

READING HOMER

FILM AND TEXT



αὐτοκράτορας autokratōs EDITED BY
KOSTAS MYRSIADES

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Associated University Presses
2010 Eastpark Boulevard
Cranbury, NJ 08512

The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Reading Homer : film and text / edited by Kostas Myrsiades.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8386-4219-1 (alk. paper)

1. Homer—Criticism and interpretation. 2. Homer—Influence. 3. Motion pictures—Plots, themes, etc. 4. Mythology in motion pictures. 5. Troy (Motion picture) I. Myrsiades, Kostas.

PA4037.A5R43 2009

883'.01—dc22

2009001421

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Introduction: Why Read Homer?

Kostas Myrsiades

ALMOST 3,000 YEARS AGO, A BLIND POET(S) LIVING AT THE DAWN OF civilization recited/composed two epic poems, the *Iliad*, recounting the wrath of Achilles, and the *Odyssey*, about the ten-year-long adventures of Odysseus. Today the Homeric epics as they are known to us, are read and taught throughout our colleges and universities, and ultimately they will probably become known in one form or another to most educated people around the world. What is it about these two poems that makes them the most read works, except the Bible, in Western civilization?

The answers are many. Historians use Homer's works to piece together Mycenaean society and the world as it existed during the poet's life, usually placed around the end of the eighth century B.C.E.; anthropologists and sociologists study the epics for their wealth of information on everyday Homeric life; psychologists focus on Homer's heroes to probe people's need for moral values and religion; and folklorists search the texts as an encyclopedia of classical mythology.

Alexander the Great reportedly carried a copy of the *Iliad* with him wherever he went because for him the poem represented the epitome of heroism and the way a warrior had to conduct himself. Leo Tolstoy believed the Homeric epics were the closest thing to nature itself. Victorian poet and critic Matthew Arnold found them the best cure for a headache.

Beginning with Aristotle, students of Homer tended to become bogged down with linguistic disagreements until 1795, the year the German philologist F. A. Wolf published his *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, which argued that Homer's epics were products of an illiterate age. With the publication of this book, Wolf was able to legitimize what up to his time was taken to be a heretical and minority view. Wolf's book defined the course Homeric studies were to take from that point on—that Homer was an oral poet (an *aoidos*) whose epics were

preserved through memory until an alphabet came along to preserve them in writing. However, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were poems of too great a length for anyone to believe that a single bard could store them in his memory—the *Iliad* consists of 15,693 lines and the *Odyssey* of 12,109 lines. Thus, Wolf argued that Homer, or rather many Homers, orally composed and left behind a number of short lays, which were then stitched together at a later period when writing came into being. Wolf's theory was to occupy Homeric scholarship well into the early years of the twentieth century, dividing Homerists into two camps—unitarians who felt the epics were the products of a single mind and analysts who followed Wolf's theory that the epics were composed of smaller songs by a variety of bards and were stitched together. These arguments between unitarians and analysts abated to a degree as a result of the work of Milman Parry in the early part of the twentieth century. Parry demonstrated through linguistic analysis and fieldwork that Homer was an oral poet who composed his epics in performance. In other words, instead of reciting a memorized text, the bard composed as he performed, relying on a store of traditional techniques, formulas, stock phrases, and lines constructed to meet the demands of the dactylic hexameter line in which the epics were composed.

Earlier in 1870 a German businessman and avid unitarian, Heinrich Schliemann, began the excavation of Troy (modern Hissarlik, western Turkey) and convinced scholars to look at the Homeric epics in a historical light rather than as the unhistorical fictions they were considered to be up to that point. After the decipherment in the 1950s of Linear B, the early Mycenaean alphabet, and the advancements made by archaeologists in Troy, scholars turned their attention to the epics' depiction of the Mycenaean world in which they were set. In time, however, a generation of new Homerists concluded as K. A. Raafaub states that "heroic epic is historical in appearance but contemporary in meaning" (1997, 628).

Although still concerned to a large extent with many of the issues that have plagued Homerists since Aristotle, the myriad books and articles appearing on Homer each year of the twenty-first century have shifted their emphasis. This time the emphasis is on the role of the narrator and narration itself, the poet's method of characterization and description, epic plot developments, the nature and purpose of epic type scenes, the nature of character speeches and "sound bites" and close readings of specific passages in both epics.

After 2,800 years on the best-seller list, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*

in English translation are still required reading in most college/university basic world literature courses, judging from their appearance in most introductory world literature texts (including the *Norton Anthology*, the *Longman Anthology*, and the *Bedford Anthology*). Interest in Homer in the twenty-first century seems to be stronger than ever. The most recent of the over two dozen translations of Homer's *Iliad* and/or *Odyssey* in the last fifty years has just been published (Jordan 2008). Since 1990 there have been eight new English translations of the *Odyssey* and six of the *Iliad* (see appendix, 2. English Translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in Circulation). New critical studies on Homer since 2000 seem to be on the rise, including a renewed interest among historians and critics in the question of the authenticity of the Trojan War and Troy, which has generated a number of new books in the last few years (Bryce, 2006, Burgess 2001, Castledon 2006, Latacz 2001, Lowenstam 2008, Strauss 2006, Thomas and Conant 2005, and Thompson 2004), and studies on Homeric influence on contemporary culture (Burgess 2008, Hall 2008, Macdonald 2003, Shay 2002, Tatum 2003; see appendix, 1. A Selected List of Critical Works on Homer's Epics since 2000). Even the graphic novel has appropriated Homer, as we see in the projected seven-volume series of Eric Shanower (2001–), of which three volumes (twenty-six installments) have already been published. Shanower is presently working on volume 4, having completed twenty-seven installments.

In her recent book, *The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey* (2008), Edith Hall revisits the influence of Homer's epic on Western culture, a task first approached by W. B. Stanford in his classic *The Ulysses Theme* (1954), and finds that Homer's influence has pervaded all phases of contemporary culture. This is especially evident in film. Of the several versions of Homer's epics brought to the screen since the silent era, almost half have been produced in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (*Troy*, 2004, *Helen of Troy* [TV miniseries], 2003, *The Odyssey* [TV miniseries], 1997, *Helen of Troy*, 1955, *Ulysses*, 1954; for a complete list of films see Winkler 2007). In addition to the film adaptations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* noted, both classic and contemporary world cinema have been studied for Homeric influences, especially in the American western film (see, for example, Goldhill [2007] and Eckstein and Lehman [2004], who supplement earlier work by Blundell and Ormand [1997] and Winkler [1996, 1985]). Works of fiction and nonfiction influenced by both of Homer's epics have also been at a record high

ranging from John Barton's *Tantalus* (2000) to the popular final volumes of David Gemmell's Troy trilogy, *Troy: Fall of Kings* (2007); see appendix, 3. A Selected List of Works of Fiction and Nonfiction since 2000 Influenced by Homer's Epics).

The basic reasons why we still read Homer today seem to me to have remained constant, although each generation seems to find new ways of approaching the Homeric epics. As we see in the present collection of new essays on Homer's epics, the underlying issues of *timé* (honor), *kleos* (fame), *geras* (rewards), the psychology of Homeric warriors, the reevaluation of type scenes, the influences of Homer that have preoccupied scholars for millennia are still present but are revisited anew. Four of the essays collected in this book deal with fresh analysis of key passages and themes in the two epics in question while another four turn to Homer's influence on popular culture, specifically film. Since Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* was released in 2004, Homerists have taken the opportunity not only to evaluate and critique this film but also to question the existence of Troy and to consider Homer's epics as film, war memorials, and the works of Homer in relation to politics (see Winkler 2007). Even before the release of *Troy*, scholars were finding Homeric influences in Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992; see Blundell and Ormand 1997), John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956; Eckstein and Lehman 2004), the Coen Brothers' *O Brother Where Art Thou?* and Mike Leigh's *Naked* (Goldhill 2007), to mention only a few.

