

## MORTAL OPINIONS

## 7.1 End of the Line

How far have we come? Or, given that a *hodos*, as we saw in Section 1.2, is durative but telic: what have we accomplished? To what destination have we arrived on this *hodos dizēsios*?

Throughout this project we have set our sights on Parmenides' invention of extended deductive argumentation and the way that he established the basic conceptual footprint of what would be called demonstration: (i) proceeding from a starting point that has to be accepted (ii) by strict deductive arguments (iii) to establish an inescapable conclusion. All three components, we have seen, are made possible by, and develop under the deep influence of, the network of meanings compressed into, and emanating out from, the figure of the *hodos*.

To begin at the beginning (i), Parmenides inherited a pattern of Homeric deliberation that involved the thinking through of two alternatives and the rejection of one to lead to a conclusion. In the Homeric figure of the *hodos* and the discourse modes organized by its characteristic types of dependence, he inherited a specific discursive organization: narration, followed by description, followed by instruction (which was often – at least in the *hodos* spanning *Od.* 12.37–141 – justified by argument). Even more specifically, in lines 12.55–126 he would have encountered a number of textual elements that feature with unusual frequency: a modally charged version of description-by-negation, description made up of existential and predicative forms of *einai* (and *esti* in particular), and the use of *gar* and *epei* to articulate the relationship between premises and the imperatives to action that formed Circe's conclusions. The audience of the Homeric poem encounters in this segment of Circe's *hodos* a special kind of choice, one between two courses in physical space: a choice between two mutually incompatible, exhaustive alternatives (*viz.* a *krisis* or

exclusive disjunction). Thanks to Parmenides' reversal of the relationship between argument and description, second and third person, action and state of affairs, the Homeric pattern of deliberation, applied to this special *krisis* forming an exclusive disjunction, converged to form an exceptionally powerful nexus by which the rejection of one term – in typical Homeric fashion – now enforced with a modal power, *mandated* the selection of the other. The terms of the choice were no longer actions, however, but descriptions of what-is; and the argumentative support was not previously established descriptions, but actions whose impossibility of being performed – by any 'you' who should hear or read the verse – served as the self-founding basis for an entirely new sequence of argument. Homer's *krisis* came in the middle of the *hodos*; Parmenides moved it to the very beginning of his own to force all who would listen to his goddess down the path 'IS': to proceed, that is to say, from a starting point that, because it cannot *not* be accepted, must therefore be accepted by all comers.

Point (ii) encompasses no more and no less than the invention of extended deductive argumentation. The rhetorical schema of the *hodos* governs a form of catalogic discourse that orders a series of items enumerated on the basis of their contiguity in space and the movement of a voyager in time, a combination we termed consequence. The discursive architecture structured by the *hodos* is thus systematic, linking each item within the same catalogue and organizing their interrelationships on the basis of this principle of consequence; insofar as its types of dependence accommodate argumentative support justifying claims made in the timeless present (and with the predicative *esti*) of description, it also provides a framework that makes possible more than mere assertion. By transforming the items his *hodos* catalogues from nodes on the itinerary of a journey through physical space – and in many cases, narrative episodes tied to places – to claims about the nature of what-is; by converting previous claims into supporting premises at lower levels of dependence for items later in the catalogue; by exploiting the polysemy of the word *hodos* (which signifies both object and action); and by harnessing the power of word and world, of the image of the physical rut road engraved in the earth, Parmenides thus transforms spatio-temporal consequence into logical consequence. Put schematically: the *hodos*, as a figure

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governing its own rhetorical schema, mediates a new discursive architecture that orders discourse-units and *hodos*-units in a systematic, cumulative way. The *hodos*, as a figure governing its own rhetorical schema with its own types of dependence, mediates a new discursive architecture that makes these units argumentatively justified claims about the nature of what-is. The *hodos*, as a signifier with a physical referent, mediates a new concept of necessary movement from point to point, unit to unit, assertion to assertion, premise to conclusion. The *hodos*, as a signifier whose signified intrinsically involves purposeful movement towards a destination, mediates a new concept of movement towards a final and terminal conclusion (iii). Taken together: movement towards a destination by wheeled vehicle along a graven track, through space and in time, has been transformed into a ‘metaphysical’ necessity, a *hodos*(-journey) whose *hodos*(-itinerary) moves along a *hodos* (rut road) in such a way that no deviation, no wandering, no swerving, no erring is possible. From *sēma* to *sēma* to *sēma* to *sēma* to . . .

To what?

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The poem has clearly thought hard about, and finally rejected, a role for Laertes in the palace situation . . . His withdrawal not only disencumbers the game of a morally and strategically uncomfortable complication, but cleverly locates the zenith of emotion in the reunion with Penelope, with Laertes held in judicious reserve for an epilogue.<sup>1</sup>

Almost as soon as they were conceived . . . these truly portentous ideas of Parmenides suffered a kind of breakdown, leading to what I call a Parmenidean apology, and this breakdown was portentous too.<sup>2</sup>

We saw above (Section 1.2) that, being durative and telic, in Homer a *hodos* is intrinsically oriented towards an ultimate, purpose-laden destination.<sup>3</sup> In short, a *hodos* should conclude (lest it be ἀτέλεστος, ἀλίη, τηῦσίη) – finally and absolutely.

<sup>1</sup> Lowe (2000) 142.

<sup>2</sup> Popper (1998a) 146–47.

<sup>3</sup> *Contra* Montiglio (2005), who does not provide a thorough semantic analysis of her key terms; see again Folit-Weinberg (forthcoming, 2022).

In addressing Lloyd's point (iii), one final set of comparisons between the *Odyssey* and Parmenides' 'Route to Truth' can prove illuminating – and provocative. In the *Odyssey*, the end, the climax, the culmination, the terminal point is, as everyone since the Alexandrians has known, the great olive-root bed of Odysseus, *empedon sēma*.<sup>4</sup> One can understand why Aristarchus and Aristophanes – like so many subsequent readers of the *Odyssey* – purportedly felt that the 'real' end/*telos* of the *Odyssey* was at 23.296.<sup>5</sup> From at least three perspectives, the conclusion, climax, culmination of Odysseus' *hodos* is the olive-root bed and his reattainment of it.

