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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
PROGRAM IN THE HUMANITIES

AN ARISTOTELIAN CRITIQUE OF HOMERIC COMIC TECHNIQUE IN THE *ILIAD*

By

Richard Baldwin

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Program in the Humanities
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requirements for the degree of
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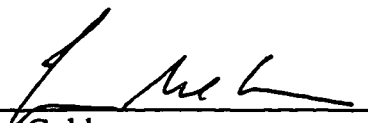
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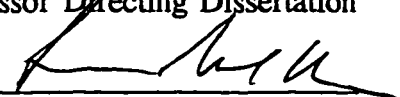
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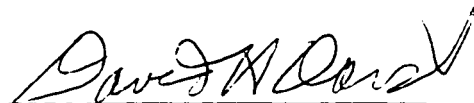
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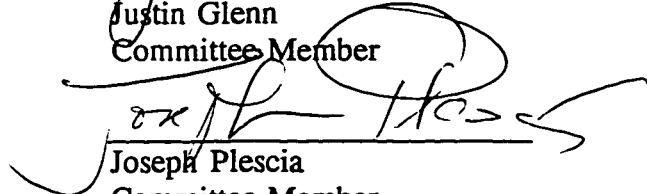
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INTRODUCTION

The journey which led to this dissertation was guided by the curiously frequent number of comic incidents I encountered on a close reading of the *Iliad*. I soon became convinced that Aristotle was correct when he stated that Homer "first traced out the form of comedy" in *Poetics* 1448 b 36-7.¹

As I encountered a broad field of opinions about the comic passages in the *Iliad*, I realized the importance of assembling a set of hermeneutic principles that I could accept as valid tools to use to interpret the *Iliad* in general and those comic passages in particular. In the last century the critics were divided into those who saw the epic as a patchwork of earlier songs sown together over centuries (thereby making it easy to regard

¹To be sure, Aristotle was referring to the *Margites*, not the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; however, according to M. Heath, "Aristotelian Comedy," *Classical Quarterly* 39 (1989), "Aristotle goes on to claim the *Margites* shares with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* the qualities which made them exceptional even among heroic poems: both anticipate the much later emergence of drama in their narrative technique" (347). G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), remarks, "Although Homeric Epos is not intrinsically suited for the comic element, Aristotle does find an attested poetic form, *within the Homeric tradition*, that has a function parallel to that of comedy. The form in question is represented by the Homeric *Margites* . . ." (259). In a footnote Nagy explains "I note again—as I have done throughout—that in matters of archaic Greek poetry our concern should be more with questions of poetic tradition than with questions of poetic authorship" (footnote 9n1, 259). No doubt Aristotle was able to accept the Homeric authorship of the *Margites* because he recognized the comic talents of Homer in the many non-heroic and comic scenes in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

humorous passages in the epics as interpolations) versus those who saw the poem as a unified whole. I was delighted to discover that I would not be burdened with this now obsolete polarization of criticism into "analytical" and "unitarian" schools of thought that began in the modern era with Friedrich August Wolf's famous work, *Prolegomena, Volumen I*, published in 1795.² For as I read the *textus receptus* of the *Iliad*, I could not help but intuit a single hand involved in this impressive poem, no matter what number of hands had contributed this or that over what number of centuries before and after this single genius.³ Through my investigation I discovered that, "Not a trace of proof has ever been found that during the classical period anyone questioned the unity of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* or that they were both the work of one poet, and that poet, Homer."⁴ In fact, there are no arguments by either Greek or Latin writers to show that Homer was not the creator of both epics.⁵ Therefore I welcomed the fact that, "Most scholars now accept that the Homeric epics are the result of a developing oral epic tradition on the one hand, the unifying and creative work of an exceptional monumental

²J. A. Scott, *The Unity of Homer* (Berkeley, 1921), 41.

³As Bowra in R. P. Draper, ed., *The Epic: Developments in Criticism, A Casebook* (Basingstoke, 1990) remarks: "...the *Iliad* is a single poem with a single plan and a remarkably consistent use of language" (123).

⁴*Ibid.*, 39.

⁵Scott, *Unity of Homer*, points out, "Except for the utterly vain and ineffectual paradoxical reasoning of Xenon and Hellanicus we hear of no arguments by either Greek or Latin writers to show that Homer was not the creator of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*" (41).

composer on the other."⁶ Included among these scholars is Richard Janko who set out to prove multiple authorship:

"Inspired by the late Sir Denys Page, I first began to investigate the diction of the Homeric poems in order to prove that they result from multiple authorship, but reached the opposite conclusion: that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were taken down by dictation, much as we have them, from the lips of a single eighth-century singer."⁷

Though differing from Janko in some of the details, Kirk reports that the belief in the early composition of the Homeric epics is supported on several fronts:

⁶G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, ed. G. S. Kirk, vol. 1 (1985; reprint, Cambridge, 1993), xv. Cf. N. Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, ed. G. S. Kirk, Vol. 6 (Cambridge, 1993), 1. As Richardson summarizes, "I admit without hesitation to being entirely convinced by the unitarians that, with the exception of occasional brief interpolations, each poem is the product of a single poet's creative endeavor within the poetic tradition rather than a redacted compilation of several narratives" (6). W. G. Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Epic Poetry* (Baltimore, 1984), concludes concerning the integrity of the Homeric poems: "I believe that each poem was shaped by a single artist according to a coherent design" (xviii). Note that, despite the prevailing conviction of the unity of our text, R. Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, ed. G. S. Kirk, vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1992), must proclaim such confidence with a caveat: ". . . the origin of our text and the nature of Alexandrian scholarship are still obscure and hotly debated topics" (2).

⁷Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4, xi. He later informs us: "All our MSS somehow go back to a single origin, and have passed through a single channel; it is improbable that more than one 'original' of the *Iliad* ever existed, even if different rhapsodic performances and editorial interventions have led to the addition or (rarely) omissions of verses here and there. . . . linguistic data prove that the text acquired fixed form well before Hesiod's time; if the *Iliad* was first written down later, we must accept a long intervening period of reasonably accurate memorized transmissions, which I find unlikely" (29).

That the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were widely known by the middle of the seventh century B.C., if not earlier, is supported by other considerations: mainly the quotations and echoes in surviving poetry of that time (in Archilochus, Alcman, Callinus and Tyrtæus especially), but also a couplet referring to Nestor's cup of *Il.* 11.632ff. which was inscribed around 725 B.C. on a cup excavated in Ischia in 1954. This is confirmed by the appearance of heroic scenes as decorations on vases from around 735 B.C. onward. . . . There can be no serious doubt that both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were quite well known, not only in Ionia but also on the mainland, by 650 B.C. The increase from around 700 in cults of epic heroes and heroines, like those of Agamemnon at Mikenæ and Menelaos and Helen at Sparta, points in the same direction.⁸

We are aware that our text became the standard by about the middle of the second century B.C. and is essentially the same as the texts of Roman and medieval times. "Before this time, as ancient scholars attest and surviving papyri prove, there were a number of different texts, differing from each other often in a word or two and

⁸Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, 4.

sometimes in a sequence of three or more verses."⁹ Janko submits that the Homeric epics could not have been liable to *free* oral transmission until they were fixed a hundred or more years later; instead "it is clear that the texts were fixed before the time of Hesiod, and it is difficult to refuse the conclusion that the texts were fixed at the time when each was composed, whether by rote memorisation or by oral dictated texts."¹⁰

In his 1991 presidential address to the annual meeting of the American Philological Association,¹¹ Gregory Nagy argued that it was unnecessary to assume the use of writing to account for the early fixity of the text. In fact, he insisted that "there is no evidence for assuming that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as compositions, resulted from the writing down of a text" (42). Instead Nagy proposed an "evolutionary model of

⁹M. W. Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad*, (Baltimore, 1987), 23. Edwards further maintains that "There is no hint whatever of versions of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* widely different from our own, or even different in more than the most minor details of wording and expansions of type scene. . . . Expansion by repetition of recurrent verses, by minor variation in expression of the same idea, is the characteristic of the variants in the divergent texts, and this has little effect on our understanding or appreciation" (27-8). "Evidence for the nature of the texts before the establishment of this standard vulgate comes mainly from these sources: the remarks of commentators of the Roman and Byzantine periods (the "skholiasts") about the methods and decisions of the Alexandrian scholars; papyri surviving from the period before the mid-second century B.C. ("Ptolemaic" papyri, edited by S. West 1967); and quotations from Homer in writers of the classical period" (24). Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol.4., informs us that "Fragments of over 600 MSS and myriads of quotations, not to mention the scholia and their lemmata, give us a clear view of the text which prevailed from about 150 B.C. to about A.D. 600. This 'ancient vulgate' is close to that found in the 188 medieval codices of c. 900-1550" (2).

¹⁰R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in Epic Diction* (Cambridge, 1982), 191.

¹¹The text of this address was printed as "Homeric Questions," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 122 (1992): 17-60.

Homeric poetry culminating in a static phase that lasts about two centuries, framed by a relatively *formative stage* in the later part of the eighth century and an increasingly *definitive stage* in the middle of the sixth" (52). In his *Greek Mythology and Poetics*, Nagy described the alternative (i.e. illiterate) source of this fixity:

The fixity of phrasing in oral poetry . . . is actually due primarily to the factor of traditional theme rather than meter. Accordingly, I now offer a working definition of the formula that leaves out the factor of meter as the prime conditioning force: *the formula is a fixed phrase conditioned by the traditional themes of oral poetry.* Furthermore, I am ready to propose that meter is *diachronically generated by formula rather than vice versa.*¹²

Having accepted this basic unity of the poem, when attempting to interpret the *Iliad*, or any part thereof, in a manner that it deserves, I must concur fully with Janko when he proposes the use of many methods and approaches:

These include Unitarianism, the view that each epic is a

¹²G. Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca, 1990), 29. Cf. Thalmann, *Conventions*: "The typicality of meter, diction, themes, and form were, of course, enormously helpful to the poets in composition, whatever use, if any, they made of writing. But it also reflected, and must have helped to preserve, a uniformity of thought, attitude, and subject matter that was essential if poetry was to perform its important service to the society" (113). On the other hand, B. Powell, "Did Homer Sing at Lefkandi?," *Electronic Antiquity*, vol. 1, no. 2 (July 1993), presents impressive evidence to conclude that Homer "must have spent some of his career on Euboea, and probably on Euboea his poems were written down" (17).

basically unified creation by a poetic genius; the proof by Parry and Lord that the epics belong to an oral tradition; the study of other such poems, both post-Homeric and from other traditional societies, especially in the Balkans; the recognition of Near Eastern influence on early Greece; the work of Burkert and the structuralists on myth; the work of Severyns and the Neo-Analysts on how Homer adapts traditional tales, especially those found in the post-Homeric Epic Cycle; Aristotelian and narratological literary theory; the decipherment of Linear B by Ventris and Chadwick; Greek dialectology and onomastics; Indo-European linguistics; Bronze and Iron-Age Aegean archaeology; the textual criticism of an oral-dictated poem, transmitted with oral and scribal variants in an open recension; van der Valk's work on Alexandrian scholarship; Erbse's edition of the scholia; and the recognition that our basic notions of literary style have been decisively shaped by poems of oral origin.¹³

Since my interest is focused on the purpose and techniques of Homer's use of comedy in the *Iliad*, I will find the most benefit in the following approaches from Janko's list: an understanding of the Near Eastern influence on these characters (particularly

¹³Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol.4, xi.

authors such as Nagy, Clader, de Jong and Suter); the work of Burkert and the structuralists on myth (how Homer reflects and reworks his tradition as in the work of Austin, Fenik, S. Richardson); narratological literary theory (especially the work of de Jong and S. Richardson); Greek dialectology and onomastics (aids to interpretation that come from diction and the origin of these characters names—for instance, the work of Nagy, Boedecker, and Clader¹⁴); but especially the understanding of comedy that has emerged from a reconstruction of an Aristotelian theory of comedy in chapter 1 based on the scholarship of Cooper, Butcher, Bywater, Else, Golden, Halliwell, House and Janko.

My willingness to accept the *Iliad* as we have it as largely the product of one author causes me to be particularly interested in the results of recent narratological critiques of the poems. Therefore I especially appreciate the approach of de Jong:

This study, too, will try to account for the *Iliad* as it is rather than to reconstruct how it came about. More specifically, I intend to study the *Iliad* as a narrative text, analyzing it within the theoretical framework of narratology, i.e. the theory that deals with the general principles underlying narrative texts. Narratologists are

¹⁴A.C. Suter, "Paris/Alexandros: A Study in Homeric Techniques of Characterization" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1984), parallels my own conviction when she says: "The studies of Boedecker, Clader, and Nagy share the advantage of approaching the text without moral preconceptions, and have also in their favour that they examine the texts as they are, with the benefit of the tools of diction analysis and theories of traditional oral composition developed by Parry and his followers, as well as their own tools of comparative linguistics and myth" (11).

concerned with such issues as characterization, chronology, suspense, space, plot-structure, point of view and the role of the narrator.¹⁵

De Jong goes on to express the basic thrust of my own approach when she remonstrates with those who explain such a phenomenon in the text as repetition as solely due to the oral composition of the text. Rather, she insists, "A narratological approach invites the interpreter to ask whether the phenomenon can also be explained or given a significance in terms of the story" (xii).¹⁶

¹⁵I. J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad* (Amsterdam, 1987), x. I find this approach coincides with my experience with the text much more than one that sees Homer so limited by metrical considerations, conventional technique, and epic tradition, that his own contributions are rather those of an editor than a composer. I am more comfortable with those who see Homer as "the master storyteller who offered us at the beginning of Western literary tradition a standard for all the narratives that followed" (Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6, ix). I do not at all want to minimize Homer's use of his tradition, though, and D.G. Miller, *Improvisation, Typology, Culture and 'The New Orthodoxy': How Oral is Homer?* (Washington D.C., 1982), makes a good point about Homer's inherited diction: "While the Homeric language is an artificial *Kunstsprache*, there are numerous forms, of several different dialects, that date back several hundred years. They remained in the tradition because they fit metrical slots different from the current Ionic forms or belonged to traditional formulas (Parry 1930: 135=1971:315; Severyns 1943), and added special poetic effects (Parry 1932:17ff=1971:337ff; cf. Hainsworth 1969:22). A single literate author, unless a philologist, could not have access to such a motley array of forms, but singers who learned their songs and traditional language from a long stock of bards from different areas naturally have a repertoire of archaic (including obsolete) and dialect forms (cf. Lord 1965:11; Nagy 1976: 250f)" (27).

¹⁶M. Mueller, "Oral Poetry, the 'Iliad' and the Modern Reader," in Draper, *The Epic*, is another scholar who follows this recent approach to the text and praises those who argue for analysis of the text as is (explaining Homer out of Homer): "Ruth Finnegan has therefore done Homeric scholarship a great service by proving that the Parry-Lord theory in its rigid form is a myth that does not fit the facts . . . Above all, Finnegan showed that the relationship of oral to literate traditions is extremely flexible and that many oral traditions have co-existed with literacy and made use of it. . . . To

Assuming that the *Iliad* is indeed the final product of one author, I feel justified in referring to Homer as a poet of genius (although some may consider that term too effusive), and I shall unabashedly assume the *Iliad* to be a masterpiece that reflects that unique genius. It seems obvious to this writer, as it did to Aristotle, that the art of Homer so surpassed his rivals that it could be considered something *sui generis* since it does achieve a status in ancient Greece that could be called scriptural.¹⁷ This is not revolutionary. Although antiquity knew nothing definite about Homer's life and personality,¹⁸ the poems they attributed to Homer became the focus of ancient Greece:

The great fact of ancient Greece is the poetry of Homer,
which was the center of education, the source of

say of a work that it is oral is to make a statement about its dominant mode of production and/or transmission. Such a statement itself says nothing about the organization, complexity and spirit of a text so produced or transmitted. . . . For the student of Homer, Finnegan's demonstration of what oral poetry is and is not has a wonderfully liberating effect. He no longer knows in advance what kind of composition the *Iliad* is or what rhetorical effects are possible in it. He must listen to the text in order to find out and, as Aristarchus preached, he must explain Homer out of Homer" (173-4). Still another modern scholar who emphasizes taking the text seriously as we have it is Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought*, who maintains that "One passage after another in this poetry has been branded by scholars as interpolated or has been scorned as an inartistic blemish, when an informed and sympathetic reading would have revealed its true value" (xvii).

¹⁷Scholars like Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4, commonly resort to the substantive "genius" when referring to the poet of the *Iliad*: "we cannot set limits to the quality of a poet's work, especially when dealing with a genius like Homer" (38). This does not negate the fact that Homer was the recipient of an ancient, rich tradition. As M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, 1981), reminds us about the epic: "We come upon it when it is already completely finished, a congealed and half-moribund genre. Its completeness, its consistency and its absolute lack of artistic naiveté bespeak its old age as a genre and its lengthy past" (14).

¹⁸Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, 1.

mythology, the model of literature, the inspiration of artists; known and quoted by all. Homer was the poet of such authority, even in matters not poetic, that contending states were supposed to have settled their claims to territory on the interpretation of his verse.¹⁹

Even one's recognition of Plato's strong misgivings about the role of poetry in his ideal state set out in the *Republic* must be balanced by an understanding of Plato's "deep and abiding love of the poet, whose influence on him (as Longinus observed: 13.3-4) can be detected at every turn (he quotes him some 150 times). . . ." ²⁰

Aristotle's admiration of Homer was no less than his teacher's: "Aristotle is said to have 'discussed Homer in detail in many dialogues, admiring and praising him' (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 53.1)."²¹ Even in Aristotle's surviving works the influence of Homer can be seen in his use of no less than 114 quotations from Homer.²²

Athenaeus (VIII, 347E) quotes Aeschylus as saying that his tragedies were just portions of the great feasts of Homer: *ὅς τὰς αὐτοῦ τραγῳδίας τεμάχη εἶναι τῶν*

¹⁹Scott, *Unity*, 1. Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6: "The authority of Homer in sixth-century Athens is shown most clearly by the regulation that the Homeric poems alone should be recited at the Panathenaia (Lycurgus, *In Leocratem* 102, Isocrates, *Paneg.* 159, Pl. *Hipparchus* 229B)" (27). In fact, since the time of the Pisistratids in the sixth century, as R. Flacelière, *A Literary History of Greece*, trans. D. Garman (1962; reprint, Chicago, 1964), informs us, "Homer was regarded as the greatest poet of Greece, or quite simply as 'the poet'" (60).

²⁰Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6, 30.

²¹*Ibid.*, 31.

²²*Ibid.*

‘Ομήρου μεγάλων δείπνων.²³ The Romans used the epics of Homer as school texts²⁴, and even later among the Christian apologists Homer "continued to enjoy a relatively privileged status as the conveyor of divinely inspired truth, despite the general hostility of the apologists towards pagan religion and myths."²⁵

In sum, it is no exaggeration to state that "Homer himself possessed the quality of genius that enabled him to exploit, master, and transcend his predecessors, his contemporaries, and most of his successors in literary history."²⁶ Thalmann offers an explanation for Homer's unique place in history:

What seems to be most important about this poetry is that it was a means of coming to know and of explaining the world and man's place in it: the history and arrangement of the physical world; the course of divine and human history; the conditions that govern men's relations with the

²³Scott, *Unity of Homer*, 27.

²⁴Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6, 40.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 48-9.

²⁶Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad*, 21-22. G. Murray, *The Rise of Greek Epic* (1934; reprint, Oxford, 1960) states: "We know that from about the sixth century onwards Homer formed the staple of Greek education. Every one knew Homer, and all parts of Greece accepted him. Consequently, any local tradition which conflicted with Homer tended to die out, or else to be trimmed and fitted into consistency with him" (196). G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, wants to temper the attribution of genius to the final poet of the *Iliad*: "I think that the activity of the Homeric poems is traditional both in diction and in theme. For me the key is not so much the genius of Homer but the genius of the overall poetic tradition that culminated in our *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. . . . If indeed tradition is a principle factor in the artistic integrity of an archaic Greek poem, it follows that we need not simply attempt to ascribe an *Iliad* or an *Odyssey* to the creativity of one genius, the poet Homer" (3-5).

gods and with each other; and the significance and value of human civilization and social institutions.²⁷

Redfield adds:

The quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon results in the death of Achilles and thus in his establishment as the figure through whose story, more than any other, the Greeks confronted the meaning of death--a confrontation embodied in the *Iliad*. . . . Nagy places Homer with the law givers and teachers, with Lycurgus and Pythagoras. Since the Homeric epics, not Holy Scripture, served the Greeks throughout their history as the basis of education and the texts of first and last resort, Nagy's placement of Homer is surely right.²⁸

The importance of this universal praise of Homer is that the assumption of his genius drives us to analyze why he is so highly rated. In other words, part of my task will be to explain how even the comic passages we focus on do indeed contribute to the narrative and thematic unity of the poem as a whole.

Although these comic passages were misunderstood and devalued in antiquity, Homer was very early recognized for his insight into the comic dimension of human existence. As noted above, the ancients considered Homer to be the author of the comic

²⁷Thalman, *Conventions of Form and Thought*, xiv.

²⁸Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, xiii.

epic *Margites* and the parody *Battle of the Frogs and the Mice*. "The attribution was not an aberration, however. The direct result of the recognition that the tenor of the two poems parallels in some respects that of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, it affected the way listeners, and eventually readers too, assessed the Homeric achievement."²⁹ Unfortunately, the comic has not been acknowledged and appreciated on the level that the heroic and the tragic have been in the West. In point of fact, although Homer's great epic the *Iliad* represents the earliest extant literature in the West, the obvious humorous incidents in that great work have been little appreciated down through history.

Attacks on Homer seem to have begun with Xenophanes of Colophon who rejected the Homeric picture of the gods in a series of extant fragments such as this one:

Homer and Hesiod have ascribed to the gods all things that
are a shame and a disgrace among mortals, stealings and
adulteries and deceivings of one another.³⁰

Xenophanes is not alone in his misunderstanding of Homer's use of humor in respect to the gods. Pythagoras was supposedly so opposed to the Homeric view of the gods that he said that he saw Homer being punished in the Underworld because of his lies about the gods.³¹ The result of these attacks was the invention of a new hermeneutic for understanding Homeric epic: "Toward the end of the sixth century, we begin to hear of

²⁹C. A. Patrides, "Homer: The Invention of Reality," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28, no. 4 (1989): 305.

³⁰J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (1892; reprint, Cleveland, 1968), 119.

³¹Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6, citing "Hieronymus of Rhodes, fr. 42 Wehrli" (26).

an attempt to meet the attacks of the philosophers on their own ground through allegory, in the work of Theagenes of Rhegium, who is said to have been the first to use this method."³²

No doubt it is the prejudice against the comic even in the ancient world that sparks this animosity to those less than heroic passages in Homer. Indeed, the prevailing view of Homer was that he was the poet of a noble work:

Anaxagoras . . . is said to have been 'the first to show that Homeric poetry concerned valour and justice' (D-K 59 A 1 § 11). This sounds not so very different from the popular view reflected in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, that Homer teaches 'marshalling of armies, forms of valour, arming of men for war' (1034ff).³³

Thus it is not surprising that the less than noble passages, including the comic episodes, would continue to be athetized or criticized. Pfeiffer notes that this criticism which began with Xenophanes continued with later philosophers:

It is somewhat paradoxical that the protest of a self-conscious, religious rhapsode should be the starting-point of Homeric criticism in antiquity; it remained the privilege of philosophers to follow his lead and to criticize the way in which Homer presented the gods, until Plato, for this

³²Ibid., 27.

³³Ibid., 29.

and other reasons expelled him from his ideal city.³⁴

Plato's attack on poetry in general, and Homer in particular, resulted from his metaphysics: this world is a mere shadow of the ultimate reality of the forms. Poetry, therefore, is another step removed from reality. Furthermore, Plato assumes "that poetry arouses chaotic emotions in the soul and thus overturns the subordination of emotion to intellect necessary to the pursuit of philosophy."³⁵ Still another complaint about the epic poetry of Homer concerned the influence of Homer's portrayal of the gods as participants in immoral activities. On the other hand, Jaeger is able to mitigate the picture of Plato as one who denigrates poetry by pointing to Plato's own works:

. . . at the end of *The Symposium* [Plato] makes Socrates say that the true poet must be both a tragedian and a comedian—a claim which Plato himself answered by writing *Phaedo* and *The Symposium*. All Athenian culture was aimed at realizing that ideal. Not only did it pit tragedy and comedy against each other in the same theatre, but it taught the Athenians (in Plato's words) to consider all human life as both a tragedy and a comedy.³⁶

³⁴R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship: From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford, 1968), 9.

³⁵D. White, "A Sourcebook on the Catharsis Controversy" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1984), 138. Cf. *Republic* 606 D: καὶ περὶ ἀφροδισίων δὴ καὶ θυμοῦ καὶ περὶ πάντων τῶν ἐπιθυμητικῶν τε καὶ λυπηρῶν καὶ ἡδέων ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ.

³⁶W. Jaeger, *Paedeia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. 1, trans. G. Highet (New York, 1979), 360. Cf. *Phileb.* 50b.

Some blame Plato's student Aristotle for the prevailing negative conception of comedy in the classical European tradition which "in effect postulated normal patterns of human behavior from which the comic was a deviation worthy of ridicule and contempt".³⁷

Thus if the origins of comedy remain obscure, as Aristotle comments, principally because it was not at first given serious attention, he himself greatly compounded and ratified that original misapprehension. Succeeding generations had the Stagirite's weighty authority for treating the comic as distinctly second-rate, if they treated it at all.³⁸

It is not difficult to agree with this assessment of Aristotle's influence on literary critics when one reads certain passages in Aristotle's writings, particularly *Politics* 1336 b 20-3:

τοὺς δὲ νεωτέρους οὐτ' ἰάμβων οὔτε
 κωμωδίας θεατὰς ἑατέον, πρὶν ἢ θῆν ἡλικίαν
 λάβωσιν ἐν ἧ καὶ κατακλίσεως ὑπάρξει κοινωνεῖν
 ἤδη καὶ μέθης καὶ τῆς ἀπὸ τῶν τοιούτων γιγνο-
 μένης βλάβης ἀπαθείς ἢ παιδεία ποιήσει πάντας.

Legislators should not allow youth to be spectators of

³⁷R. Torrence, *The Comic Hero* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), 1.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 2.

lampoons or of comedies until they have reached an age at which they are allowed to share at public tables and to drink strong wine and by which time education will cause them all not to suffer damage from such things.

On the other hand, like Plato, Aristotle exhibits a love and admiration for Homer: in fact, in order to rescue him from the attacks of earlier critics, "he shifts the focus right away from the preoccupation with the gap between Homer's portrayal of divine or heroic ethics and later moral beliefs, and also between the aesthetic criteria suitable for an early epic poem and those governing the literature of the classical period."³⁹ Literal truth is no longer as important as dramatic effectiveness and credibility so that Homer can retain his status as the precursor of tragedy.

Later the Alexandrian scholars reacted by doubting that certain comic scenes were actually written by Homer; for instance, the Zeus-Hera seduction scene, a large part of book 14 of the *Iliad*, was athetized as being an interpolation.⁴⁰ Among the Romans, at least Quintilian recognized that Homer was not always so *gravis* "serious" but also had a lighter side—that he was also *jucundus* "delightful" (*Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.46).

Although the Middle Ages is hardly a time that could appreciate the comic spirit

³⁹Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6, 35.

⁴⁰G. Davies, "Homeric Humour and Homeric Laughter," (Ph.D. diss., University of Bangor, Wales, 1976), 116. See also, Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4, 23f., who believes Zenodotus "was applying Plato's proposals for the censure of the Homeric poems" (23) and Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol.6, who remarks that Aristophanes objected to passages on grounds of impropriety (35f.). Cf. J. Morrison, *Homeric Misdirection: False Predictions in the Iliad* (Ann Arbor, 1992), 80f., on athetization by Aristarchus, Aristophanes and Zenodotus.

in Homer, he is still considered a great poet by Dante in his *Divine Comedy (Inferno IV.86-90)*:

Mira colui con quella spada in mano,
 che vien dinanzi ai tre sì come sire:
 quelli è Omero poeta sovrano;
 l'altro è Orazio satiro che vene;
 Ovidio è 'l terzo, e l'ultimo Lucano.
 Look well at him who holds that sword in hand,
 who moves before the other three as lord.
 That shade is Homer, the consummate poet;
 the other one is Horace, satirist;
 the third is Ovid, and the last is Lucan.⁴¹

Even after the Renaissance, by the sixteenth century, the comic still is not valued very highly. For instance, Erasmus of Rotterdam feels he must justify his lapse into the humorous in his *Praise of Folly* by mentioning other distinguished authors who also did so, like Homer and Virgil.⁴²

In modern times this negative attitude toward comedy has had some dissenters. Most notably, Molière and Johnson in the seventeenth century:

The "Letter on *The Imposter*" of 1667, possibly written by

⁴¹Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. A Mandelbaum (Berkeley, 1980; reprint, New York, 1982), 34-5.

⁴²D. Erasmus, *Praise of Folly* (1509; reprint, Cleveland, 1982), 57.

Molière himself, provides perhaps the most comprehensive single statement of the didactic conception of comedy. The ridiculous, the letter asserts, conflicts with the accepted laws of reasonable conduct; by perceiving this discrepancy we may learn to amend our ways "because of course, we believe that Reason should govern everything." In such apologies as these Johnson and Molière, like others in their age, endeavored to ascribe to comedy a higher and more respectable function than any that is evident from the scattered remarks in Aristotle's *Poetics*.⁴³

The nineteenth century, following Wolf's *Prolegomena*, saw the beginnings of the modern unitarian/analyst controversy that occupied classicists for over a century. The prevailing position of "the analysts viewed the *Iliad* as a conglomeration of separate songs by distinct poets, joined together by a less than ingenious editor."⁴⁴ This could explain the less than heroic comic interpolations. (Though this position held sway for years, the current consensus, as seen above, is in the unitarian camp.)

But by the nineteenth century comedy would find one to praise the comic, one who would probably not be surpassed, Hegel:

Comedy, for Hegel, is the most intense and meaningful

⁴³S. Law, "*In Risu Veritas: The Dialectics of the Comic Spirit*," (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1986), 3-4.

⁴⁴Morrison, *Homeric Misdirection*, 3.

aesthetic means by which the human spirit can transcend itself. Comedy provides us with an artistic mimesis that both purifies and purges the soul. More important, though, it provides us with a clarification of our position in the cosmos. Comedy, Hegel implies, is "The ultimate aesthetic catharsis."⁴⁵

Unfortunately, Hegel's praise did not characterize the general attitude toward the comic in the nineteenth century. More typical was the attitude expressed in 1857 in the essay "De l'essence du rire" in which "Baudelaire starts from the premise that laughter is the property of fools, not of wise men. Christ never laughed and laughter, like pain, seems rather to be a consequence of Man's primordial fall from grace."⁴⁶ Even toward the end of the nineteenth century when W. Irving Hunt wrote an article on "Homeric Wit and Humor," he could not do so without a caveat: "We must not look for too much wit and humor in Homer. . . . The dignity and nobility of the epic forbid it."⁴⁷

The twentieth century has resulted in an increasing attention paid to the comic.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Law, "In Risu Veritas," 65.

⁴⁶T. K. Hubbard, *The Mask of Comedy: Aristophanes and the Intertextual Parabasis* (Ithaca, 1991), 13.

⁴⁷W. I. Hunt, "Homeric Wit and Humor " *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 21 (1890): 48-58.

⁴⁸Even the comedy of Aristophanes has only been really appreciated in this century as K. J. Reckford, *Aristophanes' Old-and-New Comedy* (Chapel Hill, 1987), would comment, "it was only in our century, a time of unusual 'comic sense', as of unusual vulnerability to chaos, that Aristophanes...could be rediscovered in his whole and joyful achievement, and generously admired" (386).

But the residual prejudice against the comic persisted in the first half of the century. For instance, though in 1913 Butler would write about the comic in Homer, he too would do so almost apologetically: "Among mortals the humour, what there is of it, is confined mainly to the grim taunts which the heroes fling at one another when they are fighting, and more especially to crowing over a fallen foe."⁴⁹ In 1920 the renowned classical scholar Wilamowitz, no doubt influenced by the spirit of his age, athetized the *dios apate* ("deception of Zeus") of book 14 as an interpolation: surely this whimsical episode could not have been composed by the same author that wrote the great battles of books 12 and 13.⁵⁰ In 1934 Murray would even argue that the Zeus-Hera scene in book 14 must be an addition that crept in to infect the epic!⁵¹ By 1939 there is evidence of an awareness, maybe even the beginning of an acceptance, of the comic in the Homeric epics by some scholars. For example, Feibleman wrote:

The epics of Homer contain sure evidence of a sense of
humour in Homer himself. . . . Parts of the *Iliad* are true

⁴⁹S. Butler, *The Humour of Homer and Other Essays*, ed. R. A. Streatfeild (1913; reprint, New York, 1967), 73.

⁵⁰U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Die Ilias und Homer* (1920; reprint, Berlin, 1966): "Unverkennbar ist der Unterschied von Stimmung und Sinnesart zwischen dem Dichter, der den Zeus berücken läßt, und dem Dichter, der in großartiger Geradlinigkeit seinen Hektor durch das Tor zum Kampfe mit Aias führt, auch zu dem Verfasser des Idomeneusgedichtes, der nur wie ein Krieger für Krieger dichtet. Unverkennbar ist erst recht die Überlegenheit des Dichters der Διὸς ἀπάτη über den Bearbeiter, dessen Werk jenem ebenso wie uns allein die Reste der beiden älteren Gedichte darbot. Denn die Bearbeitung liegt zugrunde. Die Einlagen, welche auf die Διὸς ἀπάτη vorbereiten, stehen in Stücken, die der Bearbeiter aus seinen beiden Vorlagen nahm, und die glänzende Szene O 110-143 ist auf N 518-20 gebaut: daß Ares ganz unbesinnlich hinunterstürzen will, den Fall seines Sohnes Askalaphos zu rächen..." (232).

⁵¹Murray, *The Rise of Greek Epic*, 273.

comedy. . . . the whole of the *Odyssey* forms a vast comic pattern. . . .⁵²

Even so, in 1940 the prevailing view of humor in Homeric epic could be characterized as follows:

. . . [E]ven Matthew Arnold followed the lead of Aristotle and 'Longinus' and hardly recognized the existence of Homeric wit, on the assumption that the Bible of the Greeks must be as serious as other Bibles. In quite recent days the presence of burlesque in the *Iliad* . . . has usually been either neglected or, at least, not adequately discussed.⁵³

In 1952 Duckworth remarked that there was an increasing number of books devoted to the comic from the students of drama, philosophers, and psychologists,⁵⁴ but he had the same complaint that Lauter would have in 1964: "there has been precious little agreement about the objects of comic theory, let alone about the nature of comedy itself."⁵⁵ Still, from the late sixties to the present there has been an increasing attention

⁵²J. K. Feibleman, *In Praise of Comedy: A Study in its Theory and Practice* (1939; reprint, New York, 1962), 24-5.

⁵³E. R. Sikes, "The Humor of Homer," *Classical Review* 54 (1940): 121.

⁵⁴G. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (Princeton, 1952), 305.

⁵⁵P. Lauter, ed., *Theories of Comedy* (New York, 1964), xv. Lauter also reveals the paucity of work on the comic up to the 1960s: "Indeed, I think it would not be an exaggeration to say that this volume taken together with that other in the Anchor Books series called *Comedy* (Anchor A 87, edited by Wylie Sypher and containing Bergson's *Laughter*, Meredith's "An Essay on Comedy," and Professor Sypher's "The Meanings

paid to the comic in general and Homeric comedy in particular, despite McLeish's observation in 1980 that there was "a continuing scholarly reluctance to discuss comedy in depth at all: it still tends to be regarded as an insubstantial and essentially secondary form of literature."⁵⁶ Even as recently as 1989 Patrides could declare that "in our time scholars who disapprove of the comic episodes in Homer are as likely as not to declare them unauthentic"⁵⁷ while he himself declared that "the *Iliad* is fraught with comic characters."⁵⁸

By 1993 the tide had finally turned. Nilsen would remark on the increasing attention given to the comic in the universities: "Humor classes are springing up on university campuses all around the United States, and they are located in various departments--Anthropology, Communication, Literature, Journalism, Linguistics, Speech, Theatre, and a wide range of others."⁵⁹ In chapter 10, "Humor Theory and Epistemology," Nilsen discusses the results of all this attention to the comic by summarizing the physiological, psychological, educational, and social functions of humor. For example, he notes that "Medicine is one of the fastest growing disciplines

of Comedy") contain a substantial portion of the major works on the subject and selections representing just about every significant position" (xv, footnote 2). Whereas, "A writer on the tragic must master a literature containing perhaps a book--at least an essay--for every line in the great tragedies" (xv).

⁵⁶K. McLeish, *The Theatre of Aristophanes* (New York, 1980), 157.

⁵⁷Patrides, "Homer: The Invention of Reality": 313.

⁵⁸Ibid. 307.

⁵⁹Nilsen, D. L. F. *Humor Scholarship: A Research Bibliography* (Westport, CT, 1993), 290.

in terms of humor research,"⁶⁰ and reports on the vast number of institutes and associations involved in humor research and therapy. Then he remarks on the psychological functions of humor, the fact that laughter "can be used to express fear, embarrassment, contempt, and grief, as well as...love and joy."⁶¹ Humor can also have educational functions: "Because humor and laughter cause us to be more alert, cause our brains to be engaged and our eyes to sparkle, and put our brain in an alert and receptive mood, humor and laughter are important learning tools."⁶² Finally, humor also has social functions: It "is used not only to in-bond with people and groups we like, but also to out-bond from people and groups we do not like"; it "is also used to promote social stability and control"; it "can also be used to promote social change."⁶³ Nilsen concludes this chapter with a chart that lists the physiological functions as exhilaration, relaxation and healing; the psychological functions as relief, ego defense, coping, and gaining status; the educational functions as alertness, arguing and persuading, teaching effectively, and long-term-memory learning; and the social functions as in-bonding, out-bonding, promoting social stability and promoting social change.⁶⁴

That is all very well, but what is humor? How does one define it? Nilsen finds

⁶⁰Ibid. 287.

⁶¹Ibid. 288, as he quotes Antony Chapman, "Humor and Laughter in Social Interaction and Some Implications for Humor Research," *Handbook of Humor Research*, eds. P. McGhee and J. Goldstein (New York, 1983), 151.

⁶²Ibid. 290.

⁶³Ibid. 292.

⁶⁴Ibid. 293.

eight basic philosophical approaches to the problem that actually end in agnosticism: there is no historic agreement. Nilsen even attempts to explain this phenomenon by an analogy with the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle in physics:

"Although it is possible to observe the position and the momentum of an electron, it is not possible to observe both simultaneously. To observe the position of a particle it is necessary to occlude any observation of its momentum. On the other hand, to observe its momentum, it is necessary to occlude the observation of its position. . . . Science claims to be transcendent of individual subjectivity, however Lakoff shows that science is no more objective and transcendent than is metaphor, or religion, or humor, or art or other admittedly subjective fields of study.⁶⁵

Nilsen is basically expressing the current skepticism and relativity and nihilism that rejects absolute truth: All truth is subjective; everything is just a point of view. This supposedly explains the problems inherent in comic literary theory. We cannot explain or define it, but we know it when we see it and finally do appreciate it.

Although all this modern appreciation of the comic in general is a giant step forward in understanding the importance of the comic, there is still a paucity of critics who understand the value of the comic elements in the *Iliad*. Meltzer is one of the interesting exceptions. He rejoices that "Recent criticism has taken increasing interest

⁶⁵Ibid. 304.

in comic incidents, motifs, and characters in Homeric epic," but he also laments that:

"the role of the comic in defining the nature of heroism in the *Iliad* has received relatively little attention. Throughout the poem Homer juxtaposes comic incidents with scenes of bravery and pathos, drawing contrasts which enhance the dignity and poignancy of the heroic choice."⁶⁶

The attitude towards the comic is not the only problem that has hindered an understanding of Homeric comic technique in the *Iliad*. The enormous difficulty plaguing comic criticism is the lack of a clear, commonly accepted definition of the comic. Despite all the interest in the comic and all those who write about it as if they understood it, no one has satisfactorily defined it. As Bergson so aptly put it: "(Comedy) has a knack of baffling every effort, of slipping away and escaping only to bob up again."⁶⁷ Levine, another insightful critic of the comic, recognized this problem when he complained that most of those who write on the humor of Homer "begin with the subjective judgment of their own that 'this scene is humorous.' But who is to be the *arbiter ridiculorum*?"⁶⁸

A good example that illustrates the problem of recognizing the comic comes to

⁶⁶G. Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives in Shaping Homer's Tragic Vision," *Classical World* 83 (1989-1990): 265.

⁶⁷H. Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. C. Brereton and F. Ruthuelli (1911; reprint, New York, 1970), 61.

⁶⁸D. Levine, "ΓΕΛΩΙ ΕΚΘΑΝΟΝ: Laughter and the Demise of the Suitors," (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Cincinnati, 1980), 9.

mind in *Iliad* 19 where Agamemnon blames his quarrel with Achilles on Zeus; God made him do it. After his best friend Patroclus has been killed, Achilles stated that he wished Briseis had died rather than been taken captive so that their quarrel over her would not have resulted in the deaths of so many Achaeans. Then Agamemnon rises up and blames his part in the quarrel on Zeus, Destiny and Erinys (*Il.* 19. 86-90):

...ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ αἰτιός εἰμι,

ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς,

οἳ τέ μοι εἰν ἀγορῇ φρεσὶν ἔμβαλον ἄγριον ἄτην,

ἤματι τῷ ὄτ' Ἀχιλλῆος γέρας αὐτὸς ἀπηύρων.

ἀλλὰ τί δὲν ῥέξαιμι; θεὸς διὰ πάντα τελευτᾷ.

yet I am not responsible

but Zeus is, and Destiny, and Erinys the mist-walking

who in assembly caught my heart in the savage delusion

on that day I myself stripped from him the prize of

Achilleus.

Yet what could I do? It is the god who accomplishes all

things.

Agamemnon seems to be offering a flimsy excuse for his actions: "The devil made me do it," as a popular comedian a few years ago would say. In other words, this sounds like the king of Mycenae and the leader of the Greek expedition is acting like a child in refusing to take responsibility for his own actions. Therefore this could be interpreted as an instance of the comic. But E. R. Dodds has explained this passage in a different

light. Dodds explains that a careful reader will not interpret these words of Agamemnon as a weak excuse or evasion of responsibility. For Agamemnon does offer compensation for his actions. As Dodds explains,

Had he acted of his own volition, he could not so easily admit himself in the wrong; as it is, he will pay for his acts. Juridically, his position would be the same in either case; for early Greek justice cared nothing for intent—it was the act that mattered. Nor is he dishonestly inventing a moral alibi; for the victim of his action takes the same view of it as he does.⁶⁹

The key is in a proper understanding of *ἀτη*. Dodds explains that *ate* has a different meaning in Homer than in Greek tragedy. That is, rather than meaning "objective disaster,"

always, or practically always, *ate* is a state of mind—a temporary clouding or bewildering of the normal consciousness. It is, in fact, a partial and temporary insanity; and, like all insanity, it is ascribed, not to physiological or psychological causes, but to an external "daemonic" agency.⁷⁰

So, this passage has a quite normal explanation (when one takes into account the world-

⁶⁹E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), 3.

⁷⁰*Ibid.* 5.

view of Archaic Greeks) that does not lend itself to the comic. Rather than making up a flimsy excuse for his actions as an average modern reader might interpret it, Agamemnon is actually explaining his irrational behavior in an acceptable fashion while offering compensation for his responsibility for those actions.

Another example of dubious humor is the interpretation of the character of Nestor. The oldest of the Greeks to fight at Troy is consistently verbose to the point of the ridiculous to many moderns who read the poem. Edwards and Owen, for instance, point out the humor in this old warrior bragging on and on about the good old days when he fought men much larger and tougher than the Trojans and their allies.⁷¹ Snell, on the other hand, interprets Nestor seriously:

"[In a crisis] men are helped by a storehouse of experience and by recollection of similar cases, but not by a law that has been carefully thought out and based on general principles. That is why the prestige of old Nestor, who has seen three generations, is so great among fellow heroes and why they listen so willingly to his lengthy discourses."⁷²

⁷¹Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad*, 98; E. T. Owen, *The Story of the Iliad* (Toronto, 1946), 10-11.

⁷²B. Snell, *Poetry and Society: The Role of Poetry in Ancient Greece* (Bloomington, IN, 1961), 5. I. C. Johnston, *The Ironies of War: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (Lanham, Md, and London, 1988): 20, and N. Austin, "The Function of Digression in the 'Iliad'," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 7 (1966): 295-312, also interpret Nestor seriously, as does G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, 1962), who feels that the notion that Nestor's reminiscences merely provide some "greater relief" to the battle descriptions is misplaced (348). See also G. E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought* (Cambridge, 1966) who observes

Thus again, there seems to be no agreement on just what is or is not humorous in the *Iliad* because of the lack of an authoritative definition of the comic.

On the other hand, thanks to the researches of Ekman, the theory that facial displays of emotion are socially learned and therefore culturally variable has been disproved. In fact, Ekman has concluded that "our findings support Darwin's suggestion that facial expressions of emotion are similar among humans, regardless of culture, because of their evolutionary origin."⁷³ Since humans share not only a common set of emotions, but also common elements in facial display of those emotions, we may assume that smiles and laughter are significant signs of the comic in the *Iliad* and that one merely has to locate those passages in which *γελῶν* "laughing" and *μειδῶν* "smiling" and their compounds appear. One recent scholar who takes this approach to humor in the *Iliad* is Levine. After surveying numerous passages in which various critics feel they detect the comic, Levine, in his despair about the subjective nature of humor, summarizes:

"Such are the results of the subjective nature of humor: it can become omnipresent, for it includes such amorphous quantities as wit, parody, irony, folk expressions, characterization, burlesque, the comic, sarcasm; in short,

that, "In Homer, analogical arguments are mainly drawn either from first-hand experience (as in *Iliad* 14 243 ff, a 568 ff.) or from the store of precedents contained in legends, fables and myths (e.g. *Iliad* 9 527 ff., 24 599 ff.), and the contexts in which such arguments are usually adduced are when a person either decides on a course of action for himself, or attempts to influence someone else in his decision" (386-7).

⁷³P. E. Ekman, R. Sorenson, and W. V. Friesen, "Pan-cultural Elements in Facial Displays of Emotion," *Science* 164 (1969): 87.

whatever the critic considers humorous."⁷⁴

Levine concludes that "'humor in Homer' . . . is an unmanageable quantity" and urged "a study of laughter which divorces itself from definitions of 'humor'."⁷⁵ The answer is obvious for Levine (which indicates his frustration in defining the comic): "The only concrete indication we have that something is humorous is when smiling or laughter appears in the text."⁷⁶ So Levine will concentrate on those passages that indicate the presence of the comic by the physiological signs of laughter and smiling.

In one of his discussions of laughter and smiling, Levine isolates (in the *Iliad*) four situations that elicit laughter and three that elicit smiles. First, "Laughter generally implies a real or imagined physical or moral superiority."⁷⁷ Examples, according to Levine, include 1.599, 2.270, 3.43, 6.471, 6.514, 10.565, 11.378, 21.389, 21.408, 21.508, 23.784, and 23.840.

A second kind of laughter is figurative laughter that "appears once in the *Iliad*, when the whole earth 'laughs', at the shining armor of the assembled warriors (19.362)."⁷⁸ Levine interprets even this laughter as an example of superiority in that the earth's appearance is enhanced: "[S]he sparkles and is made resplendent by the

⁷⁴Levine, "ΓΕΛΩΙ ΕΚΘΑΝΟΝ: Laughter and the Demise of the Suitors," 11.

⁷⁵Ibid. 1-2.

⁷⁶Ibid. 15.

⁷⁷D. Levine, "Homeric Laughter and the Unsmiling Suitors," *Classical Journal* 78 (1983): 97.

⁷⁸Ibid. 98.

glittering bronze almost as though it were jewelry which makes her more beautiful."⁷⁹

A third example of laughter involves derisive laughter, such as that at 1.599, 2.279, 6.471, and 23.784, but this is just another form of superiority.⁸⁰ So, as it turns out, derisive laughter is actually a sub-category of the first category (which explains the fact that these passages are listed by Levine in the first group).

Finally, the fourth kind of laughter involves a simultaneous expression of true affection and superiority. Examples include the gods' laughter at Hephaestus at 1.599; the Achaeans' at Ajax Oiliades at 23.784, and Hector and Andromache's laughter at Astyanax at 6.471, as well as Zeus' laughter as he comforts his daughter Artemis at 21.508. But again these examples appear in the first list because they too involve superiority. In sum, Levine has concluded that all laughter in the *Iliad* is expressive of feelings of some form of superiority.

Smiles, a second sign of humor in Homer, express three types of humor: affection, conciliation and exultation. When Hera smiles at Hephaestus in 1.59f. for his advice and concern, or Zeus does so at Athena's joke about the wounded Aphrodite in 5.426, they are expressing amusement mixed with affection. A smile is used to express conciliation at 4.356 where Agamemnon smiles at Odysseus when he realizes he had rebuked Odysseus unfairly. Odysseus smiles at Dolon to calm his fears in order to acquire more information from him at 10.400. Finally, smiles can express feelings of superiority or victory as at 14.222f. where Hera has tricked Aphrodite or the Achaeans

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Levine, "ΓΕΛΩΙ ΕΚΘΑΝΟΝ," 23.

laugh at Ajax Oileus at 23.784.

Levine concludes, therefore, that there seems to be "no uniform thematic usage" of smiling in the *Iliad*.⁸¹

In Homer a smile is a true reflection of a character's position: if he smiles in triumph or with anticipation of victory, he is always justified in doing so. Laughter, on the other hand, can be used to deceive and to cover up true feelings: thus does Hera use it at O 101. . . . Thus Homeric characters use laughter to create a false impression of reality. . . . Smiling is a more "honest" expression than laughter: It is always sincere and always expresses a warranted confidence.⁸²

Levine has done an impressive job in analyzing laughter and smiles in Homeric epic. But do laughter and smiles always indicate the comic? Are all these scenes "funny"? Levine has indicated in the above quotation that humans can use laughter to deceive and cover up true feelings as Hera does at O 101. And in the *Iliad*, does the Achaean laughter in the Thersites scene at 2.270 represent comic laughter? Is Agamemnon's smile at Odysseus in *Il.* 4.356 a sign of the comic? What is funny or

⁸¹Ibid. 34.

⁸²Ibid., 36. I am extremely impressed with Levine's understanding of the nature of the comic in his commentary on laughter and smiles in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He is so very close to an understanding of the universal comic emotions of indignation and confidence with his emphasis on superiority and confidence that it adds confirmation to my own reconstruction of an Aristotelian theory of comedy in chapter 1.

humorous in either of these cases? Do all human laughs or smiles indicate the comic? Certainly not.⁸³ Those physiological signs or expressions may even indicate merely that someone is being tickled, not experiencing the comic. So despite Levine's attempt to identify the comic without a definition of the comic, he has failed to eliminate the subjective element involved in discussing the comic because his discussion has actually illustrated that even his attempt to identify the presence of the comic spirit necessitates an element of subjective judgment; i.e., even laughter and smiles are not fail-safe evidence of the presence of the comic. One can only conclude that it is necessary to develop a theory of comedy in order to claim anything near a truly substantive analysis of any "comic" passage. Therefore, this will be the task of chapter 1: to produce a theory of the comic.

Beyond the necessity of a theory of the comic to analyse certain non-heroic passages of the *Iliad*, a short survey of the poetic devices of Homer's artistry will illuminate the means by which his comic technique can be used to contribute to the depth and complexity of the *Iliad*. Indeed, an awareness of these devices could elucidate or broaden an understanding of the purpose, meaning, or thrust of the comic spirit of the passage, i.e., how Homer's effective use of these devices combined with the comic spirit furthers the narrative and thematic unity of the *Iliad*.

It is only in the twentieth century that a systematic attempt has been made to achieve a deeper understanding and appreciation of the conventional forms of oral poetry.

⁸³E. Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York, 1952), demonstrates what we all intuitively know, "Much laughter has nothing to do with the comic"(205f.).

The important early work by Milman Parry⁸⁴ on formulae and Walter Arend on type-scenes in the 1930s began to explain some important characteristics of oral composition, but the oral-formulaic theories were rather mechanical explanations until recently. Oral critics have come to understand the genius of oral poets in the use of conventional elements like formulae, type-scenes, ring composition, etc. Rather than conceiving of these elements as restricting oral poets to meaningless phrases used just to fit the metrical needs of the moment, scholars like Martin understand that, "It is a working principle of oral poetics that theme creates diction and similar themes create similar diction."⁸⁵ Therefore, the very conventional nature of the formula aids the oral poet in conveying meaning, since this diction is the language shared by poet and audience.⁸⁶ Thalmann sums it up in a rather interesting observation on this communication between poet and audience:

Communication by conventional forms of expression, in poetry or any other medium, is so habitual that it becomes almost a reflex and need not involve conscious mental processes. Thus we are not required, and probably ought not, to assume deliberate intent on the poet's part or

⁸⁴Mueller, "Oral Poetry," described Parry's achievement: Parry "not only made a systematic study of the oral features of Homeric poetry but also gave to the study of oral poetry a programme and a method" (172).

⁸⁵R. P. Martin, "Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 114 (1984): 29.

⁸⁶Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought*, 36.

reflective understanding on the audience's.⁸⁷

Mueller also informs us that, "As we move beyond the phrase to the sentence, the paragraph and larger narrative units, we find that conventional elements become less fixed and the rules for their combination more flexible."⁸⁸ This offers the poet immense latitude in developing particular themes. Rather than merely joining together blocks of poetry by means of formal transitions,

the surviving poems show other, less obvious but more expressive organizational patterns as well. In some cases, . . . [the] poems were arranged in ring composition. But . . . ideas or episodes that appear in different and often widely separated parts are connected with each other by means of two intimately related kinds of repetition. First, the recurrence of words, phrases, whole lines, or even groups of lines stresses important ideas and clarifies the overall form of the poem, as several scholars have noted. Second, certain patterns of action or event might be

⁸⁷Ibid., 30. S. Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome: Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene* (Ann Arbor, 1993), notes that, "Formulaic phrases, type-scenes, and repeated themes and narrative patterns are much more than convenient verse-fillers, generic descriptions, and mnemonic devices designed to assist an extemporaneously composing oral poet. These conventional elements, inherited from a long and rich tradition, are dynamic ingredients of oral poetry that have accrued deep and significant meaning over time through their accumulated use in various contexts, and in each particular instance, they call these associative meanings to mind for a well-informed audience" (1-2).

⁸⁸Mueller, "Oral Poetry," 181.

repeated, often but not necessarily with echoes in phrasing, so that the poem becomes a balanced design of similar and contrasting elements.⁸⁹

It is this interplay of the typical and the individual, the repeated phrase or dissimilar diction, that can convey deeper meaning. Suter understands the interplay between diction and patterns and offers a clue to some "Homeric problems" by reminding us of Homer's tradition. She finds the "tri-level resonance of diction/narrative pattern/mythical archetype" a complex web of mythical and artistic traditions that, when taken into account and studied, could release the richness now hidden by a background we do not recognize.⁹⁰ We shall, therefore, attempt to be aware of this interplay between diction and patterns, especially in our analysis of Thersites and Paris in chapters 2 and 3.

Furthermore, it must be remembered that Homer does not compose like a modern novelist. "Instead of uniform flow and unhurried narration of events, we find an artistic scheme of interconnection and cross-reference, happenings sometimes briefly sketched, sometimes elaborately worked out."⁹¹ Recent criticism has paid increasing attention to these patterns, interconnections, cross-references, and varied lengths of descriptions, including foreshadowing, chiasmus, parataxis, type-scene, and so-called digression.

One characteristic device, foreshadowing, entails the sharing of knowledge of the

⁸⁹Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought*, 36.

⁹⁰Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," 14.

⁹¹A. Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature*, trans. J. Willis and C. de Heer (1963; reprint, New York, 1966), 32.

future by the poet "for pathetic effect"⁹²:

Characters may predict the future, either because they are gods, with special knowledge, or because they correctly interpret the omens the gods send. In many instances the poet in his own voice comments on the future outcome of an action, or sets the present action against a future unknown to his characters. The predicted future may fall within the limits of the poem, in which case we wait in suspense to see it come true--the suspense arising, as is usual in Greek literature, not from ignorance of the outcome, but from the agony of waiting for it to happen. Or the event predicted may occur beyond the conclusion of the poem, in which case the audience must be familiar enough with the story to realize its truth and react with the proper emotion.⁹³

An important example of foreshadowing that links a particular scene to the larger myth that informs the poem is Thersites' beating by Odysseus that surely foreshadows his future death at the hand of Achilles.

