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KAI TO ΠΟΥΛΙ ΠΑΡΑΚΟΥΣΕ :
A NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN THE *ILIAD* AND MODERN
GREEK FOLKSONGS*

Analysing Achilles' evolution as a hero in the ninth book of the *Iliad* C.H. Whitman finds that the embassy does not fail entirely to move Achilles, and that his rejection of Agamemnon's offer is not based upon mere sulky passion, but upon the half-realized inward conception of honour¹. When Odysseus has finished his speech, Achilles in his final words to him announces that «tomorrow... you will see, if you have a mind to it and if it concerns you, my ships in the dawn at sea on the Hellespont... If the glorious shaker of the earth should grant us a favouring passage, on the third day thereafter we might raise generous Phthia» (Lattimore, 357-63). After the long emotional speech of Phoinix, Achilles is less sure and in his final words to Phoinix he says «we shall decide tomorrow, as dawn shows, whether to go back home again or else to remain here» (Lattimore, 618-19). Finally after the short and straight targeted speech of Ajax, Achilles says nothing about going home, but he announces that «I shall not think again of the bloody fighting until such time as... Hector comes all the way to the ships of the Myrmidons... But around my own shelter, I think, and beside my black ship Hector will be held, though he be very hungry for battle» (Latt., 650-55). Achilles' reply to fight only when the fire reached his own ships constitutes the active terms in which he has framed the absolute for himself: This is the heroic paradigm which he embraced from the story of Meleager². There is no doubt

* I am grateful to Dr A.J. Gossage and Professor M.M. Willcock for reading an earlier draft of this short paper and making a number of helpful comments and criticisms; for whatever blemishes remaining the responsibility is mine.

1. Whitman, p. 190.

2. Whitman, p. 198.



that the dishonour upon Achilles¹ is the cause of his *menis* already in the first book (169) and in his reply to Ajax in the ninth: «still the heart in me swells up in anger, when I remember the disgrace that he wrought upon me before the Argives, the son of Atreus, as if I were some dishonoured vagabond» (Latt., 646-48). The disgrace upon him has not been requited; Nestor's advice to persuade him with sweet words of supplication and with the gifts (9.112-3) has not yet been fulfilled. These three points in Achilles' replies to the envoys and to Phoinix have already since antiquity been recognized as three stages of Achilles' decision making². But scholars have failed to see a gradual withdrawal in Achilles' refusal to participate in the war and its function. We must remember that already in his second speech to Agamemnon in an early stage of their quarrel in the first book Achilles concludes with a similar threat «Now I am returning to Phthia» (169); in the night of the 26th day of the *Iliad* Achilles is still there.

When the envoys go back, at the end of the ninth book, Odysseus reports: «That man will not quench his anger... He refuses you and refuses your presents... And he himself has threatened that tomorrow as dawn shows he will drag down his strong-benched, oarswept ships to the water» (Latt., 678-83). «Oddly enough», Whitman observes³, «his promise to fight at the last ditch, ... is forgotten by the envoys; Odysseus reports only that Achilles threatened to go home, and hence the whole venture seems to have failed. Odysseus' mind, somewhat typically, is taken up by the immediate problem in hand, and he seems not to have noticed that Achilles has already wavered a little». Odysseus, the great diplomat, reports Achilles' position quite erroneously, as Whitman put it⁴. By reporting the first and most hostile speech is the clearest way for the poet to show the failure of the embassy, as Willcock summarizes and J. Griffin records the lines of the interpretations offered⁵. Already the Scholia observed the inconsistency⁶. The fact that Odysseus, and

1. Cf. Adkins (1960) ch. III pp. 30-72 and *passim*; (1960A) *passim*.

2. Scholia ad vv. 651-2 (Erbse; cf ad vv. 682-3): πρὸς μὲν Ὀδυσσεύα ἀποπλεύσεσθαι φησιν (ἔτι γὰρ αὐτὸν σφόδρα ἡ ὀργὴ ἐξέμεινε), πρὸς δὲ Φοίνικα ἤδη πρᾶνόμενος σκέψασθαι περὶ τοῦ μένειν, τὸν δὲ Αἴαντα αἰδεσθεὶς τότε ἐπαμυνεῖν, ἤνικα ἂν πλησίον γέωνται οἱ πολέμοι.

