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Out of the Mix: (Dis)ability, Intimacy, and the Homeric Poems

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ABSTRACT: Disabled characters in the Homeric hymns and epics are associated with two key themes. They might possess special abilities (e.g., Hephaestus' craftsmanship), but they are distanced from forms of physical intimacy associated with the verb μίσγομαι ("mingle"): erotic intimacy and the intimacy experienced by a warrior and his opponent on the battlefield. By contrast, the intimate encounters of nondisabled individuals play a central role in the plots of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

KEYWORDS: Disability, Homer, Hephaestus, Thersites, Demodocus, Tiresias, Tithonus

The last twenty-five years have witnessed significant advances in the study of disability in ancient Greece. Daniel Ogden (1997) has explored mythological story-patterns that center around the disabled body of a king, colonist, or scapegoat; Robert Garland (1995) has investigated the attitudes of nondisabled individuals to their disabled peers; Martha Lynn Rose (2003) has cast light on the lived experiences of the disabled. Such inquiries, however, have not tended to concentrate on treatments of disability in particular ancient Greek texts.[1] This paper attempts to address the need for such studies. I have chosen to discuss the Homeric hymns and epics, since those works present some of the richest explorations of disabled characters to survive from the Archaic period.[2] In what follows, I explore the common themes that underlie Homeric descriptions

[1] For exceptions see for instance Meeussen 2017 on Plutarch.

[2] I treat our texts of the Homeric poems as representative of the poetic system from which they arose, and I survey the hymns and epics in order to identify themes underlying this system: cf. Foley (1999, 2002), who "reads" Homeric formulae and themes by considering all attested instances across the different Homeric poems.

of these individuals: as we shall see, disabled characters in Homeric poetry might possess special abilities, but they are nonetheless distanced from physical intimacy.

Before starting such an investigation, however, it is necessary to establish which Homeric characters might count as "disabled." Recently, scholars have offered two competing models of disability. The "social model" emphasizes the distinctions between disability and impairment. An impairment is a characteristic of an individual's body or mind that reduces or eliminates a given capacity[3]—e.g., the capacity to see, to walk, or to make accurate predictions. Under earlier, medical conceptions of disability, such personal characteristics were themselves regarded as disabilities. But for proponents of the social model, people with impairments are not ipso facto disabled. A disability is the result of social circumstances, which deny a person with an impairment the opportunity to engage in activities that are accessible to others. For example, an amputated leg constitutes an impairment since it affects an individual's capacity to walk. A person with such an impairment is only disabled if social circumstances (e.g., a lack of wheelchair ramps, discrimination on the part of governmental organizations) leave her/him without the opportunity to go for a stroll, visit the movie theater, work in a factory, teach in a school, etc.

The "cultural model," however, argues that social circumstances and a person's private experiences of impairment cannot in fact be disentangled from one another: each inevitably affects the other. A disabled person's exclusion from some aspect of the public sphere results partly from social circumstances but partly also from the nature of her/his impairment; conversely, an individual's perception of her/his impairment is shaped in part by experiences of exclusion in the public arena.[4] Proponents of the cultural model apply the term "disability" to such complex networks of impairment and social circumstances.[5]

Homeric depictions of characters with impairments are consistent with this second model of disability: they suggest interconnections between impairments and social circumstances. Demodocus and Hephaestus receive help from assistants, but it is not sufficient to cancel out the limitations imposed by their impairments. Hephaestus' lameness is also

[3] Cf. Shakespeare's (2017: 197) definition of impairment: "physical limitation."

[4] On ways in which social factors affect conceptions of impairment cf. Tremain 2002.

[5] For the cultural model see Snyder and Mitchell: 2006: 5–7. See also Shakespeare's (2017) critiques of the social model.

the cause of his dishonor (*Od.* 8.308–311), and these elements of his characterization—physical and social—are closely connected with one another. Similarly, Thersites is "the most shameful" soldier at Troy (*Il.* 2.216), in part because of his lameness. Under the cultural model, it is reasonable to speak of these individuals not merely as impaired but also as disabled.

We can, then, apply the basic framework of the cultural model to Homeric poetry, but we should be aware that from one ancient or modern context to the next different impairments and different social circumstances will be emphasized and that the relationships between these two elements will be expressed in different ways, resulting in different conceptions of disability. While in the modern world people with physical or psychological impairments might suffer from social disadvantages such as disrespect or condescension, the dishonor and shame endured by Hephaestus and Thersites might not have exact parallels in our own societies. While the Homeric hymns and epics describe impairments that have rough equivalents in modern contexts, they do not include as wide a range of impairments as are recognized nowadays. They emphasize impairments that are both permanent and focused on the body, and concentrate for the most part on two particular kinds of permanent physical impairment.

Psychological impairment is not a prominent factor in the Homeric poems and, where it is depicted, tends only to have a temporary effect on characters. We find a vivid description of such impairment when Athena "strikes aside the minds" of the suitors (*Od.* 20.345–349).[6] Nevertheless, the "collective madness" (Guidorizzi 2011) that results is of no great duration. Moreover, this passage is unusual in the Homeric hymns and epics for its depiction of severe psychological impairment (cf. Hershkowitz 1998: 125–60). In some other passages, possession by ἄτη (d/Delusion) impairs a character's judgment. For instance, when Apollo deals the first of the three blows that bring about the death of Patroclus, "ἄτη seized [Patroclus'] mind" (*Il.* 16.805). Patroclus recovers his wits soon afterwards; as he lies dying, he offers an accurate assessment of Apollo's role in his defeat. As this passage indicates, the effects of ἄτη are short-lived.[7] In any case, accounts of ἄτη emphasize its consequences rather than the actor's mental state (Hershkowitz 1998: 128–32).

[6] Translations are my own, drawing on the Greek text of Allen (1912–1920).

[7] Cf. Hershkowitz 1998: 151. The wolf-madness (λύσσα) and rage (μαίνομαι) that possess Iliadic warriors (5.185, 6.101, 8.299, 355, 9.238, 305, 13.53, 15.605–606,

The Homeric hymns and epics place greater emphasis on physical than psychological impairment. They distinguish, moreover, between temporary and permanent physical conditions. Two kinds of physical impairment are prominent in the Homeric poems—lameness and loss of vision,[8] which imply a reduced capacity to walk or to see and which have rough modern equivalents in visual and mobility impairments. In Homeric poetry, however, different language is used to describe the permanent and temporary manifestations of such conditions. Hephaestus, who has been lame from birth (*Od.* 8.310–312), goes "limping," χωλεύων (*Il.* 18.411, 417, 20.37). But a different lexeme, σκάζων, describes the movements of those with short-term impairments caused by wounds (*Il.* 11.811, 19.47), and those characters are never described as χωλός, "lame." Likewise, if mist temporarily obscures a warrior's vision (cf. *Il.* 17.643–647), he is not described as "blind" (τυφλός/ἀλαός). The Homeric poems, moreover, spend more time describing permanent physical impairments than their temporary equivalents.[9] Accordingly, this essay focuses on the former rather than the latter.

Two key elements unite the Homeric portrayals of characters with permanent physical impairments. Such individuals might demonstrate special abilities which win the praise of others or which are associated with a special status, but they are also distanced from two kinds of physical intimacy associated with the verb μίσγομαι, "mingle"[10]—erotic intimacy and the sort of intimacy experienced by opposing warriors on the battlefield. By contrast, the intimate encounters of able-bodied characters play an important role in the plots of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Some disabled characters in Homeric poetry lack a corresponding ability. For example, according to Diomedes, Zeus blinded Lycurgus (τυφλὸν ἔθηκε, *Il.* 6.139) after he attacked the young Dionysus, and the rest of his life was remarkable only for being short (130–131, 139–140). Other such characters display exceptional abilities that counterbalance

16.245, 21.5, 542–543) are likewise temporary but are not indicative of impairment: rather, they lend those warriors special potency on the battlefield.

