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## ODYSSEUS AND THE GENUS 'HERO'\*

By MARGALIT FINKELBERG

The *Iliad* proceeds from an idea of hero<sup>1</sup> which is pure and simple: a hero is one who prizes honour and glory above life itself and dies on the battlefield in the prime of life.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in spite of what Achilles says at a bitter moment of the choice between a short and glorious life and a long and obscure one, his actual choice is made when, warned by Thetis that Hector's death is only a prelude to his own, he prefers to kill Hector and die himself rather than leave Patroclus unavenged.<sup>3</sup> Hector behaves in a similar way: having chosen honour over life, he remains outside the walls of Troy to meet his death at Achilles' hands.<sup>4</sup> Hundreds of minor Iliadic warriors make the same choice in a less spectacular way, by the very fact that they volunteered to come to Troy in order to win glory in war. This is true both of young Simoeisios, who came to Troy even before he had time to take a wife, and fell 'like a black poplar' at Ajax' hands, and of Lycaon son of Priamus who, having slipped away from nearby Arisbe where he was kept in safety as a hostage, returned to the battlefield only to be taught in his last moments the bitter lesson that death is after all the inevitable conclusion to life.<sup>5</sup> This attitude of the Iliadic warrior is epitomized in the following words of Sarpedon to Glaucus:

Ah, friend, if once escaped from this battle we were for ever to be ageless and immortal, neither would I fight myself in the foremost ranks, nor would I send thee into the war that giveth men renown, but now – for assuredly ten thousand fates of death (κῆρες . . . θανάτοιο) do every way beset us, and these no mortal may escape nor avoid – now let us go forward, whether we shall give glory to other men, or others to us.<sup>6</sup>

There can be no doubt that this is a pattern into which Odysseus of the *Odyssey* would not fit. True, Odysseus' surviving the war was far from being a matter of his personal choice: he did not shrink from risking his life on the battlefield (*Il.* 11.401–13 is the best proof of this), nor did he challenge the heroic code of behaviour by preferring long life to glorious death. It was above all the circumstances of Odysseus' life that determined that he should stay alive rather than die young. The fact however is that these circumstances exposed him to a life-experience in the face of which any conventional heroic response would have been out of place, with the

result that there is no way in which Odysseus' behaviour throughout the *Odyssey* can be accounted for as heroic on terms of the *Iliad*. In what follows, I shall argue that the *Odyssey* not only is aware of the fact that the situation of its hero differs essentially from that of the heroes of the *Iliad*, but that this poem proceeds from a different idea of hero than that found in the *Iliad*.

## I

The presence of 'unheroic' features in the character of Homeric Odysseus was noticed long ago, and since the time of the ancient commentators it has become habitual to gloss those features by predicating them on Odysseus' *metis*, 'cunning', as opposed to the *bie*, 'might', of other Homeric heroes, first and foremost Achilles.<sup>7</sup> There is, however, reason to believe that the difference between the heroes of the two epics goes far beyond these two characteristics.

That the feature of *metis* does not exhaust the character of Homeric Odysseus has been made clear by W. B. Stanford, who in his exemplary study of this hero showed that 'Homer ... skilfully succeeded in distinguishing Odysseus by slight deviations from the norm in almost every heroic feature'.<sup>8</sup> The following features seem to be of special interest in this connection:

(a) Odysseus is the only hero who is represented, both in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, as being concerned with food and explicitly discussing this subject: 'If one remembers that no other hero in the *Iliad*, nor any Homeric heroine in either poem, even uses the word for "belly" and still less discusses its effects, it is clear that Odysseus is an untypical hero in this respect.'<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it is precisely in this respect that Odysseus is directly opposed to Achilles in their debate on food in *Iliad* 19;<sup>10</sup>

(b) Odysseus is the only Achaean hero of importance who is described (in the *Odyssey* and in *Iliad* 10 only) as using the 'unheroic' bow rather than the spear, that standard weapon of the other heroes;

(c) Odysseus is the only Homeric hero who, in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, bears the epithet *polutlas*, 'much-enduring',<sup>11</sup> and who is systematically described (in the *Odyssey* only) as passing through compromise and humiliation: 'Ajax or Achilles would never have been willing to undergo some of Odysseus' experiences – his three adventures in beggar's disguise, for instance, and his ignominious escape from the Cyclops' cave by hanging under a ram's belly.'<sup>12</sup>

These and other features make of Odysseus a figure completely isolated in the epics, an 'untypical hero' par excellence. This is not yet to say that the Greek tradition as a whole possesses no niche in which a hero like this could be placed.

