

A LIAR'S YARN: STORYTELLING IN *THE LOST BOOKS OF THE ODYSSEY*¹

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Zachary Mason's debut novel, *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*, was compared by its first publisher, Starcherone Books, to the work of Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges. A postmodern meditation on storytelling, truth, and transmission, *The Lost Books* continues the tale of Homer's *Odyssey*: Mason's novel purports to be the titular "lost books" missing from Homer's poem. They report, for example, another version of the Polyphemus episode, the exploits of a doppelgänger Odysseus, and a bard Odysseus who composes the *Odyssey*. The discontinuous "books" are thus highly self-referential and oftentimes paradoxical, and they do not form a coherent single narrative. The novel was first published in 2008 by Starcherone Books as a result of winning the publishing house's Prize for Innovative Fiction. While it garnered some recognition in literary circles, it was not known by a wider audience until Farrar, Straus, and Giroux released in 2010 a second edition, significantly different from the first.² The changes were, in the eyes of Farrar, Straus, and Giroux president Jonathan Galassi, meant to declutter the novel: "There were some things that seemed overly complicated and distanced the reader from the magic of the storytelling itself. This way, without the protective layering he [the author Mason] didn't really need, you're really dealing with the myths more immediately" (as quoted in Rohter 2010). However, the Starcherone edition contained the original final chapter, "Endless City," which best represents Mason's postmodern expansion of the original narrative techniques of the *Odyssey*. Mason's novel pushes Homeric narrative techniques to their limit and produces a surreal pseudo-Homeric world, as if one were to hold up a distorting mirror to the original *Odyssey*. Specifically, Mason uses the Odyssean narrative strategies of concealing the identity of the storyteller; inset storytelling; achronological narrative structure; and the ekphrasis.

When Galassi speaks of the "protective layering" of the novel, he refers to Mason's framing device in the Starcherone edition, which consists of an Introduction, Appendix, and an Author Biography. These elements mutually reinforce the conceit of *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*, which is presented as a translation of 46 (44 in the 2nd edition) unrelated lost "books", or vignettes, as old as the *Odyssey* itself. The Appendix presents the history of the *Lost Books*, citing "evidence" of their existence in Herodotus and in Aristotle's *Poetics*. It then traces the life of the manuscript from Marcus Aurelius' library to the present day. The Introduction reads much like any introduction to a translation. It describes how the translator learned of the work, how the text was translated, and various intricacies of the English translation. Of note, however, is that the Introduction claims that the text was not so much translated as it was decoded. The text of *The Lost Books*, Mason tells us, was encrypted in a series of eleven keys, and this publication is the first decoding of its mysterious, ancient contents. The "translator" ends his Introduction with this bittersweet sentiment: "I will never read another new word of Homer's, and after finishing this book, reader, neither will you" (xx).

Finally, slipped inconspicuously into the end of book in the informational pages about typesetting and the publishing house is the Author Biography:

Zachary Mason was educated at Trinity College, the University of Michigan, and the Sorbonne. He is currently the John Shade Professor of Archaeocryptography and Paleomathematics at Magdalen College, Oxford. He divides his time between Oxford and the Greek island Ogygia. He lives with his cats, Talleyrand and Penthesilia.

Zachary Mason's academic title is "the John Shade Professor of Archaeocryptography and Paleomathematics at Magdalen College, Oxford." No such position exists, of course, but the title of the professorship is telling: John Shade is the "author" of Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*. Like the *Lost Books*, *Pale Fire* is a novel that presents itself as something else: a poem by John Shade

with commentary by editor Charles Kinbote. Mason's fake title, then, alerts the reader to his authorial fabrication: the "Zachary Mason" who narrates the Introduction and discusses the process of decoding the lost books is as much a character as Nabokov's John Shade. If this illusive, allusive job title were not enough to arouse suspicion, the next bit of information, that he lives part-time on the island of Ogygia, unravels the façade. Mason is, of course, a novelist, but he primarily earns his living as a computer scientist. He lives in California.

