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Dio of Prusa's *Chryseis* and the Moral Interpretation of Homer, or, Arguing from Silence

Throughout antiquity, one of the predominant ways of understanding Homeric poetry was through a moralizing lens. Homer was thought to have set forth in his poetry moral rules which could serve as guidelines for ethical conduct, his heroes were considered as models for human behavior, their actions as exempla, and his work as a whole as embodying a fundamentally pedagogical purpose; he was "the poet who educated Greece" and was to be read "in order to learn how to manage and educate people." (Plato, *Rep.* 606e; cf. Verdenius (1970) *Homer the Educator*, Havelock (1963) *Preface to Plato*) But how precisely did this type of interpretation work? Could it actually constitute a sustained method of reading the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*? How was it reconciled with the equally popular belief that Homer was writing about real people and real events? I want to take a few steps toward answering these questions by examining the ethically-tinged Homeric interpretation of the first-century C.E. moralist-orator-philosopher Dio of Prusa, focusing on his 61st discourse, entitled *Chryseis*.

Chryseis is a rather interesting discussion between Dio and an unnamed woman (student?), concerning *Chryseis*, the daughter of the priest *Chryses*, who appears in the first book of the *Iliad*. One would have thought that this fascinating dialogue, which combines an interest in Homeric interpretation and heroic female psychology with a rare instance of a vocal and perceptive female interlocutor, might have attracted more attention. But other than the rather obscure articles by Giner Soria (1987) *Helmantica* 38 and Blomqvist (1995) *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 60, interest in *Chryseis* has never progressed beyond the brief treatments in the standard books on Dio (von Arnim (1898) *Leben und Werke*, 300; Valgimigli (1912), *La critica letteraria di Dione*, 11-14; Kindstrand (1973) *Homer in der Zweiten Sophistik*, 136; Desideri (1978) *Dione di Prusa*, 498).

My interest in the dialogue relates to the rather remarkable hermeneutic premises upon which it rests. Dio proposes to "examine how the poet has depicted the daughter of the priest...For Agamemnon seems to praise not only her beauty but also her character (*tropos*)." Now, the problem is, of course, that *Chryseis* doesn't actually say or do anything in the *Iliad*; how then can we possibly know anything about her intelligence or character? Dio counters that he can 'read' a person's character without any direct evidence of their activity or words: "Can't we infer her psychological characteristics from what took place in connection with her, provided one were to consider the matter in a manner not wholly superficial and foolish?" Here an absence of information, rather than giving rise to *aporia*, only serves to inspire more subtle techniques of interpretation.

In my paper, I want to explore the method by which Dio proceeds, in the dialogue, to reconstruct *Chryseis*' character and thoughts from the absences, lacunae, and hints in the Homeric text (handout). By the conclusion of the piece, the unspeaking, unacting *Chryseis* has become a model of wisdom, foresight, and moderation, and even possibly, as Desideri (op. cit., 498) reads it, a paradigm for the behavior proper to intellectuals dealing with kings. This concentration on the moral and ethical dimension is not

surprising; such themes are characteristic of much Dionian interpretation, central as they were to his larger communicative projects. What I will demonstrate, however, is that this creation of Chryseis as a moral exemplar is not simply arbitrary, the result of a sophistic game (von Arnim; Desideri), but based on interpretative premises that can be found scattered throughout Dio's work: that there are no random details in Homer, that inner ethical characteristics can be suggested by outward dress or appearance, that Homer introduces characters as embodying certain moral states.

For Dio and the many others who used Homer as a moral authority, the narrative (as opposed to didactic) form of Homeric epic meant that determining the precise nature of Homer's moral precepts depended on a careful reading of the characters and situations in question. This type of reading in turn took for granted certain standards of narrative consistency and probability, and to conclude I show how moralizing interpretations, in this respect, do not necessarily conflict with readings that emphasize the mimetic aspects of Homeric narrative; in *Chryseis*, I argue, they ultimately depend on such readings.