

## The coming of night in Homer

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We think of night as a space of time during which certain things occur, but traces of a more primitive view of night as substance in which or through which we make our way remain in modern idiom: “he came in out of the night”, „he disappeared in the night”.<sup>1)</sup> This natural ambiguity in simple thought between night as a time and as a substance seems to give rise in Homeric Greek to certain uses of prepositions which are classified in Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique*,<sup>2)</sup> as temporal but probably still retained in Homeric Greek their more primitive sense. For it can be shown that to Homer night is a substance spread over the earth by the gods, either for miraculous purposes or when the light of the sun disappears.

Chantraine lists the following prepositional phrases as temporal, and thereby has to treat them as exceptional:

*ἀνά* (p. 91) “Un exemple du sens temporel: *Ξ 80 ἀνά νύκτα* <<durant la nuit>>.”

*δία* (p. 96) “Au sens temporel, seulement avec *νύκτα*, pour exprimer la durée, dans l’*Odyssée* et dans l’*Iliade* surtout dans les chants *K* et *Ω*: *B 57 ἀμβροσίην διὰ νύκτα*; cf. *K 41, 142, Ω 363, ι 404, ο 50*, etc. Cet emploi temporel est également proprement homérique.”

*ἐν* (p. 102) “Au sens temporel *Π 643* etc. *ὥρη ἐν εἰαρινῇ* (mais cf. *I, p. 128*); *ρ 176 ἐν ὥρῃ δείπνον ἐλέσθαι*; — *Λ 173* etc. *ἐν νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶ*; — *μ 76 οὔτ’ ἐν θέρει οὔτ’ ἐν ὀπώρῃ*”;

*ἐπὶ* (p. 109) “Le sens temporel, à côté du sens local, ne s’observe que dans quelques expressions: *Θ 529 ἐπὶ νυκτί* <<pour la nuit>>; — *N 234 ἐπ’ ἡματι τῷδε* <<pour ce jour-ci>>; — *K 48 ἐπ’ ἡματι* <<pour un jour>>; — *ξ 105 αἰεὶ . . . ἐπ’ ἡματι* <<pour chaque jour>>”;

*ὕπο* (p. 144) “En deux passages, *ὕπό*, avec l’accusatif, prend un sens temporel: *Π 202 πάνθ’ ὑπὸ μνηστῶν* <<tout le temps qu’a duré

<sup>1)</sup> I am grateful to Professor K.J. Dover for his criticism of an earlier version of this paper, and for pointing out that the two senses of night are found together naturally in most languages.

<sup>2)</sup> Vol. II: *Syntaxe* (Paris, 1953), pp. 82ff. on prepositions.

ma rancune)); — *X* 102 νύχθ' ὑπο τήνδ' ὅλοήν << tout au long de cette nuit funeste >>.”

However, there are ample parallels to suggest Homer thinks of night as a substance. The most obvious is *Θ* 485–486 ἐν δ' ἔπεισ' Ὠκεανῷ λαμπρὸν φάος ἡέλλοιο / ἔλκον νύκτα μέλαιναν ἐπὶ ζείδωρον ἄρουραν. The expression is normally treated as metaphorical, but this is incorrect. Νύξ is, like σκότος or νέφος, a substance which may cover: *K* 201 ἐκάλυψε, etc., through which man cannot see: *K* 275–276 τοὶ δ' οὐκ ἴδον ὀφθαλμοῖσι / νύκτα δι' ὀρφναίην ι 142–145 καὶ τις θεὸς ἡγεμόνευε / νύκτα δι' ὀρφναίην, οὐδὲ προῖφαινετ' ἰδέσθαι / ἀήρ γὰρ περὶ νηυσὶ βαθεῖ ἦν, οὐδὲ σελήνη / οὐρανόνθεν προῖφαινε, κατείχετο δὲ νεφέεσσιν, through which a god must guide. Night may obscure the sky in the same way that clouds obscure the moon (ι 145): ν 269 νύξ δὲ μάλα δνοφερὴ κάτεχ' οὐρανόν, οὐδέ τις ἡμέας / ἀνθρώπων ἐνόησε. Zeus may stretch night over the battlefield: *Π* 567 Ζεὺς δ' ἐπὶ νύκτ' ὅλοήν τάνυσσε κρατερῇ ὕσμίνῃ, and for the Cimmerians who live ἥρῃ καὶ νεφέλῃ κεκαλυμμένοι, λ 19 ἐπὶ νύξ ὅλοή τέταται δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι.

