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TRANSLATING ANCIENT EMOTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The emotional vocabulary of the Greeks and Romans differs in important ways from what are commonly taken to be equivalent terms in English and other modern languages. In this paper, I offer two case studies in the problem of translating Greek emotions. The first considers the difference between Greek ἔλεος and English ’sympathy’ in the audience response to Greek tragedy. The second and longer discussion examines the differences between Greek ὄργη and English ‘anger’, beginning with Aristotle’s definition of ὄργη in the Rhetoric and then applying his analysis to the role of ‘anger’ in Homer’s Iliad.

Catherine Lutz, in her book with the intriguing title, Unnatural Emotions, observes (1988:8): ‘The process of coming to understand the emotional lives of people in different cultures can be seen first and foremost as a problem of translation. What must be translated,’ she goes on to say, ‘are the meanings of the emotion words spoken in everyday conversation, of the emotionally imbued events of everyday life, of tears and other gestures, and of audience reaction to emotional performance. The interpretive task, then, is not primarily to fathom somehow “what they are feeling” inside ... but rather to translate emotional communications from one idiom, context, language, or sociohistorical mode of understanding into another.’

* This paper is a lightly revised version of the keynote address delivered at the 25th Biennial Conference of the Classical Association of South Africa, held at the University of Stellenbosch on 30 June–2 July 2003. It was a great honour to participate in the conference, and I wish to express my gratitude to the organizers, and especially to Johan Thom, for their hospitality. In addition, I am pleased to acknowledge the support provided by the National Research Foundation; it was in the capacity of Research Fellow of the National Research Foundation at the University of Stellenbosch that I delivered this address.

1 Lutz adds: ‘It has commonly been observed that the process of translation involves much more than the one-to-one linking of concepts in one language with concepts in another. Rather, the process ideally involves providing the context of use of the words in each of the two languages between which translation is attempted.’
This is a tall order, especially when the foreign culture under investigation is no longer a living one, in which we can interrogate native speakers and observe their interactions, complete with ‘tears and other gestures, and ... audience reaction to emotional performance.’ But we have sufficiently rich evidence to make a start in this endeavour, evidence of various kinds often lacking in contemporary societies. For the ancients have bequeathed us precise philosophical definitions of the several emotions, or rather παθή and ‘affectus’ or ‘perturbationes’, as they are called in Greek and Latin, as well as dramatic and narrative texts that shed light on how the emotion terms were used and what kinds of responses they elicited in those who witnessed their display. Analysis reveals, moreover, that the emotional vocabulary of the Greeks and Romans differs in important ways, sometimes subtle and sometimes quite palpable, from what are commonly taken to be equivalent terms in English and other modern languages. The question of how to translate the ancient emotions thus promises to be illuminating both with respect to ancient psychology as such and to a great many literary works in which those emotions are exhibited. And yet, investigation in this area is, it is safe to say, still very much in its infancy.

Now, the view defended by Lutz is not in fact uncontroversial. The new discipline of evolutionary psychology, which is heir to the old socio-biology, has mobilized various arguments to demonstrate that the emotions, or at least the most basic of them, are and indeed must be uniform across different cultures. Proponents of this view, which goes back to Darwin’s last book, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, published in 1872, tend to suppose that the emotions, like certain other traits, evolved through natural selection, and so serve to meet challenges to the survival of the species. Their universality is thus a consequence of animal, or at least human, biology. The opponents of this hypothesis – sometimes collectively identified as social constructionists – emphasize, on the contrary, the way the emotions are shaped by the values and customs of a given society; as Lutz puts it (ibid.), emotion is ‘woven in complex ways into cultural meaning systems and social interaction.’ Rather than being instinctive reactions, the emotions are highly cognitive in nature, as Aristotle insisted, and depend crucially on the way we interpret and judge such things as the behaviour and motives of others.

