ENTERING THE AGÔN
Entering the Agōn

Dissent and Authority in Homer, Historiography and Tragedy

ELTON T. E. BARKER
Preface

Though it has become axiomatic to think of ancient Greek society in terms of competition, the contest of words (agon) in literature—the scene of debate in which, with varying degrees of formalization, characters confront each other with opposing views—is less well appreciated. This book sets out to explore for the first time the agon in three generic traditions—epic, historiography and tragedy—and trace its changing representations over those genres and, by comparing two examples of each type of narrative, within them. It demonstrates not only the fundamental importance of debate to these genres, but also the ways representations of debate construct a political community through the reproduction of dissent.

Previous works have studied the agon in isolation: yet, the focus on one genre, author or text, most commonly Euripidean tragedy, has failed to grasp the agon’s range of forms and has encouraged the assumption that it should provide resolution or derive ‘naturally’ from the plot; moreover, the cataloguing of the agon’s features in abstraction from textual context has overlooked its performance in each narrative or drama. Combining literary approaches to debate with a sociological understanding of structures within society, this book aims to investigate textual debates in relation to recognizable parameters that indicate an institution, such as the assembly. Being closely connected to the idea of public gatherings, literary representations of debate set issues out ‘into the open’, challenge authority and enact the potential for dissent. But this book also shows that, because debate gestures towards allowing difference of opinion, its establishment and procedure are highly charged and important to control.

Act I investigates the two Homeric epics for the rival narrative strategies towards dissent that each bequeaths to the tradition. Building on the recent suggestion that the Iliad acts as a foundational narrative, Chapter 1 demonstrates the Iliad’s institutionalization of dissent within the Achaean assembly. It differs, however, from previous studies that have located a political community at the end of the Iliad by conceiving of the discovery of politics as a process originating from the poem’s very
Preface

beginning in the strife between Achilles and Agamemnon. Chapter 2 presents the *Odyssey*’s radically different approach to the subject, in which dissenting voices are grouped together and aligned as obstructions to Odysseus and his epic return. As well as showing the narrative’s marginalization of dissent, this study exposes the playfulness of the *Odyssey* rather as a serious challenge to the utility of debate and examination of the authority exercised over it.

Act II rethinks the relationship between Herodotus and Thucydides, who, as prose authors and uniquely responsible for their narratives, faced the problem of getting their voice heard in a culture which privileged the oral, public spoken word: their differing responses can be traced through their representation of debate. Herodotus counters the marginalization of his voice by reworking an Odyssean strategy towards representing debate that challenges its normative institutional value: while the most formal debates occur paradoxically in the Persian king’s court, Greek assemblies frequently degenerate into rival in-fighting. The problem clearly relates to the incapacity of the assembly to transcend any one particular *polis*: Herodotus’ written enquiry provides an alternate means by which a Panhellenic political community may be achieved. Chapter 4 suggests that Thucydides takes an even more challenging approach to the way politics was done by representing debate as *agōn*. In contrast to the usual claim that Thucydides’ debates serve only to show the limits of democratic deliberation, this chapter interprets Thucydides’ more exact reproduction of assembly scenes as exposing his readers to the dangers of rhetoric, while providing them with the tools to analyse it. In an Achilles-like stand against the decision-making practice of his contemporaries, Thucydides’ representation of debate offers a strikingly innovative, and better, way of doing politics, through the activity of reading.

Act III re-examines the tragic *agōn* and the issue of politics in tragedy more generally in the light of this broader enquiry by looking anew at two problem plays that suffer from an overly formal *agōn*. Chapter 5 discusses Sophocles’ *Ajax* as a reworking of the *Iliad* from the viewpoint of others engaged with the hero: this approach makes sense of the problematic double agon which takes place after Ajax’s suicide by showing how it dramatizes competing reactions to the hero and reproduces the crisis of interpretation among the audience. Chapter 6 takes the even more disturbing case of Euripides’ *Hecuba*, whose Odyssean
insistence on the protagonist’s suffering culminates in an agón that appears to legitimize even Hecuba’s extreme vengeance. Yet, dissent spills over this formal frame as Polymestor continues to speak frankly, ultimately leaving the audience to deal alone with dissent and face the consequences of their own judgement outside the security of any institutional framework, including the play itself.

The aim of this book is to show how the presence of formal debate in the public literature of ancient Greece helps to create a ‘mentalité’ of agón that intersects with and informs the political development in the culture at large. It will be of interest to scholars and students alike, especially those specializing in Greek epic, historiography or tragedy. Yet, its broad scope and careful consideration of the cultural context of literature will also appeal to non-classicists interested in the origins of political thought or literary critics interested in narrative constructions.

Given the breadth of this study and the correlative importance assigned to interrogating each example closely, it has been neither possible nor desirable to examine every single instance of debate in the three genres under investigation. It is hoped, however, that the reason for omission will be clear from each particular study, and that no single omission detracts from the overall value of the argument being made. The same may be held for other generic traditions that are not investigated here, but that also feature debate, such as the comedy of Aristophanes and the philosophical dialogues of Plato. While it is true that both authors have been the subject of recent dissertations (see N. Papageorgiou, ‘A Study in the Aristophanic Agôn: Clouds, Wasps and Plutus’, Diss., Royal Holloway (2000) and A. G. Long, ‘Character and Dialectic: the Philosophical Origins of the Platonic Dialogue’, Diss., Cambridge (2004)), even so there is sufficient overlap with the genres included in this book for most relevant issues and considerations to be discussed here. It should also be noted that this study explores literary representations of debate: that is to say, ‘real-life’ debates or arenas for debate do not come under investigation. Nevertheless, it is the intention of this study to engage with some ways in which literary representations of debate may impact on and intersect with their cultural contexts in the construction of a cultural imagination. The issue of speech in Herodotus is also the subject of a current dissertation by V. Zali (Provisional title: ‘(Re)shaping Herodotean Rhetoric: a Study of the Direct and Indirect Speeches in Books 5–9’, University College,
London): while time has not permitted me to incorporate her findings into this book, the chapter on Herodotus’ speeches has benefited greatly from her comments.

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August 2008

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THE OPEN UNIVERSITY,
February 2011
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<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Acta Classica</td>
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<tr>
<td>AJP</td>
<td>American Journal of Philology</td>
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<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Ancient Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASNP</td>
<td>Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia</td>
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<tr>
<td>BICS</td>
<td>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMCR</td>
<td>Bryn Mawr Classical Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Classical Antiquity</td>
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<td>CB</td>
<td>Classical Bulletin</td>
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<td>CJ</td>
<td>Classical Journal</td>
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<td>CP</td>
<td>Classical Philology</td>
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<td>CQ</td>
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<td>CR</td>
<td>Classical Review</td>
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<td>CW</td>
<td>Classical World</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gr&amp;R</td>
<td>Greece &amp; Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRBS</td>
<td>Greek, Rome, and Byzantine Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSCP</td>
<td>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPT</td>
<td>History of Political Thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHS</td>
<td>Journal of Hellenic Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRS</td>
<td>Journal of Roman Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICS</td>
<td>Institute Classical Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>L’Information Littéraire</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCM</td>
<td>Liverpool Classical Monthly</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEC</td>
<td>Les Études Classiques</td>
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<tr>
<td>LICS</td>
<td>Leeds International Classical Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loeb</td>
<td>Harvard Classical Library</td>
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List of abbreviations

MD  Materiali e discussioni per l’analisi dei testi classici
MH  Museum Helveticum
OCD Oxford Classical Dictionary
OCT Oxford Classical Texts
PCPS Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society
PLLS Papers of the Leeds International Latin Seminar
QS  Quaderni di storia
REA Real-Enzyklopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft
RFIC Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica
TAPA Transactions of the American Philological Association
TLS Times Literary Supplement
YCS Yale Classical Studies
WS  Wiener Studien

Note

Ancient texts are cited according to the latest Oxford Classical Texts. My translations are often adapted from the Loeb Classical Library editions. For reasons of accessibility I have used familiar Latinized versions of Greek names (so Achilles, not Akhilleus; Ajax, not Aias, etc.).
Prologue

OPENING SKIRMISHES

Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.

(George W. Bush)¹

How would Homer or Demosthenes had either been present have listened to this said by me? How would they have reacted to it? In truth, great is the struggle, if we posit such a law court and theatre for our private words, and to pretend that we are submitting public accounts of our writings to the scrutiny of such long-standing heroes as witnesses and judges.

(Longinus, *On the Sublime* 14.2)²

At one point in his analysis of great writing, *On the Sublime*, Longinus ponders his own reception by turning to two of the greats, Homer and Demosthenes. By bringing together these particular authors, Longinus already reveals certain cultural assumptions which can read an epic poet and classical orator alongside each other.³ Indeed, Longinus goes some way to inserting himself within that canon by citing Homer and


² ἦτι δὲ μάλλον, εἰ κάκειν τῇ διανοίᾳ προσαναγράφομεν, πῶς ἄν τόδε τι ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ λεγόμενον παρὼν Ὅμηρος ἤκουσεν ἡ Δημοσθένης, ἢ πῶς ἄν ἦπι τούτῳ διετέθησαν· τῷ γὰρ ὅσι μεγά τὸ ἀγάπημα, τοιοῦτον ὑποτίθεσθαι τῶν ἱδίων λόγων δικαστήριων καὶ θέατρον, καὶ ἐν τηλεούσις ἠρώας κραταί τε καὶ μάρτυριν ὑπέχειν τῶν γραφομένων εὐθύναις πεπαίχθαι.

³ Too (1998), 214 relates these lines to ‘[Longinus’] belief that the sublime should transcend its current temporal context’, for ‘the classical lawcourt and theatre are patently anachronistic contexts in which to locate Homer’. 

Demosthenes not as objects of his analysis but as themselves a critical audience of his own writings. In making this move, Longinus reconfigures these epic authors or ‘heroes’ (ἥρωες) as an audience drawn from the contemporary world of the law court and theatre (δικαστήριον καὶ θέατρον)—‘judges and witnesses’ (κριταὶ καὶ μάρτυρες). Thus reading is imagined as a public act, the reception of the writer’s ‘private words’ (οἱ ἰδίοι λόγοι) a matter of ‘public auditing’ (ἐνθώπια). For a writer to hypothesize such a scenario would be a ‘struggle’—a public contest (ἀγώνισμα).

In setting up a public contest over his words, then, Longinus constructs a judging audience deeply embedded in the agonistic culture of a shared heritage, best represented by the civic institutions of the law court and theatre he mentions. Even though he is describing the act of reading, he nevertheless draws on an image derived from the public spaces of his cultural tradition. That is to say, in spite of the fact that, by this period, the author’s world is thoroughly literary and bookish, it appears natural for the act of reception to be thought of in terms of public contest or ἀγῶν. This book investigates representations of the ἀγῶν in ancient Greek literature. The agonistic spirit of ancient Greek culture is well

4 On rendering accounts in Athenian democratic procedure, see Vernant (1982), 51–2.
5 The term ἀγώνισμα, first coined it seems by Herodotus to describe the product of striving for something (1.140), famously occurs at the end of Thucydides’ methodological statement to denote ‘a contest for the moment’ (ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρήμα), against which he defines his work, a possession for always (κτήμα ἐς αἰεί, 1.22.4). See Chapter 4 below.
6 Too (1998), 214–16 discusses the implications of the literary struggle being described here. She argues that this ἀγῶν is a site which patently acknowledges the social and political significance of criticism as a process which seeks the benefit for the community as a whole by judging in favour of certain discourses against others (p. 216). While the present study will put the stress on the ἀγῶν reproducing the crisis of judgement, Too’s reading of literary criticism and politics is suggestive of the power of the ἀγῶν. The image of the ἀγῶν—as a contest that writers enter into to become part of a canon—dominates the literary theory of Harold Bloom: see e.g. Bloom (1973) and (1982). His use of the ἀγῶν, however, is avowedly aesthetic, not political.
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documented, from the rivalry between heroes or poets to the establishment of competitive festivals. Less well appreciated, however, is the contest of words (agôn) in literature—the scene of debate in which, with varying degrees of formalization, characters confront each other with opposing views. This book sets out to explore for the first time the agôn in three generic traditions—epic, historiography and tragedy—and trace its changing representations over those genres and, by comparing two examples of each type, within them with the aim of understanding debate in terms of dissent from authority.

Dissent is an important phenomenon in modern political culture and the subject of much contemporary anxiety, being frequently cited both as a defining feature of Western liberal democracies in the current ‘war on terror’ rhetoric and as under threat precisely during such trying times. More generally there is a current perception that formal democratic institutions are disconnected from people’s everyday lives, while dissent continues to thrive in other arenas and media.


9 For poetic competition, see Griffith (1990). For an analysis from the perspective of the performer, see now Collins (2004), who explores the practice of ‘capping’: the mode by which speakers or singers seek mastery over one other by coming up with a response that outdoes their rival.

10 For the Greek games, see M. Finley and H. W. Plecket (1976); Scanlon (1984); Golden (1998). Osborne (1993) describes a process by which the collective interest in competition transforms the institution into a democratic framework.


12 With the advent of new media for mass communication, such as the internet, many alternative venues for dissent aside from traditional arenas are forming, prompting both academics and politicians alike to speculate on the possible consequences for the way
political controversies over dissent—both its production and its limitations—offer a way into thinking about how debate is represented in ancient Greek literature. On the one hand, the ways in which examples of opposition in political rhetoric, such as ‘you’re either with us or against us’, may work to silence dissent challenge a simplistic notion that dissent is generated through opposition alone. To put that slightly differently, the establishment of contrary positions—or dissoi logoi—within a narrative does not necessarily invite dialogue. On the other hand, the observation that dissent occurs in a variety of different arenas invites reflection on the consequences of those different manifestations for assessing the dynamics and impact of dissent and, in particular, also draws attention to the importance of the institutional context for thinking about dissent.

This study sets out to make three interlocking claims. They are: first, that debate is fundamental to the public forms of ancient Greek narrative, as exemplified by epic and tragedy, and to the writing of history as politics is carried out. On the adaptation of democratic institutions, processes and cultures to digital interactivity, see J. G. Blumler and S. Coleman, Realising Democracy Online: A Civic Commons in Cyberspace (Cambridge, 2001); S. Coleman, ‘Exploring New Media Effects on Representative Democracy,’ Journal of Legislative Studies, (Jan. 2005); R. Butsch (ed.), The Media and the Public Sphere (Basingstoke, 2007).

Claims to be fighting terrorism have been used to justify the suppression of legitimate opposition, as in Zimbabwe (Gary Younge, Guardian, 10 Dec. 2001) or Uzbekistan (editorial, Daily Telegraph, 16 Oct. 2004). See esp. E. S. Herman and G. O’Sullivan: The ‘Terrorism’ Industry: The Experts and Institutions that Shape our View of Terror (New York, 1989); J. Cooley, Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America, and International Terrorism (London, 1999); R. Mahajan, The New Crusade: America’s War on Terrorism (New York, 2002). See also N. Chomsky and E. S. Herman, Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media (New York, 1988), who explore concerns of contemporary governments over the potential for their citizens to act and think differently and question their obsession with manufacturing consent. Rehm (2003), 87–118 suggests that Athenian tragedy resists ‘ideological truisms that cover up deeply intractable problems’ (p. 118).

