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SUPPLICATION IN THE *ILIAD* AND THE *ODYSSEY*

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The Homeric epics contain several of the most vivid descriptions of supplication in Greek literature: Thetis before Zeus, Lykaon and Priam each before Achilles, Odysseus before Arete in the court of the Phaeacians. The suppliant's gesture of lowering himself to embrace his opponent's knees, thus showing his humility and desperation, complements the beseeching tone of his request. It is tempting to rely upon the details provided in these scenes (and others) in writing an account about the act of suppliancy and the ancient Greek attitude toward it, especially since in later literature the ritual itself acquired such force. In a recent article J. P. Gould has attempted just such an account. He describes the symbolic meaning behind the physical gestures and an interesting link between the institutions of *xenia* and *hiketeia*.[1] But his discussion of the Homeric evidence reveals some of the difficulties in using literary sources, especially epic poetry, for sociological interpretation. He suggests that the Homeric suppliant can force acceptance of his plea because of the power inherent in the gestures themselves. But this conclusion is based on three assumptions which should be more closely examined:

1. that the Homeric epics have the same attitude toward the act of supplication (and the correct performance of the ritual gestures associated with it) as later Greek literature;
2. that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* share the same belief in the potency of the ritual, so that evidence about it can be drawn indifferently from either poem;
3. that the poems furnish evidence about customs and religious beliefs which can be lifted from the text without attention to their contexts.

[1] J. P. Gould, "Hiketeia," *JHS* 93 (1973) 74–103. He notes that supplication in Greek literature has not been studied in detail. His seventh note should be consulted for bibliography, especially on suppliancy in tragedy. To his list add: Guy K. Whitfield, *The Restored Relation. The Supplication Theme in the Iliad* (Diss., Columbia 1967); and A. K. Karademetriou, "Ὁ Ἱκέτης στὴν Ἀρχαία Ἑλλάδα," *Hellenika* 28 (1975) 29–48.

I shall not concern myself with the first problem because it is too complex for a paper of this length. But I shall address the other two issues. First, although supplication is performed in the same way in both epics, a significant difference in attitude toward the act emerges. Characters in the *Odyssey* exhibit a respect for divine sanctions strengthening the suppliant's status, while in the *Iliad* heroes do not.[2] Second, we need to examine some of the ways the poet manipulates supplication scenes for poetic effect. The detail with which the suppliancy is described, the accuracy with which the ritual is performed, and the success or failure of the plea all depend upon artistic considerations. Conclusions about the form and strength of the ritual must take these into account.

I

The two epics offer similar descriptions of supplication. They share a field of vocabulary used to describe or suggest the ceremony and the basic gestures of supplication, when these are fully depicted, are the same in both poems. Moreover, suppliancy occurs in each epic in a broad range of contexts, from the most serious situation, such as a plea for life in battle, to circumstances where reference to the ceremony seems little more than conventional means of formulating requests.

The vocabulary field provides specific idioms for each gesture of both participants as well as for the suppliant's goals and the supplicated's attitude in response.[3] For instance, the gesture of embracing the knees can be described both literally and figuratively. γούνων λαβεῖν, ἕλεῖν, ἅψασθαι are phrases used when the act is described.[4] γουνάζεσθαι and γουνεῖσθαι are used both in descriptions and in the suppliant's address, sometimes when the physical act is impossible.[5] Other expressions denote the suppliant's approach or arrival (ἱκάνειν, ἱκέσθαι) and mark the beseeching tone of his plea (λίσσεσθαι). The technical term ἱκέτης (ἱκετεύειν) occurs less frequently in the *Iliad* than in the *Odyssey*.[6] When the ceremony is not fully described, one or more phrases from this distinctive vocabulary can still signal it. For instance, the pleas to Meleager described by Phoenix are each marked simply by forms of λίσσεσθαι or γουνεῖσθαι (*Il.* 9.574, 583, 585, 591), since complete accounts would be cumbersome. But much of the language is capable of metaphorical interpretation,

[2] E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951) 32, has noted this point.

[3] For a discussion of many though not all words closely associated with suppliancy, see André Corlu, *Recherches sur les mots relatifs à l'idée de prière, d'Homère aux tragiques* (Paris 1966) 293–321.

[4] See *Il.* 1.500, 512; 21.71; *Od.* 6.147, 169; 14.279, etc.

[5] See *Il.* 1.427; 9.583; *Od.* 4.433; 22.312, etc. See τὰ <σὰ> γούναθ' ἱκάνειν, ἱκέσθαι (*Il.* 18.457; *Od.* 3.92).

[6] See *Il.* 21.75; 24.158=187, 570; *Od.* 5.450; 6.193; 7.165=181, etc. See below, page 131.

without implying physical gestures, and often the vocabulary is used simply to intensify the earnestness of a request.[7]

Full descriptions of the ceremony in both epics show differences arising only from context. Two examples which can be compared are Priam's supplication of Achilles (*Il.* 24.477) and Odysseus' entreaty to Arete (*Od.* 7.139). Both men enter unseen and embrace their host or hostess at the knees. Priam also kisses Achilles' hands. Each suppliant then makes his plea. Priam remains thereafter at Achilles' knees; Odysseus withdraws into the ashes of the hearth. Both Achilles and Alkinoos, after some hesitation, respond in the same way: each takes the suppliant by the hand, pushes or raises him out of his humble posture and offers him a seat.[8] Although the contexts are very different, the physical gestures on both sides are nearly the same.

