply a bad lot: according to Nausicaa, *μάλα δ' εἰσὶν ὑπερφίαλοι κατὰ δῆμον* (6.274). If the Phaeacians are *hyperphialoi*, they are in consistently bad company in terms of the entire poem. The word is nearly restricted to Penelope's suitors, even when it appears to carry a neutral sense of "great(ly)." The only other characters of whom it is used are Locrian Ajax (4.503), the Cyclopes (9.106), and lastly Telemachus (4.663, 16.346), one of those instances in which the suitors ascribe to others what in reality fits themselves.⁸

One might plausibly object that since Nausicaa, newly but intensely interested in marriage, is undeniably making a play for Odysseus, she may wish to inject a note of modesty and coyness. But in the beginning of Book 7 the poet conclusively dispels this objection, when he informs the audience (7.16–17) that Athena hides Odysseus in a cloud,

*μή τις Φαιήκων μεγαθύμων ἀντιβολήσας
κερτομέοι ἐπέεσσι καὶ ἐξερέοιθ' ὅτις εἴη.*

Athena's fear may not seem at first sight very significant. Nevertheless, *κερτομέοι* probably embodies hostility, and *ἐξερέοιθ' ὅτις εἴη* represents a lack of proper hospitality, since one may question a

⁷ According to H. W. Clarke, *The Art of the Odyssey* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1967) 54, the Phaeacians "seem to prefer to live in a kind of splendid isolation, . . . where they can avoid contamination with the rest of the world."

⁸ An excellent example is Antinous' comparison of Odysseus with Eurytion the centaur as a heavy drinker (21.293–304), whereas Antinous himself, Odysseus' first victim, gets an arrow in the throat as he is about to gulp some wine (22.9–16).

stranger only after entertaining him. The inquiry, moreover, would imperil Odysseus' safety; he conceals his identity as long as he does, partly because in order to avoid a hostile reaction he must make himself believable as the Trojan-War hero. *Kertomeô* and its cognates occur ten times in the *Odyssey*.⁹ In five of these, the words are used of the cruel derision by the suitors or their miserable ally, Melanthius, against Odysseus (16.87, 18.350, 20.177, 20.263) or Telemachus (2.323). In three additional instances Odysseus either is or supposes himself to be the target of abuse (8.153, 13.326, and here, where it is to be avoided). Odysseus himself does the abusing in the remaining examples, once of his enemy Polyphemus (9.474) and once of his father (24.240). In the last example teasing rather than hostile derision is involved. Of the seven occurrences in the *Iliad*, four plainly embody hostility (1.539, 2.256, 20.202, 20.433), while the other three seem to mean "tease" (4.6, 5.419, 16.261). Hence, not only does the word in Homer usually connote real hostility, but like *hyperphialoi* it suggests a similarity between the Phaeacians and the suitors, the most flagrantly outrageous of Odysseus' enemies.

Further confirmation of Phaeacian audacity is then given to Odysseus himself by the disguised Athena. She warns him against even looking at anybody on his way to Alcinous' house, on the grounds that these people neither tolerate strangers nor treat them in a friendly and hospitable manner (7.30-33).¹⁰ Later, Arete herself will instruct Odysseus to lock securely the chest containing his gifts, in order to prevent the Phaeacian crew from stealing them during his sleep (8.443-45). This possibility should remind Odysseus of how his own treacherous crew twice took advantage of his sleep—when they opened Aeolus' bag of winds and when they slaughtered Helius' cattle.

Hostility to foreigners, then, as well as malevolence generally are characteristic of the Phaeacian commoners. As for the entire Phaeacian people, Homer makes a considerable effort to associate them both with Poseidon and with the Giants, thereby providing Odysseus

⁹ H. Ebeling, ed., *Lexicon Homericum* (Hildesheim 1963) 1.769, translates *kertomeô* as "irrideo, laedo verbis." As for the epithet, *megathymôn* (7.16), the scholiast glosses with *hyperoptai*, but probably it simply means "brave."

¹⁰ Finley (above, note 6) 136: "*philein* was the word by which hospitable treatment was expressed."

with additional cause for anxiety. In the early passages where the Phaeacians' marvelous ships are discussed¹¹—namely, in speeches by Nausicaa and Athena (6.261–75, 7.30–36)—Homer juxtaposes them with a statement not that Odysseus might ride home in them, but that the Phaeacians are untrustworthy. Athena's reference to the ships comes immediately and abruptly, without even a connecting particle, after her announcement of the Phaeacians' unfriendliness. The emphatic subject, *τοί γε* (7.34), may enhance the idea that these are a strange people, which is due in no small part to their ships. In both passages, moreover, Poseidon is mentioned.