[8] The Homeric concentration on these impairments probably reflects their prevalence in the everyday life of the ancient world, for which cf. Laes 2018: 87.

[9] For more expansive descriptions as a technique of emphasis in the Homeric epics cf. Lord 2000.

[10] While μίσγομαι is a medio-passive form I have translated the verb actively throughout since (a) the results of mingling and being mingled are very similar; (b) translations such as "being mingled" or "mingling (for) oneself" make for awkward English.

their impairments.[11] Hephaestus, for instance, possesses a number of epithets that refer to his physical characteristics. He is lame (χωλός: *Il.* 18.397, *Od.* 8.308, 332); he is also described as κυλλοποδίων, "with twisted foot" (*Il.* 18.371, 20.270, 21.331),[12] and as ἀμφιγυήεις, perhaps "lame on both sides" (*Il.* 1.607, 14.239, 18.383, 393, 462, 587, 590, 614; *Od.* 8.300, 349, 357).[13]

Whether or not he receives assistance, Hephaestus' impairment always impedes his movement. At *Iliad* 18.411 and 20.37 he moves unaided: "his slight forelegs moved vigorously beneath him." At 18.416–421, he is assisted by magical attendants: when he goes to the door to receive Thetis, "golden maidservants moved vigorously beneath their lord" (417–418).[14] He also employs a staff (416), but, in all these instances, he moves awkwardly: he is described "limping" (χωλεύων: 18.411, 417; 20.37).

And yet, alongside his physical impairment, Hephaestus possesses exceptional intelligence, which enables him to craft a series of marvelous objects.[15] This second aspect to his characterization is expressed by Hephaestus' other Homeric epithets, which emphasize either his mental acuity or his fame. When he crafts the special chains that trap Ares and Aphrodite in *Odyssey* 8, descriptions of his handiwork are accompanied

[11] Such depictions resemble not so much the modern discourse of "overcoming" impairment (for which see Linton 1998: 17–19) as accounts of "compensation" or "gain," whereby impairment is coupled with extraordinary gifts (cf. Murray 2008; Bauman and Murray 2017). For application of the notion of compensation to the ancient world see Laes 2018: 164–165 on Hephaestus and n22 below. For combinations of disability and power in wider Greek culture cf. Stiker 1999: 59–61.

[12] Scholars associate the term κυλλοποδίων with the notion of twisting, turning, or rolling: see Boisacq 1950, Chantraine 1984–1990 and Beekes 2010 s.v. κυλλός; Pokorny 1959 s.v. *(s)kel-* (4); Masson 1976: 94; Ogden 1997: 54–55.

[13] Humbach 1969 and Melazzo 1991 associate ἀμφιγυήεις with ἀμφίγυος ("two-pointed"), an adjective that describes spears in Homeric epic (e.g., *Il.* 13.147), and suggest that the former epithet refers to a double-ax, a traditional attribute of Hephaestus. Some ancient writers saw ἀμφιγυήεις as a reference to ambidexterity, in keeping with Hephaestus' skill as a craftsman: cf. Heubeck, West, and Hainsworth 1988 ad *Od.* 8.300. Many modern commentators, however, follow other ancient authorities in rendering the epithet "crooked on both sides" *vel sim.*—i.e., with two crooked legs: cf. LSJ and *LfgrE* s.v.; Bechtel 1914: 40; Frisk 1960–1972 s.v. γύης; Chantraine 1984–1990 s.v. *γύη. See also the Homeric verb γυιόω, "to lame" (*Il.* 8.402, 416).

[14] Cf. 18.421: the maidservants "bustled beneath their lord."

[15] For items crafted by Hephaestus see *Il.* 1.607–608, 2.101, 8.195, 14.166–167, 338–339, 15.308–310, 18.369–380, 401, 417–420, 478–608, 20.11–12; *Od.* 4.615–617, 7.91–94, 8.274–281, 15.115–117, 24.73–75.

by allusions to his cleverness: "the crafty bonds . . . of much-thinking (πολύφρονος) Hephaestus" (*Od.* 8.296–297); "the crafts . . . of much-thinking (πολύφρονος) Hephaestus" (327).[16] Other descriptions emphasize the fame that he earns through his craftsmanship. He is κλυτοτέχνης, "famous for his craft" (*Il.* 1.571, 18.143, 391; *Od.* 8.286; *Hymn* 20.5),[17] and περίκλυτος, "very famous" (*Il.* 1.607, 18.383, 393, 462, 587, 590; *Od.* 8.287, 300, 349, 357, 24.75).[18] This last epithet is coupled in every case with the adjective ἀμφιγυήεις, thus suggesting a balance between the two aspects of Hephaestus' portrayal—his lameness and his renown.[19]

Hephaestus' lameness, which impedes his movement, appears to be a negative element in his characterization, while his fame is a more positive factor, but these two elements are nonetheless consistent with one another. The one concerns Hephaestus' body; the other, his mind. Hephaestus possesses a physical impairment, but this is complemented by his mental dexterity.[20] In addition, the fame that he acquires and the dishonor that he endures have different origins: he wins fame as a metalworker, but his lameness is a source of dishonor.[21]

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[16] For Hephaestus as πολύφρων cf. *Il.* 21.367. For the importance of Hephaestus' intelligence to his craftsmanship see also the phrase ἰδυίῃσι πραπίδεσσι(ν) ("with his knowing mind (?)"), which accompanies references to his manufacture of particular items (*Il.* 1.608, 18.380, 482, 20.12; *Od.* 7.92). For the meaning of this phrase cf. Sullivan 1987; Frontisi-Ducroux 2002.

[17] Cf. Hephaestus' epithets κλυτοεργός ("famous for his work," *Od.* 8.345) and κλυτόμητις ("famous for his intelligence," *Hymn* 20.1).

[18] Cf. *Il.* 18.614 and *HHerm.* 115, where Hephaestus is κλυτός ("famous"). In the first of these passages he is also ἀμφιγυήεις.

[19] On the contrasting attributes of Hephaestus in Homeric poetry and elsewhere cf. Bremmer 2010; Barbanera 2015.

[20] For the complementary relationship between these two sides to Hephaestus' characterization cf. Detienne and Vernant 1978: 270–73, who argue that Hephaestus' crooked feet are in fact indicative of "his wise thoughts and his craftsman's intelligence" (272). In wider Greek culture, lameness might be seen as consistent with the physical demands of metalwork. Smiths needed considerable upper-body strength, but restricted mobility would not necessarily have been a hindrance to their work: cf. Garland 1995: 62; Rose 2003: 40.

[21] Hephaestus' handiwork might not, however, be regarded in a wholly positive light. High-status, nondisabled divinities such as Apollo or Hera rely on Hephaestus' skills in crafting particular objects or structures that they need to use (*Il.* 14.166–167, 338–339, 15.308–310), but those gods would not stoop to manufacturing such items themselves. Hephaestus' work is praiseworthy insofar as it benefits his fellow Olympians, but craftsmanship itself is not necessarily an honorable activity. Cf. *HHerm.*: Hermes, who at that stage lacks Olympian honors (Clay 2006: 95–151), crafts the lyre that Apollo eventually

Descriptions of the Phaeacian bard Demodocus in *Odyssey* 8 present similar contrasts between physical impairment and abilities that are prized by others. Demodocus is blind, but his artistic gifts balance his loss of sight.[22] When he is first introduced, we learn that "the Muse loved [him] exceedingly, and she had given him a good and an evil: / she had taken away his sight but given him sweet song" (8.63–64). The following lines develop the contrast between these two aspects of Demodocus' characterization. When he enters the feasting hall, Demodocus requires the help of others, who guide him to his chair (65–70),[23] but the Muse then inspires him to sing of the quarrel of Odysseus and Achilles (73–82). The impact of his song on the assembled audience attests to his skill as a singer. The Phaeacians delight in the performance, but it causes Odysseus distress as he recollects the events described by Demodocus, such that he is forced to hide his tears (83–95).[24] Like Hephaestus, Demodocus wins respect for his artistry: he is a "very famous singer" (ἀοιδός . . . περίκλυτος: 83, 367, 521) and a "trusty singer . . . honored by the people" (471–472). Neither his fame nor the assistance that he receives from others negates the effect of his impairment on his negotiation of space; for instance, he takes no part in the athletic competitions of *Odyssey* 8.

