

## COMMENTATIONES AD LITTERAS GRAECAS SPECTANTES

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### ON MADNESS WITHOUT WORDS: GESTURES IN HOMER'S POEMS AS A NONVERBAL MEANS OF DEPICTING MADNESS

ABSTRACT. Chruściak Ilona, On madness without words: gestures in Homer's poems as a nonverbal means of depicting madness.

The paper discusses various ways of depicting madness in Homer's epics based on the example of a scene from the *Iliad*, in which Andromache is compared to a maenad, as well as the scene concerning the feast of suitors in book XX of the *Odyssey*. Depicting madness by means of gestures affects the reception of the described scenes by the external and internal epic audience in a very special way. The gestures that are described invoke in the listeners associations related to their own experiences and appeal to particular emotions, whose presence affects the reception of an epic. The gestures and the nonverbal message allude to the Bacchic trance and this raises the question whether Homer and his audience were familiar with the cult of Dionysus.

Keywords: Homer, gestures, nonverbal behaviour, Andromache, suitors, maenad, Dionysus, laughter.

The force of Homer's poems lies in their ability to affect the reader. The poet must arouse powerful emotions and draw the audience's attention, and the mood he creates may even obscure some elements of the content. Homer introduced an intensively emotional message by means of gestures that accompany a given scene. He employs a kind of a "third language",<sup>1</sup> which supports characters' statements and the narrative description. Usually the meaning of the gestures is much more profound than it appears at first glance: not only do they complement the verbal message and make it more attractive, but they may also contain information that evokes completely different associations than words uttered by

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. D. Lateiner, *Sardonic Smile: Nonverbal Behavior in Homeric Epic*, Ann Arbor 1995, p. 31.

the characters. By describing the nonverbal message, the poet plays an intellectual game with the audience, introduces two levels of interpretations, presents a scene to the listeners, but also alludes and refers to a different reality. Listeners can content themselves with the basic meaning of a given gesture or look for a hidden message. For ancient Greeks deciphering other meanings was a common process in the reception of literature.<sup>2</sup>

Gestures have one significant advantage over words – they may include much more meanings that can be conveyed within a moment. Examples of intentional and well thought out usage of nonverbal language can be found in scenes of Andromache's madness presented in the *Iliad*<sup>3</sup>, as well as in the scene of suitors' feast described in book XX of the *Odyssey*.<sup>4</sup>

Before moving on to a detailed analysis of these scenes, it is worth pondering over a general image of a mad person in Homer's works. In the *Iliad* the poet introduced the theme of madness on numerous occasions. According to Homer, a madman is someone whose behaviour visibly deviates from the widely accepted norm and is inappropriate for a given situation and social expectations. Madness is inextricably associated with action and activity, and hence the importance of gestures in descriptions of madness – it is the gestures that introduce us into the world of characters' lunacy. It should be pointed out that in descriptions found in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, madness never manifests in words and the characters do not talk about what torments them. They roam alone, run, change their physiognomy and make violent gestures, but they never complain nor talk about it. Madmen usually distance themselves from their loved ones, they are misunderstood and alienated, both in a physical and mental sense. How they behave and what they feel or think remains impenetrable to the outsiders. The poet never attempts to perform an in-depth analysis of the characters' psyche, but focuses on showing their eccentricity and alienation. In order to do that he uses gestures and patterns of behaviour the audience knows very well from everyday life. The listeners were well familiar with Dionysian mysteries or battle frenzy during war.

It is possible to distinguish two perspectives on the theme of madness in the *Iliad*. The first differentiation concerns the persons affected by madness: we witness mad gods (Ares, Athena) and ordinary mortals (Diomedes, Hector). The second differentiation concerns the type of madness. We can distinguish war madness (sent by Ares) and ritual madness (for which Dionysus provides patronage), which are manifested in Hector's and Andromache's behaviour.

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<sup>2</sup>On Homeric audience, see R. Scodel, *The Story-teller and His Audience*, [in:] R. Fowler (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 45–55.

<sup>3</sup>Hom. *Il.* VI 381–389; XXII 437–476.

<sup>4</sup>Hom. *Od.* XX 345–394.

