

Zeus the Wife-Beater

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I. A threatened incident of domestic violence.

That the behavior of the Olympian gods was often ignoble was obvious to Aristophanes, who exploited the fact;¹ that it was often immoral was obvious to Plato, who deplored the fact.² That Zeus in the first book of the Iliad should threaten to strike his wife Hera is remarkable neither from a theological nor a psychological point of view, and it has rarely aroused more comment than a listing of places where he cuts off argument with threats of violence.³

Modern psychology and sociology, however, do not see wife-beating⁴ as being identical with other forms of violence. Wife-beating has a pathology of its own, not identical with the pathology of violence between men. Husbands who beat their wives may avoid any hint of physical violence with their peers, and conversely, men who have no qualms about fighting each other may consider it illegitimate and even unmanly to raise their hands against a woman.⁵ On the communal level as well, societies may take a different attitude towards wife-beating than to other forms of violence.

The Greeks did not write much about wife-beating. Medea's famous monologue⁶ does not include physical abuse among the tribulations of women; Strepsiades complains about his wife putting on airs⁷, but it doesn't seem to have occurred to him to take a stick to her.⁸ I once wondered in print whether the Athenians considered wife-beating un-

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¹ As at *Birds* 1493-1693, *Frogs* in the description of Heracles' behavior at 549-78 and in the behavior of Dionysus throughout, and *Plutus* 1102-90. Modern comedians, too, among them Albert Brooks in his 1999 film *The Muse*, have occasionally exploited the opportunities offered by the dysfunctional family of the father of gods and men.

² *Republic* 386-391.

³ As in *Il.* 8.10-17, 397-424 (by means of a messenger), 15.14-33.

⁴ It is common today to refer to this phenomenon with the less emotive 'domestic violence', a more inclusive expression that can also refer to husband-beating and to various forms of verbal and physical abuse that would not involve actual blows. I retain the older expression, since that is undoubtedly what Zeus is threatening in the passage under discussion.

⁵ This is not to suggest that there is no relationship between violence towards women and violence towards outsiders; at least two studies have found such a correlation (Hotelling and Sugarman 111).

⁶ *Eur. Med.* 230-251.

⁷ *Ar. Clouds* 46-72.

⁸ Plautus' *Menaechmi* offers another example of this reticence: Menaechmus of Epidamnus flees his wife at the beginning of the play and offers her for sale at the end, but he does not

thinkable or unremarkable.⁹ The first is not a real possibility, since there are comic fragments that admit that men beat their wives;¹⁰ but there still might be room to wonder whether the phenomenon extended to the entire pathology of wife-beating as observed by modern researchers.

I wish to demonstrate that in Iliad 1.533-611 and the subsequent scenes, the gods behave not as people involved in an ordinary fight, but as family members involved in a threatened episode of wife-beating. This is not to say that Homer's purpose in the scene is to hold Zeus up to ridicule as an abusive husband; the scene is a complex one with dramatic echoes throughout the Iliad.¹¹ But the gods throughout the epics behave in ways that are entirely human,¹² and Homer's description of them is always based on his knowledge of human behavior. Once we consider the scene in these terms, I think the conclusion inescapable that the human observation on which this scene is built is the observation of wife-beating, and that the scene, and its acceptance almost without comment by later generations, suggests that the situation depicted was at least plausible, and probably familiar, to its audience. The behavior of the principals and the reaction of the bystanders (including the narrator) in many respects echo modern observations, and in some respects stand in opposition to them. In both cases they may be instructive.

raise a finger against her. Menaechmus of Syracuse, in his mad scene, threatens her with gory violence, as he later threatens her father and the doctor (Plaut. *Men.* 831-956), but this is insanity, and that is how she takes it: her exit-line is *sumne ego mulier misera quae illaec audio?*, surely implying that normally a wife would not hear such threats. But the doubts recently raised as to whether the *Menaechmi* had a Greek original at all (Stärk; *contra* Gratwick 23-4 n. 27) require me to restrict this example to a footnote.

⁹ Schaps 169, with n. 38 there.

¹⁰ That, at any rate, is how Segal 32, understands the expression *πάσι κακοῖσι ἡμᾶς φλώσιν* (he translates, 'beat us regularly for all the trouble we cause'), Ar. fr. 9 K-A, an interpretation supported (as K-A note ad loc.) by Ar. *Clouds* 1333-6, where *ἀράττω πολλοῖς κακοῖς καίσχροῖσι* refers to verbal abuse, but *ἔφλα με* denotes physical violence. Cf. Plato fr. 105 K-A. See also the comments of Olson 167-8.

¹¹ To mention a few: it serves as an introduction to the dissension among the gods between those who favor the Greeks and those who favor the Trojans (Schadewaldt 147); it provides a contrast between the power of Zeus, exercised with moderation, matched by superiority of physical power, and acknowledged by all, and that of Agamemnon, exercised with arrogance, based on superiority of political but not physical power, and subject to challenge by Achilles (see Lowenstam 69-70); it shows for the first time, but not the last, the contrast between the gods, whose days are spent in feasting, whose cares are fleeting, and whose day ends with pleasant sleep, and men, whose days are spent in fighting, whose cares are existential, and whose day ends with death (Schadewaldt 148). I am less inclined to see this scene as 'a parody of the earthly quarrel' (Beye, *The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition* 124). Closest to my own analysis is that of Olson 161-4, who sees as archetypal the tension between the father who tries to control the family by violence and the mother who uses her own wiles and the father's desire to subvert his authority.

¹² On the seamless way in which the Olympians combine human and divine traits see Griffin 198-9.

II. Wife-beating distinguished from other violent quarrels.

Lest the reader think that I am merely making a trivial observation — anyone can see that Zeus is threatening violence, and that the person against whom he is threatening it is his wife — it must be made clear that wife-beating is not simply ordinary violence that happens, in a given case, to be exercised against one's wife. If Zeus vs. Hera were simply a rerun of Zeus vs. Kronos, it would be just one more fight, and would tell us nothing about the practice of wife-beating among the Greeks. But wife-beating is quite different from a fight. Among the differences:

- Fights normally take place between equals or near-equals: both sides will tend to avoid a fight that gives the weaker certain loss and the stronger no honor. The wife-beater, though clearly the stronger, freely initiates a fight whose very purpose may be 'to show her who's boss'.
- The outcome of a fight is initially unknown, whereas the outcome of wife-beating is known; only the severity of damage is uncertain.
- A fight between men is generally a contest over honor. Wife-beating is a direct application of power, designed not to gain respect but simply to cow the wife into compliance.
- The participants in fights change, whereas wife-beating has a fixed set of principals (man and wife) and audience (often none at all; otherwise the children, and occasionally the neighbors).
- In a fight, both sides will use roughly similar tactics, but a beaten wife's tactics are more likely to involve verbal aggression, appeasement, a search for allies (screaming to alert the neighbors, calling the police, complaining to her family), or moral pressure.
- The buildup to a fight usually involves mutually escalating insults or threats. Wife-beating, too, may be triggered this way: as long as the dispute is verbal, wives may give as good as they get, or better.¹³ But in another common scenario the escalating insults and threats tend to be more and more one-sided, since the wife is trying to avoid a beating, not to encourage it.
- Winning a fight gives honor to the winner and disgrace to the loser. Wife-beating today is shameful¹⁴ both to the husband because the behavior is

¹³ 'In contrast to the common idea that female interaction is characterized by politeness and an aversion to fighting, I found my female informants equally competent in this kind of activity as were the men.... According to what both the men and the women said, the types of arguments used by the women seemed to be more advanced and complex than those of the men. The women seemed to know more about their men than vice versa. Knowledge about the other party, especially about weaknesses and sensitivities, was considered to be valuable in this kind of verbal fighting', Hydén 81. This superiority of women in verbal attack may be a reason why the worsted male chooses to change the dispute into a physical one, as Zeus does: see below, n. 44.