Both of these requests are made by strangers. Supplication can also occur between acquaintances, as when Thetis beseeches Zeus to honor her son (*Il.* 1.500). The ritual is still the same, though Thetis' gestures are bolder. When Zeus hesitates, she persists in her hold on his knees. The same posture is found in battlefield ransom requests when circumstances permit. Thus at *Il.* 6.45 Adrestos is in a position to embrace Menelaos' knees, but at *Il.* 11.130 the sons of Antimachos cannot do the same to Agamemnon. The language used to describe their plea, however, marks it as a supplication (*γουνάζεσθην*).

The variety of contexts in which supplication occurs is also similar in both epics. Men who have been exiled for murder or who are wandering beggars appeal for sanctuary or aid in foreign lands: Epigeus once supplicated Peleus after killing a cousin (*Il.* 16.573); Theoklymenos, also in flight from kinsmen, seeks aid from Telemachos (*Od.* 15.272).[9] Odysseus' appeals as a wanderer in need are common in the *Odyssey*.[10] A warrior trapped in battle may beg for his life; in the *Iliad*, only Trojans resort to this. In the *Odyssey*, Leodes the suitor and two servants beg for mercy from Odysseus, and the hero himself in one of his lies claims to have supplicated an Egyptian king after defeat.[11] In the *Iliad*, fathers seek to ransom children from enemy captors.[12]

[7] See *Il.* 1.282; 5.357; 19.304; *Od.* 2.209 and below, page 136.

[8] Gould (above, note 1) 97 ff. has a discussion of the possible significance of Odysseus' retreat into the hearth as a further symbolic gesture of his humble state. He also discusses the fact that Alkinoos reacts to a suppliant of Arete.

[9] See also *Il.* 2.661; 9.478; 13.694; 15.431; 23.85; *Od.* 13.258. See Robin Schlunk, "The Theme of the Suppliant-Exile in the *Iliad*," *AJP* 97 (1976) 199–209, for further discussion.

[10] See 6.141; 9.266; 13.230, etc.

[11] See *Il.* 6.45; 10.374; 11.130; 20.463; 21.72; *Od.* 22.310, 330, 365; 14.276. At *Il.* 22.337, Hektor begs that his body be ransomed. Another life-or-death suppliancy, though not on the battlefield, is Kirke's first appeal to Odysseus (*Od.* 10.323).

[12] See 1.12; 24.477; probably also 6.426; 11.106.

Between acquaintances, suppliancies are usually less urgent; in fact, they are formal requests for favors. For instance, Thetis asks Zeus to avenge her son's honor; Odysseus requests Kirke's help in leaving.[13] But even friends may make desperate pleas, as when Eurylochos begs Odysseus not to take him back to Kirke's lair, or the Greeks urge Achilles to return to battle.[14]

Although supplication normally occurs between physical equals (man to man or god to god), both poems use the language of supplication between men and gods. Achilles beseeches the winds to light Patroclus' funeral pyre (*Il.* 23.196: λιτάνευεν); Menelaos supplicates the gods for salvation from the island where he is becalmed (*Od.* 4.433: γουνούμενος). The suppliant language seems merely to substitute for the more normal words for praying.[15] Odysseus' plea to the river deity at Scheria, however, is one of the most explicitly suppliant speeches in either poem.

> κλῦθι, ἄναξ, ὅτις ἐσσί· πολύλλιστον δέ σ' ἱκάνω
> φεύγων ἐκ πόντοιο Ποσειδάωνος ἐνιπάς.
> αἰδοῖος μέν τ' ἐστὶ καὶ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν
> ἀνδρῶν ὅς τις ἵκηται ἀλώμενος, ὡς καὶ ἐγὼ νῦν
> σόν τε ῥόον σά τε γούναθ' ἱκάνω πολλὰ μογήσας.
> ἀλλ' ἐλέαιρε, ἄναξ· ἱκέτης δέ τοι εὔχομαι εἶναι. (*Od.* 5.445–50)

In none of these passages, however, can we imagine any of the ceremonial gestures associated with suppliancy.

Throughout the range of appeals in both poems the significance of the suppliant's gestures helps explain each recourse to the ceremony. Signaling as they do his humility, his willingness to relinquish hostility (if any intrudes) and his desperate need, they can be the basis for any plea forced by a weakened condition or inferior position, whether to an enemy or a friend.[16] This is true whether the physical gestures are actually performed or simply alluded to by the suppliant. Yet the very breadth of use for the ceremony points to a problem in interpreting supplication in a literary work: where does the reality of the ritual—the gestures and language—cease to be felt and poetic convention take over?

When we wish to discuss the meaning and force of the ritual, we must bear in mind that many events in the Homeric epics are described by a series of specific acts or gestures which are repetitive and predictable.

[13] *Il.* 1.500 and *passim*; *Od.* 10.480. See also *Il.* 2.14; 4.376; 9.450; 18.457. Both Hektor and Menelaos are scolded for not supplicating their allies for help (*Il.* 5.490; 10.117).

[14] *Il.* 9 *passim*; *Od.* 10.264. See also *Il.* 16.20, 46; 22.35, 81.

[15] See also *Il.* 9.501; *Od.* 14.406.

[16] For further discussion of the symbolic meaning of the gestures see Gould (above, note 1) 94 ff.; also Richard B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate* (Cambridge 1951) 174–85. See also Whitfield (above, note 1) 53–57.