In order to describe madness, Homer applies the verb *μαίνω*. This term is used always with reference to madness, each time the poet describes a kind of trance that occurs outside the will of characters. The term *φρένας ἐξαιρέω* is used with regard to madness understood as losing one's mind, making an unreasonable and inexplicable decision or sinking into temporary torpor. This happens in case of Glaucus – “ἔνθ' αὖτε Γλαύκῳ Κρονίδης φρένας ἐξέλετο Ζεὺς”<sup>5</sup> (“And then from Glaucus did Zeus, son of Cronos, take away his senses”<sup>6</sup>). What differentiates such loss of mind from madness is the shortness of the process. Loss of mind usually involves a short instant, a moment's inattention, parting ways with common sense. Descriptions of madness usually refer to the entire scene, while loss of mind, construed as a mistake or inaccurate behaviour, is accompanied by a short comment, which merely signals an unexpected decision of the character.

The order in which Homer introduces the motif of madness appears to be well thought out. The first mention depicts Ares in battle frenzy. It is not a coincidence that the poem, which is set during a war conflict, invokes the god of war and the theme of war frenzy. Only later does the other type of madness occur, inseparably associated with Dionysus, who is depicted as a *mad* god. With the phrase *μαινομένοιῳ Διωνύσοιο*<sup>7</sup> Homer bears testimony to the ancient cult of Dionysus and the Bacchic trance that is linked to it. This short mention proves that the audience was familiar with the world of Bacchanalia and accompanying ceremonies. Therefore, the fact that Andromache is later compared to a maenad should not be surprising. Comparing Andromache's behaviour to a woman immersed in a Bacchic trance immediately evokes appropriate connotations and creates a chain of associations. Introducing one phrase or a particular gesture evokes the right associations, and detailed descriptions not only appear completely redundant but also offend with their literalism. Listeners of Homer's poems are familiar with religion and culture; they can draw conclusions and interpret information provided by the poet.

The analysis of Homer's epic poems brings us to the conclusion that the poet is convinced about the supernatural origins of madness. The evidence for this can be found in the following words: “πῆ μέματον; τί σφῶϊν ἐνὶ φρεσὶ μαίνεται ἦτορ;”<sup>8</sup> (“Why is it that the hearts are mad within your breasts?”<sup>9</sup>), or in the example of Bellerophon, who sinks into madness after falling into disfavour of gods.<sup>10</sup> Without god's interference a human is not capable of entering the state of madness and, as Eric Dodds proves, the phenomenon of a mental illness or the

<sup>5</sup> Hom. *Il.* VI 234.

<sup>6</sup> Homer: *The Iliad*, vol. 1: Books 1–12, trans. A. T. Murray, Cambridge, Mass. 1924, p. 291.

<sup>7</sup> Hom. *Il.* VI 132.

<sup>8</sup> Hom. *Il.* VIII 413.

<sup>9</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 383.

<sup>10</sup> Hom. *Il.* VI 200–202.

idea of a frenzy triggered by internal factors, appears to be unknown of in Homer's works, as is the concept of possession.<sup>11</sup> The questions that arise are which god afflicts characters with madness, as well as why and for what purpose?

Ares' madness is described as battle frenzy, and the god himself is depicted as unstable, vacillating between Achaeans and Trojans, sympathising with one side and then supporting their opponents. Ares is depicted as an uncontrollable god of war and his behaviour resembles the war during which the scales turn in favour of one party, and then the other. Homer compares Ares to Hector. The behaviour of the hero in battle is similar to god's behaviour: Hector is the earthly embodiment of the god of war. His deeds during the battle instil terror among his adversaries. He falls into a battle frenzy, which results in unbridled courage. A detailed description of Hector leaves no doubt.<sup>12</sup> Rattling his spear threateningly, with foam at the mouth and glittering eyes, he resembles a human in trance, possessed by alien forces: external demons, as well as demons that arise out of the inner soul of the mortals. However, in this situation the influence of gods prevails. It is Zeus to whom we owe the heroic duel of Hector and Achilles and finally the goddess' deception leads to the decisive clash with Achilles.

As far as Hector is concerned, we can talk about a specific kind of madness called *lyssa*. Battle frenzy endows him with superhuman power. Hector's behaviour can be compared to the attitude of Nordic warriors, known as berserks.<sup>13</sup> These warriors would put themselves into a trance, which enabled them to attack the enemy even without the necessary weaponry. This trance was associated with the interference of god Odin.

Hector does not fall into battle frenzy merely because of determination and courage. The poet directly highlights both Ares' and Zeus' influence on his behaviour. The transformation of Andromache seems to be most mysterious. The text does not explicitly suggest that Dionysus was involved, but her behaviour alludes to rituals celebrating this god.