These framing elements mask the author's identity and displace authorial intent. Mason encourages his readers to believe that he is merely a transmitter of another's words and intent. But readers of the *Odyssey* will recognize this technique as Odysseus' own: the concealment and subsequent reclamation of identity in his interactions with Eumaeus, Telemachus, Antinous, Penelope, and Laertes are primary features of Odysseus' *nostos*. Odysseus' assumed identities are not entirely removed from the truth; he poses as acquaintances of Odysseus, or as individuals who have reason to know his plight. To Eumaeus and Telemachus he claims to be the son of a Cretan named Hylax. He tells a tale of fighting at Troy, living in Egypt, being shipwrecked, escaping slavery, and arriving at Ithaca in rags (14.185-359). The Cretan's story is similar to Odysseus' earlier *apologos* to the Phaeacians. Upon his arrival at the palace he offers an abbreviated, slightly modified version to Antinous (17.415-445). But when Odysseus is finally reunited with Penelope at 19.164-202 he modifies his identity in light of his discussion with Eumaeus. In response to Odysseus' speech in Book 14, Eumaeus told him of a liar long ago who claimed to have seen Odysseus hosted at Idomeneus' court, and who promised Odysseus' swift return (14.381-5). Odysseus incorporates this detail into his speech to Penelope: he claims that he is Aethon, the brother of Idomeneus.³ However, he tells Penelope that he saw Odysseus on his way to Troy, and that Odysseus missed seeing Idomeneus by a week or so. Finally, in Book 24, Odysseus approaches Laertes and begins his speech by relating a story about Odysseus. When Laertes asks him his identity, Odysseus answers that his name is Eperitos from Alubas, son of Apheidas and grandson of Polupemonides (24.304-6). The names are striking, and—like the title of Mason's professorship—provide an indication to the audience that the speaker is not who he claims to be.⁴ But Laertes is fooled, and Odysseus reveals himself to the old man after he has reduced him to tears. All of these disguises are similar: Odysseus presents himself as a nobleman who has hosted Odysseus along his journey. In all of them, he distances himself sufficiently from the identity of Odysseus, but nonetheless provides a reason for knowing as much as he does about Odysseus' journey. Thus he disguises his identity so that his interlocutors cannot discern his true motives: the Odysseus whom they desire is not the man before them.⁵

Similarly Mason is not a professor of archaeocryptography and paleomathematics, but he earned a PhD with a dissertation on artificial intelligence and metaphor. He is not the decoder of the *Lost Books*, but he spends his days working with code. He selects as his disguise a profession which he could convincingly perform. Despite his similarities with Odysseus in the crafting of a false identity, Mason differs significantly from Homer in that he directly confronts his readership with this duplicitous identity, whereas the audience is always aware of who Odysseus really is. The proximity of the duplicity is one step closer in Mason: we are Laertes. In doing so Mason brings the question of authorship and authority, and their relation to truth, to the fore. In his duplicity Mason renders immediate the vague discomfort readers of the *Odyssey* feel at Odysseus' treatment of Laertes.

Thus the frame of Mason's novel recalls and advances Odyssean issues regarding the narrator's identity. In addition, Mason's "decoded" lost books themselves push conventions of the progression and chronology of narrative, much as the *Odyssey* does. Mason's books are not consecutive, nor do they form a coherent plotline; rather, they relate other possible experiences of Odysseus: alternate adventures and alternate homecomings. In "The Iliad of Odysseus," Odysseus disguises himself as a bard who travels the Ionian coast reciting falsified poems of his own glory. In "The Book of Winter," Odysseus finds himself with no memory, alone in a cabin in the wilderness, with only a copy of the *Odyssey* to entertain him. The plausible ways in which to connect the disparate plotlines result in mental contortions and impossibilities: Odysseus must be in multiple places at the same time. This enigma is best exemplified by the chapter "The Stranger," in which

Odysseus rejects a man who claims to be his doppelgänger at Troy only to find him ruler of Ithaca upon his return home. One of the suggestions of the novel is that Odysseus is a liar who has made up not just the *apologos*, but the entire tale that is the *Odyssey*. Thus Mason's novel casts the original poem in such a new light that reading the *Odyssey* in the same way again is rendered impossible.

