

Agamemnon and His Audiences

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WHEN WE INTERPRET a speech in Homer, we should consider the social and performative context to which the speech belongs. That is to say, we should consider whether the speech is delivered in the context of a council of leaders (βουλή), an assembly (ἀγορή), within an intimate group of ἑταῖροι, as with the embassy to Achilles, or in private conversation. Recent studies suggest that the poet, and by extension his audience, is very sensitive to these distinctions and is usually quite clear as to the social context of a speech and the internal audience to which it is delivered.¹ Understanding this helps the external audience to identify the rhetorical aims of the speaker and to follow their execution. On the other hand, Homeric speeches are more than mere representations of social interaction or political discourse. They add in significant ways to the ongoing characterization of the speaker; and, more importantly, they provide an important space for the development of the poet's themes.² In this paper I examine

¹ The poet is even more sensitive to these distinctions than older studies of Homeric rhetoric, e.g., Richard P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad* (Ithaca 1989), have appreciated. For differences between speech in the βουλή as opposed to ἀγορή, see Joel P. Christensen, *The Failure of Speech: Rhetoric and Politics in the Iliad* (diss. New York Univ. 2007) 132–176; for the ἀγορή as a venue for “institutionalized dissent,” see Elton Barker, “Achilles’ Last Stand: Institutionalising Dissent in Homer’s *Iliad*,” *PCPS* 50 (2004) 92–120; for different poetic conventions for describing speech and its reception in assembly and council as opposed to intimate or private converse, see Deborah Beck, *Homeric Conversation* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2005) 191–229.

² Indeed, as Jasper Griffin demonstrates, “Homeric Words and Speakers,” *JHS* 106 (1986) 36–57, character-speech includes an entire vocabulary

a speech of Agamemnon for which the poet is not only unclear as to performative context and internal audience, but, I believe, intentionally ambiguous. I hope to show that this speech is introduced and performed in such a way that it can be interpreted either as an emotional personal address to a close relative or as an ingenious piece of political theater directed to a broader internal audience. I hope to show as well that, when viewed from the latter standpoint, the speech is entirely consistent not only with the Agamemnon's characteristic rhetorical strategies, but also with the poet's habitual use of this extraordinary figure for the development of themes important to his representation of the Trojan War.

In Book 3 of the *Iliad*, Paris and Menelaus fight a duel to decide the outcome of the war. The Achaeans and the Trojans have sworn a solemn oath: should Paris win, the Achaeans will depart and leave the Trojans alone; should Menelaus be victorious, the Trojans will return Helen and the property taken with her and pay an indemnity (3.276–291). The narrative leaves little doubt of Menelaus' imminent victory (373).³ However, the gods are loath to permit this ending to the war. First, Aphrodite rescues her protégé from Menelaus and returns him to the safety of his boudoir. In Book 4, Zeus, after cajolingly suggesting that the oath should stand, finally strikes a deal with Hera sealing Troy's fate (34–67). Athena is sent to earth and beguiles the wits of Pandarus, who shoots an arrow at Menelaus and wounds him. This nefarious act violates the oath and leads eventually to a resumption of hostilities.

Naturally, the infamous shot of Pandarus, being engineered by Athena herself, does not seriously injure the hero. Although he shudders at first, he quickly notices that the wound is superficial and regains his composure. Meanwhile, Agamemnon sees the wound, shudders himself, approaches, and takes Menelaus by the hand. He then delivers our speech (4.155–182):

“φίλε κασίγνητε, θάνατόν νύ τοι ὄρκι' ἔταμνον, 155
οἶον προστήσας πρὸ Ἀχαιῶν Τρῶσι μάχεσθαι,

that is never or rarely used by the poet in his own voice and yet expresses many of the more pathetic themes of the poem.

³ Paris' poor chances are already signaled by Priam's shudder at 259.

ὡς σ' ἔβαλον Τρῶες, κατὰ δ' ὄρκια πιστὰ πάτησαν.
 οὐ μὲν πως ἄλιον πέλει ὄρκιον αἷμά τε ἀρνῶν
 σπονδαί τ' ἄκροτοι καὶ δεξιαί, ἧς ἐπέπιθμεν.
 εἶ περ γὰρ τε καὶ αὐτίκ' Ὀλύμπιος οὐκ ἐτέλεσσεν, 160
 ἔκ τε καὶ ὄψ' ἐτελεί, σὺν τε μεγάλῳ ἀπέτεισαν
 σὺν σφῆσιν κεφαλῆσι γυναιξί τε καὶ τεκέεσσιν.
 εὐ γὰρ ἐγὼ τόδε οἶδα κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν·
 ἔσσεται ἡμᾶρ ὅτ' ἂν ποτ' ὀλώλῃ Ἴλιος ἰρῆ
 καὶ Πριάμος καὶ λαὸς εὐμμελίῳ Πριάμοιο, 165
 Ζεὺς δέ σφι Κρονίδης ὑψίζυγος, αἰθέρι ναίων,
 αὐτὸς ἐπισσεύησιν ἐρεμνὴν αἰγίδα πάσι
 τῆσδ' ἀπάτης κοτέων· τὰ μὲν ἔσσεται οὐκ ἀτέλεστα·
 ἀλλὰ μοι αἰνὸν ἄχος σέθεν ἔσσεται, ὦ Μενέλαε,
 αἶ κε θάνης καὶ πότμον ἀναπλήσης βιότοιο. 170
 καὶ κεν ἐλέγχιστος πολυδίψιον Ἄργος ἰκοίμην·
 αὐτίκα γὰρ μνήσονται Ἀχαιοὶ πατρίδος αἴης·
 κὰδ δέ κεν εὐχολὴν Πριάμῳ καὶ Τρωσὶ λίποιμεν
 Ἀργεῖην Ἑλένην· σέο δ' ὅστέα πύσει ἄρουρα
 κειμένου ἐν Τροίῃ ἀτελευτήτῳ ἐπὶ ἔργῳ. 175
 καὶ κέ τις ὦδ' ἐρέει Τρώων ὑπερηγορέοντων
 τύμβῳ ἐπιθρόσκων Μενελάου κυδαλίμοιο·
 'αἶθ' οὕτως ἐπὶ πάσι χόλον τελέσει' Ἀγαμέμνων,
 ὡς καὶ νῦν ἄλιον στρατὸν ἤγαγεν ἐνθάδ' Ἀχαιῶν,
 καὶ δὴ ἔβη οἰκόνδε φίλῃν ἐς πατρίδα γαίαν 180
 σὺν κεινήσιν νηυσί, λιπὼν ἀγαθὸν Μενέλαον·
 ὡς ποτὲ τις ἐρέει· τότε μοι χάνοι εὐρεῖα χθῶν."

"Dear brother, so I swore those oaths to be death for you when
 I sent you alone to fight the Trojans on behalf of the Achaeans,
 since the Trojans have shot you, and have trampled firm oaths.
 But an oath and the blood of sheep are in no way vain,
 nor unmixed libations and the right hands in which we trusted.
 For even if the Olympian does not fulfill these immediately,
 yet he will do so late, and perjurers pay with a great price,
 with their own lives, and with their women and children.
 For I know this well in my mind and heart:
 A day will come when sacred Ilion shall perish
 and Priam and the host of Priam, skillful spearman,
 and Zeus son of Kronos, high-ruling, living in the sky,
 will himself shake the dark aegis over them all in anger
 at this deception. These things will not be unaccomplished.
 But I will have terrible grief for you, Menelaus,
 if you die and fulfill the end of your life.
 Then under great reproach I would go to thirsty Argos.