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uses. Both Hephaestus and Hermes, however, are able to use their intelligence to turn the tables on their higher-status opponents: in his *Homeric Hymn*, Hermes gains entry to the Olympian community; Hephaestus takes revenge on Aphrodite and Ares in *Od.* 8.

[22] The narrator of the *Hymn to Apollo* presents a similar case: he is a "blind man (τυφλὸς ἀνήρ) . . . whose songs are all the best" (172–173). There may also be references to blind singers in *Od.* 1 and *Il.* 2. Given that "a herald placed a very beautiful lyre in Phemius' hands" (*Od.* 1.153–154), Garland 1995: 33–34 wonders whether the Ithacan bard is also blind: cf. 8.67–69, where a herald hangs up Demodocus' lyre and checks that he can access it. At *Il.* 2.594–600 we hear that, when Thamyris challenged the Muses to a singing competition, the goddesses "took away his song" (599–600) and left him πηρόν, which is sometimes understood as a reference to blinding (e.g., Garland 1995: 100, Michel 2008: 78 and 78n58; for πηρός as "blind" see *AP* 9.46.1). See however Kirk 1985 ad *Il.* 2.599–600 for problems with this interpretation. The biographical tradition portrays Homer himself as blind, e.g., *Contest* 2–3. Such passages probably draw on Homeric depictions of blind singers, including *HAp.* 172–173: cf. *Contest* 18, where the blind Homer recites his *Hymn to Apollo*. Some held that the Muses gave Homer his skill at singing as compensation for his blindness (*Vita Romana* 5 West): cf. Demodocus at *Od.* 8.63–64.

[23] Likewise, at 8.106–108 a herald leads Demodocus out of the halls.

[24] For the implications of these contrasting reactions to Demodocus' song and of similarly complex responses to other performances in Homeric poetry cf. Walsh 1984: 3–21; Halliwell 2011: 36–92.

In the tales of his travels, Odysseus introduces another disabled character who likewise possesses special abilities. He recalls how Circe instructed him to consult "Tiresias, / the blind prophet" (Τειρεσίαο, / μάντιος ἀλαοῦ, 10.492–493; cf. 12.267) in order to learn "your route, the measures of your path / and your return" (10.539–540).[25] Tiresias' speech justifies Circe's confidence in his powers (11.100–137): though Tiresias does not reveal all that Odysseus needs to know if he is to complete his *nostos*, he nonetheless offers important information—about the Cattle of the Sun, the suitors, and Odysseus' final journey inland to propitiate Poseidon (cf. Heubeck and Hoekstra 1989 ad *Od.* 11.100–137). Tiresias enjoys special privileges among the dead: Persephone "granted to him alone when dead a mind capable of understanding" (10.494–495), while the other inhabitants of the Underworld flit aimlessly (495) and are "mindless" (11.476). She did not, however, restore Tiresias' eyesight.[26]

These three characters, then, exhibit exceptional abilities that are in turn associated with positive circumstances—Hephaestus' fame, Demodocus' honor, Tiresias' privileged status. However, neither such positive factors nor the assistance that these characters receive from others fully alleviates the limitations associated with their impairments. Another element in the portrayal of disabled characters in the Homeric poems has clearly negative connotations. Such individuals are distanced from the physical intimacy experienced by nondisabled heroes and gods, which is often expressed by the lexeme μίσγομαι, "mingle," and such distancing is most apparent in the sphere of the erotic.

This aspect of Homeric poetry contrasts with some other Greek representations of disabled individuals. Ogden explores associations of disability and sexual prowess in Greek sources such as the ancient life of Aesop, which is first attested in complete form in the Roman imperial period, but which had its roots in classical Greece (Kurke 2011, Hall 2013). The great storyteller "was not only a slave, but also had the ugliest (δυσειδέστατα) characteristics of any man of his time. He was pointy-headed (φόξος) . . . , lame (βλαισός) and hunch-backed

[25] For blindness and prophecy see also *Od.* 9.507–512: the blinded Polyphemus remembers a prophecy of Odysseus' coming. And Polyphemus' subsequent prayer anticipates part of Tiresias' prophecy (9.534–535 ≈ 11.114–115). For blind prophets in the Greek tradition cf. Hdt. 9.93–94 (Evenius); [Apollod.] Bibl. 1.120 (Phineus).

[26] For blindness and exceptional ability in Homeric poetry see also Létoublon 2010.

(κυφός)," thereby "surpassing even the Homeric Thersites in the ugliness/shamefulness (αἰσχρότητι) of his appearance" (*Vita Pl.* 227.16–228.4 Eberhard). Nevertheless, his master's wife, having caught Aesop masturbating, is impressed by "the length and thickness of his privy part (αἰδοῦς)" and offers him a cloak if he will sleep with her ten times in a row. He manages nine (*Vita W* 75 Perry).[27]

The Homeric poems, by contrast, do not explore the sexual experiences of disabled characters. There are no allusions to such individuals enjoying erotic intimacy—be they the blind Demodocus, the blinded Lycurgus, the blinded Cyclops,[28] or the "lame, wrinkled, and squinting" Prayers, whom Phoenix introduces (*Il.* 9.502–512). The significance of this omission from descriptions of disabled individuals is suggested by the fact that the Homeric poems explicitly dissociate three such characters—Hephaestus, Thersites, and Tithonus—from sexual pleasure.

Hephaestus has a wife in both the major Homeric epics; he is not, then, categorically excluded from erotic intimacy. Nevertheless, while the epics allude to the erotic "mingling" of nondisabled divinities such as Zeus and Hera (ἐμισγέσθην, *Il.* 14.295; ἐμίγης, 15.33), Hephaestus is not described engaging in such activities.[29] We hear in *Iliad* 18 that he is married to Charis (Grace), but the relevant lines do not emphasize erotic enjoyment. The kinds of physical contact involving Hephaestus in book 18 are of an entirely different nature: that of a host greeting a guest, of a mother rejecting her child, or of nurses tending a patient. Hephaestus takes the hand of his guest Thetis as he greets her at the door (423). A little earlier, he remembers how his mother Hera cast him from heaven for being lame (395–397), but that Thetis and Eurynome tended to him in his stricken state (397–399).[30]

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[27] Ogden 1997: 38–39. Such stories, in Ogden's opinion, justify the Greek proverb, "The lame man fucks best" (ἄριστα χωλὸς οἰφεῖ). For sexual aspects of unusual bodies cf. Arist. *HA* 577b.28–29 on dwarfs' large phalluses. Such figures might not, however, be associated with erotic intimacy: cf. Dasen 1990: 203; 1993: 237; 2006a: 435, 446.

[28] Cf. Theoc. *Id.* 11: Polyphemus is excluded from intimacy with Galatea.

[29] For the erotic connotations of μίσγομαι cf. LSJ s.v. μείγνυμι II.B4; *LfgrE* s.v. μίσγω I.2d; *Il.* 2.232, 3.445, 6.25, 161, 165, 9.133, 275, 452, 14.295, 15.32–33, 19.176, 21.143, 24.130–131; *Od.* 1.73, 433, 5.126, 7.61, 8.268, 271, 10.334–335, 11.268, 306, 15.420–421, 430, 18.325, 19.266, 20.7, 12, 22.445, 23.219; *HHerm.* 4, 7; *HAphr.* 46, 150, 263, 287; *Hymn* 7.57; 15.3; 18.4, 7; 19.34; 32.14; 33.5.