### 7.2.1 Space, Symbol, Plot

What Hestia, the hearth, does for the ordering of space in archaic and classical Greek constructions of the *oikos* generally (at least on Vernant's construction) the olive-root bed does for the *oikos* of Odysseus.<sup>6</sup> Vernant highlights three aspects of Hestia: fixity and permanence, centrality, and seclusion.<sup>7</sup> The bed famously embodies the first pair of characteristics: as Odysseus describes at great length and with bewildering specificity (*Od.* 23.190–91), he fashioned it from a living olive tree; he goes on to refer to it as ἐμπέδον (*Od.* 23.203)<sup>8</sup> and marvels at the extreme difficulty – if not

<sup>4</sup> This exaggerates the matter, of course; for a detailed treatment of the Alexandrians (and the more recent, largely Germanophone, analytic tradition), see Heubeck, Russo, and Fernández-Galiano (1989) 342–45. The meaning of the phrase *empedon sēma* will be discussed at length; for *empedon*, see n. 8 below.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to n. 4 above, see esp. discussions at Page (1955) 101–36; Kirk (1962) 244–52; Moulton (1974); Goldhill (1991) 18 n. 34 with bibliography; Foley (1999) 157–67.

<sup>6</sup> See Katz (1991) 180, the only piece I have encountered that explicitly links the bed to Vernant (2006d). This could be developed much further; many of the comments made by e.g. Bergren (1993) 19 could apply equally to the olive-root bed or Hestia.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Vernant (2006d) 161, and 163, 193, 174: to 'represent at the heart of the house . . . values of fixity, permanence, seclusion'; 'spatial values associated with a center, immobile and withdrawn'; 'polarity between the static and the immobile, the open and the enclosed, the interior and the exterior'.

<sup>8</sup> A strikingly well-chosen word, one that, instantiates – better, reifies – its (etymological) root. It is a compound composed of the spatial item ἐν ('in') and πέδον, which Chantraine translates literally as 'ce sur quoi repose le pied, "sol"' (*DELG* 867); Chantraine gives the primary meaning 'solidement planté dans le sol'. To refer to a tree stump as ἐμπέδον is thus quite a different matter from so describing other physical objects with a concrete presence, like an army of men massed on the battlefield (*Il.* 5.527, 15.405, 15.622), or a man tied to a mast on a moving ship, as in Cassin (1987) and Cassin (2011). See below for further discussion.

impossibility – of uprooting it from the ground (*Od.* 23.184–86).<sup>9</sup> In the course of his description, the bed’s central position emerges: it was the orienting point which, thick as a pillar (πάχκετος δ’ ἦν ἡὔτε κίων, *Od.* 23.191), dictated the construction of the entire bedchamber (23.190–94).<sup>10</sup> The bed is also uniquely secluded:<sup>11</sup> Odysseus fashioned ‘an enclosure within an enclosure; the image drawn here is that of a concentric structure, of a sealed place, of a protected *inside*’.<sup>12</sup> Penelope, the ever-vigilant guardian of the bed and bedchamber (*Od.* 23.226–29), has ensured that not a soul except for the loyal handmaid, the absent husband, and the faithful wife have ever entered the chamber or know of the bed.<sup>13</sup> And like Vernant’s Hestia, which ‘centres’ and ‘organizes’ space and helps ‘constitute the framework within which . . . the experience of spatiality took place’,<sup>14</sup> the position of Odysseus’ *oikos* is the central gravitational pole in the story space of the *Odyssey*, forever pulling back its wide-ranging master.<sup>15</sup> Tiresias’ prophecy suggests that, even after Odysseus’ final journey inland to the people without oars, he is to return back οἴκαδε, where the ritual must be performed (*Od.* 11.132–33).<sup>16</sup>

If the bed stands like a magnet at the heart of the story space, the space it organizes is not uniform and homogenous. Several generations of scholarship *après* Lévi-Strauss have helped us see the manner in which the various codes that form the symbolic economy of the *Odyssey* work in concert to map the terrain of human life,<sup>17</sup> society,<sup>18</sup> and the house<sup>19</sup> in a way that makes the bed the

<sup>9</sup> What could better exemplify Vernant’s description of the hearth: ‘Fixed in the ground, the circular hearth is the navel that *ties the house* to the earth . . .’ (Vernant (2006d) 158, emphasis mine)?

<sup>10</sup> And presumably the whole *oikos*: see Heubeck, Russo, and Fernández-Galiano (1989) ad loc.; Katz (1991) 179–80.

<sup>11</sup> See Section 7.2.3 below.

<sup>12</sup> Starobinski and Brown (1975) 350, emphasis original; see also Katz (1991) 181–82.

<sup>13</sup> See esp. Bergren (1993); also Zeitlin (1995) 137–39 and Nagler (1996).

<sup>14</sup> Vernant (2006d) 161.

<sup>15</sup> See Katz (1991) 180 and Vernant (2006d) 161.

<sup>16</sup> Review of bibliography in Peradotto (1990) and Purves (2010).

<sup>17</sup> Landmarks and other fruitful studies include Segal (1962); Vidal-Naquet (1996); Vernant (1990b) 62–64; Vernant (1991); Detienne (1994) 15–36; Most (1989); Hartog (1996); Dougherty (2001); Montiglio (2005).

<sup>18</sup> Note that e.g. Goldhill (1991) 1–68 cites Bourdieu, rather than, say, Lévi-Strauss or Lévy-Bruhl; see also Hölkeskamp (2002).