3. Whitman, pp. 190-91.

4. Whitman, p. 191.

5. Willcock, p. 284 (cf. 283 ad v. 619) and Griffin pp. 145-6.

6. ad vv. 682-3 (Erbse): ἀλλ' ἴσως Ὀδυσσεύς τὰ πρὸς αὐτὸν μόνον βηθέντα ἀγγέλλει, ἀνακόπτει δὲ τὰ Αἴαντος εἰπὼν «εἰσὶ καὶ οἶδε τὰδ' εἰπέμεν» (688), ὥπως μὴ αἰσχύνοντο Αἴαντος πλέον κατορθώσαντος. ἢ ἵνα ἐκκόψῃ αὐτῶν τὴν ἐλπίδα καὶ εὐψύχως μαχέσωνται.



no other member of the Embassy, reports Achilles' reply probably answers indirectly the tantalizing problem of the duals, and who is the leader of the embassy; also, the fact that Odysseus reports Achilles' first reply, the reply to him, must stress the same answer to the same problem: i.e. that Odysseus and Ajax are the envoys, and that he is the official leader. But that Odysseus reports to Agamemnon the reply to him, though officially the proper one, may not be accidental; it may serve for something else and may have another function. Much more so that one must not fail to observe that Achilles introduces his third announcement asking the envoys to «go back to him, and take him this message» (649). Besides, when Odysseus reports Achilles' reply to Agamemnon he invokes the testimony of Ajax and the heralds: «there are these to attest it who went there with me» (688). Odysseus is creating *ethos* in Aristotelian sense: in his words character (*ethos*) is almost the controlling factor in persuasion for the audience (*Rhet.* 1356a13). That means that Homer makes Odysseus report, though in accordance with the due procedure of an embassy, neither Achilles' final words, in spite of his special request, nor the whole truth, and use witnesses to attest his report. Odysseus' report *inter alia* must go back to Achilles' curious proimion that he «detests that man, who hides one thing in the depths of his heart, and speaks forth another» (Latt., 312-13). The poet must have some reason for all this. The purpose of this note is to suggest similar techniques of erroneous reports and to argue for their function.

The modern Greek folksong «On the Bridge of Arta» (*Tou giofyriou tes Artas*), belonging to the narrative and dramatic kind of folksongs, the so called *paralogai*, echoes the popular belief that a building in order to be firm and protected from any danger requires an animal to be sacrificed, sunk in the earth and built in its foundations. The nobler the victim the greater the protection of the building¹. The bridge of Arta which was every day built up and collapsed every evening was finally successfully founded and constructed after the master builder's (protomastoras') wife was buried deep in the foundations of the bridge. A passing bird prophesied that unless the builders provide a soul for the building by sacrificing a human being (ἀν δὲ στοιχειώσετε ἄνθρωπο), the master builder's wife in particular, they will not succeed in the foundation and the building of the bridge. Shocked by the prophecy the

1. N. Politis, No 89.



master builder sent a message with the nightingale¹ to his wife to be prepared late and bring the lunch late ('Αργά ντυθῆ, ἀργά ἀλλαχτῆ, ἀργά νὰ πάη τὸ γιόμα, 16).

But the bird

Καὶ τὸ πουλὶ παράκουσε, κί' ἀλλιῶς ἐπῆγε κ' εἶπε:

«Γοργά ντυσου, γοργά ἀλλάξε, γοργά νὰ πᾶς τὸ γιόμα,

γοργά νὰ πᾶς καὶ νὰ διαβῆς τῆς Ἄρτας τὸ γιοφύρι» (18-20; Polites 89).

