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The Irony of Homer

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THE IRONY OF HOMER

BY

JOHN J. CANAVAN, S. J.

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VITA AUCTORIS

John Joseph Canavan was born in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey on August 18, 1921. He attended Saint Francis Parochial School there, and Regis High School in New York City, from which he graduated in June, 1938. In July of the same year he entered the Society of Jesus at Wernersville, Pennsylvania. He started his undergraduate studies at Georgetown University in September 1940. In 1942 he transferred to West Baden College of Loyola University, and there received the Bachelor of Arts degree in February 1944. He then entered the Graduate School of Loyola University.
CHAPTER I

The Nature and Types of Irony

Irony is a subtle literary device of a type that would be deeply appreciated by the keen Greek mind. In the works of their great tragic poets, and, oddly enough, even in the writings of one of their two eminent philosophers we find constant use of irony. Socratic irony is as famous as Socrates himself, and no student of tragedy has failed to be impressed by the power of tragic irony, or, as it is also known, Sophoclean irony. In this thesis the intention is to examine carefully the notion of irony; to distinguish it from all other similar uses of language; and to determine just what its essential elements are. When we have done this, we can carry the results of our investigation over to the works of Homer and consider his use of irony, and the important part this device plays in the artistic development of the Iliad and the Odyssey.

In his classic work on this subject, Irony, J. A. K. Thomson maintains that: "It (irony) is the secret of much of Homer's beauty, and it is even more the secret of his power."1 The task before us is to demonstrate how and why this device plays such an important part in the Homeric poems.

The first thing we must do, then, is to examine the notion of irony. The **Oxford English Dictionary** defines irony thus:

a figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of what is expressed by the words used, usually taking the form of sarcasm or ridicule in which laudatory expressions are used to imply condemnation or contempt.

2. a condition of affairs or events of a character opposite to what was expected, or might be expected; a contradictory outcome of events, as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things.

From this definition we can draw the essentials of a true notion of irony. The first is that it is a use of language and the second is that this particular use implies some covert meaning. Aristotle says much the same thing in his definition of irony: "Irony is to say something and to pretend that you are not saying it, or else to call things by the names of their contraries." Elsewhere he describes it as "a pretense of tending toward the underside of the truth."

Even the Stagirite does not give us much more of an intimation into the deeper meaning of this term than the first definition which we considered. In his, *Of Irony, Especially In Drama*, Sedgewick asserts:

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2 The Oxford English Dictionary, S. V. 'irony'.
3 Aristotle, *De Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, 1434 a.
"Of course the trope itself, not the word, must really be as old as coherent speech. Long before history began, its methods became instinctive in the race: to blame by seeming to praise, to praise by seeming to blame, says Quintilian, - laudis adsimulatone detrahere et vituperationis laudare - leaving the truth to be understood from tone, gesture or known circumstances. It is the most powerful weapon of the orator, nearly the whole panoply of the satirist." 5

Besides the speaker who utters the irony, there is necessarily implied a double audience, - those who merely take the words at their face value, and upon whom the inner meaning is wholly lost; and then the select group who catch the occult connotation and mentally scorn the hapless victims of the irony. When dealing with irony, especially as the Greeks employed it, we have always to keep in mind this implied double audience. The whole force of the device is based upon this duplicity.

Many authors are inclined to identify irony with sarcasm or satire. For instance, in their Anatomy of Literature, Walley and Wilson describe sarcasm as "the method of irony when employed for the purpose of a taunt or jeer." 6 There seems to be a shade of difference in meaning, however, between irony and sarcasm that they have failed to notice. Sarcasm has as its purpose the inflicting of pain. There is no double meaning that

escapes its victim. It deals with the faults and foibles of another, and by inversion employs them to ridicule the victim in his own eyes and in those of the bystander. The purpose of irony is not to inflict pain. It aims rather at exclusiveness. Its purpose is to set up a bond between the one who employs it and those who are clever enough to detect it. It does not necessarily deal with faults, but can be used with any statement of facts. It differs from sarcasm especially in this, that it is not addressed to the victim at all but to the "inner circle".

At this point, we must also note that irony is also to be distinguished from satire, whose aim is amendment. Satire confines itself to morals and manners, and by accentuating the vices of the self-satisfied strives to bring on their amendment. This may appear to be drawing out the notion of irony to extremes, but it is quite necessary that we distinguish carefully what is implied in the notion of irony before going on to the positive matter of the thesis.

Among the various types of irony the two best known, especially in Greek literature, are Socratic irony and tragic, or Sophoclean, irony. Socratic irony was a profession of ignorance. What Socrates represented as ignorance in himself was

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actually a non-committal attitude towards any dogma, however accepted or imposing, that has not been carried back and shown to be based on first principles. Such a process was very vexatious to those who at first were sure that they knew, only to discover that they did not. Croiset tells us:

"His (Socrates') irony had the grace of finest comedy: it made fools seem more ridiculous; and the moral wretchedness of folly, false knowledge, or duped honesty, was manifested to all by the smile of derision on his lips."9

A typical example of this irony is to be found in the First Book of the Republic. Here in order to ascertain a true definition of justice, Socrates feigns ignorance with the intention of drawing various false definitions from his hearers.10 In this manner he takes up the proposals of Cephalus, Polemarchus, Trasymachus, and shows by his own assumed simplicity where some error is latent in each of their definitions. Later in the Fourth Book, having put aside the pretended ignorance, he establishes what he considers the true definition.11 The double audience which is so necessary to true irony, in the case of

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10 Plato, Republic, 331 b-354.
11 Ibid., 432b.
Socratic irony is made up of two groups of Socrates' listeners. One group consists of those who, not knowing his method, pity Socrates' ignorance and simplicity and hasten to enlighten him with their half-truths. The rest of the audience are those, who, familiar with the method, watch "the game in which learning shall be turned inside out by simplicity,"\(^{12}\) and appreciate the true depths of Socrates' wisdom as contrasted with the shallowness of those who consider themselves wise. The delight that irony gives to the "inner circle" is based on the secret intimacy which exists between Socrates and themselves.

It does not appear to be too ingenious an explanation of Socrates' constant use of this device in the Platonic Dialogues to say that Plato employed it to flatter his readers. The reader was always one of the "inner circle", and in pitying the ignorance of the victims of the irony, he would consider himself a clever person, merely because he realized the implications of the Socratic method. Hence he would be more inclined in favor of Socrates and his doctrine because of the subtle prejudice in his favor that the irony has produced.

This form of irony is based on purely intellectual notions, and for the most part is entirely free of any emotional touches. It is a perfect vehicle for the expression of

\(^{12}\) Fowler, op. cit., p. 295.
philosophical thought. That such a form of irony cannot be used often, if at all, by a poet who deals with the emotions for the most part, seems to be quite evident. However, as we shall see later, there are some passages in Homer which bear a remarkable resemblance to this Socratic irony.

The second well known type of irony is tragic, or Sophoclean, irony. Since this type of irony was a favorite device of the Greek dramatists, we can expect to find some use of it in Homer, whose works, Aristotle tells us, were the guiding light of the tragedians. The technique of the Greek Poet in the exposition of his subject was altogether different from that of the modern dramatists. In The Greek Way, Edith Hamilton brings out this point very well.

"The English poet puts before his audience the full tragedy as they would never have seen it but for him. He does it all for them in words so splendid, in images so poignant, that they are lifted to a vision that completely transcends themselves. The Greek poet lifts one corner of the curtain only. A glimpse is given, no more, but by it, the mind is fired to see what lies beyond. The writer will do no more than suggest the way to go, but he does it in such a way that the imagination is quickened to create for itself."14

13 Aristotle, Poetics, 1448b.
The Greek poet, then, did not expect his audience to be completely passive. On the contrary, he expected them to use their own imaginations and intellectual powers to follow up the suggestions presented to them. Perhaps the best device used to set in motion the minds of the audience was tragic irony.

The Greek poets labored under a handicap that does not affect the dramatists of today. They were forced to draw their material from the reservoir of legend common to all. The audience consequently knew in advance the destinies of the characters, with the result that the element of surprise so common today was practically non-existent in the drama of the Greeks. Symonds expresses it as follows: "The ancient poet plays with his cards on the table; the modern dramatist conceals his hand." The use of irony enabled the Greek tragedians to overcome this difficulty, which doubtless would prove to be an insurmountable obstacle to the present day playwright. To produce a work on a theme already well known to the audience and to hold their attention and interest in doing so required more skill and genuine artistic ability than to turn out new flights of fancy. In this matter Gilbert Norwood has this to say:

"Another characteristic of Sophocles is that famous tragic irony by which he again imparts new life to old themes. It turns to magnificent profit a circumstance which might seem to vitiate dramatic interest, -- the fact that the spectator knows the myth and cannot be taken by surprise. Between the audience which forsees the event, and the stage personages who cannot, the playwright sets up a thrilling interest of suspense. He causes his characters to discuss the future in language which is fearfully and exquisitely suited to the future that actually awaits them."

