

## FEASTING AND FOOD IN HOMER: REALISM AND STYLISATION\*

Some of the most valuable work done on Homer in recent years has proceeded from an observation of the absence from his poems of given features which we might expect to find were we dealing with real life as opposed to an artefact. Thus it has been noted<sup>1</sup> that the *Iliad* fails to present us with incurably but not fatally wounded warriors (to avoid blurring that distinction between life and death which is one of the poem's grand themes). Likewise missing from the same epic (for reasons which we need not go into now) is any account of the weather or the landscape, which, were we to consider things realistically, must have formed a significant background to events. Seen from this point of view, the Homeric epics' artificiality or stylisation comes to the fore. As a valuable antidote or counterbalance we may adduce a contrast taken from the world of Japanese literature. The medieval prose masterpiece *Genji Monogatari* (or 'Tale of Prince Genji') composed in the early eleventh century A.D. by a lady-in-waiting at the Emperor's Kyoto court<sup>2</sup>, paints what is in many ways a realistic picture of court life with all its pomp, ceremony, and intricate etiquette. And yet, in the novel's 1,900 pages, it has been observed, eating is nowhere mentioned, any more than the concomitant features of food and hunger.

The contrast with Homer is immense. But we must be careful in our talk of 'realism', 'stylisation' and the like. In seeking to explain the altogether larger role of food in the *Iliad*, most Homeric scholars would probably place the stress on the *social* significance of food and eating<sup>3</sup>, rather than on any

\* There is a factual and objective account of the varieties of food and drink mentioned by Homer in Gerda Bruns' contribution to the *Archaeologia Homerica* series: ii Φ (*Küchenwesen und Mahlzeiten*, Göttingen 1970, pp. 45ff.), which one can read without for a moment supposing that the actual significance of food and drink within the Homeric epics has been grasped. For an interesting and recent general survey of relevant topics see *Food in Antiquity* (ed. J. Wilkins, D. Harvey and M. Dobson, Exeter 1995), esp. part three (pp. 172ff.) on "the social and religious context of food and eating".

<sup>1</sup> See in particular the work of Jasper Griffin. So for the notion that "the poet dislikes any account of men being gravely wounded but not dying; a wounded man either dies quickly or recovers and fights again" see *Homer On Life and Death* (Oxford 1980) p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Shuichi Kato, *A History of Japanese Literature* vol. i (The First Thousand Years), London 1979, pp. 180-8.

<sup>3</sup> See, S. W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: excursions into eating, culture and the past* (Boston 1997) for an introduction to the social and symbolic roles of food.

supposed concern for realism on Homer's part. And yet realism has its part to play, I feel, in the most striking (and, at least until recently, most misunderstood) manifestation of the function of food in the Iliadic narrative. I refer to the interview between Achilles and Odysseus at *Il.* 19.145ff. This was memorably misinterpreted by D. L. Page<sup>4</sup>, who found Odysseus' persistent pressing upon Achilles of the army's need to eat before entering battle to be absurd, trivial, and therefore an indication of the whole passage's status as a late and decadent addition. More recent scholars<sup>5</sup> have been a great deal more sympathetic in their evaluation of the episode and its function than was Page. But the most convincing explanation of Odysseus' stress on food here was actually available to Page, who quotes it<sup>6</sup> uncomprehendingly, prefacing it with the incredulous statement "Schadewaldt detects the great artist even here". What Schadewaldt says is (in translation) that "The disagreement over eating expresses the idea of 'life as it really is', in order to bring out more profoundly the contrast with the higher existence of the hero..."<sup>7</sup> Odysseus' mundane realism, his awareness that life must go on (and with it everyday activities such as eating) contrasts with the uncompromising heroism of Achilles, his refusal to condescend to the outlook of ordinary humanity. Two incompatible and inconsistent views of the world are movingly juxtaposed here and the realistic stress on the human need for food has its role to play in this wider scheme.

