**Paris X Nanterre**
**Cours de Ruth Webb « Approaches to the *Iliad* »**
**Oral Presentation of R.B. Rutherford's article**
"From the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*"

**R.B. Rutherford, "From the Iliad to the Odyssey", in *Oxford Readings in Homer's* Iliad, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp.117-146. Cote Ulm : LG p 25 KB 8°**

Rutherford's article studies the relation between "Homer" 's two epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It was first published in the #38 issue of the *Bulletin of the Institute for Classical Studies* in March 1991 and revised before reprinting in those *Oxford Readings*. His article is divided into six sections, to which an additional note was added in 2000.

**Section I :** the problems of the relation between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* ; Rutherford's main point: there is a relation and there are allusions to the *Iliad* in the *Odyssey*.
**Section II (p. 120) :** first comparison : similarities between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* compared with other poems of the Epic Cycle ; the *Odyssey* as a sequel to the *Iliad* ; similarities in structure and detail; the problem of "allusions" in an oral tradition. Following sections : identifying allusions to the *Iliad* in the *Odyssey*.
**Section III (p. 127) :** allusions, from general resemblances to possible parallels or echoes in the detail. Parallels between the beginnings, structures, and endings. The beginning of the *Odyssey* as echoing the end of the *Iliad*. Different theology.
**Section IV (p. 132) :** the nature of the imitation and the differing character of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Achilles and Odysseus' choices of lives. Achilles' glorious death… and his bitterness as a king among the dead. Helping fathers.
**Section V (p. 135) :** The *Odyssey* as a more self-conscious poem than the *Iliad* : poets and songs in the *Odyssey*.
**Section VI (p. 137) :** The aftermath of the Trojan War in the *Odyssey* : memories of suffering and bitterness. The *Odyssey*-poet has a different attitude to war and heroism from the *Iliad*-poet. The question of possible parody : *Odysseus* as a lion among young girls : heroism with a smile. Almost an opposite kind of epic : the glory of homecoming and mortal life.

**Section I**

**Rutherford starts with a quick recap of common opinions about those two poems among ancient and modern scholars.** In ancient times, the common opinion was that both poems had been composed by a single poet, Homer ; now it is the opposite. The two epics have been being compared for a long time since Aristotle in his *Poetics* (*Iliad* simple in construction and closer to tragedy ; *Odyssey* complex and closer to comedy). The *Odyssey* has often suffered from its comparison with the *Iliad*, and only recently has it been pointed that the *Odyssey* attempts something not inferior but only different from the *Iliad*, each poem adopting a different approach of the same realities.

If many readers naturally assume that both poems are somehow connected, Milman Parry's discovery of the 'oral' nature of Homer's epics has changed many things, so that it has been stated that, in oral tradition, poets and bards couldn't use so complicated things as intertextual devices[1]. Some[2] have even tried to prove that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the results of entirely separate traditions, and that the poet of the *Odyssey* didn't even know about the events narrated in the *Iliad*.

**Rutherford's main point** is that excluding any possibility of allusion in oral or oral-based poems is going too far : he intends to prove that the *Odyssey* has been composed (or at least written down in its near-definite form) later than the *Iliad*, by someone who knew about the *Iliad*, and has been conceived as a sequel, or even a 'riposte', to the *Iliad*.

Rutherford thusly clearly defines his thesis and method from the very start. His article isn't intended to give definite proofs, but is openly conceived as a *work in progress*, published in the hope of

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[1] In his Additional note, Rutherford explains he willingly used the term 'allusion' rather than 'intertextuality'.
[2] Sir Denys Page, quoted in section II (p. 120).

stimulating further discussion. His arguments are 'cumulative and tentative' and don't pretend to be exhaustive.

Rutherford states his **two main assumptions** for the purpose of the article :

- that each poem is a globally unified creation, composed by a single mind (even if the poet derived his work from a previous oral tradition) ;

- that the poets of homeric epics were not 'primitive' bards incapable of artistic shaping of their work, and could build intricate plot, use complex narrative devices and cross-references with other poems.

A third point Rutherford only explains later in the article is that his arguments are stated so that they remain valid wether the reader believes that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed by the same poet, or that they were composed by two different poets.

**Section II**

**In section II Rutherford examines some very global similarities between the two poems, in order to prove that the *Odyssey* was written as a sequel to the *Iliad*.**

**His first point** is that the *Odyssey* never refers to the main narrative events of the *Iliad*, such as the wrath of Achilles or the death of Hector, but it does a very good job at telling to the readers of the *Iliad* what happened after the end of *Iliad* book 24 : the death of Achilles, the dispute about his armor, the Trojan Horse, the sack of Troy and so on, and the destinies of the main characters of the Iliad, not only Odysseus himself but also Helen, Agememnon, Menelas, Nestor, and so on, so that the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* complete each other very well in the telling of the global story of the Trojan War. This, says Rutherford, would be a remarkable coincidence if the *Odyssey*-poet had never heard the *Iliad*.