[30] The equivalent scene at *Aen.* 8.370–406 is highly eroticized. As Venus persuades Vulcan to fashion arms for Aeneas, she "breathes divine love with her words" (373) and holds him "with her snow-white arms . . . in a soft embrace" (387–388).

Demodocus' song of Ares and Aphrodite in *Odyssey* 8 separates Hephaestus more decisively from erotic enjoyment: in this respect, then, the disabled bard offers a less than positive depiction of his disabled character. Demodocus draws clear contrasts between Hephaestus' experiences and those of the other gods. Ares enjoys his dalliance with Aphrodite, who in this story is Hephaestus' wife, but the pleasure of the two lovers causes distress for Hephaestus. His reaction to the affair also differs from that of the Olympians who witness the lovemaking of the two gods. While he feels anguish, his fellow Olympians derive amusement and a vicarious sexual pleasure from the scene.

Demodocus describes the erotic "mingling" (μίγησαν, 268; μιγαζομένους, 271) of Ares and Aphrodite. While those two nondisabled gods experience erotic intimacy, the lame smith is associated with no such experiences—whether before, during, or after the events described in the song. We hear that Ares and Aphrodite made love prior to the action depicted by Demodocus (268–270). The narrative itself focuses on Ares' and Aphrodite's affair. Nor is there any suggestion of an erotic reconciliation of Hephaestus and Aphrodite after the time of the narrative. In fact, Hephaestus sees her adultery as grounds for divorce: he intends to ask Zeus for the return of his bridal gifts (318–320).

Demodocus also distinguishes between Hephaestus' emotions and those of the other characters involved in the tale. Ares eagerly (ἰσχανόων, 288) pursues Aphrodite's love, and the lovemaking is welcome (ἀσπαστόν, 295) to both partners. By contrast, Helios' reports of the couple's dalliances arouse grief (272, 303) and anger (276, 304) in Hephaestus. The smith-god later has his revenge on the two lovers by trapping them *in flagrante* in a web of chains that he rigs up over his and Aphrodite's marriage-bed. A further contrast then arises between Hephaestus' displeasure at the sight of the trapped lovers and the mirth of the gods who arrive to witness the scene.

When "unquenchable laughter arose among the blessed gods" (326, ἄσβεστος δ' ἄρ' ἐνῶρτο γέλως μακάρεσσι θεοῖσι), it seems that their amusement arises at least partly at the expense of Hephaestus' lame body.[31] Such indeed are the associations of the phrase "unquenchable laughter arose among the blessed gods" in its only other Homeric

[31] For laughter at the expense of Hephaestus in this scene cf. Caldwell 1978: 43; Burkert 2009: 35.

instantiation. At the end of *Iliad* 1, Hera quarrels with Zeus as a result of his decision to harm the Achaeans. In response, Hephaestus attempts to soothe her (571–594) and pours wine for her and for the other gods that are present (584–585, 595–598). Hephaestus thus takes on the role of a figure who would have been familiar to early audiences—Ganymede, the cupbearer of the gods.[32] Listeners would have perceived the contrast between Ganymede, who was chosen for his beauty (cf. *Il.* 20.232–235; *HAphr.* 202–206), and the lame Hephaestus. They would therefore have understood the reaction of the internal audience as they watch smith-god: the gods burst into "unquenchable laughter" as they witness him "bustling about the halls" (599–600).

Similarly, in *Odyssey* 8 the lines following the phrase "unquenchable laughter arose among the blessed gods" draw attention to the contrast between Hephaestus' body and that of Ares. These lines emphasize two interrelated themes—Hephaestus' ingenuity and the way in which it allows the lame smith to overcome his able-bodied rival.[33] The gods were looking at the "contrivances of very wise Hephaestus" (327). Immediately afterwards the gods comment to one another that "Hephaestus the slow has seized Ares, the swiftest of the gods . . . , though he is lame (χωλός), with his crafts" (330–332). The gods' words, which follow the description of their laughter, suggest that the contrast between Hephaestus' lameness and Ares' nondisabled physique plays an essential part in the humor of the scene.[34]

If Hephaestus' own words are any indication, it is unlikely that he sees the funny side of this contrast.[35] In fact, he feels that it is the cause both of the dishonor that he has endured in the past and of the emotional pain that he is currently experiencing. He explains that "Aphrodite

[32] Hephaestus could also be assuming the role of Hebe, who is cupbearer of the gods at *Il.* 4.2–3 and known for her beauty no less than Ganymede (e.g., *Od.* 11.603): cf. Schol. AbT ad *Il.* 1.584; Kirk 1985 ad *Il.* 1.599–600; Garland 1995: 84; Halliwell 2008: 63.

[33] Braswell 1982 notes the importance of the themes of intelligence and of slow and swift bodies, both in these lines and in *Odyssey* 8 in general.

[34] The phrases "evil deeds do not win out" (329) and "[Ares] owes an adulterer's fine" (332) suggest also a moral dimension to the gods' reaction: cf. Brown 1989.

[35] This observation is consistent with both possible versions of line 307: Hephaestus invites the gods to witness either "laughable and unendurable deeds" (ἔργα γελαστὰ καὶ οὐκ ἐπιεικτά) or "*un*laughable deeds" (ἐργ' ἀγέλεστα; cf. Allen 1912–1920 ad loc.). On the reading that I have proposed, Hephaestus would either be referring to deeds that are "laughable" for others but not for himself, or would be describing them from his own perspective as "unlaughable."

daughter of Zeus always dishonors me because I am lame (χωλόν) and loves cursed Ares, because he is beautiful and sound-limbed (ἀρτίπος), while I was born weak" (308–311). He goes on to express the wish that he had never been born (312) and to confirm that the sight of the two lovers distresses him (314). What for the rest of the gods is a comic contrast between the lame Hephaestus and his nondisabled rival is for him a source of anguish.[36] The cuckolded smith-god is isolated from his peers in their enjoyment of the scene.[37]

At line 343 "laughter arose among the immortal gods" once more, and the circumstances surrounding this second outbreak of hilarity further emphasize Hephaestus' isolation. The speeches of Apollo and Hermes immediately beforehand suggest a vicarious sexual pleasure in the scene (cf. Halliwell 2008: 82–83). Apollo asks whether Hermes would "be willing to sleep beside golden Aphrodite . . . though weighed down with strong bonds" (336–337); to which Hermes replies that he would gladly endure three times the number of bonds, even if all the gods and goddesses were looking on (339–342). Hermes' words emphasize the attractiveness of Aphrodite, whose naked body is displayed beneath Hephaestus' chains. The amusement resulting from Hermes' conversation with Apollo, when combined with Hephaestus' discomfort at the scene, underlines the smith-god's exclusion from erotic enjoyment.[38]

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[36] Phoenix establishes a similar distinction between the "lame" (χωλαί) Prayers and the "sound-limbed" (ἀρτίπος) goddess Delusion (*Il.* 9.502–507). In *Odyssey* 8 Hephaestus' description of Ares and Aphrodite as "beautiful" (310, 320) suggests a further contrast with his own physique. Nevertheless, in Demodocus' song this second contrast is not emphasized to the same extent as the disabled/nondisabled polarity. While Ares is "sound-limbed" (310), Hephaestus is "lame" (308, 332); Ares is swift, but Hephaestus, as a result of his impairment, is "slow" (330–331). And yet, while his rivals are "beautiful," Hephaestus is not described as "ugly."

[37] Cf. Halliwell 2008: 80–83. Collobert 2000 argues that Hephaestus' distress transforms into more positive emotions along with the outbreak of laughter at 326. But Hephaestus' earnest discussion of compensation with Poseidon even after this (344–358), in which he alludes to his own wretchedness (351), suggests that his attitude to the adultery has not changed: he treats it just as seriously as before, and as a reflection of his own physical disadvantages.

