

Homeric Truth

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The diction of truth in Homer reveals a conceptual system that distinguishes between the verifiable truth of everyday life (et- words), the certain future truth of prophets and gods (*nemertes*), the undistorted communication of truth (*atrekeos*), and a form of truth contingent upon the reciprocal negotiation of truth between speaker and audience (*aletheia*). In Homeric usage, *aletheia* is a way of speaking: an honest, authoritative and credible performance of memory. It is the criterion of truth for composition-in-performance. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, however, *aletheia* became objectified and absorbed the nuances of the other Homeric terms.

Richard Martin begins his evaluation of the “particular and complex Greek construction” of ‘wisdom’ with the proclamation: “nature, culture, gender, myth, East, West, truth—the degree to which these concepts are not transcendent universals but are socially constructed has finally hit us” (1993: 108). In some ways, the idea that truth could be something ‘socially constructed’ is especially foreign to the modern, secular mind. Marcel Detienne explains that in our “scientific civilization, the idea of ‘truth’ immediately summons up notions of objectivity, communicability, and unity. *Truth* is defined at two levels: conformity with logical principles and conformity with reality. Accordingly, truth is inseparable from concepts of demonstration, verification, and experimentation” (1996: 35). For us, ‘Truth’ is ultimately and simply about knowledge: the apprehension of the reality of experience. It is about the search for that which is behind illusion, finding the fact of the matter. As an abstraction, it lies in the realm of speculative philosophy and religion as “a hidden or esoteric property of things (e.g. ‘the truth about the universe’), attainable only by the initiate or the specialist, or held secretly by the gods” (Pratt 1993: 22).

The English lexeme ‘truth’ is difficult to discuss, as it contains several different connotations. In order to gain a foothold, I have determined three levels in this framework: first, that a thing is true (real), not merely apparent; second, that a statement is true (veridical), not false; and third, that a person is true (honest), not lying<sup>1</sup>. Truth springs from the comparison of and the consistency between two experiences or ideas. It therefore includes both the affirmation of reality and the process of attaining that affirmation; to be shared, truth has to be

communicated by language, and so statements require assessment (implicitly or explicitly) before they are believed to be true. Direct personal observation is naturally the most reliable criterion for deciding if a thing is real or a statement veridical, but the judgment of quality of the performance of speech is the essential criterion of truth when no first-hand evidence is available.

The history of Greek conceptions of truth is especially interesting as ancient Greece is frequently held up as the wellspring of rational discourse, abstraction and philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Correspondence Theory of Truth<sup>3</sup> is often traced back to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1011b25: τὸ μὲν γὰρ λέγειν τὸ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ἢ τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι ψεῦδος, τὸ δὲ τὸ ὄν εἶναι καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ἀληθές ("To say that what is is not, or that what is not is, is false; but to say that what is is, and what is not is not, is true"), or to Plato's *Cratylus* 385b2: ἄρ' οὖν οὗτος ὃς ἂν τὰ ὄντα λέγη ὡς ἔστιν, ἀληθής: ὃς δ' ἂν ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, ψευδής; ("Then that speech which says things as they are is true, and that which says them as they are not is false?"). What is intriguing about these passages is that, as J. P. Levet notes, the ancient Greek language "désigne cette notion de vérité par des termes négatifs: l'adjectif ἀληθής et le substantif ἀλήθεια" (1976: 1). In order to understand why a word that literally means 'un-forgotten' should come to be the most common ancient Greek word for truth by the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE<sup>4</sup>, it is necessary to take a diachronic view of the ancient Greek language.

The writings of the Classical period did not emerge *ex nihilo*; rather, they were the culmination of what Bruce Lincoln calls "pointed and highly consequential semantic skirmishes fought between rival régimes of truth" (1997: 363). Lincoln suggests that "the beloved Greek Miracle," the birth of philosophy in the 'Greek Enlightenment' of the later Archaic period, in reality took place on the level of discourse—the redefinition of words and the reconceptualization of authoritative discourse. The transition from a culture of 'mythos' to one of

‘*logos*’ involved new cultural valuations of the terms μῦθος and λόγος. Thomas Cole proposes a connection between this evolution and the history of usage of ἀλήθεια, which, in Homer, is associated with the semantic range of μῦθος and subjectivity, but over time became associated with λόγος and objectivity. Cole acknowledges that understanding of any shift is “hampered by the absence of any sizeable body of post-Homeric, pre-Aeschylean evidence” (1983: 26). It is thus to Homer, the beginning of attested Greek literature, that we must turn in order to get a foundational framework of truth on which to base an understanding of ἀλήθεια. Insight into the transformation of ἀλήθεια—the history of a particular cultural construction of truth—is valuable for understanding the intellectual culture of the Archaic period that ultimately nurtured the seminal works of Classical Athens.

First and foremost, it is clear that the world of Homer is represented as reassuringly concrete: an implicit metaphysical realism supports the world of gods and heroes. ‘Truth’ as an abstract concept is simply not at issue. Within the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the characters desire to know assuredly (σάφα) or well (εὔ) about events, things or people—epic poetry is, after all, not the place for ontological musings. It is a narrative—the κλέα ἀνδρῶν (“fame of men”). The characters assert emphatically (καὶ λίην, δὴ) that their reality is one way or another, and talk about the truth of their experience much as the audience would, either recognizing it themselves (first-hand truth) or learning from the experience of others (second-hand truth), who are either honest or deceitful (judged truthfulness as criterion of second-hand truth). Their knowledge is necessarily bound by these parameters; in epic even the faculties of prophets and gods are human, although not as limited in scope—they may thus be able to speak prophetic truths that are manifested for the characters. Truth for the characters is a question of the general internal consistency the narrative.

The truth-value of the poem itself was predicated upon its performance, which was, in effect, a negotiation of truth. It is probably true that, in respect to the whole tradition that ‘surrounded’ the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*<sup>5</sup>, as M. L. West suggests, ‘no Greek ever regarded the Homeric epics as substantially fiction.’<sup>6</sup> Margalit Finkelberg suggests (1998: 69):

the range of traditional subjects and their basic plots were a matter of common knowledge rather than the poet’s exclusive prerogative. Clearly, no poet could offer his audience a song about heroes they did not believe to have existed or about events not believed to have taken place.

The oral poet, “in the years of acquiring his profession, while still a child in fact, . . . not only learns the repertoire of the epic subjects current in his tradition but also takes in the stock of traditional expressions, the ‘formulae,’ and the traditional narrative units, the ‘themes,’ and masters the rules of their combination” (Finkelberg 1998: 50). As Paul Veyne suggests, “everything was to be learned from people who knew. [The realm of the ‘supernatural’] was composed of events, not abstract truths against which the listener could oppose his own reason. The facts were specific: heroes’ names and patronyms were always indicated, and the location of the action was equally precise” (1988: 24). The basic plots, οἶμαι, e.g. Helen and Paris, the death of Hector, or Orestes’ revenge, like the playing of the lyre, were something that the bard was able to learn and for which he had responsibility.

The act of composition-in-performance, however, was something inspired, beyond the mere responsibility of the poet: a human act prompted by the divine Muse. An illustrative parallel presented by Finkelberg is the Homeric conception of military prowess. Compare Hector praising all of his individual skills (*Il.* 7.233-41):

τὸν δ’ αὖτε προσέειπε μέγας κορυθαίολος Ἴκτωρ:  
 ‘Αἴαν διογενὲς Τελαμώνιε κοίρανε λαῶν

μή τί μεν ἤϋτε παιδὸς ἀφαιροῦ πειρήτιζε  
 ἢ ἔ γυναικός, ἢ οὐκ οἶδεν πολεμήϊα ἔργα.  
 αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν εὖ οἶδα μάχας τ' ἀνδροκτασίας τε:  
 οἶδ' ἐπὶ δεξιά, οἶδ' ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ νωμῆσαι βῶν  
 ἀζαλέην, τό μοι ἔστι ταλαύρινον πολεμίζειν:  
 240οἶδα δ' ἐπαΐζαι μόθον ἵππων ὠκειάων:  
 οἶδα δ' ἐνὶ σταδίῃ δηΐῳ μέλπεσθαι Ἄρηϊ.

Tall Hektor of the glancing helm answered him: 'Aias,  
 son of Telamon, seed of Zeus, o lord of the people,  
 do not be testing me as I were some ineffectual  
 boy, or a woman, who knows nothing of the works of warfare.  
 I know well myself how to fight and kill men in battle;  
 I know how to turn to the right, how to turn to the left the ox-hide  
 tanned into a shield which is my protection in battle;  
 I know how to tread my measures on the grim floor of the war god<sup>7</sup>.