"Endless City" is one of three chapters excised from the second edition, and is by far the most prominent omission. As the original ending of the novel, "Endless City" offers the final impression of Mason's narrative. The chapter tells two intertwining parts of one story. It is set during the Trojan War, at the Greek camps, and is based on the tale Helen tells Telemachus at *Odyssey* 4.240-259. In Helen's tale Odysseus dresses as a beggar and sneaks into Troy; only Helen recognizes him; Odysseus reveals the Greeks' strategy to her; he departs the city, killing many Trojans in the process. In one of the two storylines of Mason's "Endless City," Odysseus is brought before Agamemnon under charges of turning traitor and sneaking into Troy. In the other, Odysseus sneaks into Troy in disguise and meets Cassandra, Helen, and Hector. The temporal relationship between these two storylines is unclear. It appears that the excursion to Troy occurs both before and after the confrontation with Agamemnon: Odysseus is dragged before Agamemnon because of his excursion to Troy, yet after his meeting with Agamemnon he also sneaks off to Troy. The chronology of the two stories is further complicated by the order in which they are presented: they are laid out in interlocking sections, alternating between the two. The inter-relation of the two stories remains unclear until Mason's footnote on the last page:

Mathematically, the structure of this chapter is this: the *n*th section encapsulates the telling of the *n+1*th section, is encapsulated by the *n-1*th, is a continuation of the *n-2*th, and is continued in the *n+2*th, where all section numbers are computed modulo the total number of sections. Since the number of sections is odd, each section ends up containing, contained by, continuing, and continued by every other section. (216n.)

This is all to say that there are two organizational systems to the chapter: encapsulation and continuation. Within the nine total sections, each section encapsulates the next, and is encapsulated by the previous: "the *n*th section encapsulates the telling of the *n+1*th section, is encapsulated by the *n-1*th." For example, in section 1 Agamemnon confronts Odysseus. Odysseus replies that he was not turning traitor (205).⁶ The section ends with Odysseus saying "Be patient and I will tell you the story" (205). Section 2 is the story of Odysseus sneaking into Troy (205-6). He encounters a Trojan soldier, and lies to him about his identity. He claims to be an old Trojan beggar who overheard a disagreement between Odysseus and Agamemnon. The section ends with Odysseus telling the Trojan, "I pressed my ear to the tent and this is what I heard" (206). Section 3 is the story of Odysseus and Agamemnon disagreeing, and ends with Odysseus about to tell Agamemnon a story (206-7). This continues through all nine sections. Thus every section is the direct quotation of the section before it, like nesting dolls.⁷

Mason describes the second of the organizational systems, continuation, thus: "the *n*th section . . . is a continuation of the *n-2*th, and is continued in the *n+2*th." In narrative progression, each section continues the story of two sections prior, and is continued two sections later. The first few sections again may serve as an illustration: the story of section 1, in which Agamemnon confronts Odysseus, is continued in section 3, wherein Agamemnon continues to berate Odysseus' insolence. Likewise, section 4, in which the Trojan soldier lets Odysseus go, continues the story of section 2, in which the Trojan soldier encounters Odysseus.

But how are these two storylines connected? Another footnote keyed to the ellipsis which ends the entire novel informs us: "Note that this section continues with the opening section of the chapter" (216n.). In essence, once a reader reaches the end of the chapter, the reader is to

continue the story by returning to the beginning of the chapter. The encapsulation continues *ad infinitum* as section 9 encapsulates section 1.