Nevertheless, on the whole, realism is not a faithful guide to the significance of food in Homer: "Wahrscheinlichkeit im naturalistischen Sinn ist nicht homerisch", as G. Finsler once observed<sup>8</sup>. A clue to the relevance of this statement was already available in antiquity when, as the evidence of the

<sup>4</sup> *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Cambridge/Berkeley 1959) p. 314f. and p. 332 n. 24.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Griffin (*sup. cit.* n. 1) pp. 15ff.; Lloyd-Jones, *History and Imagination* (Trevor-Roper Festschrift) p. 21 = *Academic Papers* [1] p. 11 ("Achilles in his grief for his friend can ignore the ordinary processes of life; but Odysseus, always a realist, acts wholly in character in politely reminding Achilles that an army fights better on a full stomach"); M.W. Edwards' commentary *ad loc.*

<sup>6</sup> Cf. n. 4 above.

<sup>7</sup> *Iliasstudien* (Leipzig 1938) p. 133: "Im Streit um das Essen kommt das 'Leben wie es ist' zur Sprache, um eben im Gegensatz das höhere Leben des Heros um so tiefer fühlen zu lassen". In "Prometheus" 12, 1986, 19ff. I have suggested a similar distinction as underlying Soph. *Ant.* 572ff. In a letter to Richard Strauss (mid-July 1911) Hugo von Hofmannstahl made a similar point about the contrast between Ariadne and Zerbinetta in their opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*: "one of the straightforward and stupendous problems of life: ... whether to hold fast to that which is lost... or to live, to live on... It is the fundamental theme of *Elektra*, the voice of Electra opposed to the voice of Chrysothemis, the heroic voice against the human" (*Briefwechsel* p. 89 ~ *Correspondence* p. 94).

<sup>8</sup> *Homer* (Leipzig 1924<sup>3</sup>) p. 320.

Iliadic scholia reminds us, it was already noted that Homer's heroes enjoy a heroic diet, normally of roast beef, uncontaminated by such unheroic delicacies as fish or fowl. In the words of Gilbert Murray<sup>9</sup>: "The heroes of the *Iliad* consume only heroic food, consisting chiefly of 'unspeakable flesh and sweet strong wine'. They eat enormous slices of roast ox or sheep or boar, and that three times a day. They do not condescend to boiled meat, much less to fish, fowl or vegetable, milk or cheese... In the similes, however, there is quite a lot about fishing, alike with rod and net and spear; about diving for oysters and the advantages of a sea rich in fish. There are similes taken from the catching of larks and pigeons, and perhaps from hawking. There is much about milk and cheese, and one mention of boiled pork. That is the poet's own work-a-day world, where people had at most two meals a day and meat was a scarcity"<sup>10</sup>.

This divergence between narrative and similes reminds us that in the matter of food too the poet has been just as carefully selective and given to significant omission. In the words of one of the most eloquent exponents of this aspect of Iliadic art<sup>11</sup>, "Meals are never described with real truth to actual practice of life, and the point about them is the honour done to those present and the fairness of the division... Thus it is moral aspects which interest the

<sup>9</sup> *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (Oxford 1934<sup>4</sup>) p. 121. Murray usefully assembles the relevant Homeric verses which he is summarising in the passage quoted above in p. 122 n. 1. See especially his citation of ΣΤ *Il.* 16.747 (4.296 Erbse) οὐδὲ γὰρ ἰχθύσι χρωμένους εἰσήγαγεν ἢ ὄρνισιν, ἀλλ' ὅμως δι' ἀνάγκην καὶ τοῖς τοιοῦτοῖς ἐπεχειροῦν οἱ Ὀδυσσεὺς ἑταῖροι (cf. *Od.* 4.368, 12.331)· καθόλου γὰρ τὴν τοιαύτην χρῆσιν διὰ τὸ μικροπρεπὲς παρητήσατο, κρέασι δὲ ὅποῖς χρῆσθαι αὐτοὺς φησιν (cf. *Il.* 1.459ff. etc.) ... ἵνα καὶ ἐπὶ Ἀχιλλέως εἰπεῖν δυνήθῃ "τῷ δ' ἔχεν Αὐτομέδων, τάμνε(ν) δ' ἄρα διος Ἀχιλλεύς" (*Il.* 9.209). ὅρα δὲ οἷον ἦν ἰχθὺν καθαίρειν τὸν τῆς Θετιδος ἢ ζωμὸν ἔψειν ("Imagine what the effect would be of making the son of Thetis clean a fish or boil soup!" is Murray's rendering of this last comment).