The notion of arguing from opposing positions or with opposing speeches (dissoi logoi) is regarded as a characteristic of the activity of sophists in Athens, as testified by fragments of Protagoras (DK80A1, DK80A20), the treatise of the same name (DK90), and Aristophanes’ satirical treatment in his Clouds. See Kerferd (1981), esp. 84–5, 131–2. See also Chapter 4, n. 96 below.

The extent to which Platonic dialogue may be considered open or closed has been the subject of recent intense speculation: see e.g. the debate between Euben (1996) and Barber (1996). Much may depend on the particular dialogue: for a discussion of the dialogue form and its variances in Plato, see Rutherford (1995), esp. 7–16, 23–9.
demonstrated by Herodotus and Thucydides; second, that representations of debate may be best understood in terms of institutional dissent, by virtue of which authority is challenged and alternative views are not only tolerated, but also somehow incorporated, managed and utilized; third, that textual representations of debate do not exist independently from an institutional framework but, by working through strategies for managing dissent, serve to reproduce an agonistic mental horizon among its many audiences.16

SETTING THE BOUNDARIES TO DEBATE

We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty... We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine and remember that we are not descended from fearful men. Not from men who feared to write, to associate, to speak and to defend the causes that were for the moment unpopular.

Edward R. Murrow

While the institutions of the democracy guaranteed free speech—that is, the right to address the Assembly—and therefore to try to persuade the majority, it was not imagined that this procured unanimity. So the democratic ideal was not one of total agreement, so much as one of the due management of disagreement.

(Geoffrey Lloyd, (1996), 132–3)

Previous work on debate in ancient Greek literature has been limited in scope in at least two ways. First, studies have focused on debate in individual genres, authors or plays.17 These approaches, limited in

16 These three claims are explored in greater detail over the course of the rest of the Prologue below: the importance of debate is discussed in the section ‘Setting the boundaries to debate’; the value of reading debate in its institutional context is set out in ‘Laying down the ground-rules’; and the interrelationship between the institutional form of debate and its textual representations in the reproduction of dissent is articulated in ‘Entering the ἀγών to judge’.

17 On debate or ἀγών in Homer, see R. Martin (1951); M. Finley (2002); Momigliano (1973); Ruzé (1997); Hölkeskamp (1998); Hammer (2002); in Thucydides: Cogan (1981); Macleod (1983), 52–122; Ober (1998); in Aeschylus: Goldhill (1986), 33–56; in Euripides: Strohm (1957); Collard (2003); Downing (1990); M. Lloyd (1992); Croally (1994), 46, 120–62; in Aristophanes: Gelzer (1960). A notable exception to these single author/text studies remains Dùchemin (1968), whose concern
scope, have failed to grasp both the range of forms of debate and how it functions differently in varying cultural contexts or even within a particular genre. Second, critics have tended to catalogue the different attributes of debates in abstraction from their textual context. The subsequent studies have resulted in little attention being accorded to how debate works, or performs, in a narrative at a particular point.

An example of some of the difficulties that arise from taking a narrow approach to debate is most obvious when we consider Thucydides and Euripides, two authors whose debate scenes have frequently been criticized for lacking dramatic coherence, appearing artificial or failing to affect the outcome of events (let alone resolve the crisis). Even less negative criticism tends to be double-edged. Thus Josiah Ober argues that Thucydides shows debates going wrong in order to justify his own presentation of the facts, an approach that fails, however, to appreciate how debates work to read tragedy’s formal debates as part of its ‘natural inheritance from a long popular or pastoral tradition of dramatic poetry’ wins the approval of Collard (2003), 64 (his quotation). As well as the historiographical genre that Dùchemin identifies, Collard (ibid. 65) adds ‘the chief place of oral epic in time and influence in the Greek literary tradition’. It remains true, however, that both Dùchemin and Collard concentrate on the tragic agôn, particularly as it is handled by Euripides. On the long and varied tradition of tragic stichomythia, see Collins (2004).

18 Collard (2003), 65 issues a similar caveat against the ‘instinctive temptation to isolate Euripides’ formal debate from their dramatic setting’, insisting instead on taxonomic flexibility: ‘formal debates are too various and loose in structure, despite frequent respension or symmetry between their various elements in position, length, or even content’ (p. 66).

19 For the theory of ‘performativity’—the ability for words to effect situations—see J. L. Austin (1962); Searle (1969). For its application to literature, see Levinson (1983); Petrey (1990); and to the study of ancient Greek culture, see Goldhill and Osborne, eds. (1999). Performance theory, in particular the speech acts of outstanding individuals, also underpins Vincent Farenga’s recent study of the development of citizenship in ancient Greece. See Farenga (2006), 4–33 for an introduction to and discussion of his methodology. Collard (2003) again is alert to the problem we face in this book: ‘Even to define formal debates risks isolating them still further in criticism from their dramatic setting’ (p. 68).

within Thucydides’ narrative; on the other hand, Neil Croally reads the *agon*’s lack of resolution sympathetically in Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, but his conclusion that ‘the *agon* itself is questioned as an institution which can properly produce a victor’ is still based on the assumption that debate *should* lead to resolution and provide a definitive outcome of the kind one that would expect from a law-court model.

The value of the present study lies in its dual approach to debate. First, it traces the changing representations between genres and, by comparing two examples of each type of narrative, within them. Debates are most recognizable in Thucydides and Euripides by virtue of their formality: two speeches of more or less equal length formally are set down in antithesis to each other. Athenian tragedy in general stages opposing voices, and even in Aeschylus, an author whose plays do not so evidently or formally represent a set-piece *agon*, speeches frequently occur in opposition to each other. The greater prominence or self-conscious application of debate in Euripides should prompt us to investigate the different effect that he is trying to achieve. Furthermore, while being less of a feature in his narrative than in Thucydides, competing public speeches delivered in a formal setting before an audience also occur in Herodotus, particularly among the Persians and more so as the narrative progresses. Indeed, we can trace the idea of a contest of words back to epic itself, when Achilles and Agamemnon square up to each other in the assembly (*agora*) at the beginning of the *Iliad*’s exploration of strife. Taking the long view, then, will allow us to better account for the variations in the representation of debate and thematization of dissent across different genres and authors. The second benefit of the present study lies in the close attention it pays to the ways

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21 Ober (1998), 52–121. See Ch. 4 below.
23 Putting aside the more general point that tragic plays stage a contest of voices, there are many occasions even in Aeschylus when speeches occur in some kind of more formal opposition to each other. See e.g. the long central scene of the *Seven Against Thebes* that juxtaposes the Scout’s speeches with Eteocles’ responses (Aesch. *Sept*. 375–676), or Clytemnestra’s series of confrontations with the men who come on stage, notably her husband (Aesch. *Ag*. 810–974).
24 Euripidean characters often draw attention to the rhetorical structure of their speeches; see M. Lloyd (1992), 19–36; Scodel (2000).
in which debates are embedded within their narratives. In the case studies presented below the concern is not just to define and describe the form of each individual debate; the context of each scene and the interplay between the debate and its surrounding narrative will also be explored. In this way it is hoped to demonstrate the importance of debate in ancient Greek literature, not only by accounting for the scene of debate in isolation, but also by explaining its role in each narrative.

The problem of defining the topic of debate may be illustrated if we consider for one moment the terminology involved in signalling it. By the time of Athenian tragedy a formal debate may be identified as an \( \alpha\gamma\omicron\nu \) —contest—of words: this is the marker that is used in both the plays of Sophocles and Euripides under examination here, and the reason why this book’s title reads entering the \( \alpha\gamma\omicron\nu \).\(^{25}\) Even in tragedy, however, the term agon does not achieve ubiquitous usage, even if a formal debate occurs in a play; it will be important to consider on what occasions, and for what reason, an agon is called an agon or not.\(^{26}\) On the other hand, in Homeric epic even the primary meaning of \( \alpha\gamma\omicron\nu \) as denoting contest is disputed:\(^{27}\) since it applies to a variety of different contexts, from a divine assembly\(^{28}\) and place by the ships\(^{29}\) to the funeral games in honour of Patroclus,\(^{30}\) scholars tend to define the Homeric meaning of \( \alpha\gamma\omicron\nu \) as: \textit{any} gathering, and hence an assembly of spectators at a contest, or the place of contest, and then the contest

\(^{25}\) For the phrase ‘an agon of words’ (e.g. \( \dot{\alpha}\gamma\dot{\omicron}\nu\ \dot{\lambda}\dot{\omicron}\nu\nu\ \sigma\ \dot{\alpha}\mu\mu\lambda\lambda\ \dot{\lambda}\dot{\omicron}\nu\nu\)) in tragedy, see Eur. \textit{Andr}. 234; \textit{Her}. 1255; \textit{Herac.} 116; \textit{Hipp}. 971; \textit{Med}. 546; \textit{Phoen}. 588, 930; \textit{Supp}. 426–8; fr. 21; fr. 189; Soph. \textit{El}. 1492; cf. Pl. \textit{Prt}. 335a4. See M. Lloyd (1992); Mastronade (2002), 262. But a contest of words often remains implicit in the reference to an impending agon: see e.g. Soph. \textit{Aj}. 1163 and Eur. \textit{Hec}. 229, discussed in Chs. 5 and 6 below respectively. Thucydides’ Cleon explicitly labels assembly-debate as agon, and suggests that this is a typical Athenian feature (Thuc. 3.37): see Ch. 4, sec. 3 below.

\(^{26}\) To a certain extent all tragedy, by virtue of setting voices in some kind of formal opposition to one another, may be considered agonistic. Certainly, the formal opposition of speakers belongs to the very structure of a tragic play, whether or not an agon is formally marked. See Act III below.

\(^{27}\) See the definition by Cunliffe (1963), 6: (1) An assembly: (a) ‘the assemblage of the gods supposed to meet together to receive their worshippers.’ (b) ‘An assembly brought together to view contests.’ (2) ‘A place for contests.’ (3) ‘In reference to the Greek ships drawn up on the beach.’ Cf. Entry I under \( \dot{\alpha}\gamma\dot{\omicron}\nu\) in \textit{LSJ} 18.


\(^{29}\) \textit{Il}. 15.428; 16.239, 500; 19.42; 20.33. Duchemin (1968), 11–12.

itself.\textsuperscript{31} This study, then, will have to go beyond merely the study of the word \textit{agôn}, if we want to gain an insight into ancient Greek conceptions of debate.\textsuperscript{32} For example, my analysis of debate in Homeric epic will be based on occurrences of the term \textit{agora}—the ‘place of assembly’ or ‘assembly’ itself. Having identified the contexts in which an assembly takes place, I will examine the ideas related to its setting up and performance in order to erect a framework for thinking about the process of debate.

One approach to penetrating the idea of debate in ancient Greek society and to getting ‘away from the assumptions that the Greek way of doing things was the natural or inevitable way of doing them’ has been suggested by Geoffrey Lloyd.\textsuperscript{33} Reflecting on ancient Chinese approaches to science, Lloyd describes how alternative views do not lead to competition because the groups engaged in research belong to a royal court: being patronized by a ruling authority, these scholars work within and for the promotion of that authority, fitting their work into the tradition in a way that builds on it.\textsuperscript{34} In contrast, ‘on the Greek side,’ Lloyd

\textsuperscript{31} N. J. Richardson (1993), my italics. Cf. Kirk (1985; 1990); Janko (1992). Attempts have also been made to trace an etymological connection between the two terms, with varying degrees of confidence. Chantraine (1968), 9 calls it ‘a simple hypothesis’. Rix (1998), 246 fails to find a cognate for \\textit{\dual{\varepsilon}}\textit{\varepsilon\iota\rho\omega}, which could support its identification with \\textit{\dual{\gamma\o}} and an \textit{ag}- root. Note, however, Pokorny (1994), 382, who reconstructs a root ‘\textit{\ger}', connected to both \\textit{\dual{\varepsilon}}\textit{\varepsilon\iota\rho\omega} and the Latin \textit{grex, gregis} ‘herd’. I thank Olga Tribulato for a helpful discussion about these conjectures.

\textsuperscript{32} A brief analysis of the term ‘\textit{agôn}’ in the \textit{Iliad}, however, may yield reward. Ellsworth (1974) argues that the phrase ‘the \textit{agôn} of the ships’ occurs only during that time when Achilles’ absence from battle is felt and the Achaean ships are under threat; that is, when there is a ‘contest’ over them. When Achilles returns to the battle, he removes the threat from the ships and, consequently, transforms the phrase to ‘the assembly of the ships’. See Ch. 1, sec. 4 below. The idea that ‘\textit{agôn}’ consistently means ‘contest’ is the central point of his 1971 Berkeley Ph.D thesis. Contrast Poliakoff (1987), 181, n. 78: ‘The most one can say is that Homer has begun to show the later semantic concept of \textit{agon} [that is, as a form of competition not simply a place] but this is not provable.’ For \textit{agôn} as ‘including the space reserved for spectators’: Autenrieth (1984), 7.

\textsuperscript{33} G. E. R. Lloyd (1996), quotation from p. 18.

\textsuperscript{34} The ruler as a part of the system was not threatened: though the individual ruler could be ousted, the idea or reality of having a ruler itself was not questioned: G. E. R. Lloyd (1996), 207. It is open to question, however, whether it really was the case that competition did not exist in ancient Chinese society, or whether as Western critics we fail to see it operating: on the distorting lens of ‘orientalism’, see Said (1978). Interestingly, the extent of China’s difference in terms of political structure has been recently raised by M. Leonard, \textit{What Does China Think?} (London, 2008), which explores China’s
suggests, ‘not only were political ideals disputed, but the prime target of persuasion was less often the ruler. It could be the general public, or your own colleagues, rivals or potential adherents ... [C]ompetitiveness was built into the institutional set-up within which they operated.’ According to Lloyd, not only was there no individual authority figure presiding over the classical Greek polis, but no embedded superstructure existed to support one: authority was something that was won or lost, upheld or extended, in a continual struggle. Extending this idea to the political field, Lloyd writes: ‘the democratic ideal was not one of total agreement, so much as one of the due management of disagreement.’ Whether oligarchy or democracy, politics was not so much about achieving unanimity as about regulating or even asserting the right to dissent from authority.

This book proposes that the dynamic between authority and dissent provides a useful matrix for thinking about textual representations of debate: hence the subtitle ‘dissent and authority in Homer, historiography and tragedy’. It has been argued, for example, that authority is most successful when it is not noticed: when threatened, it comes under experiences of democratic debate and participation within, and as part of, an embedded communist framework.