In the Oedipus Tyrannus we have a typical example of this irony. The stage personages are the victims and the audience forms the "inner circle". Imprecating curses on the head of the murderer of Laius, Oedipus unwittingly pronounces his own doom. Almost every word that falls from his lips is pregnant with his own impending disaster. Mackail tells us that this type of irony is based upon the power of language. The spoken word is more than the expression of the speaker's meaning; it is a living thing, carrying with it the issues of life and death. Speaking of the scene in the Electra in which Electra and Clytemnestra hear the account of the death of Orestes from the servant, he remarks:

18 Sophocles, Electra, ll. 660ff.
"One feels as though in an electric storm, played about by a hundred lightnings. And it is all done without what is called action, by the more potent and more living power to the word." 19

In the epic because of its length, naturally enough, we do not expect to find the compressed emotional power that is so characteristic of tragedy, but rather a range of the emotions equally as sweeping. When Homer uses irony, then, we will not find the finish in its use that is peculiar to Sophocles. Its effect will be the same, but its emotional intensity will be less pronounced. Still, as we shall show in the course of our investigations later on, the fact that Homer did use this form of irony is indisputable. It is probable too that his use of this device, unfinished though it may be, inspired Homer's successors, especially Sophocles, to develop this form of irony to the perfection it has in his plays. Aristotle tells us that Homer was "the poet of poets in the serious style, standing alone not only through literary excellence, but also through the dramatic character of his imitations." 20

He then goes on to tell us that Homer was the first to outline the general form of Comedy in his Margites, and the general form of tragedy in the Iliad and the Odyssey. Since irony is such an important element in Greek tragedy, it seems likely that even Aristotle would be inclined

20 Aristotle, Poetics, 1448b.
to agree that it, too, was drawn from the archetype, that is from
the Iliad and the Odyssey. It is interesting to note in this
connection that Sophocles was regarded in ancient criticism as
the most Homeric of the tragedians.\(^{21}\) MacGregor asserts that
"This kinship of the two poets reveals itself in respect of their
heroes, their attitude towards and portrayal of them, and the
manner of their portrayal."\(^{22}\) It was Sophocles' choice of heroes
that enabled him to employ his irony, and this same irony was
all-important in his portrayal of Oedipus and Electra. If what
MacGregor says is true, and there seems to be no reason for
doubting his assertion, then, the theory that Sophocles received
the inspiration to use irony from Homer receives additional con­
firmation.

Among the other types of irony we find the irony of
fate and irony of action.\(^{23}\) Irony of fate is based upon the
probable opinion normal persons have of the future outcome of
events. Fowler describes it thus:

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21 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, iv, 20: \(\varepsilon \lambda \varepsilon \gamma \varepsilon \eta \varepsilon \delta \nu \tau \dot{\nu} \nu \kappa \varepsilon \nu \mu \eta \rho \omega \nu \) \(\varepsilon \tau \iota \iota \kappa \kappa \nu \varepsilon \iota \nu \alpha \iota \) \(\Sigma \sigma \omega \phi \omega \kappa \lambda \varepsilon \alpha \) \(\omega \mu \eta \rho \omega \delta \varepsilon \) \(\Sigma \sigma \omega \phi \omega \kappa \lambda \varepsilon \alpha \) \(\tau \alpha \gamma \iota \kappa \kappa \nu \varepsilon \).
23 For this distinction confer the treatment given by G. Duck­
"Nature persuades us that the course of events within wide limits is foreseeable, that things will follow the usual course, that violent outrage to our sense of the probable or reasonable need not be looked for; and these 'most of us' are the uncomprehending outsiders, the elect or inner circle, with whom fate shares her amusement, are the few to whom it is not an occasional maxim, but a living conviction that what happens is unexpected."24

Often it is difficult to distinguish this type of irony from tragic irony. What is often tragic irony for the spectators, is really irony of fate for the stage personages. There are a few instances where Homer employs this irony of fate to heighten the feeling of pity for many of the minor characters, as we see later in the treatment of Homer's use of irony in his portrayal of character.

Thus far the main types of irony have been adequately treated, and it remains for us now briefly to consider the purpose of irony. As we have already seen, the Greek poet expected his audience to respond actively to what was presented to them. Basset considers the audience the "silent partner" of the poet.25 "Still more consideration is shown by telling the hearer in advance how the action is to issue, for it recognizes the audience as a partner who has the right to share all the knowledge which concerns the partnership."26 The use of irony serves to make the

24 Fowler, op. cit. 296
26 Ibid.
bond between the poet and his hearer ever more strong. The hearer because of this bond feels superior to the unfortunate characters, and this brings in the element of pity, one of the essential requisites of tragedy according to Aristotle. Irony also creates an all but overpowering suspense, especially when it is sustained. In the final section of the Odyssey, Homer makes use of irony so well in creating suspense, that Odysseus' revenge on the suitors comes as a welcome relief. The incidental use of this device throughout both poems serves also as a means of unification, since it emphasizes points that otherwise would have passed unnoticed. We have already seen that Thomson considers irony the secret of much of Homer's beauty, and the secret of his power. That irony and foreshadowing in Homer are clearly connected has been admirably demonstrated by Duckworth in his Foreshadowing and Suspense in the Epics of Homer, Apollonius and Vergil.

So far in our exposition we have confined ourselves to general notions. In the subsequent chapters we will descend to particulars and examine Homer's irony in the light of these general notions. If we have made clear the true nature of irony,

our present purpose has been accomplished. It remains for us now to show where, how, and with what artistic effect Homer employed irony.
CHAPTER II

THE IRONY OF THE ILIAD

The plot of the Iliad furnishes us with our broadest considerations of Homeric irony. The close interrelation of plot and irony is no novel theory. Discussing the Aristotelian requisites of a good plot, Atkins mentions the important part irony plays in the denouement.

The presence of irony always adds a peculiar poignancy to the tragic effect. It may be of a verbal kind when words are caught up by circumstances and charged with a fuller meaning than the speaker meant. But it may also arise out of the action itself, when deeds are caught up out of an agent's grasp and charged with a meaning the very opposite of what was intended.¹

Duckworth also realizes the value of irony and the important influence it has on the plot.

Irony of this type, implying a complete reversal of fortune arouses the expectation and suspense of the reader and holds his interest to the denouement of the narrative.²

Sedgewick does not hesitate to assert that the undercurrent of irony is one of the elements of a plot according to the tenets of Aristotle.

² Duckworth, Foreshadowing and Suspense, 79.
But very certainly indeed, the Greeks were even more keenly aware than we are of what I have called general irony, although they gave it no precise name. Irony is implicit in the principle of Reversal of Fortune, which Aristotle notes as the basis of Tragedy; its general and its specific form are both implicit in his doctrine of Recognition or Discovery. And the sense of contradiction between appearance and reality in circumstance, the sense of mocking fate colors practically the whole of classic Greek literature.  

Since the plot of the Iliad deals in the main with the reversal of Achilles, and since the actual plot of the Odyssey is in reality a series of recognitions, we will have ample material to consider in some detail how Homer has employed irony in the unfolding of his plots.

The Iliad is the story of the wrath of Achilles "which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans" and most of all upon Achilles himself. Symonds aptly expresses the keynote of the Iliad.

The Greek poet divined the pathos and expounded the philosophy of human life, showing how the fate of nations may depend upon the passions of a man, who in his turn is but the creature of a day.

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3 Sedgewick, 50.
4 II. I 4.
Though Achilles is so powerful that the fortunes of both the Achaeans and the Trojans depend upon his whims, he is unable to save himself from the fate he chose for himself. That such a situation cannot be fraught with irony is immediately evident. Thompson tells us:

The irony of Homer is not so simple always as it looks, but it is in general a fairly plain comment on the human tragedy. His text might be the title which Johnson chose for his poem: The Vanity of Human Wishes. It is also the text of perhaps the main body of the greatest Greek literature. Achilles had his wish: glory and a short life.\(^6\)

The task before us now is to analyse the Iliad, in order to demonstrate the existence and nature of this powerful undercurrent of irony, which extends through the whole work.

The Iliad opens with an invocation to the Muse, in which we find the pregnant statement: \(^7\)

Everything which is going to happen has already been decided by Zeus, and we, the audience who form the inner circle, are prepared to behold the struggles of men laboring under this unswerving destiny. All of their words and actions are colored with this added meaning for us, and their exploits and successes serve only to heighten the tragic effect of the swift-moving narrative.

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6 Thompson, 85.
7 Il. I 5.
Homer, as Horace tells us, \(^8\) starts his tale "in medias res." We are immediately swept into the dramatic quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon. Agamemnon has taken the maiden, Briseis, to vindicate his honor and position against Achilles. Being restrained from physical violence by Athene, Achilles pronounces the oath in which unwittingly he seals his own doom.

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Among those who shall fall beneath the sword of man-slaying Hector, is Patroclus, the alter ego of Achilles. This is a clever combination on the part of Homer of Irony of Fate and Tragic Irony. The tragic irony is grasped by the hearer who knows in advance of the death of Patroclus at the hands of Hector. The irony of fate lies in Achilles' rashness, which is the remote cause of all his own sorrow. The flow of irony now started does not reach its culmination until the very end of the poem.

\(^8\) Ars Poetica, 148.
\(^9\) Il. I 239-244.
Achilles retires to sulk among the ships and asks his immortal mother to intercede for him on Olympus. The introduction of Thetis into the Iliad contains a definite element of irony. Being immortal, she emphasizes the shortness of Achilles' life. Thetis enters the story only four times, but each time this is emphasized. Achilles embodies in his person the reading of destiny in the poem. Man stands out as a creature of brief life.