**As poems not independent**, but only part of a grander **Epic Cycle**, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* resemble each other more than any of the other poems of the Cycle (as far as we know about them) :

Those resemblances show in length (number of lines and, more relatively, number of books) : all other poems were, as it seems, much shorter than those two[3].

They show, too, in structure : both poems begin *in medias res*, deal only with part of their nominal subject (the *Iliad* : only 3 days in the Trojan War ; the *Odyssey* : only the part of Odysseus' homecoming included between his leaving Calypso's island and his returning to Ithaca). Those structures are, it seems, much more complex and coherent than those of the other poems of the Cycle, which were more linear and didn't focus on a singular hero.

Similarities show also in the use of rhetorics in characterization, the vivid but not extravagant language, the near-absence of explicit moral judgement from the poet, and the presence of gods observing and conducting the action.

**An other reason** to think of the *Odyssey* as a sequel to the *Iliad*, or as a poem intended to complete it, is the contrast between the stories they tell and the character of their main heroes. The *Iliad* deals about war, stars Achilles as a violent, passionate hero doomed to die young ; the events are concentrated into a very restricted area in space and time ; the *Odyssey* deals about peace, shows Odysseus as a master strategist who most of the time chooses not to fight directly his opponents, and who will in the end return home and live long among his family and city ; the events take place in a wide range of places and peoples.

**More detailed comparisons** imply to exclude some parts of the poems, mainly the 'typical scenes' like meals, nights and dawns, sacrifices, assemblies, ships departing or docking and so on. Even so, the problem remains to determine how close a resemblance needs to be in order to prove (or make plausible) that the poet's audience might detect an allusion to an other poem.

Rutherford shows that excluding the very possibility of 'allusion' in oral traditions would be too dogmatic a position :

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[3] The *Iliad* counts 15,689 lines, the *Odyssey* 12,110, the *Oedipodia* only 6,600, the *Thebais* 7,000. Both Homer's poems are divided into 24 books, though the *Aethiopis* had only five, the *Ilioupersis* two. The *Cypria*, however, counted 11 books.

- He states that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were, in his opinion, committed for writing from the start rather than composed as we know them in a completely oral tradition (because they would be too difficult to perform as they are, that is, extremely long).

- Even if his assumption is not right, our knowledge of the context of oral performances in ancient Greece, of the expectations of the audience and so on, is not precise enough to allow us to exclude the possibility of some poems alluding to others.

- Recent studies show us that the adaptation and variation from 'stock' themes ('typical' material given in a new form) are very lively within a given poem, so it is plausible that the audience could be sensible to this from one poem to another, too.

Rutherford ends by **a possible scenario** of how one or two poets may have composed the *Odyssey* after the *Iliad* – a pure hypothesis, that he puts forward with many methodological precautions. The two scenarios are, either an other bard, maybe younger, composing the *Odyssey* as a response to the *Iliad* in a general context of rivalry between bards, so as to gain fame by rivaling with the best ; or the *Iliad*-poet composing the *Odyssey* in his old age, to try something different after the success of his first and now well-known composition.

**In short**, there is a relationship between the two poems ; and though the identification of possible allusions from one poem to another remain problematical, some general rules can be established : mere repetitions of words or sentences aren't enough, there must be similarities in context or in the thematic of given episodes.

**Section III**

**Rutherford then begins to draw more precise parallels**, from obvious general resemblances to possible or problematical echoes in the detail.

**A possible argument that must be ruled out first is the number of books in both poems : those are the result of later editorial convention, not part of the original poems.**

Rutherford begins with **structural parallels showing similar themes appearing at the same place in both poems** :

- Both poems begin *in medias res* ; both delay some major climaxes the audience must be waiting for from the very start, like the fulfilment of Zeus' promise to Thetis[4], or the first appearance of Odysseus.

- Both begin with an invocation to the Muse which in fact leaves untold some of the main aspects of the poem : the beginning of the *Iliad* tells us about Achilles' wrath against Agamemnon but not about his later wrath against Hector, resulting in their long-awaited duel ; the beginning of the *Odyssey* tells us about Odysseus returning home, but not about the dangers that wait for him at home (i.e. the suitors).

- In book 2 of both poems, assemblies are summoned by a character (Agamemnon in one case, Telemachus in the other) but end up in a failure (Agamemnon's troops fail to his testing their morale ; the assembly in Ithaca fails to summon enough courage to force the suitors out of Odysseus' home).