It is significant that the bird *parakouse*, which in Greek means either that «it did not hear the message clearly» or that «it disobeyed the order», so that it went and announced an erroneous message: instead of coming late the master builder's wife was told to be prepared quickly, bring the lunch to her husband and pass the bridge of Arta.

In his monograph on the song Georgios Megas finds eight motifs in the poem after some introductory ones, such as the cause of the nightly collapse: the demand of the sacrifice, the builders' agreement on the victim, the invitation of the heroine, the scene with the ring, the building in of the victim, the three sisters' fortune, the curse, and the victim's requests and wishes². The change of the protomastoras' words must be interpreted as a psychological element in the development of the song's plot: i.e. the poet in order to express the hesitations in the protomastoras' soul, makes him order his wife to come late, as if he wanted to avoid such a cruel duty, but his attempt to delay in a way or even to cancel what is fated must become ineffectual, and therefore he invents the falsification of the protomastoras' words. The unexpected appearance of his wife makes more intensive the protomastoras' anxiety and emotion, so as to make justified his tears and his wife's question of the reason for his being worried. And it was a clever «interpolation»: just one word was enough, or even one syllable of two letters, *go-*instead of *a-*, to cause the tragic and inevitable result³. There was a need for a particular language. The hastening of the events causes tragic tension in the protomastoras' soul and in the plot of the poem.

It has been shown that modern Greek folksongs are related to or continue ancient Greek mythology and literature, especially tragedy and epic; the *paralogai* in particular echo or continue ancient Greek

1. A case of the common feature of the idealization (the voice, in this case) in the folksongs, but probably an ominous echo of the myth of the *aedon*.

2. G. Megas, pp. 97-127. On the song cf. also Beaton, pp. 120-4, 117-8, 127-8, 44-6.

3. G. Megas, pp. 109, 133, 157; cf. K. Romatos, *Demotico Tragoudi* pp. 26-7.



motifs and themes. At the time when the modern Greek popular songs were arising, the *acritica* songs (concerning the guardians of the eastern frontier, *acrai*, of Byzantium), the ancient tragic Muse continues, in the form of *pantomimos*, to delight the Byzantine people; this is true especially for the *paralogai*¹. Nevertheless, I am not suggesting that the anonymous modern Greek poet had in mind Homer or the *Iliad*, though Ioannes Kakrides in particular has applied successfully modern Greek folk-tale material to the Meleagros story or other themes in the *Iliad*². But it is quite possible that both poets use the same motif of «erroneous message» for the sake of the development of the plot and for dramatic reasons. The modern Greek poet used the bird or the nightingale, a common feature in the technique of folksongs in general, where the birds participate in the action, answer the hero, prophesy, bring a message, and in this case bring a false message³. The tragic consequences of the erroneous message may appear more obvious in the folksong, in the person of the protomastoras' wife, but nevertheless Achilles' tragic fate in the *Iliad* is materialized through this third and erroneously transferred message. The erroneous message in fact resembles the function of some oracles, in particular that concerning Oidipus in Sophocles' *Oidipus Tyrannus*: the hero fulfils what he is trying to avoid, and this constitutes the supreme sense of the fragility of humankind. On the other hand, the song may stand as an aetiological myth in the sense in which some tragedies contain or end in the establishment of such rituals and myths.

The key to Odysseus' rhetoric is the stance he takes toward his audience and his aptitude at varying this alignment. As Cramer pictures him, «Odysseus is made to tailor rhetoric to an audience and situation but occasionally, to burst out with a characteristic eccentric speech on some special topic». One feature related to Odysseus' grasp of speech concepts is his speech in the embassy. Odysseus assumes the stance of a distant narrator in focusing his introduction on several significant speech-acts: Zeus is showing signs (9.236), Hector prays (240) for dawn to come and boasts (241) that he will burn the ships, while Odysseus

1. S. Kyriakides, pp. 169-207 with notes; the modern Greek word itself for the folksong, *tragoudi*, comes from the ancient *tragoidia*; *paralogai* are narrative songs with epic dimension and tragic as well as lyric elements on a false or imaginative subject; cf. Fauriel, Introduction sections v-vii.