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Man has created his compensation in the glory and praise given to the courage that daily risks the loss of life. Achilles is the heroic man intensified by short life and desire of glory, and fully conscious of his destiny. Thompson pointedly remarks on the character of Achilles.

"It seems to me that Achilles provides us with the supreme achievement of the Ironic method in Homer. This can be shown only at some length and in some detail. But the essence of the Irony lies in something almost too simple, as we say, for words. Achilles is represented as knowing himself foredoomed to an early death 'far from his native land'. In the light of this knowledge he moves throughout the Iliad, and in that light we are made to see him. It changes everything."

12. Thompson, 96.
Though the reversal of Achilles from the impetuous and precipitant warrior of the first Book to the chastened and disheartened man of the last Book is developed with consummate skill, still Homer does not confine his irony to this one reversal alone. By the incidental use of irony he welds apparently episodic passages into the unity of his plot, and arouses in his audience the pity and fear so essential to a good plot according to Aristotle.

After Thetis asks Zeus to grant the wishes of her son, Achilles disappears from the narrative and the story starts again among the other Achaeans. The 'Wrath of Achilles' is not reintroduced until Book VIII, yet Homer maintains a sense of progress in his plot by conveying the impression that each event is a sequel of what precedes. Sheppard points out this expert craftsmanship of Homer.

"If a reader has leisure to peruse the Iliad several times, and ask himself at every point what reason, as an artist, the poet may have had for the choice and arrangement of material, he will find the details gradually falling into place as parts, subordinate but always relevant, of a magnificent design. Through the story of Achilles the poet has interpreted the life of Achilles as a splendid answer of humanity to the inevitable fact of death.

13 Basset, 130; also Schoder, 209.
And the pattern is so cunningly designed that even the minor incidents contribute to the pathos and the beauty of the central story.  

Though Achilles is sulking away from the battle, the hearer needs but to reflect to realize that what is taking place is the fulfillment of his wish.

Zeus, in accordance with his promise to Thetis, sends a dream to Agamemnon which advises him to assemble the Achaeans in council, and assures him of a quick and easy victory. We, the audience, know that the dream is a false one, though none of the Achaeans are aware of this. We know that their hopes of a quick and easy victory are soon to be frustrated, since the will of Zeus is to be accomplished. This irony is very subtle and runs through the story until Achilles returns to the fight.

The armies are marshalled and advance to battle. We are introduced to the Trojan leaders, Hector and Paris. Paris challenges Menelaus to fight him in single combat, and for a short time it appears that the war will be ended even without the aid of Achilles. We know that this cannot be, and that the truce will have to be broken. The irony of the scene at the Scean gates is keenly pathetic, as Priam calls Helen to point

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15 Il. II i ff.
16 Il. II 6.
17 Il. III 16-57
18 Il. III 146-244.
out for him the leaders of the Achaeans. Homer presents Helen to us as a lovely repentant sinner, self-confessed, but not carrying her repentance into action, not returning, but staying with Paris. She has been the cause of the woes of the Trojans, yet Priam treats her kindly, and places the blame for the war upon the gods. With masterful artistry and irony Homer has Priam ask her about the leaders of the Achaeans who are to bring about the destruction of his realm. Bowra hits off Priam's character very well.

"Priam is the old man who has learned not to expect too much out of life, but to take things as they come. His faculties are still alert and he inquires with insight into the personalities of the Achaean heroes, and thinks how far greater is the army than any he saw as a boy. He is the antithesis of Nestor, for whom nothing is as good as it once was. He has lost his illusions and the loss has left him gentle. He has only words of kindness and comfort for Helen and bears with resignation the loss of most of his sons. But he nurses one dear hope in Hector and his tragedy is that he loses even this."19

The irony of this scene reaches its climax in the aside of the poet when Helen mentions her failure to see her brothers among the Achaeans. She tells Priam that fear of shame and revilings because of her must have kept them from joining the fight. To this the poet rejoins:

20 II. III 243-244.
These lines are overflowing with irony. Even the epithet φυσίζοος adds a peculiar bitterness to the ironic effect.21

As the story progresses, the truce is ratified and both sides pray for an end of the war. But once more we, the audience, know that this is not to be, for we are told:

οὐ δὲ ἄρα πῶ σφιν ἔπεκραίνει Ἐρυνίων .22 Paris and Menelaus fight, and when Menelaus has Paris at his mercy, Aphrodite saves her favorite from certain death. This leaves the duel undecided, and even Zeus appears to be at a loss as to what is to be done.23 Priam and his city are especially dear to the heart of the lord of Olympus,24 but Hera and Athene demand their destruction. The irony of this situation is expressed by Zeus himself:

καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ σοὶ δῶκα ἔκὼν, ἀκούστι γε θυμῶ 25

Even the lord of all is the victim of petty strifes and cannot freely exercise his power. Against his will he bids Athene to force the Trojans to violate their oaths. With promises of favor and renown, Athene persuades Pandarous to let fly an arrow

21 Cf. Bowra, 84
22 II. 302. III.
23 II. IV 44-49.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
at Menelaus. Menelaus is wounded and the war is started again. Ironically enough, Pandarus is one of the first of the Trojans to fall under the onslaught of the valiant Diomedes.26

The important part that the aristeia of Diomedes27 has in the ironic pattern of the whole Iliad must not be overlooked. The aristeia combines several purposes. It rounds off the incident of Pandarus by dramatically relating Pandarus' death. The result of the treachery in breaking the true truce affirms concretely and imaginately the truths affirmed by Agamemnon, that the doom of Troy is finally sealed.29 The slaying of Pandarus is the core of Diomedes' aristeia. After the wounding of Menelaus, Homer wants to get Pandarus out of the picture, so he selects Diomedes as his slayer. At this time the Achaeans enter battle confident of triumph, and to warrant this confidence a successful battle should be staged. Since Book II events have pointed to a Greek victory, but in Book II we were led to expect a Greek disaster. The promise of Zeus to Thetis30 has changed into the white-hot anger of the Achaeans. Homer must portray an Achaean victory in the first battle in order that the normal battle relations may be established before the effect of the dismay of the Achaeans is described, when they are hemmed in

26 Il. V 296.  
27 Il. V 1-448  
28 Il. V 290-296  
29 Il. IV 163-168  
30 Il. I 523-525
around the ships and when the Trojans hold the plain. That must be realized as a new and striking occurrence when it occurs. The present battle serves as a summary of the previous history of the war. In this its irony consists. It is a picture of the battles in the days before Achilles withdrew, and the role of Achilles is played by Diomedes. This produces the important emotional effect. Diomedes, as the perfect Homeric knight, contrasts sharply with Achilles when he actually takes the field. The whole aristeia is merely a preparation for the impending calamity promised to Thetis by Zeus.  

During the battle scenes themselves the frequent use of irony helps relieve the monotony. The introduction of Ares and Aphrodite into the battle serves almost as comic relief in the grim scenes of the first day of fighting. The slight wound that sends Aphrodite from the battle compares ironically with the carnage of men on the field. The cry of Ares,

\[ \text{"οὔσον τ' ἐννέακχιλοι ἐπίσκοπον ἦ δεκάκχιλοι} \]

\[ \text{αὐρεσ ἐν πολέμῳ ἔριδα ξυναγαγόντες Ἄρης 33} \]

certainly was intended by Homer to draw a hearty laugh from his hearers. Homer must have had his tongue in his cheek when he employed the phrase \[ ξυναγαγόντες ἔριδα Ἄρης \] implying ironically

31 II. I 523-527.
32 II. V 335-336.
33 II. V 860-866.
as it does that Ares is a rank amateur at his own profession.
The meeting of Glaucus and Diomedes also tones down the fury of
the account of the fighting. It gives us a glimpse of the
brighter side of Diomedes' character, and also of Homer's sense
of Humor. The poet's remark on the exchange of armor is unique.

Εἰθ' αὕτε Γλαύκως Κρονίδης φρένας ἔγελε Ζεὺς
ὅς πρὸς Τούδείδην Διομήδα πέμψε; ἀμείβε
χρύσεως ἕλκείων, ἐκατόβοιρ' ἐννέα βοίων 34

Sheppard aptly remarks on these lines:

"The humor is delightful, but the poet
never forgets that he intends to make
Patroclus wear the armor of Achilles,
nor that the poem will end with the
meeting of two enemies strangely,
united by their sense that one is a
father and the other a son." 35

This may seem to be stretching a point, but it shows that the
idea of a current of irony running through the whole poem is not
entirely novel.

In the classic parting scene of Hector and Andromache
we have some of the most outstanding of the whole Iliad. Hector
is characterized in view of his coming death at the hands of
Achilles so that his death may be more pathetic, as regrettable
as possible. Marian Tait gives us an excellent analysis of his
character and his place in the stream of irony of the Iliad.