The gods may use νύξ to save their favourites: *E* 22–23 (Hephaistos saves Phegeus) οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδέ κεν αὐτὸς ὑπέκφυγε κῆρα μέλαιναν / ἀλλ' Ἥφαιστος ἔρυτο, σώωσε δὲ νυκτὶ καλύψας *E* 506–507 ἀμφὶ δὲ νύκτα / θούρος Ἄρης ἐκάλυψε μάχῃ Τρώεσσιν ἀρήγων, in the same way that they use ἀήρ *Γ* 381. *Λ* 752. *Υ* 444. *Φ* 597, ἀχλὺς *Υ* 321, νεφέλῃ *E* 345, or their garments *E* 314–316. It is one of those mysterious substances which are in the hands of the gods to be used according to their will. And it can be extended, on analogy with these words and the near-synonym σκότος, for the darkness which covers a man's eyes when he dies or faints. Two formulae are available: *E* 659 (= *N* 580. *X* 466) τὸ (τήν) δὲ κατ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἐρεβεννὴ νύξ ἐκάλυψε, *E* 310 (= *Λ* 356) ἀμφὶ δὲ ὅσσε κελαινὴ νύξ ἐκάλυψε. In three cases these formulae refer only to fainting: *E* 310, *Λ* 356, *X* 466, and in the other two it is not specified whether Tlepolemos and Deipyros faint or actually die (for they do not return to the story). It seems, however, that the substance νύξ is a darkness, veiling the eyes of the fainting man, which will pass away. The easy translations “night”, “Nacht”, etc., should perhaps be avoided, with their heavy overtones in modern languages of death and finality, in favor of “the dark” and other phrases which carry the notions of dread and of physical substance. Thus νύξ is parallel to κνέφας, the cloud of dusk which comes in the evening, and νέφος,

the dark cloud or overcast sky,<sup>3</sup>) for all three refer to substances which come over the earth, hiding the sky and daylight from a man's eyes. They may be dispelled by the gods, the wind (in the images of *II*) or by the return of day.

I do not want, of course, to underestimate the possibility of real temporal uses with *νύξ* in the singular. The plural *νύκτας*, always balanced by *ἡματα* or *ἡμαρ*, esp. in the phrase *νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμαρ*, is common in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to describe actions prosecuted beyond normal human endeavour. (The plural of *νύξ* is not used otherwise in the *Iliad*, but is common in the *Odyssey*, measuring lapse of time by nights—usu. and days.) The following adverbial uses of the singular occur: *τὴν νύκτ'*(*a*) *K* 497 (om. Zenodotus, Aristophanes; *τῇ νυκτ'* van Leeuwen), *νύκτα Σ* 274; *νυκτός ν* 278; *τῇδε νυκτί ν* 88. However the *Odyssey* instances are to be explained, the instances of the accusative in the *Iliad* may derive from the direct accusative after *ιαύω* (*I* 325. 466, *ε* 154, *τ* 340), and the developed use after *φυλάσσω* and *φυλάσσομαι* (*K* 188. 312=399, *ε* 466, *χ* 195). The latter verb seems in Homer to mean “to watch over, or for”, often in the sense of cherishing possessions (e.g. Penelope *τ* 23, etc.), a favourite (*O* 461) or emotions in oneself (*II* 30) or others (*Ω* 111). It may be used in a military sense, “to guard”, esp. intransitively “to be on guard” (*K* 421, *δ* 526, *ν* 301, *ν* 52). With *φυλασσέμεναι* (*K* 312=399), and *φυλασσομένοισι* (*K* 188), *νύκτα* can easily be explained as a direct object. It might mean either “to watch over the night” or perhaps “to guard against the night” (this sense, acc. to LSJ, first in Sappho 27 = 158 LP). The former sense is supported by *ε* 466 *δυσκηδέα νύκτα φυλάσσω* (used by Odysseus looking for somewhere to sleep, where it might also mean “to wait for”, cf. *B* 251 and, with *νύκτα*, Thuc. 2,3), and *χ* 195. But it is also possible that the phrases in *K* originate as a military term for taking the night watch, in which case *νύκτα* would be, although based on its use with *ιαύω*, used adverbially. As this explanation can be extended to suit *Σ* 274 *νύκτα μὲν εἰν ἀγορῇ σθένος ἐξομεν*, it may be preferable. In any case all these uses of *νύξ* temporally or near-temporally are restricted to the *Odyssey*, to *I* (*ιαύω* only) and *K*, both anomalous books, except *Σ* 274.<sup>4</sup>)

<sup>3</sup>) On *κλεινεφής* and related ideas see Dyer, “On describing some Homeric glosses,” *Glotta* 42, 1964, 121ff.

<sup>4</sup>) On *Σ* 266–283 as an interpolation see Leaf *ad loc.* The lines are at least late, as digamma is ignored at 270, 274.

It appears that few temporal phrases form part of the epic tradition, and that the interest in chronology in the *Odyssey* is innovative. The commonest phrase, “nights and days”, indicates brave, indeed superhuman effort. For night is treated everywhere as the dreaded dark, which covers the earth and makes men stay safe in their houses or tents, feasting, sleeping, listening to the bards or making love.