The present collection of essays on key scenes from Homer's epics and his influence on American cinema begins with a background essay by Shawn Ross, "Homer as History: Greeks and Others in a Dark Age," which argues that understanding Homeric epic as the product of a long-standing oral tradition facilitates its use as a source for early Greek history, which in turn illuminates the study of the beliefs, institutions, and ideologies of the eighth century B.C.E. when the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as we know them were composed. The next four essays delve into Homer's texts themselves, focusing on a number of approaches to key passages and themes. Rick Newton's "Geras and Guest-Gifts in Homer" draws parallels between *xeineia* (hospitality and guest-gifts) in the *Odyssey* and *geras* (gifts from plunder) in the *Iliad*. Focusing on the Glaukos-Diomedes scene in *Iliad* 6, Newton establishes that this analogy is inherent in oral tradition and that the analogues function as interchangeable narrative components. John B. Vlahos in "Homer's *Odyssey*, Books 19 and 23: Early Recognition: A Solution to the Enigmas of Ivory and Horns, and the

Test of the Bed” tackles certain aspects of the *Odyssey* that have created problems for Homerists since the epics were composed. He first focuses on *Odyssey* 19 by posing two questions, “Why does Penelope ask Odysseus when he appears to her as a stranger to interpret a dream she supposedly had when the dream is self-interpreting?” and “Why does she decide to hold a contest with the bow, with her as the prize, at a time when she has been told that Odysseus is near?” For *Odyssey* 23 Vlahos asks, “What is the true purpose of the so-called test of the bed?” The answer he suggests for all three questions is that Penelope must already know the beggar to be her husband, Odysseus. Scott Richardson in “Conversation in the *Odyssey*” focuses on character conversation, which he claims tends toward “obfuscation rather than illumination.” Focusing on Homer’s language in the *Odyssey*, he illustrates that conversation in this epic is a game in which some play better than others, and playing the game properly requires not only a keen ability to convey meaning indirectly but also a sensitive awareness of what has been previously said. Conversation in the *Odyssey*, Richardson claims, creates a world characterized by distrust and uncertainty. Joel Christensen in “The End of Speeches and a Speech’s End: Nestor, Diomedes, and the *telos muthôn*” turns back to the *Iliad* and offers a close reading of a crucial passage in *Iliad* 9 concerning the phrase *telos muthôn*. A clearer understanding of these two words, according to Christensen, enhances our understanding not only of this critical phrase, but more importantly of the dynamic of Homeric speech in general.

The second set of four essays turn from reading Homer’s texts to Homer’s influence on film. The first two contributions deal with Wolfgang Petersen’s *Troy*, which has received a great deal of attention since its release in 2004 (see essays by Frederick Ahl, Alena Allen, Monica S. Cyrino, J. Lesley Fitton, Joachim Latacz, Robert J. Rabel, Stephen Scully, Kim Shahabudin, Jon Solomon, and Martin M. Winkler all in Winkler 2007; Hanna M. Roisman 2008). Jonathan S. Burgess’s “Achilles’ Heel: The Historicism of the Film *Troy*” argues that the film’s weakness lies in its trying to portray a factual Trojan War rather than concentrating on the myth of the Trojan War. To navigate the film’s uneasy negotiation of history and myth, Burgess concentrates on the motif of Achilles’ heel in his death scene at the end of *Troy*. Charles C. Chiasson in “Redefining Homeric Heroism in Wolfgang Petersen’s *Troy*” continues the discussion on the film by observing that by adding romantic love to heroism in battle and diminishing the power of the Homeric gods, the film

intertwines the spheres of love and battle, which he believes are irreconcilable in the *Iliad*.

The final two articles in this collection turn to American classics and to genre films for Homeric influences. Critics and teachers of film have in recent years alluded to Homeric parallels in a number of films, including Preston Sturges's *Sullivan's Travels* (1942), Mervyn LeRoy's *Homecoming* (1948), Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (1964), Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Frank Perry's *The Swimmer* (1968), Barry Levinson's *The Natural* (1984), Lee David Zlotoff's *The Spitfire Grill* (1996), Victory Zunez's *Ulee's Gold* (1997), Joel Coen's *O Brother Where Art Thou?* (2000), Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now Redux* (2001), and Anthony Minghella's *Cold Mountain* (2003). In "The *Odyssey* and Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*," Bruce Loudon emphasizes motifs shared by the *Odyssey* in one of the best known and loved American film classics. After tracing motifs such as the divine council, the hero's descent to the underworld, and *the vision*, Loudon proceeds to demonstrate how *It's a Wonderful Life* Christianizes these mythical events to construct a distinctly American subgenre of myth. My own reading of a 1950s classic western film in "Reading *The Gunfighter* as Homeric Epic" examines the progress of the warrior through his pursuit of glory and his homecoming, comparing Henry King's *The Gunfighter* and Homer's two epics. It explores the themes of the hero's cunning, the destination, homecoming, and reunion in the *Odyssey*, and considers how the hero is condemned to glory, his self-recognition, and the roles of irony and fate in the *Iliad*.

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APPENDIX 1: A SELECTED LIST OF CRITICAL WORKS ON HOMER'S EPICS SINCE 2000

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APPENDIX 2: ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF HOMER'S *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* in Circulation

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- Odyssey*. Translated by Ian Johnson. Arlington, VA: Richer Resources, 2006b.
- The Iliad*. Translated by Rodney Merrill. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007.
- The Iliad*. Translated by Herbert Jordan. Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2008.

APPENDIX 3: A SELECTED LIST OF WORKS OF FICTION AND NONFICTION SINCE 2000 INFLUENCED BY HOMER'S EPICS

- Atwood, Margaret. *The Penelopiad*. New York: Canongate, 2005.
- Baricco, Alessandro. *An Iliad*. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.
- Barton, John. *Tantalus*. London: Oberon, 2000.
- Clarke, Lindsay. *The War at Troy*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004.

- . *The Return from Troy*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.
- Cook, Elizabeth. *Achilles*. New York: Picador, 2001.
- Gemmell, David. *Troy; Lord of the Silver Bow*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2005.
- . *Troy; Shield of Thunder*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2006.
- . *Troy; Fall of Kings*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2007.
- George, Margaret. *Helen of Troy*. New York: Viking, 2006.
- Geras, Adele. *Troy*. New York: Harcourt, 2000.
- Hand, Judith. *The Amazon Warrior; a Novel of Ancient Troy*. New York: TOR, 2004.
- Hughes, Bettany. *Helen of Troy; Goddess, Princess, Whore*. New York: Knopf, 2005.
- Manfredi, Valerio Massimo. *The Talisman of Troy*. Translated by Christine Feddersen-Manfredi. New York: Pan Books, 2004.
- Mason, Zachary. *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*. Buffalo, NY: Starcherone Books, 2007.
- Rawlings, Jane. *The Penelopeia; A Novel in Verse*. Boston: David R. Godine, 2003.
- Shanower, Eric. *Age of Bronze* Vol. 1. *A Thousand Ships*; Vol. 2 *Sacrifice*; Vol. 3. *Betrayal, Part One*. Orange, CA: Image Comics, 2001.
- Simmons, Dan. *Ilium*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.
- . *Olympos*. New York: HaperCollins, 2005.
- Tobin, Greg. *The Siege of Troy*. NY: TOR, 2004.
- Unsworth, Barry. *The Songs of the Kings*. New York: Doubleday, 2003.
- Zimmerman, Mary. *The Odyssey*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006.

READING HOMER



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material) for the period are scant and problematic enough to require an interdisciplinary approach.

Sophisticated and responsible use of the Homeric epics as historical sources, however, demands a coherent and systematic methodology. The historian must demonstrate that the epics reflect a coherent, historical society external to the poems themselves. Once the basic historicity of Homeric society has been established, two chronological questions must be answered: when did the poems reach the form they take today, and when did the society depicted in the poems exist? Third, interpretation of the epics depends upon understanding the implications of their origin and nature as poetry produced by a long-standing oral tradition. Next, in order to contextualize Homeric epic, other early Greek literature (and traditions preserved in later sources) must be taken into account. Finally, archaeology must be considered, and material evidence integrated with the written—a fraught but extremely important task, especially considering that archaeology is almost certainly the only remaining source of genuinely new information about the world of Homer. Each component of a provisional historical methodology, moreover, will interlock with the others. The origin of the poems in an oral tradition, comparison with other early Greek poetry, and an understanding of material culture, for example, all contribute to dating the epics and the society that produced them. Even considered in isolation each component of the methodology I propose here probably stirs controversy; many will disagree with many of its individual elements, let alone the entire program. Still, I hope to demonstrate that each component is defensible, and that together they yield a reasonable approach to the study of the Homeric epics as history. Whether or not I succeed in making a convincing case, ongoing controversy over fundamental aspects of historical interpretation adds excitement to the study of the epics.