In the moment of conflict, however, the “warlikeness usually takes the form of warlike inspiration, which emerges whenever one is ‘set in motion’ or ‘stirred’ toward fighting, or whenever martial prowess is represented as ‘thrown’ or ‘breathed’ into one’s heart; it seizes a warrior in spite of himself” (Finkelberg 1998: 45). The knowledge of how to use a spear is a prerequisite for the mental state of martial fury; a bard, similarly, knows the accepted plots and how to play his instrument<sup>8</sup>. When he sits down to perform, however, a force that transcends rational control compels and allows him to speak: his memory<sup>9</sup>.

The act of composing in performance implies both repetition and improvisation; in order for a performance to be successful, it was necessary for the bard to maintain his credibility as a source of detail beyond the bare outline of plot known to all. The invocation of the Muse is an indication of the divine source of the mentality of composition-in-performance: the Muse will grant him a steady flow of memory—an *ad hoc* expansion of the basic plots, delivered in the traditional style. It is the performance of the poet (his ἀληθῆς speech) that is conceptualized as guaranteeing the acceptance (perceived truth) of the particular telling of an epic to a particular audience (in the sense of Gregory Nagy’s ‘canonization’<sup>10</sup>) —not the audience’s sense that the

telling was ‘true’ in any verifiable sense. Ἀλήθεια and the Muses are conceptually related; the psychological state of recollection and narration, as contained in the concept of ἀληθής, is personified as Μνημοσύνη, the mother of the Muses. Together these concepts proffer to the audience a criterion of truth for epic: the authority of presentation.

Understanding the conceptual framework of truth articulated within the poems themselves is useful for clarifying the relationship between the bard and his audience. The Homeric vocabulary of truth is complex and there is a large corpus of words that can be glossed as ‘truth’ in translation. Of particular importance are three positive words formed from an *et-* root (ἔτεός, ἔτυμος, and ἐτήτυμος), and the three words formed negatively (νημερτής, ἀτρεκής and ἀληθής). Truth is implied in various ways throughout the poem, but there are significant moments in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* where the truth is explicitly at issue and the nuances of these specific truth terms are activated. By examining the etymologies and patterns of usage of these words, we will be able to better conceive how the poems themselves were evaluated with a criterion of truth based on authority rather than verifiability.

#### ἔτεός, ἔτυμος, and ἐτήτυμος

There is scholarly debate over the possible etymologies for the *et-* root of ἔτεός, ἔτυμος, and ἐτήτυμος. The two primary suggestions, however, both expose its connection to the everyday truth of verifiable reality. One possibility, proposed by Krischer, is that the root is related to εἶναι ‘to be,’ and thus means that “which is genuine, *echt*, or factual, *tatsächlich*.”<sup>11</sup> Alexander Beecroft favors the suggestion of Chantraine that connects the root to ἐτάζειν ‘to investigate.’<sup>12</sup> He adduces the fact that the lexicographer Hesychius glosses the term ἐτυμόδρυς, ‘true oak,’ as “the kind bearing sweet acorns,” and thus “[t]he proof can be in the results that accrue . . . as an oak tree proves that it is ἔτυμος by bearing sweet acorns” (Beecroft 2006: 57). J. P. Levet

explains that ἐτάζειν “et son composé ἐξετάζειν” “ne sont pas homériques,” and mean to investigate “pour avoir en soi une connaissance authentique,” *i.e.* “rendre ἐτεός” (1976: 8). This suggests that the truth described by *et-* words is the status of verification. The requirement of confirmation would require either that the truth of an object is observable in itself, or that there are observable results that prove its truth.

These possible etymologies are only relevant insofar as they are suggestive for understanding of the usage of the word in context. Ἐτεός, ἔτυμος, and ἐτήτυμος all do, indeed, assert the truth of a situation or the correspondence of speech to reality based upon verifiability. They all act on the first two levels of truth, either asserting that a person, thing or situation is real, not apparent or illusory, or confirming that a statement is true, not false. They do not refer to the intentionality or truthfulness of the speaker. Cole groups all three together, applying them to “a communication of what is, or will prove to be, in conformity with the facts, or to what is in fact the case, by contrast with uniformed report, wishful thinking, or as yet unconfirmed hypothesis” (1983: 13).

Ἐτεός appears 22 times in Homer, fairly equally split between the poems: twelve times in the *Iliad* and ten times in the *Odyssey*.<sup>13</sup> It is the most commonly used of the *et-* words in Homer, and Levet suggests that it is “un mot ancien, peut-être déjà usé à l’époque homérique, comme le montrent ses emplois formulaires” (1976: 70), noting its appearance in Mycenaean Greek (1976: 44). It is primarily used in the neuter, singular form as an adverb following εἰ, ‘if’. It “refers to kinds of truth that are not yet certain, but (generally speaking) will become certain on the basis of events or results to come” (Beecroft 2006: 58n31). Thus when Polyphemus prays to his father (*Od.* 9.528-30), he is making a statement about reality that is contingent on manifest evidence.

ἄκλυθι, Ποσειδάων γαίηοχε κυανοχαῖτα,  
εἰ ἐτεόν γε σός εἰμι, πατήρ δ’ ἐμός εὐχεται εἶναι,

δὸς μὴ Ὀδυσσῆα πολυπόρθιον οἴκαδ' ἰκέσθαι

Hear me, earth-holder Poseidon, dark-haired one,  
if I am truly yours, and you claim to be my father,  
grant that Odysseus the sacker of cities not reach home.

The adverb posits the truth hypothetically, in effect stating ‘if this situation that I suggest is true, than reality will be consistent to it.’ Likewise at *Iliad* 2.300, when Odysseus suggests that the Greeks stay at Troy:

τλήτε φίλοι, καὶ μείνατ' ἐπὶ χρόνον ὄφρα δαῶμεν  
εἰ ἐτέον Κάλχας μαντεύεται ἦε καὶ οὐκί.

No, but be patient, friends, and stay yet a little longer  
until we know whether Kalchas' prophecy is true or not true.

Odysseus is saying they should wait until it becomes clear which of the two possible situations (true or false prophecy) becomes reality. When Penelope tests Odysseus in book 19, she uses similarly uses this construction (215-19):

νῦν μὲν δὴ σευ, ξεινέ γ', ὄτω πειρήσεσθαι,  
εἰ ἐτέον δὴ κεῖθι σὺν ἀντιθέοις ἐτάροισι  
ξεινίσας ἐν μεγάροισιν ἐμὸν πόσιν, ὡς ἀγορεύεις.  
εἰπέ μοι ὅπποῖ' ἄσσα περὶ χροῖ ἐῖματα ἔστο,  
αὐτός θ' οἶος ἔην, καὶ ἐταίρους, οἳ οἱ ἔποντο.

‘Now, stranger, I think I’ll put you to the test.  
If it’s true you welcomed my husband, with his godlike comrades,  
as a guest in your palace, as you say,  
tell me what kind of things were those he wore around his body,  
and what sort he himself was, and his comrades who went with him

When he is able to answer her questions correctly, and σήματ' ἀναγνούση τά οἱ ἔμπεδα πέφραδ' Ὀδυσσεύς (“as she recognized the signs that Odysseus steadily showed her”) (19.250), she accepts the reality postulated in the εἰ ἐτέον clause. It required verified σήματα (signs, tokens by which one’s identity can be certified) in order for her to accept his false identity as truth.

Ἔτυμος also asserts evident truth. The importance of confirmation can be seen in the famous passage in book 19, where Penelope describes the gates of horn and ivory. False dreams, from the gate of ivory, οἳ ῥ' ἐλεφαίρονται, ἔπει' ἀκράαντα φέροντες (“are ones that deceive and bear words not to be fulfilled”) (565), while true dreams, from the gate of horn, οἳ ῥ' ἔτυμα κραίνουσι (“are ones that make true things come true”) (567). The dream from the gate of horn causes ἔτυμα ἔπεα, words that are fulfilled—words that correspond to the reality of experience. Ἔτυμος can also be used as an internal object of a verb of speaking, as in the formula ψεύσομαι ἢ ἔτυμον ἐρέω; κέλεται δέ με θυμός (“Will I speak wrong, or will I tell the truth? But my heart bids me speak”). In book 10 of the *Iliad*, Nestor is the first to hear the horses of Odysseus and Diomedes returning. He muses whether or not he is right; he will be telling the truth only if Odysseus and Diomedes are in reality returning to the camp (532-35). Similarly, in book 4 of the *Odyssey*, Helen uses this phrase in deliberating whether to conceal or reveal a speculation about the identity of Telemachus, which will ultimately turn out to be true upon evidence (140-43)<sup>14</sup>

ψεύσομαι ἢ ἔτυμον ἐρέω; κέλεται δέ με θυμός.  
 οὐ γάρ πώ τινά φημι ἐοικότα ὧδε ιδέσθαι  
 οὔτ' ἄνδρ' οὔτε γυναῖκα, σέβας μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωσαν,  
 ὥς ὄδ' Ὀδυσσῆος μεγαλήτορος νῦν ἔοικε

Will I speak wrong, or will I tell the truth? But my heart bids me speak,  
 for I don't think I've ever seen one who seems so alike,  
 neither a man nor a woman, and wonder holds me as I behold him,  
 as this one seems like the son of great-hearted Odysseus.

