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HOMER AND THE ART OF OVERTAKING

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Abstract. This article draws attention to the thematics of running in Homer, seeking to make sense of the difference between catching up and overtaking as it applies to the two epics. It begins by exploring how the *Iliad* foregrounds the problems and strategies involved in catching up with one's opponent and getting ahead. It then goes on to show how, by contrast, the *Odyssey* presents a world where the act of overtaking and the alternation between the categories of first and last are of central concern to Odysseus on his way home in Books 8 and 9.

καὶ οὐ πως ἔστι πόδεσσι / στήμεναι ἀμφοτέροισι καὶ ἐκφυγέειν κακότητα
("There is no way to stand firm on both feet and escape trouble.")
—*Od.* 5.413–14¹

THE WORLD OF THE *ILIAD* IS ONE IN WHICH, to use the words of Sarpedon, one must always strive to be "among the first" (μετὰ πρώτοισι), and the kinesthetic dynamics of that poem foreground the problems and strategies involved in getting ahead.² The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, presents a more complex picture, a world where the positioning of oneself as first or last is central to the problem of achieving one's *nostos*. In that epic, away from the charged space and specific rules of the battlefield, running might also transfer to other competitive categories and other ways of coming in "first" or "last." It is clear in both poems that, while being still on one's feet may provide ideal starting positions for epic plots (as with *Iliad* 1.6 or the initial seated postures of Telemachus and Odysseus when they are introduced in *Odyssey* 1 and 5), legs need to move in

¹The quotation and translation are taken from Dimock's epigraph to his 1956 article.
²*Il.* 12.315, 321, cf. 324. Hector says the same at *Il.* 6.445.

order for a narrative to progress. The point may seem overly obvious, but a careful examination of the thematics of running in both poems can in fact bring new aspects of Homeric epic to light. In this article, I examine the complementary movements of catching up and overtaking in order to argue that the way in which characters in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* engage in these actions reflects important distinctions between the two poems.

Catching up and overtaking are similar actions in that they depend on two figures running—one ahead and one behind the other—yet the power dynamics embedded in the meaning of being “first” or “last” is notably altered at the moment of the transition from attaining to overtaking.³ The small passage from the one to the other draws out the distinction between running in war and running in a race, as it is marked out in the shift from battleground to running track.⁴ In what follows, I will set my reading of Homeric running within two primary frames of inquiry, arguing that speed of foot can have as much to do with the organization and timing within the poem as with the strategy of a particular character on the battlefield or during his return home. On the one hand, therefore, I will look at how various temporalities in the poem affect or are manipulated by the actors in the epics, and, on the other, at how they can be strategized by the poet himself in the organization of his narrative. These two approaches are complementary to one another, for they both reveal how running and its attendant actions open up new ways of reading time and technique in Homer. The *Iliad*, as I will show, is a poem that is particularly associated with the thematics of catching up, but it is precisely this action that Homer counters with the various manifestations of overtaking that are initiated by the figure of Odysseus in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

As a guiding thread for this inquiry, I use a selection of passages

³The verbs that describe the acts of running (θέω, τρέχω) and reaching or catching up with (αἰρέω, ἰκάνω, ἰκνέομαι, καταμάρπτω, κιχάνω, μάρπτω, τέτμον) in Homer are varied, as are the verbs that describe chasing (δίεμαι, διώκω, ἐπείγω, ἐπιτρέχω, μεθάλλομαι) and running ahead or fleeing (ἐκφέρω, προθέω, προφεύγω, τιταίνω, ὑπεκπροθέω, ὑποφεύγω, φεύγω, φοβέομαι), but the movement of the pursuing figure toward his target is motivated largely by the same impulses and physical actions. See Létoublon’s detailed study of verbs of running (1985, 181–99). The verbs that denote overtaking in Homer are παραδύω, παρατρέχω, παραφθάνω, παρελαύνω, παρεξελαύνω, παρεξέρχομαι, παρέρχομαι, and φθάνω.

⁴Depending on the kind of running that takes place, the one who runs first is either quarry or victor, either fleeing in desperation or surging ahead in jubilation. The associations between games and battle have been well discussed in the scholarship. See for example Dickie 1983; Thalmann 1998, 133–40; Kyle 2007, 54–71, and further references in my notes below.

from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to examine the significance of the difference between catching up and overtaking as it pertains to Achilles and Odysseus. The distinction that I am suggesting in their running styles and abilities fits securely within the broader rubric of the *biē* (force) / *mētis* (cunning) divide by which these two heroes are often evaluated. But I wish here to rethink those categories by setting them within an exclusively kinesthetic frame. What the actions of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* teach us is that it is not just, nor even necessarily, how fast the body moves that is important, but rather that sometimes the best way to move forward is by a complex rearrangement of the categories of being first and last, fast or slow, as they are played out on the battlefield or in the athletic arena. The weary-legged and possibly also thin- and short-legged Odysseus' unique understanding and manipulation of that fact are key elements in Homer's articulation of the difference between him and his swift-footed, Iliadic counterpart.⁵

Before we can fully understand how overtaking works in Homer we must spend some time with the kind of running that is so important to the *Iliad*, and that is the notion of running in order to catch up with somebody. To this end, we will begin by rehearsing some familiar material, by analyzing a series of "catching ups" that are coordinated around the bodies of Hector and Achilles, culminating in the famous unsuccessful chase of *Iliad* 22. In the second part of the article, I will look at how Odysseus positions himself in relation to an "Achilles" or Iliadic style of running, primarily in Books 8 and 9 of the *Odyssey*. As a bridge between sections 1 and 2, I will analyze the various acts of running that take place within the funeral games for Patroclus. The races there will serve as a transition in the movement from attaining to overtaking that this article seeks to chart.

1. RUNNING AND CATCHING UP IN THE *ILIAD*

Achilles is the fastest of all the warriors at Troy and the hero who runs with the most intensity, and he is paradigmatic of the notion that success, especially on the battlefield, comes through speed.⁶ He embodies the

⁵*Od.* 8.233; *Il.* 3.196–97; *Il.* 3.211 and n. 57, below; but see also *Od.* 18.68, where Odysseus' thighs are described as beautiful and strong (καλούς τε μεγάλους τε).

⁶Men, animals such as dogs and horses (e.g., 10.437; 19.415; 22.162–63; cf. Griffith 2006, part 2), and gods (e.g., Ares 5.430; 8.215; Nagy [1979] 1999, 327) are all celebrated for the speed at which they move in the *Iliad*, in ascending order of velocity; the gods themselves can move "as swift as thought" (Vernant 1991, 27–49). Achilles' swiftness was

principle that a good warrior will not only run far out in front in battle but will also outrun his opponent, and in reaching him, cut him down.⁷ Not until Achilles reenters the battlefield in Book 20, however, do we see his famous feet at last move into action. Then they travel with the speed of a wind-driven fire (20.490–93) in pursuit of Hector, Aeneas, Polydorus (the fastest of Priam's sons), and numerous other Trojans, a large number of whom escape by fleeing back into the citadel and some of whom are chased down and killed on the plain or trapped and killed within the river Scamander. A fairly standard vocabulary of chasing, fleeing, and catching occurs frequently through Achilles' *aristeia* in Books 20 and 21. Even when he stands in one place to fight in traditional Homeric combat (as against Aeneas), the vocabulary of speed energizes both Achilles' rhetoric and that of his opponent.⁸ Everywhere in these two books, therefore, we find bodies fleeing, springing, darting, running, pouncing, chasing, and rushing, with a recurrent emphasis on the feet and legs.⁹

legendary (see further Edwards 1985, 15; Burgess 2009, 13–15), and he in fact runs more slowly in the *Iliad* than elsewhere (Pi. *Nem.* 3.51–52; Griffin 1977, 40).

⁷See my n. 3, above. Catching up happens frequently on the *Iliad*'s battlefield in the sequence of combat whereby a warrior pursues, reaches, and most likely kills his opponent (e.g., *Il.* 5.65–66). There are exceptions to this order of course (e.g., *Il.* 16.597–98). It was a mark of honor to run out in the forefront of battle (e.g., *Il.* 22.459, where Andromache states that Hector used to run far ahead [πολὸν προθέεσκε] in battle; Odysseus says the same about Neoptolemus at *Od.* 11.515) as a *promachos* (see further Fenik 1968; Van Wees 1988; Van Wees 1994).

⁸*Il.* 20.89–93, 187–94 (Aeneas' previous flight from Achilles down the slopes of Mount Ida), and 20.226–29 (the twelve foals of Boreas, who run so fast that their feet do not break the tips of the grain). In this way, chasing annuls the standard constraints of a formal duel, one of the most important forms of heroic fighting. See further Tsagalis (forthcoming 2012) on how the Iliadic duel operates in a markedly different kind of space to the running of two heroes across the field.

