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WAR GAMES: ODYSSEUS AT TROY

CORINNE ONDINE PACHE

THIS paper examines two aspects of Odysseus' behavior that fundamentally set him apart from the other Greek heroes in the *Iliad*. Odysseus at Troy superficially appears to share many traits with the other Homeric heroes: he is a prominent participant both in assemblies and in combat, and he takes part in many of the decisive episodes of the narrative. He shares in the *kleos* ("glory") of the other renowned warriors by association, but closer examination shows that he speaks and behaves in an idiosyncratic, often unconventional, manner, and that many of his words and deeds reflect a stance of ambivalence towards the war and his role in it. Just as his words and deeds are often incongruous, the very role Odysseus performs in the *Iliad* is an ambiguous one.¹ Often alone, often aloof, Odysseus stands apart from his companions, and does not fully share in either their glory or their sufferings. Two extraordinary traits further distinguish Odysseus in the *Iliad*: alone of all the Greeks, he does not cry, and against all conventions, he smiles at an enemy in the middle of a particularly gruesome episode.

Lateiner argues that nonverbal behavior in Homeric epic is just as informative as speeches are: emotional states are characterized not only by what heroes say, but also by their facial and physical expressions; the poet in turn can use descriptions of nonverbal behaviors to describe characters' nature and disposition.² Odysseus' lack of tears and peculiar

¹ Charles Segal argues that the self-conscious use of the word *kleos* in the *Odyssey* reflects the ambiguities of the figure of Odysseus, in his *Singers, Heroes, and Gods in the Odyssey* (Ithaca 1994) 85–109. My approach is similar and owes much to his, though I approach the same problem from the different angle of Odysseus' own ambiguous attitude towards the events narrated in the *Iliad*.

² "Physiognomics consciousness is essential to Homeric characterization of emotional states": D. Lateiner, *Sardonic Smile: Nonverbal Behavior in Homeric Epic* (Ann Arbor 1995) 43.

smile in the *Iliad* have been noticed before, but they have never been linked as the two sides of one same coin, as it were, revealing Odysseus' lack of emotional connection to the narrative.³

"Tous les grands héros pleurent dans l'*Iliade*," says Hélène Monsacré, and indeed they do.⁴ There are fifty-eight instances of the word for tears (*dakru*) in some form or other in the *Iliad*.⁵ Verbs of weeping and lamenting are also frequent: *olophuromai* occurs sixteen times, *stenakhô* thirty-nine times, and *klaiô* thirty-seven times. Reasons to cry are plentiful as loss and grief are ubiquitous: Trojans, Greeks, women, men, gods and goddesses, no one seems to escape crying. Yet Odysseus does not shed one single tear.

Both men and women cry in Homeric epic, but with a fundamental difference: while women cry for themselves, male tears are often reserved for others.⁶ Pain comes in many different forms, and warriors can cry over their own wounds as well as over their comrades' fate. Achilles weeps for ever greater losses; Agamemnon cries when his brother is wounded (4.153), and as a prelude to his speech (9.14); Phoinix breaks down when he talks to Achilles (9.433); Patroklos weeps over the wounded Eurypylos (11.601); Hector cries as he is carried out of the battle because of his wound (14.432); Ajax also weeps after Patroklos' death (17.648); and Diomedes cries when he loses his whip in the horse race (23.384).⁷ Even horses cry in the *Iliad*, as Achilles' horses shed warm tears for Patroklos (17.437). The gods themselves are not immune to the sorrows of war, and Zeus cries tears of blood when his son, Sarpedon, dies (16.459). The *Iliad* ends with more tears, as Achilles and Priam cry together (24.510–11), and the Trojans mourn Hector (24.794).

³ Cf. W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme* (1963, reedited Dallas 1992) 15 and 122.

⁴ H. Monsacré, *Les larmes d'Achilles* (Paris 1984) 139.

⁵ Not counting adjectival forms used to modify some nouns in an abstract manner, like tearful Ares, war, or battle.

⁶ C. Segal makes this crucial distinction between female and male crying in "Euripides' *Alkestis*: Female Death and Male Tears," *Classical Antiquity* 11 (1992) 148–149, and especially note 23.

⁷ Monsacré, *Les larmes d'Achille* 139 argues that "il s'agit ici de pleurs de rage, de frustration et de colère mélangées. Diomède, à la différence des autres héros, semble inaccessible aux pleurs de douleur, comme si sa nature ambivalente, plus sauvage qu'héroïque, le rendait insensible au spectacle de la mort." This is an interesting distinction, but still he is capable of tears.