THE HISTORICITY AND DATE OF HOMERIC SOCIETY

The rediscovery of Late Bronze Age, “Mycenaean” civilization in the late nineteenth century, initiated by Schliemann’s excavations at Troy and Mycenae, forced archaeologists, philologists, and historians to face the possibility that Homer would have to be taken seriously as a historical source (Dickinson 1994, 1). In the early twentieth century, Homeric society was often thought to reflect real-



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tion, but either had died before or been born afterwards. For now truly is a race of iron, and men never rest from labour and sorrow by day, and from perishing by night; and the gods shall lay sore trouble upon them. (*Works and Days* 156–78)¹⁵

Not only does this passage from Hesiod vividly illustrate the gulf separating poet and audience from the people of the heroic age, but it demonstrates that, despite the *Iliad*'s veneer of plausibility, the Trojan War is set firmly in the mythological past.¹⁶ Epic distance may encourage retention of authentic but "old-fashioned" features of society to signal that events are taking place in the distant past, but it may also lead the poet to craft fantastic scenarios, in order to make the epic world feel different from and better than recent times, an era peopled by a "a god-like race of hero-men." As a result, it is often difficult to disentangle poetic invention from genuine, but archaic, information retained in the service of epic distance.¹⁷

Moreover, the ability of oral tradition to preserve certain types of information for long periods (either as a result of external referents stabilizing the tradition, or archaizing to produce epic distance) must be balanced against the extent to which such traditions are relentlessly modernizing. As discussed, oral traditions are dynamic, constantly changing through recomposition; as a result, they retain accurate details, chronological arrangements, and cause-and-effect relationships for only about three generations at most. After that, events and people slip out of historical time, traverse the floating gap, and reappear as part of the mythological past, taking with them some of their objects, homes, and other paraphernalia with external referents that oral tradition is good at remembering. More abstract information about institutions, practices, and values is, however, forgotten or transformed if it does not remain rooted in contemporary culture and society: "It would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that non-literate societies float in a kind of perpetual present, but it does seem to be the case that ideas that are no longer relevant to the present rapidly disappear from oral tradition" (Morris 1985, 87). Indeed, abstract information that does remain relevant to the contemporary world will not only persist in stories about the recent past, but will also imprint itself onto stories about the age of origins, before the floating gap. Oral poets, interacting with their audiences, continually reconfigure the heroic past in light of the contemporary world as they recompose their songs in each performance. The ideals, values, social structures, group identity, political practices, and



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I find a fifty-year window in the second half of the eighth century for the stabilization of the Homeric epics convincing. At most, archaizing by the poet might push some aspects of culture and society back two or three generations, describing a situation that existed within the horizon of living memory; social structures and cultural practices that passed away shortly before the oldest members of Homer's audience were born could have been passed down to them as "the way things used to be" and then employed by the poet to make his songs confirm to the collectively held view of what the past should look like. I doubt that more purely ideological—and therefore abstract—phenomena, communal identity, for example, would endure even that long, considering how subject they are to contemporary saliency and the active, structuring properties inherent to oral tradition.²⁶ At the risk of producing a false sense of accuracy, it may be helpful to translate this idea into exact dates. An epicenter around 735 (roughly averaging Janko's dates) and using the eighty-year horizon Vansina found in some African cultures yield an era for Homeric society of about 815–735; accounting for the full uncertainty inherent to dating the stabilization of Homeric epic might extend that range to something like 830–700.²⁷ Considering such uncertainties and the ability of oral tradition to retain information, not to mention intentional archaizing by the poet, I do not think that specifying a more accurate date is possible. Regardless of the uncertainties surrounding the date of Homeric society, the epics carry much of the eighth century B.C. out of the "Dark Age" and into the light of protohistory.

Finally, before turning to a historical "case study" of Greeks and others in the Homeric epics, it is worthwhile taking a moment to examine the existence of the epics themselves as an object of historical interest. The stabilization of the poems probably attests to a great degree of facility with writing before the end of the eighth century (especially when considered alongside internal evidence from the poems themselves about writing and papyrus). Indeed, Barry Powell has argued that writing was adopted by the Greeks specifically for the purpose of writing the epics (1991). The stabilization and widespread dissemination of the poems in the second half of the eighth century B.C. indicate that enormous efforts were made to transmit and probably transcribe them at that time, revealing that desires, needs, or pressures in contemporary society compelled their recording and fostered their popularity (Morris 1986, 122). Such widespread popularity also attests to the beginnings of a unified Greek



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as Mackie first realized, there is a fundamental difference in language between Akhaians and Trojans. Later, language became central to Hellenic identity. Speaking Greek is one of Herodotos's criteria for Panhellenism (Her. 8.144). Homer, however, indicates no language barrier between Trojans and Akhaians. Instead, the epics consistently portray Akhaian linguistic homogeneity against a backdrop of linguistic diversity among the Trojan allies. The Karians are, for example, described as *barbarophonos* ("barbar-speaking," i.e., unintelligible to Hellenes) in the Trojan Catalogue (*Il.* 2.867). Also in the Trojan Catalogue, Hektor is advised by the goddess Iris (disguised as the watchman Polites) to use interpreters to disseminate orders to his *epikouroi* (*Il.* 2.802–06). Even when linguistic diversity is recognized within "Greek" lands like Krete (*Od.* 19.172–77), groups traditionally considered "Greek" (Akhaians and Dorians) are not systematically differentiated from those who are not (Eteocretans, Kudones, Pelasgians). Selective recognition of the speaking of different languages contrasts Akhaian unity with non-Akhaian diversity, without establishing a simple dichotomy. Instead, linguistic diversity itself serves as a marker of alterity; the poet desires to cast the Trojan host as divided and chaotic, the Akhaian as unified and organized. This artistic device is effective because during the late eighth century, it resonated with—and perhaps even contributed to—an emerging sense of group identity; the audience found the linguistically homogeneous Akhaians familiar and perhaps heard in epic an extension or idealization of the "intercultural synthesis" emerging around them (see note 29).

Third, terms concerning place of origin and membership in a particular military retinue, which are normally only associated with restricted groups, are applied to the Akhaians as a whole. *Gaia* ("homeland") and *ethnos* ("contingent," pl. *ethnea*), are among the most important categories of identity in Homer, and both are used in a pan-Akhaian as well as a local or regional sense. In book 2 of the *Iliad*, for example, *ethnea* appears in the plural to denote the contingents of Akhaians preparing for battle (*Il.* 2.91; 464). Likewise, the Lykians and Trojans are each designated as an *ethnos* (12.330 and 13.495, respectively). Later in the *Iliad*, however, Homer applies *ethnos*, in the singular, to the Akhaians more broadly. When Athena visits the Akhaian army, she entered the "*ethnos* of the Akhaians" (*Il.* 17.52). Moreover, several uses of the phrase *ethnos heteron* ("contingent of companions") indicate a broad application of the term. Eurypylos, for example, "shrinks in the tribe of his com-



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begin to conduct trade as well, emerging as the Phoenicians' primary mercantile and colonial competitors in the Mediterranean littoral (Tandy 1997, chapter 3; Thomas and Conant 1999, 134–43). The *emporion* (trading depot) at Al Mina in Syria was established at this time. Several *apoikia* (overseas settlements or “colonies”) were also founded in Italy and Sicily in the eighth century, launching the era of Greek colonization that would spread hundreds of poleis along the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black Sea coasts.⁴² As opposed to (usually late) legends of colonial foundation that often report the simple expulsion of indigenous peoples, archaeological investigations conducted in the extraurban territories of *apoikia* like Taras (Taranto) have revealed intense and complex interactions between Greeks and natives.⁴³ Such environments may have provided the oppositional stimulus that initiated the development of proto-Panhellenism, but without instigating the hostility aroused by conflicts such as the Persian Wars (which led to a much more rigid dichotomy between Greek and “barbarian”).

Third, certain aspects of the aristocratic worldview embodied in the epics would have provided fertile ground for proto-Panhellenism. Even though (or perhaps because) the epics depict every community beyond one's own as a foreign land and a place of potential danger, aristocrats maintained connections beyond their own communities (Kirke 1992; Donlan 1982; see also note 40). The unified Akhaian elite waging war at Troy, each hero leading his own contingent but bound to Agamemnon and Menelaus by oath and to one another through ties of guest-friendship, serves as a prototype for the aristocratic network. Intermarriage across, rather than within, communities also appears to be normal for elites, if not universal. Guest-friendship across communities among the *aristoi* is universal. Hesiod, by contrast, in giving voice to the *mesoi*, expresses a considerably greater investment in his humble *polis* of Askra. Such a pattern is not uncommon among premodern societies, where elites consider themselves part of a class that transcends local communities, while commoners live in a world bounded by those local communities (Gellner 1983, 8–14). Indeed, this cosmopolitan perspective, including guest-friendship and marriage ties with both Greek and (less frequently) foreign elites, represented a significant component of the early Greek aristocratic ideal (Donlan 1973, 1980; Kirke 1992; Hanson 1999). Considering their elite audience, it is not surprising that the Homeric epics reflect the cosmopolitan outlook of the *aristoi*.