<sup>19</sup> Largely a subset of nn. 17, 18 above; if n. 17 contains studies that anthropologize, and n. 18 works that sociologize the *Odyssey*, the slippage here between an *oiko*-nomy and

apex crowning its contour gradient. Insofar as the plot of the *Odyssey* tracks a progression to – and therefore articulates a definition of – normal human relations, social order, and household organization, the bed therefore represents the climactic item, the terminal point of the sequence. As a craft item fusing nature and culture in its unique way (*Od.* 23.180–203, discussed below), apotheosis and emblem *par excellence* of the ‘wild outdoors present within’<sup>20</sup> which ‘the “cultural” . . . holds captive in the very centre of its artifice’, the bed constitutes the ultimate taming of the wild by the civilized.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, insofar as ‘the ties which link Penelope, through the conjugal bed, to royalty’ mean that, ‘in the vacuum left . . . at the center of his kingdom by the disappearance of the king’, then ‘to be taken into Odysseus’ bed’ is to ‘step directly into the former master’s place both in the palace and the land’;<sup>22</sup> the bed of the absent ruler’s wife thus represents the decisive site of sociopolitical power. Thirdly, the marriage bed, as true and proper location from which the legitimate bearer of name and line is produced, becomes the rooted place where the male seed is made to bear fruit, and establishes (in the etymological sense of the word) the family line of the house of Odysseus.<sup>23</sup>

Third comes plot. The *Odyssey*’s mapping of plot to space has often been observed: from a spread that encompasses the no-place of Ogygia, ‘*omphalos* of the sea’ (*Od.* 1.50), and the halfway world of Scheria,<sup>24</sup> the plot is ‘purposefully *funneled* in

an eco-nomy is felicitous considering the fusion of nature and culture, tree and craft represented by the bed; see esp. Starobinski and Brown (1975).

<sup>20</sup> Burkert (1983) 62.

<sup>21</sup> Starobinski and Brown (1975) 351. See also Katz (1991) 181 and Zeitlin (1995) 124–25. For the marriage bed as symbol of one of the three foundational institutions fundamental to the Greek conception of civilization, see e.g. Vernant (1990a) 152–55; Zeitlin (1995) 124–25.

<sup>22</sup> Vernant (1990b) 76, 74, 75. See Dougherty (2001) 44 for a similar point about Nausicaa (likewise Vernant (1990b) 72). One thinks here of Oedipus and Jocasta.

<sup>23</sup> Vernant (2006d) 171–72: ‘The landed property of the *oikos*, the *patrōia*, which through the rise and fall of succeeding generations maintains the bond between the family line and its native soil . . . the royal scion born of the hearth and rooted at the center of its domain . . . transforms [the sovereign domain] into a domestic enclosure, a place of security’; see also Nagler (1996) 158. See also Detienne’s remarks on the description of the bed as a λέκτροιο παλαίου θεσμός (*Od.* 23.296), Detienne (1998) 157; likewise Burkert (1983) 62 n. 16; Heubeck, Russo, and Fernández-Galiano (1989) ad loc.

<sup>24</sup> Segal (1962).

a consistent spatial direction’, its ‘aperture’ closed,<sup>25</sup> until all the lines – the destiny of the house of Odysseus, the Return of the Hero – converge on a single focal point: the κίων (*Od.* 23.191) that forms the *omphalos* of the *oikos*.<sup>26</sup> This is because, as discussed, ‘[h]ouse, household, property, mistress, kingship: the five objects of the suitors’ aspiration, five challenges to Odysseus’ hold on his identity, are all assimilated’ in the single space of the bed.<sup>27</sup> The bed is thus *the* decisive, climactic site of plot resolution, the great node where the major threads of the poem – What will become of the house of Odysseus? Will the hero successfully return? – are to be tied up and thus where, paradoxically, *dénouements* occur.

### 7.2.2 *Penelope’s peira*

But before he can attain this ultimate destination, the symbolic epicentre, and climactic site of plot resolution, Odysseus must pass a test (*Od.* 23.114, 181). A *peira* is precisely what we would expect at this point of the ‘quest’ pattern;<sup>28</sup> it is also precisely what we would expect in an Odyssean ‘recognition scene’ (although here the roles are reversed, and Odysseus the one tested).<sup>29</sup> This particular *peira* is notable for two reasons, however: unlike the *peira* of the Cyclops, Eumaeus, or the stringing of the bow, this is a test of *knowledge*, not of respect for *xenia*, or loyalty, or brawn.<sup>30</sup> What is more, following the shift in narrative structure, begun with the departure from Circe’s island, which brought about the ‘coalescence of a quest and a return pattern’ in such a way that ‘consecutive quests are interlocking’

<sup>25</sup> Lowe (2000) 137; see also Fowler (1997b) for the language of closure of apertures.

<sup>26</sup> This paragraph draws on Lowe (2000) 129–56; see also Hartog (1996) and Montiglio (2005).

<sup>27</sup> Lowe (2000) 136, building on Goldhill (1991) 1–24 (see esp. 27). Surprisingly, Lowe identifies the *megaron* as the climactic site of plot resolution – a claim that is hard to justify given his analysis. ‘Mistress’ can certainly be lost in the *megaron*, but not won until the bed. Similarly, as we have seen, kingship and house run through the bed, too – and with them household and property. A more serious challenge to the bed’s status as the decisive locus of plot resolution comes in the form of Laertes; see discussion below.

<sup>28</sup> Bakker (2013) 12–35, esp. 27–29, 31–32; on the notion of the ‘quest’, the most basic form of which is ‘test + liquidation of lack’, see esp. Bakker (2013) 18.

<sup>29</sup> For a typology, see Gainsford (2003). Among the vast secondary literature on recognition in the *Odyssey*, see esp. e.g. Murnaghan (1987); Pucci (1987) 82–9; Goldhill (1991) 1–24.

<sup>30</sup> For other ‘tests’, see Goldhill (1991) 1–24; Bakker (2013) 28–35; Montiglio (2005).

