

interpretation

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Volume 10 number 1

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The Undercover Hero: Odysseus from Dark to Daylight

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INTRODUCTION

In the *Iliad* Odysseus is a man of dim dawns and dark nights. But most of the action of the poem takes place in broad daylight. Even under the blazing sun, helmets flash, shields gleam, ships flare, and the greatest warriors appear like fire, stars, or the sun itself. Combat begins after the sun rises, is held in balance at midday, and turns to the advantage of one side or another as the sun goes down; as darkness falls, fighting ceases, truces are called, and warriors withdraw from the battlefield.

The relentless passage of time in the brief period described in the *Iliad* is essential to our sense of the mortality of these men. They shine forth briefly, in a world where only the stars and gods live forever. The great days of battle are marked off by grey or saffron dawn, the herald which appears before Helios, and by black night when men build fires to light the dark, to pray, cook, eat, and anticipate contests to come. After the sun goes down and before the dawn, one sees in a different light. These are times for women and for thoughts of home, for dreams that blind, and urges to flee in the dark, for questioning leaders, and doubting their causes. Then might a man test his commitment to the life and death actions of the day.

These are also times for the exercise of abilities of another sort from those seen in the daytime battles. Between Hector's advance, which comes to a halt as the sun goes down in Book Eight, and the great battle which begins at morning in Book Eleven, Homer describes the events of a long tense night: early in the evening an Achaean embassy tries to convince Achilles to stave off Hector from the ships; later a spying mission ends in the ambush of sleeping Trojan allies. We hear also of morning events: the disastrous council in which Agamemnon proposes flight and order must be restored among the troops, and another at dawn on the day Achilles goes into battle.

Men like Achilles are the heroes of the daytime action of the *Iliad*. His appearance in Books Nine and Nineteen, the great nighttime events of the poem, are extraordinary, in contrast to his ordinary mode of excelling. Odysseus, a very different sort of man, is the protagonist par excellence of the shadows. While he may show well from time to time in the daylight battles, it is in embassy, ambush, and council that he proves most valuable. In the

Translations are by A. T. Murray, Loeb Classical Library, with some changes. Small capital Roman numerals refer to the *Iliad*, lower-case to the *Odyssey*. Greek words are transliterated to make discussions accessible to readers who don't know Greek.

Odyssey, this order is altered, though not reversed. Now it is Achilles who inhabits the dark world; we hear of him in Hades among the shades, and in the shadowy memories of those who knew him long ago. Odysseus is now the protagonist of the daytime events as well as the dawns and nights, as Homer brings to light a new way of life. The *Odyssey* is about emerging into the light, about showing oneself—but in a very different way from that seen in the *Iliad*.

Part One of this essay considers what councils, embassies, and ambushes reveal about the heroic fighting which is the daytime subject of the *Iliad*. What effect does the partial presence or complete absence of Helios Hyperion have upon the actions and attitudes of the mortals whose time he marks? Part Two examines *polutropos* (literally, “of many turns”) Odysseus, first as a man, and then, as a human being. How does the portrayal of this singular man among many heroes in the *Iliad* anticipate the portrayal of him as the single hero of the *Odyssey*? This section considers what it means for a godlike man to keep in touch, and ends by examining him in the light of a god—Hephaestus. Part Three considers the nighttime hero’s return to light. Why is Odysseus—who retains in the *Odyssey* all the qualities which make him excel when Helios is absent from the plains of Troy—characterized by his refusal to violate the sun god?

I. DIM DAWN AND DARK NIGHT

We must begin with the differences between daytime combat and the activities of the nights and dawns. War begins with concern for one’s family, household, and city. But war enables a man to exhibit himself and win glory. Noble men overcome their fear of death because they fear shame (*aidōs*) in the eyes of their comrades. They wish to *be* excellent, and also to *be recognized* for their excellence, to have others behold and identify them in their gleaming armour. At first, light is a prerequisite for shame. Later shame is internalized; the hero imagines the views of others if they were there to see. The emphasis often shifts from group revenge to single renown. As the sun mounts, single heroes break away from their sides and call to each other through the lines (xi.84–91). Even when antagonists do not address each other, the daytime *Iliad* is a book of names; there are few unknown soldiers in the battle scenes. Two warriors may withdraw, having discovered that their personal histories overrule their military affiliations. The greatest of warriors sometimes seem almost dissociated from their sides. When Diomedes exerts himself, it is difficult to tell whether he is fighting for the Trojans or the Achaeans (v.85–86); he is, indeed, fighting for Diomedes.

The hero fights with two times in mind, the immediate present and the distant future. His performance today will establish a reputation to endure beyond his brief life which soon will end in any case (xii.310–28). He aims to

fix time. Though he knows what war takes, his yearnings for peace are at least ambivalent, because battle gives worth to his life. The heroes speak of winning glory by winning the war, but the greatest warriors do not always wish to hasten the end of the war. The boastings, confrontation, and parting friendship of Hector and Ajax in Book Seven suggest that they are as much interested in their own reputations as in the fate of their sides. When Achilles kills Hector he does not think primarily of the fall of Troy, though his victory makes it possible.

Action on the battlefield is out in the open, straightforward. The aim is to kill one's opponents: one aims directly. Spears and arrows miss by human error or divine interference, and mortals rarely try to deceive their enemies. Through the thunder of Zeus, the shouts of gods, the groans of men, and the clash of arms, emerge clear exchanges of speech. Prayers, exhortations, boasts, taunts, and pleas pierce the air. In the din of battle what is said is true or, at least, there is no calculated discrepancy between what the speaker thinks or wishes and what he shouts.

There are also tacit rules regarding participants, places, and times of battles. Men make pacts and swear oaths under the light of the sun. They are expected to honor guest-host friendships and promises to return the living for ransom and the dead for burial, to abide by the results of single combat, and to keep a truce. Those who abide by this code believe it is enforceable. They swear by Zeus and by Helios "who oversees all." They also expect that those who prove themselves best in battle will be rewarded accordingly. Though the conflicts in the *Iliad* move beyond the issues which initiated the war, justice remains some sort of standard; men are judged by their adherence to rules as well as by their courage and prowess.

When Helios is absent or only partially present, the activities of the army at Troy are very different from those just described. In morning council and evening embassy, Homer depicts the internal politics of the army that does battle by day. In Books Two, Nine, and Nineteen, Odysseus engages in a kind of military action which differs from (and somehow conflicts with) the glorious fighting, but upon which the latter depends. Here we see the business of maintaining morale among the many, resolving disputes among the great, and the feeding of all. These are tasks, responses to necessity, rather than the exercise of high-spirited freedom. Here the preeminent man acts less on his own behalf than as the representative of a group. He recognizes the need to subdue his allies in order to defeat the enemy.

Negotiators and deliberators are less absorbed by the glittering show on the battlefield and more concerned with the end of the war. The early embassy of Odysseus and Menelaus, Odysseus' visit to Troy, the mission to Chryses, return of Briseis, and embassy to Achilles, all mark potentially important moments in the progress of the war. After suppressing Thersites, Odysseus urges the men to "endure [*tlēte*]" . . . "and remain for a time" (II.299) in order

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to verify the prophesies at Aulis. He uses here for the first time a word which points to his epithet (“much-enduring”—*polutlas*) at Troy and years later. But his view of “endurance” differs from that of the great fighters. Characteristically, he looks back in time to an incident at the beginning of the war, to anticipate the future conclusion of the war. Courageous display thinks of the brevity of a lifetime, and of hardship endured at one time, to leave a memory for all time; prudence is concerned with the continuing time of the present. Unlike those who would die young to win personal glory, the counsellors and ambassadors are mature men who have themselves lived long or who have devoted themselves to long-lived groups. Their speeches are full of elaborate memories. They come less to be seen than to plan and to persuade.

The medium of persuasion is primarily speech, although force may be necessary as well (II.198–99, 265–66). In contrast to battlefield exchanges, where the verbal duels are as open as the bodily duels which follow, council and embassy delicately alternate speech and silence, open truth and obscurity. Antenor compares Odysseus’ words at an early embassy to “snowflakes on a winter’s day” (III.222). Homer suggests elsewhere (XII.278ff.) the obscuring effect of snow; it covers over, blurs and softens distinctions. At night Nestor orders the leaders to call each man to council, “but not to shout aloud” (IX.12). He bids the men to keep “ritual silence” as they pray, and sends the ambassadors off with hushed commands and glances, reserving his last minute consultations for Odysseus alone. His foresight in sending the embassy secretly prevents his having to disappoint the troops with its failure.¹ Nestor’s behavior contrasts with that of the blunt warrior Ajax, who volunteers, but is passed over, for the spying expedition in Book Ten. As Ajax dresses to meet Hector in Book Seven, he tells his comrades to pray either:

in silence by yourselves, that the Trojans learn nought thereof—nay, or openly [*amphadiēn*], if ye will, since in any case we fear no man. (VII.195–96)

The studied ceremony of the meeting in Achilles’ tent also derives its tension from the silences as well as from the speeches: Achilles nods to Patroclus; Ajax nods to Phoenix, but Odysseus quickly begins to speak; Achilles’ reply is greeted in shocked silence by the ambassadors (and again by the Achaean leaders when they are told of his refusal). Odysseus, who in council does not reply to Thersites, on embassy omits parts of Agamemnon’s message to Achilles, changing the form of address, and adding his own appeal. Achilles, the warrior who is outraged by deception on the battlefield (XXII.15–20), also rejects the indirections of speech:

Zeus-born son of Laertes, Odysseus of many wiles, needs must I surely speak my word outright [*apēlegeōs*] even as I am minded, and as it shall be brought to pass,

1. Seth Benardete, “Achilles and Hector: The Homeric Hero” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Committee on Social Thought, University of Chicago), p. 138. (A useful article for understanding the *Iliad* generally is Benardete’s “The Aristeia of Diomedes and the Plot of the *Iliad*,” *Agon*. No. 2 (1968), 10–38.)

that you sit not by me here on this side and on that and prate endlessly. For hateful in my eyes, even as the gates of Hades, is that man that hideth one thing in his mind and sayeth another. Nay, I will speak what seemeth to me best (ix.308–14)

For him, the man who does not speak *apēlegeōs*—without regard to consequence or to the person addressed and who does not reveal in speech all that is in his heart—belongs at the entrance to the dark land where Helios does not shine; there is something shady about him. (Years later, Odysseus uses similar words to Eumaeus (xiv.156–57); he verbally condemns the very thing he does, thus doubling the deception.) Achilles explains his wrath against Agamemnon in terms of deception: he was misled into expecting rewards in keeping with his performance; he has been cheated of these rewards as if he were a clanless foreigner. He requests that *his* reply to Agamemnon, who won't face him directly, be declared "openly" (*amphadon*) (ix.370), the word Ajax uses; it suggests a light shining through the dark. Achilles correctly discerns that Agamemnon's offerings would continue to make him a subordinate. He maintains his earlier refusal to recognize the general's conventional superiority. In council, as well as in battle, Achilles' mode is the showdown. Although his first appearance is sincere and public-spirited, his insistence on revealing Agamemnon for what he is leads to chaos. A complete breakdown is avoided only by Odysseus and Nestor, who recognize the need to cover the truth, to leave some things unsaid, others in the dark, and to re clothe the exposed Agamemnon. But even they cannot move a man who does not share their view of speech. By the time of the embassy Achilles' concern for the army and even for justice in his own case is less acute. Absorbed by the promise of Zeus, who lives for all time, he turns away from the timely needs of his mortal companions.