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2. Specifically, Finley argues that there are “no Ionians, no Dorians to speak of, no writing, no iron weapons, no cavalry in battle scenes, no colonization, no Greek traders, [and] no communities without kings.”

3. But see Morris (1986, 105–15), for a detailed rebuttal of Snodgrass’s contention that the Homeric epics depict multiple, incompatible systems of marriage and inheritance.

4. Homeric orality has generated a large bibliography; key works include Parry (1971), Lord (1967, 1971, 1995, and 2000), Goody (1976), Kirk (1976), Janko (1982), Ong (2002), Havelock (1982), Nagy (1996a, 1996b, 1999, and 2004), Foley (1992 and 1999), Scodel (2002), Bakker (2005).

5. Snodgrass asserts that the Homeric epics are a special case, differing from other oral traditions attested in preliterate civilizations around the world. He admits that such an argument is subjective, based in some measure on belief in a unique genius behind Homeric poetry (Snodgrass compares Homeric epic to Germanic, Irish, and Icelandic oral traditions to make this point). Snodgrass ([1974], 2006 reprint, 190–91).

6. I base the following discussion primarily on Vansina (1985), which offers a useful and compelling explanation of the origins and nature of oral tradition, and one that has the added benefit of being derived independently from the Homeric epics themselves or the south Slavic epic studied by Parry and Lord when they formulated their models of oral composition.

7. For the exception of memorized speech, see Vansina (1985, 14–16).

8. Foley provides an excellent introduction to the formulaic yet dynamic nature of Homeric epic, which I have not duplicated here (Foley 2007). See also the bibliography in note 4.

9. Dickinson goes on to report the preservation of genealogies for some prominent families (2006, 1, 11–12). Overall, Dickinson’s synopsis—written, so far as I can tell, without reference to the oral basis of that history—strikingly reveals the imprint of oral tradition on the Greek view of their own past. See also Raubitschek (1989) but compare Whitley (1993, 226).

10. But see also Morris (1986, 123, citing Finnegan 1977), who notes that oral tradition may either sustain or critique the status quo.

11. Vansina (1985, 23–24). Vansina provides the following examples of the floating gap: “The shortest such time-depth I know is that of the Aka of Lobaye (Central African Republic), where it does not exceed one generation of adults. . . . For the Tio (Congo), c. 1880, the limit lay c. 1800, while in 1960 it had moved to 1880. If the Tio were still a fully oral society, the arrival of de Brazza in 1880 would now lie in the period of origins. As it is, he has become a culture hero, but can still be dated” (24).

12. Oral tradition does not suddenly end the moment writing is invented; oral and literate cultures can coexist for centuries, although the existence of writing may have an impact on living oral traditions (Vansina 1985). Herodotus’s *Histories*, for example, preserve much information drawn from recent oral tradition (sometimes heard directly by Herodotus, sometimes preserved in other writings now lost, 31; Murray 2001a, 2001b). Early Roman history also reflects the three-tiered shape of oral tradition with the floating gap falling, perhaps, in the early third century B.C.. And of course the South Slavic epics analyzed by Parry and Lord in their re-evaluation of Homer were products of a (partially) literate society.



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sity in the epics. Largely on the basis of the lack of the term *barbarian* or an equivalent, Cartledge argues against any sense of Panhellenism in Homer (1993, 12; cf. Cartledge 1995, 77–78). Konstan extends this line of thought, contending that the contrast between civilized and uncivilized worlds underlying books 9–12 of the *Odyssey* is never conceived of in terms of Greek versus non-Greek (2001, 31–32) but also admits that while “it seems impossible, on the basis of the epics themselves, to discriminate Greeks from non-Greeks” on the basis of language, religion, customs, geography, or even genealogy, it is nevertheless “Achaeans and only Achaeans who mobilize to carry on the siege of Troy, whereas Priam draws his allies from among [only] non-Achaean populations.” On the other hand, Finley (1978, 18) both respects the heterogeneity of Homer’s Akhaians and sees in the epics the beginnings of Greekness. He sees Homer’s use of (multiple) common names for the Akhaians as a metaphor for early Panhellenism: “The presence of a common name (or names) is a symbol that Greek history proper had been launched. But there was more than one name, and that serves as a symbol, too, of the social and cultural diversity which characterized Hellas both in its infancy and throughout its history, little though it is to be seen in the two Homeric poems.” See also Haubold (2000, 43–45). Although he is a supporter of an early emergence of proto-Panhellenism, the “softness” of Finley’s belief in Homeric Panhellenism is evident when he later asserts that there are no local, regional, or national dividing lines of genuine consequence in Homer, and that while individuals and classes vary in capacity, peoples do not (1978, 135). Compare Mackie (1996, chapter 1, esp. 20), where she argues for “complex unity” of the Greek army before Troy.

32. Mackie (1996, 21, 19, cf. 11–12; 15–16; 92; 97; see also chapter 4, esp. 127–35 and 158–59). See also Konstan (2001, 31), Ross (2005, 210–11). Mackie also sees systematic differences between the speeches of Akhaian and Trojan heroes, with Akhaian speeches being aggressive, public, political, and censuring, while Trojan speakers are introspective, private, and poetic and prefer praise to blame. Overall, Mackie sees this distinction as marking the difference between political community and household (reconciled successfully by the Akhaians; 1996, chapter 1, esp. 1, 5, 12).

33. Indeed, Mackie in particular is reluctant to extend her argument beyond “an imagined, artistic version of ethnic and cultural difference” (1996, 44).

34. I plan to expand this analysis elsewhere and extend it to the terms *demos* (a term designating a people and/or their territory), *laos* (a people), and *genos* (lineage). *Demos* is used in a pan-Akhaian context at least once, and *laos* appears to follow a similar pattern. By contrast, *genos* is rarely used in a regional context, and never in a Panhellenic context; as argued by Jonathan Hall, the rise of ethnic groups based upon putative descent from a common ancestor appears later than Homer (Hall suggests the sixth century B.C.; cf. Haubold 2002, Hall 1997; 2002).

35. See also Morgan (1993), Malkin (1998, 94), Scodel (2002, 45–46).

36. Hall (1997, chapter 1, esp. 2, see also chapter 5). The epics provide the emic criteria for ethnic identity that is very difficult to interpret from material evidence alone; cf. Hall (1997, chapter 2, especially 18–21; 2003).

37. But often such groups also retained their local identities, creating “nested” intra-Hellenic and Panhellenic identities; see Hall (1997, xiii). The practice of constructed larger (fictive) kin groups from smaller ones was known as *syngeneia*, “joining of *genea*” (*genea* is the plural of *genos*, lineage group; 36–37).



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quiry after Glaukos's name is the first question a host asks of his guest.² Especially puzzling is Diomedes' speculation that Glaukos may be a god: Athena has recently removed the mist from his eyes (*Il.* 5.124–32) so that he can distinguish human from divine combatants. Aristarchus explains the problem by positing that Diomedes' clairvoyance is only partial.³ Others have assumed that it is no longer in effect.⁴ The text does not encourage either assumption.⁵ But if the poet is constructing the battle scene with a specific conclusion in mind—the friendly exchange of armor—he may be incorporating elements from a hospitality scene, taking advantage of a compositional flexibility provided by a gifts-as-*geras* equivalence inherent in the tradition.

Diomedes' question is triggered by something unusual about Glaukos. To the surprise of Diomedes, from whom human and mortal opponents have been scurrying throughout his merciless *aristeia*, Glaukos has shown the “boldness to step out far in front of his companions” (*Il.* 6.125–26) and challenge him from an offensive position. The Lycian brazenly “awaits Diomedes' long-shadowing spear,” the very weapon with which this “savage spearman instills dread terror” (*Il.* 6.97). Diomedes may find such eagerness puzzling, and his question “Are you a god?” may be tongue in cheek, suggesting that only a god would display such temerity.

