

## Heroic Elevation, Triadic Reception: Capturing the Charismatic Structure of the *Iliad*

In this paper, I set out to capture the heroic semantics of *χάρις* in the *Iliad*. This study proves quite difficult, given the semantic slipperiness of the PIE root,  $\sqrt{\text{gher}}$  (Chantraine, 1980). As evidence of this elusiveness, one need only consider the variety of *charis* renderings given by a single translator—say, Anthony Verity (2011): “gratitude” (4.95; 9.316; 17.147); “service” (5.211); “favor(s)” (5.874; 21.458); “allure” (14.183); “joy” (11.243); “obedience” (15.744); and “reward” (23.650). This semantic range aptly reflects the diverse array of passages in which *charis* appears. At 4.95, e.g., Athena entices Pandarus to break the truce on the grounds that he will “win *charis* and *kudos* for himself” (χάριν καὶ κῦδος ἄροιο). At 11.243, Agamemnon kills Iphidamas, “who knew no *charis* from his bride” (κουριδίης, ἧς οὐ τι χάριν ἶδε). At 14.183, “much *charis* shines forth” (χάρις δ' ἀπελάμπετο πολλή) from Hera’s earrings. Such a panoply of uses leaves the reader at a loss: what, if anything, do these different shades of *charis* have to do with one another?

This question, though difficult, also promises a rich hermeneutical yield. “Capturing *charis*,” I propose, will give us a new interpretative key for decoding the heroic structure of the epic. This analysis will begin and culminate—but by no means be bounded to—the central conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon. In the course of the Embassy, e.g., Achilles defends his continued absence from battle on the basis of a *charis* slight (*Il.*9.315-317):

οὐτ' ἐμέγ' Ἀτρεΐδην Ἀγαμέμνονα πεισέμεν οἴω  
οὐτ' ἄλλους Δαναούς, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἄρα τις χάρις ἦεν  
μάρνασθαι δηΐοισιν ἐπ' ἀνδράσι νωλεμῆς αἰεὶ.

I do not think that Atreides Agamemnon

or the other Danaans will persuade me, since there was no *charis*  
for fighting ever-ceaselessly against hostile men.

*Prima facie*, Achilles' self-disclosure here suggests that his unquenchable μῆνις (1.1) is intimately tied to χάρις, or the lack thereof. Accordingly, if we want to understand the arc of the epic—viz., why Achilles, in his wrath, withdraws from battle and how he ultimately reconciles himself with Agamemnon—we must determine what *charis* is and what it does.

In response to these questions, I will propose a new semantic core for Homeric *charis*, one which departs from the traditional line of inquiry. For over a century, scholars like Scott (1983) and MacLachlan (1993) have followed Loew (1908) in defining *charis* as *factum laetificans*. I will argue that this “hedonistic” conception—which treats *charis* as a kind of “pleasure bearing power” (*vis laetificatrix*)—fundamentally distorts the real charismatic structure of the *Iliad*. There, we find that *charis* is a heroic, *not* a hedonistic, force (Franzmann, 1973). In particular, Iliadic *charis* arises from and redounds to the hero's deepest aspirations and anxieties: desire for that honor (τιμή) which brings social recognition and dread of that failure which brings social humiliation (αἰσχρόν). In order to elucidate these heroic concerns, I will redefine Homeric *charis* as a *beneficium attollens*. The noun, *beneficium*, will designate a reciprocal social benefit that one agent (X) gives to another agent (Y). The participle, *attollens*, will specify the heroic effects of this exchange: if received, X's *beneficium* invariably elevates or aggrandizes Y. This social elevation, I shall insist, must take place before a public audience of mortals or gods—i.e., an assembly of witnesses, designated by the letter Z.

What this new definition makes clear—and what, to the best of my knowledge, has never been recognized in the scholarship—is that *charis* is inherently “triadic” in nature. That is, three distinct parties come together in each and every “*charis* event”: the one who gives *charis* (X),

the one who receives it (Y), and those (Z) who publicly witness the social elevation that *charis* effects in Y. I will unpack this triadic structure by looking at the thirteen distinct *charis* events in the *Iliad*. What we will find is that—despite the manifold differences of these scenes—they follow a stable, predictable pattern: *charis* events always occur within a heroic context (concern for honor, fear of shame) and impinge upon a heroic outcome (social elevation or humiliation). In the end, my analysis will show how the triadic *charis* event permeates the epic and uniquely informs its heroic structure and significance.

### Bibliography

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