Like the great combats, the ambush of Book Ten involves warriors in bodily conflict with the enemy. Courage, speed, and power are necessary here as on the battlefield. But success now requires, in addition, special qualities of mind: wit (*noos*) and craft (*mētis*) (x.226), and an extraordinary sense of timing, virtues shared by spies, ambassadors, and counsellors. *Noos* and *mētis* suggest an extended, but practical vision, one which looks ahead to a foreseeable future in which present actors will participate. Spying, like council, is concerned with planning. Lying in wait (*lokhaō*) and laying out (*legō*) plans in speech (*logos*) are acts in a series of precisely calculated, but related, moments, rather than single feats memorable as fixed monuments.

Like other ambushes in Homer, the Doloneia takes place on the third watch of night when the stars have turned their course. (In the *Odyssey* Odysseus says this is the prime time for wily schemes [xiv.480].) Though it will soon be dawn, it is so dark that even one's own comrades are hard to recognize. Athena's omen, the heron, cannot be seen by the men who hear its cry (x.275–76). The word "night" occurs in Book Ten more than in any other book of the

Iliad.² Here, too, action and speech are indirect and obscure. The Achaean scouts do not wish to be seen; they hide themselves in dark skins and leather helmets which, unlike those of Achilles, Diomedes at other times, and Hector of the flashing helmet, will not catch the light.³ They lie down among dead bodies on the ground as they await their victim. Only here does a warrior “purposely” miss his enemy with his spear (x.372). The goal is not the heroic conquest of a worthy opponent, but information. Although Odysseus and Diomedes know Dolon’s name, the Trojan spy remains in the dark about who will destroy him. In the absence of Helios, Odysseus shamelessly misleads Dolon—“let not death be in thy thoughts” (x.383)—violating his expectations about the conventional treatment of surrendered enemies. The smiles of Odysseus here and of Ajax even as he grimly goes forth to face Hector (vii.212) are as different as night and day. Dolon speaks frankly (*atrekeōs*)⁴ to those who deceive him (x.413).

The “combat” part of the mission is accomplished in complete silence. The enemies here never exchange boasts or names; there is no chance of a ransom or the discovery of a guest friendship. The Thracians never know who kills them; Rhesus’ dream suggests the ordinary shame of dying unawares; nevertheless, he is unconscious. (Like Dolon and Antinous, Penelope’s suitor in a later surprise ambush, “death was not in his thoughts” [xxii.11–12].) Odysseus and Diomedes do not wring victory from fully conscious individuals who recognize them as superior. Rather, they kill silent bodies, already prone on the ground, an anonymous collection who, except for Rhesus, are known only as allies of the enemy.⁵ The humanity of these ordinarily formidable warriors is not even recognized by a threat to deprive them of funerals. The bodies of these men are simply dragged away and left to be picked up by their comrades.

While councils and embassies are a respectable part of military virtue, ambushes, raids and spying are sometimes considered dishonorable, the tactics of transgressors. One who wishes to make a name for himself, to win glory and even to save face, must fight “like men,” face-to-face. Thus Hector tells Ajax, “Yet I do not want to smite thee . . . by spying unnoticed; but rather openly [*amphadon*]” (vii.242–43). Glaucus and Bellerophon, noble warriors of old, had to ward off treacherous ambushes (iv.392. vi.189, x.285–90). Paris began the Trojan–Achaean hostilities with a domestic raid (iii.443–46). Appropriately, he wounds Diomedes from behind a pillar, a place of ambush (*ek lokhou*) (xi.379). Pandarus breaks the truce, using a bow which Homer says he made from the

2. Sixteen times. Norman Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer’s Odyssey* (Berkeley, 1975), p. 72. See pp. 71–73 for epithets for night.

3. Compare with the fatal carelessness of Euryalus and Nisus in a derivative incident in the *Aeneid* (ix).

4. In the *Odyssey* especially the words *atrekeōs*, *apēlegeōs*, *amphadon* are a guide to character. There is not time here to trace the ironies in Homer’s use of these words.

5. Bernard Fenik discusses sources in “*Iliad* X and the *Rhesus*.” Collection Latomus, Vol. LXXIII, 1964.

horn of an unsuspecting ibex he killed while lying out of sight (IV.107). (In the *Odyssey* ambushes are the special tactic of Aegisthus' twenty men who waited for Agamemnon to return from the war they did not fight in, and of the suitors, twenty of whom lie in wait for Telemachus day and night.)

The most frequently mentioned ambushes in the *Iliad* are attacks of wild beasts on domestic animals "in the dead of night." Although Homer often compares men with animals—in the open battles as well—he does not suggest that war is a bestial activity. The concern with names, weapons, honor, justice, the past, and the future preclude any such suggestion. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the regulated daytime duels, ambush does deny the humanity of one's opponent. Under cover of darkness, the line between honorable and dishonorable is obscured; ambushers, like animals, have no shame. In Book Ten, Diomedes, who sparkles among men and gods on the battlefield in Book Five, chases a lesser man in the dark, as a hound would pursue a hare or doe (x.360–64). Treating the enemy as less than human, the victor becomes less human too; the ambushers even look like beasts. After disposing of Dolon and the Thracians, Diomedes ponders what "most doglike" deed he might do (x.503). Human contest here risks deteriorating into bestial predation, though, of course, human beings who do what dogs do, are very different from dogs, perhaps worse. It is not surprising that Odysseus is the first warrior to threaten to feed his *conscious* victim's corpse to scavenger birds (XI.450–55). His threat suggests something other than the notion of combat as heroic duel.⁶

When we read Book Ten, we must ask if the nighttime Odysseus is a hero to admire. When we think about the necessities to which his deeds are responses, our answer must be "yes." The Doloneia leaves us no illusions about the shamelessly grim and inhumane deeds this man chooses to commit. Yet it depicts specifically human virtues—intelligence and foresight—in the context of specifically human conflict, that is, conflict which originates between communities. The lions who attack farms at night, and even human robbers who love the dark (III.10–14), do not act on behalf of others. As we have seen, glorious heroes often lose sight of the communities they fight for. But wartime ambushes, are generally community affairs. Odysseus and Diomedes are representatives, ambassadors as it were. They are sent forth as Achaeans against Trojans, and their glory is shared, with each other and with their comrades whose morale is markedly raised by their success. In Book Ten, as in the embassy to Achilles, we are reminded of the original political motives of the

6. In that ambush never aspires to a code of honor, it is the complete antithesis of the funeral games, which are strictly regulated and quickly terminated at the possibility of serious injury. Games take place in the light, are staged for acknowledged spectators, but the stakes are never human lives. Guile is effective in chariot races as it is in ambush, but, when asked to swear that he did not cheat, Antilochus graciously yields his prize (xxiii.586–95). Odysseus wrestles with his usual guile against the might of Ajax, but the result is a draw rather than total defeat. Temporarily released from fighting Trojans, the heroic warriors still wish to prove who is "best of the Achaeans."

war. The Greek sentinels protect their own (x.180–89). Dolon distinguishes between the Trojans, who keep night watch, and their allies, who sleep: the allies' children and wives do not need to be protected (x.418–22). The Trojans defend themselves out of necessity; the allies have come to win glory. Ambushes, like councils and embassies, promise progress in the course of a war. While they may bring honor, they are primarily useful; face-to-face combats may turn the tide of battle, but they are primarily affairs of glory.

In Phaeacia the bard alludes to a dispute between Odysseus and Achilles, perhaps over whether Troy would be taken by stratagem or by assault (viii.75–82). The *Iliad* does not tell how the Trojans finally are defeated. But everyone knows, and the *Odyssey* recalls explicitly, that Troy fell in an ambush masterminded, or at least directed, by Odysseus (iv.266–89, viii.500–20, xi.523–32),⁷ the only warrior besides Achilles who frequently is called “city-sacker” (*ptoliporthos*). This victory raises a subordinate military maneuver to the means of final victory. The end of the war and resumption of peace follow from abandoning the rules of the game, and engaging in an obscene and “total” war. But even the most stealthy, ruthless strategy is more humane than are duels without end. Victory, even when the vanquished side is totally destroyed as well as defeated, is a limited end, whereas the hero's desire for personal glory can never be satisfied. The same can be said of the desire for revenge when the avenger merely looks back on his own dishonor and not ahead to normal life as well. Achilles' loss of *aidōs* after Patroclus' death may be more horrifying than Odysseus' unheroic defeat of the Trojans (Achilles' revenge may be compared also to Odysseus' punishment of the suitors). In judging Odysseus' tactics in *Iliad* Ten, it is well to remember that much harsher ambush which eventually put an end to ten years of fighting.

But heroic warriors do not utterly disdain raids and ambush. Community hostilities often precede personal confrontations. Border raids are mentioned frequently (i.154, xi.670ff., xxi.18–19). Though they rely less on furtive stratagems, these raids require the attitude of ambush towards enemies. Once a war has begun, warriors cannot live merely the life of heroic confrontation, if only because, as Thucydides notes, armies need supplies to sustain them. We hear of Achilles' exploits against Thebe, and of cattle raids by Nestor (xi.670–81) and Achilles (xx.89–90, 188–90), who especially elevates these forays into opportunities to win glory.⁸

7. Aeschylus, Euripides, Virgil, and Lucretius assume that the ambush and sacking took place at night.

8. In the *Odyssey*, war is often reduced to the status of raids. The sack of the “sacred city of the Cicones” (ix.39–42) is reminiscent of the sack of the “sacred city of Troy,” this time deprived of any glory. There is no indication here, as in the *Iliad* catalogue, that the Cicones were Trojan allies; the motive appears to be mere plunder. Odysseus' tales in the *Odyssey* often begin with attacks like this one. Later the marauding suitors are compared to warriors attacking a city (xiv.85–88). Interestingly, the first mention of Achilles in the *Odyssey* is in Nestor's recollection of a foray for booty (iii.103–06).

Ambush, a form of raid, is further distinguished from heroic battle by its stealthy stratagems, but this mode of warfare, too, is not merely to be scorned. Odysseus and Diomedes work in the dark, but their deeds do not remain in the dark. Unlike the spies of modern warfare, undercover agents who often go unnamed and unhonored in their own lands, Homer's scouts return triumphant to the acclaim of their comrades. They all know that the courage required by ambush is a cold-blooded, silent bravery not called for by the panting public confrontations. On the battlefield there is company. In combat one stands alone; in ambush one is alone (x.37–41). Achilles taunts Agamemnon for never having had courage to go forth on ambush with the Achaean chiefs (1.223–28); Menelaus worries that no one will be brave enough for the spying mission (x.37–41); and Idomeneus says that in ambush the coward will reveal himself (xiii.276–94).

Achilles and blunt Idomeneus dwell on the manly courage required by ambush; they view it as a kind of raid. Diomedes, when he chooses Odysseus in Book Ten, emphasizes virtues of the head rather than the chest. Dolon is a living example of the coward described by Idomeneus. Ugly and arrogant, raised among sisters, he has only one of the virtues necessary for successful forays. But his speed is of no avail when he encounters a fleetfooted man with judgment and courage as well. Despite his name, he is devoid of cunning (*dolos*) and appropriately loses his head. By describing an inferior spy as a prelude to the successful foray which ends Book Ten, Homer makes us accept night ambush as a part of military virtue, even though he shows how this mode differs from heroic combat under the sun.