And these events also imply a society's code of behavior. In a sense, the act of supplication is no more a ritual (and no less one) than the arming of a warrior or the reception or departure of a guest. This point becomes more pertinent when we realize that the divine sanctions, which might mark supplication as a religious ceremony, are accretions to the ritual which appear in one of the poems only. Moreover, the poet exhibits the same ability and willingness to manipulate details in his descriptions of suppliancies for artistic effect as he does in accounts of other typical events (see below, page 133).[17]

II

In language, gesture and circumstance, then, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* share a common form for supplication. Yet each epic conveys a very different attitude toward the force of the ceremony. For the heroes of the *Iliad* supplication operates strictly on a human level, commanding respect only so far as custom and human sanctions compel. In the *Odyssey*, however, Zeus appears as the upholder of the suppliant's appeals. Yet even in this poem his protection is not universally claimed.

In the *Iliad* the ceremony itself exercises no binding force. The suppliant neither insists on any privileges nor claims a god's protection by right of his ritual posture. The supplicated shows no sign of being influenced by a special code of behavior toward suppliants. His acceptance or rejection, if the decision is explained, is based upon personal considerations, and when he rejects a plea it is without a sense of shame or fear of retribution. Thus the main purpose of supplication in this epic is to get one's request heard. The ceremony arrests attention and prevents rejection (or slaying) out of hand, but does not insure success.

Lacking any defined religious or moral scruple on which to secure his claim, the Iliadic suppliant tries to strengthen his plea in various ways. Battlefield suppliants offer ἄποινα in return for their lives (see 6.49; 10.380; 11.131). Ransom is expected[18]—even Hektor's body, whose release has been divinely commanded, must be redeemed—but in the ransom

[17] As has been demonstrated with the arming scenes; see, for instance, Joseph Russo, "Homer against his Tradition," *Arion* 7 (1968) 282–86; J. Armstrong, "The Arming Motif in the *Iliad*," *AJP* 79 (1958) 337–54; and Harald Patzer, *Dichterische Kunst und poetisches Handwerk im homerischen Epos* (Wiesbaden 1972).

[18] Ransom goods have been interpreted as a symbol of "submission and dependency" by the suppliant and an important means of creating αἰδώς in the supplicated; see Whitfield (above, note 1) 58 ff. The evidence in the *Iliad* suggests otherwise. In most offers of recompense, the supplicant makes no reference to αἰδώς (see 1.17; 6.47; 10.378; 11.131; 22.338). Lykaon's plea in 21, which most heavily stresses αἰδώς, is the one in which recompense is mentioned only obliquely (21.79–80).

scenes most fully described, gifts are unsuccessful as a means of persuasion.[19]

In her suppliancy from Troy's walls, Hekabe appeals to Hektor's respect for her motherhood. She exposes one breast and cries:

> Ἕκτορ, τέκνον ἐμόν, τάδε τ' αἴδεο καί μ' ἐλέησον
> αὐτήν, εἴ ποτέ τοι λαθικηδέα μαζὸν ἐπέσχον. (22.82–83)

Her plea for pity is a natural expression of her helplessness, but her appeal for respect requires more consideration. αἰδώς is a sense of respect or shame toward someone or something which can demand the exercise of restraint. With rare exceptions, the feeling is exercised between two mortals or two deities, not between man and god.[20] μ' αἴδεο is a cry for human consideration, not an appeal to higher authority.[21] Its strength lies in emotions which need not be binding. Perhaps for this reason the appeal occurs only in emotionally-charged encounters: Lykaon captured again by the now demonic Achilles (21.74); and Priam begging for Hektor's return (24.503).

Hektor strengthens his supplication for his body's return with a veiled threat:

> λίσσομ' ὑπὲρ ψυχῆς καὶ γούνων σῶν τε τοκήων . . . (22.338)

The reference to Achilles' soul represents a curse if his body is mutilated and left unburied.[22] Hektor's last words make his curse more explicit:

> φράζεο νῦν, μή τοί τι θεῶν μήνιμα γένωμαι
> ἤματι τῷ ὅτε κέν σε Πάρις καὶ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων
> ἐσθλὸν ἐόντ' ὀλέσωσιν ἐνὶ Σκαιῇσι πύλῃσιν. (22.358–60)

[19] Achilles, however, formerly released prisoners for ransom, as did others; see 2.229; 6.427; 11.106, 21.99–102. Reasons for the consistent failure of ransom requests in the current narrative until Priam's attempt will be suggested below, page 139.

[20] The range of uses in epic for the concept behind αἰδώς is outlined in *Das Lexicon des frühgriechischen Epos*, ed. Bruno Snell, under αἰδοῖος, αἰδέομαι, αἰδώς. Only four instances are cited where the concept occurs in relations between man and god: *Il.* 9.508; 24.503; *Od.* 9.269; 21.28. See also C. E. Frhr. von Erffa, ΑΙΔΩΣ *und verwandte Begriffe* (Philologus Suppl. 30.2, 1937) 13 f.; and W. J. Verdenius, "ΑΙΔΩΣ bei Homer," *Mnemosyne* 3.12 (1944) 47–60, esp. 51 f; also Helen North, *Sophrosyne* (Ithaca 1966) 6 ff., though the religious implications of αἰδώς are not as great as she suggests.

[21] von Erffa (above, note 20) 3, 13 f.; Whitfield (above, note 1) 67 f. See, however, *Il.* 24.503: ἀλλ' αἰδεῖο θεούς. The full context shows that this is a variation on the more normal association of respect and mercy for the suppliant himself (see 21.74), and seems aimed at reminding Achilles of the gods' role in Hektor's ransom.