¹⁴ Throughout this article I use the term 'shame' to refer to a person's diminished status in society, not the personal feeling of discomfort that may accompany a shameful situation.

frowned upon and to the wife because she tends to see the incident as a failure on her part.¹⁵

- Fights are almost always carried out in public — there is no honor without witnesses, and spectators help prevent the violence from going too far. Wife-beating generally takes place behind closed doors, and may be hidden for long periods from neighbors, friends and family.¹⁶

Most of these differences arise from one basic difference, that wife-beating is almost always an unequal contest and hence no contest at all. An observer may not be aware of all these differences, and there is room for disagreement about their number and details.¹⁷ But since the details of wife-beating are so different from the usual rules of fighting, a convincing portrayal of the circumstances, tactics, and emotional reactions involved probably has some basis in behavior observable in the society.

III. The background.

Where a fight begins usually depends on who is telling the story. From Hera's point of view, the problem began before they ever spoke, when Zeus accepted the entreaties of Thetis; from Zeus' point of view, this interview was merely background. Its very terms offer a striking example of Homer's interweaving of the divine with the everyday: Thetis had promised Achilles to ask for this favor, but she had had to wait until the twelfth day because the gods had gone to visit the Ethiopians. In terms of the plot, there is no justification for the twelve-day wait, during which nothing happened on Olympus or at Troy; nor is any explanation offered as to why Thetis, who had no difficulty in moving from the sea to Olympus, did not have the ability (or perhaps permission) to travel to the Ethiopians herself and speak to Zeus there. But the waiting period presents very effectively Zeus' status as king and Thetis' as petitioner, who must cool her heels until the boss gets back from vacation. Upon his return she went to seek him, touching his knees and chin in the traditional position of a suppliant (1.500-2). Her words were conciliatory but pointed (1.503-10),¹⁸ and she was confident of her ability to persuade him (1.427).¹⁹

¹⁵ On the mutual shame, which might at first glance seem counter-intuitive, see, *inter alia*, Jackson and Oates 126; on the woman's side see Walker, *The Battered Woman* 32-3. Later, however, in *The Battered Woman Syndrome* 80-2, 193, Walker found that battered women saw themselves more positively than they saw other women; she considered this result surprising and recommended further research. The observation must be treated with great caution, since she did not measure her volunteers against a control group of non-battered women.

¹⁶ On the usefulness of public attention as a way of restraining domestic violence see Burbank 59.

¹⁷ The literature describing the behavior of the principals in wife-beating is overwhelmingly western, and particularly American. I could have wished for more description of the phenomenology of wife-beating in primitive or Mediterranean societies, but the literature from those places tends to focus more on aspects such as frequency, legality, and preventative measures, matters that do not figure in Homer's description.

¹⁸ She asked for a favor 'if I have ever done anything for you by word or deed among the immortals', (1.503-4). In fact she had saved his kingship, and Homer has seen to it (1.396-406) that we know this detail.

Zeus, however, did not answer, and Thetis had to press him, with a properly submissive reminder that she would take a negative answer as an insult (1.514-16). Now Zeus admitted what was troubling him:

ἦ δὴ λοίγια ἔργ', ὃ τέ μ' ἐχθοδοπήσαι ἐφήσεις
 Ἥρηι, ὄτ' ἄν μ' ἐρέθῃσιν ὀνειδείοις ἐπέεσσιν.
 ἦ δὲ καὶ αὐτως μ' αἰεὶ ἐν ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν
 νεικεῖ, καὶ τέ μέ φησι μάχη Τρώεσσιν ἀρήγειν.
 ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν νῦν αὖτις ἀπόστιχε, μὴ τι νοήσῃ
 Ἥρη· ἐμοὶ δέ κε ταῦτα μελήσεται, ὄφρα τελέσω.

This is a bad business, for you are urging me to stir up
 Hera's hate, when she provokes me²⁰ with abusive words.
 Even as things are, forever among the immortal gods
 She fights with me and says that I help the Trojans in battle.
 But you go back again now, so that Hera won't
 Notice something. I will take care of getting this done.²¹

At this point Zeus nodded his head 'so that you will believe me (ὄφρα πεποιθήεις)', shaking great Olympus,²² and Thetis returned to the sea.

This prologue has already indicated some things about Zeus. He is not seeking a fight with Hera; on the contrary, he would prefer to avoid it. He is, moreover, susceptible to management by women. Thetis suspected in advance that she would be able to persuade him, and persuade him she does, against his own better judgment. He knows that there will be a scene with Hera, but he is unable to prevent it.

All of this can be interpreted to Zeus' credit: he is receptive to Thetis' supplication as Agamemnon was not to Chryses',²³ and he is dismayed at the prospect of fighting with his wife where Agamemnon was willing to introduce a rival to the house with explicit disdain for Clytemnestra's feelings. But Zeus' relative sensitivity does not necessarily contradict the violence that he will threaten later on, for wife-beaters come in various types. There are those who use violence as a substitute for true closeness (which they fear); these are the men who come home, often drunk, looking for a fight and do not cease their belligerent behavior until they have succeeded in eliciting from their wife a word or an action that will justify (to their minds) the drubbing they want to give her. Zeus is not this sort of husband, nor is there any suggestion that drinking nectar makes

¹⁹ The term Homer uses in 1.502 is λισσομένη, a request that is made by somebody who has some valid claim. See Aubriot-Sévin 439-94, in particular 444 n. 127, and Pulleyn's note on 1.502.

²⁰ As she certainly will: the subjunctive with ἄν that Zeus uses is a future construction. See Latacz ad loc., citing Chantraine II §380.

²¹ 1.518-23. The Greek text is that of West; the translations are my own.

²² We are certainly not supposed to ask why he chooses such a loud way of making a promise he is trying to keep secret.

²³ 1.24-32. Zeus considers it his problem if Hera provokes him (ὄτ' ἄν μ' ἐρέθῃσιν 1.519); for Agamemnon, if Chryses provokes him, that is Chryses' problem (ἀλλ' ἴθι, μὴ μ' ἐρέθιζε, σαώτερος ὧς κε νήηαι 1.32).

him worse. But even today no single factor identifies husbands who beat their wives,²⁴ and we would have yet less justification for presuming *a priori* that a modern stereotype would hold for Homeric Greece.²⁵

IV. The confrontation.

When Zeus enters his house, all the gods rise; they would not dare do otherwise.²⁶ Hera recognizes at a glance²⁷ what has been going on between Zeus and Thetis. He sits upon his throne and Hera immediately speaks to him ‘provocatively’:²⁸

τίς δὴ αὖ τοι, δολομήτα, θεῶν συμφράσσατο βουλάς;
αἰεὶ τοι φίλον ἔστιν ἐμεῖ’ ἀπὸ νόσφιν ἔοντα
κρυπτάδια φρονέοντα δικαζέμεν· οὐδέ τί πώ μοι
πρόφρων τέτληκας εἰπεῖν ἔπος ὅττι νοήσης.

Sly one, now which of the gods has been discussing matters with you?
You always like to keep far away from me,
And to judge things according to your secret thoughts. You have never
Dared to go ahead and tell me the thing you have in mind.²⁹

These are just what Homer said they would be, provocative words. Δολομήτα, ‘sly one’, is a ἄπαξ λεγόμενον, but it is not a compliment: its sister δολόμητις occurs in the Odyssey, where it is applied to Aegisthus five times and once to Clytemnestra.³⁰ The brusque address that begins with a demand for information, the statement that this is his usual behavior, the term κρυπτάδια that implies (correctly) that he is hiding things from her on purpose, and the scornful οὐδέ τί πω ... τέτληκας, ‘you have never dared’, do not characterize the kind of gentle or respectful tone that a man would want to hear from his wife. As abusive husbands tend to put it, Hera is asking for it.

²⁴ Hotaling and Sugarman, in a survey of evidence that had been published at the time, found that few alleged ‘risk markers’ for identifying husbands likely to beat their wives had much empirical support.

²⁵ Tempting for a typology of the relationship between Zeus and Hera would be the sort of situation described by Gayford, which he calls that of the ‘highly competent wife’ (Gayford 131). This wife is usually well-educated, often a professional, and generally her husband’s intellectual superior. The husband finds his position of inferiority intolerable, and compensates for it by asserting his superiority in the field where it is most certain: he can beat her up. This, however, is not quite a description of Zeus’ relationship with Hera. He is by no means inferior to her or dependent upon her, though she on her side does not accept a position of inferiority to him, and the matter galls him. A more serious objection is that neither this characterization of women nor any other has been shown consistently to correlate with their being victims of violence, except for one: women who have witnessed violence in their family of origin are more likely to become its victims in marriage (Hotaling and Sugarman 106-111).