34 II. VI 234-237.
35 Sheppard, 55-56.
"Hector is a study of the quiet, hopeless frustration of the human heart by life. The resources of spirit which he rallies to meet the blow dealt him by circumstances are essentially human and frail -- belief in the honor and righteousness of expending his life and his energies in behalf of his city and his people. 'One omen is best, to fight for our country.' That it is a desperate faith he recognizes deep within himself, but dares not allow himself to express. ....The consciousness of defeat leads him into despair, occasionally; it never leads him into irony as it does Achilles. It is the poet who turns the vanity of his faith to irony, implicitly in the account of his defeat, explicitly in the commentary of the twenty-fourth book."36

As he bids farewell to his wife and infant son,

Hector tells her:

εὐγένω τόδε οἶδα κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν
ἐστήκει θυμώ τδ' ἂν ποτ᾽ ἀλλ᾽ Ἰλίου ῥή
καὶ Πρίαμος καὶ λαὸς οὐμκέλῳ Πρίαμοιο 37

We have heard these very same words before on the lips of Agamemnon.38 Is this a mere otiose repetition on the part of the poet? It seems not. It is rather a deliberate use of irony. Agamemnon first uttered these words in wrath because of the wounding of Menelaus and the treachery of the Trojans. Hector who was not among those present when Agamemnon made his threat, now with the very same words acknowledges the apparent

37 447-449 VI. 38 IV 163-165.
hopelessness of the Trojans' cause. This repetition shows that through Hector's mind is passing the idea of the broken truce and of Pandarus' infidelity. He feels that despite his personal heroism and honesty, the obvious guilt of his fellow countrymen demands satisfaction. We must remember, however, that he does not definitely know that he is to die at the hands of Achilles, since Achilles alone in the Iliad has foreknowledge of his fate. Homer in this section is building up an atmosphere of foreboding. The audience is not told at first the time and details of Hector's death. That will come later. It does know that Zeus has decided in favor of the Achaeans, and that sooner or later Hector will perish in the fray. In this especially lies the irony of this scene, namely that the audience knows that Hector is doomed and that the grim forebodings of his despair are to be realized to the fullest possible extent.

After the parting scene the battle is resumed, and at first the Achaeans seem destined to achieve the easy victory promised Agamemnon by the false dream. Hector, heartened by the prophecy of Helenus, casts off the melancholy that formerly oppressed him and with

39 Duckworth, 71.
40 37 IV 43.
41 II. VII 52.
renewed courage leads the Trojans to battle. The time has come for the Trojans to prevail, as Zeus carries out his promise to Thetis. The description of the weighing of the scales\textsuperscript{42} makes it evident that the turning point is at hand. The rout of the Achaeans immediately follows and the battle ends with the ironical situation of the Achaeans, the besiegers of Troy for nine years, now besieged behind their hastily constructed wall. When Hera and Athene protest the slaughter of their favorites, Zeus replies in prophecy:

\textit{οὐ γὰρ πρὶν πολέμου ἀποταμοῦται ὀβριμὸς Ἠκτὰρ
πρὶν ὀρθῶν πάρα ναῦφι πολέμωκεν Ἄθλειον
ηματὶ τῷ οὔτ' έχει οἷον ἐπ' ἐπὶ πρόμηθοι μάχ' ἐντοιχῆσαι
στεάζει ἐν διονότῳ περὶ Πατρόκλου θανόντος \textsuperscript{43}}

We, the audience, have been told that the Greeks are still to be driven back to the ships, that Patroclus is to fall a victim of Hector, and finally that Achilles is to return to the battle. This prophecy coming, as it does, immediately before the embassy, is especially significant. It gives the speeches of Achilles added meaning for us, and heightens the irony of his character.

\textsuperscript{42} Il. VIII 68-74.
\textsuperscript{43} Il. VIII 473-476.
The embassy scene has an all-important part in the pattern of the Iliad. Without this scene we would have pathos, not tragedy. Achilles is the first tragic hero and a most impressive one. We could feel for Achilles, if no embassy were sent, for he has really been more sinned against than sinning; but where would the tragedy enter? By his tragic error of rejecting the embassy he brings his future grief upon himself. Agamemnon had offered him generous gifts which should have more than satisfied his wounded ego. Achilles' pride knows no bounds and he dismisses the embassy with another example of unconscious irony.

By his refusal to care about the war he becomes the cause of the death of Patroclus. We have already been informed that Patroclus will be dead when the fighting takes place about the ships.

Now we hear Achilles' unwitting confirmation of the decree of Zeus. The irony of this situation makes his plight all the more tragic.

44. Il. IX 225-655.
45 cf. Basset, S. E., The Harmartia of Achilles, T. A. P. A.
46 Il. IX 649-653.
47 Il. VIII 475-476.
There is a good deal of incidental irony in the speeches of this scene. Basset considers one bit of it classic:

"The best illustration of epic irony is in the reply of Achilles to Odysseus in the Embassy, in which he rejects the offer of the hand of one of his daughters: 'And a daughter of Agamemnon I will not wed, not even if she vies with Aphrodite in beauty and with Athene in accomplishments. Let him choose some other Achaean, one that befits him, one that is more kingly.'

When we recall the scene in Agamemnon's quarters, we find that Nestor advised the appeasement of Achilles wrath "by kindly gifts and soft words." Agamemnon offered the gifts, but instead of the soft words had said:

καὶ μοι ὴποστήσω, ὡςον βασιλέατερα εἴμι
ἡδ' ὡςον γένει προγενέστερος εὐχώμαι εἶναι.

The king admits the wrong done in taking Briseis as his own, but he repeats the insult which caused the wrath, and refuses him the honor due the noblest of the Achaeanst. The word βασιλέατερος used by Agamemnon for the first time in the Iliad, and grimly repeated by Achilles clearly marks the essential point of the quarrel, but it is the knowledge of the listener, not of Achilles that makes this repetition ironical.

48 Basset, Poetry of Homer, 136.
49 Il. IX 113.
50 Il. IX 160-161.
The 'Lay of Dolon' follows the Embassy. Leaf is of the opinion that the Iliad might do without Book X.51 This view is frowned upon by more recent commentators.52 This Book seems to have been deliberately planned as a transition to the following section of the plot which leads to the death of Patroclus. The successful commando-raid of Diomedes and Odysseus is needed to raise the morale of the Achaeans, if their army is to take to the field with renewed courage the following day. This spirit is needed to make the rout of the Achaeans all the more ironic. After the butchering of Rhesus' company, the Greeks once more are confident of the quick and easy victory promised by the false dream,53 but we know that they are to be driven back still further, even to the sterns of the ships.54 At first we have the aristeia of Agamemnon.55 He drives the Trojans from the plain, but in the midst of his success we are told the message of Zeus to Hector.56 Agamemnon's triumph is to be shortlived, and when he is forced to retire, Zeus will give Hector the power to slay until he reaches the ships.57 From this time on we merely wait for Agamemnon's daring to exhaust itself. The irony of the situation is evident. All the incidents in these books seem to look to the frustration of the hopes of both sides.

52 Sheppard, 84.
53 II. II 12-14.
54 II. IX 653.
55 II. XI 91-217
56 II. XI 185-194.
57 II. XI 192-194.
With the invocation to the Muse we have the turning point of the poem. Agamemnon has been wounded and retires from the fray. The entire Achaean force falls back in defeat. Attention is now focused upon Hector, the chief actor of the next few books. Thus far in the Iliad we have seen Hector as an ideal prince, a devoted husband and a courageous warrior. Now, we are introduced to Hector, the tragic hero. Just as Achilles, Hector has his tragic fault that brings about his disaster. In the simile of the boar the poet reveals to us this defect in Hector's character "The leading note is surely just the irresistible daring of the boar that carries him to his doom." We recall the words of Andromache "οὐδὲν ἄλλο γε τὸ σῶμα μένος," and now realize that this statement is only too true. This is the keynote of this section of the poem. Homer makes us feel throughout the shadow of impending doom. In this light we watch the action of Hector, as he ironically shapes his doom out of his own nature.

Polydamas discourages the Trojan attempt to drive across the trench. They should attack on foot. Hector sees the wisdom of Polydamas' advice and follows it. Meanwhile Asios

58 ll. XI 218-220
60 ll. VI 407.
61 ll. XII 61.
rejects this advice and crosses with his chariot. He leads his men to disaster. He was a fool. He calls Zeus a lover of lies because he was not successful in his rashness. This incident serves to show that Polydamas is a good adviser, and also the folly of rejecting advice. When we return to Hector we are to see him do the same thing. Asios' fate foreshadows that of Hector, and ironically prefigures the tragedy of Hector.

The portent and Hector's neglect of it finally seal his fate. Polydamas, whose sagesse has already been proven in the incident of Asios, advises withdrawal. We the audience, know that this portent was sent by 'aegis-bearing' Zeus. Polydamas is right, but there are better things than merely being right, as every tragedian knows. There is exquisite irony here:

"He rejects it finely with a noble gesture. Had he taken it, he would have been a good example of caution, not a tragic hero. Hector is fighting always for Troy, and for his wife and children; and yet he knows all the time that Troy will fall. That is what makes him tragic, magnificent."

"One omen is best, to fight for the fatherland." Hector is infatuated and makes his fatal choice as Achilles did in the

62 ll. XII 112.
63 ll. XII 113.
64 ll. XII 173.
65 ll. XII 200-207.
66 ll. XII 209.
67 Sheppard, 118.
68 ll. XII 243.
Embassy scene. Here we get a good idea of the artistic method of Homer. He shows us the folly of Hector, and at the same time the splendor of that folly, which ironically makes, Hector really great.