Another characteristic pattern, parataxis, is the stringing together of clauses without subordination, thus making them equal in value and importance rather than

⁹²Edwards, *Poet of the Iliad*, 32.

⁹³Ibid., 32.

arranging them through subordination according to their logical relations.⁹⁴ Rather than merely exhibiting an immature style, parataxis, on the contrary, allows the poems to "gain tremendously in suggestiveness, subtlety, and complexity. Far from being a hindrance, the style is a powerful means of poetic expression."⁹⁵ As Hurwit explains: "All phenomena are thrust forward to the narrative surface--to the foreground--where they receive even, objective illumination."⁹⁶ Thalmann adds:

Whereas logical subordination implies the exclusion of all that does not bear directly upon the main idea, parataxis is inclusive. Poetry in this style is wonderfully commodious. A single poem can incorporate an astonishing number of very diverse stories, themes, and ideas. . . . At the same time, this mentality *is* able to conceive of a unified whole with a definite shape.⁹⁷

Moreover, the paratactic style by juxtaposition can reveal the relations between things as consisting of either similarity or contrasts. This corresponds to the two basic modes of early Greek thought, polarity and analogy.⁹⁸ *Il.* 14.312-329, as we shall see in

⁹⁴Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought*, 4.

⁹⁵Ibid., 6.

⁹⁶J. Hurwit, *The Art and Culture of Early Greece, 1000-480 B.C.* (Ithaca, 1985), 103.

⁹⁷Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought*, 5.

⁹⁸Ibid., 31. "The basis of this manner of viewing things is a particular sense of form as enclosure, wherein antithetical extremes define what lies between them and the whole consists of juxtaposed but interrelated parts. . . . [This conception of form] seems . . .

chapter 4, illustrates the humorous use of parataxis when Zeus is trying to encourage Hera to lie with him by listing, in paratactic fashion, passionate lovers of his who did not arouse him as much as Hera does at that moment. The inherent incongruity and inappropriateness of a male attempting to seduce his wife by reminding her of his infidelities underlie the humor of this action.

The complexity of the *Iliad* also seems to include the pattern of *chiasmus*. Hurwit, for instance, sees the poem as framed by a vast *chiasmus*:

Book I begins with a nine-day-long plague and mass burials and continues with Akhilleus' quarrel with Agamemnon, Thetis' visits to Akhilleus and Zeus, and finally an argument among the gods. Book XXIV begins with an argument among the gods and continues with Thetis' visits to Zeus and Akhilleus, the reconciliation between Akhilleus and Priam (antithetical to the quarrel with Agamemnon in Book I), and finally a nine-day-long truce for Hektor's burial.⁹⁹

Ring composition, another pattern or compositional device, is not just the repetition of the beginning at the end of a passage, but a foreshadowing or anticipation of the end at the beginning. It, therefore, not only helps the poet compose and develop his thought,

to have grown naturally out of certain habits of mind, and thus a certain way of thinking about human life and its environment, which are characteristic of the Greeks of the geometric and archaic ages" (3).

⁹⁹Hurwit, *Art and Culture*, 102.

it also helps the audience to follow it. This allows the poet to enclose a passage by adding emphasis to an idea but also finality and conviction to the ending.¹⁰⁰ In the meantime, this architectonic pattern is supported by the many scenes in the poem that contribute to the narrative and thematic unity of the poem as a whole by their contribution to the action and motivation of characters that moves the narrative and by their contribution to those larger themes that inform the poem as a whole. Some of the scenes we will be examining have been judged to be superfluous interpolations or inferior work of the poet, but, as we shall see, they are significant contributions to the artistry of the poem.

Still another pattern that Homer uses to tell the story of Achilles is the type-scene, "all pervasive, and as important a tradition of epic composition as the formulae that make up the verses."¹⁰¹ Walter Arend's *Die typischen Szenen bei Homer* (1933) classified and compared such scenes as arming and dressing, sleeping and deliberation, assemblies, oaths, baths, dreams, arrivals, etc. Though scenes such as these are described again and again in standard language, "in fact no two such descriptions are exactly alike, and in the majority of such scenes only a few verses recur in identical form."¹⁰² Thus variations

¹⁰⁰Ibid. 8-16. Cf. the incisive discussions of ring composition in C. Whitman *Homer and the Homeric Tradition* (1958; reprint, Cambridge, MA, 1965) and W. G. Thalmann *Conventions*.

¹⁰¹Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad*, 71.

¹⁰²M. W. Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, 1991), 13.

in diction and content and elaboration¹⁰³ become significant in interpreting the scene. The importance of being aware of type-scenes and their comic potential will be illustrated by the contrast between the typical arming scene for a heroic warrior and that of Paris in *Il.* 3.330-8, as we shall see in chapter 3.

Digressions are one form of elaboration. Scott Richardson's *The Homeric Narrator* explains the importance of seeming breaks in the flow of the story with intrusive descriptions or commentary. In fact, these "digressions" or "intrusions" turn out to "provide for an enhanced understanding of the immediate action and a clearer sense of the particular scene's underlying significance."¹⁰⁴ The point is that modern critics are realizing that Homer has an ability to use the conventions of his craft for subtle expressions of meaning that we are just now beginning to understand as scholars unravel the lost (to the literate West) art of oral composition. So Hurwit can declare that "Digressions typically occur at times of high tension or high drama . . . [they] are not there to relieve tension but to elucidate. They are characteristic of the Homeric impulse to leave nothing obscure. . . ."¹⁰⁵ Even with descriptions, "What is peculiarly Homeric

¹⁰³As Edwards notes: "It is a basic principle of Homeric technique that amplification is used to signify importance, and the normal way to expand a scene is by elaboration of the elements of which it is composed" (ibid. 13).

¹⁰⁴S. Richardson, *The Homeric Narrator* (Nashville, 1990), 198. Thalmann, *Conventions*, points out: "Because the notion of 'unity' that informed these poems was less narrow than our own, *digression* may be a misleading term if it is taken to imply near or total irrelevance. On reflection, all inserted passages of this type will be found to add something to the surrounding context" (11). An excellent summary of the modern scholarship on Homer's use of digressions is Austin's "The Function of Digressions in the *Iliad*."

¹⁰⁵Hurwit, *Art and Culture*, 103.

is the disinterest in pausing for descriptions as a matter of course. Since descriptions do not come automatically, they stand out in relief and can be used effectively when they do occur."¹⁰⁶

The unusually elaborate description of Thersites is a case in point. Why does Homer leave out elaborate descriptions of main characters like Achilles and Hector, yet describe Thersites in such detail? We shall examine the significance of this lengthy description of a relatively minor character and its impact on the Thersites scene of book 2 in chapter 2.

Morrison and de Jong have pointed out Homer's effective use of misdirection. Homer may withhold crucial information or even mislead his audience. In doing so the audience realizes that its own perspective could be as narrow or limited as any character within the story. In this way, the audience is reminded of "the purely human scope of its own knowledge. This affinity with mortal characters--rather than with the narrator or the omniscient gods--produces on the part of the audience more sympathy for those characters."¹⁰⁷ This all heightens interest on the part of the audience since they are familiar with the epic tradition and know how the story will turn out. "False predictions and untraditional episodes--alternating with accurate predictions and familiar scenes--free the audience to negotiate between everything it knows . . . and an uncertainty as to how and whether the story will indeed turn out as expected."¹⁰⁸ In the end, by even

¹⁰⁶Richardson, *Homeric Narrator*, 61.

¹⁰⁷Morrison, *Homeric Misdirection*, 8.

¹⁰⁸Ibid. 6.

mentioning the alternative, "the narrator stresses the authenticity of the version actually presented by him."¹⁰⁹ In interpreting these and other seeming inconsistent passages, an important principle should be kept in mind:

Whatever Homeric passages seem at first to be inconsistent in the short range may in the long range be the key to various central themes of the overall *Iliad* . . . central messages that are hidden away from those of us, such as we are, who have not been raised by Hellenic society as the appreciative audience of Epos.¹¹⁰

As we shall see in chapter 2, book 2 contains a "reversal passage" that follows the pattern of misdirection, a passage that adds depth and complexity to the narrative and thematic unity of the *Iliad* as well as being an important element in comic potential.

Despite the *Iliad*'s seeming digressions, Richardson reminds us that "Aristotle's admiration for Homer is focused especially on the extraordinary skill with which he creates a single, unified story out of a vast and highly diversified body of material, incorporating many subsidiary episodes without allowing us to lose sight of the main theme."¹¹¹ The *Iliad*, in the end, is the story of Achilles. Even when he is absent from the foreground, he is never far from the story. As Flacelière states:

Thus, like a classical tragedy, the *Iliad* consists of a

¹⁰⁹De Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers*, 21.

¹¹⁰Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, 4-5.

¹¹¹Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6, 34.

beginning, the quarrel; followed by a peripeteia, the 'Patrocleia'; and end, the death of Hector. The unity of action is psychological, since all the important events are determined by the feelings of Achilles, so that the treatment of the subject always brings us back to the portrayal of his character.¹¹²

Even the unheroic, like Thersites and Paris (as we shall see in chapters 2 and 3), point to Achilles since they are the polar opposite of the Homeric hero like Achilles who is guided by the heroic code. Indeed, not only will polarity and analogy, the typical characteristics of Greek thought, be keys in reconstructing an Aristotelian comic theory in chapter 1, but they are keys to understanding much of Homeric poetry. The very structure of the universe as well as hexameter poetry consists of similarity and antithesis, i.e., analogy and polarity. As Hurwit explains, these principles bring order to the Greek world of poetry as well as the Greek universe:

Two of [Homer's] most important devices are symmetry and antithesis, devices that order because they arrange, enclose, and frame. The impulse for symmetry can be seen in a single line--for instance, the line that summarizes what it is to be a Homeric hero: *mythōn te rētēr' emenai prēktēra te ergōn* (*Iliad*, IX.443). The verse means "to be a speaker of words and a doer of deeds," but in the Greek

¹¹²Flacelière, *A Literary History of Greece*, 16.

"of words" (*mythōn*) at the beginning of the line is balanced by "of deeds" (*ergōn*) at the end, "speaker" (*rētēr*) is balanced by "doer" (*prēktēra*), and "to be" (*emenai*) occupies dead center. This kind of symmetry, in which the order of words in parallel clauses is inverted, is known as *chiasm*, and the same antithetical (and mnemonic) principle governs whole passages as well.¹¹³

Finally, a better understanding and clearer interpretation of Homeric epic can be achieved if one pays attention to Homer's expertise at characterization.¹¹⁴ Aristotle noted in *Poetics* 1460 a 5-11 that Homer was outstanding in his portrayal of characters through speeches. This is significant when we realize that almost one half of the *Iliad* is composed of direct speech.¹¹⁵ Even when Homer wishes to indicate thoughts of his characters,

to present an extensive picture of what is going on in a character's mind, he externalizes the thought processes in ways alien to most other narrative--the thinking is cast as a conversation with an extension of the self (the nearest

¹¹³Hurwit, *Art and Culture*, 101-2.

¹¹⁴J. J. Richardson, "Literary Criticism in the Exegetical Scholia to the *Iliad*: A Sketch," *Classical Quarterly* 30 (1980), remarks: "Turning to characterization, we find that the Scholia are constantly aware of Homer's subtlety in this respect. They frequently comment on the way in which *speeches* reveal character, or observe that a particular thing is spoken or done ἠθικῶς" (272).

¹¹⁵Scott, *Unity of the Iliad*, 254.

modern equivalent is the dramatic soliloquy). His most profound demonstration of omniscience, complete access to private thoughts, is thereby disguised and made to seem no privilege at all.¹¹⁶

Homer does not waste words either. When he introduces a character his purpose is not merely "to introduce so much as to aid in the evaluation of the scene at hand, and consequently [he does] not tell anything more about the character than is necessary for that purpose."¹¹⁷ He also does not offer physical descriptions of characters so that his audience may visualize the people whose actions are being followed. Instead, "Physical appearance is an issue only when it supports a point being made about other qualities (moral or intellectual) essential to the narrative. . . ."¹¹⁸ It is astonishing how few Homeric introductions of major characters include a descriptive pause. As stated above, main characters such as Achilles, Agamemnon, Menelaus, Diomedes, Patroclus, Hector, and Paris are not introduced with elaborate descriptions of physical appearance,¹¹⁹ yet

¹¹⁶Richardson, *The Homeric Narrator*, 132.

¹¹⁷Ibid. 38.

¹¹⁸Ibid. 40.

¹¹⁹Ibid. 44. Since it is true that the "majority of character introductions in Homer give information about characters who appear only once and play no significant role" (44), one may wonder, then, why Homer tells us so much about any of slain warriors whose appearance in the poem is so brief. Surely Richardson is correct when he surmises: "It is in stressing and reminding us of the humanity of those killed that the narrator is able to make his most impressive statement on the inhumanity of war" (46). Particularly enlightening is J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford, 1968), in his two chapters "Death and the God-like Hero" and "Death, Pathos, and Objectivity" (81-143). As Griffin remarks, "the dispassionate manner in which these slayings are recorded, and above all the short obituaries which many of them are given, are important

in chapter 2 we shall see the importance of one of the most elaborate physical descriptions in the poem accompanying the introduction of a rather minor character, Thersites.

Since I am convinced that the functions of the comic passages in Homer consist of much more than mere comic relief or even the furtherance of the narrative progress of the epic--that they do indeed also contribute to the thematic unity of the epic as a whole--it would be appropriate to summarize some of the major themes in the *Iliad* in order to recognize the contribution of even the comic episodes to the development of these themes.

First of all, though Homer tells us that his story is about the wrath of Achilles and the death and suffering it brought on the Greeks fighting at Troy (*Il.* 1.1-5), he depicts the Trojan War "not as the local effort at supremacy that it was but as an enterprise of universal dimensions."¹²⁰ In other words, these particular events are presented as affecting the very powers of the universe (the gods) and explaining the nature of, not just individuals, but human beings in general. In fact, as the story unfolds one realizes that, "Although many forces active in the world impinge--with good effect or ill--on human life, mankind holds a subordinate place in a larger order. Such, at least, is the strict cosmological view, and its influence helps account for the sense of limits on human

and striking because they do in fact convey emotion, and because in doing so they give status and significance to their subjects. It is because they do this that they remain in the memory of the reader, and that they form one of the most telling and representative aspects of the *Iliad* (104).

¹²⁰Patrides, "Homer: The Invention of Reality": 317.

aspirations and conduct that was the magnificent achievement of archaic Greek thought."¹²¹ We shall examine man's place in the cosmos according to Homer in chapter 4 in a discussion of the Iliadic view of the gods.

Besides presenting the limitations of human life in the universe of the *Iliad*, Homer paints the picture of a universe in which warfare and its consequences form an integral part: "The warfare in the *Iliad* . . . is considerably more than a part of the natural and human world--it belongs also in the metaphysical order of the cosmos, the divine structure according to which everything behaves the way it does."¹²² This means that the *Iliad* is concerned with mankind's ultimate fear and limitation: death. In reading the epic one is confronted with one death scene after another and these deaths seem meaningless: ". . . [T]he formulaic repetition ('he fell, thunderously, and his armor clattered upon him') pronounces through its very repetitiveness, the pointlessness of each death. The theme is varied almost without limit, the basic formula tolling a macabre litany of waste. . . ."¹²³ Even the death of the great heroes who have gods or goddesses as parents is inevitable. Not even Zeus, for instance, can prevent the death of his son Sarpedon (16.462-507). So for all men, "success is inevitably followed,

¹²¹Thalman, *Conventions of Form and Thought*, 78.

¹²²As Johnston, *Ironies of War*, points out: "By paying virtually no attention to the detailed chronology of the conflict from beginning to the end, by leaving the war open ended, and by focusing on a very short, concentrated period of time, a very small part of a much larger event, Homer develops the sense that these battles, or ones just like them, have been going on and will go on for a long, long time, almost indefinitely" (16).

¹²³Patrides, "Homer: The Invention of Reality": 317.

sooner or later, by failure, because even this kind of man is mortal and limited."¹²⁴ The themes of war and strife, death and suffering, will surface in our analysis of the thematic unity of the comic passages with the poem as a whole. For even in light-hearted passages such as the Zeus/Hera seduction scene, death and suffering are never far below the surface of consciousness for the audience of Homer.

Πάθος "passion," both erotic emotion and suffering, are also central themes of the epic.¹²⁵ Paris' passion for and abduction of Helen are the cause of the suffering of both Trojans and Greeks.¹²⁶ This initial source of strife (ἔρις) over a female and the resulting suffering will repeat itself in the quarrel between Agamemnon and Chryses over Chryseis and in the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles over Briseis. Again, this all is presented as part of the human condition: ". . . [T]he éris willed by Zeus causes not only the Trojan War in particular but the human condition in general."¹²⁷

If in the *Iliad* the capriciousness of the gods and the ineluctability of fate "reinforce the sense of man as a plaything at the mercy of mightier powers,"¹²⁸ it does not leave man without hope. For though the *Iliad* is not a religious book, if there is any

¹²⁴Thalman, *Conventions of Form and Thought*, 47.

¹²⁵As Richardson, "Exegetical Scholia," remarks: "The power to portray emotion and evoke feeling is the most important link between Homer and tragedy, according with the Aristotelian view of tragedy as arousing 'pity and fear', and the Scholia are full of comments on Homer's ability to create sympathy in this way" (274).

¹²⁶Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6: "Passion, war, and death are the basic ingredients which go to make up much of this work"(15).

¹²⁷Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, 220.

¹²⁸Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4, 6.

faith expressed, "it is faith in man; in man who through his courage and intelligence can learn to control his own unhappy fate."¹²⁹ Janko summarizes:

[Human beings] must win honour within the limits set for us by our existence within a cosmos which is basically well-ordered, however hard that order may be to discern....Homer adapts for his own poetic and moral ends ways of thinking which are potentially contradictory, refining the myths and world-view of his tradition. All his art is mobilized to stress the need for intelligence, courage and moral responsibility in the face of a dangerous universe, wherein mankind has an insignificant and yet paramount role. It is this attitude which makes the Homeric poems so sublimely and archetypally humane.¹³⁰

This, no doubt, is a key to the eternal relevance of this epic: ". . . [T]he reader necessarily has to confront the mysterious and extraordinary human greatness of the uncompromising heroic search for ultimate meaning in an irrational and dangerous world."¹³¹ As we shall see below, the comic passages under discussion will contribute depth to the Homeric expression of man's search for meaning.

On the other hand, the complexity of the Homeric view of the human condition

¹²⁹Flacelière, *Literary History of Greece*, 50.

¹³⁰Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4, 6-7.

¹³¹Johnston, *Ironies of War*, 102.

reveals the theme of life, as well as death and violence. A thoughtful reading of the *Iliad* will reveal that beyond all the violence and death portrayed in the epic, there is also a sense of the Greek commitment to life rather than death. This is particularly evident in the feasts and funeral games:

The feasts are often meant to betoken hospitality; but they are just as often intended to celebrate the actuality of being alive, in a sort of sacramental acclaim of life in the midst of death. In parallel fashion, the funeral games are meant not only to honor warriors like Patroclus and Achilles (*Il.* 23:259ff.; *Od.* 24:85ff.) but to reassert life too, much as the Irish wake twines the quick and the dead in festivities beyond a mere funeral.¹³²

Another important theme that informs the Homeric worldview is a sense of order. But there is a particular kind of order that describes the uniformity of form or structure as well as content in the world of Homeric poetry. As indicated above, certain patterns in epic poetry--such as parataxis and chiasmus--reveal relations between things as consisting of either similarity or contrasts. The basic manner of viewing things is through bi-polarity. Each thing is seen as only complete and comprehensible because it has a place and function that can be defined by its opposite. "The resulting symmetries, according to this view, create a consistent and intelligible order in the tangible world and

¹³²Patrides, "Homer: The Invention of Reality": 321.

in experience."¹³³

This particular sense of order in the universe explains many seeming contradictions in theme in the *Iliad*. For instance, whereas the modern mind might try to impose an anti-war bias on this poetry or a glorification of war, the truth is that Homer is ambiguous. He presents us with a world of polar opposites: love/hate; peace/war; eroticism/friendship; strife/reconciliation; etc. This ironic characteristic of the Homeric universe can be frustrating. As Johnston concludes,

the irony in Homer requires us always to adjust and then to readjust our reactions to the characters and the events, as we recognize that the vision of life is not so straightforward as it may at first reading appear. The irony forcibly reminds us that what we witness in the *Iliad* is complex and ambiguous.¹³⁴

Many of these bipolar abstract contrasts are presented by Homer through characters. By looking for these contrasts in Homer, we can more fully appreciate not only the ambiguity and complexity these contrasts may provide, but also the clarity. For example, the heroic code of men like Achilles, Diomedes, and Hector is vividly emphasized by unheroic characters such as Thersites and Paris. The meaningful love in the family life of Hector, Andromache and Astyanax is contrasted with the superficial erotic life of Paris and Helen. Homer seems to present us with options that illuminate

¹³³Thalman, *Conventions of Form and Thought*, 2.

¹³⁴Johnston, *Ironies of War*, 6.

human existence.

These, then, are various poetic devices and themes in the epic that it would be well to be aware of for an analysis of Homeric comic technique, i.e., to judge rightly Homer's use of comic characters and comic action for the serious purposes of furthering the narrative and thematic unity of the *Iliad*. But before any analysis can take place, as indicated above, a definition of the comic needs to be proposed in order to even recognize truly comic passages.

CHAPTER ONE
SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF THE COMIC

In order to survey and evaluate Homer's use of comedy in the *Iliad* it would be advantageous to establish a comic model, or prescriptive definition, through which any potentially comic scene could be evaluated. However, dissecting comedy into its constituent elements in order to form this model is a much more difficult task than it appears to be at first glance. For as one investigates the various attempts at defining comedy, the comic appears to be something that everyone recognizes but at the same time something that escapes definition. Indeed, the history of theories of comedy is marked by that one enigmatic problem--everyone assumes he knows what it is but is unable to define it to everyone's satisfaction. Every monolithic definition seems to fail to include all those sorts of incidents that men classify as comic. As Duckworth laments: "The modern reader is deluged by theories of comedy--realistic, nominalistic, mechanical, subjective-metaphysical, subjective-literary, psychoanalytic, physiological, and the like. . . ." ¹³⁵ Hume goes so far as to declare that "despite the labors of many theorists, *comedy* remains so vague a term that it is almost meaningless." ¹³⁶ Is there

¹³⁵Duckworth, *Roman Comedy*, 310.

¹³⁶R. D. Hume, "Some Problems in the Theory of Comedy," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 (1972): 87.

any path through this quagmire of theoretical confusion?

According to most critics the problem is that the comic, more so than the tragic, is embedded in various cultural, linguistic and personal contexts. For instance, many comic effects are incapable of translation from one culture to another because they depend on the customs and ideas of a particular social group.¹³⁷ Certain norms of moral behavior and standards of beauty must be agreed upon in order for action or characters to fall short of the norms or the standards and thereby be comic. As Corrigan says:

A thing cannot be ugly or immoral until we have first agreed upon what is beautiful and moral. This explains why it is we can discuss tragedy (which deals directly with the serious) without reference to comedy, but when talking about comedy, why we must always refer to standards of seriousness which give it its essential definition.¹³⁸

Furthermore, ". . . comedy which derives from the use of words--puns, jests, word-play and the like--usually disappears when translated into another tongue...."¹³⁹ Even personal factors may dictate the nature of the comic. "As we all know, one person's joke is another's insult. All seems to hinge on intent, on a compassionate attitude, and so an ethnic joke can be construed as non-threatening to insiders whereas

¹³⁷Bergson, *Laughter*, 7.

¹³⁸R. W. Corrigan, *Comedy: Meaning and Form* (San Francisco, 1965), 5.

¹³⁹Duckworth, *Roman Comedy*, 305.

told by an outsider it is a different matter entirely."¹⁴⁰

A second complication or problem with defining the comic is that these cultural, linguistic and personal factors of comedy combine to produce an atmosphere that is the ground of the comic, a world beyond the real world of everyday existence, but yet often reflecting quite clearly the truths of the human condition. As Nelson observes, "In most comedies reality and fantasy are deliberately blended: there is no clear predominance of one over the other."¹⁴¹ Fleming understands this comic atmosphere when he says of comedy:

It represents a buoyant attitude which overrides misfortune in the expectation of ultimate or predominant good fortune, and since this expectation is not at all founded upon a sage and reasonable optimism, it delights in anything unexpected, irrational, or incongruous, for such things give the world an air of disarming inconsequentiality.¹⁴²

Critics have often presented a third aspect of comedy that complicates its definition: the fact that it can have a variety of purposes or functions. Kris explains that the psychological function of this comic atmosphere, and the play of adults in general, "may be partially understood in terms of a 'holiday from the superego,'" that is, in the

¹⁴⁰R. A. Haig, *The Anatomy of Humor: Biopsychosocial and Therapeutic Perspectives* (Springfield, IL, 1988), viii.

¹⁴¹T. B. A. Nelson, *Comedy. An Introduction to Comedy in Literature, Drama, and Cinema* (Oxford, 1990), 149.

¹⁴²R. Fleming, "Of contrast between Tragedy and Comedy," *Journal of Philosophy* 36 (1939): 551.

tension between instincts or drives and the superego's repudiation of them.¹⁴³ Segal uses Kris' theory to present his own explanation of the appeal of Roman comic drama to a people who were steeped in the virtues of personal discipline and duty to the state. He, in fact, reminds us that "...Roman drama from the earliest time is inextricably connected with Roman holidays."¹⁴⁴ Thus it is the thumbing of the nose at conventions that restricts instinctual trends within parameters of propriety that often create a comic atmosphere.

But this comic atmosphere often has a serious purpose. Bergson calls comedy "a game that imitates life."¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the various paradoxes of serious comic purpose that seem to haunt laughter and humor do seem to thwart any attempt at simple definition of the comic. For instance, according to Nelson there are three paradoxical outcomes or purposes of humor: 1) humor may affirm life within society or seek to revolutionize society; 2) humor may affirm the values of existence as God's gift or reject life as sinful, or 3) humor may accept life as low while aspiring to what is high.¹⁴⁶

A fourth factor that has added to the confusion is the attempt to explain human laughter. Some attempts at defining the comic have assumed that laughter is intrinsic to the comic, even a comic emotion, and in doing so have complicated and misdirected serious efforts at producing a universal definition of comedy that clarifies the comic

¹⁴³Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*, 182.

¹⁴⁴E. Segal, *Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus* (Cambridge, MS, 1968), 7.

¹⁴⁵Bergson, *Laughter*, 69.

¹⁴⁶Nelson, *Comedy*, 40.

dimension of human life.

An evaluation of the problems of defining the comic actually reveals that they are not unique to comedy. In fact, as we shall see, these so-called problems fall by the wayside when fairly and properly compared to the nature of the tragic. The immediately apparent difference is that historic definitions of the comic are not only, on the one hand, too narrow so that they exclude some examples of the comic, but, on the other hand, too broad in that too much is expected of them. That is, the same problems that critics seem to have with defining the comic could also be seen as problems they would have had with defining the tragic if Aristotle's definitive work on the tragic had not survived antiquity and so influenced the direction of tragic literary theory.

For instance, to answer the first problem involved in defining the comic, the fact that puns and other culturally related humor do not translate well from one language or culture to another does not make comedy any more impossible to define than tragedy. For there are events that would seem tragic to one culture that would not seem so to another. An example could be drawn from events in World War II: Americans would have found it quite tragic to witness an American pilot sacrifice his life by crashing his plane into an enemy ship, but the Japanese saw their pilots who did so as warriors committing noble and honorable acts in concert with the patriotism inspired by *Bushido*, the Japanese warrior code.

Furthermore, puns and culturally related humor are a relatively small part of the broader comic whole. And, after all, the elements of puns and culturally related material ultimately can be explained in such a manner so that one culture can ultimately

understand why another culture finds those particular things comic.

Second, the fact that these cultural, linguistic, and personal factors of comedy combine to produce the atmosphere of a world beyond the real world of everyday existence is also true of tragedy. Whereas in comedy there is an air of inconsequentiality with an expectation of good fortune, in tragedy there is an ominous expectation of bad fortune that goes beyond the real world of everyday existence. Both the comic and tragic represent only one dimension of the real world and are of necessity an unrealistic blend of reality and fantasy. This is why they are so powerful; they concentrate on just one aspect of the human condition.¹⁴⁷

Third, the critics who argue that a definition of comedy is complicated by the fact that it can have a variety of functions or purposes have overlooked the fact that the same could be said of tragedy. After all, the representation of the tragic can have paradoxical purposes or functions just as comedy can. It could be used to support the prevailing institutions of a society or to warn that those institutions need change. It could be used to support a view of the universe as just or unjust.

Examples of the former paradoxical uses of tragedy can be illustrated by comparing the plots of the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus and the *Antigone* of Sophocles. The *Oresteia* is a marvelous tragedy that serves as a "grand parable of progress."¹⁴⁸ It is a celebration of the triumph of Apollo and all he stands for—civilization, enlightenment,

¹⁴⁷Hume, "Some Problems in the Theory of Comedy," understands this when he remarks, "Both comedy and tragedy are usually radically unrealistic in the way they impose a definite pattern and movement on their material" (98).

¹⁴⁸D. Grene and R. Lattimore, ed., *Aeschylus I* (1954; reprint, New York, 1973), 35.

etc.—over the Erinyes and all they stood for—the barbaric pre-enlightened world. It is a fitting exemplar of the optimistic period of Athenian culture following the defeat of the barbarous Persians. This triumph of Hellenism that proved justice ruled the universe would be celebrated not only in other plays of Aeschylus but also in the metopes, friezes and pediments of temples, the iconography of vases, etc.¹⁴⁹

Here with Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra the curse on the House of Atreus will end. The Erinyes, avengers of blood-guilt, will be transformed and worshiped as the Eumenides or "kindly spirits." Henceforth, murder cases will be solved in a civilized manner in a court of justice. Thus the purpose of tragedy in this instance is to support the prevailing institutions of Athens.

The *Antigone* of Sophocles provides us with quite a different use of tragic events. In this case the establishment, King Creon, whose inflexible adherence to law without exception causes the deaths of his own son and wife as well as Antigone, the individual following her own conscience. This play "has often been regarded as the classical statement of the struggle between the law of the individual conscience and the central power of the state."¹⁵⁰ So tragedy can either support the established system or criticize and undercut it.

¹⁴⁹See D. Grene and R. Lattimore, ed., *Aeschylus II* (1956; reprint, New York, 1973) 45-7 and 132-7 for the impact of victory in the Persian Wars on the optimism and confidence in a just universe among the classical Greeks. For a concise treatment of the impact of the victory of the Greeks over the Persians on Hellenic civilization as revealed in their sculpture, painting, and architecture, see J. J. Pollitt's *Art and Experience in Classical Greece* (1972; reprint, New York, 1973).

¹⁵⁰D. Grene and R. Lattimore, ed., *Sophocles I* (1954; reprint, New York, 1973), 5.

Tragedy's purpose can also be to support the picture of a just universe or the opposite, an unjust universe. For example, Aeschylus' *Persians* is "perhaps the noblest expression of triumphant thanksgiving for a great national deliverance that has yet been written."¹⁵¹ Aeschylus makes it clear in the statements of the Queen and of Darius' ghost that the Persians were in the wrong to attempt to enslave the Greeks and that their loss to the Greeks was the will of the gods. But Aeschylus does not make the Persians seem like evil barbarians who were easily overcome because of their inferiority. To make the victory of the Greeks seem all the more obviously sanctioned by the will of the gods, Aeschylus exaggerates the size of Xerxes' fleet at Salamis, presents the Persians as calling upon the Greek gods, and only obliquely mentions the defeat of the Persians at Marathon once. Thus the victory clearly illustrates that justice prevails in the universe since the gods who are worshipped by both sides have sided with the Greeks. The gods have ordained the triumph of right over wrong, of liberty over tyranny.

Tragic events can also support the polar opposite view of the universe. The prime example of this is Euripides' *Bacchae*. In the *Bacchae* the universe is not just capricious and without justice; it is malignant and unjust. The king of Thebes, Pentheus, is but a beardless youth (cf. ll. 1185 ff.), yet the god of the vine will have no mercy on this boy-king who refuses to recognize this new addition to Olympus. The youth can only see the chaos in his kingdom: Dionysus has driven all the women of Thebes mad into the countryside. Instead of leading the youth out of his folly, Dionysus decides to destroy this impudent young man and plays with Pentheus like a cat plays with a mouse

¹⁵¹H. J. Rose, *Handbook of Greek Literature* (New York, 1960), 150.

before the kill. Although the women had been captured, the chains had fallen off them and the doors had opened of their own accord for them to escape, Pentheus stands firm in his opinions of this religion as a false one. Now Dionysus allows himself to be captured, bound and jailed, and then revels in telling how he humiliated Pentheus. First the mad Pentheus attempts to bind a bull he thought to be Dionysus. Then setting the palace on fire Pentheus rushes to put out the fire only to be confronted with a phantom of Dionysus which he vainly attempts to stab. When Pentheus falls exhausted, Dionysus leaves and after telling the chorus of his mockery of Pentheus states that he cares nothing for him (l. 637). This is not enough revenge for this god, so he then further humiliates him by driving him mad with curiosity so that he makes him dress up like a woman to spy on the Maenads of Theban women who eventually kill him. The horror of this action is magnified by the fact that the Bacchantes, Dionysus' Asian female followers, even express some pity for Cadmus and Agave. Agave, who has been out in the countryside in worship of the god, is made to kill her own son and run into the city with his head on her thyrsus thinking she has killed a lion. Her father Cadmus is also destroyed, but no appeals for mercy move this god. The universe is uncaring, unfeeling, and unjust. Tragic events have portrayed an absurd universe ruled by malignant gods.

So just as comedy can serve several purposes, tragedy can do the same, and any theory about tragic purpose is as complex and multifaceted as analogous statements about the purpose of comedy.

Finally, discussion of comic emotions is definitely appropriate for an essential definition of the comic, but no explanation of the physiological signs (smiling and

laughter) of those comic emotions is necessary.¹⁵² For, in fact, we do not feel that an explanation of the physiological signs of the tragic emotions (frowns and weeping) is necessary to define the tragic. We do not judge whether a particular character or action is tragic or not by whether frowns and tears or weeping are evoked. On the contrary, a noble character who suffers unjustified bad fortune and falls from happiness to misery is considered tragic no matter what physiological response it causes, since this set of circumstances evokes the tragic emotions of pity and fear, as Aristotle observed. So our definition need not include explanations of laughter just as the definition of tragedy does not include explanations of weeping.

Uncertainty about the the nature of the comic is well illustrated by even a cursory look at historic attempts to define comedy.¹⁵³ It seems theorists inevitably all make

¹⁵²Feibleman, *In Praise of Comedy*, sees the concentration on explaining laughter as a major block to understanding and formulating a theory of comedy. He points to the later Middle Ages as the beginning of this important problem: ". . . [W]ith the overthrow of the philosophy of realism and the rise of nominalism as a dominant metaphysics in the later Middle Ages, the emphasis of all normative studies upon the subjective aspects of existence brought new difficulties into play in the study of the theory of comedy. So deeply was the subjective postulate of nominalism accepted, that the question of an objective basis for comedy was not even discussed by the various philosophers who dealt with the topic, and no need to refute it was ever felt. It simply was not envisaged as a possibility. Instead it was taken for granted that comedy must be altogether a psychological affair, and the only question at hand was the nature of that psychological reaction which is called laughter" (121).

¹⁵³Much of the following is based on surveys of ancient and modern theories of comedy in Duckworth's *The Nature of Roman Comedy*, and D. H. Munro's *Argument of Laughter* (Notre Dame, IN, 1963). See also M. Eastman, *The Sense of Humor* (New York, 1921) and Feibleman, *In Praise of Comedy*. Excellent resources for presentations of all facets of comic theory are J. E. Evans, *Comedy, an Annotated Bibliography of Theory and Criticism* (Metuchen, NJ, 1987) and Nilsen, *Humor Scholarship, a Research Bibliography*.

the same mistake of a narrow definition. Indeed, no one seems to have adequately captured the common denominator(s) of the comic in a general definition that is as satisfying as Aristotle's definition of tragedy.

Anacharsis, the friend of Solon, is quoted by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1176 b 33 as saying "Be merry, that you may be serious."¹⁵⁴ So there was some thought about the comic spirit early on. But even though the ancient philosophers who pre-dated Plato were interested in the comic, it is Plato who first deals with comedy at a serious, theoretical level.¹⁵⁵ For it is in the works of Plato that we first encounter an attempt to speculate on the nature of the comic. In fact, a number of Plato's dialogues contain statements about the comic. For instance, *Laws* 7, 816 illustrates the typical Greek bipolar thought pattern in an approach to the phenomenon of the comic when Plato asserts that since a thing is most clearly understood by its opposite, so serious things can not be understood without laughable things. This belief certainly can and will be used to raise the discussion of the comic from a trivial level to a much more profound one.

The *Philebus* is the Platonic dialogue which contains Plato's most significant comments concerning the comic. This dialogue was written toward the end of Plato's life and lacks the enjoyable art of his earlier dialogues:

Little or nothing would be lost if Plato had dropped the
dialogue form and made Socrates deliver a lecture, or left

¹⁵⁴Duckworth, *Roman Comedy*, 306.

¹⁵⁵Feibleman, *Praise of Comedy*, 74.

him entirely out and put the subject into an essay, for Socrates himself does not come through. There is never a touch of irony or gay self-depreciation or anything that recalls the vivid personality the earlier dialogues bring to us. . . . [N]o idea of his amusing himself as he did in the *Protagoras* or the *Symposium* is now admitted, no laughing sketch of Very Important People, philosophers, mathematicians, statesmen, no pictures of delightful lads or of a grassy bank and a clear-flowing river.¹⁵⁶

The things of the mind, for Plato, are in fact so superior to the enjoyment of the senses that even the comic has no value except in illustrating what to avoid in life. Plato does not seem to understand the worth of the comic spirit in reaching ultimate truths about the human condition.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, as we have seen in the introduction, Plato has no appreciation for Homeric comic technique. Duckworth comments, "Since the element of satire had been prominent in Old Comedy, Plato perhaps inevitably looked upon the essence of the comic as a kind of malicious pleasure afforded by the discomfiture of

¹⁵⁶E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, *Plato: The Collected Dialogues* (1961; reprint, Princeton, NJ, 1982), 1086.

¹⁵⁷L. Golden, *Tragic and Comic Mimesis* (Atlanta, 1992), does point out the singular positive effect comedy may produce for Plato: "If an inferior genre is countenanced at all, as is comedy in the *Laws*, it is because it serves as a didactic strategy to guide us away from what is false and detrimental and point us toward what is true and good" (61). Plato does seem to begrudge this allowance of a positive use of comedy in *Laws* 816 e, since in 935 df. he states that the law would not only severely restrict the objects of comedy, but those who exceed those boundries do so on penalty of exile and fines.

another."¹⁵⁸ Thus Plato does not give us a broad enough definition to truly understand the comic beyond a superiority theory of scornful laughter.

Aristotle builds on his teacher's theory of comedy, for although he recognizes "the feeling of superiority as the essential stimulus to laughter, he does have a perception of the contrast or incongruity between the actual and ideal."¹⁵⁹ His emphasis on baser men and baser conduct (aberrations from the norm) is summarized by his discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1108 a, 1127 ab) of three important comic characters that fall below the norm, the *alazon* "imposter," the *eirone* "trickster/rogue," and the *bomolochos* "buffoon."

Furthermore, Aristotle understands that laughter is caused by the element of surprise, when things turn out contrary to what one expects (cf. *Rhetoric* 1412 a and *Problems* 965 a). Unfortunately Aristotle's full discussion of comedy which he refers to in *Rhetoric* 1372 a 1, 1419 b 5 and *Poetics* 1449 b 21-22 is not extant.¹⁶⁰ No doubt much of the following centuries of discussion about the comic would have occurred with much less confusion if Aristotle's insights into the comic had guided comic literary criticism as his prescriptions for tragedy have done in tragic literary criticism.

¹⁵⁸Ibid. 306.

¹⁵⁹Ibid. 307.

¹⁶⁰In L. Golden and O.B. Hardison, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1968), Hardison mentions another hint that Aristotle dealt with comedy in a lost book of the *Poetics*. Riccardianus 46, a manuscript of the *Poetics*, continues the text we have with words that seem to read, "Now as to iambic poetry and comedy..." (52, n. 44). In addition, D. W. Lucas *Aristotle: Poetics* (London, 1969) informs us that "the reference to the *Margites* at 48 b 30 is cited by Eustratius (c. A.D. 1100) on *Ethics* 1141 a 14 as occurring in τῷ πρώτῳ περὶ ποιητικῆς, the first book" (xiv).

The Roman writers who followed Plato and Aristotle—for instance, Cicero and Quintilian—"reveal a dependence, direct or indirect, upon Plato and Aristotle."¹⁶¹

Duckworth notes Cicero's deep appreciation of the comic:

Cicero observes (*De orat.* II, 61,250): "There is no kind of wit, in which severe and serious things may not be derived from the subject," thus implying that comedy indirectly affirms a greater truth than the errors which it ridicules and criticizes; hence it is not surprising that, according to *De comoedia* (V,I), Cicero defined comedy as "an imitation of life, a mirror of custom, an image of truth."¹⁶²

Yet both Cicero and Quintilian "admit that they do not understand it and agree that those who pretend to explain it know little about it."¹⁶³ Later Greek commentators, such as Iamblichus, Proclus and Tzetzes, and Renaissance writers, such as Trissino, Castelvetro, and Guarini, add little to the earlier Greek and Roman discussions.¹⁶⁴

The problem of defining the comic in modern times has expanded so that it has been tackled not only by literary critics but by those involved in other disciplines:

¹⁶¹Duckworth, 309.

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴On the other hand, R. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy* (London, 1984), uses Tzetzes to reconstruct an epitome he designates as Ω of which he postulates C (the *Tractatus Coislinianus*) is a descendant. Then he goes on to represent C as an authentic Aristotelian document. See below, 36f.

philosophers, psychologists, physiologists, and psychiatrists. Though moderns do achieve certain insights into the comic, many—as noted above by Feibleman—have been sidetracked into merely explaining laughter.

Hobbes, the first modern student of comedy,¹⁶⁵ in Part I, chapter 6, of *Leviathan* explains laughter with a superiority theory:

Sudden Glory, is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves.¹⁶⁶

Laughter for Hobbes, therefore, is caused by a "sudden glory," by which Hobbes means "vainglory" or "self-esteem." That is, comedy, is achieved by observing the infirmities of others. Although he has indicated that we may also laugh at our own mistakes, he does seem to feel that humor is generally not proper for the best of men:

And therefore much Laughter at the defects of others, is a signe of Pusillanimity. For of great minds, one of the proper workes is, to help and free others from scorn; and compare themselves onely with the most able.¹⁶⁷

These few statements of Hobbes have made him the most important and influential

¹⁶⁵Feibleman, *Praise of Comedy*, 95.

¹⁶⁶T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651; reprint, Oxford, 1965), 45.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*

exponent of the superiority theory of comedy.¹⁶⁸

The humorous is referred to by Immanuel Kant in his *The Critique of Judgement* during a discussion of aesthetic judgement: "Laughter is an affection arising from a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing."¹⁶⁹ Although this seems to put the emphasis on surprise, Kant has given more than surprise as a cause of laughter when he uses the phrase "strained expectation" that is "reduced to nothing." Here he clearly implies an incongruity theory of comedy. The mind was ready to proceed in a definite direction when it is suddenly turned into another by an incongruous element.¹⁷⁰

Kant seems intent on disputing the superiority theory of comedy and replacing it with his emphasis on the element of surprise. He tells the story of an Indian who witnessed a bottle of ale opened and overflowing with froth. His repeated astonishment caused the Englishman to ask, "Well, what is so wonderful in that?" The Indian replied that he was not astonished at the beer flowing out of the bottle, but that the English could manage to get it all in the bottle. Kant argues that we do not laugh because of thinking ourselves "more quick-witted than this Indian, or because our understanding here brings to our notice any other ground of delight. It is rather that the bubble of our expectation was extended to the full and suddenly went off into nothing."¹⁷¹

Other limited definitions of the comic include the vastly influential contributions

¹⁶⁸Munro, *Argument of Laughter*, 83.

¹⁶⁹I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. C. Meredith (1928; reprint, Oxford, 1969), 199.

¹⁷⁰Duckworth, *Roman Comedy*, 310.

¹⁷¹Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 199-200.

of Bergson and Freud. Bergson's famous book *Laughter* attempts a monolithic theory of comedy, namely that the comic involves "something mechanical encrusted upon the living."¹⁷² Again, according to Bergson, "The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine."¹⁷³ Thus for Bergson, "Any arrangement of acts and events is comic which gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement."¹⁷⁴ Al Capp's essay "Types of Comedy" recognizes the limits of Bergson's theory: "(Bergson) remained rather parochial in drawing too much on the kind of comedy which has so admirably set the standard for the French comic stage, that of Moliere."¹⁷⁵ Besides, "the three properties by which he would distinguish the living from the mechanical: repetition, inversion, and reciprocal interference of series, would be equally applicable to tragedy. . . ."¹⁷⁶

Freud, on the other hand, noticed that we seem to enjoy laughing at the physical deformities and misfortunes of others and stressed the aggression involved in the comic. In his influential book *Jokes* Freud states:

The methods that serve to make people comic are: putting them in a comic situation, mimicry, disguise, unmasking,

¹⁷²Bergson, *Laughter*, 49.

¹⁷³Ibid. 29.

¹⁷⁴Ibid. 69.

¹⁷⁵Corrigan, *Comedy*, 232.

¹⁷⁶Feibleman, *Praise of Comedy*, 127.

caricature, parody, travesty, and so on. It is obvious that these techniques can be used to serve hostile and aggressive purposes.¹⁷⁷

But as Nelson comments, "Bergson and Freud fail to deal adequately with comedy because they consider only one of its main features."¹⁷⁸

The frustration of literary critics, philosophers, psychologists and all others who have attempted to define the comic are expressed by Freud as he actually does admit the limitations of his approach to the comic through jokes:

...[T]he problems of the comic have proved so complicated and all the efforts of the philosophers at solving them have been so unsuccessful that we cannot hold out any prospect that we shall be able to master them in a sudden onslaught, as it were, by approaching them from the direction of jokes.¹⁷⁹

Eastman, in fact, concludes that "All attempts to explain humor have failed."¹⁸⁰

The situation, however, is not as bleak as this historical survey might lead one to believe. For, in fact, the twentieth century has witnessed some significant clarification of the comic, particularly the work of a philosopher on the one hand, and some

¹⁷⁷S. Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (1960; reprint, London, 1983), 189.

¹⁷⁸Nelson, *Comedy*, 1.

¹⁷⁹Freud, *Jokes*, 181.

¹⁸⁰M. Eastman, *Enjoyment of Laughter* (New York, 1936), 15.

Aristotelian scholars on the other. The philosopher D. H. Munro, for example, has summarized and classified all the comic theories in three categories and has offered a unified theory of his own. His three categories are: superiority theories, incongruity theories, and relief theories.¹⁸¹

With respect to the first category Munro asks, "If we laugh at the miser, the drunkard, the glutton, the henpecked husband, the man who gets hit by the custard pie, the schoolboy howler, the person with faulty pronunciation, may it not be because we feel superior to all of these?"¹⁸²

Munro extends and illuminates this theory with a more subtle understanding of "superiority" when he likens this feeling of superiority that explains humor to our being "conscious of surveying the whole human scene from some godlike level at which all men and women look pretty much alike: all weak, all lovable, all transparently obvious in their petty pretenses." So rather than "simply a sneering contempt for some failing we do not have," it is this "god's-eye view" that can account for humor.¹⁸³

The second category, incongruity theories, emphasizes the comic as resulting from bringing together two things normally kept in separate compartments of our minds. Schopenhauer "claimed that all humor can be 'traced to syllogism in the first figure with an undisputed major and an unexpected minor, which to a certain extent is only

¹⁸¹D. H. Munro, "Humor," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (1967; reprint, New York, 1972), 91.

¹⁸²Ibid.

¹⁸³Ibid. This nuance will come into play with Golden's proposal of *nemesan* "indignation" as a comic emotion. See below, n.257.

sophistically valid.'"¹⁸⁴ This theory explains certain types of satire and the mock-heroic. Aristotle's point about intellectual pleasure in *mimesis* can be seen in this type of comedy in that we experience "the sense of enlarged horizons that comes from seeing unexpected connections."¹⁸⁵ Bergson's comic theory of inelasticity is obviously a form of incongruity theory. Incongruity also explains the pleasure and laughter associated with playing with words and ideas, puns, etc.

The third category, relief theories, emphasizes the importance of liberation or relief from restraint. Segal's use of Kris' "holiday from the superego" falls into this category as well as Freud's insistence that much of humor represents the "gratification of giving rein to repressed sexual or aggressive impulses." Freud identified "'psychic economy' first with the line of least resistance and then with the brevity and neatness that is the soul of wit. Against Freud it may be said that the lazy pleasure of following the path of least resistance is very different from our appreciation of the skill with which a master of humor links disparate ideas."¹⁸⁶

The problem with the theorists that offer some kind of superiority theory to explain comedy is that they are not explaining the nature of the comic, but an emotion in the audience. It may be that comic action or comic character causes one to feel superior, but what is the nature of that action or character that causes one to feel superior? The incongruity theorists' important contribution is their emphasis on the

¹⁸⁴Munro, "Humor," 91-2.

¹⁸⁵Ibid. 92.

¹⁸⁶Ibid. 93.

intellectual component to humor, but comedy is surely more than just a recognition on the part of an audience that some logical fallacy has been committed in the linking of two disparate ideas.

The third category, the relief theory, is problematic in that it really confuses the definition of the comic with the cause of the physiological expression of laughter since those who see comedy as "relief" or "liberation" usually talk about surprise. Their insight is that it is the sudden turn of events or expectations reversed--often transgressions of social conventions--that causes laughter. But it is also true that the sudden peripeteia of tragedy can cause weeping. Though this may contribute to our understanding of observable physiological responses to comic characters or comic action, it does little to enhance our knowledge of comic characters or comic action. Therefore, I continue to insist that physiological responses must be kept separate from our investigation of the nature of the comic just as they have been from the theories of the nature of the tragic.¹⁸⁷

Munro concludes his book *Argument of Laughter* by suggesting that all humorous situations are characterized by the "inappropriate":

"There is a sense in which 'funny' is indefinable. It is a name we give to situations which arouse in us a particular emotion. If we assert that those situations also strike us as

¹⁸⁷Actually, this third category does not appear to be anything more than a subcategory of the second category, the incongruous, since the "relief" or "liberation" and the concomitant surprise and delight result from action contrary or "incongruous" to expectations.

containing a special kind of inappropriateness, and that if they did not we would not call them funny, we are making an empirical observation."¹⁸⁸

This is an astute observation; as we shall see below, the "inappropriate" turns out to be intimately linked to an Aristotelian definition of τὸ γελοῖον "the ridiculous." And, indeed, it is to Aristotle and his modern critics that I would like to turn to discover the essential common denominators of the comic that identify the particular situations of comedy (comic character and comic action) and the comic emotions those situations arouse. For I wholeheartedly believe that just as his genius for getting at the common denominators of the tragic dimension of human existence was able to guide critics in the understanding of the tragic, so a reconstruction of his insights into the comic dimension of human existence could very well simplify attempts to understand the comic. Given the immense influence of Aristotle on tragic theory, it appears that it was not until the Renaissance that the significance of Aristotle's *Poetics* was recognized. As Janko remarks, "the *Poetics* was neglected and its most important insights misunderstood or ignored through most of antiquity."¹⁸⁹ Since the rediscovery of the *Poetics* during the Renaissance, tragic theory has been greatly influenced by the prescriptive definition and explication of tragedy in Aristotle's *Poetics*, and there is a gradual consensus about the

¹⁸⁸Munro, *Argument of Laughter*, 255.

¹⁸⁹Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, 68. Lucas, *Aristotle: Poetics*, states, "Neither before nor after the alleged loss of Aristotle's esoteric writings does the *Poetics* seem to have been widely read. . . . The *Poetics* seems never to have been the subject of a commentary" (xxii-xxiii). For a succinct survey of the influence and status of the *Poetics*, see S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Chapel Hill, 1986), 286-323.

meaning of Aristotle's key terms. Aristotle specifically defines tragedy in *Poetics* 1449b 24-28 as follows:

ἔστιν οὖν τραγωδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας
καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης, ἠδυσμένῳ λόγῳ χωρὶς ἐκά-
στω τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις, δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγ-
γελίας, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων
παθημάτων κάθαρσιν.

Tragedy is, then, an imitation of a noble and complete action, having the proper magnitude; it employs language that has been artistically enhanced by each of the kinds of linguistic adornment, applied separately in the various parts of the play; it is presented in dramatic, not narrative form, and achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such pitiable and fearful incidents.¹⁹⁰

This clear statement and its elaboration in the rest of the *Poetics* has provided a sounding board for an arena of focused tragic literary criticism down through the ages. Unfortunately, Aristotle's prescriptive definition for comedy has not survived antiquity. As we have seen, the focus of attention of critics has not been anchored in the nature of comic characters and comic action and the emotions evoked by these characters and their

¹⁹⁰ This and all other translations of Aristotle's *Poetics* will be from L. Golden's translation in Golden and Hardison, *Aristotle's Poetics*.

action as discussion of the tragic has focused on tragic action, characters, and emotions. Rather, other extraneous factors--such as the nature of laughter, the physiological and psychological mechanism involved in laughter, or the purpose of comedy--have clouded the clear investigation of the comic spirit. The importance of reconstructing Aristotle's comic literary theory is well-stated by Lane Cooper:

His analysis of tragedy has been the foundation of all subsequent inquiries and has not been superseded. He is the master of critical analysis. The chances are that his insight into Greek comedy was superior to that of modern scholars. . . .¹⁹¹

Modern scholars, however, are making some inroads into the theory of the comic. Indeed, it is the classicists of the twentieth century that are having the greatest success in explaining comedy by reconstructing Aristotle's comic literary theory. Scholars such as Cooper himself, Bernays, Richard Janko, and Leon Golden, have been rather successful in reconstructing Aristotelian comic theory. Cooper demonstrated that even though Aristotle's book on comedy was lost, if it ever existed, Aristotle was not silent about the nature of comedy in his extant works. In fact, he summarizes the nature of the comic character and comic action at *Poetics* 1449 a 32-37:

Ἡ δὲ κωμῳδία ἐστὶν ὥσπερ εἶπομεν μίμησις φανλο-
τέρων μὲν, οὐ μέντοι κατὰ πᾶσαν κακίαν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ
αἰσχροῦ ἐστὶ τὸ γελοῖον μῶριον. τὸ γὰρ γελοῖον ἐστὶν ἀμάρ-

¹⁹¹L. Cooper, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy* (New York, 1922), 39.

τημά τι καὶ αἰσχος ἀνώδυνον καὶ οὐ φθαρτικόν, οἶον
εὐθύς τὸ γελοῖον πρόσωπον αἰσχροῦ τι καὶ διεστραμμένον
ἄνευ ὀδύνης.

As we have said, comedy is an imitation of baser men. These are characterized not by every kind of vice but specifically by the "ridiculous," which is some error or ugliness that is painless and has no harmful effects. The example that comes to mind is the comic mask, which is ugly and distorted but causes no pain.

Therefore, the only real mystery for critics to solve is the identity of the comic emotions that parallel the tragic emotions. This is the key to establishing an Aristotelian theory of comedy that is parallel to his theory of tragedy and that would provide a focused discussion of the nature of the comic spirit devoid of extraneous distractions.

Before reviewing the controversy concerning the comic emotions evoked by comic characters and comic actions, another important controversy must first be introduced because of its centrality in discovering the comic emotions: the nature of *katharsis*.¹⁹² "We cannot achieve a genuine understanding of Aristotle's literary theory until we arrive at a persuasive understanding of *katharsis*, the best known and most widely debated concept in that theory."¹⁹³ In his definition of tragedy in *Poetics* 1449 b 24-28

¹⁹²For a brief summary of *katharsis* theory, see D. Keeseey, "On some recent interpretations of catharsis," *Classical World* 72 (1978-9): 193-205; and L. Golden, "The Clarification Theory of *Katharsis*," *Hermes* 104 (1976): 437-452. For a more extensive examination of the various theories, see White, "A Sourcebook on the Catharsis Controversy".