For the Achaeans will immediately think of their fatherland.
 And we would leave as a boast for Priam and the Trojans
 Argive Helen. But your bones the earth will make rotten
 as you lie dead in Troy for an unaccomplished work.
 And one of the overbearing Trojans will say
 as he leaps on the funeral-mound of glorious Menelaus:
 ‘May Agamemnon fulfill his anger against all in this way
 as just now he led an army of Achaeans here in vain
 and then went home to his dear fatherland
 with empty ships, leaving good Menelaus behind!’
 Thus someone will speak. Then let the wide earth swallow me!”

The speech has drawn attention in the scholarship mainly for seeming contradictions between its two parts.⁴ In the first part (155–168) Agamemnon confidently predicts that the Trojans will be destroyed by Zeus for their impious violation of the oath. In the second (169–182) he ponders at length the consequences should Menelaus die of his wound. These include the disbanding of the Achaean army, his own ignominious homecoming, elation of the arrogant Trojans at his failure, and destruction of Menelaus’ funeral monument.⁵ It seems strange to imagine, as two consequences of a single impious act, Zeus’ anger and destruction of Troy on the one hand, and the failure of the Achaean expedition on the other.

The contradiction is not entire or inescapable; by strict logic, Agamemnon may imagine that the Trojans will meet their doom not through the agency of the Achaean army, but through other human agents or more directly at the hands of Zeus.⁶ Nevertheless, there is a peculiar difference in tone and

⁴ On the bipartite structure of the speech, see Dieter Lohmann, *Die Komposition der Reden in der Ilias* (Berlin 1970) 43–45.

⁵ The phrase *τύμβῳ ἐπιθρόσζων* is often translated “dancing on your grave,” but the verb is stronger than this cliché would suggest. In my view, the imagined Trojan will leap on Menelaus’ funeral mound so as to efface all memory of his heroic death. *Contra* Lora L. Holland, “Last Act in Corinth: The Burial of Medea’s Children,” *CJ* 103 (2008) 407–430, at 417. Cf. Andrew Ford, *Homer: The Poetry of the Past* (Ithaca 1992) 144, who contrasts the “durable, provocative, but unreadable sign” of the tomb with the glory offered by poetry.

⁶ So Wolfgang Bergold, *Der Zweikampf des Paris und Menelaos* (Bonn 1977) 164–167; see also the scholion on line 164 quoted below.

outlook between the two parts of the speech; the first part gives a sense of optimism and a calm confidence that the gods will take the side of justice over wickedness, while the second part appears tinged with a pessimistic defeatism. The difference is sufficiently dramatic to amount to a contradiction in all but the most logical sense. It is as though Agamemnon had lost his train of thought and resumed along lines very different from those on which he began.

Since the Analytic tradition,⁷ these contradictions have been handled mainly with appeal to the characterization of Agamemnon. Kirk praises Agamemnon's affection for his brother, as well as his religious faith, but says also that "his subsequent descent into self-pity is vivid and imaginative in its way, typical of Agamemnon but also of the heroic character in adversity."

⁷ Unsurprisingly, Agamemnon's speech drew the attention of the Analysts, since it combines two features they viewed as important evidence. First, there are the seeming contradictions of tone and outlook just noted. Second, some of its lines (163–165) are repeated later on in Book 6 (447–449), where Hector famously predicts the inevitability of Troy's fall in colloquy with his wife. These two apparent defects, compassed in a single speech, seemed to show the work of at least two very different poetic hands. Since the words predicting the downfall of Troy were thought to be more appropriate and of higher poetic quality in their context in Book 6, the first half of Agamemnon's speech, where the lines appear, was thought to "depend" on Book 6; on the other hand, the second half seemed better suited to the narrative situation and echoes earlier remarks of Agamemnon in Book 2: see L. Friedländer, "Doppelte recensionen in Iliade und Odyssee." *Philologus* 4 (1849) 577–591, at 578–579; Peter von der Mühl, *Kritisches Hypomnema zur Ilias* (Basel 1952) 81–83; Günther Jachmann, *Homeric Einzeliieder* (Darmstadt 1968) 14–15. In view of the oral-traditional theory of Homeric composition, contradictions and verbatim repetitions are no longer thought to carry such implications. Repeated lines are likely to belong to a store of memorized material the poet deploys at convenient moments, and are also used without embarrassment to construct and correlate themes across long stretches of the narrative, as argued in the present case by C. W. Macleod, *Iliad, Book XXIV* (Cambridge 1982) 43; Oliver Taplin, *Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of the Iliad* (Oxford 1992) 123 n.22. This view of Homer is less useful for explaining contradictions in such a short speech, although Bernard Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad* (*Hermes Einzelschr.* 21 [1968]) 69–70, argues that the second part of the speech shows a reflexive use of traditional themes inappropriate to the narrative situation.

Rabel sees “the natural human tendency to live with contradictory expectations of the future, especially when they concern the death of a loved one.” Griffin argues that “the poet has created a speech which combines the self-confident and defeatist sides of Agamemnon in one utterance” and that the speech “is excellent and perfectly in accord with the whole characterization of Agamemnon.” The best analysis along these lines is offered by van Erp Taalman Kip. She also sees the alternating “aggressive unreasonableness” and “self-pity, fear and timidity” of a character who generally “gives way to his emotions without restraint” and therefore allows contradictory aspects of his personality to project different visions of the future.⁸

On the other hand, the speech is not uncharacteristic of Agamemnon’s rhetorical style, which has been described as overzealous, irrational, and excessive.⁹ Rhetorical analysis has not played a significant role in discussion of this particular speech, presumably because Agamemnon addresses only his brother and does not seem to have persuasion or even consolation (consider the second portion) as an aim. It does seem, on the surface, to be merely an emotional outburst, and one that misses the mark in ridiculous fashion, misinterpreting the situation on both the human and the divine level. That is, the poet

⁸ G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary* I (Cambridge 1985) 347 *ad* 155–182, *cf.* 349 *ad* 171–175; Robert J. Rabel, *Plot and Point of View in the Iliad* (Ann Arbor 1997) 84–85; Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford 1980) 71–72; A. M. van Erp Taalman Kip, *Agamemnon in Epos en Tragedie: De persoonsuitbeelding als component van het epische en dramatische werk* (Assen 1971) 29–31, 257–258; *cf.* Lohmann, *Komposition* 44 n.72. For similar views of Agamemnon’s psychology, see Cedric Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1958) 161–163; Walter Donlan, “Homer’s Agamemnon,” *CW* 65 (1971) 109–115; Bernard Fenik, *Homer and the Nibelungenlied: Comparative Studies in Epic Style* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1986) 22–27; Gustav Adolf Seeck, “Der Streit des Mächtigen und des Starken: Motivstruktur und homerische Verhaltenspsychologie im 1. Buch der ‘Ilias,’” *Hermes* 120 (1992) 1–18.

⁹ For a full analysis of Agamemnon’s over-the-top rhetorical style, see Martin, *Language of Heroes* 113–119: Agamemnon “is a deficient rhetorician because he violates proportions” (119). *Cf.* my discussion, “Gift, List and Story in *Iliad* 9.115–61,” *CJ* 103 (2008) 353–379, at 368.

tells us that Menelaus' wound is not serious (151–152), and Agamemnon's notion of divine retribution appears naïve relative to the Olympian scene that has just been narrated (1–72).¹⁰

I suggest that rhetorical analysis is necessary, if not for a solution to the puzzling nature of the speech, at least to uncovering the multivalent interpretations to which it is subject. To whom, after all, does Agamemnon speak? I noted at the beginning that social context and internal audience should be considered in the analysis of a Homeric speech, but this does not mean that the poet always chooses to be clear on these points. I argue that Homer leaves open the possibility that Agamemnon speaks here for the benefit of a larger audience than just Menelaus; indeed, that he can be imagined as speaking for the benefit of the whole Achaean host. Consider the rather elaborate way in which Homer sets the scene and introduces the speech (4.148–154):

ὀρίγησεν δ' ἄρ' ἔπειτα ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνων,
 ὡς εἶδεν μέλαν αἶμα καταρρέον ἐξ ὤτειλῆς·
 ὀρίγησεν δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ἀρηίφιλος Μενέλαος. 150
 ὡς δὲ ἶδεν νεῦρόν τε καὶ ὄγκους ἐκτὸς ἐόντας,
 ἄψορρόν οἱ θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ἀγέσθη.
 τοῖς δὲ βαρὺ στενάχων μετέφη κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων,
 χειρὸς ἔχων Μενέλαον, ἐπεστενάχοντο δ' ἑταῖροι·
 φίλε κασίγνητε ...