36 For the absence of a centralized monarchy with attendant priestly caste in Greece, see Ehrenberg (1935); G. E. R. Lloyd (1979), 226–67; Vernant (1982), 38–68; Detienne (1996), 89–106. The classical Greek polis that fits the bill is, of course, Athens. Lloyd seems to take for granted that a similar notion of institutional competition could apply, though in varying degrees, to other Greek poleis. In fact, the extent to which and the manner in which debate ‘works’ in oligarchies such as those of Sparta, Corinth or Thebes warrants further investigation, especially since there is a tendency—a problem with which this book too struggles—for modern scholars to equate debate with democratic procedure, as if democracy (especially Western liberal democracies) had a special claim on notions and practices of freedom. See, however, Raaflaub (2004a), 225–47; (2004b), who compares and contrasts aristocratic with democratic views on free speech. Herodotus and Thucydides too are important witnesses for complicating this ideal: see Act II below.
37 Golden (1998), 28–33 argues that the evidence is lacking for signs of such a competitive spirit elsewhere in the ancient world. Contrast Bernal (1987–91), who, in resisting the notion that the Greeks were some how superior, claims that they are no more competitive than other cultures. But we do not have to deny their competitiveness to dispute the claim that it is superior, precisely because it is their claim. Here Lloyd’s less judgmental approach, which attempts to understand competition and the ways in which it is represented, offers a more fruitful line of enquiry.
This study will show that one such occasion is *in debate*. It proposes that representations of debate pose a whole range of questions, from who has authority and how does one gain or hold on to authority, to who can (or cannot) dissent, where, how, with what consequences, and so on.

Dissent has been the subject of an important recent monograph on literature in democratic Athens. Working from the premise that in Athens political authority was ‘at least potentially discontinuous with economic power’, Josiah Ober analyses a range of Athenian authors, including Thucydides, as forming a ‘critical community’ of Athenian democratic practice. Although most of Ober’s reviewers have criticized him for in effect creating a ‘community of critics’ according to a model of an educated intelligentsia Ober himself acknowledges, a problem also arises in his use of the term dissent itself. While conceding that dissent ‘was rightly recognized at the time as an important and distinctive attribute of popular rule’, Ober understands dissent in terms of an opposition to the dominant ideology of ‘democratic knowledge’, as if dissent equated to elite *criticism* of democracy.


40 ‘To maintain his thesis that the critics formed a unified community’, Ober is obliged to misrepresent specific criticisms of laws and procedures as a more general attack on ‘democratic knowledge’: Harris (2000), 509. Cf. J. Roberts (2000), 482; Rhodes (2000), 182. More problematically, Ober groups authors of widely differing works together, from a comic poet performing in public for the public at public expense (Aristophanes) to an elitist critic of politics constructing a written philosophical programme (Plato).

41 Ober (1998), 5 notes in passing that he took the term dissent from the title of an American journal, which had sought to offer a fresh left-wing critique of politics in America after Stalinism had tainted the previous Marxist credo. Ober later makes the comparison even more explicit when, in labelling the Athenian critics of democracy a ‘virtual community’, he notes: ‘a modern analogy might be sought in the contributors to a journal of political opinion’ (46, n. 63).

42 Ibid. 39.

43 Thus the title of his book notably slides from ‘political *dissent*’ to ‘critics of popular rule’. Here the quotation from Ed Murrow is useful. Whereas Ober reads dissent in terms of elite critics of the dominant government—as in political *dissidents*—Murrow emphasizes the importance of dissent per se for democracy. It is this ‘popular’ sense of dissent with which this book works. Murrow is a particularly interesting and important figure to counterbalance Ober’s claims about dissent, given his prominence as a (popular) news-broadcasting personality during the specific period Ober himself uses: Cold War US politics.
One problem may relate to the difficulty of defining dissent. Though ‘authority’ may be translated by the Greek words ἀρχή or κράτος, the term dissent finds no exact equivalent. This is in part due to the range of associations which the English ‘dissent’ triggers. The Oxford English Dictionary definition for the verb ‘to dissent’ reads (in sum):

1. *intr.* To withhold assent or consent from a proposal, etc.; not to assent; to disagree with or object to an action.
2. To think differently, disagree, differ from, in (an opinion), from, with (a person).
3. To be at dissension or variance; to quarrel.
4. To differ in sense, meaning, or purport; also, in more general sense, to differ in nature, form, or other respect. *Obs.*

The fundamental idea in ‘dissenting’ is, therefore, *difference or opposition*; when the term ‘dissent’ is used in this book, it is meant to evoke a sense of disagreement, variance and/or opposition. In the case studies under examination differences come to light by various kinds of formal opposition, rather than by specific terminology describing the act of replying or disagreeing. Since tragedy is a dramatic art form, speeches lack introductory tags that denote the tenor of their content anyway; but explicit evaluation tends to be absent from Homeric speech introductions as well. So, for example, even in the exchange between Agamemnon and Achilles at the beginning of the *Iliad*, the narrator uses for the most part neutral descriptors such as ‘he answered the other’, or ‘answering him, the other replied’; yet, when the assembly dissolves, the narrator glosses their exchange as ‘fighting with opposing words’ (ἀντιβίοισι μαχεσσαμένω ἐπέεσαν, *Il.* 1.304). Besides,
dissent as an idea finds expression in many forms, ranging from non-participation (the *Iliad*’s Achilles), silence (Sophocles’ Ajax) or mediation (Sophocles’ Odysseus), to frank speaking (Sophocles’ Teucer, Euripides’ Polymestor), potential insurrection (the *Odyssey*’s suitors) and even violent reprisal (Euripides’ Hecuba). As we shall see, the general notion of dissent or disagreement may be gainfully employed to think about a wide variety of situations, such as the scenes of Homer’s heroes vying with words, or the historians scripting the decision-making process undertaken by various groups, or the tragic protagonist’s refusal to accept their circumstances lying down. The unifying strand running throughout these examples is the formal context in which a contest of words may be said to take place: the scene of assembly in epic and historiography, and the *agon* in tragedy.

Starting from a series of questions—Who does debate? How? Where? With what effect?—this book aims to show that literary representations of debate may be best understood in relation to certain recognizable parameters that indicate a special—or institutional—space: the assembly. As a formal gathering, part of what is at stake in debate is how people relate to each other within an arena that is set up according to an

words’, at other times it may be introduced, as I contend, simply as *muthos*, and again, it might be unmarked completely, when the poet allows the dramatic setting of the speeches itself to cue the audience to the genre involved’ (p. 68). Martin, however, follows Nagy (1979), 222–42 in viewing this kind of speech generically, specifically in contrast to what Martin calls ‘political’ discourse (p. 68). It is one premise of this book that such an exclusive focus misrepresents the evidence by introducing an anachronistic dichotomy between politics and poetics.

An important related topic here is the idea of freedom of speech. This has been a burgeoning area of interest in recent years, as evidenced by the edited volume on ‘free speech’ by Sluiter and Rosen, eds. (2004). In that volume see esp. D. Carter (2004) for questions of definition; Balot (2004) for the centrality of free speech to democratic identity, particularly its relation to the institutions and practices of democracy; J. Roisman (2004) for the power struggle between the speakers and the audience, ‘who, by law and self-perception, held the supreme power in the state’ (p. 276); and Raaffaub (2004b), who compares democratic and aristocratic notions of free speech. See also Raaffaub (2004a), 221–5 for a discussion of the terminology of free speech: *eleutherōs legein*, *siēgoria*, and *parrheisia*. In order to move away from modern notions of rights, Saxonhouse (2006) prefers the definition of *parrheisia* as ‘frank speech’: ‘*Parrheisia* as free speech or speaking all is not a “right” in our terms; rather it captures both the egalitarianism of the regime that rejected the hierarchy implicit in the treatment of *Thersites* and the expectation that speech reveals the truth as one sees it, that speech opens and uncovers’ (p. 87). This study will make use of the notion of ‘frank speech’ or ‘speaking back’ for the analysis of tragedy in Act III below.
ideal of putting ideas ‘into the open’. This book, then, understands debate in terms of an institution that accommodates dissent: a place where authority is challenged, resisted and explored; where the possibility of different responses gains communal sanction; and where the ideal is not one of total agreement so much as the due management of disagreement.

LAYING DOWN THE GROUND-RULES

Human social activities . . . are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves as actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible.

(Anthony Giddens, (1984), 2)

For an entire tradition, to put things es meson is to set them ‘in common’ . . . . The significance of the center emerges clearly from the institutional forms operating both in the allocation of prizes and in the distribution of booty: the center means both ‘that which is held in common’ and ‘that which is public’.

(Marcel Detienne, (1996), 95)

The institutionalized context for dissent in ancient Greek culture argued for by Lloyd has led us to posit that representations of debate in literature are best understood in relation to the institutions of assembly or ἀγών. Modern approaches to institutions have been greatly influenced by Michel Foucault’s conception of power ‘as the multiplicity of force relations

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48 The study of politics in ancient Greece has tended to take two approaches: either the institutional, which analyses the constitutional framework of a city (e.g. Hansen (1989; 1991; 2006)), or else the ideological, which examines the assumptions, opinions and principles common to the majority (e.g. Ober (1989), esp. 3–52; Ober and Hedrick (1996) (eds.)) on the basis that an ‘analysis of the “parliamentary” mechanics alone’ (M. Finley (1983), 56, his italics) is insufficient to understand politics. See J. Davies (2003), esp. 325–6, for a critique of ideological/political approaches that do not take into consideration the institutions on the ground. This book attempts to combine both approaches in a study of how institutions are lived in and acted out through literary representations. Vlassopoulos (2007b) takes a different approach by gathering evidence of Athenian political life outside institutional settings in so-called ‘free spaces’. For a recent critique of modern approaches to the Greek polis, see Vlassopoulos (2007a).
immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization’ and ‘as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them’.49 By regarding power as being immanent within social structures rather than ‘as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state’,50 Foucault challenges the top-down notion of institutions that regards them as imposed from above by a governing entity. Expanding on Foucault’s work, Antony Giddens51 argues that ‘we should not conceive of the structures of domination built into social institutions as in some way grinding out “docile bodies” who behave like the automata suggested by objectivist social science’. From this perspective, structure is to be regarded not as external to individuals but as fundamentally part of people’s everyday lives, which each person lives and experiences, works through and enacts.52 Thus Giddens’ approach stresses the activity of people working within social structures to reproduce them (whether consciously or not)—a process he labels ‘structuration’. He writes: ‘Analysing the structuration of social systems means studying the modes in which such systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction.’53 Giddens here is talking about social and political institutions, which, he argues, people perpetuate in their everyday lives.54 Nevertheless, what he has to say about real-life institutions can be helpful for thinking about their literary manifestations. As an audience or a reader, we experience the text as a series of structures. This is not, however, to conceive of interpretation as, to

49 Foucault (1979), 92.
50 Ibid.
51 Giddens (1984), 16.
52 Ibid. 25; cf. 16–18. Working in the tradition of modern liberalism, Farenga (2006) puts a similar onus on the activity of the individual, in terms of the relationship of citizenship and selfhood (pp. 10–12) and the intersubjectivity of the self in deliberative democracies (pp. 12–14).
54 Also relevant is Bourdieu (1990), whose work derives more from the field of anthropology than political science. He writes: ‘contrary to simplistic uses of the distinction between infrastructure and superstructure, the social mechanisms that ensure the production of a compliant habitus are . . . an integral part of the conditions of the reproduction of the social order and of the productive apparatus itself’ (pp. 129–30). For the theory and practice of putting together Giddens and Bourdieu, see esp. Cohen (1991), 14–34.
paraphrase Giddens, ‘in some way grinding out docile bodies’; nor is it, however, to regard reading as somehow ‘free play’. Rather, this is to recognize an essential duality within the interpretative process: each text is composed of structures that position the reader or audience in particular ways, and yet that come into being precisely because they are realized by that reader or audience. With the case of those texts which represent debate—the subject of this book—the reader or audience experiences the process of going through competing arguments, which has the effect of shaping responses to the events: debate becomes internalized. In turn, however, by that very process of internalizing competing arguments, the audience or reader realizes the institution of debate within the text.

In the light of Giddens’ theory of structuration, then, the proposition that debate may be best understood in relation to the institutional form of debate, such as the *agôn* and *agora*, may be fleshed out by two additional points. First, by virtue of their structure the scenes of institutional debate involve the reader or audience in a process of negotiating between dissent and authority. Second, by becoming involved in that process the audience/reader reproduces those representations of debate and, therefore, realizes them as institutional arenas. We might say that responses to debate are part of an interpretative process that simulta-

55 The interdependence of both text and reader/audience has given rise to the theory of dialogism, associated with the Russian formalist theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. He writes: ‘Every literary work faces outward away from itself, towards the listener-reader, and to a certain extent thus anticipates possible reactions to itself’ (Bakhtin (1981), 257). In this respect, Bakhtin is responding to the unidirectional model of communication expounded by Jakobson (2000). See also Holquist (1981), 63, who calls the outwardness of the text ‘relational’; Morson (1981); Todorov (1984), 54–6; Holquist (1990), 40–66. The other aspect of ‘dialogism’ or ‘heteroglossia’—the representation of competing voices within the text itself—is discussed below. For a good discussion of the duality of the critic’s task, in resisting domination by the text while recognizing that one cannot be liberated absolutely from the conventions of language: McGann (1993).

56 Raaflaub (2004), 227–33 makes the important observation that, while democratic institutions are important for notions of freedom, primary identification with freedom seems to be in relation to democracy as a comprehensive way of life, a politeia. This study also puts the emphasis on process and experience—a way of conducting oneself—but in relation to embedded structures (within the text) and, in particular, representations of debate.