Vision-enhanced, he knows Glaukos is no god: his question is rhetorical. Though it is understandable within its context, the Homeric audience would have found the question also remarkable. For this is the first instance in the *Iliad* in which a warrior asks his opponent's name. Pausing over a stranger's divinity, furthermore, is especially typical of hosts in hospitality scenes. Diomedes' question is not only rhetorical: it is formulaic.⁶ The same wording (with a shift from second to third person) appears in the *Odyssey* when Alcinous invites the Phaeacian noblemen to a banquet for a stranger who may be a god:

But if he has come from heaven as one of the immortals (= *Il.* 6.128)
 The gods must be contriving something different for us.
 For, until now, the gods have always presented themselves to us in full
 view
 Whenever we offer them glorious hecatombs.
(*Od.* 7.199–203)

The textual analogue is apposite: both Diomedes and the Phaeacians can see gods head-on. The *Odyssey* provides several instances of



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are narrative components. Each analogue (gifts and prizes) draws into the poem the syntactical sequence of events found in type scenes of its respective genre (hospitality and battle). Diomedes' heroics and Homer's poetics are intertwined.

This suggestion is borne out in the ensuing dialogue. Now that the context of hospitality has been introduced by the one speaker and expanded by the other, the anticipated narrative sequence takes its course. For, in a hospitality scene, a guest typically follows his declaration of name and birthplace with a family story highlighting his social standing. Glaukos heeds the syntax, tracing his descent from Bellerophontes, slayer of the Chimera, and imbuing his name with an aura of distinction to impress his "host." He tells the story, furthermore, so that his interlocutor may join the ranks of the many who know him ("so that you can learn my lineage"). But as Glaukos follows the narrative rules of a hospitality scene, he speaks of hospitality itself: both the syntax and the content of his words focus on *xeneia*, and he describes the hospitality his grandfather once received from the king of Lycia. In the course of that reception, the rules of *xeneia* were duly observed: the host asked his guest's name after nine days of feasting, and exceptionally lavish gifts were offered at the end (including the hand of the princess and half a kingdom: *Il.* 6.191–95). By setting the story of his grandfather's slaying of the Chimera within a hospitality narrative, Glaukos replies in kind to the dual challenge posed by Diomedes, who is both foe and host. Descended from accomplished fighters and heroic guests, Glaukos presents himself as a worthy match on both fronts. The Lycian is as bold in word as he is in deed.¹¹

While listening, Diomedes deduces that he and this stranger are grandsons of men who were *xenoi* to one another. Form and content are thus both still in operation when he replies that his own grandfather hosted Bellerophontes. In fact, Oineus provided twenty days of hospitality to the same man. Diomedes raises the stakes just set by Glaukos: the Lycian king provided nine days of feasting, but Diomedes' grandfather doubled the stay. If Glaukos is the descendant of an impressive guest, Diomedes is the descendant of an even more impressive host. During those twenty days Oineus offered the requisite entertainments. For, in the syntax of a hospitality scene, the guest's life story is followed by host-provided entertainments.¹² As conversant as Glaukos in the syntax of the tradition, Diomedes knows what to do and say at this point. But he is not at liberty to furnish songs, baths, or beds on a battlefield. He meets his obliga-



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tion to the previously mandated cloaks, tunics, and talents of silver (*Od.* 8.389–93). “We will recover our losses with a tax on the deme,” Alcinous consoles the donors. In hospitality scenes, therefore, guest gifts are routinely “assessed,” itemized as so many items of precious metals, rare fabrics, and talents of silver and gold. They tend to be things that can be stored as family heirlooms.¹⁸ Diomedes looks on Oineus’s souvenir from Bellerophon in the same terms: he recalls the golden cup among his grandfather’s holdings. Read within this light, the evaluation of the armor is not so much puzzling as it is intriguing. The exchange between the fighters ends as it began: as a conflation of type scenes in which hospitality and warfare are juxtaposed. In the course of the juxtaposition, battle has given way to hospitality. What began as *geras* has been transformed into guest gifts that will stay in each recipient’s family for generations.

We observed earlier that Diomedes presumptuously postured as Glaukos’ host, perhaps to toy with him. By the end of the scene, however, it occurs to Diomedes that he owes his friend an apology. After posing as a host on foreign soil, he knows he is a mere stranger. The real host in the now-hospitable encounter has proven to be Glaukos, a native of the region. Diomedes acknowledges the role reversal when he explains, “So now I am your friend and host in the midst of Argos, but you are mine in Lycia” (*Il.* 6.224–25). But the apologies of epic heroes entail qualifications. Warriors who make amends also reassert their superiority. Agamemnon in *Il.* 9.160–61 concludes his catalogue of compensatory gifts to Achilles, “And let him submit to me, since I am more kingly and many years his senior.” An apologetic Agamemnon reclaims his higher status over even Achilles. A similar dynamic informs the end of the Glaukos-Diomedes exchange. On the one hand, Diomedes compensates with a gift. On the other, he remains Glaukos’ superior by receiving over ten times the value of what he gives. Diomedes’ *aristeia* on the battlefield has been transformed into an *aristeia* of *xeneia*: Glaukos can outperform the son of Tydeus neither in the actual outdoors of real battle nor in the mock indoors of pretend hospitality. This is still Diomedes’—not Glaukos’—finest moment.

Read within the context of a hospitality scene, the description of the value of the armor sheds light on another detail commentators have found “out of place” and “rather forced.”¹⁹ Recalling the grandfathers’ gifts, Diomedes claims firsthand knowledge of Oineus’ cup and hearsay knowledge of the belt given to Bellerophon: “I left (*katelipon*) the cup in my house when I came here. But

Tydeus I do not remember, since he left (*kalliphe*) me when I was a mere child when the Achaean army perished at Thebes" (*Il.* 6.221–23). Applying the same verb—*kataleipein*—to the cup he "left behind" and the child his father "left behind," Diomedes draws an analogy between his own and his father's actions. What point, on the contextual level, does the son of Tydeus make with this allusion to his father, who was not involved in the grandfathers' transaction? On the narrative level, what does the *Iliad* poet accomplish with this seemingly extrinsic detail? An answer emerges when we read the scene as a conflation of a military *aristeia* and a hospitality scene. Although Diomedes has seen the cup, he knows of the belt only through stories he has heard growing up "in his house." For along with Oineus' souvenir, the story of his hosting Bellerophontes—that is, the narrative context of the cup—has entered the house as an orally transmitted heirloom that likewise spans generations. In similar fashion, Glaukos' house resounded with tales of the military exploits of his forebears (Bellerophontes slew the Chimera) and their heroic hospitality (Bellerophontes was royally hosted in Lycia). Even within the context of a war poem, tales of ancestral hospitality are esteemed, preserved, and handed down.

Raised to prove himself a fighter worthy of his father, as he has been hearing from both gods and men who recount Tydeus' exploits (*Il.* 4.370–400, 5.800–13), Diomedes is also conditioned to look on hospitality as a competitive arena—not only with his "guest" on a synchronic level but also diachronically with his ancestors. He speaks of his grandfather's "left-behind" cup as analogous to himself, "left behind" by Tydeus, because he is thinking of heroic legacies: Diomedes is still competing with his father. Claiming not to remember Tydeus the person, he does know of the hospitality Oineus extended two generations ago: Oineus received the most precious of metals from a guest who revered him. Oineus himself gave a leather belt, an item of value to be sure, but worth considerably less than a golden vessel. This tale of his grandfather's profitable *xeneia* is as well known to Diomedes as are the accounts of Tydeus' accomplishments in war, for both activities have been celebrated in the oral tradition in which he was raised. Similarly, as we have observed, Glaukos knows—through tales of his ancestors—that his grandfather was both decorated fighter and honored guest. Looking on Glaukos' golden armor, therefore, Diomedes takes advantage of a rare opportunity to outperform his forebears with a gesture that would have elicited their beaming admiration. Proving

himself a worthy grandson of Oineus by making an astounding profit from the grandson of Bellerophontes, he trades bronze for gold—a full set of armor, not a single cup—and makes an instant 1,000 percent return on his investment. This is not a “cheap success” lacking in the dignity of epic. For a hero’s worth in the Homeric world is measured in material possessions, both those won in war and those received in hospitality. Indeed, Glaukos has just boasted of Sisyphus of Ephyre, “the most profit-making of men” (*kerdistos andrôn*, *Il.* 6.153) as the founder of his family line. Diomedes has outprofited Glaukos’ entire clan!