Agamemnon, lord of men, shuddered
 when he saw the dark blood flowing from the wound.
 War-loving Menelaus also shuddered.
 But when Menelaus saw that the cord and barbs were outside
 the spirit in his breast came back to him.
 But groaning heavily, powerful Agamemnon spoke among them
 taking Menelaus by the hand, while companions lamented for him.
 “Dear brother ...”

As a speech-introduction, these lines seem to blend conventions

¹⁰ Cf. Fenik, *Homer and the Nibelungenlied* 23: “All this melancholy misses the mark because the wound is so slight—we know that from the start, and so does Menelaus. The result is the bathos of a mawkish and untimely threnody.” Agamemnon's ironic misapprehension of divine justice is emphasized by Rabel, *Plot* 85–87.

associated with public and private speech respectively. Suggestive of private speech is the vocative φίλε κασίγνητε (155) and the fact that Menelaus remains the addressee throughout.¹¹ The description of their respective reactions to the crisis emphasizes the intimate atmosphere. Moreover, Agamemnon takes Menelaus by the hand, a gesture elsewhere associated with private, if not intimate, conversations.¹² Suggestive of public speech is the *verbum dicendi*, μετέφη with a plural complement τοῖς. This verb with a dative always introduces public speech, most often in an assembly where the speaker is making a positive proposal. For personal address, προσέφη with an accusative would be regular.¹³ Moreover, a larger audience is available, since Homer mentions the presence of additional, emotionally engaged, “fellows” on the scene (ἐπεστενάχοντο δ’ ἑταῖροι).¹⁴ Besides these unidentified Achaeans, it should be remembered that, as far as we know, the army still sits in order as they had at the beginning of the duel—that is to say, in the position of an audience. Agamemnon was able to address both armies publicly not much earlier, when declaring victory after the disappearance of Paris (3.456–460).¹⁵ Finally, Menelaus’ response implies that not just others, but the whole army is

¹¹ Except at line 177, on which see below.

¹² E.g., *Il.* 5.30, 14.137, 14.232, 24.361; *Od.* 1.121, 3.374, 12.33, 17.263. See Christophorus Barck, *Wort und Tat bei Homer* (Spudasmata 34 [1976] 141–143; Martin, *Language of Heroes* 18–19; G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary* II (Cambridge 1990) 247 ad 7.106–108 (on which see below).

¹³ H. Fournier, “Formules homériques de référence avec verbe ‘dire,’” *RevPhil* SER. III 20 (1946) 29–68, at 32–33. For μετέφη introducing public proposals, see *Il.* 1.58, 19.55, 19.100; *Od.* 4.660, 8.132, 16.363, 18.51.

¹⁴ As H. Paul Brown notes, “Addressing Agamemnon: A Pilot Study of Politeness and Pragmatics in the *Iliad*,” *TAPA* 136 (2006) 1–46, “In forming an utterance, speakers consider not only the potential impact of their statement on the specific addressee, but also its impact on other bystanders who may perceive it” (35).

¹⁵ At 3.324 the armies sit drawn up in ranks (οἱ μὲν ἔπειθ’ ἕζοντο κατὰ στίχας) with their armor set aside. There has been no indication since that either army has changed position, except Pandarus and his fellows at 4.113–115. The Olympian scene at 4.1–72 perhaps creates an exaggerated sense of time intervening between Agamemnon’s general address to both sides and the shot of Pandarus.

listening in (4.183–185):

τὸν δ' ἐπιθαρσύνων προσέφη ξανθὸς Μενέλαος·
θάρσει, μηδέ τί πω δειδίσσεο λαὸν Ἀχαιῶν·
οὐκ ἐν καιρίῳ ὄξυ βέλος ...

Blonde Menelaus answered, encouraging him,
“Take heart, and do not frighten the army of the Achaeans.
The sharp missile did not strike a fatal spot ...”

“Don’t scare the army!”—one imagines the line delivered in furtive whisper.¹⁶ Note the use of τὸν ... προσέφη appropriate to private conversation. Menelaus’ response at least shows an awareness that Agamemnon’s words may have an effect on the larger public, and this is what I suggest as a solution to the contradictions in the speech. A speech that begins as a personal address to Menelaus ends up sounding more like an exhortation for the benefit of the Achaean army. This may be suggested too in the third-person reference to Menelaus near its end (177).¹⁷

The scholia on the speech seem to respond to the same difficulties as modern critics, but seek a solution not only in the characterization of Agamemnon but in the rhetorical effect on a larger audience. In some scholia it seems to be assumed that the army is listening, and constitutes the true addressee; as one scholion notes, when Agamemnon regrets allowing Menelaus to fight on behalf of the Greeks, “he stirs pity and zeal in the Achaeans.”¹⁸ More significant is the way the scholia handle the seeming contradiction in Agamemnon’s simultaneous prediction of calamity for the Trojans and a shameful homecoming for himself (schol. 164b²-c² [I 480]):

ἀπειλεῖ τοῦτο οὐχ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι, ἀλλ’ ὑφ’ ἐτέρων τινῶν·
φησὶ γοῦν· “καὶ κεν ἐλέγχιστος πολυδίψιον Ἄργος.” ἢ μᾶλλον
διὰ τούτων τοὺς ἀκούοντας προτρέπεται πολεμεῖν.

He threatens that this thing will be done not by himself, but by some others. Therefore he says, “and [I will go] to thirsty Argos

¹⁶ Van Erp Taalman Kip, *Agamemnon* 32, detects a slight reproof.

¹⁷ Cf. M. L. West, *Studies in the Text and Transmission of the Iliad* (Munich 2001) 189–190, who argues partly on this basis that line 177 is a rhapsodic interpolation.

¹⁸ Schol. 4.156b (I 479 Erbse): πρὸ Ἀχαιῶν· οἶκτον ἅμα καὶ σπουδὴν κινεῖ τοῖς Ἀχαιοῖς.

under great reproach.” Or, rather, through these remarks he urges those listening to make war.

And then, on his dark fantasy of an inglorious homecoming (schol. 4.171b [I 481–482]):

καί κεν ἐλέγχιστος <πολυδίψιον Ἄργος ἰκοίμην>· διὰ τί· ὅτι Ἕλληνες μὲν ἄπρακτοι ἐπανελεύσονται, Τρῶες δὲ κερτομήσουσι τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονα, Μενέλαος ἐπὶ ξένης σαπήσεται, ἀτελής ἡ μάχη μενεΐ. τεχνικῶς δὲ δι’ ὧν ἀπολοφύρεται ὡς καταλειφθησόμενος ὑπὸ τῶν συμμάχων, εἰ ὁ Μενέλαος ἀποθάνοι, κατέχειν αὐτοὺς πειράται μὴ τεθνηκότος τοῦ Μενελάου.

