CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Remembering Someone Else's Past: The Social Psychology of Odysseus' Fake Autobiographies (*Od.* 14 and 19)

Luca Valle Salazar ID

Università degli Studi di Trento, Italy
Email: lucavallesalazar@gmail.com

Abstract

This article discusses some social and psychological aspects involved in two of Odysseus' lying tales (*Od.* 14.192–359 and 19.165–248). If one understands remembering as reconstructing the past, this reconstructive element leaves room for forgery and deception. Telling credible lies involves many of the same cognitive structures used in the sharing of authentic personal memories. Odysseus' fake autobiographical stories in the guise of a Cretan beggar offer an interesting case study of this overlap between reconstructed memories and credible lies. Drawing on recent studies on autobiographical memory and on parallel examples in our contemporary world, the aim of this paper is to analyse some narrative and psychological features of Odysseus' fake memories, as well as the social functions that they fulfil in the fiction of the poem. It will be shown that, speaking with Eumaios, Odysseus builds his story using a conventional structure common to 'truthful' autobiographies in the fictional world of the epics, while with Penelope his autobiographical memories are co-narrated during the dialogue, guided by the emotions mutually aroused between narrator and narratee.

Keywords: Odyssey; psychology; lying tales; autobiographical memories

> In every man's memories, there are such things as he will reveal not to everyone, but perhaps only to friends... I will observe incidentally: Heine insists that faithful autobiographies are almost impossible, and that a man is sure to tell a pack of lies about himself.
> F. Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* (trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky)

Introduction

One of the conceptual cornerstones of contemporary memory studies is the notion that to remember is to reconstruct past events, rather than to simply

recover information accurately stocked in our minds.[1] This may raise a naïve question about the difference between remembering and lying. We may just as naively answer that remembering means reconstructing the past sincerely, while lying implies the intentionality to deceive. But the difference is much more nuanced than that. Indeed, as every jury knows, one may sincerely recall only the most convenient aspects of an event, intentionally omitting other details – this is why prosecutors and lawyers may further question witnesses during a trial. *Vice versa*, when one tells a complex lie, the best strategy is to build it on true memories. On the one hand, this will make the lie easier to construct and to remember in time; on the other, the lie will acquire more overall plausibility, being based on true facts.[2]

The *Odyssey* offers some very interesting insights into this overlapping of reconstructed memories and credible lies. Indeed, it is well known that in the second half of the poem, the primary narrator often leaves the floor to his main character, Odysseus, who wanders through Ithaca's society in disguise, telling a bunch of lying tales. He presents himself as a beggar of Cretan origins, recounting fake autobiographies about his pitiful life and destiny. Even though many similarities have been found between the beggar's tales and the narrative art of the ancient Greek epic poet,[3] in the fiction of the poem Odysseus is telling what must appear to the secondary narratees to be not epic song but the spontaneous recollection of personal memories.

In the following pages, I will discuss some social and psychological aspects of the situations presented in the poem.[4] In particular, the element of reconstruction involved in normal habits of remembrance offers the framework for the analysis of the narrative features and the social functions of autobiographical accounts shared in conversational contexts, such as those found in the *Odyssey*. And so, after an illustration of some relevant theories and findings about autobiographical memory in the field of psychology, the discussion will focus on two episodes: the beggar's presentation in Eumaios' hut (*Od.* 14.192–359) and his dialogue with Penelope (19.165–248). It will be argued that the construction of these fake autobiographical narratives is guided by mental schemata, that is, cognitive structures which are strongly conventional, functional, and affective. On the one hand, as he speaks with Eumaios, Odysseus' narrative follows a structure typical to 'truthful' autobiographical accounts in the fictional world of Homer (with an interesting parallel in our contemporary real world). On the other hand, with Penelope the beggar's story is

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[1] See Erll ([2011]) for an overview of the various modern approaches to the study of memory in culture.

[2] See Debey et al. ([2014]) 331, who discuss the 'two-steps hypothesis' for the construction of lies, putting forward 'the idea that the truth forms a first step in the construction of lies'. See also Minchin ([2019]) 109–11.

[3] It has also been argued that Odysseus' 'Cretan' tales mirror different ancient epic versions of the hero's *nostos*. See Reece ([1994]); Tsagalis ([2012]).

[4] The present discussion partly builds on Minchin's ([2019]) recent contribution about the cognitive processes involved in the construction (by the poet) and reception (by the audiences) of this kind of lies, that is, complex and coherent lies told in high-stake situations.

co-narrated through dialogue and guided by a sequence of emotions which each interlocutor arouses in the other.