These two passages place ἔτυμος in opposition to the word for false, ψευδής. The word ψευδής in archaic diction contains “all varieties of falsehood, from a merely accidental misstatement to an elaborate fabrication” (Pratt 1993: 56). When in opposition to ἔτυμος, as here, it does not refer to the intent of the speaker but rather to the lack of veridicality of the speech. Thus Odysseus, like the Muses, can say ψεύδεα πολλὰ, ‘many falsehoods’, that are ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, ‘like things

that are of a sort that can be verified by evidence.’ This phrase, while certainly not excluding the intention to deceive, can instead be understood to describe the quality of the correspondence between the speech and a hypothetical reality: πολύτροπος (“wily”) Odysseus is good at lying. Ἔττυμος is thus operating on the second level of our truth-framework (veridicality), rather than on the third (intentionality).

Ἔττυμος is used more frequently in the *Odyssey* (ten times) than in the *Iliad* (four times). This is likely because of the formulaic expression καί μοι τοῦτ’ ἀγόρευσον ἐτήτυμον, ὄφρ’ ἐὺ εἰδῶ (“and tell me this truly, so I’ll know it well”), which Beecroft suggests is used seven times in the *Odyssey* because it is “frequently used to make enquiries of travelers” (2006: 60), e.g. when Odysseus arrives on Ithaca, he uses it to request information from the disguised Athena (13.232)<sup>15</sup>. Ἔττυμος is also an adjective used “as an attribute of persons or of objects, rather than of discourse, being used of . . . things whose truth or legitimacy is not discernible, but which may prove themselves to be true in time” (Beecroft 2006: 60). Thus Telemachus denies that his father will ever have a νόστος ἐτήτυμος, a ‘true homecoming,’ because he believes that Odysseus has already died and will thus not actually appear at Ithaca (*Od.* 3.241-42). And so also Peisistratus tells Menelaus that Telemachus is indeed the son of Odysseus (*Od.* 4.155-57),

τὸν δ’ αὖ Νεστορίδης Πεισίστρατος ἀντίον ἠΰδα:  
 Ἄτρεΐδη Μενέλαε διοτρεφές, ὄρχαμε λαῶν,  
 κείνου μὲν τοι ὄδ’ υἱὸς ἐτήτυμον, ὡς ἀγορεύεις

Peisistratus Nestorides said back to him in turn:  
 ‘Atreides Menelaus, Zeus-nurtured leader of men,  
 it’s true, this one is indeed the son of that one, as you say.

By saying that he is the υἱὸς ἐτήτυμον, the ‘true son,’ of Odysseus, he is affirming a fact that Menelaus has already seen, having been “persuaded by the physiognomic similarities between

the two.” Peisistratus “does not expect or need the listener to accept his truth on faith” and uses “clear and unambiguous evidence in support of his claim” (Beecroft 2006: 61).

Book 23 sees a further negotiation between Penelope and Eurycleia about the reality of the situation with vocabulary centered around *et-* words. After Penelope initially rejects Eurycleia’s report that Odysseus had slain the suitors, Eurycleia responds (26-27):

οὐ τί σε λωβεύω, τέκνον φίλον, ἀλλ’ ἔτυμόν τοι  
ἦλθ’ Ὀδυσσεὺς καὶ οἶκον ἰκάνεται, ὡς ἀγορεύω

I mock you not at all, dear child, but it’s really true.  
Odysseus has come and reached his home, as I say

Penelope, becoming hopeful, asks for more details, hypothetically positing his return (35-38):

εἰ δ’ ἄγε δὴ μοι, μαῖα φίλη, νημερτὲς ἐνίσπες,  
εἰ ἐτεὸν δὴ οἶκον ἰκάνεται, ὡς ἀγορεύεις,  
ὅπως δὴ μνηστῆρσιν ἀναιδέσι χεῖρας ἐφῆκε  
μοῦνος ἐών, οἱ δ’ αἰὲν ἀολλέες ἔνδον ἔμιμνον

Come, dear lady, tell me infallibly,  
if it’s true he reached his home, as you say,  
how did he lay his hands upon the shameless suitors,  
alone as he was, while they always, all together, stayed inside?

Penelope, though, does not, after so long a time, readily think it possible that Odysseus would have returned. She despairs, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὅδε μῦθος ἐτήτυμος, ὡς ἀγορεύεις (“But this story isn’t true, as you tell it”) (62), and suggests that instead some immortal had slain the suitors, as Odysseus ὄλεσε τηλοῦ νόστον Ἀχαιΐδος, ὄλετο δ’ αὐτός (“lost his return far away from Achaea, and he himself has perished”) (68). She does not believe that Odysseus has had a νόστος ἐτήτυμος, one characterized by the verifiable fact of his presence. Eurycleia answers her disbelief in the terms of concrete evidence, saying (70-4)

‘τέκνον ἐμόν, ποῖόν σε ἔπος φύγεν ἕρκος ὀδόντων,  
ἦ πόσιν ἔνδον ἐόντα παρ’ ἐσχάρη οὐ ποτ’ ἔφησθα  
οἴκαδ’ ἐλεύσεσθαι: θυμὸς δέ τοι αἰὲν ἄπιστος.  
ἀλλ’ ἄγε τοι καὶ σῆμα ἀριφραδὲς ἄλλο τι εἶπω,

οὐλήν, τὴν ποτέ μιν σῶς ἤλασε λευκῷ ὀδόντι

My child, what kind of talk is this that's fled your wall of teeth?  
 You, who, though your husband's inside beside his hearth, would never  
 say he'd come home. Your heart is ever unbelieving.  
 But come, you have a sign, too, a very clear one, something else I'll tell of,  
 a scar, that a pig inflicted on him with its white tooth, once upon a time

By arguing that she has a σῆμα ἀριφραδὲς, a 'manifest sign,' she is answering Penelope's objection on its own terms, and proving her statement is true with evidence. This passage nicely displays all three of the *et-* words in their context of usage. It is clear how the three positive words for truth (ἐτεός, ἔτυμος, and ἐτήτυμος), whatever their etymology, share a general pattern of usage. They articulate an affirmation of the objective, verifiable truth of experience or the veridicality of speech.

#### νημερτής

Cole suggests, in contrast, that the other main truth words (νημερτής, ἀτρεκής, and ἀληθής) are more concerned with the "transmission of information through discourse" (1983: 13-14). They are, interestingly, all negative constructions with a privative prefix, derived from the Indo-European syllabic nasal, which remains strong enough to prevent their being used with a negative.<sup>16</sup> As each of the different negated concepts brings different meanings that

attach as much to the speaker in the process of framing his discourse as to the transmitted speech, they all suggest forms of truthfulness as well as truth: sure truthfulness, straight truthfulness, strict truthfulness. More accurately, perhaps, one could say that the idea of truth or truthfulness is not contained in the words themselves but, in the normal course of things, implied by the context in which they appear (Cole 1983: 14).

These words therefore don't necessarily mean objective 'truth'; they are, in some sense, metaphorical, and are more concerned with the subjective apprehension and presentation of truth—the process of second-hand truth.

The first, νημερτής, is formed from the root of the verb ἀμαρτάνω, which means 'to miss the mark' in the sense of a thrown spear gone astray. There is a "clear parallel between the special distance separating a marksman from his target and the temporal distance between delivery and fulfillment" (Cole 1983: 15), and indeed νημερτής is often used to indicate that the thing spoken of will become manifest in future time. It is as dependent on evidence as ἔτυμος, but, unlike ἔτυμος, it has "the added idea of speaking unerringly what one's interlocutor wants to know" (Cole 1983: 13). It expresses "le réel-dans-les-mots, quand son enveloppe subjective représente précisément et effectivement ce qui existe objectivement" (Levet: 1976: 159). Characters can request that others speak νημερτής, and it is used adverbially<sup>17</sup> with verbs of speaking and promising that may look to future time. As above, when Penelope asks that Eurycleia νημερτὲς ἐνίσπες ("tell me infallibly"), she is asking for Eurycleia's speech to represent a situation that will be verified by future experience, and to speak this truth with the intention of revealing knowledge of the future. A request for νημερτὲς often denotes a sense of urgency on the part of the speaker and importance to the thing spoken<sup>18</sup>.