[μὴ τεθν. T, τεθνηκότος ἢ καὶ μὴ b, καὶ μὴ τεθνηκότος Maass]

“And under great reproach [I would go to thirsty Argos].” Why? Because the Greeks will go home unsuccessful, the Trojans will revile Agamemnon, Menelaus will rot in a foreign land, the war will remain incomplete. But by loudly bewailing these things, as though he is going to be abandoned by his allies should Menelaus die, he skillfully tries to hold them back *should Menelaus not die.*”

Here the intricacy of interpretation seems to have led to textual difficulties, and we may read, “whether Menelaus dies or not,” or, following Maass, “even if Menelaus doesn’t die.” It is clear in any case that the scholia follow two mutually exclusive lines of interpretation. The first takes Agamemnon’s words literally and closely tracks modern interpretations based in his emotional or histrionic character. The second assumes a rhetorical duplicity and takes his words as intended to provoke a particular emotional response in a larger audience that is represented by the whole Achaean army.

The possibility that Agamemnon performs here for the benefit of a wider audience lends new significance to parallels which have been noted between the second, despairing part of the speech and Agamemnon’s “test” of the army in Book 2.¹⁹ This duplicitous speech is the audience’s first introduction to

¹⁹ 2.110–141. On the parallels see Lohmann, *Komposition* 44 n.72; Bergold, *Zweikampf* 165–167.

Agamemnon's public rhetorical style²⁰ and is not unlikely to be lingering in their minds early in Book 4.

The most notable parallels: in Book 2 Agamemnon declared that Zeus, having promised victory, “now orders me to go to Argos in ill repute, since I lost a great army.” In Book 4, he declares that if Menelaus dies “under great reproach I would go to thirsty Argos, for the Achaeans will immediately take thought for their fatherland.”

νῦν δὲ κακὴν ἀπάτην βουλευσατο, καὶ με κελεύει
δυσκλέα Ἄργος ἰκέσθαι, ἐπεὶ πολὺν ὄλεσα λαόν. (2.114–115)

καὶ κεν ἐλέγγιστος πολυδίψιον Ἄργος ἰκοίμην·
αὐτίκα γὰρ μνήσονται Ἀχαιοὶ πατρίδος αἴης. (4.171–172)

In Book 2, he complains that “our work has not been accomplished, for which we came here.” In Book 4, he bewails the fact that Menelaus will die for an “unfinished work.”

ἄμμι δὲ ἔργον
αὐτῶς ἀκροάαντον, οὐ εἶνεκα δεῦρ' ἰκόμεσθα. (2.137–38)

σέο δ' ὅστέα πύσει ἄρουρα
κειμένου ἐν Τροίῃ ἀτελευτήτῳ ἐπὶ ἔργῳ. (4.174–75)

In Book 2, Agamemnon complains that it would be shameful for “such a large army” to go home without success (2.119–122):

αἰσχρὸν γὰρ τόδε γ' ἐστὶ καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι,
μὰψ οὕτω τοιόνδε τοσόνδε τε λαὸν Ἀχαιῶν
ἄπρηκτον πόλεμον πολεμίζειν ἠδὲ μάχεσθαι
ἀνδράσι παυροτέροισι, τέλος δ' οὐ πῶ τι πέφανται·

For this is a shameful thing even for future generations to hear of,
that in vain so great and numerous an army of Achaeans
fought a war without result and battled
with a less numerous foe, and an end was never in sight.

In Book 4, his prediction of Trojan mockery seems nothing less than a vivid description of how this shame will be thrown in his teeth; it will be said of him that he led an army of Achaeans in vain (ἄλιον στρατὸν ἤγαγεν ἐνθάδ' Ἀχαιῶν, 179). That the

²⁰ That is to say, the speech in Book 2 is the first Agamemnon's delivers as a prepared speech before an assembly of the Achaeans (in contrast to his impromptu remarks in the quarrel with Achilles in Book 1).

mockery is conjoined with an act of destroying Menelaus' funeral mound shows clearly how good repute can be replaced with bad repute "for future generations." Indeed, Agamemnon's wish that he be swallowed by the earth (182) suggests that he can expect little better than to be consigned to the same oblivion.

But perhaps the clearest parallel is with a speech of Hera, after the army responded to Agamemnon's test by running for the ships. Then, Hera had spurred Athena to intervene with a rhetorical question (2.157–162):

ὦ πόποι, αἰγιόχοιο Διὸς τέκος, Ἀτρυτώνη,
 οὕτω δὴ οἰκόνδε φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαίαν
 Ἀργεῖοι φεύξονται ἐπ' εὐρέα νῶτα θαλάσσης,
κὰδ δέ κεν εὐχολὴν Ποιάμῳ καὶ Τρωσὶ λίποιεν
Ἀργεῖην Ἑλένην, ἧς εἵνεκα πολλοὶ Ἀχαιῶν
 ἐν Τροίῃ ἀπόλοντο, φίλης ἀπὸ πατρίδος αἴης·
 Alas! Athena, daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus,
 thus home to their dear father-land
 will the Achaeans flee, over the wide back of the sea,
 and leave behind as a boast for Priam and the Trojans
 Argive Helen, for whose sake many of the Achaeans
 have been killed in Troy, far from their dear fatherland?

The dire prediction is repeated by Agamemnon, again in view of a prospective disbanding of the Achaean army (4.172–174):

αὐτίκα γὰρ μνήσονται Ἀχαιοὶ πατρίδος αἴης·
κὰδ δέ κεν εὐχολὴν Ποιάμῳ καὶ Τρωσὶ λίπομεν
Ἀργεῖην Ἑλένην· σέο δ' ὅστέα πύσει ἄρουρα ...

That Agamemnon repeats Hera's words suggests that, for all his misapprehension of divine justice, he is entirely in tune with the divine petulance of Homer's gods. Indeed, the manifold echoes and repetitions from Book 2 suggest continuity in Agamemnon's work both as leader of the Achaean host and as unwitting victim of the poem's manifold ironies. I will take each aspect of his performance in turn.

Viewed as a public performance, the second half of Agamemnon's speech is entirely in accord with the rhetorical strategy he pursued, albeit with nearly disastrous results, earlier in Book 2 and, moreover, in accord with the strategy he pursues in the so-called "Epipoleis" later in Book 4, where he stirs up various Achaean leaders, again with a fair measure of

rebuke and play-defeatism.²¹ Indeed, I suggest that across these scenes we can see a development and refinement of Agamemnon's rhetorical strategy. All the parallels adduced above concern the second, despairing and pessimistic part of Agamemnon's speech. What makes our speech different is the first, optimistic part. In Book 2, Agamemnon claimed that Zeus no longer willed the destruction of Troy, while here in Book 4 he treats Zeus as the guarantor of Troy's destruction. In the new perspective, the onus of failure falls exclusively upon the army and its supposed eagerness to abandon the war. The imagined failure of the Achaeans is no longer due to the hostility of the gods, but to their own lack of resolve before the perfidy of the Trojans. For it is imagined that the Achaeans who were willing to avenge Menelaus' cuckoldry will not be willing to avenge his death, though Zeus will be an unfailing guarantor of Troy's destruction regardless of the army's response. From this perspective, it seems clear that Agamemnon expatiates on the Achaean retreat and consequent Trojan delight in order to stimulate the army's sense of shame, for in departing they would do nothing more than remove themselves from the workings of divine justice. But as an effort to stir up Achaean shame, it is much more effective in view of another crucial difference. In Book 2 Agamemnon spoke in his capacity as leader of the Achaean expedition before a formally convoked assembly of the army. In Book 4 his speech is ostensibly a private address and he speaks in his capacity as a loving brother. He puts the Achaeans into the role of eavesdroppers, and in doing so he finds a more effective way of arousing their sense of shame. He makes the Achaeans audience to their own poor repute (*κακῶς ἀκούειν*).²²

Of course, this interpretation opens up the possibility that Agamemnon knows full well that his brother is not seriously injured and not in danger of imminent death. As the (textually

²¹ E.g., 4.242–249, 338–348, 370–400.