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1 Cf. Smith & Scott 1997:229: ‘There is considerable evidence indicating distinct, prototypical facial signals that across a variety of cultures can be reliably recognized as corresponding to at least six different emotions (happiness, sadness, surprise, disgust, anger, and fear), and possibly others, including interest, shame, and contempt’ (references suppressed).
Rather than explore this controversy on a theoretical level, I should like on this occasion to examine some ways in which an awareness of differences between ancient and modern conceptions of the emotions may affect our understanding of a couple of well-known classical texts and the translation of certain basic emotion terms. I begin by considering some remarks by the eminent Marxist critic Terry Eagleton, in his recent book, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (2003), since they explicitly address the controversy I have mentioned and make their point with reference to Greek tragedy. Eagleton begins (2003:xii-xiv) by citing the book, *On Materialism* (1975:52, originally published in 1970), by the distinguished Italian philologist, Sebastiano Timpanaro: 'Cultural continuities, Timpanaro points out, “have been rendered possible by the fact that man as a biological being has remained essentially unchanged from the beginnings of civilization to the present; and those sentiments and representations which are closest to the biological facts of human existence have changed little.”' We recognize here a version of what I have called the universalist position. 'However culturalists may wince at this cheek-by-jowl consorting of “sentiments and representations” with “biological facts,”' Eagleton continues, 'it is surely true that to ask, say, why we feel sympathy for Philoctetes is a pseudo-problem bred by a bogus historicism. We feel sympathy for Philoctetes because he is in agonizing pain from his pus-swollen foot. There is no use in pretending that his foot is a realm of impenetrable otherness which our modern-day notions can grasp only at the cost of brutally colonizing the past. There is nothing hermeneutically opaque about Philoctetes’ hobbling and bellowing.'

So much for post-modern relativism, hermetically closed hermeneutic circles, and queasy hesitations about our capacity to understand the so-called “Other.” Pain is pain. Eagleton pauses a moment to concede that classical tragedy is not wholly transparent to us: 'There is, to be sure, a great deal about the art form in which he [that is, Philoctetes] figures which is profoundly obscure to us. We are, for example, bemused and mildly scandalized by Antigone’s declaration that she would not have broken the law for a husband or a son, as opposed to a brother. It is not the kind of thing a good liberal would say.' Eagleton, we understand, is not a liberal but a hard-nosed realist who sees in Antigone a tough-minded comrade, prepared to make unsentimental choices; he is not really one of the ‘We’ who are ‘bemused and scandalized’ by her. 'But,' Eagleton insists, 'as far as his agony goes, we understand Philoctetes in much the same way as we understand the afflictions of those around us. It is not that such a response is “unhistorical”'; it is rather that human history includes the history of the body, which in respect of physical suffering has probably changed little over the centuries.'
I agree that physical pain has changed little since classical antiquity—and not just ‘probably’, in Eagleton’s coy formulation. Pain, however, is not an emotion. It is, as Aristotle says, a sensation (στάσις). But our responses to pain include emotional responses, and here it is not so clear that nothing has changed over the centuries. If Gorgias (Hlt. 9), Plato (Rep. 10, 606b-c), Isocrates (Pan. 112, 168) and Aristotle (Poet. 1452a2-3, 1452b32-33, etc.) are at all reliable guides, then a Greek in the theater of Dionysus would not have professed to ‘feel sympathy for Philoctetes’ because of his pain, a reaction that Eagleton takes to be a transhistorical constant. A Greek would have spoken rather of pity (παθήσω), and pity, as Aristotle and others make clear, is aroused not by suffering as such but by undeserved suffering. In Aristotle’s words, pity is ‘a kind of pain in the case of an apparent destructive or painful harm in one not deserving to encounter it, which one might expect oneself, or one of one’s own, to suffer, and this when it seems near’ (Rhet. 2.8, 1385b13-16). Raw sympathy for pain is not the emotion that Aristotle, at least, identified as the characteristic response to tragedy.

We can perhaps gauge something of what the original audience of Sophocles’ Philoctetes might have experienced upon observing Philoctetes’ suffering from the reactions of Neoptolemus and the chorus in the play. 4 At the sight of Philoctetes’ miserable cave the chorus exclaim: ‘I pity him: no human being to care for him, with no companion in sight, miserable, forever alone, he is afflicted by a savage disease and wanders at the mercy of every need that arises’ (169-75). Note the emphasis on Philoctetes’ isolation, which they remark on even before his physical agony. 5 Later in the play, Neoptolemus is provoked by Philoctetes’ stubborn refusal to go to Troy, even though his wound can be cured only if he does so: ‘it is not just to pardon or to pity those who are involved in self-willed harm, like you’ (1318-20), he asserts. As Aristotle says, pity is aroused by undeserved suffering, and someone who suffers willingly fails to qualify. For a Greek, then, the mere spectacle of pain was not enough to elicit pity—something one might have

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4 Plato employs the term συμπαθέω at 605d, but the sense is apparently to feel pain or pleasure along with someone (cf. οὐσίασμα) rather than to experience another person’s emotion by a process of identification.