The comparison of Andromache to a maenad, which evokes associations with the Dionysian ritual, occurs twice in the *Iliad*. Both instances are closely related to each other and they have to be read in the same context. They refer to the same person and despite their seeming distance in the epic narrative (first expression appears in book VI, and the second in book XXII) they follow each other as a continuation of one particular scene.<sup>14</sup>

The first connection between Andromache and Dionysus can be found in book VI, in the scene preceding the meeting of the woman with her husband.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. E. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley 1951, p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> Hom. *Il.* XV 605–610.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. B. Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice*, Chicago 1991, pp. 131–137.

<sup>14</sup> These particular links are thoroughly discussed in detail by Nicholas Richardson in *The Iliad: A Commentary, vol. VI: Books 21–24*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 152–154.

After returning to Troy Hector cannot find his wife in her chamber and he learns from the servant that Andromache ran to the fortress tower. According to the servant's account, she ran along the city walls like if she was mad – μαινομένη ἔϊκυῖα.<sup>15</sup> Hector finds Andromache and talks to her briefly, which is a moving scene of the parting of the couple. Upon leaving, Hector tells his wife to return to her chamber and take up weaving or other feminine tasks. This is how we find Andromache in book XXII: she is weaving a decorative robe and awaits her husband to return from the battlefield. Her work is interrupted by noise coming from the city walls. She hears moans and wailing and realises that the greatest defender of Troy died. Andromache drops her shuttle and expresses concern over the fate of her husband. After a while she leaves the chamber and runs to the fortress walls and it is at this particular moment that the narrator compares her to a maenad: μαινάδι ἴση.<sup>16</sup>

The first and the most important problem that arises when we attempt to interpret the comparisons to a maenad is the question whether the poet deliberately alludes to the Dionysian mysteries or whether he is only concerned with emphasising Andromache's exceptional emotional state. We may undoubtedly state that Homer was familiar with the cult of Dionysus.<sup>17</sup> Dionysus himself is mentioned in book VI and he is described as mad – μαινομένοιο Διωνύσοιο. Another reference to the god and the use of the same word with reference to Andromache (also in the participle form and in the same book) cannot be treated as a coincidence.<sup>18</sup> Obviously employing this particular phrase could have served as a means of highlighting Andromache's emotional state, but one interpretation does not exclude the other.

Another question that arises is whether Homer was familiar with the maenads. Irene de Jong points out that the similes and comparisons involve things and events that are well-known and repeatable. The listeners could understand the comparison but because the historical audience changes, the level of comprehension arguably depended on the period and many other factors.<sup>19</sup>

What has to be stressed is the fact that an account of Andromache's venture onto the city walls is provided twice in book VI: first by the narrator, and then by the servant. And it is according to the servant that we learn that Andromache

<sup>15</sup> Hom. *Il.* VI 389.

<sup>16</sup> Hom. *Il.* XXII 460.

<sup>17</sup> This theme was discussed in more detail by G. Aurelio Privitera in *Dioniso in Omero e nella Poesia Greca Arcaica* (Rome 1970) and by Christos Tsagalis in *The Oral Palimpsest: Exploring Intertextuality in the Homeric Epics* (Cambridge, Mass. 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. R. Muich, *Pouring out Tears: Andromache in Homer and Euripides*, Urbana 2010. [http://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/16755/Muich\\_Rebecca.pdf?sequence=1](http://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/16755/Muich_Rebecca.pdf?sequence=1), 01.03.2012, p. 106.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. I. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad*, Amsterdam 1987, p. 94.

ran like mad, while the narrator states that she left moaning and complaining – “ἐφροστήκει γοώσά τε μυρομένη τε”<sup>20</sup>. The event is thus presented from two different points of view. The narrator does not mention madness, but the servant’s words foreground the madness. Her account, which is addressed to Hector, is supposed to underline Andromache’s emotional state and explain her behaviour. The description of her behaviour contains only one term, *μαινομένη ἔϊκυῖα*, which is loaded with emotional connotations and related associations.<sup>21</sup> An external member of an audience has access to a more complete image of the events thanks to the situational description given by the narrator, who foregrounds moaning and complaining. It is possible that the use of expressions *γοῶσα* and *μυρομένη* in this description is not coincidental and that the fact that they allude to the funeral ceremony was meant to prepare the listener for forthcoming events and scenes that would take place in the future. In this perspective, the conjecture that seems most likely is that the servant’s version emphasises the emotions of Andromache, while the narrator’s account is to prepare the audience for future events.