## Mortal Opinions

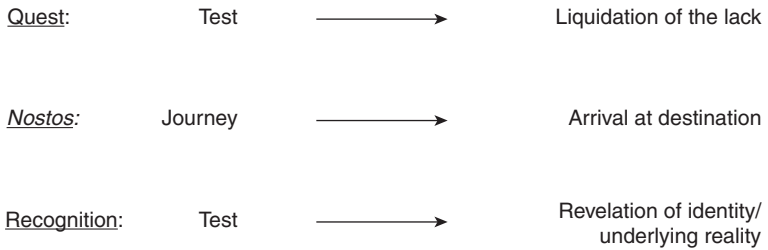


Figure 7.1 Confluence of story pattern, theme, type-scene: Interview with Penelope

rather than merely consecutive, ‘*the return [nostos] is part and ultimate object of the quest*’;<sup>31</sup> this means that just as the bed therefore becomes the ultimate destination of the *hodos*, the interview with Penelope becomes the ultimate *peira* (see Figure 7.1). The scene thus recapitulates in miniature the dynamics of the larger *nostos-as-quest*: a journey that culminates in a *peira*, which, when passed, grants access to the absolutely fixed, stable point at the secluded core of the *oikos*.

About the second point we have said much already: the bed, as a tree root, is literally *em-pedon* – etymology and image, sign and referent converge at the *root*, the archetypally fixed, hidden, unchanging *sēma* which is both what stands at the end of the journey and that to which one gains access by virtue of the *peira*. Although critics have excavated an exceptional range of meaning out of this test,<sup>32</sup> the degree to which the rooted bed functions as the hub of a knowledge-based *oiko-nomy* – where knowledge input is converted or exchanged into knowledge output – has been little discussed.<sup>33</sup>

The test is a test of knowledge firstly insofar as a special kind of knowledge is the precondition to its operations; as Odysseus is careful to point out, the craftsmanship required to make such an *empedon sēma* requires one who works εὖ . . . ἐπισταμένως

<sup>31</sup> Bakker (2013) 19–20, 30, emphasis original.

<sup>32</sup> Much of which focuses on the interrelationship between his identity and her fidelity in the neat summation of Zeitlin (1995); Pucci (1987) 82–93.

<sup>33</sup> Only Leshner (1994a) 29–30 examines this connection thoroughly, though see also Robbiano (2006) 108–09.



7.2 *Epi-/Apologoi*: ‘Here I End My *pistos logos* . . .’?

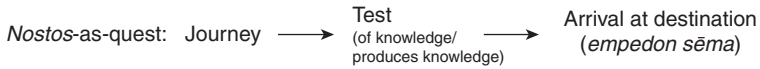


Figure 7.2 *Nostos-as-quest* (à la Bakker): Final episode (interview with Penelope)

(*Od.* 23.197).<sup>34</sup> In addition to this knowledge-how that acts as a condition of possibility for the test, what the *peira* tests for is knowledge-that (viz. knowledge that a certain object has a certain quality): ‘If he knows the bed, he is (her) Odysseus.’<sup>35</sup> But, thirdly, even more than this: if he knows the bed, *she knows that* he is (her) Odysseus. With the introduction of his knowledge, the bed in turn *generates, bears, produces* knowledge for her – knowledge, what is more, of an especially certain, absolute, fixed kind (see Figure 7.2).

7.2.3 *The Fixity of the Sign Signs Fixity (Fixedly)*

It is well known that Odysseus first refers to the bed itself as a *sēma* (*Od.* 23.188) and then characterizes his knowledge of the bed’s manufacture as a *sēma* that he ‘makes manifest’ (*Od.* 23.202) to Penelope. In this second use, Odysseus echoes Penelope’s rebuke to Telemachus that she and Odysseus share ‘secret’ or ‘hidden’ (κεκρυμμένα) *sēmata* (*Od.* 23.110; used again by Penelope to confirm his passage of the *peira* at *Od.* 23.225: σήματ’ ἀριφραδέα κατέλεξας). Likewise, we have seen that Odysseus refers to the bed’s physically ‘in-rooted’ quality with the word *empedon* (*Od.* 23.203). This semantic dance attains its climax immediately thereafter in the narrator’s virtually untranslatable description of Penelope’s acceptance that the beggar is Odysseus (*Od.* 23.206):

σήματ’ ἀναγνούση τά οἱ ἔμπεδα πέφραδ’ Ὀδυσσεύς . . .

[Since] she recognized the *empeda sēmata* which  
Odysseus declared/indicated . . .

<sup>34</sup> Cf. also *Od.* 23.184–85: it would be ‘difficult even for someone very *epistamēnos*’ (χαλεπὸν δέ κεν εἶη καὶ μάλ’ ἐπισταμένῳ) to move the bed; see here Starobinski and Brown (1975) 351; Dougherty (2001); Nagler (1996); Katz (1991); Austin (1975).

<sup>35</sup> Bergren (1993) 19.

Through this dazzling *jeu de mot*, ‘the *sēma* that is *empedon* (i.e. the bed rooted in the earth) emerges as a *sēma empedon* (i.e. a valid sign).<sup>36</sup> A valid sign of ‘Odysseus’ identity and Penelope’s fidelity’ that works as a sign precisely because it ‘entwine[s]’ these two components ‘like the infinite turnings of a Möbius strip’.<sup>37</sup>

The relationship between the *sēma* that is *empedon* that emerges as an *empedon sēma* obtains at an even deeper level, however, and the two are more tightly entwined than simply by a metonymy wrought in the text by the artful narrator. Once we acknowledge (as too few critics seem to have done) the degree to which the *sēma* really and truly is *empedon* (i.e. the sign is valid as a proof), we have what the Aristotelian typology would classify as a recognition *ek syllogismou* (*Poet.* 14.1455a4–13).<sup>38</sup> (Were one so inclined, one could even formalize it into a logically valid deductive argument – a strange exercise, but one that is illustrative simply because it is possible.) The conclusion of the knowledge provided by the *peira* and the *empedon sēma* (valid proof) is indeed *empedon*: fixed, certain, stable, ‘inconvertible’.<sup>39</sup> And not because a god revealed it, or a prophet foretold it;<sup>40</sup> the security of Penelope’s conclusion is fixed by nothing more nor less than the series of deductive inferences that the strict conditions of her *peira* make possible (see Figure 7.3).