Those who both know of the future and speak it unerringly are therefore frequently either prophets or gods. Thetis thus supplicates Zeus at in book 1 of the *Iliad*, νημερτὲς μὲν δὴ μοι ὑπόσχεο καὶ κατάνευσον ("bend your head and promise me to accomplish this thing") (*Il.* 514). For Zeus to agree to something is to guarantee its actualization, as stated categorically in the opening of the poem, Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή ("the will of Zeus was accomplished"). Indeed,

as an adjective, νημερτής also modifies βουλή, ‘will,’ when Athena suggests the release of Odysseus from captivity at the very beginning of the *Odyssey* (1.82-87).

εἰ μὲν δὴ νῦν τοῦτο φίλον μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν,  
 νοστήσαι Ὀδυσῆα πολύφρονα ὄνδε δόμονδε,  
 Ἑρμείαν μὲν ἔπειτα διάκτορον ἀργεῖφόντην  
 85νῆσον ἐς Ἴουγυίην ὀτρύνομεν, ὄφρα τάχιστα  
 νύμφη ἐνπλοκάμῳ εἶπη νημερτέα βουλήν,  
 νόστον Ὀδυσσεῖος ταλασίφρονος, ὥς κε νέηται

If this is now pleasing to the blessed gods,  
 that ingenious Odysseus would return to his home,  
 then let’s dispatch Hermes, the runner Argeiphontes,  
 to the island of Ogygia, to clearly speak  
 most quickly to the fair-haired nymph our will,  
 the return home of steadfast Odysseus, so that he may go.

This ‘will’ is νημερτέα because it will be accomplished within the scope of the narrative: the νόστος of Odysseus is a fact that will happen in the future of the timeline relative to this point; it will become experiential truth for the characters, just as Zeus will accomplish Thetis’s request.

In terms of prophecy, Tiresias, prophet *par excellence*, speaks νημερτέα to Odysseus in the underworld in book 11 (*Od.* 96, 137), and Odysseus requests that Calypso speak νημερτῆς about how to escape Scylla and Charybdis (*Od.* 12.112-14):

εἰ δ’ ἄγε δὴ μοι τοῦτο, θεά, νημερτῆς ἐνίσπες,  
 εἴ πως τὴν ὅλοην μὲν ὑπεκπροφύγοιμι Χάρυβδιν,  
 τὴν δέ κ’ ἀμυναίμην, ὅτε μοι σίνιτό γ’ ἑταίρους.

Come, goddess, if you can tell me this infallibly,  
 if somehow I can stay out of reach of baneful Charybdis  
 but ward off Scylla when she assails my comrades.

Νημερτής is the proper name of a daughter of Nereus (*Il.* 18.46), who, like her sister Ἀψευδής, Levet suggests may have received her name “parce qu’elle détient . . . des pouvoirs de divination” (1976: 145). Proteus is four times called γέρων ἄλιος νημερτής, the unerring Old Man of the Sea, in book 4 of the *Odyssey*: he is the final source of sure, unerring truth and stands

at the end of a chain of questioning for νημερτέα. Telemachus is prompted by Athena to ask Nestor about his father: λίσσεσθαι δέ μιν αὐτόν, ὅπως νημερτέα εἶπη (“entreat him yourself, so he’ll speak infallibly”) (3.19), but Nestor refers Telemachus to Menelaus with the same phrase (3.327). “The pattern is only completed when Menelaus reports what he has heard from the [γέρον ἄλιος νημερτής],” who is able to speak unerringly about the future (Cole 1983: 17).

This connection with divine (and therefore unerring) knowledge may also explain the slightly bizarre exchange in book 17, when Penelope feels as though Telemachus’ sneeze (541) is a portent that implies the veracity of her claim that if Odysseus would come home, he’d shortly avenge the outrageous behavior of the suitors. Her laughter (17.542) at the timing of the sneeze suggests that she is suddenly filled with a sense of enthusiasm: she believes that the ‘stranger’ (Odysseus himself) could possibly be able to speak words whose ultimate manifestation has been vouched for by the gods; the suitors will not escape death (ἀτελής θάνατος) (17.546). She hopefully sends Eumaeus to the ‘beggar’ (548-50):

ἄλλο δέ τοι ἐρέω, σὺ δ’ ἐνὶ φρεσὶ βάλλεο σῆσιν:  
αἴ κ’ αὐτόν γνῶω νημερτέα πάντ’ ἐνέποντα,  
ἔσσω μιν χλαῖνάν τε χιτῶνά τε, εἵματα καλά

I’ll tell you something else, and you put it in your mind.  
If I perceive that he tells everything infallibly,  
I’ll dress him in fine clothing, a cloak and tunic

After Eumaeus reports her words to Odysseus, Odysseus replies ironically that he will tell her νημερτέα πάντα, ‘everything infallibly,’ about Odysseus since οἶδα γὰρ εὖ περὶ κείνου, ὁμῆν δ’ ἀνεδέγμεθ’ ὀϊζύν (“I know well of that one, and we’ve accepted the same hardship”). He has the sure knowledge of his own presence that will, in the end, verify his own return. In this situation, he possesses true knowledge of future events in the narrative, like a god, prophet or even, perhaps, the bard himself, and he is control of how it is spoken.

ἀτρεκίης

On the other hand, unlike νημερτέα or the *et-* words, neither ἀτρεκίης nor ἀληθής refer to the truth of a future event<sup>19</sup>. They are both grounded at the moment of speaking, and reflect the speaker’s mentality. They are both concerned with the subjective aspect of truth, and are criteria for judging truthful speech. ἀτρεκίης is formed from the root *trek-*, like Latin *torqueo*. It is “that which does not deviate or distort” (Cole 1983: 13). While ἀληθής never appears in the adverbial form ἀληθέως, ἀτρεκίης is always used in the form ἀτρεκέως, and its meaning “suggests, if it does not demand, non-deviation from a model that is already in existence” (Cole 1983: 15) when someone speaks. It is used in Zeus’ order for Dream to deliver a verbatim command (*Il.* 2.8-10):

‘βάσκ’ ἴθι οὐλε ὄνειρε θοὰς ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν:  
ἐλθὼν ἐς κλισίην Ἀγαμέμνονος Ἀτρεΐδαο  
πάντα μάλ’ ἀτρεκέως ἀγορευέμεν ὡς ἐπιτέλλω

‘Go forth, evil Dream, beside the swift ships of the Achaians.  
Make your way to the shelter of Atreus’ son Agamemnon;  
speak to him in words exactly as I command you

Ἀτρεκίης is therefore the untwisted truthfulness that requests an absence of ψευδής in the sense of active, deliberate deception<sup>20</sup> (lie), unlike the objective difference between ἔτυμος and ψευδής (falsehood). It is connected to second-hand truth, asserted by those wishing their speech to be accepted as true, and requested by those looking for true speech. It implies that the speaker has or should have “full command of what is to be communicated” (Cole 1983: 15). A statement communicated ἀτρεκέως is thus implied to have been ἔτυμός for the speaker, but is not immediately verifiable for the hearer. It thus also means that the speaker ought to have a forthright character; indeed “to insist on *atrekeia* in a situation where there is some reason to believe that accurate transmission will not occur can be equivalent to demanding, or offering, undeviating disclosure—even at the cost of self-incrimination” (Cole 1983: 16), such as the

exchange between Polydamas and Ajax at *Il.* 14.470. It is telling that ἀτρεκέως does not appear at all in Book 3 of the *Odyssey* during Nestor and Telemachus’s exchange; it would be extremely impolite of Telemachus to imply that Nestor would even consider speaking ψευδές.

Ατρεκέως, like ἐτήτυμον, is used frequently as part of a formula—ἀλλ’ ἄγε μοι τόδε εἰπέ καὶ ἀτρεκέως κατάλεξον (but come, tell me this, and recount it exactly), which Cole suggests “does little more than contribute a certain epic elevation to the humdrum inquiries of the τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν variety” (1983: 15), but this “very routineness . . . may create special overtones in passages where a possibly discreditable piece of information is involved (four times in the exchanges between Odysseus and Dolon, *Il.* 10.384, 405, 413, 427)” (1983: 15-16), as well as at *Il.* 15.53, where Zeus separates out the content of Hera’s speech and her delivery of it, the objective and subjective parts, ἀλλ’ εἰ δὴ ῥ’ ἐτεόν γε καὶ ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύεις (“If now all this that you say is real, and you speak truthfully”). He is hypothesizing about the correspondence of her statement to reality and evaluating her style of presenting the information. The exchange between Odysseus and Laertes in book 24 of the *Odyssey* also places ἀτρεκέως in the context of lies. After Odysseus requests true information (ἐτήτυμον) in the typical form of travellers, and hypothesizes about his true location (ἐτεόν) (258-59),

καὶ μοι τοῦτ’ ἀγόρευσον ἐτήτυμον, ὄφρ’ ἐὺ εἰδῶ,  
εἰ ἐτεόν γ’ Ἰθάκην τήνδ’ ἰκόμεθ’, ὥς μοι ἔειπεν

And tell me truly, so I’ll know it well,  
if truly this is Ithaca we’ve come to, as he told me

He then claims a false identity of someone who had previously played host to himself, a statement that prompts Laertes to request him to speak ἀτρεκέως (287-89)

ἀλλ’ ἄγε μοι τόδε εἰπέ καὶ ἀτρεκέως κατάλεξον,  
πόστον δὴ ἔτος ἐστίν, ὅτε ξείνισσας ἐκεῖνον  
σὸν ξεῖνον δύστηνον, ἐμὸν παῖδ’, εἴ ποτ’ ἔην γε,

But come, tell me this, and recount it exactly.  
 What number is the year, when you welcomed that one  
 as your guest, that wretched one, my son, if there ever was one

And then, later in the same speech, he asks again for the truth, this time looking for Odysseus to tell him the objective truth, ἐτήτυμον, in addition to his previous request for exact speech, ἀτρεκέως (297-301).