The origin of the prepositional phrase *διὰ νύκτα* is now clear. One walks or tries to see “into and through the night”, cf. *Ψ* 122 *ἐλδόμεναι πεδίοιο διὰ ῥωπήϊα πυκνά* and *διά* with the genitive, “through and out of”. The semantic change to the causal sense “on account of” (common in Homer with „Satzinhalt“ nouns such as *βουλή*) and a temporal sense “during” is easy, and this phrase may play an important part in this development. It is impossible to say how clearly envisaged this semantic change was by the bard who composed the epics, but the lack of parallels suggests that Homer did not read the phrase in the temporal sense which our grammarians give it.

The sense of *ὑπό* is equally clear, for night is a cover beneath which man may move. There is no temporal use of *ὑπό* in Homer, and this red herring should not blind us to the brilliant metaphor at *Π* 202 *πάνθ' ὑπὸ μῆνιδμόν* “overcast completely by anger”, which develops the use of emotions as subjects of *καλύπτω*: *τὸν δ' ἄχεος νεφέλη ἐκάλυψε μέλαινα* (*P* 591 = *Σ* 22 = *ω* 315); *πένθος* *Λ* 250; *ἔρος* *Γ* 442. A parallel for the use with *νύκτα* is supplied by *ὑπὸ ζόφον ἤεροντα*, although the sense of *ζόφος* (the darkness north of west where the sun never goes) is kept carefully discrete from that of *νύξ*.

In *Ε* Agamemnon proposes flight by ship: 80 *οὐ γάρ τις νέμεσις φνυγέμεν κακόν, οὐδ' ἀνὰ νύκτα*. The phrase applies to the flight up into darkness, away from the shore, as we may say “out into the dark”.

The preposition *ἐν* is certainly found with *ὥρη* and the names of the seasons, but for its use with the normally ungoverned phrase *νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶ* we cannot assert a temporal sense until we can prove that *ἀμολγῶ* is a temporal term. The probable etymology, forgetting about fancies of the milky way or midnight milking, was first proposed by Wiedemann, *BB* 13, 1888, 301: to a root \**melk/melg*, whence Goth. *milhma* ‘cloud’, ODan. *moln* ‘darkness’, OIr. *melg* ‘death’, Lett. *milst* ‘it grows dark’, and perhaps some words for milk and dampness (cf. Pokorny p. 724), with prothetic alpha. To

Homer it may be a meaningless, archaic gloss. However, its origin as a substance justifies its use after *ἐν*.

The last instance *ἐπὶ νυκτί* (Θ 529) is the most recalcitrant. It is directly followed by words referring to daybreak: *πρωὶ δ' ὑπη-οῖοι* . . . and it is parallel to *ἐπ' ἡματι* and *ἐφημέριος*, where *ἐπὶ* must have some temporal sense. Homer may himself here mean “for the night”, but I suggest that an alternative explanation, retaining a non-temporal sense of *ἐπὶ*, shows the sort of usage from which temporal uses evolved. The line in question *ἀλλ' ἦ τοι ἐπὶ νυκτὶ φυλάξομεν ἡμέας αὐτούς*, may mean either “but indeed we shall protect ourselves against the night” (for *ἐπὶ* “against” see LSJ B I 2d, listed as with verbs of motion, but cf. *Ε* 97 *ἐπὶ Τυδεΐδῃ ἐτιταίνετο* . . . τόξα, cf. *Α* 370).<sup>5</sup>) Despite the temporal content of this line, we should remember that night is a substance to be guarded against, and indeed it is regarded as a substance only 44 lines before (485).

Homer clearly writes at a transitional stage, whether in the language as a whole or in the epic conventions, as *νύξ* moves from meaning the tangible substance of the dark, similar to cloud, to being a temporal concept opposed to day. But the older concept remains alive in the fragments of Parmenides (fr. 8, 53–59; 9, 1–4 Diels-Kranz<sup>8</sup>, I 239f.). Simplicius introduces these quotations (*in Physica* 179, 29–33 Diels, *Comm. in Arist. Graeca IX*): *καὶ γὰρ οἱ ἐν τὸ ὄν καὶ ἀκίνητον λέγοντες ὥσπερ Παρμενίδης, καὶ οὗτοι τῶν φυσικῶν ἐναντίας ποιοῦσι τὰς ἀρχάς. καὶ γὰρ οὗτος ἐν τοῖς πρὸς δόξαν θερμὸν καὶ ψυχρὸν ἀρχὰς ποιεῖ. ταῦτα δὲ προσαγορεύει πῦρ καὶ γῆν καὶ φῶς καὶ νύκτα ἥτοι σκότος. λέγει γὰρ μετὰ τὰ περὶ ἀληθείας· ‘Μορφὰς γὰρ κατέθεντο . . .’.* In fact the passage quoted opposes only the names (*σήματα*) given to the *μορφαί* postulated by men: *φλογὸς αἰθέριον*