The organizational principle of continuation is somewhat more complicated. As Mason himself notes, the number of sections is odd. Thus the continuation of section 9 is section 2, and section 1 is the continuation of section 8. From the "beginning" of the chapter, the sections run in this order, per continuation: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 2, 4, 6, 8, 1, 3, ... Mason succinctly describes this loop as a Möbius strip, the mathematical figure of a loop with a half twist in it. The Möbius strip's special characteristic is that it has only one side: "both" sides of the loop can be traveled without ever leaving the surface. Similarly "both" storylines in Mason's chapter can be read continuously without transitioning to the other storyline.

There is, additionally, a metafictionality to the chapter, which is not surprising given the influence of poststructuralist authors such as Borges, Nabokov, and Calvino upon Mason. Many characters speak as if they are aware of the Möbius strip effect. For example, in the very first section, Agamemnon bemoans that "the orders I issue are lost, or ignored, or come back to me distorted" (205). When Odysseus meets Hector in section 8, Odysseus asks Hector how long he has been wandering the night. Hector says: "Why, forever, of course. This night has neither beginning nor end and I have been here since the dawn of the world except there never was a dawn" (215). Agamemnon and Hector, then, speak as if they have knowledge of the doubling-back structure of the chapter.

These properties of nesting doll encapsulation and Möbius strip continuation are Mason's hyperbolic versions of the narrative complexity evident in the original *Odyssey*. Encapsulation appears in the *Odyssey* in the form of the stories that Odysseus tells his various hosts. The *apologos* of Books 9-12, after all, are an encapsulation in which Odysseus tells the Phaeacians of his travels. Within this encapsulation we may find other stories, such as the one which Odysseus tells Polyphemus about himself in Book 9. In both Homer's and Mason's tales, moreover, Odysseus not only conceals his true identity, but also comments on himself in the third person. As we have seen above, in the *Odyssey* Odysseus often presents himself as a Cretan who tells tall tales of how he has seen Odysseus, whereas in "Endless City" he presents himself as a Trojan who tells tales of how he has seen Odysseus. Indeed, Mason's Odysseus says, "I am nobody," when asked to account for himself (206). Thus both Odysseuses also participate in a certain metafiction whereby they become narrators themselves, and weave themselves into the tales they tell.

Mason's Möbius strip technique, too, is an exaggerated version of Odyssean storytelling. As Hector himself implies, every event in "Endless City" is both anterior and posterior to other events in the chapter. The conventional flow of narrative time is subverted. Such is also true of the aforementioned *apologos* of *Odyssey* 9-12, which take place before the *Odyssey* opens. Moreover the opening of the *Odyssey*, too, feels out of time insofar as it begins *in medias res*. Finally, the technique of ring composition, while not itself achronological, is a form of "circling back," which is echoed in the shape of the Möbius strip.

Mason adds one final Homeric flourish to "Endless City," one which significantly deepens the storyline and function of the chapter. Section 8 includes an ekphrasis, employed here with a typical Masonian twist. Odysseus, having infiltrated the city of Troy, approaches Helen with intent to kill her and thereby end the war. She appears here weaving, as she first appears at *Iliad* 3.125-8. Helen, like Hector, possesses a sense of metafictionality. She first comments that "there are many Helens in the night—I must not be the real one" (213).⁸ Then she tells Odysseus that, when Zeus granted her any wish, she wished "to stay here at my loom, weaving, world without end, and so I will" (214). Mason's Helen wishes to be eternally Homer's Helen frozen in time before the scene at the ramparts. Odysseus then looks at her weaving:

My eyes were drawn to her weaving, a long cloth looping back on itself like a wheel but with a half twist in the middle. Images were woven into both sides—a man in a pylos⁹ standing before

a wrathful king and then debating with a priestess, a beggar with sly eyes directing a Trojan warrior's gaze, the same beggar, now with a murderous expression, pulling a dagger from his robes while a beautiful woman, larger than the rest of the figures, smiled and placidly worked her loom. (214)

Helen's weaving is, of course, a Möbius strip. And the images depicted on her cloth form the plot of the chapter: Odysseus dragged before Agamemnon; meeting Cassandra; tricking the Trojan soldier; threatening Helen. Thus Helen's weaving is a copy of the entire chapter, encapsulated within the chapter itself.¹⁰ But what happens next is the truly remarkable twist.