- Both poems reach their climax in book 22 (Achilles kills Hector ; Odysseus kills the suitors) but don't end there and leave place for calmer endings including reconciliation (the funeral games for Patroclus, Achilles encountering Priam ; Odysseus and Penelope, end of conflicts in Ithaca).

- Rutherford then compares three more specific passages of refusal speeches, by Achilles to the Greek ambassy (book 9) then to Hector (book 22), and then by Odysseus to the chief of the suitors Eurymachus (*Od.* book 22) : the *Odyssey* imitates the *Iliad* in its heights of heroic eloquence.

- Book 24 of the *Odyssey* arouses some problems as for its authenticity ; but whoever wrote it (either the same poet as the rest of the epic, or a different, later one), it was composed to echo the end of the *Iliad*, so that both ends focus on burials and celebrations (Patroclus, Hector ; the suitors), and on the relationship between father and son (Priam-Hector and Achilles-Peleus ; Odysseus-Laertes).

Then Rutherford deals with less obvious parallels that don't fall that precisely into places at equivalent points in the poems. **The end of the *Iliad* is echoed in the beginning of the *Odyssey*** :

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[4] That is, that the Greek army will deeply suffer from Achilles' absence, so that Agamemnon will have to send for him again and seek reconciliation with him.

- Book 24 of the *Iliad* (Achilles not purged from his anger) and book 1 of the *Odyssey* (Odysseus is the only one who still hasn't returned home) begin with the contrast between a majority (the Greek) and the separate, isolated hero.

- Then in both cases an assembly of gods gathers to pity a singular human. Rutherford compares the role of Hermes in *Iliad* 24 to the one of Athene in the beginnings of the *Odyssey*.

- In book 1 of the *Odyssey*, Zeus reflects about human beliefs about the gods : the sequence emphasizes the difference between theology in the *Iliad* and the new approach that the *Odyssey* is putting forward. **The *Iliad* showed a world where gods bring misfortune, or never unmixed happiness, to men ; the *Odyssey* offers a less tragic vision of the gods.** Rutherford though expresses his doubts about this passage being an allusion or just a general topic of polemic. Rather, the *Odyssey*-poet selected the approach which suited best the story he had to tell, among several, all traditional ones.

### Section IV

**Rutherford now examines passages which allow to think more precisely about how exactly, and from what standpoint, the *Odyssey* imitates the *Iliad*.** The most striking contrast, as for the differing characters and ethos of the two poems, lies in Achilles' and Odysseus' radically different choices of life. Achilles chooses to die young as a warrior to gain immortality by the means of eternal glory. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus faces great perils, but we know that in the end he will eventually return home and be reunited to his family and friends. When Thetis' desperate statement in *Iliad* 18, 'I shall not welcome him back again on his return to his home', is echoed by Penelope in *Odyssey* 19, she's adressing Odysseus himself, already back home but disguised as a beggar, not to be recognized by the suitors before he gets ready to lay wrath and revenge on them : the echo is ironic, but in an optimistic way.

**More precise, says Rutherford, are both characters' choices of lives** : Odysseus has the choice either to on Calypso's island, immortal but hidden and forgotten from the rest of the world, or to return home to live happily – a mortal life. This is a different choice from the one Achilles has to make in the *Iliad*, but not that different, for both characters choose to fulfill themselves rather than 'to sink into anonymous and inglorious ease'.

**The parallel between Achilles and Odysseus, though, is deepened in the *Odyssey* 'nekuia' sequence**, when Odysseus discovers the land of the dead and encounters several heroes of the Trojan War, including Achilles himself. Achilles' bitterness is emphasized by his famous statement that he would prefer to be the humblest mortal on Earth, a worker and a slave, rather than a king among the dead. But Achilles also regrets not to be able to go and help his father Peleus, who he depicts annoyed by men of violence in his own home. Which is precisely the situation in which Laertes finds himself while Odysseus is gone : Odysseus, though, will be actually able to return home and eliminate the 'men of violence', that is, the suitors.

### Section V

**The Odyssey contains much more references to poetry than the Iliad.** The only exception in the *Iliad* is the bitter sentence stated by Helen in book 6, when she remarks to Hector than she and Paris will be remembered with ignominy rather than glory. The line is echoed in the mouth of Alcinous in book 8 of the *Odyssey*, when he encourages Odysseus to tell the Phaeacians about his adventures. But this passage mostly stresses the gap between the events of the *Iliad* and the time of the *Odyssey* : the memories of Odysseus (for instance the sack of Troy) are memories of sufferings for him, but are turned into the delightful story of past, distant and unrepeatable events, to his Phaeacean audience.