⁹E.g., αἰσσω (20.277, 401, 21.247, 254, 303); ἄλλομαι (20.353, 21.174, 536); ἀπαίσσω (21.234); ἀποτρέπω (20.109, 119); διώκω (21.3, 601, 602); ἐκθρώσκω (21.539); ἐκφεύγω (21.66); ἐνθρώσκω (21.233); ἔπομαι (21.256); ἐπορούω (20.284, 442, 445, 21.33, 144, 392); ἐπισσεύω (20.288, 447, 21.227, 234, 601); ἐφάλλομαι (21.140); ἐφέπω (20.337, 357, 359, 494, 21.100); ἐφήμι (20.454, 21.424, 524); ἐφορμάω (20.461); θέω (20.53); θρώσκω (20.381, 21.126); θύ[ν]ω (20.412, 493, 21.234); κηάνω (20.454, 21.128, 263, 605); κλονέω (20.492, 21.528, 533, 554); μάπτω (21.489, 564); μεθορμάω (20.192); μεταίσσω (21.564); μετατροπαλίζομαι (20.190); οἰμάω (21.252); ὀρμάω (21.265, 572, 595); παραίσσω (20.414); πηδάω (21.269, 302); σεύω (20.148, 189, 325); τρέπω (21.349, 603); ὑπεκπροθέω (21.604); ὑπεκφεύγω (20.191); ὑπεράλλομαι (20.327); ὑποτρέχω (21.68); φεύγω (20.190, 350, 402, 449, 21.6, 13, 23, 35, 52, 57, 93, 129, 256, 296, 472, 493, 496, 528, 532, 542, 554, 558, 580, 609); φθάνω (21.262, 576); φοβέω (20.90, 187, 21.4, 206, 267, 575, 606); γούνατα (20.435, 21.52, 114, 270, 302, 425, 506, 611); πόδες (20.59, 157, 189, 324, 410, 411, 441, 456, 21.241, 269, 271, 453, 557, 564, 601[x2], 605, 611).

As Achilles continues to progress through this section of the poem, the description of his actions becomes increasingly associated with chasing and fleeing. At the end of Book 21, as the Trojans flee en masse toward the city gates, Achilles is so focused on the act of running that he is even able to keep pace with Apollo (21.600–605):

αὐτῷ γὰρ ἐκάεργος Ἀγήγορι πάντα ἐοικῶς
 ἔστι πρόσθε ποδῶν, ὃ δ' ἐπέσσυτο ποσὶ διώκειν.
 ἦος ὃ τὸν πεδίοιο διώκετο πυροφόροιο,
 τρέψας πὰρ ποταμὸν βαθυδινήεντα Σκάμανδρον,
 τυτθὸν ὑπεκπροθέοντα· δόλω δ' ἄρ' ἔθελγεν Ἀπόλλων,
 ὡς αἰεὶ ἔλπιτο κιχῆσεσθαι ποσὶν οἴσι.

The striker from afar likened himself in all ways to Agenor and stood there before his feet, and Achilles sprang in chase of him in the speed of his feet; for the time he chased him across the wheat-bearing plain, turning him toward the deep whirls of the river Scamander as he ran a little in front; with the trick Apollo beguiled him so that he hoped ever by running to catch up with him.¹⁰

Three of the four running verbs in this short passage preview the running that is still to come involving Achilles and Hector, as if Apollo were standing in not only for Agenor but for Agenor's brother as well.¹¹ Thus ἐπισσεύω occurs again at the beginning of the next book to describe Achilles' swift advance upon Hector (22.26); διώκω a further eight times in Book 22, with Achilles always in the chasing role (22.8, 157, 158, 168, 173, 199, 200, 230); and κιχάνω one more time, to describe how Hector's fate has now caught him up (22.303).¹² In fact, the prominence of διώκω (*to chase*) at the very end of Book 21 and on into Book 22 suggests a narrowing in on the final pursuit of Hector by Achilles, for in the frenetic movement of Books 20–21 before the running of Apollo and Achilles,

¹⁰Translations of Homer are taken from Lattimore 1951 and Lattimore 1965 unless otherwise noted, with changes in spelling to conform to my text. On occasion I have modified Lattimore's translation of κιχάνω and καταμάρπτω from "overtake" to "catch up" for the sake of clarity. Although the meaning of κιχάνω is close to that of τυγχάνω (*obtain*, KG 1, 349), Lattimore will sometimes use the English word "overtake" to imply the idea of reaching or attaining.

¹¹Cf. Fenik 1968, 214, on this scene as an example of an anticipatory device.

¹²The fourth running verb, ὑπεκπροθέω (*to run just a little ahead of, outstrip*), does not occur in Book 22. Note however its use at *Il.* 9.506 (Atē ahead of the Litai, discussed later in the article) and *Od.* 8.125 (the running race on Scheria).

where we see verbs denoting rushing, leaping, and whirling, as well as running, διώκω occurs only once, at the very beginning of Book 21 (line 3) and nowhere in Book 20.

While Achilles runs on with his remarkable speed and intensity, Hector awaits him in a posture of such stillness that Homer calls him “shackled” by fate (Ἑκτορα δ’ αὐτοῦ μείναι ὀλοῖη μοῖρα πέδησεν, 22.5). The previous significant instance in the poem where Homer places Hector at the city gate occurs during his meeting with Andromache (6.390–502), in a section of the *Iliad* that rehearses the concept of Hector being “caught up with” in precisely this location.¹³ That section will be worth drawing on now for the light it sheds on Hector’s stance in Book 22 as Achilles approaches the city walls. In the second half of Book 6, Hector’s visit to the city brings him for a time into Paris and Helen’s bedroom, where he urges Paris to come out and fight. Paris agrees and tells Hector that he will follow and catch him up (κιχήσασθαι) on his way out of the city after he has put on his armor (6.341). Hector immediately afterward stresses the importance of the timing of this meeting upon Helen, asking her to hurry Paris along, “so he may catch up (καταμάρψη) with me while I am still in the city” (6.363–64).

Following that conversation, Hector goes looking for Andromache and learns that she has left for the city wall (6.388). This sets him hurrying back along the same path through which he had entered the city, hoping to reach his wife before she leaves. At the Scaean gates, instead of meeting Paris as planned, he unexpectedly meets Andromache, who catches up with him much as we had been prepared to expect Paris would (6.392–94):

εὔτε πύλας ἴκανε διερχόμενος μέγα ἄστυ
Σκαϊάς, τῆ ἄρ’ ἔμελλε διεξιμέναι πεδίονδε,
ἔνθ’ ἄλοχος πολύδωρος ἐναντίη ἦλθε θέουσα

As he had come to the gates on his way through the great city,
the Scaean gates, whereby he would issue into the plain, there
at last his own generous wife came running to meet him

After the conversation between Hector, Andromache, and their son, Andromache turns away from Hector and follows the path back to the city, looking back (ἐντροπαλιζομένη, 496) at her husband as she goes. Once home, she weeps with her servants because she does not expect to ever see him returning to her again (Hector had foreseen the same thing of

¹³At 16.712, Hector pauses at the Scaean gates and decides whether to make an offensive or defensive move against Patroclus.

himself at 6.367). He will not, she believes, be one of those “fleeing ahead” (προφύγοντα, 502) of the strength and hands of the Achaeans.

The scene that Andromache envisions in Book 6 and the one that takes place at the beginning of Book 22 (as the other Trojans “flee like fawns” within the gates and Hector stands still) thus quietly mirror one another. Hector’s position in front of the Scaean gates in both these scenes places him at an interesting temporal crossroads, as in the first case, Andromache imagines her husband’s future as she retreats and continually looks back at him, while in the second, that imagined future appears running at full speed toward him. In both instances, Hector stands still at the intersection.

At the same time, at the very moment when Andromache is retreating from Hector at the gates, Paris is also running to meet him, and he catches up with his brother just when Hector is about to turn away for the battlefield. Although so elaborately prepared for earlier, their meeting almost does not happen, for Paris had been lingering in his bedroom and now reaches Hector only at the very last moment (6.514–16):

αἴψα δ’ ἔπειτα
Ἴκτορα δῖον ἔτετμεν ἀδελφεόν, εὖτ’ ἄρ’ ἔμελλε
στρέψεσθ’ ἐκ χάρις ὄθι ἦ δάριζε γυναικί.

Suddenly thereafter
he came on brilliant Hector, his brother, where he yet lingered
before turning away from the place where he had talked with his lady.

Through these lines and the long description of Paris running through the city that preceded them (6.503–14), we are invited to measure Paris’ speed in real, relative terms: it took exactly as long for Paris to be left by Hector and then eventually catch up with him as it did for Hector to walk further into the city, look for his wife, go back to the Scaean gates, and then carry on a conversation with her. The act of catching up thereby works, as Garcia has observed, to channel the separate temporal threads of each character’s activity within the city into a single, organized timeline.¹⁴ Andromache herself catches up (κιχάνω) with the handmaids she had left behind after leaving Hector at the gates (6.498), thereby further refining the overall effects of symmetry and timing in this scene.