The poet seems to be establishing a three-way connection among Poseidon, the boats, and Phaeacian hostility. Not only is Poseidon the guarantor of the ships' special qualities (7.35), he is also closely associated in the *Odyssey* with the Cyclopes, paradigms of brutality toward guests. And yet, since the mentions of Poseidon in these two passages are brief and apparently tangential, there ought also to exist some direct connection between Phaeacian hostility and their ships which would explain the striking juxtapositions and would have import for Odysseus. Actually, at least two aspects of this relationship could trouble Odysseus. First, the very fact that the boats possess magical abilities places them, in this respect at least, into the class of several of Odysseus' previous encounters in the world of witches and sea-monsters. Second, Nausicaa explains that the ships are the Phaeacians' substitute for the bow and quiver (6.270–71). But, inasmuch as these instruments of war and hunting are integral to the sort of life Odysseus knows, their rejection might portend a society strange to the hero of the Trojan War. Moreover, on a personal level the famed bow with which Odysseus reestablishes his identity in Book 21 is virtually his trademark. Hence, even though Odysseus will eventually ride home safely in a Phaeacian ship, at this point in the narrative he has no reason to be delighted with what he is told of them.

The Phaeacians have a second relationship with Poseidon in addition to the ships: he is Alcinous' grandfather and Arete's great-grandfather. What is more, he is the progenitor of the Phaeacian people, which brings us to their connection with the Giants. Poseidon's mate in this case was the daughter of Eurymedon (7.59–60),

¹¹ For the ships' special abilities, see 8.557–63.

ὅς ποθ' ὑπερθύμοισι Γιγάντεσσιν βασίλευεν.
ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ὤλεσε λαὸν ἀτάσθαλον, ὤλετο δ' αὐτός.

Presumably Eurymedon was himself a Giant, as well as his daughter, which means that the Phaeacians trace their ancestry to Poseidon and the Giants. That Eurymedon destroyed himself and his Giants in a war specifically against the Olympians is perhaps a later idea or concerns a different race of Giants and therefore is merely conjectural here.¹² If true, it would inject into the Phaeacians' history an element that could only alienate Odysseus. In any case, that their ancestors are called *laon atasthalon* reflects badly upon the Phaeacians. The reflection, moreover, is for Odysseus' benefit; the speaker is Athena, not the poet. The fact that Odysseus himself, not merely the audience, receives all this damaging information supports the assumption that he experiences more than the usual anxiety about a strange people.

This is not the last he hears of the Giants. The Phaeacians, Alcinous tells Odysseus, enjoy a special relationship with the gods and are in this regard just like the Cyclopes and the ἄγρια φύλα Γιγάντων (7.204-6). Such a comparison in itself could hardly be comforting for any guest, but especially for Odysseus. Moreover, the comparison is suggestive again of Poseidon, Polyphemus' father and the son-in-law of Eurymedon. This passage does not imply that the Phaeacians fundamentally resemble either the Cyclopes or the Giants. Rather, these associations tend to maintain a tense atmosphere throughout Book 7 and an uncertainty which helps to account for Odysseus' long delay in revealing himself.

The next element of the Phaeacian threat to Odysseus' sense of safety is the quality of Alcinous' personal hospitality. In order to

¹² The scholium on 7.59, for example, says that Homer here presents a race of good Giants, being unaware of the later portrayal of the Giants as monsters who warred against the gods. *Hyperthymoi*, thus, is to be understood in a complimentary sense. The difficulty with this is that it ignores *atasthalon* in the next line, which must be bad and must still refer to the Giants; it would be un-Homeric if Eurymedon were said to have destroyed some unidentified people who nevertheless were given the highly important epithet, *atasthalos*. Curiously, the scholium on 7.60 supplies "when he fought against Zeus or some king," which implies that the poet of the *Odyssey* may, after all, have known of some Giants who fought the gods. Eustathius 1568.7-13 is more consistent: he sees that *atasthalon* maligns the Giants and supposes that Homer knew of their war against Zeus.

judge him as a host, a detailed understanding of the Homeric pattern of proper, initial hospitality is necessary. To establish such a pattern is one of the functions of the "Telemachy," which provides three of the four examples of a host adequately fulfilling his rôle. When the head of a household becomes aware of a visitor at his door, he must first greet the guest and offer him a seat.¹³ Of great importance in this step is promptness. Thus, in Book 1 the poet relates that Telemachus "went directly to the door and was outraged in his heart at the thought of a stranger standing at his door for a long time" (1.119-20). After seating his guest the host serves him wine and food.¹⁴ Finally, only when the visitor has finished his meal may the host question him as to his identity, the place from which he has come, or the purpose of his visit.¹⁵ All the exemplary hosts actually state their awareness of this custom.¹⁶ Thus, all four hosts adhere to these evidently essential steps in the pattern of initial hospitality—prompt greeting and seating, wine and food, plus delaying all inquiries.

The poet begins to measure Alcinous against this standard when Odysseus has arrived in his palace and begged Arete the queen for passage home (7.139-52). He then waits sitting in the ashes of the hearth, while the assembled Phaeacian leaders stare in amazement at him. The tension mounts.