Social and Psychological Aspects of Autobiographical Memory

When we are asked to write a 'short bio' for a professional presentation, selecting the appropriate contents is relatively easy and fast. In writing this kind of autobiography, one is guided by social expectations. Naturally, the aim of the short biography is to provide the audience or the readers with a very brief identikit, a sketchy idea of a person's (professional) identity. This points to the well-known relationship between memory and identity, that is, the prominent role and function of the former in the construction and definition of the latter.[5] Thus, in social contexts where we are interacting with others, we tell our memories in such a way that we construct for ourselves an identity fitting the specific situation. With our friends, we may want to be more expansive and include emotionally relevant events in our tales, whereas with strangers we may prefer to control more the flux of content and choose the most appropriate memories.

In giving an autobiographical account, we are guided by cognitive structures that we may call 'schemata', building on Frederic Bartlett's studies.[6] In his words,

> 'schema' refers to an active organization of past reactions, or of past experiences, which must always be supposed to be operating in any well-adapted organic response.[7]

In other words, when we engage in daily-life situations we proceed to remember (not necessarily at a conscious level) similar ones experienced in the past thanks to the appropriate schemata, which will also guide us in our reactions. In this way, performing daily-life acts such as recounting an autobiographical memory will not require us to engage in complex reasoning and analysis each time, but we will be guided by the right schemata built in similar past occasions. We might think of it as an economising function of the mind that allows us to expend the least amount of mental energy.

Two more aspects of schemata are relevant to the narration of autobiographical memories in social contexts. The first is that schemata are *shaped in social interaction* and are therefore largely cultural and conventional.[8] Autobiographical accounts are constituted of episodic memories,[9] which are given a coherent form and an organic sense by the narrative form.[10] When

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[5] See, among others, Gillis (1994); Assmann (1995); Conway (1997); King (2000); Eakin (2008).
[6] Bartlett (1932). See also Edwards and Middleton (1987); Emmott and Alexander (2009); Eysenck (2020).
[7] Bartlett (1932) 201.
[8] Bartlett (1932) ch. 16.
[9] On the distinction between episodic and semantic memory, see Tulving (1983); Baddeley (2015).
[10] Erll (2011) 85, with further bibliography.

we tell our story we reconstruct events that not only happened in our lives but are also directly related to us. Even though the core of the content may be personal, the structure and style of autobiographical narratives are largely acquired through social contact, hence they tend to be strongly conventional.[11]

In other words, the reconstruction of our past in a narrative form does not depend only on us and on our ideas and experiences but follows forms and conventions that are socially acquired during our lives. We begin to acquire these conventions at a young age, when we engage in our first 'conversations' with our parents and we listen and learn from them the proper ways to tell autobiographical memories.[12] It has been observed that 'as the child succeeds in adopting the narrative forms initially displayed in the social interaction, autobiographical memories become more and more narrativized and culturally conventionalized.'[13] It follows that adults, who have many years of development and experience, have various conventional narrative scripts for telling their stories.[14]

The second interesting aspect of schemata is that they '[are] not static knowledge structures stored in the brains or minds of individuals for the interpretation of experience, but rather [are] *functional properties of adaptation* between persons and their physical environments.'[15] Remembering our own lives is not only a matter of choosing conventional and ready-to-use patterns stored in our memory; instead, 'autobiographical memories are constructed in social interaction.'[16] They serve an adaptive function for the individual, meaning that they are guided by the individual's needs, plans, and goals in each social context.[17]

Furthermore, autobiographical memories are not only individually constructed but also co-constructed in social interaction. Indeed, in conversational situations we are not just narrating: we are engaging with an interlocutor who does not only listen to our story but may also comment, reply, and guide our narrative through specific questions. As Tilmann Habermas puts it, it is a 'process of co-narration,' where remembering 'is strongly colored by the action tendencies and emotions aroused by narrator and listener'.[18]

For this process of co-narration to take place, there must be mutual agreement on the fact that an autobiographical memory is being told: an 'autobiographical pact' must be stipulated between the narrator and the narratee, an assurance that the name and the contents of the life told correspond to the

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[11] See Barclay (1986) on the process of schematisation of autobiographical memories.

[12] Cf. Fivush (1991); Fivush and Reese (1992); Habermas (2012), 46–8.

[13] Fivush and Reese (1992) 116. Vygotsky (2012) (first English edition 1962) offered interesting insight on this phenomenon in his research about the relationship between language and thought.

[14] I use the term 'script' here and further in this article in a generic sense, to indicate a narrative structure typical in a certain culture, without following Schank's and Abelson's (1977) specific theorisation of cognitive scripts.

[15] Edwards and Middleton (1987) 80, with my emphasis.

[16] Fivush and Reese (1992) 116. See also Fivush (1991).

[17] Conway and Jobson (2012) stress the fact that different goals tend to predominate in different cultures.