[22] The rest of the line represents more customary appeals: the reference to knees invokes suppliant gestures impossible for the dying man; mention of the supplicated's parents as a means of arousing sympathy is found elsewhere. See *Il.* 15.663; 24.486.

θεῶν μήνιμα does not represent, however, anger over the denied suppliancy. The use of this phrase in Elpenor's supplication of Odysseus indicates that it is the lack of burial which outrages the gods.[23]

Chryses offers ransom for his daughter, but he also stands upon his position as priest of Apollo in supplicating the Greeks. Far from falling into the suppliant posture, he carries his priestly staff as he beseeches the assembly (λίσσετο: 1.15), and bids them respect Apollo (1.21). And most of the warriors are moved by the reminders of the god:

> Ἐνθ' ἄλλοι μὲν πάντες ἐπευφήμησαν Ἀχαιοὶ
> αἰδεῖσθαί θ' ἱερῆα καὶ ἀγλαὰ δέχθαι ἄποινα. (1.22–23)

Agamemnon, however, scorns Chryses' priestly status:[24]

> μή σε, γέρον, κοίλῃσιν ἐγὼ παρὰ νηυσὶ κιχείω
> ἢ νῦν δηθύνοντ' ἢ ὕστερον αὖτις ἰόντα,
> μή νύ τοι οὐ χραίσμῃ σκῆπτρον καὶ στέμμα θεοῖο. (1.26–28)

It is Chryses' angry prayer for vengeance, however, which brings the plague upon the Greeks; Apollo is not aroused to wrath spontaneously by the insulted suppliancy.

A final way to strengthen a plea is found in Lykaon's opening words to Achilles. He claims respect as the warrior's suppliant (ἱκέτης).

> γουνοῦμαί σ', Ἀχιλεῦ· σὺ δέ μ' αἴδεο καί μ' ἐλέησον·
> ἀντί τοί εἰμ' ἱκέταο, διοτρεφές, αἰδοίοιο·
> πὰρ γὰρ σοὶ πρώτῳ πασάμην Δημήτερος ἀκτήν . . . (21.74–76)

His justification for this status is interesting because it is based upon their past encounter, not upon his present supplication. His claim seems specious, since he shared a meal with the Greek only because of his captivity. Still, it implies two important details about supplication. First, ἱκέτης is a technical term not applicable to just anyone who assumes the suppliant posture.[25] Second, this technical form of supplication seems indeed to claim a respect which should be honored even after the event.[26] Yet

[23] *Od.* 11.72–73: μή μ' ἄκλαυτον ἄθαπτον ἰὼν ὄπιθεν καταλείπειν / νοσφισθείς, μή τοί τι θεῶν μήνιμα γένωμαι. This is the only other occurrence of the word μήνιμα in Homer. See also *Il.* 16.498 ff. Apollo is angered at Achilles because of his refusal to bury Hektor (*Il.* 24.33).

[24] In answering Priam's request for Hektor's return Achilles also scorns divine pressure; see 24.568–70.

[25] Priam is the only other suppliant in the *Iliad* to be so called (24.158, 570). The term is regularly used in the *Odyssey* in reference to wanderers or beggars. See 6.191; 7.165; 9.266; 16.67, etc.

[26] See *Od.* 16.421, where Penelope scolds Antinoos for failing to respect a suppliant relationship incurred by his father when he pleaded for help from Odysseus. See Gould (above, note 1) 92, who also discusses the reciprocity implied in this passage.

Lykaon does not call any god to his witness, and Achilles rejects the claim because his own anger overrides it.

The image of suppliancy which emerges from the *Iliad*'s fullest descriptions is of a ceremony which when performed between mortals by no means guarantees success.[27] The offer of money, the plea for respect, the special threat are all means of making it more compelling. The first two tactics operate on a strictly human level as appeals to greed or emotion. The threat invokes divine anger, but anger called down upon a specific grievance, not upon the violation of the ceremony itself. These strengthening measures are uniformly unsuccessful in scenes most fully described until Priam seeks the return of Hektor's body. Successful supplications are not unknown: for instance Achilles ransomed sons of Priam for ἄποινα (11.106) and Phoenix yielded to his mother's pleas to dishonor his father (9.451). But these are merely reported, as memories past.[28] The prevailing prospect for suppliants in the *Iliad* is gloomy, and that can be no accident (see below, page 139).[29]

A different set of tactics is used in the *Odyssey* to strengthen the suppliant's plea. Recompense is no longer offered by suppliants.[30] Instead supplication made in battle contains pleas for respect and mercy (22.312, 344).[31] Other direct appeals for αἰδώς, however, are lacking, although Odysseus does beg Polyphemos to respect the gods (9.269).

Suppliants are now regularly called ἱκέται and are said to be αἰδοῖοι, an epithet used only in reference to Lykaon in the *Iliad* (21.75).[32] At 5.447 Odysseus says that a wanderer is αἰδοῖος even to the gods. The extension is understandable since he is supplicating a river. The wandering suppliant

[27] Supplications between gods are uniformly successful in the *Iliad*: 1.500; 2.15; 5.357; 18.457; 21.368.

[28] Other successful supplications which are reported: 9.590; 16.573. At 16.46–47 Patroklos convinces Achilles to let him go into battle. See also 23.609.