The fight rages on and in the midst of the fighting we hear from Glaucus a perfect exposition of the heroic view of tragic life:

\[
\text{ό πέπον, ε] μὲν γὰρ πόλεμον περὶ τὸν ὑμεῖς φυγόντε}
\text{αἰεὶ δὲ Μελλωμὴν ἀγῆρω τ' ἄθροιστα ὑμῖν ἐξετάζει, οὔτε κεν οὕτως ἐνὶ πρώτης μοιχοίην}
\text{οὔτε κε σε στέλλωμι μάχην ἐς κυβάνειαν}
\text{νῦν δ' ἐμπεσα γὰρ θυραῖς ἐφεστάσαι Θανάτοιο}
\text{μορίζα, ἃς οὖκ ἐστίν φυγεῖν βροτὸν ὀοὐδ' ὑπαλύσαι}
\text{γομεγ, ἢ τῷ ἐνὸς ὕπποθοις, ἢ ὑς ἡ κατ' 69}
\]

The irony of fate contained in these lines is scarcely equalled by any other passage of the entire Iliad. It is significant to note that this speech of Glaucus follows almost directly upon the tragic decision of Hector. It is also to be noted that Homer cleverly joins Hector and Sarpedon:

69 II. XII 322-328.
There is more than a little irony here. The passage anticipates the death of Sarpedon at the hands of Patroclus, which death shall be avenged by Hector who in turn is to fall under the attack of Achilles.

Now that Hector's character is fully developed, we expect the Patroclus theme to commence, but we are disappointed. From the end of Book XII until the beginning of BOOK XV there is no progress in the main plot. Though there is some incidental irony in these intervening books, we shall omit them from our discussion, since they play no important part in the Iliad considered as a whole.

In the final part of Book XI when Achilles noticed Nestor assisting a wounded Achaean from the field, he sent Patroclus to learn the identity of the unfortunate warrior. Here Homer inserts the ironical clause: κακοῦ δίδω λοιπὸς τετέλεν ἄρα Ζεὸς. 71

From the very beginning Homer wishes us to know that Achilles is

70 Il. XII 290-293.
71 Il. XI 604.
entirely to blame for the death of Patroclus. He sent Patroclus
to find who had been wounded, and it was while on this errand
that Patroclus was inspired to protest against Achilles' hard-
heartedness. In the beginning of Book XVI Patroclus finally
returns. We are struck at once by the cordiality and friendli-
ness of Achilles, who in all previous scenes has been very dis-
tant. There is irony even in this, for this is the last time
that Achilles and Patroclus talk together, and Homer thus clever-
ly recalls their deep friendship. Patroclus tells him of the
woes of the Achaeans and entreats Achilles to let him go to their
defense. Immediately after this speech Homer in an aside adds
with bitter irony:

\[
\text{ώς φάτο λισόμενος μέγαν νῆπιος. ἦ γὰρ ἐμέλλειν}
\text{οἷς αὐτῶν θάνατον τε κακὸν καὶ καλὸν λιτέσθαι.}
\]

Here we are once more reminded of Patroclus' fate and quite apt-
ly here before Achilles sends him off to battle. As soon as
Patroclus has departed, Achilles poured a libation and prayed to
Zeus to grant success to Patroclus. Only part of his prayer is
to be fulfilled for Patroclus' death is once more foretold,

\[
\text{ἔτοι δὲνέεσσε μάχης ἐς ἀπονέοντα.}
\]

72 Il. XVI 21-45.
73 Il. XVI 46-47.
74 Il. XVI 252.
The arrival of the Myrmidons and Patroclus turns the tide of battle, and the Trojans are driven back from the ships. Patroclus slays Sarpedon, and incurs the vengeance of Hector. He smites his charioteer, and still further increases Hector's wrath. Hector then attacks and overcomes Patroclus. Hector, who formerly had been the ideal fighter, now gives way and boasting and exults in the plight of Patroclus. In the slaying of Patroclus Hector loses all his glory, for it takes two gods and a man to kill him. Ironically now, our sympathies are with Achilles, as we wait for the avenging of Patroclus.

In the moment of his greatest triumph, the irony of Patroclus' prophecy takes away all of Hector's joy:

{oTTHV OOb'GUTAOE DAYP0V 8EY, 8LLA TOI 8ID7
O'X'HI PARaSHYKEV THaVATOS KAI MOIPOE KRAPOI7
KEROI D'AMENT! AKIhHOs D'AmMONO5 AIAKIDAO. 76

This prophecy is all the more ironic when we recall the pregnant statement of the poet but a few lines earlier:77

75 Il. XVI 476-503
76 Il. XVI 852-854.
77 cf. Duckworth, 79.
78 Il. XVI 799-800.
When Hector despoils the body of Patroclus, his actions bring forth another dread prophecy. This time it is from Zeus.

Τῶν ποινὴν ὃ τοι οὖν τιμᾶξ ἐκ νοστήουτι
δεῖ οὖσαν Ἀνδρομάκη κλωτέεεν Πηγείωνος

We know now that Hector's death is merely a matter of time and that his future exploits are small consolation for the fate that awaits him.

When the news of Patroclus' death is brought to Achilles, the final theme of the Iliad commences. Tait characterizes Achilles very well as he appears in this last part of the poem:

"There are some traces of resentment in him as he sees his rebellion cancelled half-fulfilled, and his heart curbed by its own deepest necessity. He taunts his mother and himself with the ironic implications of his pitiful attempt to escape decision, and its deluding egōism. This tinge of irony characterizes Achilles through the rest of the story and is indicative of his increased stature." 80

We see the irony of his grovelling in the dust. 81 His prayer 82 has been translated into reality. The plan of Zeus has been accomplished despite the attempts of men and gods to thwart it.

79 II. XVII 207-208.
80 Tait, 51-52.
81 II. XVIII 26.
82 II. I 239-244.
Achilles alone is responsible for Patroclus' death and he knows this fact only too well.

He realizes his infatuation and sees himself as he really is, but this realization comes all too late.

Ωδέ τι Πατρόκλου γενόμην φαντ οὐδέτεροίσι
tois Ἀλλοις, οἳ δὴ πολέες δὲμὲν Ἐκτορὶ δίῳ
ἀλλ' ἦμαι πολὺ νηστίν ἐτάσσον ἄγεσ' ἀρόφος.

The prayer of Thetis that has been the motive force of the poem up to this point, now is answered. The wrath of Achilles has been allayed, not by gifts, as the Achaeans hoped it would be; nor by the humiliation of Agamemnon, as Achilles thought it would be; but it has allayed itself. Achilles' grief is so intense that his quarrel with Agamemnon pales in comparison.

ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν προτετόχθαι ἐσόμεν ἄχυρμενοι περ

Θυμὸν ἐνὶ ὑπ' ἑαυτῆς φίλων διαμάζοντες ἤγαγακα.

It is necessary that we realize the greatness of Achilles' grief in order that we may be prepared for the dreadful sequel. His anger kept him from the battle before, his anger now forces him to fight. The irony of the rest of the poem consists in

83 II. XVIII 100.
84 II. XVIII 102-104.
85 II. XVIII 112-113.
Achilles continually trying to assuage his grief, while all his actions made it all the more keenly felt.

In his Lament for Patroclus we find another instance of that irony of fate that has been following Achilles since the beginning of the poem. He complains of his destined early death.

Yet we have seen him deliberately choose this fate, when he decided to avenge Patroclus' death by slaying Hector. Hector's death ironically is the prelude to his own inescapable fate.

The irony of his position is overpowering and his future actions as a result shall be all the more tragic.

His grief now infatuates him and makes Hector his personal enemy. Hector is no longer just the leader of the Trojans -- he is the slayer of Patroclus. The Trojans are to

86 Il. XVIII 328-330.
87 Il. XVIII 97ff.
88 Il. XVIII 95-96.
suffer because they too had a share in his death. With this spirit Achilles enters the battle again. An added touch of irony is had in the poet's having Xanthos, one of the immortal horses, predict Achilles' death as they are setting out to battle. 89

The following Books are intended to focus our attention and emotions on the coming duel of the two champions. Achilles' fury on the field shows him to be a victim of Hate. No longer a chivalrous knight, he is in inhuman killer. The Lycaon incident 90 has an important part to play in our current of irony. At the same time it points backwards and forwards. It puts before us as an event the real inwardness of the tragedy of Achilles. The reply of Achilles to Lycaon 91 is a masterpiece of Homer's technique. These lines embody the tragedy of Achilles and are overflowing with irony. In them we see Achilles, ruthless and hateful; Achilles, the generous enemy; Achilles, who will find himself one in sorrow with his deadliest enemy; Achilles, the embodiment of the glory and pride of life, of the brevity and futility of life. All these traits arise out of one

89 Il. XIX 416-417.
90 Il. XXI 34-135.
91 Il. XXI 99-113.
overmastering passion. His passion, as seen by the poet, broadens into a splendid view of the irony of life.

The famous Theomachia\textsuperscript{92} seems to have been intended by the poet to relax the minds of his hearers and at the same time to prepare them for the poignant tragedy that is to come. Leaf remarks on the contest: "Only once does Zeus in Homer so far relax his dignity to go beyond a smile. He evidently regards the contest as more of a joke than a real fight."\textsuperscript{93} There is much irony in this sport of the gods, and its position just before the final battle of the poem greatly increases its tragic effect since the cause of utmost grief and suffering for men is no more than a game for the gods.