²⁶ οὐδέ τις ἔτλη / μεῖναι ἐπερχόμενον 1.534-5.

²⁷ οὐδέ μιν Ἥρη / ἠγνοίησεν ἰδοῦσ’ 1.536-7.

²⁸ κερτομίοισι, ‘with words that cut the heart’ (Σ D ad loc.).

²⁹ 1.540-3.

³⁰ See also the comment of Pulleyn ad loc., comparing it to the epithet ἀγκυλομήτης used of Cronus: ‘Hera implies that Zeus is in reality no better than his crooked father’.

Not only Hera's language but the nature of her demand is a typical trigger for violence. Margareta Hydén, in a study claiming that violence is a matter of patterns of marital interaction, paid a good deal of attention to the question of how fights get started.³¹

According to my informants, the first step in the verbal aggressive episode was an utterance about a commonplace issue, constructed as an opposition in regard to the issue in question....

The special type of opposed utterance that is the precursor to my informants' arguments is best described as consisting both of a difference in understanding the 'antecedent event', and an intention to influence the other's behavior or attitude to the issue in question. An example of this is the following:

'He drinks too much. Most of our fights start with me getting impatient with his drinking. His daily rhythm is disrupted when he drinks. He can stay up and party all night, sleep all day, and then party again all night. That makes it impossible for me to relax. And he blows a lot of money this way. Our fights are often about money. His defense is often "This has nothing to do with you. This is my life". That type of answer saddens me every time'. (Ruth H., individual interview)³²

According to Hydén, the request to change, which in a different model of discourse might lead into a discussion of the proposed change, is instead construed as an act of personal opposition. This is followed by a refusal,³³ and that is what Hera gets. Zeus is still diplomatic, assuring her that she will be the first to know whatever he is willing to have known, but he warns her not to try to know all of his plans; they would be hard for her, even though she is his wife (μη δὴ πάντας ἐμοὺς ἐπιέλπεο μύθους / εἰδήσειν· χαλεποί τοι ἔσονται ἀλόχῳ περ ἑούσῃ, 1.545-6).

Hydén notes that the continuation of the discussion tends to move on to the personal level: 'What was found ... was the frequent use of a turn, not meant as an opposition to prior *utterances*, but more as an opposition to the general competence and *personal characteristics* or *status* of the person making the utterance in question'.³⁴ Zeus, indeed, already in his refusal makes a point of putting Hera in her place. He is trying to assert his superiority, as part of his superiority over the gods in general, and he understands that Hera thinks that she, as his wife, is exempt from this.

ὄν δέ κ' ἐγὼν ἀπάνευθε θεῶν ἐθέλωμι νοῆσαι,
μή τι σὺ ταῦτα ἕκαστα διείρεο μηδὲ μετᾶλλα.

But what I choose to have in mind apart from the gods,
Don't *you* ask me or interrogate me at all about each of these things.³⁵

³¹ I have particularly relied on Hydén's study in this article because, since she based her method of investigation on the interviewees' construction of a narrative account, her study offers a good deal of information about the way in which a discourse of violence develops, and thus a good parallel for the narratives of the Iliad.

³² Hydén 68.

³³ Ibid. 77-80.

³⁴ Ibid. 80.

³⁵ 1.549-50.

‘Even though you are my wife’; ‘interrogate me ... about each of these things’: Zeus is being diplomatic, but he makes it clear that she is overstepping the limits. He wants to have his relationship with Hera structured like his relationship with the other gods.

Hera recognizes the ominous words, and reacts not as a fighter, but as a wife: she beats a retreat.

αἰνότατε Κρονίδη, ποῖον τὸν μῦθον ἔειπες;
καὶ λίην σε πάρος γ' οὐτ' εἶρομαι οὔτε μεταλλῶ,
ἀλλὰ μάλ' εὐκηλος τὰ φράζειαι ἄσος' ἐθέλησθα.

Most terrible son of Cronus, what kind of word have you said?
Even in the past, I have surely never asked you or interrogated you,
But you plan whatever you want perfectly easily.³⁶

So far, perhaps, so good: if Zeus were looking for trouble he could take offense at the statement that she never did what she has just done,³⁷ but as we have seen, he does not want an argument. Hera, however, does not yet give up her request: she ‘is terribly afraid in her heart’ (αἰνῶς δειδοῖκα κατὰ φρένα, 1.555) that Thetis has been talking to Zeus, and she thinks that Zeus nodded assent to her.

On the straightforward level, she is behaving entirely correctly: she no longer asks him for the information he warned her not to (‘Who has been speaking to you?’), nor does she make any direct request of him at all. Unlike the people in Hydén’s combative model, she does not repeat her unpleasant characterizations of his behavior. On the psychological level, however, she is terribly mistaken in her choice of strategy.³⁸ Her entire approach is the feminine tactic of trying to influence him by asserting her powerlessness,³⁹ the kind of approach that already made him uncomfortable when Thetis used it. For Thetis it worked, but giving in once to Thetis is not the same as giving in to Hera in a situation that repeats itself regularly between husband and wife. Yet worse, by mentioning Thetis, Zeus’ assent, and what she ‘thinks’ (οἶω) he has agreed to, she admits that she has been less than straightforward with him, and knew perfectly well the information she claimed to be trying to get from him: that is, she has been trying to manipulate him in ways that the other gods could not use — exactly what he has just warned her against. His answer begins with sarcasm and ends with a threat:

³⁶ 1.552-4.

³⁷ He might also take ποῖον, as one reader of this article did, as an implied criticism (‘What nonsense!’), but it can equally well be taken as a deflecting pout (‘Oh, how can a mighty god like you say such a thing?’).

³⁸ A common problem of battered wives: ‘Women and children spent considerable time and energy in trying to second-guess what the man’s mood would be like so they could try to make things better ... Frequently, mothers and young people referred to being able to “cut the atmosphere with a knife”, constantly scared of doing something “wrong” which could be used as an excuse to trigger an assault’, McGee 100.

³⁹ Hera might have taken another tack. Embarrassed by Thetis, Zeus had made a promise to her of the sort that a king would not normally make without discussing it with his advisors. Hera, however, keeps the matter entirely between the two of them, and avoids claiming any rights at all, for herself or for any other god, against Zeus’ free will.

δαιμονίη, αἰεὶ μὲν δῖεαι, οὐδέ σε λήθω,
 πρῆξι δ' ἔμπης οὐ τι δυνήσεται, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ θυμοῦ
 μάλλον ἐμοὶ ἔσσει, τὸ δέ τοι καὶ ῥίγιον ἔσται.
 εἰ δ' οὕτω τοῦτ' ἔστιν, ἐμοὶ μέλλει φίλον εἶναι.
 ἀλλ' ἀκέουσα κάθησο, ἐμῶι δ' ἐπιπέθεο μύθωι,
 μή νύ τοι οὐ χραίσμωσιν ὅσοι θεοὶ εἰς' ἐν Ὀλύμπωι
 ἄσσον ἰόνθ', ὅτε κέν τοι ἀάπτους χεῖρας ἐφείω.

Very funny!⁴⁰ You always 'think',⁴¹ and I never escape your notice;
 But you won't be able to do anything at all. You'll just be further
 Away from my heart, and that will be all the worse for you.
 If that is the way this is, that must be the way I like it.
 So sit down even though you don't like it, and obey my word,
 Lest all the gods in Olympus be unable to defend you⁴²
 If I come nearer, when I put my irresistible hands on you.⁴³

The first words identify exactly what bothers him: her 'high competence' — she always knows what he plans — and the suggestion that she can get her way. He resists it with the ace-in-the-hole of the wife-beater, by moving the argument onto the level of physical violence, a level on which Hera will certainly lose.⁴⁴ Hera reads the situation correctly and does as she is told, sitting down even though she doesn't like it, 'repressing her own heart' (ἐπιγνάμψασα φίλον κῆρ 569).