In the midst of all the sadness and tragedy of war, Odysseus is the only hero who does not cry in the *Iliad*, although he does talk about crying in a speech to Achilles:

ἀλλὰ χρὴ τὸν μὲν καταθάπτειν ὃς κε θάνησι,
νηλέα θυμὸν ἔχοντας, ἐπ' ἥματι δακρύσαντας·

but we must harden our hearts and bury the man
who dies, weeping over him for a day. *Iliad* 19.228–229

Odysseus is very good at talking about conventions, even when he does not follow them, and here again he proves to be much more of a speaker than a doer. Death is pervasive in the warrior's world, and crying is the appropriate response to loss; yet Odysseus, although he recognizes and sanctions the practice of mourning dead companions, does not himself share in the lament over Patroklos' death. When faced with Achilles' grief and his thirst for revenge, Odysseus' first thought is in fact for food. He is a pragmatic man who is more concerned with practical realities than with emotions and ideals.

Writing about Odysseus' role in the narrative, Pucci notes that the *Iliad* sometimes sings in "double harmony, at once serious and comic," and that in those moments, "it does not take Odysseus' prowess and military contribution too seriously."⁸ Conversely, I would argue that Odysseus does not take the Trojan expedition and the war too seriously: his concerns lie elsewhere, and his emotional involvement in the *Iliad* stays minimal.

It is not until the beginning of his own narrative, in the *Odyssey*, that Odysseus experiences true yearning and emotion:

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε·
πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,
πολλὰ δ' ὃ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν,
ἄρνυμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many turns, who was driven
far journeys, after he had sacked Troy's sacred citadel.
Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of,

⁸ P. Pucci, *Odysseus Polutropos: Intertextual Readings in the Odyssey and the Iliad* (Ithaca 1987) 147.

many the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea,
struggling for his own life and the homecoming of his companions.
Odyssey 1.1–5

Ever since he left Troy, Odysseus has been striving (*arnumenos*) for both his own life and the return of his companions.⁹ And it is not until his *Odyssey* that Odysseus will begin to cry. Odysseus is indeed crying when he first appears in the *Odyssey* (5.82–84, and 151–158), οὐδέ ποτ' ὅσσε δακρυόφιν τέρσοντο (“and his eyes were never wiped dry of tears”), and from then on, crying and lamenting is pervasive throughout the work: tears, or the concealing thereof, accompany all the major episodes of the *Odyssey*.

Just as there is much crying, there is also a fair amount of laughing and smiling in the *Iliad*. This usually happens outside of the battlefield, and among friends or allies. There are 13 instances of the verb γελάω, “to laugh” and 15 instances of μειδάω, “to smile,” and its compound form ἐπιμειδάω, not including the adjective φιλομειδής often used of Aphrodite in both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.¹⁰ Odysseus frequently smiles in the *Odyssey*, but his smiles often have a menacing or at least ambivalent force.¹¹ In the *Iliad*, Odysseus’ smile is downright chilling.

Friends smile at each other, parents smile at children, and husbands at wives. Agamemnon smiles (*epimeidêsas*) at Odysseus (4.356), whom he has just angered with accusations of greed and gluttony. His smile is a plea for forgiveness, as he takes his word back. Achilles smiles (*meidêsen*) at Antilochos after the horse race, and Antilochos smiles as he takes up the last prize in the foot race (*meidioôn* 23.786). The Achaeans all laugh “sweetly” (*hêdu gelassan*) at Ajax when Athena makes him slip and fall in a pile of cow manure (23.784). Hector and Andromache laugh (*gelasse*) together at their son’s fear (6.471). Hera also smiles (*meidêsen*) at Hephaistos (1.595), and Zeus smiles (*meidêsen*) at his wife (15.47).

⁹ See E. D. Francis, “Virtue, Folly, and Greek Etymology,” in C. Rubino and C. Shelmerdine eds., *Approaches to Homer* (Austin 1983) 85, for his etymological analysis of *arnumai* and its relation to *aretê*.

¹⁰ See D. Levine, “Homeric Laughter and the Unsmiling Suitors,” *CJ* 78 (1982) 97–104 for a detailed analysis of laughing and smiling in Homeric diction. For more on Odysseus’ smiles in the *Odyssey*, see D. Levine, “Odysseus’ Smiles: *Odyssey* 20.301, 22.371, 23.111,” *TAPA* 114 (1984) 1–9.

¹¹ D. Lateiner, *Sardonic Smile* 42.