²² Cf. Johannes Haubold, *Homer's People: Epic Poetry and Social Formation* (Cambridge 2000) 56, who argues that already in Book 2 Agamemnon shifts focus from his own failure and disrepute to the question of "what reputation the people deserve."

difficult) scholion quoted above seems to suggest, it is as though he is intent on using Menelaus' death for political purposes whether the latter dies or not. Perhaps the narrative leaves even this most cynical interpretation open, if one considers the sequence of events leading up to the speech: Homer first records Agamemnon's shudder at seeing the wound (148–149), then a shudder from Menelaus (150), who quickly regains his composure upon seeing that the wound is not serious (151–152). Only then does Agamemnon groan and deliver his speech (153–154). Homer neglects to mention Agamemnon's observations in the meantime, and it is worth noting that the whole sequence could be differently ordered. Agamemnon's shudder could come after Menelaus' shudder and relief, directly before the speech, so as to make clear that he does not yet see that all is well; or, Menelaus' relief could come after the speech and before his encouragement of Agamemnon, hence keeping the external audience in suspense as the possible consequences are worked out by Agamemnon. The poet seems concerned to make clear *before* the speech that Menelaus is not in danger. With Menelaus' relief standing between Agamemnon's shudder and his verbal response, the tension is broken in a way that relieves the external audience of concern for the wound itself, but opens up a new space of interpretation for the speech that follows. Alternatively, it may appear so much more histrionic, or so much more calculated.

The interpretation suggested here, granted only it be a possible one, sheds light on important aspects of Agamemnon's style of rhetoric. This speech offers an excellent example of his tendency to transgress the conventions associated with particular performance contexts and to blend different registers of rhetorical speech and physical gesture. This is seen in his gesture of taking Menelaus by the hand, and in his pretense of despair, both of which give the impression of private address. As I have noted, the pretense of despair is a tactic Agamemnon has already used in a public setting, his test of the army in Book 2. But in Book 4 we see Agamemnon handling the device with greater skill; for he has made it more natural and effective by translating it into an ostensibly private speech addressed to his brother. Certainly, Agamemnon's blending of the personal and public can be traced to his special position as leader, or

primus inter pares, of the Achaean expedition, and the constant pressure he is under to maintain morale and enthusiasm for the war. Agamemnon, perhaps inevitably, given his position of authority among the Achaeans, is the consummate public man. Only on very rare occasions in the *Iliad* does Agamemnon engage in an unambiguously private conversation.²³ In other words, he is always “on,” always before the eyes of the public and always, to some degree, putting on a public performance.

This aspect of Agamemnon’s rhetorical style may shed light on other scenes and speeches that have earned him a reputation as irascible or histrionic. That reputation is partly a consequence of the difficulties of interpretation his verbal behavior presents to the audience. That is to say, the poet’s audience does not always know what to make of his speeches, and this is so because the poet wishes it so. Agamemnon, as leader of the Achaean expedition of the Trojan War, and, as is often implied,²⁴ instigator and organizer of the war on the Greek side, is important to the poet as a vehicle and spokesmen for the themes touching the larger frame of the *Iliad*’s story. As such, he presents a less tragic, less stable, and more heavily ironized picture of the war than his Trojan counterpart, Hector. Through Agamemnon, Homer keeps his audience off-balance in a way that adds to the entertainment value of his narrative as well as its depth of theme.²⁵

It is well known that the poet explores various alternatives to the traditional story of the Trojan War, and one is that the

²³ Book 10 offers the clearest examples: 43–59, 87–101, 120–127 (on the last, see below).

²⁴ As in our speech at 178–179, where it is Agamemnon, not Menelaus, who led the army of the Achaeans to Troy to avenge his anger. Cf. 2.112 (Agamemnon received a promise of victory from Zeus), 2.612–614 (Agamemnon provided ships to the Arcadians to make possible their participation in the war), 11.766 (Menoetius sent Patroclus as a recruit to Agamemnon, not to Menelaus).

²⁵ See Pietro Pucci, *The Song of the Sirens: Essays on Homer* (Lanham 1998) 187–193, for a beautiful description of the ironies generated through the fact that the language of Agamemnon, while authoritative for the characters within the story, nevertheless complicates the narrative through its “amorphousness” and “unpredictability” (193).

Achaean could go home without victory.²⁶ Of course, inglorious *nostos* is an important theme in the *Iliad* precisely because it is endorsed by Achilles, and represents one of his two possible fates (9.412–416). But surprisingly, it is Agamemnon, and Achilles only to a lesser degree, who serves as the poet's spokesman in developing this theme throughout the first half of the *Iliad*. Agamemnon proposes an inglorious departure three times in the *Iliad*, with varying seriousness. In Book 2 (110–141), his proposal is merely a ploy, and the aim is to excite the troops through some kind of reverse psychology. In Book 9 (17–28), it is less clear whether his proposal is serious, but Diomedes furnishes the objections which were lacking in Book 2, and Agamemnon willingly accepts Nestor's advice to reconcile with Achilles.²⁷ Finally, in Book 14 (65–81), Agamemnon is deadly serious, and for the first time he supplements his proposal with specifics, namely to drag the ships to sea in preparation for retreat under cover of night. This time it is not only a concern for glory but the impracticality of the scheme which is pointed out by Odysseus (83–102).

Our speech in Book 4 represents a step in the process, but its rhetorically ambiguous directedness leaves a great deal to depend on how one interprets it. Interpreted as an emotional outburst, it seems to seriously contemplate the possibility of an Achaean retreat and offers an embarrassing acknowledgment of the poor Achaean morale evidenced already in Book 2. Interpreted as a rhetorical exhortation, it appears shrewder, and

²⁶ Another possibility is Trojan victory, a theme played out in the ongoing characterization of Hector (e.g. at 8.497–541, 13.824–832). The possibility of an Achaean victory before its fated day is developed through Patroclus (16.698–701) and Achilles (22.378–394) respectively.

²⁷ That Agamemnon weeps on this occasion suggests that his despair is to be taken seriously; on the other hand, the fact that he presents his proposal before an assembly of the Achaean host rather than, as in Book 14, to a council of leaders, leaves open the possibility of more political theater aimed at provoking objections. It is also worth noting that, when Nestor suggests reconciliation with Achilles, Agamemnon responds promptly with an offer of recompense. As I argue in *CJ* 103 (2008) 353–379, the offer is ingeniously constructed and shows great enthusiasm for a successful conclusion to the war.

not wholly inadequate as an interpretation of events. Certainly Agamemnon is right in taking the Trojan violation of the oath as a sign of divine wrath, though he is mistaken in taking it as a cause rather than a result thereof. The show of despair, taken as a piece of political theater, is more skillfully deployed than in Book 2. By publicly foreboding rather than proposing an Achaean retreat, Agamemnon sets it in a subjunctive sphere better suited to the aim of exciting shame. His despair will become more real—or, at least, harder to interpret as pretense—as the possibility of an Achaean defeat becomes more credible. By the time he drops all pretense and seriously advocates an inglorious retreat, his rival Achilles will have come around to the opposite position. Agamemnon is, in this sense, a barometer for the progress of the narrative; but the narrative is a long one, and here we can see our poet keeping his own audience off-balance somewhere around the middle of its beginning.

