COMMUNICATION WITHOUT WORDS: 
BODY LANGUAGE, ‘PICTUREABILITY’, 
AND MEMORABILITY IN THE ILIAD

Elizabeth Minchin 
The Australian National University

Silvia Montiglio, in Silence in the Land of Logos, argues that the ancient Greeks, in both archaic and classical periods, engaged with the spoken word to a greater extent than is the case today. This is not a topic that we can now easily discuss, whether to prove or to disprove the claim. The evidence we have from the ancient world is largely restricted to the evidence of literature: epic and other narrative texts, drama, praise-poetry, and oratory. Even so, to take the first of these genres only, epic poetry, it is telling that the epic poet should step back so often to allow his characters, as Aristotle says, to speak for themselves. The long exchanges of talk that Homer reports, whether debates, quarrels, appeals and responses, create chains of direct discourse: as Montiglio puts it, an ‘untiring flow of words’. It is telling, too, that the heroic culture that the epic poet transmits sets such store on the power of speech as a vital adjunct to prowess on the battlefield: Achilleus was trained by Phoinix to be both a speaker of words and skilled in action. Furthermore, to use a contrary example, the least heroic amongst the Achaians and the Trojans, Thersites and Dolon respectively, are, as John Heath

1 I worked on this paper in the course of a very pleasant study leave which I spent at Brown University, Providence R. I. I thank David Konstan and Pura Nieto Hernandez, my hosts, for their hospitality and their company. My thanks go also to the anonymous readers of this paper for their helpful comments.
4 Montiglio, Silence in the Land of Logos, at 6.
5 Cf., e.g., ll. 9.442-443.
points out, the least effective speakers. In this world of heroes, therefore, speech can be a powerful as well as an all-pervasive tool of communication.

Communication, however, can take place also in the absence of talk. We observe in the Homeric epics, as in life, that sometimes non-verbal vocalization can take the place of words: laughter, weeping and sobbing, grumbling, whistling or hissing. Silent forms of self-expression – scowls, smiles, grimaces, or yawns – may be as informative as speech. Or again silence itself may be a communicative form, in that it can imply a reluctance or a refusal to speak. We see these kinds of silence in the epics. In the *Odyssey* silence plays a significant role: the unspoken thoughts and the careful restraint of Odysseus and of Penelope are a central factor in the action. In this tale we see how the power of speech is balanced by the power of silence. The account of silence that the *Iliad* offers us parallels the ambiguities of real life. Silence, in the *Iliad* especially, may be a sign of strength or a sign of weakness. We see in his silence the self-control, here too, of Odysseus, or, in their silence, the formidable discipline of the combined forces of the Achaians. In these cases Odysseus, or the Achaian forces, like Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, are giving nothing away; but the fact that they are so controlled is ultimately expressive in itself: such silence reveals acquired behaviours, discipline, and character.

8 On silence as a choice, see Scarpi, “The Eloquence of Silence”, at 22.
12 For good discussion of this point see Heath, *The Talking Greeks*, at 65-66.
13 As Scarpi says, silence is eloquent: Scarpi, “The Eloquence of Silence”, at 23.
On the other hand, we might also associate silence with the failure of words. Silence, in both epics, may communicate fear, grief, disappointment, reluctance, and amazement or awe: these are not the silences of self-control, as above, but of *aporia*, when the aspiring speaker has the desire to speak but cannot find the words that he or she needs. Silence may also reflect youthful inexperience, lack of authority, and social status. In this latter cluster the aspiring speaker lacks the authority to gain access to the floor; thus he or she misses out on a speaking turn. In such cases silence is not a choice – as it was for Odysseus in the *Odyssey* – but an imposition.

In this paper I shall study instances of communication in the *Iliad* that occur against a background of silence: that is, a sample of moments in which, although no words are exchanged, an act of communication is successfully performed. Some of these silent exchanges may be marked by those key words that we identify with silence in Homer: ἀκέων, ἀκήν, ἄνεῳ; and the verbs σιωπάω (and its related noun) and σιγάω (and its related noun). Others are not. But in every case the

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18 Only the first of the instances I have selected has received particular attention in either commentaries or in secondary literature. Lateiner, *Sardonic Smile*, in what is in so many respects a groundbreaking work, pays little attention to the instances I have selected.

very ‘wordlessness’ of the communication introduces a new element to this exchange – an element that we would not find if the thought had been verbalized. I shall examine each one in its context to identify what is being communicated and to evaluate the non-verbal manner through which it is conveyed. And I shall ask why the poet has chosen to move beyond words at this point of his narrative when it would be possible to express the same thoughts in speech; or, to put this another way, why the poet occasionally resists the spoken word, even though for the most part he embraces it.

In order to read these instances I shall use, where relevant, findings from the field of non-verbal communication, also termed, in more popular usage, body language. Three broad categories of non-verbal communication have been identified: kinesics (body movements and still positions which have a psychomuscular basis); haptics (touching behaviour); and proxemics (behaviour in space).20 Within kinesics we find physical action of all kinds, gestures, body postures, facial expression, eye behaviour, and automatic physiological reactions, such as blushing, or perspiring.21 Paul Ekman makes further distinctions within this category of body movement and facial expression. Those that will be relevant to my enquiry will be both those movements which have a set of precise meanings and are understood by all members of a culture or sub-culture22 and emotional expressions (involuntary signals which provide information to others).23