¹⁹³Golden, *Tragic and Comic Mimesis*, 5.

Aristotle states that tragedy "achieves through pity and fear the *katharsis* of these emotions." Thus the goal and pleasure associated with tragedy are related to *katharsis*. Likewise, the goal and pleasure associated with comedy is related to *katharsis* of the comic emotions.¹⁹⁴ The problem is that, as important as this term is in his definition of tragedy, Aristotle neither defines nor comments on it. The nature of *katharsis*, therefore, has been a source of contention for literary critics for some time.¹⁹⁵ Without

¹⁹⁴Some scholars are not convinced that Aristotle ever posited a comic *katharsis*. For instance, E. Olson, *The Theory of Comedy* (Bloomington, 1968), declares, "Comedy has no catharsis, since all the kinds of the comic—the ridiculous and ludicrous, for example—are naturally pleasant" (36). G. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, MA, 1957), remarks that "our interpretation of (*katharsis*) excludes the possibility of a comic catharsis. Comedy has no tragic *pathē*, no *μιαρόν*, to be cleansed; the idea could not possibly be relevant to it" (447). Indeed, purgation and structural purification views of *katharsis* eliminate or obstruct any attempt to reconstruct an Aristotelian theory of comedy. In fact, as I show below, without a correct view of *katharsis*, one will have to believe there is no comic *katharsis*, as Else argues, or produce the wrong (un-Aristotelian) comic emotions, as Cooper and Janko do. As opposed to "unbelievers" such as Olson, Else, Zeller, Gudeman, and Lord, Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, includes as "believers" in a comic *katharsis* Vahlen, Bywater, Rostagni, and Stark (274-5, n. 33). I agree with Halliwell, who sums up his own view of the controversy: "The decisive consideration, I believe, is that the Platonic charge (esp. *Rep.* 388e-9a, 606a-d) calls for comic just as much as for tragic *katharsis*, and this is corroborated in the neo-platonic evidence on the subject, cited by Janko 146 in what is now the major discussion of comic *katharsis* (136-51)" (275, n. 33). (For a summary on Janko's view of comic *katharsis*, see below.) Halliwell, though, makes no attempt to reconstruct an Aristotelian theory of comedy or to suggest what the comic emotions might be since it is his contention that we are unable "on the surviving evidence to reconstruct the core of the Aristotelian theory of comedy" (274). Halliwell rules out the possibility that Aristotle's theory of comedy could "simply have been a reverse image of that of tragedy" (275), whereas I see the typically Greek bipolar thought pattern exhibited in Aristotelian thought as the key to recovery of an Aristotelian comic theory (see below).

¹⁹⁵Its particular relevance to the reconstruction of an Aristotelian theory of comedy will become eminently apparent below when examining Lane Cooper and Dana Sutton's frustrated attempts to offer their own suggestions for the comic emotions based on a purgation theory of *katharsis*, and Richard Janko's attempt to support the comic emotions appearing in the definition of comedy in the *Tractatus Coislinianus*.

an adequate understanding of this term, any reconstruction of Aristotle's definition of comedy would be arbitrary or at least unconvincing.

S. H. Butcher characterizes the "great historic discussion" over this phrase: "No passage, probably, in ancient literature has been so frequently handled by commentators, critics, and poets, by men who knew Greek, and by men who knew no Greek."¹⁹⁶

Leon Golden has devoted much work to this problem and summarizes the historical debate over this term:

Catharsis, a much disputed term, has been interpreted in four principle ways: (1) as a form of medical purgation in which the pathological elements of pity and fear are purged from the spectator; (2) as a form of moral purification in which the spectator achieves the proper mean between excess and deficiency in experiencing pity and fear; (3) as a structural process by which the tragic deed of the hero is, in the course of the play, purified of its moral pollution; and (4) as the process of intellectual clarification by which the spectator comes to understand, under a universal heading, the nature of the particular pitiable and fearful events that have been depicted.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶S.H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (1894; reprint, New York, 1951), 243.

¹⁹⁷L. Golden, "Aristotle, Frye, and the Theory of Tragedy," *Comparative Literature* 27, no.1 (1975): 48.

Purgation theories of catharsis were favored by early translators and commentators until the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when purification theories came into vogue.¹⁹⁸ We shall first examine the moral purification theory of *katharsis* and its variation in Gerald Else's "structural purification" theory, and then examine the current predominant theory of *katharsis* as "purgation" as proposed by Jacob Bernays. Finally, after presenting Richard Janko's recent revival of the purification theory that includes an intellectual component, we shall give reasons for adopting the interpretation of *katharsis* that arises from the internal argument of the *Poetics*, the "intellectual clarification" theory as defined by Leon Golden.

The "moral purification" theorists rely on a text external to the *Poetics* as the basis for their view of the meaning of *katharsis*. They cite *Nicomachean Ethics* 1106 b 15-23 where Aristotle explains moral virtue as a mean between excess and deficiency.¹⁹⁹ In that work, the emotion of pity is mentioned in a context which leads critics to infer that tragedy must have as its goal this process of adjusting the amount of pity and fear to a proper mean. Few scholars now hold this view since there is nothing in the development of Aristotle's theory of tragedy in the *Poetics* to support it.²⁰⁰ This theory even fails to satisfy the minimum requirement that *katharsis* be related to Aristotle's explicitly stated goal and pleasure of all *mimesis* ("imitation"). In *Poetics*

¹⁹⁸Keeseey, "Recent Interpretations of Catharsis": 193.

¹⁹⁹For example, see H. House, *Aristotle's Poetics: A Course of Eight Lectures* (London, 1956), 100-111.

²⁰⁰See Golden, "The Clarification Theory of *Katharsis*": 437.

1448 b 4-19 Aristotle explains that human beings are imitative by nature and feel pleasure when viewing things imitated. He says humans even feel pleasure at viewing imitations of objects that would cause us pain to see in reality. The reason is, he says, that people learn and infer when viewing works of *mimesis* (*Poetics* 1448 b 15-17). Furthermore, according to 1453 b 11-14 there is a pleasure peculiar to tragedy that results from pity and fear through imitation. Any theory that attempts to explain adequately the *katharsis* of pity and fear, the goal of tragedy in particular, should at least address the goal and pleasure of *mimesis* in general, namely learning and inference.²⁰¹

Else proposed a variation of the purification theory with his theory that a structural purification takes place within the plot of the play so that the audience is able to express emotions of pity and fear toward the tragic hero.²⁰² In defending his own theory Else makes a valuable contribution to the search for an Aristotelian view of *katharsis* in the *Poetics* when he insists that such a definition be derived from the internal argument of the *Poetics* itself. He does so in the midst of refuting Bernays' purgation theory. Else states that *katharsis* as "purgation" may very well fit the passage in the *Politics* from which Bernays extracts such a definition for the *Poetics*, but what has to be explained before everything else is the *Poetics*. Else insists that neither Bernays' explanation nor any of the others has ever shed any light on the *Poetics* itself. In fact, Bernays' interpretation of *katharsis* would long ago have been discarded if it did not so

²⁰¹As Golden so ably points out in his discussions of *katharsis*. See footnote 234 below for references.

²⁰²Else, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 221-32, 436-44.

well fit the passage in the *Politics*. The reason is that the purgation theory, "no matter how adapted or refined, is inherently and indefeasibly *therapeutic*."²⁰³ Therefore it presupposes that all human beings come to a tragic drama as "patients to be cured, relieved, restored to psychic health."²⁰⁴ Yet there is no hint that such an end, to cure pathological states, is the purpose of tragedy. "On the contrary it is evident in every line of the work that Aristotle is presupposing *normal* auditors, normal states of mind and feeling, normal emotional and aesthetic experience."²⁰⁵

Else really solidifies his insistence that a definition of *katharsis* be derived from the internal argument of the *Poetics* itself by reminding his readers that:

In so doing it puts catharsis in the center of a nexus of concepts with which it is organically connected: *Pathos*, *hamartia*, recognition, pity and fear, and (perhaps) the tragic pleasure. . . . If an interpretation of a detail in a given work is solidly based on the rationale and argument of that work, if it fits firmly into place in a system of thought along with other concepts which it helps to explain and which help to explain it, then it cannot be refuted *merely* by appealing to a reference in another work which seems to imply a different concept, especially if that

²⁰³Ibid. 440.

²⁰⁴Ibid.

²⁰⁵Ibid.

reference is obscure or controversial in itself.²⁰⁶

In summary, Else argues that the *Poetics* should be interpreted out of itself and any external evidence must coincide with that interpretation, not precede it.²⁰⁷

As he reads the *Poetics* Else realizes that, for Aristotle, the tragic hero commits the tragic deed in ignorance and not from an immoral motive. The fact that the hero is "*katharos*, free of pollution,"²⁰⁸ says Else, is what allows the audience to experience pity and fear for the tragic hero. So through the plot that included pitiable and fearful incidents there is a *katharsis* "purification" of those incidents since the hero commits a *hamartia* "error" through ignorance, thereby removing anything that is *miaros* and so avoids "pollution".

Else himself recognized some weaknesses in his theory. One is that his explanation "turns the latter [*katharsis*] into a relatively minor operational factor in the poetic economy instead of a major aesthetic (or moral or therapeutic, etc.) concept."²⁰⁹ But, Else argues, if *katharsis* was such an important idea, why did Aristotle not tell us so and spend more time on it? We might argue that Aristotle indeed may have done so (as he in fact stated that he did in *Politics* 1341 b 1-2) in the supposedly lost second book of the *Poetics* along with his discussion of comedy.

Another problem Else recognizes with his theory is that it limits *katharsis* to

²⁰⁶Ibid. 441.

²⁰⁷Ibid. 442.

²⁰⁸Ibid. 438.

²⁰⁹Ibid. 443.

complex plots (like the *Oedipus* in which a noble hero commits a *hamartia* "error" in ignorance) which are not part of all tragedies. Else retorts that single plots are barely even recognized as tragic anyway.²¹⁰ Furthermore, he admits that a "structural purification" theory of *katharsis* would not be applicable to comedy at all.²¹¹ This adds up to a weak defense against this serious defect in his theory.

Finally, this theory of the goal of tragedy as a *katharsis* in the sense of a "structural purification" of pity and fear within the plot fails to reflect the Aristotelian requirement that the goal and pleasure of tragedy be rooted in the pleasure of learning and inferring universals from particulars any more than do previous purification theories. In spite of Else's criticism of Jacob Bernays'²¹² interpretation of *katharsis* as "purgation," Bernays' theory with its stress on a narrow medical sense of the metaphor was so convincing that it has become the dominant interpretation of *katharsis* in the twentieth century.²¹³

Three premises form the basis of Bernays' influential medical theory of purgation.²¹⁴ The first is that *katharsis*, besides the general sense of "cleaning," can only have one of two meanings "purification" (a religious purification of guilt and sin) or "purgation" (medical relief of illness).

²¹⁰Ibid. 444.

²¹¹Ibid. 447.

²¹²Jacob Bernays, *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung de Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie* (1928; reprint, Hildesheim, 1970).

²¹³Keesey, "Recent Interpretations of Catharsis": 193.

²¹⁴See Golden, "The Clarification Theory of *Katharsis*": 439.

Secondly, *katharsis* occurs in the *Politics* 1341 b 32 - 1342 a 15 to describe the effect of curing troubled minds by wild and restless music, a homeopathic cure whereby the wild music purges the mind of tumult. Based on this passage, *katharsis* must be a purgative kind of curing or healing of emotions.

Finally, Bernays concludes that, since it is so obviously used as a purgative of emotion in the *Politics*, *katharsis*, must be operating the same way in the definition of tragedy in the *Poetics*, i.e. as a purgation of the tragic emotions of pity and fear.

Despite Bernays influential philological and exegetical arguments, Leon Golden has raised some important objections to the widespread acceptance of the purgation theory of *katharsis* that has occurred in this century. One of his most important objections is that Bernays was simply wrong in his assumption that *katharsis* had only two possible meanings.²¹⁵ An important nuance of *katharsis* that escaped Bernays is "intellectual clarification," as can be attested to in at least three authors: Plato, Epicurus, and Philodemus.²¹⁶

Secondly, Golden states that there is no compelling reason to accept Bernays argument that the passage in the *Politics* must mean "purgation" rather than

²¹⁵Ibid. See also L. Golden, "The Purgation Theory of Catharsis," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 (1973) where Golden explains why Bernays could make this assumption, namely that "None of the editions of the lexica of Stephanus, Passow, and Liddell and Scott, which Bernays would have had at his disposal, make reference to this meaning of *katharsis*. The connotation 'intellectual clarification' is first noted in the ninth edition of Liddell-Scott-Jones which appeared in 1940" (474).

²¹⁶For Plato's use of the meaning of "intellectual clarification" for *katharsis*, see Golden's discussion concerning Plato's *Sophist* in *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis*, 22f.

"purification." Bernays argues that a meaning of "purification" is just too complex and hard to grasp to be the meaning Aristotle meant for *katharsis*:

For he [Aristotle] cannot have had in mind the ceremonies themselves--the incense and the ablutions--but at most the emotional changes in the object of these ministrations; and he must therefore have hoped to explain a perplexing emotional reaction--the calming of ecstasy by means of frenzied singing--by comparing it with another reaction no less perplexing, namely the feeling of release from guilt experienced by those who receive absolution. No one in his right mind could seriously credit Aristotle with so pointless and obvious a piece of verbal conjuring.²¹⁷

Golden argues that the fact that the mechanism of the purgation may be clearer or simpler does not guarantee its validity as the metaphor of choice.

The last conclusion of Bernays may be rejected for several reasons. First, even if purgation is the meaning of *katharsis* in the *Politics*, the meaning of *katharsis* in one work of Aristotle's cannot merely be assumed to be the same in the context of a completely different work.²¹⁸ Secondly, as Golden points out, at *Politics* 1341 b 1-2

²¹⁷Bernays as quoted by D. White, *A Sourcebook on the Catharsis Controversy*, 208.

²¹⁸As Golden explains in *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis*: "Bernays made the assumption that the *katharsis* described in the passage from the *Politics* cited above [*Politics* 1341 b 36-1342 a 16] must be exactly the same process to which Aristotle was

Aristotle informs us that he will tell us "more precisely" what he means by *katharsis* in the *Poetics*,²¹⁹ an indication in itself that the term probably has a different nuance than the precise way it was used in the *Politics*.

In general, Bernays' purgation theory fails on the same grounds as the moral purification and structural purification theories in that it too ignores the intellectual pleasure that Aristotle had indicated was the goal of all *mimesis* (*Poetics* 1448 b 4-19) as well as the peculiar pleasure from pity and fear that results through the imitation of the tragic (*Poetics* 1453 b 11-14).

Interestingly enough, there is an increasing awareness of this intellectual component to *katharsis* even by some of those who subscribe to the purgation theory. For instance, S. H. Butcher, although he subscribes to the purgation theory, betrays an acknowledgement of the basic importance of an intellectual component:

Tragedy, then, does more than effect the homeopathic cure of certain passions. Its function . . . is not merely to provide an outlet for pity and fear, but to provide for them a distinctively

referring when he used the word in the definition of tragedy in the *Poetics*. He failed to observe that Aristotle carries out his discussion of art in the *Poetics*, and elsewhere in the *Politics*, on the basis of very different first principles, which lead him to a discussion of quite diverse aspects of art in the two works. In the passage cited above Aristotle is concerned with the role of music in *παιδεία*, the moral training of the young, while in the *Poetics*, and elsewhere in the *Politics*, he is concerned with the role of music in what he describes as *διαγωγή*, the highest level of intellectual activity and enjoyment for human beings. Because of this crucial difference in emphasis, the term *katharsis*, as used in both works, does not always refer to the same process each time it appears but can denote very different effects" (7).

²¹⁹Golden, "The Clarification Theory of *Katharsis*": 439.

aesthetic satisfaction, to purify and *clarify* [my italics] them by passing them through the medium of art.²²⁰

Butcher also understands that the pleasure of all *mimesis*, including tragedy, involves the audience's learning and inferring universals from particulars:

The tragic *katharsis* requires that suffering shall be exhibited in one of its comprehensive aspects; that the deeds and fortunes of the actors shall attach themselves to larger issues, and the spectator himself be lifted above the special case and brought face to face with universal law and the divine plan of the world.²²¹

One of the most convincing modern theories, a modified purification theory that recognizes an intellectual component to *katharsis*, is found in Richard Janko's explanation of the term. He translates the definition of tragedy in book 6 of the *Poetics* (1449 b 27) as follows:

Tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play]; [represented] by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions.²²²

²²⁰Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry*, 255.

²²¹Ibid. 271.

²²²R. Janko, *Aristotle: Poetics I* (Indianapolis, 1987), 7.

To explain his understanding of "accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions" Janko first presents his problems with the prevailing medical interpretation of *katharsis* by Bernays. For him Bernays's view "makes catharsis an accidental by-product of tragedy, rather than something essential to its nature, as Aristotle implies by including it in his definition of tragedy. . . ." ²²³ Bernays' theory also implies that the best audience for a tragedy would be one that is emotionally disturbed and unbalanced, whereas Aristotle nowhere implies that the purpose of attendance at a tragic performance was the same as a visit to a physician. Finally, Bernays, like Plato, assumes that the emotions are inherently undesirable.

Janko reminds us that for Aristotle the very aim of tragedy is to bring about the peculiar pleasure of the tragic representation of pitiable and fearful things that will lead to a *katharsis* of these emotions in the audience. *Poetics* 1448 b 10-12 states that we derive pleasure from the representation of things on the stage that would bring pain in real life. If the plot is carefully and properly structured it will arouse in the audience the correct emotional response; but if not, the wrong emotional response, "which Aristotle calls 'shock' or 'revulsion' (52b36), literally 'dirtiness'—the opposite, surely, of *catharsis*, which means 'cleansing' or purification'." ²²⁴

²²³Ibid., xvii.

²²⁴Ibid. Note that Janko is contrasting the emotion of "shock" to *katharsis* as if *katharsis* were an emotion, but Aristotle is making the point that the plot must not portray a decent man as falling from happiness to misery for it would not evoke pity or fear, but shock (*miarón*) from the audience. Because *miarón* literally means "dirtiness" Janko attempts to draw this into his evidence for translating *katharsis* as "purification," but there is no direct linguistic connection that can be made to *katharsis* from this context. That is, Aristotle has not presented *katharsis* as the polar opposite of *miarón*

Aristotle, unlike Plato, does not have a totally negative view of emotions as merely irrational and improper influences on human behavior. Instead, as we learn from *Nicomachean Ethics* 1115 b 11-20, he considers emotions important factors in making correct decisions and in forming good character. But it is important to feel the right emotions in the proper amount. For instance, too little fear leads to foolhardiness, while too much fear leads to cowardice. Moderation, that Greek cultural virtue, becomes the key to an Aristotelian ethic. Thus, in turn, emotion is important in building good character, since one must feel emotion correctly in order to make good decisions that correspond to good character. In summary, virtue lies in the mean so that achieving the proper emotional responses leads to good decisions which produce virtuous character.

Janko takes this principle of proper adjustment of the emotions that he extracted from the *Ethics* and applies it to poetry through *Politics* VIII 5.1340a14-25. In this passage Aristotle states that representation (here especially music) has a power to form character, thus having an educative and moral function. To tie this to *katharsis* Janko translates a fragment of papyrus (no. 1581) on poetry from the library found at Herculaneum and first published by M.L. Nardelli in 1978 as follows: "It must be understood that poetry is useful with regard to virtue, purifying, as we said, the [related] part [of the soul]."²²⁵ This text, for Janko, shows that *katharsis* applies to errors of character and emotion as well as errors in the intellectual virtue of practical intelligence. He sums up his conclusions about tragic *katharsis* as follows:

in this passage.

²²⁵Ibid. 61.

By representing pitiable, terrifying and other painful events, tragedy arouses pity, terror and other painful emotions in the audience, for each according to his own emotional capacity, and so stimulates these emotions as to relieve them by giving them moderate and harmless exercise, thereby bringing the audience nearer to the mean in their emotional responses, and so nearer to virtue in their characters; and with this relief comes pleasure.²²⁶

Janko had, in his earlier work on reconstructing Aristotle's lost *Poetics II*, spent considerable energy defending the *Tractatus Coislinianus* as Aristotelian and then used its definition of tragedy's action on the mind ("Tragedy removes the mind's emotions of fear by means of pity and terror.") to support his explanations of tragic *katharsis*. So although the audience is not exactly medically purged of an excess of the emotions of pity and fear, Janko does seem to be saying they are cured or "purified" of an imbalance so that they experience relief. They also are thereby educated in some sense so as to make better decisions and thereby become more virtuous.

I think Janko, despite a brilliant use of external sources, has made one important mistake in his interpretation of *katharsis*: he relies too heavily on those external documents instead of relying on the internal argument of the *Poetics* itself. This is especially true when he explains the peculiar pleasure of tragedy as coming from the relief that tragedy affords the audience through the moderate and harmless exercise of

²²⁶Ibid. xx.

pity and fear they experienced. Janko's acceptance of L. Golden's argument concerning the close relationship between the concepts of *mimesis* and *katharsis*²²⁷ has not led him to accept the primacy of the intellectual process involved in the *telos* of tragedy, the intellectual nuance of the *katharsis* of pity and fear.

The earliest suggestion of an "intellectual clarification" theory of *catharsis* is found in a letter from Otto Imisch to S. O. Haupt quoted in the latter's 1915 work on tragedy. Haupt defended this view and, in fact, realized that Aristotle certainly indicated in his discussion of *katharsis* in the *Politics* that he intended to develop a different view of *katharsis* in the *Poetics*.²²⁸ Other scholars such as E. Zeller, K. von Fritz, Anna Tumarkin, W. J. Verdenius, and W. D. Ross have become increasingly aware of the intellectual component involved in tragedy.²²⁹ Laín Entralgo even argues for an intellectual understanding for *katharsis* in his 1958 book *La Curación por la Palabra en la Antigüedad Clásica*.²³⁰ But Leon Golden is the principal contemporary scholar who has consistently answered critics and defended the "intellectual clarification" theory of catharsis in a number of publications since his 1962 article "Catharsis."²³¹ As we have noted, Janko mentions Golden as influencing his own realization of an intellectual

²²⁷Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, 142.

²²⁸Golden, "The Clarification Theory of *Katharsis*": 447.

²²⁹*Ibid.*

²³⁰P. Laín Entralgo, *La Curación por la Palabra en la Antigüedad Clásica* (Madrid, 1958), published in English under the title, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity*, ed., trans., L.J. Rather and J. M. Sharp (New Haven, 1970).

²³¹L. Golden, "Catharsis," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 93 (1962): 51-60.

component to *katharsis*, and indeed it is Leon Golden who has achieved a convincing argument for an intellectual definition of *catharsis* that is strongly based on the internal argument of Aristotle's *Poetics* itself.

Golden's defense of *katharsis* as "intellectual clarification" begins with his agreement with the principle put forth by Gerald Else that the *Poetics* should be interpreted within itself. Thus any explanation of *katharsis* as it appears in the definition of tragedy in the *Poetics* must be based primarily on the internal argument of the *Poetics*. The use of *katharsis* in other contexts cannot override *katharsis* as a term in the internal argument of the *Poetics*. This seems obvious at first, but it is an important premise in the development of Golden's argument which some others have ignored. Indeed, Golden argues that Aristotle explicitly states that all *mimesis* brings pleasure to human beings. Why? Because, says Aristotle in 1448 a, learning is pleasurable to human beings, and human beings learn something from all *mimesis* (art, literature, epic, drama, etc.). Thus even the *mimesis* of tragic events, things that distress us in reality, we view with pleasure on the stage because we learn from them:

The process of inference described by Aristotle "clarifies" the nature of the individual act by providing, through the medium of art, the means of ascending from the particular event witnessed to an understanding of its universal nature, and thus permits us to understand the individual act more clearly and distinctly.²³²

²³²Ibid. 57.

Furthermore, Aristotle, at 1453 b 8-14, states that the pleasure of tragedy is derived "from pity and fear through imitation." Since "nearly all scholars agree that in Aristotle's definition of tragedy the term *katharsis* functions as the essential *telos* of tragic *mimesis* . . . it is only *katharsis* in the sense of 'intellectual clarification' that can provide a *telos* for tragedy that is in harmony with the general argument of the *Poetics*."²³³

In conclusion, the intellectual clarification theory of *katharsis* is the only theory that is properly consistent with the general argument of the goal of the intellectual pleasure of *mimesis* stated in chapter 4 of the *Poetics*, the goal of learning and inferring universals from particulars stated in chapter 9, and Aristotle's statement in 1453 b 10-14 that the particular pleasure of tragedy is derived from pity and fear through *mimesis*.²³⁴

If we accept the intellectual clarification theory of *katharsis*, the quest for the comic emotions that parallel the tragic emotions of pity and fear becomes more focused. It is my contention that part of the confusion in this quest has been the focusing of critics on laughter as if it were an emotion. This confusion of laughter with an emotion rather than a physiological response to the comic emotions, as I contend, has been exacerbated by the brief treatise on comedy called the *Tractatus Coislinianus*. Many scholars agree with Duckworth: "The brief *Coislinian Tractate*, an anonymous condensation of a theory

²³³Golden, "The Clarification Theory of *Katharsis*": 447.

²³⁴For a fuller presentation of Golden's arguments for the intellectual clarification theory of *katharsis*, in addition to works already cited, see: "Epic Tragedy, and Catharsis," *Classical Philology* 71 (1976): 77-85; "Mimesis and Katharsis," *Classical Philology* 64 (1969): 145-53; "Toward a Definition of Tragedy," *Classical Journal* 72 (1976): 21-33.

of comedy dating perhaps from the first century B.C., preserves the Aristotelian tradition and may even reproduce the substance of Aristotle's lost discussion of comedy."²³⁵ There appears in the *Tractate* a definition of comedy parallel to the definition of tragedy in the *Poetics*. That definition states that the goal of comic *katharsis* is reached δι' ἡδονῆς καὶ γέλωτος "through pleasure and laughter." Janko accepts the *Tractate* as an authentic witness to Aristotelian comic theory, and I agree with Golden that Janko "has presented the case, pro and con with admirable clarity"²³⁶ in his 1984 book *Aristotle on Comedy: Towards a Reconstruction of Poetics II*.

What he proposes is a modified purification theory of tragic *katharsis* whereby the emotions of pity and fear are aroused by the character and action of tragedy and then by being given moderate exercise are able to bring the audience nearer to the mean in their emotional responses. Comic *katharsis* then also occurs as the comic emotions are stimulated and the audience brought nearer to the mean in these emotional responses. In accepting the *Tractate's* comic emotions of "pleasure and laughter" Janko is swimming against the tide of scholarly opinion. He is aware of the considerations that caused such scholars as Bernays, Cooper and Golden to reject "pleasure and laughter" as un-Aristotelian. One objection is that laughter is a subdivision of pleasure, and since pleasure belongs to tragedy also, it is not a distinctive attribute of comedy. But his suggestions do work for his theory of *katharsis*. The serious problem with Janko's argument is that he relies too heavily on external documents (several of which are not

²³⁵Duckworth, *Roman Comedy*, 308.

²³⁶L. Golden, "Comic Pleasure," *Hermes* 115 (1987): 165.

unquestionably Aristotelian) rather than extrapolating the comic emotions from the internal argument of the *Poetics* itself.

Golden has elaborated on the flaws in Janko's pro arguments.²³⁷ For pleasure is indeed too general a category to be set forth as a special comic emotion. Furthermore Golden's exegesis of the *Poetics* has clearly demonstrated pleasure as an Aristotelian common denominator both of comedy and of tragedy, not a special category of comedy.²³⁸

On the highest theoretical level the *Tractatus Coislinianus* shows a seriously flawed understanding of Aristotle's view of the nature, goal, and pleasure of *mimesis*, in general, as that view is expressed in the *Poetics*. Its attempt to define comedy ignores or contradicts explicit statements in the *Poetics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Nicomachean Ethics*, and thus the denunciation by Bernays and others of this definition as a travesty is fully justified. A genuine Aristotelian theory of comedy must be derived, first and foremost, from the indisputably authentic treatises of Aristotle.²³⁹

Bernays, as Golden points out, earlier rejected laughter as a comic emotion since it is a

²³⁷See especially Golden's lucid criticism of "pleasure and laughter" as comic emotions in his response to Janko's 1984 book *Aristotle on Comedy: Towards a Reconstruction of Poetics II* in his article "Comic Pleasure" (165-174).

²³⁸Ibid.

²³⁹Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis*, 101.

subcategory of pleasure rather than an emotion on equal terms with pleasure. Furthermore, I continue to argue that laughter is not an emotion at all, but a physiological phenomenon sometimes evoked by whatever comic emotions (which are aroused by some form of the ridiculous) are present.²⁴⁰

Another important and influential attempt to reconstruct an Aristotelian theory of comedy is Lane Cooper's 1922 book *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*²⁴¹ in which he offers his own suggestions for the comic emotions. Although he declares that the *Tractate* "is by all odds the most important technical treatise on comedy that has come down to us from the ancients,"²⁴² he rejects the *Tractate*'s offering of pleasure and laughter as the comic emotions as un-Aristotelian. However, Cooper's adherence to the purgative theory of *catharsis* compels him to look for emotions to be purged. This, in fact, is why he rejects pleasure and laughter as the comic emotions, since it makes no sense for the aim of comedy to be to purge pleasure and laughter.²⁴³ He finds help in the *Philebus* 48-50 where Plato associates anger and envy with comedy.²⁴⁴ This

²⁴⁰For objections to the *Tractatus*'s suggestions of pleasure and laughter as the comic emotions, see also A. P. McMahon, "On the Second Book of Aristotle's *Poetics* and the Source of Theophrastus' Definition of Tragedy," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 28 (1917): 30; M. Tierney, "Aristotle and Menander," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 43 (1936): 24-54; K. Smith, "Aristotle's 'Lost Chapter on Comedy'," *Classical Weekly* 21 (1928): 155.

²⁴¹Golden summarizes Cooper's positive contributions to reconstructing an Aristotelian comic theory in *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis*, 101-2.

²⁴²Cooper, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, viii.

²⁴³*Ibid.* 70.

²⁴⁴*Ibid.* 66.

passage also informs Cooper that comedy causes the soul to experience a mixed-feeling of pain and pleasure. He then finds corroboration for his suggestion in a list of emotions in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in book 2, chapter 4, that includes anger and envy along with desire, fear, courage, joy, love, hatred, regret, emulation and pity. But then, almost betraying his own doubts about his suggestion, he ineffectually proposes, "But if we must find in the list two emotions equally common with pity and fear, and specially capable of relief through comedy, why not take anger and envy?"²⁴⁵ Although sensing, I think, that comedy really does not evoke the emotions of anger and envy, Cooper forces a strange interpretation of a purgation of anger and envy to support his proposed comic emotions:

[T]he cure wrought by comedy is not, like the cure effected by tragedy, homeopathic, but, on the contrary, is allopathic. The generalized emotions of pity and fear in a tragic poem are specific for the pity and fear of the individual in the audience; whereas anger and envy may be removed by something very unlike them in comedy.²⁴⁶

But what are these emotions in a comic poem that remove the anger and envy in the audience? Having totally abandoned a truly Aristotelian theory, Cooper has now created a real dilemma--he must find two new emotions for his allopathic hypothesis. Rather than offer some suggestions as to the nature of these emotions in comedy that will

²⁴⁵Ibid.

²⁴⁶Ibid. 67.

remove anger and envy in the audience, he acts as if the dilemma is resolved by changing the discussion to the mechanism of this purgation: comic suspense.²⁴⁷ Cooper's suggestions, therefore, have led us in circles.

D. F. Sutton, a more recent advocate of the purgation interpretation of *katharsis*, seeks some "bad feelings" that could be purged by a comic *katharsis*. Through a procrustean manipulation of the few Aristotelian references he does utilize,²⁴⁸ Sutton is able to satisfy himself that he has found the comic emotions: "Thanks to Aristotle and Freud we have identified four bad feelings available for comic purgation: anxiety, fear, sexual aggression, and hostility."²⁴⁹

Sutton sums up his theory of comic *katharsis* as follows:

When a surrogate evokes bad feelings, and the spectator laughs at the surrogate because of his appreciation of its ridiculous qualities (for such reasons as perceived incongruities), a double effect is achieved. Bad feelings are summoned by the surrogate, and the spectator transfers something of what he knows and feels about the target onto

²⁴⁷Ibid. 68.

²⁴⁸D. F. Sutton, *The Catharsis of Comedy* (Lanham, MD, 1994), is not attempting to reconstruct an Aristotelian theory of comedy, and in fact he states, "For present purposes, therefore, we should feel free to reject possible views of Aristotle's thinking about the nature of catharsis, not because they are necessarily untrue, but because they do not strike us as useful" (10). On the contrary, one focus of this dissertation is to examine Aristotle inductively to determine if his insights can lead us to the truth about the comic, for surely the truth is useful.

²⁴⁹Ibid. 69.

the surrogate. Thus some fraction of his bad feelings towards the target is rendered available for purgation by laughter. Simultaneously, the spectator's thoughts and feelings towards the target are modified so that its capacity to inspire similar bad feelings in the future is inhibited.²⁵⁰

The problem is that he arrives at these emotions simply through the logic that he must find bad feelings that need to be purged, and he does so without demonstrating that either Aristotle or Freud ever connected these particular emotions to the comic. Furthermore, Sutton never adequately explains how the pleasure signified by laughter could be evoked by these "bad feelings,"²⁵¹ so the whole argument of his book is based on a presupposition that must be presumed true without demonstration.

A much more satisfying suggestion for comic emotion was made by Leon Golden in his 1984 article entitled "Aristotle on Comedy." Indeed, it is Golden that discovered a key to the reconstruction of Aristotelian comic theory when his analysis of the relation of comedy to tragedy as presented by Aristotle in the *Poetics* combined with passages in the *Rhetoric* gave him a clue to one of the comic emotions.

²⁵⁰Ibid. 81.

²⁵¹Sutton, *The Catharsis of Comedy*, bases the pleasure of comedy solely on the physiologically purgative effect of laughter: "A more or less explosive laugh is a pleasantly purgative and entropy-achieving event both physiologically and psychologically" (16). But he fails to recognize that when humans laugh at the comic, that laughter is a physiological response to some pleasant emotion they are experiencing. He, on the other hand, is arguing that human laughter is a result of bad feelings and that the pleasure of comedy is the result of the purgative nature of laughter itself. This seems hardly defensible both intuitively and empirically.

Golden's logical extrapolation of one of the comic emotions parallel to the pity and fear of tragedy began with a clue he discovered in Aristotle's explanation of comedy's relationship to tragedy:

[W]e know that Aristotle explicitly contrasts tragedy to comedy on the basis of the fact that tragedy represents noble (*spoudaioi*) human beings and comedy those who are ignoble (*phauloi*) (*Poetics* 1448 b 24-27). We note that Aristotle identifies the object of tragic imitation to be both "noble actions and the actions of noble human beings" while comedy represents the actions of ignoble human beings. Thus Aristotle has placed the genres of tragedy and comedy in polar opposition to each other. . . .²⁵²

This recognition of Aristotle's logical conformity to the typical Greek bipolar thought pattern²⁵³ in his theory of tragedy and comedy allowed Golden to ask himself, "What, then, are the emotions that are directly opposed to pity (which is the painful emotion that results from the undeserved misfortune suffered by others) and fear (which is the painful emotion that results from the recognition of one's own vulnerability to undeserved misfortune)?"²⁵⁴ As it turns out, Aristotle answers this at *Rhetoric* 1386 b 9 where

²⁵²L. Golden, "Aristotle on Comedy," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42/3 (1984): 286. See also Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis*, 66f.

²⁵³For an invaluable explication of polarity and analogy as typical Greek thought patterns, see Lloyd *Polarity and Analogy*.

²⁵⁴Golden, "Aristotle on Comedy": 287.

he states that *νεμεσᾶν* "indignation" is opposed to pity.²⁵⁵ When Golden reads further at *Rhetoric* 1387 a 26-31 he discovers that Aristotle states that *νεμεσᾶν* is generated under two specific conditions: (1) circumstances involving unjustified good fortune and (2) circumstances involving whatever is inappropriate or incongruous.

It is not difficult to agree that circumstances involving unjustified good fortune that generate *nemesan* "indignation" are clearly opposed to circumstances involving undeserved bad fortune that generate *eleos* "pity." So one can concur with Golden's association of circumstances involving whatever is inappropriate and incongruous with *to geloion* "the ridiculous." He argues, "The ridiculous along with its constitutive elements of error and ugliness are certainly inappropriate characteristics of the *spoudaios* person and action as well as the person and action that Aristotle would designate as the norm."²⁵⁶

However Aristotle associates pain to the emotion of indignation, and this contradicts Aristotle's contention that pain can not be part of the comic spirit. Golden convincingly dispenses with this problem in his article "Comic Pleasure" where he argues that Aristotle makes a distinction between incidents of everyday life and the *mimesis* of

²⁵⁵In *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis* Golden addresses the fact that R. Fleming had also understood the relevance of *Rhetoric* 1386 b 8-31 to comedy. But as Golden states, "...his argument was not based on an exhaustive and authoritative philological examination of the Greek text; thus he did not achieve a rigorous demonstration of his thesis, which might have influenced subsequent scholarship" (94, n.93). Fleming does, though, anticipate Golden and me with his recognition of Aristotle's presentation of the antonymic relationship of tragedy and comedy which could be used to recover his theory of comedy.

²⁵⁶*Ibid.* 287.

life in comedy. For example, since the *ἀμάρτημα* "error" and *αἰσχος* "ugliness" depicted in comedy are painful in ordinary life but *ἀνώδυνον* "painless" and *οὐ φθαρτικόν* "harmless" when depicted in comedy, one can conclude that the type of *νεμεσᾶν* "indignation" produced by the *mimesis* of *ἀμάρτημα* and *αἰσχος* is one without pain. That is,

we respond with *νεμεσᾶν*, devoid of pain, to comic incidents. . . . We must . . . understand that there is no fully adequate translation of *νεμεσᾶν*. Rendering the term by "indignation" will be misleading if we fail to remember that this emotion, like all emotions, admits of degree and nuance. If we focus on Aristotle's precise association of the term *νεμεσᾶν* with the recognition of (1) *unjustified good fortune* and (2) *whatever violates the laws of proportion and appropriateness*, we will understand what the word means and how it applies to comedy. . . .²⁵⁷

This, I believe, is a significant contribution to comic theory. Indeed, Golden's exegetical extrapolation of Aristotelian passages in the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* easily fits the logically consistent development of tragic and comic theory in those works. There is, however, some concern that Golden includes fear as an opposite emotion to *nemesan*

²⁵⁷Golden, "Comic Pleasure": 174. This explanation of "indignation" by Golden seems to coincide with Munro's attempt to explain that superiority is not just "sneering contempt by a 'god's eye-view'" that the audience enjoys while witnessing comic characters involved in comic action. See above, n. 183.

without any logical explanation. In his initial article on *nemesan*, "Aristotle on Comedy," in fact, he seems to approach it as if it needed no justification. In his later article "Comic Pleasure," however, he attempts to show that in *Rhetoric* 1387 a 31-32 Aristotle considers *nemesan* to have the same reverse side as *eleos* "pity," namely *phobos* "fear."²⁵⁸ But not only is fear never mentioned in this passage, Aristotle does not talk about the opposite to pity until 1387 b 18-20. Even here he does not mention fear. He does state that in a speech before a judge where someone asks for pity but does not deserve it will receive the opposite of pity. In the context, he obviously is referring to *nemesan* "indignation," the emotion Aristotle has already indicated as the opposite to pity.

Golden states:

We know that Aristotle explicitly recognizes *νεμεσᾶν* as a painful feeling that is evoked by *undeserved good fortune* (italics mine) that occurs to another person and that he understands that this *νεμεσᾶν* turns into *φόβος* when the undeserved good fortune is seen as a direct threat to oneself. (Rhet. 1386 b 22-25)²⁵⁹

The problem is that in this passage Aristotle is referring to the pity the judge might have felt for a defendant whose case displayed an obvious example of someone suffering from undeserved bad fortune. But when a defendant begs for pity on fraudulent

²⁵⁸Ibid. 171f.

²⁵⁹Ibid. 172.

grounds, instead of receiving pity from the judge, he will receive indignation. Aristotle is referring to the emotions the judge would feel—pity in the first case and indignation in the second. The defendant, not the judge, is the one who sees the bad fortune as a direct threat to himself and experiences fear. So it is not the defendant but the judge to whom Aristotle is referring who feels pity and its opposite. And, indeed, the emotion that is the opposite to the pity the judge would feel, even in this context, is indignation, not fear. Consequently, nowhere in this passage does Aristotle state or even imply that *nemesan* is the opposite of *phobos* or that *nemesan* "turns into" *phobos*. So, assuming that indignation is the comic emotion parallel to the tragic emotion of pity, what, then, is the comic emotion parallel to the tragic emotion of fear?

Using Golden's technique in extrapolating a comic emotion from the extant Aristotelian corpus by means of the principle of Greek bi-polar thought pattern, I would like to suggest that *θάρασος* "confidence" emerges as the second comic emotion, the one that is opposite and parallel to fear. For at *Rhetoric* 1383 a 15-16 Aristotle explicitly states that *θάρασος* "confidence" is the opposite of fear.²⁶⁰ *τό τε γὰρ θάρασος ἐναντίον*

²⁶⁰Despite R. Fleming's ("Of Contrast Between Tragedy and Comedy") insight into the antonymic relationship between tragedy and comedy that led him to perceive the relevance of *Rhetoric* 1386 b 8-31 in which Aristotle declares indignation to be the emotion opposite to pity, he did not go on to discover the emotion opposite to fear that Aristotle gives us here as *θάρασος* "confidence." Instead Fleming attempts to recover the emotion opposite to fear through logic alone without the aid of Aristotle's explicit statement at *Rhetoric* 1383 a 15-16. After he demonstrates the antonymic pattern of emotions in the *Rhetoric* from which he discovered Aristotle's mention of indignation as opposed to pity, Fleming concludes: "Following a similar pattern of definition, fear may be defined as what a man feels when he forbodes undeserved misfortune; then the contrary emotion might be described in a number of ways: as happy-go-lucky self-assurance, merry insolence, or, perhaps, genial pomposity. In any case it can not be thought of as a just or reasonable feeling; it will be free from care, and it will tend

τῷ φόβῳ. If *tharsos* "confidence" can be shown to logically fill the missing comic emotion in Golden's rigorous and logically consistent reconstruction of an Aristotelian definition of comedy, the millennia-old quest for the comic emotions that complete an Aristotelian definition of comedy parallel to that of tragedy will have finally concluded.

LSJ translates *θάρσος* as "courage" or "confidence" and states that it is rarely used in the sense of *θράσος* as "audacity" or "rashness." The nuance that differentiates the two words in regular use is in fact substantiated in *Rhetoric* 1383 a-1383 b 11 where Aristotle does use *θάρσος* and its verbal and adjectival forms to mean "confidence" and *θράσος* (1383 a 2) to mean "rashness," "recklessness," or "over-confidence." The fact that he actually uses the two forms to distinguish these nuances in meaning is amplified by another feature of this passage: Aristotle precisely defines *θάρσος* by a series of examples of situations and expectations that produce *θάρσος*.

1383 a 16 states that "confidence (*θάρσος*) is the opposite of fear (*φόβῳ*) and that which causes confidence (*τὸ θαρραλέον*) is the opposite to that which causes fear (*τῷ φοβερῷ*). This includes the expectation that things that keep human beings safe are near,

toward insolence without the tension which accompanies the kind of insolence that is really a form of defiance. In contrast to the tragic fear, which makes a man withdraw into himself and seek the stable center of reason and prudence, the comic insolence is extroverted and foolishly buoyant" (545). Thus Fleming suggests indignation and insolence as the comic emotions. Not only has Fleming abandoned a rigorous method of extrapolation from the Aristotelian corpus, but he has also abandoned any experiential analysis of his conclusions. Does comedy actually arouse an emotion of insolence in the audience? Fleming realizes this problem when he comments, "Thus the buoyancy proper to the feeling of undeserved success, together with the fact that the poet's effort to arouse insolence and indignation at the same time must repeatedly break down in impossibility, suggests the extroverted and episodic nature of comedy, opposed to the introverted and concentrated nature of tragedy. . . ." (552).

and terrible or fearful things are far away. Humans can also experience confidence if they have neither wronged nor been wronged by anyone. Furthermore if their rivals are either non-existent or not strong, or if they are strong and they are their friends, they also will experience confidence. If their rivals have treated them well or have been treated well by them, they can also be confident. If their rivals have similar interests and are numerous and/or stronger, the result will be confidence.

Particularly, says Aristotle, human beings experience confidence if they feel they have succeeded often without suffering and often escaped terrible situations. Men face danger with confidence either because they have not yet experienced danger or they have the experience in order to deal with it.

Finally, at *Rhetoric* 1383 a 32-35 Aristotle provides a situation that evokes confidence that is especially relevant to his definition of the ridiculous (τὸ γελοῖον) at *Poetics* 1449 a 34-35 as "some error or ugliness that is painless and harmless." He reports that human beings even feel confident if they see that those like them or weaker than they or those to whom they feel superior do not fear. In viewing a comedy the audience sees a comic character who is weaker than the norm or to whom the audience feels superior and who does not fear as his destiny actually ascends from misery to happiness. The audience, therefore, will feel confident that if such good fortune (a painless and harmless outcome) could occur for someone they are stronger or superior to, it could also happen to them. Not only does this make logical sense within the framework of an Aristotelian literary theory, but it works in the real life experience of an audience to comedy. Just as Aristotle's pity and fear make sense of what human

beings experience when witnessing tragedy, so also indignation and confidence, the Aristotelian opposites of pity and fear, explain the experience of human beings who witness comedy.

Indeed, *nemesan* and *tharsos* do seem to fill the requirements for the comic emotions generated by *to geloion*: (1) *nemesan* "indignation" which is aroused by circumstances involving an ignoble character experiencing unjustified good fortune and (2) *tharsos* "confidence" which is aroused by an ignoble character involved in an inappropriate or incongruous action (*to geloion* "the ridiculous") that does not result in pain or harmful effects. The audience experiences confidence that their lives too could escape bad fortune since even the ignoble (those whose action and character are below their own) enjoy good fortune.

Golden's caveat regarding translating *nemesan* as indignation must be kept in mind in regard to translating *tharsos* as "confidence"; i.e., just as when translating *nemesan* by "indignation," one must remember that all emotions admit of degree and nuance, the same applies to *tharsos*. Thus, *tharsos* is not the *θρασεΐς* "over confidence" of *Rhetoric* 1383 a 1-3 which might well fit a comic character who falls below the norm, but the *θάρασος* "confidence" that might be produced in an audience experiencing comic *katharsis* as a result of witnessing a *phaulos* character behaving below the norm in comedy. Is this not clearly the positive emotion of joyful confidence one actually experiences after having witnessed comic characters and comic action? A confidence that life ultimately can be painless and harmless, that good fortune can actually fall upon one. Life, despite one's imperfections and the vicissitudes of daily events, can consist of a

fortunate turn of events. This feeling that life can be fortunate, this air of confidence in the possibility of joy in life, permeates the audience to comedy just as an air of fear permeates the audience to a tragedy. Indeed, actual experience validates Aristotle's prescriptive definition of comedy. Not all comedies perfectly fit Aristotle's prescriptive definition, but his definition of comedy does give critics a basic paradigm from which to judge all comedy, just as his prescriptive definition of tragedy has given critics a paradigm from which to critique tragedy.

A contrast with the functions of the tragic emotions of pity and fear will shed light on the comic emotions of indignation and confidence. The case of Oedipus is Aristotle's quintessential example of the functions of pity and fear. Oedipus, a noble character whose action rises above the norm, suffers undeserved bad fortune. One feels pity because his bad fortune was undeserved. One feels fear because he realizes that if undeserved misfortune can happen to a man whose action rises above the norm, it could certainly happen to someone whose actions meet or fall below the norm. But one must remember that not all tragedy falls within Aristotle's prescriptions for the quintessential tragedy. In *Poetics* 1453 b 1-7 Aristotle admits that,

Pity and fear can arise from the spectacle and also from the very structure of the plot, which is the superior way and shows the better poet. The poet should construct the plot so that even if the action is not performed before spectators, one who merely hears the incidents that have occurred both shudders and feels pity from the way they

turn out. That is what anyone who hears the plot of the *Oedipus* would experience.

Even the plays of Euripides that do not follow the prescriptions as well as the *Oedipus* seem, says Aristotle, to be the "most tragic" because of their disastrous endings (*Poetics* 1453 a 51-55). For instance, the *Medea* of Euripides presents Medea as very culpable in her banishment from Corinth. She proves that the fears about her were well-founded when she murders her own children as well as Jason's new bride and father-in-law. She is not a totally innocent sufferer whose misfortune is the result of a mere miscalculation due to ignorance. Therefore, though one may feel some pity for her because of her abandonment by Jason, one would hardly experience a full amount of pity that would have been evoked by innocent suffering. Instead there is a great amount of pity for all those who suffer at her hands. And instead of evoking fear that one could suffer the fate of Medea, instead there is the fear that one might suffer the fate of her victims. Thus, even though it is a powerful tragedy and involves the tragic emotions that Aristotle's theory requires of tragedy, it veers somewhat from his quintessential paradigm of the *Oedipus*.

The same scenario applies to this reconstruction of Aristotle's prescriptions for the quintessential comedy. It can give us an understanding of the highest form of comedy (that which results from the construction of a prescribed comic plot with the prescribed comic character and comic action), but also enlighten us about the nature of *to geloion* "the ridiculous" in general. Unfortunately we have no idea which play Aristotle would have chosen as the quintessential comedy. The *Clouds* of Aristophanes

has won universal acclaim as a great comedy (Aristophanes himself thought it was his best play, *Clouds* 522), but Aristotle would no doubt have problems with its parody of Socrates. For indeed the Aristophanic picture of Socrates as a sophist charging money to teach how to make the weaker argument the stronger is reflected in the charges of the prosecution at the historical Socrates' trial as preserved in Plato's *Apology*.

The basic plot of Aristophanes' *Clouds* does seem to fit Aristotle's general prescriptions for comedy: Strepsiades, an ignoble character whose action falls below the norm, does reap undeserved good fortune. Indeed, even the emotions of indignation and confidence, the comic emotions suggested above, are evoked by the *to geloion* which is imitated in the plot of the *Clouds*. Strepsiades, a country gentleman who has moved to the city, has been corrupted into acting badly. Because of the spending habits of his aristocratic wife and the gambling habits of their lazy son, Strepsiades is hounded by creditors. He decides to send his son to the Phrontisterion of the charlatan philosopher Socrates to learn how to make the weaker argument the stronger so that he can win lawsuits. After his son returns with the New Education and is able to prove logically that whipping his father was a good thing and that he should also whip his mother, Strepsiades sees the error of his ways and burns down the Phrontisterion so that this danger to society is destroyed and Athens is the better for it. So the play ends happily with the integrity of Strepsiades restored.

In the course of this comedy, one feels indignation that this ignoble character reaps undeserved good fortune, but at the same time one feels confidence that undeserved good fortune could surely happen to us if it could happen to this fellow. That is,

Strepsiades was an ignoble character who was trying to cheat his creditors out of the money due them and thus he evokes our indignation. But even this rather foolish fellow was able to turn the situation around and restore his lost integrity. Since the audience of even average people would behave better than Strepsiades (for instance, perform better under the tutelage of Socrates or not attempt an evasion of legal debts), they would be confident of being able to act as nobly as he finally does in reversing a corrupt situation.

This is the reason comedies make humans feel good and tragedies make them feel bad. Upon viewing tragic action, one leaves with residual pity and fear that one's life could turn for the worse. Whereas, when viewing comic action, one experiences residual indignation (which necessarily involves a feeling of superiority) and confidence that one's life could very well turn out for the better (which leads to a positive and even joyful mood). Since the compound effect of this nexus of emotions is one of joyful optimism, there is no need to explain away or to purge any negative emotion. Indeed, τὸ γελῶσιον, as Aristotle states, excludes the painful or harmful (*Poetics* 1449 a 34-35). Instead, true comedy delights and amuses the audience while at the same time clarifying the comic dimension of human experience just as tragedy clarifies the tragic dimension.

Although no one seems to have proposed this nexus of emotions to explain the feelings an audience experiences when it encounters the comic, some have almost unwittingly stumbled upon it. Theorists have erred by only comprehending one or the other of the emotions of indignation and confidence or by exaggerating one or the other.

The superiority theories, including those that emphasized scorn, partially understood the elements that involved indignation. But these theories could not explain

the joy of comedy that I have argued enters through an atmosphere of confidence.

At least two critics actually do almost understand this important key to a thorough comprehension of the comic spirit. Janko actually comes close to understanding indignation and confidence as comic emotions when he states, "In the narrow interpretation, the emotions to be purged would be scorn and over-confidence. . . ." ²⁶¹ Scorn and over-confidence are negative extremes of indignation and confidence. Although he seems to almost intuit the emotions that comedy does evoke, his understanding of *katharsis* does not allow him to take full advantage of that intuition. Relying on documents of questionable Aristotelian authorship and not on the internal argument of the *Poetics*, Janko (in spite of his superior intuition) moves away from the truly Aristotelian comic emotions altogether as he accepts the *Tractatus Coislinianus'* suggestion of pleasure and laughter for the comic emotions.

Levine does not propose any general theory of confidence as a comic emotion, but his keen understanding of comedy does lead him to offer an interesting interpretation of a particular instance of laughter in the *Odyssey*. In his explanation of Penelope's laugh at *Odyssey* 18.163 as "more than pale, idle, inane, useless, helpless, needless, pointless, forced, silly, aimless, improper, artificial, ill-timed, fruitless, feigned, superficial, queer, and foolish" as various interpreters have concluded, Levine interprets it as "a mark of *confidence* [my italics] when she sees that she will be able to fool the

²⁶¹Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, 143. Janko may just be reflecting Lucas' (*Aristotle Poetics*) statement: "The emotions to be purged by comedy, which correspond to pity and fear, would be scorn and over-confidence. . . ." (287).

suitors."²⁶² This insight into the smile of Penelope as being evoked by confidence in her ability to fool the suitors, reveals Levine's understanding of the ability of the emotion of confidence to create smiles and laughter. Aristotle just realized that this emotion, along with the emotion of indignation, is part of the nexus of emotions behind all smiles and laughter that are signs of the comic.

In conclusion, what has finally emerged (thanks to the extant Aristotelian corpus and modern scholarship) is a prescriptive definition of the elements of the comic that finally explains "the ridiculous," the comic dimension of human experience. The nature of comic character (*Poetics* 1448 a 16-18; 1449 a 32-37) is that of *φαιλοτέρων* "baser men," "those below the norm." Comic characters will often, therefore, be ugly and/or foolish or stupid. This covers a whole range of characters who possess some physical or mental ugliness or deformity.

Comic action will be characterized by some *ἀμάρτημα* "error" that causes no pain or harmful effects (*Poetics* 1449 a 34-35). Furthermore, *Rhetoric* 1387 a 26-31 identified circumstances involving unjustified good fortune (cf. also *Poetics* 1453 a 35-39) and circumstances involving whatever is inappropriate or incongruous as evoking *nemesian*, and we agreed with Golden that these actions are the opposite to those considered tragic and therefore do describe comic action.

The comic emotions evoked by comic characters and comic actions are *nemesian* and *tharsos*. A character of less than normal physical and/or mental attributes is

²⁶²D. Levine, "Penelope's Laugh: *Odyssey* 18.163," *American Journal of Philology* 104 (1983): 172.

involved in inappropriate or incongruous action that nevertheless leads to good fortune. The audience is indignant at inappropriate or incongruous action that leads to undeserved good fortune, but is also confident that if such good fortune could happen to some character below the norm, surely it could happen to them. The audience feels optimistic about life since good fortune does occur even to those who do not deserve it as much as they surely do. They rejoice with their expectations raised for more of the good times in life.

Thus comedy creates the opposite emotional atmosphere to tragedy. Tragedy and comedy recognize the vicissitudes of human existence: one recognizes the negative times in life and the other the positive. Comedy creates a joyful mood of confidence by the dramatic representation of the potential for good fortune in life, whereas tragedy creates fear by the dramatic representation of the negative misfortunes of human existence.²⁶³ The incidents of the play must produce the tragic or comic emotions. Just hearing the story should produce the pity and fear or indignation and confidence (cf. *Poetics* 1453 b).