Six times in the *Odyssey* the life-experience of Odysseus is defined by the word *aethlos*.<sup>13</sup> Both in Homer and in Greek in general this word (*athlos* after Homer) and its cognates have two meanings: of 'athletic contest' and of 'labour', the latter being best exemplified by the labours of Heracles. The distinction between the two meanings, while clear-cut in the Homeric Lexicon of Ebeling, which discerns between *certamen*, *ludus* on the one hand and *aerumna*, *labor*, *contentio*, on the other, is blurred in the Liddell-Scott-Jones Lexicon due to the tendency to subsume all the usages of the word under the meaning 'struggle'. The fact however is that this rendering not only ignores the indisputable etymological affinity between *aethlos/athlos* and the adjective *athlios* 'wretched', 'miserable', but also fails to account for all the usages of the term in both Homer and later authors. This can be seen from the following examples.

In her lament for Hector in *Iliad* 24, Andromache describes what might happen to the young Astyanax after the fall of Troy: 'and thou, my child, shall either go with me upon a place where thou shalt toil at unseemly tasks, labouring (*ἀθλεύων*) before the face of some harsh lord etc.'<sup>14</sup> The LSJ translation 'struggling or suffering for him' is unsatisfactory: the rendering 'struggling', issuing as it does from the attempt to reconcile the Homeric usage with the later and more widespread meaning 'contest', does not fit the context, whereas 'suffering' seems too weak a rendering in respect of the specific kind of experience involved.

This becomes clear from comparison with another verbal usage of the same root. In *Il.* 7.452–3 Poseidon complains to Zeus that the wall built by the Achaeans will make men forget the one built by Apollo and himself during their service to Laomedon: 'and men will forget the wall that I and Phoebus Apollo built with labour (*ἀθλήσαντε*) for the hero Laomedon.' Again, the LSJ translation 'having contended with him' misses the point.<sup>15</sup> This becomes especially clear from Poseidon's words to Apollo in *Il.* 21.441–5, where the same experience is rendered by the verb *θητεύω*, 'to be a serf or labourer': 'Thou rememberest not all the ills that we twain alone of the gods endured (*ἴσα . . . πάθομεν κακά*) at Ilios, when by ordinance of Zeus we came to proud Laomedon and served (*θητεύσαμεν*) him through a year for promised recompense, and he laid on us his commands.' These instances go well with the *Odyssey's* definition of Heracles' labours as pronounced by Heracles himself: 'I was the son of

Zeus Kronion, yet had I trouble beyond measure, for I was subdued unto a man far worse than I, and he enjoined on me hard labours (*ἀέθλους*).<sup>16</sup> In so far as there is a struggle here, this is a struggle for survival, and in so far as there is suffering, this is suffering involving humiliation. As was shown by Gregory Nagy, the underlying semantic affinity between *aethlos* 'contest' and *aethlos* 'labour' is at its clearest in Pindar:

In the inherited diction of praise poetry, what an athlete undergoes in his pursuit of victory is denoted by *ponos*, 'ordeal', also called *kamatos*, and these very same words apply also to the life-and-death struggle of heroes with their enemies, man and beast alike. There is a parallel situation with the partial synonym *aethlos* (*athlos*), from which *athletes*, 'athlete', is derived: besides meaning 'contest', *aethlos* also means 'ordeal' and is applicable both to the athletic event of the athlete in the present and to the life-and-death struggle of the hero in the past.<sup>17</sup>

The only other individual hero besides Odysseus to whom the term *aethlos* is consistently applied in the epics is Heracles. Note indeed that of the fifteen epic usages of *aethlos* and its cognates meaning 'labour' as registered by Ebeling, six, as already said, relate to the life-experience of Odysseus, and five to that of Heracles.<sup>18</sup> Consider now that, seen in the perspective of Iliadic heroism, Heracles proves to be as untypical as the Odysseus of the *Odyssey*. Moreover, it can be shown that the characteristic features of this hero exactly correspond to those of Odysseus as adduced above: Heracles' attitude to food is no less prosaic than that of Odysseus (cf. Heracles the glutton and drunkard of the Attic scene); the bow is one of his permanent attributes, and his entire life-experience proves that Heracles, who knew many compromises and was constantly exposed to humiliation (see his service to Eurystheus and his being a slave of the Lydian queen Omphale), was as 'much-enduring' as Odysseus.<sup>19</sup>

The encounter of Odysseus and Heracles in the Underworld shows that it is not mere chance that these two are the only individual heroes characterized in the epics through the word *aethlos*. As A. Heubeck put it, 'the descent into Hades is deliberately mentioned as an example of the *ἀέθλοι*; it is a deed which both heroes have in common and the most dangerous enterprise undertaken by either.'<sup>20</sup> Consider especially the words with which Heracles greets Odysseus on their meeting in the Underworld:

*Διογενὲς Λαερτιάδη, πολυμήχαν' Ὀδυσσεῦ,  
ἂ δειλ', ἢ τίνα καὶ σὺ κακὸν μόρον ἡγηλάζεις,  
ὄν περ ἐγὼν ὀχέεσκον ὑπ' αὐγᾶς ἡελίοιο.*

'Son of Laertes, of the seed of Zeus, Odysseus of many devices: ah! wretched one, dost thou too lead such a life of evil doom, as I endured

beneath the rays of the sun?'<sup>21</sup> There can be little doubt that this address with its emphatic 'and you too' (*καὶ σὺ*) was deliberately cast as a 'formal' recognition of Odysseus as a hero of the same type as Heracles himself.