5 Cf. Halliwell 2002:208-11, who points out that ‘it is an extraordinary feature of Philoctetes that it invites its audience to recognize the increasing aptness of pity ... without having access, until much later, to Neoptolemus’s own reactions’ (209).

6 The chorus’ pity does not necessarily signify a disposition to help Philoctetes; Philoctetes himself mentions that merchants who from time to time took refuge on Lemnos pitied him (§θυσ). Indeed, but refused to take him aboard their ships (367-11).
inferred, it seems to me, from a consideration of such practices as the judicial torture of slaves (it is odd that a Marxist critic should have overlooked this).

Between Greek pity and modern English sympathy there is a deep cultural divide, extending to basic conceptions of the self. Sympathy involves putting oneself in the position of another so as to feel what the other person feels. Thus, Edmund Burke (1990:41) writes that ‘sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected.’ David Hume, in turn, supposes that the thought of another’s passion may acquire ‘such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself’ (1906:317). Such a description of sympathy has little to do with Greek pity, and its roots lie elsewhere:6 The spectators of Philoctetes’ suffering, whether on stage or in the audience, did not expect to be affected as he was affected, or that his passion would become theirs. As a distinct emotion in its own right, pity did not mean identifying with the experience of another; rather, it was just as one did not share another’s misfortune that one was in a position to pity it. Eagleton’s facile assimilation of ancient pity to modern sympathy fails to perform the work of translation that understanding the ancient emotions requires.

I turn now to the emotion on which I will concentrate for the balance of this paper. Aristotle defines anger, or rather ὀργή, as ‘a desire, accompanied by pain, for a perceived revenge, on account of a perceived slight on the part of people who are not fit to slight one or one’s own’ (Rhet. 2.2, 1378a31-33). A slight or ὀργωρία, in turn, is ‘the activation of an opinion about something seeming worthless’ (2.2, 1378b10-11). A slight may take the form of contempt (κατάφρονσις), which Aristotle defines as the belief that something is of no value, or again of spite (ἐφρασμός), that is, ‘blocking the wishes (θετέοι) of another not in order to have something for oneself but rather so that the other not have it’ (2.2, 1378b18-19). In this latter case, the slight lies precisely in that the offender seeks no personal advantage: the only explanation for such a gratuitous hindrance of another’s wishes is that one considers the other useless whether for good or ill. If the motive were self-

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6 Modern ideas of sympathy are inspired by an epistemological question: how is it that human beings, each locked into his or her own private world of sensations, ever come to know and appreciate the feelings of other people? This is the so-called problem of other minds, and it is a major issue in philosophy today. The ancients, however, are almost entirely silent on it. They took it for granted that we know what others feel, and were concerned principally with the ethical character of our responses. For a splendid analysis of the difference between ancient pity, as an emotion specific to a detached observer, and modern notions of identification, see Halliwell 2002:207-16.
interest, it would not be a clear case of belittlement, since one can impede another person’s plans out of selfishness and still respect him or her. And if that were the case, then the act, according to Aristotle, would not produce anger, for anger results from a slight and nothing else. So too with Aristotle’s third category of slighting, namely ψιπτόνωσις or arrogant abuse, which is defined as speaking or acting in ways that cause shame to another for the sheer pleasure of it (2.2, 1378b23-25). If the abuse is in return for an injury, it does not count as insolence but rather as revenge. The kind of affront that provokes anger, Aristotle explains, must be neither in reprisal for an offense nor beneficial to the offender, but purely a function of arrogance (2.2, 1379a20-32) — that is, a form of belittlement.7

It is evident that the causes of anger, in Aristotle’s view, are far more limited than is the case in English. Anger is not a response to harm as such, even intentional harm. It is not that one is indifferent to deliberate injury, of course; but one reacts to it, if I understand Aristotle correctly, not with anger but with hatred or hostility (μισειν), unless it is the sort of injury that constitutes an affront. Aristotle is intensely conscious of the difference between these two emotions, which overlap in English to a far greater extent than in Greek, to go by Aristotle’s descriptions. Let me offer some illustrations.