As for Paris, his own actions are held at bay in the narrative in the second half of Book 6 until it is time for Hector to meet with him. Then,

¹⁴Garcia 2007, 59–61.

like a horse that has been stalled in the manger and suddenly breaks free (6.506–11), he is given thirteen lines to bound from his bedroom to the spot that Andromache has just vacated. Through the motif of the running figure, in other words, Homer allows one thread of his narrative to “catch up” with another.¹⁵ By slowing down or accelerating the speed of his characters as they travel on foot, he is able to engineer two perfectly coordinated moments of coincidence and narrative timing. Hector’s presence at the gate thereby draws various timelines toward and away from him along so many spokes, organizing the various temporalities of the poem into a coherent system. It is not that those timelines themselves run at different speeds, it is that they act as paths along which Homer can choose to have his characters move either quickly or slowly. The discrepancy between Hector’s, Paris’ and Andromache’s relative speeds makes this system dynamic, enabling those characters who have been temporarily “left behind” to catch up with the main part of the story. The careful management of the running in the second half of Book 6 shows that speed of foot can have as much to do with the organization and timing of the poem as with strategy on the battlefield. The acts of catching up that are at work on a narratorial level in Book 6 underpin—through various connections that I will continue to explore—the ones that take place on a more strictly actorial plane in Books 20–22. In this way the two levels reinforce each other, drawing our attention to the kinesthetic nature of the exchange between Achilles and Hector.

As Hector waits at the Scaean gates at the beginning of Book 22, there is a sense, as we have now seen, in which he is reenacting an earlier moment in the epic. Later in the book his fate (*moira*, the same fate that shackled him at 22.5) will catch him up (κίχάνω, 22.303). But here we are invited to imagine the past storylines that previewed this scene catching up with him too. Instead of Paris, it is now Achilles who speeds toward Hector in a simile that compares him to a horse (22.21–24). Indeed, if the simile here triggers a recollection of Paris as a horse who runs free, having suddenly broken loose from its shackles (6.506–11), so does it remind us that Paris’ simile was also applied to Hector running forward catching up as a form of repetition. Past catching up with you.

¹⁵ See esp. the charts denoting different timelines for the *Iliad* in Zielinski 1889–1901. This method of reading a narrative according to a separate strand of time for each character is outlined well in Shklovsky 1965. See also, for Homer, Whitman and Scodel 1981; Scodel 2008, 115–16, with further bibliography throughout. Much of this scholarship deals with the question of whether events presented sequentially should be understood as occurring simultaneously.

in battle at 15.263–68, in a posture that is quite opposite to his shackled position as he awaits Achilles in Book 22.¹⁶

The similarities between the scenes in Books 6 and 22 may also gesture toward a third point in time, for Achilles' own impending death will take place at the same Scaean gates before which Hector now stands.¹⁷ After Hector's death, Paris and Achilles will meet at the very site toward which both, in their respective scenes, now run. We can imagine the scene played three times, in other words, with Paris, Achilles, and Hector each appearing twice, in each possible combination of pairs but never all together. The different temporalities that converge in Hector's still posture at the beginning of Book 22 are bound up with the recurrent placement of certain figures in the same point in space at key moments in the poem, but also with the speed and the timing by which those figures keep reaching him.

To read these scenes as anticipatory of a later, key moment beyond the end of the epic is also to consider what never in fact happens in the *Iliad*: the running toward one another of Achilles and Paris. The parallelism between Paris and Achilles extends beyond the symmetrical placement of their movement in these two scenes toward the Scaean gates. For Paris runs through the city toward Hector “in the confidence of his quick feet” (ποσὶ κραιπνοῖσι πεποιθώς, 6.505), a phrase that occurs at only one other time in Homer, to describe Achilles as he sets out after Hector at the start of the chase in Book 22: Πηλεΐδης δ' ἐπόρουσε ποσὶ κραιπνοῖσι πεποιθώς (138).¹⁸ The correspondence between the two generally static figures who choose to sit out the war in much of the poem is thus briefly

¹⁶ *Il.* 6.506–11 (= 15.263–68): ὡς δ' ὅτε τις στατὸς ἵππος, ἀκοστήσας ἐπὶ φάτνῃ / δεσμὸν ἀπορρήξας θείῃ πεδίοιο κροαίνων, / εἰωθὼς λούεσθαι ἐϋρρείος ποταμοῖο, / κυδιόων· ὕψοῦ δὲ κάρη ἔχει, ἀμφὶ δὲ χαίται / ὤμοις αἴσσονται· ὁ δ' ἀγλαΐῃφι πεποιθώς, / ῥίμφα ἔ γούνα φέρε μετὰ τ' ἦθεα καὶ νομὸν ἵππων (“As when some stalled horse who has been corn-fed at the manger / breaking free of his rope gallops over the plain in thunder / to his accustomed bathing place in a sweet-running river / and in the pride of his strength holds high his head, and the mane floats / over his shoulders; sure of his glorious strength, the quick knees / carry him to the loved places and the pasture of horses”). On this simile looking ahead to the later simile comparing the running of Achilles and Hector to racehorses, see the perceptive analysis of Tsagalis 2008, 279–81.

¹⁷ Achilles' death and its location are prophesied later in the book (22.359–60), as well as elsewhere in the poem (sometimes the site is specified as the Scaean gates, at other times as under the walls of Troy). See further Burgess 2009, 38–39, 43–55.

¹⁸ I thank Mario Telò for this observation.

illuminated by the speed of their feet as they run toward Hector from opposite directions and from opposite parts of the poem.¹⁹

Before Achilles is able to catch up with Hector, the Trojan starts to run. Thus begins the final, cumulative chase of the poem (cf. Clay 2002), in which the two famously enter a dreamlike vortex with neither able to outpace the other and where words themselves chase and circle around each other. This can be seen in the fourfold repetition of οὐ and οὔτε, and the twofold chasing of δύναιμι by φεύγω and φεύγω by διώκω in the following lines (22.199–201; cf. Tsagalis 2008, 284):

ὥς δ' ἐν ὄνειρῳ οὐ δύναται φεύγοντα διώκειν·
 οὔτ' ἄρ' ὁ τὸν δύναται ὑποφεύγειν οὔθ' ὁ διώκειν·
 ὥς ὁ τὸν οὐ δύνατο μάρψαι ποσίν, οὐδ' ὃς ἀλύξαι.

As in a dream a man is not able to follow one who runs
 from him, nor can the runner escape, nor the other pursue him,
 so he could not run him down in his speed, nor the other get clear.

The runners, like the scene, become temporarily frozen in time, as Achilles, despite the careful foreshadowing of the exquisitely timed acts of “meeting” and “catching up” in Book 6, never manages to reach his opponent on foot. His pursuit of Hector is compared to a chariot race where a great prize lies in sight (22.162–66), but “here was no festal beast, no ox-hide / they strove for, for these are prizes that given men for their running. / No, they ran for the life of Hector, breaker of horses” (22.159–61). These lines are important because they underscore exactly the moment of the crossover between the two arenas of battle and athletics; the difference between these two worlds is encapsulated in the difference between catching up and overtaking.²⁰

¹⁹As one of my anonymous readers points out, the convergence of Paris, Achilles, and Hector at this spot may symbolize a complementary distribution within the wider matrix of the epic tradition. Thus we might think not only of Achilles and Paris vying in the *Aethiopsis* as Achilles and Hector do here, but also of the racing of Paris against his own brothers in the funeral games that Priam had set up for him, before it is known that Paris is still alive. Hyginus tells us that the games included a race (*Fab.* 273.12: *cursu*), in which Paris defeated his own brothers (*Fab.* 91.5: *fratres suos superavit*), although Hector is not listed in the group of competitors. In Euripides’ fragmentary *Alexander*, however, which featured the event as a major plot element, Hector is defeated by Paris in the race (fr. 62aK).

²⁰See further Ziogas 2011, 258–61, and Ormand’s chapter on Atalanta (forthcoming). Both demonstrate several ways in which Atalanta’s chasing of Hippomenes (fr. 73, 75, 76 M–W) forecasts the chasing of Hector by Achilles, especially insofar as Hippomenes is racing in a competition for his life (Ormand) and in Hesiod’s use of the word *phuegō* following its role in Homer (Ziogas).

In Book 22, however, neither of these two activities takes place: the runners are too well-matched and the chase ends without conclusion. There is speed, certainly, but none of the timing that we found in Book 6.²¹ Without the connective spark that comes from one character catching up with another, the plot cannot move forward clearly from one action to the next.²² The speed at which the two men run instead compares to scenes of endless running that can be found in ekphrastic descriptions.²³ It is only when Athena tricks Hector into stopping that Achilles is able to approach and kill him. One consequence of that shift from running to standing is that Hector's death affords Achilles none of the satisfaction of catching up with his opponent. Perhaps this explains in part his decision to drag Hector behind his chariot around Patroclus' tomb, as if it could reactivate the motion and momentum of their earlier chase. Even in death, Hector is made to run with Achilles, albeit with his feet as bound (22.396) as they were when he first stood his ground at the beginning of the book.