22 Precise movements, such as certain hand gestures, are called ‘emblems’: on these see P. Ekman, “Emotional and Conversational Nonverbal Signals”, in L. Messing and R. Campbell eds, Gesture, Speech, and Sign, Oxford, 1999, 45-55.
23 Ekman, “Emotional and Conversational Nonverbal Signals”, describes three further categories: illustrators (movements that illustrate speech, such as deictic movements, pointing to a present object); regulators (actions which regulate the flow of conversation, including listener responses, such as smiles of agreement); and manipulators (actions the speaker performs on himself or herself, reflecting nervousness or
1. LAUGHTER AND SMILES: HECTOR AND ANDROMACHE

This scene is one that lives on in the minds of all Homer’s audiences. In it the poet brings together the family group – husband, wife, and baby son – at the very moment when Hektor is about to leave Troy for the battlefield. The scene is presented as Hektor’s final farewell to his wife.\(^{24}\) The words that Hektor and Andromache exchange at this moment are prefaced by the narrator’s account of what happens before the meeting – as well as his description of the meeting itself: he tells us of Hektor’s search for Andromache (369-389); Andromache’s running to meet him at the Skaian gates (394);\(^{25}\) his silent smile as he looks at Astyanax (404);\(^{26}\) her standing close, her clinging to his hand, and her tears (405-406).\(^{27}\) The farewell itself is built around two long speeches: an impassioned plea from Andromache (407-439) and a reply by Hektor (441-465). Despite his wife’s urgent pleas that he adopt a defensive strategy...
and fight the Achaians from inside the walls (433-439), Hektor expresses his determination to continue the fight out on the plain. At 441-465 he sets out his reasons for acting as he does – he is impelled by shame and duty. Troy, he says, with painful clear-sightedness, will one day fall. Nothing will cause him more distress than the knowledge that his wife has lost her day of liberty (455). For the present, therefore, he must fight, in order to preserve his own κλέος (459) and to protect Andromache as long as he can (464-465). I shall return to Hektor’s words below.

Now the poet takes up the narrative, and the voices of Hektor and Andromache fade away. These next moments are the focus of my discussion. Hektor reaches out to take his son (466) from the arms of the nurse. The child rears back in alarm and cries out, frightened by his father’s appearance. It is the shining helmet with its nodding crest that distresses him. But, as the baby wails, the baby’s father and mother laugh (471). And Hektor takes off his helmet (472) and places it on the ground; now ‘disarmed’ he can kiss his son and toss him in his arms (474).

Two questions arise at this point: why does Hektor reach for his son? And what is the significance of his and Andromache’s laugh? To take the first question first: Hektor, at 441-465, has attempted to put into words his anxieties about the future – as it concerns Troy and, especially, as it concerns his wife. Let me return to Hektor’s words at 441-465. He speaks of the fall of Troy (447-448); and he dwells on his own fate (at first fleetingly at 449 and, at 459-463, at greater length). He expresses, most movingly, his dread of what may happen to Andromache as a captive widow (450-458); his declaration of concern – a declaration that goes beyond a mere statement of duty – reveals Hektor as both noble warrior and loving husband (464-465):

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ἀλλὰ με τεθνηῶτα χυτὴ κατὰ γαῖα καλύπτοι
πρίν γέ τι σῆς τε βοῆς σοῦ θ᾽ ἑλκηθμοῖο πυθέσθαι.
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But may I be dead and the piled earth hide me under before I hear you crying and know by this that they drag you captive.28

28 Translations, unless otherwise indicated, are those of R. Lattimore, The Iliad of Homer, Chicago, 1951.
Hektor’s heart is now too full to say more – indeed, what more could be said? He channels emotion into action, reaching for the child who unites him and Andromache, the token of their bond of love, and who represents the hopes of Hektor’s generation for the future.\textsuperscript{29} The emotional tension of the scene is at a peak (466-468):

\begin{quote}
Ὣς εἰπὼν οὗ παιδὸς ὀρέξατο φαίδιμος Ἕκτωρ:
ἂψ δ᾽ ὃ πάϊς πρὸς κόλπον ἐὕζωνοι τιθήνης
ἐκλίνθη ἰάχων...
\end{quote}

So speaking glorious Hektor held out his arms to his baby, who shrank back to his fair-girdled nurse’s bosom screaming, ...

When Hektor puts out his hands to take the child, the baby, to everyone’s surprise, wails. And the tension is broken. At this point Homer offers us a glimpse of Hektor and Andromache, not now as warrior fated to die and soon-to-be widow, but quite simply as parents.\textsuperscript{30} Both have suddenly been brought back to the present moment by their son’s distress. Both quickly realize what has caused it. And they laugh (471):

\begin{quote}
ἐκ δὲ γέλασσε πατήρ τε φίλος καὶ πότνια μήτηρ.
\end{quote}

It is in part an affectionate laugh – for their son’s fears are ill-founded. His problem, compared with the troubles that face their city, is an easy one to fix. In part too their laughter is a reaction to the tensions of the preceding minutes,


\textsuperscript{30} On this also, see de Jong, “Silent Characters”, at 109.

