

Theoklymenos and the Long Arc of the *Odyssey*

Theoklymenos' appearance in the *Odyssey* is mysterious, his apocalyptic prophecy weird and grotesque, and his disappearance abrupt. While his prophecies are essentially true, his compositional fit demands explication, and scholars have long viewed him either as evidence of inconsistency at the hands of a flawed poet or editor (Page 1955, for instance) or see his fit as perfectly consistent with traditional poetic composition (Fenik 1974). Theoklymenos' origin has also been imagined outside the epic, perhaps referencing alternate Cretan tradition where Odysseus returns with Telemachus disguised as the seer (cf. Reece 1994; Tsagalis 2012).

Theoklymenos appears peripherally in more recent *Odyssey* scholarship, and West 2014 calls him into question once again on compositional grounds. In this paper, I argue that Theoklymenos is strategically positioned among resonant poetic structures of the *Odyssey* such that his appearance is anything but haphazard. As explained below, his implication with two structures in particular—1) Pero's inset tale within the Catalogue of Heroines featuring the seer Melampus and 2) the formulaic interrogation “τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν” (who, and from where, are you among men?)—signal his fit within the poem's architecture and his significance to the long arc of the epic.

Despite the abruptness of Theoklymenos' appearance at *Odyssey* 15.223, his entry into the poem is already anticipated within the Catalogue of Heroines in *Odyssey* 11. At the structural middle of this Catalogue, Odysseus employs the inset tale of Pero to tell part of the tale of Melampus, which is elliptically completed in book 15 at Theoklymenos' long genealogical introduction (de Jong 2011, Sammons 2010, Scodel 2002). This intricate connection across the poem demonstrates compositional planning and summons resonances from book 11 that make

the seer less mysterious in book 15. Among the prominent themes summoned by the Melampus tale are the dangers of captivity, marriage, and wooing. In the *nekuia* there is reasonable anxiety about Odysseus' *nostos*, thus the appropriateness of the tale as a plea to his Phaeacian hosts. Theoklymenos' appearance later in book 15 picks up the tale's threads and merges them with Telemachus' own search for his detained father—an uncertainty that Theoklymenos and the poet put to rest for the external audience, but one that remains in play for Telemachus at this point in the narrative.

Moreover, Theoklymenos is uniquely connected to a formulaic interrogation in the *Odyssey* that tags him as a critical figure in the epic. The interrogation τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν recurs seven times in the *Odyssey*, most often asked of Odysseus. In two other instances, Telemachus is implicated in the interrogation, once with Theoklymenos at 15.264. This question typically induces a recognition scene and indicates the interrogator's ability to identify and define the “real” hero, usually Odysseus, and often indicates a significant alliance between the parties (Arft 2014). Similarly, Theoklymenos interrogates Telemachus in a quick, perfectly executed question and answer. The result is the identification of Telemachus as a man of *xenia* (thus eligible for his own return) along with the gain of an accurate seer who will accompany Odysseus' inner circle nearly up to the point of the suitors' slaughter—one of the poem's major fulfillments.

Once returned, however, neither Telemachus nor Penelope believe Theoklymenos' accurate prediction that Odysseus will return (*Od.* 15.531-34; 17.152-161). This disbelief becomes a critical signal for the external audience as to the poetic unfolding of the Odysseus tale at hand. Theoklymenos has been structurally signaled as an important and powerful figure, yet his truth is not accepted. The poet leverages this dissonance, demanding the external audience

pay careful attention to the internal audience's disbelief. The function of this indeterminate skepticism becomes clear as the epic resolves: the *Odyssey* seeks to define Odysseus through the complex process of unfolding recognition via his inner circle. His mere return, or even ill-timed declarations of truth are secondary to this process—all of which Theoklymenos directly and indirectly signals to the audience.

Theoklymenos both reminds the audience of the path upon which the epic lies and signals why we must struggle through some delays to see its end. His bracing appearance is ultimately the sign of an aesthetically rich composition, one that uses traditional structures to signal poetic innovation.

Bibliography

Arft 2014. "Micro-multiformity and Tradition: Clues to the *Odyssey*'s Composition."

Kyklos@Classics@, 2.

de Jong 2001. *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*. Cambridge.

Fenik 1974. *Studies in the Odyssey*. Wiesbaden: Steiner.

Page 1955. *The Homeric Odyssey*. Oxford.

Reece 1994. "The Cretan *Odyssey*: A Lie Truer Than Truth." *AJP*, 115.2:157-73.

Tsagalis 2012. "Deauthorizing the Epic Cycle: Odysseus' False Tale to Eumaios." In Montanari et al. 2012:309-46.

Sammons 2010. *The Art and Rhetoric of the Homeric Catalogue*. Oxford.

Scodel 2002. *Listening to Homer: Tradition, Narrative, and Audience*. University of Michigan Press.

West 2014. *The Making of the Odyssey*. Oxford.