Whether this or that individual weeps while witnessing tragic action or laughs while witnessing comic action should interest not the literary critic but the psychologist and physiologist. The literary critic should merely judge whether the circumstances that

²⁶³This, indeed, is the very reason that Greek tragedies were not just trilogies of the tragic dramas, but tetralogies that included a fourth play—a comic satyr play. This, in itself, should call into question the purgation theory of catharsis. The emotions of pity and fear were obviously not "purged," since it was necessary to follow the tragic trilogy with a satyr play. It took a comic play to create a feeling of confidence that life is not all misfortune. Good things do happen, and the audience can feel confident that it is smarter, more coordinated, or more successful than the comic characters on stage.

generate indignation and confidence are present--i.e., how well the characters and action conform to Aristotelian comic theory--just as critics have used Aristotelian tragic theory to judge tragic characters and action to determine whether they conform to the circumstances that generate pity and fear.

Now, armed with a comic model--an Aristotelian definition of *to geloion* and the comic emotions it evokes--it is possible to evaluate various scenes in the *Iliad* for their comic potential. Of particular interest are the three types of comic characters given by the *Tractatus Coislinianus* XII: ἦθη κωμωδίας τὰ τε βωμολόχα καὶ τὰ εἰρωνικά καὶ τὰ τῶν ἀλαζόνων "The characters of comedy are the buffoonish, the ironical and the boasters."²⁶⁴ Accordingly, we shall first deal with Homer's comic characterization of the *alazon*, the "imposter" or "boaster," particularly Thersites. Secondly, Paris will be examined as an example of the *iron*, the "trickster" or "rogue." Finally, our attention will turn to the *bomolochos*, "buffoon" or "fool," in scenes such as those involving Hephaestus and Zeus.

²⁶⁴Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, 38-39. These seem to reflect the classification of the characters of comedy by Aristotle, particularly in the light of *Nicomachean Ethics* 1108 a 21f. and *Rhetoric* iii.18.

CHAPTER TWO

COMIC CHARACTER ONE: THE *ALAZON*

It is my contention that even though Homer is writing epic, not comic drama, Aristotle was essentially correct when at *Poetics* 1448 b 36-8 he said concerning Homer²⁶⁵:

οὕτως καὶ τὸ τῆς κωμωδίας σχῆμα
πρῶτος ὑπέδειξεν . . . τὸ γελοῖον δραματο-
ποιήσας·

[H]e first traced out the form of comedy by dramatically
presenting . . . the ridiculous.

With tragic drama, action (*μῦθος* "plot") is the "soul of tragedy" (*ψυχὴ ὁ μῦθος τῆς τραγωδίας*, *Poetics* 1450 a 38-9) while "character" (*ἦθος*) is the most important element of comedy.²⁶⁶ And, indeed, it is in the development of comic character that I see

²⁶⁵McLeish, *The Theatre of Aristophanes*, in fact, states the comic character types "are not Aristophanes' invention (they occur in Homer, for example)...." (56). Cf. footnote 1 which explains that although Aristotle was referring to the *Margites*, we may infer that he recognized the same qualities in the non-heroic and comic passages of the extant epics.

²⁶⁶F. M. Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (London, 1914), remarks that "The Old Comedy in general is content with a much laxer construction. It is not primarily the representation of an 'action' or 'experience,' to which character is secondary, but its bent is always towards the representation of a set of characters, turned loose to bring about

Homer's greatest influence. A schema that appears rightly to categorize the characters of comedy is that one whereby "Aristotle seems to have classified the characters in Comedy under three heads: the Buffoon (*bomolochus*), the Ironical type (*eiron*), and the Imposter (*alazon*)."²⁶⁷ Therefore I propose to establish the nature of these three comic types as they appear in the Old Comedy with which Aristotle was familiar and later ancient Roman comedy, and then examine the *Iliad* to discover if indeed these types actually appear in Homer first, as Aristotle seems to claim.

One important point should be made before establishing the nature of the comic character types and investigating Homer; that is, rarely do these types appear in pure form. A character can indeed display characteristics of more than one character type. An excellent example of this phenomenon in Aristophanes is the character of Dionysus

the action by their interplay" (198).

²⁶⁷Ibid. 137. In his footnote to this sentence Cornford quotes the *Tractatus Coislinianus* as evidence while at the same time referring his readers to *Nicomachean Ethics* 1108 a 21 and *Rhetoric* iii.18. McLeish, *The Theatre of Aristophanes*, also accepts this conclusion when he writes: "Aristotle considered the *alazon* one of the three main character types in comedy (the others being the *bomolochos* and the *eiron* . . .)" (75). Hubbard, *The Mask of Comedy*, also addresses the *alazon* in footnote 8 on pages 4-5: "That *alazōn* and *eirōn* were recognized by Aristotle as comic types is suggested by their enumeration contiguous to the explicitly comic types of *EN* 4.8 (the *bomolochos* and *agroikos*) with which they are also grouped in *EN* 2.7 and *Rhet.* 3.18; Aristotle's recognition is suggested also by their prominence in later tradition--not only Theophrastus' *Characters* (for the relation of which to Old Comedy, see Ussher 1977, 75-79), but also the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, which lists them along with the *bomolochos* as the primary comic character types. The term *alazōn* is frequently used in Comedy . . . and is associated with laughter by Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.7.2, *Cyr.* 2.2.11)." Cornford lists the "stock masks" of Old Comedy as an Old Man, an Old Woman, a Young Woman, a Learned Doctor or Pedant, a Cook, a Swaggering Soldier, and a Comic Slave or pair of slaves, but indicates that these are just examples of "an indefinite variety of professional types" that fall into the three categories of the Aristotelian comic characters (175).

in the *Frogs*.²⁶⁸ For most of the play Dionysus appears as an *eiron* disguising his divine nature. Only to escape a beating (631) and during the poetic contest (1488f.) does he declare his divinity. But he also displays the characteristics of the *alazon* in the first half of the play when he claims to be Herakles. But when he is confronted by Herakles he plays the role of the *bomolochos*.

Having made this point, we now must ask what precisely the nature of the *alazon* type is. Although in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle's focus is not on the comic stage, but rather on describing and analyzing character types (and his focus is not here on the comic characters *per se*), he does comment on the three comic types mentioned by the *Tractatus Coislinianus*. One must tread carefully, keeping in mind that Aristotle's prescription for comic characters outlined in the *Poetics* required that the comic poet not portray his characters with simply any defects; in other words, "he is limited to the kinds and degrees of disproportion and ugliness that are not painful or injurious and corrupting."²⁶⁹ The poet must, therefore, be familiar with human action below the norm. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle assists us in this task by describing the nature of virtue and vice by means of the Greek concept of *σωφροσύνη* "moderation." That is, virtue is the mean between two extremes. It is here that we encounter the *ἀλαζών* as a human being exemplifying vice. In his explanation of the nature of truth and truthful human beings Aristotle defines one form of excess beyond the mean of truthfulness as

²⁶⁸I rely heavily for my interpretation here on McLeish, *The Theatre of Aristophanes*, 142-3.

²⁶⁹As Cooper reminds us in *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, 117.

the vice displayed by one who exaggerates the truth, i.e. an ἀλαζών "boaster" or "imposter." In *Nicomachean Ethics* 1127 a 22-3, he specifically defines the ἀλαζών:

δοκεῖ δὴ ὁ μὲν ἀλαζών προσποιητικὸς τῶν ἐνδόξων

εἶναι καὶ μὴ ὑπαρχόντων καὶ μειζόνων ἢ ὑπάρχει

As generally understood then, the boaster is a man who pretends to creditable qualities that he does not possess, or possesses in a lesser degree than he makes out.²⁷⁰

Indeed, we do discover this comic type successfully portrayed by Aristophanes and Plautus²⁷¹ in some of their most important plays. In his summary of Aristophanic

²⁷⁰This and all subsequent translations of Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics* will be those of Loeb Classical Library (1926; reprint, Cambridge, MA, 1968).

²⁷¹As M. Hammond writes in the preface to the text of *Miles Gloriosus* [M. Hammond, A. M. Mack, and W. Moskalow, eds., *T. Macci Plauti Miles Gloriosus* (1963; reprint, Cambridge, MA, 1970)], "the Latin writers of comedy, notably the surviving Plautus and Terence, drew more or less directly on Greek originals, and in many cases the names of the authors and plays which they used have been preserved" (8). For instance, Duckworth, *Roman Comedy*, lists the twenty extant plays of Plautus and includes the author and title of the Greek original where known (for the *Miles* it is known that the *Alazon* is the original Greek play, but the author remains unknown), though "the Greek sources of about half of Plautus' comedies still remain unidentified" (54). For a brief outline of the stages of Roman cultural development, see chapter 2, "The Cultural Horizons of the Aristocracy," in M. Beard and M. Crawford's *Rome in the Late Republic* (Ithaca, NY, 1985) for their views on Greek cultural influence on Rome. They call the first stage "Translation." But even during the second and third stages, which they call "Adaptation"--the period of Plautus' works--and "Cultural Explosion," the Greek influence remains strong. Beard and Crawford continue: "On the blending of Greek and Roman elements in Plautus and Terence, see Williams, *Tradition and Originality*, 285-294 (*Nature of Roman Poetry*, 61-63); W. G. Arnott, *Menander, Plautus, Terence (Greece and Rome New Survey 9*, Oxford, 1975), 28-62; F. H. Sandbach, *The Comic Theatre of Greece and Rome* (London, 1977), 118-147. . . ." (18, footnote 14). I may be accused of overstating the case, but despite Duckworth's arguments for Roman originality, even he admits, "That many essential features of the Roman plays were inherited from the Greeks cannot be denied" (329). Here we are

comedy, Cornford²⁷² emphasizes three essential elements concerning the *alazon* figure who often appears in the second part of the play: "(1) he interrupts the sacrifice or wedding-feast, and claims a share in the fruits of the Agonist's victory; (2) he has a vaunting, boastful, swaggering disposition; (3) he is regularly mocked, beaten, or otherwise mishandled, and driven away."²⁷³ Cornford, in addition, notes that "We have also found reason to suggest that he may be in some way a double of the Antagonist."²⁷⁴ The *alazones* who play a leading part in the action share in these characteristics.

mainly interested in the broad outlines of comic character and comic action, and are not really denying Plautus and Terence, for instance, their originality in adapting Greek plays to a Roman audience. But I am confident that it is accurate to assume a chain of influence in regard to comic character and comic action that can be traced from Homer through Roman comedy, as I hope to demonstrate below.

²⁷²Although Cornford's book is generally disregarded by classicists today (mainly because the Cambridge Anthropologists are out of fashion), I found his insights concerning the *alazon* to be informative and accurate. Reckford, *Aristophanes' Old-and-New Comedy*, recognizes the weakness of Cornford's work in its "Procrustean effort to make Aristophanes' surviving plays . . . fit the imagined structure of that old archetypal ritual plot, namely "the struggle (*agōn*) of the year god against his enemies, his death and resurrection, and the culmination or celebration of the latter in a revel and sacred marriage (*kōmos* and *gamos*)" (39). On the other hand, he also acknowledges his "longtime" debt to Cornford. He particularly praises Cornford for "his sense of a balance between positive and negative elements in the parabasis and elsewhere. He traces this balance back to the two complementary aspects of agricultural or preagricultural fertility rites: to evoke the blessings of prosperity and increase, and to expel or avert any bad influences that might harm the people or the animals or blight the crops" (40-1). For Reckford, Cornford's main achievement was "to bring out the celebratory nature of comedy" (42).

²⁷³Cornford, *Attic Comedy*, 148.

²⁷⁴*Ibid.*

"There are over forty *alazon* scenes in the extant plays"²⁷⁵ of Aristophanes. A few of the important *alazones* should confirm or deny the pattern described by Cornford. In Aristophanes' *Clouds* we find a form of the *alazon* in the character of Socrates:

A second stock mask, at least equally important, is that of the Learned Doctor, ancestor of the *scholasticus* of later comic anecdote and kinsman of the *Dottore* in Italian Comedy. Shakespeare has him as the schoolmaster Holophernes, to whom, with his friend the parson Sir Nathaniel, Goodman Dull, the constable, plays buffoon. In the *Merry Wives* he is Doctor Caius, whose extraordinary lingo is supposed to be the dialect of a 'French physician.'

In fifth-century Athens he is the 'Sophist.'²⁷⁶

Cornford makes the important point that Aristophanes has not availed himself of the many real traits of Socrates that lend themselves quite well to satire and caricature. "The famous *daimonion*, the midwife mother and the obstetric theory of education, the Silenus-like figure and countenance with its prominent eyes and snub-nose--all these are left untouched."²⁷⁷ Rather, Socrates is presented as a Sophist who makes "the weaker

²⁷⁵McLeish, *The Theatre of Aristophanes*, 75.

²⁷⁶Cornford, *Attic Comedy*, 157.

²⁷⁷*Ibid.*

argument the stronger."²⁷⁸

First, though there is no sacrifice or wedding-feast to interrupt in the *Clouds*, Socrates does interrupt the plans of Strepsiades when he dismisses him from the Phrontisterion, thereby delaying the protagonist of the play and thus fulfilling the first of Cornford's prescriptions of *alazoneia*. Strepsiades has gone to Socrates' school to learn "Sophistic, or Sokratic, Logic"²⁷⁹ and by means of the rhetorical sophistry learned from Socrates he plans to win the lawsuits against him. Unfortunately for Strepsiades, Socrates finds him incompetent. In fact, Strepsiades proves to be such a dullard that he forgets everything as fast as he learns it so that Socrates loses his patience and screams at Strepsiades at lines 789-90:

οὐκ ἐς κόρακας ἀποφθερεῖ,

ἐπιλησμότατον καὶ σκαιότατον γερόντον;

Why, you blithering bungler!

You senile incompetent! You . . . you mooncalf! Clear

out!²⁸⁰

Instead of being able to defeat the impending lawsuits immediately himself, Strepsiades

²⁷⁸*Clouds* 225f.; cf. Plato's *Apology* 18 b where Socrates lists this as one of the charges leveled against him and his denial of the charges at 19 b in which he claims the picture of himself painted in Aristophanes's *Clouds* was distorted and did not accurately portray who he really was.

²⁷⁹W. Arrowsmith, trans., *The Clouds by Aristophanes* (New York, 1962), translates τὸν ἄδικον τοῦτον λόγον (line 116) "that unjust logic."

²⁸⁰This and all other English translations of *The Clouds* will be from Arrowsmith, *Clouds*.

will now have to force his son to go to Socrates' school so he can learn the Socratic Logic by which he can avoid paying his creditors.

Cornford's second characteristic, "a vaunting, boastful, swaggering disposition," is particularly evident in Aristophanes' Socrates in that he "has the pontifical airs of the pedant, and the intolerable conceit of superior wisdom, which, when disclosed, turns out to be either blasphemous or absurdly trivial."²⁸¹ The most remarkable display of hubris occurs with Socrates' boast in answer to Strepsiades' query as to what he was doing hanging in a basket at line 225:

ἀεροβατῶ καὶ περιφρονῶ τὸν ἥλιον.

Ah, sir, I walk upon the air and look down upon the sun
from a superior standpoint .

Socrates believes it is only in the air that his superior brain can be loosed from contact with the inferior earthly realm and realize its full potential.²⁸² Yet time and time again the wisdom of Socrates is shown to be trivial and blasphemous. For example, when Socrates is explaining that there is no Zeus and that the Clouds are all that exist, in order to explain the phenomenon of thunder as produced by the Clouds and not Zeus, he gives the analogy of eating the meat-stew sold at the Panathenaia. One's belly cramps and

²⁸¹Cornford, *Attic Comedy*, 160.

²⁸²K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Clouds* (Oxford, 1968), suggests the arrogance inherent in Socrates' pontificating while suspended from the *mechane*, as gods were in Greek drama, in the note to line 233: ". . . and pretentious as a mode of address. Socrates is looking down on Strepsiades as a god might look down from Olympos on a mortal." Dover also remarks that one interpretation of line 219 is that "Strepsiades, awestruck, invokes Socrates as one would a god. . . ."

starts to rumble and farts rip loose like thunder; so it is with clouds (lines 392-5):

σκέψαι τοῖνον ἀπὸ γαστριδίου τυννουτοῦ οἶα
 πέπορδας·
 τὸν δ' ἄερα τόνδ' ὄντ' ἀπέραντον, πῶς οὐκ εἰκὸς
 μέγα βροντᾶν;
 ταῦτ' ἄρα καὶ τῶνόματ' ἀλλήλου, βροντῆ καὶ
 πορ δῆ, ὁμοίω.

First think of the tiny fart that your intestines make. Then consider the heavens: their infinite farting is thunder. For thunder and farting are, in principle, one and the same.

Another ridiculous bit of sophistic "wisdom" occurs in an example of supposed linguistic analysis as Socrates asks Strepsiades to name some male animals. Then he asks him to name the female of the same species. When Strepsiades comes to ἀλέκτωρ, a term in Greek like fowl in English that can be either masculine or feminine, Socrates corrects him with ἀλεκτρύαινα, a silly word (like saying "fowlette" in English) coined here by Aristophanes.²⁸³ Thus Socrates proves that in fact he is an *alazon*, an imposter, not a genuine learned man. Strepsiades proves his own lack of sophistication by accepting this foolishness as an actually wise insight, thereby adding to the absurdity and comic

²⁸³Cf. Moses Hadas' translation in *The Complete Plays of Aristophanes*, ed. Moses Hadas (1962; reprint, New York, 1988), 119. In his translation of these Greek words, Arrowsmith invents a pun and explains it in the footnote to this line: "*the female's a duchess*: An anachronistic pun of my own invention; the Greeks had ducks but no dukes. Literally, the Greek says 'the male is a rooster (ἀλέκτωρ), the female a roosterette (ἀλεκτρύαινα)'" (144).

impact of this scene.²⁸⁴

Finally, the pattern of the *alazon* described by Cornford is completed when Socrates is mocked and does experience defeat and physical harm. Strepsiades experiences the result of a Socratic education in the outrageous logic and resultant behavior of his son when Pheidippides "proves" that it is a good thing to beat one's father and mother. Strepsiades, having recognized the errors of his way, decides to cleanse Athens of the charlatan Socrates by burning down his school and beating Socrates. Thus Cornford's third element of *alazoneia* is indeed satisfied with Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates in the *Clouds*.

In the *Acharnians* of Aristophanes we find another class of the *alazon* type: Lamachus²⁸⁵ as the braggart soldier. "In Lamachus, the Antagonist who stands for the war-party in the *Acharnians*, every one recognises a figure familiar throughout the whole

²⁸⁴L. Spatz, *Aristophanes* (Boston, 1978), understands why these scenes remain funny: "Parodies of tragedy or contemporary science and philosophy demand little precise knowledge. The incongruity of familiar tragic style and language in a comic situation is enough by itself to make the audience laugh. When the affectations of the learned quack, with his pretentious jargon and mannerisms, are exposed by the simple fool, we confront a basic ingredient of comedy that goes all the way back to the earliest improvised scenes" (29).

²⁸⁵It is not surprising that Aristophanes would use a real politician such as Lamachus in a comic play any more than Socrates, a real philosopher. For as K. Dover relates in his *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972), "Of all the men whom we know from historical sources to have achieved political prominence at Athens during the period 445-385, there is not one who is not attacked and ridiculed either in the extant plays of Aristophanes or in the extant citations from the numerous lost plays of the period" (34).

history of Comedy--the Swaggering Soldier,²⁸⁶ a quintessential example of an ἀλαζών "boaster." The *Acharnians* won first prize at the Lenaia in 425 BC,²⁸⁷ and the character of Lamachus illustrates one element of Aristophanes' comic genius that won him the prize. And indeed, as we shall see, Cornford's three elements of *alazoneia* are further substantiated with the character of Lamachus. In the first place, he does interrupt Dikaeopolis' affairs. Dikaeopolis has achieved a private thirty-year truce with Sparta to the chagrin of the chorus of Acharnians who have suffered much in the war. Although he convinces half the chorus of the rightness of his truce through the typical sophistic rhetoric of the times (including emotional appeals made all the more convincing by dressing in rags for sympathy), the rest of the chorus call out Lamachus, the general, to argue with Dikaeopolis. Lamachus vainly argues in favor of war, but Dikaeopolis persuades the balance of the chorus of the folly of pursuing war with the Spartans. But in the meantime Lamachus, as the representative of the war-party, has delayed Dikaeopolis' enjoyment of the fruits of his peace treaty.

Secondly, Lamachus is a swaggering boaster. When the chorus calls him to defend the war with Sparta, Lamachus emerges boasting, τίς Γοργόν' ἐξήγειρεν ἐκ τοῦ σάγματος; "Who waked the Gorgon from her shield?" (line 574) as if he were as fearful

²⁸⁶Cornford, *Attic Comedy*, 155. Although D. Parker in his comments introducing the scene of the entrance of Lamachus--in his translation of Aristophanes' *The Acharnians* (Ann Arbor, 1961)--states that "Lamachos, of course, is the original Miles Gloriosus"(49), I shall demonstrate in this chapter that Homer's Thersites is in fact the original Miles Gloriosus. Plautus used this character often in his plays; for a useful summary of the characteristics of the braggart soldier in Plautine comedy, see Duckworth, *Roman Comedy*, 264-5.

²⁸⁷Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, 78.

a foe as the mythological monster. After sarcastically feigning fear of Lamachus' armor, Dikaeopolis refers to Lamachus as a *κομπολακύθος* "braggart" (line 589).

Lamachus' delay of Dikaeopolis is short, and they go off to enjoy the fruits of their separate choices, one war, the other peace. It is now that the last of Cornford's elements is fulfilled as Lamachus is mocked and does experience defeat and physical harm. Two heralds have arrived, one inviting Dikaeopolis to a party and another summoning Lamachus to war. The contrast between the results of peace and war are striking. While Dikaeopolis, who has chosen peace, returns supported by two flute-girls to whom he is making love, Lamachus is carried in with a wounded leg, limping as he groans in "para-tragic"²⁸⁸ style. Parker translates the first speech of the returning, wounded Lamachus in a manner in which the audience could readily recognize the humor of this mock-tragic style at lines 1190-7:

ἀτταταῖ, ἀτταταῖ.
 στυγερά τάδε γε κρυερά πάθεα· τάλας ἐγώ.
 διόλλυμαι δορὸς ὑπο πολεμίου τυκίεις.
 ἐκείνο δ' οὖν αἰακτὸν ἂν γένοιτο,
 Δικαιόπολις εἴ μ' ἴδοι τετρωμένον,
 κᾶτ' ἐγχάνα ταῖς ἐμαῖς τύχαισιν.

Cry Woe! the Injustice of War!

Racked with torture, with torment rent, I writhe

²⁸⁸Rose, *Handbook of Greek Literature*, 232. McLeish, *The Theatre of Aristophanes*, refers to Lamachos' scenes as "mock tragic" (150).

at agony's onslaught, a riddled wreck of body!
 Oh, I am slain, sped stiff to ruin by the edge
 of enemy staff!

But pen me from the peak of pain.

Let me, undone, be not descried by Dikaiopolis,
 whereat my woe might make me meat for mockery!²⁸⁹

Finally "Lamakhos is taken off in one direction to the surgery, and the chorus follows Dikaiopolis off in the other direction, echoing his cries of triumphant victory."²⁹⁰

There are many *alazones* in ancient literature, but it has been said that Plautus' Pyrgopolynices character in the *Miles Gloriosus* is the greatest *alazon* in all of ancient literature.²⁹¹ Though this is not a Greek drama, Roman comedy was essentially based on the characters and plots of Greek comedy. This was inevitable because "Rome's contacts with Greece, through commerce, through the Greek colonies in southern Italy and Sicily, and through Greek slaves serving Roman families were innumerable. Many Roman traders and soldiers spoke Greek fluently and must have witnessed performances of Greek plays long before these were translated into Latin."²⁹² In fact, "the *Miles*

²⁸⁹Parker, *Acharnians*, 98.

²⁹⁰Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, 81-2.

²⁹¹E. Segal, trans., *Plautus: Three Comedies* (1969; reprint, New York, 1985), 3. Note that it is not difficult to identify Pyrgopolynices as an *alazon* since in lines 86-7 of the *Miles* (all Latin quotes of the *Miles* are from Hammond, Mack, and Moskalew, eds., *Miles Gloriosus*), Plautus has Palaestrio say: Alázon Graéce huic nómen ést comoédiaé, id nós Latíne "glóriósum" dícimús ("This Play is called the *Alazon* in Greek, a name translated "braggart" in the tongue we speak," as Segal translates these lines).

²⁹²Segal, *Plautus*, 10.

shows Roman elements or coloring in only a few superficial details. . . ."²⁹³ Therefore we can analyze this Roman comedy along with Aristophanic comedy for the characteristics of the *alazon* as described by Cornford.

The first of Cornford's prescriptions for the comic *alazon* is fulfilled when Pyrgopolynices causes delay: he interferes with and delays the marriage of Palaestrio's master and a girl named Philocomasium, for the Braggart Soldier had kidnapped the girl. When Palaestrio pursues them, he is captured by pirates and by happenstance ends up the slave of the Braggart Soldier in Ephesus.

As far as Cornford's second characteristic of the *alazon*, boasting, is concerned, the Braggart Soldier boasts with the best of them when in the opening scene of the *Miles* he claims to have killed an elephant with his bare fist (line 28) and to have slaughtered 7,000 men in a single day (line 45). Furthermore, he complains about what a burden it is to be such a good-looking man: *nimiást miséria nímis pulchrum ésse hominem* (line 68). Pyrgopolynices has so inflated his accomplishments and abilities that he has come to believe that he is a superior man and becomes susceptible to the machinations of the wily slave Palaestrio.

Those machinations begin when Palaestrio realizes that an old friend of his former master just happens to live next door to the Braggart Soldier. He arranges for a passageway between the two houses to be built and sends for his master, Pleusicles. During one of the secret meetings between Philocomasium and Pleusicles another slave of Pyrgopolynices inadvertently spies the two lovers together and is about to reveal this

²⁹³Ibid. 12.

information to Pyrgopolynices. Plautus utilizes the "twin" joke at this juncture: Palaestrio induces Philocomasium to pretend she is her own twin newly arrived in Ephesus, and the conspirators convince the slave that he saw, not Philocomasium, but her sister.

But how do they rescue Philocomasium from Pyrgopolynices? Palaestrio invents another trick to deceive Pyrgopolynices into thinking his next door neighbor's wife is madly in love with him so that he will release Philocomasium. The courtesan that is engaged to seduce Pyrgopolynices is so convincing (a feat not that difficult in light of Pyrgopolynices' conviction that all women find him irresistible) that he not only releases her, but also allows her to take all the clothes, jewelry and other gifts he had ever bestowed upon her as well as Palaestrio. Pleusicles masquerades as a ship captain and they all sail off into the sunset.

Meanwhile, Palaestrio has even had the old neighbor feign discovery of Pyrgopolynices and his wife's adultery and threatens to castrate the Braggart Soldier while beating him in order to secure a promise from Pyrgopolynices not to harm anyone for the whole affair. Thus the Pyrgopolynices character fulfills the third and final criterion of Cornford's *alazon* paradigm when he is mocked, is a victim of extortion, and is an object of physical abuse, beaten and threatened with castration.

In conclusion, the evidence from ancient comedy supports Cornford's description of the three common characteristics of the *alazon*. This character (1) causes delay in action for the protagonist (2) and is a boaster who (3) is mocked and/or beaten.

Even during a superficial reading of Homer's *Iliad*, Thersites in book 2 seems to

have characteristics of Aristotle's three comic character types, particularly the *alazon*. Indeed, the Thersites scene of book 2 is obviously outside the realm of heroic action and at first glance seems to fall quite neatly into the category of the comic. Immediately one recognizes that, rather than depicting him in heroic terms, Homer, at 2.215-6, describes Thersites as the resident clown whose purpose was to say *τί οἱ εἶσαιτο γελοῖον Ἀργείοισιν/ ἔμμεναι* "any word he thought might be amusing to the Argives."²⁹⁴

As we investigate the comic potential of this episode, Nagy reminds us of the connection between "the comic element" and "baseness":

We may note that the word here for 'laughable' is actually *geloïion* (II 215) corresponding to Aristotle's term for the function of comedy, *to geloion* (*Poetics* 1448 b 37, 1449 c 32-37). We may note also that Aristotle's concept of *aiskhos* 'baseness', to which the concept of *to geloion* 'laughter' is intrinsic (*Poetics* 1449 a 32-37), corresponds to the characterization of Thersites as the *aiskhistos* 'most base' of all the Achaeans who came to Troy (II 216).²⁹⁵

On this occasion in book 2, though, the laughter is not over the abuse he gives one of the princes (Agamemnon), but over the abuse he finally receives at the hands of one of them (Odysseus). This is an important point that will be discussed in detail

²⁹⁴This and all subsequent translations of the *Iliad* will be those of R. Lattimore, trans., *Iliad of Homer* (1951; reprint, Chicago, 1971).

²⁹⁵Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, 262.

below. First, the primary concern must be whether Thersites conforms to Aristotle's general prescriptions for a comic character and to Cornford's three characteristics of the *alazon* character as seen in Aristophanes and Plautus. Then the important question of whether the scene itself is ultimately comic will be addressed using the Aristotelian prescriptions for comic action. Finally, the focus will be on what can be learned about Homeric comic technique from the analysis of this scene. In particular, is humor in Homer merely comic relief or does it contribute to the overall thematic and narrative development of the *Iliad* as a whole?

Thersites certainly does not fit Aristotle's prescriptions of the noble character, which he describes at great length in the *Poetics*, but he fits very neatly into the type of man imitated in comedy we find prescribed at 1449 a 32-37:

Ἡ δὲ κωμῳδία ἐστὶν ὥσπερ εἶπομεν μίμησις φαυλο-
τέρων μὲν, οὐ μέντοι κατὰ πᾶσαν κακίαν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ
αἰσχροῦ ἐστὶ τὸ γελοῖον μῶριον. τὸ γὰρ γελοῖον ἐστὶν ἀμάρ-
τημά τι καὶ αἰσχος ἀνώδυνον καὶ οὐ φθαρτικόν, οἷον
εὐθύς τὸ γελοῖον πρόσωπον αἰσχροὺν τι καὶ
διστραμμένον ἄνευ ὀδύνης.

As we have said, comedy is an imitation of baser men. These are characterized not by every kind of vice but specifically by "the ridiculous," which is a subdivision of the category of "deformity." What we mean by "the ridiculous" is some error or ugliness that is painless and

has no harmful effects. The example that comes immediately to mind is the comic mask, which is ugly and distorted but causes no pain.

Homer, in fact, describes Thersites in much more physical detail than almost any other character in the *Iliad*.²⁹⁶ He not only says that *αἰσχιστος δὲ ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθεν* "he was the ugliest man (who) came to Ilium," but goes on to describe him with explicit detail. Homer says he was *φολκός* "bow-legged."²⁹⁷ Furthermore he was *χωλὸς δ' ἕτερον πόδα* "lame of foot." His shoulders were stooped and drawn together over his chest. Clearly, then, he was not ideally made for battle. Bow-legged, lame and stooped-shouldered all connote the opposite of the physical strength and agility of a great warrior. The ridiculous Thersites even possessed a pointed head with little hair on it.²⁹⁸ Beyond the apparent physical deformity, his baseness was evident in his

²⁹⁶Thersites is a saga-figure with a whole myth outside the *Iliad*: cf. the *Aethiopsis*, the *Sack of Ilios*, Chairemon's tragedy *Achilles Thersitoctonos*, the scholia on the *Philoctetes*, and Quintus Smyrnaeus (fourth century AD). According to the extra-Homeric material Thersites is of royal and divine lineage. This is surely a later invention since Homer is unaware of this tradition. Cf. A. Lang, *The World of Homer* (London, 1910), 180-1.

²⁹⁷Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, states, "*φολκός* comes only here in surviving Greek; its meaning is unclear but presumably it refers to the lower limbs, since the description seems to pass on to the upper body with *τὼ δέ οἱ ὤμω* later in the verse. LSJ conjecture 'bandy-legged,' but 'dragging the feet (or one foot),' cf. *ἐφέλκεσθαι* (so Lobeck, see Chantraine, *Dict.*) is better—because he was lame in one leg, *χωλός* etc." (139).

²⁹⁸On this unusually long introduction of Thersites, Richardson, *The Homeric Narrator*, notes that "even if Thersites had been as well known as Achilles, a lengthy portrait of the antithesis of the Homeric hero is just what is needed at this point—for the sake of the ensuing scene, not of the character" (40). The diction associated with Thersites is also important. Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome*, notes that "the poet appears

status. He was not on the same social level as the princes he was abusing: he was a commoner. Homer makes this very clear to those who hear this tale by the method of summoning the men to assembly.²⁹⁹ There are two distinct approaches in calling them to assembly. The first group, *τινα μὲν βασιλῆα καὶ ἔξοχον ἄνδρα* "some king or man of influence," he urged *ἀγανοῖς ἐπέεσσιν* "with soft words"; however, when Odysseus saw a *δήμου ἄνδρα* "man of the people," he first struck him with his staff and then threatened him—a foreshadowing of the same abuse Thersites would shortly receive.

Lang notes a further piece of evidence for Thersites' low status:

[Homer] is most careful to tell us *who* his heroes are (except for the Athenians), even when they only appear for the purpose of being slain. But he says not a word about the genealogy and ante-cedents of Thersites, who is only a man of the *demos* or host. . . .³⁰⁰

to abandon the inherited diction when describing a nonheroic character or situation: thus the long description of Thersites, that ugly and vulgar Achaean of dubious social status, is noticeably lacking in conventional diction" (149).

²⁹⁹A. G. Geddes, "Who's Who in 'Homeric' Society?," *Classical Quarterly* 34 (1984), casts doubt on this interpretation: "May not Odysseus have spoken politely to the officers and less politely to those who were not in positions of command, or politely to the brave and distinguished among the men but less politely to those who had little reputation? There is nothing to compel belief that Odysseus is making a class difference" (22). But Homer does seem to contrast the two groups by class, as I argue, by the very words he uses to distinguish between them.

³⁰⁰Lang, *World of Homer*, 180. Geddes, "Who's Who in 'Homeric' Society?," points out that "It is true that Thersites has no patronymic, but that is not unique in Homer. Neither Aegyptius nor Eurylochus (a relative of Odysseus), nor Mentor until Book 22 of the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 22.235), has a patronymic, nor have a good few of the minor characters, as a glance at the Catalogue of Ships will show" (22). On the other hand, N. Postlethwaite, "Thersites in the *Iliad*," *Greece and Rome* 35 (1988), follows Lang in

Finally, "Thersites is a 'speaking' name formed from *θήρσος*, the Aeolic form of Ionic *θάρσος*, implying either boldness or rashness--in his case, obviously the latter."³⁰¹ Indeed, he has made a habit of rashly abusing his betters. In respect to his abuse of Agamemnon, he was described as *ἀμετροεπής* "of endless speech." He knew many words in his mind, but they were *ἄκοσμα* "disorderly."

But if Thersites is so base, why does Odysseus refer to Thersites as a *λιγύς ἀγορητής* "clear-toned" or "fluent" orator while at the same time denoting him as *ἀκριτόμυθε* "confusedly babbling"? No doubt Odysseus is forced to admit that this man, of whom he says *no χερειότερον βροτὸν* "viler man" came to Troy, has said some things that made sense.³⁰² In fact, "virtually every commentator on the *Iliad* from the scholiasts on has noted the echoes of Achilles' indictment of Agamemnon" in Thersites'

considering this lack of a patronymic as significant (125). Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, points out that "He is the only character in the *Iliad* to lack both patronymic and place of origin--some minor characters are given only the one or the other, but he, who is not exactly minor, receives neither. This is usually taken to mean that he is a common soldier, a member of the *πληθύς*, 'multitude'(143), or *δῆμος*, 'people' (198), who are left unnamed by the poet" (138).

³⁰¹Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, 138. Despite Nagy's (*Best of the Achaeans*) impressive etymological argument that links the element *thersi-* to the "'boldness' of the blame poet" [Thersites, he argues, is performing the same function of blame and ridicule in *Iliad* 2 that "blame poets" such as Archilocus do.] (260f.), I think the average Greek listener to the bard singing the story of Thersites would immediately connect this element of his name to the "rashness" of the *alazoneia* Thersites displays in his speech. Here indeed is a character that inspires indignation and scorn because of his inappropriate "boldness" (insolence) to contend with his betters. A base individual boasts of his exploits and has the audacity (*thersos* "boldness" or "rashness") to usurp prerogatives that are not his.

³⁰²Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, interprets the phrase as "sarcastic: Thersites is a ready talker but devoid of judgement" (142).

speech.³⁰³ In addition, everything Thersites says is vindicated by the events of the poem.³⁰⁴ The only conclusion one can make of all of this is that, rather than the actual content of Thersites' speech, it is his low social position combined with his abuse of the princes that ultimately necessitates his punishment.³⁰⁵ Rankin summarizes the situation:

[I]t is to be noted in addition that Odysseus does not deploy the famous resources of his intellect to put down Thersites; he merely makes assertions and gives blows. . . . The arguments and accusations advanced by Thersites are hard to answer, and his use of substantially the same material as Achilles made it necessary for the poet to turn aside situations in which they could be refuted: hence,

³⁰³P. W. Rose, "Thersites and the Plural Voices of Homer," *Arethusa*, 21 (1988): 19. W. G. Thalmann, "Thersites. Comedy, Scapegoats and Heroic Ideology in the *Iliad*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 118 (1988), reflects on the reason for Thersites' parody of Achilles: "In a world so dominated by the outlook of one class, Thersites has only the official language in which to challenge a basic assumption of that class: that there must be 'one ruler,' that Agamemnon, whatever his conduct, must be obeyed. And so Thersites resorts to parody" (20-1). H. D. Rankin, "Thersites the Malcontent, A Discussion," *Symbolae Osloensis* 47 (1972), remarks on the sophistication of Thersites and the poet as revealed by this speech of Thersites: "The substance is not considered to be worthy of notice, though it is composed of arguments which were sufficient previously to bring Achilles into conflict with his chief, and which are therefore practically crucial to the whole movement of the *Iliad* (47)...disregarding his own personal animus towards the hero (Achilles) he attempts to engage it as an emotive auxiliary of his case. In this he is a sophisticated cold-blooded politician, and his demagogic cynicism is represented in a most advanced and artistic fashion" (51).

³⁰⁴In fact, Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition*, declares that "the theme of the entire Second Book is Delusion, and truth can appear only in the mouth of Thersites" (161).

³⁰⁵Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," 81.

artistically speaking, comes the motivation for Odysseus' failure to reply to them in detail, though on another level his silence is that of a βασιλεύς who does not deign to reply in detail to a commoner. . . .³⁰⁶

Homer's development of the baseness of the character of Thersites is further magnified by its juxtaposition to two important Homeric heroes. Thersites represents the polar opposite of the two men he abuses³⁰⁷, and they, especially Achilles³⁰⁸, hate him. Rather than αἴσχιστος "most ugly,"³⁰⁹ Achilles is described by Homer as δῖος "god-like (1.121). Rather than φολκός "bow-legged" and χωλὸς ἕτερον πόδα "lame of one foot," Achilles is πόδας ὠκύς "swift of feet (1.58)." Rather than φεδνή λάχνη "sparse hair," Achilles has enough ξανθὴ κόμη "blond hair" for Athena to pull to get his attention (1.197).

Thersites obviously has no god protecting and empowering him. Achilles, on the

³⁰⁶Rankin, "Thersites the Malcontent": 44.

³⁰⁷E. R. Lowry, "Thersites. A Study in Comic-shame" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1980), notes evidence that this abuse of Achilles and Odysseus was a habit of Thersites: "In his narration Homer tells us that customarily Thersites attacks Odysseus and Achilles: he uses the imperfect tense and the inceptive format *-sk-* in *neikeieske*, II.221" (16).

³⁰⁸This hatred reaches its climax in the epic cycle with the *Aethiopis* which tells the story of the slaying of Thersites by Achilles for abusing him for his love for Penthesileia (cf. Hesiod, *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, Loeb Classical Library (1920; reprint, 1970), 506-9.

³⁰⁹Lowry, "Thersites," expends a good deal of effort attempting to prove that αἴσχιστος does not mean "ugliest" but "most shameful" (9-24). He may be correct, for as Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol.1, comments, "αἴσχιστος (etc.) occurs only here of physical ugliness rather than moral turpitude" (139).

other hand, is referred to as *δίφιλε* "beloved of Zeus (1.74)" and will be aided by more than one of the gods in the course of the action of the *Iliad*. Odysseus too, is referred to as "god-like" with two synonyms *δῖος* (2.244) and *θείοιο* (2.335). In this context of an assembly of the sons of the Achaeans in which Thersites is about to abuse another prince (Agamemnon), Odysseus proves to be the opposite of Thersites in speech as well as strength. He will first verbally beat Thersites down and then physically do the same.

Though Thersites does speak some truth in his speech before the assembly, the Achaeans are angry with him for overstepping his bounds. He is a commoner and the basest of men who has no right to address his betters, let alone abuse the acknowledged leader of the expedition.

This is only natural, for the chiefs were the representatives of their contingents and spoke in their name. Further, the mode of fighting gave prominence to the chiefs and the noblemen who possessed horses and chariots. . . . The noblemen played the most prominent role both on the battlefield and in the assembly.³¹⁰

Despite his low status, Thersites boldly accuses Agamemnon of hoarding treasure and women and asks him what more he wants. He then addresses the sons of the Achaeans and, after calling them wretches, weaklings and women, suggests they all return to Greece and leave Agamemnon with his spoils. Thersites also can not resist

³¹⁰M.P. Nilsson, *Homer and Mycenae* (1933; reprint, Philadelphia, 1972), 227-8.

another jab at Achilles. He states that Agamemnon,³¹¹ by dishonoring Achilles, dishonors a man much better than himself. But then he attempts to ridicule the anger of Achilles by saying that he must be a forgiving man and not really angry. Otherwise, it would have been Agamemnon's last outrage. Thus, he has subtly abused Achilles again while boldly abusing Agamemnon. Achilles was indeed angry and withheld his sword only at the insistence of Athena during his argument with Agamemnon in book 1. His wrath is so deep, though, that he refuses to fight alongside his dying comrades and will refuse to fight until Hector kills his closest friend Patroclus. No doubt this attack on Achilles did not go unnoticed by the Achaeans and only served to deepen their disgust and anger at this "worst of the Achaeans."

Odysseus can not stand by any longer and begins the verbal attack on Thersites. First Odysseus says that although Thersites is a "clear-toned orator," he is a man of immoderate speech. He warns him about quarreling with princes for he is the worst man to come to Troy. He points out that they are not even sure whether they can return home safely, yet Thersites sits there giving advice and abusing Agamemnon. Finally, he warns him that if he ever dares to address his betters in this manner again, may he (Odysseus) lose his head and not be called the father of Telemachos if he does not strip Thersites naked and beat him out of the assembly back to the ships. The severity of this threat is obvious. "The exposure of a man's genitals . . . is shameful. . . . That would

³¹¹Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, informs us that "this attempt to renew the provocations of the quarrel in book 1 has caused some critics to wonder whether Thersites' intervention did not belong, in some earlier versions, to that quarrel itself" (142). As we shall see below, though, this scene performs very important narrative and thematic functions where it occurs in our text.

be even more so, no doubt, in the case of a deformed person like Thersites. Odysseus' threat is violent and unusual; the epic tradition generally avoided the genitals. . . ."³¹²

Odysseus immediately decides not to wait until the next time Thersites speaks to strike him and bashes him in the middle of the upper back with the scepter so hard that a bloody swelling occurs. Thersites bends over in pain and a tear falls.³¹³ Although the Achaeans feel distress or grief over this, they laugh and feel that of all the thousands of excellent things Odysseus has done this was by far the best. Thersites had gone too far this time by actually reviling his betters in the assembly where he had no right to speak in the first place.

All of this action not only establishes that the character of Thersites is definitely not heroic, and in fact conforms to the baseness prescribed by Aristotle for the comic character, but it also demonstrates that the characteristics of Thersites conform to Cornford's elements of the *alazon*.

The first of Cornford's prescriptions of *alazoneia*--delaying the protagonist--is fulfilled by the very fact that Thersites has spoken out of turn. He had no right to speak; he was a commoner and had not been handed the scepter. He has delayed the speech of

³¹²Ibid. 143.

³¹³I disagree with Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives," that "Thersites' extravagant, self-pitying response to his relatively light punishment is comic in its incongruity" (269). Meltzer no doubt reasons this from the laughter of the Achaeans that follows, but I interpret this laughter differently. First of all, Homer describes the blow as resulting in a bloody welt and in tears by Thersites. This was a painful blow, not just a tap on the shoulder. Furthermore I see the gravity of the pain of Thersites (and a negation of the potential comic action here) reflected in the coloring of the laughter of the Achaeans indicated by the participle ἀχνύμενοι (see below).

the noble Odysseus, the very man who had assembled the Achaeans, and the sacrifice following the speeches (2.400f.).

Furthermore, in his speech before the assembly Thersites definitely resorts to boasting, thus conforming to Cornford's second prescription for an *alazon*. He intimates that he has been instrumental in capturing cities (2.231) and adding gold to Agamemnon's store (2.229). If this were true he would be a Homeric hero with all the rights and prerogatives of an Achilles, Odysseus, or any other hero. But his boasting is obviously contrary to the facts since he seems to have no status among any of the Achaeans or their leaders and in all aspects of appearance and actions belies any heroic qualities.³¹⁴

Not only is he no "doer of deeds," he is no "speaker of words" in the heroic sense of things. For here too he will utterly fail. His abuse of the Achaeans themselves at 2.235, where he calls them *πέπρονες* "weaklings," *κακ' ἐλεγχέ'* "base disgraces," and *Ἀχαιίδες, οὐκέτι Ἀχαιοί* "Achaean women, not men," is no doubt his attempt at fancy rhetoric (modern "reverse psychology"). Here he seems to be attempting to reverse the heroic code by making it a weak and disgraceful thing to stay and fight. Thersites is actually arguing that the manly, honorable thing to do is to flee! This is an inappropriate and incongruous action for a hero even to contemplate. In fact, "the speech calls into question the basic assumptions of the group in a manner unlike anything else in the poem. For Thersites is essentially challenging the values of the warrior

³¹⁴Meltzer notes this fact by commenting that the comic effect of Thersites stems from an incongruity between the posture he adopts and the deeds he accomplishes (ibid., 265).

code."³¹⁵ Although, in fact, the Achaeans have just attempted to do that very thing (flee), Odysseus³¹⁶ will call them children and women for doing so since they had promised to sack Troy (2.286-290). The wise Odysseus does not leave them insulted, though, and like any good orator urging men to action, he strokes their egos by admitting that any good warrior would be impatient to go home after so long a time away. Then he encourages them to action by saying it would really be disgraceful to go home empty-handed after such a long time. Finally, he wisely reminds them of Kalchas' prophecy that they would take Troy in the tenth year and urges them to be patient just a little while longer, since this was indeed the tenth year.

Thus Odysseus exhibits true rhetorical skills as opposed to the failed attempt of Thersites' inappropriate rhetoric that adds to the picture of him as φαῦλος "base." Indeed Thersites's speech fulfills the introductory description of him as "of endless speech," and of his words as "disorderly."³¹⁷

Finally, as indicated above, Odysseus does mock and beat this imposter, thereby completing Cornford's third characteristic of the *alazon*.

Homer's characterization of Thersites goes even beyond these basic prescriptions

³¹⁵Johnston, *The Ironies of War*, 74. Johnston also reminds us that this is "the only speech we have from a common soldier" (73).

³¹⁶See Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, 146, for an analysis of the careful composition of this persuasive speech.

³¹⁷Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspective," reflects that "Thersites' speech is quite to the point and is disorderly only because it is he that delivers it. What is ridiculous in Thersites is noble in Achilles" (270). According to Lowry, "Thersites," "when Homer calls him *ametroepēs* (II 212) and says he speaks *ou katà kósmon* (214), a reference is not being made to Thersites' unorganized delivery or unpremeditated composition. It refers rather to the effect of the words to cause shame" (213).

of *alazoneia*. It may also be recalled that Cornford suggested that the *alazon* "may be in some way a double of the antagonist."³¹⁸ In fact, although it was noted above that Thersites was the polar opposite of Achilles, he might also be seen as a mirror image of Achilles in a convoluted sort of way, for they have a number of things in common. They both are hated by Agamemnon because of their love of strife (1.122 and 2.222). They both accuse Agamemnon of not meriting his larger share of booty, accusing him of receiving what they and the other Achaeans capture (1.165-6 and 2.231). And, finally, Thersites' suggestion that they all go home parallels Achilles's threat to do just that.³¹⁹ This in particular betrays Thersites as an imposter, the *alazon* figure of comedy, a man who is impersonating a warrior but who in fact falls far short of being one.³²⁰ The very traits he had in common with the "best of the Achaeans" are the negative ones that further add to his lack of status as the "worst of the Achaeans."³²¹

³¹⁸Cornford, *Attic Comedy*, 148. As evident in the ensuing discussion, I reject Rankin's ("Thersites the Malcontent") insistence that "The poet did not seem to be attempting to establish a connection between the two characters. . . ." (50-1).

³¹⁹Postlethwaite, "Thersites": 126-9.

³²⁰Murray, *The Rise of Greek Epic*, recalls that the expedition against Troy is not the first time this imposter has attempted to play the warrior. Thersites also took part in the legendary Calydonian boar hunt only to be thrown over a rock for showing cowardice. See also Lang, *World of Homer*, 180, who locates this story in Pherecydes (fr. 82).

³²¹As is the case with most comic characters, although it is convenient to apply a category like *alazon* to them, they often fit other categories just as well. For instance, Thersites is designated a "buffoon" in *Republic* 620 c. C. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge, MA, 1964) states: "Like many a comic hero, Thersites is a great talker (ἀμετροεπής); what he says is directed in good part toward getting a laugh from the Achaeans, so that in this respect he qualifies as a *bomolochos*, a buffoon, whose business it is to pick up everything and make a joke of it" (47). On the other hand, Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspective," is quite correct in his observation: "But to see Thersites as a mere buffoon denies his ironic nature as well as the logic underlying

Thalman summarizes:

His ugliness and the anti-heroic realism with which his appearance is described, his pretensions, his skill at imitation and parody (in his speech he appropriates the language of the aristocrats)--these traits mark him as a comic figure. He represents the comic type of the *alazon* or imposter, in the particular form of the *miles gloriosus*.³²²

One must concur with Thalman, for the character of Thersites has conformed to Cornford's three essential elements that we confirmed through an analysis of *alazones* in ancient comedy. Thersites has caused delay or interruption by speaking up inappropriately in the assembly called by Odysseus. He is a boaster whose actions do not match his boasts. He is mocked and beaten. He has been shown to be the *alazon* in general and the original *miles gloriosus* in particular.

Despite indisputable evidence of Thersites' comic character traits, one must still

his parody, which is a biting, carefully constructed pastiche of the discourse of Achilles and Agamemnon" (269).

³²²Thalman, "Thersites": 16. Thalman also remarks on the social attitude of the Greeks that links outward appearance to quality of character: "But in this case we have just seen the presumably handsome heroes behaving in a less than admirable way. If the actions of the leaders are inconsistent with their appearance, then we cannot assume that the behavior of a common soldier will be wrong because he is ugly. The social attitude that makes appearance an index of quality is simultaneously suggested by overt description and undercut by the context" (15). On the folktale principle prevalent among the Greeks that outward appearance is an image of the soul, see also Richardson, *The Homeric Narrator*, 39f.; Rankin, "Thersites the Malcontent": 55-9; Patrides, "Homer: The Invention of Reality,": 306; and Snell, *Poetry and Society*, 13.

demonstrate the comic nature of the action of this Thersites scene in *Iliad* 2. That is, given that Thersites fits the category of the baser man that constitutes the subject of comedy, does this scene fit Aristotle's prescriptions for comic action? Even in dramatic comedies, comic characters are not involved in comic action in every scene: not every action performed by the comic characters is comic action. So is this action indeed characterized by the ridiculous according to our reconstruction of an Aristotelian paradigm; i.e., is it characterized by inappropriate and incongruous action where the errors and ugliness involved are painless and harmless?

The answer lies in Odysseus' reaction to Thersites' inappropriate speech. The last double attack on Agamemnon and Achilles was the final straw for Odysseus. It is here that he begins his tirade against Thersites and his correction of Thersites' errant rhetoric. Odysseus calls him *ἀκριτόμυθε* "reckless babbler" as he warns him not to quarrel with princes. He calls Thersites the worst of those who came to Troy, and then begins to undercut Thersites' argument for going home as shown above.

This argument and counter-argument by the base Thersites and noble Odysseus could conceivably be amusing. The incongruity of this ugly commoner instructing the commander-in-chief of the Greek forces with twisted rhetoric is full of comic potential. For instance, Thalman remarks that "The overthrow of the restraints normally imposed on social life, including those of class, makes this a comic moment" (16). Jaeger calls this episode "a true piece of popular comedy, for it caters to the instincts of the mob."³²³ But we have suggested a comic model that prescribes specific characteristics

³²³Jaeger, *Paideia*, vol. 1, 359.

of comic action, i.e., inappropriate and incongruous action where the errors and ugliness involved are painless and harmless. I submit that this scene does not completely fit our paradigm. For surely the comic spirit dissipates when Odysseus' blow with the scepter³²⁴ draws blood, and Thersites sheds tears. Furthermore, Homer adds a description of the psychic pain that accompanies Thersites' physical pain at 2.268-70:

ὁ δ' ἔζετο ταρβησέν τε

ἀλγήσας δ', ἀχρεῖον ἰδών, ἀπομόρξατο δάκρυ.

οἱ δέ καὶ ἀχνύμενοί περ ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἠδὺ γέλασαν.

and he sat down and was terrified, and having felt pain and looking uselessly he wiped away the tears. And although they were grieved, the men laughed at him heartily.

The men are laughing; however, this laughter is qualified by the participle ἀχνύμενοι.³²⁵ Kirk wants to negate the force of this participle by arguing:

Why are the troops 'grieved', ἀχνύμενοι? Presumably

³²⁴The scepter plays an important role in this scene as M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (1954; reprint, New York, 1965), observes: "The scepter, any scepter, was not only the symbol of authority: it was also the mark of *themis*, of orderly procedure, and so it was given to each assembly speaker in turn to secure his inviolability . . . Against Thersites, however, it was a club, for Thersites was of those 'who are not counted either in battle or in council.' He harangued the assembly without *themis*; he had been given no scepter by the herald, therefore it was proper for him to receive it across his back" (120).

³²⁵W. J. Cummins, "Motivational Conflict from Homer to Plato: A Study of Language and Imagery," (Ph.D diss., University of Cincinnati, 1989), explains that "the participial expression ἀχνύμενοί περ emphasizes Achilles' tension between conflicting inclinations" in *Il.* 18.107-13 and 24.523 (15). The conflict of inclinations here may be that although Thersites has acted badly and the troops are angry, they still feel some compassion for his suffering.

because of all the recent confusion as well as the bad taste left by Thersites' harangue . . . not because of his present sufferings, which they find amusing. . . .³²⁶

Postlethwaite argues that they are disappointed at not being able to finally go home:

[T]hey feel sorrow, that is, because they have been prevented from returning home, and because Agamemnon's suggestion that they do so has proved to be a deception (2.190-3). Thersites has in fact voiced the disappointment and frustration felt by them all.³²⁷

However, it is hard to believe that the physical pain and mental anguish experienced by Thersites could not elicit a feeling of grief for Thersites on the part of the troops, even though they might feel he has gone too far this time. Kirk is probably essentially correct in his downplaying of the grief the men do feel for Thersites, but it should not be totally dismissed nor its meaning lost. Homer does not waste words, and one should always search for the effect he is trying to convey rather than dismiss any word whose significance is not immediately apparent.

Finley explains:

[T]hough they pitied him as one of their own they

³²⁶Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, 144.