The theme of running evolves through Books 20–22, and then again into 23, in the movement from combat, to chase, to race. During the funeral games for Patroclus, the seemingly endless whirling around the walls of Troy of Book 22 is translated into the ordered structure of turning, once, and then returning.²⁴ The two races that the Achaeans compete in during the games, first on chariot and then on foot, are plotted on a track

²¹ In this way, their pace compares to what Jameson has written of the continuously running action in Jan de Bont's film *Speed*: "contrary to expectation, its title does not designate temporality or velocity, nor change in time, nor even repetition any longer, but rather the absence of temporality altogether" (2003, 714–15).

²² As examples of how catching up can act as a narrative device, we might consider that Plato's *Republic* is set in motion by a boy catching up with Socrates, or that the stories in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, such as the pursuit of Daphne by Apollo, reach their climax and point of transformation into a new narrative at the exact moment when one figure reaches another. See further Knox 1990; Hardie 1999; Lovatt 2005.

²³ On the Shield of Achilles, for example, Homer likens the movement of dancing boys to the "running" of a potter's wheel, where the word for the wheel, τροχός, comes from τρέχω, to run (18.599–601). The movement round and round of the potter's wheel suggests timelessness and the absence of an endpoint, just as the running of Achilles and Hector (ρίμφα μάλα τρωχῶσι, 22.163) in a series of circles around the walls of Troy takes on the timeless and aimless quality of a dream (cf. Purves 2010, 55–59). On the Shield of Heracles, a tripod lies before charioteers as a prize that is never awarded because the end of the race will never be seen by the observer (*Scut.* 310–11).

²⁴ So, too, is Achilles' dragging of Hector's corpse around Patroclus' tomb (which also seems endless) resolved by the return of the body to Priam. There, as with the race out to the post and back, the repetitive figure of circular movement is replaced by Priam's journey out and back, mirroring the structure of the *dioulos* (see following note).

with a single turning point (τέρμα[τα]) which the competitors run out to, turn around (ἐλίσσω, 23.309, 320, 466), and then come back from.²⁵ By running away from the ships and back again, instead of—like Achilles and Hector—around and around the walls of Troy, the athletes in these races symbolically remedy Patroclus' mistake, who ran on without turning back despite Achilles' instructions.²⁶

But the most significant way in which these races, especially the chariot race, reconfigure the pursuit of Hector by Achilles in *Iliad* 22 is that, here, the men competing not only catch up with but also overtake one another. By doing so, the competitors subvert the expected order of positions in the race, leading to the famously complicated allotment of prizes.²⁷ The risky act of overtaking performed by Antilochus in the chariot race (23.417–34) demonstrates this point particularly clearly. This is a scene that has received considerable scholarly attention and its details can be rehearsed quickly here.²⁸ Before the chariot race, Nestor coaches his son on the details of the track (23.306–48), but the son modifies his father's advice by choosing to overtake at a slightly different place than instructed (23.418–24).²⁹ This explicit display of *mētis* allows Antilochus, who has slower horses, to overtake Menelaus and finish slightly ahead.³⁰ Antilochus makes his move at a spot where the road is narrow, which forces Menelaus, who had been ahead, to pull back (23.431–34). Once he has been overtaken, however, Menelaus steadily regains his ground, so that by the very end of the race he has reduced the distance between them to only the width of a horse's hair. Homer even tells us that Menelaus would have passed Antilochus if the course had been any longer (23.526–27).

²⁵They are both examples of the *diaulos* race. Note that the same formula is used to describe both races at 23.373 and 768 (Gagarin 1983, 38).

²⁶Achilles tells Patroclus, "When you have driven [the Trojans] from the ships, come back (ἰέναι πάλιν, 16.87)" and "You must turn back (πάλιν τροπᾶσθαι) once you bring the light of salvation / to the ships" (16.95–96). The point is elaborated in Frame 2009, 161–62.

²⁷Achilles attempts to award the second prize to Eumelus simply because his horses are the fastest (23.536–38), despite the fact that, due to divine intervention and a crash, he places last in the race. The spectators, too, have trouble accepting that the final ordering of positions in the chariot race does not reflect the natural order of the competitors' abilities (480). See further (with bibliography) Thalmann 1998, 136–37.

²⁸Gernet 1948; Willcock 1973; Gagarin 1983; Dunkle 1987; Roisman 1988; Nagy 1990, 208–10; Detienne and Vernant 1991, 11–26; Scott 1997; Kitchell 1998; Frame 2009, 131–72.

²⁹Although scholars dispute the exact details of where on the track the overtaking happens, there is no mention of a turning post. See Gagarin 1983; Roisman 1988; Richardson 1993, 218; Frame 2009, 136.

³⁰As Kyle 2007, 60, notes, *mētis* appears five times in the passage and starts the line three times.

Antilochus' skill in overtaking is a classic manifestation—perhaps *the* classic manifestation in the *Iliad*—of *mētis* (cunning) over *biē* (force).³¹ The cleverer man with slow horses is able to bring a series of calculations into play about the length of the running track and the timing of events in order to surpass a competitor who relies on the speed of his horses alone. Indeed, the only “overtaking” (φθάνω) that Menelaus can acknowledge for Antilochus is paradoxical, in that the latter’s horses will precede his own in the tiring of their legs and feet (φθήσονται τούτοισι πόδες καὶ γοῦνα καμόντα / ἢ ὑμῖν, 23.444–45). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the other character who performs a significant act of overtaking in this book is Odysseus, who wins the footrace by overtaking the lesser Ajax (ἦλθε φθάμενος, 23.779) thanks to the intervention of the goddess of *mētis* herself, Athena (23.758–79).

An interesting complication arises when we consider that in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* those who are swiftest on their feet are sometimes also the younger members of their community. This is true of Polydorus, the youngest son of Priam (20.407–10), and of Antilochus, as we hear elsewhere in Homer (*Od.* 3.112, 4.202).³² If young men run more swiftly than those elders who are nevertheless still in their prime, then it is not surprising that racing by foot is given less prominence than racing by chariot in Homeric epic.³³ At the same time, however, the idea that the swifter man may be younger sits uncomfortably alongside the Homeric convention that those of an earlier generation are superior in every way to those who come after them, for to be πρότερος is to be further forward not only in age but also in space.

Thus when Antilochus, the fastest son of Nestor, offers to Menelaus

³¹ Dunkle 1987; Nagy 1990, 202–22; Detienne and Vernant 1991, 11–26, 49–47; Roisman 1998. See Nagy [1979] 1999, 326–28, on the connections between swiftness and *biē*.

³² It also accounts for the swiftness of Achilles, who is stronger than Odysseus in battle but whom Odysseus overtakes in wisdom and age (ἐγὼ δὲ κε σείο νοήματι γε προβαλοίμην / πολλόν, ἐπεὶ πρότερος γενόμεν καὶ πλείονα οἶδα, “yet I [Odysseus] in turn might overpass you in wisdom / by far, since I was born before (*proteros*) you and have learned more things,” 19.218–19). On Achilles’ speed relative to Odysseus’, cf. *Il.* 23.792. Note also that Patroclus, who is older than Achilles (*Il.* 11.787), catches up with him in a simile in Book 16 that also reverses their ages. There, Patroclus is likened to a small girl who runs after her mother (Achilles), slowing her down, and catching hold of her dress (16.7–10).

³³ As Pavlovskis 1976, 201, has written of the youths who participate in the footrace in *Aeneid* 5, “these boys have no future before them, and the rapidity with which they run their course seems to prophesy the brevity of their lives.” From the opposite end of the spectrum, the fact that Nestor is given a prize in the funeral games without competing (23.615–24) explains the necessity of privileging those who were born before, even if they are now too old to compete. Cf. Thalmann 1998, 136–37.

the prize he won by overtaking him, he claims, “For I, my lord Menelaus, am younger / by far than you, and you are the greater and go before (πρότερος) me” (23.587–88). Later in the book he loses the footrace to Odysseus and Ajax.³⁴ He then claims (23.787–92):

εἰδόσιν ὑμῶν ἐρέω πᾶσιν, φίλοι, ὡς ἔτι καὶ νῦν
 ἀθάνατοι τιμῶσι παλαιότερους ἀνθρώπους.
 Αἴας μὲν γὰρ ἐμεῖ’ ὀλίγον προγενέστερός ἐστιν,
 οὗτος δὲ προτέρης γενεῆς προτέρων τ’ ἀνθρώπων·
 ὠμογέροντα δὲ μὴ φασ’ ἔμμεναι· ἀργαλέον δὲ
 ποσσὶν ἐριδήσασθαι Ἀχαιοῖς, εἰ μὴ Ἀχιλλεΐ.

Friends, you all know well what I tell you, that still the immortals
 continue to favor the elder men. For see now, Ajax
 is elder than I, if only by a little, but this man [Odysseus]
 is out of an earlier age than ours and one of the ancients.
 But his, they say, is a green old age. It would be a hard thing
 for any Achaeans to match his speed. Except for Achilles.