Also useful, however, is what such an exercise reveals about the basic structure of the test. The *peira* hinges on the rigorous and absolute *seclusion* of the bed: only its secure *enclosure* allows the *disclosure* of its secret to bring true, lasting, stable ultimate closure.<sup>41</sup> This in turn, however, requires that the bed be absolutely and permanently secluded, which in turn can only be guaranteed if the bed is impossible to remove from its place of secrecy. It is

<sup>36</sup> Zeitlin (1995) 137.

<sup>37</sup> Zeitlin (1995) 14; each point is made separately: see e.g. Newton (1987), esp. 17–20 for fidelity; Pucci (1998) 82–93, where further bibliography can be found.

<sup>38</sup> See now Zerba (2009) 315 for comments made in passing.

<sup>39</sup> After Heubeck, Russo, and Fernández-Galiano (1989) ad loc.

<sup>40</sup> See esp. Leshner (1999) and Leshner (2008) for the importance of divinity for the achievement of certain knowledge in Homer (see also sections 2.1 and 2.3 above). See also Leshner (1981).

<sup>41</sup> See e.g. Bergren (1993) 19; Austin (1975) 283. In a poem where so much of what is said is deceptive, the great *sēma* of *anagnōrisis*, the one that is truly *empedon*, is the one of which no one has spoken of at all, until the very final moment.

7.2 *Epi-/Apologoi*: ‘Here I End My *pistos logos* . . .?’

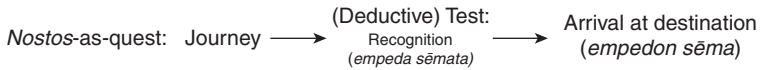


Figure 7.3 *Nostos-as-quest* (à la Bakker) + Recognition: Interview with Penelope

therefore the very quality of the bed – its fixity – that constitutes the secret in question which makes this secret possible in the first place, and that makes knowledge of its secret an *empedon sēma*. Had the great *sēma* of their marriage lay in a mark inscribed upon a free-standing bed – or a bow in a storeroom, or, say, a ring – something mobile that, in one form or another, could be exposed or put into free circulation, how could one police the secrecy of the secret, how ensure that the *sēma* had not been covertly smuggled out, where anyone might come to see it and know it? It is only because the very nature of the *sēma* (bed) – that it is *empedon* – intrinsically precludes its being put into open circulation that it can remain *empedon* as a *sēma* (proof), can properly *ground* the proof (*sēma*), and the certain knowledge it provides. Returning to the question of the semantic play between (that which is a *sēma* and (that which is) *empedon*, it is not only that the words *empedon* and *sēma* are transferred metonymically from the bed to the proof (that results from the *peira* which grants access to the bed). Logically, the test is only as valid as the bed-tree is fixed; the *sēma* is *empedon* (a valid proof) *because* the *sēma* is *empedon* (the bed is fixed).<sup>42</sup>

Except, of course, there is no word for ‘deduction’ at this point (and as Lloyd reminds us, there will be none in Parmenides) – nor for ‘logic’, nor ‘inference’, nor ‘proof’ – nor is there any conceptual apparatus within which they would make sense.<sup>43</sup> That of course, does not (and perhaps cannot) happen until after Parmenides establishes the practice the concept would name. In the absence of any technical vocabulary or conceptual apparatus, then, how does one figure the notion of certainty derived from rigorous in-ference? How imag(in)e it? In the articulation of what

<sup>42</sup> A point underexplored, despite the enormous scholarship on this scene; see the neglected Bergren (1993), also Zerba (2009) 315.

<sup>43</sup> Lloyd (2000) 244–45; see also pp. 10–11, 31–32 above.

it means for a *sēma* (as proof) to be valid, what we see is a complex and powerful *semantic* trans-fer of meaning, one whose journey trans-scends (from) the physical to the conceptual, the sensible to the intelligible, the concrete to the abstract, the etymologically primary to the derivative.<sup>44</sup> The first use of the word *empedon* at line 23.203 to describe the bed brings us (at just the moment it allows Odysseus himself) back to the (etymological) root (./ of the ‘in-grounded’. The signified of the signifier *sēma* having thus been sufficiently *established* in this unique<sup>45</sup> – and uniquely fixed – signified, it is then immediately put into circulation in the text. We have seen that this circulation operates metonymically: the proof is fixed and certain *next to* (in language of the text) and *before* (in the plot) the in-grounded tree root. We have also seen that this transfer of signifieds is grounded or authorized by the logical relationship between the *empedon sēma* (fixed object), which stands as a premise in the *empedon sēma* (fixed proof): the proof is fixed and certain *because* the in-grounded tree root is. What it means, though, for the conclusion produced by this inference – an abstract, conceptual, intelligible notion (one that, through its position in the plot happens to be an in-ference, in physical, concrete, sensible terms: a ‘bearing-into’ a fixed, terminal, stable [place of] conclusion) – can only be expressed in language and imagery anchored to, rooted in, grounded by the arresting concrete, physical, sensible image of the in-grounded root: the proof is (as) fixed and certain *as* or *like* the in-grounded tree root is. What it means for a conclusion to be absolutely certain, then, for a proof-by-inference to be absolutely secure and trustworthy requires this figuration: this *semantic* transfer draws its power from the strength of the (image of the) in-grounded root.

There is, finally, one last figuration derived from this root. The *sēma* that cannot be put into circulation (and thus works like a signature), that is untransferable, whose absolute se-clusion and fixity are the condition of possibility for the *peira* and the absolute fixity of the conclusion it produces, has not quite finished stabilizing, establishing, certifying. For the absolutely certain

<sup>44</sup> For important complications in making these distinctions in the Homeric milieu, however, see Stevens (2003).