ὁψὲ δὲ δὴ μετέειπε γέρων ἦρως Ἐχένης,
ὅς δὴ Φαιήκων ἀνδρῶν προγενέστερος ἦεν
καὶ μύθοισι κέκαστο, παλαιὰ τε πολλά τε εἰδώς (7.155-57).

Inasmuch as ὁψὲ δὲ δὴ is an emphatic "finally," Alcinous' first error is a violation of promptness in greeting his visitor. The mature king fails in this respect to measure up to the boy, Telemachus. Someone may object that the hesitation is quite comprehensible in view of the sudden and extraordinary manner in which Odysseus has made his appearance.¹⁷ It is true that, if this were his only lapse, Alcinous could

¹³ Telemachus, 1.123-31; Peisistratus, 3.34-39; Menelaus, 4.43-51 (Menelaus does not first greet his guests because his attendant leads them in); Eumaeus, 14.37-51.

¹⁴ Telemachus, 1.136-43; Peisistratus, 3.40-67; Menelaus, 4.52-58; Eumaeus, 14.73-78.

¹⁵ See Finley (above, note 6) 135.

¹⁶ Telemachus, 1.123-24; Nestor, 3.69-70; Menelaus, 4.60-62; Eumaeus, 14.45-47.

¹⁷ W. Mattes, *Odysseus bei den Phäaken: Kritisches zur Homeranalyse* (Würzburg

be excused on the basis of his unquestionably great surprise. But when the silence is finally broken, it is not the host, Alcinous, who does so but someone else, an old man, Echeneos. As if to emphasize this related lapse of Alcinous—abdication of his rôle as the one who must greet the newcomer—Homer clearly establishes the credentials of Echeneos as the wisest of the Phaeacian men, as the one who knows what to do. That someone else must urge Alcinous to greet a guest contrasts sharply with an earlier passage—Telemachus' visit to Menelaus' house in Sparta. The comparison seems justified in view of several striking parallels between the two situations: for example, the impending marriage of the host's children (4.3–14, 6.25–28), the glittering luxury at which the stranger marvels (4.43–46, 7.1–75; 7.82–102), the importance and power of the host's wife, the visitor's need for assistance, the dramatic revelation of the visitor's identity. However, in contrast to Alcinous and Echeneos, Menelaus' attendant first asks him whether the strangers waiting outside are to be entertained or sent on to some other household, and Menelaus sharply rebukes his attendant, calling him *nēpios*, "childishly foolish" (4.26–36). Whereas Menelaus, a wise and gracious host, must correct his attendant's lapse of hospitality, Alcinous must be corrected by his companion.

Echeneos' rebuke is direct and unsoftened, and Alcinous never attempts to defend himself, additional evidence that Odysseus' strange entrance should not excuse Alcinous' dilatory behavior. He is told that he acts in an improper, unseemly way by allowing the stranger to sit in the ashes, clearly a humiliating position (7.159–60). Echeneos also charges him with delay and lack of leadership as head of the household:

οἷδε δὲ σὸν μῦθον ποτιδέγμενοι ἰσχανόωνται (7.161).

The wise man then feels obliged to explain step by step exactly how Alcinous should entertain the guest. These steps constitute the same pattern of initial hospitality displayed by the four exemplary hosts

1958) 147–49, argues for this very point. He also states that Alcinous' surprise and confusion account for his indirect probing while Odysseus is eating (7.199–206); Mattes believes (without evidence) that Alcinous is aware of the custom of postponing inquiries until after the guest has eaten, and he refrains from actually asking who his guest is, but merely observes how peculiar it would be if he were a god.

(except that there is no statement concerning the obligation to delay questions). Homer thereby reveals that at least one Phaeacian does know the Achaean customs of hospitality; Alcinous may not be excused on the basis of his society's ignorance.

As mentioned a moment ago, neither Echeneos nor Alcinous nor any other Phaeacian declares at this point his sense of the propriety of allowing the guest to finish eating before questioning him. Actually, nowhere in the episode is such a statement forthcoming, which perhaps would be inconsequential if Alcinous adhered to the principle in his actions. But does he? As soon as the food has been placed in front of him, Odysseus begins to eat and drink (7.177). At this point Alcinous orders a libation and delivers a speech nearly half of which is taken up with the suggestion that Odysseus may be a god in disguise (7.199–206). There is no good reason for not regarding this as “a subtle attempt to get Odysseus to reveal who he is before the ritual moment for asking identities has arrived after the dinner.”¹⁸ It is the timing, not the nature, of Alcinous' statement that is at fault. But even if it be merely an indiscretion by oversight, the result is that Odysseus has been put on the spot. His brilliant response consists first in denying the imputed divine status and then in tactfully and indirectly rebuking Alcinous. “Let me eat my dinner” (7.215), he says and then blames not Alcinous but his own well-known appetite. Odysseus thereby averts alienating his wayward host, upon whom he must nevertheless depend, while at the same time he preserves the needed secrecy of his identity.¹⁹

These failures of hospitality, in addition to others still to be discussed, require an explanation, an explanation, moreover, based upon Alcinous' character, since at least one other Phaeacian—Echeneos—understands proper hospitality. One could answer that Alcinous, far from being blameworthy, keeps constant vigilance on behalf of his people: he fails to give proper hospitality because he remembers and fears Poseidon's threatened vengeance (8.564–71). And yet, granted that Alcinous has this in mind, it cannot explain his lapses. For in his very first speech concerning the stranger, he unhesitatingly offers Odysseus

¹⁸ Beye (above, note 2) 197–98.