[38] Other Greek sources offer a mixed picture of Hephaestus' relationship with the erotic. In some, Hephaestus fathers children: Palaemonius (AR *Arg.* 1.202–204) and Periphetes ([Apollod.] *Bibl.* 3.16.1), who are lame like their father (πόδα σιφλός, *Arg.* 1.204; πόδας δὲ ἀσθενεῖς ἔχων in most MSS of *Bibl.* 3.16.1: cf. Frazer 1921 ad loc.); also Camillus (Acusilaus fr. 2.20 Jacoby), the Cabirides (Pherecydes fr. 3.48 Jacoby), and the Cabiri (Hdt. 3.37; Hescyh. s.v. Κάβειροι; Pherecydes, *ibid.*). At *Theog.* 945–946 Hephaestus is married to the Grace Aglaea. But he is dissociated from sexual intercourse

In *Iliad* 2, the disabled character Thersites is likewise distanced from erotic intimacy, after he attempts to voice the grievances of the Achaean troops against Agamemnon. At the beginning of the episode, the narrative places considerable emphasis on Thersites' crooked body.[39] We hear firstly that αἴσχιστος . . . ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθε (216): he is at once "the ugliest" and "the most shameful man who came beneath Troy."[40] The poem goes on to list his shameful attributes, which include lameness: Thersites' shoulders curve in towards his chest (217); he is "lame in one foot" (χωλὸς δ' ἕτερον πόδα, 217);[41] and he has a pointy head (φοξός . . . κεφαλήν) which, in place of hair, hosts sparse, downy growths (219).

Many readers of this episode focus on the physical drubbing that Thersites later receives from Odysseus: in return for his insubordinate complaints, Odysseus strikes him with Agamemnon's scepter (265–268). In this respect Thersites' experience is not so different from that of other soldiers earlier in book 2 (198–199). Granted, the allusions to the victim's body and to onlookers' reactions (265–270) find no parallels in the earlier passage. Thersites "bent over" under Odysseus' blows and let fall a tear (266). A "welt" (σμῶδιξ, 267) rose up on his back and he was forced to sit down, wiping away another tear (269). In response, his comrades "laughed sweetly" (270); as in *Iliad* 1 and *Odyssey*

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insofar as Hera gives birth to him "not mingling in love" (οὐ φιλότητι μιγεῖσα, 927). Another story, told by [Apollodorus], combines the themes of sexless reproduction with Hephaestus' exclusion from the erotic. The smith-god is abandoned by Aphrodite but, despite being lame (χωλός), pursues Athena. Although Athena also rejects him, he ejaculates on her leg, which leads to the birth of Erichthonius (*Bibl.* 3.14.6). For these two sides to depictions of Hephaestus cf. Caldwell 1978, who associates him both with the phallus and with impotence.

[39] Cf. Thalmann 1988: 15: "No other character in the *Iliad* is given so detailed a physical description. . . ." For possible physiological bases for Thersites' appearance see Simms 2005.

[40] For Lowry 1991 the term αἴσχιστος also suggests Thersites' ability to cause shame, both through his words and through his unusual appearance. For shame in the Thersites episode see also *Il.* 2.262 (Odysseus employs the euphemism αἰδῶ, lit. "shame," to refer to Thersites' genitals) and 264 (Odysseus threatens Thersites with "shameful blows").

[41] Critics contend that the *hapax* φολκός, used of Thersites (2.217), also refers to an impairment, but they disagree over the sort of condition that is implied: "squinting" (schol. AbT ad *Il.* 2.217; Lowry 1991: 107–17); "stammering" (Ogden 1997: 40); "dragging the feet" (Chantraine 1984–1990 s.v.); "bandy-legged" (LSJ, Boisacq 1950 and Beekes 2010 s.v.; Pokorny 1959: 489; Simms 2005: 37; Samama 2017: 130). Given Odysseus' later acknowledgement that Thersites is a "clear-voiced speaker" (246—rather than a stammerer) and the juxtaposition of φολκός with a reference to his lameness at 217, the latter two explanations are the more likely.

8, then, humor arises at the expense of a disabled character.[42] In other respects, however, Odysseus' assault on Thersites echoes his treatment of the common soldiers, as he attempts to put down their mutiny. Agamemnon suggests that the Achaeans abandon the siege of Troy (110–141), and the troops respond with a dash for the ships. Odysseus proceeds to round up every mutinous "man of the demos," "driv[ing] him with the scepter" (198–199).

Clearer distinctions between Thersites and his fellow soldiers emerge when we consider the erotic themes that are associated both with the figure of Thersites in early epic and with Odysseus' verbal response to his words in *Iliad* 2. The notion of eroticism is prominent not only in Thersites' speech (225–242) but also in descriptions of Thersites in the wider epic cycle. As we shall see, in *Iliad* 2 Thersites reproaches Agamemnon for (among other things) his selfish enjoyment of erotic pleasures. In the *Aethiopis* he accuses another chieftain, Achilles, of love for Penthesilea and for this reason is killed by the Greek champion.[43] Early epic, then, strongly associates Thersites with such erotically themed accusations.

As Thersites tries to persuade the troops to resume their mutiny in *Iliad* 2, he mentions not only Agamemnon's greed for precious metals but also his erotic desires, and describes the toil that the Achaean soldiers undergo in order to satisfy their leader's urges. He refers to the slave women that he and his comrades provide for Agamemnon and to the erotic intimacy that he enjoys with them. Thersites wonders (232–233) whether Agamemnon desires yet another "new woman, so that you may mingle (μίσγεαι) in love with her," and "you yourself may possess her at a distance." In this way Thersites, as he looks to establish common cause with his peers, suggests that Agamemnon experiences sexual pleasures that are denied both to Thersites himself and to the other soldiers who facilitate them: Agamemnon enjoys captive women alone, "at a distance."

Odysseus, in his response to Thersites' speech, threatens a punishment with erotic overtones. Odysseus explains that, should Thersites insult the chieftains again, he will strip him bare (258–264). He will thus

[42] There is a further similarity between the contexts of the laughter in *Il.* 1 and *Il.* 2. While in book 1 Hephaestus' awkward wine-pouring dissolves tensions on Olympus, the troops' amusement at Thersites' expense diffuses tensions that have built up in the Achaean army over the course of the first two books (cf. Thalmann 1988: 24; Ogden 1997: 35, 41). For humor at the expense of the disabled see Garland 1995: 73–86.

[43] Proclus at Bernabé 1996: 68 lines 6–8. For connections between Thersites' abusive performances in *Iliad* 2 and in the *Aethiopis* cf. Marks 2005.

reveal Thersites' genitals (αἰδῶ, 262)—the only part of Thersites' naked body to which Odysseus directly alludes. Presumably, then, the genitals will be a particular target of the blows that Odysseus mentions (264).[44] The erotic associations of Odysseus' threat become apparent when we consider another Homeric passage that refers both to nakedness and to genitalia. The naked Odysseus covers his genitals with a branch as he prepares to go amongst (μίξεσθαι) Nausicaa and her attendants, who are playing near the seashore (*Od.* 6.128–136). The verb used of his actions, μίσγομαι, draws attention to the sexual dimensions of the scene—in particular, to the sexual danger that a man like Odysseus poses to young girls in this wild setting.[45]

Odysseus' reference to Thersites' exposed genitals (*Il.* 2.262) is, then, in keeping with the erotic themes that are associated with Thersites in *Iliad* 2 and in early epic more generally. While in the *Odyssey* passage (6.128–136) allusions to genitalia and nakedness anticipate sexual intercourse, Odysseus, by threatening to beat Thersites' genitals, offers him pain in place of sexual pleasure (*Il.* 2.258–264). Such a punishment befits a character who is in the habit of mocking others for their erotic desires. At the same time, Odysseus disrupts the distinction that Thersites tries to draw between Agamemnon and the Achaean soldiers (*Il.* 2.232–233). Thersites claims that both he and his comrades are excluded from erotic enjoyment, but Odysseus promises to inflict a punishment with erotic connotations on Thersites alone. While, according to Thersites, Agamemnon "mingles" with captive women "at a distance" from his troops, Odysseus' threat distances Thersites himself from such enjoyment.