II. ODYSSEUS

A. *The Man: Keeping One's Distance*

Early in the *Iliad* Agamemnon taunts Odysseus and the Athenian Menestheus for their tardy start in battle:

for ye are the first to hear my bidding to the feast, whenso we Achaeans make ready a banquet for the elders. Then are ye glad to eat roast meat and drink cups of honey-sweet wine as long as ye will. But now would ye gladly behold it, aye if ten serried battalions of the Achaeans were to fight in front of you with the pitiless bronze. (iv.341–48)

But Odysseus is a distinguished fighter, and usually is included among the prominent Achaeans. Homer tells us that the Cephallenians are no weaklings, and that the two men have only been waiting for the right moment to enter battle. Unashamed, Odysseus replies with scorn; the general retracts his words, and the incident is forgotten.

But Agamemnon's insult, exaggerated as it is, is not, as Odysseus says, mere "empty wind." There is, in Odysseus, a reluctance in the face of death, and an attraction to what is suggested here by "roast meat" and "honey-sweet wine." Though he does not lack hearty spirit (*thumos*) in battle, still we sense that his heart is not fully in it. Homer does not elaborate on the legends of Odysseus' reluctance to join the Trojan expedition, but he does mention, late in the *Odyssey*, that it took a long time to convince him (xxiv.115–19). Just as Odysseus and Menestheus start late because "their host had not yet heard the war cry," so Odysseus ambiguously "fails to hear" Diomedes' cry to rescue the endangered Nestor (vii.78–111); rapidly retreating, he leaves the task to the younger, more impetuous man. In Book Four, and in his own muted *aristeia* in Book Eleven, he does not face the most prominent Trojans. Sarpedon moves elsewhere as Odysseus takes on lesser foes. When he and Diomedes pursue Hector, Diomedes wounds the great Trojan (xi.345–53). Odysseus is the last to offer to challenge Hector (vii.168), and, even in the Doloneia, he is the last of the volunteers to join Diomedes (x.231). Posing in the *Odyssey* as a wanderer, he says he is expert in night ambush (xiii.260ff., 468ff., xiv.216–21), and that he once saved his life in Egypt by becoming a suppliant (xiv.274–84). At Troy only Trojans beg for their lives; the Achaeans die fighting. Though he is indispensable,⁹ there is something marginal about Odysseus' presence at Troy. He stands at the edge of the heroic world which produces him, and therefore, he outlasts it.

Called, at various times, *tlēmōn* (enduring), *polutlas* (much-enduring), *talasiphrōn* (enduring or suffering in mind), Odysseus is repeatedly singled out for his ability to endure (*tlāō*). He is, in every sense of the word, patient. The words derived from *tlāō* suggest his suffering, both the afflictions of war, and the insults of his homecoming. But, as we have seen, the capacity to last to the end is related to great daring (*tolmaō*) as well as great suffering. *Tolmaō* suggests a willingness to overstep limits—to be shameless, as well as unshameable, in order to achieve one's end (*telos*).

Glory requires excess; Odysseus is diverse, many-sided,¹⁰ but he is not excessive. Though he oversteps boundaries and limits, he is successful because he does so by controlled calculation. *Choosing* to transcend limits is akin to adhering to a mean: both depend on calculating measurement.¹¹ With carefully measured words he silences the "unmeasured speech" of the babbling Thersites (ii.212). Later he measures the distance for the duel between Menelaus and Paris (iii.314–17). When Agamemnon and Achilles are reconciled, it is Ody-

9. The *Iliad* is about "longing" for Achilles (i.240, xiv.368), but Menelaus' fear that Odysseus may be killed and "a great longing for him come upon the Danaans" (xi.470–71), shows that he too, is indispensable in wartime. In the *Odyssey*, "longing" for Odysseus becomes a major theme.

10. He is, or is like, a spear thrower, hunter, archer, runner, wrestler, carpenter, sailmaker, lyre-stringer, and bard.

11. Note the kinship among *metron* (measure), *mētis* (craft), *medomai* (provide for), and *mēdomai* (contrive).

seus who measures the gold to be given in recompense (xix.247–48). He is a middleman, specializing in means, in between, in the twilights through which one moves from desires to well-defined ends; he excels at dawn, between night and day, and in the middle of the night. His ships are located exactly in the center of the Achaean line (xi.6, 806–7), and Homer places him and his troops exactly at the center of the catalogue of the Danaan ships (ii.631–37).

At Troy the actions of Odysseus usually have more limited ends than those of the shining warriors. This is true even when there is booty to win. In the Rhesus raid, Odysseus takes the horses and whistles to signal that the job is completed. Diomedes, who often seems more moderate than Achilles, here ponders further action until Athena exhorts him to return to the ships. Years later, Menelaus remembers how, in the wooden horse, it was also necessary for Odysseus to restrain Diomedes (iv.280–84). Odysseus has internalized crafty (*polumētis*) Athena's qualities, while Diomedes must be checked from without. The Phaeacian bard says that when the Achaeans left the horse, the other warriors looted the city. But Odysseus, only here compared to Ares, and Menelaus went to the house of Deiphobus and fought until they conquered (viii.516–20). The reference to Deiphobus, who replaced Hector as the Trojan leader (and who, later legends say, inherited Helen after the death of Paris), reminds us that Odysseus is the only warrior besides Menelaus who remembers the original purpose of the war. Once again we see the measured "political" concerns seen in the ambush: he seeks neither glory nor loot with uncontrolled abandon; what he wants is to finish the job.

In Book Ten of the *Iliad*, he responds to Diomedes' praise with moderation and confidence:

Son of Tydeus, praise me not overmuch, neither blame me in aught; this thou sayest among the Argives that themselves know all. Nay, let us go (x.249–51)

After the spying mission, he claims no special credit for success. His self-containment contrasts sharply with Achilles' continual need for visible and audible recognition of his excellence. Odysseus is distinguished from Achilles by his reaction to insult as well as to praise. Agamemnon threatens not only Achilles in Book One:

then will I come myself and take thy [Achilles'] prize or that of Ajax, or that of Odysseus will I seize and bear away. (i.137–39)

Achilles responds that he would be a coward, a "man of nought" (*outidanos*) if he should yield (i.293). But the man who later controls himself in the face of attacks from giants, servants, and suitors, does not react to the general's insult. He repeatedly allows himself to be called a "nothing," a "man of nought"; No One (*Outis*) is the very *outidanos* that Polyphemus never had expected to overpower him (ix.515). Whatever others may say, he is the measure of himself.

Other warriors are noted for their backs, muscles, swift feet. But Homer most often draws attention to the eyes of Odysseus, the eyes his grandmother kissed when, as a child, he visited Autolycus (xix.417). Years later when “bright-eyed” Athena disguises him for his return, she says she will dim his “two eyes that were before so beautiful” (xiii.401). In the *Iliad*, Antenor describes how Odysseus cast his eyes downward to the earth when he addressed a council (III.216–18). In battle he glances warily about (IV.497),¹² in contrast to Ajax, for example, who looks steadily at his opponent (xvii.305) and “straitly charges” (xvii.355). The shifty glances and failure to look others in the eye suggest his characteristic indirection. Some might say he is ashamed. But when it is expedient to look another in the face, his eyes are direct. Repeatedly, Odysseus, like other leaders, silences opponents with an angry glance, and he and Telemachus,¹³ like Athena, signal with their brows. The ability to control one’s eyes, to avert one’s glance and to stare back at will, are signs of shamelessness rather than shame, the ability to do unblinkingly—or unblushingly—what others might avoid.

The eyes of the Iliadic Odysseus indicate his foresight, provision, and ability to size up a situation at a glance. Diomedes does all the killing in Book Ten, but Homer explicitly says that Odysseus is the first to *see* both Dolon and Rhesus. Spying is the perfect vehicle for expressing this practical sight, for it is, by definition, vision with a mission. Characteristically, the expedition which begins as reconnaissance ends as a raid for booty.¹⁴ The daytime heroes of the *Iliad* live to see and be seen. In the *Iliad* Odysseus’ eyes are less intensely focused on glory, except, as we shall see, for prudential purposes. He sees beyond the battlefield, keeping always in his mind’s eye a wider view of the world and of human life. Later legends appropriately award Odysseus the armour of Achilles, who does not in battle see the pictures of peace which balance those of war on his shield.

In the *Odyssey* Odysseus’ peculiar vision is somewhere between that of the he-men of of prepolitical Greece and that of the contemplative men who emerge in Greek cities centuries later.¹⁵ Repeatedly we find him standing and

12. Some translators render *amphi he paptēnas* only as “glaring about him.”

13. Telemachus inherits his father’s head and eyes (i.208–9, iv.149–50, xvii.39), and learns to exploit the darkness. In Book One, Athena speaks of routing the suitors by guile (*dolos*) or openly (*amphadon*) (i.296). See Tiresias’ almost identical words to Odysseus, who immediately chooses ambush (x.120). As Telemachus first finds courage to challenge the suitors, he is open—and reckless. Repeatedly, he speaks “frankly” (*arekeōs*) and insists on declaring his word “outright” (*apēlegeōs*). But he soon learns to sail by night, to avoid overzealous hosts, and to keep counsel. By the end, the wise youth shares the virtues of his ambassador father. As Austin says, “The Telemacheia is the longest, most fully developed embassy scene in Homer” (p. 79). His mother, too, has nighttime vision and craft; she weaves by day, unravelling at night. She usually appears veiled, seeing, but not seen by others.

14. This is not true of all his spying missions. Helen says that on an earlier visit to Troy he killed many Trojans and returned, bearing much news—but no booty (iv.252–56).

15. Themistocles seems to combine similar traits.

gazing. Still his desire to see is not always divorced from prudential considerations. His interest in the one-eyed Cyclops, for example, accompanies his characteristic desire for gain, what one critic has called inquisitiveness linked with acquisitiveness.¹⁶ But his gazing also suggests the compelling and even shameless will to see that philosophical men exhibit. Odysseus looks upon and hears what is denied to most men. For all his propriety, he does not avert his gaze. He does not expose his own body to embarrass Nausicaa and her maidens, but unseen, like Gyges, he gazes at length upon them. He returns alive from Hades, having seen beyond the horizon. And even if what the Sirens “know” is all “voice,” Odysseus is free to see, hear, and judge for himself. As we shall see, his deliberate return from the places he has seen distinguishes him from both philosophers and warrior-heroes. But there can be little doubt that the return is motivated by deep insight about the proper way for a man to live. Truly, he has seen far in his travels.

The calculating speech of Odysseus is mentioned as much as his intelligent eyes. After the Thersites incident his Achaean comrades applaud his verbal victory:

verily hath Odysseus ere now wrought good deeds without number as leader in good counsel and setting battle in array, but now is this deed far the best that he hath wrought among the Argives (II.272–74)

When he reminds them of Calchas’s prophesy, they shout their approval. “praising the words of godlike Odysseus” (II.335). In a simile used elsewhere only to describe missiles falling in battle (XII.156–59, 278–89), or warriors marching out to fight (XIX.357–61), Homer points to speech as Odysseus’ most important weapon. Antenor says that

whenso he uttered his great voice from his chest, and words like snowflakes on a winter’s day, then could no mortal man beside vie with Odysseus. (III.221–24)

Many years later, Helen describes an early spying mission of Odysseus in Troy. She says that he slew many Trojans before they realized what was happening; they were “like infants” (*abakēsan*) (iv.249), a word suggesting their inability to speak. They were dumbfounded, disarmed of words as well as weapons. In the spying and ambush in the *Iliad* he never uses a weapon. And when, in his last ambush, he strings the great bow that will destroy the unsuspecting suitors, he does so as “a man well-skilled in the lyre and in song easily stretches the string . . .” (xxi.406–9).