[29] The preceding account leaves out consideration of the allegory of the Litai (9.502–14), a passage which states that Zeus punishes with ἄτη any man who fails to listen to prayers. The omission is intentional. The retribution envisioned is otherwise alien to both epics, and suits Phoenix's arguments rather than any theology. See Judith A. Rosner, "The Speech of Phoenix: *Iliad* 9.434–605," *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 314–27, for further discussion of this passage.

[30] Except for Odysseus (in a lie) when he offers booty (μενοεικέα λῃΐδα) to the Phoenicians after supplicating them for passage to Pylos (13.273). Here, however, the booty might equally be considered payment for the passage.

[31] Lykaon is the only Iliadic warrior to try this tack (21.74). He has some acquaintance with Achilles from his former captivity, just as the men who beseech Odysseus are known to him. Phemios pleads on the basis of his singing talent. See Sigfried Besslich, *Schweigen — Verschweigen — Übergehen* (Heidelberg 1966) 101–4.

[32] At 9.271 Odysseus uses αἰδοῖος with ξεῖνος; see also 8.544. The suppliant and the guest-friend are not always clearly distinguished in the *Odyssey*. At 9.265 Odysseus uses the terms interchangeably, as does Eumaios when speaking about his beggar guest (14.511, 404). The conflation is perhaps due to the fact that once accepted the suppliant is elevated to the status of a guest. See 6.207; 8.541 and Gould (above, note 1) 79.

also has rather clearly defined rights in this epic. According to Nausikaa, he is entitled to food and whatever else he asks for (6.191–93); her father even apologizes for her lack of courtesy in failing to escort him into the city (7.299). Gifts are also owed to the suppliant, apparently as a sign that he is no longer considered an outcast but a guest (8.544–47).[33]

The greatest support for supplication in the *Odyssey* is the protection of Zeus. Suppliants claim it and the supplicated acknowledge it. After Odysseus has seated himself among the ashes, an elder chides Alkinoos for his slow response and bids him make the stranger welcome:

> . . . σὺ δὲ κηρύκεσσι κέλευσον
> οἶνον ἐπικρῆσαι, ἵνα καὶ Διὶ τερπικεραύνῳ
> σπείσομεν, ὅς θ' ἱκέτῃσιν ἅμ' αἰδοίοισιν ὀπηδεῖ. (7.163–65, see 180–81)

Odysseus tries a similar admonition with Polyphemos, and even gives Zeus a special title designating his protection (9.270–71: Ζεὺς δ' ἐπιτιμήτωρ ἱκετάων τε ξείνων τε / ξείνιος). But the Kyklops has no fear of the god's emnity:

> οὐδ' ἂν ἐγὼ Διὸς ἔχθος ἀλευάμενος πεφιδοίμην
> οὔτε σεῦ οὔθ' ἑτάρων, εἰ μὴ θυμός με κελεύοι. (9.277–28)

Penelope calls Zeus the witness of suppliants as she complains of Antinoos' lack of respect (16.421). When Odysseus suspects the Phaeacians of having brought him to the wrong island, he curses them with the vengeance of Zeus ἱκετήσιος (13.213). Eumaios reassures his guest that he need fear no tricks from him, since if he were to kill him, he could himself no longer appeal to Zeus (14.402). Nausikaa says that all strangers (ξεῖνοι) and beggars come from the god (6.207).

When Odysseus gives a fictitious account of himself to Eumaios, he says that an Egyptian king honored his suppliancy and protected him from hostile soldiers because he feared Zeus' wrath (14.283).[34] The hero is trying to influence Eumaios' reception of him, of course, but the passage is notable because Zeus is imagined as protecting the suppliant even in battle. The example points up clearly the difference in the suppliant's status between the two epics. No warrior in the *Iliad* is ever stopped from rejecting an enemy's plea for his life by fear of Zeus.

III

Despite similarity in external forms, supplication appears to have a different basis of strength in the two epics. When discussing the ceremony, we must take care from which poem we draw our evidence. The

[33] See 9.268; also *Il.* 9.481, where Phoenix mentions the wealth and lands he got from Peleus.

[34] But note that it is Διὸς ξεινίου and see above, note 32.

distinction in attitude, however, may be misleading, if we seek the reasons behind it in theories about different societies (or authors) for the poems. Instead, we must recognize the extent to which the poet manipulates the ceremony of supplication in both epics.

As a beginning, it should be noted that Zeus' protection is not universally claimed in the *Odyssey*. Its most conspicuous absence is in the battle supplications of 22. None of the three men who seek mercy threatens Odysseus with Zeus' vengeance and he shows no restraint because of religious scruples.[35] Of course Medon has been promised safety before he approaches Telemachos (357) and Phemios' plea is accepted (356), so that no question of divine anger arises. But Leodes the suitor is not successful in his bid for mercy. Why did he not claim the god's protection in order to strengthen his plea?[36]

The answer is clear enough: Leodes' own violation of guest-friendship is severe enough to remove any blame for Odysseus. The poet has been at pains to establish the guilt of the suitors, especially their violation of *ξενία*, to the point where Odysseus' slaughter of them is palatable. He can hardly attribute at this climax any blame to Odysseus, so he suppresses reference to the divine protection normally enjoyed by suppliants. The pleas for mercy (especially Leodes'), far from condemning Odysseus, become a means of underscoring his righteous—and hence, implacable—wrath. Literary considerations appear to have governed the poet's treatment of supplication in 22, rather than religious beliefs or a strict sense of ritual. Rigid adherence to the "rules of the game"[37] has not been allowed to interfere with the climactic battle nor to change our perception of the hero's right to exact vengeance.