Thus not only Odysseus but even Heracles, who is of course a 'hero' par excellence, cannot pass for one by the standards of the *Iliad*. Consider now that after all Heracles is only the most prominent representative of an entire category of such heroes of Greek tradition who, like Perseus, Bellerophon, Jason, Theseus, and others, are mostly conspicuous by the labours they performed; some of them, as, for example, Theseus, also underwent the ultimate experience of a *katabasis*. None of the heroes of this group died on the battlefield. This prompts the question as to the grounds on which one was recognized as a hero.

## II

In so far as the Homeric usage is not taken into account, the main criteria on the basis of which a hero is identified in modern scholarship are those of the cult. A hero receives honours similar to those paid to the chthonic deities: the colour of the victims is black, they are offered at night and are slaughtered throat downward (and not upward, as for the Olympians), the liquids are poured into a trench, or low altar, *ἐσχάρα*, etc.<sup>22</sup> According to the widely accepted classification introduced by L. R. Farnell, among those who received these honours the following sub-groups can be discerned: 'heroes of divine or daimonic origin' (such as Trophonius, Linus, Ino-Leucothea); 'sacral heroes' (Aineias, Iphigeneia, Amphiaräus, Melampous); 'functional heroes', whose names are in fact nothing more than appellative epithets; and also Heracles, the Dioscuroi, Asclepius, each of whom is taken as a category in his own right; the heroes of the Homeric epics; and, finally, historical figures who became objects of a hero-cult.<sup>23</sup>

It is difficult to see what common feature could possibly be shared by all these heterogeneous figures to turn them into a clearly defined class. It is not surprising, therefore, that the only attempt to arrive at a definition accounting for all the cases of Greek heroism is, to my knowledge, Walter Burkert's remark that 'it is some extraordinary quality that makes the hero; something unpredictable and uncanny is left behind and is always present'; whereas the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* defines the hero-cult as 'the worship, as being superhuman, of noteworthy dead men and women, real or imaginary, normally at their actual or supposed tombs'.<sup>24</sup>

It seems, however, that the ancients knew better. That they did possess a

coherent concept of heroism can be seen, for example, from Diodorus Siculus, according to whom 'it is an excellent thing ... to receive in exchange for mortal labours an immortal fame (*θνητῶν πόνων ἀντικαταλλάξασθαι τὴν ἀθάνατον εὐφημίαν*). In the case of Heracles, for instance, it is generally agreed that during the whole time which he spent among men he submitted to great and continuous labours (*ὑπομείναι μεγάλους καὶ συνεχεῖς πόνους*) and perils (*κινδύνους*) willingly, in order that he might confer benefits upon the race of men and thereby gain immortality; and likewise in the case of other great and good men, some have attained to heroic honours and others to honours equal to the divine ...'<sup>25</sup> On other occasions Diodorus mentions Perseus' war against the Gorgons as his greatest labour (*τελέσαι μέγιστον ἄθλον*), the labours of Jason who, 'since he observed that of the men of former times Perseus and certain others had gained glory which was held in everlasting remembrance from the campaigns which they had waged in foreign lands and the hazard attending the labours they had performed (*διὰ τὰς ὑπερορίους στρατείας καὶ τὸ παράβολον τῶν ἄθλων δόξης ἀειμνήστου τετυχότας*), he was eager to follow the examples they had set', and Heracles again, who 'by his own labours had brought under cultivation the inhabited world' (*τοῖς ἰδίοις πόνοις ἐξημερῶσαι τὴν οἰκουμένην*).<sup>26</sup>