57 As we saw above, Homeric scholars understand the term *agora* as not simply indicating the place of an assembly but marking that *an assembly is going on*—the assembly as an institution.
neously is a performance of those institutions as they are represented in the text.\textsuperscript{58}

So far I have been setting out how to approach representations of debate in ancient Greek literature, and I have suggested that thinking of them as institutions that work through possibilities for dissent allows us to make sense of their varying manifestations. The focus on the exploration and valorization of dissent within a text reproduces something of the openness that Marcel Detienne has seen as characteristic of the series of contests or \emph{agônes} that Achilles sets up in honour of Patroclus in \textit{Iliad} 23, when Achilles ‘held the people and sat them down in a wide space’ (ἀντὸ καὶ ἐρυκέ καὶ ἔρραν ἐν ἄγονα, \textit{Il.} 23.258).\textsuperscript{59} So, for example, having won the first contest (the chariot race), Diomedes ‘stands in the middle of the \emph{agôn}’ (στη δὲ μέσω ἐν ἄγονι, \textit{Il.} 23.507) to collect the prize, on which basis Detienne argues that ‘the centre means both ‘that which is held in common’ and ‘that which is public’.’\textsuperscript{60} That is to say, Achilles’ act of placing goods ‘into the middle’ of the \emph{agôn} has symbolic value: it signifies that the goods are no longer any one person’s property but are common to all and, as such, may be competed for and acquired. The idea of the \emph{agôn} as the place in which all-comers may enter to compete for the goods placed ‘in the middle’ has a clear application for this study; indeed, Jean-Pierre Vernant has expressly extended the concept of the centre, or \emph{meson}, to thinking about debate. He writes:

The \emph{agora}, which represented this [new] spatial arrangement on the ground, formed the center of a common public space. All those who entered it were by that fact defined as equals, \emph{isoi}. By their presence in that political space they entered into relations of perfect reciprocity with one another... The social

\footnotetext[58]{At best a supplement of or substitute for ‘real life’ debate, these representations nevertheless offer important insights into the construction of narrative and a reader’s/spectator’s place within it. For the dual notion of the supplement as supplying something that is missing or supplying something additional, see Derrida (2000\textsuperscript{2}), 99.}

\footnotetext[59]{\textit{Il.} 23.273, 448, 451, 495, 507, 551, 617, 654, 685, 696, 710, 799, 847, 886; 24.1. It seems that, by killing Hector, Achilles has definitively warded off ‘contest’ over the Achaean ships (see n. 32 above); instead, in a move that mirrors his establishment of the assembly Achilles institutionalizes the \emph{agôn} within the Achaean community. For Hammer (1997\textsuperscript{b}) 21 the funeral games introduces a new kind of political relationship. See Ch. 1, conclusion.}

\footnotetext[60]{Detienne (1996), 95.}
space was a centered space—common, public, egalitarian, and symmetrical—but also secularized, intended for confrontation, debate, and argument.61

In the case of an assembly, we can think of obvious practical reasons for standing in a circle, in that it gives everyone the opportunity to hear what is said. But it has symbolic value as well: everyone stands equidistant from the centre, from what is said, discussed and ratified; arguments set ‘into the middle’ become symbolically the common property of all, to be taken up or taken over as each person deems fit.62 Yet, the notion of the meson as discussed by Vernant and Detienne represents an ideal of openness; paradoxically, for the concept of openness to have any meaning it must necessarily be accompanied by limitations and exclusions: only by having certain circumstances, material or groups for whom or for which disclosure does not or cannot apply can openness itself be defined.63

Not only that: as we shall see, proclaiming openness is never an innocent gesture. Precisely because of the ideal of openness, places of debate become highly charged and important to control. Setting up an assembly or agôn, then, is an act that is not simply descriptive

61 Vernant (1982), 125, 126. For an analysis of the agora as a place external to a city’s institutional framework see Vlassopoulos (2007b). He shows that the Athenian agora—in this case, solely the marketplace—not only ‘brought together public life, social life, work and exchange’ (p. 40); it also blurred boundaries between citizen and non-citizen in its activation of a ‘free space’.

62 As Vernant (1983), 185 puts it: ‘in that they have access to this circular space centred on the agora, the citizens enter a political system governed by equilibrium, symmetry, and reciprocity.’ According to Vernant, this contrasts with eastern kingdoms, where ‘political space took the form of a pyramid dominated by a king, with a hierarchy of powers, prerogatives, and functions stretching down from top to bottom’ (p. 190). Cf. Vernant (1982), 45–8; Steiner (1994), 191–2. Loraux (2002), 98–104 makes compelling reading: though she rather fetishes consensus, her focus is on post-Peloponnesian War Athens, when there must have been a particular concern to control dissent.

63 A completely different example that exposes the claim to openness is a version of Jesus’ ‘Sermon on the Mount’, in which a great throng of people are depicted hanging on every word of his parable that the meek shall inherit the earth—a message that mirrors the spatial inclusiveness of the circular performance context. But, then, as the camera pans back, and back and back, and Jesus’ words fade out to a mere murmur, eventually a point is reached on the outer edge of the circle where the sermon is no longer audible at all, and Jesus’ message gets misheard as ‘blessed are the cheese-makers…’. While of course, not holy scripture but the unholy script of Monty Python’s Life of Brian, this example aptly demonstrates an important limitation to the ideology of openness: even when a message of inclusiveness is being broadcast, one eventually meets the margins, and those margins are all the more powerful for the inclusiveness of the message. In short, there is already a fiction of openness in the phrase es meson.
but prescriptive: it makes a difference what kind of debate is established, when, where it takes place, and who does it. In fact, where, or rather, how the boundaries may be drawn is one of the critical problems that will be encountered.

And it is because the form of debate is by no means self-evident or given, but demands that boundaries be drawn and redrawn each time it is entered, that previous attempts at describing debate have proven insufficient: while debate, notably the agón, has been commonly studied as fixed in form, precisely what we don’t get is a form that sustains or remains consistent over different manifestations. Where a debate is drawn up, for what reasons, and with what consequences when it is dissolved, all make a difference: its form is always a matter of trial, contest and negotiation. There is no ground zero for setting up a debate;

words are always heard or read in a context.

Such an understanding of debate assumes particular significance if one thinks of it as the place where an author cedes his stage to the characters in his drama or narrative: how the author frames these other voices in debate has implications for how we respond to the work as a whole.

Two frames to debate come to mind. On the one hand, there is the narrative context in which a debate takes place, which means investigating how a debate is set up vis-à-vis the events by the agents in the narrative or drama. On the other hand, there is the external commentary on debate that a narrator may offer: in this case the task will be to consider how debate is narrated by the poet, written up by the historian or staged by the dramatist.

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64 This is another way of recognizing the problem of representation even as one tries to establish a model or, at least, a pattern. See Spariosu (1984) and, in particular, the essays by Rapp (1984), 142–3 and Black (1984), 184–8.

65 On the impossibility of reading degree zero: Barthes (1967).

66 This is another essential insight of ‘dialogism’ as articulated by Bakhtin (1981), especially: ‘discourse is a social phenomenon’ (p. 259); any utterance ‘finds the object at which it was directed already overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value’ (p. 276); ‘Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others’ (p. 294). Cf. Morson (1981), 6, who writes: ‘Meaning—in the sense of dictionary meaning—means nothing; it only has the potential for meaning.’

67 Goldhill (1994), 59–60: the frame is not a borderline but the source of difference that undermines the inside–outside polarity. Felman’s (1985) study of Henry James’ Turn of the Screw is exemplary in this respect. Extrapolating from the prologue frame, in which the character-narrator warns us that ‘the story won’t tell’, Felman argues that the text ‘comprehends the critic’ and ‘through its reading, orchestrates the critical disagreement as the performance and the “speech act” of its own disharmony’ (p. 161). Cf. Booth (1961), 311–16, 364–71.
Prologue

Here the notion of ‘heteroglossia’—the theory inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin’s analysis of the modern novel’s plurality of voices—will be an important tool: its emphasis on the creative tension between the narrative frame and the alien voices incorporated within it is potentially disruptive of the authorial word.\(^{68}\) More generally we will be faced with the problem of making sense of the contest of voices, as either setting up rival positions in which a space opens up in-between, thereby allowing ‘dialogue’ to take place between the text and its reader,\(^{69}\) or else constructing an opposition in which one position is clearly favoured over another.

The nexus between dissent and authority, and the tension between ideals of openness and its fiction; the shifting forms, parameters and locations of debate; and the importance of framing debate by both its internal agents and external author, all provide the methodological framework that underpins this book.

INTRODUCING THE RIVAL COMPETITORS

In the Millennium Declaration, all States resolved to intensify their efforts ‘to achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects’… This reflected the view, long held by the majority, that a change in the Council’s composition is needed to make it more broadly representative of the international community as a whole, as well as of the geopolitical realities of today, and thereby more legitimate in the eyes of the world.

(Kofi Annan, *Report on UN reform*)\(^ {70}\)

The only emulator successfully to challenge the *Iliad*’s supremacy as a model of how narrative should be done was the *Odyssey*,

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\(^{68}\) Bakhtin (1981), 259–422. He writes: ‘Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel… is another’s speech in another’s language’ (p. 324). Cf. Emerson (1997). This is the form of dialogism most familiar to classicists, in particular those working on Herodotus: see Act II below.

\(^{69}\) Holquist (1990), 38 speaks of a ‘dialogic’ triad between the utterance, the reply, and the relationship between the two. Goldhill (1999a) 3 emphasizes the display element of democratic performance, which ‘triangulates competition through an audience’. For the significance of contest as being derived from *con-testari*, an implied ‘third-stander’ in an agonistic confrontation, see Ong (1981), 45–6 (quotation from p. 45).

apparently a generation or so later. Yet despite its higher technical ambitions and accomplishment, even this did not knock the *Iliad* off its paradigmatic perch. What it did instead was to bequeath to later narrative systems a *dual* template: a pair of fundamentally distinct narrative key signatures, one minor one major, between which all subsequent Western classical narrative would be required to choose or compromise.

(Lowe (2000), 103)

The material gathered here derives from three genres on the principle that a study of debate is best served by an investigation that crosses generic boundaries and incorporates different textual and cultural contexts. Each of the three genres has been chosen due to the prominence of scenes of debate within it; but other factors are at play too, since each genre also presents the opportunity of looking at debate from radically different and distinctive points of view. Epic is chosen because of its place as the ‘super genre’ where everything begins: the prominence of verbal conflict in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* has long attracted the interest of scholars, whereas signs of an institutional framework underpinning Homeric society have only recently gained scholarly attention. At the other end of the scale, tragedy’s central place in the institutional fabric of Athenian society affords the opportunity to explore the importance of debate in a particular *polis*, and to test whether tragedy engages more directly with issues that may be considered democratic rather than merely political. On the other hand, the third genre, historiography, finds its way into this study on the basis of the vastly different genesis of its narrative. In tragedy actors verbally confront each other on stage with varying degrees of formality without intervention on the part of the dramatist; it is also the case that narratorial comment on the setting up of debates is minimal in Homeric epic, where the narrator

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71 J. Foley (2005), 209 talks about epic as the ‘omnibus genre’ in an ‘ecosystem of living, interactive oral genres’. Whether or not epic poetry truly does pre-date all other ancient Greek literature is not the concern of this study, though there is enough evidence from ancient Greek poetry to suggest inter-poetic rivalry with epic: see e.g. Irwin (2005); Barker and Christensen (2006). It is enough to acknowledge that Homeric epic at any rate presents itself as a foundational narrative: Graziosi and Haubold (2005). Cf. Ford (1992).

72 See Ch. 1, conclusion.

73 See Act III.
(for the most part) avoids intrusive personal comment. In both Herodotus and Thucydides debates play an important role in the experience and conduct of their respective wars, but, given the fact that their narratives derive from their own personal enquiry and study, the way they frame debate becomes a critical issue: when representing debate their authority is at risk in a way that is not true of the Homeric poet or Athenian tragedian.

The data collected here are presented according to two types of organizational principle. First, the book is divided into different Acts, which correspond to the different genres under investigation. Act I investigates scenes of debate in Homeric epic. It demonstrates that debate takes place within carefully codified parameters, marked by formulaic language, and indicating the presence of an institution, the assembly. In this way the Homeric epics act as foundational narratives that explore the importance of dissent within the community. Act II takes up the story by turning to the creators of history-writing, Herodotus and Thucydides, and enquires how these two authors overcome the problem of writing in a culture that is dominated by the public, spoken word. It will show that one way in which they negotiate that problem and displace it onto their readers is through their representation of public debate: in the ways that they write up debate, the historians make reading (history) useful for thinking politically. Lastly, Act III examines tragedy, in which scenes of debate become formalized and embedded in the very structure of the genre itself in the form of the *agon*. Unlike historiography, tragedy lacks a narratorial figure, removing explicit guidance for audience interpretation; whereas epic focuses on the actions of individual heroes, tragedy explores reactions to the hero. Both points lead to the proposal that tragedy puts the audience’s judgement under the spotlight. Thus tragic debates often fail to lead to resolution precisely because the *agon* is as much about reproducing the crisis of interpretation among the audience as about displaying the contest between characters, all of which suggests a significant interrelationship between tragic dissent and the new cultural conditions of democracy.

74 And, in Thucydides’ case at least, personal experience of assembly debate.
75 On problems of authority for an ancient historian, see Marincola (1997), and Act II below.
While this rather schematic outline may suggest an evolutionary path towards the greater valorization and institutionalization of dissent, evidence mustered within those genres can also be used to flag up anxieties about debate and the benefits of allowing dissent—from this perspective contest takes place not only between different genres but also within the same genre. To put it simply: Chapter 1 presents an Iliad that institutionalizes dissent within the heroic community, while Chapter 2 offers an Odyssey that radically challenges and undermines that positive outcome of contest. Chapter 3 picks up this thread by analysing Herodotus’ open narrative texture as an Odyssean strategy to gain authority for his enquiry, while Chapter 4 reads Thucydides as taking an Achilles-like stand in dissenting from his contemporaries’ way of political decision-making, whether Athenian, Spartan or Sicilian, and so on. Chapter 5 puts on stage a version of Sophocles’ Ajax that sees its hero as a second Achilles and the play as a performance of dissent from authority figures, while Chapter 6 dresses Hecuba up as an Odysseus-like figure in Euripides’ provocative challenge to the Athenian ideals of open debate. As can be seen from this summary account, one consequence of thinking about debate in terms of dissent and authority will be to suggest that the Homeric epics offer alternative, contesting narrative paradigms, which are taken up, negotiated and challenged by later authors in a variety of ways. This book contends that the Iliad, Thucydides and Sophocles’ Ajax all privilege an understanding of dissent in which characters, or the author, take a stand in the arena of debate to challenge the dominant figures, ideals or discourses of their time. On the other hand, the Odyssey, Herodotus and Euripides’ Hecuba expose that ideal of open contest and fruitful dissent as a fiction. The opposition I will trace undoubtedly has many reasons (as well as many manifestations), but this study flags up one of particular importance: that is, the problem of negotiating dissent from the perspective of, or when dealing with, other groups, whether by that we mean the Odyssey’s suitors, Herodotus’ Persians or Euripides’ female barbarian ex-queen, Hecuba.

The complex ideological issues raised by the subject of debate are particularly noticeable in Herodotus, who, while showing the importance of dissent for the survival of Greece, looks into, represents and articulates the fault-lines of the Greek resistance to the Persian invasion.
through a series of fractious assemblies.\textsuperscript{76} The problem of negotiating dissent in international institutions still confronts Western-style nation-state democracies today, particularly in the ‘democratization’ of international bodies such as the United Nations.\textsuperscript{77} As Kofi Annan has said, reform of the institution of the United Nations is something on which just about all of its members agree: it needs to be more ‘democratic’ in order to be ‘more broadly representative of the international community’ and ‘thereby more legitimate’. The problem, however, is how to carry out those reforms in practice: how, in other words, ‘its working methods’ can be made ‘more efficient and transparent’. Just how much dissent is allowed, when and by whom? And who decides? For the importance of such questions one need only point to the crisis in the UN during the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, the fall-out from which is still being felt in the international community as this book goes to press. A study of the way debate is represented in ancient Greek literature has the potential to prompt new ways of thinking about the role of debate in contemporary culture and of reinvigorating those institutions involved in its production.

\section*{ENTERING THE AGÔN TO JUDGE}

It is in the nature of the \textit{agôn} neither to render its participants mute nor to attain the conquering finality of \textit{telos}. The agonistic paradigm allows texts, author, historical events, and cultural voices to engage in a creative and regenerative contest.

(Janet Lungstrum and Elizabeth Sauer (1997), 25)

Indeed, politics, too, had the form of an \textit{agôn}: an oratorical contest, a battle of arguments whose theater was the \textit{agora}, the public square, which had been the meeting place before it was a marketplace. Those who contended with words, who opposed speech with speech, became in this hierarchical society a class of

\textsuperscript{76} For the circumstances of and problems within Greek inter-poleis relations: Purnell (1978); Giovannini (2007).