<sup>10</sup> That "long ago Aristarchus shrewdly observed the use of the trumpet, of boiled meat and of riding horses in similes, as differing from the heroic habit" was already pointed out by Arthur Platt, *Homeric Similes*, "Journal of Philology" 24, 1896, 30, who goes on to observe of the *Odyssey* (p. 31) that βοῦς ἐπὶ φάτνῃ (*Od.* 11.411) in the simile of Agamemnon's murder "is the only mention of beef for food in a simile; along with it go the swine killed for a great feast in the house of a rich man [*Od.* 11.413]. But if little is said of meat, we hear plenty about fish... Thus there are five distinct ways of getting fish of some sort, and fish appears to be a far more important article of food than meat" (cf. *ib.* p. 37 on Iliadic similes). For Aristarchus' view see A. Severyns, *Le Cycle Epique et l'École d'Aristarque* (Liège 1928) pp. 230ff.

<sup>11</sup> Griffin (*sup. cit.* n. 1) p. 19. Compare the "widespread idea that if you eat anyone's bread you establish communion and enter into kinship with him": T. H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament* (London 1969) p. 30 with bibliography on p. 336 n. 33.

poet, and their significance; these men were simple and heroic in their tastes, and they ate together like brothers”.

This way of putting things inspires a further comment on Achilles' abstention from the communal experience of feasting together. It is not irrelevant to observe that, in more recent times, even when the eating of food has largely lost its social and cohesive significance, refusal to eat in public and under the eyes of others has been identified as a psychological disorder<sup>12</sup>. The eighteenth century, as it happens, provides two famous instances in the context of mental collapse. Doctor Johnson in his life of Jonathan Swift<sup>13</sup> has a memorable description of the author's decline: “He grew more violent; and his mental powers declined till (1741) it was found necessary that legal guardians should be appointed of his person and fortune... His meat was brought him cut into mouthfuls; but he would never touch it while the servant staid; and at last, after it had stood perhaps an hour, would eat it walking; for he continued his old habit, and was on his feet ten hours a day”.

Similarly for Pitt the Elder as part of the nervous breakdown that accompanied his second and unsuccessful period (1767-9) as Prime Minister: “His meals were not brought into the room, but left in a hatch outside: this he opened when the servant had gone, and, after he had taken food, replaced the dishes”<sup>14</sup>.

Achilles' abstention from food may not rank as quite so extreme a withdrawal from society as the two real examples just quoted; however, it is potent enough, and the symbolic effect of his finally consenting to eat with Priam as a reintegration into the normal world is clear<sup>15</sup>. But for the symbolism to function effectively, the process of eating must be, as it were, idealised and stylised, must be what one might call purged of some of the less desirable aspects which can attend upon the real life event. We have already seen one instance of this in the creation of a ‘heroic’ diet for Homer's warriors. But there is much more to be said. The significance, what one might almost call the *sanctity*, of the ceremony of eating in the *Iliad* emerges all the more clearly if we again draw on some literary comparisons. First of all with

<sup>12</sup> *Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry* (1996<sup>3</sup>) p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill (Oxford 1905), iii.48f.

<sup>14</sup> Basil Williams, *Life of William Pitt, Lord Chatham* (London 1915) ii.241.

<sup>15</sup> That even in the twentieth century food and feasting can still operate as potent and poignant symbols of reconciliation and forgiveness was shown by Karen Blixen in her remarkable short story *Babette's Feast* which was made into an even more remarkable film. Another recent film, Ang Lee's *Chinese Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994) has been described as using “food as a metaphor for communication, friendship and love”, in a way that many have found characteristically oriental.