Odysseus the storyteller is, to some extent, suggested in the *Iliad*. His ambiguous speech, fame for deception, and ability to hold an audience point to his later prowess as a teller of tales. The Achaeans do not witness the night

16. W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Ann Arbor, 1976), p. 76.

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ambush they so applaud; it is Odysseus' *report* of the incident, as much as the trophies, that must move the men. The most wondrous words at Troy come from Sarpedon, Hector, Achilles, and others who attempt to comment upon their lives and deaths before they die. But the heroes speak of how their *actions* must speak for them; words point always to fleeting deeds. Lasting *stories* of these deeds must be made by other men.

Odysseus' story is one of survival. His prudential, as opposed to heroic, speeches at Troy make it possible for him to endure on the way home and in Ithaca. His speech, like his vision, is not always disinterested. From very early in his life, he seems somewhere between narrowly practical men on the one hand, and poetical singers and lofty thinkers, on the other. The child whose adult gazing usually results in booty, went to Autolycus to hunt, and to collect gifts. But he brought back as well an exciting *story*, the report of an adventure which took place on the mountain sacred to poets (xix.462–66).¹⁷ In a way, Odysseus remains always a *hunter* on Parnassus. But, as the only man from the Trojan war who becomes both the subject and teller of his tale,¹⁸ he memorializes himself as a speaker as well as a man of action. In the *Odyssey* he acts by day but spends his nights telling stories. His speech is less a compressed expression of the meaning of death than a discursive account of continuing life, a life which Homer is careful to leave unfinished. Odysseus' mode is the rambling story rather than grand heroic address. He is, somehow, more self-sufficient than both Achilles and the professional bard whom he resembles. Between the eloquence of the dying heroes at Troy, and the immortal poetry of Homer, are the wondrous words which emerge from the willingness to use words as weapons.

Odysseus' weaponless triumphs at Troy are in keeping with his unconventional use of weapons when he does resort to them. Repeatedly, the unconventionalities point away from the battlefield to a very different way of life. Archaeologists may wonder why Odysseus uses a bow in the *Odyssey* and a spear in the *Iliad*, but Homer knows that the man "of many devices" (*polumēkhanos*) would be comfortable with both. Perhaps this is why he notes when Pandarus, Teucer, and Paris switch weapons, but does not remark on Odysseus' choice. The bow does seem more suited to him than the spear. It is in keeping with his distance from the heart of battle,¹⁹ his lack of concern that his victims identify their vanquisher, and his use of machines as well as simple extensions of his own strength. Furthermore, he increases the intrinsic capacity of the bow by using poisoned arrows (i.260–64). The poison is unseen and points once more to efficacy as opposed to glory; as in night ambush, almost

17. The kill took place just at sunrise, when he chased his prey from its lair, or ambush-place (*lokhmē*), through which no sun could shine.

18. Menelaus and Nestor also report their experiences, but they are not "storytellers." Nestor's narratives never move anyone to call him a bard.

19. He names his son Telemachus (cf. Achilles' son Neoptolemus, "new warrior").

anything goes.²⁰ He also uses the instruments of battle in diverse ways. He is the only hero Homer names who uses a spear to obtain food (ix.150–56, x.156–71). The earliest report of him establishes him as a heroic *hunter*; both the boar on Parnassus and the stag on Circe's island are described as if they were warriors vanquished on the battlefield (x.161–63, xix.447–54). He is also the only hero to make a weapon, the stake which blinds Polyphemus. He uses any handy instrument as a weapon: his bow to whip Rhesus' horses (x.500, 514), and Agamemnon's sceptre to govern men by force when they fail to recognize its symbolic authority (ii.199, 264–65). It is difficult to imagine the pompous lord of men so reducing his royal staff to a club, or godlike Achilles grabbing a carved branch when there is no spear at hand. Odysseus, however, has a job to do; effectiveness matters more than his dignity, and any instrument that *works* will suffice.

The armour of the other heroes is described at great length, but in the *Iliad*, Odysseus' entries into action are not heralded by such descriptions of the makers, former owners, and appearances of his equipment. Only once is there an extended passage of this sort; it is about the helmet given to him before the night foray. This helmet particularly suits Odysseus since it originally was stolen by his grandfather, Autolycus, whose wily intelligence Odysseus has inherited. The helmet might remind us of the so-called Hades cap worn elsewhere by Hermes to make himself invisible for his nighttime thefts. The only equipment of Odysseus at Troy that Homer describes is not a shield held in a mighty hand, nor protective armour for a spirited breast, but is a helmet²¹ for his remarkable head.²²

Odysseus, more than most heroes, seems distinct from his armour and the weapons he uses. Others show great concern for their equipment, seeking to exchange it for better when possible. In Hades Odysseus sees former comrades who died in battle, still clad in their armour (xi.40). However one interprets the prophesy of Teiresias, it seems that this former warrior will not die in battle dress. In Book Two of the *Iliad*, Agamemnon rises, dresses, and takes his sceptre before going to council; Odysseus, when awakened, takes only his shield and even drops his cloak as he runs to halt the troops. Later, Helen and Priam observe him near the walls of Troy. Although all the men have removed their armour (iii.88–89, 113–15), in the individual descriptions, only in Odys-

20. Ilus, from whom he first requested the poison, refused from "awe of the gods" (i.262–63).

21. William Whallon suggests that "helmets, as means of defense, do not lead to heroic action." *Formula, Character, and Context* (Washington, D.C., 1969), p. 18. This may suggest differences between Achilles and Hector of the shining helmet. A fuller understanding of Hector would place him between Achilles and Odysseus. But since Odysseus moves from battle to home, and Hector moves from home to battle, for this discussion, I have ignored crucial differences between Hector and Achilles.

22. The emphasis on Odysseus' head and eyes may seem a modern misreading to those interested in Homer's location of various psychic faculties. Odysseus, like other warriors, has *thumos* and *noos* in his chest, but the emphasis on his head and eyes is his own and Homer's.

seus' case does Homer call attention to the difference between a man and his weapons: his armour lies upon the ground, while he "himself" ranges among the men (III.195). In Book Ten also, he is distinguished from the other Achaeans.²³ Diomedes, like Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Nestor, lies outside his hut with his arms around him. His weapons seem almost a part of him, ready to be used the moment he is awake and conscious. But Odysseus, after answering Nestor's summons, returns to his hut for his shield, part of his equipment, but by no means an essential part of himself. Not wholly defined by his activities as a warrior, Odysseus puts on armour when the task requires it, just as he had before (iv.244–50), and will again, put on beggar's clothes for other tasks. He does not hesitate to disguise or even maim his own body (iv.247) to accomplish his ends. The constant changes of clothing in the *Odyssey* suggest the difficulty of labeling him; the man in Autolycus' helmet is a man of many hats. Though he usually seeks to add to his possessions, Odysseus shows little interest in collecting trophy-armour from the men he defeats. Socus, the one Trojan over whom Odysseus exults, and whose body Odysseus threatens to feed to birds, fears that Odysseus will take his armour. But Odysseus never mentions it and neither does Homer.²⁴

Odysseus captures personal equipment only once—during the night ambush. Here he is distinguished from both base and noble warriors. Dolon thinks of prizes in the lowest terms: he is after Achilles' horses; though Hector offers glory as well as a great gift, the already-rich Dolon, also impressed with Rhesus' showy equipment, desires only the material reward; he never speaks of glory. Diomedes, like Dolon, wants the horses because he knows they are valuable. But, unlike Dolon, Diomedes is a horseman. Descended from the horsemen Oineus and Tydeus, more than any other Achaean except Nestor, his epithets refer to horses; he is known by his shield, his helmet, and his horses (v.180–83). In Book Five, Diomedes captures Aeneas' immortal horses, the "best horses that are beneath the dawn and the sun" (v.266–67). While he makes use of these trophies to rescue Nestor (VIII.109–11), and to win acclaim in the funeral games (XXIII.290–92), he is mainly interested in the renown they bring. Rhesus' steeds resemble immortal horses and are like the rays of the sun (x.547). But these Thracian horses, like the Thracian sword he wins in the games, are of value primarily for show. Unlike Dolon, Diomedes knows the higher meaning of a war-prize.

Odysseus' acquisitiveness, also, is carefully distinguished from that of baser men. His willingness to use most means to achieve victory does not preclude

23. For some similar observations about the sleeping warriors in Book Ten, see Benardete, pp. 64–66.

24. Legend tells that Odysseus won the arms of Achilles, but the latter was his ally, and he won them with words, not weapons. Homer does not mention the episode. The best depiction I know is in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book Thirteen, Fable I, which points to many themes in this essay. Odysseus tells Ajax, "You have manly strength without intelligence, I have care for the future." (xiii.i.363).

distinguishing between what is noble and what is base. He stops to pick up Dolon's bloody spoils, but his concern for them is at least partly connected with his intent to honor Athena (x.462–64, 529, 571). Unlike Thersites, he knows that a prize is not merely booty to be “digested” (ii.237). But Odysseus is distinguished from Diomedes as well as from Dolon, for Homer mutes the intrinsic worth of the reward for the usually acquisitive Odysseus. Though he is always eager to increase his possessions, he is not a connoisseur or collector of horses. As Telemachus reminds Menelaus, horses would not be appropriate souvenirs for an Ithacan (iv.607–608). Athena makes the same point to Odysseus on his arrival home (xiii.242), and Eumaus' inventory to the stranger noticeably lacks horses. Ambushers go on foot; Odysseus does not even enter battle from a chariot; in the *Odyssey*, the Cicones who routed his men, knew how to fight from chariots (ix.49–50). There is no indication that he has any horses. Hence, the Thracian steeds are stabled in the manger of Diomedes. It is all the more impressive that Odysseus, no “horsetamer,” is able to calm the Thracian horses and drive²⁵ them back to his own camp. In the next book he vanquishes two brothers who are the sons of a Trojan horsetamer (xi.426, 450). Achilles, Diomedes, Hector, and Aeneas, are noble heroes who combine their prowess with that of extraordinary steeds.²⁶ Odysseus, an unchivalric warrior who assumes ignoble postures when necessary, is not enthralled by the virtues of horses. Seeing that other men care passionately for the noble animals, he carries off the prized Thracian steeds. While he clearly enjoys the triumph, his attention, and ours, is absorbed by the act of acquisition and by its effect on his comrades. Here, as in the Thersites incident, he improved morale by allowing others to see and honor him. He finally triumphs at Troy because the “horsetaming” Trojans are unable to resist the temptation to take an enormous wooden horse within their walls. This is the only *ambush* in Homer which makes use of a horse.