Mention of divine protection for suppliants occurs in scenes where hospitality and the proper treatment of strangers are important.[38] Thus Nausikaa and the Phaeacians recall on their own the obligations toward Odysseus, while Polyphemus is specifically warned and yet still is scornful of Zeus' guardianship (9.269, 277). Between Odysseus and Eumaios there is a subtle interchange: in his fictitious account, the hero notes the Egyptian

[35] See 23.117, where he expressly fears revenge by the families of the slain suitors.

[36] Gould (above, note 1) 81 believes that it is strengthened in some measure: "The rejection [of Leodes], like those of Adrastus and Lykaon, is justified by the need for vengeance: but in this case there is nothing in the ritual procedures to mitigate the act or by casuistry to exculpate Odysseus."

[37] Gould's phrase (81–85) for the strict code of behavior he envisions surrounding suppliant and supplicated.

[38] Supplications fully described which do not refer to Zeus' anger: 10.264 (Eurylochos to Odysseus); 10.323 (Kirke to Odysseus); 10.480 (Odysseus to Kirke); 11.66 (Elpenor to Odysseus); 13.230 (Odysseus to the disguised Athene). This last is a curious example; the poet develops much unconscious irony in Odysseus' words, especially at 230 f.: . . . σοὶ γὰρ ἐγώ γε / εὔχομαι ὥς τε θεῷ καί σευ φίλα γούναθ' ἱκάνω, a phrase otherwise unparalleled in suppliancies. See also below, note 39.

king's respect of his prisoner (14.283); the swineherd acknowledges his duty before Zeus, but later, when he declines his guest's oath about news of Odysseus (401–6). But during the slaughter of the suitors, Odysseus does not deserve the blame of being reminded of Zeus' protection, and so it is omitted.[39]

In these scenes the poet is manipulating a feature of supplication which does not appear in the *Iliad* at all—the notion of divine protection. Since the feature is peculiar to one poem, it might be considered no true part of the traditional ritual, and hence more susceptible to omission or inclusion as the context requires. But further examination of the various suppliancies in both poems reveals the manipulation for literary effect influences every aspect of the ritual: the detail with which a supplication is depicted; the completeness or accuracy with which the gestures are performed; and finally, the very success or failure of the plea.

That the poet adjusts the detail with which any supplication is depicted to its context is an easy observation. When the suppliancy itself is the main event of a scene, when its outcome is momentous, the ceremony is described fully. Each gesture is depicted, or the inability to perform any is remarked upon, and the speeches of both parties are given. Thetis before Zeus or Priam before Achilles are scenes in which the primary focus is upon the supplication itself. Elsewhere, interest lies in another aspect of the situation, or the context seems to prohibit elaborate description. The gestures then are only alluded to, or the suppliant's words suggest them.

For instance, in the *Iliad* both Nestor and Hektor are said to supplicate their troops for a special effort in fighting. Hektor pleads with his men to cross the Greek ditch (12.49); Nestor begs Greek forces to fight valiantly on behalf of their wives, children and parents (15.660).[40] In neither case are the gestures of kneeling and embracing the knees more than briefly alluded to, although Nestor reiterates his suppliant posture in his speech (15.665). In both scenes it is impossible to decide whether the gestures have been performed.[41] Reasons for this ambiguity are not hard to discern. The image of a commander embracing various soldiers is awkward

[39] So also, Penelope does not incriminate herself when she remarks that she no longer admits suppliants, guests and heralds because of the suitors (19.134). Nor does Theoklymenos remind Telemachos of Zeus' protection when he supplicates him (15.277).

[40] His request is in the form of an exhortation to battle; see also 5.529; 6.112; 8.174; 11.287, etc. None, however, is couched in terms of a supplication.

[41] Hektor's words are only characterized as suppliant (12.49: ἐλίσσεθ' ἑταίρους). Nestor is briefly described as approaching each man's knees on behalf of his parents (15.660). γουνούμενος ἄνδρα ἕκαστον is unusual. The verb itself can be either literal or metaphorical (see *Od.*6.141), but the expression "each man" implies that Nestor is actually approaching individuals. Thus these two battlefield exhortations cannot easily be considered simple requests intensified by suppliant language.

to envision and the primary focus of each scene is upon another matter. Hektor's supplication is part of the preliminary frustration the Trojans suffer at the ditch. Poulydamas' timely suggestion about abandoning the chariots, which resolves the problem, is the real point of the scene. Similarly, Nestor's appeal occurs in the final rush of battle which brings the Trojan torches to the ships. The moment is dangerous; hence the urgent appeal. But it cannot be interrupted by a lengthy depiction of supplication.

Another more striking example of the way in which the poet expands or omits details is found in a pair of supplications by goddesses at the beginning of the *Iliad*. In Book 1, Thetis supplicates Zeus to avenge her son's honor. The scene is impressive and the ceremony minutely described—naturally, for her request is a serious one which governs the direction of the epic. The moment needs to be underscored and the ritual helps do it. Two hundred lines later we hear of another goddess supplicating the gods with an important request (2.14). The lying dream sent by Zeus reports that Hera has secured the destruction of Troy on that very day. In this case the supplication is referred to only by the participle λισσομένη, and it is usually assumed that the poet is simply using suppliant language loosely.[42] After all, it is only a report, and a lie at that. But is this a safe assumption? The reference to her appeal is no briefer than others considered to be "genuine."[43] And Hera is after something deadly serious; her request, if it were truly granted, would have as far-reaching consequences as Thetis' in fact does.