At this point the focus turns away from husband and wife to the onlookers. The rest of the gods are made uncomfortable by the scene. They are not being directly threatened as long as they don't try to intervene — which they certainly will not — but they are made uncomfortable (ὄχθησαν, 1.570) at having to witness the scene. One might take this as nothing more than the embarrassment felt when husband and wife have a disagreement in the middle of a friendly gathering, but the term used by Homer is precisely the term used of a person who feels required to do something but unable to do so⁴⁵ —

⁴⁰ 'This word [δαιμονίη], found only in the vocative in Homer, may imply that the addressee is acting unexpectedly, because of the influence of a δαίμων. Very often, there is a tone not only of surprise but also of rebuke; cf. Eng. "what's got into you?", Pulleyn ad loc. For other views of the meaning of this hotly debated word see the brief comments of Dickey 141-2.

⁴¹ One of Hydén's methods of 'communicating worthlessness' is what she calls "definite" talk: '[In] "definite" talk, things happen *never* or *always*, when they most probably happen *seldom* or *often*. "Definite" talk omits everything specific, and touches upon every subject with a general sweep', Hydén 85. This is, of course, a common — and in domestic situations, a very destructive — psychological perception or rhetorical maneuver.

⁴² Another parallel with Agamemnon, who threatened that the god's scepter and fillets would be unable to defend Chryses. Again, Zeus' real power is contrasted to Agamemnon's bluster. In 1.588-9 Hephaestus admits that he would not be able to defend Hera (οὐ τι δυνήσομαι ... χραισμεῖν), and at 14.21-4 Zeus reminds her that the other gods were unable to defend her in the past. Cf. also 8.18-27.

⁴³ 1.561-7.

⁴⁴ 'Men resort more quickly to violence when they can no longer contain a verbal attack which is a more feminine technique of contesting', Le Gall 85.

⁴⁵ 'Not good intentions, but results, are demanded of the Homeric ἀγαθός, in all his activities: he is constantly faced, or threatened, with a demand that he should succeed in doing what he

and as such, it indicates that the gods recognize that they should try to defend Hera, although they cannot. Zeus himself will imply the same in Book 15, when he describes how he hung her in the upper air and the clouds with anvils on her feet, 'and the gods scurried around great Olympus, but they were not able to free you standing by' (15.21-2). Among the Olympians, too, it would seem, the presence of outsiders should be a protection against wife-beating. When Zeus is the offender, none of the gods can offer physical protection, and they find the fact frustrating. For all that, it is not impossible that their presence is a psychological protection, either because he would rather not incur their disapproval even though unexpressed, or because they themselves can provide, by their acquiescence, the confirmation of his superiority that he would otherwise have to exact from Hera herself.

V. Hephaestus' intervention.

Homer disposes of the gods' distress in a single line; it is Hephaestus, the son of Zeus and Hera, who steals the scene with his intervention. The sons and daughters of Zeus and Hera are all gods, and none of them are children or adolescents; but Hephaestus the cripple, who 'is repeatedly a victim',⁴⁶ is not an inappropriate choice to embody a child's reaction to the threat of violence.

The reaction is appropriate to a family situation. Children rarely intervene in a fight between men, even if their father is involved; they know that they can only cause harm to themselves. In the case of wife-beating, however, the occasional intervention of children to try to restrain the husband, even where they are obviously unable to overpower him, is a well-documented strategy, though not the only one.⁴⁷

Hephaestus does not try to intervene physically: he tried that before with disastrous results (1.590-4).⁴⁸ Instead he tries a public and a private strategy: publicly by minimizing the importance of the issue and appeasing his father, and privately by urging his

cannot do; and a psychological response of frustration, distress and anger, all confused together, seems not inappropriate to his situation. This, I suggest, is ὀχθεῖν', Adkins 15. So also Scully 14, and similarly Considine 24-5: 'In the great majority of passages, it expresses the frustrated reaction of one who finds himself in a disagreeable dilemma or in disagreeable circumstances which he is impotent to alter, and about which he is therefore likely to be angry. In nearly every case the subject feels puzzled or thwarted'. The same verb recurs at 15.101 when Hera appears among the gods, obviously frightened; but here there is another reason for their discomfort, since she has unpleasant things to tell them about Zeus' plans.

⁴⁶ Scodel 39. She is referring to his being thrown from heaven by Zeus (1.586-94) and by Hera (18.394-407), and attributes the stories to 'a general familiarity with the gods' personalities, which renders them credible' (ibid. 40). Her observation is in no way contradicted by the scene in *Od.* 8.266-366 where Hephaestus traps Ares and Aphrodite in bed: he wins that round, but he is still the crippled cuckold husband of a wife too beautiful for him.

⁴⁷ For examples, and for other coping strategies, see McGee 100-110.

⁴⁸ This, too, is a common phenomenon today: 'Many adolescents are injured when they attempt to protect their mother from their father's violence'. (Williams, Boggess, and Carter, 170-1, quoting as their source Williams, 'Developing an African American perspective', which was not available to me.) 'Another major problem faced by these children is the risk of physical injury to themselves, whether intentional or accidental, especially if they attempt to intervene on behalf of the victimized parent' (Carlson 154).

mother to submit. First he addresses Hera in public, ‘offering his mother friendship’⁴⁹ (μητρὶ φίλῃ ἐπὶ ἧρα φέρων, 1.572). His claims are three: it is ‘a bad business’ (ἦ δὴ λοίγια ἔργα, 1.573, the same expression Zeus had used at 1.518 of Thetis’ getting him into a quarrel with Hera) for the two of them to fight over mortals and spoil the pleasure of the feast; he advises his mother to ‘offer friendship’⁵⁰ to Zeus (πατρὶ φίλωι ἐπὶ ἧρα φέρειν, 1.578), because otherwise Zeus might blow them all out of their seats (1.580-1), because he is much more powerful (ὁ γὰρ πολὺ φέρτερός ἐστιν, 1.581); and he assures her that if she gives in, Zeus will calm down:

ἀλλὰ σὺ τόν γ’ ἐπέεσσι καθάπτεσθαι μαλακοῖσιν·
αὐτίκ’ ἔπειθ’ Ἰλαος Ὀλύμπιος ἔσσεται ἡμῖν.

But you, address him with gentle words;
Then the Olympian will right away be gracious to us.⁵¹

In the first part of his speech, Hephaestus succeeds in doing what Hera failed to do: he sees the situation as Zeus saw it, a bad business, and so can deflect the blame from Hera herself to the mortals over whom they are fighting. In the second part he gives Zeus what he wants, admission of his supreme power; and in the third he paints a flattering picture of a gracious Zeus, a picture that is well designed to encourage his father to adopt the persona of which Hephaestus pretends to be certain. Adopting a submissive attitude is perhaps the most obvious way to deal with a father’s brutality.⁵²

The first speech is for public consumption; but in private Hephaestus assures Hera that he is on her side. He brings his mother a cup — something nobody had asked him to

⁴⁹ This is the translation of M. Schmidt in LfgrE s.v. (‘der lieben Mutter Freundlichkeit entgegenbringend’), and fits the tone of its echo in Hephaestus’ speech, on which see below, better than Leaf’s ‘doing kind service’, which Pulleyn chooses. Schmidt points out that in later Greek ἧρα is replaced by χάρις, which perhaps renders it better than any English.

⁵⁰ Here Schmidt in LfgrE s.v. explains: ‘Hera soll nicht Gleiches mit Gleichem vergelten, sondern eher freundlich entgegenkommen, *nachgeben*’. Translators have tended to obscure the parallel: ‘in his mother’s care (1.572) ... Give good termes to our lov’d father (1.577)’, Chapman; ‘to bring comfort to his beloved mother (1.572) ... to be ingratiating toward our father (1.577)’, Lattimore; ‘doing a kindness to the snowy-armed lady, his mother Hêra (1.572) ... better make up to Father (1.577)’, Fitzgerald; ‘to bring his loving mother a little comfort (1.572) ... work back into his good graces (1.577)’, Fagles. Pope offers ‘Peace at his heart, and pleasure his design, / Thus interposed the architect divine (1.572) ... Thou, goddess-mother, with our sire comply (1.577)’, one example out of thousands why Bentley thought that it was a pretty poem but you must not call it Homer. Others may think that nothing but a pretty poem can be called Homer.