Aristotle affirms that we cannot slight a person we fear (2.3, 1380a22-23), because fear is a sign of one’s own weakness, and this is incompatible with contempt for the other. Of course, we can certainly hate such a person, and normally do. As Aristotle says, ‘no one likes a person he fears’ (2.4, 1381b33). For the same reason, we cannot be angry with those who fear us, since their fear demonstrates their respect for us, though we may certainly dislike them. As Aristotle says, ‘no one likes a person he fears’ (2.4, 1381b33). For the same reason, we cannot be angry with those who fear us, since their fear demonstrates their respect for us, though we may certainly dislike them. Nor can we return anger for anger, according to Aristotle, since those who are angry at us do not act out of contempt, but are responding precisely to our disdain for them (2.3, 1380a34-35), yet anger is one of the primary causes of enmity (2.4, 1382a1-2). The result of a slight or put-down is that we find ourselves diminished in esteem, and in order to turn the tables on the offender, we must first restore the original equilibrium through an act of revenge. Until that happens, we are not in a position to diminish the other, and hence inspire her or his anger.

Aristotle says further that the object of anger is to cause pain to the other, while the object of hatred is to inflict harm (2.4, 1382a8). A slight, we understand, makes one feel small, and the only way to get even is to induce a similar feeling in the other. It follows that, for an angry person to achieve revenge, the original offender must be aware of it, since there is no such

7 For fuller discussion, see Konstan 2003.
thing as unperceived pain. That is why we may wish that people whom we hate should die, but when we are angry, what we desire is that the other person feel in return (ἁμαρτία) the kind of diminishment that provoked our anger in the first place (2.4, 1382a14-15). The death of the other would render that impossible.

Of course, Aristotle is a professional philosopher, and he is within his rights to define a concept more narrowly or widely than obtains in popular usage. Hence, we must inquire whether classical Greek literature bears out the distinction he draws between anger and hatred, and the limited scope that this contrast leaves for the emotion anger. I shall, in the balance of this paper, attempt to assess the validity or usefulness of Aristotle’s analysis by means of a single case study, reserving a more complete survey of the material for a future occasion.

At the beginning of Greek literature stands Homer’s Iliad, and, as is well known, the first word of this epic poem is anger, or rather, wrath: the term ῥήμα has a solemn and perhaps religious register, and is often associated with divine anger (Cosmides 1986:54). Among mortals, the word is employed of Achilles’ anger against Agamemnon, who took from Achilles the girl he had won as a war prize. There can be no doubt that what provokes Achilles’ rage or κόμμα — the standard term for anger in the Homeric epics (e.g. Il. 1.224, 285) — in this part of the epic is precisely his sense of having been slighted; as he says to his mother, Thetis, ‘wide-ruling Agamemnon has dishonoured me (ἤγχωσεν)’ (1.356; cf. 1.412 and 244: Agamemnon ‘failed to honour the best of the Achaeans’). To Agamemnon, he declares: ‘Call me a coward, a no-account, if I ever again submit to anything you say’ (1.293-94). And when Agamemnon sends an embassy to Achilles’ tent, offering to compensate Achilles with boundless gifts, Achilles’ final word is: ‘My heart swells with anger when I recall those things, how Agamemnon treated me shamefully before the Achaeans as if I were some vagabond without honour’ (9.646-48).

Achilles returns to battle after he learns that Patroclus has been slain by Hector; he will not rest or take food until he has killed Hector in return. What motivates his hostility in this portion of the epic? One of the sections in Oliver Taplin’s fine study of the Iliad is entitled ‘Anger Displaces Anger’ (1992:193-202, section 7.3). Taplin argues that Achilles’ rage after the death of Patroclus remains unchanged in substance, but is transferred from one object to another. So too, William Harris, in his recent and massive investigation of anger entitled Restraining Rage (2001:131), observes that ‘the hero’s