[18] Habermas (2012) 47–8.

truth.[19] Of course, this becomes easier if the interlocutor cues the memory or expressly asks for it. In that case, there may be a 'header', that is, a reference 'to elements, actions, or roles [...] that are strongly associated with that schema,' which are 'likely to activate the schema in general'.[20] Being based on our life story,[21] an autobiographical memory may be cued by any element from the past that bears reference to the self (the mention of a particular episode in one's life, a question about one's relationship with somebody, *et similia*).

Moreover, to establish the 'autobiographical pact' there will need to be some guarantee that the memory is a truthful one, or at least that the intention of the teller is that of recalling everything as truthfully as possible. Autobiographies may present themselves in various forms, but 'the essential ingredient of autobiography is that the *meaning* of the author's life is portrayed honestly; the morphology of that portrayal can vary tremendously'.[22]

Hence, if one's purpose is to construct and tell a fake but credible autobiographical memory, they must be able to skilfully work with the psychological processes here discussed. This is something challenging but not impossible to do. Indeed, Bartlett's opinion was that 'an organism has somehow to acquire the capacity to turn round upon its own "schemata" and to construct them afresh', and that 'this [...] is where and why consciousness comes in'.[23] Thus, we may now observe how the poet of the *Odyssey* works on his own and his audience's schemata projecting in his character the construction and narration of credible but fake autobiographical memories.

Tuning the Memories: Conventional Patterns in Odysseus' Tales

To tell credible life stories, Odysseus needs to construct them according to known and recognisable patterns used in truthful autobiographical accounts in the fiction of the epic poems. These, as we have observed, would be shaped by conventional forms. In order to test this proposal, we may consider some examples of autobiographical memories present in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, in order to confront them with the fake beggar's narrative.

Among the characters who tell accounts about their own lives we find Phoinix (*Il.* 9.447–83), Patroklos (*Il.* 23.85–90), Theoklymenos (*Od.* 15.223–78), and Eumaios himself (*Od.* 15.390–484). In his article about Odysseus' tale at Eumaios' hut, Ben King, building on Richard Martin's observations,[24] highlighted the fact that the fake beggar's story follows a pattern common to all the autobiographies above mentioned. As King puts it:

> The tale conforms to a story-type [...]. All of these characters are noblemen who have lost their rank, wealth, and homeland but have been

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[19] See Lejeune (1975); Smith and Watson (2005) 358–9.
[20] Stockwell (2006) 10.
[21] On the concept of 'life story', see Conway and Jobson (2012) 55. See also Baddeley and Singer (2007); McAdams and Olson (2010); Habermas (2012) 33–8.
[22] Barclay (1986) 84, with my emphasis.
[23] Bartlett (1932) 206.
[24] Martin (1992).

accepted as dependents in the household of another. Though accepted and respected, they remain marginalized, second-class members in their new household – a pejorative term for them is μετανάστης, immigrant or outsider.[25]

Indeed, Phoinix is the son of Amyntor, a Boeotian king (*Il.* 9.448). He fled his home due to a dispute with his father (447–77), and he was accepted at Peleus' *oikos* (480). Even though Peleus treated him with respect ('like a father loves his son', 481), and appointed him to rule over the Dolopians (484), Phoinix dwelled 'on the furthermost border of Phthia' (484),[26] and he had a hard time taking care of the young Achilles (492), not having any sons of his own. In a very similar way, Patroklos, son of Menoitios from Opus (one of the Argonauts), fled his home after committing a homicide when he was still a child (*Il.* 23.85–8). He was accepted at Peleus' household, too, and was treated with respect (89–90), but he had to serve as Achilles' squire (θεράποντ', 90). In the *Odyssey* we find Theoklymenos' story (*Od.* 15.224–5, 272–81, 508–24). He descends from Melampos, son of Amythaon (225). He left his home after committing a homicide too (224), but he was then accepted by Telemakhos in his journey back to Ithaca (280–1). Once at Ithaca, Telemakhos sent him to Eurymakhos' household (508–24).

Besides being a *topos* in archaic Greek poetry,[27] this story-type works also as a cultural script, that is, a conventional narrative structure familiar to the inhabitants of the Homeric world. It is constituted by a clear pattern of elements that we may summarise as follows: being of noble origins, fleeing or leaving one's home, being accepted and well treated in the house of someone else, living at the margins of the new social milieu.

We may confront the Homeric pattern with a similar instance in our contemporary world. In the United States, it has been observed to be common among the Vietnam veterans to tell their own war experiences following common narrative forms and patterns to adapt themselves to their audiences. Patrick Hagopian, an American historian, calls this 'the cultural script of the Vietnam veteran'.[28] I quote:

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[25] King (1999) 78. On the motif of the suppliant-exile and of the exiled killer in the Homeric poems, see also Schlunk (1976); Nünlist (2009).