⁵¹ 1.582-3.

⁵² ‘Another strategy, used particularly by younger children, was to ally themselves with their fathers to protect themselves.... Children also thought of ways of behaving which they hoped would protect their mother, not just themselves. For example one little boy would try to persuade his mother to be submissive in an attempt to avert his father’s violence’, McGee 104. ‘I blamed my mother. If only she wouldn’t talk back to him or nag and complain so much about the same old things all the time.... If only she’d be nicer, more loving and understanding, and not set him off. (Of course this is what my father said, too.)’, Jones 2-3.

do, but it offers his mother a distraction and provides a good cover for speaking to her directly⁵³ — and says:

τέτλαθι, μήτηρ ἐμή, καὶ ἀνάσχεο κηδομένη περ,
μὴ σε φίλην περ εἴουσιν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἴδωμαι
θεινομένην· τότε δ' οὐ τι δυνήσομαι, ἀχνύμενός περ,
χραιοσμεῖν.

Endure it, my mother, and put up with it even though you are distressed,
So that I won't have to see you, as dear to me as you are, being hit in front
Of my eyes; then, even though it will hurt me, I won't be able at all
To defend you.⁵⁴

and he continues by describing the time he tried to defend her, and was thrown out of heaven for his efforts.

Homer's unerring art has put into Hephaestus' mouth precisely the part of wife-beating that is most painful to children: having to witness it. Hephaestus does not warn Hera of the pain she will feel; he may suspect that she is either injured to it or sufficiently jealous of her dignity that she would be willing to endure it. He warns her of the pain it would cause him to see her 'being hit in front of [his] eyes', and to be powerless to stop it. The effect of seeing, or even overhearing, an incident of wife-beating can be devastating for children.⁵⁵ A public-service advertisement in the New York subways some years ago warned that an incident of domestic violence would be recorded by the most sensitive recording mechanism known; the accompanying picture showed only a child's pair of eyes.

Hephaestus' public words, although addressed to Hera, were meant for Zeus' ears; his private words, on the contrary, assure his mother that he is on her side, and it is precisely because she is so dear to him that he urges her to give in. Hera's reaction is the pivotal moment of the scene:

μείδησεν δὲ θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,
μειδήσασα δὲ παιδὸς ἐδέξατο χεῖρὶ κύπελλον.

⁵³ The words are addressed to Hera only; Homer does not state whether or not we are to imagine Zeus and the other gods as hearing them. Whether or not anyone else hears, it is only Hera who responds, and even she does so wordlessly.

⁵⁴ 1.586-9.

⁵⁵ 'Children interviewed in this study have described witnessing the violence by being physically present when it happened.... Children commonly overhear the violence and are very afraid, highlighting the fact that children do not have to directly witness the violence to be (sometimes profoundly) disturbed by it.... Children frequently talk about their powerlessness in the situation as one of the worst aspects of their experience', McGee 79-80. 'Older children talked about trying to protect younger siblings from knowledge of the violence. They did this by not talking about it in front of the younger child, turning music or the television up to cover sounds, taking the child out of the room and trying to reassure them or convince them that everything was all right', *ibid.* 102. Cf. Hester 102.

The goddess, white-armed Hera, smiled,
And smiling, she accepted the cup from her son with her hand.⁵⁶

By her smile, and by accepting the cup, Hera yields without the indignity of having to do so directly,⁵⁷ but why does she smile? Is it because her heart is warmed by Hephaestus' devotion? Because her affections are aroused by his mentioning his previous (ineffectual) effort to defend her? Because she is happy to have the quarrel ended? Or is she simply 'putting a good face on it' while hiding her true feelings,⁵⁸ perhaps even meditating how to get her way in spite of everything? Any of these, the last most of all, would be a possible reaction from a wife threatened with a beating and offered a gracious exit from the situation.

Hephaestus has gotten from Hera, albeit tacitly, the concession he wanted; he does not wait to hear Zeus' reaction, but begins to pour nectar for all the gods.

ἄσβεστος δ' ἄρ' ἐνώρτο γέλωσ μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν,
ὡς ἴδον Ἥφαιστων διὰ δώματα ποιπνύοντα.

And an irrepressible laughter broke out among the blessed gods,
As they saw Hephaestus bustling through the house.⁵⁹

After his success at distracting Hera by offering her a cup, Hephaestus finally defuses the tension by pouring the nectar for all the gods, a job in no way his — Zeus' cupbearers were Hebe, 'Youth', and Ganymede, kidnapped for his exquisite beauty — and quite inappropriate for a cripple. The gods react to Hephaestus' officious limping as the Achaeans later react to the welt on Thersites' crooked back,⁶⁰ with unrestrained laughter. The dangerous moment has passed.

Willcock⁶¹ is no doubt correct — insofar as it is ever correct to ascribe intention to a fictional character⁶² — that the gods' reaction was precisely what Hephaestus intended. In the literature on domestic violence, I have not found any reference to children's trying to distract their father by drawing laughter upon themselves, nor is it easy to imagine their doing so in a situation as tense and as violent as an actual beating. But the tactic of intentionally turning oneself into an object of laughter in order to avoid a more painful situation is an established one,⁶³ and one that Hephaestus here uses to excellent effect.

⁵⁶ 1.595-6. On the use of the aorist participle to describe an action concomitant with that of the main verb see Barrett on Eur. *Hipp.* 289-292; my thanks to Ra'anana Meridor for pointing this out to me.

⁵⁷ So Latacz ad loc.

⁵⁸ So Pulleyn ad loc., with some interesting parallels.

⁵⁹ 1.599-600.

⁶⁰ 2.265-77.

⁶¹ Ad loc.

⁶² The extent to which it is true is only the extent to which the audience can be expected to infer the intention; and I do not think that Willcock is stretching matters too far when he thinks that the listeners will realize what Hephaestus is supposed to be up to.

⁶³ Eileen Simpson used this trick to disguise her dyslexia: 'To be a sketch was greatly preferable to being the family idiot. Encouraged, I tried out my act in school. What had made Aunt Lucy smile ruefully made my classmates, always greedy for a diversion, explode with laughter; The same boys and girls who the previous year had laughed at the freak were now laughing with the jester. The teacher clapped her hands and said, "Class! Class!" calling it to

Hydén found two factors that often aborted a potentially violent argument: interruption by children, neighbors, or friends, or the resignation of the woman.⁶⁴ Hephaestus' appeal to Hera has secured her tacit retreat, but no more; he does not get from her the 'gentle words' that he wanted.⁶⁵ He finesses the matter by offering a distraction as well, and the gods return to their feasting. The end of the scene (609-611) is pointed, and unlike what a modern observer might have expected:

Ζεὺς δὲ πρὸς ὃν λέχος ἦι' Ὀλύμπιος ἀστεροπητῆς,
 εἶθα πάρος κοιμᾶθ', ὅτε μιν γλυκὺς ὕπνος ἰκάνοι·
 εἶθα καθηῦδ' ἀναβάς, παρά δὲ χρυσόθρονος Ἥρη.

And Olympian Zeus, the thrower of lightning, went to his bed,
 Where he was used to lie down, when sweet sleep came upon him.
 There he got into bed and lay down, and next to him golden-throned Hera.

I do not think that metrical reasons alone account for the epithet χρυσόθρονος. There are only two other times when Hera is 'golden-throned':⁶⁶ at 14.153, when she is about to conceive the plan to seduce Zeus in order to help the Achaeans, and at 15.5 when Zeus wakes up afterward. Hera's royal position is intimately connected with her being Zeus' wife,⁶⁷ and their reconciliation confirms her majesty. Her husband's threats have not, in the end, been shameful for her or for him.

VI. Recurrences.

There are two more scenes in the Iliad in which Zeus threatens Hera with violence. The first of these scenes takes place on the battlefield, the second, as it were, in the transition from bedroom to battle; neither repeats the 'classic' description of Book 1. The two scenes, however, do give an indication of the ongoing relationship of the divine royal couple, and the progression — or deterioration — of the situation will help us evaluate the extent to which Zeus' behavior was acceptable in the eyes of the community (i.e., the other gods), and the extent to which their opinion made a difference to how husband and wife saw the situation.