Odysseus is further distinguished from his peers by not sharing their attitudes towards their forbears. Others envision themselves in the eyes of their glorious fathers, as well as their glorious contemporaries. Whether revering them or competing with them, they somehow define themselves by them. From the first lines of the *Iliad*, Achilles is *Pelean* Achilles; though greater than his father, his weapon is his father's spear. Similarly, Diomedes is “Tydeus' son.” He chides Glaucus for boasting that they might be better than their fathers (iv.410), and his prayers to Athena recall her former loyalty to Tydeus, his main claim to her help for himself (x.284–94). Emphasizing his youth (xiv.110–12), deferring to Agamemnon (iv.401–02), and to the elderly Nestor (viii.100), who could be his father (ix.58), he is preeminently a son. In Book Ten Agamemnon tells Diomedes to choose a partner for the scouting mission:

25. Though some commentators disagree, there does not seem to be any horseback riding in the *Iliad*. The *Odyssey* description of him riding the board in the sea as if it were a horse (v.31) is striking when one remembers he does not use horses.

26. The end of the *Iliad* signals the end of the heroic horseman.

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And do not thou out of reverent heart leave the better man behind, and take as thy comrade one that is worse, yielding to reverence, and looking to birth, nay, not though one be more kingly. (x.237–39)²⁷

Odysseus especially qualifies by virtue of his own abilities. In the *Iliad* he appears to be almost self-made; his military virtues do not seem to derive from his father who, though a grandson of Zeus, seems to have been a lesser warrior than the fathers of his comrades. In contrast to his semidivine peers, the divine lineage of Zeus-born Odysseus is not emphasized. Laertes once fought great battles, but unlike Tydeus and other warriors of the preceding generation, he lived to return home; perhaps this is the virtue Odysseus inherited from him. When Odysseus prays to Athena he reminds her that she has always been *his* friend (x.278–82). In the *Iliad* he does not boast of his ancestors, and on the voyage home he disguises himself under different family names. Other warriors address Odysseus as “son of Laertes,” but in the *Iliad*, neither he nor Homer uses the patronymic.

On his maternal side too, Odysseus’ ancestry is atypical. Autolycus, “who excelled all men in thievery and oaths” (xix.395–96), was a self-made man who apparently stole, rather than inherited, his possessions. He thrived in what seems to be almost a different world from that of the grandfathers mentioned in the daylight battles of the *Iliad*. His patron was Hermes,²⁸ Zeus’ swift-footed, “keen-sighted,” and eloquent messenger. Hermes serves as an efficient ambassador to Calypso and helps Odysseus protect himself from Circe. He is a traveller and a guide for much-travelled men, especially merchants. He is associated with lowly tasks, rather than grand gestures; the disguised Odysseus mentions him when he “boasts” of his ability as a servant (xv.319ff.). In the *Iliad* he quickly yields glory, declining to fight with the other gods (xv.211), and even says that boasts of his defeat would not disturb him (xxi.498–501). In the *Odyssey* song about Ares and Aphrodite, he says he gladly would risk the laughter of all the gods and goddesses—the latter are said to have stayed home for shame—if he could lie with the goddess (viii.339–42). The Homeric Hymn speaks of Hermes’ shifty craftiness; he too is *polumētis* and *polutropos* and is called “comrade of the night”; the Phaeacians pour the last libation of the day for him (vii.136–38). Hermes is equally comfortable in Hades, where Helios never shines, and on earth, guiding mortals to Hades and (sometimes) back again. Odysseus shows the influence of this old family friend.²⁹

But Odysseus is somehow better than Autolycus, less dependent on his grandpaternal protector. Hermes, “the giver of good things,” is associated with gain. Odysseus, like all merchants and thieves, takes advantage of the propi-

27. The general, as usual, is protecting his brother, and, thus, is forced to recognize the distinction between conventional and natural superiority which he rejects in Book One.

28. Homer makes Hermes the patron, not the father, of Autolycus, again emphasizing his human ancestry.

29. On Hermes, see Walter F. Otto, *The Homeric Gods; The Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion* (Boston, 1964), pp. 104–24.

tious moments provided by the god. But except in times of war, when all men appropriate, Odysseus' holdings do not increase by direct theft. He is stealthy, but, unprovoked, he does not simply steal. Furthermore, ambiguous as it is, his acquisition seems less like simple selfish appropriation than that of Autolycus. Despite Odysseus' autonomy he is, as we shall see, always the husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus, and the lord of Ithaca. Much more than the irreverent old thief who named him, he is a self responsible for others. His life differs greatly from that at his grandfather's mountain camp. Though Autolycus did give him gifts, he did not properly will his stolen possessions to his descendants; the helmet passes to his grandson from others. Like his grandfather, Odysseus is "skilled at the oath"; but, just as he acquires rather than steals, he more often equivocates than lies; repeatedly, he circumvents the limits of custom and oaths without openly violating them. Autolycus, like Hermes, was known as a thief and a liar, while Odysseus is reknowned as "many-wiled."³⁰ One does not boast of descent from Autolycus, and when Odysseus prays in the night ambush, he appeals to Athena, not to Hermes. Resembling the conventional Laertes and the unconventional Autolycus, he keeps his distance from both and remains the measure of himself as does no other hero at Troy.

Odysseus' differences from his comrades are reflected in his relations with them. Many readers are disturbed by the isolation of this only son of an only son, the grandson of the lone wolf (*Autolukas*). The other heroes are mainland men. Odysseus is like the island of his birth, separated off toward the dark, even from those in its vicinity (ix.25–27)³¹ In the Achaean camp, he sleeps alone, within his tent (x.140). Though we hear of several good friends,³² we never see him with a close companion or in a private conversation at Troy. Unequipped for chariot battle with a partner during the day, his night exploits are directed, if not initiated, by him. He devotes himself to the needs of his companions but always seems detached. This distance might raise the question whether such a man can be friends with another like himself, as well as with son, servants, and especially with a woman whose qualities correspond to or complement his own, but who is, by definition, other.

B. The Human Being: Keeping in Touch

Heroic warriors die far from home. Striving for godlike glory, they separate themselves from the world of men. Odysseus' ships at Troy are located near the

30. In the Homeric Hymn the infant Hermes steals Apollo's cattle. The grandson of Hermes' favorite is descended from cattle rustlers, but he is distinguished by his refusal to violate the oxen of the sun.

31. Austin, p. 97.

32. One can only speculate about the importance of four lost comrades: Leucas, after whose death Odysseus kills several Trojans (iv.491); Polites (the name is of interest perhaps), whom he says was the dearest and trustiest of his comrades (x.224); Eurybates, honored because he was likeminded with himself (xix.247); Iphitus, who gave him the great bow, but was slain by Herakles before the friendship could develop (xxi.14ff.).

altars of the gods (x1.808). Repeatedly noted for his piety,³³ he does not attempt to strive with gods in battle. It is not necessary for Athena or Apollo, whose oracle will later exhort men to know themselves, to check Odysseus as they do others. Despite his heroic stature as a man (*anēr*), he is distinguished from his comrades by steadfastly and insistently remembering that he is a human being (*anthrōpos*).³⁴

We have observed Odysseus' somehow distant relations with his comrades; but we must also notice that there is a peculiar tension between their desire for transcendent glory and their relations with others. Though we are moved by the attachments of Glaucus and Sarpedon, and the two Ajaxes, the speeches with which Achilles sends Patroclus to battle show that he who would be the best of the Achaeans can share with his friend only in a very ambiguous way. The desire for battle-glory requires that one outshine one's friends as well as one's enemies. Achilles is never so much Patroclus' friend as when the latter is dead; Achilles knows that he has "destroyed" (*ton apōlesa*), as well as "lost" him (xviii.82) and that he has failed as a "light" to his other comrades as well (xviii.101–03).

While the desire to outshine others by intelligence may also be competitive, there is a greater likelihood of common victory. Achilles is alone in the opening lines of the *Iliad*, and we soon see the difficulty he has participating in an assembly of peers. But the *Odyssey* begins by speaking of Odysseus and his comrades. Shared success is more likely to be found in ambush and council than in battle; men confer together in the assembly place, and, even when the conception and planning of clever deeds are attributable to one superior intelligence, the execution of strategies often requires others as well. Achilles' ships are at the end of the line, but Odysseus' are in the central place of assembly (x1.6, 806–7). His long voyage home from the councils at Troy to the meeting places of the Phaeacians takes him through cities and noncities. In his twenty-year absence from Ithaca there have been no proper assemblies on the island (ii.26–27). Heroic striving lifts one out of the councils of men; but Odysseus' desire to return home restores him and Ithaca to proper—human—political life.

33. Attentive to signs and omens, his piety is never simple dependence on the gods. Nor does he expose himself in doubtful cases. After the sack of Troy, Atreus' sons dispute about whether to remain to appease Athena. In this evening council which is ill-timed, disorderly, and besotted, Odysseus does not participate. He leaves with Menelaus and others, but when they run into Zeus storm, *polutropos* Odysseus turns back to Agamemnon. Apparently he does not offend Athena, and even Zeus remarks on his sacrifices.

34. A full account of the way he "remembers" his humanity would consider cannibalism, incestuous marriages, and a variety of arrangements for living together in families and in cities. The present discussion concentrates on Odysseus in the light of great men. In exploring the ways in which a superior man remains true to his nature, it cannot consider in depth the subhuman alternatives he meets.

Some of the images considered below are also discussed in a book published after this essay was written. See Chapter 9 "Poetic Visions of Immortality for the Hero" of Gregory Nagy's *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, 1979), pp. 174–210.

Even the emphasis by Diomedes and others on their patronymics and lineages is curiously abstract. These men give up present relations with those whose names they strive to live up to, as well as those to whom they transmit them. Tydeus left for Thebes when Diomedes was a child (vi.222–23). Though the son finally completed the sack of the city besieged by the father, they never fought together. Exertion carried to an extreme prevents the hero's return to see his own children (v.408–9). Sarpedon, whose father's plan requires his death, will not return to his wife and child (v.685–88). Before his greatest battle Achilles is embraced by his immortal mother, but heroic death separates him forever from his mortal father who, nevertheless, outlives his son: "For I am not there to bear him aid beneath the rays of the sun . . ." (xi.498). Achilles had hoped that Patroclus would acquaint his son with his holdings at home (xix.328–33). In Hades he knows of Neoptolemus only by his reputation (xi.504–40). There is great pathos in his dependence on the report of Odysseus, the ambassador from life, whose wily words Achilles had once called "hateful . . . as the gates of Hades."³⁵ The terrible price the heroes pay for their glory is felt most keenly when Hector parts from his wife and infant son. Like Achilles he hopes that his boy will someday be considered a greater fighter than his father (vi.497). But the price of future glory is the loss of present contact; the child for whom he dies is separated from him by the helmet he uses to win that glory. Like Achilles with the shade of Patroclus (xviii.99–101), Hector with his helmet on, determined to die, is deprived of embrace. He is already out of touch with the living. Andromache weeps with her handmaidens "while he yet lived; for they deemed that he should never more come back from battle . . ." (vi.501–2). His parents, like those of Achilles, outlive him.

The depictions of human mothers in the *Iliad* convey powerfully the way in which the heroic life is opposed to the life of birth, nurture, the family, home. Hecuba mourning for Hector. Andromache foreseeing slavery for her son, and the mythical Niobe weeping for her children, make vivid the difference between the warriors who exhort each other to "be men" and the women for whom they originally went to war. In extreme moments these men strain their bodies to overcome the natural temporality of these bodies. Their women live always in time. Their rhythms are natural and they devote themselves to feeding, bathing, clothing, shrouding, and burying mortal bodies.³⁶ In a particularly harsh exhortation, Agamemnon warns his softer brother to let no Trojan go, "not the man-child whom his mother bears in her womb; let not even him escape, but let all perish together . . ." (vi.57–59).