\textsuperscript{31} On this laugh see also Levine, “Homeric Laughter and the Unsmiling Suitors”, at 99. Levine traces the motivations for this kind of laughter (illustrated in the affectionate element of Andromache and Hektor’s laughter) to a feeling of superiority. On laughter as a social behaviour across cultures, see W. Siefenhövel, “Universals in Interpersonal Interactions”, in U. Segerstråle and P. Molnár eds, \textit{Nonverbal Communication: Where Nature Meets Culture}, Mahwah, NJ, 1997, 61-85, at 64-65: group laughter can be directed at an outsider (here, Astyanax), whose behaviour gives rise to this expressive form. Such laughter can function also as an agent of in-group bonding.
now interrupted by their son and his needs. The laughter of Hektor and Andromache is an individual involuntary response to the situation. We, the audience, on the basis of our own understanding of life, recognize in their identical response, their simultaneous laughter, not only affection and the release of tension but also the pleasure, however short-lived, of shared experience and ‘togetherness’.33

The scene has not yet ended. Hektor has his fatherly moment with his son, kissing him (that most intimate of behaviours) and hoisting him into the air (ὁ γ’ δὲν φιλον υίόν ἐπεὶ κύσε πῆλε τε χερσίν, 474), as fathers do. He prays to Zeus (476-481), seeking a successful future for his son.34 And, at 482-483, he places the baby in the arms of Andromache (not the nurse): ἄλοχοιο φιλης ἐν χερσίν ἔθηκε | παῖδ’ ἑόν. His wife, δακρυόεν γελάσασα (laughing through her tears, 484), takes the child. Her husband observes her emotional state – she is beyond words – and takes pity on her. He caresses her (χειρὶ τὲ μιν κατέρεξεν, 485) as he speaks words of ‘comfort’:35 he will die when it is fated for him to die, he says; in the meantime she should return to women’s work – and he will get on with the business of war (490-493).

This fragment of a scene has extended over only 27 lines, during which (after the paired speeches of Andromache and Hektor, at 407-439 and 441-465) there have been only two short speeches: Hektor’s prayer to Zeus and his final words to his wife. For the rest the poet has taken over the telling. The affectionate relationship of husband and wife (which is at the heart of the action) is here represented vividly and economically. Hektor’s actions are eloquent: in kissing his baby he expresses the joy and the pride of fatherhood; in returning the baby to

33 Homer in the Odyssey refers to such a bond, between husband and wife, as ὀμοφροσύνη, like-mindedness: see Od. 6.181.
34 Hektor makes this prayer despite what he knows in his heart (441-465). But, although illogical, his hopes for his son are dramatically effective – and true of life.
35 Kirk, The Iliad: A Commentary, vol. 2, at 224, notes that stroking is usually a feminine gesture of tenderness (cf. Thetis’ caresses of Achilles at 1.361 and 24.127; but we should, by way of exception, note that Zeus caresses Aphrodite at 5.372). Here Hektor’s caress of Andromache reflects his emotional state and his concern for his wife.
his wife, he makes it clear that he entrusts their offspring to her care (this is a family moment); and in caressing her he is expressing his tenderness and concern (this is an intimate moment). As for Andromache, her smiles and laughter are a fond maternal reaction to her baby’s baseless fears. The tears that were falling when she met her husband (405), and that mingle with her smiles, are again an involuntary expression, a silent sign that she understands the purpose of Hektor’s visit – this meeting is a farewell – and that she is already grieving.\textsuperscript{36}

This scene, as I noted earlier, is amongst the best-known of the scenes from the \textit{Iliad}. The reason for this, I propose, is that it is rendered through the language of the body as much as through words. Homer has portrayed the affectionate bond between Hektor and his wife with delicacy and restraint. Although they have each already made a statement about their relationship (Andromache has spoken of her dependence on Hektor \textsuperscript{[407-430];} Hektor has spoken of his responsibility for his wife \textsuperscript{[441-465]}), it is the non-verbal aspects of this scene that mark the point at which words, for each one, are no longer possible. Body language brings this relationship to life. And we, the audience, observing the actions the poet describes, involuntary and otherwise, of the young husband and his wife, make our own judgments about them and their feelings for each other.\textsuperscript{37} We may not all have a clear mental image of Hektor or of Andromache, but we all know well the behaviours of weeping, smiling, and laughing and the gestures of touching, kissing, and caressing. About these we can be more precise. Not only can we empathize with and evaluate these behaviours, we can also picture them in our mind’s eye. And, because these moments are ‘pictureable’, they are readily memorable: they linger in our minds.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} There is further pathos in 496, as Andromache turns repeatedly to look back (ἐντροπαλίκνησθι) to Hektor as she makes her way home – her last lingering glances, and her tears, show her to be reluctant to let him go.

\textsuperscript{37} On this see Lateiner, \textit{Sardonic Smile}, 281 (‘[n]onverbal messages override verbal messages in importance’). This scene is a fine example of how successfully Homer works to build internal evaluative cues into his narrative. For discussion of evaluative information that is integrated into the story (so-called internal evaluation), see E. Minchin, \textit{Homer and the Resources of Memory: Some Applications of Cognitive Theory to the Iliad and the Odyssey}, Oxford, 2001, 123-127.

\textsuperscript{38} On imagery as one of the most powerful aids to memory, see D. Rubin,
The memorability of these mental pictures has advantages for the poet, too, since the images that come so readily before his mind’s eye prompt the language that describes them. The vivid image, therefore, assists the poet as he sings.

2. Two Nods and a Hiss: Aias, Achilleus, and Odysseus
(Iliad 9.223 and 620; 10.502)

These gestures are of a kind. In each instance one individual gives a particular sign to another on the assumption that the addressee will understand from the context what is to be done. The two nods of Iliad 9 frame the formal negotiations between the members of the Embassy (comprising Phoinix, Aias, and Odysseus) and Achilleus. Each nod generates some interesting byplay.

The embassy from the Achaian camp has arrived at Achilleus’ tent. Once the ceremony of the shared meal has been completed (222), Aias senses that the moment has come for talk. He nods his head to Phoinix, Achilleus’ tutor (νεῦσ᾽ Αἴας Φοίνικι, 223). In everyday contexts such a movement is usually as slight as possible, since people who choose to nod generally do not wish to signal their intentions to anyone but the addressee. And it is important to remember that eye contact directed to the addressee accompanies the nod. A nod of the head is one of those

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40 On the nod of the head, see Lateiner, Sardonic Smile, at 77-78: he describes it (at 77) as a ‘pre-arranged signal for action in a hostile encounter’.