Book 8 begins with a general threat addressed to all the gods and goddesses: they are no longer to intervene, as they have been doing freely since Aphrodite whisked Paris off

order, but she was laughing too. It wasn't long before I was acknowledged to be the class clown', Simpson 60.

⁶⁴ Hydén 87.

⁶⁵ On 'the resignation of the woman' Hydén comments: 'The majority of female informants knew how to do this, but were also aware of what it did to their life project' (ibid.).

⁶⁶ The epithet obviously cannot have this meaning when applied to Artemis at 9.533 and at *Od.* 5.123, since Artemis is not queen of the gods; the source of this use is probably in cult, where Artemis' position was considerably more important than in Homer's Olympus. The use of the term to refer to Eos (*Od.* 10.541 and elsewhere) refers, as the ancients took it, to the color of the dawn (Eustathius on 1.611).

⁶⁷ As Aphrodite admits when deferring to Hera in 14.212-3: 'It is impossible, it is not proper to refuse your word; for you spend the night in the arms of Zeus, the greatest'. There is a good deal of irony in the poet's use of these words (see Janko ad loc.), but they are not inaccurate.

the battlefield at 3.373-82. He is more explicit than he was at 1.567 when he threatened to ‘put [his] irresistible hands on’ Hera; any disobedient divinity ‘will go [back] to Olympus beaten beyond proportion’⁶⁸ or be thrown down to Tartarus. He reminds them pointedly that if they were all to pull against him, he would overpower the lot of them (8.18-27); none of the gods denies it. Athena is uncomfortable with this decree the moment she hears it, and obtains her father’s agreement to allow the gods to give advice. Earlier, when Hera and Athena had suspected that Menelaus’ victory over Paris would end the war and leave Troy standing, Athena, the daughter, had sat in resentful silence, while Hera, the wife, spoke out;⁶⁹ in the current situation Athena makes a request, but Hera’s reaction gets no special mention.

Perhaps she felt no need to ask for favors, for by 8.200, when advice is not enough and Nestor and Diomedes are fleeing before Hector’s attack, she can take no more, and goes to Poseidon to urge him to join her in helping the Achaeans. She even suggests that they can beat Zeus:

εἴ περ γάρ κ’ ἐθέλοιμεν, ὅσοι Δαναοῖσιν ἄρωγοί,
Τρῶας ἀπώσασθαι καὶ ἐρυκέμεν εὐρύοπα Ζῆν,
αὐτοῦ κ’ ἔνθ’ ἀκάχοιτο καθήμενος οἶος ἐν Ἴδηι.

If all we who are helpers to the Danaans should be willing
To fend off the Trojans and restrain wide-voiced Zeus,
Then he would be sorry there, sitting alone on Ida.⁷⁰

Poseidon, however, knows better than to fight with Zeus,⁷¹ and Homer switches his attention to the battle; Hera’s help is restricted for now to urging on Agamemnon at a crucial moment.⁷² But Teucer slaughters the Achaeans with his arrows, Hector renews the attack, and at 8.350-6 Hera turns to Athena and gets a better reception: Athena remembers the help she gave to Zeus’ son Heracles, and decides that she can go into battle even against Zeus’ will. She and Hera arm and are already in their chariots on their way to battle when Zeus sends them Iris with a message:

γυῖώσω μὲν σφῶϊν ὑφ’ ἄρμασιν ὠκέας ἵππους,
αὐτὰς δ’ ἐκ δίφρου βαλέω κατὰ θ’ ἄρματα ἄξω·
οὐδέ κεν ἐς δεκάτους περιτελλομένους ἐνιαυτούς

⁶⁸ πληγείς οὐ κατὰ κόσμον ἐλεύσεται Οὐλυμπόνδε 8.12, taking οὐ κατὰ κόσμον with πληγείς as Cunliffe does. If we take οὐ κατὰ κόσμον with ἐλεύσεται, as did Ameis and Hentze, we would translate ‘will get beaten and go back to Olympus disgracefully’. The Greek can bear either interpretation, so that the choice is that of the reader (or the rhapsode), not of the author.

⁶⁹ 4.20-9. On this occasion Zeus, whose plan from the beginning had regretfully included the destruction of Troy, let Hera have her way, but not without getting very upset (μέγ’ ὀχθήσας 4.30: for the meaning of the expression see above, n. 45).

⁷⁰ 8.205-7.

⁷¹ Schadewaldt 100 and 114, observes perceptively that this anticlimactic answer prepares the way for Poseidon’s very different behavior as Hera’s accomplice in Book 14. One might add that his immediate acknowledgement of Zeus’ superiority at 8.210-11 demonstrates the depth of his indignation when he insists on his own equality at 15.184-217.

⁷² 8.217-19.

ἔλκε' ἀπαλήσεισθον, ἃ κεν μάρπτῃσι κεραυνός·
ὄφρ' εἶδη Γλαυκῶπις, ὅτ' ἂν ᾧ πατρὶ μάχῃται.

I will cripple both of their swift horses on their chariots,
And I will throw them out of their seat and break the chariots;
And in ten years of revolving seasons
The wounds that the thunderbolt will fasten on them will not heal;
In order that Athena should know, when she fights against her own father.⁷³

This is the same threat he made against all of the gods and goddesses, though he goes into more detail; he also makes the point that family relationships will not hold him back. All the more noteworthy are the words he adds immediately:

Ἥρῃ δ' οὐ τι τόσον νεμεσίζομαι οὐδὲ χολοῦμαι·
αἰεὶ γάρ μοι ἔωθεν ἐνικλᾶν, ὅττι νοήσω.

But I do not blame Hera or get angry with her so much,
Because she is always in the habit of frustrating whatever I plan.⁷⁴

To Iris, at least, Zeus admits what Hera already knew when she spoke up in 4.20-9, and what Zeus himself had denied so firmly in the first book: Hera *can* get away with more than the other gods can, since she is his wife. He is even used to the fact, and does not take it as hard as he takes his daughter's opposition.⁷⁵

Iris' threat has the desired effect; Hera turns back to Olympus with Athena, not before she has said a few bitter words about how 'that one' (κεῖνος) will do what he wants. When Zeus arrives they sulk and do not speak to him, but he insists on rubbing in the point that is important to him: he is stronger than they are, stronger than all the gods together. Athena does not answer; Hera does answer, as she did in Book 1, admitting his superiority but maintaining her dissatisfaction. Zeus answers that tomorrow he will do worse things to the Achaeans. As for Hera, he doesn't care if she runs away to the ends of the earth and to Tartarus. Zeus has now taken the offensive in communicating to Hera her worthlessness; and Hera, beaten, does not answer. Night falls, but this scene does not end with them going to bed together.

The first scene started with threats and ended in bed; the second scene started with threats but did not end in bed; the third scene starts in bed, but ends quite differently. The erotic beginning is a manipulative love: Hera, with Aphrodite's unsuspecting connivance, has seduced Zeus in order to allow Poseidon to rally the Achaeans while Zeus is asleep. When Zeus awakes, sees Hector vomiting blood, and realizes what has happened, he turns on Hera with harsher words than before, and threats that are no longer dependent upon her future actions:

⁷³ 8.402-6.

⁷⁴ 8.407-8.

⁷⁵ Kirk ad loc. thinks that these verses 'are added, a little lamely perhaps, to take account of Here (who is, however, to suffer the same punishment)', and 'suspect[s] later, even post-rhapsodic, elaboration'. Even if they are excised, however, the fact remains that it is Athena, not Hera, to whom he wants to teach a lesson in 8.406. If Kirk is right Zeus may indeed be as angry with Hera as with Athena, but he is in any event less sanguine about the possibilities of improving her behavior by punishment. The doubts of Aristarchus as to whether Iris could really have repeated these words at 420-4 are not relevant to our discussion.

ἦ μάλα δὴ κακότεχνος, ἀμήχανε, σὸς δόλος, Ἥρη,
 Ἐκτορα δῖον ἔπαυσε μάχης, ἐφόβησε δὲ λαούς.
 οὐ μὲν οἶδ', εἰ αὐτε κακοραφίης ἀλεγεινῆς
 πρώτη ἐπαύρηαι καὶ σε πληγῆσιν ἰμάσσω.