³²⁷Postlethwaite, "Thersites": 134. L. I. C. Pearson, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece* (Stanford, 1962), also denies that this participle refers to any grief of the Achaeans for Thersites' fate (35).

concluded with full heart in the rebuke administered by Odysseus and in the methods he employed . . . for Thersites had gnawed at the foundations on which the world of Odysseus was erected.³²⁸

So rather than a case of normal amusement, the fact that the troops do laugh should be explained as nervous laughter that exceeds even the comic principle of superiority that involves aggression that Plato and Freud emphasized.³²⁹ Indeed, their

³²⁸Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, 119. W. Leaf, *The Iliad*, vol. 1 (1902; reprint, Amsterdam, 1971), describes the troops' reaction sensibly: "Thersites is at the moment the accepted spokesman of the mob, who are indignant with Agamemnon for his treatment of Achilles; and it is by a subtle piece of psychology that they are made ashamed of themselves and brought to hear reason by seeing their representative exhibited in an absurd and humiliating light, and their own sentiments caricatured till they dare not acknowledge them" (306-7).

³²⁹Nelson, *Comedy* recognizes the abusive element involved in much of the comic when he comments, "The more closely we examine both comedy and carnival, the more deeply penetrated by scapegoating and victimization they seem to be" (177). But I reiterate, pure comic mimesis (Aristotelian *to geloion*) has evolved away from its early roots, even though some less pure forms of it may include more scapegoating and victimization than a pure comic spirit utilizes. Laughter can be a source of pain to the comic character, but, in contrast to influential non-Aristotelian theories of comedy, Aristotle established a theory in which a central axiom is that pure comic mimesis does not cause pain to the audience. Pure comic mimesis elicits the unadulterated and balanced emotions of *νεμεσᾶν* "indignation" and *θάρασος* "confidence." On the other hand, forms of ridicule related to pure comic mimesis can be used to inflict pain (e.g., bitter satire, tragicomedy, ethnic jokes, etc.), but that is not humorous in the pure sense of the quintessential comedy we have defined with a balance of the comic emotions of *νεμεσᾶν* "indignation" and *θάρασος* "confidence." Even ethnic jokes that denigrate whole races of people or individuals of a certain race seem funny as long as those laughing do not identify with and feel the pain of a real person in that group; for if they do, it ceases to be funny. Aristotle, I think, made it clear that the comic spirit, *to geloion*, had evolved away from bitter satire and invective: *τὸ τῆς κωμωδίας σχῆμα πρῶτος ὑπέδειξεν, οὐ ψόγον ἀλλὰ τὸ γελοῖον δραματοποιήσας* "[Homer] first traced out the form of comedy by dramatically presenting not invective but the ridiculous" (*Poetics* 1448 b 36-8). True comedy is not *ὁ ψόγος* "invective" but *τὸ γελοῖον* "the ridiculous."

laughter is more like an angry laughter beyond mere scornful laughter. This is not the laughter over some bungler who merely does or says things below the norm that involve the incongruous or inappropriate. This is angry, vengeful laughter that no doubt intends to add to the pain of an evil doer. This laughter is sweet in the same way that revenge is sweet. The grief they do feel is overshadowed by the outrage they feel at Thersites. Indeed, Homer indicates that this is not the comic laughter that accompanied this imposter's abuse of princes in the past. The army was not in a humorous mood, as they normally were when Thersites abused Achilles and Odysseus. On the contrary, Homer said ἐκπάγλως κοτέοντο "they were vehemently angry" and νεμέσσηθέν τ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ "felt resentment in their hearts." They are experiencing *nemesan* alone rather than the comic nexus of emotions (*νεμεσᾶν* "indignation" coupled with *θάρσος* "confidence") that leads to joyous laughter; *nemesan* by itself results in the bitter anger and resentment that causes them to beat Thersites emotionally with laughter as Odysseus is beating him physically with the scepter. Rather than enjoying the abuse of Agamemnon and Achilles, as the army had done in the past, they are here identifying with Odysseus as he beats down and punishes this upstart who has overstepped societal standards of behavior.³³⁰ This is further indicated by what the army says after the beating. Rather than laughing

This scene is not funny, is not *to geloion*, to the Achaeans nor to us. As I have shown, Homer has made sure we understand this by his explicit description of the emotions the Achaeans were feeling. Both the Achaeans and Homer's audience do no doubt feel some pity for Thersites who suffers pain at the hands of Odysseus so that this worst of the Achaeans is in fact a tragicomic figure in a context of action that lacks the qualities of *τὸ γελοῖον*.

³³⁰Lowry, "Thersites," emphasizes the shame Thersites has caused the rank-and-file as one of their own (113).

with excitement that cannot wait for another good laugh the next time Thersites abuses a prince, they say, "Surely not again will his bold heart drive him to rebuke princes with reproachful words" (2.276-7). Thersites' status has sunk even lower; he has even lost his status as the local comic and been totally rejected by the commoners as well as the aristocracy. Thersites has crossed the boundaries of the ridiculous into the category of the malicious evil doer. Jaeger would go so far as to say that, "Thersites is the only really malicious caricature in the whole of Homer."³³¹

So, both Thersites' physical and mental anguish as well as laughter that is vicious rather than merely the result of comic action, riddle this scene with both pain and harmful effects that Aristotle says are lacking in comedy. For Thersites does not stand up unharmed, brush himself off and return the blows as a clown in a circus act might do. He crumbles beneath the physical and emotional pain that results from the physical and emotional abuse he receives from the Argives as well as from Odysseus. Homer's audience as well as the Achaeans surely feel some pity (along with indignation) for the ignoble Thersites so that this scene enters the realm of the tragicomic rather than Aristotelian *to geloion*. As a result, although at first glance this scene seems to be an example of comedy in Homer, we will have to look elsewhere for the appropriate laughter of comedy, i.e., laughter of *to geloion* that evokes the proper comic emotions of *nemesan* and *tharsos*.³³²

³³¹Jaeger, *Paideia*, vol. 1, 19.

³³²It is interesting to note that the perceptive Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives," although interpreting this scene as comic, knows something is amiss when he admits that the Thersites episode "may seem more cruel than comic" (266).

This confusion over the apparent similarities of this passage to the comic (despite its falling short of fulfilling the requirement of portraying errors and ugliness without pain) is dismantled deftly by Gregory Nagy. He makes a convincing case for including this scene in the genre of blame poetry. In his book *The Best of the Achaeans* Nagy cogently argues for including Greek poetry with Indic and Old Irish as exhibiting the principle of counterbalancing praise and blame in society primarily through the medium of poetry. He demonstrates this principle through the examination of diction and theme in the poetry of Pindar and Bacchylides, then in the *Odyssey* and the *iamboi* of Archilochus. It is at this point that he makes the connection between blame poetry and comedy:

The resemblance in poetic form between the Archilochean Iambos and the Homeric Epos suggest that blame poetry may have evolved away from an old (and unattested) form corresponding to that of praise poetry (as still attested in Pindar and Bacchylides) into its new form resembling comedy.³³³

Although comedy has obviously evolved beyond Nagy's "unattested" form of

Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, goes even further, denying even that Thersites is a comic character: "But he is not fully a comic character, least of all a comic hero. Thersites is pathetic. . . . He is merely Mr. Nobody, pinned to the wall, with only the brash buffoon's instinct for objection and articulation. Thersites could not develop further, for he lives in the *Iliad*, and it is hard to be a low character in a high tradition" (47).

³³³Nagy, *Best of the Achaeans*, 253.

blame poetry, Nagy reminds us that Aristotle stated that the comic element (*τὸ γελοῖον*) is intrinsic to *αἰσχος* "baseness." This is a major link to blame poetry, since "the diction of Homeric Epos itself associates these same words with the overall concept of blame poetry."³³⁴ The ignobility and baseness of Thersites and his actions in this episode make it stand out "as one epic passage with by far the most overt representation of blame poetry."³³⁵

So despite the fact that this passage could be an example of blame poetry, and not comedy, comedy is no doubt the ultimate successor if not the direct descendant of this sort of blame poetry according to Nagy.³³⁶ Thus many of the elements of the comic naturally evident in this example of blame poetry would make it of interest to the literary critic as he examines the nature, scope and purpose of Homeric epic.

An important question to answer at this point is why the *alazon* characters of Aristophanic and Plautine comedy partake of the comic spirit when Thersites does not. After all, those characters were used to establish the *alazon* paradigm. The reason is the lack of *tharsos*-evoking action in *Iliad* 2. As explained in chapter 1, *tharsos* "confidence" is evoked when a *phaulos* "base" character acting below the norm experiences undeserved good fortune. The audience realizes that if a character baser than

³³⁴Ibid. 255.

³³⁵Ibid. 263.

³³⁶Ibid. 253. Nagy is not the first to recognize the abusive element in much of comedy, as we noted above with Plato, Bergson, and Freud particularly. So Nagy's hypothesis of comedy as a descendant of a type of blame poetry deserves serious consideration. After all, his theory does seem to reflect Aristotle's view of the development of comedy (*Poetics* 1448 b 24-1449 a 6).

they acts worse or with no better wisdom than they possess can still experience good fortune, surely they too could fall upon good fortune. Thus reminded that positive or even wonderful things can and do happen to human beings, they are filled with confidence that such things may be in their future.

Even in the comic dramas of Aristophanes and Plautus, whether he is the protagonist or antagonist, things rarely work out well for the *alazon*, as we may deduce from our paradigm. It is his opponent who fairs well and experiences the good fortune that evokes confidence and joy in the audience. The *alazon* is only comical, therefore, in relation to another character. Socrates, Lamachus, and Pyrgopolynices are only funny because of their connections to Strepsiades, Dicaeopolis, and Xanthias and Pleusicles, respectively. The *alazon* seems to be like the foil or straight man in modern comedy teams.³³⁷ The *alazon* and his comic partner are part of a nexus of comic actions in a comic atmosphere that creates or evokes the nexus of comic emotions (*nemesan* and *tharsos*). If the misfortunes of these comic characters of Aristophanes and Plautus were to be presented in an epic or tragic atmosphere of activity without the characters who experience the good fortune, the scenes in which they appear would be no more comic than the Thersites scene. It is their interaction with Strepsiades, Dicaeopolis, and Xanthias and Pleusicles that draws Socrates, Lamachos, and Pyrgopolynices into the comic action.

The fact that Thersites conforms to the Aristotelian prescriptions for a comic

³³⁷N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ, 1957), recognized that the *alazon* sometimes functions as the straight man in his discussion of the comic characters (172-6).

character in general and Cornford's prescriptions for the *alazon* in particular and has in the past generated much comedy for the Achaeans underscores Homer's understanding of the nature of the comic,³³⁸ despite the lack of the comic spirit in the Thersites scene in *Iliad* 2. Homer has demonstrated his ability to take the unexpected turn from expected comic action to blame poetry at the last moment Thersites is seen in this passage. In the process of doing so he also skillfully furthered the narrative and thematic unity of the poem as a whole (i.e., this scene performs important functions in the *Iliad*), thus revealing the depth of his understanding of the human condition as well as his own poetic skill.³³⁹

Before addressing the functions of this scene in the *Iliad*, we would do well to take note of the integral part that minor characters such as Thersites and Paris play in the epic as a whole:

Both Thersites and Paris, however, play a much more important role than their actual time on the stage of the *Iliad* might indicate. These apparently minor characters color our perceptions of the heroes, influencing our reading

³³⁸As we shall see in the analysis of the *eirōn* and *bomolochus* comic characters in chapters 3 and 4, Homer does understand and employ the comic spirit.

³³⁹Although Geddes, "Who's Who in 'Homeric' Society?," feels that "The literary function of Thersites is to be comic relief" (23), many scholars see this character as performing a much more important function in the *Iliad*. As we shall see, there are narrative and thematic functions, and many agree with Rankin, "Thersites the Malcontent," that "the way in which his character is presented has not only artistic but also social implications" (50).

of the rest of the poem.³⁴⁰

Bowra,³⁴¹ too, recognizes the importance of Thersites in this respect, while Rankin expresses it as follows:

The episode is deftly handled in the *Iliad*, and both the artistry expended upon it and the links it forms with incidents in Book A of the *Iliad* add to the suggestion that we have no mere incidentally invented figure but a traditional one being handled in a special way.³⁴²

Thalman adds his voice to those who appreciate the importance of the Thersites scene:

Parody, like that of Thersites, liberates consciousness from the power of this discourse, reveals that the world is too rich and complex to be captured in straight forward and unitary language, and challenges the unifying socio-political ideology.³⁴³

In discussing the purpose and function of the Thersites episode, Rose summarizes the three basic traditional approaches to the scene in his article "Thersites and the Plural Voices of Homer."³⁴⁴ In the first approach, which Rose calls the "unmediated

³⁴⁰Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives": 265.

³⁴¹C. M. Bowra, *Homer* (London, 1972), 155-6.

³⁴²Rankin, "Thersites the Malcontent": 49.

³⁴³Thalman, "Thersites": 21.

³⁴⁴Rose, "Thersites": 6-10.

empiricist approach," evidence is found in this scene "for social and political realities of the poet's own time or of some earlier period, both for the actual functioning of assemblies and the actual attitudes of the participants."³⁴⁵ The second approach, the "purely literary approach," emphasizes either the genius of Homer's characterization or the role of the episode within the comprehensive thematics of the whole poem or even the epic tradition. This includes such questions as how the episode contrasts Thersites with Agamemnon and Achilles, or how the episode may fit into a pattern of ring composition within the epic, or how the episode may exemplify the genre of blame poetry. The third approach, the "ideological approach," sees this episode as a "straight forward revelation of the poet's aristocratic bias, his ideology."³⁴⁶

The second approach is the approach taken in this discussion. How does Homer's use of this comic character, the *alazon* "imposter" or *miles gloriosus*, further the narrative and thematic unity of the epic as a whole?

Although Thalmann is more interested in the third approach mentioned by Rose, "the ideological approach," his insights do lend themselves to the discovery of an important function of the Thersites scene to the narrative or dramatic unity of the epic. Thalmann mentions that the traditional interpretation of this passage is that it reinforces

³⁴⁵Ibid. 6.

³⁴⁶Ibid. 10. R. B. Kebric, *Greek People* (Mountain View, CA, 1989), surmises that "the incident would probably never have found its way into the narrative if there had been no need to remind restless non-aristocrats of their place in society" (8).

the "ideology common to the poet, his characters and his audience."³⁴⁷ He invites comparison to the class structure implicit in the speech of Sarpedon to Glaucus in book 12.310-28. But he goes on to suggest a more subtle purpose to this scene as, in fact, a challenge to the unifying socio-political ideology:

Its text should be seen neither as a neutral ground for the play of rival ideologies nor as the ideological weapon of a dominant class. It is deeply involved in ideology, but in a complex way that is reflected, in part, by the failure of the Thersites scene to attain genuine closure. As an ordering of conflicts into a constructed artifice, it reproduces, but in some degree helps to clarify, the indeterminacies of lived experience.³⁴⁸

Thersites, in effect, provides Homer's audience with a parodic distance from the established socio-political and value system for the first and only time in the poem. Thersites actually performs a healing function for his society that only he could do. "His detached, ironic perspective . . . allows a peculiar clarity of vision bringing into focus tensions and contradictions that otherwise would remain half-concealed, tolerated by the commoners with inarticulate resentment at most."³⁴⁹ It is only as an outsider, a comic

³⁴⁷Thalmann, "Thersites": 1. As a contrast to Thalmann, see G. M. Calhoun "Classes and Masses in Homer, II," *Classical Philology* 29 (1934): 1-28, for a denial of the political significance of this passage.

³⁴⁸Ibid.

³⁴⁹Ibid. 17.

figure, that Thersites is inadvertently the instrument of healing for his society.

This healing of frustrations and disappointments between the army and the princes constitutes an important impetus to narrative progress at this crucial juncture in the poem. The fleeing army obviously is tired of war and anxious to get home. Motivation for a new willingness to fight on must be provided for Homer's audience to accept a continuance of the war, namely, a reestablishment of loyalty to the heroic code. Homer has created a situation whereby Agamemnon has effectively urged the troops to abandon the siege of Troy. What can Homer have Agamemnon say to the army now called back by Odysseus to explain away all he has just said? The Thersites scene makes an explanation unnecessary.

. . . Agamemnon does not explain at all; he does not have to; the army's attention too is turned in a new direction, when on their return to the assembly-place Thersites, a common soldier, taking a leaf from Achilles' book, hurls abuse at Agamemnon, urging his fellows to go home and desert him, and Odysseus crushes him by word and deed making him an object of ridicule.³⁵⁰

The fact that the ridiculous and disgusting anti-heroic figure of Thersites champions their very sentiments causes the army to be susceptible to the ensuing speech of Odysseus. As stated above, the fact that he violates societal conventions and is made to suffer a humiliating punishment for doing so causes them to side with the princes and

³⁵⁰Owen, *Story of the Iliad*, 23-4.

listen to the cunning Odysseus. Indeed Thersites has so scandalized the army that they declare that of the thousands of excellent things Odysseus had done, beating this braggart and abuser of princes down was by far his greatest accomplishment (2.272-5). Just in case they are not convinced, though, Nestor joins in. After accusing them of being like children who care nothing for war, he threatens any who attempt to leave with death (2.359), a threat which Agamemnon then repeats (2.391-3). He also urges Agamemnon to arrange the army by tribes and clans in a display of loyalty as a sign of their renewed commitment to the heroic code, thus preparing the way for the insertion of the Catalogue of Ships. The sight of this by the Trojans causes them to likewise order themselves, and the poem is set again for the deeds of heroes in war, and the narrative proceeds fully motivated. Reckford summarizes concisely:

In *Iliad* 2, military and social order are reestablished after their large-scale breakdown in *Iliad* 1; thus the army is marshaled in good order, hierarchy is reasserted, discipline is reaffirmed. The comic exposure of Thersites therefore does more than provide comic relief: it vindicates the usual social and psychological controls suggested by words like *kalos* ("fine," "beautiful"), *aretē* ("excellence"), and *aidōs* and *nemesis* ("shame" and "blame"), and inversely by *aischros* ("ugly-and-shameful").³⁵¹

Homer also employs some rather sophisticated narrative techniques that allow him

³⁵¹Reckford, *Aristophanes' Old-and-New Comedy*, 67.

to tie this scene to the *Iliad* as a whole and to advance the story while maintaining audience interest in the immediate events. Morrison explains that the structure of this scene utilizes one of those sophisticated narrative techniques in order to maintain the interest of the audience: the reversal scene. Indeed, although Homer remains in many ways a traditional poet, "he is determined to challenge that tradition by showing how easily events--and his song--might have followed a different course."³⁵² Homer accomplishes this through what Morrison calls "reversal passages."

From the poet's vantage, the function of the reversal passage is quite distinct. The reversal passage allows the poet to comment upon his own story. It expresses a self-conscious reflection upon the shift in the narrative by pointing out the abrupt turn. Beyond this, the poet can use the reversal passage to respond to the epic tradition by posing an alternative to it.³⁵³

There are similarities of diction by which these passages may be recognized: they "follow the predictable pattern of a past contrary-to-fact condition with certain formulaic elements. The apodosis always comes first, introduced by *καί νύ κεν* or *ἔνθα κεν*, while the protasis begins *εἰ μή* or *εἰ μή ἄρ*."³⁵⁴ In fact, the Thersites scene in book 2 does

³⁵²J. V. Morrison, "Alternatives to Epic Tradition: Homer's Challenges in the *Iliad*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 122 (1992): 67.

³⁵³*Ibid.* 67.

³⁵⁴*Ibid.* 66. It is interesting to observe that as early as 1890 Hunt, "Homeric Wit and Humor," noted the significance of the particle *κέν*: "One of the ways by which irony is indicated or made stronger, is by the use of particles;--either intensive particles as *ῆ*,

follow this pattern (2.155-6):

*Ἐνθα κεν Ἀργείοισιν ὑπέρμορα νόστος ἐτύχθη,
εἰ μὴ Ἀθηναίην Ἥρη πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν*

Then for the Argives a homecoming beyond fate might
have been accomplished, had not Hera spoken a word to
Athene.

Morrison points out that in this passage (when the Greeks take Agamemnon's suggestion to simply leave Troy for home seriously and run to the ships), Homer does not simply report that Athena came down and the Greeks returned to assembly. "The narrative does not move directly from Greek flight to Odysseus marshalling troops. Instead the poet interposes an editorial comment going out of his way to emphasize how close the story comes to moving in a different direction."³⁵⁵ Homer has thus challenged his tradition without really violating it. His genius at storytelling has taken what could have been a dull repetition of a story his audience already knew and heightened their expectations. Indeed, along with other reversal passages (Achilles nearly slays Agamemnon in book 1; the proposed duel leads to the possibility of a negotiated settlement in book 3, etc.), this "transgression" of the tradition heightens the drama for Homer's auditors. If nothing else, "By driving his song outside its usual course--and by highlighting his challenges to

θήν, and *δή*, or weakening particles as *πού*, *ποθί*, and *κέν* (cf. *οἶω*, *οἰομαι*)" (49). Morrison, "Alternatives to the Epic Tradition," has elaborated on the significance of the particular irony indicated by contrary-to-fact conditional clauses with the particle *κέν*: these clauses indicate the irony between the tradition and "transgressions" of that tradition invented by Homer.

³⁵⁵Ibid.

the tradition with reversal passages--Homer can effectively distinguish himself from his peers."³⁵⁶ He can thereby endeavor to avoid a passive response of an audience familiar with the essentials of the Trojan saga by using unexpected episodes that challenge their complacency. "Although reversal passages always return the story to plot and tradition, the audience would still appreciate the poet's near violations of the plot and tradition over the course of the narrative."³⁵⁷

Homer's ability to keep his audience's attention while connecting the scene to the Trojan saga as a whole also entails the use of another narrative technique: the use of similar circumstances to foreshadow other events. For instance, this beating of Thersites which ends his appearance in the *Iliad* surely foreshadows his ultimate end--death at the hand of Achilles--just as the end of Patroclus will foreshadow the end of Achilles and the end of Hector foreshadows the end of Troy. This thread of hints or foreshadowing of future events adds uniquely to the unity of the whole epic.³⁵⁸

Still another technique is embedded in the scene's structure. Meltzer notes that the structure of this scene adds to the imposter status of Thersites while easing its addition into the narrative: "[T]he action of the Thersites episode mimics the pattern of many Iliadic battles, which are preceded by verbal abuse and followed by the gloating of the victor."³⁵⁹

³⁵⁶Ibid. 70.

³⁵⁷Ibid. footnote 19.

³⁵⁸Cf. S. Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), for a good discussion of this technique.

³⁵⁹Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives": 266.

The narrative continuity that we have seen this scene enjoys with the epic as a whole is complemented by its thematic development. For instance, the *μῆνις* "wrath" of Achilles which Homer explicitly states as the theme of the story is evident in its effect on the action of this scene. Thersites' speech "was intended rather as a rehearsal of, and comment upon, the main theme of the poem, the quarrel and consequent *menis*."³⁶⁰ The *ἔρις* "strife" between Agamemnon and Achilles has its counterpart in the *ἔρις* between Agamemnon and Thersites, Achilles' negative alter-ego. Achilles effectively haunts this episode as he will continue to haunt the intervening episodes until his actual reappearance in the narrative in book 9.

The army is no doubt eager to desert the siege of Troy because the Greek champion has done so. If they have not been able to take Troy during the last nine years with Achilles, how can they ever hope to do so without him? Thus their flight is ultimately motivated by the *μῆνις* of Achilles that has caused him to withdraw from the fight.

The other side of the coin is that the pseudo-Achilles, this *alazon* of the Greek hero, in his usurpation of heroic privilege and his making light of the *μῆνις* of Achilles motivates the return to battle of the army.

There is also a theme in the mythic tradition that the Thersites episode may support:

More generally, the *Iliad* elsewhere seems to show an awareness of a tradition that saw the Trojan war in the context of a myth of destruction, as the event that violently ended the age of the heroes. Thus, when Thersites

³⁶⁰Postlethwaite, "Thersites": 133.

denounces Agamemnon and the war, we should not dismiss him simply because of who and what he is.³⁶¹

An important subtext of the entire *Iliad* that also cannot be missed in this scene is the anti-war sentiment that is constantly hovering in the background. How much more convincingly can the utter senseless nature of war be expressed than this situation? As stated above, the ridiculous Thersites has made good points in his speech that actually paralleled the points made earlier by the hero of the epic, and yet the soldiers remain to fight a war in which men are dying over a quarrel between a husband and his wife's lover.

Thus Homer, in a seemingly insignificant episode, has contributed significantly to the narrative and thematic development of the epic as a whole. He has piqued his audience's interest by turning a potentially comic scene into a rather pathetic portrayal of the *alazon* character. This twist of expectation, as shown above, is used skillfully by Homer to underscore some significant themes and to further the movement of the story.

In summary, it is clear, aside from the exceptional poetic skills evident in this scene, that with Thersites Homer has provided a model for the *miles gloriosus* character of future Greek and Roman comedy. He has fulfilled all but one of the Aristotelian prescriptions for a comic character in *Poetics* 1449 a 32-37: he is a *phaulos* "base" individual characterized by *to geloion* "the ridiculous," i.e. by "some error or ugliness" but his error is not without pain for the audience. His physical and mental anguish, we noted above, eliminated the comic spirit, from the Aristotelian point of view, from the

³⁶¹Thalman, "Thersites": 10.

scene. Yet, it does appear that it is Homer who has invented the braggart soldier.³⁶² As we examined this scene we noticed that it provides a model, or even a type-scene, that future comic dramatists seem to have emulated. For instance, the braggart soldier type of *alazon*, above all, exaggerates his exploits. He boasts about martial and erotic abilities that he actually does not possess. Thersites claims to have been among those capturing cities and seizing hostages for ransom (2.226-31); it is obvious from the text that he lies. He is physically incapable of achieving such deeds and lacks the status among the Achaeans that would likely accompany such heroism. In similar fashion, Aristophanes presents his braggart soldier Lamachus as a boaster whose first words indicate that he thinks he is a fearful warrior who inspires terror in others, like the monster Gorgon. In the heated debate with Dicaeopolis Lamachus boasts (620-2):

ἀλλ' οὖν ἐγὼ μὲν πᾶσι Πελοποννησίοις
 ἀεὶ πολεμήσω, καὶ ταράξω πανταχῆ,
 καὶ ναυσὶ καὶ πεζοῖσι, κατὰ τὸ καρτερὸν.

I SHALL PROSECUTE THIS WAR. I SHALL STRIKE
 DEEP INTO THE SOFT UNDERBELLY OF THE
 PELOPONNESIANS. I SHALL NOT FLAG OR FAIL.
 I SHALL FIGHT IN SPARTA. I SHALL FIGHT ON
 THE SEAS AND OCEANS, I SHALL FIGHT ON THE

³⁶²Duckworth, *Roman Comedy*, mentions that some have attributed the invention of this character to Epicharmus, a Sicilian who flourished at Syracuse in the early part of the fifth century, who was the earliest of the Greek comic playwrights. The problem is that "there are no fragments that would indicate this" (19), and even if there were, Homer predates Epicharmus by nearly three hundred years.

FIELDS AND IN THE STREETS, I SHALL FIGHT IN

THE HILLS: I SHALL NEVER SURRENDER. [Parker's capitalization]

These boasts will prove impotent as Lamachus returns from battle a beaten and broken man without even having done any damage to the Peloponnesian cause. The boasts reach a new level of hyperbole with Plautus' Pyrgopolynices who, as we saw above, makes such outrageous and impossible claims as having killed an elephant with his bare hands and having killed 7,000 men in a single day.

Furthermore, the braggart soldiers delay the celebration of a sacrifice or feast. Thersites has inappropriately interrupted the assembly and delayed the feast and sacrifice which followed that assembly (2.398-401). Lamachus has entered into debate (572f.) with Dicaeopolis and delayed the enjoyment of his private peace treaty that includes trade and a glorious feast (1003f.) with fowl, rabbit, squid, and even eel! Pyrgopolynices, in turn, has delayed the wedding of Pleusicles and Philocomasium with his amorous advances toward Philocomasium. Furthermore, he must be tricked into freeing her so that she and Pleusicles may leave to live happily ever after.

Finally, it is part of the lot of the braggart soldier to experience mocking and beating. Thersites is mocked and then beaten by Odysseus with the scepter. Lamachus is mocked by Dicaeopolis before he even goes off to war (1080f.) and returns injured by his own ineptness: he has pierced his leg while attempting to jump over a trench; he has sprained his ankle; and he has cracked open his head by tripping and bashing his head on a rock (1174f.). Pyrgopolynices likewise is mocked and beaten. He is threatened with a knife while being pummeled by clubs (1398f.).

The fact that all three of these situations occur with braggart soldiers appearing after Homer's Thersites seem to eliminate doubt of mere coincidence. Thersites is not only the clearly the precursor of, but may well be the model for, the *miles gloriosus* of Aristophanes and Plautus. Indeed the claim of Aristotle that Homer first "traced out the form of comedy by dramatically representing...the ridiculous" is beginning to find support in the *Iliad* itself. If the case can be made as convincingly for the Homeric models of the *ieron* and *bomolochos*, Homer could be seen as important in the development of not only tragedy but comedy as well.

CHAPTER THREE

COMIC CHARACTER TWO: THE *EIRON*

Having established Thersites as the model for the *alazon* of ancient comedy, our task will now shift to the second of Aristotle's three comic types, the *eiron* "self-depreciator," the "trickster/rogue." An examination of the appearances of the Trojan prince Paris, the son of Priam, reveals his connection to the second of Aristotle's comic characters, the *eiron* or ironic trickster/rogue character. In fact, at 3.39 Paris' brother Hector even calls him ἡπεροπευτά "trickster," "cheat," "deceiver."

Scholarship on Paris has been concerned with three problems associated with this character: "the apparent inconsistency presented by a carefree erotic figure in a serious military epic"; "textual problems where the passage under scrutiny involves Paris"; and the origin and purpose of his double name Paris/Alexandros.³⁶³ The first category forms the area of concern in examination of the comic potential of this character

³⁶³Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," 3. L. Collins, "The Wrath of Paris: Ethical Vocabulary and Ethical Type in the *Iliad*," *American Journal of Philology* 108 (1987), remarks: "Throughout the *Iliad* the nexus of themes with which Paris is identified is associated with the erotic or otherwise opposed to the martial" (230). Suter complains about the "romantic moralists who do their best to minimize the importance of his role feeling, or so it seems, that Homer too would have got rid of him altogether if tradition had permitted him to" (10). She insists "that the poet of the *Iliad* is a purposeful craftsman, that in his portrayal of Paris, he chooses his diction and narrative material deliberately, not because tradition forced him to, nor because the moral sensibilities of his audience did, but because he wished to portray Paris in a certain way" (12).

in Homeric epic poetry. Within this inconsistency of the appearance of an anti-hero in an epic may lie keys to narrative and thematic artistry that have often been overlooked by those whose sensibilities have blinded them to the possibility that the character of Paris could have serious purposes.

Before investigating that inconsistency, it may prove fruitful to summarize a recent explanation of the origin and purpose of the Trojan prince's double name. In fact, the curious use by Homer of two names, Paris/Alexandros, for one character without explanation has given rise to efforts to explain the origin and purpose of the double name since antiquity.³⁶⁴ In modern times, Nilsson attempted to explain the double names as a conflation of two myths. A pre-Greek myth of the rape of a vegetation goddess was retained with its sacred character in Greek myth only in "the rape of Kore by Pluton, whilst the others were metamorphosed into heroic myths, the rape of Persephone, of Ariadne, and of Helen by Theseus." Eventually, "This pre-Greek myth was grafted on to the myth of the Trojan war, and thus the double name of the robber can be explained. Alexandros, the name of the robber in Greek myth, was identified with the Trojan prince Paris."³⁶⁵ MacKay suggested that "the use of one name or other seems to be no more than a matter of metrical convenience."³⁶⁶ Kirk, on the other hand, merely states that

³⁶⁴Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," for instance, reports: "Apollodorus (Bibliotheca, 111.12.5) says that Paris was the name given him by the slave who saved him; and when he grew up, he earned the name Alexandros ληστὰς ἀμυνόμενος καὶ τοῖς ποιμνίοις ἀλεξήσας" (174).

³⁶⁵Nilsson, *Homer and Mycenae*, 252-3.

³⁶⁶L. A. MacKay, *The Wrath of Homer* (Toronto, 1948), 57.

"Paris is clearly a non-Greek name...whereas Alexandros is Greek."³⁶⁷ Suter offers more plausible conclusions about the double name that result from her exhaustive analysis of the diction and narrative material involving the character of Paris. She states, for instance, that the use of these names "does not parallel any apparent effort to characterize a particular aspect of the figure's personality or position in society."³⁶⁸ Furthermore, "In a given narrative sequence, both names are used, as in the scenes where Hektor returns to Troy and brings Paris back to battle (6.280-356, 503-517)."³⁶⁹ Suter observes: "This kind of alternation, where both names are used in a single narrative sequence, makes it unlikely that sequences from two separate poems about two different people were incorporated into the single structure of the *Iliad* and made to refer to one character."³⁷⁰ Metrical convenience does not explain the use of two names either. An "Alexandros" line (3.58) is practically identical in meaning to a "Paris" line (3.437). Based on these observations from her analysis of diction surrounding both names, Suter is able to arrive at several significant conclusions. First, "Alexandros appears in one of two places in the hexameter 43 of its 45 appearances"³⁷¹; i.e., "Alexandros has a secure formulaic presence in epic diction."³⁷² "Paris' lack of a fixed place in the

³⁶⁷Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, 267.

³⁶⁸Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," 16.

³⁶⁹Ibid.

³⁷⁰Ibid. 16-17.

³⁷¹Ibid. 17.

³⁷²Ibid. 19.

hexameter, its dearth of epithets, and the comparatively unformulaic nature of the lines in which it appears argue for its late entry into epic diction."³⁷³ This is significant because "Paris" has many more possible places where it can fit in the hexameter line than "Alexandros." "The disproportion in the degree of formulaic development between the two names suggests that Alexandros was the earlier name which became established in epic diction before it had to compete with the metrically more tractable Paris."³⁷⁴

As far as the deployment of the two names, Suter concludes:

The evidence of the deployment of the names Paris and Alexandros in the epic narrative tradition suggests that the figure of the Trojan prince is not a conflation of two separate figures from separate traditional stories, but was always one figure, in one story.

Furthermore,

an examination of the users of the names indicates that Paris is the name used by the close family, or even by his elder brother alone. And Alexandros is used by other than family members, both human and divine.³⁷⁵

³⁷³Ibid.

³⁷⁴Ibid. 20.

³⁷⁵Ibid. 23. In light of Suter's work, I. J. F. de Jong, "Paris/Alexandros in the *Iliad*," *Mnemosyne* 40 (1987), comments: "In the first place, [the uses of the two names] may be said to support (certainly not prove) the linguistic hypothesis that the name 'Paris' is non-Greek and 'Alexandros' Greek. In the second place, they seem to indicate that the poet of the *Iliad* retained a tradition of 'Paris' as being a foreign ("Trojan") name. In fact, there are several passages in the *Il.* where it is explicitly stated that the

Because Paris' lines demonstrate little formulaic development and because those lines stress Paris' physical appearance and behavior without particular relevance to the narrative context, Suter concludes that the lines were from another poetic tradition and that they reflect a character with a certain set of attributes, and, furthermore, that "this character was brought into the Iiadic tradition with its diction intact."³⁷⁶

Suter finds the key to identifying this tradition by comparing the use of the name "Paris" to the names/epithets/cult-titles of divinities in the Homeric poems. The understandable names/epithets/cult-titles describe the nature, locality, or activities of the individual god or goddess. Though "Paris" cannot be termed an epithet of "Alexandros" (since it is not used as one), it does have an exact parallel in the cult titles of Aphrodite: Kythereia and Kupris.

[These titles] are never used with one another and are never explained. The likeness of its employment, therefore, to that of divine epithets and cult titles in general, and to Aphrodite's in particular, urges consideration of the suggestion: Paris is perhaps in origin a substantivized description, or an epithet, of a divine figure. Its application to the character Paris in the *Iliad*

Trojans and their allies spoke foreign, 'barbarian' languages. . . .

"The poet of the *Iliad*, by keeping the 'Trojan' name 'Paris', may have intended to introduce a 'realistic' element in the representation of the Trojans as speakers of a foreign language" (126).

³⁷⁶Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," 90.

would imply--to an audience which recognized it and knew its origin--the nature, locality, or activity of its original bearer, and would affect the characterization of the figure Paris in their eyes.³⁷⁷

Suter suggests that "The character is 'divinized' when the name Paris is used, and the name itself is possibly originally divine."³⁷⁸ Her analysis of the diction surrounding the name "Paris" suggests a narrative pattern of mutual blaming that reflects a pattern of festival presentation of iamboi. In addition, the evidence of diction³⁷⁹ and narrative sequences³⁸⁰ parallel those of myths of Dionysus *μελάναιγισ*. She thus concludes that "the origin of the name Paris/Dusparis may be in *Δυσπάριος*, a figure in the iambic rituals of Dionysus/Demeter cults on Paros."³⁸¹ Furthermore the episode where Paris is transported from the battlefield to Helen and returns to the fighting with Hector

³⁷⁷Ibid. 52.

³⁷⁸Ibid. ii.

³⁷⁹For example, Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," states: "*γυναιμανές* is altogether apt now: as we have noted, it is used only of Paris in this line, and of Dionysus in the *Hymn to Dionysus* 17, and is a well-known activity of the god, particularly in his *μελάναιγισ* form. Next comes *ἡπεροπευτά*: the aition for the name Apatouria and its reflection in the duel of Paris and Menelaos make this understandable also now. Paris partakes once again of Dionysus' characteristics" (112). Indeed, "Most of the Paris epithets appear to be associated with Dionysus--especially *γυναιμανές*, *ἡπεροπευτά*, *λωβητήρ*, *κέρα ἀγλαέ*" (115).

³⁸⁰The narrative sequences which Paris shares with Thersites and Iros as well as Dionysus are summarized by Suter, "Paris/Alexandros": "the first figure blames someone; in turn, he, the blamer, becomes the blamed when figure two reacts by blaming figure one; mutual blaming results in conflict between figures one and two; the conflict is the occasion for laughter for those who are watching, who approve it" (97).

³⁸¹Ibid. ii.

suggests an analogy to Dawn's consort.³⁸² Suter identifies the mythical pattern of abduction scenes of the Dawn goddess on page 124 with examples from the *Hymn to Aphrodite*, the *Theogony*, Euripides' *Hippolytus*, as well as the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, and concludes that the characteristics of Dawn's consort have been attached to Alexandros the Trojan prince as Paris, thus the use of the double name Paris/Alexandros. This expansion of the character of the Trojan prince allows Homer to increase the complexity of his poem as we shall see in our analysis of the important Paris scenes in the *Iliad*.

It may be that in attaching this tradition to the Trojan prince and thereby creating

³⁸²Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," suggests: "Paris takes his place, then, as the analogue for the Dawn goddess' consort, and the bedchamber to which Aphrodite conveys him is one for the *θάλαμος* of Dawn, where she and her lover, on the cosmic level, produce the next day's sunlight" (134). Murray, *The Rise of Greek Epic*, had indicated the tradition of the divinity of Helen: "[Helen] was an important goddess, a marriage-*Korē*, in Sparta. Her temple at Therapnae has been excavated; she and her husband Menelaus were worshipped there together, 'not as heroes but as gods', and she had sacred trees and wells in many places" (205). L. Clader, *Helen: The Evolution from Divine to Heroic in Greek Epic Tradition* (Leiden [Mnemosyne Suppl. 42], 1976), also had earlier provided strong evidence for Helen as a divine figure, and she concluded: "The longer and more closely one considers thematic and cult parallels between various goddesses of the Peloponnese, the more confused the identities of the ladies become. Farnell goes so far as to claim that Artemis, Hecate, Demeter, Persephone, and Aphrodite are all 'cognate.' To his list one may be justified in adding the more minor figures Iphigeneia, Ariadne, Kallisto, Nemesis, and others. Furthermore, Helen has a great deal in common with some of them--notably Artemis, Nemesis, Iphigeneia, and Ariadne, but more than likely with Demeter also and certainly with her often-raped 'daughter' Persephone.... On the basis of all the similarities between Helen and her Peloponnesian neighbors, then, it seems safe to assert that Helen is one form, one local variant, of the ancient Mediterranean fertility goddess" (78-9). This would, therefore, lend credence to the efforts of Suter to identify Paris as the divine consort of a goddess. See also Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, 196ff., for a discussion of the myth of the abduction of the dawn goddess and the reflections of this original Indic tradition in the myths of various Greek goddesses.

seeming contradictions in the Paris character, Homer has created what will become the origin of the *ieron* character of ancient comedy. That is, rather than a warrior who is a brave as he is handsome, Paris will display actions below the norm, and will become a figure of blame in a narrative pattern which he shares with Thersites, Iros and Dionysus.³⁸³ We shall demonstrate that Paris' actions sometimes fulfill the characteristics of the *ieron* of ancient comedy. It must be pointed out, though, that Paris does not have to act as an *ieron* throughout the *Iliad*, just as comic characters do not necessarily conform to one character type throughout an Aristophanic comedy.³⁸⁴ In fact, creating this complex character of Paris, Homer has broadened his expression of the complexity of the human condition and added to the universality of his epic.³⁸⁵ Therefore, our task now will be to establish the nature of the comic *ieron* by looking to Aristotle for a general definition of the *ieron* and then to Cornford for the specific characteristics of the *ieron*, as we did for the *alazon* character in chapter 2. We shall

³⁸³Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," 97.

³⁸⁴I reiterate the example from chapter 2 of Dionysus in the *Frogs* who appears as *ieron*, *alazon*, and *bomolochos* in separate parts of the play.

³⁸⁵This analysis of the character of Paris seems to provide an explanation for the three contradictions which J. A. Scott, "Paris and Hector in Tradition and in Homer," *Classical Philology* 8 (1913), sees in the characterization of Paris: 1) the fact that a coward like Paris could be introduced as 'Ἀλέξανδρος θεοειδής since "godlike Alexander" seems to give too much honor to the base Paris; 2) how Homer, who felt to be beautiful was also to be brave, καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός, could represent a coward as handsome; finally, 3) the continued influence of Paris, i.e., how a man who disgraced himself like Paris did in fleeing from Menelaus would not be opposed when he refuses to give Helen back to the Greeks (161). Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives," adds another quandary involving Paris: the fact that "Paris represents . . . an ignoble character who profits from divine favor without meriting it" (274).

then analyze certain characters in Aristophanic comedy as a check on Cornford before proceeding to ascertain whether Paris conforms to these prescriptions of *eironeia*, thereby again demonstrating the possible origin of these comic characters in Homeric epic.³⁸⁶

In discussing the nature of truth and truthful human beings in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1127 a, Aristotle defines the deficient aberration of truthfulness as a vice displayed by one who depreciates the truth (lines 23-4):

ὁ δὲ εἴρων ἀνάπαλιν ἀρνείσθαι τὰ ὑπάρχοντα ἢ
ἐλάττω ποιεῖν

[W]hile conversely the self-depreciator disclaims or
disparages good qualities that he does possess. . . .

Cornford's analysis of the comic types expands Aristotle's definition of the *iron* in ancient comedy as follows:

The word *iron* itself in the fifth century appears to mean 'cunning' or (more exactly) 'sly.' Especially it meant the man who masks his batteries of deceit behind a show of ordinary good nature; or indulges a secret pride and conceit of wisdom, while he affects ignorance and self-depreciation, but lets you see all the while that he could

³⁸⁶I must reiterate the caveat concerning the *iron* similar to the one concerning the *alazon* in chapter 2. That is, we are only interested in the scenes in which Paris' actions seem to exhibit the characteristics of *eironeia*. We also are not interested in *eironeia* that is not comic (for instance, the actions of Socrates which might classify him as an *iron* but not a comic *iron*: cf. *Republic* 337a, where Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of resorting to his famous *eironeia* to avoid direct answers to questions).

enlighten you if he chose, and so makes a mock of
you.³⁸⁷

He adds, "The *eiron* masks his cleverness under a show of clownish dulness. He is a fox in the sheep's clothing of a buffoon."³⁸⁸ Furthermore, he "makes fun for his own private satisfaction, whereas the buffoon does it to amuse others."³⁸⁹ In other words, the *eiron* acts less brave, or clever, or intelligent than he is. Since he marches to his own drummer--he does what he does, not to amuse others, but to amuse himself--he is not one of the crowd: he lives outside the ethics and values of his society. Lacking these values, he uses his wiles to cheat others.

In summary, according to Cornford the *eiron* is a character who (1) feigns incompetence or weakness or makes a show of ordinary good nature to hide his batteries of deceit³⁹⁰, (2) stands outside the normal values, and (3) takes advantage of others. He is the "trickster/rogue" character of comedy.

In Aristophanes' *Knights* we meet an *eiron* "trickster/rogue" in the character Demos. The *Knights* "is an allegory of an unusual kind."³⁹¹ Dover characterizes the central idea of the *Knights* (Demos--Athenian "people"-- as master of a household with

³⁸⁷Cornford, *Attic Comedy*, 137.

³⁸⁸Ibid. 138.

³⁸⁹Ibid.

³⁹⁰Cf. *N.E.* 1127 a 23-4.

³⁹¹Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, 89.

politicians as his slaves) as "brilliant,"³⁹² but finds problems in the details. For instance, he decries the fact that purely domestic relationships are paralleled by purely political relationships throughout the play with a confusing shift from one level to the other. An example is Dover's complaint about the oracle foretelling the overthrow of Paphlagon:

The oracle which foretells the overthrow of the Paphlagonian by the Sausage-seller is not presented as an oracle foretelling the displacement of the slave-steward within a household, but as a succession of men who 'will have the administration of the *city*' (130): first an oakum-seller, then a sheep-seller, thirdly a seller of hides (Kleon), where we would have thought it possible to say 'house' instead of 'city' and substitute specialized skills (such as appear in lists of slaves) for trades.³⁹³

Dover also complains that an appeal to the assembly that comes after the failure of Paphlagon's complaint about the sausage-seller to the Council could be portrayed as an appeal to the individual Demos, and, in fact, "there is nothing in domestic relationships corresponding to the Council."³⁹⁴

Though Dover may find all this confusing or lacking in artistry, the Athenians must

³⁹²Ibid. 93.

³⁹³Ibid.

³⁹⁴Ibid.

have disagreed since it won first prize at the Lenaia in 424. The summer before this play was produced the Athenians had won a victory at Pylos, had captured the Spartan naval force, and had taken about 120 Spartan nobles prisoner so that the Spartans sued for peace. Rather than accept peace, the Athenians, influenced by the opposition of Kleon, refused the Spartan offer of armistice.³⁹⁵ Aristophanes is attempting to make the case for peace and criticizes the politician Kleon who stole the credit for Pylos from Demosthenes, the man who really captured Pylos. It is Demos ("the people of Athens") who, in the end, will enjoy victory over Paphlagon (Kleon), the militant spokesman for this dreaded war with Sparta which is bringing death, poverty, and destruction to the Athenian people.

In the beginning of the play the two slaves, Demosthenes and Nicias, are complaining about how a new slave, Paphlagon, has cheated his way into the master's good graces. He is a flatterer who reads oracles that cause the master to beat the other slaves while he steals meals prepared by the other slaves and serves them to the master as if he prepared them himself. Demosthenes and Nicias get drunk and devise a plan to dislodge Paphlagon from his good position with Demos: they steal Paphlagon's oracles that reveal that a sausage-seller will cause the downfall of Paphlagon. They immediately grab a sausage-seller and tell him that he is destined to rule Athens. When the Sausage-seller protests that he has no education and is of bad stock, they exclaim, "Perfect for political life!" because (191-3):

³⁹⁵J. B. Bury, S.A. Cook, and F. E. Adcock, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History: Athens 478-401 B.C.*, vol. 5 (1927; reprint, London, 1973), 230-5.

ἡ δημαγωγία γὰρ οὐ πρὸς μουσικοῦ
 ἔτ' ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς οὐδὲ χρηστοῦ τοὺς τρόπους,
 ἀλλ' εἰς ἀμαθῆ καὶ βδελυρόν.

The leadership of the people is no longer a job for an
 educated man or one of good qualities, but for one who's
 ignorant and foul.³⁹⁶

When Paphlagon arrives on the scene, he attempts to flatter the chorus after their initial support of the Sausage-seller. Next Paphlagon and the Sausage-seller trade insults, boasts and threats.³⁹⁷ Finally, Paphlagon goes off to the Council to make charges against the Sausage-seller, Demosthenes, and the chorus as conspirators against the state. The Sausage-seller chases after him and returns with the report that he was the victor before the Council by being the portender of good news: the price of sardines was the lowest since the start of the war. When Paphlagon attempted to win their favor by announcing that the Spartans were ready to talk peace, the Council members replied that the Spartans were only interested in peace because they heard about the cheap price of sardines; so forget it! The Sausage-seller sealed his favor with the Council by buying up all the garlic and onions and then passing them out free for the Council to use as seasoning for the sardines.

When Paphlagon returns, he and the Sausage-seller trade more insults until

³⁹⁶This and all other English translations of *Knights* will be those of A. Sommerstein, *Knights* (Warminster, 1981).

³⁹⁷Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, remarks, "In the course of the scene all the stock forms of political smear and charge are satirized. . . ." (90).

Paphlagon threatens to haul the Sausage-seller before the assembly (Demos). The two of them call out Demos and declare themselves to be his lovers. These sycophants try to outdo each other. For instance, when Paphlagon offers to wipe Demos' eyes with a hare's tail, the Sausage-seller tells Demos to blow his nose and wipe his hand on his head (910)! Next, when Paphlagon brings out oracles to please Demos, the Sausage-seller twists them around with his own oracles so that Paphlagon looks bad.

When the two rival "lovers" declare that they are going to provide for Demos, and he promises the "reins of the Pnyx" to whoever does him more good service, the chorus accuses Demos of being easily led astray by flatterers and orators. Demos then surprises them with a curious statement (1121-4):

νοῦς οὐκ ἔνι ταῖς κόμαις
 ὑμῶν, ὅτε μ' οὐ φρονεῖν
 νομίζετ'· ἐγὼ δ' ἐκῶν
 ταῦτ' ἠλιθιάζω.

There's no brains under that long hair
 of yours, if you think me
 witless; this imbecility
 of mine is deliberately put on.

Thus Demos fulfills the first of Cornford's descriptions of the *ieron*: feigning incompetence. He has been playing the *ieron*, as is evident from his claim that he only appears to be influenced by demagogues; in reality he just uses them and then tosses

them away (1125-30).³⁹⁸

No one can witness the sycophancy of Paphlagon and the Sausage-seller in lines 733f. while knowing that Demos has claimed that he is aware of their ploys and is using them without feeling that Demos has strayed outside normal values. Especially abhorrent to normal democratic sensibilities is the following statement by Demos (1107-9):

ἀνύσατέ νυν ὃ τι περ ποιήσεθ'· ὡς ἐγώ,

ὁπότερος ἂν σφῶν εὖ με μᾶλλον ἂν ποιῆ,

τούτῳ παραδώσω τῆς Πυκνὸς τὰς ἡνίας.

Hurry up now with whatever you're going to do;

because whichever of you two does me more good service,

to that one I shall hand over the reins of the Pnyx.

Is the democracy for sale? It certainly appears so. Paphlagon and the Sausage-seller proceed to cook for Demos, each trying to outdo the other. At one point when the Sausage-seller serves up a dish that Paphlagon had prepared, Demos turns away the protests of Paphlagon by telling him that it is the waiter that gets the thanks (1205). Paphlagon can only moan: οἶμοι κακοδαίμων, ὑπεραναιδισθήσομαι "God above, I'm going to be outdone in shamelessness!" (1206). The contest is finally decided when the Sausage-seller suggests that Demos look in their hampers and see what is in them. The Sausage-seller's is empty while Paphlagon's is full of goodies; i.e., he has been holding

³⁹⁸Sommerstein, *Knights*, does not find anything to admire about Demos as the metaphor of the Athenian democracy in this claim: "The claim of Demos (1111-50) that he is not really being gullible but rather acting on a crude calculation of self-interest is one that offers little comfort even if we believe it" (2).

back goodies for himself. The Sausage-seller declares that that has been Paphlagon's normal habit: stealing from the city.

Finally, Demos does appear to fulfill the third of Cornford's characteristics of the *eirōn* when he consciously has taken advantage of others. His awareness of his "lover's" real intentions allowed him to benefit slyly from their attempts to win his confidence with gifts and services until he decided they had gone far enough, and then he strikes them down (1125-30):

αὐτός τε γὰρ ἥδομαι
 βρύλλων τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν,
 κλέπτοντά τε βούλομαι
 τρέφειν ἕνα προστάτην·
 τοῦτιβ δ', ὅταν ᾗ πλέως,
 ἄρας ἐπάταξα.

For I get personal pleasure
 out of my daily feed,
 and also I deliberately fatten up
 one thief of a political leader;
 and when he is full up,
 I raise my hand and strike him down.

Thus, the character of Demos has fulfilled the three characteristics of the *eirōn* of ancient comedy: 1) he has been feigning incompetence; 2) he has been acting outside normal values; and 3) he is guilty of taking advantage of others.

But then circumstances begin to turn contradictory when Demos, oddly enough considering his boast at 1123, appears surprised at the revelation of Paphlagon's stealing. In his disgust at Paphlagon's treachery, he orders the transfer of authority to the Sausage-seller. But Paphlagon refuses to give up power until he consults the oracles. Upon doing so, he realizes that the Sausage-seller is indeed the one prophesied to replace him.

Events take another unpredictable turn when the Sausage-seller and Demos both experience remarkable transformations. The Sausage-seller, rather than continuing to be the lying, cheating, miscreant he was while rising to power, is now converted into an honest man dedicated to the city's best interests. Demos is rejuvenated (*ἀφεφήσας* "boiled down" by the Sausage-seller) from a senile, ugly, stupid and gullible old man who could be so easily taken advantage of by Paphlagon to a handsome man whose wits have been restored. Demos does not even remember what his former self was like (1339). When the Sausage-seller tells him of his fondness for sycophants, Demos asks *οὕτως ἀνόητος ἐγεγενήμην καὶ γέρων;* "Was I that stupid and senile?" (1349) and admits *αἰσχύνομαί τοι ταῖς πρότερον ἀμαρτίαις* "You know, I'm really ashamed of my former errors" (1355). This all seems to negate Demos' earlier claims of feigning incompetence. Sommerstein attempts to reconcile this apparent inconsistency by explaining Aristophanes' purpose:

Perhaps this may be meant to suggest that the Athenian people gets the political leaders it deserves. If it is stupid and selfish, its politicians will likely be selfish and will prey on its stupidity. If it recovers its wits, its

understanding of what are its true interests (1350-3), and the habit of honest dealing (1366-71), its politicians will have no choice but to be honest and to seek the public good. Typically, however, Aristophanes takes pains to avoid any imputation of denigrating the ordinary man: the stupidity and selfishness of Demos are not inherent in his nature, but are the result of senility, of which politicians make calculating use.³⁹⁹

Dover, on the other hand, considers this inconsistency a flaw. If Aristophanes' purpose in this play was 1) to satirize Athenian politics, 2) to exalt the basic good sense of the Athenian people, and 3) to take revenge on Kleon, and if he was aiming for irony and despair, Dover insists that,

he marred his own intention by the lyric interchange between the chorus and Demos in 1111-1150, where Demos, reproached for being too easily flattered and misled, declares that he knows very well what is going on [Furthermore] his boast is not really in keeping with his shame and shock when he is told (1335-1355) of his follies. . . .⁴⁰⁰

But even Dover gives Aristophanes some latitude by explaining:

³⁹⁹Ibid. 3.

⁴⁰⁰Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, 98.

contradictions must appear--in Aristophanes' time, in Demosthenes' or in ours--when we try to push to extremes *both* satire on the style of democratic politics *and* an expression of faith in the intelligence and integrity of ordinary people.⁴⁰¹

A more clearly consistent example of the *eiron* figure of ancient comedy appears in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. This play was written in 411 after several disastrous events: the war had been resumed, Athens' fleet had been destroyed, the empire was in revolt, and the Spartan army was occupying part of Attica itself. The glory of war was beginning to fade, for not only was the hope of victory gone, but even the possibility of an honorable peace was gone and the situation desperate. "*Lysistrata* concurs with Aristophanes' other briefs for peace, *The Acharnians* and *The Peace*, in its basically hedonistic approach: To the discomforts of war are opposed the joys of fulfilled desire."⁴⁰² *Lysistrata* has devised a plan to cease hostilities: let the women refuse to lie with their husbands until the men agree to peace.

As the character of *Lysistrata* effects her plan for peace, she acts as an *eiron*. It will not be difficult for her to feign incompetence and thereby catch her opponents off guard: she is assumed incompetent because she is female. The typical Athenian male assumption of female inferiority is quite explicitly expressed at the beginning of the play

⁴⁰¹Ibid. 98-9.