[26] Translations of the *Iliad* from Murray (1924). Eumaios too is said to live at 'the border of the land' (ἀγροῦ ἐπ' ἐσχατιήν, ὅθι δώματα ναῖε συβώτης, *Od.* 24.150). The Greek term ἐσχατιά was used symbolically and ideologically in the archaic literary tradition by the elites of the *astu* to indicate a space far from and opposed to the political centre of the community (see e.g., Alc. 130). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that from a socio-economic perspective the ἐσχατιαί were well-integrated zones in the administrative and productive space of the community in *poleis* like classical Athens or Tenos, as shown by the epigraphic evidence. In a similar way Phoinix and Eumaios, who live in the ἐσχατιαί of the lands, are integrated in the *oikoi* and communities of Peleus and Odysseus, but in a secondary or marginal position. For discussion and bibliography on the term ἐσχατιά with its symbolic and historical meanings, see Giangiulio (2001); now also Giangiulio (forthcoming); Jameson (2002).

[27] Martin (1992) 18.

[28] Hagopian (2000) 595–6.

Even when they remain true to events, veterans' stories may adjust to societal expectations – or what veterans *believe* their audience wishes to hear. The stories may also respond to the other narratives that circulate around the storyteller.[29]

Many episodes have even assumed the currency of parables, such as the story of the soldier who stepped on a mine but was saved by his comrades by being dragged away with a rope (the mine would have exploded as soon as he had removed his weight from it, tearing him apart if he was anywhere in the proximity). Examples like this can be found in volumes that collect oral testimonies about the war, like *Bloods*.[30] Thus, many contents of these veterans' memories are authentic, but they are shaped by typical episodes, a style and a structure which are to a high degree conventional. This gives the veterans more social appeal, creating acceptable and pitiful identities for them in the social contexts where they tell their stories (such as, for instance, the school classroom, in Hagopian's study).

In a similar way, the stories told by the Homeric characters mentioned above respond to a cultural script which is specific to Greek epic and society and follows the conventions of Homeric discourse. This kind of story has a social function too, that of appealing to the interlocutors' sympathy, as in Phoinix's case, when he tells his story to Achilles 'to win a sympathetic hearing [...] and to strengthen his case by drawing on the bond between himself and Peleus in the first instance and himself and Achilles in the second'.[31]

But what about Odysseus' tales? These are not truthful memories: we, the readers, know that Odysseus is inventing a false identity to analyse the situation in Ithaca without being recognised, as a precaution, following Agamemnon's suggestion (*Od.* 11.441–56) and Athena's plan (*Od.* 13.393–403). However, Odysseus needs to construct his false memories in a perfectly credible way, following the same patterns and conventions through which the other Homeric autobiographies are told. He will be able to do it because he, among all Homeric heroes, is characterised as the best in the use of discourse.[32]

Again, Vietnam veterans offer a very interesting case for comparison. Hagopian discussed instances of people who had not participated in the war but wished to obtain some of the social compassion and attention that derived from the figure of the veteran. He calls this 'the wannabe phenomenon'.[33] These people presented themselves as war veterans and told fake autobiographical memories which were perfectly credible, because in many cases they followed the 'cultural script of the Vietnam veteran'. In Hagopian's own testimony:

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[29] Hagopian ([2000]) 595. Emphasis in the original.
[30] See Terry ([1984]) 21–2.
[31] Minchin ([2005]) 63.
[32] See, e.g., the description made by Antenor in *Il.* 3.221–3, or Alcinous' praise of Odysseus' narrative skills in *Od.* 11.363–9.
[33] Hagopian ([2000]) 594–5.

> I, too, heard this story [*scil.* the story about the mine] – from a homeless veteran who haunted the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Sacramento, who showed me the scars on his leg where shrapnel from the mine hit him. According to a trusted informant, though, it was unlikely that the homeless man had ever been in Vietnam. But I had reason to doubt the story anyway, because I had previously heard it in the words of Harold "Light Bulb" Bryant in *Bloods*.[34]

Just as these 'wannabe veterans' used cultural scripts in the construction of their fake memories to obtain social compassion and attention, Odysseus too builds his stories following a story-type, that of the *metanastes*, present in the autobiographies of Phoinix, Patroklos, Theoklymenos, and Eumaios. He adapts his tale for the specific situation, tuning the tone, the themes, and the contents of his fake memory to match Eumaios' personal experience and feelings.[35]

We may observe how Odysseus' narrative fulfils the conditions of authentic autobiographies. The header which is supposed to cue and put in motion this memory is a formulaic question posed by Eumaios during the conversation: τίς πόθεν εἶς ἀνδρῶν; πόθι τοι πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆες; ('Who are you, and who are you descended from? Where is your city and your parents?' *Od.* 14.187).[36] This is a typical question in the *Odyssey*, one used at scenes of arrival of a stranger to a character's home.[37] In a synthetic form (τίς εἶ καὶ πόθεν;), it is found also in Attic drama and in Herodotus' *Histories*,[38] which suggests its cultural significance in the classical period. It may be perceived by the audiences as an appropriate and conventional way of asking someone to introduce themselves. It activates the appropriate schema through the reference to the beggar's parents and his *polis* of provenience, elements of great cultural importance in the construction of an individual's social identity in the ancient Greek world.[39]