Odysseus, though absent in war and lost at sea, keeps in touch. Escaping

35. There is no reason to think Odysseus lies. Achilles never appreciated that tact and delicacy may be between mere lies and full openness. Odysseus' remarks about Achilles and his first address to Nausicaa provide further examples.

36. Helen, the "cause" of the war, differs; she weaves their stories to insure their immortal reputations.

from the sea, he kisses the earth. Though he can no longer hold his mother in Hades, he lives to embrace his son. His references to himself as “father of Telemachus” in the *Iliad* (II.260, IV.354) suggest the return which is the subject of the *Odyssey*. Cut off from home and dependent on himself, he views himself as a founder.³⁷ On the way home he is, once again, a middleman, a restorer, a link between past and future: *polutropos*. Now he too refers to himself as “Laertides.” His most important battle is the one he fights side by side with his father and his son. The reports he fabricates contain at least one truth about himself. He tells of the treasure Odysseus had accumulated: “verily unto the tenth generation would it feed his children after him . . .” (xiv.325–26, xix.294–95). He leaves for his descendants not only a respectable name, but tangible, material security. Once more he is distinguished both from those who collect booty from greed, and from those who want trophies to be used by sons who will themselves die for glory. Odysseus’ goods are the means by which one maintains a family through time.

This diverse *anthrōpos* is not so implacably alienated from the world of the women; in him can be seen feminine as well as masculine aspects of human nature. Though he condemns those who would flee, he speaks with sympathy of their longing for home (II.291–97). Even in war, his function as peacekeeper and provider in the night suggests the less exposed, darker concerns of home economics, the rhythms of a household in time. His rational planning is supplemented by an intuitive sense of what is appropriate. Protected by a divinity who combines masculine daring with feminine concern for life, he is attached especially to his maternal line.

I have suggested in the foregoing that the complex intelligence of Odysseus sees deeply and is able to articulate what he sees. But the protégé of far-seeing but essentially practical Athena differs from philosophers as well as from warriors. In pursuing understanding and glory, the contemplative man and the heroic warrior have in common their ultimate disregard for man’s perishable body. Socrates, as well as Achilles, turns away from the feasts of his fellow mortals; he too is remarkable for his ability to do without sleep. The wish to see the things that are forever and the wish to be seen forever are accompanied by a yearning for uninterrupted light, and imply a wish to remove oneself from human flesh and human time. The shadowy Odysseus, on the other hand, is an articulate advocate for man’s mortal flesh, his need for sustenance and sleep. Sarpedon and Glaucus (XII.320) and Hector³⁸ (VI.258) forgo “honey-sweet wine” as they enter battle. Achilles claims that his anger is sweeter than honey to him (XVIII.108–10). But Odysseus, as Agamemnon and countless critics since have noticed, is repeatedly identified with food.³⁹ He is the only great warrior in

37. See Benardete, p. 57.

38. Hector’s son will be excluded from the common meals as a result of his father’s defeat (XXII.496–98).

39. An amusing objection to the authenticity of Book Ten is that Odysseus appears to eat three meals between sunset and dawn!

Homer to use the word “belly” (*gastēr*),⁴⁰ and, as we have seen, to use his weapons to hunt. The semidivine Achilles is sustained by the gods with a transfusion of ambrosia, used elsewhere to maintain the dead bodies of Sarpedon (xvi.670), Patroclus (xix.37–39), and Hector (xxiii.184–87). “A man that is mortal . . . eateth the grain of Demeter” (xiii.322); a monster, the Cyclops, is not like a bread-eating man” (ix.190–91). Homer emphasizes that Odysseus requires this food of mortals, grown on the earth, in the seasons warmed by the life-giving sun. Calypso dines on ambrosia and nectar, as did Hermes, but she gives Odysseus, now sitting in Hermes’ chair, the food that “mortal men eat” (v.194–99), and remembers to give him bread, water, and wine for his journey. He kisses the earth, “giver of grain” (v.462–63, xiii.354). Gods enjoy a feast as much as men, but they do not *need* to eat. The odor and sweet taste of nectar and ambrosia give pure pleasure to the senses of autonomous, complete beings; bread is necessary to fill the emptiness of perishable beings who are not self-sustaining. Human eating, like human marriage, friendship, and cities, shows that a thriving mortal must maintain contact with something outside himself in order to complete himself.

Odysseus’ eating, like his marriage and his city, is not merely for life, but for *good* life. Thus, he urges that the “plentiful feast” before the battle be a formal reconciliation with Agamemnon (xix.178); the chief ambassador is ever a master of ceremony. He knows that feasting sustains men, not only because bodies need food, but because breaking bread with other men is a social event, a communion. It is a time for speech, ceremony, and sacrifice to the gods among men whose time is marked, not only by days and nights, but by the taking of meals. The human taking of meals takes time.⁴¹ In the *Iliad* those who do not eat like other men are those who seek to be superior to other men. In the *Odyssey*, too, we hear of those who have neither the time nor the habits to eat like men: the suitors, Aegisthus’ banqueters, the Cyclopes, Laestrygonians, Lotus-eaters, and the sailors who cannot abstain from Helios’ cattle. The motives and behavior of these two groups differ greatly. But once one abandons the manner and manners of men, it may be difficult to distinguish between gods and beasts. After the embassy where he meticulously shares his food with the ambassadors, Achilles moves steadily out of the community of human eaters. In Book Twenty-One he refuses Lycaon’s plea for mercy on the ground that they’d eaten together, and feeds him to the fish (xxi.122–27). Later he threatens to eat the corpse of Hector (xxii.346–48). Only at the very end does he accept his mortality; then he eats with the aged Priam. There is something inhuman about the wrath of Achilles.⁴² In refusing food, he refuses much more than bread and wine.

40. Stanford, p. 69.

41. See the description of his return of Chryseis (1.339ff.), a feasting ceremony that lasts all day. Norman Austin, “The Function of Digressions in the *Iliad*”: *Essays on the Iliad: Selected Modern Criticism*, ed. John Wright (Bloomington, Indiana, 1978), p. 80.

42. Wrath (*mēnis*) is used only for Achilles and the gods. Other warriors feel anger (*kholos*). Odysseus’ anger, though fully justified, never becomes *mēnis*.

Sleep too is a sign that one belongs to the human community. Odysseus' night ambush, his vigilance in the Cyclops' cave, and his wakefulness in guarding Aeolus' bags and Helios' cattle, are evidence of extraordinary alertness.⁴³ His ability to keep his eyes open distinguishes him from Polyphemus, Elpenor, and the drunken suitors. But Odysseus, the associate of Hermes, recognizes the need for "honey-hearted sleep," the prerequisite for the next day's activities. Before the night raid, he sleeps soundly within his tent; skilled at lying in ambush, he knows when to lie in bed. Achilles refuses to relieve the pain of Patroclus' death with sleep as well as food. Fated never to return home, he only rests finally, as warriors do, in death, the "sleep of bronze."

Odysseus' homecoming is a delicately alternating pattern of sleeps and awakenings.⁴⁴ Arriving exhausted in Scheria, he prudently decides to sleep, rather than watch all night. When he finally approaches Ithaca he is fast asleep. He wakes, refreshed and wary, for the tense days ahead. Penelope's restoring sleeps are encouraged by her husband who appreciates that sleep may provide guidance in the form of dreams and intuitions. Odysseus' rationality, unlike some of its modern descendants, does not demand total enlightenment; knowing how to work at night does not mean lighting the dark. On the night before the slaughter of the suitors, both Penelope and Odysseus are sleepless. We are briefly reminded of Achilles, restless for revenge, but the difference is more striking. Odysseus yields to Athena, who urges sleep: "There is weariness also in keeping wakeful watch the whole night through" (xx.52-53). When the suitors are dead, Odysseus and Penelope put off sleep until they have told their tales. Only then do they close their eyes in the great bed whose identification has proved that wide-eyed Odysseus has come home; at last the human man sleeps with his human wife.

The godlike heroes pursue, and, in a way, achieve, immortal glory by dying: "Would that I might be in this way immortal and ageless all my days" (viii. 538). They end as shades fixed forever in Hades. There are intriguing references in Homer to an alternative end for some great warriors. Menelaus, a lesser man, but a son-in-law of Zeus, will be transported "to the Elysian plain and the bounds of the earth," to abide in a realm that resembles Olympus, free of the seasonal variations which make life difficult for mortals on earth (iv.561-69). It reminds us of the island of ease where, we have just heard, the goddess Calypso holds Odysseus by force (iv.556-58). For seven years she tried to persuade him to become "immortal and ageless all my days" (vii.257), but he

43. It is impossible to discuss these incidents at length here. Some say that Odysseus' alertness and suspicion of his men is responsible for his fatal sleeping in the Aeolus episode, and that his talk of suicide and "our" folly are signs that he recognizes his own responsibility for the disaster. But Homer's descriptions of the men throughout the poem (Cicones, Circe, Lotus-eaters, Helios' cattle) suggest that Odysseus was not simply wrong not to trust them. He errs not in staying awake, nor in falling asleep, but in failing to realize that *they* would not trust *him*.

44. See Charles Segal, "Transition in Odysseus' Return" in *The Odyssey*, ed. Albert Cook (New York, 1974), pp. 470ff., for a discussion of sleep after the arrival at Scheria.

continued to weep his mortal tears on her “immortal raiment” (vii.259–60). As he emphatically tells Alcinoo, “I am not like the immortals, who hold broad heaven, either in stature or in form, but like mortal men” (vii.208–10). Offered something like an apotheosis, he chooses to remain a human being.

Another warrior, far greater than Menelaus, is actually transformed from a man to a hero to a god. Homer refers from time to time to Herakles, whom Odysseus encounters at several important moments in his life. A comparison of these two great labouring heroes is instructive. Both are bowmen, but the son of Zeus strove with immortals, something the son of Laertes says he would never do (viii.225). Both sack Troy, but in contrast to wily Odysseus, Herakles is merely a he-man, who returns to avenge himself upon the Trojan king who hired him for his brawn, and failed to deliver the horses he had promised as reward (v.638, xx.145). Homer suggests grounds for Odysseus to hate Herakles. The son of Zeus had slain Iphitus, with whom Odysseus had begun a “loving friendship.” With “regard neither for the wrath of the gods nor for the table which he had set before him” (xxi.27–30), Herakles slew his guest and kept the horses the young man had come to claim. The bow with which Odysseus slays the suitors was given to him by Iphitus and kept in loving memory of him. In his birth and death too, Herakles departs from the ways and times of human beings. Homer tells of his delayed birth, the cause of his later servitude (xix.95–124), and of his death which, though fated like those of other men (xviii.117), is nevertheless not the same as theirs. Odysseus meets him in Hades, not among the great warriors, but with mythical figures who are remembered more as symbols than as particular human beings. Herakles is between these two groups, a semidivine warrior with a human name, who, like Achilles, mingled with gods and centaurs, as well as with men. But Herakles dies differently from Achilles. Odysseus meets only his phantom in Hades, for “he himself among the immortal gods takes his joy in the feast” and is married to the goddess Hebe (xi.601–04). Homer mentions only the last labour of Herakles, in which he carried off the hound of Hades, apparently overpowering death itself. Living, he went to the realm of the dead; “dying,” he does not truly return there.