Shakespeare. The late John Wain<sup>16</sup> has pointed out how "the symbol of the interrupted feast is always an important one" in this dramatist. He makes the observation with particular reference to *Antony and Cleopatra* II.vii, "the banquet-scene... at which Caesar, Antony and Lepidus celebrate a short-lived amity with Pompey" the younger. (Note, with Wain, the sequel: "a little later it is casually remarked by some-one that Pompey has been murdered [III.v.18]; a few toasts round a table do not protect anyone in this world of imperial power politics.") In this particular instance, the feast is interrupted by "drunkenness"<sup>17</sup>, i.e. the dissolution of consciousness, ... to chime in with the central theme of dissolution and blurring". The absence of drunkenness from Homer's heroic world has been observed by Griffin, "JHS" 97, 1977, 45, 47. The charge of drunkenness can be used as a reproach in a quarrel (so Achilles to Agamemnon at *Il.* 1.225: οἶνοβαρές, a criticism that evoked much discussion in antiquity: see ΣΤ *ad loc.* [1.72 Erbse]) but intoxication never actually occurs at any of the *Iliad's* feasts because it would spoil their symbolic significance as signs of harmonious brotherhood. There is an interesting contrast here with the Attic tragedians which we can appreciate thanks to Athenaeus 1.17c τῶν δ' ἄλλων ποιητῶν ἔνιοι τὰς καθ' αὐτοὺς πολυτελείας καὶ ῥαθυμίας ἀνέπεμπον ὥς οὔσας καὶ κατὰ τὰ Τρωϊκὰ Αἰσχύλος γοῦν ἀπρεπῶς που παράγει μεθύοντας τοὺς Ἕλληνας, ὥς καὶ τὰς ἀμίδας ἀλλήλοις περικαταγνύναι. λέγει γοῦν (Aesch. fr. 180 Radt) ... καὶ Σοφοκλῆς δὲ (fr. 565 Radt) ... Εὐπόλις δὲ (fr. 385 Kassel-Austin) ... οἱ παρ' Ὀμήρῳ δὲ ἀριστεῖς κοσμίως δειπνοῦσιν ἐν Ἀγαμέμνονος. εἰ δ' ἐν Ὀδυσσεΐᾳ φιλονεικοῦσιν Ἀχιλλεὺς καὶ Ὀδυσσεὺς καὶ Ἀγαμέμνων χαῖρε νόφ (*Od.* 8.77f.), ἀλλ' ὠφέλιμοι αἱ φιλοτιμίαι, ζητούντων εἰ λόγῳ ἢ μάχῃ αἰρεθῆναι δεῖ τὸ Ἴλιον. ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὅτε μνηστῆρας εἰσάγει μεθύοντας, οὐδὲ τότε τοιαύτην ἀκοσμίαν εἰσήγαγεν ὥς Σοφοκλῆς καὶ Αἰσχύλος πεποιήκασιν, ἀλλὰ πόδα βόειον ἐπὶ τὸν Ὀδυσσεά ριπτούμενον (*Od.* 20.299). One should stress, however, that there is uncertainty as to whether the relevant plays of Aeschylus (*Ostologoi*) and Sophocles (*Syndeipnoi*) were tragic or satyric: see Radt *TrGF* iii.291f. and iv.426 respectively. For the related biographical tradition that Aeschylus actually *composed* tragedies while drunk himself (an extreme instance of the assimilation of an author's life to his characters') see Radt, *TrGF* iii T 117a-g (esp. 117a = Athen. 10.428f: πρῶτος γὰρ ἐκεῖνος – καὶ οὐχ, ὥς ἔνιοι φασιν, Εὐριπίδης – παρήγαγε τὴν τῶν μεθύοντων ὄψιν εἰς τραγῳδίαν. ἐν γὰρ τοῖς

<sup>16</sup> *The Living World of Shakespeare* (London 1966) p. 156.

<sup>17</sup> North's translation of Plutarch's *Life of Antony* (which is Shakespeare's source here) has no such detail.

Καβείροις (*TrGF* iii p. 214) εισάγει τοὺς περὶ Ἰάσονα μεθύοντας, ἃ δ' αὐτὸς ὁ τραγωδιοποιὸς ἐποίει, ταῦτα τοῖς ἥρωσι περιέθηκε· μεθύων γοῦν ἔγραφε τὰς τραγωδίας. The *Kabeiroi* too may have been satyric [cf. Radt p. 215]). But (to return for a moment to Shakespeare) of course there are numerous other Shakespearean instances of this motif of the interrupted feast, beginning with the Thyestean meal which Titus Andronicus cooks for Emperor and Empress in Act V sc. iii.60ff. of his play and ending with *The Tempest* III.iii.52ff. ("Enter Ariel like a Harpy<sup>18</sup>; claps his wings upon the table; and with a quaint device, the banquet vanishes"). In between stands what is probably the most famous Shakespearian example of the device, *Macbeth* III.iv with the concomitant apparition of Banquo's ghost.