The beggar then begins his tale with a promise of truthfulness, which may immediately reassure the secondary narratee Eumaios that the correct schema has been activated. He tells the swineherd that he will answer his questions ἀτρεκέως (14.192), that is, as truthfully and accurately as he can – even though the audiences or readers may know that this promise often signals a lie in the *Odyssey*.[40] This promise of truthfulness is sufficient for the autobiographical schema to be appropriately activated or confirmed, because what matters is

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[34] Hagopian (2000) 596.

[35] See Trahman (1952); Rose (1980); Haft (1984); Emlyn-Jones (1986); Hölscher (1988) ch. 15; de Jong (2001) 353–4; Bowie (2013) 193–4.

[36] Here and elsewhere (unless otherwise specified) all translations from the *Odyssey* are from Dawe (1993).

[37] See, e.g., *Od.* 1.170; 10.325; 15.264; 19.105; 24.298. For this type-scene in Homer, see Edwards (1992) 303–6.

[38] See Zelnick-Abramovitz (2022).

[39] See Bowie (2013) ad loc.

[40] As de Jong (2001: 355) observes. See also Emlyn-Jones (1986) on the use of ἀτρεκέως in the *Odyssey.*

that the *meaning* of the narrator's life is portrayed honestly. For this purpose, 'historical' reality or factual accuracy is not relevant.

Thus, after an emotional preamble that picks up a keyword spoken by Eumaios before (κήδεα, the 'troubles'),[41] Odysseus starts recounting his auto-biographical memory, which is made up of fictional information and events, mixed with factual ones.[42] Let us recall what the fake beggar tells the swine-herd. In his account, he is a Cretan, son of a nobleman called Castor (*Od.* 14.199–204). He fought at Troy with Idomeneus (235–42), and then raided Egypt (236–75), where he was defeated but ultimately accepted at the Egyptian king's home. There, he was treated with respect and given gifts of hospitality (276–86). He then met a Phoenician man who tricked him and kid-napped him to sell him as a slave (285–98), but he was saved by a storm, which dragged him alive to Thesprotia (294–333). At this point, the Thesprotian king offered him a safe ride to Doulikhion, but he was kidnapped again by the men who were supposed to accompany him (334–43). At last, when they stopped at Ithaca, he managed to escape (344–59). In a similar way, Eumaios was the son of a king in an island called Ktesios (*Od.* 15.403–14). He was kidnapped by some Phoenician pirates too (415–75) and sold as a slave in Ithaca, where Laertes bought him and took him to his household (482–4). Here, he has been respected and treated like one of the family ever since, even though he lives outside the town and serves as a swineherd (14.137–47).

The poet makes Odysseus select carefully among his memories in order to make them fit his interlocutor's experience and the specific conversational situation to obtain sympathy. Speaking with Eumaios, he uses what King calls 'the rhetoric of the victim', making the tone and the moral standpoint of his story match the swineherd's personal views and experience.[43] But it is interesting that this is not just some rhetorical stratagem invented *ex novo* by Odysseus' – or rather the poet's – imaginative cleverness. It follows a prop-erty of episodic memories told in narrative form in real conversational con-texts. In the words of Astrid Erll:

> In studies of conversational remembering it has been shown that through memory talk and the cross-cuing that emerges as a result it is not so much that *more* is remembered, but first and foremost that the partici-pants remember *differently*: Episodic memories are adjusted according to criteria of relevance specific to the group. 'Audience tuning' determines the selection of and perspective on what is remembered.[44]

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[41] Eumaios mentions it at *Od.* 14.185. See de Jong (2001) 355.

[42] Of course, both the concepts of 'fictional' and 'factual' must be understood as embedded in the fiction of the epics, thus 'fictional fiction' and 'fictional facts'. See Richardson (1996) 395: 'In the *Odyssey* everything the narrator says is by convention a fictional fact. That Athena transforms Odysseus into a squalid beggar is indisputable – the narrator himself says so. Everything the char-acters say, however, is subject to the authentication test.' On the mixture of facts and fictional ele-ments in Odysseus' tale, see de Jong (2001) 353–4.

[43] King (1999). See also de Jong (2001) 353–4.

[44] Erll (2011) 89. Emphasis in the original.

Indeed, we should keep in mind that this instance of autobiography is a co-narration between two interlocutors. Eumaios set the mood of Odysseus' narration through the questions he asked, hence preparing and building the story together with his interlocutor.