<sup>5</sup>) Alternatively, we might have here an example of the causative or ergative use of the sigmatic aorist, a construction which I explored with respect to *καλύπτω* in *Glotta* 42, 1964, 29–38. Such deverbative causative constructions usually derive from intransitive verbs + preposition, e.g. *ἐφ' ἵππων βάντες*, Σ 352) is transformed to *ὄν ῥα ἵππων . . . ἐπέβησε* (Θ 129), cf. J. Wackernagel, *Sprachliche Untersuchungen* (Göttingen 1916), p. 227: “Der Gebrauch des Aktivs von -οῦν ist bei Homer fast noch ganz auf die sigmatischen Aorist- und Futurbildungen beschränkt” (cf. Chantraine I 364), “die ja auch in anderen Verbalklassen zur Neubildung kausativer Formen zu von Haus aus intransitiven Verben gedient haben (z.B. *ἔβησα, βήσω, ἔφυσσε, φύσει*).” However, just as *ἀμφικαλύψω* X to Y seems to mean, “I shall cause X to cover Y, so the line under study might mean, we shall cause ourselves to guard against the night”.

πῦρ (ἥπιον ὄν, μέγ' [ἄραιον] ἐλαφρόν, ἐωντῷ πάντοσε τωυτόν) and νύκτ' ἄδαῃ, πνικινὸν δέμας ἐμβριθές τε (κἀκεῖνο κατ' αὐτό / τάντια). When Parmenides says (fr. 9,3–4): πᾶν πλέον ἐστὶν ὁμοῦ φάεος καὶ νυκτὸς ἀφάντου / ἴσων ἀμφοτέρων (Diels-Kranz “die beide gleich[-gewichtig]”), ἐπεὶ οὐδετέρῳ μέτα μηδέν, it is not clear whether he is still speaking in the popular voice (cf. fr. 8,51: δόξαι βροτεῖαι) or now in his own, but whether the view is being rejected or not, the passages show that the concept of night as having density and weight had survived long after Homer.

Let us remember when we translate Homer that night was to him something real, formidable and substantial, which comes to cover the earth as day departs.

### A propos du grec ἤλεκτρον “ambre” et “or blanc”

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Un récent article de Martin S. Ruipérez dans les *Mélanges Pierre Chantraine*<sup>1)</sup> a ramené l'attention sur l'étymologie d'ἤλεκτρον. On sait que les hellénistes s'accordent généralement à réunir dans une même famille ἤλεκτρον<sup>2)</sup>, ἡλέκτρα, ἡλέκτωρ et ἡλεκτρίς. Mais si le rapprochement formel est clair et incontesté, l'accord, en revanche, n'est pas réalisé sur une étymologie apte à expliquer véritablement la divergence des sens. L'explication traditionnelle<sup>3)</sup> est simpliste:

<sup>1)</sup> Paris, 1972, p. 231–241.

<sup>2)</sup> C'est la forme habituelle, mais on trouve aussi quelquefois, au sens d' “or blanc”, une forme masculine ἡλεκτρος, créée sans doute par analogie des autres noms de métaux, qui sont généralement masculins en grec (cf. E. Schwyzer et A. Debrunner, *Griechische Grammatik*, II, München, 1950, p. 34, n. 4). P. Buttmann, *Über das Elektron*, dans *Abhandl. der Preuß. Akad. der Wiss.* [APAW], 1818–19, p. 46, note, a émis l'hypothèse que ἤλεκτρον aurait été le nom de l'ambre et ἡλεκτρος celui de l'or blanc. Il a été suivi par R. Lepsius (*Die Metalle in den ägyptischen Inschriften*, dans APAW, 1871, 1, p. 129 sq., tr. fr. par W. Berend, *Les métaux dans les inscriptions égyptiennes*, Paris, 1877, p. 69) et par W. Helbig (*L'épopée homérique expliquée par les monuments*, tr. fr. par F. Trawinski, Paris, 1894, p. 134). Mais cette hypothèse est contredite par les textes.

<sup>3)</sup> Elle remonte à l'Antiquité. Cf. Hesychios s.v. ἡλέκτωρ· ὁ ἥλιος ἐπιθετικῶς· ἦτοι ὁ λαμπρὸς παρὰ τὴν τοῦ ἡλέκτρον οὐσίαν, περὶ οὗ φησιν· χρυσοῦ τ' ἡλέκτρον τε (*Od.*, IV, 73). — Eustathe, *Ad Il.*, VI, 513: Ἥλεκτωρ δὲ ἀντὶ