<sup>45</sup> Starobinski and Brown (1975).

conclusion is itself *about* the absolute stability and fixedness of identity, about the invariable reality beneath the shimmering, *poikilia* world of appearances (where a beggar can be a king and a stranger one’s husband). This underlying reality (as secluded and closely guarded as the impenetrable bedroom, one which can only be accessed by a test of knowledge, a certain proof) is as fixed, stable, certain, immobile, invariant as the proof that guarantees it and gives access to it, as fixed, stable, certain, immobile, invariant as/because the tree root is in-grounded. If he knows the (fixed, certain, unmoving) bed, she knows (certainly, fixedly, unerringly, unchangingly) he is her (fixed, unmovingly, unchangingly same) Odysseus. Bed, proof, underlying reality: all *empedon*, all (as) in-grounded (as/because the tree root is).

7.2.4 ‘*And on This hodos There Are Many sēmata . . . That (What-Is Is/Are) Indivisible, Immobile, Perfectly Completed . . .*’

Where does all this leave us *vis-à-vis* Parmenides? Briefly, four possibilities. First, what (of the Odyssean *sēma*) is em-bedded in Parmenides’ what-is? Or, to reverse the question, does his ‘what-is’ spring from this same (tree) root? The bed stands *em-pedon* (*Od.* 23.203); so, too, does *to eon*: being ἀκίνητον (Fr. 8.26), it χούτως ἔμπεδον αὖθι μένει (Fr. 8.30).<sup>46</sup> The bed is *empedon*, as we

<sup>46</sup> This line repeats *Od.* 12.161 (and other words and images from Fr. 8.26–33 echo *Od.* 12.158–64): see esp. Mourelatos (2008b) 115–16, 116 n. 2 and Cassin (1987) and Cassin (2011) ‘and thus empedon there it remains’. A passage which provides even closer parallels – one that does not seem to have been noticed in this context – is the description of the trap Hephaestus sets in his *own bed* to ‘bind fast’ his *unfaithful* wife and her adulterous lover. (For the extensive parallels between Odysseus’ master craft product and Hephaestus’ anti-Penelopean bed, see Newton (1987).) For some examples of linguistic echoes and other similarities, cf. the following passages (*Od.* 8.274–78):

ἐν δ’ ἔθετ’ ἀκμοθέτω μέγαν ἄκμονα, κόπτε δὲ δεσμούς  
ἀρρήκτους ἀλύτους [cf. Fr. 8.26–27], ὄφρ’ ἔμπεδον αὖθι μένοιεν  
[cf. Fr. 8.30]

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ τεύξε δόλον κεχολωμένος Ἄρει,  
βῆ ῥ’ ἴμεν ἐς θάλαμον, ὅθι οἱ φίλα δέμνι’ ἔκειτο,  
ἀμφὶ δ’ ἄρ’ ἐρμῖσιν χέε δέσματα κύκλω ἀπάντη [cf. Fr. 8.43–44].

Of further Parmenidean interest in this episode at *Od.* 8.296–98:

. . . ἀμφὶ δὲ δεσμοὶ [cf. Fr. 8.26, 31]

## Mortal Opinions

saw, because it is virtually impossible – even for a god (*Od.* 23.184–86) – to sever it, cut it, divide it (*ὑποτέμνειν*, as Odysseus puts it at *Od.* 23.204); so, too, is Parmenides’ being – οὐδὲ διαίρετόν as it is declared to be (*Fr.* 8.22). The bed is indivisible in turn because of the perfect way in which it has been formed, this great sign; as Odysseus notes, he cut the branches (*Od.* 23.195), trimmed the trunk ‘from the root up’ and planed it smooth ‘all around’ (*ἀμφέξεσα*, *Od.* 23.196) with a bronze adze ‘well and cunningly, truing it to the line . . . I bored it with the augur . . . beginning with this, I made smooth the timbers of my bed, until I completed it’ (*ᾄφρ’ ἐτέλεσσα*, *Od.* 23.199; 23.196–99 for the passage). But not before first encasing the tree in the cocoon of a protective, hidden seclusion, an outermost bound that establishes an inviolate inner space (*Od.* 23.192–93):

τῶ δ’ ἐγὼ ἀμφιβαλὼν θάλαμον δέμον, ᾄφρ’ ἐτέλεσσα,  
πυκνήσιν λιθάδεσσι, καὶ εὖ καθύπερθεν ἔρεψα.

All around [the tree stump] I built my chamber, until I had finished it,

τεχνήεντες ἔχυντο πολύφρονος Ἥφαιστοιο,  
οὐδέ τι κινῆσαι [cf. *Fr.* 8.26] μελέων ἦν οὐδ’ ἀναεῖραι.

*Od.* 8.336–37:

ἦ ρά κεν ἐν δεσμοῖς ἐθέλοις κρατεροῖσι πιεσθεῖς  
εὐδαιν ἐν λέκτροισι παρὰ χρυσῆν Ἄφροδίτη;

*Od.* 8.340:

δεσμοὶ μὲν τρὶς τόσσοι ἀπείρονες ἀμφὶς ἔχουεν.

*Od.* 8.352–53, and 8.353–56, where the exchange between Hephaestus and Poseidon connects the notion of compulsion, necessity, and loosing bonds:

πῶς ἂν ἐγὼ σε δέοιμι μετ’ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν,  
εἴ κεν Ἄρης οἴχοιτο χρέος καὶ δεσμόν ἀλύξας;

Ἥφαιστ’, εἴ περ γάρ κεν Ἄρης χρεῖος ὑπαλύξας  
οἴχηται φεύγων, αὐτός τοι ἐγὼ τάδε τίσω.

Hephaestus ultimately consents (*Od.* 23.359–61):

ὡς εἰπὼν δεσμόν ἀνίει μένος Ἥφαιστοιο.  
τῶ δ’ ἐπεὶ ἐκ δεσμοῦ λύθεν, κρατεροῦ περ ἐόντος,  
αὐτίκ’ ἀναΐξαντε . . .