The Norse poem *Lokasenna* (from the *Poetic Edda*) provides a further instance: the story of how Loki intrudes upon and disrupts the feasting and drinking of the gods on Asgard with his irresponsible insults and abuse<sup>19</sup>. But in the *Iliad*, the process of feasting is as sacrosanct and inviolate among the gods as it is on earth, and is, indeed, used as a means of calming and assuaging divine disturbances, as at the end of *Iliad* 1 with the quarrel of Zeus and Hera. This was not invariably the case in Greek literature: Eris' intervention at the marriage of Peleus and Thetis comes immediately to mind. Whether this episode featured in the epic known as the *Cypria* has long been disputed, but that work certainly featured an analogous detail relevant to the point at issue. According to Proclus (see *EGF* p. 32) after the Greeks had sailed to Tenedos and Philoctetes had been abandoned on Lemnos on account of his wound, "Achilles quarrelled with Agamemnon because of a late invitation" (Ἀχιλλεὺς ὕστερος κληθεὶς διαφέρεται πρὸς Ἀγαμέμνονα). This detail is clarified if we further quote Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 2.1401B16 ἢ εἴ τις φαίη τὸ ἐπὶ δεῖπνον κληθῆναι τιμιώτατον· διὰ γὰρ τὸ μὴ κληθῆναι ὁ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἐμήνισε τοῖς Ἀχαιοῖς ἐν Τενέδῳ. Here again, feasting, in a most unIliadic fashion, is the cause, rather than the resolution, of conflict and dispute.

"The fairness of the division" was mentioned above as a standard feature

<sup>18</sup> The mention of a Harpy in the stage direction is a reminder that this scene ultimately derives from another variant of the disturbed feast, the story of Phineus and the Harpies (cf. Apollonius *Argonautica* 2.250ff., the source for Vergil *Aen.* 3.225ff.).

<sup>19</sup> Division of food becomes a source of strife in the literature of other cultures too. Thus in the Irish *Story of the Pig of MacDatho* (cf. Alwyn and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, London 1961, pp. 54f. and p. 366 n. 62) at a great feast for rival parties "Bricriu, who in several tales is the evil-tongued counsellor who sows dissension among the Ulster heroes", suggests "that the pig should be divided 'according to battle-victories'", which proposal leads to taunts and violence. For another instance see Griffin (*sup. cit.* n. 1) p. 15 n. 36.

of Iliadic feasting. But a quarrel over just such a division led to the death of Castor and Polydeuces and their cousins the sons of Aphareus according to one version. In Apollod. 3.11.2<sup>20</sup> the two sets of brothers engage in a cattle raid and Idas is then allowed to divide the spoil. ὁ δὲ τεμὼν βοῶν εἰς μέρη τέσσαρα, τοῦ πρώτου καταφαγόντος εἶπε τῆς λείας τὸ ἥμισυ ἔσεσθαι, καὶ τοῦ δευτέρου τὸ λοιπὸν· καὶ φθάσας κατηνάλωσε τὸ μέρος τὸ ἴδιον πρώτος Ἴδας, καὶ τὸ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ, καὶ μετ' ἐκείνου τὴν λείαν εἰς Μεσσήνην ἤλασε. The Dioscuri then make a cattle raid on Messene which leads to their encounter with the Apharetidae and their death.

The great Friedrich Welcker<sup>21</sup> took offence at the gargantuan appetite of Idas in this story and presumed the detail was invented "in the palaestra, where the custom of devouring great hunks of roast oxen was highly honoured". Karl Meuli<sup>22</sup>, by contrast, pointed out that ἀδηφαγία in Greek and other cultures has an ancient pedigree. Heracles in particular<sup>23</sup> was endowed with prodigious capacities for eating (as well as drinking), as witness his devouring of a whole ox at Lindos, and the gods and heroes of other cultures are credited with similar exploits. By contrast the heroes of the *Iliad*, though allowed a consistently heroic diet<sup>24</sup>, do not manifest this type of heroic appetite. "Unspeakably large amounts of flesh" consumed twice daily is a decidedly toned-down regimen in comparison with the spectacular achievements of Heracles, and there is no hint at the eating contests which are so common a feature of Norse epics<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Possibly from the *Cypria*.

<sup>21</sup> *Der Epische Cyclus* 2<sup>2</sup> (1882) p. 97 n. 11.

<sup>22</sup> *Odyssee und Argonautika* (Berlin 1921) pp. 20f. = *Ges. Schr.* ii.607f.