The second scene, which is similar but of a more profound significance, appears in book XXII. This time the allusion to the Dionysian ritual is more precise. The poet literally compares Andromache to a maenad. In this particular case, we cannot treat this comparison merely as a way of conveying emotions, because Andromache herself provides an account of her state, using a precise description of her body’s reactions to the tragic news.<sup>22</sup> It is characteristic that on hearing moans and laments (which she knows mean Hector’s death) Andromache does not behave in a way that would be expected by the audience. At this stage the listeners expect a traditional lament, a poetic convention, which usually occurs in similar circumstances. All the more so, because a moment earlier Priam and Hecuba responded with such lament to the news announcing their son’s death.<sup>23</sup> Andromache’s behaviour is unexpected and difficult to explain as she runs out of the chamber like mad and climbs the fortress tower. By calling her a maenad, Homer evokes associations with a bacchante participating in ancient rituals related to the cult of Dionysus. The poet leads her out of her chamber and abandons the accepted convention that a woman should wait for her returning husband. In this scene, the towers may trigger associations with mountains peaks, where ritual dances of the Dionysus’ worshippers used to take place.

<sup>20</sup> Hom. *Il.* VI 373.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. R. Muich, *op. cit.*, pp. 105–107. The author emphasises the servant’s subjective impression and the fact that she intended to express emotions rather than allude to Dionysus.

<sup>22</sup> This is the first such accurate characterisation of Andromache, and actually provided by the character herself. Cf. R. Muich, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ch. Segal, *Andromache’s Anagnorisis: Formulaic Artistry in Iliad 22.437–476*, HSPH 75, 1971, p. 35 et seq.

Another element that provides a link between Andromache and the bacchantes is the fact she forgets her little son. Andromache runs out without paying the slightest attention to the infant, and the nanny follows her carrying the baby. Myths related to the cult of Dionysus make mention of women overcome with madness, who do not recognise their children (e.g. Agaue). They do not behave in a rational and comprehensible manner and the state of their spirit does not allow for a sober assessment of the situation. It was not uncommon for a female participant of the Bacchic cult to kill her child in a surge of unconsciousness. Andromache is far from committing such a drastic deed, but abandoning her little son can be a symbolic substitute of it. Such behaviour is all the more gross that until that moment she had never parted from him even for a moment, her speeches were always focused on him and they expressed deep concern over his future.

The Bacchic frenzy is usually created through sound stimuli. This is what happens in case of Andromache – she goes mad the moment she hears the collective wailing and moaning at the city gate. She does not wait for the news messenger and does not receive explicit and confirmed information about her husband's death.

Another similarity between Andromache's state and the Bacchic trance concerns the way in which it ends. Andromache's madness ends the moment she swoons and falls. After regaining consciousness she burst into a lament which is a proper and expected reaction to the news on her husband's death. As Segal points out, Andromache's fall can have symbolic significance. The veil that falls off her head symbolises the end of a certain stage in her life – the end of her happy marriage with Hector.<sup>24</sup> Richard Seaford stresses the important role that Dionysus plays in the breakdown of a home and according to his theory maenadism is the antithesis of marriage.<sup>25</sup> The comparison of Andromache to a maenad is to symbolise the breakdown of her marriage with Hector.

What is also significant is the fact that Andromache is compared to a maenad twice. One reference could be treated as a coincidence and an unintentional employment of a literary device. However, the presence of two allusions to the bacchantes suggests that it was a purposeful act on the part of Homer. It cannot be related to formulaic expressions, because, as Segal proves, it is not a common expression, but a conscious invention of the poet. Similarly, the vocabulary used to describe Andromache is unusual: in order to describe Andromache's experience the poet uses words that were earlier applied in the description of the warriors.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Ibidem, pp. 48–50.

<sup>25</sup>R. Seaford, *Dionysus as Destroyer of the Household: Homer, Tragedy, and the Polis*, [in:] T. Carpenter, C. Faraone (eds), *Masks of Dionysus*, Ithaca 1993, pp. 115–146.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Ch. Segal, op. cit., pp. 33–57.