8 Hence the stipulation in the definition of anger that the revenge, like the slight itself, must be perceived.
rage, first against Agamemnon, later against the Trojan prince Hector, gives
the poem its principal structure’ (cf. 143: ‘The second of Achilles’ great
angers’). Taplin opens his discussion with a citation of Achilles’ address to
his mother in Iliad 18.94-126, in which Achilles, stricken with grief at the loss
of his friend, utters the wish that strife (eris) might perish among gods and
mortals, and also cholos or anger, which, Achilles says, ‘is far sweeter than
dripping honey in the breasts of men’ (107-10); so it was, he says, when
Agamemnon, lord of men, angered him just now (ετοιμάσα μόλις ἐγὼ τὸν ἄντρον
Iliad 11.11). Taplin comments on this passionate plea (199): ‘In sum, Achilleus renounces
all the eris and cholos which have pervaded the Iliad since its
very beginning. ... Thus, half-way through a speech, the passions of book 1
are renounced: the μῆνις poem is over.’ Taplin continues (199-20): ‘When
Achilleus turns his attention to Hektor in 114ff., he shows no awareness that
what has happened is not that he has given up eris and cholos altogether, but
that Hektor has replaced Agamemnon as his target. The timing of this
realization by the audience may vary; but there will be no shortage of eris and
cholos, verbal and physical, in books 20 to 22. There are verbal signals even
sooner,’ Taplin concludes (citing 18.337 and 19.116).

Hector has done Achilles, and the Achaeans generally, great harm, as
Achilles himself acknowledges. At the moment of his triumph over Hector,
when he is at his most savage and has wished aloud that he might be capable
of devouring Hector’s body for what he has done to him (22.346-47), he
recognizes Hector’s stature as a warrior who has damaged the Greek side
more than all the other Trojans combined (22.378-80). Achilles has every
motive for hating his opponent. But if anger is, as Aristotle defines it, a
response not to injury but to insult, and more particularly to dishonour or
belittlement, in what sense has Hector provoked this emotion in Achilles?
True, Achilles taunts the dying Hector for having forgotten, when he slew
Patroclus, that a greater spearman remained behind (22.331-35). But we can
hardly conclude from this that Hector’s act was a sign of contempt for
Achilles. Warriors slaughter whom they can.

Was Aristotle wrong, then, about the motives for anger, when he
restricted them to a narrow range that belies the ample and complex
caracter of the emotion? Of course, the term that Aristotle subjected to
analysis, as I have mentioned, was ὁμοργή not the Homeric cholos (which
does not appear in archaic epic); we have no more reason, a priori, for assuming
that ὁμοργή and cholos coincide in meaning than we do for assuming that one
or both coincide with the English term ‘anger’ (cf. Harris 2001:51: ‘It would
be extremely perilous to assume that there was one constant meaning that
was attached to cholos or to oμοργή or to ira in all ages’). Nevertheless, I believe
that Aristotle’s discussion is in fact illuminating for the interpretation of the

Iliad, and that Achilles does respond differently to Agamemnon’s affront and to the pain that Hector inflicts on him.

Contrary to what Taplin suggests, there are in fact no references to Achilles’ κόνεο~ in Books 20-22 of the Iliad, and indeed only one in the last five books, apart from a single occurrence that looks back to the original quarrel between him and Agamemnon (Réколоμενο ~ ἁτρείλην, 24.395). Moreover, when Achilles ‘turns his attention to Hector’, as Taplin puts it, in his speech to his mother (in Book 18), he does not mention his own anger. He simply declares that he will return to battle in order to slay Hector, and with that, he is prepared to accept whatever Zeus and the other gods have in store for him – for his mother has just told him that Hector’s death is the prelude to his own (18.96). Not even Hercules, he observes, escaped his fate, but destiny and the anger of Hera conquered him. Here the word κόνεο~ does indeed occur (18.119), but as frequently in the Iliad, the subject of the emotion is a god, and the gods – especially Zeus and Hera – are notoriously sensitive when it comes to human overachievers and other obstacles to their ambitions, which they tend to treat as personal affronts.