Odysseus is placed in the curious position of belonging to the πρότεροι generation and also of being ὠμογέρων, an adjective that appears only here in Homer and that translates as something like “raw” or “unripe” old age. The oxymoron suggests that Odysseus is both old and young; that he can have it both ways.³⁵ From this position of being πρότερος twice—both further ahead in age, as an older man, and further ahead in running, as if he were a younger man—nobody can challenge him in the speed of his feet, except, that is, Achilles. Here, toward the very end of the epic, the suggestion of competition (ἐριδήσασθαι) between Achilles and Odysseus serves as a subtle, even reconciliatory, counterpoint to the vying of Achilles and Agamemnon in the poem’s opening lines. Whereas there the two heroes “stood apart in strife” (διαστήτην ἐρίσαντε, 1.6), leading to an immobilizing of Achilles’ famous feet for the first two-thirds of the poem, in Book 23 the difference between Achilles and Odysseus is figured instead as a closing of the gap between two competitors in a race.

³⁴ Kyle 2007, 62 states, “The younger men, Antilochus or Ajax, son of Oileus, should win.”

³⁵ Odysseus’ status as simultaneously “old” and “young” also mirrors his status on Ithaca when he returns in the persona of an old beggar, prompting Irus to ask him how he can fight against a younger man (*Od.* 18.31); I thank Craig Russell for this observation. Frame 2009, 151, makes a related argument about the combination of youthful and old elements in the characterization of Antilochus in *Iliad* 23. He argues that Antilochus,

I have tried to show thus far that running and catching up in the *Iliad* is noteworthy not merely as an important battle strategy but also for the way in which it points to the combined significance of timing and speed in the poem. In particular, I have pointed to the thematic resonance of catching up for the poem as a whole, seeing it as a key action or gesture within the *Iliad*'s poetics. I have also suggested that, at the end of the epic, this gesture is co-opted by Antilochus and Odysseus and transformed—within the athletic context of *Iliad* 23—into the art of overtaking. In the second half of this article, I will consider the consequences of moving from a thematics of catching up to a thematics of overtaking.

2. OVERTAKING ODYSSEUS

In Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, while Odysseus is being entertained by the Phaeacians on the final stage of his journey home, he is invited to participate in their games.³⁶ In response to the taunting of Euryalus at his initial refusal, Odysseus angrily defends his status before throwing a discus far beyond those already scattered in the field (*Od.* 8.179–98). We will return to this discus throw later on. For now, however, I wish to consider Odysseus' words after that throw, when he continues to defend his prowess as an athlete ("I stand far out ahead of all others," 8.221), but draws particular attention to his legs (8.230–33):

οἴοισιν δειδοῖκα ποσὶν μὴ τίς με παρέλθῃ
 Φαιήκων· λὴν γὰρ ἀεικελίως ἔδαμάσθην
 κύμασιν ἐν πολλοῖς, ἐπεὶ οὐ κομιδὴ κατὰ νῆα
 ἦεν ἐπηετανός· τῷ μοι φίλα γυῖα λέλυνται.

Only in a foot race I fear one of the Phaeacians
 might outpass me; I have been through too much and shamefully
 battered
 on many rough seas, since there could be no orderly training
 on shipboard; because of this my legs have lost their condition.

Although Odysseus outdistanced men younger than himself in the footrace during Patroclus' funeral games, he will not run now against the younger

although young in age, resembles an older man (specifically, the older Nestor) in terms of his knowledge and skill, and a younger man in terms of his reckless actions in the race.

³⁶On the Phaeacian games, especially in relation to the martial *aethloi* (contests) and the funeral games of the *Iliad*, see Thalmann 1998, 134–53.

but less warlike Phaeacians, on the grounds that he has prematurely lost his runner's physique on board ship.³⁷ Specifically, his "limbs have loosened," a seafaring modulation of the Iliadic formula for death. We might compare them to Nestor's limbs and knees in the *Iliad*, which are no longer firm, as they used to be.³⁸

What then are the consequences of Odysseus' transformation into a "slow" hero by this point in his life, a competitor who hints that he might come in last? Do these lines cast an anxious look back to the *Iliad*, where men were constantly running in battle and where it was a point of honor to run out in front and challenge an opponent? Certainly the lines draw our attention to the fact that the *Odyssey's* protagonist has to prove his heroic worth from a setting in which there has been little opportunity to engage in running. More specifically, how should we understand Odysseus' words in relation to the end of the *Iliad*, where he not only won the running race but where Antilochus afterward claimed that only Achilles could challenge Odysseus in the speed of his feet? Was Antilochus only being conciliatory there, or can we detect behind his words hints of a rivalry between Achilles and Odysseus?

I would not press the latter point were it not for the fact that Demodocus had only just sung of precisely such a rivalry to the assembled guests on Scheria in the first of his three songs (*Od.* 8.72–82).³⁹ It is all the more striking, therefore, that not two-hundred lines later (8.223–33), Odysseus—in the course of defending himself against Euryalus' taunts—overturns several of the points in Antilochus' speech from the *Iliad*. He first makes himself "young," by telling the Phaeacians he will compete with anyone except the men of the generation ahead (πρότεροι) of him, such as Heracles or Eurytus, famed for their skill in archery (8.221–25).⁴⁰ But he then says that he will not compete on foot because he no longer

³⁷ As Felson 1999, 94, notes, Odysseus calls the Phaeacians νέοι (in her words, "you young pups") when he challenges them to compete with him in the discus throw (*Od.* 8.202).

³⁸ Cf. *Il.* 4.313–15; 11.668–70.

³⁹ On the poetic tradition of the rivalry between Achilles and Odysseus, see esp. Nagy [1979] 1999, 45–58, who discusses passages such as *Il.* 9.308–429, where Achilles expresses a dislike of Odysseus; Edwards 1985; Martin 1989, 62–65; Danek 1998, 142–50 (with further bibliography). The quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus is an event that is said to make Agamemnon glad in his heart because "the best of the Achaeans were divided" (*Od.* 8.78), alluding to a prophecy concerning the capture of Troy. See further Braswell 1982, 130, n. 5; Heubeck, West, and Hainsworth 1998, on 8.75.

⁴⁰ Cf. Schein 2002; Buchan 2004, 97–98. The reference to archery here looks forward to Odysseus' stringing of the bow in *Od.* 22 (cf. Thalmann 1998, 140–41 (with further bibliography), 171–237), and to his successful hitting of his target there (compare the attempts of Polyphemus to hit Odysseus' ship with a rock, discussed later in the article).

has the strength in his legs, as we saw above. He thus undermines both of the points that Antilochus made about him in *Iliad* 23, reversing the terms by which he previously appeared to be both “young” and “old.”

Odysseus’ apology for his feet at this particular moment in the poem is carefully placed between the first and second of Demodocus’ songs. In the first song, as we have discussed, the mention of a rivalry between Achilles and Odysseus recalls, however lightly, Antilochus’ speech after Odysseus’ victory in the running race during the funeral games for Patroclus.⁴¹ Now, in Demodocus’ second song, the theme of running, overtaking, and speed is given prominence through the story of Ares and Aphrodite (8.266–367), where the slow god, Hephaestus, manages to “catch up” with the swift-footed Ares. As scholars have noted, Hephaestus’ slowness of foot echoes Odysseus’ comments about his weak legs just a little earlier, and it is one of the many factors by which Homer draws an association between Odysseus and Hephaestus.⁴² In the song, Ares is described as swift-footed (ἀρτίπους, 8.310) and fastest of all the gods (8.331), while Hephaestus is lame (χωλός, 8.308) and weak on his feet (ῆπεδανός, 8.311).⁴³

Hephaestus’ capture of Ares—by setting out from home as if on a journey and then turning back once his wife and Ares have gone to bed together—incorporates vocabulary (κιχάνω, αἰρέω) that is familiar from the *Iliad*’s lexicon of running. Yet it is not the fastest one who wins, but rather the one who bides his time, taking a detour out and back. The moral of the story is clear (8.329–31):

οὐκ ἀρετᾶ κακὰ ἔργα· κιχάνει τοι βραδὺς ἄκύν,
ὥς καὶ νῦν Ἥφαιστος ἔων βραδὺς εἶλεν Ἄρηα,
ᾧκύτατόν περ ἐόντα θεῶν, οἳ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσι

No virtue in bad dealings. See, the slow one has caught up with
the swift, as now slow Hephaestus has caught up with
Ares, swiftest of all the gods on Olympus

Placed within the larger frame of Demodocus’ first song and Odysseus’ comment about his legs, Hephaestus’ clever ruse allows us to see

⁴¹This observation is also made by Buchan 2004, 98–102, whose work on these passages has had an important influence on my own.

⁴²See further Burkert 1960; Newton 1987; Braswell 1982; Olson 1989; Zeitlin 1996, 19–52; Buchan 2004, 100–101. On the self-deprecatory stance of the trickster, cf. Rosen 1990.