\textsuperscript{77} A recent book published under the auspices of the UN tackles precisely this issue: T. G. Weiss and S. Daws (eds.), \textit{The Oxford Handbook on the UN} (Oxford, 2007). See esp. the chapters by W. A. Knight, ‘Democracy and Good Governance’, pp. 620–33 (on democratization in the outside world), and E. C. Luck, ‘Principal Organs—Prospects for Reform’, pp. 653–74 (about the internal reform of the UN).
equals... What this urban framework in fact defined was a mental space; it opened up a new spiritual horizon.

(Jean-Pierre Vernant (1982), 47–8)

One subsidiary effect of this study will be to draw attention to the importance of context on the act of interpretation. In their introduction to an edited volume of literary essays on the theme of ‘agonistics’, Elizabeth Sauer and Janet Lungstrum argue that the *agôn*, as a concept, is dynamic and dialogic. Their description of the *agôn* as avoiding definitive resolution and putting the onus on a response suggests something more than the weighing of arguments that one might expect from antilogy; they emphasize rather the range of actors involved—‘texts, author, historical events, and cultural voices’—and the processes by which authority is displaced and dispersed through the text as these competing voices jostle for attention and endorsement. This creates, in the words of one of their contributors, a ‘logic of dispossession’ in the reader;78 that is to say, the reader is dispossessed of knowledge or, rather, dispossessed of the security of knowing.79

This description of agonistics resonates strongly with the analysis of debate in terms of dissent as outlined above. Yet the concept of ‘agonistics’ as outlined here and applied throughout that edited volume appears to be a tool for the modern scholar to interpret texts from any period of time or culture without regard to context.80 Similar criticism may be levelled at reader-response theories. For all their utility in analysing reading as ‘an event’ and in considering the reader’s experience of a text,81 they also all too readily examine the text detached from its

78 Trey (1997), 332.
79 In his analysis of the interpretive act Goldhill (1993), 151 describes how ‘there is an inevitable gap between the author’s voice and the voice of authority. This gap opens a space—*un écart*—in which writing as an author takes place.’ He goes on to stress that posing the question ‘What is an author?’ leads to the question ‘What is reading?’ (p. 152).
80 The term ‘agonistics’ is also used by Graff (1997), who sees the policy of embracing diversity and conflict as the way forward for a discipline like ours: ‘Unfortunately, it does not occur to us that we have been looking for common ground in the wrong place—that is, our conflicts and differences constitute whatever common ground we have or have had’ (p. 393).
81 See e.g. Iser (1978), 127.
cultural context. Indeed, Edward Said has criticized reader-led theories precisely for not being historically grounded in the literature that they purport to analyse: instead they lead to an essentially private, internalized event, which, according to Said, can promote a self-confirming authority within academic institutions. This caveat is particularly meaningful for those of us who analyse texts that were both publicly performed and publicly received, such as Homeric epic and Athenian tragedy.

A brief example of a recent controversy among classicists may help to highlight what is at stake in terms of the strategies of interpretation one may adopt. Richard Seaford has complained that the emphasis of tragic criticism on ambiguity is ‘in danger of becoming a disabling cliché, in which irreducible ambivalence... becomes the final destination of analysis’. Seaford’s concern articulates the intellectual bankruptcy of the kind of decontextualized reading that frustrates Said: according to this view, contemporary studies on tragedy, regardless of context and structure, reduce all possible interpretations of tragedy to one of ambiguity—the prevailing trend within the academy at the present time. On the other hand, one of Seaford’s targets, Simon Goldhill, has responded by asserting that ‘reading for closure or reading for ambiguity is always already a politicized positioning, an engagement’, by which he means that each critic is inevitably involved ‘in the agon of producing, controlling, debating political meaning’. The example he cites makes that point starkly: ‘I am as unswayed by a claim of ambiguity when it is applied to the anti-Semitic writing of Paul de Man, as I am dismayed by the certainty with which the Bible is read to justify the violent re-possession of land. The issue is not simply “is it ambiguous or not?”’, “open or

82 Fish (1980), 14, when speaking of the ‘interpretative communities’ that claim to make sense of a text, means the strategies of reading that are the fashion in the academy, and not the cultural context of interpretation to which the target text belongs.
83 Said (1983). He complains: ‘It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that an implicit consensus has been building for the past decade in which the study of literature is considered to be profoundly, even constitutively nonpolitical’ (p. 18). Critics of Athenian tragedy now complain that the reverse (that political, even democratic, readings dominate) is true. See Act III, introduction below.
85 Goldhill (2000), 56.
86 Ibid. (my italics).
not?”, but “what is at stake in our determination that it is ambiguous, open or not?”.

Yet while Goldhill is making a claim for ambiguity that encompasses different cultural circumstances—‘the agón of producing, controlling, debating political meaning’—the language that he draws upon betrays the context of his debate with Seaford: both critics are responding to the trial scene in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, arguably the agón on the tragic stage. Here I return to the metaphor of the agón which began my investigation: drawing on two authors from his tradition and constructing a law court out of their rival perspectives, Longinus introduces a metaphor for criticism that still has purchase in contemporary studies of those texts. The power of the agón as a metaphor for reading ancient Greek literature derives in part at least from its presence in the literature under investigation.

This study aims to ground the idea of ‘agonistics’ in close readings of exemplary texts, and show the impact of those texts in establishing a particular cultural framework of interpretation. As noted above, Jean-Pierre Vernant has discussed the idea of the centre (meson) in relation to the institution of the assembly (agora) in the typical Greek *polis*. He goes on to suggest that the physical landscape of the *polis* has an effect on the psychology of the people within it: by investing in the central space of the community as a public arena in which decisions that affected the community were made, the citizens of the community not only took charge of running their own lives, but also became better prepared to do so. In Vernant’s words: ‘What this urban framework in fact defined was a mental space; it opened up a new spiritual horizon.’ In a similar fashion, this book will argue that the presence of formal debate in the public literature of ancient Greece helps to create a ‘mentalité’ of agón; it challenges each audience (member) not just to find a place

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87 Ibid. (his italics).
89 In another context Goldhill (1999b), 118 writes about the need to study reading practices in different periods as a means of exploring how reading and self-formation are interconnected; as he puts it, ‘the conceptualization of the citizen as a speaking subject, the cultural frames of interpretation, and the idea(l)s of the body, each informs the notion of reading in antiquity’.
in-between the opposing positions represented, but also to reflect on the reasons for doing so.\textsuperscript{90}

Ultimately, then, the representation of debate is a two-way process, and continually so: the importance attached to institutional debate within the broad cultural framework of the time (sixth–fourth century BC) generates the intense interest in it in each of the three literary genres under investigation; and at the same time these very representations help renew the audience’s or, even, a readership’s commitment to debate and the management of dissent.\textsuperscript{91} Being an audience of epic or tragedy, or even reading history, may thus be understood as an activity intimately connected to the exercise of citizenship.\textsuperscript{92}

It is with the origins of this institution that we begin, with the scenes of debate in Homeric epic.

\textsuperscript{90} Modern studies of theatre criticism have emphasized the plurality of responses, even among audiences homogenous in other respects, such as time and place. Given the highly fractured nature of ‘we’, this book tries to avoid the suggestion that there is only one way ‘we’ read the debates in ancient Greek literature. Nevertheless, it hopes to show the value of bringing out the structures embedded in the text, such as the ways in which they invite certain responses, and of speculating on the possible experience of those structures. See also Pelling (2000), esp. 1–17, who suggests that ‘there is . . . a sense in which a text illuminates the dynamics of its own occasion’ (p. 17).

\textsuperscript{91} Smith (1984), 26 argues that evaluations are not individual acts but take place through various institutional procedures. A right or wrong evaluation is contingent, not upon an abstract truth, but upon ‘how well it performs various desired/able functions for the various people who may be concretely involved with it’.

\textsuperscript{92} Farenga (2006), esp. 7–12, offers an alternative route to citizenship, through an examination of individuals who perform ‘scripts’ (p. 8) of justice. Cf. Hammer (2002), esp. 19–48.
ACT I

EPIC
Introduction: founding dissent

Our enquiry into debate begins with the two Homeric epics, whose interrelationship has occupied critics since antiquity. Longinus draws a contrast between the 'dramatic body' (τὸ σωμάτιον δραματικῶν ὑπεστήσατο) of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*'s more 'diegetic' (διηγηματικῶν)

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1 How to talk about the relationship between the two poems has become particularly problematic in the wake of Parry and Lord's work on oral tradition. Critics such as Gregory Nagy have questioned the integrity of the Homeric poems as set texts, emphasizing rather the multiformity of oral composition: Nagy (1996), 29–112, (1999); on the multiformity of oral poetry see esp. J. Foley (2005), 202. It is striking, however, that most discussions of multiformity centre on (what is known as) the 'Epic Cycle' (cf. Finkelberg (2000); Burgess (2002)): the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* appear to be of a different order: cf. Griffin (1977). Indeed, Richard Rutherford treats the Homeric poems as literary creations precisely because of their apparent familiarity with each other, which is ordinarily conceived in terms of the *Odyssey* replying to the *Iliad* (though see Pucci (1987), 17–18): Rutherford (1986), 162 with n. 87; (1991–3), esp. 53–4; (1996), 58–61. It is important, then, to be sensitive to the possible interrelationship of the Homeric poems, *while at the same time* paying heed to their orality, as Allan (2005), 14 maintains: 'the pursuit of specific dependence or influence (from Homer to the cyclic poems, or vice versa) is, in the pre-textual stage of early Greek epic, a misleading methodology.' As a result, the two following chapters will attempt to talk about this relationship in terms of *resonance*—the theory that describes the process by which particular formulae (conceived of as word-units, motifs or even story patterns) evoke a wider epic tradition, which in turn *resonates* through each and every particular instance of a particular formula. See esp. J. Foley (1997), 151–3; (1999), 13–34. (He labels this process 'traditional referentiality': for the term 'resonance', see Graziosi and Haubold (2005), 53.) While, for the most part, this theory operates according to a general perception of a wider epic tradition, at times—as will come to the fore in the study of the *Odyssey*—resonance may have particular charge if thought to be activating a series of interconnections between our two poems (or, if not the extant texts themselves, then between their respective narrative traditions). Nevertheless, to avoid the suggestion that we are dealing with written texts, examples of resonances will be discussed in terms of their *Iliadic* or *Odyssean* tonality—even if the connection to particular passages from our extant texts seems undeniable: see esp. Ch. 2, sec. 3 below. For an attempt to supplement studies of resonance with the added focus on inter-poetic rivalry, see Barker and Christensen (2008).
character. On the face of it, Longinus’ assessment seems to draw a distinction between the battlefield duels of the *Iliad* and the storytelling scenes in the *Odyssey*, the latter of which has been reframed in modern theoretical discussions as denoting the *Odyssey*’s greater self-reflexivity and openness. Yet Longinus disrupts his neat antithesis by supplementing his description of the *Iliad* with the gloss ‘*ήδ K*’ (of or for a contest), which, while unclear in meaning, has the idea of ‘contest’ at its root. Indeed, contest lies at the heart of heroic society as presented in the *Iliad*, particularly in battlefield encounters, which are framed by and fought out in speech. But the *Odyssey* also dramatizes contest, most notably in Odysseus’ battle against the suitors. Besides, Longinus applies the two other terms to denote the way the story is told, either dramatic (in the case of the *Iliad*) or else diegetic (as regards the *Odyssey*). In this sense the suggestion seems to be that the *Iliad* is somehow more ‘in contest’ in its narration, making that poem the more dialogic narrative. Following this cue, my approach to contest within the Homeric poems will reappraise the customary division...
between the *Iliad*’s monumentality and the *Odyssey*’s dialogism by analysing the representation of debate.\(^7\)

Debate in Homeric epic—what form it takes, what significance it has, whether or not it even exists—has been a matter of some controversy in recent scholarship. Generally speaking it is possible to identify two contrasting strands of criticism. The first has been to examine the external surroundings and formal trappings of a debate, from which some kind of political community presented by the Homeric epics has been extrapolated;\(^8\) there have been many very different ideas, however, about how to describe that society, how to interpret that depiction, or whether such attempts are even fruitful.\(^9\) An alternative approach has focused on the internal form of debate, by means of which speech is analysed as the production of thesis and antithesis, and the cut-and-thrust of debate is regarded as a form of proto-rhetorical theory.\(^10\) Yet, neither approach has proven capable of coming to terms with the sheer range of the ways in which debate is represented in either narrative. Instead, strategies of reading conform to certain expectations of what debate should look like, with little

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\(^7\) For Longinus the conclusion is rather different: he conceives of the *Iliad* being a product of Homer’s youth, when he was energetic, while the *Odyssey*’s tale-telling derives from the poet’s old age. But this conclusion could derive from the biographical tendency of ancient reception, in which literary criticism takes the form of assigning characteristics to the author of the text: see Graziosi (2002).

\(^8\) Much of this work derives from the anthropologically influenced French school of criticism. For example, on the Homeric *agora*, see R. Martin (1951); Ruzé (1997); on institutions in general, see Detienne (1996); Vernant (1983); Carlier (1984; 1996); on the importance of law, see esp. Gernet (1955).

\(^9\) Is there a *polis* (Raaflaub 1997), or not a *polis* (Finley 2002)? Does the society depicted reflect elitist conservatism (Morris 1986), or the beginnings of a class struggle (Rose 1997)? On the utility of talking about ‘Homeric society’, see Raaflaub (1998) (for); Snodgrass (1974) (against). Scodel (2002), 179 aptly warns against interpreting the Homeric epics as ideological productions, at least in the sense that the plurality of voices tells against conceiving the texts as having been produced with ‘propagandistic intent’.

\(^10\) According to Hölkenskamp (1998), the Homeric assemblies sort out alternatives (p. 36); the alternation between argument and counter-argument, constructs a rational, consensus-oriented discourse (p. 39). Hölkenskamp’s understanding of the *agôn* as the method of opposing arguments, by which a *rhetra*—a binding word or covenant—is forged by the text, seems too clean-cut and cut off from the drama of the narrative. (The term ‘*rhetra*’ itself occurs only once in Homer, at *Od*. 14.393.) Lohmann (1970) is less reductive in his analysis of how speeches, in the way that they are structured, assist the weighing-up of arguments.
regard to differences in structure or context.11 Therefore, we need to read debate in context and pay careful attention to its differing circumstances and form(s).