By comparing Andromache to a maenad, Homer clearly highlights her submissive participation in the situation; she is not responsible for her acts and everything happens outside her will and consciousness. She is involuntarily involved in the event because of her husband's will and his destiny, and it is the news about his war doings that triggers such a reaction. Andromache cannot have entered such state herself. She does not stay alone to lament the loss of her beloved, but she sinks into madness. Perhaps her frenzy, just like a maenad's, is a frenzy of a woman that is seized with murder fury accompanied by the thirst for revenge on her husband's killer. Is Andromache's behaviour a punishment sent by gods? Or perhaps it is not a punishment but a method of treatment?

The gods destroy Hector by sentencing him to death and they destroy or neutralise Andromache in a similar way. Hector's death can be linked to the symbolic death of Andromache.<sup>27</sup> She lapses into madness, but she quickly recovers and returns to her normal behaviour, i.e. she laments and grieves as everyone else. Also in her case madness can have symbolic meaning. It may offer purification, a kind of catharsis, which brings internal regeneration and reconciliation with one's fate. What is more, a person overcome with madness does not feel pain, and it is not coincidental that Dionysus was a god endowed with the power of purification.

The most distinct reference to Dionysus in the *Odyssey* is the suitors' feast, which presents the problem of collective madness in a unique way. The scene depicts feasting suitors, whose behaviour (because of Athena's divine intervention) changes immeasurably in an unexpected and sudden way:

ὥς φάτο Τηλέμαχος· μνηστήρσι δὲ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη  
 ἄσβεστον γέλω ὤρσε, παρέπλαγξεν δὲ νόημα.  
 οἱ δ' ἤδη γναθμοῖσι γελοίων ἀλλοτρίοισιν,  
 αἰμοφόρυκτα δὲ δὴ κρέα ἤσθιον· ὄσσε δ' ἄρα σφέων  
 δακρυόφιν πίμπλαντο, γόον δ' ὤϊετο θυμός *Od.* XX 345–349

So spoke Telemachos, but among the wooers Pallas Athene roused unquenchable laughter, and turned their wits awry. And now they laughed with alien lips, and all bedabbled with blood was the flesh they ate, and their eyes were filled with tears and their spirits set on wailing.<sup>28</sup>

Their laughter becomes *unquenchable*, they *laughed with alien lips*, and their eyes fill with tears. The meat they eat appears to be raw, and their hearts sense

<sup>27</sup>Ch. Segal points to the fact that in this scene Andromache's identity is defined by the word ἄλοχος, which is used instead of her name and focuses primarily on her role as Hector's wife. Cf. Ch. Segal, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup>Homer, *The Odyssey*, vol. 2: Books 13–24, trans. A. T. Murray, Cambridge, Mass. 1919, p. 299.

grief. One of the suitors, Theoclymenus, has a momentary capacity to see future events.<sup>29</sup> He sees the dead walking through the courtyard to the Erebus and the sun hid in the darkness. When he shares his vision with the others, he is ridiculed – “οἱ δ’ ἄρα πάντες ἐπ’ αὐτῶν ἠδὺ γέλασαν”<sup>30</sup> (“And they all laughed sweetly at him”). The earlier *unquenchable* laughter of the suitors stands in obvious opposition to the later *sweet* laughter.<sup>31</sup> What seems crucial in this scene is the depiction of a moment of collective madness. The lunacy concerns the entire group; all people gathered at the table experience the same state at the same time and they behave in an identical way. Homer does not introduce any differentiations or individualisations in the description of their behaviour. All suitors sink into madness at the same time, which is an unusual situation that does not occur frequently in an epic poem. A religious trance (Dionysus mysteries, Corybantes) is a known phenomenon, but there is no literal reference to ritual elements in this scene.<sup>32</sup> However, as Guidorizzi claims, it seems that some similarities to the Dionysian mysteries can be observed here. Perhaps, as numerous similarities suggest, the poet intentionally alludes to Dionysian rituals, and the slight differences or inaccuracies are merely a result of limitations imposed by the plot, vocabulary and the specific nature of oral literature.

What is also surprising is the sudden and unprecedented metamorphosis of the characters. The scene occurs unexpectedly and the listeners couldn’t have predicted the course of the events. The sudden madness is unusual because it challenges the traditional description of a feast. The customary meal pattern is disturbed and the plot is enriched by the additional description of collective madness. The detailed description of this lunacy introduces tension, arouses curiosity and even draws listeners’ attention away from the main plot of the epic. The audience is particularly susceptible to changes of convention as oral literature is inseparably related to repetition.