The ekphrasis of the weaving continues:

The cloth showed Odysseus blundering through long corridors and into blind alleys, high walls, locked doors, culverts, and dead ends until finally he burst out onto the street behind the palace. It was deserted, shocking in its stillness. He tried to remember the way he had taken out of the palace for the next time but could only think of Helen's smile, her stillness and her inexorable weaving.

He fled the city and made for the Greek camp. Looking back over his shoulder, he nearly walked into Hector..." (214).

The narrative continues from there. What is not entirely clear is whether the narrative has exited the ekphrasis. Odysseus views himself escaping Troy in the weaving, and smoothly, inexplicably, he becomes that Odysseus who has fled from Troy. The remainder of the chapter, then, might still be considered part of the ekphrasis. And when the narrative doubles back on itself and reaches the point of the ekphrasis once again, it descends into yet another level of ekphrasis. The shape of the chapter, then, resembles not so much a Möbius strip that traces the same path over and over again, but rather a Möbius spiral tracing the same events, but with each iteration inscribed within the previous one—a fractal.¹¹

But what is the function of Mason's neat little trick? This chapter, "Endless City"—we may now fully appreciate the title—is itself a comment on the open-endedness of the *Odyssey* wherein Odysseus comes home only to set off again, leaves war behind only to bring more violence home.¹² Similarly, the fate of one of Mason's Odysseuses is to walk forever along a tightrope in an endless, cloudless, sky, with no memory of his identity ("Odysseus in Hell"). "Endless City" realizes this fate as it refuses to close the book on the *Odyssey*.¹³ It is, additionally, a comment upon the reception of the *Odyssey*, itself a journey with no end.¹⁴

These different facets of the *Odyssey* which Mason touches upon may seem somewhat random: concealing the identity of the storyteller; encapsulation; achronological narrative structure; the ekphrasis. Yet upon closer examination we may observe that his construction of "Endless City" revolves around a single word which unites the themes of the chapter, and of the novel at large. This word is *speiron*. The word occurs, save for one late usage, only in Homer, and only in the *Odyssey*. It means, generally, "a covering," whether it be for a person ("clothing"), a body ("shroud"), or a ship ("sails"). It is used only seven times in all. One of the seven is at 4.245, in Helen's speech: "σπεῖρα κάκ' ἄμφ' ὤμοισι βαλὼν, οἰκῇ ἐοικώς ([Odysseus], putting disgusting rags around his shoulders like a slave)." Here Odysseus disguises himself with these rags to sneak into Troy, the very action that is retold by Mason in section 2 of "Endless City." There are further parallels between Homer's usage of *speiron* and Mason's composition of "Endless City." At 2.102, 19.147, and 24.137 *speiron* is used to refer to Laertes' shroud that Penelope "weaves." The shroud is, of course, Penelope's bit of deception against the suitors. In Mason's chapter, Odysseus finds Helen weaving; Mason's weaving Helen, then, is a reference to Penelope's deceptive weaving of Laertes'

speiron. Of the three remaining uses of *speiron*, two are in Book 6: 6.179 and 6.269. Both uses occur in the meeting of Odysseus and Nausicaa: at 179, Odysseus asks Nausicaa for some *rags* to cover his naked body; at 269, Nausicaa gives Odysseus instructions on how to sneak into Phaeacia, making sure the sailors tending to their *sails* do not spy them together. In the former Odysseus asks for covering: protection for his body; in the latter Nausicaa instructs him on how to hide and deceive. The one remaining use is at 5.318, wherein Odysseus' raft is beset by Poseidon's storm after leaving Calypso's island, and the *sails* are ripped apart. This usage has, to my mind, no parallel in Mason.