In the slaying of Hector,\textsuperscript{94} the tragedy of Achilles reaches its climax. There is not any nobility in Achilles here. His one motive is revenge. Yet the whole is artistically right, for Homer has been building up to this. Here Achilles' wrath is at its blackest, and Hector is pitiable. Hector now appears noble in order that we may plumb the depths of Achilles' passion. This wrath is the tragedy of Achilles. Now we see the full horror of hatred in a soul that is capable of the extremes of

\textsuperscript{92} Il. XXI 385-520.
\textsuperscript{93} Leaf, 514.
\textsuperscript{94} Il. XXII 344-366
passion. The use of irony in this climactic part of the Iliad greatly aids the poet in achieving his effect.

Before his death, we are told: ἔπειτα Ἐκτός Ἀθηνᾶ
ἡμαρ, ἢ ὅτε ὅτι Ἄθω. Homer makes excellent use of irony in showing the revelation of Hector's death to Andromache. After Achilles and the other Achaeans have vented their anger on the corpse of the Trojan hero, we are taken to the peace of Hector's home in Troy, where Andromache bids her maids to prepare Hector's bath. The position of this scene, after Achilles has started to drag Hector's body about the city make the irony of it more pathetic. Especially ironic is the poet's comment on Andromache's action.

95 Il. XXII 212–213.
96 Il. XXII 356–360.
97 Il. XXII 437–444.
Achilles retires from the field after he dragged the body of Hector thrice about the city. After lamenting the death of Patroclus once more, the Achaeans feast and retire for the night. The shade of Patroclus then appears to Achilles and chides him for his forgetfulness. The irony of Patroclus' rebuke is disheartening to Achilles. He is not concerned with thoughts of vengeance. He wants only the last rites to be paid him quickly. Achilles' grief and Hector's death make no impression on the soul in Hades. The futility of Achilles is further emphasized when Patroclus also tells him of the death that awaits him. In Achilles Homer presents us with the picture of the irony of life. We cannot but pity him, as we watch him struggle vainly against his preordained doom.

In the closing Book of the Iliad we have some of the most touching irony of the whole poem. Marian Tait has expressed the spirit of this Book perfectly.

98 Il. XXII 445-446.
"There can scarcely be a sadder commentary on human life than that of the last Book of the Iliad. The dominant motif is pessimism pointed and relieved by irony. Achilles and Priam review the waste and futility of all high effort and all human anguish over the bodies of Patroclus and Hector. Achilles' furious defiance, Hector's desperate courage, Priam's terrible grief have beaten frantically against the inexorable, relentless progress of life's tragedy and defeat. The dreadful irony of nullification of all this tortured struggle is manifested in the two dead heroes, Patroclus, whom Achilles would have died to save, yet unwittingly committed to death; Hector whose death cannot undo the death of Patroclus and dooms Achilles. Life does not even leave men room for grief."99

A story of revenge ought to find conclusion in the satisfaction of that revenge. Achilles' feelings, however, are too deep to be allayed by revenge, which is a shallow emotion. He seeks rest from grief and cannot find it. A generous and noble nature may undertake revenge as an obligation, but it cannot find relief in vengeful acts. It will find rest only in forgiveness.

"The meeting of Achilles and Priam, the kissing of the deadly hands, and the simplicity of infinite sadness in Achilles' reply, mark the high tide of a great epoch of poetry."100

99 Tait, 54.
100 Leaf, 574.
The irony of each of these events is the culmination of the irony of the entire poem. Priam who had once declared that his grief for his lost sons could only be assuaged if the dead body of Achilles were torn by dogs and vultures,\textsuperscript{101} now in abject humility kisses those hands which are the cause of so much of his sorrow. Achilles, who had felt an equally savage desire: to satisfy him, Hector's flesh must feed dogs and bird of prey, and he, who declared that no ransom would be large enough to buy back Hector's body, now weeps with Priam and of his own accord gives him back his son. He gives orders to have the body clothed in costly rainment, and washed and anointed. He himself raises Hector in his arms and puts him upon a couch. He, who in his rage had promised οὐκ ἐσθ' ὅς σῆς γε κύνας κεφαλῆς ἀπελαλόκοι,\textsuperscript{102} now helps in preparing Hector for burial. Ironically enough, he is the one who grants the truce of eleven days so that Hector may be buried with full honors.\textsuperscript{103}

We have now reached the end of the Iliad, and up to the very end we find the undercurrent of irony. That Homer was aware of this, and was consciously ironic is unquestionable. Too often we are apt to think of Homer as the simple and naive wandering bard. This attitude is wholly false. Tait says aptly on this point:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{101} Il. XXII 41-46
\item \textsuperscript{102} Il. 348, XXII
\item \textsuperscript{103} Il. XXIV 669-670.
\end{itemize}
"The modern reader insists upon investing the Iliad with an aura of stark and primitive simplicity. Nothing could be more deceptive. The civilization which produced the poem, far from being primitive, must have been highly developed and sophisticated. The Homeric poet is earlier in time and bound within the limits of a traditional genre, but he is none the less the product of a period that holds within it the promise of Ionian Philosophy."104.

Homer was a master craftsman in the art of poetry. He knew the value and the peculiar effect of irony and used it as often as possible in his poems. He was no rash experimenter in this field. His irony equals that of Sophocles. Without the continual use of irony we could not have the Iliad the masterpiece that it is. It might have been a great poem without irony, but it would be a dull and uninteresting tale.

104 Tait, 57.
CHAPTER III

THE IRONY OF THE ODYSSEY

"The Iliad" says Aristotle, "is simple and pathetic, the Odyssey is complex, dealing throughout in recognitions, and ethical." That is to say the Iliad is a straightforward story, the essentials of which are the wrong done to the hero and the grief suffered by him in the loss of his friend. The Odyssey is a story with a developed plot, in which the interest turns upon the play of character and the final triumph of right over wrong.

Before we begin any discussion of the irony of the Odyssey it is very necessary that we recognize these differences of the two poems. Because the plot of the Iliad is based upon action, the irony of the poem, as we have pointed out in the last chapter, is for the most part either irony of action or irony of fate. In the Odyssey, however, which is based on character, we shall see that most of the irony of the poem is tragic irony of the purest type. Another point that we must not fail to note is that there are really two distinct parts in the Odyssey.

1 Aristotle, Poetics 1459b 13. καὶ τῶν ποιημάτων ἑκάτερον συνέστηκεν ἡ μὲν Ἰλιάς ἀπλών καὶ παθητικόν, ἡ δὲ Ὀδύσσεια πεπλήμμενον (ἀναγνώρισις γαρ διόλου) καὶ ἠθική.
"The first part is a series of marvelous stories admitting of no development, but only of addition to their number, an addition, that is to say, of other stories, like in kind and equally devoid of any inner principle of life and development. The second part is a story involving mainly human actors, with truly human interests, directed upon truly human issues, and governed by, in the main, truly human factors." 2

In the second part of the poem especially, Homer has some of the finest tragic irony to be found in Greek literature. The numerous recognition scenes afford him an unparalleled opportunity of employing this subtle device.

How irony aids in character portrayal has been noted by Webster.

"Character-drawing is also served by tragic irony. The character says something which means one thing for him and another for the audience. The character then is a poor blind thing and the audience both understands and pities his limitations." 3

By his expert use of tragic irony Homer has made the character of Eumaeus more admirable, of Penelope more noble, and of the suitors more detestable. The use of this same irony heightens the suspense of the story and greatly contributes to the emotional peak of the climax. In this chapter we shall consider in detail these points and show how important a part irony plays in the artistic development of the Odyssey.

Since the irony of the first part of the poem does not affect the plot or the emotional tone of the whole we will omit it from the present discussion. We shall take up the story after Odysseus has been set ashore in Ithaca by the Phaeacians. The first person he meets on the island is the swineherd Eumaeus. This 'faithful retainer', as Woodhouse calls him, is one of the most appealing characters of the Homeric poems. Burdened with years and grief for his master, he remains a loyal and faithful servant. The irony with which Homer reveals his character is of a delicate type and serves its purpose admirably. When he first meets Odysseus, he acquaints him with the situation in the household:

In these few lines we find expressed a devoted care and esteem of his absent master, and a deep-seated contempt for the suitors. We the audience, knowing the identity of Odysseus, can appreciate the irony of the situation. This clever use of irony brings out the sterling qualities of Eumaeus more than any description of

4 Woodhouse, op. cit. 194-198
5 Od. XIV 40-44.
the poet ever could have done. There is additional irony in his despair as he, little knowing whom he is addressing, tells Odysseus that his master has perished far from Ithaca.

We can almost see Odysseus chuckling behind his beard during these grim accounts of his own death. Eumaeus also tells him ὁδ. XIV 67-68. Homer seems deliberately to have placed these pessimistic utterances upon Eumaeus' lips to get as much humor out of the situation as possible. Later on, when the suitors are the object of the irony, the use of the device will not be very humorous, but rather a grim exposition of their truly mean natures.