⁴⁰²D. Parker, trans., *Lysistrata by Aristophanes* (1964; reprint, New York, 1970), 8.

by Lysistrata and Kleonike: the women are considered by the men to be *πανούργοι* "ready to do anything wicked" (12). Thus the character of Lysistrata conforms to the first characteristic of the *ieron*; her incompetence and inferiority is assumed in her male-dominated society.

The second of Cornford's characteristics of the *ieron*, the character being outside the normal values, is fulfilled in the behavior of Lysistrata as she works for peace. Contrary to the normal values of Athenian society, Lysistrata will confound the males and catch them off guard with her masculine-like behavior. She will be bold, assertive, demanding, all contrary to the expected conduct of the Athenian wife.⁴⁰³ She is the one who concocts this plan for peace (26). She is the one who puts the plan into action by calling a meeting of the women (13). She is the one who convinces the reluctant women to forgo sex for peace (124f.). She is the one who leads the women in the capture of the Athenian treasury (430f.). When trouble with the women erupts (*βινητιώμεν* "we want to get laid!"), she convinces them to stay the course (715f.). And finally, Lysistrata is the one who oversees the peace negotiations between the Spartan and Athenian men (1112f.).

The last of the characteristics of *eironeia* to be fulfilled is the taking advantage of others. Lysistrata definitely takes advantage of the men's "condition" (priapism) to achieve her goal of peace. Though the men want to pursue the war, Lysistrata's plot to

⁴⁰³Cf. Thucydides 2.45.2 where Perikles declares that the greatest glory of women is not even to be spoken of, either for praise or blame: *τῆς τε γὰρ ὑπαρχούσης φύσεως μὴ χείροσι γενέσθαι ὑμῖν μεγάλη ἢ δόξα, καὶ ἥς ἂν ἐπ' ἐλάχιστον ἀρετῆς πέρι ἢ ψόγου ἐν τοῖς ἄρσεσι κλέος ἦ.*

deprive the warriors of their conjugal rights has afforded them no choice. The painful erections will not be satisfied by their wives until the peace treaty is concluded. The Spartans have sent a herald to seek peace negotiations. The herald arrives in the painful condition and has no trouble finding agreement with the proboulos—who is also in that painful condition—that a peace settlement must be arranged immediately (980f.).

Lysistrata thus satisfies all three of Cornford's elements of *eironeia*: 1) she appears incompetent and 2) stands outside the normal values of her society, 3) while she takes advantage of others. She is a classic *iron* or trickster/rogue.

In a further test of Cornford's three characteristics of the *iron* of ancient comedy, we shall now examine the character of Dicaeopolis in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*. With respect to the first of Cornford's prescriptions, Dicaeopolis certainly does feign incompetence as he attempts to win the chorus over to his side. The chorus of charcoal-burners from Archarnae, who have suffered much from the war with the Peloponnesians, are very angry with Dicaeopolis, calling him a traitor because he acquired a private peace treaty with the Spartans. He avoids a stoning by threatening to kill a basket of charcoal (325f.)⁴⁰⁴ and convinces the chorus of Acharnians to hear him out. In order to make himself seem more humble than he is and to elicit their sympathy for his speech, Dicaeopolis first borrows some rags of a costume from Euripides that allow him to

⁴⁰⁴Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, apprises us that this threat to the charcoal is Aristophanes' "parody of Euripides' *Telephus*, in which Telephus secured a hearing by seizing the infant son of Agamemnon as a hostage" (79).

appear to be a poor beggar (410f.).⁴⁰⁵ Now dressed as a beggar, Dicaeopolis blames the war not on the Athenian people but a few corrupt men who banned goods from Megara. He basically argues that some Athenian youths stole a whore from Megara, and the Megarians reciprocated by stealing two whores of Aspasia. The Athenians retaliated for this act by blockading Megara, cutting them off from trade and causing starvation in Megara. The Megarians then appealed to Sparta and the war resulted. After he rhetorically asks the chorus what they would do if the Spartans had even stolen a mangy dog and replies they would go to war of course, Dicaeopolis concludes by saying the Spartans only did what the Athenians themselves would have done. This charade in beggar's clothing convinces half the chorus. So by appearing to be an incompetent beggar, Dicaeopolis was able to catch half the Acharnians off guard, and they are convinced by his argument that he was right to seek peace.

Dicaeopolis continues to play the *eirōn* by pretending to be less than he is during a debate with Lamachus which he hopes will convince the other half of the chorus that he was right to seek peace (572f.). He continues to play the incompetent, self-effacing beggar with Lamachus when he says (578-9): ὦ Λάμαχ' ἦρωες, ἀλλὰ συγγνώμην ἔχει, εἰ πτωχὸς ὢν εἰπὼν τι κάστωμυλάμην "Major, Sir, a genuine hero like you will certainly pardon a poor old beggarman for tripping over his tongue once or twice. Please?"⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵According to Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, this donning of rags is another parody of Euripides's *Telephus* (80).

⁴⁰⁶This and all other English translations of the *Acharnians* are those of Parker.

He certainly seems to be outside normal values, the second of Cornford's prescriptions, in his self-centered actions when he does acquire peace. For instance, as soon as he acquires his peace he establishes a market that will do business with Athens' enemies. Both of these actions are traitorous, but Dicaeopolis is merely concerned about himself. His first customer is from Megara, an ally of Sparta. This wretched man is so poverty-stricken and starving from the war that he sells his daughters in the guise of pigs to Dicaeopolis.⁴⁰⁷ Dicaeopolis buys the little girls in exchange for a bunch of garlic and some salt (813-4).⁴⁰⁸

Next when an informer declares the "pigs" contraband and attempts to confiscate them, Dicaeopolis ignores the law and chases him off (828f.), not to help the Megarian or his daughters, but because he wishes to buy them.

When Dicaeopolis and a Theban (another enemy of Athens with whom he is doing business) are having difficulty finding anything uniquely Athenian that Dicaeopolis can trade the Theban for his wares, Dicaeopolis says, "How about an informer?" The Theban is delighted; they have no informers in Thebes, and λάβοιμι μένταν κέρδος

⁴⁰⁷As Parker, *Acharnians*, remarks in his notes: "The subsequent scene depends for most of its effect on a basic pun: The word *choiros* means 'pig' and is slang for the female genitalia" (104). J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse* (New Haven, 1975), adds, "Like Lat. *porcus* or *porcellus*, *χοῖρος* indicates the pink, hairless cunt of young girls as opposed to that of mature women . . ." (131). Spatz, *Aristophanes*, points out that the outrageousness of a man selling his two daughters as sacrificial piglets "transforms the Megarian's desperation into comedy," and the pun involved in the word *choiros* "associates peace with good food and sex" (36).

⁴⁰⁸Hubbard, *The Mask of Comedy*, recognizes Dicaeopolis' *eironeia* in this scene: "Though most Aristophanic heroes are basically *alazōns* who presume to a station higher than is properly theirs, they also have moments of *eirōneia*; one thinks, for instance, of Dicaeopolis pretending to be hoodwinked by the Megarian's disguised 'piggies'" (6).

ἀγαγὼν καὶ πολὺ, ἔπερ πίθακον ἀλιτρίας πολλᾶς πλέων "One could simply make pots of money, what? We don't have any of *them!* Thebes would be *wild* to see a monkey like that, just full of devilry!" (906-7). So when another informer comes along and declares the Theban's "alien lampwick" for sale is contraband, Dicaeopolis wraps the informer up like a piece of pottery and trades him to the Theban.

Dicaeopolis also stands outside normal values in his self-centered refusal to share the peace with anyone. A poor blind farmer begs him for just a dab of peace; Dicaeopolis refuses. Next a member of a groom's party begs him for just a little peace so that the groom can avoid military service to enjoy his new bride. Again Dicaeopolis refuses.⁴⁰⁹ These two men "represent a society ready to renounce war."⁴¹⁰

Finally, Dicaeopolis completes the third of Cornford's characteristics of *eironeia* by his taking advantage of others. One example of taking advantage of others occurs in his dealings with the Theban. He takes a large Boeotian eel and begins to cook it for himself. When the Theban protests that it is the usual thing to get paid for merchandise, Dicaeopolis refuses to pay and replies ἀγορᾶς τέλος ταύτην γέ που δώσεις ἐμοί "An eel to seal our dealings--and pay for your license to sell" (896). His other business deals

⁴⁰⁹Oddly enough, Dicaeopolis does give in when the Maid of Honor asks for some peace on behalf of the bride. Dicaeopolis says, φέρε δεῦρο τὰς σπονδάς, ἴν' αὐτῇ δῶ μόνῃ. ὅτιῃ γυνή 'στι τοῦ πολέμου τ' οὐκ ἀξία "Bring out the Peace! I'll do it. For her. *Just her.* She's only a woman. And you don't make war on women" (1061-2). Spatz, *Aristophanes*, explains this change of heart: "The fact that Dicaeopolis shares his peace with the bridegroom who had been drafted symbolizes the triumph of the life-force celebrated in comedy. When he prescribes how the bride should apply the balm, he connects peace with Phales, and, thus, with Dionysus himself" (37).

⁴¹⁰*Ibid.*, 37.

are just as profitable for him: the two "pigs" for some garlic and salt, and all the Theban's produce for an informer.

Thus we find confirmed in Aristophanic comedy the characteristics of the second of Aristotle's comic characters as described by Cornford. As demonstrated by the actions of Demos, *Lysistrata*, and *Dicaeopolis* when they act as *eirons*, the *iron* of ancient comedy is one who (1) feigns incompetence or weakness or "masks his batteries of deceit behind a show of ordinary good nature"⁴¹¹, (2) stands outside the normal values, and (3) takes advantage of others. Armed with this model of *eironeia* we may now analyze the character of Paris. Can Paris be described as a *phaulos* "base" character who commits the kind of acts that Aristotle prescribes for a comic character, as well as one whose baseness conforms to the characteristics of the *iron* as prescribed by Aristotle and Cornford?

To begin with, the general baseness of Paris is normally conceded. Scott emphasizes the moral baseness of Paris.⁴¹² Reece makes the point that the diction used to describe Paris reinforces his baseness: "They [the suitors] are described as 'sinners' (*ἀλείται* 20.121), a word used by Homer only of the suitors and of Paris (*Il.* 3.28), another notorious violator of hospitality, who stole his host's wife while a guest in his house."⁴¹³ As Finley remarks, Paris "is both a contemptible, unheroic coward and a

⁴¹¹Cornford, *Attic Comedy*, 137.

⁴¹²Scott, "Paris and Hector": 165.

⁴¹³Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome*, 173.

true hero;⁴¹⁴ i.e., Paris has capabilities far beyond those he often displays to others. For instance, Scott reminds us that Paris, despite his loss to Menelaus, is no coward and no weakling:

This is shown by the fact that he and not Hector determined the decision of the assembly, and by the following minute details: Paris was a leader of one of the great divisions of the Trojans (M 93). When Aeneas was hard-pressed by the Greeks he called for help, "trying to fix his eye on Paris" (N 490). In the very thick of the fight when Hector moves along the portions most engaged he finds Paris . . . Paris is the only Trojan to wound a Greek of the first rank who is not himself slain. Euphorbus and Hector who caused the death of Patroclus, Pandarus who wounded Diomedes, Coon who pierced Agamemnon, and Socus who thrust Odysseus paid for their brief glory with their lives; while Paris, without divine aid, wounded Diomedes, Machaon, and Eurypylus, slew Euchenor, Menesthius, and Deiochus; yet Paris escaped. His greatness in Homer is of a piece with the *Cypria*,

⁴¹⁴Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, 40.

*Aethiopsis, and Ilias Parva.*⁴¹⁵

Since even Hector declares that Paris ἐκῶν "willingly" (6.523) does not go to war when he refuses to do so (as opposed to being just too cowardly to go to war), he may not be as incompetent and weak as one might assume from many of his cowardly actions.

In fact, an examination of the action of Paris reveals that he not only fits the general description of a comic character by his *phaulos* nature, but even conforms to Cornford's characterization of *eironeia*. For instance, Paris does exhibit behavior that corresponds to Cornford's first prescription for the *eiros*: "masking his batteries of deceit behind a show of ordinary good nature." For example, Paris' attempts to put forward a good face to Hector when he rebukes him though his sincerity surely could be called into question by his subsequent actions. At *Iliad* 3.38ff. Hector rebukes Paris for cowardice before Menelaus. First, to placate Hector, Paris begins by telling him, "You're right!" (κατ' αἴσιαν ἐνεΐκεσας "you chide me duly") (3.59), as if he suddenly has been converted to the heroic code of Hector.

Secondly, Paris endeavors to mollify his brother further by justifying his erotic preoccupations. He advises Hector μή μοι δῶρ' ἐρατὰ πρόφερε χρυσέης Ἀφροδίτης "never to be cast away are the gifts of golden Aphrodite" (64), as if they were to be awarded the same respect as the gifts of Ares even by this great warrior and defender of

⁴¹⁵Scott, "Paris and Hector": 164-5. In order to make his point, though, Scott fails to mention other appearances of Paris in the *Iliad* besides the duel with Menelaus and the wounding of Diomedes in the foot in which he is not exactly at the forefront of battle: his shooting of Nestor's horse in the foot (8.82) and his being "to the left of the sorrowful battle . . . encouraging his companions and urging them on into battle" (13.765-6).

Troy, despite the fact that it is precisely his "gifts of Aphrodite" that have caused this war in the first place.

Thirdly, Paris agreeably offers to acquiesce to his brother's demand to fight Menelaus. It will be a "winner-takes-all" contest (72), and both sides must swear to friendship (73). Paris seems to think that all the suffering and dying over the last nine years can thus be forgiven and forgotten with one contest between himself and Menelaus. All should be forgiven, though up to this point he has ignored all the pain and suffering he has brought upon his own family as well as the Trojan and Greek peoples.

The sincerity of Paris seems to be merely a mask he wore for Hector in light of his subsequent action. Indeed, upon his loss to Menelaus, he hides in his bedroom engaging in sex with the very woman he had agreed to give up (3.421ff.), hardly an honorable mode of behavior following his professions to his brother. That is, he wilfully contradicts the impression he gave Hector.

Another example of Paris' attempts to show an ordinary good nature that complies with the values of his brother is his response to Hector's rebuke at 6.312ff. Hector asks Paris why in the world he is sitting in the house playing with his weapons while there is a war to fight. Paris begins his response with the exact words he used at 3.59 to answer another of Hector's rebukes: "You're right!" (κατ' αἴσῳ ἐνεΐκεσας "you chide me duly") (6.333). In putting the best face forward, Paris indicates that he was just about to go back to the fray. In fact, Helen was just now urging him to do so (337-8), and he himself deemed to do it (338-9). This *iron* is obviously not having much success with "masking his batteries of deceit" this time since Hector's response to Paris' excuses

is silence (342). Hector no doubt is weary with Paris' deceit behind his show of good natured acceptance of the heroic code that only seems to appear with chastisements.⁴¹⁶

The second of Cornford's prescriptions for *eironeia* is fulfilled by Paris also, since he definitely stands outside the normal values of his society of heroic warriors. The anti-heroic, tragicomic, and erotic nature of this Trojan prince has been a source of confusion, frustration and embarrassment to scholars in the past who seem to resent the appearance of this erotic figure in a serious military epic.⁴¹⁷ Achilles, Odysseus, Hector and other heroes on both sides of this war display great courage, superior martial skills, and rhetorical ability (that is, they are "doers of deeds and speakers of words"). Paris, on the other hand, seems to respond to something other than the heroic code that motivates these great heroes.⁴¹⁸ Rather than anxious for glory in war, Paris is

⁴¹⁶There is an alternative interpretation of Paris' actions here. Owen, *Story of the Iliad*, sums it up quite well: "[Paris] feels only what touches himself, and that only while it touches him; incapable of sustained resentment through the same lack of imagination which permits him to watch his city suffer for his sake without a genuine qualm of remorse, he lives from moment to moment as a child does, taking the good the gods provide him and dodging the momentary evil, himself and his immediate mood the boundary of his world" (31). Although one can point to the silly, playful Paris, who laughs like a child who has scored his first home run when he wounds Diomedes in the foot (11.385ff.), both this passage and the passage of the seduction of Helen (see below) provide evidence of Paris' cunning and deceit. In both instances, his actions or the circumstances contradict the claims of Paris.

⁴¹⁷See, for example, Scott, "Paris and Hector": 160-71.

⁴¹⁸As H. Clarke, "The Humor of Homer," *Classical Journal* 64 (1969), comments: "What Paris lacks is the spiritual component of heroism, that prickly pride that informs and exalts the Bronze Age warriors that crowd Homer's poems. Whereas the typical hero finds in battle the opportunity to excel, to surpass himself, to discover in heroism a temporary but glorious transcendence, Paris' view, as he tells Hector at the end of book XIII, is that man is *limited* and cannot exceed his own strength, no matter how much he wants to" (248).

γυναιμανές "mad after women (3.35)." Rather than great courage and fortitude in battle, Paris has no βίη "strength" in his heart nor any ἀλκή "courage" (3.45). Collins sums up the anti-heroic character of Paris rather concisely:

With no *biē* (11.390; 3.45) he must occupy himself with overcoming women by seduction (*ēperopeuta*, 3.39, 13.769). He is, like a woman, *eidōs aristos, promōs* for beauty rather than strength (3.43-45; 3.39; cf. 3.124, etc.). As a lyricist and dancer (24.261; 3.54; 11.385), he is preferred by Aphrodite to the warrior (3.392-94). His erotic orientation is conceived as a contradiction of his manhood and sanity: he is afflicted with the weak wits of a child or woman (11.389); susceptible to delusion or madness which, in the form of *atē*, made him praise Aphrodite and pursue Helen (6.356; 24.28-30); his valorization of sex over warfare is a kind of madness (3.39). Paradoxically, his unwarlike erotic ethic is the cause of the war (3.46ff.; 22.114-16) and as such has earned for Paris his value, in the *Iliad's* warrior ethical system, of *lōbē*, outrage (3.42).⁴¹⁹

Indeed, as Bowra points out, the very fact that he is an archer means that he is not

⁴¹⁹Collins, "The Wrath of Paris": 230.

regarded as a warrior in the full sense.⁴²⁰ When Paris wounds Diomedes in the foot with an arrow (11.385f.), Diomedes taunts him with accusations of fighting like a child or a woman, not a real warrior. Diomedes boasts that when he strikes men their wives become widows and their children fatherless while they themselves become food for birds.

Finally, Paris also conforms quite well to Cornford's third prescription for the *iron*: he takes advantage of others. His relationships with women are a good example of actions that mark him as an *iron* "trickster/rogue."⁴²¹ As Hector points out, Paris tricks and seduces women. After his unsuccessful duel with Menelaus, Helen reproaches Paris with a reminder of this deceit⁴²²:

⁴²⁰C. M. Bowra, *Homer* (London, 1972), 114. Scott, "Paris and Hector," disagrees: "Paris was an archer, but that was not disgrace, despite the angry words of the wounded Diomedes. A people who regarded the ambush as the place of greatest honor (A 257) and a tradition which gave glory to such archers as Teucer and Philoctetes, or made the bow of Heracles his greatest possession and the bow of Odysseus the arbiter of marriage--these could not have considered archery a source of infamy" (165). Owen, *Story of the Iliad*, reminds us of the damage Paris is able to do with the bow, first causing Diomedes ("despite his scorn of his wound") to be disabled and to retire from battle, and then wounding Machaon and Eurypylus with his "potent bow" (113). On the other hand, in the *Iliad* it is man-to-man combat that is the norm of the hero, and in the context of the *Iliad* I would agree with Bowra that the archer does not seem to be the ideal warrior.

⁴²¹K. G. Williams, "Heroic Archetypes in the Comedies of Aristophanes and Later Playwrights" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1983), describes Paris' character rather well in her synopsis of the "trickster": "A Trickster type of protagonist will have a relatively infantile psyche. . . . Basic instincts will provide his motivation, and his power of action will be small or wasted on direct gratification of his desires" (3).

⁴²²Some may wish to dispute the interpretation here of the deceit of Helen. There are passages in the *Iliad* that appear to contradict this view, for instance, 3.173 ff. where Helen seems to suggest that she deserted her home, her daughter, and her people to follow Paris, and 3.136 ff. where the Achaeans and Trojans have agreed that Menelaus and Paris will fight a duel and the winner gets Helen, arrangements that ignore Helen's

ἡ μὲν δὴ πρὶν γ' εὐχε' ἀρηϊφίλου Μενελάου
 σῆ τε βίη καὶ χερσὶ καὶ ἔγχεϊ φέρτερος εἶναι.

There was a time before now you boasted that you were better
 than warlike Menelaos, in spear and hand and your own strength.

(3.430-1)

But this reproach does not bother the great deceiver/seducer. After explaining away his cowardice and defeat in the duel with Menelaus by telling Helen that Menelaus had a god on his side (a claim not supported by the narrator--thus his deception of Helen), he is successful again in seducing Helen into his bed (3.447):

He says, in effect, "Helen, you're so sexy when you get

rights as a human being and treat her as a lifeless object whom they need not consult. Yet there are passages (particularly 3.443 ff. where Paris uses the word ἀρπάζας "snatched" or "abducted") that indicate she was carried off. J. T. Kakridis, *Homer Revisited* (Lund, 1971), observes: "Contrary to the general picture of the repentant guilty woman, as she characterizes herself, there are other passages where she is spoken of as an innocent woman who weeps in distress because she was taken away from her kinsfolk, and finally there are other passages which present her as a *res*, without feelings whatever" (27). Kakridis explains the apparent contradictions by submitting that these three pictures of Helen--"the lifeless doll, the grieved innocent woman, the repentant guilty wife"--represent various stages of the myth of Helen. "Most probably it was Homer who first integrated the image of the heroine by giving her such a strong personality. But it seems that even the last stage of the myth--that of the guilty woman--had already been formulated in pre-Homeric poetry. Homer used the two first stages every time he needed a more innocent Helen" (31). It is the stage of the grieved innocent woman that I see Homer using effectively here. In 3.39 Hector has called Paris εἶδος ἄριστε, γυναιμανές, ἠπεροπευτά "handsome," "woman-crazy," "deceiver" and wishes Paris had never been born because he who has caused this war by bringing Helen to Troy now runs from her husband like a coward. The gifts of Aphrodite helped him deceive and carry off Helen but they will not help him when he lies in the dust. Helen refers to the deception of Aphrodite in 3.399 and complains that Paris is not the man he boasted he was in 3.430-1. But Paris deceives her saying that Menelaus defeated him because he had a god (Athena) on his side (which is contrary to the evidence of the narrator) and is able to seduce her still again (3.438 ff.).

mad. Kiss me." When Helen then trails meekly off to bed with him, we are reminded that Paris has his own special kind of heroism that is quite at variance with the simple warrior ideals of the *Iliad's* society.⁴²³

The worst example of taking advantage of others, though, is his willingness to let Trojans die while he refuses to return Helen and seems to have to be coerced into fighting the Greeks himself.

Thus characteristics of Paris have demonstrated his conformity to Aristotle's prescriptions for the comic (*phaulos* "ignoble," "base") character in general and Cornford's prescriptions for an *eiron* in particular.⁴²⁴ It only remains to be determined whether this mostly *phaulos* character Paris is engaging in action below the norm that evokes *nemeses* and *tharsos* so that his appearances in the *Iliad* may be deemed comic.

In the first major scene involving Paris (3.15-461), the Achaeans and Trojans are lined up for battle when Paris begins challenging all the best of them to fight him man to man. He is weighed down not only with more weapons than he can possibly use, including a bow, a sword and a javelin in each hand, but he is also decked out with a

⁴²³Clarke, "Humor of Homer": 247.

⁴²⁴As indicated in chapter 2, comic characters rarely appear in pure form, and, in fact, Paris is no exception. For although we have examined him as an *eiron*, Paris demonstrates characteristics of the *alazon* as well. Paris' *alazon* "imposter" nature is evident in his boast to Helen that he is a better man than Menelaus. Furthermore, he is not the typical Homeric hero motivated by honor to engage in life-threatening battle; this is especially evident in light of his actions on the field of battle when 1) he appears on the battle field in a leopard-skin rather than the proper armor and loaded down with more weapons than he could possibly use, and 2) when he runs from a direct confrontation with Menelaus and has to be shamed into the duel by Hector.

leopard hide across his shoulders: no doubt impressive garb for the sexiest man in Troy, but hardly functional. Then when Menelaus, the very man whom Paris dishonored by taking off with his wife, answers the challenge, Paris shrinks back into the Trojans and hides from him. Homer emphasizes the sheer terror of Paris at the sight of Menelaus with a simile comparing Paris' reaction to that of a man who has just stepped on a snake whose body shivers and whose cheeks turn green with fear. Hector, Paris' brother and the great warrior of Troy, cannot believe his eyes. He scolds Paris, calling him "evil Paris, beautiful, woman-crazy, cheat," and wishes Paris had never been born because the Achaeans surely *καγχαλόωσι* "are laughing" at them now. Paris has no defense; even he realizes he has acted badly. Moved in some fashion by his brother's remarks, Paris offers to meet Menelaus on the battlefield. Menelaus accepts the challenge, and the warriors on both sides prepare for the duel. In regard to Paris' arming scene,⁴²⁵ Reece notes:

The scene of Paris' arming in the *Iliad*, for example, is short and perfunctory, containing just the skeleton of the arming type-scene, and thereby suggesting Paris' relative unimportance as a warrior on the battle field. This is in

⁴²⁵Concerning Paris' arming scene in this passage, Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad*, observes: "[T]he single note of elaboration is the note that the corselet he puts on belonged to his brother Lycaon. This is not simply padding, but a reminder that Paris is normally an archer who needs no heavy defensive armor; in fact the poet has mentioned specifically at Paris's first entrance that he is wearing a leopard skin in place of armor (3.17)" (72). Furthermore, Edwards apprises his readers that Homer has a "way of using occurrences of a type-scene, or part of one, for different purposes" (76). Paris' arming scene in this passage illustrates this very point. See below on Paris in book 6 where the purpose and significance of this type-scene is discussed.

sharp contrast to the fully developed arming scenes of Agamemnon and Achilles, which are elaborated with extended descriptions of the armour. . . .⁴²⁶

Meanwhile Homer creates interest and suspense by postponing his narration of the duel. Iris, the messenger of the gods, appears to Helen in the form of one of Priam's daughters and informs her of the impending fight between her lover and husband. Homer inserts the *τειχοσκοπία* "watching from the walls" at this point to introduce Priam and the major Greek players in the war; for when Helen reaches the walls of Troy to peer at the conflict below, Priam asks her about the Greek warriors he sees on the battlefield below. Homer's audience also begins to become acquainted with the character of Helen. "The passage has become a *locus classicus* of the right way to describe beauty, *i.e.* by its effect."⁴²⁷ Homer describes not the physical characteristics of Helen, but only the reaction of these old men to her beauty. The fact that even these old men, whose sons and comrades are dying on account of this woman, can feel that war over such a beautiful woman is understandable paints a picture of the beauty of Helen more than any detailed physical description could ever do.

The fact that Helen deprecates herself for being the cause of so much suffering causes the audience to sympathize with her, a fact that magnifies the shame and culpability of Paris. Both are guilty of shameful deeds that have resulted in pain and

⁴²⁶Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome*, 193.

⁴²⁷Owen, *Story of the Iliad*, 32.

suffering for others. Helen recognizes her shame⁴²⁸ and seems to experience even more shame at her inability to resist the sexual charms of Paris. Paris, on the other hand, seems not to appreciate the horror and suffering his action has caused both Trojans and Greeks. The *nemesan* "indignation" of the audience, therefore, is increased against this *phaulos* "ignoble" character even through the psychic dilemmas of Helen.

After the proper sacrifices and oaths were completed, lots were thrown to decide who should cast the first spear. Paris wins and casts the first spear at Menelaus unsuccessfully. Menelaus' spear also fails to strike the body of Paris. Further frustrated by the breaking of his sword on Paris' helmet, Menelaus grabs Paris by the helmet and begins to drag him toward the Achaeans. But before he can kill this man who abused his hospitality and stole his wife, the goddess Aphrodite causes the strap of the helmet to break and whisks Paris off to his own bedchamber. Then, appearing to Helen in the

⁴²⁸In a shame-culture, Helen could feel at fault whether any culpability was hers or not. "Homeric man's highest good is not the enjoyment of a quiet conscience, but the enjoyment of *tīmē*, public esteem: 'Why should I fight,' asks Achilles, 'if the good fighter receives no more *τιμή* than the bad?' And the strongest moral force which Homeric man knows is not the fear of god, but respect for public opinion, *aidōs*: *αἰδέομαι Τρῶας*, says Hector at the crisis of his fate, and goes with open eyes to his death. . . . In such a society, anything which exposes a man to the contempt or ridicule of his fellows, which causes him to 'lose face,' is felt as unbearable" [E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), 17-8]. Helen, as the "wife" of Paris and the cause of the Greek attack on Troy, obviously does feel the shame, the indignation of the Trojans against her and Paris. In *Iliad* 6.350 she even complains that Paris does not feel the shame of this indignation of his compatriots.

Another clue to Helen's feeling of shame without culpability could be the "battered woman syndrome." It seems to be typical for a woman in an abusive situation to assume some guilt for the abuse she receives, whether she is guilty or not [L. B. Alloy, J. Acocella, and R. R. Bootzin, *Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspectives* (1972; reprint, New York, 1996), 526]. Maybe Homer has observed the behavior of women in this sort of situation who accepted blame for their dilemma whether it was deserved or not. Shame and guilt often are experienced by members of an offender's family.

form of an old woman, Aphrodite declares that Paris wants her to come to him. After some resistance, Helen greets Paris with words of rebuke. Paris ignores her maligning of his manhood, argues that on another day the gods will be on his side and he will win, and proclaims his desire for her. Helen does succumb to the wiles of Paris, and they end up making love while Menelaus wanders around outside the walls of Troy looking for this strange man.

Whether these actions of Paris provide examples of Homeric comic technique is debatable. Clarke thinks so⁴²⁹, while Edwards takes the middle ground: "The situation may be outrageous or humorous, depending on the observer's outlook."⁴³⁰ Clader also equivocates: "[T]he tone of his anger and refusal to fight is quite serious, while the tone of this scene is close to comic--tragicomic, perhaps, if one considers the enormity of the battle outside contrasted with the folly within the house."⁴³¹ Suter, on the other hand, has "serious doubts about the intrinsic comicality of Paris in the *Iliad*."⁴³² She records the similarities between Paris and Thersites, another *alazon*. They both are a cause of ἔρις "strife," Paris by abducting Helen and Thersites by rebuking Agamemnon for his action against Achilles and then the Achaeans for putting up with Agamemnon. They are both objects of laughter by the Achaeans.

⁴²⁹Clarke, "The Humor of Homer": 247.

⁴³⁰Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad*, 76.

⁴³¹Clader, *Helen*, 15-16.

⁴³²Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," 11. She also presents a slightly different slant on Paris' action: "Paris . . . leaves the battlefield for Helen . . . suggesting by this the possibility of a new kind of hero, one who wins his κλέος not in an epic war, but in another genre with another ethic, because of love" (139).

Paris is an object of abuse, as Suter points out. When others address Paris, they often speak *νεικείων αἰσχροῖσι ἐπέεσσι* "reproaching with shameful words."⁴³³ The epithet *λωβητήρ* "the abuser," the one who is blamed and blames others, is shared by Paris with Thersites. In addition to the shared diction, Paris and Thersites share a common narrative pattern:

[T]he first figure blames someone; in turn, he, the blamer, becomes the blamed when figure two reacts by blaming figure one; mutual blaming results in conflict between figures one and two; the conflict is the occasion for laughter for those who are watching, who approve it.⁴³⁴

Although Suter's analysis does point out some salient parallels between Thersites and Paris and she does make a persuasive case for a tradition of blame poetry behind Thersites and Paris,⁴³⁵ does this mean that in Homeric *epos* these figures could not already be transformed from merely blame figures to comic figures? Suter does not in fact seem to feel it necessary to present any cogent refutation of the comicality that many observers of Paris' actions perceive. On the contrary, she seems to assume that diction surrounding Paris which is parallel to invective automatically removes the comic potential

⁴³³Ibid., 93.

⁴³⁴Ibid., 97.

⁴³⁵Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," argues that "Paris seems to be, by general account, an object of blame, even when blameless; even when blameless, he is 'such a person.' This scapegoat role suggests the other possible source for the figure who brought with him these epithets into the *Iliad*: the tradition of blame poetry known as *iambos*" (93). See also, Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, 253f.

of this character. But could not the parallels be explained by the fact that *iambos* and comedy both derived from an earlier form of blame poetry, and therefore a comic character would naturally share diction with invective? The whole argument of an earlier tradition of blame poetry is that it precedes, and therefore represents an earlier stage in, the development of comedy by providing *phaulos* characters whose potential for comedy could be realized by presenting them as performing action below the norm that has no painful or harmful effects (and therefore action which evokes the comic emotions of *νεμεσᾶν* "indignation" and *θάρασος* "confidence"). Do Paris' actions keep him in the *iambos* tradition, or do they push him into the realm of the comic?

Despite Suter's denial of Paris' comicality, I submit that Paris' actions do fit Aristotle's prescription for comic action. As far as the scene of the duel is concerned, Homer obviously expects his audience at least to smile at the picture he has painted of the great lover who is oblivious to the fact that he has made a fool of himself in front of both his own comrades and the enemy. This over-dressed, conceited fellow who was the cause of the war in the first place and who runs at the sight of the man he wronged is obviously *φαῦλος* "ignoble," a flawed character acting below the norm with this act of cowardice. This sort of humorous character acting in this undignified manner that really results in no actual pain or harmful effects is universally comic. As Meltzer puts it: "Part of the comic effect of the duel stems from the fact that, aside from the wound to the Greek chief's pride, no one gets hurt and nothing is decided in a combat which was to be decisive."⁴³⁶ Golden recognizes the conformity of this episode to an Aristotelian

⁴³⁶Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives": 273.

prescription for comedy: "For when a pretense at heroics turns into a frightened (but successful) run for one's life, we have an example of spiritual ugliness without pain, τὸ γελοῖον, which precisely meets the Aristotelian criterion for comedy."⁴³⁷

Paris is acting below the norm of his society in rejecting those very norms in regard to which even Helen feels obligated to acknowledge shame for her aberrant behavior. Hector just does not understand someone who does not adhere to his set of values, someone like Paris who has the physical abilities to be a hero but whom Hector admonishes: ἀλλὰ ἐκὼν μεθιείς τε καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλεις "But of your own accord you hang back, unwilling" (6.523). The contrast with the nobility of Hector and the shame of Helen can only exacerbate the *nemesian* Homer's audience already has experienced toward Paris.

In addition, Paris' actions also result in the evocation of *tharsos*. His base actions cause no immediate harmful effects for himself or Helen, and, in fact, lend themselves to good fortune for himself as his erotic *aristeia* allows him to seduce Helen. The audience realizes that even the *phaulos* Paris in the midst of a terrible war can still experience good fortune.⁴³⁸ Surely then, life could offer the possibility of good fortune for those whose actions fit within the norm. Indeed, most human beings, as they experience the action here, can probably recall good things happening during bad times,

⁴³⁷L. Golden, "τὸ γελοῖον in the *Iliad*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 93 (1990): 52.

⁴³⁸As Golden, "τὸ γελοῖον in the *Iliad*," notes: "[Paris] seduces Helen while temporarily ignoring the reality of the bloody war that is going on outside of his bedroom. His behavior is deemed inappropriate by Hektor and other Trojan leaders, but he is impervious to their anger and suffers no painful consequences for it" (52).

and the fact that those memories often sustain them when other bad times befall them. Therefore, this scene evokes the emotion of *tharsos* "confidence" that good fortune, not just tragedy, is part of the human condition. Thus the comic nexus of emotions (*nemesan* and *tharsos*) have been evoked in the audience, fulfilling the Aristotelian prescription for comedy.

As far as the integrity of this scene to the narrative unity of the poem, it has been said, "The single combat between Paris and Menelaus is here the episode that explains the past, advances the present, and motivates the future."⁴³⁹ Paris' initial flight from confrontation with Menelaus coupled with Hector's rebuke of his action recalls the past by bringing to the foreground the very cause of the Trojan War as Hector asks his brother if he also lacked courage when he sailed across the sea and carried Helen away and thus brought grief to his city and shame to himself (3.46-51).

We also see the current circumstances: Troy is besieged by men seeking revenge for a wrong, and men are dying on both sides while the perpetrator continues to do as he pleases. Paris agrees to a duel, but not so much in response to *αἰδώς* "shame" or *νέμεσις* "blame" as to the insistence of Hector. Homer also uses this occasion to introduce Helen and to contrast her own aberrance from the norms of society with Paris. She, at least, is self-deprecating; she feels shame at her behavior (3.410) while Paris is oblivious to the opinions of society. This contrast reinforces the condemnation of Paris that contrasts so well with the nobility of warriors such as Hector and Achilles.

Finally, the future is surely portended in the duel which foreshadows the duel

⁴³⁹Owen, *Story of the Iliad*, 28.

between Achilles and Hector, the beginning of the doom of Troy.⁴⁴⁰

This passage also contributes significantly to the overall thematic unity of the poem. Homer, in a particularly skillful manner, has emphasized Paris' flaw in character by contrasting him and his motives, not only with Helen's, but also with Hector's own character and motives. Thus Homer's comic technique has a serious purpose here too. Hector is an honorable defender of Troy who is fighting to defend his city, not his brother's guilt. His honor and nobility are thrown into stark contrast with his self-serving, self-centered, irresponsible brother.⁴⁴¹ By this contrast, the noble Hector is depicted as a worthy opponent of the Greek hero Achilles. Furthermore, this contrast has a purpose in the overall thematic development of the poem in respect to the doom of Troy:

⁴⁴⁰Cf. Owen, *Story of the Iliad*: "Paris symbolizes (*i.e.* conveys directly to the imagination) the certainty of Troy's fall . . ." (30).

⁴⁴¹Clader, *Helen*, comments: "Beginning with her longest, most hyperbolic, and most beautiful escape-metaphor, Helen voices her recognition of the emptiness of her relationship with Paris, wishing she was the wife of an *ἀνὴρ ἀμείνων*. Homer certainly intends his audience to think of Hektor as an example of what she wishes for, and the contrast between the two brothers grows stronger, until the scene between Hektor and Andromache presents the picture of a full, profound marriage in dramatic opposition to the patently shallow relationship of Helen and Paris" (16). The character of Paris falls so short of the heroic that some have proposed that since the tradition had provided him with no other leader of Troy, Homer had to invent one--the noble Hector. See J. A. Scott, "The Choice of Paris in Homer," *Classical Journal* 14 (1919): 329. Finley, *World of Odysseus*, on the other hand, finds Hector lacking when he defends his return to battle to Andromache: "There is no social conscience in these words, no trace of the Decalogue, no responsibility other than familial, no obligation to anyone or anything but one's own prowess and one's own drive to victory and power" (20). Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives," in contrast to Finley, lends his voice to praising Hector: "...Hector's brother Paris sets off Hector's central traits as a hero--not only his stalwart dedication to wife, family, and city, but also the vulnerabilities and contradictions which underlie that dedication" (272).

Paris symbolizes (i.e. conveys directly to the imagination) the certainty of Troy's fall; in a world of poetic justice a cause so based must fail; he and his guilt are the shadow of the coming doom, which we see deepening and drawing nearer in the immediately following books. Hector, we might say, in contrast embodies the tragedy of her fall, the thought of the noble, innocent, and happy lives involved in her destruction. But it is for the sake of Hector, not for the sake of Troy, that we are made to sympathize with the doomed city. Homer's thought is put absolutely at the service of his art. . . .⁴⁴²

Furthermore, "As Paris prefigures Troy's fate, so does this duel with Menelaus, with its comic aspects, find its tragic counterpart in Hector's final battle with Achilles."⁴⁴³

Besides these important examples of foreshadowing, we are confronted in this scene with the bi-polarity of Homer's picture of the world in the theme of love-war.

In other terms, Paris' withdrawal from battle shows that he values eros over *nikē* (3.439-46); it is as a figure of eros that Paris apologizes (3.59; 6.222) to the demands and reproaches of a *polemos*-oriented value system and is assigned an ethical attitude of inattention to *nemesis* and

⁴⁴²Owen, *Story of the Iliad*, 30-31.

⁴⁴³Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives": 274.

aidos. This opposition between *eros* and *polemos*, as well as their respective ethical identities, are larger than the characterization of Paris and run throughout the *Iliad*.⁴⁴⁴

As we shall see below, this opposition of love to war, of the unheroic value of *eros* to the heroic value of war,⁴⁴⁵ will be amplified with Paris' denial of a *χόλος* that would explain his withdrawal from battle in heroic terms matching those of Achilles.

In summary, the actions of Paris portray him in many ways as a comic character. He escapes without harm and so his ignoble action amuses Homer's audience as well as the Achaeans in the epic story. The audience has experienced *νεμεσᾶν* "indignation" by the ignoble action of Paris that results in his good fortune (surely anyone would consider a tryst with Helen "good fortune") rather than in a fall from happiness to misery that he deserves. The audience has also experienced *θάρσος* "confidence," in that an ignoble

⁴⁴⁴Collins, "The Wrath of Paris": 229. For example, Collins explains: "Zeus explicitly defines Aphrodite's expertise as the *erga gamoio* and opposes these to the *polemēia erga* which are, he says, the province of Ares and Athena (5.427-29). Diomedes, facing Aphrodite on the battle field, implies that Aphrodite, being an *analkis theos*, has dim prospects against him, while she will do well if she is happy to overcome *analkides* women by seduction (5.348-51). This is the way Helen also describes Aphrodite's technique and orientation, when she reproaches her for intervening on Paris' behalf in the duel: Aphrodite, *dolophroneousa*, is out to seduce (*ēperopeuein*) Helen, sabotaging Menelaus' right to her by *nikē* (3.399, 404-4-5)" (230-1). Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives," submits that ". . . Paris' defense of the gifts of Aphrodite (3.59-75) raise issues central to the heroic struggle. Their challenge allows the reader better to appreciate the difficulty, value, and poignancy of the tragic position" (266).

⁴⁴⁵Johnston, *The Ironies of War*, interprets the bipolar abstracts in the *Iliad* as indications of complexity and ambiguity in the Homeric depiction of the universe (6). In the case of Paris, though, Collins, "Wrath of Paris," sees the seemingly contradictory selective bravery of Paris on the battlefield as supportive of Homer's ultimate valuation of the heroic code: "Sporadic attempts at living up to the warrior ideal are certainly in keeping with Paris' ethical value in this poem which celebrates the warrior" (232).

character involved in inappropriate or incongruous action has escaped pain or harmful effects; thus they can be sure that they too could possibly experience a favorable outcome in their lives since they consider their actions at least equal to, if not above, the norm. Furthermore, as we have seen, this episode is not merely comic relief, but plays an integral part in furthering the narrative and thematic unity of the epic.

The second passage that seems to involve Paris in comic action are the scenes in book 6 that emphasize the anti-heroic nature of Paris by the usage of Homeric diction and action that is elsewhere associated with Achilles. In association with Achilles these elements emphasize his heroic character, but in association with Paris Homer has used them to emphasize his distance from the heroic code. Before analyzing these elements and their contribution to the thematic unity of the *Iliad*, these scenes will be tested by our comic model for their comicality.

Paris is brought to the foreground as Hector leaves the battle field searching for him. While the Trojans are dying on the battle field protecting the city, Paris, the cause of the war, is nowhere to be found. Hector wishes Paris was dead (6.284). When he does find Paris, he finds him ἔποντα "busy" with his περικαλλέα τεύχε' "splendid armor." This scene continues the contrast with the typical arming scene of the Homeric warrior that we saw in 3.330-8.⁴⁴⁶ For one thing, the bow is not the preferred weapon

⁴⁴⁶Already in book 3, Paris' main arming scene (330-8) contains detail that conveys his variance from the heroic code. Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 5, notes: "This is exemplified in the four major arming-scenes, those of Paris (see 3.330-8n.), Agamemnon (see 11.15-46n.), Patroklos (see 16.130-54n.), and Akhilleus (see 19.356-424n.). Paris is characterized as an archer, unused to the hand-to-hand battle he will face against Menelaos, by his need to borrow a corslet (3.333)...." (13). Our scene here confirms his characterization as an archer as he fondles his bow.

of the Homeric hero. Furthermore, the tense atmosphere of a warrior preparing for battle is absent: Paris is playing with his armor (maybe shining it up⁴⁴⁷) while Helen was supervising the *περικλυτὰ ἔργα* "magnificent work" of her handmaidens. Hector is incredulous; he addresses him as *δαιμόνι'* "strange man,"⁴⁴⁸ tells him that it is not right to nurse the *χόλον* "anger" in his heart, and rebukes him for not being at the front fighting since he (Paris) would certainly scold any shirker who held back from the fight.⁴⁴⁹

Paris responds that Hector is right to scold him, but informs him that not on account of *χόλω οὐδὲ νεμέσσι* "anger or indignation" did he yield himself to *ἄχεϊ* "grief." He also admits that Helen had just now been urging him *μαλακοῖς ἐπέεσσιν* "with soft words"⁴⁵⁰ to get out and fight.⁴⁵¹ Helen then denigrates Paris and herself while

⁴⁴⁷As W. Leaf, *A Companion to the Iliad* (London and New York, 1892), suggests (145-6).

⁴⁴⁸Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4: ". . . someone who speaks or acts oddly is addressed as *δαιμόνιε* . . ." (2-3).

⁴⁴⁹On Hector's rebuke, Suter, "Paris/Alexandros," notes: "There is no mention, as one would expect, of cowardice in the duel, or of the shame of indulging his sexual desires at such a time, only *χόλος*, *νέμεσις* and *ἄχος*. The poet, I suggest, has incorporated the elements from *iambos* into the narrative sequence of the duel in Book 3, and here is referring again to that incorporation, reminding us that he is remaking the image of the Trojan prince. The figure of Paris has been newly characterized in the mold of Dionysus, the god who alternately blames and is blamed. Another Paris had cause for anger and sorrow in another version of this story, perhaps, but the Paris figure has cause for being blamed" (116-7).

⁴⁵⁰Is Paris trying to put on a good front for Hector? It is hard to imagine Helen urging Paris with soft words when she calls herself a *κυνὸς κακομηχάνου* "nasty bitch evil-intriguing" and reveals her disdain for Paris to Hector (6.350-1):

*ἀνδρὸς ἔπειτ' ὠφελλον ἀμείνονος εἶναι ἄκοιτις,
ὃς ἤδη νέμεσίν τε καὶ αἴσχεα πόλλ' ἀνθρώπων.
I wish I had been the wife of a better man than this is,*

informing Hector that she knows that he is the one suffering for their acts. She attempts to get Hector to sit down and rest, but he declares the urgency of his return to battle for the defense of Troy. As Hector leaves to see his own wife and son, he encourages her to get Paris into the fight while also expressing his premonition of his own imminent demise: οὐ γὰρ οἶδ' εἰ ἔτι σφιν ὑπότροπος ἴξομαι αὐτίς, ἢ ἤδη μ' ὑπὸ χερσὶ θεοῖ δαμόωσιν Ἀχαιῶν "I do not know if ever again I shall come back this way, or whether the gods will strike me down at the hands of the Achaians" (6.367-8). Hector then leaves as Paris promises to catch up.

It could be argued that his scene does admit of a little humor. After all, if this scene was part of a drama, the handsome warrior polishing his armor seemingly

one who knew modesty and all things of shame that men say.

But Helen is a complex character with conflicting emotions who, in spite of these negative emotions toward Paris, still seems to follow him into bed at his bidding (as she did in book 3). Paris could be stating the facts, therefore, though it would be easier to believe him if the narrator indicated the presense of Aphrodite, Paris' divine ally with influence over Helen and the source of Helen's conflicting emotions.

It is also interesting that in this scene Paris is not only contrasted unfavorably with the noble Hector, but also the ignoble Helen. For even Helen can experience *νέμεσις* and *αἰσχος*: "Paris' fault according to [Helen] is that he takes no notice of public moral indignation" (Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 206).

⁴⁵¹At this point Paris adds the statement *νίκη δ' ἐπαμείβεται ἄνδρας* "Victory passes back and forth between men." Clarke, "Humor of Homer," explains Paris' remark thus: "[Paris'] response is more or less: 'Hector, you're right, you're always right, you're one of the rightest people I know. Helen here was just saying the very same thing. All right, then, off to battle.' But then Paris undercuts his resolve, undercuts, indeed, the resolve of all the fighters and of the whole heroic code, by asserting that it does not really matter much who fights for what, since, as he says, 'Victory alternates between men'" (248). Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 2, agrees: "He thus attributes success in battle to more or less random factors, discounting his personal responsibility and performance" (204).

oblivious to the concern of his frantic brother does present a *phaulos* character acting below the norm without immediate painful or harmful effects. The mere incongruity of a character who seems to be joyfully engaged in a rather frivolous activity oblivious to the anxiety and fear of others can be humorous.⁴⁵²

On the other hand, in the larger context of the Trojan War, his actions are causing the death of Troy's finest men. Paris just does not understand, or just does not care, that his actions are devastating his family and society. He certainly finds it all amusing. Indeed, we understand a little more of how far outside the norms of his society Paris is from his actions upon catching up with Hector on the way to battle.

While Paris is primping for battle, Hector has been saying farewell to his family in what is probably the most tender and poignant scene in all the *Iliad*. Then as he leaves his family this tender atmosphere is shattered with the reappearance of Paris in his shining armor laughing as he hurries to war.⁴⁵³ Clarke aptly describes Paris'

⁴⁵²Davies, "Homeric Humour and Homeric Laughter," finds it comic: "It is the success of Paris in this sphere of activity, and his complacent, matter-of-fact recognition of his own irresistible charms which make him amusing to us, and exasperating to his fellow Trojans" (262).

⁴⁵³Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 2, reminds us that Homeric diction at 6.503-5 again links the ignoble Paris in a marvelous contrast to the hero Achilles: "The decorative epithets are standard ones, but their number, together with the stallion simile that follows, helps present Paris in a more glamorous light: *ὑψηλοῖσε, κλυτά, ποικίλα χαλκῶ, κραιπνοῖσι*. The whole scene, including the simile, has something in common with the briefer description of Akhilleus himself at 22.21-3:

*ὥς εἰπὼν προτὶ ἄστυ μέγα φρονέων ἐβεβήκει
σευάμενος ὥς θ' ἵππος ἀεθλοφόρος σὺν ὄχεσφιν
ὃς ῥά τε ῥεῖα θέησι τιταινόμενος πεδίοιο*" (225-6).

Clarke, "Humor of Homer," describes Paris as "the first of the antiheroes, a man who was endowed with all the appropriate talents to be a great warrior but who somehow could hardly care less" (247).

reappearance after the Hector/Andromache scene:

Then suddenly, as the scene ends, there is an explosion of light and noise and out comes Paris, prancing like a stallion and laughing like an idiot. What in the name of heaven, one wonders, is this fool laughing at? Homer does not tell us, but when Paris sees Hector all he can say is, "Oh dear, Hector, I guess I'm late again." What can Hector, this incarnation of heroic idealism and family responsibility, say except, "I don't understand you!"⁴⁵⁴

Hector again addresses his brother, who spurns the heroic values, as *δαιμόνι*'. It might have been different if Paris was a weakling, but Hector has seen his strength and martial skills in the past (6.521-2).⁴⁵⁵ Paris actually chooses to hang back despite the shame he brings on himself and his family. Hector's only hope is that he and Paris can win glory by driving the Achaeans out of Troy.

In summary, this passage does contain the Aristotelian prerequisites for *to geloion*: Paris is a *phaulos* character acting below the norm whose actions here do not generate

⁴⁵⁴Clarke, "Humor of Homer": 248.

⁴⁵⁵Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 2, comments on Hector's calling Paris *ἄλκιμος* "a strong man": "No one could question Paris' valour when he put his mind to it, since he was *ἄλκιμος*: this term usually comes in epithet-name formulas, especially of Patroklos; it is the opposite of *δειλός* at 13.278; even the stout fighter, the *ἄλκιμος*, can be put to flight by Zeus at 17.177; troops are exhorted to have an *ἄλκιμον ἦτορ*--it is not something one necessarily has all the time, but can be summoned up even by quite ordinary fighters in a crisis. Yet the description comes as a surprise as Hektor strains to be affable, especially in view of his words to Paris at 3.45, *ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔστι βίη φρεσὶν οὐδέ τις ἀλκή*" (228).

painful or harmful effects for himself or for Homer's audience.⁴⁵⁶ Furthermore, within this audience he evokes *nemesan* "indignation" with his *phaulos* actions, but also *tharsos* "confidence" with his undeserved good fortune as he frivolously avoids the horrors of war. The audience can experience confidence that they too, since their actions at least are above those of *phaulos* Paris, might experience good fortune of avoiding the horrors of war. Above all, Paris' actions at the end of this scene, as he laughingly marches off to war apparently oblivious to the seriousness of war, are comic in their incongruity, their ridiculousness.

But has Homer successfully used the humor of this scene to further the narrative and thematic unity of the *Iliad*? The narrative unity of this passage is not as apparent as one would like at first glance. An analysis of Hector's return from the battlefield to Troy and Paris' interaction with Troy's greatest hero does not seem to demonstrate the Aristotelian demand for the necessity and probability that properly drive narrative action. Yet, on the other hand, Homer must have had reasons for Hector's interactions with his mother, Paris, Helen and Andromache, reasons that go beyond the obvious entertainment value of these scenes. Owen seems to have realized Homer's purpose: "So far as the actual progress of events is concerned, this scene is not needed at all; its value is purely

⁴⁵⁶As Golden, "τὸ γελοῖον in the *Iliad*," informs us, some scholars do not note the comic nuances in the Paris/Helen scene in this passage: "See P. Vivante, *The Homeric Imagination* (Bloomington-London 1970) 148-150) for a romantic reading of the episode and John A. Scott, *The Unity of Homer* (repr. New York 1965 [originally Berkeley 1921]) 227-230 for an evaluation of Paris as a legitimate hero. C. M. Bowra, *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* (Oxford 1963) 24 and W. Bergold, *Der Zweikampf des Paris und Menelaos* (Bonn 1977) 130 suggest that Paris as well as Helen are under the literal control of Aphrodite" (53, n.7).

emotional, and it is put here because this is where it belongs in the emotional march of the poem."⁴⁵⁷ Homer has been emphasizing the doom of Troy as the rout of the Trojans seems imminent (6.73-5). The justice of Troy's doom was made clear in the breaking of the truce by Pandarus (4.85f.). The inevitability of Troy's doom is surely portended by the *aristeia* of Diomedes in book 5 and the beginning of book 6. "Now we are to see something of what is involved in her doom; having shown the justice of it, the poet is now going to make us feel the pity of it." ⁴⁵⁸

This is not to say that Hector's visit to Troy is unmotivated: "It is because Diomedes is continuing his victorious career that Hector goes to Troy."⁴⁵⁹ But it is to contribute to the "emotional march of the poem" that Hector's farewell to Andromache appears so early in the poem instead of right before he goes to fight his final duel with Achilles. Thus Homer has not disrupted the narrative unity of the poem as a whole with this seeming digression.

Even the return of Paris to the battle after the Hector/Andromache scene is an important event in the narrative unity of the poem:

Paris' reappearance on the scene displays Homer's brilliant narrative control in interweaving the comic and tragic strands of his text. To end the scene on the ominous note of Andromache's tragic lament would send off both the

⁴⁵⁷Owen, *Story of the Iliad*, 56.

⁴⁵⁸Ibid. 57.

⁴⁵⁹Ibid.

narrative and Hector's fate too tightly. Ending it on the triumphal note of Paris' rededication to the Trojan cause, however, leaves open the question of Troy's fate.⁴⁶⁰

This scene also demonstrates a thematic connection to the *Iliad* as a whole. Achilles continues to be omnipresent despite his absence from the foreground of action. Indeed, Andromache's lament includes references to the "best of the Achaeans" as she reminds Hector that Achilles had killed her father and her seven brothers and that even though he allowed her mother to be released for ransom, she died soon after. That is, "by the skill of the poet, Achilles, though he remains sullenly in his tent doing nothing till nearly the end, also stalks through the poem as the unequalled warrior, the sword-point of the Achaean war."⁴⁶¹ Thus the wrath of Achilles continues to be an important theme even in his absence.