Late and Hellenistic as it is, Diodorus' evidence deserves serious attention, because it highlights in a clear and concise form the elements which are dispersed in earlier sources. Thus, the idea that toil and suffering bring with them the highest reward is found also in such utterances of Pindar as 'if there is some happiness (*olbos*) among men, it does not seem to have come without effort', or 'But without hard toil, few have won the kind of victory that sheds a light upon their lifetime for all the deeds they accomplished'.<sup>27</sup> The heroes whose *aethloi* are most celebrated by Pindar are the same as those mentioned by Diodorus – Heracles, Jason, Perseus.<sup>28</sup> In Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and *Philoctetes* Heracles is represented as one who laboured for the benefit of all Greece and whose toil qualified him for divine status.<sup>29</sup> That the enduring of labours was seen as inseparable from the hero's mission follows also from the fact that Socrates is presented in Plato's *Apology* as describing his own mission in terms of labours: 'I have to describe to you my wanderings, similar to those of one who endures labours. ...'<sup>30</sup> In his description of the Sicyonian cult of Adrastus, Herodotus supplies what seems to be our only direct evidence that the idea of labours and the hero-cult might have been felt to be mutually connected: 'Besides other things, the Sicyonians used to honour Adrastus with tragic choruses on account of his sufferings.'<sup>31</sup> However, Sophocles' *Oedipus at*

*Colonus* gives us a vivid description of how a man whose only achievement is the immense suffering which he endured in the course of his long life eventually becomes a blessed hero,<sup>32</sup> and the evidence provided by the *Trachiniae* and the *Philoctetes* regarding Heracles eventually amounts to much the same.

This is not yet to say that the hero-cult provided the only context in which the idea of the life of labours as resulting in the highest reward could be applied. Thus, in his famous moral allegory the fifth-century philosopher Prodicus set hardship and toil endured for a good cause as a precondition of the highest happiness. In much the same vein as Diodorus' characterization of the hero four centuries later, Prodicus makes Heracles choose the labours of Virtue over the pleasures of Vice: 'Of the good and beautiful things, nothing is given by gods to men without labour and effort (*ἄνευ πόνου καὶ ἐπιμελείας*), but if you wish to placate the gods, you must serve the gods; if you desire to be loved by your friends, you must be a benefactor (*εὐεργετητέον*) to your friends; if you are eager to be honoured by a state, you must serve the state (*ὠφελητέον*), and if you wish to be admired by the whole of Greece for your virtue, you should try to be a benefactor of Greece (*εὖ ποιεῖν*).'<sup>33</sup> Although Virtue's words are addressed to Heracles, the parable itself was obviously meant to apply to every man, so that 'the most blessed happiness' proposed by Prodicus as a reward for the life of labours need not necessarily imply the kind of reward earned by Heracles himself.<sup>34</sup> Characteristically, the divine status achieved by Heracles is usually designated by the same words, *olbos* and *olbios*, as the happiness achieved in this life.<sup>35</sup>

In view of Odysseus' specific experiences in the *Odyssey*, there is nothing extraordinary about the fact that the term 'labour', *aethlos*, bearing as it does the connotations of toil and suffering, should be associated from time to time with the poem's hero. Yet, the range of the term's application to him demonstrates beyond doubt that Odysseus' association with *aethloi* was deliberate. Consider first the following lines of the prooemium: 'But when now the year had come in the course of the seasons, wherein the gods had ordained that he should return home to Ithaca, not even there was he quit of labours (*οὐδ' ἔνθα πεφυγμένος ἦεν ἀέθλων*), not even among his own.'<sup>36</sup> Since at this point in the story Odysseus is with Calypso on Ogygia after he had lost all his companions, and since Phaeacia is the only remaining stop on his way to Ithaca, there can be no doubt that, while the former labours suggested by this line may well refer to Odysseus' adventures at sea, by speaking of the 'labours' in store for Odysseus the poet meant the latter's experience as a beggar in his



own home.<sup>37</sup> This is not to say, of course, that Odysseus' wanderings are not regarded in the same way. Consider indeed Odysseus' words to Penelope in *Od.* 23.350–3: 'Lady, already we have enough of labours (πολέων κεκορήμεθ' ἀέθλων), thou and I; thou, in weeping here, and longing for my troublous return, I, while Zeus and the other gods bound me fast in pain, despite my yearning after home, away from my own country.' And this is not all. In *Odyssey* 4 the term *aethlos* extends over Odysseus' experience during the war itself, both generally, as in 4.170 (πολέας ἐμόγησεν ἀέθλους), and particularly, in Helen's reminiscence of how Odysseus penetrated Troy disguised as a beggar (4.241).

Thus, all of Odysseus' experience, from his fighting at Troy to his return to Ithaca, is consistently described in the poem as falling into the sphere of *aethloi*. But it is *Odyssey* 23 that is especially illuminating. The war is over, and so also the wanderings, and even the struggle to reestablish himself in his own home is behind the hero of the *Odyssey*. But what does Odysseus say to Penelope immediately upon their happy reunion?