¹⁹ For a different interpretation of the incident, see Stanford (above, note 5) 326–27, notes on 7.199 and 7.216–18.

a safe passage home (7.191-96). His early decision to brave Poseidon's wrath is the one important thing he does correctly. To go to the other extreme and accuse Alcinous of outright hostility toward his guest, even though such an accusation does fit the Phaeacian commoners, would be unfair and would certainly clash with his behavior generally. After all, not only does he immediately promise a ride home, he later strengthens and reiterates his decision (7.317-28, 8.30-36); he offers his daughter (7.311-15); and tactfully changes the subject when he notices Odysseus weeping (8.94-103). The answer, rather, lies in the middle: Alcinous is basically kind and spontaneous; but ineptitude as a leader (remember Arete's status in this society) and an ignorance of protocol (contrast Echeneos) are the traits which best explain his flawed hospitality.

However, an explanation based upon ineptitude instead of hostility does not imply that Odysseus has no inner sense of danger or even that there exists no objective danger. On the one hand, a man who has always expected from other men the sort of ready hospitality that a Menelaus, for example, provides would naturally tend to interpret failures in this area, however wrongly, as a sign of hostility. This is especially true in Phaeacia, since Odysseus already has reason to fear the Phaeacians for their association with the Giants, with Poseidon, and, through Poseidon, with the Cyclopes. The objective danger consists in the possibility that Odysseus will face hostile treatment from other Phaeacians, a possibility that becomes actual in Book 8 and involves not a commoner but an aristocrat, a person of greater power. A host must be able and willing to protect his guest from such abuse, but the Alcinous of Book 7 does not seem to be such a host. Except for Arete, who has yet to say or do anything reassuring, Alcinous represents Odysseus' only protector in an unfamiliar society. Therefore, his ineptitude and ignorance are partly responsible for the tension which is present quietly, and for a while overtly, in Books 7 and 8.²⁰

The tension in this part of the *Odyssey* can be made more evident

²⁰ Two critics who have perceived flaws in Alcinous' character, but who fail to view these as cause for anxiety, are A. Shewan, *Homeric Essays* (Oxford 1935) 254-57 and Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero*² (Oxford 1963) 63.

by a reformulation of the problem of Phaeacian hospitality. In terms of the demands of the plot, Odysseus requires only one thing from the Phaeacians—a safe passage home. But, inasmuch as he elicits a pledge of this aid almost immediately (7.191–96), the center of interest in Books 7 and 8 (plus the “Intermezzo” in Book 11) must lie elsewhere. If one should say—citing 1.3—that Odysseus the world traveler is studying and acquainting himself with another foreign people, then one would miss the point of the adventures of Books 9 through 12. Far from being an observer of his own encounters, Odysseus becomes fully involved in each, his safety is generally threatened, and he must apply every mental and physical resource to extricate himself from the dangers. It would be odd, to say the least, if by far the longest and most elaborate of his adventures were to violate this pattern.

Rather, Odysseus’ major problem in Books 7 and 8, and thus the focus of interest, consists in replacing the suspicion and very incomplete hospitality he first encounters with admiration, warmth, and total acceptance on the part of the royal family.²¹ He accomplishes this in stages through his own extraordinary physical and especially mental prowess, just as in his previous adventures. The first stage, in fact, occurs in Book 6, which implies that our view of the center of interest in Books 7 and 8 really applies to the whole Phaeacian episode. For, although Nausicaa treats Odysseus with immediate and courageous hospitality, Odysseus must use great caution in order not to frighten or repulse the young virgin. His famous supplication to her (6.149–85) excellently foreshadows his need to speak and act among the Phaeacians in such a way as to portray a man deserving of both respect and compassion. Odysseus easily wins Nausicaa over, alert as she is to marital possibilities; her parents, especially Arete, will not prove so easy.