The diction within Paris's response to the rebuke of Hector reveals further important clues to the thematic unity of this scene. In Hector's rebuke of Paris he accuses Paris of staying back on account of *χόλος* "wrath" in his heart. This choice of diction links Paris to Achilles and the heroic code: Achilles, in fact, had withdrawn from battle because of *χόλος* "wrath" and *ἄχος* "grief":

Πηλείωνι δ' ἄχος γένητ', ἐν δέ οἱ ἦτορ
 στήθεσσι λασίοισι διάνδιχα μερμήριξεν,
 ἦ ὃ γε φάσγανον ὄξυ ἐρυσσάμενος παρὰ μηροῦ

⁴⁶⁰Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives": 277-8.

⁴⁶¹Owen, *Story of the Iliad*, 67.

τοὺς μὲν ἀναστήσειεν, ὁ δ' Ἀτρεΐδην ἐναρίζοι,

ἦε χόλον παύσειεν ἐρητύσειέ τε θυμόν.

And [grief ἄχος] came on Peleus' son, and within

his shaggy breast the heart was divided two ways, pondering

whether to draw from beside his thigh the sharp sword, driving

away all those who stood between and kill the son of Atreus,

or else to check the spleen within and keep down his anger [χόλος]

(1.188-92).

Naturally, Hector would like to believe Paris' action reflects such heroic motivation, and therefore he attempts to explain the withdrawal of Paris from the battle in terms of a warrior's χόλος "anger and withdrawal." But in contrast to a Homeric hero such as Achilles, Paris' behavior cannot be explained by χόλος. He, in fact, denies χόλος, and states, "It was not so much in [anger χόλον] and bitter will [νεμέσσι] toward the Trojans that I sat in my room, but I wished to give myself over to sorrow [ἄχει]" (6.335-6).⁴⁶² This very denial of χόλος or νέμεσις separates Paris from the warrior code of his peers:

. . . Paris' motivation for withdrawing from battle--*akhos*

without *kholos*--seems consistent with his characteristic

⁴⁶²Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives," points out the distinct contrast that exists between the spear-bearing warrior Hector and his dallying brother: "Paris' portrait as a dallier contrasts vividly with the image of the battle-worn Hector, whose upraised, 'eleven cubit-long spear' stands as an image of his male potency and war-readiness (6.319-20)" (275). Furthermore, the comic incongruity of Paris as the sulking warrior in the woman's sphere of the bedroom is accompanied by some darker implications: "Paris seems to manipulate fate as easily as the weapons he uses as toys. His excuse for dallying, a wish to give way to 'anguish' (*achei* [6.336]), is set off against Hector's and Andromache's real anguish (*ache* [6.413])" (275).

disinclination to *nemesis* (6.51). Just as Achilles' repeated identification with this structure of ethical terms (cf. 23.23, 47) expresses his heroism, so also Paris' distance from the heroic ethos is conveyed by his different relation to these terms.⁴⁶³

Thus again we have comic action that sustains and enhances the thematic unity of the poem. The wrath of Achilles in all its ethical and heroic nuances is undergirded and emphasized by the contrast of the unethical and unheroic deeds and character of Paris. The hero Achilles conforms to the heroic ethic that is responsive to *αἰδώς* "shame" and *νέμεσις* "righteous indignation" or "blame." Paris' distance from this heroic code "does not challenge but rather flatters the *Iliad's* heroism."⁴⁶⁴

Furthermore, "Hector's entire encounter with Paris and Helen, with its element of

⁴⁶³Collins, "Wrath of Paris": 228-9.

⁴⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 229. Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, concurs with this interpretation of the effect of Paris' character and actions: "Paris tells Hector (3.64-65) not to reproach him for the gifts of Aphrodite, since 'the glorious gifts of the gods are not to be thrown away'; but we know that in the *Iliad*, an epic about heroic warfare, the gifts of Aphrodite are more trivial, of less weight, than those of Athene. Like the rest of Troy's domestic and civilized qualities, the gifts of Aphrodite cannot prevent its eventual, inevitable fall" (56). Golden, "*τὸ γελόιον* in the *Iliad*," on the other hand, perceives a more sophisticated purpose in the character of Paris: "The scenes involving Paris are, in their turn, a potent critique of the heroic code of the orthodox warriors of the *Iliad*. The attraction of Paris to the pleasures of life is a pointed contrast to the 'kill or be killed' goal of Hektor, Diomedes, and Achilles. This theme, affirming life over death, plays a significant role elsewhere in the poem: in Hektor and Andromache's protective love for Astyanax in Book 6, in a number of the scenes of joy and tranquility depicted on the shield of Achilles, and most especially in the poignant triumph of compassion over wrath which takes place in Achilles's psyche in Book 24" (56). Thus ultimately the character of Paris may reflect the complexity and ambiguity in the *Iliad* that Johnston, *Ironies of War*, sees as an element of the genius of Homer (6).

low domestic comedy, looks ahead to the farewell scene between Hector and Andromache, a scene of tragic seriousness and dignity, inviting the reader to compare the two brothers, their mettle, and their marriages."⁴⁶⁵

In conclusion, the character of Paris has indeed been utilized by Homer to add depth and universality to his great epic. Though he is a relatively minor figure in the *Iliad*,⁴⁶⁶ he does not interfere with the power and scope of the *Iliad* as a unified and powerful poem. The fact is that Paris adds to the depth and insight into the human condition in a way not possible without characters like him. As Clarke explains:

Were he a more important character, he would be discordant and disruptive, but as he now figures in the *Iliad*, he adds to its completeness, to its greatness, by suggesting to us in his blithe and frivolous fashion other possibilities, other views of life beyond the heroic, alternative ways of heroism. . . . The comic adds those small grains of truth that the serious and the tragic have

⁴⁶⁵Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives": 275.

⁴⁶⁶The only other scene in the *Iliad* involving Paris that seems to have the possibility of humor occurs in 11.369-400 where Paris exults with glee over the superficial arrow-wound he inflicts on the foot of Diomedes. Golden, "Τὸ γελοῖον in the *Iliad*," remarks: "For Paris the encounter with Diomedes is, indeed, something amusing, and he has no interest in pressing it to the heroic level of killing and being killed. His laughter makes the wounding of Diomedes seem to be more a childish prank that inconveniences his opponent rather than a serious military feat and offers us an example of comic action in which a potentially heroic struggle between two enemies is reduced, as Diomedes so clearly recognizes, to a trivial event" (54). Rather than an example of τὸ γελοῖον, Golden refers to this scene as "another example of the comedy of insult" and "another example of tragicomedy" (54).

had to omit. . . . Achilles and Hector and Diomedes and Agamemnon and Idomeneus are brave and noble and proud and heroic, and these are inspiring qualities. Measured by these high standards, good old Paris is just sexy and irresponsible; but sexiness and irresponsibility have their slight, ignoble roles to play in the human scene. The *Iliad* would be a lesser poem if it did not recognize that fact, the fact of Paris, just as it would be a lesser poem if its similes did not reveal another kind of world apart from the world of fighting, just as it would be a lesser poem if its catalogue of ships or its middle books did not reveal that there are other men at Troy beyond the quarreling leaders in the foreground of its action.⁴⁶⁷

This examination of important appearances in the *Iliad* of Paris has revealed a consistency of thematic and narrative development that is actually enhanced by this anti-heroic figure. It has also revealed Homer's brilliant use of *phaulos* Paris to illuminate a variety of human values. So, rather than a detriment to the serious themes and subplots that elucidate the human condition, the scenes involving Paris have been seen to add another dimension to an illumination of universal human experience as Homer introduces us to the first comic *eiron* character in Western literature.

Before turning to the *bomolochos* figure, though, one may wonder why this chapter

⁴⁶⁷Clarke, "Humor of Homer": 248-9.

did not discuss Odysseus as the model for the *iron* figure of comedy since he is a much more important "trickster figure" in literary history.⁴⁶⁸ One reason for not using Odysseus as the model is that his *eironeia* in the *Iliad* is so limited:

Apart from the deception of Dolon . . . and one deft, but apparently legitimate, trick in his wrestling match with Ajax, he never exploits a single ruse or deceit in the *Iliad*. On the contrary, his conduct is scrupulously honest and his words are studiously candid. If the *Iliad* was the only record of Odysseus's career one would find it hard to understand how he had got his notoriety as a man of extreme wiliness.⁴⁶⁹

The second reason concerns Odysseus' potential as a comic *iron* and relates to the question of whether he is a *phaulos* character in the *Iliad* in the first place. A possible contradiction to his "scrupulously honest" conduct in the *Iliad* may exist in the text. In

⁴⁶⁸W.B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (1954; reprint, New York, 1964), explains Odysseus's popularity in later literature: "Homer presented Ulysses--whether one simply reckons the amount of poetry devoted to him, or considers the quality of the interest shown in him--much more fully than any other hero. Ulysses has a considerable and subtly impressive part to play in the *Iliad*: he is the central figure of the *Odyssey*. The personalities and talents of the other heroes are displayed in one single setting, and that a narrow one--the environment of an invading army. Ulysses is also displayed as an adventurer in unexplored and magical lands, as a disguised avenger in his own land, and as husband, father, conspirator, and king. Naturally this ampler canvas gave later writers scope for wider developments and adaptations, especially when Homer in the richness of his imagination had left so many incidents sketched in mere outline" (244).

⁴⁶⁹*Ibid.* 12-13.

evaluating Odysseus's standing among his fellow Achaeans, Stanford finds two passages in the *Iliad* that may indicate hostility toward Odysseus (and thus evidence contrary to an immaculate character). The first passage is Agamemnon's outburst toward Odysseus at 4.339: *καὶ σύ, κακοῖσι δόλοισι κεκασμένη, κερδαλεόφρον* "you, too, with your mind forever on profit and your ways of treachery." "The impression is given that Agamemnon with characteristic tactlessness has expressed one of those secret prejudices that a king should never utter in public."⁴⁷⁰ Agamemnon, therefore, has given the impression that Odysseus is indeed not characterized by the scrupulous honesty that one could conclude from his overt actions.

In the second passage, the following is spoken by Achilles to Odysseus (who is trying to reconcile Achilles to Agamemnon) at 9.308-313:

διογενὲς Λαερτιάδη, πολυμήχαν' Ὀδυσσεῦ,
 χρὴ μὲν δὴ τὸν μῦθον ἀπηλεγέως ἀποειπεῖν,
 ἢ περ δὴ φρονέω τε καὶ ὡς τετελεσμένον ἔσται,
 ὡς μή μοι τρύζητε παρήμενοι ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος.
 ἐχθρὸς γάρ μοι κείνος ὁμῶς Ἄϊδαο πύλησιν
 ὅς χ' ἕτερον μὲν κεύθη ἐνὶ φρεσίν, ἄλλο δὲ εἶπη.

Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus:
 without consideration for you I must make my answer,
 the way I think, and the way it will be accomplished, that
 you may not come one after another, and sit by me, and

⁴⁷⁰Ibid. 18.

speak softly. For as I detest the doorways of Death, I
 detest that man, who hides one thing in the depths of his
 heart, and speaks forth another.

Stanford agrees with the ancient commentators who take this last complaint of Achilles as an oblique criticism of Odysseus.⁴⁷¹ Indeed, Stanford argues that these outbursts by Agamemnon and Achilles reveal hidden tensions among the aristocratic warriors who normally treat one another with courtesy "as one would expect from those archaic equivalents of officers and gentlemen."⁴⁷² This evidence of "deep-seated suspicions and prejudices and dislikes" could mark Odysseus off as a *phaulos* character, one who acts below the norm, but which actions in the *Iliad* can be pinpointed as *phaulos*? We shall examine his deceit of Dolon for evidence of just such action.

But first, does Odysseus conform to our established model for *eironeia*? He does feign incompetence or weakness, or at least seems to be masking his deceit behind a show of ordinary good nature. For instance, when he is chosen by Diomedes as a fellow spy with glowing praise, Odysseus responds in modesty (248-9):

Τυδείδη, μήτ' ἄρ με μάλ' αἶνεε μήτε τι νείκει·
 εἰδόσι γάρ τοι ταῦτα μετ' Ἀργείοις ἀγορεύεις.

"Son of Tydeus, do not praise me so, nor yet blame me.

These are the Argives, who know well all these matters
 you speak of.

⁴⁷¹Ibid.

⁴⁷²Ibid. 18.

Later in the *Iliad* during the funeral games for Patroclus Odysseus only participates in two events. Achilles judges a tie in a wrestling match against Ajax, even though Odysseus had twice thrown Ajax. Then he wins a foot-race, and despite his obvious versatility in athletics chooses not to compete in any other competitions (even the archery contest which he surely would have had a chance of winning). What ever the motive (Stanford surmises that he is "consciously striving to avoid giving offence and to avoid . . . odium"⁴⁷³), these actions do seem to fulfill our first element of *eironeia*, pretending to be less than he is.

These circumstances also lend themselves to the interpretation that Odysseus stands outside the normal values. In fact, Stanford attempts to explain Odysseus's conduct in the *Iliad* as his attempt to mold his behavior to the accepted heroic code, to fit in with a group whose values may differ from his own:

One is intended to see him as a man consciously controlling his unusual versatility and flexibility in an uneasy environment, moving with alert circumspection among people of different heredity and outlook, like an Irish chieftain at the court of Elizabeth I or the Jewish hero of Joyce's *Ulysses* at Dublin High School. In such circumstances a person of prudence—especially if, like Odysseus, he has a dubious ancestry and comes from a remote and inglorious island—would be specially careful to

⁴⁷³Ibid. 17.

conform to local etiquette. He is a marked man. Any individualism on his part will confirm the suspicion that he is an outsider; any ingenuity will prove he is a twister, any over-cleverness that he is a cad.⁴⁷⁴

Finally, evidence must be found for the third element of *eironeia*: taking advantage of others. Dolon is one who was most assuredly taken advantage of by Odysseus. After being captured by Diomedes and Odysseus, Dolon was tricked by Odysseus into believing his life would be spared if he told them everything. After doing so he was immediately killed by Diomedes with no protestations on the part of Odysseus. In fact, Odysseus was so pleased that he had finally persuaded Dolon into giving them the information they desired, that he smiled for the first and only time in all of the *Iliad*.⁴⁷⁵

Even though the actions of Odysseus seem to conform to those of a comic *eiron*, do they indeed conform to Aristotle's prescriptions for comic action? Are they characterized by some *ἀμάρτημα* "error" that causes no painful or harmful effects (*Poetics* 1449 a 34-5)? It seems not. The deception of Odysseus causes Dolon to give up the information and yet he is not spared. The actions of Odysseus eventually lead to the death of a human being who could have been ransomed for much wealth, as Dolon himself suggested.

In addition, Odysseus and Diomedes's actions would not likely elicit *nemesan* "indignation" in the audience. Since they are at war, they would likely have to fight

⁴⁷⁴Ibid. 14.

⁴⁷⁵Ibid. 15.

Dolon again another day if they had spared him. In other words, their actions would not be deemed incongruous or inappropriate in a time of war. Furthermore, the text supports this position in that there is no evidence of any culpability on the part of these warriors. Indeed, the goddess Athena obviously approves since she not only helps them kill Rhesos and the Thracians (10.482), but also warns them to get back to camp before the Trojans are awake and catch them (10.509-11).

There also is nothing in this scene to elicit the concomitant comic emotion *tharsos* "confidence," the emotion that one experiences by observing an inappropriate or incongruous action that nevertheless leads to undeserved good fortune. The good fortune that Odysseus and Diomedes experience is the result of bravery, of courageous actions in war, actions that go beyond those of ordinary men. This, therefore, could be of little comfort to the average man who would be unlikely to perform such heroic deeds himself.

In conclusion, the actions of Odysseus do not provide an example of comic *eironeia* in the *Iliad*, or even of *phaulos* action. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, does contain a number of instances of Odyssean comic *eironeia*. As Stanford remarks: "In contrast the *Odyssey* is a compendium of Odyssean . . . cunning. Odysseus's famous deceptions of the Cyclops and the Suitors, his ingenious stories and skilful manoeuvres when still disguised as a beggar in Ithaca, his masterly stratagem of the Trojan Horse (as related in passing by Helen and Demodocus), marked him out for posterity as the supreme man of wile in classical mythology."⁴⁷⁶

Odysseus's encounter with the Cyclops in the *Odyssey* illustrates the very comic

⁴⁷⁶Ibid. 13.

eironeia absent from the Odysseus of the *Iliad*. Odysseus lands his ship on an island not far from the land of the Cyclopes. He and his men rest, and at dawn, leaving the other ships (eleven) behind, Odysseus sails with his ship to the land of the Cyclopes. After reaching shore, he chooses the twelve best men and proceeds to investigate a nearby cave, bringing along a goatskin bottle of wine realizing he would be encountering a wild man of great strength. The Cyclops was not at home, and his men begged Odysseus to take some of the cheeses and leave, but Odysseus wanted to meet the owner of the cave and receive the customary gifts. While they waited for the Cyclops, they made themselves at home. When the Cyclops came home, he sealed the entrance with a huge stone that twenty-two wagons could not have carried off (9.241-2). This monstrous being with one eye did not see the Greeks until after he had finished his chores. When he does see them, he asks who they are, someone on business or pirates. Odysseus replies that they are Greeks coming from Troy who had gotten lost at sea and then appeals to the Cyclops to observe the custom of *xenia* whereby strangers protected by Zeus were to be given honors and gifts.

When the Cyclops asks him where his ship is, the wily Odysseus begins his litany of deceptions by replying that his ship is lost at sea. Without a word, the Cyclops grabs two of Odysseus's men, beats their brains out and eats them. The Greeks protest to no avail. When the Cyclops lies down to sleep, Odysseus's first inclination is to slay him with his sword, but his keen intelligence (*ἕτερος δέ με θυμὸς ἔρυκεν* "but a second thought

checked me"⁴⁷⁷ [9.302]) makes him realize they would be trapped in the cave by the great stone which was placed at the entrance by the Cyclops. In the meantime, Odysseus observes the routine of the Cyclops, waiting for a chance to outwit him.

Although he loses another two men to this barbaric man-eater, Odysseus devises a plan. He has his men take a great bludgeon of olive wood and prepare it by cutting, shaping, and hardening it in the fire. Four men are chosen by lot to blind the Cyclops with this stick. Odysseus then offers the Cyclops some of the strong wine which he had brought along. The Cyclops drinks it and asks for more, as well as asking his name. Odysseus replies Οὐτις ἐμοί γ' ὄνομα "Nobody is my name" (9.366). When the great Cyclops falls asleep, Odysseus and his men drive the beam of olive wood into his eye. His great cries alarm the other Cyclopes, who ask who is harming him. When he answers, ὦ φίλοι, Οὐτίς με κτείνει. δούλω οὐδὲ βίηφιν "Good friends, Nobody is killing me by force or treachery" (9.408),⁴⁷⁸ they leave him to his fate. Odysseus responds by laughing: ἐμὸν δ' ἐγέλασσε φίλον κῆρ, ὡς ὄνομ' ἐξαπάτησεν ἐμὸν καὶ μῆτις ἀμύμων "the heart within me laughed over how my name and my perfect planning had fooled him" (9.413-4).

Next Odysseus devises a plan by which he and his men are able to slip out of the cave under the bellies of sheep. Odysseus ties three sheep together and then a man under

⁴⁷⁷As with the *Iliad*, I have utilized the translation of the *Odyssey* by R. Lattimore, *The Odyssey of Homer* (1965; reprint, New York, 1975), for this and all other English quotations, unless otherwise stated.

⁴⁷⁸A more literal translation of this line would be "My friends, it is Noman that is slaying me by guile and not by force" (Loeb Classical Library) or "Nobody's killing me now by fraud and not by force" [R. Fagles, trans., *The Iliad* (New York, 1990)].

the belly of the middle sheep so that when the blind Cyclops lets them out of the cave he feels the backs of the sheep to ensure no man escapes; but alas he is not wise enough to feel underneath the sheep. Odysseus escapes last under the belly of the ram who normally leads the sheep. Although the Cyclops thinks it strange that the normal leader of the flock leaves last, he still does not think to check under the belly of the ram.

This episode does present Odysseus as a comic *iron*. In the first place, Odysseus is feigning incompetence or weakness by acting as if he had no hope of escape when talking to the Cyclops. He offers him the wine on the pretext that it was originally intended as a gift before the pitiless Cyclops devoured human flesh. The Cyclops pretends that he will honor this *xenia* by giving Odysseus a gift in return if he will only tell him his name. Not fooled by this lie, Odysseus tells him his name is Nobody to which the Cyclops responds that his gift to Odysseus is to eat him last. This silly ruse emphasizes just how witless the Cyclops is and in contrast how wily Odysseus is in giving the Cyclops wine while pretending he has given up all hope of escape.

Odysseus does stand outside the normal values in this episode. He refuses on several occasions to take the advice of his men. When they first arrive at the cave of the Cyclops, his men beg him to take cheeses and then the lambs and kids but not to wait for the Cyclops. But Odysseus admits, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ οὐ πιθόμην, ἢ τ' ἄν πολὺ κέρδιον ἦεν "but I would not listen to them, it would have been better their way" (9.228). As these adventurers are escaping from the land of the Cyclopes Odysseus's anger at outrages of the Cyclops causes him to taunt him. The Cyclops responds by throwing an enormous chunk of rock toward the sound of Odysseus's voice and the tidal wave caused by the

rock crashing into the sea pushes their ship back to shore. They escape only by making no noise as they row vigorously back out to sea. When they had reached a distance twice that from which he first taunted the Cyclops, Odysseus taunts him again, despite the warnings of his men, Σχέτλιε, τίπτ' ἐθέλεις ἐρεθιζέμεν ἄγριον ἄνδρα? "Hard one, why are you trying once more to stir up this savage man?" (9.494). Odysseus obviously acts in a manner that is outside the normal values as exemplified by his men.

Finally, Odysseus is certainly one who takes advantage of others, in this case both his men and the Cyclops. He and his men enter the Cyclops's domain, make themselves at home eating his food, and then put out his eye. His men had wanted to leave and never meet the owner of that cave, but Odysseus insisted and as a result four of his men were eaten by the Cyclops. He also taunts the Cyclops over his men's protestations, and will bring the curse of the Cyclops (Poseidon's wrath) on them all. ⁴⁷⁹

Thus although Odysseus, as the much more developed trickster figure, will have an enormous effect on the subsequent Western literary tradition, Paris remains the first comic *iron* character in Western literature.

⁴⁷⁹Cf. Stanford's *The Ulysses Theme* for a rather full treatment of the character of Odysseus from Homer to the modern world through authors as varied as Virgil, Shakespeare, Goethe, Tennyson and Joyce. His discussion of the historical, linguistic, technical, and ethical variables in the treatment of the character of Odysseus is enlightening as well as informative.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMIC CHARACTER THREE: THE *BOMOLOCHOS*

I propose to continue the argument that Homer left a legacy of comic characterization for the Western literary tradition by illustrating the appearance in the *Iliad* of the third of Aristotle's comic characters, the *bomolochos*.

After first extrapolating a definition of *bomolochia* from Aristotle, Cornford, and McLeish and verifying this definition with an analysis of several of Aristophanes' plays, I shall examine the *Iliad* for examples of such characters and behavior. When Hephaestus and Zeus are determined to exhibit *bomolochia*, I shall address the historical conflict between philosophy and poetry over this irreverent portrayal of the gods by the poets. This conflict began no later than the sixth century B.C. when the actions of the gods in Homer began to concern the first philosophers. In fact the first perceived comedy in the *Iliad* addressed by scholars concerned scenes involving the gods; indeed, the phrase "Homeric laughter"⁴⁸⁰ referred to this comedy connected to the gods. In order to understand the somewhat irreverent humor associated with the gods in the *Iliad* and later Greek poetry, which the philosophers and later critics would condemn, we shall examine the misunderstanding by the philosophers (and later critics) of the poetic use of

⁴⁸⁰J. W. Hewitt, "Homeric Laughter," *Classical Journal* 23 (1928): 437.

the gods. Finally, as in previous chapters, I will summarize the contribution to the overall thematic and narrative unity of the epic that these scenes of divine *bomolochia* make.

For a definition of the *bomolochos*, we begin with the *Nicomachean Ethics*. First, from 1128 a 4-8 we note:

οἱ μὲν οὖν τῷ γελοίῳ ὑπερβάλλοντες
βωμολόχοι δοκοῦσιν εἶναι καὶ φορτικοὶ, γλιχό-
μενοι πάντως τοῦ γελοίου, καὶ μᾶλλον στοχαζό-
μενοι τοῦ γέλωτα ποιῆσαι ἢ τοῦ λέγειν εὐσχήμονα
καὶ νῆ λυπεῖν τὸν σκωπτόμενον.

Those then who go to excess in ridicule are thought to be buffoons and vulgar fellows, who itch to have their joke at all costs, and are more concerned to raise a laugh than to keep within the bounds of decorum and avoid giving pain to the object of their raillery.

From 1228 a 33-1228 b 1 we learn:

ὁ δὲ βωμο-
λόχος ἡττων ἐστὶ τοῦ γελοίου, καὶ οὔτε ἑαυτοῦ
οὔτε τῶν ἄλλων ἀπεχόμενος, εἰ γέλωτα ποιῆσει,
καὶ τοιαῦτα λέγων ὧν οὐθέν ἄν εἴποι ὁ χαρίεις,
ἔνια δ' οὐδ' ἄν ἀκούσαι.

The buffoon is one who cannot resist a joke; he will not

keep his tongue off himself or anyone else, if he can raise a laugh, and will say things which a man of refinement would never say, and some of which he would not even allow to be said to him.

And from 1108 a 23-6 we are told by Aristotle:

. . . περὶ δὲ τὸ ἡδὺ

τὸ μὲν ἐν παιδιᾷ . . . ἢ δ' ὑπερβολὴ βωμολοχία καὶ
ὁ ἔχων αὐτὴν βωμολόχος

In respect of pleasantness in social amusement . . . the
excess is buffoonery and its possessor a buffoon.

Finally, in *Rhetoric* 1419 b 8-10 Aristotle states that the buffoon makes jokes to please others:

ἔστι δ' ἡ εἰρωνεία

τῆς βωμολοχίας ἐλευθεριώτερον· ὁ μὲν γὰρ αὐτοῦ
ἔνεκα ποιεῖ τὸ γελοῖον, ὁ δὲ βωμολόχος ἑτέρου.

Irony is more gentlemanly than buffoonery; for the first is employed on one's own account, the second on that of another.⁴⁸¹

McLeish discusses this comic character as follows:

[T]he *bomolochos* (literally, 'hanger-about for scraps')

⁴⁸¹Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, Loeb Classical Library (1926; reprint, Cambridge, MA, 1947).

. . . is a buffoon, characterized by loud, irreverent and often ludicrous remarks. . . . When he is not a secondary character, but the hero of the play, the function of the *bomolochos* is rather subtler. Aristophanes often uses him in plays dealing with quite abstruse intellectual matters, and his assertive humour either serves to punctuate complicated exposition . . . or else makes a very clear commentary on the pretensions of his learned interlocutor. (For example, if Socrates fails to take in even a *bomolochos* like Strepsiades, how can he ever hope to fool an intelligent audience?)⁴⁸²

Cornford provides an incisive summary of the characteristics of this third comic character as he describes the buffoon as one who 1) assumes the role of affected simplicity, 2) is ungentlemanly in conduct (e.g., produces "scurrilous anecdotes," "obscene comments," and "humorous asides") and 3) makes fun for the amusement of others.⁴⁸³

Xanthias in Aristophanes' *Wasps* demonstrates just such behavior. In the beginning of the play Xanthias acts the buffoon and fulfills the first criterion of assuming the role of affected simplicity. Sosias wakes him up and asks him what he thinks he is doing, to which Xanthias replies, *φυλακῆν καταλύειν νυκτερινῆν διδάσκομαι* "I'm studyin'.

⁴⁸²McLeish, *The Theater of Aristophanes*, 55.

⁴⁸³Cornford, *Attic Comedy*, 139-40.

How to Relieve the Watch. One easy lesson" (2).⁴⁸⁴ Sosias warns him that he is just asking for trouble since they are charged with watching a *κνώδαλον* "monster." Xanthias flippantly replies, οἶδ'· ἄλλ' σμικρὸν ἀπομερμηρίσαι "Scares me so much I'm afraid to stay awake (5)" and proceeds to go to sleep.⁴⁸⁵

Then Sosias wakes up Xanthias with a nightmare.⁴⁸⁶ Xanthias, too, has dreamed and offers his dream first. True to form, Aristophanes offers a bit of political satire. In Xanthias' dream a large eagle swooped down on the city, grabbed a bronze shield,⁴⁸⁷ and carried it to heaven where the eagle turned into Kleonymos and threw away the

⁴⁸⁴This and all subsequent translations of Aristophanes' *Wasps* are those of D. Parker, trans., *The Wasps* (Ann Arbor, 1962).

⁴⁸⁵One can only guess at the amusement of the Athenian audience who surely would think of the watchman scene that begins the Aeschylean tragedy *Agamemnon* in which the watchman is so fearful of Clytemnestra that he cannot sleep.

⁴⁸⁶Cf. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 102-21. Dodds remarks that "recent enquiries into the dreams of contemporary primitives suggest that, side by side with the familiar anxiety-dreams and wish-fulfillment dreams that are common to humanity, there are others whose manifest content, at any rate, is determined by a local culture-pattern" (103). One pattern that can be observed in Homer and throughout Greek antiquity (as well as in modern primitive societies), the third of the three types distinguished by Artemidorus, Macrobius, and other late writers, is the *chrematismos* or "oracle": "Ancient literature is full of these 'godsent' dreams in which a single dream-figure presents itself, as in Homer, to the sleeper and gives him prophecy, advice, or warning" (107). Here Sosias asserts that he has had a visitation from Bacchos (line 9).

⁴⁸⁷D. MacDowell, *Aristophanes: Wasps* (Oxford, 1971), reveals a joke in the Greek: "The joke of Xanthias's dream lies in the surprise ending. At first the subject seems to be serious: an eagle drops a snake which it is carrying in its talons, which is a traditional omen of failure in an enterprise (*Iliad* 12.200-29; cf. *Knights* 197-210). But in 18 the word *ἐπίχαλκον* reveals that the *ἄσπις* which is dropped is not a snake but a shield, and the climax is reached when in the very last word Kleonymos is unexpectedly substituted for the eagle" (129). Kleonymos' discarding his shield is an action "on which Ar. harps mercilessly (*Knights* 1369-72, *Clouds* 353, *Wasps* 15-27, 592, 823, *Peace* 444-6, 670-8, 1295-1304, *Birds* 290, 1480-1)" (130).

shield. Sosias so loved the dream that he made a joke of it by saying one could win a drink with the riddle *τί ταῦτόν ἐν γῆ τ' ἀπέβαλεν κἄν οὐρανῶ κἄν τῇ θαλάττῃ θηρίον τὴν ἀσπίδα;* (21-2) "What animal defends itself by shedding its armor?"⁴⁸⁸

Sosias' dream continues the buffoonery with humorous anecdotes and scurrilous remarks that exemplify the second characteristic of the *bomolochos*. He begins on the serious note: *περὶ τῆς πόλεως γὰρ ἔστι τοῦ σκάφους ὄλου* (29) "[My dream] concerns the whole hull of the Ship of State." But then he recounts a silly dream about sheep dressed in cloaks and carrying canes meeting on the Pnyx. He saw a *δημηγορεῖν φάλαινα πανδοκεύτρια, ἔχουσα φωνὴν ἐμπεπρημένης ὑός* "greedy, rapacious whale haranguing these poor sheep in a booming bellow, the bloated blating of a swollen sow" (35-6). Though the Athenian audience would have guessed by now that the whale is Kleon, Aristophanes makes it eminently clear by having Xanthias say, *ὄζει κάκιστον τοῦνύπνιον βύρσης σαπρᾶς* (36) "your nightmare stinks of rotten leather; it reeks of that tanner Kleon."⁴⁸⁹

Sosias continues the details of his dream by reporting that the whale filled a bag with lumps of fat [*δημόν*], to which Xanthias exclaims, *τὸν Δῆμον ἡμῶν βούλεται*

⁴⁸⁸Lit., "What beast throws its shield away alike in earth, sky, and sea?"

⁴⁸⁹As MacDowell, *Wasps*, notes: "Kleon's father owned a tannery (*Knights* 44 with Σ), and so this word [*βύρσης*] finally puts it beyond doubt that it is Kleon whom the whale represents. Most members of the audience will have guessed this while Sosias was still speaking 35-6, for Kleon was at this time the most prominent politician of all and his greed and loud voice were constant objects of Ar.'s satire. So the mention of leather enables the slow-witted to understand the allegory, and the quick-witted to feel complacent at having their guess confirmed" (133). D. Parker, *Wasps*, has made it even easier for the English speaking reader to catch this metaphor by supplying Kleon's name in his translation.

δυστάναι (41) "He's sacking Greece!" Thus Aristophanes' humor shines in another play on words (*δημόν* and *Δῆμον*). "There is a similar pun between *δημός*, 'fat', and *δῆμος*, 'people', in *Knights* 954."⁴⁹⁰ "The accusation made here against Cleon is that of fomenting hostility between classes."⁴⁹¹ Next Sosias saw Theoros with a crow's head. The meaning of this is obvious to Xanthias: *οὔκουν ἐναργὲς τοῦτο συμβάλλειν, ὅτι ἀρθεῖς ἀφ' ἡμῶν ἐς κόρακας οἰχήσεται;* (50-1) "[T]he interpretation's obvious. Your dream means that Theoros will soar away from us . . . and CROAK!" The phrase Parker translates "Croak" is *ἐς κόρακας οἰχήσεται* "he is going to the crows," a "common imprecation, cf. *Birds* 28, *Frogs* 187-9" that means "to hell."⁴⁹² At this, Sosias chases Xanthias around the stage.

Then the action stops as Xanthias addresses the audience and fulfills the third element of *bomolochia* as he reveals his concern to amuse the audience. First Xanthias warns the audience not to expect anything too "highbrow" (*μέγα*) or "slapstick (*γέλωτα*) smuggled out of Megara"⁴⁹³ (56-7). He promises not to utilize slaves throwing chestnuts to the audience to make them happy, nor to give Euripides a hard time, nor to

⁴⁹⁰MacDowell, *Wasps*, 133.

⁴⁹¹A. H. Sommerstein, trans., *Wasps* (Warminster, Wilts, England, 1983), 155.

⁴⁹²MacDowell, *Wasps*, 134.

⁴⁹³MacDowell, *Wasps*, explains: "The Megarians were traditionally rivals of the Athenians in the art of comedy, which they claimed to have invented (Arist. *Poet.* 1448a31). Consequently Athenian comic dramatists express contempt for Megarian comedy" (136).

even abuse Kleon again.⁴⁹⁴ He describes the character of this play thus:

ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἡμῖν λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον,
 ὑμῶν μὲν αὐτῶν οὐχὶ δεξιώτερον
 κωμωδίας δὲ φορτικῆς σοφώτερον (63-6).
 We merely have a little plot with a moral--
 not too refined and dainty for *you*, of course,
 but rather more intelligent than smutty farce.⁴⁹⁵

Xanthias then poses a riddle for the audience. He points to his master asleep on the roof and asks the audience if they could guess of what disease he is afflicted. After supposed guesses of gambling, alcohol, religion, entertaining guests, which are all rejected, Xanthias announces that his master is afflicted with jury-addiction! He cries

⁴⁹⁴Ibid.: "Aristophanes has already attacked [Kleon's success] in *Knights*, and now he means that he will not make further attacks on the same man for further successes" (137-8). It is interesting, though, that Aristophanes cannot resist adding that Kleon's successes are attributable to luck (τῆς τύχης χάριν).

⁴⁹⁵Parker, *Wasps*, provides some interesting comment on a chief purpose of Aristophanes for this play: "Indeed, the whole play is a calculated insult to the audience's intelligence. Not only does it break every rule of good comedy formulated by Aristophanes in *The Clouds* 537 ff. (though this may have been written later), but it contradicts its own program, expounded by Xanthias in lines 57-63. We have an avowedly slapstickless play that wallows in knockabout farce; a professedly nonpolitical play whose principals are 'Kleon-Lover' and 'Kleon-Hater'; a play which avoids attacking Euripides by bringing him on stage (so I believe) in an advanced stage of disrepair; a chaste play whose Chorus is distinguished by a phallic peculiarity. And so forth. And, in the final wild dance, Philokleon, once juryman, now jury-bait, has progressed from Phrynichos the elder to Phrynichos the younger, has been rejuvenated according to comic formula--and still prefers indecent spectacle to sense. His triumph in the dance is his defeat as a rational being. Aristophanes, with an overt contempt for his audience's taste rarely matched elsewhere (the Introduction to Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* affords some comparison), has given the people what they want--and, in giving, damned them for wanting" (2-3).

when he misses sitting on the first bench; he cannot sleep, or if he does he dreams about jury duty; his three fingers get stuck together at night because in his dreams he has been squeezing the pebbles which jurors record their verdicts by dropping in the appropriate urn; he will accuse a cock as corrupt that crows too late for him to arrive in court on time; he usually arrives so early for jury duty that he falls asleep clutching a courtroom column; he gives a guilty verdict before he has even heard the evidence; and he always gives the maximum sentence.

Many cures have been attempted. They first merely pleaded with him, but then tried to cure him by dunking him in water. They tried religion, making a Korybant of him, but he appeared in court wearing his Korybantic regalia. They even took him to the temple of Asklepios at Aigina for a cure in that famous temple, but he appeared the next morning at the jury-box gate. So they were forced to lock him up in his own house. The humor proceeds as the old man continues to attempt to escape from his captors.

During the course of his actions, Xanthias has conformed to all three elements of *bomolochia*. He has entertained Sosias and then the audience with his puns, exaggerations, and riddles. He has not committed outrageous acts for his own amusement like an *ieron* might do, but obviously delights in amusing others like a true *bomolochos*.

One of the slaves of Demos, identified by Sommerstein as representing the general Demosthenes, in Aristophanes' *Knights* is another comic character in the *bomolochos*

tradition. In the prologue the audience is entertained by two slaves⁴⁹⁶ of Demos who open the play coming out of the house complaining about how bad things have gotten since the newly-bought slave Paphlagon arrived on the scene. As the conversation develops, it is immediately apparent that this is a comedy and the buffoonery is in play. This buffoon's simplicity is immediately apparent in the opening dialogue. Demosthenes suggests that they come up with some method of alleviating the situation. After some arguing back and forth about who should speak up first, Nicias suggests they just escape until Demosthenes reminds him of the penalty for run-away slaves, flailing (29). Nicias advises that they seek the help of the gods. After Demosthenes asks Nicias whether he believes in the gods and Nicias replies that he does since he is "a god-forsaken wretch," Demosthenes suggests they follow another tack, and asks Nicias if he would like him to explain the situation to the audience.

Now the second of Cornford's elements of *bomolochia*, humorous asides or scurrilous anecdotes, is fulfilled as Demosthenes addresses the audience in a humorous aside in which he describes the situation in the household of Demos. According to Demosthenes, his master was *ἀγροικὸς ὀργήν* "rustic or rude in his bad temper." Furthermore he was *κναμοτρῶξ* "a bean-chewer." Although B. B. Rogers indicates that

⁴⁹⁶A. Sommerstein, trans., *Knights* (Warminster, Wilts, England, 1981), explains the identification of the slaves: "The . . . two slaves of Demos, who open the play, are not named at all in the text; but it is clear that the more important of them represents Demosthenes, who was regarded by Cleon's opponents as the real architect of victory at Pylos (cf. 54-57), and the characterization of the other (unusually vivid, for a minor personage in Aristophanes) guarantees, in its timidity (16-18), its strong religiosity (30-33), its pessimism (34, 111-2), its dislike for over-indulgence (87-88, 97), that it is intended for Nicias, the third major figure in the Pylos drama" (3).

this is a reference to the fact that beans were used for voting purposes,⁴⁹⁷ Sommerstein comments:

[I]t is not quite certain what this epithet implies, but most probably it denotes a peasant: Greeks chewed beans to stay awake and concentrate when doing monotonous work (*Lys.* 537 with schol.) and bean-chewing may well have had associations with rusticity, low social status, and/or low intellect, much as gum-chewing or tobacco-chewing may today. . . . There is no reason to believe that the epithet has anything to do with the one-time use of beans as lottery-tokens in Athenian elections.⁴⁹⁸

Demos is characterized also as ἀκράχολος "quick to be irritated," an epithet that will soon be given evidence to support it. The master is called Δῆμος Πυκνίτης which could mean "Demos of the deme Pnyx," but probably is a double-entendre inferring that his master is a metaphor for the Athenian people and could be taken to mean "The people of the Pnyx," with Pnyx referring to the hill where the Assembly of the people met to vote on the affairs of state. And finally, he calls him a δύσκολον γερόντιον ὑπόκωφον "a grumpy old man who is hard of hearing."

Demosthenes then relates to the audience the dilemma in the household: the master

⁴⁹⁷B. B. Rogers, trans., *The Knights* (1924; reprint, Cambridge, MA, 1992), footnote c, 128.

⁴⁹⁸Sommerstein, *Knights*, 146.

has bought a new trouble-making slave, Paphlagon. This sycophant has totally deceived the master through flattery and fawning on Demos. He even goes so far as to steal things prepared by other slaves and to offer them as his own to the master. To protect himself from discovery, he keeps all others away from Demos and threatens the other slaves with floggings, which he effects by making false accusations, if they do not make payments to him.

When Nicias suggests to Demosthenes that they escape, Demosthenes asks how that can be accomplished with Paphlagon always on the alert. Paphlagon, says Demosthenes, watches over everything standing with one leg on Pylos and the other in the Assembly so that "his arse is right in Chasmos, his hands in Extortia, and his mind in Larcenadae" (78-129).⁴⁹⁹

After Nicias despairs and suggests death, Demosthenes suggests drinking wine until they come up with an idea. Nicias complains that all Demosthenes wants to do is drink and wonders how they can ever come up with a plan while drunk, but Demosthenes does come up with a plan: steal Paphlagon's oracles. When Nicias returns with the scroll, they discover that Paphlagon is fated to be undone by a sausage-seller: ἀλλαντοπώλης ἔσθ' ὁ τοῦτον ἐξελῶν "A sausage-seller is the one who will oust him" (143). Then, at that very moment, there just happens to be a seller of sausages who arrives on the scene.

⁴⁹⁹Sommerstein, *Knights*, explains his translation of these phrases in a series of footnotes. "In Chasmos" is his translation of "among the Chaonians," "with a pun on *khaos* 'gaping void' (cf. on *Ach.* 604). Paphlagon is said to have a 'gaping arse' again at 380-1." On "in Extoria," Sommerstein explains the Greek "among the Aetolians" as a pun on *aitein* "to demand." Finally, on "in Larcenadai (Greek "in Clopidae") the pun is on *klōps* "thief." "Clopidae was a small Attic hamlet, situated most probably near Aphidna in north-east Attica" (148-9).

They immediately assume any sausage-seller will do and accost him with effusive salutations: ὦ μακάριε ἀλλαντοπῶλα, δεῦρο δεῦρ', ὦ φίλτατε, ἀνάβαινε, σωτὴρ τῆ πόλει καὶ νῶν φανείς "Blest sausage-seller! come here, come up here, beloved one, arisen a saviour to the city and to us!" (147-9). Demosthenes begins to seduce the Sausage-seller into his role in fulfillment of the prophecy by painting a picture of his future: he will be a man of wealth, the grand-marshal of Athens, chief of the market, the harbors, and the Pnyx, with powers to chain, to imprison and to suck cocks in the Prytaneum! [This last phrase is a sharp dig at politicians who are assumed to be or to have been male prostitutes.⁵⁰⁰] Furthermore, he is destined to be master of all the islands, trading ports, and ships of the Athenian empire.

The frivolous and scurrilous buffoonery continues as the Sausage-seller protests that he is not worthy to hold the great power that these slaves are promising are his. When he relates that he is of bad stock, Demosthenes replies, "ὦ μακάριε τῆς τύχης, οἶον

⁵⁰⁰Sommerstein's (*Knights*) extensive note is illuminating. "[S]uck cocks: a surprise substitute for 'dine' (cf. 280-1, 535, 779, 766, 1404-5). The future active form of the verb *laikazein* occurs only here; elsewhere we find a present active (*Thesm.* 57; Petronius 42.2; Martial 11.58.12) and a future middle (Cephisodorus fr. 3; Men. *Dysc.* 892), both with the meaning 'fellate' whether used literally or merely as an imprecation. The use of the active form here has no semantic function but simply facilitates a jingle (all five verbs end in *-seis*); for a similar change of verbal voice in the interests of a jingle cf. 1057 and *Peace* 291. Fellatio was a regular item in the repertoires of low-grade prostitutes, male and female (cf. *Wasps* 1346): Demosthenes is thus assuming that the Sausage-seller is a male prostitute (as indeed he once was: 1242). No doubt this is because the Sausage-seller is destined to be a leading politician, and comedy assumes that all leading politicians are or have been male prostitutes (423-8, 878-880), *Eccl.* 112-3, Pl. *Symp.* 192a). On the meaning of *laikazein* see H. D. Jocelyn, *PCPS* 26 (1980) 12-66, who rightly notes that the utter shamelessness and depravity of the Sausage-seller is manifested by his failure to resent what is normally a very gross and coarse insult" (151-2).

πέπονθας ἀγαθὸν εἰς τὰ πράγματα "Oh, congratulations! what good luck! what an advantage you've got for political life!" To further mock and insult politicians, when the Sausage-seller further denigrates his worthiness with the news that he has no education beyond a poor knowledge of reading and writing, Demosthenes replies:

τουτί σε μόνον ἔβλαψεν, ὅτι καὶ κακὰ κακῶς
 ἡ δημαγωγία γὰρ οὐ πρὸς μουσικοῦ
 ἔτ' ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς οὐδὲ χρηστοῦ τοὺς τρόπους,
 ἀλλ' εἰς ἀμαθῆ καὶ βδελυρόν. ἀλλὰ μὴ παρῆς
 ἃ σοι διδόασ' ἐν τοῖς λογίοισιν οἱ θεοί.

That's your only impediment, that you know them at all, even "proper bad". The leadership of the people is no longer a job for an educated man or one of good qualities, but for one who's ignorant and foul. Don't let slip what the gods offer you in their oracle (190-4).

The Sausage-seller asks about the oracle and Demosthenes repeats it:

"ἀλλ' ὁπότεν μάρψῃ βυρσαίετος ἀγκυλοχήλης
 γαμφηλήσι δράκοντα κοάλεμον αἱματοπώτην,
 δὴ τότε Παφλαγόνων μὲν ἀπόλλυται ἡ σκοροδάλμη,
 κοιλιοπώλησιν δὲ θεὸς μέγα κῦδος ὀπάξει,
 αἷ κεν μὴ πωλεῖν ἀλλᾶντας μᾶλλον ἔλωνται."

"But when the crook-taloned eagle of leather shall seize
 in his beak the blood-quaffing blockhead serpent,

even then perisheth the garlic-brine of the Paphlagon,
 and to the sellers of tripe the god grants great glory,
 sith they prefer not rather to vend sausages." (197-201)

Demosthenes then interprets the oracle. The "eagle of leather"⁵⁰¹ refers to Paphlagon⁵⁰² and the epithet "crooked-taloned" means his fingers are crooked like eagle talons to seize and carry off things. The serpent is a metaphor for a sausage since they are both long and blood-drinking,⁵⁰³ and the serpent is about to defeat the eagle of leather. When the Sausage-seller expresses further doubts about his ability to rule, Demosthenes replies:

φauλότατον ἔργον· ταῦθ' ἄπερ ποιεῖς ποίει·

τάραττε καὶ χόρδευ' ὁμοῦ τὰ πράγματα

ἅπαντα, καὶ τὸν δῆμον ἀεὶ προσποιού

ὑπογλυκαίνων ῥηματίοις μαγειρικοῖς.

τὰ δ' ἄλλα σοι πρόσεστι δημαγωγικά·

φωνὴ μιαιρά, γέγονας κακῶς, ἀγόραιος εἶ·

ἔχεις ἅπαντα πρὸς πολιτείαν ἃ δεῖ. . . .

Easy as pie: do the same things you do already. Mix all

⁵⁰¹Sommerstein, *Knights*, relates that in the omen of an eagle holding a snake that appears in *Iliad* 12.200-7, "the snake bites the eagle which had hoped to eat it; so here Paphlagon will attempt to destroy the Sausage-seller but will instead be defeated by him" (153).

⁵⁰²Sommerstein's (*Knights*) inserted stage directions that the actor here pointed to Cleon in the audience is probably a good guess, since he continues to denigrate that politician throughout the play.

⁵⁰³"because sausages were made with blood" (Ibid. 153).

their affairs together and stir them into a hash, and always try to win the people over with little touches of elegantly prepared rhetoric as sweeteners. The other demagogic qualities you possess: a repellent voice, low birth, and you're a typical product of the Agora. You have everything that's needed for public life. . . . (213-219)

These last comments indicate that politicians suffered even worse abuse from comics in the Athenian democracy than they do today in the modern American democracy. The Athenian people revelled in this sort of satire of Cleon so much that the judges gave *Knights* first prize. Then, ironically, as Dover reminds us, "A few weeks later the Athenian people elected Kleon one of the ten generals for the year 424/3."⁵⁰⁴

Finally, the third element of *bomolochia* is evident when Nicias makes it plain that their scurrilous anecdotes and humorous asides are done for the amusement of others (i.e., the audience) when he says to Demosthenes, ἐν δ' αὐτοῦς παραιτησώμεθα, ἐπίδηλον ἡμῖν τοῖς προσώποισιν ποιεῖν, ἦν τοῖς ἔπεσι χαίρωσι καὶ τοῖς πράγμασιν "But let us ask them one favour: to let us see plainly in their faces, if they enjoy our dialogue and our doings" (37-9). The purpose of this buffoonery is thus obviously to please the audience with humor that will be reflected in smiles and laughter on their faces.

A legendary idiot in the buffoon tradition is Strepsiades in the *Clouds*. His conformity to the first element of *bomolochia*, simplicity, is evident from the opening

⁵⁰⁴Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, 100.

soliloquy in which he commits actions that are clearly below the norm. For instance, in response to his sleeping son's snoring he climbs under the covers and snores back at him. A farcical dialogue between this buffoon and his sleeping son ensues while the son talks in his sleep and the father makes an amusing or sarcastic response. Strepsiades is suffering insomnia while he adds up his son's debts and anxiously contemplates on how he can rectify his ever-worsening financial crisis caused by his spendthrift wife and gambler son. Finally a spark of hope cheers him up as he conceives a plan to solve all his problems: send his son to Socrates' school, the Phrontisterion, to learn the Unjust Logic by which he can make the weaker argument the stronger and disprove any lawsuits pending against him. When Pheidippides refuses, Strepsiades goes himself to learn, though even he admits (129) his memory is bad (*ἐπιλήσμων*) and his intellect dull (*βραδύς*). When Strepsiades is able to talk Socrates into giving him a chance at joining his school, his initiation into the Phrontisterion begins. This tongue-in-cheek initiation is in keeping with Aristophanes' choice of a name for the fictitious school of Socrates:

[Phrontisterion] is a loaded word. Coined from a combination of *phrontis* for thought and *telesterion*, the place of initiation into the mysteries, the name conveys the idea that philosophy itself is a religion which offers truth and life to its worshippers.⁵⁰⁵

The pupil of Socrates had earlier (113) referred to the events inside as mysteries, and the rites awaiting Strepsiades parody the sacred rites of mysteries "complete with a sacred

⁵⁰⁵Spatz, *Aristophanes*, 50.

couch, a chaplet, powder for purification, a vision of the divine Clouds, and a naked entrance through a cavelike opening.⁵⁰⁶

Socrates should have taken a clue as to the obtuseness of this initiate as Strepsiades confuses every part of the ceremony. When Socrates sets him down on the mystical couch and offers him the chaplet of the initiate, he confuses it with that used in sacrifice (255-6). Then he complains as Socrates initiates the purification with more powder than Strepsiades thinks is necessary. Socrates orders him to silence to enforce a sacred atmosphere and prays to the Clouds to reveal themselves. When they do reveal themselves with a peal of thunder, Strepsiades is not merely moved with awe but is so frightened that he breaks wind and complains that he must go to the bathroom. Henderson comments on this type of scatological humor in which someone is in dire need of relieving themselves:

We are simply invited by the poet to laugh at someone revealed in his embarrassing dependence upon the most ignoble of bodily needs. No spectator can feel anything but merry superiority to the plight of such a character, whose rising desperation serves merely to degrade him further and thus increase our amusement.⁵⁰⁷

Aristophanes avails himself of another bit of scatological comedy as Socrates attempts

⁵⁰⁶Ibid. Arrowsmith, *Clouds*, adds, in keeping with initiation into the mysteries: "After his entrance he must undergo an *ordeal* (whippings, bedbugs, etc.) before being vouchsafed rebirth as a *new man* (141).

⁵⁰⁷Henderson, *The Maculate Muse*, 187.

to explain the nature of thunder to Strepsiades and in so doing further underlines his buffoonish character by conforming to the second element of *bomolochia*, scurrilous or obscene remarks. Socrates explains that thunder is the result of convection and collision of clouds. When Strepsiades has difficulty with this scientific explanation, Socrates puts it in terms he can understand: the meat-stew the vendors sell at the Panathenaia. The light of comprehension turns on for the buffoon:

νῆ τὸν Ἀπόλλω, καὶ δεινὰ ποιεῖ γ' εὐθύς μοι, καὶ

τετάρακται

χῶσπερ βροντῆ τὸ ζωμίδιον παταγεῖ καὶ δεινὰ κέκραγεν·

ἀτρέμας πρῶτον παππάξ παππάξ, κάπειτ' ἐπάγει

παπαπαππάξ

χῶταν χέζω, κομιδῆ βροντῆ παπαπαππάξ ὥσπερ

ἐκεῖναι.

Yes, by Apollo! I remember. What an awful feeling! You feel sick and your belly churns and the fart rips loose like thunder. First just a gurgle, *pappapax*; the louder, *pappaPAPAXapaX* and finally like thunder, *PAPAPAPAXAPAXAPPAPAXarap!* (388-391)

The behavior of Strepsiades in these examples illustrates his rigid conformity to the first two characteristics of the buffoon: 1) simplicity and 2) ungentlemanly behavior with abusive remarks or obscene comments. Indeed, here is an obviously simple man whose behavior is characterized by scurrilous remarks and obscene comments. Though he does

not strictly exhibit the third characteristic, performing for the amusement of others, Aristophanes has clearly created this clown for the amusement of the audience. His soliloquy at the beginning of the play is full of buffoonish actions that immediately establish Strepsiades as a clown in the *bomolochos* tradition, and he continues to demonstrate this *bomolochia* (to the delight of the audience) throughout the play.

His initiation, in particular, reveals his buffoonery. He is forced to be naked and shoved toward the black cavelike opening at the rear of the Phrontisterion. After the parabasis and a choral interlude, Socrates reappears on stage in a state of extreme frustration with this initiate. Never has he ever seen such stupidity. Strepsiades forgets things as fast as he learns them. Still he attempts to resume the lessons. He cannot even get him to understand the basics of dactylic rhythm. When Socrates asks him to define it, ignorant of dactylic meter Strepsiades takes δάκτυλος literally ("finger") and tells Socrates that it is tapping time with "this" finger (raising his middle finger in an obscene gesture). Then he explains that he used to make rhythm with "this finger" when a boy, an obvious reference to the phallus. Arrowsmith makes a good case for Aristophanes' use of the comic phallus:

Despite the almost unanimous consensus of scholars that Aristophanic characters did *not* wear the phallus . . . I am nonetheless convinced they did. . . . In *Clouds*, Strepsiades' little play on "finger-rhythm" (652 ff.) literally requires the phallus. . . .⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁸Arrowsmith, *Clouds*, 142.

Another obscene reference is made to the *membrum virile* in line 734. Socrates is striving to get Strepsiades to use his new mental acuity to solve his dilemma. When he asks Strepsiades if he has anything yet, Strepsiades answers, *μὰ Δι' οὐ δῆτ' ἔγωγ'* "No, not a thing." Socrates insists that he surely has something, to which Strepsiades answers, *οὐδέν γε πλὴν ἢ τὸ πέος ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ* "Nothing except my cock in my right hand!"⁵⁰⁹

Having demonstrated the accuracy of Cornford's insights into the nature of yet another comic character, it must now be demonstrated that Homer foreshadows even this third of Aristotle's three basic comic types, the buffoon. One need not search long to discover that Hephaestus in *Iliad* 1.568-611 seems to fit the prescriptions for the *bomolochos*.