Hera's suppliancy, however, can not really be more fully depicted. Another full scene so soon after Thetis' appeal would be unbalanced and anticlimactic, especially since the whole account is a lie. Greater emphasis might only be confusing. Furthermore, suppliancies reported in speeches are not normally elaborated. Finally, Hera has had to persuade all the gods, and a description of the repeated knee-scraping would be tiresome. The language of Hera's appeal is thus left ambiguous, suggesting a crucial moment of decision but leaving the impression vague. But the point to be stressed is that Thetis' and Hera's supplications are fundamentally similar. Each is a formal request concerning divine intervention in the war.[44] Each is deadly serious with potentially far-ranging effect. Both are successful. It would be a mistake to suppose that somehow Thetis' appeal

[42] Gould, for instance, does not include it among his list of Homeric supplications ". . . some of which are merely reported in the course of a speech or imagined in very general terms" (above, note 1) 80 and note 39. Whitfield, however, does include it (above, note 1) 65.

[43] See *Il.* 9.581; 583; 585 (to Meleager); 11.610 (Achilles imagines the Greeks before him).

[44] It is interesting how Hera's false supplication, which Agamemnon and the Greeks hear about, echoes dimly the genuine appeal of Thetis, as one more example of the curious refraction of reality which plagues the Greeks throughout the first half of Book 2.

and her position in themselves require the full ritual to secure Zeus' approval, while other requests do not; that is, to suppose that certain requests, when isolated from their contexts, by their very nature require the ritual. The poet chooses to emphasize one request and not another.

As noted, when a former supplication is recalled, usually in a speech, the reference is normally a simple statement of fact. Phoenix recounts briefly the supplication made to him by his mother (9.451) and those made to Meleager (9.574 ff.); Odysseus mentions Neoptolemos' to him inside the Trojan horse (11.530). Normally a character's report focuses on things like the consequences of a supplication, and not upon the ritual. But sometimes, even in reported supplications, the ritual itself, how it was performed and received, becomes the issue.

This can be most clearly seen in the suppliancies Odysseus mentions within his lying tales. Trying to deceive the disguised Athena (*Od.* 13.256–86), he reports that after the murder of Orsilochos he besought Phoenicians for passage to Pylos (258–78). The actual ceremony is referred to only briefly; instead, the hero concentrates on the murder which forced him to flee[45] and on the failure of the Phoenicians to deliver him properly—through no fault of their own (276–78). When Odysseus gives his "history" to Eumaios, however, his supplication now occurs on the battlefield to the Egyptian king (14.276–84) and he describes the ritual itself in detail, including his embrace of the king's knees and the monarch's pious respect for Zeus.[46]

Odysseus' focus upon the sailors' failure to do what he had supplicated (and paid) them for reflects his pique at the apparent breach of hospitality by his real escort, the Phaeacians, in dumping him on an unknown shore. Shortly before Athena's appearance, he privately cursed his former hosts for just this (13.213). Hence in his lie, the issue is not whether he performed his supplication correctly, or whether the sailors initially agreed, but that they later inadvertently failed him.[47] But in Eumaios' hut Odysseus' concern is to establish his own awareness of proper behavior as well as to remind his host of his obligations. Despite his beggarly appearance, he was once a man of consequence, and a man who expects correct treatment.

[45] As a means of suggesting to his listener that he is a crafty man, and dangerous to cross. See C. T. Trahman, "Odysseus' Lies (*Odyssey*, Books 13–19)," *Phoenix* 6 (1952) 36; Hartmut Erbse, *Beiträge zum Verständnis der Odyssee* (Berlin 1972) 154 f.; and P. Walcot, "Odysseus and the Art of Lying," *Ancient Society* 1 (1977) 9, 11–12.

[46] The variation in the situation—from Phoenician ship deck to Egyptian battlefield—is not the issue, but it is interesting. See Walcot (above, note 45) 14–15.

[47] His insistence that Phoenicians were not to blame—does it represent a retraction of his angry curse, a tacit admission that perhaps the Phaeacians did the best they could? Or is it a clever suppression of a recent anger which he does not wish his new benefactor to notice?

To repeat, the fact that the poet adapts the length and detail of each supplication to its context is not surprising. But he also manipulates the completeness and accuracy with which the ceremonial gestures are performed, and this kind of variation reveals independence *vis-à-vis* the ritual itself. A ceremony which can be partially or entirely omitted, depending on circumstances, without noticeable variation in results is not one which should be defined only or even mainly by its externals. It is, in fact, subjected to literary manipulation and for a variety of uses.

The most conspicuous omission of the ritual gestures during a supplication occurs in Odysseus' plea to Nausikaa and the omission is fully self-conscious. The hero debates with himself whether he should embrace the princess' knees (*Od.* 6.141–47), and no one doubts that he makes the right decision under the circumstances: Nausikaa is a young maiden and he a dirty, naked stranger. Apparently even desperate suppliants must observe certain limits. Besides, Nausikaa is quick to assume her responsibility toward him without the full ceremony (6.192). Odysseus' hurried debate once he recognizes the delicacy of his situation, his sure choice for the course of reserved flattery, Nausikaa's pert lecturing and ready hospitality: the scene is graceful and seductive. Of course the desperate gestures are unnecessary.