With this in mind, it will first be necessary to identify scenes of assembly, a procedure which must be done through the language itself.12 On the basis that the term *agora* (Homeric *agorê*) defines the location or event of an assembly of people,13 study of the *Iliad* will supply four Achaean assemblies (in books 1, 2, 9, and 19), three assemblies of the gods (in books 8, 20, and 24), and four Trojan assemblies (in books 2, 7, 8, and 18);14 on the other hand, the *Odyssey* provides four Ithacan assemblies (in books 2, 16, 20, and 24), two divine assemblies (in books 1 and 5), and various assemblies as reported in Odysseus’ narrative (from books 9 to 12).15

11 Ruze´ (1997), 35, taking the assemblies *en masse*, concludes that the procedure is already fixed. In his review Goldhill (1999) complains that an approach in which ‘the Homeric poems are raided for all indications of formal decision-making bodies’ runs the risk of ’failing to account for “pouvoir” or “deliberation” in action’ (pp. 151, 152, my italics). For further discussion and bibliography, see Momigliano (1973); Taplin (1992), 49; Hammer (1997b), 1–4, nn. 1–18; (2002), 19–26; Haubold (2000), 11, nn. 46, 47. R. Martin (1951), 20 warns against treating the assemblies as ‘une source de documents homogènes’.

12 Schofield (1986) discusses six particularly important assemblies and councils; Hammer (2002), 230, n. 63 identifies sixteen scenes of shared decision-making. In her table of Homeric assemblies Ruze´ (1997), 103–4 omits two of the Ithacan assemblies (presumably because they are passed over so swiftly—see ch. 2, n. 70 below), but finds an additional scene of assembly in Chryses’ appeal to the Atreidae. For the significant lack of institutional apparatus in this example, see ch. 1, n. 5 below.

13 Benveniste (1969). Battlefield speeches are of a different order and, while important instances of dissent do occur (such as when Sthenelaides answers Agamemnon’s insults against Diomedes, *Il. 4.404–10*), they are less clearly related to a political framework and, of course, do not seek to stimulate a debate. The question of the council (*boule*) is trickier, since, among the Achaeans at least, it appears to be intimately related to, and yet quite distinct from, the assembly: in *Iliad* 2, for example, a council precedes the assembly, whereas in *Iliad* 9 it succeeds it. Christensen (2007), ch. 3, esp. pp. 132–5, argues that it is in the council where political language comes under particular scrutiny.


15 The Ithacan assembly: *Od*. 2.6–257; 16.342–408; 20.240–7; 24.421–64. The assembly of the gods: 1.26–95; 5.3–42. Odysseus’ assemblies: 9.171–7; 10.188–201; 12.319–24. There are also two assemblies narrated by Nestor (3.136–50) and Demodocus (8.503–13), and two more briefly represented during Odysseus’ time in Phaeacia (8.5–46; 109–256).
But, while isolating the term *agora* constitutes the important first step, analysing a debate is quite another thing altogether. The occasion of a debate is generally marked by various formulae, such as ‘*x* called *y* to an assembly’ or ‘*y* was in an assembly’. Marked vocabulary of this kind signifies a particular interpretative framework by means of which both internal and external audiences can: (a) realize when an assembly is going on; (b) compare it to other manifestations marked by this formula (both intra- and inter-textually); and (c) assess its outcome in relation to its particular narrative context. When an assembly happens, two distinct groups and the relationship between them are mapped out: an individual gathers together the people (*laos*). According to Johannes Haubold, this relationship is one of dependency: the *laos* signify an undifferentiated pre-political social mass who rely (in epic) upon a leader, ‘the shepherd of the people’, for protection. Significantly, when addressing the assembled body, individuals do *not do* so *qua* heroes: rather, scenes of assembly investigate how the leaders relate to their group.

On the other hand, the act of assembly constructs the *laos* as a united and cohesive group, in contrast to elsewhere in epic where they remain largely silent. Convoking an assembly establishes a special arena, in

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16 See e.g. the first instance in the *Iliad* τῇ δεκάτῃ δ’ ἀγορήνθε καλέσασαν λαὸν Ἀχιλλεῖς, *Il.* 1.54. Such phrases are not simply formulaic, but resonate throughout an epic tradition. Cf. Scodel (2002), esp. 1–2.

17 Haubold (2000), 1–54. On the question of the definition of the Homeric hero, one can point to Hesiod’s description of a race of ‘heroic men’ (ἄνδρες ἕρωι, *Op.* 158–60). According to Haubold, ‘the “hero” (*hörös*) among heroes participates in a fundamentally amorphous social world’ and ‘above all points to “us”, the non-heroes, outside his world’ (p. 7, his italics). That is to say, the Greek term ‘hero’ indicates a world before ours, a world before social formation.

18 The few exceptions are notable. One is Agamemnon (*Il.* 2.102), who attempts to use the assembly as a vehicle for self-promotion: see Haubold (2000), 55–8. See also the first Ithacan assembly in the *Odyssey*: Ch. 2, n. 39 below.

19 That is not to say that the individual’s pursuit of glory is not an issue in the assembly; the Homeric warrior not only must perform his deeds but also speak about them—be ‘a speaker of words and a doer of deeds’, in Phoenix’s words (*Il.* 9.443). But in their capacity as *heroes*, the characters enjoy a different (even destructive) relationship with the *laos*, in the *Iliad* at least. Haubold (2000), 55–9 shows how the bond between leader and *laos* breaks down because Agamemnon addresses the group as heroes: with each man acting according to his own aspirations, they rush to the ships.

20 Clearly the people do not play an active role in the assembly; the leaders dominate the speaking arena and the group do not even possess the power of ratifying policy. So Strasburger (1997), 50: ‘The assembly of the army in the *Iliad* and the peaceful assembly
which the relationship between the leader and his people is examined, questioned and forged.\footnote{21}

Equally, however, the absence of either a coherent polis structure or even a uniform presentation of assemblies is striking.\footnote{22} Therefore, we should pay attention to the performativity of the narrative: or, to put that another way, the task of examining debate should be informed by the audience’s experience of it as a process. Analysing the assembly in this way has the advantage over previous studies that seek to crystallize debate by compiling lists of attributes, since it approaches debate dynamically, with due regard to variation over the course of the poems.

The relevance of a narrative’s performativity for thinking about debate may be exemplified by a brief survey of the scholarly discussion of the strife between Agamemnon and Achilles. While Walter Donlan and Ian Morris have argued that Agamemnon’s authority is first threatened then confirmed by Achilles’ challenge,\footnote{23} Peter Rose and Dean Hammer have suggested that Agamemnon’s leadership is far less easy to

of the people in the Odyssey are mute assemblies, in which the crowd receives announcements and instructions’ (my italics). But the reactions of the group are important, as Hammer (1999), 337 suggests: ‘The people, through the assembly, do not vote nor do they make binding decisions. But neither are they compliant, inert, absent, or silenced. We see decisions “enacted” in a public space.’ Cf. Hammer (2002), 44–8. R. Martin (1951), 20 summarizes the competing views of the assembly as showing either ‘la toute-puissance du roi’ or, on the contrary, ‘une puissance populaire’. Carlier (1984), 183–4 argues for the importance of the assembly in the Homeric poems, which must have reflected a deep-seated reality.

\footnote{21} The assembly ‘opens a space in which the joint efforts of shepherd and group are co-ordinated with the aim of ensuring the success of social life’: Haubold (2000), 35; Hölkeskamp (1998), 33 identifies the agora as centre of the ordered world and place of common action. Once the agora is dissolved and the laoi disperse, the speaking agent returns to acting as an individual: at Il. 19.303–8, cf. 276–7, in spite of the Achaean elders urging him to eat, Achilles refuses in mourning for his friend; cf. 1.306–7; 9.79–88.

\footnote{22} See Hammer (2002), 20–6 for a critique of the scholarship that views the Homeric epics as pre-political. The fact that the assembly is not represented uniformly helps account for the scholarly disagreement over whether or not the Iliad presents a pre-political, political or even proto-political society, or whether indeed any coherent picture of society can be isolated and described. Hammer goes on to emphasize politics as performance, but sees this as a separate activity from the assembly: ‘the political field is not defined by institutional and territorial boundaries but rather is constituted by groups who are engaged in political activity’ (p. 26).

\footnote{23} Donlan (1979) usefully raises questions about who has authority and how it is acquired but comes down on the side of Agamemnon. Morris (1986) reads debate in the light of an Iliad that is sensitive to elite reactions against a growing demotic consciousness.
put back together again because of the way the narrative unwinds. For Hammer, the *Iliad* presents not only a functioning social system, but a system in which we can see ‘competing values and orientations’. As a result, interpreting the *Iliad* is ‘not premised on the maintenance of a static, monolithic social order but...contains within it traces of conflict and dissent that, in the end, remain unresolved’. Rose also favours a dynamic, ‘relational’ model to describe the internal struggle of the ruling class; yet more suggestive still are the terms with which he counters Morris’ criticism: ‘Morris seems to envision a short-circuited process of artistic production in which the consciousness of the main target audience, the dēmos, contributes no relevant feedback to the generation of the text.’ Whether or not the (or even a) dēmos was really the ‘main target audience’ is a moot point; but the role of the poem’s audience is an important aspect to take into consideration. Rose’s emphasis on feedback identifies the audience as equally important to the generation of the text. Developing Giddens’ notion of structuration outlined above, this section will argue that it is not just the characters but the audience who experience ‘traces of conflict and dissent’ in the context of the assembly. At one level the textual structures help shape an agonistic response to these events; but, simultaneously, the varying responses to each of these crises involve the audience in realizing the assembly as an institution that supports the challenging of authority and accommodates differences of opinion.

The idea that dissent in the assembly is enacted and has its potential as a forum for managing dissent realized over the course of the *Iliad* may help get away from the notion that the Homeric poems, in some trivial sense, presuppose a socio-political framework or—a more sophisticated version of the same approach—challenge or question such a framework.

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24 See esp. Hammer (2002), 82–92, 129–32. So too Taplin (1992), 6–7: ‘Issues...are open for dispute, both by characters within the poem, and by the audience outside. It is, indeed, vital to the quality of the poem that such matters are not closed.’ For Taplin, this makes the *Iliad* a ‘highly political poem’, p. 7 (his italics on both occasions). See also Osborne (1996), 150–5.


26 Rose (1997), 167.

27 Scodel (2002), 182 argues that, by creating a shared past, the Homeric poems foster a sense of inclusiveness amongst their listeners; cf. Graziosi (2002), 171–80, 253–5. For the idea of the *Iliad* presenting a shared past, see Ford (1992), 6, 18; Scodel (2002), 88. For the notion that a text may be understood as actively constructing an audience, see Prologue, ‘Laying down’, above.
This leads me to consider one last methodological approach, which regards the Homeric poems as foundational narratives. Building on the idea of the resonant patterns of traditional formulae, Barbara Graziosi and Johannes Haubold have outlined how the Homeric and Hesiodic poems belong to, and help form, an epic cosmos.\footnote{See ‘Resonant Patterns’: Graziosi and Haubold (2005), 63–149.} They explain:

[I]ndividual hexameter texts tend to sketch the overall history of the cosmos as well as placing themselves at a particular point within it. This is perhaps most obvious in the Hesiodic Works and Days, which incorporates a full account of past history from the golden age to the present. In a similar vein, the Theogony can be read as a complete account of the world, which ends with the present, that is, with a stable Olympian hierarchy under the rule of Zeus… Similarly, the Iliad and Odyssey describe developments which, conceptually, if not actually, lead us from the distant past to the present day.\footnote{Ibid. 139, 140. An important division remains, however, between the world of epic narrative and the world of the audience. Cf. Clay (1989).}

Conceiving of the Homeric poems as somehow mapping out the history of the world can make sense of the inconsistencies in the ways in which debate is represented, as well as taking on board the idea mooted above regarding the narrative’s performativity. The subsequent chapters will present an Iliad which brings dissent within the boundaries of the assembly over the course of its narrative, and an Odyssey which challenges the capacity of the assembly to manage dissent properly. My analysis of debate in terms of dissent and authority, then, has implications for understanding the competing narrative strategies of the two Homeric epics, such as that outlined at the beginning of this section.

Chapter 1 explores debate in the Iliad in four parts. The first section sets out Achilles’ challenge to Agamemnon’s authority in the assembly that opens the epic, a challenge that precipitates the even greater crisis in the Achaean community of Achilles’ withdrawal. The second section takes up the story by analysing the two subsequent Achaean assemblies of books 2 and 9, which are key not only for charting a process of dissenting without Achilles, but also for exploring the boundaries of debate, such as who can dissent, who cannot, how does one do it properly, and so on. The third section tests my conclusions—that
dissent becomes valorized within the Achaean community—by considering the two other groups who hold assemblies, the Trojans and the gods: while the Trojan assembly shows the value of the contest of voices in the Achaean assembly, scenes of assembly among the gods similarly chart a gradual institutionalization of dissent under, however, Zeus’ unquestioned governance. Section 4 examines the less closely studied final assembly of book 19, when Achilles returns to the fray: by continuing to resist attempts at control, he turns the debate onto the utility of debate itself and the achievement of the *Iliad*’s narrative strategy in subjecting its audience(s) to the process of founding a political community.

Chapter 2 argues that the *Odyssey* takes a very different approach to debate in line with its own narrative dynamics that privilege storytelling and Odysseus’ return to his home and family. Whereas the consequences of Achilles’ establishment of an assembly reverberate through the *Iliad*, the institution of the assembly plays a far less prominent role in the *Odyssey*, far more important to the success of this narrative than the hero’s dissent is his deceit. The first section analyses the two assemblies that take place on Ithaca: it will be argued that the assembly of book 2 does little more than draw up the battle-lines between the friends and enemies of the house of Odysseus, the consequences of which are unpacked in the final assembly scene of book 24, when the suitors’ relatives ignore clear warnings against challenging Odysseus, and go off to their deaths. Section 2 confronts the issue of dissent as it is represented in character narration, particularly when Odysseus himself takes control of the telling of his tale: by dissenting from their commander, Odysseus’ companions bring destruction upon themselves. Section three examines the end-game of book 22, when the suitors see their symposium turn into an Iliadic battleground: it brings to light the way in which the *Odyssey* makes use of Iliadic scenes of representing contest in order to marginalize and ultimately suppress the dissenting voices of the suitors. The final section considers the scenes of divine assembly in the epic: by virtue of their very formality and overt management of the narrative they emphasize the *Odyssey*’s control over debate.30

30 The concern of this chapter will not be to deny ‘dialogism’ to the *Odyssey*, rather, it will be to demonstrate that the *Odyssey* makes its audience/reader fully aware of the ways in which the contest is loaded.
Challenging authority in the assemblies of the *Iliad*

1. STRIFE IN THE ACAEAN ASSEMBLY (*ILIAD* 1)

Achilles calls an assembly

The *Iliad* begins in strife. After the muse is instructed to sing 'from that time when Agamemnon lord of men and godlike Achilles stood in strife against each other' (ἐξ ὀδὸς δὴ τὰ πρῶτα διαστήμην ἐρώσαντε Ἀτρείδης τε ἀναξ ἄνδρῶν καὶ δίος Ἀχιλλεύος, II. 1.6–7), the narrator brings on stage Chryses, whose speech propels the *Iliad* into a narrative of political, as well as martial, conflict (1.22–4):

ἔνθα ἂλλοι μὲν πάντες ἐπενεφήμησαν Ἀχαιοὶ ἀιδεῖοι θ' ἱερὴ καὶ ἀγαλὰ δέχθαι ἄπωνα· ἀλλ' οὐκ Ἀτρείδη Ἀγαμέμνων ἤνδαιον θημῷ...