The value of items exchanged at *Il.* 6.234–36 is significant, therefore, on two counts. First, in giving Glaukos armor worth nine oxen, Diomedes observes the protocol of transgenerational hospitality. As descendants of former *xenoi* receive one another, the gifts are expected to equal or surpass the value of earlier presents.²⁰ Glaukos’ grandfather received leather, but Oineus’ grandson now gives bronze. A generous transgenerational host, Diomedes not merely matches but significantly increases the value of the gift his ancestor gave. Second, receiving gold in exchange, he strikes an even better deal than his grandfather did years ago. Oineus’ cup is an impressive memento, but his grandson now receives the weight of many gold cups. Diomedes’ *aristeia* is still in operation, therefore, and in outdoing his own grandfather in gift exchange he proves himself more measurably heroic than the *father of Tydeus*. Tydeus “left behind” his son for battle in Thebes, leaving a legacy of oral heirlooms celebrating his military excellence (the *klea andrôn*). Now Diomedes earns his place in this line of hosts who pride themselves on striking profitable transactions with guests. He has “left behind” his grandfather’s gift to return with a better one. Diomedes thus takes even his own *aristeia* to unprecedented heights. He does more than match his father: he outmatches his own grandfather. By the climactic end of the episode, this hero proves himself an exceptional performer in both arenas. This son of Tydeus has wounded gods, and this grandson of Oineus has won the worth of one hundred oxen in a single gift exchange. In Homer’s world, hecatombs are reserved for the gods themselves (cf. *Il.* 1.99, 309). In receiving a hecatomb equivalent from Glaukos, therefore, Diomedes imbues himself with a divine aura similar to that with which Athena has graced him, enabling him to pursue Apollo in battle and even wound Ares and Aphrodite. This ending is not merely climactic: it is virtuoso.

Most significantly for our appreciation of the poetics of the epi-

sode, Diomedes' *xeneia* unfolds in such a way as to draw audience attention to the poet's accomplishment as an innovator within his tradition. For, besides the armor that will become Diomedes' material legacy, this hero has given rise to a new narrative tradition about himself. Future generations will hear of his hostlike victory over Glaukos and his surpassing of his father's father as a performer of hospitality on the battlefield. The proof lies in the Homeric text itself, an oral heirloom celebrating the innovative juxtaposition of two heroics: the heroics of warfare *and* the heroics of hospitality. The poet revels in his own *aristeia* with a rare metanarrative comment: "Zeus, son of Kronos, robbed Glaukos of his wits, for in exchanging armor with Diomedes, son of Tydeus, he gave gold for bronze, the worth of a hundred oxen for nine" (*Il.* 6.234–36). Mark Edwards (1992, 288) observes that "type scenes may be closely related in form": the sequence a fighter follows in donning armor, for example, may resemble a woman or goddess putting on her finery, or a messenger may be received into a house as if he were a guest.²¹ But in *Iliad* 6 the poet raises type scene conflation to new heights. For the sequence of events in a battle scene does not readily translate into those of a hospitality scene: these are not inherently analogous undertakings, and the likening of a blood-thirsty Diomedes at the height of his physical prowess to a host is a most unexpected comparison for the audience of a war poem. The poet's juxtaposition of these two traditions may therefore occur "contrary to audience expectations" (*para prosdokian; para doxan*: cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* 52a4).²² The audience would likewise have found Diomedes' opening question unexpected. But, composing within the genre of military epic, the poet has done what Diomedes himself has done. The warrior has transformed himself from a fighter into a host. The poet has transformed a battle scene into a hospitality scene. In the process, both poet and hero have surpassed what has been handed down to them: Diomedes improves on the multigenerational accomplishments of his clan, and the poet improves on the oral tradition he has inherited. As an *aristeia* in its own right, *Il.* 6.119–236 constitutes an *aristeia* among *aristeiai*.

In conclusion to this discussion of the heroics and poetics of this Iliadic scene, we may reasonably surmise that the tradition in which the *Iliad* poet composes does indeed allow the equation of prizes taken in war with gifts received in hospitality. The analogy announced by Zeus in *Odyssey* 5 therefore articulates explicitly what the *Iliad* presents in implicit terms. The equivalency exists on two levels.

On a contextual level, war prizes and guest gifts are analogous currencies. We may therefore expect to find characters in the *Odyssey* treating guest gifts with the same earnestness that characters in the *Iliad* assign to plunder. Throughout the *Odyssey*, Odysseus displays keen interest in acquiring and guarding his presents. At times, he goes out of his way to procure more, jeopardizing the safety of his comrades. Such “acquisitiveness” and “cupidity” have been interpreted as expressions of an “untypical hero’s” less-than-dignified character when it comes to his belly and insatiable appetites.²³ His valuing of gifts over the welfare of his companions has been read as a sign of his deficiency in leadership.²⁴ But now we may look on it as an expression of a traditionally heroic, and therefore ethically complex, nature.

The analogy also has implications for our appreciation of Homeric poetics. These currencies are especially intelligible to an audience steeped in oral poetry when the poet presents them within recognizable contexts. Such contextualization lies within his control, for he is free to move from one genre of type scenes to another, crossing even from war into hospitality. *Geras* and guest gifts are thus compositional elements that the poet can manipulate for effect as he performs. When he subtly introduces guest gifts into a war narrative (as in *Iliad* 6), he introduces the theme of hospitality, giving himself the opportunity to play on audience expectations from type scenes in that genre. When he openly introduces war prizes into a poem about hospitality (as in *Odyssey* 5), he introduces the theme of warfare, giving himself the opportunity to play on audience expectations from type scenes in that genre.

UNLIKELY ANALOGUES

In the *Iliad*, the value of *geras* is directly dependent on an amassed and intact soldiery. Plunder from battle is distributed openly to the fighters. As Achilles explains with resentment in *Il.* 1.163–68, the portion of honor always goes to the commander in chief (Agamemnon), and the rest is distributed, the best items designated for the best fighters. Whatever the prizes’ intrinsic worth, their value is augmented by the award ceremony itself. M. I. Finley (1982, 126) observes that these ceremonial “acts [are] an added touch that would have been needless were possession sufficient unto itself . . . in fact, both counted greatly, the wealth as wealth on the one hand, and the

wealth as symbol on the other.” Achilles especially esteems Briseis because (*Il.* 1.162, 392) “the sons of the Achaeans gave her” to him. The fact that she is chosen by the troops for the “best of the Achaeans” increases her worth in everyone’s eyes. She holds a “value-added” status that puts her on a par with Chryseis, daughter of the priest of Apollo: Agamemnon thus looks on her as a fair replacement for his own concubine. At the same time, however, *geras* has a negative side, for it engenders a jealousy that can destabilize the community. Achilles resents that the lion’s share goes to a commander who is a lesser fighter than him. Prizes are so equated with status, furthermore, that their seizure is tantamount to a public shaming. Thus, Achilles complains to Thetis,

Wide ruling Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
Has dishonored me: he has taken my prize himself and keeps it.
(*Il.* 1.355–56)

This dishonoring triggers the consequences that an audience of oral poetry readily recognizes: as “a wronged hero seeks revenge in the death of his colleagues,” Achilles goes off alone to enlist the help of Thetis.²⁵

Achilles’ anger, it is important to note, is not restricted to Agamemnon. He is enraged with his comrades on a pan-Achaean level for standing idly by. So contemptuous is he of his comrades’ passivity that he publicly demeans them as “nobodies” (*outidanoi*) as he abuses Agamemnon:

You, king who feed off your people, since you are lord over nobodies
(*outidanois*).
Otherwise, o son of Atreus, this would be your final outrage. . . .
For I would be called a coward and a nobody (*outidanos*)
If I were to defer to you in every matter, no matter what you say.
Go and give your orders to others, but don’t tell me what to do.
(*Il.* 1.231–32, 292–95)

Achilles then physically separates from his peers in refusing to become a cipher. This is why, when he specifies to Thetis the punishment he wants Zeus to mete out, he directs his ire against the men:

As for the soldiers, (ask Zeus) to pin them against their sterns along the
sea
As they are slain, so that they might all take joy in their king

And so that wide-ruling Agamemnon may come to know of his
 Outrage in showing no honor whatsoever to the best of the Achaeans.
 (Il. 1.409–12)

Achilles envisions a punishment that fits the crime. “Wide-ruling Agamemnon” has based his right to seize Briseis on the fact that he rules more men. Since these widely ruled troops have failed to stand up for Achilles, he demands a punishment that will engulf them along with their king. He wants the men to die an ignominious death, pinned in by the ships after retreating, so many “nobodies,” from the storming enemy. Achilles wants the men to be—as he is—disgraced. This is the precise form of revenge that Zeus will initially contemplate (Il. 2.3–4) and eventually execute (Il. 11.93–94) in the course of the poem.