The role of the Theoclymenus as a seer is important and mysterious. He tells his vision of this extraordinary event, and he is the only one that can fully understand the significance and gravity of the situation. Theoclymenus foretells the death of the suitors. Can we posit that this is a form of a prophetic madness? Also Dionysus could have been the source of this prophetic gift. Theoclymenus condition is a symptom of *enthusiasm*, the unification with the deity in a

<sup>29</sup>Ancient commentators stated this is just a subjective vision of Theoclymenus, Cf. G. Guidorizzi, *The Laughter of the Suitors: A Case of Collective Madness in the Odyssey*, [in:] *Poet, Public, and Performance in Ancient Greece*, L. Edmunds, R. Wallace (eds), Baltimore 2000, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup>Hom. *Od.* XX 358.

<sup>31</sup>Marianthe Cloakis calculated that in the *Odyssey* laughter occurs 23 times, of which 15 constitute suitors’ laughter. She points out that the laughter in the *Odyssey* is a bad sign and that it is often an expression of helplessness, uncertainty and suggests weakness of character. Cf. M. Cloakis, *The Laughter of the Suitors in “Odyssey”* 20, CW 79, 1986, pp. 137–141.

<sup>32</sup>G. Guidorizzi, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

prophetic frenzy. Theoclymenus, misunderstood and rejected by fellow feasters, is forced to leave the feast. Paradoxically, he is the only one who is aware of the events that have just taken place, while the others consider him a madman.

After Theoclymenus leaves the palace, the feast resumes: the suitors return to their previous occupations, i.e. insulting Telemachus and his guests. Directly before the scene of madness, a certain softening of the plot can be observed, and the earlier taunts of the suitors against Odysseus are tempered. Unexpectedly the violent scene of collective madness occurs and the action regains its pace.

The element that links the scene of the suitors' feast with the ecstatic trance is the fact that following the trance, all participants immediately forget about the entire event.<sup>33</sup> The suitors deny the words of Theoclymenus who describes their behaviour and tells his own version of events.

The main argument, which, according to Guidorizzi, speaks for the connection between suitors' madness and the cult of Dionysus is the consumption of raw meat by the feasters.<sup>34</sup> Raw meat triggers associations with *omophagia*, one of the most vital elements of the Dionysian cult. Earlier information proves that the meat served during the feast was not raw but it changed its properties only during this scene.

Another reference to Dionysian cult is the darkness and night. Dionysian mysteries and the related Bacchic frenzy usually took place at night. In the scene under discussion the night motif plays a very important role. According to Theoclymenus' description the faces and bodies of the suitors were embraced by night, and the sun drowned in darkness.

There also arises the question of the role of divine intervention. Divine intervention, which is characteristic of an epic poem, consists in depriving someone of their senses. In the scene described above Athena changes the mind of the suitors *παρέπλαγξεν* – she puts them off the right path. This word is usually used in the context of combat and with reference to the change of the trajectory of an arrow or a spear. What is emphasised is the spatial relocation – the bodies and the minds of the suitors are separated, the mind is no longer “there”.<sup>35</sup> The characters lose control over their body, they cannot influence the course of the events, they laugh involuntarily, cry and eat raw meat.

Another problem that arises is the fundamental difference between the scene described above and the Dionysian ritual, i.e. the kind of divine intervention. It is Athena and not Dionysus who is behind the metamorphosis of the suitors. The madness has no religious significance, so it is difficult to link it to Dionysus, who does not play any significant role in the *Odyssey*.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Ibidem, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>Ibidem, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup>Ibidem, p. 3 et seq.

<sup>36</sup>A solution could be linking the feast scene with Dionysus as the god of wine. *The Odyssey* mentions that Dionysus gave Thetis an amphora as a gift. Hom. *Od.* XXIV 74.