Odysseus’ first success in Book 7 is the speech, discussed earlier, in which he gently chides Alcinous for probing before the meal is

²¹ According to Mattes (above, note 17) 110, Odysseus achieves two things in Phaeacia—passage home and honor from the Phaeacians; to show Odysseus acquiring this honor is the main purpose of Book 8. Thus Mattes is in general agreement with my interpretation of this point. However, nowhere in his book does he seem aware of the obstacles to this acceptance which are inherent in the Phaeacian situation.

over (7.208-25). To determine Odysseus' success or failure in his attempts to gain the sympathy of the Phaeacian leaders, we need simply examine their reactions, spoken or otherwise. In this instance the response comes immediately (7.226-27):

"Ὡς ἔφαθ', οἳ δ' ἄρα πάντες ἐπήνεον ἡδ' ἐκέλευον
πεμπέμεναι τὸν ξείνον, ἐπεὶ κατὰ μοῖραν ἔειπεν.

It is through speaking impressively that the stranger for the first time wins from the assembled chiefs general approval of his primary request.

Arete then interrogates Odysseus concerning his identity and his clothes (7.237-39). But, except for her brief warning against the thieving tendencies of the Phaeacian crew (8.443-45), she says nothing more to him until Book 11. Clearly, Arete demands considerable proof of the stranger's merits before fully welcoming him (unless Homer has forgotten what he strongly emphasized shortly before—that Arete was the key to success in this land).

The next to probe Odysseus' merit is Alcinous (7.299-301). In contrast to Arete, the king is so enormously delighted when Odysseus cleverly vindicates Nausicaa, that he instantly showers his daughter, his house, and his wealth upon the stranger. What is more, Alcinous again promises a ride home, but this time he appends a signal of his increased interest in and affection for his guest—"even if your homeland is very much farther than Euboea, which those of our people who have seen it claim is the most distant land" (7.321-23). During his first day in Phaeacia, Odysseus, through tactful answers to his hosts, has progressed considerably in their estimation.

The second day, a day of even greater trials, begins with the assembling of the Phaeacians; accordingly, the first few lines of Book 8 are sprinkled with hints of an impending confrontation. First, the very fact of Athena's presence here, as in her earlier appearance as a little girl and later in her visitation on the Ithacan shore, suggests the precariousness of her favorite's position. The second hint appears in an apparently odd use of a formula in the description of Athena's activity (8.15):

"Ὡς εἰποῦσ' ὄτρυνε μένος καὶ θυμὸν ἐκάστου.

To render the phrase *menos kai thymon* as "curiosity" or "eagerness"

or anything similar would utterly miss the tone of the formula and, thus, the point of the passage. Even when it occurs by itself, *menos* usually carries in Homer the basic sense of "fighting spirit" (perhaps excluding its use in such primitive formulae as *ἔρὸν μένος Ἀλκινόοιο*). Moreover, in the *Iliad*, *menos* is joined by *kai* to another noun 24 times; in all but one case the characters either are engaged in, or are being stirred to, combat. A line entirely identical with 8.15 (except for *εἰπὼν* replacing *εἰποῦσ'*) is used nine times in that poem, and the subject of the verbs is always a leader prodding his men to fight (5.792, 6.72, 11.291, 13.155, 15.500, 514, 667, 16.210, 275). Of the 24 passages the only exception is Priam's eagerness to recover Hector's body from Achilles (24.198; *thymos* is the other noun); even here courage, at least, is involved. One could argue that in the instances from the *Iliad* it is the context which is hostile, not the formula *menos kai thymon* (or some other noun), and, therefore, hostility need not be present in *Odyssey* 8.15. Nevertheless, an audience so thoroughly accustomed to hearing the formula in a context of hostility would probably supply the regular association. But, in addition, all the other three instances in the *Odyssey* where *menos* is coupled by *kai* to a second noun clearly involve hostility (1.321, 11.502, 11.562). It is very likely, then, that what Athena arouses in the Phaeacians' minds is their predictable reaction to strangers—hostile curiosity.

Having prepared Odysseus' audience, the goddess next makes Odysseus look more impressive and strong, a third hint that he must this day prove himself in order to gain Phaeacian acceptance (8.18–23). Homer tells us, in particular, that Athena pours *charis* over his head and shoulders. This detail in the *Odyssey* "is regularly used to mark important moments and always impresses those who behold the effects."²²

A specific motive for Athena's improvement of Odysseus' physique provides yet a fourth clue to the real atmosphere of Book 8: she would like him to be successful in the many *ἄεθλοι* with which the Phaeacians will confront him (8.22–23). In the *Odyssey* the masculine noun *aethlos* has either of two related meanings: in 23 occurrences (excluding 8.22) it denotes an athletic contest; it appears nine other times with

²² Anne Amory, "The Reunion of Odysseus and Penelope," *Essays on the Odyssey* (above, note 3) 118. She cites the other passages where the motif occurs.