The Queen and the Beggar: Emotions and the Co-Narration of Memories

The importance of obtaining Eumaios' sympathy leads to a further point. Another aspect of autobiographical memories which I would like to focus on is their affective basis. Bartlett 'conceived of remembering as a functional, affect-driven activity'.[45] For him, the essential properties of mental schemata were 'social, *affective* and *purposive*, the basis of actions and reactions in the contexts of living one's life'.[46] Hence, one may observe that Odysseus properly leverages Eumaios' feelings and personal experience, as the swineherd tells the beggar (*Od.* 14.361–2):

> Ah, poor stranger, you have indeed stirred my heart as you said all that –
> all the suffering you underwent and all the journeys you made.

However, the affective basis of remembering comes to the fore most evidently in the case of Penelope. When the fake beggar finally meets her and tells her his story in Book 19, there are major differences from the tale narrated to Eumaios. The beggar is no longer engaging in a 'peer-to-peer' conversation between individuals from a low social background, but he is a beggar addressing the wife of the lord of the household. There is, then, a bigger difference in social status. This may be one of the reasons why the tale for Eumaios was longer (the longest of all the lying tales): that situation gave more space and was more appropriate for sharing personal memories in a more expansive way.

However, Odysseus manages to modify his 'memories' to lower that difference in social status between him and his interlocutor. He no longer emphasises the details of the '*metanastes* script', focusing instead on other details (mainly on the news he gives her about her husband).[47] Even though the story he tells Penelope briefly touches on some points from his other story (he is Cretan and has noble origins, 178–81; he knows Idomeneus, 181; he has suffered travelling away from home, 167–70; he has been to Thesprotia, where the king offered him a ride to Doulikhion, 287–92), Odysseus omits some of those points that were fundamental in the story-type of Eumaios' life: he does not mention being kidnapped by anybody or having lost his home and his rank – he just groans because he is 'away from his homeland' (169) and he has been 'wandering over many cities of men, suffering pain' (170). He also does not mention anything about the Egyptian king and how he was accepted and respected in his home. More importantly, he is no longer

[45] Edwards and Middleton (1987) 78.
[46] Edwards and Middleton (1987) 80, with my emphasis.
[47] See de Jong (2001) 468.

Castor's son, but Idomeneus' brother, son of Deucalion and grandson of Minos (*Od.* 19.178–81), and he did not fight at Troy, but he stayed in Crete, where he received Odysseus and treated him with hospitality (185–202).[48] Odysseus adapts his story to make it match Penelope's experience: in this version he is a relative of Idomeneus and remains at home waiting for him, just as Penelope is doing with her husband.[49]

 Nevertheless, making his story believable as an autobiographical memory is more difficult with Penelope than it was with Eumaios. As the swineherd himself warned him (*Od.* 14.372–89), it is not the first time that a stranger has come to Odysseus' *oikos* claiming to have seen Odysseus in order to obtain hospitality and respect from Penelope. Hence, Penelope needs some explicit confirmation. At first, she uses the usual formulaic question when she asks the beggar his identity (*Od.* 19.105), but the question will be avoided by him in an active attempt at forgetting sad personal memories. He tells her (*Od.* 19.115–8):

> So now ask me about everything else in your house, but do not ask me about my family and my home land, for fear you should fill my heart even more with pain as I call them to mind (μνησαμένωι).

From a psychological point of view, this would not be an unconscious repression of traumatic memories, but a conscious attempt of forgetting by blocking the memory cued by the linguistic input of Penelope's question.[50] Nevertheless, Penelope insists, asking again for the beggar's γένος (162), and at that point Odysseus narrates his story. By contrast with his tale for Eumaios, this time he does not give any promise of truthfulness at first, so the 'autobiographical pact' fails to be fully stipulated between narrator and listener. Hence, even though Penelope is moved as she hears about Odysseus and bursts into tears (204), she still needs some more proof to believe that she is indeed listening to an autobiographical account. Therefore, she asks him another question (*Od.* 19.218–9):

> Tell me what kind of clothes he had on his body, and what he was like himself, and about his comrades who accompanied him.

What is most interesting is that this time Odysseus emphasises much more the intention of veridical accuracy for his story (*Od.* 19.221–4):

> Madam, it is hard to say, after so much time apart. By now this is the twentieth year since he went from there and departed from my country;

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[48] See also Minchin (2019) 114.

[49] See also de Jong (2001) 468–9, on Odysseus' narrative techniques of adaptation to the situation.

[50] See Minchin (2006) on Homer's engagement with and representation of one of the troubling aspects of memory: its persistence (that is, our inability to forget what we want to forget); with an account of Helen, Aias, Penelope, and Achilles as case studies.

but I will tell you the way he is pictured in my heart (ὥς μοι ἰνδάλλεται
ἦτορ).