Then all the other Achaeans shouted assent to respect the priest and accept the glorious ransom; but it was not pleasing to the heart of Agamemnon, son of Atreus...

While the Achaeans acclaim Chryses' speech *en masse*, Agamemnon, taking the appeal as a personal affront to his authority, rounds on the priest and sends him scurrying away in fear.

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1 Aristotle uses the theatrical term *eisogai* to describe Homer’s narrative technique: Arist. *Po.*, 1460.10.
3 Griffin and Hammond (1998), 72 show how Agamemnon makes his assertion of authority personal by the emphatic use of the first-person pronoun. It was suggested by
word’ (κρατερός μύθος, 1.25), however, emphatically does not stand as the final word: Apollo’s swift and silent answer to his priest’s prayers obstructs the kingly manifestation of power through language with a plague on all their houses (1.44–52); in response, Achilles calls the people to assembly (1.54) and asks whoever has knowledge that may benefit the community to speak up.4

The community in crisis sets the stage for the first assembly;5 and the community is in crisis because of the king’s wilful assertion of authority. From the beginning, therefore, the assembly dramatizes the relationship between speech and power. In effect, it is what debate is all about.

The problem of debate is immediately raised by the figure who, by virtue of knowing past, future and present (1.70) and speaking ‘with good intention’ (ἐνθρονέων, 1.73), ought to be able to benefit the community—Calchas, the seer. Invited to speak out by Achilles, Calchas initially refrains from doing so (1.74–80):

Ruth Scodel (in a paper entitled ‘Boundless Ransom’, presented in Hilary Term, Oxford 2007) that Agamemnon’s blunt response may be explained by the fact that his answer had been pre-empted by the group reaction. This explanation does not quite let Agamemnon off the hook, however, since as ‘lord of men’ (οικίδων ἀνδρῶν, Il. 1.7) he should be looking out for the group’s best interests: Haubold (2000), 52–68.

4 ‘Come, let us ask seer or priest . . . who could tell us why Phoebus Apollo has been so angered’ (ἀλλ’ ἄγε δὴ ταύτα μάντων ἑρείομεν ἡ ἑρήμα, . . . | δὲ κ’ εἴποι δ’ τι τόσαν ἐχώσατο Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων’, Il. 1.62, 64). The herald of the Athenian assembly will later open proceedings with a similar open invitation: ‘Who wishes to speak?’ (Τίς ἀγορέεσθαι βούλεται): Dem. 18.170; cf. Ar. Ach. 45, with the note by Sommerstein (1980), 160. Haubold (2000), 175 suggests that, while ‘the herald of epic carries in himself the seed of institutional progress’, epic represents the people ‘in unresolved crisis’: at Athens, on the other hand, the herald’s direct address to the people becomes the all-pervading token of institutional stability in the polis’. This chapter aims to show the institutional progress made over the course of the narrative to the extent that the Iliad may be considered foundational for the kind of institutional security Athens enjoys.

5 There is some doubt whether Chryses’ supplication takes place in an ‘assembly’. Ruiz (1997), 103–4 includes it in her list of assemblies, though the term ἄγορη is not used. By swiftly taking us to a crisis point, the narrator’s description has a clear dramatic function. But the omission of any indication of the assembly’s institutional frame may have significance beyond that. (How is it that Agamemnon can send Chryses away? What might the lack of formal trappings imply?) See sec. 1 below.
‘Achilles, dear to Zeus, you urge me to pronounce on the anger of Apollo the Lord who strikes from afar. I shall indeed speak. But you agree and swear to me willingly to protect me with words and hands. For I think a man will get angry, who rules greatly over the Achaeans and they obey him. For a king is stronger, when he is angry with a lesser man.’

Calchas fears the man ‘who exercises power greatly over all’, ‘him whom the Achaeans obey’. With the middle voice of πέιλθω suggestively playing on an ambiguity over whether the Achaeans are persuaded by or obey Agamemnon, Calchas’ speech threatens to strike right at the heart of Agamemnon’s leadership and authority in general: do the community sanction his rule, on account of merit, or are they cowed by the power associated with him by virtue of the numerical superiority of his forces? Calchas leaves us in no doubt of his view: he needs Achilles’ protection to speak up on account of the king’s greater strength and his own lesser standing. The opening gesture of this assembly sets power against speaking freely, obedience against persuasion. The possibility of speaking freely on behalf of the community is threatened by presence of the king.

Significantly, this opening assembly brings to the fore Agamemnon’s obsession with power as he attempts to manage its outcome. On the three occasions when a speaker enters the debate—Calchas, Achilles and Nestor respectively—Agamemnon grudgingly accepts their point, but attempts even so to retain some semblance of control. Thus, he accepts Calchas’ statement that he must return Chryseis, but immediately demands another woman in recompense (1.116–19); in response to Achilles’ initial outburst, he articulates the formal procedure for returning Chryseis, but names and shames prominent individuals over whom

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7 Among Agamemnon’s detractors may be counted Taplin (1990; 1992); Alvis (1995), 21; Rose (1997); Hammer (1997b; 2002). His defenders include Morris (1986); McGlew (1989). The scholia are a good example of how later readers in a different institutional context have tried to salvage Agamemnon’s status and reputation, on whom see O. Murray (1965).
he can—and will—exert his power (1.137–9); lastly, he pays lip-service to Nestor’s plea for compromise, before launching on a tirade against his rival. This last example is particularly revealing of Agamemnon’s loss of control. His final attempt to reassert his leadership over the proceedings—’But this man is minded to be above all (πάντων); over all (πάντων) he wishes to hold sway and to be king over all (πάντεσαί) and to instruct all (πᾶσι)’ (1.287–91)—is betrayed by his insistent and obsessive repetition of ‘all’. Indeed, he loses his grip entirely as he is interrupted—a phenomenon unique in Homeric epic—and Achilles gets in the last word. Even as Agamemnon grabs at power, authority is wrested from his grasp.

It is noteworthy too that Agamemnon spectacularly fails to silence opposition. His demand for recompense from the group (λεύσασετε γὰρ τὸ γε πάντες, 1.120) opens up another site of contention: Achilles lambastes him for being the ‘most profit-loving of all’ (φιλοκτενώσατε πάντων, 1.122). His pulling of rank over Achilles (1.146) provokes the equally wilful response: fine, I’ll go home (1.169–71). Most revealing of all is his initial entry into the debate (1.106–14):

‘μάντι κακῶν, οὐ πώ ποτὲ μοι τὸ κρήνυν εἴπας· αἰεὶ τοι τὰ κάκ’ ἐστὶ φίλα φρειά μαντεύεσθαι, ἐσθλὸν δ’ οὔτε τί πω εἴπας ἐποὺ οὔτ’ ἐτέλεσθαι· καὶ νῦν ἐν Δαναοῖς θεοπροτέων ἀγορεύεις ὡς δὴ τοῦθ’ ἐνεκὰ σφὶν ἐκηβόλος ἄλγεα τεύχει, σὺνεκ’ ἐγὼ κούρης Χρυσῆδος ἀγλά’ ἀποινα οὐκ ἔθελον δέξασθαι, ἔπει πολὺ βουλομαι αὕτην ἀίδοι ἐχειν. καὶ γὰρ ὅ ἔντομον τοῦτο Κλυταμνήστρης προβέβουλα, κουράδης ἀλόχου . . .’

‘Seer of evil, never yet have you said to me something agreeable, but always evil things are dear to your heart to prophesy; nothing good have you spoken or accomplished. And now among the Danaans you announce your divination that the far-shooter afflicts them with pains on account of the fact that I was not willing to accept the shining ransom for the girl Chryses, since I really wanted to have her at home. And, let me tell you, I think more of her than Clytemnestra my wedded wife . . .’

8 M. Edwards (1991), 244. See n. 153 below, with accompanying text.
Purely as a response to the revelation of the plague’s origin, the vitriol Agamemnon pours on the seer seems wildly disproportionate. One may account for Agamemnon’s abuse of Calchas as ‘seer of evil’ by pointing to Aulis when, as other traditions tell, Agamemnon had sacrificed his daughter in order to launch the ships in accordance with Calchas’ prophecy.\(^9\) One recent critic has cast doubt on the assumption that this event is being referred to, on the basis that ‘the tradition’ must always be established in the process of performance.\(^10\) Nevertheless, such caution with regard to the possibilities of resonance appears unwarranted so far as this episode is concerned, especially when the issue here is precisely Agamemnon’s lack of control.\(^11\) By having him not only label Calchas as the seer who has ‘always’ prophesied him evil (such as having to sacrifice his daughter), but even rank his concubine above his wife Clytemnestra (as he will when he returns home with Cassandra), the \textit{Iliad} invites its audience to reflect on events when Agamemnon’s authority and life are at stake. Resonant echoes of the wider tradition ominously signal his loss of command over the telling of the tale. Moreover, the relevance of those echoes to the present tale must be assessed by each and every spectator, a process which implicates the audience in the resistance movement. Dissent from Agamemnon is underscored by the narrative, which threatens to fracture and unwind

\(^9\) See Kullmann (1960), 198–9, 267–8; Dowden (1989), 9–19; Taplin (1992), 86; Burgess (2001), 144, 150. Burgess notes that ‘there is a strong variant tradition in which the daughter of Agamemnon is rescued from sacrifice (e.g. \textit{Cypria} [Proclus], Hesiodic \textit{Catalogue of Women} fr. 23a M–W), which should not necessarily be regarded as secondary’ (p. 246, n. 63). He emphasizes that the fundamental outlines of the Trojan War story, including Aulis, ‘were not cobbled together late in the day’ (p. 144). The temporal vagueness of Agamemnon’s attack on the seer (‘never’, ‘always’) may well suggest that the \textit{Iliad} is playing off other accounts.

\(^10\) The tradition is not simply a collection of reified reminiscences: Scodel (2002), esp. 1–41.

\(^11\) Referring to this example, Ruth Scodel (ibid. 106) comments: ‘The poet probably had the sacrifice in mind as he generated angry words for Agamemnon, but the audience need not follow the allusion.’ Perhaps not, but the invitation is there: see also Dowden (1996), 58; Pulley (2000), 158. Nor is it necessary to follow Scodel’s assertion that the audience ‘should not’ remember the story since that would create too much sympathy for Agamemnon; sympathy is not difficult to withhold from Agamemnon, given his personal abuse of the seer and his appetite for the slave girl. In this context one might even suspect that Clytemnestra had a point.
in directions contrary to what the ‘king who exercises power greatly over all’ had intended.\(^{12}\)

The conditions for challenging authority had been laid down from the beginning of the episode. After Apollo’s darts of plague had rained down on the army for nine days, ‘on the tenth’, the narrator relates, ‘Achilles called the people to assembly; for the white-armed goddess Hera put it into his mind (τῇ δεκάτῃ δὲ ἀγορήγει καλέσατο λαὸν Ἀχιλλεύς· | τῷ γὰρ ἐπὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε θεὰ λευκόλεννος Ἡρη, 1.54–5). Three critical issues may be noted initially. First, Hera’s involvement: divine intervention immediately marks this event as out of the ordinary. Second, her turn to Achilles: this is somewhat surprising given the fact that Agamemnon is ‘lord of men’ (ἀναξ ἀνδρῶν, 1.7)—and, after all, his actions had precipitated the crisis in the first place. Third, the establishment of an assembly: apparently this represents the best means of placating Apollo’s wrath. All three issues are hardly intuitive and, as a result, render this event as significant. The challenge to authority is laid down in the very act of assembly.

Moreover, the first assembly, as noted above, is convened for the benefit of the community as a way of finding relief for their suffering.\(^{13}\) Achilles plays an instrumental role in making sure that this is the case. When the seer Calchas explains to the assembly that he knows what is wrong but fears saying it, it is Achilles who speaks up. He asks Calchas to speak what he knows (‘θαρσήσας μᾶλα εἴπε θεσπρόπιον ὅ τι οἶδα’, 1.85), and gives the reassurance that not one of the Danaans will manhandle the seer while he—Achilles—lives, not even if Agamemnon himself is angered (‘οὗ τις ἐμεῦ ζῶντος καὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ δερκομένου | σοὶ κοίλης παρὰ νησὶ βαρείας χείρας ἐποίησε | συμπάντων Δαναῶν, οὐδ’ ῥ’ Ἀγαμέμνονα ἐπη’, 1.88–90).\(^{14}\) By these words Achilles sponsors the assembly as the place where opinions should be freely given and freely heard, even if those views directly defy the authority of the king. Furthermore, in his resistance to Agamemnon’s attempts to pull rank, Achilles couches his argument in terms that replay his concern for the

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\(^{12}\) Agamemnon’s diametrically opposed response to the group on the issue of Chryses’ supplication has anticipated, and helped to structure, the dynamics of dissent in this first episode of debate.

\(^{13}\) This point is emphasized by Taplin (1992), 63.

\(^{14}\) The narrator brings out the efficacy of Achilles’ words: Calchas ‘then indeed took courage’ (καὶ τότε δὴ δάρσησε, Il. 1.92).
community at large\(^{15}\) and for his effort to be recognized.\(^{16}\) Yet, ultimately he possesses the capacity to stand up to Agamemnon because of his unique status among men.\(^{17}\) Whereas the proem defines Agamemnon in terms of his social relationships, the epithet identifying Achilles—‘divine-like’—hints at his divine origins (Ἀτρείδης τε ἀνὰξ ἀνδρῶν καὶ δίος Ἀχιλλεύς, 1.7). Indeed, his speech is endowed with a special quasi-divine force.\(^{18}\)

It is important to bear in mind both the social contract that Achilles articulates and enforces and the singularity of his status when interpreting this assembly.\(^{19}\) For, by the time it is broken up, Achilles has asserted his individual will over all by cursing the community he had

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\(^{15}\) ‘How will the great-hearted Achaean give you a prize? We do not know I think of any common goods lying around, but what we seized from cities, all has been distributed. And it is not becoming for the people to call back things once given’ (πῶς γάρ τοι δώσουσι γέρας μεγάθους Αχαίοι; ὥστε τι ποὺ ἔδειξεν ἔπωνυμα κείμενα πολλά; ἀλλά τὰ μὲν πολλά ἐξεπράθομεν, τὰ δὲ δεδασται, λαῷς δ’ οἴδη ἐπώνυμο παλλόλλογα τούτ’ ἐπογείρεων’, Il. 1.123–6). Gernet (1955), 15 points out how Achilles connects his personal ‘prize’ (γέρας) to the ‘what lay in common’ (ξωνήμα κείμενα, 1.124); cf. Alvis (1995), 21.

\(^{16}\) Il. 1.161–8, D. Wilson (2002), 54–5 comments: ‘Achilleus claims that the quarrel originates in a long-standing conflict between Agamemnon’s privileged position and the agonistic timē-based status system. The opposition is thus not presented as one between traditional kingship and a leading warrior, though Nestor construes it as such... It arises instead from a contradiction in a social organization that contains a fixed system, in which Agamemnon can legitimate his preeminence, and a fluid, timē-based system in which Achilles can legitimately claim to be the best of the Achaians.’ This fluid and dynamic conception of society extends to Iliad’s depiction of political activity within the Achaean assembly, as we shall see.