the graver sense of "struggle" or "ordeal."²³ The question is which meaning is present here at 8.22, to which the obvious answer is that of a "contest." And yet, several factors tend rather to suggest that not one but both senses are involved, that Odysseus will face a contest or contests which are really ordeals for him. Of the nine occurrences in the meaning "ordeal," six refer explicitly to Odysseus' experiences, while the other three obliquely concern him.²⁴ Odysseus, then, is the man who endures *aethloi*, certainly in the sense of "struggles." But he is also the chief participant in *aethloi* in the other sense of "contests," for of those 23 occurrences eleven are found here in Book 8 and nine pertain to the contest of the bow. The latter, moreover, is no ordinary contest, but a special test specifically relevant only to Odysseus. For it is his own bow, to string it demands almost super-human, certainly heroic prowess, and Odysseus is famous as the man capable of doing so (21.91-95). The contest of the bow, thus, is the primary means by which he reasserts his identity and reestablishes his right to respect from others. But this can also be said in a certain sense of the discus contest, in which Odysseus stuns the spectators by easily surpassing the other contestants. Therefore, even in the sense of "contest," *aethlos* does not signify at 8.22 some ordinary game with no special relevance for Odysseus.

The interpretation, "ordeal," is further strengthened by the fact that it occurs here in the plural and is modified by *πολλούς*, a word which may, incidentally, carry additional weight due to its position at the beginning of the next line. Odysseus takes part in only one actual contest, whereas his ordeals in Book 8 are several.²⁵ Aside

²³ Ebeling (above, note 9) 1.29, while recognizing both meanings in Homer, limits *aethlos* here to "certamen, ludus." In the most recent edition *LSJ* does not seem to believe that the word can mean "struggle" as early as Homer. Yet, to cite obvious examples, Penelope and Odysseus use the word three times in Book 23 to refer either to his past experiences since Troy or to his one remaining ordeal, the appeasement of Poseidon.

²⁴ The six are 1.18; 4.170, 241; 23.248, 261, 350. The others are 3.262 (the Achaeans at Troy) and 11.622, 624 (the labors of Heracles, especially the descent into Hades', clearly parallel to Odysseus' adventure). Possibly as many as three of these (1.18, 3.262, 4.170) could be called contests in the special sense of "military encounters"; but especially from the viewpoint of the aftermath of the Trojan War—i.e. in the *Odyssey*—these are more ordeals and sufferings than contests.

²⁵ According to the scholiast, Zenodotus athetized 8.23 on the very grounds that Odysseus participates in only one contest—the discus. A. Kirchhoff, *Die Homerische*

from the discus contest itself, the young Phaeacians first provoke and then insult him, to both of which he responds with great emotion; Alcinous places him in an awkward position by virtually requesting compliments for his mediocre Phaeacian athletes; and Demodocus' Trojan War songs probe his purposely hidden identity by concentrating on his rôles in the war and, thereby, force him to attempt to conceal his tearful reaction.

The four early hints, then, that the second day in Phaeacia will bring additional trials and uncertainty for Odysseus are the presence of Athena, the *menos kai thymon* which she arouses in the Phaeacians, Odysseus' enhanced appearance and strength, his *charis*, and the word *aethloi*, which denotes both the discus contest and the entirety of Book 8 as a continuing ordeal.

The most critical event to confront Odysseus at the games—the challenge from Euryalus, a young Phaeacian—also happens to involve the gravest violation of hospitality during Odysseus' stay in Phaeacia. Alcinous' son, Laodamas, first invites the stranger to try his hand at the contests, to which Odysseus responds, *τί με ταῦτα κελεύετε κερτομέοντες* (8.153). *Kertomeontes* (see above, page 391) here appears to carry the weaker sense of "goading." Strikingly parallel is *Iliad* 16.261, where boys goad wasps to stinging.

But if Laodamas goaded politely, Euryalus definitely exceeds all proper behavior. He should, indeed, have taken Odysseus' hint and kept quiet; instead Homer introduces his remark with the word *neikese*, Euryalus calls the guest a greedy merchant,²⁶ and Odysseus reacts with anger (8.158–65). Only after Odysseus vindicates himself

Odyssee (Berlin 1879) 212, also excised it. Eustathius 1584.17–22 attempted to justify *pollous* with an Aristotelian dichotomy: Odysseus accomplishes many contests not *pros energeian* but *kata to physei dynasthai*, since the Phaeacians will retreat from challenging him when he claims expertise in other contests. M. H. A. L. H. van der Valk, *Textual Criticism of the Odyssey* (Leiden 1949) 228, is far more perceptive: "In reality he only throws the disc. The poet, however, wishes to stress at the beginning of *θ* the difficulties encountered by Odysseus." Mattes (above, note 17) 106, agrees, calling the second day in Phaeacia a "Wettkampfstag für Odysseus," the outcome of which is that he displays his *aretê* (without the help of his name) and in consequence is accorded honor, trust, and gifts. None of these critics, however, takes into account the two meanings of *aethlos*.

²⁶ Eustathius 1589.61–63 points out that part of Euryalus' derision is his claim that Odysseus does not seem to be an athlete, a claim which contradicts Laodamas' earlier statement (8.146) and thus strengthens the contrast between the two young men.

singlehandedly in both speech and action does his host finally speak up to exert his control. By such delay Alcinous again demonstrates his inadequacy, for, as G. M. Calhoun has pointed out in discussing the proper treatment of a guest generally, "during his stay he is offered the best of everything and shielded from violence or rudeness."²⁷ Furthermore, the incident, like those discussed from Book 7, reveals that Odysseus must prove himself at each stage before receiving the appropriate and obligatory hospitality.