Two more examples where I see the same effect at work will be enough to reveal a pattern. First, in Book 6, in the midst of the first day of battle, the Trojan Adrestos throws aside his weapons and begs Menelaus to take him alive. Menelaus is on the verge of handing Adrestos over to be taken captive to the ships when Agamemnon runs up to the pair and reproaches his brother for showing mercy. His speech is notable for its vehemence and vivid imagery (6.53–62):

ἀλλ' Ἀγαμέμνων
 ἀντίος ἦλθε θεῶν, καὶ ὁμοκλήσας ἔπος ἠΐδα·
 “ὦ πέπον, ὦ Μενέλαε, τίη δὲ σὺ κήδεαι οὕτως 55
 ἀνδρῶν; ἢ σοὶ ἄριστα πεποιήται κατὰ οἶκον
 πρὸς Τρώων; τῶν μὴ τις ὑπεκφύγοι αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον
 χειρᾶς θ' ἡμετέρας, μηδ' ὄν τινα γαστέρι μήτηρ
 κοῦρον ἐόντα φέροι, μηδ' ὅς φύγοι, ἀλλ' ἅμα πάντες 60
 Ἴλίου ἕξαπολοίατ' ἀκήδεστοι καὶ ἄφαντοι.”
 ὣς εἰπὼν ἔτρεψεν ἀδελφειοῦ φρένας ἦρωσ,
 αἴσιμα παρειπών·

But Agamemnon
 came running, and with a shout he spoke a word:
 “Dear Menelaus, why then do you so much pity
 these men? Or did you meet with best treatment at home
 from the Trojans? Let none of them escape sheer destruction
 at our hands, not even the babe a mother carries
 in her womb—let not even this one escape, but let all the people

of Ilium be utterly destroyed, unmourned and utterly blotted out!"
Speaking thus, the hero persuaded his brother's mind
with prudent advice.

The speech has troubled critics for its spirit of cruelty in the face of supplication, an attitude somewhat at variance with standard ethics of the Homeric warrior and best exemplified elsewhere in the person of Achilles.²⁸ In the view of many the problem is exacerbated by the poet's own endorsement of the speech, when he notes that Agamemnon persuaded his brother because he gave good advice (αἴσιμα παρεϊπόν).²⁹ Agamemnon's wish for the utter annihilation of the Trojan race, in particular his notion of destroying male offspring even from the womb of pregnant mothers, shows the same rhetorical overkill elsewhere observed in his speeches.³⁰ Aside from its impassioned tone, the speech is similar in other ways to our example from Book 4. Here, as there, Agamemnon addresses his brother, alludes to Trojan wickedness, and predicts total annihilation as its consequence. Just as in Book 4 Agamemnon had imagined the destruction of Menelaus' funeral mound, so here he predicts that the Trojans will not be mourned, indeed, will be rendered "invisible" (ἄφαντοι); that is to say, in both cases he represents remembrance and glory as the stakes of the game. Is it possible that here, as well, Agamemnon intends his remarks to be overheard by a wider audience?

Homer's imagined battlefield is a broad and noisy one, but he relaxes verisimilitude in allowing his heroes to deliver exhortations as though to their assembled forces. Hence the battle

²⁸ 20.463–472, 21.34–135; cf. Graham Zanker, *The Heart of Achilles: Characterization and Personal Ethics in the Iliad* (Ann Arbor 1994) 102–106.

²⁹ On the controversy, see F. S. Naiden, *Ancient Supplication* (Oxford 2006) 142–144; Magdalene Stoevesandt, *Feinde – Gegner – Opfer: zur Darstellung der Trojaner in den Kampfszenen der Ilias* (Basel 2004) 152–155; Donna F. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad* (Cambridge 2002) 165–167, with earlier bibliography.

³⁰ The idea of infanticide is not found elsewhere in the *Iliad's* accounts of city-sacking, where men are killed while women and children are enslaved (see especially 9.591–594). Cf. Kirk, *The Iliad II* 161 *ad* 57–60: "The notion of killing male embryos is rhetorical rather than realistic, powerful enough in its way and typical of Agamemnon at his nastiest."

narrative is a context in which private and public speech both find a place. This is clear from the context of the passage at hand. Agamemnon's personal address to his brother is immediately followed (after Adrestos is dispatched, notably by Agamemnon and not Menelaus) with an exhortation of the army from Nestor (6.66–71).

Νέστωρ δ' Ἀργείοισιν ἐκέκλετο μακρὸν ἀύσας·
 “ὦ φίλοι ἦρωες Δαναοί, θεράποντες Ἄρης,
 μή τις νῦν ἐνάρων ἐπιβαλλόμενος μετόπισθε
 μιμνέτω, ὡς κε πλείστα φέρων ἐπὶ νῆας ἵκηται,
 ἀλλ' ἄνδρας κτείνωμεν· ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τὰ ἔκηλοι
 νεκροὺς ἅμ πεδίον συλήσετε τεθνηώτας.”

But Nestor exhorted the Argives, shouting loudly:
 “Oh dear Danaan heroes, servants of Ares,
 let no one now hang back in eagerness for spoils
 so as to go back to the ships with the most.
 Rather, let us kill men! Afterwards, at your pleasure,
 you will strip the dead corpses along the plain.”

But, again, to whom does Agamemnon speak? Here as well there are hints that Agamemnon may intend his speech for a wider audience than Menelaus alone. First, there is the speech introduction: Agamemnon, like Nestor, shouts his advice, ὁμοκλήσας. The verb may be used of impassioned personal address, or for commanding and exhorting an entire army.³¹ His speech encourages indiscriminate slaughter of the enemy without thought of taking prisoners for ransom, just as Nestor's exhortation encourages the Achaeans to fight continuously without thinking of collecting spoils. Both speeches can be seen to encourage the troops to press their advantage rather than to allow an interruption of the Achaeans' excellent momentum at this juncture.³²

It is certainly not coincidental either that Menelaus, rather than some other Achaean, is here Agamemnon's addressee. As Agamemnon's speech implies, it is Paris' mistreatment of Menelaus that justifies the Achaean war against the Trojans; it will

³¹ Cf. 15.658–660, 16.714, 18.156, 20.364–365.

³² From the beginning of Book 6 to the Adrestos episode, ten Achaeans kill fourteen Trojans in a one-sided catalogue of victories.

not do for Menelaus to show mercy. Just as the injustice he suffered in Book 4 offered ample opportunity to boost the general morale, so his pity here may threaten it. There is some evidence that Menelaus' lack of resolve is a matter of embarrassment to Agamemnon. In Book 10 he says to Nestor, who has asked why Menelaus is not also awake with care for the army's plight (10.120–123):

ὦ γέρον, ἄλλοτε μὲν σε καὶ αἰτιάασθαι ἄνωγα·
πολλάκι γὰρ μεθιῖ τε καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλει πονέεσθαι,
οὔτ' ὄκνη εἴκων οὔτ' ἀφραδίησι νόοιο,
ἀλλ' ἐμέ τ' εἰσορόων καὶ ἐμὴν ποτιδέγμενος ὀρμήν.

Aged sir, I encourage you to find fault even at another time.
For often he lets up, and does not wish to labor
not because he yields to sloth or foolishness of mind
but looking to me and waiting for my initiative.

He then goes on to explain that Menelaus is, indeed, up and about.³³ On the battlefield, where every act is observed by any number of spectators, Menelaus' pity for Adrestos may have an exaggerated effect on the army's commitment to battle. And so, I suggest, Agamemnon's criticism of Menelaus is meant for a wider audience. This would explain the way in which Agamemnon's advice to his brother goes beyond the matter of Menelaus and Adrestos, and touches on the whole matter of the Trojan War from its beginning (with allusion to the abduction of Helen) to its end (with the entire destruction of the Trojan race).