The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* likewise distances a disabled character from erotic pleasure. As described by Aphrodite, Tithonus faces an erotic exile, the second stage of which coincides with his total paralysis.

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[44] Other Homeric descriptions of assaults on the genitals, threatened or actualized (*Il.* 4.492, 22.75; *Od.* 18.86–87, 22.476), refer neither to nakedness nor to beating. At Ephesus, however, the genitals of scapegoats were beaten with squills: cf. Ogden 1997: 40–41. For Thersites' intersections with the figure of the scapegoat cf. Thalmann 1988; Nagy 1999: 279–80.

[45] Cf. Ahl and Roisman 1996: 51–52; Felson 1997: 47; Glenn 1998: 111–14. For the sexual connotations of μίσγομαι in this episode see also 6.241 (Nausicaa describes Odysseus as "mingl[ing] with" [ἐπιμίσγεται] the Phaeacians, before expressing the wish that he should be her husband) and 288 (Nausicaa explains that she would blame another girl who saw fit to "mingle with men" [ἀνδράσι μίσγηται] before marriage). Cf. 205: Nausicaa encourages her maidservants not to fear the stranger Odysseus, and mentions that "no other mortal mingles (ἐπιμίσγεται) with us."

Much of the rest of the hymn focuses on acts of erotic intimacy, associated with the verb μίσγομαι. The depiction of Tithonus' fate departs from this theme and makes clear why the "mingling" of the two main characters, Aphrodite and Anchises, cannot continue beyond the time of the narrative. At the start of the hymn Zeus responds to Aphrodite's habit of "mingling" (συνέμιξε, 39, 50, cf. ἀνέμιξε, 52; συνέμιξα, 250) gods with mortals, by imbuing her with the desire "to mingle" (μιχθήμεναι, 46) with the mortal Anchises. Accordingly, Aphrodite decks herself out in finery and appears before the Trojan prince. Suitably impressed, Anchises declares that "neither god nor mortal will hold me back from mingling (μιγῆναι) with your love right now" (149–151).[46]

After they make love, however, Aphrodite warns Anchises not to expect their relationship to endure, and her story of Tithonus and of the goddess Dawn helps to explain her feelings. Dawn successfully requests immortality for her lover but does not think to ask for eternal youth (220–224). Accordingly, Tithonus proves an unsuitable match for his immortal partner. His increasingly decrepit body disgusts Dawn, and Aphrodite would have the same reaction to Anchises as he aged.[47]

There are two stages to Aphrodite's tale of Tithonus' erotic exile, both of which incorporate a depiction of Tithonus' physical state and an account of Dawn's reaction to his deterioration. In the first passage Aphrodite refers to the normal signs of aging, but in the second her allusions to total disability depart from Homeric depictions of old age. Tithonus is able to take his pleasure with Dawn (τερπόμενος, 226) while he is still young, but, as soon as his first gray hairs appear (228–229), Dawn shuns "his bed"/"sex with him" (τοῦ . . . εὐνῆς, 230).[48] Later, however, Tithonus declines to such a degree that he is no longer able to move his arms and legs (μελέων, 234).[49] No other Homeric description of aging

[46] For the hymn's use of μίσγομαι in erotic contexts see also lines 263 and 287.

[47] Aphrodite uses the root στυγε-, "hate," both when describing Dawn's reaction to Tithonus' decrepit state (στυγερόν, "hateful," 233) and when referring to the gods' disgust for old age (στυγέουσι, "they hate," 246). Aphrodite thus assimilates Dawn's attitude to that of the other gods, including Aphrodite herself. There seems, however, to be a gap in Aphrodite's logic. If she wishes Anchises to avoid Tithonus' fate, she could ask Zeus to grant him both immortality and eternal youth: cf. Smith 1981: 87–90. But perhaps embarrassment at her dalliance with Anchises prevents her from making such a request: cf. Faulkner 2008 ad *HAphr.* 239–255.

[48] For the erotic associations of the root εὐνα- cf. *HAphr.* 190; *LfgrE* s.v. εὐνή 3b .

[49] Given the erotic themes of the passage, it is tempting to read *HAphr.* 234 as an allusion to sexual impotence, but I find no passage of Greek literature where the term

approaches this evocation of complete incapacity.[50] In fact, Tithonus resembles not so much an old man as a dead man.[51] The phrase "there is no life force (κῖκυς) such as there was formerly in his pliant limbs" (237–238) is paralleled by only one other passage of Homeric poetry: a near-identical phrase describes the shade of the dead Agamemnon (*Od.* 11.393–394).[52] Tithonus' hapless state prompts a second and decisive reaction from Dawn, which confirms his erotic isolation: she shuts him up in a chamber (θαλάμῳ, 236).

Parallels with other Homeric scenes confirm the importance of the themes of disability and eroticism in Aphrodite's account of Tithonus' decline; they also set in relief Tithonus' wretched state. The phrase θύρας δ' ἐπέθηκε φαεινάς ("[Dawn] shut the bright doors," 236) echoes the near-identical phrase θύρας ἐπέθηκε φαεινάς, which accompanies accounts of eroticism both in the hymn and in one other passage of Homeric poetry. The latter phrase, θύρας ἐπέθηκε φαεινάς, describes Aphrodite (*HAphr.* 60) when she withdraws to her sanctuary to prepare for the seduction of Anchises. This phrase occurs in a similar context when Hera decks herself out for the seduction of Zeus (*Il.* 14.169). There is a clear contrast between Tithonus' exile from sex and the two goddesses' preparations for erotic intimacy.

Parallels with the story of Aphrodite and Ares in *Odyssey* 8 likewise draw attention to the grievous circumstances of Tithonus' erotic exile.

μέλος refers to the penis. Giacomelli 1980, however, associates Tithonus' condition with Anchises' fear of being left ἀμενηνός (*HAphr.* 188; cf. n51 below), which she sees as a reference to a loss of semen: after sex with Aphrodite, "Anchises fears he has strayed into the sphere of gods' measures where a single copulation can expend all the moistures of life and leave one, like Tithonos, flowing in nothing but voice . . ." (19).

[50] Nor is there a parallel for this element of the *Homeric Hymn* in Sappho's poem on Tithonus (Gronewald and Daniels 2004; West 2005: 3–6): the narrator alludes to her own aged limbs but not to those of Tithonus. The Homeric portrait of Tithonus could also suggest psychological disability. The phrase τοῦ δ' ἦ τοι φωνὴ ῥεῖ ἄσπετος, 237 might evoke incessant (Faulkner 2008 ad loc.), senile babble. Alternatively, it might reflect the story of Tithonus' transformation into a (perpetually singing) cicada: cf. Kakridis 1930; Janko 2017.

[51] "Tithonos . . . is like a shade without a body": Smith 1981: 130n99. Cf. Mimn. fr. 4.2 West^2: Tithonus' old age is "chillier than grievous death." See also Segal 1986: 43–44, who links Tithonus' state to Anchises' fear of being left ἀμενηνός (*HAphr.* 188; cf. n49 above); as Segal notes, the Homeric dead are ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα (*Od.* 10.521, 536, 11.29, 49).

[52] There is only one difference between the two passages: *Od.* 11.394 opens with the words οἵη περ as opposed to ἔσθ' οἵη (*HAphr.* 238).