We may recognize, then, that the meanings and usages of *speiron* have particular thematic and emotional resonances in Homer. These themes are echoed in Mason's construction of "Endless City." *Speiron* means, in its physical sense, "a covering"; it is used in the *Odyssey* in contexts in which there is deception and, in complement, protection. Odysseus uses the rags to physically protect his body, but also to deceive others. Penelope uses the excuse of the shroud primarily to deceive the suitors, but this deception is in turn her only defense against them. These various senses of *speiron* are exploited in "Endless City." Mason uses the notion of a covering not only in the physical objects of Odysseus' disguise and Helen's weaving, but also in the very organization of the chapter: encapsulation. Further, his framing device and false identity may also be seen as his own "covering" in two senses: the frame, by enveloping the chapters with an Introduction before and an Appendix afterwards, "covers" them; the framing device is also Mason's own covering which deceives the audience and protects his identity. Jonathan Galassi was indeed spot-on when he called the frame "the protective layering [Mason] didn't really need." We may then reflect back on the *Odyssey*: like Mason's frame, the tales Odysseus tells Eumaeus and his family are both deceptive and protective. And this notion that Odysseus' tales are deceptive, but also serve as the conservators of Odysseus' identity, lies at the heart of the multiple tales and versions in Mason's novel.

There is one additional twist. While *speiron* is exclusive to the *Odyssey*, there is a more commonly used cognate, *speira*, the feminine form, which designates anything twisted. The nouns are related insofar as both are derived from the notion of twisting or wrapping one thing around another. *speira* finds a parallel in "Endless City" in the figure of the Möbius strip: Helen's weaving has a twist in it; the weaving mirrors one of the organizational structures of the chapter, continuation, which has a twist in it because of the odd number of total sections.

Thus we may observe that the composition of Mason's final chapter, and indeed of other aspects of the novel, center on the terms *speiron* / *speira*, which not only designate the physical object of a cover, but also evoke—like the English term "cover"—notions of protection and deception.¹⁵

After the final word of the novel, Mason closes with an image. It seems only fitting that I should do the same. A Greek key design graces the cover of Mason's book and appears throughout it, growing more complex each time until it appears in its final form at the end of the novel. Like Helen's weaving, it is a graphic depiction of Mason's narrativity.¹⁶ There are two broad parts, intertwined—where one is absent, the other picks up. Within each of these two larger keys (note, of course, the pun: Mason claimed he decoded the text using eleven keys) is encapsulated a series of smaller keys. And finally, the key design turns in upon itself, forming a spiral.

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¹ A version of this paper was presented at the 107th Annual Meeting of CAMWS. I would like to thank the lively audience and session presider Martin Winkler for their suggestions and encouragement. At *New Voices*, I would like to thank Trevor Fear and Antony Makrinos for their advice and guidance.

² Changes include the addition of two chapters ("No Man's Wife" and "Epigraph"), the deletion of the Introduction, Appendix, and three chapters ("After Coming Home," "Fox," and "Endless City"), and

the transposition of three chapters (“Sad Revelation,” “Fireworks,” and “Record of a Game”). In general the second edition creates more continuity between chapters, and eliminates the mathematical superstructure borrowed from Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*.

³ There has been some discussion regarding the name Odysseus presents to Penelope: Russo (1992: 86), Levaniouk (2000).

⁴ The precise etymology and meaning of the names are the subject of debate. See Russo (1992: 395).

⁵ Hall (2008: 37-8) traces Odysseus' often nefarious use of rhetoric in the tragedies to achieve his aims.

⁶ Using Mason's term, I refer to the parts of the chapter as "sections." They are able to be differentiated from one another by both content and formatting. Every other section beginning with the second one (the ones which, per my numbering system, are even-numbered sections) are indented half an inch throughout. There is also a larger paragraph spacing between sections. Mason does not, however, number the sections. For the purposes of this paper I have numbered them from beginning to end, 1-9, but I also provide the page number for the sake of clarity.