41 What Lateiner fails to mention is that the nod must be accompanied by eye contact; if there is no eye contact, the nod is in vain. On this point see M. Argyle and M. Cook, Gaze and Mutual Gaze, Cambridge, 1976, 121. For an example from literature in the English-speaking world see F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tender is the Night, New York; first published 1933; paperback edn., 2003, 73: ‘[t]heir eyes met and he nodded slightly ... Then she ... went over to join him’.
physical movements that convey an easily recognizable message. Amongst equals the nod (along with eye contact) is generally an instruction that means ‘It’s time to act (in a way appropriate to the context)!’ In this context, in the course of the Embassy, Aias is suggesting to Phoinix, Achilleus’ guardian, that he should begin to present the case for Achilleus’ return to the fighting. But Odysseus perceives the movement (νόησε δὲ δίος Ὀδυσσεύς, 223); he fills a cup with wine, lifts the cup to Achilleus to drink his health (224), and begins to speak, arguing that unless Achilleus puts on his war strength the Trojans will bring their forces right up to the Achaian ships (220-261). He goes on to outline Agamemnon’s gift-offer (262-306). It is clear that Odysseus has interpreted the nod quite correctly as an instruction to proceed with negotiations – and it is clear also that he has overruled the instruction addressed to Phoinix to the extent that he, Odysseus, has seized the floor. And Phoinix is silenced.

Odysseus’ prompt intervention reminds us that he is ever-alert, ready to take the initiative should it present itself. Its interpersonal implications (Odysseus’ outmanoeuvring of Aias) hint at Odysseus’ quicker wits in comparison with Aias’ slower, more circumspect disposition. In this case Aias has attempted to choreograph the negotiations with Achilleus but Odysseus, without prior notice, has assumed control of proceedings. And, as for Phoinix, he, having been denied the floor, will not speak until he is stirred to do so, in consternation at Achilleus’ harsh response to Odysseus and, indeed, after his name has been invoked by Achilleus (427-429).

Why did Odysseus interrupt at this point? Bryan Hainsworth suggests, persuasively, that Odysseus thought that he and he alone could conduct such delicate business successfully; and that this is the outcome the poet is working towards: a debate in which Odysseus, as the

42 B. Hainsworth, The Iliad: A Commentary, vol. 3, Cambridge, 1993, 92, suggests that Odysseus’ intervention is given no motivation. I suggest that we can satisfactorily provide our own motivation for his action, basing it on our knowledge of Odysseus’ character (and of Aias’ character, as a good man who is so often baffled by circumstances) and the urgency of the situation.

43 On interruption as a strategy of dominance, see E. Minchin, Homeric Voices: Discourse, Memory, Gender, Oxford, 2007, 222-244, esp. at 233-234.
embodiment of μῆτις (cunning), is the foil for Achilleus’ βίη (force). But Odysseus’ intervention, instead of Phoinix’s, at the outset of the negotiations may not have been as useful to the cause as Odysseus himself had expected. Achilleus appears to suspect Odysseus (as a representative of Agamemnon) and his motives (308-313) in a way that he would not suspect Phoinix, whom he trusts. In short, Achilleus rejects Odysseus’ overtures on Agamemnon’s behalf (314-317; 421-429). The outcome of the first nod, therefore, is botched communication; the Embassy, it seems, is doomed to failure.

Homer works in a tradition that is not afraid of repetition. A second nod, at 9.620, signals the close of the formal negotiations – although Aias’ reaction to Achilleus’ declaration of his intentions is yet to come (624-642). Achilleus has rejected Phoinix’s appeal to him and he has suggested to Phoinix that he sleep in his hut overnight εὐνῇ ἔνι μαλακῇ (in a soft bed, 618) and decide in the morning whether he will return to Phthia with him or whether he will stay on at Troy (618-619). As far as Achilleus is concerned, the last word has been spoken: the negotiations are at an end. Silently he nods to Patroklos (ἐπ’ ὀφρύσι νεῦσε σιωπῇ, saying nothing, he nodded with his brows, 620). As the poet tells it, Achilleus was giving Patroklos a discreet signal (of the ‘It’s time to act!’ kind) to have the bed made up for Phoinix: this would be the signal for the rest of the embassy to leave. We know that Patroklos observes the nod and recognizes its intention, for he will soon give instructions, at

44 On this see Hainsworth, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 3, at 92: because the heroic tradition viewed Achilleus as the natural foil for Odysseus, Homer brings them together in this critical scene. The bΤ scholiast on 223 appears to think along the same lines. He suggests that Odysseus was so busy thinking about what to say that he would have missed the moment in the proceedings had not Aias nodded to Phoinix (the scholiast suggests that Aias’ nod was a question: ‘is this the right moment?’). Odysseus, on seeing the nod, takes the floor, not through resentment of Phoinix but because he felt he should take on this difficult task. The scholiast tries too hard, I suggest, to protect Odysseus. Aias’ nod should be paired with Achilleus’ nod at 620, which clearly expresses an instruction: on this see below.