So far, this promise is true: it is indeed the twentieth year since he departed
from his country. Odysseus elaborates more thoroughly what he had promised
Eumaios in a condensed way with the expression ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω, 'I will
speak sincerely' (*Od.* 14.192). He points out the possible fallacies in his memor-
ies due to the long time that has passed – a very realistic observation, we may
comment – but he promises to remember Odysseus as best 'as [his] mind pic-
tures him,' as others choose to translate.[51] It is interesting that he uses the
verb ἰνδάλλομαι, which means 'to appear', 'to be seen', like the Latin *videor*,[52]
as though Odysseus conceived memories like visual representations inside the
mind (a notion currently discussed in modern studies of psychology).[53]

The beggar then goes on to describe in much detail the cloak he was wear-
ing and the clasp on it, with a brief but vivid *ekphrasis* about the decorations
engraved on it (225–48). At this point, we may observe Penelope's reaction, in
the primary narrator's words (*Od.* 19.249–50):

So he spoke, stirring in her even more the desire to lament as she recog-
nized the evidence (σήματα) which Odysseus had disclosed.

While the sign of recognition serves the declared purpose of verifying the beg-
gar's tale as some sort of 'fact checking', it also cues a very personal and emo-
tional memory, useful for Odysseus as he strives to reach his own goals.[54] As
experimental studies emphasise, 'memory is aided whenever contextual cues
arouse appropriate schemata'.[55] Indeed, Penelope herself gave Odysseus the
cloak and added the clasp, as she states immediately after the beggar's descrip-
tion. From a psychological and semiotic point of view, then, the cue that puts
in motion Penelope's memory is a material sign which assumes sense and
affective meaning in view of the intimate relationship between her and her
husband. Indeed, the mention and the detailed description of the clasp was
not strictly necessary to confirm the authenticity of Odysseus' story – the

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[51] See Murray (1980) 245.

[52] See *LSJ* s.v.

[53] See Smith (1998) 392, who discusses two theoretical approaches in the interpretation of mem-
ories as mental representations: 'First, a representation can be viewed as a *thing*... Our familiar
metaphors for memory involving storage, search, and retrieval invoke the idea of a storehouse
filled with thing-like representations. Second, a representation can also be a *state*... Holding a
given set of beliefs or attitudes amounts to being in a particular state; adopting a new belief is
changing one's state.' The prevailing ancient conception of memory was more similar to the
first type: the method of the *loci memoriae* was developed in Rome (as we know from Cicero and
Quintilian), building on Greek methods which were said to go back to Simonides of Ceos (see
Yates (1966) 27–49); Den Boer (2008); Erll (2011) 68–70). The idea of retrieval of a memory con-
served as a picture somewhere in the mind (or in the heart) is very clear in the ancient commen-
tators' paraphrase of the expression ὥς μοι ἰνδάλλεται ἦτορ, in the *schol. ad* Hom. *Od.* 19.224: ὥς μοι
ἀναφέρει ἡ ψυχὴ, ὥς διαμέμνημαι, 'as my soul/mind brings it back to me, as I keep in memory.'

[54] See Scodel (2002) on σήματα in the Homeric poems and their function as cues for memories.

[55] Baddeley (2015) 141, who quotes Bower et al. (1975).

rest of the clothes would have been enough – but it fits Penelope's own life story, assuming meaning for her. In Bartlett's conception, 'it is fitting to speak of every human cognitive reaction – perceiving, imaging, remembering, thinking and reasoning – as an *effort after meaning*.'[56]

Therefore, the beggar's story, which was already built inside a framework of cultural knowledge recognisable by Penelope (the mention of Crete with its numerous *poleis* and languages, Amnisos with its famous cave of Eileithyia, the Trojan war),[57] is then adapted to the very specific social context of private conversation. Odysseus' memories are co-constructed through dialogue with Penelope. Indeed, we may highlight the fact that this autobiographical memory is built in social interaction and co-narration, even more than the memories exchanged at the swineherd's hut. Odysseus told Eumaios his story in a long and continuous narration (*Od.* 14.192–59). After that, the two spoke about Odysseus' future return, followed by a dining scene (409–56). Only after that the beggar told another bit of his past, this time an *ainos* about the time Odysseus gave him a cloak to protect him from the cold, when they were under the walls of Troy (456–506).[58] By contrast, the recalling of the beggar's past in Penelope's episode is more of a continuous dialogue (162–348). The memories are constructed together through questions and answers, guided mainly by the emotions aroused by the interlocutors in each other.[59] Indeed, Penelope set the emotional mood from the beginning: she had just finished lamenting about her condition,[60] when she asked the beggar to tell her for the second time about his origins. In Eumaios' case, the swineherd had begun and had conducted the introductory dialogue between the two offering his moral views about the justice of Zeus and the arrogance of the wooers (14.80–108), thus setting a different mood and different themes to what would follow and leading the beggar to focus more on the ethics of hospitality and justice.[61]

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[56] Bartlett (1932) 44. Italics in the original.