There is a reason why Achilles attaches life-or-death importance to *geras*. The hero who accepts war prizes is obligated to risk his life for others. This obligation finds its clearest articulation in *Iliad* 12, where Glaukos tells Sarpedon:

Glaukos, why have we two been especially esteemed
 With places of honor and cuts of meat and the fullest cups
 In Lycia, and all look on us as if we were gods? . . .
 This is why we must now take our stand in the front ranks of the Lycians
 And go out to meet the heat of battle.
 (Il. 12.310–16)

Herein we see the symbiotic relationship between the leader and his troops that is materialized in *geras*. Separating from the others to fight in the front, the hero furthers the communal cause. At battle’s end, the comrades reciprocate with prizes that, appropriately, single him out. To accept prizes thus carries the obligation to continue plunging into the fray. This duty is so pronounced that prizes can be offered even in advance. Agamemnon’s gifts are promised only if Achilles will rejoin the war (Il. 9.299). Similarly, in Il. 10.303–12, Hector assembles the Trojan leaders and offers Achilles’ horses to whoever will venture out on a particularly risky night spying mission. In the *Iliad*, *geras* is a public matter: the warrior must have a group to defend so that, after battle, the same group can distinguish him with honors they validate in ceremony. An Iliadic hero is necessarily “invested” in his comrades.

The same cannot be said of guest gifts. *Xeineia* are bestowed privately, within the confines of the host’s house. They are not put on

display, and no onlooking troops oversee their distribution. On the contrary, an item's value increases with its interiority and obscurity. We have already commented on Menelaus' gift to Telemachus. This bowl has moved from the indoor forge of Hephaestus to a Phoenician palace, where the "concealed" (*amphēkalypse*, *Od.* 4.618) heirloom was then transferred to the king of Sparta. It will now join the treasures of the Ithacan royal family. Also in Sparta, Helen gives Telemachus her most ornate *peplos*, a wedding gown for his future bride. The dress, Helen's own handiwork, lies beneath her other valuables at the bottom of a chest (*Od.* 15.108).²⁶ The intimate nature of these items increases their value, for a gift is a token of the private relationship that arises between guest and host during hospitality. Odysseus boasts of this when he recounts his "gleaming gifts" from the Ciconian priest (*Od.* 9.205–07): the twelve jars of special wine were from a private reserve known only to Maron, his wife, and one female steward. Odysseus next takes this *xeineion* "to the inner recesses of Polyphemus's cave" (*Od.* 9.236).²⁷ Upon reaching Ithaca, furthermore, he will conceal his holdings in a cave, thereby preserving their secrecy. We may also recall from the Glaukos-Diomedes episode that Diomedes recounts "leaving behind" his grandfather's cup "in the house." This gift does not travel to Troy: it stays home.

Throughout the career of a regifted item, gazing troops have no bearing on its value. Amassed soldiers do not validate the objects. Instead, *xeineia* confer honor when the traveler returns home. Odysseus declares to Alcinous,

If you were to bid me to stay here a full year
And provide me escort and give resplendent gifts,
I would prefer that, and it would be far more profitable
To return to my dear homeland with fuller hands.
I would be more respected and loved by everyone
Who would visit me after I return to Ithaca.
(*Od.* 11.356–61)

Odysseus expects to dazzle future house guests with his trophies. Telemachus's awe (*sebas*) at the interior of the Spartan palace is in keeping with this pattern: beholding the showpieces Menelaus collected on his seven-year return trip, the wide-eyed youth wonders whether this is the palace of Olympian Zeus (*Od.* 4.71–75).

Odysseus's confession to Alcinous suggests another distinctive feature of guest gifts. The pursuit of *xeineia* may prolong the journey.

Odysseus declares that he would gladly remain an entire year in exchange for a more lavish send-off. Telemachus in Sparta tactfully declines Menelaus's offer of a twelve-day stay by invoking the same words in *Od.* 4.595–96: "I would gladly stay with you a full year, if I did not miss my house and parents." It is interesting to note that Telemachus invokes the formula as a prelude to declining his host's offer. His allusion to missing his (plural) "parents," with only his mother at home, suggests that he may be invoking a formula from a polite *decline* of extended hospitality (such as "I would love to stay, but I must get back to the folks at home"). Telemachus seems to be using the formula "typically." Odysseus, by contrast, applies it in "atypical" fashion to a profitable end: he invokes it as prelude to *accepting* Alcinous's invitation to postpone the send-off ("I would love to stay, but I expect more presents if I do"). The contrast between father and son is telling: Telemachus is a novice in these heroics; Odysseus is a professional.

A homecoming delayed to amass gifts poses problems especially if the traveler has comrades in tow. Delays jeopardize the welfare of the party.

The longer the journeyers travel, the greater the risks they face. Hosts must be sought out for practical reasons: relying on the kindness of strangers, travelers must receive sustenance, replenish supplies, and repair ships as they make their way. Stops are necessary, then, but not lengthy ones. Indeed, overly kind hosts may induce forgetfulness of the homecoming goal. Odysseus must forcefully retrieve his scouts from the narcotic Lotus Eaters (*Od.* 9. 92–104), and his own comrades must prod him to leave after he languishes for a full year in Circe's bedroom (*Od.* 10.467–74). The longer Odysseus prolongs his *nostos*, the more men he loses. The relationship between guest gifts and homecoming, therefore, is not a symbiotic one. The glory-seeking hero of hospitality is at cross-purposes with his companions as he turns necessary stops into prolonged award-winning performances at the hearth. In battle, the prospect of *geras* induces soldiers to fight for the common good. Guest gifts, by contrast, do not play an analogous role in homecoming. A traveling party can be superfluous. Paradoxically, the hero's pursuit of *xeineia* prolongs and thereby jeopardizes the *nostos* of both him and his companions.²⁸

Comrades can be worse than irrelevant. Their sheer numbers can impede. Even in Homeric hospitality, no mortal host can comfortably provide meals, baths, beds, and gifts for some six hundred sail-

ors aboard twelve ships—the original size of Odysseus' retinue. As in warfare, therefore, the hero must part from the group to single himself out. But, instead of standing protectively "in the front ranks," he leaves them to fend for themselves while he heads for the new "front" of a strange house. Hospitality is a one-on-one affair—conducted not on an open plain before onlookers but deep inside, behind closed doors. When Telemachus sails to Pylos, he seeks hospitality only for himself and Athena-Mentor. When Nestor invites the two to stay the night, Athena-Mentor replies that s/he must tend to the crew, and Nestor does *not* open the invitation: he puts up Telemachus alone (*Od.* 3.342–70). When Telemachus then travels by land to Sparta, he is accompanied by Nestor's son. The Ithacan crewmen do not join him, and whatever gifts Telemachus collects remain his private property.

Though analogous, therefore, guest gifts and war prizes are not identical in terms of their implications for the heroics of the two poems. They call for drastically different social stances between the leader and his men. The Iliadic hero needs companions to grant and validate prizes. Properly observed, the reward system of *geras* preserves the soldier community. Only if the rules are breached, as they are by Agamemnon, is the community set at risk. The loss of Achaeans to Achilles' withdrawal is directly attributable, therefore, to the breakdown of the *geras* system. In rejecting Agamemnon's gifts, Achilles concomitantly expresses his rejection of his comrades (*Il.* 9.630). In the *Odyssey*, by contrast, the delays in the hero's homecoming and the destruction of all but one of his ships are attributable to his successful pursuit of the heroic currency of his poem. Long before his seven-year detention by Calypso and long before the Ithacan remnant consume the Thrinacian cattle (the crime curiously identified in the proem as causing the mass deaths), this leader opts for detours and delays that gain him—and him alone—prestige and profits.²⁹ Among the Ciconians, his first postwar stop, he lets the men run amok on the shore while he pursues hospitality in the home of Apollo's priest: he returns the next morning with "gleaming gifts" (*Od.* 9.201), but at the cost of seventy-two comrades (six per ship).³⁰ In the Cyclops episode, he leaves eleven ships at goat island to return with eighteen rams and Polyphemus' enormous pet, but at the price of six comrades eaten alive. He then spends a full month with Aeolus, during which the sailors stay by their ships and seethe with jealousy.