Odyssey 8.266–366 and *Hymn to Aphrodite* 233–238 are the only passages of Homeric poetry in which characters are confined to a chamber, θάλαμος (*Od.* 8.277; *HAphr.* 236).[53] Very similar phrases, moreover, are used to describe the incapacitation of Tithonus in the hymn and of Ares and Aphrodite in Demodocus' song. Age weighed Tithonus down, "and he was able neither to move nor to lift any of his limbs" (234, οὐδέ τι κινῆσαι μελέων δύνατ' οὐδ' ἀναεῖραι). This phrase finds a near-exact echo when Ares and Aphrodite are incapacitated by Hephaestus' chains: "and it was no longer possible to move nor to lift any of their limbs" (*Od.* 8.298, οὐδέ τι κινῆσαι μελέων ἦν οὐδ' ἀναεῖραι).[54]

Both passages explore themes of confinement, disability, and eroticism; however, the differences between the two tales are revealing. While Ares and Aphrodite are only temporarily inconvenienced, Tithonus will forever be in the helpless state that induced Dawn to confine him in the first place and will therefore remain in his room. In fact, with respect to his physical condition Tithonus more closely resembles another character in Demodocus' tale, the god Hephaestus. Granted, the two characters acquire their impairments in different ways: while Hephaestus "was born weak" (*Od.* 8.311), Tithonus endures a preternaturally extended ageing process. Nonetheless, following his decline Tithonus, no less than Hephaestus, is left permanently impaired. Both characters, moreover, are distanced from the erotic. Ares' and Aphrodite's erotic pleasure (τραπείομεν, *Od.* 8.292) contrasts with Hephaestus' distress, and Tithonus endures a perpetual exile from the erotic pleasure (τερπόμενος, *HAphr.* 226) that he once experienced with Aphrodite.

Tithonus, then, is another disabled character who is distanced from the sort of erotic intimacy expressed by the verb μίσγομαι. Homeric poetry also distances disabled individuals from a second form of intimacy associated with that verb—that of a warrior and his opponent on the battlefield.[55] Again, such portraits of disability contrast with other aspects of Greek culture. Some disabled individuals in the Greek world would have been excused from military service.[56] Rose, however, stresses the

[53] In *Iliad* 14, Hera apparently intends to confine Zeus to a chamber (θάλαμος) to which only she has the key: cf. Janko 1994 ad *Il.* 14.330–340; schol. bT ad *Il.* 14.338. But this plan is not brought to fruition.

[54] Faulkner 2008 ad *HAphr.* 234 wonders if the hymn is imitating the Odyssean passage.

[55] For such uses of μίσγομαι cf. LSJ s.v. μείγνυμι II.A1; *LfgrE* s.v. μίσγω I.2c.

[56] See Gomme 1927; Baldwin 1965; Penrose 2015.

extent to which the disabled were included in the military—not because of any particularly enlightened principles but for the sake of practical considerations: these men could be useful on the battlefield.[57]

Homeric battle narratives present clearer distinctions between disabled and nondisabled individuals; while disabled characters tend not to be included in descriptions of fighting, able-bodied fighters are shown "mingling" with their enemies.[58] For instance, as the Greek and Trojan armies engage with one another for the first time in the *Iliad*, we hear of "the war-cry and toil . . . of those men mingling" (μισγομένων, 4.456) in battle. This use of the verb μίσγομαι suggests the close, physical engagement of soldiers with one another. One passage, moreover, associates this verb with the most intimate contact that might occur between two warriors—the act of wounding. After Odysseus is wounded in book 11, Athena prevents the weapon from "mingling with his entrails" (μιχθήμεναι ἔγκασι, 438).[59] When warriors are slain as a result of such encounters, their bodies experience a final intimacy with the earth: they "mingle in the dust" (*Il.* 3.55, 10.457; *Od.* 22.329). Such uses of μίσγομαι create a parallel between the intimacies of battle and of sex, with the former as a grim analog for the latter.[60]

In keeping with such parallels, the Homeric poems not only distance disabled characters from erotic intimacy but also tend not to describe

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[57] Rose 2003: 43–45, 92. As Hanson 2000: 89–95 notes, older, less mobile soldiers would have been able to serve in the hoplite phalanx, since it did not rely on swift movement. For disabled soldiers see also Samama 2010, 2013; Penrose 2015. Descriptions of disabled soldiers are particularly common in Plutarch: cf. *Per.* 27 (the lame siege-engineer Artemon); *Ages.*; *Mor.* 331b, 739b (the lame generals Agesilaus of Sparta and Philip II of Macedon); *Sert.* 1.8 (the one-eyed Philip II and Antigonus I); Plut. *Tim.* 37.6 (Timoleon's cataract). For lame soldiers see also *Mor.* 217c, 234e, 241e. According to Samama (2013), this aspect of Plutarch's work reflects a post-classical willingness to advertise soldiers' disabilities. Van Lommel 2015: 106, however, offers qualifications to Samama's findings. See also Meeussen 2017 for the role of disabled soldiers in Plutarch's thought.

[58] *Il.* 4.354–355, 456, 5.143, 505, 10.548, 13.286, 14.386–387, 15.510, 21.469. Cf. 5.134, 8.99, 13.642, 15.457; *Od.* 18.379 ("mingling with the forefighters"); *Il.* 11.354, 16.813, 18.215–216 (warriors mingle with their own troops). See also *Od.* 11.537 ("Ares rages mixedly [ἐπιμίξ]"); *Il.* 11.525, 14.60, 21.16 (warriors drive their enemies together/slay them ἐπιμίξ).

[59] For the intimacy of wounding cf. Janko 1994 ad *Il.* 13.290–291: "The spear seeks its victim like a man his lover. . . ."

[60] Cf. *Iliad* 3: Hector refers to Paris "mingling" (μιχθείς, 48) with foreigners and taking their wives, and imagines him "mingling" (μιγείης, 55) with the dust; later, Paris remembers how he "mingled" (ἐμίγην, 445) with Helen. See Muellner 1990: 87–89 for these and other parallels between the martial and the erotic in book 3.

them mingling with opponents, weapons, or dust in the theater of war. Granted, the graying Idomeneus (μεσαιπόλιος, 361), who experiences the sorts of mild impairments associated with middle age, nonetheless takes part in the fighting. In *Iliad* 13, he lacks the strength to strip the dead Oenomaus or the speed to retreat from the battlefield (509–513; cf. Hanson 2000: 90). And yet, his killing spree prior to this incident (361–508) attests to his martial prowess. Nestor, however, is unable to fight due to his old age; he distinguishes young warriors, who "trust in their strength" as they ply their spears, from older men such as himself, who can only give orders or offer counsel (*Il.* 4.322–325). Diomedes' words and actions in book 8 support Nestor's assessment of his own physical capabilities. The young, nondisabled Diomedes rescues Nestor from the onslaught of the young, nondisabled Hector (8.99–112). Addressing Nestor as γέρον ("old man"), Diomedes observes that "the young fighters wear you down; / your strength is destroyed; and difficult old age accompanies you" (102–103).[61]

Characters with more serious infirmities—such as the lame or the visually impaired—play even less of a role in the martial action of the Homeric poems. The lame Hephaestus appears on the battlefield in *Iliad* 5, and he intervenes in the course of the fighting in book 21; nevertheless, he is not shown grappling with an opponent. In book 5 the able-bodied gods Ares and Aphrodite, Hephaestus' tormentors in the *Odyssey*, partake in the sort of grim intimacy otherwise reserved for mortal warriors. Hephaestus himself, however, takes little part in the action. He rescues Idaeus, the son of his priest Dares, from Diomedes' attack (22–24) but then withdraws unscathed from the battlefield and without engaging in the fighting. By contrast, Aphrodite, while trying to protect her son Aeneas (311–317), is wounded in the hand by Diomedes (334–342). Ares lends her his chariot so that she can escape from the battlefield (355–366), but later, with the help of Athena, Diomedes wounds Ares himself (855–859).[62]

Hephaestus is among the gods who "went to go to war" (20.32) after Zeus encourages them to get involved in the fighting (31–40). All the rest of those gods appear on the battlefield in book 21. Although

[61] Cf. *Il.* 3.150: the old men of Troy have "ceased from battle as a result of old age." As a consequence, they remain on the walls of Troy, along with the elderly Priam.

[62] For wounded gods in *Iliad* 5 see also Dione's memories of Heracles' divine victims (392–404).