46 This is a device familiar to hosts today: Patroklos’ making arrangements for Phoinix to ‘sleep over’ are similar to, in the Western world today, a host’s clearing away the cups and plates, or looking at his or her watch, as a signal to guests that life is moving on beyond their visit.
658-659, that the bed be prepared. But, meanwhile, in a neat reworking of Odysseus’ intervention in response to the nod at 223, *Aias* notices Achilleus’ nod as well – and speaks out (624-642) at once. He too interprets the nod correctly: ἴομεν: οὐ γάρ μοι δοκέει μύθοι τελευτῇ | τῇδὲ γ’ ὁδῷ κρανέεσθαι, let us go. I think that nothing will be accomplished by argument on this errand, 625-626. He then expresses his disappointment in Achilleus. It will be Aias’ words, first to Odysseus, and then to Achilleus, that win the concession that keeps Achilleus at Troy (649-655). The outcome at this point is a modest recovery for the Embassy.

The poet uses a non-verbal means of communication, a nod, in this episode in order to kick-start and then to bring to a close the negotiations of the Embassy. But he plays with the conventions. In an ideal world the addressee alone will perceive the signal and will take up the message and act upon it. But when non-verbal signs and signals are being used there is the chance that others apart from the addressee will perceive them. In *both* cases in *Iliad* 9 the signal is taken up and acted upon by a third person, who speaks – and in speaking brings about a significant turn in the events of the story.

*Odysseus’ hiss*. When Diomedes and Odysseus conduct their night mission amongst the Thracian allies of the Trojans there is no possibility of communicating by facial expression or gesture. Darkness makes such forms useless. The ideal form of communication without words in a potentially dangerous situation, at night, is the production of a sound – another form of non-verbal communication. A hissing sound, for example, could be the sound of the wind in the trees or the noise of an animal in the undergrowth.

And this is the signal that Odysseus uses to indicate to Diomedes that he has untied the horses of Rhesos and has driven them clear of the sleeping (and the dead) Thracian warriors. As Homer describes it,

47 There is, as it were, no ‘volume’ control for facial expressions and gestures. One makes them or one does not.

48 Homer insists on the pair’s inability to see through the darkness: see 10.274-276.

ῥοίζησεν δ᾽ ἄρα πιφαύσκων Διομήδει δίῳ, he hissed as a signal to brilliant Diomedes, 10.502. Diomedes hears the sound and notes it; but he is undecided as to what he should best do in the circumstances (δὲ μερμήριζε μένων ὅ τι κύντατον ἕρδοι, 503). The hiss can give information; but it cannot assist with further decision-making. It is Athene who resolves the problem. She tells him that they must get back to the Achaian camp (νόστου δὴ μνῆσαι, think about going back, 509).

The poet’s report of the hiss at 502 adds a new dimension, the aural dimension, to the strangeness of the scene. Its inclusion makes us aware of the silence of night, when most of the world is asleep, and of the occasional muted sounds of the natural world that break that silence. Odysseus’ hiss is a stealthy (but in the circumstances sensible) attempt to mingle with those muffled signs of nocturnal activity.

The economy of the gestures of Il. 9 – the nods – and of the vocalisation in Il. 10 – the hiss – make them appropriate for such moments in the narrative. These are moments of tension, when words are unnecessary and even inappropriate in the narrative context, and would certainly distract us from the action. By including non-verbal forms of communication in his narrative the poet offers us a more naturalistic account of each scene, in that the narrative acquires visual and aural dimensions; and this in turn helps capture for us the underlying tension of these moments, whether the delicate negotiations of the Embassy or the heart-stopping stealth of night raid on the Thracians.

3. PATROKLOS’ TEARS (16.2-3)

The fighting is going badly for the Achaians. Hektor is threatening the ships with fire (15.704-725); Aias is fighting desperately to defend them (15.726-746). Patroklos has been caught up first with Nestor of sound one would make in the dark in stressful circumstances is more likely to be a hiss, which is always easier to produce than a whistle. The bT scholiast is reluctant to give a view on the type of sound (other than it is an ἄναρθρον καὶ βαρβαρικὴν φωνὴν, an inarticulate barbaric sound); the A scholiast reads it as the sound that συρίζετω would represent: a hiss? a piping sound? a whistle?

50 Homer insists on the darkness that surrounds Odysseus and Diomedes throughout their venture: see 276, 297, 386, 394, 468.
(11.618-803) and then with the wounded Eurypylus (11.804-12.2; 15.390-405), whom he had paused to tend on his way back to Achilleus’ ship. When he had left Eurypylus Patroklos had said that he would approach Achilleus and try to move him through entreaty and persuasion (15.403-404). But such is his distress at what he has seen that, when Patroklos returns to his friend, instead of speaking words of persuasion, he can do no more than weep (16.2-4):

Πάτροκλος δ’ Ἀχιλῆι παρίστατο, ποιμένι λαῶν,
δάκρυα θερμὰ χέων ὡς τε κρήνη μελάνυδρος,
ή τε κατ’ αἰγίλιπος πέτρης δνοφερὸν χέει ὕδωρ.

Meanwhile Patroklos came to the shepherd of the people, Achilleus, and stood by him and wept warm tears, like a spring dark-running that down the face of a rock impassable drips its dim water ...

Words fail him. Note that, as he describes Patroklos’ approach to his friend, the poet combines a spatial indicator, ‘he stood close by’ Achilleus (παρίστατο, 3), with a verb describing emotional expression (weeping), in the same way that ‘standing close by’ elsewhere accompanies verbs of speaking; that is, the poet considers tears to be as much a communicative form as is speech.