More explicit allusions are contained in **the three songs of Demodocos** :
- a quarrel between two Greek heroes, leading Agamemnon into a deluded interpretation of a prophecy wich in fact predicted his own future death ;
- the love affair between Aphrodite and Ares, and the revenge of Hephaestus, which makes think of, even if not echoes, the love-scene between Zeus and Hera on mount Ida in *Iliad* 14 (the *Dios apatè*) ;
- and the sack of Troy, foreshadowed in the ending books of the *Iliad*.

**Section VI**

  Rutherford then stresses the fact that the *Odyssey* **is filled with memories of the events of the** ***Iliad*** **and the Trojan War in general.** This is already a subject for poetry, as was said before. But the way the participants recall the war is strikingly pessimistic and sorrowful : hearing Nestor and Menelas in the *Odyssey* (books 3 and 4), one could hardly recall that they actually won the war. The deaths of many heroes and the griefs of the survivors seem to overwhelm the feeling of triumph and the satisfaction of well-earned loot one could be waiting for. Odysseus himself, on his way home, loses all his companions and all the treasures he brought from Troy[5]. The way the Greeks finally won the war, the Trojan Horse, is evoked in terms of trickery (dolos), which hardly corresponds to the warriors' heroism as the *Iliad* conveyed it.

  Odysseus disguised as a beggar, speaking to Eumaeus the swine-herd about the material discomforts of the war (book 14), sheds a quite different light on the heroic world of the *Iliad*. **That leads Rutherford to the questions of possible parody of the** ***Iliad*** **in the** ***Odyssey*.** Parody, like allusion, is very difficult to identify with certainty in homeric epics, but Rutherford thinks it possible to clarify it by viewing it alongside other indicators of allusion. The use of humor in the *Odyssey* at least is quite clear, as shows Rutherford's most convincing example in book 6, when Odysseus coming naked and hungry towards Nausicaa's maids and frightening them is compared to a lion hunting deer or cattle : the comparison only shows how Odysseus *appears* to the frightened girls.

  Another, different example is conveyed by Telemachus' rebukes to his mother, which re-use a couple of lines stated by Hector when dismissing his wife Andromache before his departure. Rutherford considerates here the effect of the adaptation. The 'man-concern' speech in Telemachus' mouth, though qualified as 'wise' by the poet, brings only amazement and distress to Penelope : this, to Rutherford, stresses the difference between the status of Andromache as a wife in wartime and the one of Penelope in Ithaca in peacetime. In book 23, when Telemachus rebukes his mother and is reprimanded by both his parents, shows that Penelope is regaining, as Odysseus' wife, a more active status than Andromache could have had in Troy in a time of war. Thus, says Rutherford, peace and family life are shown as preferable to war and heroic death.

  **Other uses of Iliadic vocabulary and imagery in humoristic or incongruous places** occur in book 8, when Odysseus boasts about his athletic abilities, or in 18 when he beats the beggar Iros when disguised himself as one.

  All these passages convey **a more ironic humor in the** ***Odyssey*** than in the *Iliad* (which is not deprived of humor, either, but a different one). In the *Odyssey*, heroic combat and braggadocio which characterized the *Iliad* are presented as part of a great past, but a past which is no more[6], and similar behaviors in the present are often seen as grotesque or at least not as valuable or useful as in the *Iliad*. Odysseus' qualities in the *Odyssey* would rather be his toughness and self-restraint than his pysical prowess.

  **Rutherford ends with a parallel between two moments when a god modifies the course of the sun.** In *Iliad* 18, Hera accelerates the sunset, in order to put and end to the massacre that took place by the ships. In *Odyssey* 23, Athene stops the dawn and lengthens the night so that Odysseus and Penelope may enjoy their reunion. The difference between the two episodes lies in mood and elaboration : while Hera is acting in favor of the whole Greek army, Athene stops the sun just for his personal protégé ; and the evokation of the horses of the dawn in the *Odyssey* passage is much more detailed, developing the only adjective of the *Iliad* passage which conveyed a kind of personification.

  **Rutherford ends his article by emphasizing the difference between the two epics in character and ethos : the** ***Odyssey*** **is composed as an answer and a near-riposte to the** ***Iliad***, **and, as such, conveys very different ideals where peace, home, domestic life and polital harmony have replaced the old martial intensity of the** ***Iliad*. Thus the homecoming of Odysseus becomes, by itself, his true and only triumph.**

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[5] Odysseus does bring home some treasure, but it is the treasure the Phaeacians gave him when bidding him farewell, not the loot he gained during the sack of Troy.

[6] Rutherford remarks that passages when a hero lifts a rock (etc.) 'such as two men on the earth today could not lift' occur in formulaic terms seven times in the *Iliad*, never in the *Odyssey*.