It is not that Homer rigorously eschews the word κόνεο~ in connection with Achilles’ feelings concerning Hector, subsequent to his reconciliation with Agamemnon in Book 18 and his ostensible renunciation of anger. Homer is neither a philosopher nor a pedant, and the use of emotion terms in Greek cannot be neatly circumscribed any more than it can be in English or any other language. Thus, Achilles’ grief for Patroclus is compared to that

1 κόνεο~ in this part of the epic is used in reference to women’s quarrels (20.251-55; Aeneas speaking); to Zeus’ possible anger should Achilles slay Aeneas before his time is up (20.300-02; Poseidon is the speaker); to the river Scamander’s anger at Achilles’ vengefulness, which is appropriate for a god in respect to a mortal’s pride (21.136-38; cf. 21.146-47, where Xanthos is enraged at Achilles’ lack of pity); to Hera’s anger at Artemis for daring to oppose her in battle (21.478-82); and to a snake’s κόνεο~ or venom, in a simile illustrating Hector’s determination to face Achilles’ onslaught (22.93-97); this is the sum total for Books 20-22. The first occurrence in Book 23 is indeed applied to Achilles’ rage over the death of Patroclus as the motive for his maltreatment of Hector’s body and the sacrifice of twelve Trojan youths (23.21-23). A little later, the term is used in reference to Patroclus’ anger, which caused him to slay a young companion in a quarrel over a game of knucklebones (23.482, 23.543 and 567). The final book of the epic mentions the anger of Hera (24.55) and of Zeus (24.114 = 135); there is also the reference to Achilles’ anger at Agamemnon, noted above (24.395), while the last occurrence in the entire poem (24.586) is in reference to Achilles’ command to cover Hector’s corpse for fear that Priam may become angry upon seeing it. Some of these passages are discussed below.
of a lion whose cubs have been stolen by a deerhunter; a 'bitter ἄγλων - seizes him' – that is, the lion – as he searches for the tracks of the man (18.322). It may be that the lion feels insulted that a mere deersman should have injured him, and that by treachery rather than in open combat. We recognize too that one purpose of the simile is to underscore Achilles' sense of paternal responsibility for his comrade – conceivably there is an allusion here as well to his feelings concerning Briseis, whom Agamemnon stole from him. But the adjective 'bitter' suggests the root meaning of ἄγλων - as 'bile', and as applied to an animal the term apparently signifies violent fury, irrespective of whether it is provoked by harm or scorn. So too, in the single use of the term in Book 22, Hector's determination (μενόν, 22.96) to face Achilles is compared to the ἄγλων - (94) that seeps into a snake as it lies in wait (μενόν, 95), munching its own poison. Hector himself is not described as angry; but then, he is afraid of Achilles, and anger, according to Aristotle, is incompatible with fear.

Achilles, however, does feel anger. He decides to sacrifice twelve Trojan youths on the pyre of Patroclus, so enraged is he that Patroclus has been slain (σεῦν κταμένῳ κολαστεῖ, 18.337); this is the same formula that recurs at 23.23, which is the only time in the final five books of the poem in which ἄγλων over Patroclus' death is ascribed to Achilles. Achilles' passion here evidently derives from his pain at the loss of his friend (and guilt, perhaps, over his failure to bring him home, 326-27); it is not said to be directed specifically at Hector, although he has just vowed to kill him for what he has done (334-35). Be that as it may, Zeus, in his earlier prophecy of Patroclus' (and Sarpedon's) death, explicitly asserts that Achilles will slay Hector because of his anger over Patroclus (15.68: τοù δὲ κταμένου - κτενεῖ ἂτομος ἂτοικία, and in the battle round the body of Patroclus, before Achilles has learned the news of his friend's death, Menelaus doubts that Achilles, without armour, can join the fighting, 'angry though he may be at godlike Hector' (μάλα περ θεοτάτου ἂτοικία, 17.710).

These third-person descriptions of his motives do not prevent Achilles from repeating a second time, in Book 19, that he has desisted in his anger toward Agamemnon, and that it is wrong 'to rage forever' (aijei; μενείναι, 19.67-68) – and this moments after we are told that 'ἄγλων - seeps into him' (19.16) at the sight of his new armour. The word 'seeps' (ηῶ), used also of the snake's ἄγλων - in Book 23, again suggests something
like raw battle fury, I think, rather than the focused anger aroused by an insult or personal offense.\textsuperscript{10}