The poet's statement that Agamemnon gave good advice (*αἴσιμα παρειπών*) is difficult to judge insofar as the meaning of the phrase is uncertain; it appears elsewhere only once, in a similar passage discussed below. But the statement may alert us to the speech as a rhetorical performance in which there is more at stake than the fate of hapless Adrestos. That is, it may

³³ This short speech is one of the few in which Agamemnon engages in a private conversation (cf. n.23 above), and it is notable that his concerns about his brother are expressed with more candor than elsewhere. His more oblique manner is on evidence later in Book 10, where, in conclave with other Achaean leaders, he indirectly advises Diomedes *not* to select Menelaus as a companion in arms (10.234–239, with the poet's remark at 240).

signal that the speech is intended to boost the morale of the army and encourage the kind of relentless fighting urged by Nestor in the exhortation that follows. If we assign to αἴσιμα the meaning “prudent, well-advised” or perhaps even “timely,” rather than “righteous” or “fateful,” the authorial comment could be taken to allude to Agamemnon’s opportunistic execution of a rhetorical aim.³⁴ Taking the speech as a battlefield exhortation perhaps palliates its harshness; this is not to say that as a declaration of “total war” it is any less shocking to Homer’s audience. It likely marks a point of progress in the steadily increasing cruelty of the conflict that characterizes the *Iliad*’s battle narrative, culminating in the *aristeia* of Achilles. It also looks forward to the second half of Book 6, where Hector visits his wife and the groundwork of his tragedy is laid down by the poet. As Mueller notes, “[Agamemnon’s] savage threat against the unborn child is deliberately placed by the poet in a context that will soon see Hektor among the women of Troy.”³⁵ I suggest that here, once again, Homer gives Agamemnon a speech that is both rhetorically and thematically multivalent. Hence one could argue that the poet’s own estimation of Agamemnon’s words rather calls attention to the difficulty of interpreting them. Are Agamemnon’s words “prudent” in the eyes of Menelaus, or the army? Are they prudent relative to the supplication of Adrestos, or relative to the whole Trojan War? Are they ultimately to be read with, or

³⁴ Irene J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: the Presentation of the Story in the Iliad* (Amsterdam 1987) 204, argues for a morally significant, but focalized meaning (“proper”). Fenik, *Homer and the Nibelungenlied* 26–27, sees reflexive use of a traditional formula. Simon Goldhill, “Supplication and Authorial Comment in the *Iliad*: *Iliad* Z 61–2,” *Hermes* 118 (1990) 373–376, favors “fateful,” followed by Zanker, *The Heart of Achilles* 102. Naiden, *Ancient Supplication* 143, argues that both meanings are relevant, and also sees an implication that rejecting the suppliant is ritually “correct.” Stoevesandt, *Feinde* 152–155, Wilson, *Ransom* 165–167, Taplin, *Homeric Soundings* 51–52, and Kirk, *The Iliad* II 161 *ad* 61–62, favor a blander sense, something like “prudent” or “to the point.” This seems reasonable given the other context in which the phrase appears, but it does not help much with the awkwardness the whole passage creates for us. For “timely,” cf. 6.519.

³⁵ Martin Mueller, *The Iliad* (London/Boston 1984) 70.

against, Homer's own representation of the war? Narratological solutions have been suggested for the problem of αἴσιμα παρειπών, but they tend to create an entanglement of perspectives that confuses rather than elucidates interpretation.³⁶ What I suggest is that the difficulty is no isolated case, but belongs to a pattern of peculiar verbal behavior from Agamemnon that can be traced back to Books 2 and 4.

My second example is from Book 7. Agamemnon's rhetorical aims are here most obvious, and the attendant ironies most glaring. Again Agamemnon addresses his brother, and again the narrative context is that of a duel, this time a duel proposed by Hector against whomever the Achaeans would care to present as their champion. After an uncomfortable silence, Menelaus rises to the challenge. A bout between Menelaus and Hector, as the poet makes clear, would certainly end with defeat for the former. But Agamemnon intervenes (7.104–122):

ἐνθά κέ τοι, Μενέλαε, φάνη βιότιοιο τελευτῇ
 Ἕκτορος ἐν παλάμῃσιν, ἐπεὶ πολὺ φέροτερος ἦεν, 105
 εἰ μὴ ἀναΐξαντες ἔλον βασιλῆες Ἀχαιῶν,
 αὐτός τ' Ἀτρεΐδης εὐρὸν κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων
 δεξιτερῆς ἔλε χειρὸς ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὄνομαζεν·
 “ἀφροαίνεις Μενέλαε διοτρεφές, οὐδέ τί σε χρὴ
 ταύτης ἀφροσύνης· ἀνὰ δὲ σχέο κηδόμενός περ, 110
 μηδ' ἔθελ' ἐξ ἔριδος σεῦ ἀμείνωνι φωτὶ μάχεσθαι,
 Ἕκτορι Πριαμίδῃ, τόν τε στυγέουσι καὶ ἄλλοι.
 καὶ δ' Ἀχιλεὺς τούτῳ γε μάχῃ ἔνι κυδιανείῳ
 ἔρριγ' ἀντιβολῆσαι, ὃ περ σέο πολλὸν ἀμείνων.
 ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν νῦν ἴζευ ἰὼν μετὰ ἔθνος ἐταίρων, 115
 τούτῳ δὲ πρόμον ἄλλον ἀναστήσουσιν Ἀχαιοί.
 εἴ περ ἀδειῖς τ' ἐστὶ καὶ εἰ μόθου ἔστ' ἀκόρητος,
 φημί μιν ἀσπασίως γόνυ κάμψειν, αἶ κε φύγησι
 δηϊοῦ ἐκ πολέμοιο καὶ αἰνῆς δηϊότητος.”
 ὡς εἰπὼν παρέπεισεν ἀδελφειοῦ φρένας ἦρωσ 120
 αἴσιμα παρειπών, ὃ δ' ἐπέθετο· τοῦ μὲν ἔπειτα
 γηθόσσυνοι θεράποντες ἀπ' ὤμων τεύχε' ἔλοντο.

Then, Menelaus, the end of your life would have appeared at Hector's hands, since he was a better man by far,

³⁶ Cf. Zanker, *The Heart of Achilles* 102 n.49. De Jong, *Narrators* 204, and Taplin, *Homeric Soundings* 51, suggest focalization of the poet's remark.

if the kings of the Achaeans had not leapt up and restrained you
 and if the son of Atreus himself, wide-ruling Agamemnon,
 had not taken your right hand and named you and spoken a word:
 “You are foolish, god-reared Menelaus, nor have you need
 of this foolhardiness. Restrain yourself, though you sorrow.
 Do not desire, out of quarrelsomeness, to fight a better man,
 Hector, son of Priam, whom even others fear.
 Even Achilles shuddered to meet this man
 in glorious battle, and Achilles is much better than you.
 But go amidst your companions and seat yourself;
 against this man the Achaeans will set some other champion.
 Though he be fearless, though he be insatiate of battle
 I think he will gladly take his rest, should he escape
 destructive war and dire battle.”
 Speaking thus, the hero persuaded his brother’s mind
 with prudent advice. Menelaus obeyed, and his
 companions happily took the armor from his shoulders.