7.2 *Epi-/Apologoi*: ‘Here I End My *pistos logos* . . .’?

With close-set stones, and I covered it over well with a roof.

So, too, Parmenides’ being is τετελεσμένον (Fr. 8.42), τελεστόν (Fr. 8.4), and presses out on all sides, inviolate, like a sphere.<sup>47</sup> Is this all just coincidence?

Second, in Parmenides’ *hodos dizēsios* there is the fusion, reconstitution, or recombination of the three dynamics discussed above: (i) a quest that, through a test, leads to liquidation of the lack; (ii) a recognition that, through a test, reveals a true, underlying identity beneath a potentially deceptive or uncertain world of appearances; and (iii) a *nostos* that leads to a final destination. As we have seen, the fractal logic of oral composition integrates this final episode into the *nostos* in such a way that the last quest simultaneously replicates the whole *nostos* even as it completes it, both a ‘*nostos-as-quest*’ and a ‘*quest-for-nostos*’ (as Tiresias puts it in his address to Odysseus [νόστον διζῆσαι, *Od.* 11.100]; in Odysseus’ words: νόστον . . . διζήμενος *Od.* 23.253): in this case, that is, the liquidation of the lack is itself equivalent to arrival at the final destination. The endpoint in this *nostos* is distinctively fixed. This test is distinctive insofar as it is a test of knowledge and, vitally, a test that, via a series of deductive reasoning, *produces* knowledge of an unusually certain, definitive, and absolute kind. And, finally, as a test that leads to recognition, this certain, definitive knowledge is knowledge *of* the true, certain, stable underlying *reality*, the reality here of *identity*, that is obscured by the deceptive surface appearances of the outside world (a king who appears as a beggar, a husband who appears as a stranger). It is precisely this syntagm of *nostos-as-quest-leading-to-a-fixed-stable-endpoint-through-a-deductive-test-which-reveals-the-fixed-underlying-reality* that we find in *Odyssey* 23.

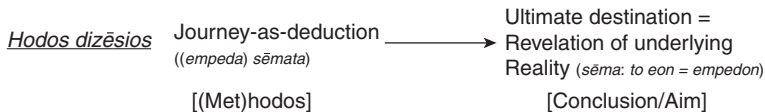


Figure 7.4 Parmenides’ ‘Route to Truth’ (frs. 2–8)

<sup>47</sup> If we accept Karsten’s emendation (see here esp. Palmer (2009) 383).

Odysseus' 'quest pattern' first becomes a true *nostos* at the point where he departs Circe's island, with her instructions – none other than the passage spanning *Odyssey* 12.39–141 – to return home.<sup>48</sup> Between the instructions of the divinity and the fixed conclusion of the *empedon sēma* of the bed (which reveals the fixed reality underlying the world of appearances) lies the *hodos*; but one attains the *empedon sēma* at the other end only after a rigorously deductive test yields an *empedon sēma*. In this we see the *précis* of the basic architecture of Parmenides' *hodos dizēsios* – and the third element of Parmenides' 'demonstration' (iii). We noted above that scholars of Parmenides were divided about the meaning of *sēmata* at Fr. 8.2: some rendered it as 'signposts', others 'proofs'. Mourelatos's discussion about the meaning of *epi* is convincing,<sup>49</sup> but the dazzling linguistic *pas-de-deux* performed during the course of the bed-test in *Odyssey* 23 should allow us to see how both meanings can exert their force in a way which is not only not mutually exclusive, but is indeed profoundly mutually reinforcing.

### 7.3 An End That Is No End

Except, of course, this is not the end. Neither of the *Odyssey* – which goes on to tell of the suitors' descent to Hades, Odysseus' reunion with Laertes, and the aftermath of the *mnēstērophonia* – nor of Odysseus' *hodos*, for, as Tiresias had told him and as he tells Penelope, 'still after this there will be a measureless toil, long and difficult, which I must fulfil to the end' (τὸν ἐμὲ χρῆ πάντα τελέσσαι, *Od.* 23.249–50). In fact, this isn't even the final *sēma*: as Tiresias had told him, when his journey carries on so far that, once again, his observer's categories fail to match the categories of the local actors, this itself will be a σῆμα ἀριφραδέες (*Od.* 23.273) for him to perform the proper rituals to appease Poseidon.<sup>50</sup> (Even within the plot of the

<sup>48</sup> See Ch. 5 above.

<sup>49</sup> See Ch. 6, n. 16 above. One thinks yet again of the Altar of the Twelve Gods, the herms, and the Thasian stele (Section 1.1).

<sup>50</sup> On this *sēma* and the episode of the winnowing fan, see Lynn-George (1988); Peradotto (1990); Goldhill (1991); Nagy 1990a 202–22; Segal (1994); Henderson (1997); Purves (2010).



### 7.3 An End That Is No End

*Odyssey*'s twenty-four books, the bed is not even the final *empe-don sēma*, the last tree root: cf. *Od.* 24.346.)<sup>51</sup> And so, once the stories are told, the two halves of the *Odyssey* recounted by Odysseus to Penelope and vice versa, Athena hits 'time-in', Dawn is back over the Ocean 'straightaway' (*Od.* 23.347), and Odysseus is all business, scheming to recoup his losses, his depleted flocks, preserve his possessions (*Od.* 23.355–56). There are angry kinsman with debts to settle, questions of paternity and patrimony to square: the world's complexities are too great to be so swiftly, so neatly resolved.<sup>52</sup>

Nor, of course, does Parmenides' poem end with the 'Route to Truth'. What else could one do after spelling out the perfect completion of the perfectly completed sphere that what-is is (like)?<sup>53</sup> What else is there to say, except, perhaps (Fr. 8.50–51):

Ἐν τῷ σοι παύω πιστὸν λόγον ἡδὲ νόημα  
ἀμφὶς ἀληθείης . . .