And yet, I believe that Aristotle’s analysis of ὀξυωματικόν points the way to a different, and perhaps richer, appreciation of the emotional dynamics of the epic. I should like to maintain that there does occur a shift in the poem from anger on Achilles’ part, which was provoked by Agamemnon’s arrogance and disdain for his best fighter, to a desire for retaliation against Hector that responds rather to the pain that Hector has caused him. Despite a couple of references to Achilles’ κόκκος against Hector, the poet insists on the harm – κακά and similar expressions – that Hector has done to Achilles and the Greeks generally as the motive for Achilles’ revenge. What is more, anger as a motive for combat is explicitly disparaged after Achilles renounces all the ἐρήμωμα and κόκκος (shouts) which have pervaded the Iliad since its very beginning. When Achilles, after his return to combat, meets Aeneas on the battlefield in Book 20, he taunts Aeneas, in the martial repartee known as ‘flyting’, with his inferior status in the royal line of Troy. Aeneas responds by excising his lineage, and then reminds Achilles that such wrangling is for women, ‘who get angry over some quarrel (ἐρήμωμα) that eats their hearts out and go out into the middle of the street to hurl abuse at one another, whether true or not; for their anger drives them to it’ (20.253-55). Men, however, decide their conflicts not with words, says Aeneas, but with steel, or rather, bronze (257; cf. Harris 2001:28).

There is more than one kind of pain in the Iliad. Achilles experiences both the resentment induced by an undeserved slight – that is, Aristotle’s ὀξυωματικόν the epic name for which is κόκκος – and the fury unleashed by the death of his dearest comrade, in the heat of which his earlier anger withers. There is no exact term in Homer for the latter sentiment. Sometimes κόκκος serves, as we have seen, but it does not capture the grim duty to the deceased and appreciation of the opponent’s valour that mark Achilles’ return to battle, and it falls short too of defining the demonic, ‘berserker’ violence of Achilles’ peak moment or ἀριστεία. Achilles is right to say that he has abandoned κόκκος in the ordinary sense after the death of Patroclus. ‘Anger’ is too weak a term, or the wrong term, for the emotion that displaces it. When Achilles declares that, despite the way Agamemnon angered him (ὁ λακεύς, 18.111), he is prepared to repress the fury in his breast (ὁ λακεύς κακά; ἀριστεία, 18.113 = 19.66) and go forth against Hector for slaying his dearest friend, the scholia comment: ‘of the two emotions besetting Achilles’ soul, anger (ὁ λακεύς) and grief (ἡρμαῖος), one wins out. ... For

\textsuperscript{10} The Latin term ‘ira’ also carries both senses; contrast Virgil, Aeneid 12.108 with 12.946, and cf. Braund & Gilbert 2003.
the emotion involving Patroclus is strongest of all, and so it is necessary to abandon his wrath (μήλος) and avenge himself on his enemies’ (schol. b T ad Il. 18.112–13). The scholia have got it right. Perhaps they were composed under the influence of Aristotle’s analysis of anger as resulting from a slight, rather than harm as such, but if so, it only confirms the value of taking Aristotle’s view into account.

At the end of Book 9 of the Iliad – the so-called ‘Embassy’ to Achilles – Ajax makes a final attempt to assuage Achilles’ wrath and bring him back to battle (9.628–39):

But Achilles, cruel as he is, harbours in his breast an arrogant temper (qumov), nor does he care about the love of his companions, we who honoured him beyond all others by the ships. Pitiless! And yet a man accepts compensation (poinhv) for the murder of a brother or a child who has died, and the murderer remains among his people when he has paid handsomely, while the heart and proud temper of the other are appeased, when he has accepted the compensation. But the gods have placed in your breast an implacable and evil temper for the sake of a single girl. But here we are offering you seven outstanding girls and much else besides: adopt a sympathetic temper.

To this, Achilles famously replies (9.644–53):

Ajax son of Telamon, descended of Zeus, ruler of peoples, all that you have said seems to me in accord with your [or my] temper. But my heart swells with covlo when I recall those things, how the son of Atreus treated me as a fool in front of the Achaeans as if I were a vagabond without honour. But go and report this message: I shall not turn my thoughts to bloody war until divine Hector, the son of wise Priam, arrives at the tents and ships of the Myrmidons as he slaughters the Achaeans.