Here again, the speech is ostensibly a private address from one brother to another, as the hand-taking gesture implies.³⁷ But, more clearly than in any previous instance, there is an internal, emotionally engaged audience. Moreover, the occasion is a delicate one for Agamemnon in his role as leader. Though it is clear that the Achaean kings do not wish Menelaus to present himself for certain death (106), there is a good reason he volunteers: it is his quarrel that precipitated the war. Yet there is more at work here than Menelaus’ own inability to actually avenge Trojan wrongs; behind his gesture is the awkward fact that no Achaean immediately rises to Hector’s challenge, and none will do so until a rousing speech of Nestor which immediately follows Agamemnon’s (124–160). Menelaus’ own reproach of the Achaeans as feckless boasters (96–102) appears impolitic; although his rhetoric closely matches Nestor’s, he is not the appropriate person to deliver this reproach. Agamemnon must simultaneously excuse his brother from a suicidal duel, redress the harshness of his remarks to the army, and

³⁷ Cf. n.12 above; on the full formula in line 108b, see Martin, *Language of Heroes* 19–20. Elizabeth Minchin, *Homeric Voices: Discourse, Memory, Gender* (Oxford 2007) 151–152, classifies this speech as a “rebuke” and suggests the hand-gesture may express “dominance” as well as affection.

somehow produce another volunteer in his place.

The speech shows the same rhetorical back-and-forth as our example in Book 4, and the same peculiar blend of confidence and defeatism. Great emphasis is placed on Hector's extraordinary prowess, even to the point of alleging that Achilles himself feared to face him in battle. The latter detail seems exaggerated and awkward. On the one hand, it appears unlikely that Achilles, the preeminent warrior on the Achaean side, would avoid battle with Hector. In this sense the detail is suggestive of rhetorical hyperbole intended to protect Menelaus' honor.³⁸ On the other hand, the claim appears self-serving in Agamemnon's mouth and can be seen to protect his own reputation before a wider Achaean audience, since Hector's present challenge to the Achaeans no doubt makes Achilles' absence most keenly felt.

In any case, the claim that not even Achilles would face Hector is difficult to reconcile with the immediately following lines, in which Agamemnon confidently predicts Hector's eager flight from destruction at the hands of some unnamed Achaean champion. Here we can once again see Agamemnon suddenly changing gears to suit the situation and tailoring his remarks to a broader internal audience. Having excused Menelaus (and perhaps himself!) from facing Hector, Agamemnon is left with the awkward fact that no one else has yet volunteered.³⁹ His prediction of Hector's defeat suggests that his concern shifts, mid-speech, from the well-being of Menelaus to the matter of general Achaean morale. As in Book 4, the speech, as a whole, seems contradictory, in tone if not strictly in logic. It is left to Nestor to take up the thread of its ending and rouse the Achaeans to the desired result—that is, so many volunteers that lots must be drawn (161–174). As in Book 4, the irony is enriched by our uncertainty as to whom Agamemnon is really

³⁸ So Wolfgang Kullmann, *Die Quellen der Ilias* (*Hermes Einzelschr.* 14 [1960]) 183. Cf. Kirk, *The Iliad* II 248 *ad* 113: "This must be a piece of persuasive exaggeration by Agamemnon to assuage his brother's pride." At 9.352–354 Achilles claims that when he fought, Hector would not even venture beyond the walls of Troy.

³⁹ Cf. Fenik, *Homer and the Nibelungenlied* 24.

talking to; what begins as a private address to Menelaus ends as something appropriate to a larger public, but in the end the whole may just as well be read this way. As for the phrase αἴσιμα παρεϊπών, it is unproblematic so long as we interpret the speech as private advice from brother to brother; Agamemnon gives good advice indeed when he urges Menelaus not to fight Hector. On the other hand, if the phrase calls attention to the speech as a rhetorical performance directed to a wider audience, it is deployed by the poet with greater irony. For in saving Menelaus from certain destruction, Agamemnon simultaneously entices the Achaean champions into undertaking the same risk.

Conclusions

In this article I may appear to complain too strenuously of Agamemnon's rhetorical duplicity, while following two lines of argument which could appear mutually exclusive in their own right. On the one hand, I have argued that Agamemnon's speeches to his brother seem at times to be delivered for the benefit of a wider audience of bystanders, and that viewed in this light, his rhetoric shows ulterior motives relative to these ulterior audiences. On the other hand, I noted at the beginning that speeches in Homer are not mere representations of social or political interaction between "real" people; that is, reading them with an undue social realism misses the way in which speech and speaker are both elements of the larger narrative and do the narrative's work. I have more than once asked the rather naïve question "to whom does Agamemnon speak?" Of course, he speaks ultimately to us, Homer's audience. What I hope to have shown is that Homer may unsettle our interpretation of a speech by creating ambiguities surrounding its rhetorical direction and aims.

The ambiguous directedness of Agamemnon's language is not generally characteristic of Homeric speakers. It is certainly an important part of Homer's construction of this unique character. I suggest above that the peculiarity is related to Agamemnon's unique position as leader among the Achaeans; as such he stands always before an audience and shows an excessive concern for how his words and actions may influence the general morale of the army and his own position of

authority. Indeed, it can be seen in my three examples that Homer exploits Agamemnon's relationship with his brother as a particularly sensitive boundary between his public and private concerns. Certainly their relationship is an awkward one.⁴⁰ Although Agamemnon is the leader of the Achaean expedition, it is Menelaus' personal dispute with Paris that is the reason for the war. Menelaus, as the moral if not the political figurehead of the expedition, is a figure whose public profile Agamemnon is at pains to control. This may mean urging him on to greater enthusiasm, excusing him in diplomatic fashion from a suicidal heroism, or painting him as a victim of Trojan wickedness. In each case, what we see at work is no mere brotherly affection, but Agamemnon's attempt to condition Achaean attitudes to the war.

Yet Agamemnon also exerts control on our own attitudes. Homer's most strongly drawn characters, among whom Agamemnon is to be ranked with Achilles and Hector, give voice to competing models of heroism and competing interpretations of the narrative in which they play a role. As the leader of the Achaean expedition and the figure who provokes Achilles' wrath, Agamemnon is the character from whom both the story and the frame-story of the *Iliad* originate. It is only natural that our vision of both should be influenced by his words and actions. As Pucci observes, for all Agamemnon's tears and posture of impotence, his words are both politically and textually powerful.⁴¹ Yet his crocodile-tears and manifold cajoleries make him a less than reliable guide through the woods for Homer's audience. This begins in Book 2; but if it is correct to rescue our passages in Books 4, 6, and 7 from analyses based only on Agamemnon's supposed irrational emotionalism, a pattern of rhetorical duplicity emerges that

⁴⁰ As Fenik notes, *Homer and the Nibelungenlied* 25, their relationship "is flattering to neither, and it springs from a sustained conception."

⁴¹ Pucci, *The Song of the Sirens* 191: "No matter how false, weak, and hysterical, no matter how copiously watered by tears of impotence, it is [Agamemnon's] word that represents the will of the whole army and, to the extent that it reflects the continuity of the Iliadic action, the word that secures the continuity of the narrative."

can be traced at least through Book 9.⁴² Moreover, the duplicity focuses throughout on the nature, aims, and prospects of the Achaean expedition against Troy and runs at times with, at times counter to the poet's own representation of this war in these crucial books preceding the resumption of Achilles' story. Why our poet should have given so forked a tongue to the Achaean leader remains something of a mystery, and the question no doubt awaits a more thorough study than presented here. But it seems clear that in this early portion of his narrative, Homer is not at pains to grant his audience the comfort of an authoritative heroic voice. He saves for the reappearance of Achilles a deeper reflection on heroism—and, perhaps, a deeper obfuscation.⁴³

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⁴² On Agamemnon's catalogue of gifts in Book 9 and its subtexts, see my study *CJ* 103 (2008) 353–379.

⁴³ A draft of this paper was read by Joel P. Christensen and much improved by his advice. The careful attention of an anonymous reader for *GRBS* helped me to further clarify and strengthen my argument. Finally, I would like to thank Kent Rigsby for a smooth editorial process and for numerous stylistic improvements to my final draft.