There are a few exceptions, and occasionally heroes do laugh in the context of war: Ajax smiles (*meidioôn*) as he marches into battle (7.212), although he smiles rather abstractedly at the prospect of combat rather than at anyone in particular. Paris also laughs (*hêdu gelassas*) just after he wounds Diomedes (11.378), yet this is clearly no behavior worthy of a hero, but the somewhat infantile reaction of a warrior who is known for constantly breaching the heroic code of behavior.

Laughing and smiling are absent from close encounters between enemies, and indeed “for Diomedes and the other great heroes, war is never an amusement but, rather, a deadly serious affair in which killing and being killed is the central theme.”¹² Not so for Odysseus: while war is surely no idle amusement for him, it is certainly not a “deadly serious affair” either.

In the night foray into the Trojan camp, Diomedes and Odysseus capture and interrogate the Trojan spy Dolon. After Dolon confesses he volunteered for the expedition in the hope of obtaining the horses and chariot of Achilles, Odysseus smiles at him:

τὸν δ' ἐπιμειδήσας προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς.

Then Odysseus the resourceful smiled and spoke to him.

Iliad 10.400

The formula τὸν/τὴν δ' ἐπιμειδήσας προσέφη filling out the first half of the hexameter appears three times in the *Iliad*: when Agamemnon smiles at Odysseus (4.356), when Zeus smiles at Athena (8.38), and when Odysseus smiles at Dolon. In the first two cases, the smile is between natural allies: Agamemnon's smile is an attempt at conciliation, while Zeus' is a gentle, affectionate, smile to his daughter.

The same expression is used only once in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus smiles at Medon, the herald saved by Telemachos' entreaties (22.371). Levine analyzes the formula τὸν/τὴν δ' ἐπιμειδήσας προσέφη and argues that it always introduces “speeches of reassurance,” in which a “calming effect” is sought.¹³ While I agree with his analysis, I argue that Odysseus' smile to Dolon is not only a smile of reassurance: Odysseus knows that he is about to kill Dolon, and his smile reveals gleeful indifference to the other man's fate. In the other instances in which the same formula is used, the smile indicates good will from the

¹² L. Golden, “τὸ γελοῖον in the *Iliad*,” *HSCP* 93 (1990) 54.

¹³ D. Levine, “Homeric Laughter” (above, n. 10) 101.

speaker towards the addressee, but in this particular case, there is no question that Odysseus' intentions are of the coldest and cruelest kind.

There is no other instance in the Homeric corpus in which a warrior smiles at an enemy.¹⁴ While it is common for victors to deride their victims, they always do so in a serious manner. There is no element of humor, for example, when Achilles taunts the body of Lykaon (21.122–135);¹⁵ fighters from both sides may rejoice at the demise of enemies, but they always take death and battle very seriously.

Odysseus' smile is all the more peculiar since it occurs in one of the darkest—both literally and figuratively—moments of the *Iliad*. Odysseus smiles because Dolon's hopes are preposterous: even if Dolon could get Achilles' horses, he would be unable to manage them since he is a mere mortal, and not a very clever one at that. Odysseus is well aware that Dolon is going to die because of his conceit, and that does not prevent him from smiling. Although there is some ironic aspect to Dolon's naïveté and fatuity, the circumstances surrounding the incident are hardly comical, and Odysseus' smile is disconcerting.

This is no gentle or innocent smile, but it reflects some deep detachment from the world of war. Just as Achilles rebels against the heroic code in Book 9, Odysseus underscores the absurdity of war by smiling. He seems more remote from his circumstances than the other Greek heroes, and what first appears as plain cruelty may just as well be a sign of the aloofness that allows him to see the humor of such a sinister situation.

Parallel to Odysseus' aloofness is his essential loneliness in the world of the *Iliad*. Of all the Greeks and Trojans, Odysseus faces little personal loss in Troy: unlike Achilles, Priam, or Andromache, who lose their closest companion, son, or husband, Odysseus is alone on the Trojan shore, far away from the people who matter the most to him. Other characters are able to share their emotions with each other: Hector and Andromache laugh together (6.471), and in another very moving scene, Priam and Achilles—enemies sitting together—cry together (24.510–

¹⁴ Hera does smile (*meidioôsa*) as she boxes Artemis' ears (21.434), but this surely is a humorous episode that cannot be compared to an encounter between fighters from opposite sides in the dead of the night.

¹⁵ The practice of taunting enemies' bodies is, in fact, introduced by Odysseus: he is the first warrior in the narrative to promise that he will feed his dead victim's corpse to scavengers, while he himself, were he to die, will be formally buried (11.450–455). This form of taunting is later practiced by other heroes as well, and in particular by Achilles.

511). Greeks and Trojans alike communicate through laughter and tears, yet Odysseus stands apart, aloof, and alone.