<sup>23</sup> For Heracles' association with feasting in Greek literature and art see S.R. Wolf, *Herakles beim Gelage* (Cologne 1993): pp. 159ff. deal with literary sources. For good examples of Heracles παμφάγος see Ion, *TrGF* 1.19 F 29 and Dionysius, *TrGF* 1.76 F 3a Snell.

<sup>24</sup> One might notice too that the slain animals on which the heroes feast are perfectly normal. Contrast e.g. the Irish tale mentioned above (n. 19) in which "the main dish was a matchless pig, nurtured for seven years on the milk of fifty cows". By contrast, when Agamemnon particularly wishes to honour Ajax (*Il.* 7.321f.) it is with five-year oxen, of which he receives the most honoured part (νῶτα διηνεκέα). (For the absence of cannibalistic consumption or the sympathetic absorption of wild animals' raw innards from Homer see Griffin [*sup. cit.* n. 1] p. 20).

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, Thor's attempts to drain a horn in one gulp and Loki's demolition of roasted meat piled high in a trough during their visit to Utgard: Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (ed. A. Faulkes, Oxford 1982, p. 40f.: English translation by Faulkes, Everyman Classics Series 1987, p. 42). For "eating an enormous amount" as a common task set in folk-tales see Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*<sup>2</sup> H 1141.

Odysseus in the *Odyssey* has been described<sup>26</sup> as “a great one for pressing the urgent claims of the belly”, so this is an obvious opportunity for a transition to the other great Homeric epic, whose use of the motif of feasting will be seen to differ radically. In fact, of the two instances Griffin cites, the second, *Od.* 18.52-4 (ὦ φίλοι, οὗ πῶς ἔστι νεωτέρῳ ἀνδρὶ μάχεσθαι / ἄνδρα γέροντα δὴ ἀρημένον· ἀλλὰ με γαστήρ / ὀτρύνει κακοεργός, ἵνα πληγῇσι δαμείω) is a special case, since, as has been pointed out<sup>27</sup>, με γαστήρ / ὀτρύνει may mean not only “my evil belly drives me on”, but also (with an allusion to the greedy beggar Iris) “a villainous glutton incites me”. Nevertheless, the whole passage, which begins (44ff.) with a reference to γαστέρες in the sense of blood-sausages, is of obvious relevance. The latest commentator<sup>28</sup> observes that the word “recalls Odysseus' earlier complaints about the urgings of his belly... so that when it is used here the word has acquired the symbolic potential of evoking a larger frame of reference: the human need for sustenance and the difficulty of survival in the physically demanding heroic world, especially if one is politically and socially powerless”<sup>29</sup>. Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, certainly seems thus powerless, a fact brought out by the first of Griffin's passages, *Od.* 17.473-4 (αὐτὰρ ἔμ' Ἀντίνοος βάλε γαστέρος εἵνεκα λυγρῆς, / οὐλομένης, ἣ πολλὰ κάκ' ἀνθρώποισι δίδωσιν) where the disguised hero complains at Antinous' mistreatment of him. The precise nature of this mistreatment will lead us on to the next section of our argument.

We may take the cue for this next stage from Athenaeus' observation (1.17c: above, p. 101) that even when Homer introduces the suitors in a

<sup>26</sup> By Griffin (*sup. cit.* n. 1) p. 15 n. 40.

<sup>27</sup> By M.L. West in his commentary on Hes. *Th.* 26. The point is not mentioned by Joseph Russo in his commentary on the Odyssean passage.

<sup>28</sup> Russo as cited in the last note. He further points out that “this *gaster*-motif, in which Odysseus is metonymically represented by his belly (17.228, 559; 18.53, 364, 380), reaches its culmination at 20.25ff. where a striking and unexpected simile directly equates Odysseus with a *gaster*”, or blood-sausage. It is interesting, in view of the brutality of the feasting suitors which I consider below, that all but the second of the ‘metonymic’ passages listed by Russo involves *mistreatment* of the disguised hero.