ὦ γύναι, οὐ γάρ πω πάντων ἐπὶ πείρατ' ἀέθλων  
ἤλθομεν, ἀλλ' ἔτ' ὄπισθεν ἀμέτρητος πόνος ἔσται,  
πολλὸς καὶ χαλεπός, τὸν ἐμὲ χρῆ πάντα τελέσσαι.

'Lady, we have not yet come to the issue of all our labours; but still there will be toil unmeasured, long and difficult, that I must needs bring to a full end.'<sup>38</sup>

The *aethlos* meant this time is Odysseus' future journey with an oar on his shoulder to the country of men who 'know not the sea, nor eat meat savoured with salt', predicted to him by Teiresias in the Underworld. The difference between this labour and the others lies first of all in the fact that Odysseus' last labour is not only self-imposed but also, in the vein of Heracles' civilizing mission, purports to serve the common good. Above all, however, the last labour of Odysseus is remarkable in that it is regarded as a crowning achievement in his life, an achievement which, in accordance with the view of labours outlined above, will guarantee him the appropriate reward. Indeed, according to the prophecy of Teiresias, only upon accomplishing this mission will Odysseus be able to return home, where he will live happily and die of old age: 'And from the sea shall thine own death come, the gentlest death that may be, which shall end thee foredone with smooth old age, and the folk shall dwell happily around thee.'<sup>39</sup> This promise seems to be a clear indication of the fact that the *Odyssey* is not only aware of the popular notion of heroism as outlined above but also deliberately models its hero to fit into this notion.

### III

Why is Achilles, doomed as he was to die young, never described by Homer in terms of labours? Metrically, Odysseus and Achilles are twins, so that nothing would prevent the poet from creating the expression *πολύτλας δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς*. Consider now the remarkable fact, paid due attention by Walter Burkert, that 'it is the exception, not the rule, for those who fall in battle to receive heroic honours'.<sup>40</sup> This goes well with the archaic Greek practice, reflected in Herodotus' story of Tellus the Athenian, that the highest honour paid to an individual for a glorious death on the battlefield was public burial on the place of the battle.<sup>41</sup> Consider also that Alexander, born warrior and admirer of Achilles as he was, insisted on conceiving of his conquests in terms of labours and, consciously modelling his own achievements on those of Heracles, regarded them as a necessary precondition of his future deification.<sup>42</sup>

It seems significant in this connection that more often than not early death was treated in popular Greek thought as a kind of blessing. To quote Theognis, 'blessed, fortunate, and blissful is he who goes down to the dark house of Hades without having experienced labours'.<sup>43</sup> According to Mimnermus, the fates of death, *keres*, hold two lots of men, one of 'hateful old age' and the other of death; it is better to die young and thus to avoid the suffering which will come sooner or later, because 'there is no one to whom Zeus would not give many sorrows'.<sup>44</sup> The story of Cleobis and Biton, on whom Hera bestowed early death as a special divine blessing, bears witness to the popularity of this idea.<sup>45</sup>

This attitude to early death is more easily understood when seen against the popular belief according to which human life is nothing but a long series of ups and downs. One need not go so far as Pindar, Herodotus, and Sophocles to illustrate this view. Take, for example, the Homeric parable of the jars of Zeus put in the mouth of Achilles in *Iliad* 24, which begins with the words: 'this is the lot the gods have spun for miserable men, that they should live in pain'.<sup>46</sup> There are only two kinds of gifts that Zeus can bestow on mortal men: either evil mixed with good or evil unmixed, so that the life in which evil is mixed with good should be recognized as a normal one. Suffering therefore should be accepted as a necessary component of human life, and it is characteristic that the life-stories of two old men, Priam and Peleus, are adduced to illustrate this thesis.<sup>47</sup>

This is not yet to say that man should try to escape suffering by committing suicide or should accept his lot passively, without trying to

make something of his life. Thus, the Heracles of Euripides, whose involuntary murder of his own wife and children caused him to consider suicide, eventually arrives at the conclusion that this would be the act of a coward, because 'the man who cannot bear up under the blows of fortune would not be able to bear up under the weapon of a man either'.<sup>48</sup> The Heracles of Bacchylides comments on the sad life story of Meleager told to him in the Underworld in a similar vein: 'For mortals it would be best not to be born nor to look at the light of the sun. But those who grieve about this cannot act, and so one must talk about what can be done.'<sup>49</sup> True, life is full of toil and suffering, but man should be able not only to endure but also to transform this toil and suffering into a supreme achievement. 'To make of this suffering a glorious life' – these words of the deified Heracles of Sophocles, addressed to his friend Philoctetes when the latter is sunk in the agony of despair, sum up everything the heroic life is about.<sup>50</sup>