After they have dined, Odysseus tells Eumaeus that he has it on good authority that Odysseus is about to return to Ithaca. ὁδ. XIV 327-330. Eumaeus refuses to believe him, and ironically accuses him of fabrication, ὁδ. XIV 365.
report of Odysseus that later proved to be false. There is much unconscious irony in Eumaeus' words as he says:

καὶ σοι, γέρον πολυπένθες, ἐπεὶ σε μοι ἦ γαγε δαίμων
μήτε τί μοι ψεύδεσσι χαρίζεσ τι θέλγε ।

What is just a meaningless platitude for Eumaeus, now is charged with added meaning for us, as we recall Athene's words to Odysseus: αὐτὸς δὲ πρώτησα σοϕότην εἰς ἀφικέσθαι .

This type of irony gives the story added interest and at the same time helps in linking the whole into a solid unit.

The next ironical part of the poem comes when Telemachus meets his father at Eumaeus' hut. Before Athene reveals Odysseus' identity to Telemachus, the double meaning of many of the lines gives life to the conversation of the "Cretan stranger" and the son of Odysseus. Little does Telemachus realize the full meaning of the words when Odysseus says:

αὐτίκ' ἔπειτ' ἄπε μεῖο κάρη τάμοι ἄλλοτρός φᾶ
εἰ μὴ ἐγὼ κείνοισι κακὸν πάντεσσοι γενοίμην
ἐλθὼν ἐς μέγαρον Λαερτίαδεω Ὁδυσσήος .

The climax of the story will come with the slaying of the

10 Od. XIV 386-387
11 Od. XIII 404
12 Od. XIV 102-104
suitors. Here this slaughter is truly foreshadowed. Telemachus, however, thinks the present situation is hopeless, and that nothing will ever keep the suitors from the wanton destruction of Odysseus' estate. After the departure of Eumaeus, when Odysseus' identity is revealed, Telemachus at first refuses to believe that this man is his father. When he is finally convinced, the two of them join forces in plotting the punishment of the suitors. There is more than a little irony in Homer's taking us back to the palace immediately, where the suitors plan the death of Telemachus at the same time as Odysseus and Telemachus are deciding their fate.

Once Odysseus leaves the farmstead and goes up to the city, the irony, which up to this point has been of a light and pleasant sort, changes its nature and becomes a grim prophecy of the unhappy fate of the suitors. The first person Odysseus meets on the road is Melanthius the goatherd. Quite the opposite of Eumaeus, he reveals his meanness by reviling Odysseus, who is disguised as a beggar, and by kicking him as he goes by. The use of the word ἀφραδίγυν 13 reveals the irony of the passage to us. There is further irony in the reply of Melanthius to the prayer of Eumaeus.

13 Od. XVII 233
The last line of this speech emphasizes the irony and at the same time foreshadows the punishment Melanthius deserves and shall certainly receive. How the use of irony aids in character portrayal is illustrated here. By his own words Melanthius shows us his true nature. From this sketch of his character we feel that he gets no more than he deserves in his terrible death, after the slaughter of the suitors.¹⁵

When Odysseus enters his own house and Telemachus bids him beg among the suitors, he replies with consummate irony:

Zeô, zÂµ, Têlêmachôn mou ên anâphôn ãbrôn einai
kai oì pânta génoi th' ãssai phrêsîn ménoînê.¹⁶

Odysseus and Telemachus alone understand the full meaning of these words. What Telemachus desires more than anything else is the death of the suitors, and it will not be long before his wish is granted. The complaint of Antinous is an excellent bit of unconscious irony. He complains that the beggar will be a

¹⁴ Od. XVII 251-253
¹⁵ Od. XXII 474-477
¹⁶ Od. XVII 35-4-355.
nuisance, especially since the suitors are already bothered by so many beggars. This beggar will prove to be much more of a nuisance than Antinous ever dreamed. The irony of the situation is further heightened when Antinous asks: 

\[ Tις \ δαίμων \ τόδε πήμεν προσήθησεν, δαίτος μὴ διέχῃ. \]

If he realized that his words were literally true, he would soon have changed his attitude. He is by far the worst of the suitors. Even though most of the others never went to the same lengths as he, still they are all equally guilty, and we know that all of them are doomed. Athene wanted Odysseus to learn which of them were lawless and which righteous, and yet we are told:

\[ διὰ κακὸτητος \ απαλείψας \ κακότητος. \]

From the first entrance of Odysseus into his own home until the death of the suitors we have a section of the Odyssey that could well be entitled 'The Tragedy of the Suitors'. In this part of the story, the suitors, even if they had not offended before, bring their doom upon themselves. Walter expresses much the same view in his "The Theme of the Suitors in the Odyssey."

17 Od. XVII 446.
18 Od. XVII 364.
"Although Odysseus had been informed of the state of affairs in his home, it is nevertheless required that he should see it with his own eyes. This fact follows the rule of tragedy that matters should be presented before the audience's eyes so far as possible. It is also true that Odysseus must experience the hybris of the wooers before he will be sufficiently angry to kill them. Hence he is represented as trying to discover which of the wooers were just, and which unjust when he first came to the palace; it must have been difficult for him to believe that all these men were so wicked. Amphinomus is used as an example to show that they are all so misguided that none of them can be spared." 19

The actions of the suitors have added meaning for us, for they continually offend Odysseus and we expect him at any time to cast off his disguise and take his revenge. This is especially true when Antinous hits him with a footstool. 20

The introduction of the beggar Irus into the story furnishes an opportunity for the use of irony. Duckworth would call the irony of this passage 'prophetic irony'.

"Dramatic irony in the sense that the words of a certain character concerning the future have an entirely different meaning to himself than they do to his hearer or to the reader may also be called prophetic irony, for the words of the character calls to the reader's mind the true future action and emphasize the folly and the blindness of the mortal actors. An excellent example of this type of irony is cited by Wieniewski; 19 Allen, Walter, The Theme of the Suitors in the Odyssey, T. A. P. A., LXX, 1939, 115. 20 Od. XVII 463."
When Odysseus, disguised as a beggar conquers Irus the suitors wish him the fulfilment of his desires -- which the reader knows will be their own destruction."21

There is much similar irony. Amphinomus toasts Odysseus with words that foreshadow his own doom.

χαῖρε, πάτερ ὤ ξεῖνε, γένοιτό τοι ἐς περ ὀπίσθω

όλφος, ἀτέρ μὲν νῦν γε κάκως ἔχει τοιοὺς πολέοσι .22

In the character of Amphinomus there is also a touch of irony of fate. Odysseus warns him that it would be wise for him to be elsewhere, when the master of the house returns.23 Evidently he has won the favor of Odysseus, but even that cannot save him from the fate that awaits him.

ἀλλ’ οὖν ἄσ φύγε κήρα, πῦργος δέ καί τὸν Ἀθῆνη

Τηλέμαχον ὑπὸ χέροι καὶ ἔχει τοι φι δαμάγναι .24

This aside of the poet not only confirms his death, but also lets us know that the slaying of the suitors is not far off.

When the suitors finally leave the hall, Odysseus and Telemachus prepare for their destruction. With the aid of Athene they remove the arms from the hall and store them away out of reach of the suitors. While Odysseus is doing this,

21 Duckworth, 75.
22 Od. XVIII 120-122.
23 Od. XVIII 147-150.
24 Od. XVIII 155-156.
Melantho, one of the serving maids, berates him. With more than a little irony Odysseus replies to her.

The wretch has already incurred the wrath of both her master and of her mistress, and we are not surprised when we hear of her death in company with the other unfaithful servants. 26

The conversation of Odysseus, still incognito, and Penelope is one of the classic passages of Homer. 27 What characterizes the passage and makes it outstanding is the artistic use of tragic irony. There is a close bond set up between us, the audience, and Odysseus. As Penelope tells of the sad years since the parting of Odysseus, we feel within us the same emotions Odysseus must have experienced. When Penelope inquires about his lineage, he gives a brief account of himself and then begins the tale of the wandering of Odysseus. The mention of Odysseus' name brings tears to her eyes, but she bids him go on

25 Od. XIX 81-84.
26 Od. XXII 461-473.
27 Od. XX 104-381.
and tell her about her long-departed husband. The description of
the cloak and the brooch\textsuperscript{28} should give Penelope a hint of
Odysseus' true identity, but apparently she does not notice it.
The irony of the closing part of Odysseus' tale is particularly
gripping as he foretells his own return:

\begin{quote}
\textit{\ νοσιν οὗτος εστίς σώσι καὶ ἔλευσεται ζῆσιν}
\textit{\ Λυχνία μάλ', οὐδ' ἔτι τῇ δίλε φίλων καὶ πατρίδος αἰ̄νθ}
\textit{\ δὴ ἔρχεται· έμμης ἐς τοῖς ἄρχει δῶσω}
\textit{\ ἢστή τ' Ὀδυσσῆος ἄμομος, ἡν ἀφικάνων}
\textit{\ ημεν τοι τάδε πάντα τελείεται ὅς ἄγορεόνων}
\textit{\ τοῦ ὁδ' αὐτου ὀλυμπαντὸς ἔλευσεται ἐνθαδ' Ὀδυσσεὺς}
\textit{\ τοῦ μὲν φθινοντος μηνός, τοῦ δ' ισταμένοιο}.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Penelope cannot bear this good news, for she knows in her heart
that "Odysseus shall never come home". The irony of the situa-
tion stirs up our pity for her. This pity is quite different
than that which we had for Andromache, or for any other character
of the Iliad. We know that Penelope's mourning will soon be over,
and that the joy of the reunion will be greater because of this
present sorrow. In this lies the essential difference of the
two poems. The Iliad is a story of suffering; the Odyssey is a
story of character.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Od.} XX 225-231.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Od.} XIX 300-307.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Od.} XIX 313.
When they have finished speaking, Penelope bids Eurycleia to wash the feet of the beggar. The old servant does as her mistress tells her and in so doing recognizes Odysseus. Odysseus restrains her from crying out in joy and swears her to silence. We may wonder why Homer delays the recognition by Penelope until so late in the story. Allen explains it thus:

"He could not have his story actually work out this way, since Penelope's seriousness in her offer of marriage was a necessary requirement in driving Odysseus to dispose of the suitors immediately, and she could not be serious in this offer if Odysseus were already revealed to her. He also preferred to have the recognition by Penelope come after the slaying of the wooers since it is more ironic to have their death accomplished without her knowledge."31

This explanation fits in well with the development of the whole second part of the Odyssey.32 Odysseus returns and is brought in contact with a number of people in Ithaca so that we can see their reaction to him and his sentiments about them. This is reminiscent of a number of tragedies,33 in which the emotional implications of a certain course of action are elaborately set forth before that action is accomplished. Then the action is accomplished with considerable rapidity. The tragic irony of

31 Allen, op. cit. 123.
32 Books XIV-XXIV.
33 cf. e.g. Iph. in Tauris 36, Oedipus Tyramos 1076 etc.
this section of the poem greatly assists the emotional pattern developed by Homer, and it seems that the whole emotional background of the Odyssey is based upon this artistic use of tragic irony.

After Eurycleia's discovery of Odysseus, Penelope, still unaware of his true identity, asks him the meaning of one of her dreams. He assures her that its meaning is evident.

After Eurycleia's discovery of Odysseus, Penelope, still unaware of his true identity, asks him the meaning of one of her dreams. He assures her that its meaning is evident.

Penelope is loath to accept this explanation. Ironically, now she seems to have decided that the situation is hopeless and that Odysseus never will return. She then tells Odysseus of the contest she will hold to see which of the suitors shall win her hand. The object will be to string the great bow of Odysseus and with it to shoot an arrow through twelve axes arranged in order. This is a feat that Odysseus used to perform before he sailed for Troy. Upon hearing this, Odysseus encourages her to stage the contest as soon as possible and adds ironically:

34 Od. XIX 557-558.
35 Od. XIX 585-587.
The following day the suitors return and the household makes ready for a feast. The swineherd comes driving the three best of his herd. Philoetius, the neatherd, bring some of his cattle from the mainland. When he meets Odysseus, he is impressed by him. He tells Odysseus of the insolence and wrong doing of the suitors, and how he longs for the return of his master. Odysseus replies to him with an oath that assures us that the slaying of the suitors is at hand.

Ironsically Philoetius does not realize how true these words are, but even so he does not hesitate to offer a prayer for the fulfillment of the word of Odysseus. Meanwhile the suitors begin to feast. Telemachus has arranged a place for Odysseus inside the door and sees that he is given an equal portion of the feast. This angers the suitors and Ctesippos most of all. He gives vent to his anger by reviling Odysseus and by throwing the hoof of an ox at him. This is the last insult that Odysseus is

36 Od. Xx230-235.
37 Od. Xx 237-238.
38 Od. Xx 292-303.
to receive from the suitors. The emotional peak of the poem is reached here. The suspense developed by tragic irony is now intense, as we wait to see how Odysseus is to take his vengeance on the suitors.

Penelope announces the contest to the suitors. Antinous realizing the difficulty of it, tells the suitors that the bow will not easily be strung, and bids the herdsman to leave it there as an ἀρέσκος for the suitors. Duckworth shows the irony of this phase.

"Wieniewski points out that Antinous understands ἀρέσκος as 'penible', but that the true sense of the word is 'malheureux', 'funeste'; there is thus a double meaning in the word: and without realizing it Antinous predicts death for himself and his comrades." 39

The importance of the suitors' ignorance of the future has been well stated by Moore.

"Now here we have in the Epic, as often, a situation full of irony, which closely resembles a situation familiar in tragedy. The individual, or, as now, the group are blind to their folly and go recklessly on to the doom which is already known to some of the characters and which has been disclosed to us. This element of irony is one of the most effective means by which our interest is secured and stimulated in the narrative of Odysseus' homecoming and his vengeance on the reckless suitors." 41

39 Oe. XXI 91.
40 Duckworth, 75.
Not only is our interest stimulated, but also our suspense and the sense of foreboding of the death of the suitors.

There is intense irony in the remarks of Leiodes, the first of the suitors who tries to string the bow.

\[
\text{πολλῶς γὰρ τὸδε τὸξον ἀριστῆς κεκαθήσει}
\]

\[\\text{Αὔμοο καὶ \, ψυχῆς} \quad 42\]

That he is speaking figuratively is evident from the rest of his speech. The poor fool does not in the least realize that his prediction is destined to be fulfilled in the most literal sense of the words. The crowning bit of irony on the part of the suitors comes immediately before their slaughter. Odysseus has asked if he might be allowed to try his skill in the contest. Despite the protests of the suitors, Telemachus gives the bow to Odysseus. As Odysseus is examining the bow before stringing it, one of the proud youths says:

\[
\text{Αἱ γὰρ οὗ τοσσοῦτον ὄνησιος ἀντιάσειν}
\]

\[\text{ὡς οὕτως ποτε τοῦτο δουκηται ἐντανύσασθαι} \quad 43\]

When Odysseus strings the bow as easily as "a man well skilled in the lyre stretches a string about a new peg" it is little wonder that great grief comes to the suitors, and that their faces changed in color.

42 Od. XXI 153-154.
43 Od. XXI 402-403.
The slaying of the suitors is the climax of the story. The tension of suspense that has been built up by irony, now is relieved. We see the suitors receive the just reward of their insolence as they fall smitten with the darts of Odysseus.

Though the main current of irony of the second section of the Odyssey is brought to an end with the death of the suitors, there is still some touching tragic irony in the conclusion of the poem.

After the bodies of the suitors have been removed, and after the hall has been purged, Eurycleia awakes Penelope and tells her of the return of her lord and of the death of the suitors. Penelope still refused to believe and says that some one of the gods must have punished the suitors, for Ὁδυσσεύς ὥλεσε τὴν νόστον Ἀχαιίδος, ὥλετο δ' αἵτως. 44

The irony of Penelope's character is now pathetic. Even in Odysseus' presence she will not believe that he is her husband. Finally, when Odysseus tells her how he cunningly devised their bedstead, 45 she is convinced, and we have the joyful reunion of husband and wife. No other literary device than irony could have served Homer so well in portraying Penelope's character. This

44 Od. XXIII 67-68
45 Od. XXIII 183-204.
device emphasizes her prudence, since she refuses to believe until she is absolutely certain. In his conversation with her Odysseus learns the true depths of her love for her departed husband, and her deep-seated contempt of the haughty suitors, we have already seen how the pathos of her position is enhanced by the skillful use of irony.

Now, that we have reached the end of the Odyssey, we can say that the irony of this poem is not as powerful as that of the Iliad, nor is it sustained throughout the whole poem. The two parts of the poem in which irony plays an important part are 'The Tragedy of the Suitors' and the development of the character of Penelope. Without the use of irony Homer could never have attained the heightened suspense that so strongly sustains our interest in the latter half of the story, nor could he ever have succeeded in painting the lovely portrait of Penelope, which is one of the chief attractions of the Odyssey.
CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The problem before us at the beginning of our investigations was to determine the nature and types of irony, and to show how and why this device plays such an important part in the artistic development of the Homeric poems. Among the types of irony may be listed tragic irony, Socratic irony, irony of action and irony of fate. All irony implies a double audience, one part of which is the victim of the irony: the other part, the inner circle, perceives the added meaning of the words or events hidden from the victims of this device. Because of its nature irony creates a special bond between the author of the irony and those who are clever enough to perceive it. In literature, then, this bond gives special interest to the poem, or speech, or any other form of literary composition in which it is used.

Homer in both of his epics has made wide use of irony. In the Iliad the irony pervades the whole poem from the beginning to the very end. The irony of this poem, because of the nature of its plot, is for the most part irony of action and irony of fate. Achilles is the supreme achievement of the ironic method in Homer. Without the abundant use of irony much of the grandeur of his character could never have been revealed to us. The irony
of the Odyssey is by no means as powerful as that of the Iliad. Since the Odyssey is a story of character, its irony for the most part is tragic irony of the purest type. Its constant use in 'The Tragedy of the Suitors' greatly adds to the suspense of the poem, and sustains our interest in the fast-moving narrative. In the character of Penelope, irony reveals many lovely facets of her personality that would otherwise have passed unnoticed.

Being the expert literary craftsman that he was, Homer certainly must have been well aware of the extra beauty and finish that irony would give to his poems. It is a mistake to think of him as a naive wandering minstrel who did not appreciate the fine points of literary style. He must have realized that without irony his poems would lack much of their vitality and appeal, and this explains his constant employment of this device.
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