Achilleus evaluates Patroklos’ tears for us in a gently mocking tone. Reproaching his companion, he describes his tears as the tears of a little girl (ἡὕτε κούρη νηπίη, 7-8). He pities Patroklos (ἀκτιρε, 5): he

51 Cf. the comments of the bT scholiast (οὐδὲ φθέγξασθαί τι οἶός τέ ἐστι συγκεχυμένος υπὸ τῶν δακρύων, he cannot say anything, since he is overwhelmed with tears). The scholiast touches on that aspect of weeping that Ekman has described more formally in terms of non-verbal communication: it is an involuntary expression of emotion; it can overwhelm the subject.

52 Cf. 2.244; 6.405; 16.715; 18.70; 19.6, 251.

53 Achilleus is speaking mockingly, with light sarcasm: his affectionate mockery is intended to prick his friend sufficiently to rally him. Even so, we should remember that tears, as Stephanie West observes, are not a matter of shame for a warrior: see A Commentary on Homer’s Odyssey, vol. 1, Oxford, 1990, at 136 (on 2.81). For a survey of weeping in the Homeric epics, see H. van Wees, “A Brief History of Tears: Gender Differentiation in Archaic Greece”, in L. Foxhall and J. Salmon eds, When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power and Identity in Classical Antiquity, London, 1998, 10-53, at 11-16.
understands the reason for his tears. And yet, in a teasing, rallying fashion, he pretends he does not (7-18). This first exchange – Patroklos’ tears and Achilleus’ gently mocking response – is, in fact, not necessary to the action. But it serves the tale in two ways. First, Patroklos’ copious tears (enhanced by the simile at 3-4) are an effective measure – for Achilleus and for the poet’s audience – of the desperate situation of the Achaians. Second, had Patroklos expressed his distress in words, directly, there would be no opportunity for Achilleus to tease him as he does. The intimacy of the scene would be lost; for as soon as the situation by the ships is spelt out the two men must put their minds to plans for Patroklos’ return to the fighting. In delaying and prolonging Patroklos’ account of Achaian suffering, therefore, the poet creates the opportunity to display for his audience’s sake the relationship between Patroklos and Achilleus – at the very moment when their mutual affection becomes an important element in the tale.

4. ODYSSEUS AND AGAMEMNON: THE RECEIPT OF THE SCEPTRE (Iliad 2.185-186)

Early in the Iliad-narrative, Agamemnon tests his forces by telling them that they should leave Troy and make for their homeland. He is,

54 Achilleus makes this clear by placing the reason he favours (is it the Argives you are mourning over?) as the last option: on the principle of contiguity, which sees the most likely response coming at the end of a speaking turn, so that the listener is more likely to attend to it and respond to it when his or her turn to speak comes, see discussion in Minchin, Homeric Voices, at 108.

55 As we saw above, in the case of Odysseus’ hiss, body language can give a sign; but, unlike verbal communication, it cannot be more specific. Achilleus chooses to recognize the sign of Patroklos’ distress, but pretends to be unable to recognize its cause. This allows the byplay of these introductory lines to Iliad 16.

56 On the use of an audience within the poem to guide the reactions of the audience of the poet, see W. Wyatt, “Homer in Performance: Iliad 1.346-427”, CJ 83 (1987-88) 289-297. This is a further instance of the poet’s use of internal evaluation, as noted above. Observe also Patroklos’ earlier non-verbal behaviour (his groan at 15.397 and, at 397-398, his slapping of his thigh, a recognized gesture of distress in the Iliad [see also the Trojan Asios’ grief at 12.162, and Ares’ expression of distress at 15.113-114]).
however, mistaken in his belief that his forces would stand firm. For, on hearing his words, the common soldiers of the Achaians sweep to the ships and begin to drag the vessels to the water (2.142-154).

Hera dispatches Athene instantly to call a halt to the flight. She tells Athene to persuade each man to change his mind (164-165). Athene speeds down to earth. She comes upon Odysseus, who has not joined the mêlée but stands to one side in frustration at the outcome of Agamemnon’s test. Athene rallies Odysseus and tells him to persuade each of the Achaians to change his mind (173-181). Odysseus recognizes her voice and acts. He runs off, throwing aside his cloak, which is caught up by Eurybates (a nice touch at 183-184: Odysseus is getting ready for action). Next, he comes to Agamemnon and receives the sceptre from him (185-186):

αὐτὸς δ’ Ἀτρεΐδεω Ἀγαμέμνονος ἀντίος ἐλθὼν
dέξατο οἱ σκῆπτρον πατρώϊον, ἀφθιτον αἰεί.

He came face to face with Agamemnon, son of Atreus, and received from him the sceptre of his fathers, immortal forever. 57

Then he goes to the ships and begins his exercise of restraint, speaking persuasive words to kings and princes and using force on men of lesser status (188-206) until he restores order to the forces (207-210). Unlike his leader, this hero has a sound understanding of crowd control.

The moment that I am interested in is that brief moment of silent communication, the moment at which Odysseus accepts from his leader the great sceptre, the symbol of kingship. Clearly, in the midst of this crisis, as the men rush for the ships, there is no time for debate, or even a brief exchange of words. But the poet is always careful to create a chain of cause and effect. 58 On this occasion there is mutual recognition of

57 I have substituted in 186 the more accurate ‘received’ for Lattimore’s ‘took’ (which gives a false impression of the action).