Undoubtedly, this is the kind of life of which the Homeric Odysseus can be an example. As distinct from the Iliadic hero, who sets an example of how one ought to die, all Odysseus' life-experience demonstrates how one ought to live. Earthy and prosaic as he is, Odysseus manages to pass through all the tests that life puts before him: to contrive the escape from the Cyclops' cave, to abstain from eating the flesh of the sacred cattle of Helios, and to endure the crowning humiliation of living as a beggar in his own house. Moreover, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Odysseus was able to overcome everything life had in store for him not in spite of being earthy and prosaic but because of these qualities, for to be earthy and prosaic (a feature, we should remember, shared by Heracles) is after all nothing else than being human. Much as has been written of the choice of Achilles, one should not forget that Odysseus too had to make a choice. Yet, as distinct from Achilles whose choice is between early death and long life, Odysseus chooses between human life and immortality, offered to him by Calypso. In full conformity with popular Greek ethics, Odysseus is represented as contented with his lot and preferring to immortality his own life even if it is a life of toil and suffering.<sup>51</sup> In this, he proves as exemplary a hero as only a Greek hero can be.<sup>52</sup>

We saw that Mimnermus made provision for two fates of death (*keres*) – that of early death and that of death in old age. Now in the *Iliad* Achilles too had two *keres* of his own, one of early death in battle accompanied by everlasting glory, the other of the peaceful but inglorious death of old age, and eventually chose the former (see n. 3 above). This is, however, not the kind of choice Achilles is prepared to repeat in the *Odyssey*. On meeting the ghost of Achilles in the Underworld, Odysseus proclaims that, as distinct

from himself, whose life is full of sorrows (*αἰὲν ἔχω κακά*), Achilles is the most blessed (*μακάρτατος*) of men, for even when still alive he was honoured by the Achaeans 'equally to gods' and after his death he holds a princely position among the dead. Achilles' answer is illuminating:

Nay, speak not comfortably to me of death, oh great Odysseus. Rather would I live on ground as the hireling of another (*βουλοίμην κ' ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλῳ*), with a landless man who had no great livelihood, than bear sway among all the dead that be departed.<sup>53</sup>

The verb *θητεύω*, 'to be a serf or labourer', used by Achilles here, is the same that designates the labours Poseidon and Apollo endured while serving the Trojan king Laomedon. As we saw above, this verb can function as a synonym of *ἀθλεύω*, 'to labour' proper; note also that the motif of serving one's inferior is closely connected with the idea of labours in general and the labours of Heracles in particular (see Section I). This seems to indicate that Achilles' choice in the Underworld is not, as is usually supposed, a choice between heroic death and unheroic life but one between two kinds of heroism.<sup>54</sup> While the Achilles of the *Iliad*, in conformity with the ethos of this poem, chooses early death in battle and the everlasting glory by which it is accompanied, the Achilles of the *Odyssey* prefers the life of labours.

To be sure, neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey* make any provision whatever for the kind of immortality suggested by the hero-cult.<sup>55</sup> This is not yet to say that the ideas associated with this phenomenon were unfamiliar to Homer. Indeed, if the present interpretation of the *Odyssey*'s evidence is correct, there seems reason to suppose that the idea that the life of labours must needs be crowned with an appropriate reward, characteristic as it is of the popular Greek attitude to the phenomenon of hero-worship, is at least as early as the Homeric *Odyssey*. This is not necessarily to say that this idea had been there from the very beginning of the *Odyssey* tradition: the alternate epithet *polumetis*, 'of many devices', is no less frequently applied to Odysseus than the epithet *polutlas*, 'much-enduring', not to mention the fact that not all of Odysseus' adventures would readily fit the pattern of labours.<sup>56</sup> What is important, however, is that this is the overall interpretation to which these adventures were eventually subsumed in our *Odyssey*, and we have seen that this interpretation is consistent in that it spreads over all of Odysseus' life-experience, while his meetings with Achilles and Heracles in the Underworld were obviously designed to deliver the same message.

To sum up, either Homeric poem offers its own version of heroism. In the *Iliad* being a hero amounts to readiness to meet death on the battlefield;<sup>57</sup> the sense in which the words 'heroism' and 'hero' are used today ultimately descends from this concept. According to the *Odyssey* a hero is one who is prepared to go through life enduring toil and suffering. Whatever the reasons for this difference,<sup>58</sup> there can be no doubt that it is the *Odyssey's* version of heroism that conforms to the popular Greek attitude to the phenomenon of hero-worship.

## NOTES

\* An early version of this paper was read in May 1991 at a colloquium held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in honour of Ra'anana Meridor. I have much pleasure in dedicating it to her.

