

Recognition and Reasoning in the Homeric Poems

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle defines “recognition” (*anagnōrisis*) as “a change from ignorance to knowledge” (1452a 30f.) and explores different types of recognition, including “recognition resulting from an inference” (1454b 19). Aristotle often cites passages from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as examples; however, in the case of “recognition resulting from an inference,” he references the recognition scene between Electra and Orestes in Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers*. This paper argues that two scenes in the Homeric poems illustrate Aristotle’s idea of “recognition resulting from an inference,” as they involve a character “recognizing” another’s identity only after a series of inferential steps. Thus, Aristotle’s theoretical framework helps shed new light on the complex depiction of characters’ mental lives in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

In my paper, I build upon various studies in the field of Homeric psychology. Many research efforts have explored the concept of the mind, its functions, and activities within the Homeric poems (e.g., Snell 1953; Pelliccia 1995; Clarke 1999). A more recent branch of scholarship has applied contemporary theory of mind to analyze specific passages in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (e.g., Scodel 2012; Cairns 2019; Privitera 2018). By concentrating on a particular type of mental activity—specifically, how Homeric characters gain knowledge of their external reality through reasoning—my paper more closely relates to the topic of mortal epistemology in the Homeric poems.

I focus on the following case studies. First, in *Iliad* 22, Hector is alone against Achilles in front of Troy’s walls, but he finds the courage to fight his enemy thanks to the appearance of his brother Deiphobos. However, when Hector calls for his brother’s help soon after, Deiphobos is no longer there. Hector recognizes that a god has tricked him, and that the person he saw before

was Athena disguised (vv. 296-305). Second, in *Odyssey* 4, Noemon, a minor character, reports to Antinous, one of the suitors, that Telemachus has left for Pylos, and he recalls that he saw Mentor leaving with him. Nevertheless, as he speaks, Noemon suddenly reassesses his statement: perhaps the person he saw leaving with Telemachus was a god, for right on the day before, he saw Mentor in Ithaca (vv. 653-656).

In my paper, I argue that these two case studies align with Aristotle's description of "recognition resulting from an inference." First, in both cases, a second recognition replaces the initial incorrect one. Second, to identify the true identity of the person they saw, both Hector and Noemon need to reevaluate the accuracy of their perceptual experience. To do this, they must reflect on it by following a series of inferential steps. Finally, both Hector and Noemon reach the correct conclusion about the person's identity by applying a general logical principle to their specific situation: the same person cannot be in two different places at the same time.

In conclusion, when faced with a confusing and deceptive reality, mortal characters in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* manage to go beyond mere perception and gain a more accurate and trustworthy understanding through their cognitive abilities and reasoning skills.

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