58 The bT scholia comment on 186 that Odysseus’ acceptance of the sceptre makes it clear that he has received power over the disorderly men from the king (my italics) – and so that those rebuked should not be angry. The urgency of the moment, continues the scholiast, has taken away Agamemnon’s capacity for speech.
what must be done. Odysseus silently offers himself to Agamemnon as the solution to the disarray of the army: he, Odysseus (he tacitly suggests), will give leadership to the Achaian forces. Agamemnon acknowledges this; and the sceptre, the emblem of power, leaves his hands. It is a tiny moment, but it quickly and neatly conveys Agamemnon’s ineffectiveness as a leader and Odysseus’ disciplined strength. Odysseus’ application to take the sceptre (and Agamemnon’s relinquishing of it) is covered, albeit briefly, in ἀντίος – face to face (185), the word which appears often in the *Iliad* to convey a challenge or a confrontation (compare its use, for example, at 5.301; 7.98; 11.219, 231; 15.584; 20.352; 21.150; 22.113). Here it must represent a short, direct, and silent intervention. This smooth transfer of power from one hero to the other is otherwise unremarked by the poet. And yet Odysseus’ quick action – and Agamemnon’s readiness to comply – saves the Achaian enterprise. This is the most economical of the instances of transactions without words in the *Iliad*, but it is no less effective for that.

**5. Sitting in silence: Athene and Zeus**

(*Iliad* 4.20-23 and 8.457-460; 1.511-512)

After the aborted contest between Paris and Menelaos has concluded the gods are sitting on Olympos in Zeus’s company; wine is being served; and they are gazing down upon the city of Troy (4.1-4). Zeus takes it into his head to stir Hera to anger (5-6). He comments that whereas Hera and Athene are sitting on the sidelines, as spectators (νόσφι καθήμεναι εἰσορόωσαι | τέρπεσθον, 9-10), Aphrodite is actively supporting her favourite, Paris (τῷ δ᾽ αὖτε φιλομειδής Ἀφροδίτη | αἰεὶ παρμέμβλωκε καὶ αὐτοῦ κήρας ἀμύνει, meanwhile laughing Aphrodite forever stands by her man and drives the spirits of death away from him, 10-11). That is Zeus’ first barb. He then goes on to ruminate on whether he might stir up warfare again between the Achaians and the Trojans – or whether he might send down love and friendship, allowing Menelaos to recover Helen, and leaving Troy to stand intact (14-19). This latter proposition is sure to incense these goddesses, whose hatred for Troy has been implacable (as we shall learn). And it does. The poet tells us that in response they briefly mutter (αἳ δ᾽ ἐπέμυξαν
Ἀθηναίη τε καὶ Ἡρη, 20) – a pre-verbal response. One can picture in one’s mind’s eye the goddesses sitting side by side, and grumbling. Hera will speak out in her anger (25-29), but Athene does not. She stays silent (Ἀθηναίη ἀκέων ἦν οὐδέ τι εἶπε, Athene stayed silent and said nothing, 22). It is the way in which she communicates her anger to her father at this point that I wish to examine.

Athene does not respond to Zeus’ vexing proposition. This in itself is remarkable, since, as Zeus’ favoured daughter, she is on occasion prepared to speak her mind to him. But she does not keep her anger entirely to herself. Her lack of verbal response, along with her murmurs of discontent, is a response in itself – a sign of unhappiness. Athene is not speaking not because she can’t (this is no failure of words); she is not speaking because she won’t. She is exercising a measure of self-control: refusing to communicate with her father is a sign of her displeasure. Note too that the poet tells us that she sulks at her father (σκυζομένη Διὶ πατρί, sulking at Zeus her father, 23). But this is no private sulk: her emotions (χόλος ... ἄγριος, a savage anger, 23) leak out, despite her silence.

Since Zeus is aware that his barbs have hit home, her sulk may have included a scowl, as Kirk suggests, or a pout – or both facial expressions together.

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59 The verb ἐπιμύζω has the senses bellow, bray, or growl. In this context the last sense is the best fit. Note that the verb describes an inarticulate sound; it does not suggest actual words.

60 On their position, near each other, see G. Kirk, The Iliad: A Commentary, vol. 1, Cambridge, 1985, at 332.

61 Cf. 5.421-425; 22.177. Kirk, The Iliad: A Commentary, vol. 1, at 333, suggests the opposite: because Athene is the daughter of Zeus she does not speak. It is true, I concede, that Hera speaks out more than Athene does. But Athene does on occasion speak up against her father: see 8.30-37 for a lively intervention, when Athene, alone of all the gods, speaks out against her father.

62 On silence as action, see Hummel, “Quand taire, c’est faire ...”.

63 On the leaking of emotions, see P. Ekman and W. Friesen, “Nonverbal Leakage and Clues to Deception”, Psychiatry 32 (1969) 88-106: ‘microexpressions’ that flash across the face betray emotions. On leakage see also Argyle, Bodily Communication, at 78-82. I thank my PhD student Jim Black for introducing me to the notion of leakage.

64 Cf. Kirk, The Iliad: A Commentary, vol. 1, at 333. The bT scholiast on 20 comments that the poet expresses female characteristics here, revealing through the goddesses’ behaviour their state of mind.
The same sequence is repeated at 8.444-468. Again Zeus teases; again the goddesses respond as they did earlier: an explosion of anger from Hera and sulky silence on Athene’s part. By dividing the responses between the goddesses as he does, the poet allows one goddess, Hera, to put into words the reasons for their unhappiness (at 462-468, for example, she protests that the Achaians are performing badly; and yet they, Hera and Athene, have been forbidden from assisting their favourites). Meanwhile, the other goddess, Athene, as before, gives a vivid reading of their mood through her body language (σκυζομένη Διὶ πατρί, χόλος δὲ μιν ἀγριος ἢρει, she sulked at her father and savage anger took hold of her, 460). The poet brings together the two forms of communication, verbal and non-verbal, to give us a strong sense of ‘being there’. Since images are generally more easily recalled than words, it is the lively image of Athene, communicating without words, that will serve as a prompt (for the poet and for his audience) for the words of Hera.