1. The Greek word 'hero' can designate either people of the remote past who lived up to the time of the Trojan War and whose deeds are celebrated in the epic songs, or people who became the object of cult after their deaths; the latter category also includes those who lived in historical times. The religious aspect of the word 'hero' is completely alien to the Homeric epic, either because the formative stage of the Greek epic tradition preceded the development of the phenomenon of the hero-cult or because for some reason or another this tradition preferred to ignore this phenomenon. See further M. L. West, *Hesiod, Works and Days* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 370 ff. and G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore and London, 1979), pp. 114 ff.

2. See J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 81 ff.; S. L. Schein, *The Mortal Hero* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 67 ff.; M. W. Edwards, *Homer, Poet of the Iliad* (Baltimore and London, 1987), pp. 149 ff.

3. *Il.* 9.406–20; 18.94–126. Cf. Pl. *Symp.* 179e: 'after learning from his mother that if he slew Hector he should die, while if he spared him he should end his days at home in the fullness of his years, he made the braver choice and went to rescue his lover Patroclus, avenged his death, and so died . . .' (tr. M. Joyce). Cf. also *Ap.* 28c–d.

4. *Il.* 22.90–130; cf. 6.440–65.

5. Simoiosios *Il.* 4.473–89; Lycaon *Il.* 21.34–114.

6. *Il.* 12.322–8; cf. also 6.487–9; Callin. 1.8–13. The English quotations from the *Iliad* are given in the translation by Andrew Lang, Walter Leaf, and Ernest Myers, and those from the *Odyssey* in the translation by S. H. Butcher and Andrew Lang; a few slight changes have been introduced for the sake of terminological uniformity.

7. See further Nagy (above n. 1), pp. 42 ff.

8. *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford, 1963), p. 66.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

10. *Il.* 19.154–83; 198–237.

11. As part of the formula *πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς*; the meaning of the epithet *ταλασίφρονος*, which appears with the genitive of Odysseus' name, amounts to much the same. Note that Stanford (above n. 8), p. 74, is mistaken in claiming that the epithet 'much-enduring' is also applied to Nestor.

12. Stanford, loc. cit.; cf. also J. Griffin, *Homer, the Odyssey* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 93 ff.

13. *Od.* 1.18; 4.170, 241; 23.248, 261, 350.

14. *Il.* 24.732–4.

15. The same tendency can be seen in the translation of *πολλά περ ἀθλήσαντα* at *Il.* 15.30, relating to Heracles, as 'having gone through many struggles': see LSJ s.v. *ἀθλέω*.

16. *Od.* 11.620–2.

17. G. Nagy, 'Early Greek Views of Poets and Poetry' in G. A. Kennedy (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 12; cf. id. (below n. 28), pp. 136 ff. This double use of the word *aethlos* can already be seen in the presentation of the chariot race in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles*; see vv. 310–11: 'So they [the charioteers] were engaged in an unending toil (*πόνον*), and the end with victory came never to them, and the contest (*ἀεθλον*) was ever unwon' (tr. H. G. Evelyn-White).