⁴³Ares is frequently described as fast (θεός) in the *Iliad* (cf. n. 6, above). See further Braswell 1982, 134.

more clearly the strategy behind some of the overtaking that Odysseus maneuvers both on the Homeric plain and in the second quarter of the *Odyssey* (particularly Books 8 and 9). In *Iliad* 10, for example, Odysseus captures Dolon by allowing him to overtake (παρεξέρχομαι, παραφθάνω, παρατρέχω) him by just a little (τυτθόν, 10.344–50) and then deliberately extending the distance between them, countering the normal practice in which one tries to close the gap with one’s rival in a race or on the battlefield (*Il.* 10.350–54). Meanwhile, Athena ensures that none of the other Achaeans get ahead (φθάνω) of Odysseus and Diomedes in capturing Dolon.⁴⁴ Yet Odysseus’ plan works by confining Dolon in the space before the ships, where the two Achaeans are then able to catch up with him.⁴⁵ Odysseus’ premeditated approach to both setting out and returning, in other words, is founded on a backward and forward tracking method that diverges from the way that other heroes pursue their targets.⁴⁶ He uses the opposite strategy to Dolon, who promised Hector that he would run “straight through” (διαμπερές) to the Achaean ships (10.325). By contrast, Odysseus—like Hephaestus—stops, waits, and allows himself to be overtaken. He understands, in other words, that the slow and indirect path is sometimes the better one.

In Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, upon unexpectedly coming across Elpenor in the Underworld, Odysseus again finds himself “overtaken” to his own advantage. His first words to Elpenor, “you have come faster (ἔφθης) on foot than I could in my black ship” (11.58), play on the association he made on Scheria between traveling by ship and losing a race.⁴⁷ Elpenor, significantly the very youngest (νεώτατος, 10.552) of Odysseus’ crew, both wins the race to the Underworld and also loses it, since—in coming in first—he finds himself left behind (καταλείπω, 11.53) by the rest.⁴⁸ Indeed,

⁴⁴ Diomedes is especially concerned since the plan leaves open the possibility that he might “come in second” (ὁ δὲ δεύτερος ἔλθοι, *Il.* 10.368). Achilles worries about coming in second, using the same phrase, when chasing Hector around the walls of Troy (22.206–7).

⁴⁵ The verbs used for catching up are κικάνω and ἄπτομαι (10.376–77).

⁴⁶ In this, Odysseus adopts the same kind of strategy as Hermes, to whom he has often been compared. In the Homeric Hymn, Hermes walked backwards, erasing his tracks, rather than in a forward line. As scholars have noted, Odysseus’ epithet *polutropos* (“many-pathed”) is applied also (and only also) to Hermes (*H. H. Merc.* 13, 439). See further Clay 1983, 29, and Pucci 1982, 53, who connects the epithet with Odysseus’ “zigzagging” strategy for survival, drawing a contrast with Achilles and the *Iliad*.

⁴⁷ Cf. Ahl and Roisman 1996, 123–25. The verb φθάνω (to anticipate, get ahead of) has precisely the sense of “overtake” here. Cf. *Il.* 21.262, where φθάνω is applied to the running ahead of water in a simile describing the river Scamander’s pursuit of Achilles, and its use at *Il.* 10.368 (discussed above).

⁴⁸ For the use of the verb λείπω to denote leaving a contender behind in a race, see *Il.* 23.407, 522–23 (discussed above), *Od.* 8.125.

the presence of φθάνω (to anticipate, overtake) in Odysseus' little joke signals not only the practice of overtaking on the battlefield but also how death can "overtake" a warrior in that context too.⁴⁹

The ploy of winning by coming in last (and vice versa) is further illustrated in the scenes between Odysseus and Polyphemus. First, Odysseus elicits from the Cyclops the promise that he will be eaten "last" using a word, πύματος, that also refers to coming in at the back (*Od.* 9.369; cf. *Il.* 4.253–4, 11.65). He thereby puts Polyphemus in the position of competing with a contender who, although coming from the back, beats him at his own game.⁵⁰ Even the verb that describes Polyphemus' action in snatching up the men to eat (μάρπτω) is used of catching up in the scenes depicting the running of Achilles in the *Iliad*.⁵¹

Over the course of the Cyclops episode, Homer increasingly introduces and makes use of the vocabulary of competing and games in order to give Odysseus a Hephaestian advantage of *mētis* over *biē*. It was just this kind of advantage that he had in winning the race against the faster Ajax in the games of *Iliad* 23.⁵² This is especially evident in the case of Odysseus' escape from Polyphemus' cave (9.444–52, trans. modified):

ὕστατος ἀρνεῖος μῆλων ἔστειχε θύραζε,
 λάχνῳ στεινόμενος καὶ ἐμοὶ πυκινὰ φρονέοντι.
 τὸν δ' ἐπιμασσάμενος προσέφη κρατερὸς Πολύφημος·
 ἴκρῃ πέπον, τί μοι ὤδε διὰ σπέος ἔσσυο μῆλων
 ὕστατος; οὐ τι πάρος γε λελειμμένος ἔρχεται οἴων,
 ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρῶτος νέμει τέρην ἄνθεα ποίης
 μακρὰ βιβιάς, πρῶτος δὲ βόας ποταμῶν ἀφικάνεις,
 πρῶτος δὲ σταθμόνδε λιλαίαι ἀπονέεσθαι
 ἐσπέριος· νῦν αὖτε πανύστατος.'

Last of all the flock the ram went out of the doorway,
 loaded with his own fleece, and with me, and my close counsels.
 Then, feeling him, powerful Polyphemus spoke a word to him:
 "My dear old ram, why are you thus leaving the cave last of
 the sheep? Never in the old days were you left behind by the flock,

⁴⁹ *Il.* 11.451: φθῆ σε τέλος θανάτοιο κιχήμενον, οὐδ' ὑπάλυξας ("death was too quick for you and ran you down"). Death is figured as a runner quite often in the *Iliad* (see, e.g., 20.449). Cf. Steiner 2010 at 17.476.

⁵⁰ The golden age aspects of the Cyclops' world would make him unused to competition. On competition in relation to the Phaeacians, see Dickie 1983; Thalmann 1998, 141–53; Buchan 2004, 36–49.

⁵¹ *Od.* 9.289, 311, 344; *Il.* 21.564, 22.201.

⁵² On the themes of *mētis* and *biē* in the Cyclops episode, see (among others) Schein 1970; Clay 1983, 112–25; Pucci 1998, 113–30.

but long-striding, first by a long way, would pasture
 on the tender bloom of the grass, be first at running rivers,
 and be eager always to lead the way first back to the sheepfold
 at evening. Now you are last of all.”

The repetition of the words for first (πρῶτος) and last (ὑστάτος) in this passage makes clear the rearrangement that Odysseus’ presence beneath the ram has set in play.⁵³ The animal, who is earlier called the best of all the flock by far (μήλων ὄχ’ ἄριστος πάντων, 9.432), and who is accustomed to walk out to pasture with giant strides (μακρὰ βιβάς, 9.450) like a great Homeric warrior,⁵⁴ is now in very last position, left behind (λελειμμένος, 9.448) as if in a race.⁵⁵ With Odysseus beneath him, the ram now resembles Diomedes, who came in last in the chariot race although he too was ὄχ’ ἄριστος, the best by far.⁵⁶

Odysseus may not have the strongest or sturdiest of legs, but—just as in the passage from Book 3 of the *Iliad* where his ram-like appearance causes others to underestimate him—he is able to use that physique to his advantage when escaping from the cave.⁵⁷ The weight of Odysseus and his close-packed thoughts counters the lightness and youth of men who, like the dancing Phaeacians, move quickly on their feet.⁵⁸ Only by these means, however, is Odysseus able to slip by Polyphemus.⁵⁹

This aspect of overtaking is skillful and subtle, inasmuch as Homer manipulates strategies and overturns a clearly coded set of positions that had been plotted so carefully on the battlefields and athletic grounds of the *Iliad*. We can see in the figure of the great ram who carries him a

⁵³ πρῶτος (23.265, 275, 538), ὑστάτος (23.536), and πανύστατος (23.532) are all used of the positions in a race in the funeral games of *Iliad* 23.

⁵⁴ The formula occurs in the *Iliad* to describe a warrior striding out to battle (7.213; 15.307, 686; cf. 3.22; 13.809; 15.676; 16.534; *Od.* 11.539).

⁵⁵ Cf. n. 48, above.

⁵⁶ *Od.* 9.432; *Il.* 23.356–57. Cf. *Od.* 8.123, where ὄχ’ ἄριστος is used to describe the fastest runner in the race during the games on Scheria.

⁵⁷ Odysseus’ legs are described as, possibly, short and thin and he is likened to a deep-fleeced ram at *Il.* 3.191–224. Cf. Clay 1983, 121; Clay 1999; Newton 1987, 13, n. 8.

⁵⁸ Being light on one’s feet and swift are usually synonymous. Cf. Hes. fr. 62 M–W, where Iphicles runs so fast over the asphodel that he does not bend or break it, and *Il.* 20.226–29 for the same motif in relation to the foals of Boreas.

