

## Odysseus and Hector in the *Iliad*

Achilles' withdrawal from the Greek effort for most of the *Iliad* allows others to step to the forefront in his place, at least temporarily. Among the first and last to do so is Odysseus, when he castigates the rabble-rouser Thersites for repeating complaints recently raised by Achilles (*Iliad* 2), or when he wins the footrace while "swift-footed" Achilles stands on the sidelines (*Iliad* 23). Though the importance of Odysseus' Iliadic achievements off the battlefield is widely recognized, details of his exploits in the poem's fighting are relatively un(der)appreciated, as are certain particulars of the battle narrative. Closer attention to Odysseus' fighting career will enhance understanding not only of his full role in the *Iliad*, but also of the work's depth and movement. After briefly reviewing rivalries between Odysseus and Achilles in the epic tradition, I focus on Odysseus' battlefield prowess in the *Iliad* as a kind of foil for Achilles, especially as indirect counterbalance to Hector.

(a) Before the poem's opening duel, Odysseus and Hector measure off space and draw lots (*Il.* 3.314–7)—anticipating their oblique juxtaposition later. The language of these lines might suggest that they will face one another, but of course they act here on behalf of Menelaus and Paris. (b) Once battle commences, Odysseus is the first warrior to be motivated explicitly by anger at a companion's death (4.494, 501) and the first to kill a son of King Priam. After the Priamid Antiphus slays the Ithacan Leucus, Odysseus angrily kills Democoön, half-brother of Antiphus (and Hector)—inaugurating an important recurring motif, battlefield vengeance, which finally culminates in Achilles' vindictive slaying of the greatest Priamid, Hector himself. Thematic comparison is appropriate here, since Odysseus' action causes Hector and the Trojans to retreat for the first time, which prompts Apollo to rally them by pointing out that Achilles is not fighting (512).

(c) Similarly, Odysseus enjoys the poem's first victory catalog, Achilles its last, just before facing Hector (5.677–8, 21.209–10). These two lists, of identical shape, uniquely name 7 victims: 3 in the first verse, capped by 4 in the second. Nobody else slays 4 in one line. Such notable feats are made to occur at significant moments in meaningful patterns. (d) Odysseus' string of 7 victories is interrupted by Hector: "he would have slain more... if Hector had not..." (5.679–80). Both Odysseus and Hector aim to kill many others rather than face one another (673b≈691b). Hector then enjoys the next victory catalog, slaying (with Ares' help) 2 named Greeks in each of three successive verses (705–7)—though these 6 victims do not quite equal the 7 just killed by Odysseus. Thus size and placement of victory catalogs are manipulated for poetic effect. (e) At day's end, when Hector challenges any Greek to a duel, the last of *nine* volunteers, explicitly numbered, is Odysseus (7.161–9). But a lottery selects Ajax, who eventually knocks Hector down. The *Odyssey's* hero is not permitted to fight Hector directly in Achilles' epic. Nevertheless, Odysseus' conquests seemingly counterbalance Hector's: each has now slain 9 named victims.

(f) Likewise, on the third day of fighting, carnage caused by Hector, who is given a catalog of 9 victims, 3 in each of three successive lines (11.301–3), will be interrupted by Odysseus: "Greeks would have fallen at the ships... if Odysseus had not..." (310–12)—much as Odysseus' earlier catalog of 7 had been halted by Hector (cf. 5.679–80), providing a nice symmetry. (g) To stop Hector, Odysseus enlists Diomedes, who knocks Hector down, causing him to abandon the field temporarily. Again, someone other than Odysseus is allowed to best Hector, who has by now slain his second round of 9 named Greeks. When Diomedes is wounded in the foot by Paris' arrow (alluding perhaps to Achilles' ultimate fate), his withdrawal is covered by Odysseus, who is eventually wounded himself and must withdraw, covered by Ajax (11.488).

During this action Odysseus has killed 9 named Trojans, balancing in a sense Hector's catalog of 9.

In sum, at this critical juncture, Odysseus and Hector have each slain 18 named victims, in two sets of 9. The sustained equivalence over separate days apparently reflects a larger design shaped, to a significant degree, by conventional numbers. Though time will not allow discussion of the entire battle narrative, it may be observed, for example, that Hector will slay another 9 named victims before being killed by Achilles (10 counting Patroclus, who denies him full credit: 16.844–50). And in the *Patrocleia*, Patroclus will kill not only *thrice nine* anonymous men (16.785), but also 27 named men, while other Greeks kill 9, the Trojans only 3. These subtotals do not seem accidental: the poet favors such numbers for their symbolic and perhaps mnemonic value.