In a recent book on ransom and revenge in the Iliad (2002), Donna Wilson attempts to resolve the apparent inconsistency between Achilles’ words here and subsequent passages in which he suggests that he might have returned to battle sooner if Agamemnon had treated him more decently (11.609–10, 16.71–73, 84–86). Wilson resolves the dilemma by distinguishing (7–10) between the terms poinhv and ἀποίνων, ‘penalty’ and ‘ransom’. ‘Although Achilles feels he is owed poinê for the seizure of Briseis, Agamemnon offers him apoina. Accordingly, Achilles in Books 11 and 16 can legitimately discount the previous offer, since Agamemnon’s gifts are inevitably unacceptable in form and function’ (10). Ajax, for his part, “misses the point of the quarrel. He fails, moreover, to account adequately for Achilles’ singular
demand: the life for which Achilles seeks to secure poinê is his own' (106). I agree with Wilson that Ajax misunderstands the reasons why Achilles remains uncompromising in his anger at Agamemnon, but it seems to me that her explanation is mistaken. Ajax supposes that the issue between Achilles and Agamemnon is the seizure of the girl Briseis, and in this respect comparable, though lesser in degree, to the loss of a relative through violence. Such aggression may be resolved, as Ajax says, by means of suitable compensation. Achilles does not deny that this is so. Rather, he distinguishes an attack that deprives a man of someone dear to him from the humiliation he has suffered at the hands of Agamemnon, which is the source of his anger. The latter requires, as Aristotle explains, that the offender be aware of and feel in return the kind of mortification that provoked the anger in the first place: it is not simply a matter of compensation. Ajax’s analogy is thus irrelevant to Achilles’ anger, insofar as it was produced by a slight and not by mere harm to himself or a dear one. But it corresponds perfectly to the pain that Achilles experiences upon the death of Patroclus, and thus anticipates the finale of the Iliad, when Achilles will in fact accept a ransom for the body of Hector: Hector has not insulted Achilles and hence is not the object of his anger in the same way that Agamemnon is. As the scholia put it (ad 9.646-47), Achilles ‘again recalls Agamemnon’s u{bri, indicating that he indeed would like to yield, but the magnitude of the u{bri does not permit it.’

In rejecting Ajax’s argument from compensation in cases of homicide, Achilles is not claiming that the anger he harbours is too great for such a solution. He is indicating rather that Ajax has offered examples of harm, while his own anger is a response to an intolerable slight. Harm causes pain, grief, even perhaps a kind of rage, but not anger in the Aristotelian sense — nor, I would say, in the Homeric sense. It really is the case that, in Book 18,

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11 To be fair to Wilson’s subtle argument, I quote at some length her summary of it: ‘Achilleus’ aggressive appropriation of a conflated Chryses/Apollo model brought him the embassy and Agamemnon’s apoinê. His strategy has failed, however, to produce a culturally acceptable offer of poinê or to cast Agamemnon in a dependent position in relation to himself. Achilleus is, as I have already suggested, determined that Agamemnon’s superiority, unlike Zeus’ own superiority, is not unassailable. He will therefore deploy his strategy of u{bri to the limit, and beyond, in the struggle for dominance. Moreover, he does so not by rejecting heroic tradition, but by appropriating and aggressively exploiting its ambiguities …; he is set on taking poinê and, after that, apoinê (107).

12 The scholia remark too (ad 9.651-52) on Achilles’ use of the epithet ‘divine’ (di`o~) in regard to Hector, which, they point out, Homer does not employ in his own voice. They explain it as Achilles’ way of irritating (lupw`n) the Achaeans (they compare 9.356, Achilles speaking to Odysseyus), but it is worth noting that his attitude toward a military enemy is very different from the wrath he bears toward Agamemnon.
‘the mênis poem is over’, as Taplin puts it; from here on, it is about revenge for another kind of injury, and the emotion that drives it is different as well. This becomes clear when we step back from our intuitions concerning the nature of anger and attempt, with Aristotle as guide, ‘to translate emotional communications from one idiom, context, language, or socio-historical mode of understanding into another’, as Lutz advises.

How, then, ought we to translate ὁμήρων τὸ ὀργῆ; As ‘anger’, no doubt. But in doing so we ought to remain aware that we will be inclined or even obliged to use ‘anger’ as well in situations where the Greeks, conscious as they were of a profound difference between humiliation and harm, might have had in mind a quite different emotion.

Bibliography


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