At this point, however, Alcinous gives Odysseus only the minimum of comfort and defense. Although he admits that Odysseus was improperly addressed by Euryalus, he fails to support his admission with any sort of action. He could, for example, have demanded an apology from Euryalus now, instead of waiting 150 lines. The impetuosity of the young Phaeacians and Alcinous' inability to control them, but also Odysseus' own brash declamation (8.201-33), have produced a virtual breakdown in the incipient rapport that Odysseus had been establishing. At the height of the deadlock Demodocus sings the song of Ares and Aphrodite, which, along with its other functions, both reflects the hostility and through its humor begins to resolve it (8.367-69).²⁸

It is Odysseus himself, however, who takes the crucial step in reducing the tension and thereby creates in his hosts a more positive desire than ever to be hospitable and friendly. In a well-chosen, well-timed compliment, he acknowledges that Alcinous' entertainment was indeed exemplary (8.382-84). The astonishing results of his brief, humble comment are sevenfold: (1) Alcinous is delighted (8.385); (2) he returns the compliment, calling Odysseus *μάλα πεπνυμένος* (388), a highly laudatory term and a regular epithet for Telemachus; (3) of extreme importance is the fact that Alcinous for the first time offers guest-gifts to Odysseus (389-95), a standard aspect of hospitality; (4) he finally orders Euryalus to apologize verbally and with a gift

²⁷ G. M. Calhoun, "The Homeric Picture," *A Companion to Homer*, ed. A. J. B. Wace and F. H. Stubbings (London 1962) 442. For corroboration within the *Odyssey*, see 16.69-72, 17.564-68, 18.215-25.

²⁸ So W. Burkert, "Das Lied von Ares und Aphrodite," *RhM* 103 (1960) 136; Mattes (above, note 17) 97, note 2; Segal (above, note 1) 27. For a full account of the functions of Demodocus' song, see my dissertation, *The Song of Ares and Aphrodite: Recurrent Motifs in Homer's Odyssey* (Berkeley 1969).

(396-97); (5) all those present end their silence by praising Alcinous' speech and proceed to fetch the gifts (398-99); (6) Euryalus apologizes, achieving a *rapprochement* with Odysseus (408-16); (7) Alcinous orders a bath for Odysseus, the only missing token of hospitable reception (426-27).²⁹ As a result of all this Odysseus feels sufficiently comfortable to express to Demodocus a compliment and a request (487-98), and finally to reveal himself.

As for Alcinous' offer of gifts, previous passages, such as those involving Athena-Mentes in Ithaca (I.311-13) and Telemachus in Sparta (4.589-92), show that a stranger could expect gifts from his host as a matter of course. But in Phaeacia the timing and circumstances strongly suggest a different cause for the offer: Odysseus has completely assured Alcinous of his merits, especially by his grace in displaying his own good will and in satisfying the king's vanity. This is but the first instance of gifts functioning as a symbol of the warmth that Odysseus wins from the Phaeacians. After Book 8, Odysseus' hosts twice more acknowledge their acceptance of him with gifts; but both times he first has to prove his worth.

The former of these is also in a sense the most important of all the signs of Phaeacian approval. Both Nausicaa (6.310-15) and Athena (7.75-77) had very early told Odysseus that if he wished to get home he would need above all to win Arete's favor.³⁰ Indeed, Arete's genealogy and status among the men of Phaeacia were detailed at some length by Athena (7.54-74), whose words "serve to magnify" Arete,³¹ and thereby to substantiate the necessity to gain her sympathy. But only in the so-called "Intermezzo" of Book 11 does she finally allay Odysseus' remaining uncertainty. In terms of the problem of Phaeacian hospitality alone, this passage thus proves to be of crucial importance. After praising him with respect to physical appear-

²⁹ The scholium on 8.383 interprets differently, saying that some of these gestures—the gifts, the bath—fulfil Alcinous' boast at 8.249. Eustathius 1602.31-40, on the other hand, sees at least that Alcinous' compliment and his offer of gifts derive directly from Odysseus' flattery. Mattes (above, note 17) 98, agrees with Eustathius.

³⁰ Nitzsch (above, note 5) 2.138 and G. Thomson, *Studies in Ancient Greek Society: The Prehistoric Aegean* (London 1949) 419, feel that Nausicaa's and Athena's statements are never fulfilled.

