

The enfreakment of Thersites: The Deformed Body as Spectacle in Homer's *Iliad*

In book two of the *Iliad*, the Greek assembly is interrupted by one of the most unique figures in the Homeric corpus. Not a hero, but a villain: Thersites. Yet his failings are projected not only by his actions and speech, but by the extravagant representation of his body, the longest description of a human body in the entire *Iliad*. On whose authority does this man, the worst of the Achaeans, speak? Is he the voice and representative of the common soldier? Does he represent a nascent class struggle which will eventually find expression in the *polis* system and emerge in Classical Athens? What nearly all scholarship on this subject has in common is the reading of Thersites as an aberrant figure. I will argue that this aberrance is not achieved by his political and social status, but by his *body* and by the rendering of Thersites as a *freak*. By engaging with art and literary theory related to the field of body studies developed in response to representations of deformity in nineteenth-century freak shows and twentieth-century disability photography, I will demonstrate how Thersites, through the discourse of representation known as *enfreakment*, is able to play the functional role of a ritual *pharmakos*, his objectified body becoming a locus for the varying and antagonistic anxieties and social disorders plaguing the Greeks in book two of Homer's narrative. It is then the Greeks' abuse and rejection of Thersites, made possible by his physical *otherness*, which in turn serves to unite them, to reestablish order, and to allow them to successfully navigate the *peira* set up by Agamemnon.