Odysseus' lack of emotion is also reflected in a certain lack of motion. Odysseus is not only motionless when speaking—as in the celebrated embassy passage in Book 3—but also in the midst of other situations where other characters move around. After Agamemnon proposes retreat to test his troops in Book 2, the assembled men start shouting and running in all directions to prepare their ships for the trip back home. In the middle of this very chaotic scene, alone of all the Greeks, Odysseus does not move (2.170). As we shall see shortly, Odysseus can also stay immobile in the midst of combat, and keep his calm in the direst of circumstances.

Another of Odysseus' peculiarities in the *Iliad* is his reluctance to participate in the fighting. Although he is as brave as any other hero once he is put to the test, he is never eager for conflict, and goes to great lengths to avoid it.

He is, characteristically, the last warrior to rise after Hector scolds the Greeks for not fighting him (7.168). Odysseus is in fact the ninth hero to volunteer after Agamemnon, Diomedes, the two Ajaxes, Idomeneus, Meriones, Eurypylos, and Thoas. In Book 10, again, Odysseus is the last of seven heroes willing to accompany Diomedes in the night raid against the Trojans (10.231). In this case, however, he does end up being chosen for the expedition.

Odysseus is not only reluctant to enter combat, he also conspicuously avoids it whenever possible. When Diomedes shouts for help in rescuing Nestor (8.92), Odysseus pays no attention to his cries, but instead runs away from the fighting towards his ships. More than winning, more than obtaining *kleos*, Odysseus wants to survive the war.

In combat, Odysseus can be remarkably coolheaded in circumstances where others lose their calm. In Book 11, after Agamemnon and Diomedes are wounded, the Trojans are overwhelming the Greeks, who disband in a panic. Odysseus again faces the situation coolly and without moving. All his companions have fled at the approach of the Trojans, and he finds himself alone, and surrounded by the enemy. While the other Greeks ran away in a panic without a second thought, Odysseus stands still and considers his alternatives:

ὁχθήσας δ' ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς ὃν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν·
 “ὦ μοι ἐγὼ, τί πάθω; μέγα μὲν κακὸν αἴ κε φέβωμαι

πληθὺν ταρβήσας· τὸ δὲ ρίγιον αἴ κεν ἁλώω
 μοῦνος· τοὺς δ' ἄλλους Δαναοὺς ἐφόβησε Κρονίων.
 ἀλλὰ τίη μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός;
 οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι κακοὶ μὲν ἀποίχονται πολέμοιο,
 ὃς δέ κ' ἀριστεύησι μάχῃ ἔνι, τὸν δὲ μάλα χρεὼ
 ἐστάμεναι κρατερῶς, ἥ τ' ἔβλητ' ἢ τ' ἔβαλ' ἄλλον.”

And troubled, he addressed his own heart:

“Ah what will I suffer? It will be a great evil if I run,
 fearing their great number, yet more horrible if I am caught
 alone. But the son of Kronos did put to flight the other Danaans.
 Yet why does my heart debate these things?

For I know that cowards walk out of the fighting,
 while if one is to be the best at battle, he must by all means
 stand strong, whether he is struck or strikes down another.

Iliad 11.403–410

It would be unseemly, of course, for a hero to display fear and run away from the enemy, since this is not the way to gain glory, and thus Odysseus decides to stand his ground and wait for the charging Trojans. Yet, for all his talk of fear, it is clear from Odysseus' heart-to-heart dialogue with himself that he does not *feel* fear at this crucial moment: unlike all his companions, the Trojans' approach did not impel him to leave, and he is calm enough to consider the situation and make a rational decision. Very aware of conventions, Odysseus this time decides to act according to the traditional warrior code, yet his conduct is nevertheless extraordinary. In similar circumstances, it is not uncommon for warriors to simply retreat within the ranks of their comrades (see for example 11.563–574 for the retreat of Ajax). Even when he strives to follow conventions, Odysseus winds up behaving in an unconventional manner.

Odysseus in the *Iliad* constantly defies, subverts, and redefines conventions: he speaks and acts in peculiar ways; he says things nobody else says, and he does things nobody else does. Odysseus does not seem to be affected by the events taking place at Troy to the same degree or in the same manner the other heroes are. He takes serious matters more lightly, and sad events more stoically than his companions: Odysseus in the *Iliad* can smile, but he does not cry. He clearly plays a central role in the narrative, yet he is strangely remote from it.

Although he completely breaks down when Demodokos sings of the Trojan War in the *Odyssey*, he displays none of that depth of emotion in the *Iliad*. It is almost as if Odysseus were aware the *Iliad* is not *his* story, and nothing for him to take too seriously.

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