⁷ John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* contains a chapter titled "Menelaïad" in which the same narrative structure is used. Mason's use of it here is likely an allusion to Barth. Barth's encapsulation is somewhat more marked in that he numbers the sections 1-7 and uses multiple quotation marks. The structure may be summarized as: 1 "2 "3 " "4 " "5 " "6 " "7 " " " " " " " "7" " "6" " "5" " "4" " "3" "2" 1 As can be seen from this structural diagram, Barth's technique also differs from Mason's in that the second half of the chapter exits the encapsulation enacted in the first half; Mason's never closes the quotation.

⁸ Mason here almost certainly refers to the notion of the other Helen as told in Stesichorus and Euripides, and expounded upon by modern works such as C. S. Lewis' "After Ten Years" and HD's "Helen in Egypt." However, Helen's comment here is particularly delicious in light of Douglas Olson's reading of Helen's original speech in the *Odyssey*: "Helen's attitude toward Odysseus is thus oddly confused, and he seems to function in her tale as a sort of idealized crypto-Helen, a Helen in disguise. Like Menelaus' wife on Paris' arm, at least in her own view of things, Odysseus enters Troy in the guise of someone base, someone he "really is not" (4.245, 247f)" (389). Thus in Mason Helen speaks to Odysseus, A.K.A. "crypto-Helen," and tells him, "there are many Helens in the night—I must not be the real one."

⁹ *Pylos* cannot be right—Mason probably means *pilos*, judging from his note on the word: “A kind of peaked cap which Odysseus is often depicted wearing, though the association is traditional rather than textual” (214n.).

¹⁰ Similarly, in *Iliad* 3 Helen is weaving scenes of the battle occurring around her.

¹¹ My thanks to Dunstan Lowe, who at the CAMWS panel provided the observation that this shape is a fractal.

¹² The title refers to Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. The names of Mason's decoding keys are also references to *Invisible Cities*: Time, Memory, Desire, Revenge, The Gods, The Dead, Departures, Returns, Words, Deception, Doubles. Under the title of each chapter (though only in the first edition), Mason lists the keys used to decode each chapter ("Doubles, Revenge"; "Desire, Words"). The chapters of *Invisible Cities* are titled, for example, "Cities and memory"; "Cities and desire"; "Cities and the dead." Calvino divides his chapters into, coincidentally, nine sections with a mathematical organization to them. Moreover, the figures of Kublai Khan and Marco Polo are duplicated in Agamemnon and Odysseus, and themes and topics (such as chess, tightrope walking, and agnosia) of *Invisible Cities* are echoed in *The Lost Books*.

¹³ It is also almost too marvelous of a coincidence that Mason removes "Endless Cities," the final "book," from the second edition, given the controversy which once surrounded *Odyssey* 24 as a spurious addition. The second edition closes with the chapter "Last Islands," in which Odysseus returns to Troy, but it is revealed only to the reader to be a sham plastic tourist version of Troy. This new ending obliterates the idea of a pristine, original *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by blurring the line between original and copy. In contrast the ending of the first edition reproduces copy upon copy of the

Odyssey as it circles back on itself. While the endings appear to be complete opposites—undermining the uniqueness of the original as opposed to creating multiple copies of it—the underlying message is the same: to question the distinction, and attendant hierarchizing, between original and copy.

¹⁴ Hall (2008: 43) characterizes the *Odyssey* itself as a Proteus that defies fixity to any one genre or interpretation.

¹⁵ Some readers may question whether Mason knows enough Greek to develop such an elaborate set of parallels. While I do not know whether Mason knows Greek, a few plausible points of entry to this term exist for the resourceful Greekless reader of Homer. First, the etymology of “spiral” may be traced back to *speira*. Second, W.B. Stanford’s red MacMillan commentary on Helen’s speech contains an entry for *speiron*, noting its cognate *speira* and its English derivative “spiral” (Stanford 1959: 275).

¹⁶ The correlation between narrative structures and visual art techniques has also been noted in the scholarship on Homer: Andreae and Flashar (1977), Mackay, Harrison, and Masters (1999), Nimis (1999).