This conclusion, however, is one we are led to by poetic artistry; by any rigid interpretation of the ritual we should wonder how the gestures could be so easily omitted. It is not enough to repeat that Nausikaa is a harmless young girl who never poses a real threat anyway.[48] The other Phaeacians prove to be even more hospitable than the princess once they recover from the surprise of Odysseus' appearance, but still the hero must undergo an elaborate humiliation at Arete's knees. The poet, however, wishes Odysseus' encounter with the queen to be ominous; both Nausikaa and Athena in disguise have warned him that it will be crucial.[49] The supplication in full detail contributes much to the awesome atmosphere surrounding these mysterious people at their banquet, although the apprehension soon vanishes. Nevertheless the momentary threat is carefully cultivated—and equally cultivated is the sense that Odysseus' behavior on the beach is right, despite his omission of the "correct" forms. His tact and persuasiveness are allowed to triumph because that is the tone which the scene is to have. The "rules" of supplication are suddenly inoperative because the poet wishes it.

In the *Iliad*, some suppliants who conspicuously omit important gestures are refused:[50] Chryses bearing his golden staff (1.14); Priam and Hekabe

[48] Except for the subtle enticement to marriage. On this point much has been written. See Thomas van Nortwick, "Penelope and Nausikaa," *TAPA* 109 (1979) 270–71.

[49] See Bernard C. Fenik, *Studies in the Odyssey* (Wiesbaden 1974) 105 ff., esp. 128–30.

[50] Others are accepted: see 18.422, 457, Thetis to Hephaistos; 21.368, Xanthus to Hera; also *Od.* 14.511, Odysseus to Eumaios.

from Troy's walls (22.33, 79); and the dying Hektor (22.337). But we cannot argue that any of these would have succeeded otherwise. The responses of the men supplicated make it clear that personal motives overpower any other consideration. Agamemnon is scornful of any other authority and refuses to be deprived of his woman (1.26–28; 118–20). Hektor in his soliloquy following his parents' appeal rejects the humiliation of returning to the city (22.99–110). Achilles is still too vengeful to be merciful to his enemy's corpse (22.344–54).

It makes no difference whether a correct ritual of supplication accompanies a plea. Men omit the humble gestures and receive their every desire; others cling desperately to the ceremony and are struck down as they speak. This fact is most poignantly illustrated on the battlefield in the *Iliad*. Four times Trojan warriors plead for ransom in exchange for their lives.[51] Dolon and the sons of Antimachos cannot perform the ceremony—his hands are grasped by his captors[52] and they are trapped in their chariot. Adrestos and Lykaon both embrace their captor's knees. All are slain. Dolon dies because Diomedes thinks him too dangerous to leave alive (10.449–51). The others are victims of two warriors who are implacable in their quest for vengeance. Agamemnon vows to punish all Trojans when he stops Menelaos from sparing Adrestos (6.51–54) and he kills the sons of Antimachos in righteous anger over a threat their father once made against his brother (11.138–42). Patroclos' death has suppressed any impulse to mercy that Achilles once felt (21.99–105).

Agamemnon and Achilles: the two warriors most bent on vengeance are also the two most often faced by suppliants. Their bitterest denunciations of their enemies are spoken to men helpless at their knees.[53] And cruelest of all are Achilles' words to Hektor when he refuses to return his body, for they speak not only of his implacable anger but also of his coming frustration in trying to injure a man beyond death (22.345–54). The pattern is chilling, yet it leads to Priam's supplication for the return of his son: the final suppliancy when Achilles' anger and need for vengeance are at last exhausted.

It is surely the poignant contrast between the helpless suppliant and the vengeful warrior which governs the pattern of battlefield supplications in the *Iliad*, both in who is supplicated and in the relentlessness with which suppliants are denied, despite passing evidence that warriors often did take prisoners alive. The contrast underscores the characters of Agamemnon and Achilles and invites comparison between them. The unbroken

[51] Including Dolon's plea to Odysseus and Diomedes during their night expedition (10.374). His words are almost the same as those used by Adrestos and the sons of Antimachos. See 10.378–81; 6.46–50; 11.131–35.

[52] He tries the gestures later; see 10.454.

[53] But also see Agamemnon's speech after Menelaos' wounding (4.155).

string of refusals gives added significance to the success of Priam's final supplication.

The results of this study can be briefly stated. Despite external similarities the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* exhibit different attitudes toward the potency of the ritual, since in one poem Zeus is said to protect suppliants[54] while in the other no such claim is made. But the attitudes are not necessarily indicative of different societies, authors or such. Rather the ceremony is subject to manipulation in both poems. In the *Odyssey*, Zeus' protection for suppliants is used to illuminate the hospitality of various hosts. In the *Iliad* the most vivid scenes of supplication promote the theme of vengeance. In other words, suppliancy is depicted in each epic in a manner suited to that poem's setting: in the one, the last bitter days of a war; in the other, the wanderings of a man searching for home.

Manipulation of typical scenes for literary effect is becoming more widely recognized as a feature of Homeric style.[55] The poet is simply not bound by his traditional material; he controls when and how details are included. Recognition of this raises a serious methodological question about using Homer to write a history of supplication without attention to context. For instance, in discussing the religious underpinnings of the ritual we must distinguish carefully the evidence of each poem. And because suppliancy scenes are so freely manipulated in both poems, care should be taken even in describing a fundamental outline of the Homeric ceremony.[56]

[54] Though he does nothing for the suppliants who are refused.

[55] See above, note 17; also Fenik (above, note 49) and "Stylization and Variety," *Homer. Tradition and Invention*, ed. B. Fenik (Leiden 1978) 68–90.

[56] I would like to thank *TAPA*'s anonymous readers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.