Oh, you evil, hopeless plotter! Your trick, Hera,
 Has stopped divine Hector from fighting, and frightened the people.
 I don't know whether for this baleful scheming
 You will first get your reward, and I will whip you with blows.⁷⁶

This is where he reminds her of the time he hung her from heaven with anvils on her feet⁷⁷ and any god who tried to save her was thrown down to earth. Now Zeus is not fooling, and Hera reacts with panic (ρίγησεν, 'she shivered'), swearing by Earth, Heaven, Styx, Zeus himself, and their marriage bed that Poseidon's interference in the battle did not come about at her instigation.⁷⁸ She is not exactly lying — it was because of Poseidon's actions on the battlefield that Hera had conceived the idea of seducing Zeus, not the other way around — but like an abused wife, she is hardly interested in opening a frank discussion of the whole matter. Neither is Zeus: he seizes on her claim and asks her to go and tell Poseidon to desist, because, he says, if she were to agree with Zeus, Poseidon would have to go along with them, even if he very much wanted to behave otherwise. Go to Olympus, says Zeus, and send me Iris and Apollo. Hera rushes to do his bidding, as quick as thought.⁷⁹ When she arrives at Olympus, the goddess Themis, 'Propriety', recognizes immediately what is wrong:

Ἥρη, τίπτε βέβηκας; ἀτυζομένη δὲ ἔοικας.
 ἦ μάλα δὴ σ' ἐφόβησε Κρόνου πάϊς, ὅς τοι ἀκοίτης.

Hera, why have you come? You look like someone terrified!
 I'll bet Cronus' son, who is your husband, has frightened you.⁸⁰

Hera doesn't deny what she thinks of Zeus, but doesn't want to talk about his behavior:

μή με, θεὰ Θέμι, ταῦτα διείρεο· οἶσθα καὶ αὐτή,
 οἶος ἐκείνου θυμὸς ὑπερφίαλος καὶ ἀπηνῆς.

⁷⁶ 15.14-17.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 18-30. Whitman holds that this picturesque detail has its source in the myth of the *hieros gamos*; he admits, however, that this would not have been known to Homer, nor would it have affected his treatment of the story. Much more convincing is the hypothesis of O'Brien 99-101, who locates the source of Hera's mistreatment by Zeus in a conflict between two originally independent but now conflicting deities: 'So, the only two characters whom Iliadic Zeus smites or threatens to smite are Typhon and his own wife. A strange way to treat one's wife, one might say, but a lashing with thunderbolts is a perfect punishment for a sky god to inflict on an earth goddess plotting insurrection' (O'Brien 100). Homer has taken a myth whose origins are in ancient cult and domesticated it, as he regularly does, to a human-like conflict between anthropomorphic gods.

⁷⁸ 15.34-46.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 80-83.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 90-91.

Goddess Themis, don't ask me about that. You yourself know
How arrogant and harsh that man's spirit is.⁸¹

She delivers her message to the gods, and although this scene includes more details reminiscent of the wife-beater's family,⁸² it will suffice us to leave Hera here at the table of the gods, 'laughing with her lips, but her forehead above her dark eyebrows did not rejoice'.⁸³ We have seen enough to understand why Katerina Synodinou, the only scholar I have seen who has treated this scene from the point of view of gender,⁸⁴ saw Hera's role in the epic as one of increasing humiliation, from her silent acceptance of Zeus' reproof in Book 1, through her speedy retreat before Iris' orders in Book 9, to her panicky transformation into her husband's instrument in Book 15.⁸⁵ In the end, it was Zeus' counsel, not Hera's, that was brought to completion.

But Homer is too astute an observer to tell us a story where, as in the thought of Chairman Mao, power grows out of the barrel of a gun.⁸⁶ It is true that Zeus the wife-beater wins in each round, for when push comes to shove the husband is stronger; but there is more to life than pushing and shoving, and Zeus does not solve his problem. The ultimate failure of terror comes about because its victims learn to live with it. Once they accept it as an inevitable part of their life, it ceases to be a major factor in their decisions. Synodinou is perfectly correct about Hera's failure to effect the outcome she wants; but Hera does not for that reason cease to pursue her own goals. On the contrary, her own behavior becomes more and more open — and more and more effective — as the poem progresses. In the first book, Hera merely expressed dismay at Zeus' plans. In the fourth book she spoke up when Athena kept silence, and got his unwilling agreement to her demand. In Book 5 — a scene that Synodinou ignores, since no violence is threatened there — she first urges Athena into battle, then asks permission from Zeus, who grants it, and then the two of them go to Troy to egg on Diomedes against Ares. In the ninth book she again urges Athena, this time without asking Zeus; in the fourteenth she seduces Zeus of her own accord, neutralizing him entirely, if temporarily. Even Hera's

⁸¹ Ibid. 93-94.

⁸² In particular the fear of Zeus' 'extremely frightened' (περιδδείσασα, *ibid.* 123) daughter Athena that if Ares provokes him, 'he will grab one after the other whoever is responsible and whoever isn't' (*ibid.* 137).

⁸³ *Ibid.* 102-3.

⁸⁴ Charles Beye's article 'Male and Female' was not available to me.

⁸⁵ With a bit of feminist rhetoric, Synodinou suggests at the end of the article what she seems to deny throughout, that there was something that Hera could have done about the situation. 'Obviously', her last sentence asserts, 'Hera has a long way to go before she would be able to stand up to Zeus' violence, thus coming to grips with the main obstacle to the realization of her wishes, which could mean no less than the becoming of her own person'. (Synodinou, 22). This, I think, is to overestimate severely the ability of women to challenge a working patriarchy successfully, even assuming that they want to do so, without the institutional and attitudinal resources at the disposal of modern American and European women. I also think it understates the ability of a woman, even in a patriarchy, to be 'her own person'. Hera is not a cipher, and her resistance is not something that Zeus takes lightly, even though he overcomes it in the end: see Taplin 128-136.

⁸⁶ Famously quoted in the 'Little Red Book' from 'Problems of War and Strategy', November 6, '38.

capitulation in book 15 is not devoid of scheming: she tells the gods that they cannot fight against Zeus, but does so in bitter words that encourage Ares to do exactly that; and it is not Hera, but Athena, who restrains him.⁸⁷ If the level and effectiveness of Zeus' threats escalate, so do Hera's provocations, and Zeus is powerless, in the long run, to do anything about it. He knows as much, and is resigned to the fact: he does not blame Hera or get angry with her so much, because she is always in the habit of frustrating whatever he plans.⁸⁸ In some matters she might even get her way. Not everything in the royal couple's relationship is a power struggle. As he says in the midst of their quarrel, Hera is the first of Zeus' advisors to hear 'what it is proper to hear', though he insists on his prerogative to decide when she should be included and when she should not (1.547-8). Sometimes Zeus accedes to her counsel,⁸⁹ and even without persuasion she can get away with a good deal: when Ares complained to Zeus about his wounding, Zeus' answer was that Hera was to blame, 'whom I can barely control with words'.⁹⁰ A beating or a threat of one, in a society that tolerates it, can win the battle, but no matter how many times it is repeated, it does not end the war.⁹¹

VII. Is Zeus a wife-beater, and is wife-beating acceptable?

If we return to the criteria that we enumerated at the beginning of the article for distinguishing wife-beating from other kinds of violence, it is clear which kind of violence Homer is describing.

⁸⁷ Hera, though she speaks bitterly, has been careful with her words, and has not directly encouraged rebellion; when Athena speaks she tells Ares and the others to listen to what Hera has said. But I do not think that Homer intends for us to think that Hera's calculating soul was unaware of Ares' probable reaction, or unable to exploit the situation — while keeping herself technically blameless — had the other gods felt as Ares did. They do not, and so at 15.143 she sends Apollo and Iris to Zeus on Ida as he had requested, 'and she sat upon her throne' (15.150): once again, her submission to Zeus is followed immediately by a confirmation of her superior position among the gods.

⁸⁸ 8.407-8; see above, n. 75.