2. *Homeric Researches* pp. 11-42, App. I pp. 127-48; cf. *Homer Revisited*; cf. Romalos, *Odyseia*.

3. Spyridakis, pp. 47, 119-21; Beaton, pp. 48-50, 51, 54-5.



fears that the threats (244) will come true¹. But mainly, by reporting only the first message Odysseus highlights the complexity and the multiple movements in the language of Achilles, a language of displacement which is never entirely Achilles' own even in the very formulation of his message and the definition of his place: «The discontinuity accentuates the distance within language, never entirely mastered by language, a measure also of the irreducible mutability of the messages issuing from the tent of Achilles»².

In this particular instance of Odysseus' report, Homer uses the rhetorical device of using witnesses to confirm to the audience, the anxious waiting Greeks at Agamemnon's tent, that he speaks the truth and so to increase their anxiety for the army's future. First, Odysseus, as in a case in court, presents witnesses (atechnic *pisteis*) and then he insists that they speak the truth as he does (Arist. *Rhet.* 1375a 22-5, 1376a 13-4); such persons are only witnesses of whether or not something has happened. Homer also grants Odysseus the *ethos* in Aristotelian terms required for the speaker. «There is persuasion through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence» (*Rhet.* 1356a13). It is necessary for the speaker «to construct a view of himself as a certain kind of person and to prepare the judge» (καὶ αὐτὸν ποιὸν τινα καὶ τὸν κριτὴν κατασκευάζειν); for it makes much difference in regard to persuasion that «the speaker seem to be a certain kind of person and that his hearers suppose him to be disposed toward them in a certain way and in addition if they, too, happen to be disposed in a certain way» (Kennedy's transl.: τὸ τε ποιὸν τινα φαίνεσθαι τὸν λέγοντα καὶ τὸ πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὑπολαμβάνειν πως διαχειῖσθαι αὐτὸν, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἔαν καὶ αὐτοὶ διακείμενοί πως τυγχάνωσιν, *Rhet.* 1377b 26-28); for the speaker to seem to have certain qualities is more useful in counsel given in public affairs. This particular detail of erroneous reporting in Odysseus' speech offers a feature of his character. Homer uses all the means available to present his development of the plot κατὰ τὸ εἰκός: the embassy must not succeed but not fail completely; and in doing so the poet must be justified completely.

The purpose of the note is to make justified Odysseus' report and *ethos* as an envoy and speaker, by adducing a similar narrative technique of erroneous reporting in modern Greek popular songs, in the «The Bridge

1. Cramer, p. 303; Martin, pp. 120, 123.

2. M. Lynn-George, p. 149.



of Arta» in particular, one of the most tragic modern Greek folksongs, and thus to emphasize the dramatic function of this narrative technique both in the ninth book of the *Iliad* and the modern Greek song for a tragic development on the plot¹. In both cases a particular language is needed. It also argues on the basis of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* for some of the rhetorical devices used in the ninth book to create Odysseus' *ethos* as a speaker (to construct a view of Odysseus as speaker as a certain kind of person) for the audience of the poem. Indirectly it relates to the problem of the duals and the members of the embassy and their status in it.

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1. The erroneous message both in the *Iliad* and the folksong reminds one of the function of Odysseus' false stories in the homonymous epic: they function, as paradigms and advance the plot, but also they grant Odysseus the rhetorical *ethos* required.



tman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge Mass. 1958). M.M. Willcock, *The Iliad of Homer, Books I-XII* (London 1978). On the wide theme of the duals and the envoys I refer only to: W.F. Wyatt, «The Embassy and the Duals in the *Iliad* 9» (*AJPh* 106 (1985) 399-408); O. Tsagarakis (*Hermes* 99 (1971) 257-77) and (*RhM* 116 (1973) 193-205); etc.