Apollo is too modest "to mingle (μιγήμεναι) in the hands" of Poseidon (21.468–469), the other gods show no such restraint: they engage with one another physically, in humanlike form. In this way, though their immortal bodies are safe from the sorts of dangers faced by mortal warriors,[63] they experience something of the intimacy of battle. Ares seeks revenge on Athena for having earlier helped Diomedes to wound him, but she incapacitates him with a stone (396–408). She leaves Ares lying on the ground, his hair covered in dust (407), like the mortals who "mingle with the dust" in other passages of the *Iliad*.[64] When Aphrodite comes to his aid, much as Ares had assisted her in book 5, Athena delivers a blow to her chest "with her sturdy hand" (424). Even the river Scamander, who is mentioned in the catalogue of gods (20.31–40), takes on the form of a man as he addresses Achilles (21.213). In contrast, when Hephaestus intervenes to contain the river's onslaught against the Achaean hero, he does not appear in person; rather, he kindles a fire on the battlefield (21.331–382).

The *Iliad*, then, distinguishes Hephaestus from the other gods described in books 5 and 21 not only through his impairment but also through his lack of involvement in the fighting. We can make similar observations regarding lame and visually impaired mortal characters. Such individuals are never described grappling with opponents in the armed conflicts of the Homeric poems. Even Thersites, who claims to have joined his comrades in sacking citadels and taking captives, fails to feature in the battle narratives of the *Iliad*.[65]

We have seen, then, that the Homeric poems distance disabled characters from the kinds of erotic and martial intimacy that are expressed by the verb μίσγομαι and thereby distinguish them from their nondisabled

[63] The gods' wounds heal quickly: cf. *Il.* 5.899–906.

[64] Cf. Purves 2006, who argues that Ares' fall brings him closer to the experience of mortals.

[65] *Il.* 3.1–9 mention the military engagements of the Pygmies, and audiences would probably have inferred that these Homeric characters possessed unusual bodies: the fact that they are said to do battle with birds is consistent with allusions to their small bodies in other Greek texts: e.g., Ctes. fr. 688.45 Jacoby 3c:492.25–493.5. But it is not clear that they should be regarded as impaired: the Homeric passage does not employ any of the lexemes used to indicate impairment elsewhere in the hymns and epics. At *CW* fr. 150.18 MW and Opp. *H.* 1.623, by contrast, the Pygmies and/or their races are described as ἀμενηνοί/ά, an adjective that Giacomelli 1980 and Segal 1986 associate with the paralyzed Tithonus in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*: see n49 and n51 above. See also Dasen 1993: 179; 2006b: 102 for the implications of such descriptions.

peers. I would like to close by considering what these findings suggest about the portrayal of nondisabled characters in Homeric poetry and about the priorities of the Homeric corpus in general.

While nondisabled characters are distanced from acts of "mingling," the Homeric poems—especially the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*[66]—foreground the intimate encounters of able-bodied characters. An act of erotic mingling precipitates the Trojan War as a whole: as Paris remembers (*Il.* 3.445), "I mingled (ἐμίγην; with Helen) in love and sex."[67] The *Iliad* itself opens with a crisis caused by Agamemnon's confiscation of the girl Briseis—which is evidence, in Thersites' opinion, of his desire to "mingle" (μίσγεαι, 2.232) with captive women. The crisis is later resolved when Agamemnon, disingenuously or not, swears never to have "mingled" (μιγῆναι, 19.176; cf. 9.133, 275) with Briseis.

The poem climaxes with the contest of Hector and Achilles, which is both like and unlike a meeting of two young lovers. Hector fears that Achilles "will kill me naked, like a woman" (22.124–125) if he were to take off his armor and supplicate his enemy. In other Iliadic passages, allusions to nakedness (root γυμνο-) draw attention to the exposed body of an unarmed warrior (e.g., 16.815, 17.711). Hector's comparison of himself with a woman introduces suggestions of sexual vulnerability. Such themes are complemented in the following lines, as Hector develops an image with erotic overtones: he reminds himself that there is nothing to be gained "by chatter (ὀαριζέμεναι), like a maiden and youth" who "chatter (ὀαρίζετον) with one another" (127–128). That Hector should think of his encounter with Achilles in these terms is readily explicable when we observe how the verb ὀαρίζω and the related noun ὀαριστύς are employed elsewhere in the *Iliad.* The two lexemes describe the chatter of lovers (6.516, 14.216), while the noun ὀαριστύς is also used of military engagements—"converse among the forefighters" (μετὰ προμάχων ὀαριστύν, 13.291) or "the converse of war" (πολέμου ὀαριστύς, 17.228).[68] As with the verb μίσγομαι, such usages of ὀαρίζω and ὀαριστύς suggest parallels between martial and erotic intimacy.

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[66] Several Homeric Hymns other than the *Hymn to Aphrodite* mention the erotic "mingling" of gods (especially Zeus) with mortals or with other gods: *HHerm.* 4, 7; *HH* 7.57; 15.3; 18.4, 7; 19.34; 32.14; 33.5. For a combination of erotic and martial themes cf. *HAp.* 208–213, 300–304, 356–370.

[67] Cf. *Od.* 23.218–221: Helen "would not have mingled" (οὐδέ κεν . . . ἐμίγη) with Paris if she had known the Achaeans would take her home.

[68] On the erotic connotations of such martial vocabulary cf. Janko 1994 ad *Il.* 13.290–291.

The *Odyssey*, likewise, focuses on the intimacy of able-bodied characters. Erotic encounters feature prominently in Odysseus' journey back to Ithaca, and at times this theme is associated with the verb μίσγομαι: Odysseus "mingles with" Circe (μιγέντε, 10.334) but is able to resist "mingling with" Nausicaa (6.136).[69] The poem climaxes with allusions to the martial and erotic intimacy of nondisabled characters—Penelope, Odysseus,[70] and his erotic rivals, the suitors. In book 22, Odysseus has his revenge on the suitors with an Iliadic-style slaughter. The narrative draws on the language of the Iliadic battlefield, including that of "mingling": as Odysseus' lops off Leodes' head, his hair "mingled (ἐμίχθη) with the dust" (*Od.* 22.329). In book 23, Odysseus decides to conceal the carnage in his halls by pretending to celebrate a marriage (23.130–136)—that is, the marriage that one of the suitors would have enjoyed, had he succeeded in the bow contest.[71] Again, the martial is paired with the erotic—this passage creates a particularly chilling disjunction between the joy of a marriage and the grim slaughter that has in fact taken place. Later, Odysseus and Penelope experience an erotic reunion: they spend an artificially lengthened night in conversation and lovemaking (300–301). The Homeric epics, then, celebrate the intimacy of nondisabled characters with one another, whether pleasurable (in love) or destructive (in war). Disabled characters, however, even if they win fame for their exceptional abilities, are distanced from such pleasure and pain.

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[69] Listeners might also have perceived sexual undertones in Odysseus' description of his former lover Calypso at 7.246–247: "no one, neither god nor mortal man, mingles (μίσγεται) with her" (cf. Ahl and Roisman 1996: 52).

[70] Odysseus' limbs may have lost their suppleness (*Od.* 8.231–233) and to that extent he resembles the lame Hephaestus of Demodocus' song. Nonetheless, he is able to defeat the Phaeacians with the discus (186–198). Moreover, even in his beggar disguise he boasts massive thighs, wide shoulders, and sturdy arms (18.67–69; for Odysseus' impressive physique see also 10.439, 11.231, 21.334). The staff (σκῆπτρον) that he carries (13.437, 14.31, 17.199, 203, 338) is not, then, a necessary mobility aid but part of his costume, like his poor clothing (13.434–438). Cf. 24.156–160: the shade of Amphimedon notes the deceptive qualities of Odysseus' staff.

[71] For the bow contest as a competition for the hand of Penelope see 21.73–79. For the fake marriage feast as a celebration of Penelope's union with one of the suitors see 23.149–151. Cf. 11.412–415: the shade of Agamemnon likens the slaughter of him and his companions to a wedding or feast.

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