[57] Crete's *poleis*, peoples and languages: *Od.* 19.172–7; Amnisos: 19.188; the Trojan war: 19.182–3.

[58] Nagy (2007) 63: 'Technically, an *ainos* is any performance conveying a meaning that needs to be interpreted and then applied in moments of making moral decisions.' Eumaios indeed understands that the beggar is feeling cold, and goes on to give him a cloak, just as Odysseus did in the story. See also Minchin (2019) 113–14.

[59] De Jong (2001) 468: 'Odysseus' lying tale to Penelope – uniquely – consists of three separate parts (165–202, 221–48, and 268–99); the division allows the narrator to record each time Penelope's emotional response (204–19, 249–60, 308–16).'

[60] Hom. *Od.* 19.129: νῦν δ' ἄχομαι...; 136: φίλον κατατήκομαι ἦτορ; 157–61, with Russo (1992) 82 ad loc.: 'Penelope here gives a realistic, and pessimistic, assessment of her situation *vis-à-vis* the suitors: both her parents and her son are pressing her to remarry, and she has run out of stalling devices.' See also Rutherford (1992) 164 (ad 19.203–12).

[61] It goes without saying that emotional and moral standpoints are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the dialogue with Eumaios comprises emotional elements, which play a role in building the sympathy between the two. Conversely, the ethics of hospitality are present in Penelope's episode too. It just seems to me that in each of the two cases, one element is given more emphasis than the other.

Conclusions

We began by raising the question about the overlap between reconstructed memories and credible lies. The *Odyssey* offers an interesting case study of the degree to which this overlap can extend. Indeed, Odysseus' lying auto-biographies show many of the social and psychological features involved in the sharing of true autobiographical memories in real conversational situations.

We observed that in recounting memories in social contexts, one is normally guided by cognitive schemata, which operate through the conventionalisation of remembered material. These schemata are acquired and shaped through social interaction in the course of the individual's life and serve an adaptive function in their social milieu. Thus, schemata are strongly guided by affect, being directed towards the needs, plans, and goals of the individual.

Autobiographical narratives tend, therefore, to follow conventional structures which are culture-specific and acquired through social contact; but these structures can be consciously used to construct fake memories too. This phenomenon has been observed at the beginning of the current century in the United States, where some individuals who did not participate in the Vietnam war could present themselves as veterans using the 'cultural script of the Vietnam veteran'. Similarly, Odysseus uses the story-type of the *metanastes*, which is recurrent in the 'truthful' autobiographical accounts of other Homeric characters, such as Phoinix, Patroklos, Theoklymenos, and Eumaios himself. This gives Odysseus the chance to make his memories fit his interlocutor's experience, drawing from familiar schemata to build his story and ultimately to obtain his host's sympathy.

In speaking with Penelope, Odysseus slightly overshadows the 'cultural script' of the *metanastes*, adapting to the new context instead. Here, he needs to be more convincing, and some psychological and discursive requirements must be met to reassure his interlocutor that his narrative is a truthful autobiography. The fake beggar reacts to a linguistic cue or a header which normally activates autobiographical memories. In this case, just as we saw with Eumaios, the header is the formulaic question about the beggar's parents and his homeland: τίς πόθεν εἶς ἀνδρῶν; πόθι τοι πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆες; But in contrast to his words in the Eumaios-scene, with Penelope the beggar at first fails to stipulate the 'autobiographical pact', which requires a clear guarantee of sincerity about the content of the life story told. Hence, Penelope asks for more proof of veracity, and the beggar amends his mistake insisting on the truthfulness of his answer much more profusely than he did with Eumaios.

Lastly, this 'question-and-answer' dynamic is typical of conversation, and this is why autobiographies told in these situations are not only narrated but 'co-narrated'. We have observed how this happens in the dialogue with Penelope, where the beggar's memories are not presented in one long narrative (as they were with Eumaios) but divided and organised in a continuous dialogue with the interlocutor instead. Therefore, the beggar's autobiographical narrative is gradually guided and shaped by the emotions aroused by narrator and listener.

‘Odysseus’ – or rather the poet – skilfully works on his psychological schemata in a conscious way to build credible autobiographical tales. The content of his stories is partly authentic and counterfeited, but most importantly he creates the same ‘meaning effect’ of a truthful autobiography.[62] The beggar’s lying tales carry meanings which are not only credible but also emotionally relevant for the narratees. This ultimately allows Odysseus to achieve his goal of obtaining a sympathetic welcome in Ithaca’s society and in his own *oikos*.

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[62] I borrow the expression ‘meaning effect’ (*effet de sense*) from semiotic terminology, where it is defined as ‘the impression of “reality” produced by our senses when confronted with meaning.’ (Greimas and Courtés (1982) s.v.).

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