⁵⁹ It is relevant to note here that the word “slip by” in Homeric Greek does in fact indicate to deceive as well as to pass by (e.g., παρεξέρχομαι, *Il.* 10.344 [run past]; *Od.* 5.103–4 [deceive]). It is not surprising to see that the language of speed has crossed over to the realm of thought in the *Odyssey*; in that poem, swiftness is no longer just a physical process. At *Od.* 13.291–92, Athena says to Odysseus (my trans.), “He would be shrewd and crafty whoever could get by (παρέρχομαι) you in all your trickery.” Cf. *Il.* 1.132.

reference back to the Odysseus of *Iliad* 3, but in recasting that identity by taking a position at the back, he also overturns the *Iliad*'s value system precisely because he prevents the ram from stepping out in respectable Iliadic style.

As he turns to leave the Cyclopes' island, Odysseus shouts back to Polyphemus: καὶ λῆν σέ γ' ἔμελλε κιχήσασθαι κακὰ ἔργα ("and your evil deeds were to catch up with you," 9.477). His use of κιχάνω and κακὰ ἔργα recalls the moral of the Ares and Aphrodite story: οὐκ ἀρετᾶ κακὰ ἔργα· κιχάνει τοι βραδὺς ὠκύν ("No virtue in bad dealings. See, the slow one has caught up with the swift," 8.329). In his own words, therefore, Odysseus indicates that he clearly believes himself to have come in first after all.

There is one final coda to Odysseus' and Polyphemus' alternate restaging of who is ahead and who behind in a reweaving of motifs from *Odyssey* 8 and the *Iliad*. For Odysseus does not escape the Cyclopes' island without being almost struck by two huge stones thrown by Polyphemus at his ship. These stones, like the vocabulary of racing that occurs in Odysseus' escape from the cave, look back to Odysseus' experiences at the Phaeacian games in Book 8 and help us to reevaluate that act of throwing within the conceptual frame of overtaking. When Odysseus reluctantly competes in those games with a discus throw, he chooses a discus that is bigger, thicker, and heavier than the Phaeacians had thrown before him and still easily wins the competition. His throw engages with the language of overtaking (ὑπερπέτομαι, ὑπερήμι) in a way we have not so far considered (8.186–98):

- ἦ ῥα, καὶ αὐτῷ φάροι ἀναΐξας λάβε δίσκον
 μείζονα καὶ πάχετον, στιβαρότερον οὐκ ὀλίγον περ
 ἦ οἴω Φαίηκες ἐδίσκεον ἀλλήλοισι.
 τὸν ῥα περιστρέψας ἦκε στιβαρῆς ἀπὸ χειρός,
 190 βόμβησεν δὲ λίθος· κατὰ δ' ἔπτηξαν ποτὶ γαίῃ
 Φαίηκες δολιχῆρετμοὶ, ναυσικλυτοὶ ἄνδρες,
 λαὸς ὑπὸ ῥύπης· ὁ δ' ὑπέρπτατο σήματα πάντων
 ῥίμφα θεῶν ἀπὸ χειρός· ἔθηκε δὲ τέρματ' Ἀθήνη
 ἀνδρὶ δέμας εἰκυῖα, ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε·
 195 'καὶ κ' ἀλαός τοι, ξεῖνε, διακρίνειε τὸ σῆμα
 ἀμφαφῶων· ἐπεὶ οὐ τι μεμιγμένον ἐστὶν ὀμίλῳ,
 ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρῶτον· σὺ δὲ θάρσει τόνδε γ' ἄεθλον·
 οὐ τις Φαίηκων τόδε γ' ἴξεται οὐδ' ὑπερήσει.'

He spoke, and with mantle still on sprang up and laid hold of a
 discus
 that was a bigger and thicker one, heavier not by a little
 than the one the Phaeacians had used for their sport in throwing.

- He spun, and let this fly from his ponderous hand. The stone
 190 hummed in the air, and the Phaeacians, men of long oars
 and famed for seafaring, shrank down against the ground, ducking
 under the flight of the stone which, speeding from his hand lightly,
 overflowed the marks of all others, and Athena, likening
 herself to a man, marked down the cast and spoke and addressed
 him:
 195 ‘Even a blind man, friend, would be able to distinguish your mark
 by feeling for it, since it is not mingled with the common
 lot, but far before. Have no fear over this contest.
 Not one of the Phaeacians will catch up with this mark or pass it.’

The discus “runs” (θέων) lightly from Odysseus’ hand, and the mark of its distance is τέρματα, a word that is used elsewhere in Homer only for the turning posts in a chariot or running race.⁶⁰ Thus, although Odysseus refuses to participate on foot, Homer nevertheless appropriates the language of the running track in order to have him win this contest at the Phaeacian games.⁶¹ Odysseus’ stone falls “far in front” of the rest (πολὸν πρῶτον), just as the ram and the best charioteer are accustomed to run “far in front” (πολὸν πρῶτος) of the pack (*Od.* 9.449; *Il.* 23.288). Even the “feeling” performed by the blind man in Athena’s hypothetical example is strikingly reminiscent, as Buchan has observed,⁶² of the blind Polyphemus’ feeling of his sheep when he determines their positions exiting the cave (*Od.* 9.446). The throw of the discus, although it has nothing ostensibly to do with running, is also phrased in this passage to connect with the idea of a race, with the order of the stones from first to last standing in for the order of runners. Twice, Homer hints that the discus has found a position on a field of other men instead of other inanimate objects. First there is a pun on λάος, the genitive form of the word denoting the stone discus that Odysseus throws at line 192, and λαός, the word for people or men.⁶³ Second there is the unusual usage of ὄμιλος at line 196 to denote the “throng” of the other stones in the competition, a term used elsewhere in Homer only of people.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ *Il.* 22.162; 23.309, 333, 358, 462, 466, 757. The adverb ῥίμφα is paired with θέων frequently in Homer to describe the act of running. On the application of verbs for running to projectiles in Homer, see Létoublon 1985, 183–84.

⁶¹ As Thalmann 1998, 140, observes, Odysseus’ superiority as an athlete is in fact evident from the very beginning of the *Odyssey* (1.11–19), which “points to Odysseus as surpassingly the man of ἀέθλοι (*aethloi*) in comparison with the other warriors at Troy, and so in this way as in others it implicitly claims its own superiority to other heroic narratives.”

⁶² Buchan 2004, 41–42.

⁶³ Buchan 2004, 72–88. There is also a pun on the word for blind man (*alaos*) at line 195.

⁶⁴ Martin 1984, 47.

Finally, by picking up and throwing a stone discus that is heavier than the ones the Phaeacians use, Odysseus in effect reaches back to the tradition of the earlier men he had just refused to engage with, the πρότεροι who were able to lift much heavier stones than the men of later generations. Odysseus thereby registers a kind of chronological separation from the Phaeacians by his refusal to engage in games to do with speed and synchronicity. He will not run alongside and at the same time as them. Instead, he is able to participate via the discus in a diachronic way, for stones and the marks of stones lie in the field for a long time across the span of generations.⁶⁵ Again, therefore, Odysseus “overtakes,” ending up “by far the first,” although he is one of the last to throw; he wins without ever moving himself from the starting point. This kind of overtaking is very different from the exquisitely timed acts of catching up that we saw taking place outside the gates of Troy in *Iliad* 6, as it is also different from Achilles’ single-minded pursuits in Books 20–22.

As Odysseus leaves on his ship, Polyphemus does one better in the trope of picking up the kind of rock that only men of old could handle, this time by ripping off part of a mountain crag and throwing it after Odysseus. But he finds himself participating in a mixed number of competitive systems and arenas, and his throw does not hit its mark. The rock lands just a little (τυτθόν) in front of the ship on first try (κάδ δ’ ἔβαλε προπάροιθε νεὸς κυανοπρώροιο / τυτθόν, ἐδεύησεν δ’ οἰήϊον ἄκρον ἰκέσθαι, 9.482–83), and just a little (τυτθόν) behind it on the second (9.537–40):

αὐτὰρ ὃ γ’ ἐξαῦτις πολὺ μείζονα λάαν ἀείρας
 ἦκ’ ἐπιδινήσας, ἐπέρεισε δὲ Ἴν’ ἀπέλεθρον,
 κάδ δ’ ἔβαλεν μετόπισθε νεὸς κυανοπρώροιο
 τυτθόν, ἐδεύησεν δ’ οἰήϊον ἄκρον ἰκέσθαι.

Then for the second time lifting a stone far greater,
 he whirled it and threw, leaning into the cast his strength beyond
 measure,
 and the stone fell behind the dark-prowed ship by only
 a little, it just failed to catch up with the edge of the steering oar.

Polyphemus’ throw co-opts both the physicality of Odysseus’ discus hurl and the language of fighting on the battlefield, specifically that of Ajax making a throw in the *Iliad* (7.268–69).⁶⁶ Indeed, it makes perfect sense

⁶⁵ *Il.* 21.403–5. Cf. 5.302–4 (= 20.285–87); 12.380–83, 445–50. Homer refers to the men of the age preceding the heroes at Troy using πρότεροι at *Il.* 4.308, 5.637, 11.691, 21.405, 23.332, 23.790; *Od.* 8.223.