At this point I cease for you my *pistos logos* and meditation  
Concerning *alētheia* . . .

and move on to a deceptive *kosmos* of words (Fr. 8.52). The question of the relationship between the 'Route to Truth' and *Doxa* is perhaps the most notorious of all Parmenidean cruces (no mean feat).<sup>54</sup> But it would seem, at any rate, that Parmenides' world, too, is too complex to be fully captured, encompassed in the single spare route whose itinerary forms Fr. 8.3–49: 'almost as soon as they were conceived . . . these truly portentous ideas of Parmenides suffered a kind of breakdown, leading to what I call

<sup>51</sup> Henderson (1997) 89.

<sup>52</sup> See esp. Goldhill (1991) 18–22, Henderson (1997), Foley (1999) 157–67, and Ready (2014) for the question *vis-à-vis* oral poetics. On the tensions between closure and open-endedness, ends projected beyond endings, the dynamics of *sēmata* and *kleos*, loss and recovery in the *Odyssey*, Peradotto (1990), chs 2–3, Goldhill (1991) 1–24, and Lynn-George (1988) 252–88 (on *sēmata* in the *Iliad*) are illuminating; Montiglio (2005) and Purves (2010) perhaps push the question too far. The self-reflexive comments of D. Fowler (1997b) are important here.

<sup>53</sup> See on this point e.g. Austin (2002), Austin (2007), Austin (2013), and Austin (2014) for excellent discussion of the ways in which the fourth *sēma* represents the culmination of a certain manner of constructing arguments.

<sup>54</sup> See Introduction, n. 86 for most up-to-date treatments.

a Parmenidean apology, and this this breakdown was portentous too'.<sup>55</sup>

#### 7.4 Another *K/Crisis*, More Con(-)sequences?

And where does this leave us here, on this book's *hodos dizēsios*, especially now that it is addressing the – and attempting to find a – conclusion (iii)? Claiming as it does to make a significant and original contribution to scholarship, it, too, is heir to Parmenides' *hodos*; is it also heir to Odysseus' *hodos*, to the *peira* of knowledge, to the *sēma* that is *empedon*?<sup>56</sup> To put the question another way: What is the status of the parallel between the two *hodoi* that should end but does not seem able to? Or, to get to the heart of the matter: What is the nature of the relationship between the root of what-is and the root-bed?

These questions are provocative for the following reason: it is not clear that it allows for the kind of definitive answer a true journey along Parmenides' *hodos* would seem to yield; certainly it is less conclusive, less absolute, than the fixity of the knowledge yielded by Penelope's *peira*, the unchanging fixity of the identity, the layer of underlying reality revealed by the test, or the utterly fixed, stable, unchanging endpoint. This is pertinent for two reasons: in the first place, because there *is* no equivalent of Penelope's *peira* that we could hope to supply in this setting; all we can do is note the linguistic resonances, the structural similarities in terms of language, structure, form, plot, dramatic scenario, *dramatis personae*. But there is no proof. This is no demonstration.

On the other hand, however, this *failure* to constitute a proper *peira*, the absence of a properly *empedon sēma* (fixed proof) yielding a proper *empedon sēma* (certain conclusion), shows us simply how close the patterns of *Odyssey* 12 and *Odyssey* 23 are to fragments 2, 6, 7, and 8 (see Figure 7.4 above). In both poems, travel down the proper *hodos* leads to (or indeed *is*) a rigorous proof that affords access to the fixed, certain end and insight into

<sup>55</sup> Popper (1998a) 146–47.

<sup>56</sup> See in this vein the evocative opening remarks at Bergren (1993) 7.

the true, invariant, permanent reality beneath appearances. Paradoxically, by *failing* to meet the rigorous threshold of the Parmenidean test in support of the claim that this evolves out of the Odyssean model, we manage more than anything else to deepen and draw into stark relief the breadth and specificity of the parallel.

There is a fork, then: to reject or to accept the parallels, and if to accept, to accept to a greater or lesser extent. A familiar pattern. But with a twist: to be unpersuaded by the parallel between *Odyssey* 12 and 23 and the ‘Route to Truth’ is, paradoxically, to confirm nothing else but the strength of the parallel. Our own *hodos dizēsios* must lead to a more *tetelesmenon telos*, our *sēmata* must be more *empeda* to claim the *atremēs* heart of truth. But we are hardly better off if the parallel persuades us – in that case, would we not have to accept the rest of the parallel, the one that runs from *apologoi* to epilogue and beyond to apology. Should we not accept, in other words, that there is more, that this end is not an end either? To answer ‘yes’ – to suggest that the reading adumbrated in the last two sections of this chapter, patchy, impressionistic, hardly rigorous as it is, adheres to an acceptable *hodos* – has an implication for the conclusion, the status of the *point* at which a good book ought to arrive (otherwise what was the point?): the conclusion is a true accomplishment, a *sēma* sufficiently *empedon*. But in that case, it also has an implication for ‘the conclusion’ (iii) as such: how could we ever end here? What *telos* could ever be *tetelesmenon*, what *sēma empedon* enough to meet the Parmenidean standards, standards that would be residues of an inheritance from Homer? Standards that neither Homer nor Parmenides could themselves adequately meet, it seems, from the very beginning? What, then, about Pindar? And what about Heraclitus, after all? Orphic texts and rituals? The Pythagoreans? Is it even possible to answer these questions: in practice, given how little we know about the interaction between Parmenides and the first two, how little remains of the second two, or in theory, given the impossibility of demonstrating – conclusively, incontrovertibly, inescapably, in a properly *empedon* way – the relationship between one poem and another, one image and another, one word and another?

## Mortal Opinions

At stake in all this is our conception of ‘method’: its past and (the) present *hodos dizēsios*, both *muthoi hodoio*: the tale of the transition from *hodos* to ‘method’, the tale we tell ourselves about the epistemology of travelling a (*met*)*hodos*. That, however, is a *muthos hodoio* not properly told until Sophocles and the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.