<sup>29</sup> Russo's commentary on *Od.* 17.286-9 (γαστέρα δ' οὐ πῶς ἔστιν ἀποκρύψαι μεμαυῖαν, / οὐλομένην, ἣ πολλὰ κάκ' ἀνθρώποισι δίδωσι, / τῆς ἔνεκεν καὶ νῆες εὐζυγοὶ ὀπλίζονται / πόντον ἐπ' ἀτρύγετον, κακὰ δυσμενέεσσι φέρουσαι) refers to Piero Pucci's idea (in *Odysseus Polytropos*, Ithaca and London 1987, 173-87) that γαστήρ is “the secret force behind Odysseus' adventures”, and “an emblem of the restlessness and wanderings in the *Odyssey*, much as μῆνις epitomises the action of the *Iliad*”. This probably goes too far, but it is interesting that Hipponax's burlesque of an epic invocation (fr. 128.1-2 W.) utilises the theme of gluttony: Μοῦσά μοι Εὐρυμεδοντιάδεα τὴν ποντοχάρυβδιν, / τὴν ἐγγαστριμάχαιραν, ὅς ἐσθίει οὐ κατὰ κόσμον.

drunken state he does not present as much disorder as Sophocles or Aeschylus but at the most shows Odysseus being hit with a cow's foot. What concerns us here is not the two aforementioned playwrights, but a contrast between *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for depicting the suitors as engaging in drunken behaviour certainly offers a very marked contrast to the decorum of the *Iliad*. A cow's foot, in fact, is not the only inconvenience Odysseus has to undergo from the feasting suitors. In Book 17 Antinous throws a footstool at him (462-5), in Book 18 Eurymachus mocks his bald pate (349-55), and it is in Book 20, as a sort of climax of humiliation, that Ctesippus hurls the cow's foot (299-303). It is in the second half of the epic, then, that the suitors' rowdy behaviour at table is most graphically depicted, but as early as Book 1, Athena, disguised as Mentès, delivers a generalised verdict on their behaviour (227-9):

ὥς τέ μοι ὑβρίζοντες ὑπερφιάλως δοκέουσι  
δαίνυσθαι κατὰ δῶμα. νεμεσσήσαιτό κεν ἀνὴρ  
αἷσχα πόλλ' ὀρόων, ὅς τις πινυτός γε μετέλθοι.

The distance from the *Iliad*'s presentation could hardly be greater. Instead of the feast as an opportunity to forget quarrels in a context of harmonious brotherhood, we find feasting as an opportunity to misuse another's wealth; to pick a quarrel; and to insult, verbally or even physically, the seemingly inferior and helpless. Nor are the suitors the only group to misbehave thus at the dinner table. *Od.* 21.22-30 relates (in describing the earlier history of Odysseus' bow) how Heracles killed Iphitus even after he had invited him to join in a meal:

σχέτλιος, οὐδὲ θεῶν ὅπιν αἰδέσατ' οὐδὲ τράπεζαν,  
τὴν ἣν οἱ περέθηκεν· ἔπειτα δὲ πέφνε καὶ αὐτόν.

Another markedly un*Iliadic* instance of the interrupted or disturbed feast is the episode of Eurytion the inebriated centaur which Antinous tells the disguised Odysseus at *Od.* 21.295-304. Eurytion got drunk and disturbed the feasting at Pirithous' marriage, to such an extent indeed that the Lapiths inflicted the extreme punishment of mutilation of ears and nose upon him. Eurytion as a centaur constitutes something of a special case, of course; that class of beings were acknowledged in Greek myth as liable to alcoholic excesses. But there is a cunning irony in the fact that it should be Antinous of all people who tells this cautionary tale to the imagined beggar, when it is the speaker himself and his boon-companions who are to suffer an even greater retribution at Odysseus' hands.

There are, of course, more normal and positive representations of feasting in the *Odyssey*, occasions which act as foils to the perversion of resources and enjoyment which the suitors' feasts represent. Telemachus is feasted at Pylos and Sparta by Nestor and Menelaus and their beneficent re-

pasts, like the feast which the Phaeacians offer Odysseus<sup>30</sup> much to his praise (9.2-11), remind us of the more positive Iliadic meals described above<sup>31</sup>. But it is striking how often eating in the *Odyssey* partakes of negative connotations and is the prelude to something sinister. The feast in the land of the Ciconians (9.45-6) might seem at first the normal heroic celebration of a victory in battle, but it allows the enemy to regroup and attack the unsuspecting Greeks. Likewise with the magical and mysterious lotus fruit which saps the will of Odysseus' men to return home (9.93-7), or even the harmless-seeming cheese which Odysseus and his twelve chosen men sit and eat while waiting for the Cyclops' return home (9.231-3). No one can fail to find sinister the meal served to Odysseus' ἑταῖροι by Circe in *Od.* 10.233-40 as a preliminary to their animal metamorphoses. And most troublesome of all, the feasting upon the cattle of the Sun on the island of Thrinacia (12.330ff.), a deed singled out in the *Odyssey's* proem (1.7-9) as the reason why Odysseus' ἑταῖροι perished so spectacularly, and attended by grim omens when the skins of the slaughtered cows begin to move and the spitted meat to send forth the sound of bellowing.