Zeus’ silence – and his nod. The silences of Athene had been provoked by Zeus for his own amusement. They were in themselves inconsequential. But the heavy silence that follows Thetis’ request to Zeus at 1.511-512 is a silence that marks a critical moment in the tale. Thetis has come to Zeus to ask a favour on behalf of her son (503-510). She supplicates him, sitting beside him (Thetis knows the advantages of physical proximity), embracing his knees with her left hand and taking his chin in her right (500-501). She sums up her plea at 509-510:

τόφρα δ᾽ ἐπὶ Τρώεσσι τίθει κράτος, ὄφρ᾽ ἂν Ἀχαιοὶ νιὸν ἐμὸν τείσωσιν ὀφελλωσίν τέ ἐ τιμῇ.

65 As Lateiner, *Sardonic Smile*, observes, ‘[b]ody-talk supplies Homer with an indirect dramatic technique for depicting personalities and concentrating reader attention’.

66 On this see Lateiner, *Sardonic Smile*, at 201.

67 Images will serve as a reference point and help us to retrieve the words we need: see above.

68 Through his or her haptic gestures, the suppliant inevitably catches and holds the attention of the addressee. On supplication in general, and this supplication in particular, see S. Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion*, Oxford, 1997, 56-69, esp. at 57-58; Minchin, *Homeric Voices*, at 204-205 (on supplication as a request).
so long put strength into the Trojans, until the Achaians
give my son his rights, and his honour is increased amongst them.

Zeus’ response to her request is silence. He does not respond to her (οAuthProvider109:00 τι προσέφη, 511). He sits in silence (ἀκέων, 512) for a long time (δὴν). This long dramatic pause without words – the silence of reluctance – tells us, even before Zeus spells it out (after sustained urging from Thetis, both by not releasing Zeus’ knees [512-513] and through words [514-516]), that Zeus has a difficult decision to make.69 He has to decide whether or not he will grant Thetis’ prayer and face the consequences of incurring Hera’s wrath (for giving assistance to the Trojans) (518-527). Yielding to Thetis may be in some respects the more attractive option;70 but there is little pleasure in the prospect of the ensuing conflict with his wife (518-521).

Zeus’ silence precedes his considered agreement to Thetis’ request; his great nod concludes it (528-530). This will not be a quick ‘It’s time to act!’ nod between social equals like the nods of 9.223 and 620. This will be a serious nod of commitment from a person of higher status: θυμοῦσαν ἐπ’ ὀφρύσι νεῦσε Κρονίων, The son of Kronos nodded his head with the dark brows, 528.71 Note how the poet goes out of his way to explain its seriousness of purpose. It is, in Zeus’ words, μέγιστο τέκμωρ, the mightiest witness, 525-526: when Zeus has bent his head to a proposal, nothing is ἀτελεύτητον, unfulfilled, 527. This is indeed an Olympos-shaking moment (μέγαν δ’ ἐλέλιξεν, and all Olympos was shaken, 530), marked by grand language that renders its solemnity.72

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69 See Lateiner, Sardonic Smile, at 291-296 (on chronemics). The silence also functions as a technique of suspense, as Thetis and the audience await Zeus’ assent.
70 On the debt which Zeus owes to Thetis, see Laura Slatkin, The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the Iliad, Berkeley, 1991, 53-84; on Thetis’ delicate minimization of this debt, see Minchin, Homeric Voices, 204-205; F. Naiden, Ancient Supplication, New York and Oxford, 2006, 80-81.
71 Cf. Hummel, “Quand taire, c’est faire ...”: Zeus’ nod itself initiates the new order of things. On such a nod – the nod of a superior – see, briefly, Lateiner, Sardonic Smile, at 78. For the reverse of this nod, see Athene’s gesture of denial at 6.311, and Zeus’ at 16.250.
72 Kirk, The Iliad: A Commentary, vol. 1, at 108, on the ‘splendid and sonorous’ language through which this nod is enhanced: Zeus’ head has dark brows (528; cf. 17.209); his hair, ἀμβροσίαι ... χαῖται, is ‘immortally anointed’ (529); it sweeps from his head (529-530).
Zeus’ actions identify this scene as a critical point in the narrative – a turning point that will lead to many Achaian deaths, that will breed discontent in Hera and Athene, that will take Patroklos into the fighting, and that will draw Achilleus after him as the slayer of Hektor. This communication from Zeus is pivotal. And, to ensure its memorability, the poet marks it out not only with words but also through the language of the body.73

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Homer has good storytelling instincts. Although he is praised for allowing his characters to speak in their own voices, he knows also when speech would be excessive: when it is inappropriate, when it would make public what should be private, and when it would distract us from the present focus of his tale. Sometimes less information – a gesture rather than a speech, a character’s facial expression rather than the evaluating voice of the narrator – is more. The economy with which gestures, facial expressions, physical movements, physiological reactions, and behaviours such as touching and standing close may be described, the richness of the information that they individually encapsulate for the audience, and the vividness – the ‘pictureability’ – of these universally recognizable behaviours ensure the memorability of these moments for the poet who composes as he sings – and for the audiences who follow the tale.

73 We find a modest parallel in the mortal world to the nod of Zeus on Olympos in the guarantee that Achilleus offers to Priam at 24.671-672. Here Achilleus takes the king by his right hand, at the wrist (so that he might not be afraid). Achilleus’ hand-clasp is the handclasp of reassurance, a guarantee of his word (πρὸς πίστιν, says the scholiast b’T): see also N. Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6, Cambridge, 1993, at 346.