

§8. Odysseus

“ . . . for to many a city of mortals he bade me
wander again from my home, with a well-shaped oar on my shoulder
till to a people I come which never hath heard of the ocean . . . ”

– *Odysseus in Od 23:267-269*

There is something strange about Odysseus. Many of his Iliad appearances are in passages for which a good interpolation argument exists; we have already noted instances in Id 2 and 4. Also, he tends to turn up with Diomedes, most obviously in the spurious Id 10, the Doloneia.¹ His rebuke by Agamemnon in Id 4 was composed to parallel the rebuke to Diomedes, adjacent to it in Id 4.

Even in his own poem, the *Odyssey*, he is never really at home. No sooner does he get safely back, and is discussing it all with Penelope, than he brings up the fact that he is not yet free of his enemy, the sea; he must endure another search (quoted above), for a land where people have never *heard* of the sea, before he will at last be home. That search is never narrated, only mentioned, but that mention takes us out of the *Odyssey* into something which both singer and hearers knew, but did not need to mention. Something outside the story.

Odysseus is a part of nothing he has met.

Odysseus the Fighter

He figures in the *Iliad* chiefly as a persuader, or evader, who talks or thinks himself out of all sorts of scrapes, and advises others on strategy. These are the instances where he appears as a fighter:

5:668-680 (1 minute; seven inconsequential Trojans killed)

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He is not a fighter in the *Odyssey*, though he may show strength (the discus throw, the blow to Irus). Only at the end, the slaying of the suitors in *Od 22* and the incipient combat with their kinfolk in *Od 24*, does he come across that way. But these are things given by the story, and not inventions of the *Odyssey* poet. Her Odysseus is wily, not warlike.

¹See the Dolon chapter, §12 below.