καί μοι τοῦτ' ἀγόρευσον ἐτήτυμον, ὄφρ' ἐὺ εἰδῶ·  
 τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν; πόθι τοι πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆς;  
 ποῦ δαί νηῦς ἔστηκε θεοῖ, ἦ σ' ἤγαγε δεῦρο  
 ἀντιθέους θ' ἐτάρους; ἦ ἔμπορος εἰλήλουθας  
 νηὸς ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίης, οἱ δ' ἐκβήσαντες ἔβησαν;

And tell me this truly, so I'll know it well.  
 What man and from where are you? Where are your city and parents?  
 Where does your swift ship stand, that brought you  
 and your godlike comrades here? Or did you come as a passenger  
 on the ship of another, who put you ashore and went on?

He is thus asking for the truth about his son, and for the story to be told truthfully. Odysseus replies asserting only that his speech will be ἀτρεκέως, and implicitly ignores the request for an ἐτήτυμον report (302-4).

τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς·  
 τοιγὰρ ἐγὼ τοι πάντα μάλ' ἀτρεκέως καταλέξω.  
 εἰμὶ μὲν ἐξ Ἀλύβαντος, ὅθι κλυτὰ δῶματα ναίω,

Adroit Odysseus said to him in reply:  
 'Well then, I'll recount all of it to you quite exactly.  
 I'm from Alybas, where I have a splendid house.

His lie is delivered like truth; Odysseus thus manipulates the Homeric system of evaluating second-hand truth. The consummate liar, he will tell a story straight out, but it will still be an objective ψευδές.

ἀλήθεια

In the truth diction discussed thus far, we have a system that covers all three different levels of truth that function within the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The *et-* words and νημερτής can assert the truth or reality of people, events and things in the past, present or future (hypothetical or concrete), νημερτής and ἀτρεκής can evaluate the reliability of speech, and ἀτρεκής asserts the intentionality of the speaker. The verifiability guaranteed by *et-* words and νημερτής is non-problematic; the truth of a statement is, was, or will be manifest through first-hand observation, or vouched for by the first-hand experience of another<sup>21</sup>. The *et-* words and ἀτρεκής are relatively unmarked, they correspond fairly well to our modern conceptions of ‘true’ and ‘truthful;’ νημερτής carries the special nuance of privileged knowledge of the future, which is understandable in the context of a culture that believes in prophecy and in a poem that depicts the deeds of gods and prophets. These words together total over 100 instances of usage in Homer.<sup>22</sup> Ἀληθής, on the other hand, is a marked term<sup>23</sup> for a specific aspect of communication; it is much more sparingly used in the poems, only appearing 4 times in the *Iliad* and 14 times in the *Odyssey*. This disparity can be explained by the fact that the *Odyssey*, much more than the *Iliad*, is a poem about stories and storytellers—a poem centered on the performance of speech and the negotiation of truth.

Ἀληθής is a word that has attracted a significant amount of scholarly attention in the past century, due in a large part to its striking etymology, which has proved enticing at least since J. Classen, whose *Beobachtungen über den homerischen Sprachgebrauch* in 1867 made the suggestion that “*to a-lēthes* is, originally and essentially, *to mē lanthanon*—i.e., the ‘unhidden’ or ‘unforgotten.’” (Cole 1983: 7). This view was influentially restated by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* and discussed by Bruno Snell, who reformulated Heidegger’s ‘objective’ reading of ἀλήθεια as a quality of unhiddenness in objects into a ‘subjective’ reading of ἀλήθεια as a quality of

unforgetting in the mind of a person.<sup>24</sup> Cole 1983 presents a convincing, reformulated interpretation of Snell's subjective reading "in terms of the processes of communication rather than perception: ἀλήθεια is that which is involved in, or results from, a transmission of information that excludes λήθη, whether in the form of forgetfulness, failure to notice, or ignoring" (8).

The Greek verb λανθάνω expresses a concept that is awkward to translate into English; it is a positive formation with an intrinsically negative meaning: when used in the active voice, it means 'to escape notice, to be unknown.' It either has as its subject the unnoticed thing or a supplementary participle that expresses the action that is unnoticed, and takes an accusative object of the person whose notice is escaped. When Helen goes to Paris's house (*Il.* 3.419-20), she avoids the attention of the Trojan women: βῆ δὲ κατασχομένη ἐανῶ ἀργῆτι φαεινῶ / σιγῆ, πάσας δὲ Τρωὰς λάθεν: ἦρχε δὲ δαίμων ("and went, shrouding herself about in the luminous spun robe, / silent, unseen by the Trojan women, and led by the goddess"). In the middle and passive voice, it means to let a thing be unnoticed by one, or to forget something. Thus Thetis was mindful (not forgetful) of her son's prayers when she went to visit Zeus οὐ λήθετ' ἐφετμέων / παιδὸς ἐοῦ ("nor did Thetis forget the entreaties / of her son") (*Il.* 1.495-96). As a noun, λήθη appears only once in Homer, when the Dream sent by Zeus deceives Agamemnon (*Il.* 2.33): μηδέ σε λήθη / αἰρείτω εὔτ' ἄν σε μελίφρων ὕπνος ἀνήη ("do not let forgetfulness / take you, after you are released from kindly sweet slumber"). The fading of a dream, the loss of information from consciousness, is the essence of λήθη.

The alpha privative of ἀλήθεια, applied to this intrinsically negative concept, thus produces a positive or active concept akin to English 'memory'. The implicit opposite to λανθάνω is μνάομαι ("to be mindful of a person or thing") or its related verb μιμνήσκω, which in

the active is the causal form of μνάομαι, ‘to remind, to call to someone’s mind.’ In the middle or passive, μιμνήσκω means either to remind oneself (*i.e.* to remember) or to remember a thing aloud (*i.e.* to make mention of something). So, the psychological state of λήθη, ‘unawareness,’ is opposed to the state of μνήμη, ‘awareness.’ This is Snell’s subjective interpretation—that which remains in the mind is the ‘unhidden.’ Cole’s argument that the ‘unhiddenness’ of ἀλήθεια is primarily concerned with discourse implies that the awareness results in “conscientious reporting” (1983: 8), the act represented by μιμνήσκω, which is a verbal exhibition of the psychological state represented by μνάομαι.

Ἀληθής is used overwhelmingly in the poems as an adverbial modifier of a ‘special’ verb of speaking: μυθέομαι (5 times),<sup>25</sup> καταλέγω (7 times),<sup>26</sup> and ἐνέπω (once).<sup>27</sup> Martin 1990 has defined μυθέομαι as marked term for the presentation of μῦθοι, or ‘authoritative speech-acts,’ the most important and fundamental form of which is the authoritative performance of memory (1989: 78). He also reports that the “semantics of [ἐνέπω] have been described by Ernst Risch as referring to formal and artful reporting,” and suggests that when the “word describing speech is made the explicit object of ἐνέπω, that word is μῦθος” (1989: 237). Similar to μυθέομαι and ἐνέπω, “*katalegein* is not an ordinary verb of speaking,” but, instead of implying an authoritative mode of speech, it “is an enumerative verb . . . Tilman Krischer has shown that this verb in Homer designates concrete and exact accounts that relate the subject ‘point by point’, and is applied only to the conveying of information” (Finkelberg 1998: 127). Accordingly Cole 1983 argues that, in different contexts, a story that is ἀληθής is at one time free “from omissions”, and at others free “from irrelevant or misleading inclusions” (10). It is a story that starts “from the beginning and [proceeds], point by point, to the end” without “evasion or inconsequentiality” (11). “An original ‘the whole story—no deletions’ becomes also ‘the whole story—no additions’

so that ἀλήθεια is alternatively the whole truth or nothing but the truth” (12). Finkelberg suggests a relationship between the truth expressed by ἀλήθεια and the phrases κατὰ μοῖραν (“according to portion”) and κατὰ κόσμον (“according to order”), both of which are used to denote qualities of performance of speech (1998: 129).