18. *Il.* 8.363; 15.30; 19.133; *Od.* 11.622, 624; cf. *H. Hom.* 15.8; *Hes. Th.* 951. Of the remaining four, two relate to the participants of the Trojan War *en masse* (*Il.* 3.162; *Od.* 3.262), one to the work done by Poseidon and Apollo in the service of Laomedon the king of Troy (*Il.* 7.453), and one to the possible future of the child Astyanax (*Il.* 24.734).
19. Cf. *H. Hom.* 15.6 (of Heracles), 'he himself did many deeds of violence, and endured many'.
20. In A. Heubeck and A. Hoekstra (edd.), *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey II* (Oxford, 1989), p. 116 (on 11.623-4); cf. G. K. Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 132f.
21. *Od.* 11.617-19.
22. See, e.g., E. Rohde, *Psyche* 1 (Tübingen, 1921), pp. 148ff.; W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (Boston, 1954), pp. 221f.
23. *Greek Hero Cults* (Oxford, 1921), p. 19.
24. *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 208; *OCD* s.v. 'hero-cult'.
25. *Diod. Sic.* 1.2.4; cf. 4.1.4-6.
26. *Perseus* 3.52.4; *Jason* 4.40.2; *Heracles* 5.8.5; cf. 4.11.1.
27. *Pyth.* 12.28-9 and *Ol.* 10.22-3.
28. See esp. *Isthm.* 6.48 (Heracles); *Pyth.* 4.220, 165 (Jason); cf. *Pyth.* 10.29ff. (Perseus); cf. also *Bacchyl.* 9.8; 13.55-7. See further G. Nagy, *Pindar's Homer* (Baltimore and London, 1990), p. 138.
29. *Soph. Trach.* 1011-13 and *Phil.* 1419-20. Cf. *Eur. H.F.* 1252; cf. 1309-10.
30. *Ap.* 22a6-7.
31. *Hdt.* 5.67.5.
32. See especially *O.C.* 563-64, Theseus' recognition of the labours of Oedipus as being of the same kind as those endured by himself.
33. *Prodicus B* 2.28 DK (= *Xen. Mem.* 2.1.28).
34. *Ibid.* 33.11-12. Cf. Galinsky (above n. 20), p. 103.
35. Cf., e.g., *Hes. Th.* 954-5; cf. also *Pind. Nem.* 1.68-75; *Soph. Phil.* 1418-22.
36. *Od.* 1.16-19.
37. This was the interpretation preferred by Aristarchus; for a different assessment of these lines see S. West in A. Heubeck, S. West, and J. B. Hainsworth (edd.), *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey I* (Oxford, 1988), p. 74 ad locum.
38. *Od.* 23.248-50.
39. *Od.* 11.134-7; cf. 23.281-4.
40. Burkert (above n. 24), pp. 207 and 431 n. 50; cf. West (above n. 1), p. 370. Characteristically, all the examples of the worship of those who fell in battle adduced by Burkert relate to collective rather than individual worship, such as that of those who fell at Marathon, at Plataea, or the Persian Wars in general: this seems to be in accordance with the Homeric practice of applying the term *aethlos* to the participants of the Trojan War in general rather than to the individuals who fell in this war (see n. 18 above).
41. *Hdt.* 1.30.3-4. See further D. Asheri, *Erodoto. Le Storie* 1 (Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1988), p. 284 ad locum.
42. *Arr. Anab.* 5.26; cf. also 4.15; 4.29; 5.25 (twice); 5.29; 6.24.
43. *Theog.* 1013-14.
44. *Mimn.* 2.15-16; cf. *Theog.* 767-8; *Soph. O.C.* 1224-38.
45. See *Hdt.* 1.31; cf. 7.46.3-4.
46. *Il.* 24.525-6; cf. *Od.* 18.130-42.
47. Note that the epithet *polutleios*, 'much-suffering', which comes very close to Odysseus' epithet *polutlas*, is applied in the *Odyssey* to old men in general; see *Od.* 11.38.
48. *Eur. H.F.* 1349-60; cf. 1347-8.
49. *Bacchyl.* 5.150-2.
50. *Phil.* 1422.
51. *Od.* 5.202-24; 7.254-8; 23.333-7; cf. 9.25-36.
52. Characteristically, it was Odysseus who, again together with Heracles, was adopted as an exemplary figure in the vein of Prodicus' exegesis by the fifth-century philosopher Antisthenes and later by both the Cynics and the Stoics. The reasons why these two were chosen as philosophers' ideal lie in their self-restraint, endurance of hardships, disregard for indignities and humiliation, and in their readiness to serve the common good. See Stanford (above n. 8), pp. 96ff. and 121ff.
53. *Od.* 11.481-91.
54. Cf. Griffin (above n. 12), pp. 95f.: 'We must hear in this scene the retort of the *Odyssey* to the

glamorous and passionate heroism of the *Iliad*; they would sing a very different tune, the poet suggests, when they really faced the facts of death. The heroism of the survivor is not such a small thing.'

55. There is good reason to suppose that *Od.* 11.602–4, commenting on the emergence of Heracles among the ghosts of the Underworld to the effect that this is only a 'phantom' whereas Heracles himself dwells with the gods (cf. *Hes. Th.* 954–5; fr. 25.26–33; 229.6–13), is an interpolation. On this passage and the apotheosis of Heracles in general see M. L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 130, 134, 169.

56. On an interesting attempt to reconcile Odysseus' cunning with his endurance by interpreting these two qualities in terms of the development of character see R. B. Rutherford, *JHS* 106 (1986), 145 ff.

57. It is doubtful whether Hesiod's account of the race of heroes as found in *Work and Days* reflects a belief different to that found in the *Iliad*. According to Hesiod, while the people of the golden and the silver races were transformed after death into spirits (*daimones*), the people of the race of heroes, which embraced all those who fought at Thebes and Troy, either died in battle or were transferred to the Isles of the Blessed: see *Op.* 166–73. Whatever the idea of immortality enshrined in the myth of the Isles of the Blessed (on this subject see especially West [above n. 37], p. 227), it is clear from Hesiod that it does not concern those who fell in war; see further West (above n. 1), pp. 192 (on line 166) and 186 (on line 141).

58. As is generally recognized, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* substantially differ from each other in their treatment of the religious and moral issues. This difference is alternately approached either in terms of historical development or in those of the social or genre standing of both poems. On the discussion see, e.g., Guthrie (above n. 22), pp. 117 ff., H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*<sup>2</sup> (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 27 ff.