

πολύαρητος: Signposting Epiphany in the *Hymn to Demeter* and *Odyssey* 19

I argue that the presence of πολύαρητος—a rare word in Greek—in the *Hymn to Demeter* (*h.Cer.* 220) and the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 6.280 and *Od.* 19.404) indicates points of comparison between the poems and reveals similar themes and patterns that suggest a link between certain episodes.

The connection between the *Hymn to Demeter* and the *Odyssey* is well-documented in modern scholarship. While the Hesiodic character of the hymn is widely accepted (Faulkner 2011), several scholars have argued that aspects of Odysseus’ experiences and Penelope’s story mirror elements of Demeter’s withdrawal from and eventual return to the assembly of the gods (A. B. Lord 2000; M. L. Lord 1967; Richardson 1974; Sowa 1984; Foley 1994). Recently, E. Cook has argued for a stronger intertextual link between the poems since “Odyssean recognition scenes” are portrayed as epiphanies “through echoes of parallel scenes . . . with the narrative traditions preserved in the *Hymn to Demeter*” (Cook 2012, 54-55). Despite these studies, little attention has been given to the intertextual potential of πολύαρητος.

Only Demophoön and Odysseus are described as “much prayed for” in the ‘Homeric’ corpus. In the *Hymn to Demeter*, πολύαρητος features in Metaneira’s description of Demophoön before she commissions a disguised Demeter to bring her son to ἥβης μέτρον (*h.Cer.* 220-1). In *Odyssey* 19, Eurykleia calls Odysseus πολύαρητος as she places the child on the knee of Autolykos who promises his possessions to his grandson when he has reached his prime (ἠβήσας) (*Od.* 19.404, 410). Eurykleia’s use of the term recalls an earlier scene, in *Odyssey* 6, where Nausikaa styles Odysseus as either a shipwrecked sailor or a πολύαρητος θεὸς (*Od.* 6.280). Notably, the usage in *Odyssey* 19 occurs in the digression that divides Eurykleia’s recognition of the scar from her reaction to Odysseus. Based on the contexts in which the word

appears, I assert that πολυάρητος invites comparisons between Demophoön and Odysseus and marks parallel epiphany scenes.

On the surface, πολυάρητος highlights the similarities between Demophoön and Odysseus. Demophoön occupies a liminal space between mortality and immortality. While mortal parents bore Demophoön, Demeter raises the infant as if he were her own divine child (Felson-Rubin and Deal 1980). Although Metaneira inadvertently impedes Demeter from granting him immortality, Demophoön is inconsolable when his sisters tend to him since they cannot compete with the goddess. Similarly, Odysseus' identity as human or divine is in question as Nausikaa reveals her uncertainty in *Odyssey* 6 after his transformational washing.

Moreover, in the Demophoön episode and *Odyssey* 19, the uses of πολυάρητος fall in between the partial and full epiphanies of Demeter to Metaneira and Odysseus to Eurykleia. Each episode in question opens with a partial epiphany: Metaneira witnesses Demeter hit the ceiling and fill the doorway with divine light; Eurykleia recognizes Odysseus' scar. Both scenes then shift to accounts of male maturation: Demophoön in the care of Demeter and Odysseus in the house of Autolykos. At this point, the two are described as πολυάρητος. After the characters are reunited with their parents, the full epiphanies of Demeter and Odysseus follow. The pattern may be outlined in detail so:

1. Protagonist disguised as a traveler from Crete is partially revealed to Person A. [Partial Epiphany]
2. Person A transfers a male child described as πολυάρητος into the care of Person B.
3. Person B raises the child during a particular period of male maturation.
4. The child is reunited with his parent(s).
5. Protagonist is fully revealed to Person A. [Full Epiphany]

Thus, I conclude that the poems either are interacting through this characterization of Demophoön and Odysseus or are incorporating similar elements from a larger poetic tradition.

Bibliography

- Cook, Erwin. "Epiphany in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the *Odyssey*." *Papers of the Langford Latin Seminar* 15 (2012): 53-111.
- Faulkner, Andrew. *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretive Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Felson-Rubin, Nancy and Harriet M. Deal, "Some Functions of the Demophon Episode in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter." *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 5 (1980): 7-21.
- Foley, Helene P., ed. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Lord, Albert B. *The Singer of Tales*. 2nd ed. Edited by Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Lord, Mary Louise. "Withdrawal and Return: An Epic Story Pattern in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter and in the Homeric Poems." *The Classical Journal* 62.6 (1967): 241-248.
- Richardson, N. J., ed. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.
- Sowa, Cora Angier. *Traditional Themes and the Homeric Hymns*. Chicago, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1984.