⁶⁶ δεύτερος αὐτ’ Αἴας πολὺ μείζονα λάαν ἀείρας / ἦκ’ ἐπιδινήσας, ἐπέρεισε δὲ Ἴν’ ἀπέλεθρον (“After him Aias in turn lifting a stone far greater / whirled it and threw, leaning into the

that we would find a correspondence between Ajax and Polyphemus here, since both are quintessential exemplars of *biē*, or force. Ajax throws a stone again (and again incompletely, although it at first looks successful) at Hector in Book 14.⁶⁷ But even here, as with the lesser (Oilean) Ajax in the running race and as in his own competition with Odysseus for the arms of Achilles, he still comes in second. While Ajax always seems to be trapped in his ranking of “second to Achilles,” Odysseus—whether he is overtaking or being overtaken—always manages to win.⁶⁸

A surprising number of connective threads link Polyphemus’ final two throws in *Odyssey* 9, by way of the games and songs in *Odyssey* 8 and the battle scenes of the *Iliad*, back to the overtaking of Ajax by Odysseus in the footrace in *Iliad* 23. In Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus’ throw was successful because it overtook all the others, yet Polyphemus’ throw fails for precisely that reason: it falls always just too far ahead or behind the target it is aiming to catch up with. The ship moves, just as a runner in a race does, and is always just out of reach. When Achilles chases Apollo at the end of *Iliad* 21, the god always runs just a little too far in front (τυτθὸν ὑπεκπροθέοντα) to be caught (604).⁶⁹ To throw the stone beyond its mark is, for the Cyclops, as useless as the act of overtaking is for Achilles. Both characters rely on their physical prowess alone to obtain their target (strength in the former’s case, speed in the latter’s);

cast his strength beyond measure”). Like Ajax, Polyphemus and Odysseus “whirl around” to make their throws, although the verbs used are different, and in both examples the stones they hurl are greater than the one previously thrown. See Buchan 2004, 82–86, for a different reading of Polyphemus’ throwing of the rocks and Odysseus’ discus throw.

⁶⁷ *Il.* 14.409–13. He also hurls an iron weight in the funeral games for Patroclus, where it “overtakes” (ὑπέρβαλε) the marks of all the others (*Il.* 23.842–43). But Polypoites’ throw, after Ajax’s, goes much further.

⁶⁸ *Il.* 2.768–70; 17.279–80 (Ajax is “best of the Achaeans” after Achilles). On the triangulation of Achilles, Ajax, and Odysseus (where Ajax always comes in second or last), see Hinckley 1986, who also discusses the wrestling match between Odysseus and Ajax in the games.

⁶⁹ By throwing at a moving target, Polyphemus can gain no satisfaction in throwing his stone ahead (*pro*) or behind (*meta*). Instead, like Achilles chasing Hector, he finds himself in a race against an opponent with whom he cannot catch up. Cf. Žižek 1991, 4, on the fable of Achilles and the tortoise: “The crucial feature of this inaccessibility of the object was nicely indicated by Lacan when he stressed that the point is not that Achilles could not overtake Hector (or the tortoise)—since he is faster than Hector, he can easily leave him behind—but rather that he cannot attain him: Hector is always too fast or too slow.” Note that in Greek myth when Cephalus’ hound (which no animal could escape) was sent after the uncatchable Teumessian fox, Zeus was forced to resolve the paradox by turning them both to stone (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.57–59; Aristodemus fr. 5 Müller, Tzetzes *Chiliades* 1.20.542–72). A version of the story is attributed to the Epic Cycle (Photius, *Lexicon*: Τευμησία).

they are not interested in bypassing or overtaking in order to ultimately achieve their goals.

By shouting out his name to the Cyclops and engaging him in competition, and by skillfully alternating between the categories of pursuer and pursued, Odysseus is able to come in first by coming in last (in the order of being eaten and in his exit from the cave). Polyphemus' parting curse ties in to the theme of their encounter, since there he requests that, if Odysseus must reach his homeland, he come in late (ὀψέ, 534). The runner most renowned for his speed in the *Iliad* runs fast and early, but with a fate that moves in tandem with his feet and that will not turn him back from Troy.⁷⁰ Odysseus, on the other hand, understands that the *Iliad*'s running should best be seen as part of a *diaulos* race, the second half of which is comprised of the return home.⁷¹ He is also shown throughout the poem to be particularly fortunate to have not been the first in arriving home.

The quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles that sets the *Iliad* in motion is sparked, Agamemnon claims (*Il.* 19.270–75), by Atē, a goddess whom it is impossible to catch up with or overtake but whom the Litai (Prayers) run in pursuit of nonetheless (*Il.* 9.502–7):

καὶ γάρ τε Λιταὶ εἰσι Διὸς κοῦραι μέγαλοιο,
 χωλαὶ τε ῥυσαὶ τε παραβλώπες τ' ὀφθαλμῶ,
 αἴ ῥά τε καὶ μετόπισθ' Ἄτης ἀλέγουσι κιοῦσαι.
 ἢ δ' Ἄτη σθεναρὴ τε καὶ ἀρτίπος, οὔνεκα πάσας
 πολλὸν ὑπεκπροθέει, φθάνει δέ τε πᾶσαν ἐπ' αἶαν
 βλάπτουσ' ἀνθρώπους· αἱ δ' ἐξακέονται ὀπίσσω.

For there are also the spirits of Prayer, the daughters of great Zeus,
 and they are lame of their feet, and wrinkled, and cast their eyes
 sidelong,
 who toil on their way left far behind by the spirit of Ruin:

⁷⁰ Achilles is variously described in the *Iliad* as ὠκύς (“swift,” e.g., 19.295), πόδας ὠκύς (“swift-footed,” e.g., 1.58), ὠκύμορος (“swift-fated,” e.g., 1.417), and ὠκυμωρότατος ἄλλων (“the most swift-fated of all,” 1.505). In Book 19, his horse tells him that speed will never be enough to save him (“But for us, we two could run with the blast of the west wind / who they say is the lightest of all things; yet still for you / there is destiny to be killed,” 19.415–17).

⁷¹ As Aeschylus put it, δεῖ γὰρ πρὸς οἶκους νοστήμιον σωτηρίας, / κάμψαι διαύλου θάτερον κῶλον πάλιν (“In order to retain their homecoming [the Achaeans] must turn the other leg of the *diaulos* back towards home,” *Ag.* 343–44). It is this turn of the *diaulos* leg that reminds us, finally, that all running requires turns of some kind or another, and that the act of doing so—whether the turn is like Hector's, Antilochus', or Hephaestus'—demands our attention just as much as running does. See also Frame 2009, 170, on this passage's relation to *Iliad* 23, and Bonifazi 2009 on the multidirectionality of *nostos* (esp. 506).

but she, Ruin, is strong and sound on her feet, and therefore
 far outruns all Prayers and wins into every country
 to force men astray; and the Prayers follow as healers after her.

To run ever ahead like this or, conversely, to run ever in pursuit, constitutes one of the tragic strains of the *Iliad*, where the running of characters in battle so often leads to their own deaths and sometimes denotes a kind of impossible striving (Apollo outran Achilles at *Il.* 21.604 using the same verb as the one here: ὑπεκπροθέω). A parallel between this passage and another from the *Odyssey* is especially telling for the difference it reveals about the two epics' approaches to running. The epithet ἀρτίπος (sound or swift of foot) that here describes Atē occurs in only one other place in Homer, to describe Ares in precisely the context when he is being caught up with by the slower but more cunning Hephaestus (*Od.* 8.310) in Demodocus' song. In the *Odyssey*, therefore, especially in the section tracing Odysseus' journey home, coming from behind takes on special prominence as a means of avoiding and subverting the *Iliad*'s heroic model.⁷² It is also no surprise—although the topic is too large to elaborate upon here—that the *Odyssey* is a poem that, rather than “running forward,” loops and reverses according to the topographical and narratorial patternings of its *polutropos* hero.⁷³ I would not want to suggest that the *Iliad* is only and exclusively about catching up, nor that Odysseus is to be only and always understood as an overtaker; yet an examination of the difference between these two ways of running uncovers larger thematic concerns that serve, in subtle but important ways, to differentiate one epic from the other.⁷⁴

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⁷²The fact that Odysseus appears prominently as an overtaker in the battle scenes of the *Iliad* only in the Doloneia fits with the prevailing scholarly opinion that Book 10 is late in date and an awkward fit with the rest of the poem (cf. Hainsworth 1993, 151–55).

⁷³Pucci 1982 and n. 46, above.

⁷⁴I wish to acknowledge the help of Kathryn Morgan, Kirk Ormand, Craig Russell, Seth Schein, and Mario Telò in writing this article, as well as the contributions offered by audience members at the University of California, Santa Barbara and UCLA where earlier versions were delivered. I also thank both of my anonymous readers at *AJP* for their valuable suggestions.

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