Based on its association with these speaking words, ἀλήθεια therefore does not necessarily make a comment on whether or not speech is ἔτυμος. Its association with μῦθος implies that the speaker asserts and is judged to have authority, and its usage with καταλέγω implies that ἀληθής describes the manner of communication, not the verifiability of the material. Ἀλήθεια it is about presentation, not content; it is a subjective, not objective, term. To speak ἀληθέα is to reveal what one is aware of (μνάομαι), in a clear and essential way. This is what is expected of Phoenix when he is reporting as an umpire of a race in *Iliad* 23.361, and why the serving women are frightened by Odysseus’ threat to report to Telemachus Melantho’s insulting words φὰν γὰρ μιν ἀληθέα μυθήσασθαι (“for they thought he spoke the truth”) (18.342). The sense of scrupulous awareness is also on display in the only usage in the Homeric poems where ἀληθής functions as an adjective rather than adverbially: the γυνὴ χερνήτις ἀληθής (“careful widow”) of *Iliad* 12.433 who weighs her wool on a scale.

Ἀλήθεια is found in comparison to νημερτέα in book 6 of the *Iliad*, when Hector, returning from battle, needs to find his wife quickly. He needs to know the truth of her location so that he will find her there in future time—this nuance of future verification prompts him to ask the Trojan women to tell him νημερτέα where she has gone (378-80), and to suggest several possible hypothetical locations:

εἰ δ’ ἄγε μοι δμῶαὶ νημερτέα μυθήσασθε:  
 πῆ ἔβη Ἀνδρομάχη λευκώλενος ἐκ μεγάροιο;  
 ἢ ἐ πη ἐς γαλόων ἢ εἰνατέρων εὐπέπλων  
 ἢ ἐς Ἀθηναίης ἐξοίχεται, ἐνθά περ ἄλλαι

Τρωαὶ εὐπλόκαμοι δεινὴν θεὸν ἰλάσκονται;

‘Come then, tell me truthfully as you may, handmaidens:  
where has Andromache of the white arms gone? Is she  
with any of the sister of her lord or the wives of his brothers?  
Or has she gone to the house of Athene, where all the other  
lovely-haired women of Troy propitiate the grim goddess?’

The housekeeper understands that his demand for her to speak νημερτέα reflects the urgency of the situation. He will not have time to look in more than one place. She responds with a full list (381-88):

τὸν δ’ αὖτ’ ὀτρηνή ταμίη πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν:  
“Ἑκτορ ἔπει μάλ’ ἀνωγας ἀληθέα μυθήσασθαι  
οὔτε πη ἐς γαλόων οὔτ’ εἰνατέρων εὐπέπλων  
οὔτ’ ἐς Ἀθηναίης ἐξοίχεται, ἔνθά περ ἄλλαι  
Τρωαὶ εὐπλόκαμοι δεινὴν θεὸν ἰλάσκονται,  
ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ πύργον ἔβη μέγαν Ἴλιου, οὐνεκ’ ἄκουσε  
τείρεσθαι Τρῶας, μέγα δὲ κράτος εἶναι Ἀχαιῶν.

Then in turn the hard-working housekeeper gave him an answer:  
‘Hector, since you have urged me to tell you the truth, she is not  
with any of the sisters of her lord or the wives of his brothers,  
nor has she gone to the house of Athene, where all the other  
lovely-haired women of Troy propitiate the grim goddess,  
but she has gone to the great basion of Ilion, because she heard that  
the Trojans were losing, and great grew the strength of the Achaians.

Her answer would have been νημερτέα if she had only said that Andromache was going to the wall. Instead, she replies with a “full, strict account” that answers each and every one of his suggested locations (Cole 1983: 19). Hector believes that she is telling the truth and hastens immediately to the gates; he trusts the ἀληθέα of her speech—both her memory and her honest intention of delivering the truth. Her speech turns out to have been νημερτέα, but the ἀλήθεια of her speech was the criterion that Hector used to determine its truth in delivery.

Ἀλήθεια appears five times in reference to speeches of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, ranging in length from his extended narrative to Achilles in the underworld about his son Neoptolemus:

πᾶσαν ἀληθείην μυθήσομαι (“I’ll tell you the whole truth”) (11.507), to his explanation to Alcinous about his interaction with Nausicaa: ἀληθείην κατέλεξα, (“what I’ve told you is the truth”) (7.297), to “the nine lines (16.226-234) that inform Telemachus of the how and why of his arrival in Ithaca” (Cole 1983: 10). The common denominator of these stories is the recollecting mind of Odysseus: in each case he is doing a performance of memory as he judges suitable for the occasion based upon the audience. The usage of ἀλήθεια suggests that the story is not necessarily accepted as true based on its verifiability, even though the stories may be true in the sense of ἔτυμος. Indeed, the audience would have no immediate way of ascertaining their veracity. Rather, it is the audience’s relationship with the performance of Odysseus that makes his words acceptable: his authority of presentation is a sufficient criterion of truth.

Telemachus, having been reunited with his father in book 16, is certainly Odysseus’s son; he is πεπνυμένος, ‘astute’ in taking advantage of the connotations of ἀλήθεια in order to deceive his mother, who asks him to speak clearly (σάφα) of Odysseus’s return (17.101-8):

Τηλέμαχ’, ἧ τοι ἐγὼν ὑπερώϊον εἰσαναβᾶσα  
λέξομαι εἰς εὐνήν, ἧ μοι στονόεσσα τέτυκται,  
αἰεὶ δάκρυσ’ ἐμοῖσι πεφυρμένη, ἐξ οὗ Ὀδυσσεὺς  
ᾤχεθ’ ἄμ’ Ἀτρεΐδῃσιν ἐς Ἴλιον: οὐδέ μοι ἔτλης,  
πρὶν ἐλθεῖν μνηστῆρας ἀγήνορας ἐς τόδε δῶμα,  
νόστον σοῦ πατρὸς σάφα εἰπέμεν, εἴ που ἄκουσας.  
τὴν δ’ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἠΰδα·  
‘τοιγὰρ ἐγὼ τοι, μήτερ, ἀληθείην καταλέξω.

‘Telemachus, yes, indeed, I’m going up into my upper chamber to lie down in the bed that’s been made one that causes groans for me, always wet with tears, from the moment Odysseus went with the Atreidae to Ilium. And you didn’t even dare, before the manly suitors came into this house, to tell me clearly of your father’s return, if you heard of it anywhere.’ Astute Telemachus said back to her in turn: ‘Well now, mother, I’ll recount the truth to you.

He answers her question with an ἀληθής story of his travels and his visit with Menelaus, presented in order (κατὰ κόσμον) under the pretense of καταλέγω. Yet he does not include the key piece of information: his final discovery of the νόστος ἐτήτυμος of Odysseus. Penelope accepts his story as complete and therefore true (no νόστος is imminent) because of his self-representation of speaking ἀληθείην. The external audience, however, would likely realize the irony in this exchange.

Eumaeus, moreover, believes that the vagabonds tell stories to Penelope ψεύδοντ', οὐδ' ἐθέλουσιν ἀληθέα μυθήσασθαι (they “tell lies, and aren’t even willing to tell stories that are true”) (*Od.* 14.125). For him, this is “less an immediate reaction to the reports themselves than an explanation of why they always turn out to be false. And their falsity is something of which Eumaeus is convinced on other grounds—whether because nothing ever comes of them, or because they insist on the imminence of the one thing—Odysseus’ return—which he is certain will never occur” (Cole 1983: 17). He believes that, as these men clearly do not know the truth about Odysseus, they can only speak ψευδές instead of ἔτυμος, and (being aware of their own ignorance) they cannot have the authority to speak ἀληθέα. To assert that one is speaking ἀλήθεια is to claim both to remember and to communicate essentially (without deception or irrelevancy) what is remembered. It is to promise delivery to the audience exactly what is necessary for them to gain the true picture of a memory, and to have them accept the speech as true—something these vagabonds utterly fail to do.