⁸⁹ As at 4.5-68, where she reminds him, although he doesn't like it (*ὄχθήσας* again 4.30), that the war must go on and Troy must fall; or at 16.431-461, when he agrees to the death of Sarpedon; or at 24.66, where he agrees that Hector cannot be honored equally with Achilles. This is not inconsistent with the behavior of modern wife-beaters, whose behavior in between violent incidents may be exemplary.

⁹⁰ τὴν μὲν ἐγὼ σπουδῆι δάμνημι' ἐπέεσσιν 5.893. My argument would be stronger if I could accept Lattimore's translation 'and try as I may I am broken by her arguments', but that would require reading τῆς for τὴν and reading δάμνημι' as passive, for neither of which there is any justification. I do not agree, however, with Ameis-Hentze that Zeus means that he cannot control her with words, but must use physical punishment. That is a true enough description of Zeus' perception, but it is not what he wants to be telling Ares here, where he is shifting blame from himself to Hera: see Kirk ad loc.

⁹¹ *Contra*, with one example, Strauss 38; but I think he is overgeneralizing. That a single act of violence may never be repeated (in Strauss' study 5.3% of the couples had experienced beating during their marriage, but only 3.8% during the previous year) is at least as likely to testify to its failure as to its success.

- The fight here is not between equals or near-equals, a point that Zeus points out on each occasion.
- The outcome is known in advance, and this is mentioned with foreboding in each case.⁹²
- What Zeus gains in each case is not more honor, but Hera's compliance in the matter under dispute.
- The threatened violence in each case is against Hera, although in Book 8 he includes (and puts first) her accomplice Athena. Only in one other instance does Zeus threaten violence, against Poseidon, and this is in the wake of Hera's seduction. He adds to his threat of violence a claim of legitimacy (he is the stronger *and the elder*)⁹³, and Poseidon replies that his threats should be used against his children.⁹⁴
- Hera never contemplates fighting back against Zeus; her weapons are verbal aggression, appeasement, allies (Athena in Book 8, Poseidon and Aphrodite in Book 14), and seduction.
- Although the incident in Book 1 begins with Hera's aggressive words, in the continuation she tries in each case to avoid real violence.

In two respects, however, Zeus and Hera do not reproduce the characteristics of a modern dysfunctional marriage. Whereas modern wife-beating normally takes place behind locked doors, Zeus is perfectly open about his threats. He does not whisper to Hera, 'Just wait until we're alone tonight'; he says in front of all the gods that if she persists he will beat her, and none of them will be able to help her. This last comment explains his willingness to make his threats in public: while a mortal husband would have to take into account the likelihood that the assembled crowd would defend his wife, Zeus need have no qualms on this point.

For a modern wife-beater, however, there is a second reason not to abuse his wife in public, and this is the second difference between him and Zeus: he would be disgraced if his behavior were known to all, whereas no shame seems to accrue to Zeus from his threats, nor indeed from his earlier violence against her. It would seem, at first glance, that wife-beating was a perfectly legitimate behavior in the eyes of the Greek gods. Since it was so, it was not shameful for Zeus to do it — nor, as the end of Book 1 shows, was it shameful for Hera to suffer it. In a society that considers the practice legitimate, although wife-beating is undoubtedly an unhappy experience, the fact that it has taken place need be in the long run no more embarrassing for either side than the spanking of a naughty child in a society that accepts spanking.⁹⁵

⁹² By Hephaestus in 1.587-9, by Iris in 8.415-20 (Iris is only repeating Zeus' threat, but Hera's reaction in 8.427-32 makes it clear that she knows the outcome would be as Zeus threatens), by Athena in 15.127-37.

⁹³ 15.165-6 = 181-2.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 197-99.

⁹⁵ For an example of the breezy way in which wife-beating may be considered in a society that finds it acceptable, one may look at Goldoni's, *Two Venetian Twins* (Act 2, Scene 12), in which the intelligent twin, Tonino, argues against the claim that marriage is a weight upon a man's spirit, body, purse, and head with the words: 'A weight on his head? Not so. A woman is either honest, or she is dishonest. If she is honest, there is no danger of cuckoldry;

There is, however, some evidence that points in the opposite direction. The assembled gods were made uncomfortable by Zeus' threats; they may even have felt that they should intervene but could not.⁹⁶ Indeed, Zeus himself apprehends that they may want to intervene, and warns that they will not be able to do so effectively. In Book 15, when he reminds Hera of her previous punishment, he admits that the gods found it intolerable (ἡλάσσειον 15.21), though they could do nothing about it. Nor is it so clear that Hera finds no shame in her husband's threats: if in the first book she smiles, maintains a good public face, and goes to bed with him, her answer to Themis at 15.93-4 is that of a woman who is not anxious to go into the details of her married life, and her 'laugh' at 15.101-2 goes no further than her lips.

I do not think that there is a contradiction between these indications. Wife-beating, for Homer and for his gods, is a reasonable practice as long as it is kept within bounds. One scholiast, indeed, thinks that Homer is trying to teach us that a certain amount of chastisement is necessary.⁹⁷ There is always a danger of its passing these bounds, and the threat of a beating causes distress to the observers; it is not accidental that one of the few comic mentions of wife-beating is apologetic in tone.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, it is only when it passes the limits of what the society considers reasonable that beating becomes a problem to the society and a shame to both perpetrator and victim.⁹⁹

In short, the fact that a society tolerates wife-beating does not necessarily mean that it has no concept of abusive behavior. Zeus' threats in Book 15 are not merely threats to 'lay his hands on' Hera, but to abuse her, as he did before when she mistreated Heracles. The gods knew that that behavior was intolerable, though they could do nothing about it; a scholiast expresses surprise that he would mistreat her so abominably because of a mortal.¹⁰⁰ She herself is ashamed of suffering such treatment, and deflects Themis' question about it. Wife-beating, for Homer, was not shameful; wife abuse was, and he was

if she is dishonest, there is a certain remedy called a cane, which has the virtue of making even crazy women judicious (*che gh'ha la virtù de far far giudizio anca alle donne matte*). Tonino is defending marriage, and in a moment he will continue by defending womankind; but Goldoni does not find anything incongruous about having him defend wife-beating. This does not, of course, indicate anything about how a beaten wife felt about the matter.

⁹⁶ See above nn. 45, 69, 89.

⁹⁷ νῦν μὲν λόγοις αὐτὴν ἀποκρούεται, ἐτέρωθι δὲ καὶ ἔργῳ κολάζει, διδάσκαυτος ἴσως τοῦ ποιητοῦ ὅτι ἀφόρητον ἂν εἶη γυνὴ μὴ ἐπηρεαζομένη, ΣβT (Erbse) on 1.566.

⁹⁸ Ar. fr. 9 K-A.

⁹⁹ This seems to be the reason that Plato, when objecting to this story as unedifying, objects not to the wife-beating itself but to the punishment of Hephaestus for having defended his mother: "Ἡρας δὲ δεσμούς ὑπὸ ἕως (the reference is to the story told in Paus. 1.20.3) καὶ Ἥφαιστου ῥίψεις ὑπὸ πατρός, μέλλοντος τῇ μητρὶ τυπτομένη ἀμυνεῖν ... οὐ παραδεκτέον εἰς τὴν πόλιν, οὐτ' ἐν ὑπονοίαις πεποιημένας οὔτε ἄνευ ὑπονοιῶν, Rep. 378d. Zeus' behavior towards Hera is not, apparently, so unobjectionable that it would be out of place for their son to defend her; but it is the mistreatment of the son, not of the wife, that is more obviously offensive, and that is the example that Plato uses. Since, however, Plato is offering a blanket condemnation of all quarrels and hatreds among the gods, it could be argued that his choice of examples is accidental. My thanks to Gabriel Danzig for drawing my attention to this passage.

¹⁰⁰ ἐζητήθη δὲ διὰ ποῖαν αἰτίαν οὕτως ἀσχήμως ὑβρίζει τὴν Ἥραν ὁ Ζεὺς διὰ θνητὸν Ἥρακλέα, ΣA (Bekker) on 15.21.

aware that the first always carried the danger of turning into the other. Our own society has decided that wife-beating is inherently abusive, and not to be tolerated even 'within measure'. Unfortunately, we have yet to succeed in eradicating it, even when it is beyond measure.

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