Hera has just nagged Zeus about making secret decisions in her absence, and Zeus reproved her for daring to question anything he might do. If it is for her to know, he will inform her. Otherwise, she should mind her own business. Hera, unable to keep quiet, remarks that she knows that he just made some sort of deal with Thetis, the mother of Achilles. Zeus tells her to shut up and sit down before he lays his "unconquerable" (1.567) hands upon her.

It is in this tense and fearful atmosphere that Hephaestus rises and advises Hera that arguing over mortals is not worth ruining a good feast among the gods and that she should be ingratiating toward Zeus before he hurls them all out of Olympus. As he hands a goblet to Hera he reminds her of another time when he attempted to help her and

⁵⁰⁹My translation, since B.B. Rogers and Arrowsmith both omit the obscene Greek word *πέος* in their English translations.

Zeus caught him by the foot and threw him out of the sky. He fell for a day until at sunset he landed almost lifeless in Lemnos where the Sintian men took care of him. Hera smiles as she takes the goblet from her son, and all the gods are overcome with *ἄσβεστος γέλως* "uncontrollable laughter" as they see Hephaestus hurriedly limping about the palace (599f).

Nemesian "indignation" is an emotion that is immediately evoked by gods acting below the norm. Zeus and Hera are fighting like any earthly couple in a bad marriage might fight, quite unbecoming of the chief deities of the universe. Hephaestus himself presents a picture far below that of even a noble human being when he displays his lack of concern for human life by arguing that mortals are not worth ruining a good dinner over. To further quell a divine revolution against Zeus, Hephaestus reminds them of the futility of opposing Zeus by recounting his own humiliation at the hands of invincible Father God who threw him out of Olympus the last time he attempted to oppose the divine ruler. While striving to restore harmony between his parents, Hephaestus hobbles around serving the other gods while relating a story of his past humiliation at the hands of Zeus. Leaf expresses the indignation aroused by Homer's picture of the divine:

It has often been pointed out with truth that the humour of Homer is almost entirely confined to the scenes in Olympus, which seem to be treated as a fit opportunity for the display of passions which would be beneath the dignity of heroes. Even in morality the tone of Olympus is distinctly beneath that of earth. Mr. Gladstone has well

remarked that not one of the gods can be called as distinctly *good* as the swineherd Eumaios.⁵¹⁰

Though more recent scholars find much more humor in Homer (as we noted in the introduction), even those whose concept of the *Iliad* emphasizes the nobility and seriousness of the epic recognize the humor involved in the base actions of the *Iliadic* pantheon. *Tharsos* too is evoked in this scene in that, despite the less than noble actions of Hephaestus and the other gods, harmony is restored. The divine Hephaestus is successful despite acting below the norm in his assumption of the role of a servant and in his self-denigrating story: he is able to defuse a potentially violent war among the gods. Thus the audience experiences *tharsos* "confidence" in life in that despite action below the norm, this episode among the gods demonstrates that life can turn out to be successful and harmonious.

Although this is surely a comic passage, do the actions of Hephaestus coincide with the prescriptive model of *bomolochia* proffered earlier? Indeed, Hephaestus does seem to display an affected simplicity, the first element of the paradigm of *bomolochia*. Here is the skilled smith of the gods who not only crafted Achilles's armor, and built each of the gods a house *ιδυίησι πραπίδεσσι* "by means of his craftsmanship and cunning" (1.608)⁵¹¹, but also the god who would craft a net to catch his wife Aphrodite in a tryst

⁵¹⁰W. Leaf and M. A. Bayfield, eds., *The Iliad of Homer*, vol. 1, 2d ed. (1908; reprint, London, 1962), 296.

⁵¹¹The craftsmanship of Hephaestus is evident from a number of passages. A. Wace and F. Stubbings, eds., *A Companion to Homer* (London, 1962) stress that Hephaestus is not a blacksmith: "The tools of Hephaestus's trade that are mentioned (Σ 468-77) are anvil, hammer and tongs, bellows, and crucibles (χόαντοι) for melting bronze, tin, gold,

with the wily Ares (*Od.* 8.266-366).⁵¹² Yet here he hobbles about⁵¹³ humbly assuming the duties of Ganymede or Hebe waiting on the other gods at table like a

and silver. These, in varying scale and detail, are necessary gear for any metalworker. Anvil, hammer, and tongs are similarly the distinctive equipment of the goldsmith (*χρυσοχόος*, also called simply *χαλκεύς*, 'smith') who is summoned by Nestor to gild the horns of a sacrificial ox (*γ* 432ff.); and almost as though to forestall the unsound criticism of some moderns that these are the tools of the *blacksmith*, introduced here through ignorance, the poet specifically adds *οἰσὶν τε χρυσὸν ἐργάζετο*—'[the anvil, etc.] which he used for working gold' (536).

⁵¹²W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. J. Ruffan (1977; reprint, Cambridge, 1985), makes some interesting observations with respect to this god of crafts: "The Greek cities relegated craftsmanship to a secondary place in favour of warrior *arete*. Only in Athens does Hephaistos have a special importance in mythology and cult: as a result of his curious encounter with Athena, he becomes *de facto* father of the first king Erechthonios, and thereby ancestor of the Athenians; accordingly, at the Apatouria, the festival of the Athenian *phratriai*, he receives a sacrifice. A smith festival *Chalkeia*, which involves Athena as well, has a place in the calendar of festivals. A monumental temple was accorded to Hephaistos, along with Athena, though only after 450; it stands, almost completely preserved, on the hill above the Agora facing Athens' Acropolis" (167-8).

⁵¹³Hewitt, "Homeric Laughter," remarks, "Especially typical of Homer is the mirth aroused by physical deformity. This is pre-eminently the *ἄσβεστος γέλως* of the immortals, the unquenchable glee that will not down, the laughter that has usurped the specific title of Homeric. It is that which resounds through the courts of Olympus when the lame god Hephaestus hobbles among the assembled deities, playing cupbearer to their festal desires. There is the element of incongruous contrast, always amusing, as the gods compare the perfect grace and beauty of Hebe or Ganymede with the deformed specimen of divinity before their eyes. It is intensely Greek" (437-8). To explain the laughter of the gods Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1; reprint, Cambridge, 1993), too emphasizes Hephaestus' assumption of the duties of Hebe or Ganymede: "Why do the gods burst out laughing at the sight of Hephaistos? Not just because he is *ποιπνύοντα* 'hobbling'; bT on 584 are probably correct that part of the comic effect lay in the lame god . . . performing the role of wine-pourer, properly the duty of the comely Hebe or Ganymedes, and in such a bustling (and perhaps even deliberately parodying) way. Whether the cripple's 'leaping up' at 584 was part of the humour, as the scholiasts thought, is more doubtful" (113-4). Though Hunt, "Homeric wit and Humor," agrees that the "gods laughed at the awkward, hobbling Hephaestus . . . much as a child laughs at the awkward capers of its father when he dances for its amusement" (56), P. Shorey, "Homeric Laughter," *Classical Philology* 22 (1927) contends that "the gods were not laughing at Hephaestus' handicap as much as at his officiousness" (222f.).

buffoon warning of Zeus' wrath.

Although there are no obscene comments, there is humorous dialogue as Hephaestus defuses the tension on Olympus through a comic reminiscence of his own humiliation at the hands of Zeus.⁵¹⁴ His anecdote emphasizes his own powerlessness in former times in just such a crisis as they now find themselves.⁵¹⁵ This attempt to calm a tense situation through humor at his own expense is the mark of the second characteristic of the buffoon, ungentlemanly behavior, as Hephaestus denigrates himself and acts the clown (both by lowering himself to act as a servant and by telling a story that illustrates his own humiliating attempt to oppose Zeus).

Finally, Hephaestus is definitely making fun for the enjoyment of others. He assumes a role of a servant to amuse the gods and restore peace and an air of festivity to Olympus.⁵¹⁶ As Burkert explains:

"[T]he hilarity which this provokes is his wished-for success--he alone has the wit and self-distance to defuse a tense situation in this way. The other outburst of Homeric

⁵¹⁴Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, remarks: ". . . the anecdote about his own fall among the Sinties may have been designed by this amiable god to provide light relief as well as deterrent example. At least it made Here smile (595 and 596), and in general that was not easy to do" (114).

⁵¹⁵N. Austin, "Function of Digressions" in H. Bloom, ed., *Homer* (New York, 1986), notes: "Paradigmatic logic appears . . . when Hephaistos apologizes to Hera for his helplessness (584-94): 'I could not help you in the past, so do not expect me to be able to help you now'" (156).

⁵¹⁶Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives," finds part of the humor in this episode stemming from the "preoccupation with the physical at the expense of the moral" as shown in Hephaestus' complaint about the interruptions of the divine banquet for the sake of mortals (272).

laughter in the *Odyssey* is also at his expense and yet once again his triumph when he has caught his unfaithful wife Aphrodite with Ares in his artful net.⁵¹⁷

Thus, though he is doing so for a noble cause—peace among the gods—by assuming the role of a servant to amuse the gods, Hephaestus conforms to the final element of our paradigm of the *bomolochos*.

We have remarked that this humor among the gods has caused much consternation among those who find this humor incongruous in a serious and noble work like the *Iliad*. Just what are we to make of this very anthropomorphic story that presents gods that seem to lack the dignity and serious mien one would expect of the gods who control the universe? Clarke almost laments this divine comedy:

[I]t is incongruous, almost dismayingly so, that the god's performances fall so sadly short of their powers. For example, that a god who can hurl thunderbolts should have to shrink from a nagging wife, as Zeus does in book I; or that gods who are immortal should get wounded by mere men and should be so undignified about it, as in book IV when Aphrodite gets so upset at being nicked by Diomedes that she drops her son Aeneas and goes shrieking off to her mother, or when Ares gets wounded by Diomedes and yells bloody murder; or that Zeus and Hera, king and queen of

⁵¹⁷Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 168.

the gods should get stuck with a teenage thug for a son-- Ares; or that gods who are all-powerful should fight so badly, as in the battle of the gods in book XXI, when Athena throws a rock at Ares and then whacks Aphrodite in the chest while Hera is boxing Artemis' ears. The spectacle of all this frustrated and misspent power is absurd.⁵¹⁸

Redfield finds the gods of the *Iliad* lacking in *numen* and therefore not really gods:

Most important, the gods of the *Iliad* are lacking in *numen*; they are in fact the chief source of comedy in the poem. We can, I think, explain this difference most easily by assuming that the gods of the *Iliad* belong to the conventional world of epic and were understood as such by the audience. Just as the epic tells, not of men, but of heroes, so also it tells stories, not of gods conceived as actual, but of literary gods.⁵¹⁹

Griffin counters with references to the ubiquitous religious activity in the poem, such as libations, prayers, oaths in the name of the gods, and at the death of Patroclus Achilles' ritual of grief:

. . . fasting, abstinence from bathing, cutting off the lock

⁵¹⁸Clarke, "The Humor of Homer": 249.

⁵¹⁹Redfield, quoted in Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death*, 146.

of hair which he had vowed to the River Spercheius on his return home, human sacrifice at Patroclus' pyre, and finally the desire to be buried in the same urn with his ashes. Nothing could show more clearly the depth and pervasiveness with which ritual and cult possess the minds of the characters of the poems.⁵²⁰

The point is that the behavior of the gods in the *Iliad* is even in the twentieth century a source of confusion. A brief survey of the nature of the Olympian gods in Homer may help shed some light on this dilemma.

We have indicated the immense impact of the Homeric epics on Greek culture in the Introduction. Homer's picture of the universe with the Olympian gods in control was one of the few things all Greeks did agree on.⁵²¹ Although Homer's epics reveal evidence of the original oral character of the poems, the picture of the gods in his tales comes at the end of a long period of development. In fact, though tales passed down orally in traditional cultures alter their emphases according to changing interests and social pressures, the Greek myths are mostly fixed in relatively inflexible literary forms.

⁵²⁰Ibid., 149-50.

⁵²¹Though, concerning the Greek pantheon M. P. O. Morford and R. J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology* (1971; rev. ed., White Plains, NY, 1985), emphasize, "It is, however, difficult and dangerous, if not impossible, to generalize about the nature of the Greek deities. Many of [the generalities about the Olympians] apply for the most part only to the highest order of divinity in the Greek pantheon. Such wondrous and terrible creations as the Gorgons, or Harpies, who populate the universe to enrich the mythology and saga, obviously represent a different category of the supernatural. Of a similar but different order, too, are the divine spirits who animate nature" (83).

"They have become a part of literature."⁵²²

The development of heroic poetry and the arrival on the scene of Homer and Hesiod around 750-700 B.C. clearly led the way to increased systematization and personal detail, but scarcely to a radical formulation or reformulation of divine powers as such. Other factors, like the emergence of the names of Zeus, Here, Poseidon, Artemis and a form of Athene (as well as Paian and Eneualios) from the Linear B tablets, and the fixed formular status of divine epithets in Homer, demonstrating the widespread acceptance of divine functions and title at least for the three or four generations necessary for the development of such formular systems, show that Homer must have come at a relatively late stage in the formation of Olympian theology.⁵²³

In other words, Homer has received a tradition that has already gone through a period of development in which the syncretism of the gods of other cultures with the Indo-European pantheon has already taken place:

The basic facts are these: that there are *no* Egyptian

⁵²²G.S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (1974; reprint, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1983), 95.

⁵²³Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 3.

elements in the Greek divinities of the pre-Classical period; that Zeus, as his name (a form of Sanskrit Dyaus) and his functions as sky- and weather-god show, is an Indo-European import from the north-eastern regions from which the Greek-speaking people moved down into Greece about 2000 B.C.; and that the rest of the pantheon consists on the one hand of specific Asiatic adaptations (Aphrodite, Hephaistos, Artemis, probably Apollo) and on the other of local versions of broadly diffused Near Eastern functional archetypes as city-protector, mother-goddess, war-god and so on. . . . these Asiatic and Indo-European associations, together with the later addition of Thracian Ares and Phrygian/Lybian Dionusos, and, more important, the idea of a council of gods under a supreme leader, itself Mesopotamian in origin, show the process of conflation and development to have been a long one, initiated no later than the 2nd millennium B.C. and carried on in largely unreconstructable ways thereafter.⁵²⁴

By the time of Homer's epics the Greek gods have already lost most of their Asiatic coloring; in fact, even most of the contradictions arising from the process of cross-

⁵²⁴Ibid., 2-3.

cultural assimilation have also disappeared.⁵²⁵

An examination of the qualities and actions and social organization of the Olympian deities reveals a very anthropomorphic conception of deity. This anthropomorphism in Homer, it is argued, is a product of these gods' original worshippers: "Homer's Olympians are the gods of bronze age war-lords, made in the likeness of their original worshippers and preserved by poetic tradition into an age to which they do not belong."⁵²⁶ These "far from purely spiritual" gods do differ from mankind: "Their knowledge surpasses the human measure by far, and their plans are directed to distant ends and generally find fulfillment; but even Zeus seems not always omniscient."⁵²⁷ In light of their human-like characteristics, it is interesting that the gods are separate from humans; that is, their presence in human affairs is limited:

In epic, encounters between gods and men are among the standard scenes; and yet Homer employs them with marked reserve. In the ordinary run of things the gods are not present; only among the distant Ethiopians do gods feast with men, just as at the other end of the world Apollo lives among his people, the Hyperboreans. Otherwise, it is only the poet who is able to describe how, for example, Poseidon leads the battle array; the warriors hear at most

⁵²⁵Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4, 8.

⁵²⁶A. R. Burn, *The Pelican History of Greece* (1965; reprint, Middlesex, 1979), 74.

⁵²⁷Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 183.

the voice of the god.⁵²⁸

Despite the anthropomorphic character of the Olympian gods, Kirk emphasizes the "de-carnalization" of the gods. Homer omits any suggestion of "meat-savour-sniffing" in Olympus. Nor does Homer present any of the gods drunk (other than Dionysus). "At all costs the vision had to be avoided of anything resembling that gruesome Mesopotamian scene in the eleventh tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh in which when sacrifices are restored the hungry gods smell the sweet savour and crowd round the sacrificer like flies."⁵²⁹

Furthermore, these gods seem to transcend even the "special rôles, functions and local associations that actual cult and tradition might have imposed on them . . . [so that] the epic tradition might reasonably be suspected of viewing them not so much through cultic rôles but rather as archetypes of social and sexual relations seen largely in human terms."⁵³⁰

One quandary is that although the Olympians are very much like idealized human beings they can also "mirror the physical and spiritual weaknesses of human counterparts: they may be crippled and deformed or conceived as vain, petty, and insincere; they can steal, lie, and cheat, sometimes with a finesse that is exquisitely divine."⁵³¹ Above all, because they are powerful and immortal, they can do as they

⁵²⁸Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 187.

⁵²⁹Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 10-12.

⁵³⁰Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol.4, 4.

⁵³¹Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 82.

please. Although to the ancient philosophers and the post-Enlightenment modern world this is a scandalous picture of the divine, it is this very freedom of action that might explain how the comic element could enter the picture of the gods in Homer and the comic poets. Bowra explains:

[O]n the whole [Homer's] picture of the gods suggests that they are very little concerned with good or evil either in themselves or in men. They do what they please, and their society is what human society would be if men could follow their desires without risk of failure. That is why they sometimes provide a sort of comic relief. In their divine security they lack something of the dignity which man gains from the short time at this disposal, and if their existence, given largely to pleasure, provides occasions for laughter at one another, there is no reason why men should not join in it. This laughter is in no sense skeptical; it is not even irreverent. It is based on affection for the gods, and even on envy and admiration for their happy state. But it implies a notion of them as almost indifferent to right and wrong, because in their own existence the distinction has little meaning.⁵³²

⁵³²C. M. Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (New York, 1957), 65. R. C. Hawley, "The Antiphonal Muse: Comic Sub-Theme in the *Iliad*," *The Classical World* (Vol. 62, No. 3, Nov. 1968), agrees: "The gods are most often the vehicle for comedy, for they

The key to understanding this state of affairs (the Greek ability to laugh at their gods) is the nature of Greek religion itself:

At the start Greek religion is unusual in its very lack of system, of any organization such as we find in the dominating religions of the modern world. It begins at no fixed point and has roots which stretch indeterminately into an unchronicled past. It has no eminent prophet or law-giver who expounded the nature of the gods, no sacred books whose authority is final on doctrine or morals, no central organization for its hierarchy, no revealed cosmology, no conception of a dedicated religious life, no insistence on orthodoxy, no agreed eschatology, no accepted scheme of redemption.⁵³³

Indeed, the fact that the traditional myths found in Homer and other authors contained stories that contradicted one another or presented the gods in a less than moral light was no problem to the average Greek:

[T]here was no need to question one's conscience before doubting or disputing a traditional myth. There were no

reflect human nature but without the human consequences" (81). Patrides, "Homer: The Invention of Reality," adds, "Nor should we be surprised that the gods do not ever laugh either at, or with, mankind; for their laughter is evidential of their apartness and emblematic of their self-sufficiency" (314).

⁵³³Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, 54.

heretics because there was no Church. The only religious crimes were acts or attitudes that caused general public resentment. The most obvious was sacrilege in all its forms (including, for instance, the profanation of Mysteries). Another was the crime that Socrates was charged with, 'not recognizing the gods that the city recognizes'. This was to put oneself outside the norms of society in a way that might be found intolerable.⁵³⁴

For these very reasons, the "poets could even make good-humoured fun of certain gods. How indeed could one help being amused by Hermes, in myth a merry thieving rogue, in image little more than a huge erect phallus? There was nothing irreligious about such laughter, the expression of a relaxed and unthreatened piety."⁵³⁵ "The laughter is not of scepticism but of belief that is so sure of itself that it is not afraid of ridiculing what it believes."⁵³⁶

⁵³⁴J. Boardman, J. Griffin, and O. Murray, eds., *The Oxford History of Greece and the Hellenistic World* (1986; reprint, Oxford, 1991), 313.

⁵³⁵*Ibid.*, 324-5. Jaeger, *Paedeia*, vol. 1, even relates this laughter at and by the gods to intellectual freedom: "If even the mighty gods could laugh and be laughed at in this frankly comic way, the Greeks obviously felt that every human being, and every being with human attributes, had not only the power of feeling heroic emotions and serious dignity, but the ability and need to laugh. Later Greek philosophy defined man as the only animal capable of laughter, though he was usually described as a talking or thinking animal; thereby they placed laughter on the same plane with thought and speech, as an expression of intellectual freedom" (359). I do not see evidence of this last statement, but rather see a designation of laughter to a lower plane than serious matters. Cf. chapter 1 on attitudes toward the comic throughout history as well as this current discussion in chapter 4 of the struggle between poetry and philosophy.

⁵³⁶Bowra, *Homer*, 111.

Why then does Homer's picture of the gods cause anxiety to Plato and the Alexandrian scholars as well as modern scholars? It is the rise of philosophy in Greece that causes conflict. The conflict between philosophy and poetry actually began the century before Plato, though, with Xenophanes. Having travelled about the world and encountering many more lands and people than most, Xenophanes developed a highly sophisticated, cosmopolitan critical faculty that moved him to war against the received religion. He especially protested the anthropomorphic picture of the gods in Homer and Hesiod. Poets, like Pindar in *Olympia* 1, responded by rewriting embarrassing myths and interpreting them allegorically.⁵³⁷ No philosopher henceforth seems to have believed in the literal reality of deities such as those of Homer, human in form and erratic in behavior.

At first, as always in all cultures, the ideas of these elite philosophers did not cause a scandal: it takes time for ideas to filter down to the masses. But by late in the fifth century professional teachers called Sophists began to threaten traditional religion. Protagoras declared, "About the gods I cannot declare whether they exist or not," and "Anaxagoras, the leading scientist of his day, was an atheist."⁵³⁸ Aristophanes' *Clouds* makes it clear that traditional religion was felt to be threatened and with it traditional social morality. "Late sources tell of a persecution of intellectuals at this time; details are very uncertain, but it is symptomatic that one of the charges brought against Socrates

⁵³⁷Boardman, Griffin, and Murray, *Oxford History of Greece*, 325.

⁵³⁸*Ibid.*, 326.

was that of 'not recognizing the gods that the city recognizes.'⁵³⁹

With this rise of philosophy it is often tempting to see the intellectual history of Greece as a succession of battles with victories, defeats, and the eventual succumbing of religion to philosophy in which the archaic religious thought gives way to the modern. In fact, modern scholars have come to realize that it is an oversimplification to state that with Thales and the rise of philosophy the Greeks had a paradigm shift that included a replacement of mythopoeic thinking with rational thinking. Kirk, in particular, rejects this oversimplification in a thought-provoking analysis of the intellectual transformation in Greece during the sixth and fifth centuries. He totally rejects the idea of "mythical thinking" and prefers to refer to the cognitive modes of pre-philosophical thinkers as "religious thinking" and what he calls "poetical thinking."⁵⁴⁰ By the time of Homer poetical thinking had been suppressed and "only the religious variant, maintained by special forces remained."⁵⁴¹ Later the religious mode was even abandoned and the myths began to be seen as *exempla*. While the religious mode had to be abandoned for philosophy to begin, the *exempla* approach also had to end for philosophy to become flexible in its approach to the world and to the proper objects of serious inquiry.⁵⁴² Kirk explains that rationalizing myths had occurred even before Homer and Hesiod with the de-personalizing that preceded them. Kirk's comparison of the nature myths of the

⁵³⁹Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, 292.

⁵⁴¹Ibid. 293.

⁵⁴²Ibid.

Greeks with the Mesopotamians clarifies his point:

Since the succession myth seems to be Mesopotamian in origin . . . , it seems probable that the whole conception of the Greek nature gods was affected by Anu, Ninhursag, Enki, Enlil and the rest. If so, then the latter's strongly anthropomorphic character as city gods and the like, a character already established by the middle of the third millennium B. C., was somehow rejected—either that, or the influence of their nature aspects was earlier still. In the first and more probable case, a kind of selectivity that is already rational and analytical in intention was being applied by 'Greeks' at a very early stage.⁵⁴³

Even when Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes rejected mythical explanations of nature, they were still strongly affected by mythical preconceptions. "[T]he object of the Presocratics' inquiry was the world as a whole, and it was the nature and generality of their object, rather than the introduction of a new mode of thinking, that distinguished them from those who used myths."⁵⁴⁴ They continued the same type of organizing of myths (from the beginning of the world to the establishment of order in the cosmos) as exemplified in Hesiod, except that they rejected the details of the model and narrowed their concern to the basic material out of which the world is made. Kirk suggests that

⁵⁴³Ibid., 294.

⁵⁴⁴Ibid., 295.

the motivation for this exercise at this particular time was the availability of Mesopotamian and Egyptian versions along with the Greek in Ionia. For instance,

Mesopotamian Enki or Ea, Egyptian Nun and Greek Okeanos are all primordial gods, and each of them, even in mythical guise, plainly represents water. Thales believed, as it happens, that the world is somehow made out of water, that water is the unity which underlies apparent incoherence; but it was his assumed concentration of the rational common essence of Enki, Nun and Okeanos as an actual world constituent, rather than his choice of water as such, that was significant for the future.⁵⁴⁵

Even the idea of opposition in nature (e.g., fire/water) that appears in Anaximander's proposition that the underlying substance is the "Indefinite" "had a more certainly mythical precedent than the Indefinite/*chaos* equation; yet even here there was already a strongly rational quality in Homer's connection of Aphrodite and Ares, Love and War, and even more so in Hesiod's reflections on Strife and Harmony--an opposition still maintained by maturer Presocratic thinkers, especially Heraclitus, Parmenides and Empedocles."⁵⁴⁶ But even this thought-pattern of opposites is not as important an influence from myth as the anthropomorphic model of how the world maintains its unity. That is, the Milesian philosophers are essentially cosmogonists whose ideas are based on

⁵⁴⁵Ibid. 295-6.

⁵⁴⁶Ibid. 296.

the theogonical model provided by myth. Just as the myths sought out an original ancestor or pair of ancestors to explain the current state of the universe, the Milesian thinkers assumed "that the most revealing thing one could say about the world was *what single material it was ultimately derived from*."⁵⁴⁷ Thus began a more scientific attempt to explain the universe.

The beginning of philosophy according to Kirk, however, was the shift by Heraclitus from a search for a primary material out of which the universe is made to a search for the unity of process, of change and movement.

[T]he crucial objective [for Heraclitus] was to name, and explain the working of, a central *directive* constituent in nature. He called it 'logos', meaning something like 'proportion' or 'measure', and it is in many respects identical with fire itself (which burns, and emits smoke and heat, proportionately to its consumption of fuel).⁵⁴⁸

Systematic rational thought could now extend itself to all aspects of human experience now that the coherence of the world was based on a universal law of change. Kirk emphasizes the influence of myth again. Heraclitus was no doubt influenced by the prevailing view of the Greeks that Zeus ruled men and Nature through *Dikē* ("Justice," a quasi-personified rule of regularity). The point is that the relationship between myth and philosophy is a complicated one. But once the model of a permanent order under

⁵⁴⁷Ibid. 297.

⁵⁴⁸Ibid. 298.

the rule of Zeus had been usurped by Heraclitus, the real development of philosophy could begin with the addition of systematic logic that would occur with Parmenides, the Sophists, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.⁵⁴⁹

On the other hand, despite the development of systematic rational thought that questioned the traditional myths, myth and the gods continued to play an important role for the Greeks. Burkert summarizes the outcome rather succinctly:

The collapse of the authority of the poets and the myth administered by them did not bring an end to religion. It was too intimately interwoven with life. On the contrary, the upsetting of old patterns could actually have a liberating effect for reflection on things divine: the concept of what is fitting for god had been established since Xenophanes, and with the new pleasure in radical thought one could draw consequences unimpeded by tradition. There are now certain postulates concerning what a god must be if he is to be god: not of human form (anthropomorphism is no longer seriously defended), not only indestructible but also ungenerated, sufficient to himself and not in need of anything; this is his strength and his bliss. God acts through his spirit, omniscient and guiding everything; but whether he cares for the individual remains a problem.

⁵⁴⁹Ibid. 302.

Thus in essence the old epithets of the everlasting, stronger, blessed gods are preserved and made absolute, only the spiritual element has been introduced in place of naive anthropomorphism.⁵⁵⁰

By the 5th and 4th centuries, Zeus had become revered so much more than the other gods that he is absent from the tragic and comic plays, and in fact Plato and other philosophers are moving beyond the mere rejection of anthropomorphic gods to the first stages of monotheism.⁵⁵¹ This evolution of the concept of the divine among the elite philosophers, then, explains why the philosophers have no sense of the humor⁵⁵² that the common man, in his relaxed piety, experiences in the tales of the poets. For the average Greek, "Hephaestus is at once the somewhat comical figure of A and θ , the glorified craftsman of Σ , the holocaust of Φ , and the flame over which men broil their meat (B426)."⁵⁵³ The fact that most Greeks, even after the rise of philosophy, could enjoy Homer's divine humor is praised by Janko: "Few Greeks ever took their gods wholly seriously; this is, perhaps, the Greeks' greatest gift to civilization."⁵⁵⁴

Since Homer pre-dates the rise of philosophy, he can especially present even Zeus,

⁵⁵⁰Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 125.

⁵⁵¹M. Grant and R. Kitzinger, *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean* (New York, 1988), 848.

⁵⁵²Sikes, "The Humor of Homer," explains, "Homeric theology was taken literally; the early philosophers were only concerned to save Homer's face and never realized that the face had a smile upon it" (123).

⁵⁵³Wace and Stubbings, *Companion to Homer*, 445.

⁵⁵⁴Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4, 170.

the ruler of the universe, in a humorous way as the libidinous philanderer that we meet in *Iliad* 14. In this most controversial portrait of the king of the gods, Zeus even seems to fit our model for the *bomolochos*. In book 14 the battle is at the ships, and the Achaean wall is overthrown. Agamemnon has just suggested to Nestor, Odysseus, and Diomedes that they get the ships in the water and flee back to Greece. After Agamemnon is scolded by Odysseus, Diomedes adds his vote to fight on even though they are wounded. As they return to battle, Hera sees Poseidon encouraging Agamemnon. She decides the best way to help the Achaeans is to get Zeus' attention off the battlefield. What subsequently occurs is the most humorous section of the *Iliad*. It is here that Homer's use of comedy reveals the depth of his understanding of the human psyche and his brilliant ability to use comedy to underscore the dismal view of the human condition that permeates the epic.

The basic ploy of Hera begins as she decides:

ἐλθεῖν εἰς Ἴδην εὖ ἐντύνασαν ἔαυτήν,
 εἰ πως ἰμέριαιτο παραδραθέειν φιλότῃτι
 ἢ χροίῃ, τῷ δ' ὕπνον ἀπήμονά τε λιαρόν τε
 χεύῃ ἐπὶ βλεφάροισιν ἰδὲ φρεσὶ πευκαλίμησι.

to array herself in loveliness, and go down to Ida, and perhaps he might be taken with desire to lie in love with her next her skin, and she might be able to drift an innocent warm sleep across his eyelids, and seal his crafty perceptions (162-165).

She cleanses, perfumes, and grooms her body, hair and face as never before. Then she attires herself with the most attractive and flattering robe, sandals, and jewelry possible.⁵⁵⁵ But to make her plan to seduce Zeus fool-proof and remove any possibility of failure from it, she, *δολοφρονέουσα* "with false lying purpose," engages the help of Aphrodite—purportedly to reunite Okeanos and Tethys who were quarreling. Aphrodite acquiesces and loans Hera a guaranteed aphrodisiac belt.⁵⁵⁶ Hera *μείδησεν* "smiles" at this⁵⁵⁷ and next asks Sleep to join her plot in return for an imperishable, golden

⁵⁵⁵Janko (ibid.) relates Hera's dressing and adornment to the arming scenes of warriors: "But this scene is also related, in purpose and even expression, to the arming of a warrior, especially a goddess. Thus *ἀμβροσίη μὲν πρῶτον*, first item in the list of beauty-aids, corresponds to *κημίδας μὲν πρῶτα* (hence Zenodotus in Arn/A is wrong to emend away the asyndeton by reading *ἐπιθείσα* in 169); an adaptation of 187 appears in a summary arming-scene (187n.); and Athene's arming (5.733-44) draws on standard verses for men getting dressed and going out (e.g. 2.42-4), from which come also 186 (7X Hom.) and the first half of 188 (cf. *Od.* 2.4f. = 4.309f.), whereas sandals are omitted in brief scenes of women dressing like *Od.* 5.230-2 (robe, girdle, wimple). In this case Aphrodite's love-charm corresponds to the warrior's special weapon, like Athene's aegis or Akhilleus' spear (19.387ff.); Herê's '*aristeia*' follows (so H. Schwabl, *WS* 16 (1982) 15f.). On dressing-scenes see Arend, *Scenen* 97f" (173-4). L .

Golden, "Διὸς ἀπάτη and the Unity of *Iliad* 14," *Mnemosyne* 42 (1989), remarks: "This is her armament and there is a clear parallel in the careful listing of Hera's several allurements to the catalogue of military equipment donned when a soldier prepares for hand to hand combat. It is not without deep significance that the conflict between Hera and Zeus is carried out with such different weapons and with such different results from heroic combat on the battlefield. The ironic contrast between the amusing strategy of seduction which immobilizes Zeus in the war and its bloody counterparts on the human level which lethally terminate the careers of many a brave warrior is, we shall see, the key to understanding the unifying role of the seduction scene in book 14" (5-6).

⁵⁵⁶Clader, *Helen*, remarks, "Nowhere else in Homer is a love-scene so described. There are other lovers in the epics, to be sure...but these two passages [Paris/Helen and Hera/Zeus] in the *Iliad* are the only two where Aphrodite takes so active a part" (14-15).

⁵⁵⁷Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4, informs us that Hera "may well smile at this, since vague expressions uttered by those not in the know were taken as omens, e.g. at *Od.* 2.33ff., 18.112ff. (so Aristarchus)" (185).

throne. Sleep, having helped her once before when Heracles sacked the city of the Trojans, at first refuses. But Hera offers the desire of his heart, Pasithea. Not trusting Hera, Sleep makes her swear on Styx's ineluctable water with one hand on the earth and the other on the sea and with all the undergods who gather about Kronos as witnesses.

Sleep hides, and Zeus catches sight of the "new" Hera. He is overwhelmed with desire and asks her where she is going. Δολοφρονέουσα "with false lying purpose" she repeats the lie to Aphrodite as if she had recently been converted to works of mercy. She also plays the part of the dutiful wife who would first report to her husband her destination on her errand of mercy. She only wanted to let him know where she was going to avoid angering him (as if he really cared where she went, normally).

Zeus tells her there is time enough for such an altruistic journey, but his burning libido needs more immediate attention. With all the suave and sophisticated manners of a mortal cave man, Zeus enumerates his mortal loves⁵⁵⁸ while assuring her that those

⁵⁵⁸Leaf and Bayfield, *The Iliad*, vol. 2, remark: "This 'Leporello Catalogue' (as it has been called) of the loves of Zeus--from 317-327--has been rejected by critics from very early times as a later interpolation" (345). Modern scholarship disagrees, such as Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4, who comments: "Homer could be influenced by the catalogue of Ishatar's lovers in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* VI (Burkert, *Die orientalisierende Epoche* 95). Yet Zeus's list deftly adapts traditional catalogue-poetry, and especially a standard theogonic list of his marriages, as its structure, cognates and diction prove. The Greeks traditionally organized their genealogies around women; the prime example is Hesiod's *Ehoiae*, but the *Odyssey* includes a catalogue wherein virgins seduced by gods precede the wives of mortals (11.235ff., 271ff.). . . . This list is a masterpiece of compression, only possible because both subject and verb are understood in each item, and because Homer controls the full range of genealogical formulae. The many parallels with the *Odyssey*, Hesiod and the *Hymns* prove that, far from being interpolated from a 'mainland' school of catalogue poetry, this passage derives from the same ancient oral tradition of genealogical verse" (202). See also, M. W. Edwards, "The Structure of Homeric Catalogues," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 110 (1980) who comments: "Similarly formal and graceful is the catalogue

amorous adventures pale in comparison to his immediate desire for her.⁵⁵⁹

Again *δολοφρονέουσα* "with lying purpose" Hera plays hard-to-get by feigning modesty to get him back to her chamber. Zeus of mighty libido cannot wait and covers their love-making with a golden mist that not even Helios can break through. He is not a total brute, though, since he causes a thick cushion of grass to grow beneath them. Sleep does his job and hurries to tell Poseidon that Zeus has been neutralized. Poseidon can now help the Greeks slaughter Trojans to his heart's content. The story then returns to brutality and gore of war as Hector is wounded by a huge rock thrown by Aias.

The Zeus/Hera seduction scene presents a very profound break in mood at this point

of Zeus' love-affairs in *Iliad* 14, which after a 'negative' introduction ('never have I been so much in love . . .') [315-16] similar to the declaration of Paris to Helen (*Il.* 3.442) extends the following 'not even when . . .' part into a catalogue; the first three entries have one verse each of elaboration about the resulting offspring (317-22), the fourth combines two names and has two separate verses about the children (323-25), the fifth has no elaboration at all (326), and the sixth (327) beautifully rounds off the whole by pausing at the C caesura to introduce Hera herself, *οὐδέ σεῦ αὐτῆς /* . . ., before the who paragraph is concluded with 'as *now* I love you.' The form (like the sense) retains traditional material (the catalogue element) but modifies it in highly sophisticated fashion for purely aesthetic purpose and appeal" (98).

⁵⁵⁹Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives," makes some interesting observations: "The marriage of Zeus and Hera, like that of Paris and Helen, is marred by henpecking, enforced seductions, deceits, and power struggles. (Both of these tawdry relationships invite comparison with the marriage of Hector and Andromache.) Zeus' affirmation of love for Hera in the deception scene directly echoes Paris' declaration of love to Helen in the bedroom scene of *Iliad* 3. Both speeches begin with the same expression, repeated nearly verbatim, of unique and fervent desire for the woman: 'But come, then, let us go to bed and turn to love. For never yet has desire so . . .' (3.441-42 and 14.314-15); but in a biting satire of divine licentiousness, Homer has Zeus' protestation of love veer off into a long list of all the other women besides Hera he has not desired so eagerly (14.317-28). The satiric frivolity of the incident contrasts vividly with the desperate plight of the Greeks that the deception is designed to alleviate" (279).

in the *Iliad*. The very serious business of dying in battle, with Homer's vivid descriptions of tearing flesh, spattering blood, and fingers clawing in the dust as life seeps from defeated warriors, is interrupted with the preceding humorous incident among the Olympians. This scene is humorous because it does fit Aristotle's prescriptions for comedy. It is a representation of *to geloion*. Hera is presented as an ignoble character acting below the norm with lies and deceptions. She does reap unjustified good fortune: she is successful. *Nemesian* "indignation" is aroused by the success of Hera's undertaking that relied on lies and deceptions. *Tharsos* "confidence" has been evoked because this action has not created for Hera pain or harmful effects for her ignoble action, and any audience whose action at least is no worse than the norm might be confident that the outcome of their action could also be fortunate. She had "smiled" earlier at the very thought of success, and, indeed, her inappropriate and incongruous action fulfilled her hopes.

Zeus too is acting below the norm, and his actions could be characterized as those of a *bomolochos* in this comic scene. The ruler of the universe cannot control his libido so that his actions match those of a buffoon. Zeus is surely assuming the role of affected simplicity, the first characteristic of *bomolochia* in our paradigm, when he sets aside his role as ruler of the universe in general and his concern with the death and dying on the battlefield to attend to the animal instinct of sexual desire. Homer no doubt has a serious purpose in mind, as we shall examine below, for his characterization of Zeus' devil-may-care attitude at this particular moment in the Trojan War. The fact remains that Zeus is not acting like even a responsible human ruler would, but is much too concerned with

carnal pleasure.

Zeus' catalogue of conquests fulfills the second element of *bomolochia*. This list of his conquests is as scurrilous as any foul or vulgar thing he could say to Hera.⁵⁶⁰ No doubt she was gritting her teeth, reminding herself of her ultimate goal, not to have exploded in a tirade against her philandering spouse.

Finally, Zeus may not be committing these acts for the amusement of others, but he obviously does not care who witnesses them, including the consummation of his passion; Hera has to remind him that other gods might witness their passion before he covers them with a golden cloud. Homer obviously presents this scene for his auditors' amusement since this scene represents one of the universally recognized comic scenes in the *Iliad*.⁵⁶¹ Zeus does seem to fit the general paradigm of the *bomolochos* of ancient

⁵⁶⁰Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol.4, emphasizes one "gaffe" of Zeus's that would be particularly odious to Hera: "The tale that Here drove the pregnant Leto all over the Aegean to prevent the birth is implied in the *Hymn to Apollo* (45ff., 95ff.), whose poet plays it down; contrast Callim. *Hy.* 4.55ff. It was surely as familiar to Homer as was her labour by the palm-tree on Delos (*Od.* 6.162f. with Hainsworth's n.). To mention her in the same breath as Here is thus Zeus's worst gaffe of all" (204-5).

⁵⁶¹Sikes, "Humor of Homer," mentions that ". . . Leaf remarks that the passage (*Il.* 14.153-362) 'is radiant with humour, grace, and healthful sensuousness'" (123). Bowra, *Homer*, describes it as "delightfully light-hearted, graceful and charming" (111). Golden, "*τὸ γέλοϊον* in the *Iliad*," goes so far as to say, "This is a very clear illustration of what Aristotle meant when he described Homer as the poet who developed comedy to maturity by offering dramatic representations of *τὸ γέλοϊον* in the place of invective (*Poetics* 1448b34-38)" (50). Golden, "The Unity of *Iliad* 14," also remarks, "Nowhere else in this poem that is devoted so largely to anger, violence, and slaughter do we have so exultant an evocation of pure joy" (7). Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4, glowingly describes this passage: "The Deception of Zeus is a bold, brilliant, graceful, sensuous and above all amusing virtuoso performance, wherein Homer parades his mastery of the other types of epic composition in his repertoire" (168). A. B. Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1925), characterizes this passage as one "of more than usual beauty" (154).

comedy--though conforming to the third prescription only tangentially, and thus all three of the major characters of comedy--the *alazon*, the *eiron*, and the *bomolochos*--have been demonstrated to appear in Homeric epic.

Furthermore, I continue to maintain that this use of comedy is not merely "relief"⁵⁶² to give the reader a break from the constant barrage of slaughter. On the contrary, it can be argued that the Zeus-Hera seduction scene is more than just comic relief.⁵⁶³ Homeric comic technique again, as always, involves a very serious purpose.

⁵⁶²Richardson, "Exegetical Scholia," notes that the scholiasts recognized this purpose of the scene: "Likewise in Book 14 the deception of Zeus gives new life to the narrative after the long scenes of battle (BT14.153)" (267).

⁵⁶³Modern commentators see much justification for the Homeric composition of this scene. Beyond the important narrative and thematic unity of the scene discussed below, Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4, offers further justification for the unitarian position on 292-353 on structural grounds: "The climactic scene of this episode elaborates the traditional story-pattern of seduction, far transcending its origin in the myth and ritual of sacred marriage (153-353n.). In typical Homeric fashion, dialogue advances the action, with brief descriptions only at the beginning and end. The couple's richly ironic conversation is symmetrically structured in both form and content; two distinct patterns provide strong defenses against the ancient atheteses of 304-6 and 317-27. Formally, there is first a brief question from Zeus, then Here's false tale (11 lines), Zeus's list of his past amours (16 lines), Here's crafty objection (11 lines), and lastly Zeus's brief and impatient reply. Patterns of ring-composition cut across the changes of speaker . . ." (197-8).

Such has not always been the case as Levine, "ΓΕΛΩΙ ΕΚΘΑΝΟΝ," points out: "Nestle, Finsler, Drerup, Bielonlawek, Nilsson, Murray and Wilamowitz take the humor in these scenes as evidence for 'late' composition at a time when, because of his Ionian scepticism, the poet is intentionally making the old gods ridiculous; for instance, by the burlesque of the *theomachia* (Φ) and by mocking the sacred marriage (Ξ)" (2-3). G. Calhoun, "The Higher Criticism on Olympus," *American Journal of Philology* 58 (1937), was another scholar who misunderstood Homeric comic technique and the importance of this scene to the *Iliad* as a whole when he wrote: "[W]e shall be well-advised to adhere to the . . . view that in these episodes as in other parts of the text the poet's purpose is to entertain and amuse, not to instruct or convert, and his attitude purely that of the artist or storyteller" (257-8).

This scene very skillfully furthers the narrative and thematic unity of the *Iliad* as a whole.

Golden has not only summarized the arguments of Erbse for the narrative unity of the *Διὸς ἀπάτη* (or "deception of Zeus," the ancient title of this chapter), but proposed a cogent argument of his own for the thematic unity of the scene. Erbse points out that Poseidon had appeared among the ranks of the Greeks to encourage them at the beginning of book 13 and actually promises them victory at the beginning of 14. Therefore, Hera's seduction of Zeus is the means by which she hopes to fulfill Poseidon's pledge to the Greeks. Neither does this exhaust the narrative connections of this scene with the unity of the epic as a whole:

[Erbse] argues that the sequence of events, which is set in motion by Patroklos' entrance into battle in the place of Achilles, is itself a direct consequence of the battle scenes of books 13-15. He states that without the unfolding of these prior incidents the Patroklos scene in book 16 would be unthinkable. . . .⁵⁶⁴

Golden goes on to explain that the sharply clashing mood between the despair of the introductory scene of the book and the humor of this scene must be accounted for to understand clearly the function of the scene in the epic as a whole. The humor of the story grows out of the fact that immortal beings are behaving below the norm even for mortals. Hera's acting with "false lying purpose" to recruit Aphrodite is inappropriate

⁵⁶⁴Golden, "The Unity of *Iliad* 14": 2.

behavior enough. But persuading another immortal, Sleep, by offering a female as reward goes beyond the merely inappropriate to the pathetically absurd. So, too, is the very fact that the highest being in the universe displays a lack of character in his regular relationships with immortals and mortals. That he can be distracted from life and death situations by being seduced by his normally repugnant wife is even more absurd.⁵⁶⁵ So even though on the surface this scene is humorous, its ultimate implications for the human condition are horrifying as the machinations of the gods on Mt. Olympus expose their ultimate disregard for the effect of their own rivalries on the destiny of human beings.

This serious theme of a universe indifferent to human beings, so ably communicated through the absurd use of comedy in the Zeus-Hera seduction scene, is part of a thematic pattern woven into the epic. This pattern of "the scornful indifference of the gods toward suffering mankind"⁵⁶⁶ is evident from the beginning of the *Iliad*. As early as book 1 when Thetis decides to go to Zeus to appeal for Trojan victories that would glorify her son Achilles, she has to wait for twelve days because the Olympians are away at a twelve day feast. While men are dying on the battlefield, the rulers of the universe care so little about the outcome that they are away feasting.

Also in book 1 Hephaestus, in attempting to stave off conflict between Hera and

⁵⁶⁵D. Lateiner, *Sardonic Smile: Nonverbal Behavior in Homeric Epic* (Ann Arbor, 1995) describes the *hieros gamos* thus: "Hera's unholy seduction (employing stimulating olfactory, dermal, thermal, and body-adaptor nonverbal behaviors) overwhelms Zeus. The male spouts a vain verbal catalog of sexual conquest as he lusts for and grabs at his wife in *Iliad* 14" (42).

⁵⁶⁶Golden, "The Unity of *Iliad* 14": 9.

Zeus, comments that the harmony and peace of the divine banquet must not be interrupted *ἔνεκα θνητῶν* "for the sake of mortals" (1.574), surely a commentary on how little human beings matter in the scheme of the universe.

In book 2 Zeus sends a false dream to the sleeping Agamemnon to encourage the Greeks into battles they will lose. The gods lie to human beings.

At the beginning of book 4, during a council of the gods, Zeus asks Hera why she wants Troy destroyed since Troy has never failed to sacrifice to Zeus. Rather than give a reasonable answer, Hera offers the destruction of any of her three favorite cities--Argos, Sparta, and Mycenae--if he so chooses. These gods do not reward even the faithful!

In book 20.22-3 Zeus goes so far as to actually state that the sight of men dying pleases his heart, and he encourages the other gods to enter the battle and give aid to whatever side they might choose.

The absurdity of the human condition may reach its starkest expression, though, in the reply of Apollo to Poseidon's challenge to fight him:

*ἐννοσίγαι', οὐκ ἄν με σαόφρονα μυθήσαιο
 ἔμμεναι, εἰ δὴ σοί γε βροτῶν ἔνεκα πτολεμίξω
 δειλῶν, οἳ φύλλοισιν ἑοικότες ἄλλοτε μὲν τε
 ῥαφλεγέες τελέθουσιν, ἀρούρης καρπὸν ἔδοντες,
 ἄλλοτε δὲ φθινύθουσιν ἀκήριοι.*

Shaker of the earth, you would have me be

as one without prudence if I am to fight

even you for the sake of insignificant
 mortals, who are as leaves are, and feed
 on what the ground gives, but then again
 fade away and are dead. (21.462-466)

To underscore the thematic unity of the Διὸς ἀπάτη Golden characterizes the three sections of book 14 as follows: "If the principal mood of the first scene was despair, and of the second, comedy wedded to lyrical joy, the bitter tone of the final episode evokes the savagery of war."⁵⁶⁷ The thematic unity is then ably described:

Thus the despair of the heroic generals in the first scene of book 14 and the cruel deaths in battle of brave warriors in the third episode of that book are powerful indications of the pathos of the human condition; and what makes that pathos especially poignant and unbearable is the fact that while men are dying so pitifully, Hera and Zeus, without a thought or care for the deep distress of humanity, enjoy a romantic mountain top tryst amid all the pleasurable trappings of lust and seduction. . . . The scenes of book 14 express most dramatically, what a number of other key passage in the *Iliad* also confirm, that events which are *the most painful and destructive for human beings* are often the source, directly or indirectly, of *intense pleasure to the*

⁵⁶⁷Ibid. 7.

*gods.*⁵⁶⁸

As Meltzer comments, "Homer's use of shifting perspectives--between the tragic and the bathetic, the heroic and the banal, the divine and the human--also characterizes many of the other comic incidents in the *Iliad*."⁵⁶⁹ Homeric comic technique, then, always involves subtle methods of weaving various superficially contradictory elements into the unified narrative and thematic pattern of the epic as a whole.

Though some *Iliadic* human characters, such as Thersites and Dolon, might be considered as exemplifying elements of buffoonery, they seem to conform more closely to the *alazon* paradigm. In Homer, it is Arnaïos/Iros in *Odyssey* 18 who is such a ridiculous character in body, mind and behavior that he must be addressed to fully appreciate Homer's development of the buffoon character.

Iros is a literal *bomolochos* ("hanger-about for scraps") in that he appears in *Odyssey* 18.1-107 as a beggar hanging about the suitors for scraps. His name "Iros" is a nickname he acquired by his willingness to "run and give messages when anyone told him," like Iris the goddess did among the Olympians.⁵⁷⁰ Rather than being known for his cleverness (cf. Odysseus of "many devices"), he is famous for his susceptibility to physical appetite ("ravenous belly and appetite for eating and drinking"). He is a large man though a weak one with no real strength. He appears at the door of Odysseus's home and immediately challenges and threatens Odysseus. Odysseus attempts a com-

⁵⁶⁸Ibid. 8-9.

⁵⁶⁹Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives": 278.

⁵⁷⁰Cf. *LSJ*, under Ἰρις and Ἴρος.

promise while warning Iros not to anger him. No doubt encouraged by an audience (the suitors) Iros taunts Odysseus about being old and to the delight of the suitors the two beggars prepare to fight. The laughing suitors find this such an amusing respite of their boredom that Antinous offers a prize to the winner: a fine meal that very day and dinner forever after.

After securing a promise of non-interference (and a modest reminder of the age difference between himself and Iros), Odysseus begins to strip for battle. The suitors are immediately impressed with the physique of Odysseus, while the buffoon Iros trembles with fear, so much so that he had to be dragged to the fight. After enduring an ineffective blow to his right shoulder, Odysseus punched Iros in the neck right below the ear breaking bones and causing Iros to spit blood and drop to the ground bleating and kicking. The suitors γέλω ἐκθανον "died with laughing" (18.100) as Odysseus dragged the beggar outside and propped him up against the courtyard wall.

Homer is quick to identify this beggar as a buffoonish simpleton whose character and action are far below those of the heroic Odysseus who is only posing as a beggar. The fact that he is well known for his appetite for eating and drinking and that he is a pawn for other men quickly separates him off as below the norm, as someone displaying simplicity. Even his huge size which lacks strength adds to the picture of a *bomolochos* that satisfies the first prescription of Cornford's paradigm.

The second prescription for a buffoon is also quickly realized as Iros insults Odysseus. His ungentlemanly challenge that Odysseus get out of his way before he drags him out when he in fact has neither the strength nor the will to do so is characteristic of

the buffoons of ancient comedy.

Finally, our paradigm requires in the third place that the buffoon make fun for the amusement of others. Even as Iros threatens Odysseus it is evident that he does so for the amusement of the suitors in 18.11-12:

οὐκ ῥ' αἴεις ὅτι δῆ μοι ἐπιλλίξουσιν ἅπαντες,
ἐλκέμεναι δὲ κέλονται;

Do you see how all of them are giving the signal
and telling me to drag you?

Iros is showing off for the suitors, trying to please and amuse them. Thus all three of the prescriptions for the buffoon are realized in the character of Iros, and therefore we have in Homer an even more thorough antecedent of the buffoon of ancient comedy here in the *Odyssey*. That is, the figure of Arnaïos/Iros further develops the characterization of the *bomolochos* and joins Hephaestus and Zeus of the *Iliad* as the earliest examples of the *bomolochos* in Western literature.

This chapter has demonstrated Homer's characterization of still another major comic character, the *bomolochos*, while also contending with any remnants of the conflict between poetry and philosophy that still dampen a few scholars' appreciation for the comic genius of Homer.

CONCLUSION

Literary critics have long admitted Homer's influence on Greek tragedy, but despite the statement of Homer's effect on comedy by Aristotle at *Poetics* 1448 b 36-8, the comic elements of the Homeric corpus have been denied or neglected, for the most part, until quite recently. As I point out in the introduction, part of the problem in comic literary criticism is the lack of a definition of the comic such as the definition of the tragic provided in *Poetics* 1449 b 24-28. It was the intention of chapter 1 to provide an Aristotelian definition of the comic that adds clarification to an understanding of the comic. The brilliant work of such scholars as Cooper, Butcher, Bywater, Else, Golden, Halliwell, House and Janko certainly provides a sound basis for building such a definition.

The remainder of the dissertation is based on the assumption that the three comic characters defined in the Aristotelian corpus actually appear in the *Iliad*. It is not my contention that Homer invented the *alazon*, the *bomolochos* or the *eiron* figures, but that they do exist in Homer's *Iliad*⁵⁷¹ and that through his brilliant characterization Homer may have defined these three characters in such a way as to influence all of subsequent

⁵⁷¹As stated above, scholars such as McLeish, *Theatre of Aristophanes*, have already declared that Aristophanes did not invent the comic characters, that they in fact appear in Homer (56).

comedy.

After producing a paradigm of *alazoneia* based on the insights of Aristotle and Cornford and testing that paradigm with examples from ancient comedy, chapter 2 identifies Thersites as the first *alazon*, in fact the original *miles gloriosus*. Following a similar method for *eironeia* and *bomolochia*, chapter 3 identifies Paris as the first *eirone* in Western literature, and chapter 4 Hephaestus and Zeus as the first *bomolochoi*. In each case the scenes involving these comic characters were demonstrated to contribute to the narrative and thematic unity of the *Iliad* as a whole, thus underlining the brilliant control of his medium by Homer.

In the end the research for this work has been very satisfying in revealing that, after thousands of years of neglect or denigration of these comic elements, modern scholars are finally beginning to recognize and appreciate Homeric comic technique in the *Iliad*. The importance of these comic elements to the unity and profundity of the epics of Homer are recognized by such scholars as Meltzer who proposes, "The sudden and surprising shifts in Homer's comic episodes lend drama and depth to the narrative,"⁵⁷² and Golden who concludes:

We see then that Homer's use of the dramatic representation of τὸ γελοῖον is in no sense incidental to the central themes of the *Iliad*; rather it is an effective technique for underscoring these themes.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷²Meltzer, "The Role of Comic Perspectives": 280.

⁵⁷³Golden, "τὸ γελοῖον in the *Iliad*": 55.

Yet I believe scholars have just scratched the surface of Homeric comic technique in the *Iliad*. It remains an exciting task to continue to explore the depth and richness that Homeric comic technique adds to the themes and artistry of the *Iliad*.

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