Beecroft suggests that ἀληθής is, in short, “a word for truth in performance, truth as proclaimed, recounted, narrated, or spoken in the assembly” (2006: 58), and that the “determination of the truth-value of a statement identified as *alēthēs* will be made on the basis of the authority of the speaker to the hearer” (62). For the content of this type of speech, like the

performances of memory encoded in a “the ‘truth’ value [itself] . . . is not an issue; epic ‘deconstructs,’ if you like, the very act of memory by showing us its pragmatic underpinnings” (Martin 1989: 85). As Nagy says, “what makes words authoritative is the value that the given society attaches to their performance” (1990: 9). In the poems, the ability to speak in the mode of ἀλήθεια can be the culturally awarded reward for the authority that stems from knowledge. The primary example of this authority in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is Nestor, who is the master of discourse from memory. The usage of truth terms in book 3 of the *Odyssey* in the exchange of Nestor and Telemachus is therefore revealing. The discussion begins with Telemachus asking Nestor “not to gloss over or embellish out of a desire to spare his feelings” (Cole 1983: 18), phraseology which activates the conceptual range of ἀληθής discourse (96-97):

μηδέ τί μ' αἰδόμενος μιλίσσῃσθε μηδ' ἐλεαίρων,  
ἀλλ' εὖ μοι κατάλεξον ὅπως ἦντησας ὀπωπῆς

Don't, out of respect, soften your words in any way and don't pity me,  
but tell me well how you got sight of him.

He then asks Nestor to μοι νημερτῆς ἐνίσπες (“tell me infallibly”) about his father—politely and reverently giving the old man the ability to speak prophetically. Nestor, in reply, hypothetically grants to Telemachus the status of being Odysseus's son based on the evidence of his speech (120-23):

ἔνθ' οὐ τίς ποτε μῆτιν ὀμοιωθήμεναι ἄντην  
ἦθελ', ἐπεὶ μάλα πολλὸν ἐνίκα δῖος Ὀδυσσεὺς  
παντοίοισι δόλοισι, πατήρ τεός, εἰ ἐτεόν γε  
κείνου ἔκγονός ἐσσι: σέβας μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωντα

There no one wished to match him face to face in counsel,  
since divine Odysseus very much surpassed them  
in all kinds of stratagems, your father, if it's true  
that you're his son. Wonder holds me when I look at you.

But after narrating at length the events after the fall of Troy, he admits that he knows nothing about the fate of Odysseus. His speech, although the poem does not articulate the point, is an ἀληθής narration that Telemachus accepts—the problem is that Nestor’s knowledge is limited. This pattern is repeated when Telemachus asks instead about something that Nestor has already vouched knowledge of: the circumstances of the death of Agamemnon. His request for that Nestor ἀληθές ἐνίσπες (“tell the truth”) is thus more like a request that Nestor tell the story κατὰ μοῖραν and κατὰ κόσμον; he wants to hear the full story (*Od.* 3.243-48).

νῦν δ' ἐθέλω ἔπος ἄλλο μεταλλῆσαι καὶ ἐρέσθαι  
 Νέστορ', ἐπεὶ περὶ οἶδε δίκας ἠδὲ φρόνιν ἄλλων:  
 τρις γὰρ δὴ μὴν φασιν ἀνάξασθαι γένε' ἀνδρῶν:  
 ὧς τέ μοι ἀθάνατος ἰνδάλλεται εἰσοράασθαι.  
 ὦ Νέστορ Νηληϊάδη, σὺ δ' ἀληθές ἐνίσπες:  
 πῶς ἔθαν' Ἀτρεΐδης εὐρὺ κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων;

Now I want to inquire about a different story and ask Nestor,  
 since he beyond others knows righteousness and wisdom.  
 For they say he's ruled three men's generations  
 and he seems to me like an immortal to behold.  
 You, Nestor Neleides, tell the truth.  
 How did wide-ruling Atreides Agammemnon die?

Martin 1989 ties Nestor to the tradition of oral poetry, suggesting that the genre of performance of memory can be compared with the overarching medium of Homeric poetry itself (1989: 78). His speech is generally characterized by its “fluency, length and authority” (1989: 103); having lived through three generations, “his commands are supported by gnomic utterance and the authority of recollection; rebukes are backed up by his status as keeper of traditions and overseer of poetic memory” (108). Nestor is explicitly compared with an epic bard, in that he actually “promises *kleos*—fame as enshrined in oral tradition—to whoever undertakes the dangerous mission” (Martin 1989: 105) to spy on the enemy camp (10.212-14).

ταῦτά κε πάντα πύθοιτο, καὶ ἂψ εἰς ἡμέας ἔλθοι  
 ἀσκηθῆς: μέγα κέν οἱ ὑπουράνιον κλέος εἶη

πάντας ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους, καί οἱ δόσις ἔσσεται ἐσθλή

Could a man learn this, and then come back again to us  
unhurt, why huge and heaven-high would rise up his glory  
among all people, and an excellent gift would befall him

The “power to guarantee fame in the tradition would seem to put Nestor on a level with such divine speakers as the Muses, with whom the epithet *hedupēs*, ‘sweet-voiced,’ has already associated him” (Martin 1989: 105). Nestor, having more experience than any other mortal, comes as close as humanly possible to speaking with the authority granted by the Muse.

Finkelberg argues, however, that Homeric diction does make a distinction between speech and ‘song.’ “Homer renders the knowledge of old men and the poet’s knowledge in only slightly different terms: while the former know ‘many things of old’ the latter knows ‘many deeds of men and gods’” (1998: 57). This difference is nonetheless revealing: only the inspiration of the Muse allows a poet to speak with authority about the gods. Nestor, through his long life, has gained much knowledge from experience. Within the poem, he speaks the truth of his explicitly and necessarily limited experience (in the sense of ἔτυμος), and he speaks authoritatively in the mode of remembering (ἀληθής). The bard, however, has to assert access to unlimited experience. Ruth Scodel suggests that while “‘ordinary’ narrative derives its authority either from personal experience or from human report . . . Epic performers, in contrast, are informed directly by the Muse and do not depend on ordinary sources” (2002: 73). The invocation of the Muses thus can be a pragmatic act that serves to replace human sources (and the implied limitations inherent in human knowledge) for the content of the performance—a deed that in fact obscures the “reality of the transmission of poetic tradition” (Scodel 2001: 110).

This claim to higher authority does more than allow the poet to speak about the gods: it allowed him to imply a lack of intentionality, removing the audience’s doubts about his

credibility that would render his speech unacceptable in the sense of ‘untrustworthily reported and therefore unreliable’. The Muses allowed the song to transcend the poet—he was not responsible for shaping the material to suit the situation, making sure that the “audience has no motive to compare the present version with alternate versions” (Scodel 2002: 71). Nagy reminds us “that songs and poetry were traditionally performed in a context of competition” (1990: 61). If not literally performed at a competition, each performance of poetry was still figuratively competing with the audience’s memories for ‘canonization.’

The acceptance (judged truth) of each performance was predicated on the audience judging to be the “ same story” (Lord 2000:28) that they had heard before. These were, after all, performances that had immense cultural capital—the poems depicted the gods, gave credit to the heroes of old, and allowed the audience to inhabit the fictive space of ‘the past.’ Epic poetry was culturally defining, and gave the Greeks a sense of history in an era without writing. Thus “by pretending that each version is the same as others told before, the audience could ignore truth-threatening changes. Poet and audience thus had a shared interest in regarding the content of each performance as fully traditional” (Scodel 2002: 41) As Lord says, the poet plays “the role of conserver of the tradition, the role of the defender of the historic truth of what is being sung; for if the singer changes what he has heard in its essence, he falsifies truth” (2000: 28). “Just as modern readers of fiction are willing to believe but will nonetheless reject a narrative that offends their sense of what is believable, so the audience of Homeric epic did not scrupulously worry about what it had heard before, but the hearers expected what they heard to accord in essentials with earlier renditions” (Scodel 2002: 41). Therefore, it is important there be no shadow of falsity on a performance. Thus “Homer denies both occasion and tradition as sources: each song comes directly from the Muses. Homeric rhetoric, by treating each performance as a

unique moment of access to the Muses' knowledge, encourages its audience not to think about alternate versions" (Scodel 2001: 114). This is made explicit in the famous invocation before the Catalogue of Ships (*Il.* 2.484-93):

ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι:  
 ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαὶ ἐστε πάρεστε τε ἴστε τε πάντα,  
 ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν:  
 οἳ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοίρανοι ἦσαν:  
 πληθὺν δ' οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω,  
 οὐδ' εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἴην,  
 φωνὴ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη,  
 εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο  
 θυγατέρες μνησαίαθ' ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον:  
 ἀρχοὺς αὖ νηῶν ἐρέω νῆάς τε προπάσας

Tell me now, you Muses who have your homes on Olympus.  
 For you, who are goddesses, are there, and you know all things,  
 and we have heard only the rumor of it and know nothing.  
 Who then of those were the chief men and lords of the Danaans?  
 I could not tell over the multitude of them nor name them,  
 not if I had ten tongues and ten mouths, not if I had  
 a voice never to be broken and a heart of bronze within me,  
 not unless the Muses of Olympia, daughters  
 of Zeus of the aegis, remembered all those who came beneath Ilion.