His phantom inspires terror around him; he is not part of the chatty world of the dead heroes. When he meets Odysseus, he recognizes him immediately and seems to suggest that, in his suffering, Odysseus is akin to him. But he is so absorbed in himself that he does not even wait for an answer. Odysseus also goes to Hades, but he goes there to be told of his own death: it will differ from those of the fighting men he knew at Troy; he will not embrace death prematurely. But there is no doubt that he “himself” will come again to the dark realm. In choosing to leave Calypso and to return home, he unequivocally chooses to return to Hades.

C. A God: Hephaestus

As Odysseus is the most down-to-earth hero in Homer, crafty (*polumētiōs*: XXI.355) Hephaestus is the most down-to-earth god.⁴⁵ His life and character are frequently reminiscent of Odysseus. After Zeus threw him from the threshold of Olympus, he dwelled in Lemnos among the Sintians, an unheroic band of brigands whose name (from *sinomai*, to plunder?) may suggest their early piracy. Later, when his single parent, his mother, again hurled him down, two female divinities rescued him from the Odyssean fate of suffering “many woes in his heart” (XVIII.397, i.1–4, XIII.90). For nine years he was protected in a cave surrounded by Oceanus, and neither gods nor mortals knew where he was. Now subservient to Zeus’ order, he nevertheless retains his matriarchal connections.

In the *Iliad* Hephaestus is a mediator, speaker, master of ceremonies. Like Odysseus, we see him often at a threshold or standing at a gateway. He first appears in the twilight of Book One, arguing that if Zeus and Hera wrangle over honor and the affairs of men, there will be no “joy in the goodly feast” (I.575–76). While insisting on the need to submit to the order established by Zeus, he also appeases Hera. He is the first in Homer to urge someone to “endure” (*tetlathi*) (i.586). As the sun goes down, he pours wine and serves sweet nectar. Like Odysseus who provokes the Achaeans to rare laughter (at Thersites and Oilean Ajax), Hephaestus evokes “unquenchable laughter” among the gods. His presence in the *Iliad* points to a world beyond the tragic glory of honorable battle.

In the *Odyssey* also, Hephaestus makes the gods laugh. In the ballad of Ares and Aphrodite the craftiness of the divine craftsman proves that “slow catches swift” (viii.329), Odysseus’ lesson to the Phaeacian youths. Hephaestus is the only married god, besides Zeus, in Homer.⁴⁶ Ares is like the suitors, who aim to “share the bed” of a husband.⁴⁷ Hephaestus never challenges him to open combat. Rather, the smith successfully ambushes his enemy, whose physical strength and destructiveness vie with his own intelligence and creativity for the beautiful but weak Aphrodite. Here too Hephaestus recognizes the need to forgo personal honor. He rightly exposes the intruder but, like Hermes, he doesn’t seem to mind exposing his own shame as well. Nor does he demand the justice of punishment beyond exposure. He yields to Poseidon’s pleas for Ares’ release because it would not be “seemly” to deny him (viii.358). The two versions of Hephaestus’ marriage in Homer’s poems resemble other marriages. When courted by the powerful forces of might and desire, unstable Beauty, like

45. Unlike Hermes, whom he sometimes resembles, he spends time among the mortals on earth. Hermes is more a messenger, a go-between.

46. Kenneth John Atchity, *Homer's Iliad: The Shield of Memory* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1978), p. 137.

47. The story points also to the adultery of Agamemnon’s wife, Clytemnestra, referred to repeatedly in the *Odyssey*, and to the Paris-Helen story in the background of both poems.

Helen, compliantly follows. After the incident, she returns to Cyprus, as shallow and as lovely as ever. When legitimately united with crafty intelligence, as in Book Eighteen of the *Iliad*, this same Beauty appears as Charis, a model of hospitable, prosperous domesticity. Here, like Penelope, she seems to be a fitting partner to her husband. But we must explore the likeness further.

Excellence on the battlefield repeatedly is identified with the unquenchable fire of Hephaestus.⁴⁸ But though *men* may fight like blazing fire, Hephaestus himself is not usually a shining battle god. He interferes only once in battle, to hide the son of his Trojan priest in night (v.9–24). Homer describes the fighting Hephaestus only once, after Hera reminds him that others expect him to halt the river Scamander. He neither boasts nor glories in this task, but does the job and departs when told to. Here we see not fiery display, but an effective instrument of destruction. More directly than hand-to-hand combat, the flames signal the *end* of conflict: burned ships, an immolated city. Heroic combats cease when the embers of burning buildings die out, and bodies have been consumed on pyres.

The fire that has the power to destroy has also the capacity to create, to forge. Detached from deeds of glory on the daylight field, Hephaestus works at night at a remote forge. His most wondrous invention is the shield for Achilles, who will not see it as he holds it before him in battle. We do not know what Achilles thinks as he “gazes” upon it, but we hear much about its size, weight, and especially its shining fiery resplendence. The *maker* of the armour has a different “view” of it, one which at first seems to resemble that of Odysseus, who also maintains some distance from weapons. The pictures on the shield comment on the main action of the *Iliad*. Heroic combat occupies only a small place in the lives of mortals. Human reputations are not everlasting; only the gods shine out among the rest, and only the gods are named. There is no heroic singer to immortalize the deeds of the anonymous fighters on the shield; all music is wordless except the pleasant lino song mourning the end of summer, the passing of time. The elaborate dances fade at their last steps. On the round shield the cyclical life of all nature in time is emphasized.⁴⁹ Young men and women in circle garlands dance in circles, marry, have children, plant and harvest, feast, and grow old. The men also settle disputes and fight battles. All is surrounded by the river Ocean and the regular circles of the heavenly bodies. Hephaestus’ view undercuts the view of the heroic warrior even as he dresses him for glory. Little is permanent in the world he depicts.⁵⁰

48. Cedric H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (New York, 1958), 128–53, and Benardete, 12ff.: Agamemnon (XI.155–61), Hector (xvii 87–89), Achilles (xviii 205–10)

49. For discussions of circle motifs and conflation of time on the shield, see Atchity, 177ff., and Whitman, 97ff.

50. The productive art or culture on the shield is as rudimentary as the music. All men’s skill goes into harnessing and using nature—into agriculture rather than high culture. The lovely city and its walls, house doors, and gold swords are mentioned in passing, but there is little sense of them as lasting artifacts. This city is almost swallowed by the widening circles of part-cultured fields and

But in his description of the smith himself, Homer suggests that making, as well as doing, aims at permanence. Hephaestus' works have a shining excellence of their own; he is famed for his art, and he knows that his work is as much a wonder as the glorious hero who will wear it—and that it will last even longer than that hero (xviii.466–67). He has also made Agamemnon's "imperishable" sceptre and Menelaus' golden bowl, jewelry for Thetis and Harmonia, and the palaces of the gods, Zeus' collonades, and Hera's chamber doors. Hephaestus is an improviser who experiments with movable tripods and mechanical serving girls who aid a limping god. He repeatedly refers to his misshapen body. Not swift-footed by nature, he compensates by invention. Interestingly, he is always described as bustling, in haste, nimble, signs of his successful compensation, as well as his lesser dignity. We see in him intelligence attempting to overcome the limitations of bodily nature. In the *Odyssey* Hephaestus appears in radiant Phaeacia, the land of arts, culture, noncontact sports, domestic accord, and soft prosperity, the place whose inhabitants delight in stories of the humiliation of Ares. There, like the tripods, maidens, and bellows, ships move by themselves in response to mere wishes. Golden lamp-youths light the darkness for banqueters; and gold and silver dogs are silent, "immortal . . . and ageless all their days" (vii.92). The gold and silver palace—which, it seems, would never need repair—stands in the midst of gardens which yield fruits regardless of seasonal change. Life here demands neither risk nor patience. We are reminded of the timeless realms of Calypso, the Elysian plain, and Olympus itself.

Although Homer suggests a similarity between Odysseus and Hephaestus when he differentiates them from the heroic warriors and fighting gods, he clearly distinguishes the down-to-earth god from the down-to-earth man. Though, from the god's point of view, the glory of mortal warriors is an illusion, the inventive artist shares with these glory-seekers a desire to counter the effects of time, to transform radically, and even to conquer, nature. But Odysseus turns away from artistic, as well as heroic, immortality. His life takes into account the succession of generations, seasons, and change depicted on the shield. Hephaestus' orderly home in the *Iliad* might suggest Penelope, but it lacks her child; there is something sterile about his artifice. While the smith's ornamental golden dogs live forever, Odysseus' hunting dog grows old and dies of grief. That is somehow right.

The difference between Odysseus and Hephaestus is seen also in the materials associated with them. Odysseus' "shadowy" palace, unlike the metallic abodes of the gods, Menelaus, and Alcinoos, seems to be made of wood. He makes rafts, bows, and beds from lumber, a living, changing, perishing material. In contrast to the man-made bronze and other metals of Hephaestus, wood

vineyards, and the greater untouched world of nature. There are sickles, buildings, baskets, and linen, but no forgers, carpenters, and weavers. Though productive art is suggested, it is not depicted. Hephaestus seems to have omitted himself as well as Homer from his picture.

shines less brightly, and is more subject to the ravages of time. On the other hand, working with wood is less violent, less disfiguring, than the toils of the forge. Precious metals must be ripped from the earth and transformed not only in shape but in kind, while a most skilled carpenter might fashion a bed even from a living olive tree. While Odysseus lifts himself above the flux and change of the natural world, he does not utterly uproot himself or its gifts. He would develop the offshore island that the Cyclops seems not to have noticed so that, like his father's farm, it would bear fruits *in season* (xxiv.343, ix.131). He shares Hephaestus' head-and-shoulders physique. But his leg is only *marked*. Not yet so narrow a specialist as the maimed smith, he can still fight, race, wrestle, and swim. Homer knows that Odysseus is a man in transit. Once one leaves the world of heroic battle, one begins an irreversible and difficult-to-regulate journey towards Hephaestus. Gazing leads to forging, to controlling, to instantly gratifying, and to all the improvements and disfigurements which accompany such activities. But Odysseus is only on the threshold. *Polutropos*, he exhibits the defects—and the virtues—of both ways.

III. RETURN TO THE LIGHT

The story of Odysseus is the story of a “return to the light of the sun.”⁵¹ The movement of the *Odyssey* reverses the dominant direction of the *Iliad*. On the night of the Dolon raid shining (*phaidimos*)⁵² Hector wants to light the night with fires. He looks forward to a dawn victory (vii.529–38), but by the end of the *Iliad*, dawn is the time of his fiery funeral. While other men face the rising sun, he will enter the dark world. The funeral of Patroclus also begins in the morning when his comrades prepare him to go “beneath the murky darkness” (xxiii.51). The pyre burns all night:

But at the hour when the star of morning goeth forth to herald light over the face of the earth—the star after which followeth saffron-robed Dawn and spreadeth over the sea—even then grew the burning faint, and the flame thereof died down. (xxiii.226–8)

Achilles appears like the beacon fires that light the night when the sun has set (xviii.210–14), and gleams in his armour like the moon (xix.375), and stars (v.5, xix.381, xxiii.315–17), and like “bright Hyperion” (xix.398). When he faces Hector he resembles the rising sun (xxii.135) But the sun returns repeat-

51. See Austin, pp. 91–105, on the sun as a measure of time and space, and on Odysseus' experience as a progress toward the sun (239–53). This and other discussions have been helpful in considering the nighttime events in both books. See also 87–89 on time as an “abstract concept” in the *Iliad*.