FROM AEOLUS TO THE LAESTRYGONIANS

When Odysseus visits Aeolus, hospitality is offered only to him. His account employs the first-person pronoun (here, italicized) four times in seven lines,

(Aeolus) befriended *me* for a full month and asked about everything,
 About Troy and the ships of the Argives and the homecomings of the
 Achaeans.
 And *I* told him everything in due order.
 But when *I* requested passage and asked to be sent off . . .
 He flayed a nine-year old ox and gave *me* the hide,
 In which he had bound up the pathways of the adverse winds.
(Od. 10.14–20)

Odysseus' comrades look on Aeolus' gift of the sealed pouch in an inappropriate manner. As a gift from a host, this is their leader's personal property, to be enjoyed within the privacy of his own house. But the men view it as *geras*:

Why, look at this! What a dear and valued friend Odysseus is
 To everyone, no matter what city or land he comes to!
 From Troy, he is carrying off for himself many fine heirlooms
 From the plunder. But we who have made the same journey
 Are returning home with empty hands.
 And now Aeolus has also given him these gifts of friendship.
(Od. 10.38–43)

This is a pivotal moment in the poem. It is the first step in a sequence of events that, within the next one hundred lines, will end in catastrophe: the sinking of eleven ships and the slaughter of their entire crews—more than five hundred men—by the Laestrygonians. As in *Iliad* 6, the poet marks the pivotal moment with a conflation, combining warfare and hospitality and playing on the audience's expectations as raised by the syntax of each genre. The sailors know the pouch is a guest gift, since Odysseus has just returned from a long stay with a host. Assuming it to contain silver and gold (Od. 10.44–45), they correctly liken it to a typical *xeineion*: guest gifts often consist of precious metals. But in plotting to distribute its contents, they are treating it as *geras*. Their grumbling over Odysseus' accumulated winnings, while they themselves remain empty-handed, sounds curiously like Achilles' resentment toward the *geras*-

grabbing Agamemnon in *Il.* 1.161–68. *Geras*, we observed, engenders jealousy.³¹ That jealousy is now transferred to Odysseus' mysterious guest gift as the crewmen publicize an item of intimately personal and undisclosed value.³² Their presumptuous plot to steal it matches Agamemnon's outrage in the *Iliad*: they claim a token of honor that does not belong to them and, in the process, violate the gift itself and disgrace its owner. For the seizing of *geras*, or a *geras* equivalent, is tantamount to a stripping of honor. In terms of the narrative, the audience may therefore wonder whether the crewmen are activating the sequence of "wronged hero seeks revenge in the death of his colleagues."

As we examine the combined poetics and heroics of this narrative, it is interesting to note that, just as Diomedes introduces the hospitality theme into *Iliad* 6 in direct speech, Odysseus' crewmen themselves conflate the currencies of *geras* and *xeineia*. The poet draws our attention to the sailors' ignoble initiative by having Odysseus report—inexplicably—a speech delivered while he was asleep. Diomedes likewise takes it upon himself, in direct speech, to transform Glaukos into a guest with a question that would have intrigued the audience. Just as Diomedes deserves the credit for broadening his heroic arena with his expanded discourse, furthermore, Odysseus' crewmen must bear the blame for the disaster about to befall them. They are the ones who unabashedly treat a guest gift as a war prize. Indeed, if their complaint of empty-handedness is true, they are so unaccomplished in battle that they have no *geras* to call their own after ten years at Troy. Their clever conflation of *geras* and guest gifts may well end in failure, as have their previous endeavors. In *Iliad* 6, the same conflation introduces narrative patterns from two genres that the poet intertwines as he plays on audience expectations. That juxtaposition ends in the overtaking of the one genre by the other: weapons are dropped and lasting friendship is proclaimed as a battle-narrative gives way to a hospitality story. Now in the *Odyssey*, a similar tension in audience expectations is engendered. In the juxtaposition of a gift-seeking *nostos* and a battlefield dispute over *geras* (now occurring on a ship!), will the one pattern overtake the other? Will the story line of the *Odyssey*, with its contextual goal of homecoming, be derailed by a narrative pattern from war?

Driven back to Aeolus, Odysseus again seeks hospitality and punctiliously follows protocol: he arrives at the house, finds the host banqueting with his family, and sits at the threshold, waiting to be received (*Od.* 10.60–63). These gestures would normally be met with

a welcome, a meal, a bath, and a bed—just as before. For their amplified description suggests to the audience that they will indeed be answered.³³ But the narrative pattern from a hospitality scene is not fulfilled. Aeolus does *not* rise from his throne to lift his guest by the hand. Odysseus, noticing the unfulfilled ritual sequence, tries to salvage the situation by “accosting [literally, “attaching himself to,” *ka-thaptomenos*] Aeolus with soothing words” (*Od.* 10.70) with all the urgency of a lowly suppliant.³⁴ He intensifies his request for hospitality with a supplication gesture—but to no avail.³⁵ Aeolus replies with a denunciation that Odysseus and the poem’s audience would have found equally shocking,

Off of this island at once, you most contemptible of living creatures!
For it is not right to receive or give passage to
A man detested (*apechthomenos*) by the gods of Olympus.
Off with you, since you have come here loathed by the immortals!
(*Od.* 10.72–75)

In terms of narrative expectations, this is a rich moment. For the traditional hospitality syntax in which a welcoming host may reflect on a visitor’s divinity is now abandoned. Aeolus knows that Odysseus, no god at all, is divinely loathed. The King of the Winds can therefore ignore protocol and deny his suppliant guest. Indeed, these are the harshest words Odysseus has ever heard from a host. Karl Reinhardt (1996, 88) comments: “The worst of it is not the storm caused by the winds rushing out of the sack, nor the uselessness of all of Odysseus’ efforts. . . . Rather, the worst of it is what all this means: that Odysseus is hated and cursed by the gods.” To suffer such a loss of status in divine eyes is the worst possible disgrace for a king “dear to Zeus.”

Instead of receiving the welcome that a narrative *nostos* pattern would lead us to expect, Odysseus hears, in a variant from a war narrative that takes both him and us by surprise, the very abuse that Agamemnon heaps on Achilles:

Go ahead and leave, if your heart is set on it. I, for one,
Do not entreat you to stay on my behalf. I have others
Who will show me respect, most of all counsellor Zeus
But you are, in my eyes, the most detested (*echthistos*) of the kings dear
to Zeus. . . .
Go home now in your ships, and take your comrades with you.
Lord it over your Myrmidons, since I care not a jot for you.
(*Il.* 1.173–76, 179–80)

Aeolus' chastisement is parallel to Agamemnon's harangue in both content and structure. As is Achilles, Odysseus is told to leave on the spot and take his men with him. Both heroes are shamed as "detested" in their revilers' spewed contempt. Just as the dismissal by Agamemnon devastates Achilles, Aeolus' rejection crushes Odysseus. If indeed he is loathed by the gods and can rightfully be denied Zeus-sanctioned hospitality, he stands no chance of securing the protection or prizes of future hospitality. Both homecoming and honor are lost. On the narrative level, we may wonder whether the lost homecoming will be accompanied by an aborted poem. Odysseus' comrades altered the discourse when they conflated the story of their own *nostos*: transforming a guest gift into a war prize, they activated an ominous sequence from a war narrative. When Odysseus returns to Aeolus, the *Odyssey* poet has the option of proceeding with a hospitality scene and keeping the *nostos* narrative on track. Instead, he takes the detour initiated by the sailors themselves. The illegitimate seizure of *geras* will lead to the loss of heroes' souls.

At the parallel point in the Iliadic sequence, Achilles seeks isolation along the shore. His physical separation from the Achaeans is indicative of disgust with them. He prays for Zeus to send a horrendous death by pinning the men in by the ships, where the Trojans will pick them off. The ensuing events in the *Odyssey* fulfill the audience's expectations arising from this pattern—but on a horrific level and at a breakneck pace. On approaching the Laestrygonians, Odysseus allows eleven ships to enter the bottleneck cove and does nothing to steer them from the deadly trap. Odysseus' actions have been variously interpreted. Alfred Heubeck (1989, 49) posits that Odysseus keeps the flagship in a safe spot "out of a sense of responsibility proper in a commander." But this commander does not muster the fleet upon attack. Jonathan Shay (2002, 60–64) faults Odysseus for placing his self-protection ahead of protection of the others. S. Douglas Olson (1995, 55) explains that the men "ignore his lead" as they fall victim to their own disobedience. But Odysseus describes the men as sailing ahead on their own, while "I alone kept my black ship outside" (*Od.* 10.95). He is not leading at this juncture, and he issues no unheeded order. On the poetic level, Jenny Strauss Clay (2002, 83) suggests that Homer, in a "neither credible nor verifiable" manner, is ridding himself of the extraneous ships he has inherited from the *Iliad*: Odysseus' *nostos* requires only one ship, and the Laestrygonians, however implausibly, do the job.³⁶

When we read the passage as a conflated narrative, however, Odys-



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