³¹ Beye (above, note 2) 177. Some ancient critics including the scholiast, failing to grasp the importance of Arete in Phaeacian society, tried to emend 7.74; they wished to read that Arete settled quarrels for women, on the grounds that it would be *aprepes* for a woman to settle men's quarrels.

ance and mental capability, Arete orders the Phaeacians to be generous in their presentation of gifts (11.336-41).³² What has Odysseus done to gain Arete's acceptance at this particular point? Nothing less than that in which the *Odyssey* shows him to possess extraordinary ability—storytelling. The reaction of the Phaeacian audience reveals his impressiveness (11.333-34):

“Ὡς ἔφαθ’, οἳ δ’ ἄρα πάντες ἀκὴν ἐγένοντο σιωπῇ,
κηληθμῷ δ’ ἔσχοντο κατὰ μέγαρα σκιόεντα.

The strong word *kēlēthmos* occurs in connection with no one else in the poem but Odysseus, not even the bards Demodocus and Phemius.

The last acknowledgment of Odysseus' acceptance comes from Alcinous at the end of his tale. Once again, Odysseus earns approval through his own mastery of narration (13.1-2 are identical with 11.333-34), and again additional gifts are offered (13.13-14). Possibly Homer also shows Alcinous' weakness as host, even as he makes this final gesture of hospitality: he will reimburse himself and the chieftains at the expense of the other Phaeacians (13.14-15).³³ Odysseus thus receives three offers of gifts: in Book 8 when he demonstrates his physical prowess and then mitigates the tense atmosphere by complimenting Alcinous, in Book 11 in the middle of his account of his adventures, and in Book 13 at the close of his tale.

To summarize, the Phaeacian episode reveals perhaps above all Odysseus' ability to cope with an unfriendly people, a clumsy host, and a powerful and demanding hostess. A society both hostile to

³² That the Phaeacians' gifts are prized for their own sake by Odysseus and are, therefore, a highly appropriate token by which Arete expresses her approval, is proven at 13.40-41 and especially at 13.135-38; in the latter case Poseidon concentrates at some length upon the gifts, evidently a cause of his great anger over the Phaeacians' hospitality to Odysseus.

Stanford (above, note 5) 394, note on 11.335 ff., correctly states that Arete is proposing "that the Phaeacian princes should contribute more" than they were going to. D. E. Belmont, "Telemachus and Nausicaa: A Study of Youth," *CJ* 63 (1967) 3, agrees that Arete's acceptance of Odysseus comes in Book 11, but he fails to perceive the role of the gifts. Mattes (above, note 17) 82 feels that Arete increases the gifts because the guest is no longer unknown but is known to be the hero Odysseus. Incidentally, Eustathius 1613.14 already suggested this explanation.

³³ While calling Alcinous' statement *mikroprepes*, the scholiast seems willing to justify it, saying that that was the way things were in those days. He may be right, for K. F. Ameis and C. Hentze, *Homers Odyssee*⁷ (Leipzig 1879-1884) 2.2, compare 19.197, where the disguised Odysseus claims to have fed the real Odysseus after collecting food and wine *dēmothen*.

strangers and associated with Poseidon and the Giants forms the background. In the initial encounter as well as at the games, Alcinous creates an uncomfortable situation through his lax ineptitude, while Odysseus is forced to undergo a series of trials. By skilful handling of questions, by his imposing mien, by dramatically rebuffing an insolent challenge, by well-timed compliments, and especially by his expertise in narrating his marvelous adventures—in short, by utilizing all the talents of his special sort of heroism—Odysseus wins the respect and affection of his host and hostess.

In a remark to Hermes early in Book 5, it would seem that Zeus upsets this entire interpretation. "They will warmly honor him like a god," he says of the Phaeacians (5.36; similarly, 19.280 and 23.339). It is never possible to determine with certainty which elements of an episode Homer inherited from his poetic tradition and which elements he either adapted from some other episode or simply invented. Nevertheless, I suspect that Zeus' statement represents the sort of rendition of the Phaeacian story that Homer's predecessors might have performed. It refers to the outcome of the adventure—Odysseus' safe journey to Ithaca (explicit at 5.37)—and presages a normal, heroic, but less interesting, treatment. The considerable complexity of the episode as we have it is quite in accord with Homer's obvious interest in characterization.

In any case, Odysseus' own reaction to the whole experience constitutes a better guide to its realities. When, upon awaking on the Ithacan shore, he fails to recognize his homeland, he delivers a striking and—without the foregoing interpretation of the Phaeacian episode—puzzling tirade: he wishes he had stayed in Phaeacia, but supplicated another of the princes; he is certain that the treacherous Phaeacian leaders have deposited him in a foreign land; and he, therefore, calls down upon them the vengeance of Zeus *Hiketêsios* (13.200–14). There is a certain illogic here, which reveals that the normally cool Odysseus feels more than his usual scepticism, that he is, in fact, bitterly angry and resentful. His inability to recognize Ithaca cannot of itself account for this. What does explain the depth of his emotion is the untrustworthiness of the Phaeacians as a people (compare his suspicion here of Phaeacian thievery, 13.215–16, with Arete's warning to this effect), as well as the uncertain hospitality of Alcinous.