These examples all come, of course, from that portion of the *Odyssey* which is most strongly indebted to folk-tale and the magical, and this will largely explain their sinister elements, as it will the cannibalistic feastings of Polyphemus, Antiphanes king of the Laestrygonians, and Scylla<sup>32</sup>. And it might be argued that this folk-tale sinisterness has invaded the depiction of feasting upon Ithaca. But the difference in the presentation of feasts between *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is so very marked<sup>33</sup> that I feel it needs some further expla-

<sup>30</sup> It is striking that the epic's very first instance of the "gaster motif" (cf. Russo above, n. 29) occurs when Odysseus has arrived at the court and is addressing Alcinous: ἄλλ' ἐμὲ δορπῆσαι ἑάσατε κηδόμενόν περ / οὐ γάρ τι στυγερῇ ἐπὶ γαστέρι κύντερον ἄλλο / ἔπλετο κτλ. (*Od.* 7.215-21).

<sup>31</sup> Note that the most Iliadic representation of feasting in the *Odyssey*, and its beneficial effects in dispelling the bad feelings that stem from a quarrel, occurs in *Od.* 8 in connection with Demodocus' song of Ares and Aphrodite (where again the gods, uniquely to the *Odyssey*, are presented in a very Iliadic light). See W. J. Slater ap. *Symptica* (ed. O. Murray, Oxford 1990) pp. 217-18.

<sup>32</sup> Also from the world of folk-tale are the less obviously sinister but clearly exaggerated everlasting feasts at Aeolus' palace (*Od.* 10.8-11) and Circe's year-long feast (10.452-77).

<sup>33</sup> It is almost emblematically symbolised by Demodocus' account (*Od.* 8.73-82) of how Odysseus and Achilles quarrelled θεῶν ἐν δαυτί, an eventuality unthinkable in the *Iliad* and probably invented by the *Odyssey's* poet (see, for instance, Slater [as cited in n. 31] p. 218 n. 50; O. Taplin ap. *Owls to Athens* (Dover Festschrift, 1990) p. 111 n. 4). It is equally appropriate that it should be the *Odyssey* which provides the one contradiction (3.135ff., Nestor relating the assembly of the Greek forces at sunset after the sack of Troy)

nation. And this is to be found, I believe, in the very climax of the poem, when Odysseus finally shakes off his rags and takes vengeance on the suitors. They are shot down in the hall where they had so often feasted and wasted the absent lord's resources; Antinous, indeed, is shot literally as he feasts. Eating as a prelude to punishment, feasting as a perversion of harmonious brotherhood: these are motifs central to the *Odyssey*, and it is the poem's climax which explains why that epic exploits them so differently from the *Iliad*<sup>34</sup>.

St. John's College, Oxford

MALCOLM DAVIES

of Griffin's generalisation (above, p. 101) that Homer's heroes are never represented as drunk.

<sup>34</sup> Another striking instance of perversion of the feasting motif (analogous to that in the story of Heracles and Iphitus mentioned p. 105) is found in *Od.* 4.534-5 and 11.409-20 where we are told how Aegisthus invited Agamemnon and his companions to a feast in his palace and ambushed and killed them after dining them (δειπνίσσας). This is all the more striking as it looks like an attempt on Homer's part to avoid the frightening aspects of the original form of the story (perversion of the returning hero's bath from his wife: cf. H. Fränkel, "Univ. of Calif. Publ. in Class. Phil." 12, 1944, 294 = *Wege und Formen frühgr. Denkens* p. 98 n. 3) by replacing it with a more heroic death in battle (or at least ambush). The source for this more heroic version is probably the main climax of the *Odyssey* itself (cf. "CQ" 37, 1987, 67). On perversion of the feasting motif in the *Odyssey* see also R. Scodel, "CQ" 44, 1994, 532ff., esp. p. 533 n. 13.