Finkelberg suggests that "what the Muses communicate to the singer and, through his mediation, to other mortals, is information about events which they have personally witnessed. The Muses thus do not possess more creative freedom than the poet: the only relevant difference between the Muses and the poet lies in the scope of their knowledge." This means that:

Homer envisaged the song as deriving from the actual experience of an eyewitness, the Muse, and no element or part of the song as 'created', or invented, by either the poet or the Muse. Consequently, the concrete historical meaning of the ontological status of poetry as a product of inspiration would be, in the case of Homer, a firsthand account of events that really happened (Finkelberg 1998: 73).

Any part of the story that was verifiable or literal truth, *e.g.* the catalogues or genealogies, that serves as “politically relevant . . . maps of the past” (Scodel 2002: 72), were thus the responsibility of the Muse and not the bard. This obscures all doubts about the intentionality of the poet, and encourages the audience to listen without doubt.

The two depictions of bards within the poem, Phemius and Demodocus, demonstrate how Homeric bards ideally wanted to be judged: on their ἀλήθεια—on their style. Telemachus defends Phemius from Penelope by implying that the content of his song (νόστοι) is true, in the sense of ἔτυμος, because Zeus caused the events that transpired (*Od.* 1.345-49):

τὴν δ' αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἠΰδα:  
 ‘μῆτερ ἐμή, τί τ’ ἄρα φθονέεις ἐρήηρον ἀοιδὸν  
 τέρπειν ὅππῃ οἱ νόος ὄρνυται; οὐ νύ τ’ ἀοιδοὶ  
 αἴτιοι, ἀλλὰ ποθὶ Ζεὺς αἴτιος, ὅς τε δίδωσιν  
 ἀνδράσιν ἀλφηστῆσιν, ὅπως ἐθέλησιν, ἐκάστω.

Astute Telemachus said back to her in turn:  
 ‘My mother, why do you begrudge the trusty singer  
 entertaining whatever way his mind is spurred? Singers  
 are not at fault, but Zeus is probably to blame, who gives  
 to men who work for break, to each one, however he wishes.

“The Muse, who inspires the singer, is not even mentioned . . . as a factor responsible for the content of the song” (Finkelberg 1998: 70) but rather is understood to be an intermediary, who communicates “to the singer and, through his mediation, to other mortals, is information about events which they have personally witnessed” (Finkelberg 1998: 71). The external audience has the perspective to grant that Phemius and Demodocus speak things internally consistent to the narrative and epic tradition. The relationship between these idealized bards and their audiences is thus paradigmatic of how the mechanics of oral poetry are supposed to work. When Odysseus praises Demodocus’s report of the Wooden Horse, he says λίην γὰρ κατὰ κόσμον Ἀχαιῶν οἶτον ἀείδεις (“for truly, in due order, you sing the fate of the Achaeans”) (8.489), and that (8.496-98):

αἶ κεν δὴ μοι ταῦτα κατὰ μοῖραν καταλέξῃς,  
 αὐτίκ' ἐγὼ πᾶσιν μυθήσομαι ἀνθρώποισιν,  
 ὡς ἄρα τοι πρόφρων θεὸς ὤπασε θέσπιν ἀοιδὴν

If you recount these things to me in the proper way,  
 I'll at once declare to all mankind  
 how generously god granted you inspired song

His criterion for truth is the κατὰ κόσμον and κατὰ μοῖραν performance. This ability of a speaker to convey information, καταλέγειν, in a structured and ordered fashion is dependent upon awareness and intentionality; the hallmark of ἀλήθεια.

Unlike the human ἀλήθεια of Nestor, however, the poet has access to the transcendent ἀλήθεια of the Muses. When thus inspired, and the words flow from his mouth the poet benefits from audience's positive valuation of his delivery as guarantee of the content. Loss of contact with the Muse, the awkward pause of λήθη would imply a failed performance. Sweetness of the style results in success with the audience, allowing them to “to enter into the story, as they say, and lose [their] bearings” (Veyne 1988: 22), like the audience lured in by the Sirens' μελίγηρυν (“honey-toned voice”) (*Od.* 12.184-91):

δεῦρ' ἄγ' ἰὼν, πολύαιν' Ὀδυσσεῦ, μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν,  
 νῆα κατάστησον, ἵνα νωιτέρην ὄπ' ἀκούσῃς.  
 οὐ γάρ πώ τις τῆδε παρήλασε νηὶ μελαίνῃ,  
 πρὶν γ' ἡμέων μελίγηρυν ἀπὸ στομάτων ὄπ' ἀκοῦσαι,  
 ἀλλ' ὅ γε τερψάμενος νεῖται καὶ πλείονα εἰδώς.  
 ἴδμεν γάρ τοι πάνθ' ὅσ' ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ  
 Ἀργεῖοι Τρῶές τε θεῶν ἰότητι μόγησαν,  
 ἴδμεν δ' ὅσσα γένηται ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ

Come here, much-praised Odysseus, great glory of Achaeans,  
 and land your ship so you can hear our voice.  
 For no one ever passes by here with a black ship  
 before he hears the honey-toned voice from our mouths,  
 then after he enjoys it, he departs, knowing more,  
 since we know everything, all that in wide Troy  
 Argives and Trojans suffered by the will of the gods.  
 And we know whatever happens on the earth that feeds many.

A successful story is memorable; thus there is “preservation of the tradition by the constant re-creation of it. The ideal is a true story well and truly retold” (Lord 2000: 29).

### Conclusion

The difference between the ἀληθής of Homer and the ἀληθής of Aristotle is manifest. The truth (ἀληθής) of the epics *in performance* belongs to the category of second-hand, reported truth rather than the empirical truth of observation and experience. It is a criterion of truth in discourse, rather than the truth itself. By the fourth century, ἀληθής had come to "to refer to the external reality of which discourse and art are imitations" (Cole 1983: 9) through an evolution in usage, but by no means a natural or expected one. Lincoln, in his discussion of the devaluation of μῦθος and the rise of λόγος argues “these are not words with fixed meanings (indeed, no such words exist); nor did their meanings change glacially over time, as the result of impersonal processes” (1997: 363). Instead, those who participated in the shift of authority from oral, traditional, localized culture to the new written, pan-Hellenic, intellectual culture at the end of the Archaic period reused traditional terms in novel ways. Thus Cole argues that the “care, precision, order and coherence” expressed by ἀληθής was abstracted and objectified: “the thing measured [was identified] with the measure:” ἔτυμος with ἀληθής (1983: 27).

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of *alētheia* in Hansen and Quinn's *Greek: an Intensive Course* and the lucid breakdown of terms in Starr 1968 were both helpful to crystalize these three distinct aspects of truth as a starting point for discussion.

<sup>2</sup> These terms come from Lincoln 1993: 342

<sup>3</sup> See David, M.

<sup>4</sup> Cole 1983: 8

<sup>5</sup> Language from Lord 2000: 159

<sup>6</sup> Reported in Finkelberg 1998: 157

<sup>7</sup> Translations from Richmond Lattimore's *Iliad* and James Huddleston's *Odyssey*

<sup>8</sup> Finkelberg 1998: 57

<sup>9</sup> The concept of 'double determination' was first introduced to me in a lecture by Professor Blondell, in a class on the Intellectual History of Classical Greece in Autumn 2010; see also Finkelberg 1998: 34-67

<sup>10</sup> 1990: 61

<sup>11</sup> As reported by Beecroft 2006: 56

<sup>12</sup> As reported by Beecroft 2006: 57

<sup>13</sup> J. P. Levet 1976 has a meticulous accounting of truth terms in Homer

<sup>14</sup> See Beecroft 2006: 59

<sup>15</sup> Beecroft: 60n39 also notes that as Odysseus "is either the speaker or addressee on five of these seven occasions" that it "is no guarantee of the sincerity of either the questioner or the questioned"

<sup>16</sup> Cole 1983: 13

<sup>17</sup> I am equating, in general, the use of an internal accusative that completes the idea of the verb and adverbs. I am treating the neuter singular or plural substantiates as accusatives of respect, rather than implying that all truth words when used as objects are empirically objective in and of themselves.

<sup>18</sup> Cole 1983: 15

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Cole 1983: 13 "unless they refer to a speaker's intentions . . . or what will occur because it occurs habitually"

<sup>20</sup> Cole 1983: 16

<sup>21</sup> Cole 1983: 17

<sup>22</sup> Cole 1983: 13, who also acknowledges the work of Levet

<sup>23</sup> Nagy 1990: 5 discusses marked v. unmarked language

<sup>24</sup> As reported by Cole 1983: 7-8

<sup>25</sup> *Il.* 6.382, *Od.* 11.507, 14.125, 17.15, 18.342

<sup>26</sup> *Il.* 24.407, *Od.* 7.297, 16.226, 17.108, 17.122, 21.212, 22.420

<sup>27</sup> *Od.* 3.247