52. The word is used mostly for Achilles, Ajax, and Hector, not in the *Iliad* for Odysseus, although, when he fights he, too, is in flaming bronze and hurls a bright spear. In the *Odyssey*, he and Telemachus are often *phaidimos*.

edly while Achilles is “short-lived” (*mununthadios*): he has no future. Achilles reminds one of the constellation on his shield; he would remain in view forever, like the Bear that watches Orion and is never bathed in Ocean. The particular star he resembles is Sirius, the Dog of Orion (xxii.29). This harvest star, which Diomedes’ helmet also resembles (v.4–6), shines out among all others in the dark of night; it is “brightest of all” . . . “yet withal is he a sign of evil, and bringeth much fever upon wretched mortals” (xxii.30–31). On the night of the embassy, Achilles says he must choose between enduring life and imperishable reknown (ix.412–16). Unable to bring himself to return home in the morning, he commits a form of suicide. When Thetis requests a new shield for him, she knows he will never return home (xviii.440–41). The last book of the *Iliad*, as many have seen, is a preview of Achilles in the land of the Dead. The last book of the *Odyssey* tells how Hephaestus, who makes his shield, also made his urn, and burned his bones; he too was laid to rest in the morning (xxiv.70–73). To Odysseus he laments his condition in the everlasting darkness. Hades now seems too great a price for the song and barrow which remind men for all time of the glory that was Achilles for so short a time.

In the *Odyssey* Odysseus comes to be *phaidimos* without dying in battle, without becoming fixed. His departure from Hades is precipitated, he says, by his fear that he might meet the head of the gorgon, who, we may remember, turns living, speaking men to mute stone.⁵³ Tempted on several occasions to give up, even to kill himself, he nevertheless regains his desire to return to the land of living and changing flesh. The return begins at the moment which the gods have set for his homecoming (i.16–18), the right time, the “*day* of his return.” He guides himself by the fixed Bear, but, unlike Achilles, he never attempts to imitate it. Though mortal, he is something like the sun in whose direction he sails, a shining source of life which regularly is obscured but repeatedly returns. Having left Calypso and having avoided being covered (*kalupsen*) by the sea’s dark waves (v.435), Odysseus arrives at Phaeacia and covers (*kalupsato*) himself with leaves, “as a man hides a brand beneath the dark embers in an outlying farm . . . and so saves a seed of fire” (v.488–89). Repeatedly he covers himself to recover himself. He enters the city in a “thick mist” (vii.15). During the farewell feast, he impatiently awaits his departure:

But Odysseus would ever turn his head toward the blazing sun, eager to see it set, for verily he was eager to return home. And as a man longs for supper, for whom all day long a yoke of wine-dark oxen has drawn the jointed plough through fallow land, and gladly for him does the light of the sun sink, that he may busy him with his supper, and his knees grow weary as he goes, even so gladly for Odysseus did the light of the sun sink. (xiii.28–36)

Achilles’ prayers for a quick dawn (ix.240) point to eternal night, but Odysseus’ yearning for night looks to a momentous next day. The arrival at Ithaca

53. But some editors think that Homer is not referring to any specific gorgon.

occurs “when the brightest of stars rose which ever comes to herald the light of early Dawn” (xiii.93–94).⁵⁴ In contrast to the year-end harvest towards which all of Achilles’ actions seem directed, Odysseus’ dawn awakening takes place in early spring; the *polutropos anēr* is a man for all seasons.

In Ithaca, fire, which burned the bones of Achilles and Hector, warms the bones of the man who calls himself “Blazes” (*Aithōn*), and who longed to see the smoke of this hearthfire (i.57–59). Though he turns to the dark to avoid being recognized (“the facts becoming open [*amphada*]” (xix.390), glints of light are beginning to show: we hear of the shirt he once wore, which shone like the sun (xix.234); his bald head, mocked by suitors and servants (xviii.354–55). (shining, we might say, like the helmets of Achilles and Diomedes), will be restored to honor the next day; all night he serves as a living lampbearer in his own halls. When day comes at last—a feast day for Apollo—the coming of light is delayed; an eclipse precedes the slaughter of the suitors. The battle is as dark and unheroic as the attack on Rhesus: the smoky, tarnished weapons, unused for years, send forth no gleams; there is no boasting or exulting. This is a clean-up job. Odysseus expresses no regret—though some readers have—that Antinoos doesn’t know who kills him. In a grim inversion, Odysseus is now compared to the sun, not sustaining life, but as the final killer (xxii.388). The fires that light the halls after the battle are not funereal but purgative. Odysseus’ extended night with Penelope⁵⁵ is followed by a dawn in which only he and his allies remain hidden in night. In the final daylight battle he fights openly, in family armour, to insure his continued life in Ithaca. One need not prove he is a “year daimon”⁵⁶ to see that the nighttime hero of the *Iliad* is at last shining forth.⁵⁷

The world of the living is a world of rhythms measured off by Helios. The sun god comes and goes, in a predictable pattern, providing light times and night times, each of which acquires value in contrast to the other. The same is true of the seasons of the sun. Respect for Helios is more reverence for the times the god makes, than absolute openness and clarity. Mere lying and violating wives and property in peacetime are punished by the god who over-sees all; Helios imposes limits, social as well as temporal, on the lives of men.

54. Other events in his return also occur at dawn: Telemachus’ first council and return to Eumaeus’ hut, Hermes’ visit to Calypso, the escape from the Cyclops.

55. In Homer, respectable men are with women only at night. Even the gods, Zeus and Calypso, take note of this propriety. In the daytime Hector must leave Andromache, and Achilles and Patroclus lie with women at night. Only Paris consorts with a woman in broad daylight. While Odysseus is no Paris, neither is he a Hector, willing to sacrifice life and wife for glory. It is a typical equivocation for the night to be lengthened so that he may respectably consummate his reunion.

56. See, for examples, J. A. K. Thomson, *Studies in the Odyssey* (New York, 1966), which summarizes J. Menrad, *Der Urmythus der Odyssee und seine dichterische Erneuerung* (Lindau, 1910), and J. A. Scott’s attack on Menrad in *Classical Philology*, xii (1917), 244–52. A simile is a simile, not an identity.

57. See Austin on Odysseus’ self-revelation as an “epiphany,” a “coming into phase” (pp. 164, 213, 224–25), and his discussion of the dawn formula (67–68).

But Odysseus is hailed for his ability to equivocate, and even Hector is not condemned for publicly swearing a false oath. A viable life in the sun is *polutropos*: it requires patient waiting, willing obscurity, and even undercover work. The hero's aim to live unremittingly in the sun is almost as inhuman as the ways of the giants in the land where the sunshine is almost continuous (x.80–86).⁵⁸ Ancient commentators thought the three hundred and fifty sacred cattle of Helios represented the days and nights of the year.⁵⁹ The men who slaughter them, like Achilles, are immediately relegated to the world of total darkness; like the suitors (ii.284), they “perish in a day.”

By providing for variety and change within a formal pattern, Helios contrasts with the dark unformed flux which is the chief threat to Odysseus. Achilles' failure to defeat Scamandrus shows that mere human strength is powerless when the elements are hostile. But careful attention to the way they function in time may enable men to survive and even turn them to their advantage. Thus, men steer by the sun and stars, and sail at night and dawn when the winds are favorable. After Thrinacia, Odysseus is left to face the watery cauldron which threatens to swallow him. From dawn till “the hour when a man rises from the assembly for his supper” (xii.439), he clings to the fig tree above him, patiently waiting for the keel to reappear. Having noted the regular daily pattern of the whirlpool⁶⁰ (xii.105–6), the man who respected the sun, escapes from the sea.

Poseidon menaces human life not only with violence but with drift. An interesting sight or encounter, a beautiful woman, the demands and fatigue of tasks at hand, make it all too easy to forget those who are close but distant. The attractions along the shore may not even be so powerful; they may merely distract. One need not *choose* to lose touch: one may just drift away. In the ten years after Odysseus helps to sack Troy, Helios punctuates his time and indicates his direction; Odysseus may wander Ocean's waves and dally on his shores, but he does not merely drift. Repeatedly, the sun god reminds him of home and this memory keeps him human.

But Homer also suggests that those who would maintain form and civilization by resisting the violence and drift of Poseidon must have genuine respect for him. When Telemachus arrives at Nestor's shores, he finds the people sacrificing to Poseidon. It is not mere politic prudence which makes Athena-Mentor lead the procession (iii.51ff.). The tides of Ocean and the sights along his shores test our abilities and expand our vision; if we never ventured forth

58. The beings and places Odysseus sees present a variety of departures from human life in time.

59. Austin, 134–35, 137–38. Austin says that in the opening lines “we discover that time plays a prominent part in this poem [*Odyssey*] as it does not in the *Iliad*.” But how can one not think of the *Iliad* as a book about time and memory? Odysseus at Troy is essential to provide an alternative to the time-sense of the shining heroes.

60. As he had earlier noted that Cyclops' unchanging schedule, and as Menelaus had learned that of Proteus. See Austin, 133ff.

we would be Cyclopes. The becalmed and riskless civilization of Phaeacia need not cope with Poseidon as others know him, and therefore, despite its complexity, it is somehow lacking. Only through Odysseus do the Phaeacians have a fuller experience of Ocean. It is fitting that after surviving ten years on the sea, *polutropos* Odysseus will once more leave his island to travel inland, this time to a people who have no experience of Ocean. There, the man Poseidon has pursued will once more bring Poseidon into the lives of others, serving for the last, and perhaps most important, time as an ambassador.

The night and dawn incidents of the *Iliad* suggest Odysseus as an alternative to Achilles from the very beginning. Odysseus on ambush, in council, on embassies, urging food, reluctant to risk his life for glory, distant from his armour and his comrades, yet constantly in touch with his humanity, is the man most likely to return. This is especially clear in the night raid of Book Ten, where he is repeatedly called “enduring.” When Diomedes chooses him as his companion, he is sure that “if he but follow with me, even out of blazing fire might we both return . . .” (x.246–47). As we have seen, Odysseus does not need the prompting that Athena gives Diomedes when she tells him “be mindful of return” (x.509)

Within the *Iliad* the Doloneia depicts a return (*nostos*) in miniature, one which resembles that difficult, yet “honey-sweet,” return depicted in full in the *Odyssey*.⁶¹ A cunning man seeks adventure, outwits a spy, captures the dazzling fairy-tale horses of a foreign king, and returns just before dawn to the acclaim of his comrades. The triumphant heroes sit down to supper and “honey-sweet wine.” They have just refreshed themselves in the only baths taken by living and unwounded mortals in the *Iliad*.⁶² Unlike the glorious heroes whose young lives end abruptly on the sunlit battlefield when dark night covers their eyes, Odysseus lives through his night exploits and his early morning councils, to greet the harbinger of Helios, rosy-fingered Dawn. He thinks less about the distant future than about the journey to “tomorrow,” even if tomorrow may be ten years in coming.

61. Some critics think the whole book is an interpolation from the *Odyssey*. See Alexander Shewan, *The Lay of Dolon* (London, 1911), and Stanford for summaries of the evidence.

62. See, in contrast, the hot bath which Andromache is preparing for Hector (xvii.442–46) and the bath in the river that Agenor thinks of just before Achilles kills him (xxi.556–59). See also Charles Segal, “Transition in Odysseus’ Return,” 474ff.