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Visible and Invisible Pain in the *Iliad*

Scholars have long marveled at the extraordinary realism of the *Iliad*, noting the precision of Homer's anatomical vocabulary and the detail of his accounts of weapon trajectories. Yet anyone who has negotiated this landscape of violence will be struck by the strange absence of bodily pain. Life escapes swiftly. There is death, rather than dying. Pain is typically registered through omniscient narration—"he was pained at heart" (Il. XI.400; 458)—and rarely articulated by characters themselves. This paper seeks to establish a second stratum of pain in the *Iliad*: its materialization as blood within the poem's mimetic frame. This argument is then evaluated in light of the wound received by Agamemnon in Book XI, where excruciating pain is singularly linked to closure of the lesion, and where we find the strange simile of the woman in labor. Thus, the paper addresses the question of visible and invisible pain, focusing on the described world rather than on reported speech.

That patterns of wounding and warriors' responses to injury are determined in part by epic's heroic code has been recognized by the scholars Nicole Loraux and Christine Salazar, who have both argued that the description of the body and suffering in poetic genres can never be strictly in the interests of realism. They have recognized, too, the restrictions placed on the warrior's articulation of his own pain. I will be interested, then, in the implications of this restriction for the ways in which the poet is able to communicate pain, and, in particular, in the split between felt pain, reported succinctly by an omniscient narrator, and "seen" pain, objectified and embedded in the represented world. In the "seen" world, blood appears to have a certain power to manifest something not intangible—Homeric emotion is physical—but screened from the external world by the natural opacity of the body.

The paper first reviews wounds sustained in battle by Greek and Trojan heroes and their treatment. Continued bleeding seems to indicate, in a variety of cases, the unresolved violation of the body, as well as persistent pain. Glaucos, for example, in his prayer to Apollo, draws attention to the shooting pains in his arms and the inability of his blood to dry up: unstaunched blood-flow is the refusal of the body to close back in on itself (XVI.514ff), and the treatment of wounds often involves checking the hemorrhage to re-seal the body. What happens, then, when a wound closes up, but pain only intensifies, as with Agamemnon? That Homer has recourse to a simile is already telling, given that the work of the simile is often to express what is difficult to imagine. The simile is especially striking because it invokes something familiar enough, but mysteriously invisible to the majority of Homer's listeners. In examining the simile, we find that its ostensibly stable element is staked on borrowed arrows. The sharp dart sent by the Eileithyiae is already modeled on the swift, bitter arrow, laden with sobs and freighted with dark pains, which is responsible for the most painful wounds in the *Iliad*, except that it is invisible. It is this invisibility, I argue, that recommends it for Agamemnon's wound, where a second catachresis returns us to the "literal" wound after it ceases to be fully literal. Far from granting these sharp pangs a correlate in the visible and accessible world, the simile exiles them to a place where pain is not felt directly, for a male bard or a male audience,

and where the wound is no longer the obvious hole in the body. While this moment is deeply embedded within the network of strategies used in the *Iliad* to describe pain, its strangeness and singularity invite the contemplation of the invisible side of epic pain, an invisibility waiting, perhaps, to gain tragedy's richer vocabulary of hidden pain.