The connection to Dionysus, both in scenes describing Andromache's behaviour and in the scene of the suitor's feast, is noticeable, but not evident. The listeners had to refer to their own observations in order to thoroughly understand the allusions to the cult of Dionysus. This has been pointed out by M. Edwards in his account of the functions of similes: "The purpose of a simile is to encourage the listener's imagination by likening something in the narrative of the heroic past to something which is directly within his own experience; and so the majority of Homeric similes are drawn from everyday life".<sup>37</sup>

It is thus possible to talk about a second level of narration that is invisible at first glance, but perfectly comprehensible and perceptible for the audience listening to the songs. Dionysian elements, which are barely visible on the plot level, are strongly present in the feelings and emotions related to the reception of the epic. According to Seaford literal and detailed references to Dionysus would not have been possible due to the unique nature of an epic. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as works that are closely connected to the aristocratic tradition which glorifies heroism and fame, could not have been overtly affected by the cult of Dionysus, who was related to agricultural phenomena, mystery cults and feasts etc.<sup>38</sup> This argument is further developed by Segal, who proves in his research that even a seemingly peaceful scene involving Andromache is depicted by means of vocabulary used to describe a battle.<sup>39</sup> A constant state of combat, expressed both in the plot, as well as in the verbal layer of the epic, does not allow for frequent and explicit references to Dionysus, who remains in contradiction to the official religion and to the traditional aristocratic order.

Madness and terror, two important elements of the Bacchic trance, are reflected in the scenes presenting Andromache and the suitors. The sense of dread is intensified by the description of gestures, which appeal to the audience more than words. The gestures play a superior role and without the power of the non-verbal message, the scenes that are described would turn into obvious and static episodes. It is worth pointing out that gestures also highlight the importance of a given situation. The more momentous the event, the more elaborate the description involving nonverbal language. Significant and vital gestures rarely occur in secondary scenes that do not contribute to the development of the plot. The role of the gesture was to highlight the uniqueness of a particular event; it was a signal directed at the audience that they should pay special attention to it.

It should be stressed that the entire oral culture is strongly connected to emotions. Live words directly penetrate the listeners' consciousness and trigger emotions – there is no time for rational and analytical reception of the content and such habit did not exist. The listeners' imagination also plays an invaluable

<sup>37</sup>M. W. Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary, vol. V: books 17–20*, Cambridge 1991, p. 35.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. R. Seaford, *Dionysos. Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World*, New York 2006, p. 27.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Ch. Segal, op. cit., p. 43.

role. They listen and watch, they can evoke familiar images, but they also feel. They sense the horror and the unusual nature of the situation. Homer describes human nature as wild and unquenchable and we may risk a thesis that he also becomes infected with the madness. Another aspect we are dealing with here is a combination of new and familiar elements. What is new is the innovative structure of the scene that breaks the well-known pattern, while the familiar element involves the feelings and emotions of the audience. This could have constituted the magnetic power of Homer's poems. It was not about abandoning the myths rooted in the culture, but about arousing a relevant reaction in the audience. Oral culture is based on the principle of interaction: it assumes that all senses are activated and the living message is present. The relationship between the singer and the listener should be multisensory and based on mutual contact as the spontaneous reaction of the audience is essential. Separating the listener from the actual message is the domain of the culture of print. The content itself and the message would not suffice – it has to be complemented by the feelings and associations it triggers. In these two scenes Homer describes human nature that the listeners knew very well from their own experience. This is the element that connects the mythical heroes with a living human: the common experience creates an invisible bond thanks to which the character and the entire literature are not perceived objectively, but they have an effect on emotions, and Homer's epic poems constitute something more than stories that are pleasant to the ear and that can be enjoyed in free time.

ON MADNESS WITHOUT WORDS:  
GESTURES IN HOMER'S POEMS AS A NONVERBAL MEANS  
OF DEPICTING MADNESS

Summary

The paper discusses images of madness in Homer's epics based on the example of a scene from the *Iliad*, in which Andromache is compared to a maenad, as well as the scene concerning the feast of suitors in book XX of the *Odyssey*. Both episodes contain numerous allusions to Dionysian mysteries. Homer and his audience were familiar with the cult of Dionysus, but due to the specific nature of an epic poem, direct references to this cult were not acceptable. These allusions are hidden in the second narrative layer, which is depicted by means of gestures. Gestures imply a multidimensional message and trigger chains of associations that draw on audience's experience. Through descriptions of gestures the discussed scenes appeal directly to the listeners' imagination; they immediately evoke images that are familiar to the audience members and resemble their own experiences. They also appeal to particular emotions, which enables the listeners to empathise and bond with the epic characters. The nonverbal message is superior to words: it highlights the exceptional importance of an event and, most of all, affects the audience's emotions.

*Translated by Paulina Gąsior*