



RIDICULE AND HUMILIATION

IN GREEK LITERATURE

FROM HOMER TO THE FOURTH CENTURY B C

Judith Maitland

The Department of Classics

The University of Adelaide

December 1986

Awarded: August 31, 1987.

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Thesis Abstract.

The thesis will show that Homer's concepts of aggressive laughter, inappropriate laughter, and laughter before and after the event endure, and are developed by those who wrote after him. The *Iliad* establishes the principle that laughter is an earned privilege; the *Odyssey* goes further in these matters, taking great interest in misplaced confidence and the thwarting of carefully laid plans. It is in this work that laughter and *hybris* are associated for the first time, and that *hybris* itself begins to take on the importance ascribed to it in the work of Hesiod, Aeschylus, Pindar, Theognis, and Solon.

The subject of *hybris* leads to that of *kataphronesis*, a concept linked with behaviour and its consequences. *Kataphronesis* is treated in two ways: either it is a privilege that is earned in specific ways, or it is a hybristic error, which is shown to be so by subsequent events.

The term "results-culture" is well suited to the background against which Herodotus develops the notion of *kataphronesis*, and Thucydides, developing writing after the event into an art form, adds the term *sphallein* to express the humiliating consequences of a lapse in judgement.

The tragic writers have a tendency to reproduce the heroic values found in Homer, perhaps owing more to the *Iliad* than to

the *Odyssey*. For this reason they may not have as much to tell as we would wish about ridicule and humiliation in their own time. However, fifth century comedy and fourth century oratory show beyond any doubt that ridicule and the response it generated retained their significance for study of Greek thought and character.

There are signs that such questions were a matter for scrutiny for the Greeks themselves; Aristotle, Plato, and even the orators are interested in the difference between the friendly jest and aggressive laughter. Plato's Socrates shows Homeric subtlety in inducing laughter for his own purposes, and is no more afraid of hiding his true nature than is Odysseus himself.

The thesis will conclude that Homer's observations of the Greek character are borne out in the work of his successors. Even when an author is not consciously setting out to reproduce Homeric ideals, the image appears of a character that is sensitive to affront, highly aggressive, and preoccupied with honour. These qualities appear in the interplay of characters in epic and drama and in the outbursts, whether naive or calculated, of poet or orator, and are exploited, with varying degrees of accomplishment, by the historians.