\(^{17}\) Donlan (1979), 58 makes the case that Achilles’ ‘leadership authority’ is grounded in his relationship to the group, which rather overlooks Achilles’ prayer for their destruction (Il. 1.239–44).


\(^{19}\) Farenga (2006), 68–108 analyses ‘the moral dimensions of [Achilles’] individual autonomy in terms of citizenship’s political and communicative (linguistic) components’ (p. 69). But, for the most part, Farenga studies Achilles’ speech acts outside the institutional framework, since—according to Farenga—in the assembly he fails to make his case. See also Hammer (1997a), who discusses Achilles as an outsider (μετανάστης), a position that ‘gives him (at least in his mind) a privileged perspective of the artifice of Achaean society’ (p. 353). He regards Achilles’ dissent as showing not so much an ‘anticultural’ strain as ‘the value of non-coerciveness’ (355); cf. Hammer (2002), 93–113 on Achilles’ self-sufficiency. This present study both suggests that Achilles’ dissent is very
claimed to support (1.239–44). Furthermore, he promptly withdraws unilaterally from the coalition and retreats to his tent in a move that dominates the poem thematically and structurally. Lastly, the way in which the narrator frames the assembly underscores what has been at stake in it: Achilles and Agamemnon ‘stood apart fighting with violent words’ (ὅσ τῶ γ’ ἀντιβίουσι μαχεσαμένω ἐπέσασν | ἀνσητήριον, 1.304–5). It appears, then, that this first assembly has simply replaced one crisis with another. Strife (ἔρεσ) has not been kept within the institution; fighting (with words) has broken out among the Achaean community. As Dean Hammer comments in reference to this opening assembly, ‘it is precisely the absence of formalised political institutions that makes any mediation between Agamemnon and Achilles so difficult’. In order to discover just how dissent has gone wrong—even when it had been shown to be absolutely necessary and desirable—it will be necessary to consider the two mediations that do occur in the assembly.

And there came Athena

The one Achaean who tries to intercede in the struggle of words is described in glowing terms by the narrator: Nestor is the ‘clear-voiced orator’ (λυγος ἀγορητής, 1.248), ‘from whose tongue flowed speech sweeter than honey’ (τοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ γλώσσης μέλιτος γλυκίων ρέεν αὐθή, 1.249), who had seen ‘two generations of men’ pass (δύο γενεαὶ μερότων ἀνθρώπων, 1.250). The speech that flows forth from his mouth justifies such a description: he redirects conflict towards its appropriate ends—their war against the Trojans (1.255–8); he cites a much cultural (in a context that—initially at least—struggles to make use of it), and will take up what happens to the Achaean assembly in Achilles’ absence.

20 The next time the assembly is described is as the place where ‘men win glory’ (ἀγορή κυδιάειρα, Il. 1.490); κυδιάειρα otherwise appears only with μάχη (Il. 4.225, 6.124, 7.113, 8.448, 12.325, 13.270, 14.155, 24.391). Cramer (1976), 300 calls the single use either ‘tendentious’ or else ‘creative incompetence’.


22 The description echoes the portrait of the good king at Hesiod, Th. 82–90, 96–7. This might well be significant for thinking about Nestor’s relationship to the events of the Iliad and its progressive institutionalization of dissent: Nestor belongs to a (Theogonic) past, when kingly privileges were still intact. See n. 92 below. Christensen (2007), 41–93 discusses the importance of Nestor in scenes of deliberation, and compares him to Hesiod’s good king at pp. 56–70. Cf. R. P. Martin (2000).
previous example of his negotiating skills to underline his authority as a mediator (1.259–74); he accords each man his due by drawing a subtle distinction between Achilles as καρτερός (1.280) and Agamemnon as φέρτερός (1.281). The undecidability of these terms accommodates different readings, which thereby create the conditions in which negotiation may take place.

Yet, for all his persuasiveness, the speech fails; neither figure shows any willingness to compromise and the assembly abruptly breaks up with the community left in crisis. This is an important point. Nestor’s intervention has shown the desirability of mediation; but the fact that it fails defers providing any answer to the community’s woes. Both aspects combine to implicate the poem’s audience in the debate over mediation; they, like Nestor, are left to pick up the skeptron and work out a position in between those staked out on either side. The fact that the skeptron—the symbol of the right to speak in public—lies on the ground, moreover, suggests that Nestor’s intervention comes too late. Divine intervention has already moved the conflict on and beyond.

Arguably the crisis-point of the assembly had arrived some hundred lines earlier. After Agamemnon had dismissively goaded his rival to go home, Achilles’ anger erupts (1.188–98):

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23 Schofield (1986), 28–30 discusses the ‘euboulia’ of Nestor’s interventions. Of this example, he writes: ‘Achilles and Agamemnon are invited to think not just of themselves and their own honour (time), but of the other man’s view, and what his position or situation entitles him to expect’ (p. 28, emphasis in the original).

24 Whether, for example, Nestor truly does give each man equal honour, or whether he favours one over the other. After all, although Nestor speaks measuredly, he deploys Agamemnon’s own description of himself as φέρτερος (Il. 1.186) and Achilles as καρτερός (1.178): Reinhardt (1961), 74, n. 15. See n. 92 with accompanying text below. The narrator complicates matters still further by describing Achilles as ‘by far the mightiest’ (πολύ φέρτας, Il. 2.769) in the Catalogue of the Ships.


So [Agamemnon] spoke. And Achilles became angry, and within his shaggy breast his heart was divided in two, whether to draw his sharp sword from his side, drive away all those who stood between them and kill the son of Atreus, or check his anger and calm his spirit. While he was deciding in his mind and spirit, and he was drawing his great sword from its sheath, Athena came from the heavens. For the white-armed goddess Hera sent her, since she loved and cared for both in her heart. Standing behind the son of Peleus, Athena grabbed his blonde hair, appearing to him alone; no other saw her.

As Achilles reaches for his sword with the aim of bringing the debate to a swift and decisive end (Agamemnon’s, he anticipates), Athena appears. As scholarship on this epiphany testifies, far from resolving the crisis, her intervention challenges interpretation; if anything it stresses human responsibility for making judgement.

One suggestion, made by Hartmut Erbse, has been that Athena is obliged to intervene since none of the other kings could.

At first sight this would seem to overlook Nestor’s intervention which we have just discussed; but Erbse is right in the sense that a point of no return has already, and precipitously, been reached: Achilles is in the process of reaching for his sword. A contest of words that leads to armed combat is not debate, however, but flyting, the verbal sparring that prefigures physical duelling on the

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28 This is a favourite case for scholars wishing to comment on ‘Homeric’ man: Dodds (1951), 14–15 sees Athena’s intervention as an outward projection of Achilles’ inner self; Snell (1982), 30–4 denies Homeric man a sense of self; cf. Williams (1993), 21–31 for a critique. I have learnt much about telling divine presence from Alex Stevens (2002).

battlefield.\footnote{For this assembly as a typical battlefield flyting exchange, see Parks (1986; 1990). Cf. R. P. Martin (1989), 65–77. For an application of modern discourse analysis on the debate between Agamemnon and Achilles, see Clark (1992). See also Cairns (1993\textit{b}).} There is at this point no human means for accommodating Achilles’ dissent in the institution of assembly, regardless of how greatly he had been initially motivated to speak on behalf of the community.

Athena’s intervention raises four issues fundamental to the rest of the present enquiry. First, it marks a limit to dissent in the assembly. Her hold on Achilles’ hair does not in any way suggest that his resistance to Agamemnon is wrong,\footnote{On the contrary, Achilles’ labelling of Agamemnon’s behaviour as \textit{hybris} (\textit{Il.} 1.203) is endorsed by Athena (1.214). This kind of verbal collusion between a mortal and a divinity is highly unusual, as the \textit{PCPS} referee for Barker (2004\textit{c}) remarked; cf. Griffin (1986), 52. On the significance of \textit{hybris} in this scene, see Farenga (2006), 70–2.} but nor does it legitimize the reaction of naked force: the potential violence of an Achilles needs to be excluded as a socially acceptable reaction in debate. Thus the narrative provides an authorizing of, but equally a careful bounding to, dissent. By virtue of Athena’s intervention, it may be concluded that dissent cannot, and does not, equal violence.\footnote{This important restriction on dissent nevertheless applies only internally with respect to the Achaean assembly: there is no similar compulsion over the Achaean to stop fighting the Trojans. Far from it: the gods play a fundamental role in breaking the oaths (at \textit{Il.} 4.64–104), which had represented an attempt at conflict resolution. Euripides pushes to an extreme the notion that dissent can, and should be, kept within limits: see Ch. 6 below.}

Second, that intervention identifies the agent who had convoked the assembly, Achilles, as a problem in it. Athena compensates Achilles for not drawing his sword with the possibility of greater licence in his verbal assault.\footnote{Lynn-George (1988), 45–6. For Achilles’ dissent (after Athena’s intervention) as blame, see Nagy (1979), 226. Agamemnon explicitly rules out the possibility that the gods had granted Achilles the right to abuse him (\textit{ôneiδεω}, \textit{Il.} 1.291). But he is cut off in mid-flow by Achilles’ angry response (\textit{υποβλήθην}, \textit{Il.} 1.292). Besides, Agamemnon is wrong: Athena has granted Achilles permission to abuse the king (\textit{ονειδιαων}, \textit{Il.} 1.211). In this way, while not manifesting itself as physical violence, Achilles’ dissent still exceeds the bounds of the assembly by taking the form of abuse suggested by Athena.} But it is precisely this licence that renders Nestor’s intervention futile before the act. Similarly, when with his last words in the assembly Achilles promises an immediate and demonstrative end to contest,\footnote{‘Try me so that these here may recognize who is best’ (\textit{πειρήσας ἵνα γνώσω καὶ οἶδε}, \textit{Il.} 1.302).} he has already sworn an oath which his mother, Thetis, will
fulfil by going to Olympus to supplicate Zeus. In this way, Achilles’ challenge *demonstratively* exceeds the frame of this assembly.

From this perspective, the Achaean assembly does not appear to start off as an institution that can easily accommodate dissent. It takes an Achilles, by virtue of his unique status, to set up an assembly and then support a voice in opposition to the recognized authority. The two subsequent Achaean assemblies in *Iliad* 2 and 9 take the idea of dissent further by exploring how it may be managed within the institutional framework. But these assemblies occur, importantly, without Achilles: having prepared the ground for supporting communal debate, he finds himself excluded from it. Far from providing the answer, Achilles becomes part of the problem with his assertion of individuality. This first assembly opens a space into which the poem’s audience are invited to enter and work out what they think about debate.

Lastly, Achilles’ unique relationship with the gods suggests a way of looking at the *Iliad* in broader, more cosmic, terms. Athena appears at the behest of Hera, who holds dear both Achilles and Agamemnon, just as before she had prompted Achilles to call an assembly because she ‘cared’ for the Danaans (*κύνετο γὰρ Δαναῶν*, 1.56). As we have just noted, Athena in effect diverts dissent from violence, and instead validates dissent as a mode of political interaction. On the other hand, this is achieved here not through any pre-existent public arena—the assembly *fails*—but rather through a personal bond of *philia*—a special relationship, moreover, between a god and a mortal. Perhaps what is wrong then with Achilles’ initial dissent is that its containment can be guaranteed only at the level of personal relations, and not through the public institution—yet. The *Iliad*’s opening foray into the strife between Achilles and Agamemnon represents the beginnings of a political community.

It is worth dwelling upon this idea for a moment. The first episode of the poem culminates in the king’s rejection of Chryses’ appeal. That he can do so, when so clearly out of line with the will of the people, already shows the *Iliad*’s interest in community relations; but it is also striking that all formal indications of an institution are absent, though

35 ἀμφότεροι ὕμως θυμῶς φιλονωσά τε κηδομένη τε (*Il*. 1.209).

36 The Homeric narrator makes this clear: Athena appeared *only* to Achilles; no one else saw her (*Il*. 1.198).
presumably some kind of an assembly must be taking place.37 When Achilles calls an assembly, the protagonist of the *Iliad* lays the basis for the Achaeans to discuss public concerns in the open in the vacuum created by Agamemnon’s initial act.38 By regarding the assembly as in the *process* of being established as a forum for accommodating dissent for the salvation of the people helps explain why the issue of speech and power is so central to it and why Achilles’ challenge is so problematic. In turn, by their experience of these assemblies, the audience of the poem gain a sense of managing dissent.

The opening assembly sets the stage for an exploration of dissent in the rest of the epic. It is by no means clear, after the *epis* between Agamemnon and Achilles, whether dissent is, or can be, institutional; Achilles challenges the authority of Agamemnon on behalf of the community for the good of the community, but ends up asserting his uniqueness over it. In the two assembly scenes that follow, the Achaean community respond by working through the possibilities for and the limitations of debate that were set out in the prologue: who can dissent, who cannot, and in what ways can you dissent properly?

2. MAKING DISSENT INSTITUTIONAL (*ILIAD* 2, 9)

By the time we see Achilles again, two other Achaean assemblies have taken place forming differing kinds of responses to his challenge. In the first, a necessary human limit is placed on dissent by the violent suppression of a figure who is excluded from being able to speak by

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37 So Ruze (1997), 103. The term ἀγορή, however, is absent from the scene. See n. 5 above.

38 In Barker (2004), I had argued that the *Iliad* represents this assembly as a *first*. The argument sketched out here differs in that it suggests that the *Iliad* represents Achilles’ convocation of the assembly as a significant *new* usage (in terms of accommodating dissent) of an institution already familiar to (an audience of) epic poetry. The bare minimum use of formulae—‘Achilles calls an assembly’ (1.54) and ‘when they were gathered all in one place together’ (1.57), which contrasts with three full lines of formulae that introduce the next assembly (2.50–3)—reproduces the sense of novelty. That this is not to say that the assembly has never been thought of or represented in this way before now: rather that the *Iliad* presents itself as founding the assembly as a place in which dissent may be, and certainly ought to be, accommodated. I thank Jon Hesk and Chris Pelling for helping me articulate this point more clearly.
Challenging authority in the Iliad

virtue of his status. In the second, an Achilles-like figure takes up the fight with Agamemnon, though, on this occasion, in a more constructive way. Left at that, this would show the Iliad’s interest in valorizing dissent. The text goes further, however, by virtue of involving its audience in the process of managing dissent.

The most shameful

Having plunged the Achaean camp into strife, the narrative soon appears to get back on track for a tale of Troy’s sacking: the king convokes a second assembly, a voice of opposition is silenced, and two wise advisors prepare for the mustering of the troops before battle (finally) commences.39 Yet, how that set of circumstances is arrived at is rather more complex.40 This section analyses Agamemnon’s ongoing efforts to reaffirm his authority and the ongoing challenge he faces, particularly from Thersites. It will show that this assembly scene may be understood as continuing to explore the boundaries of debate and to implicate the audience of the poem more explicitly in setting those boundaries for themselves.

Agamemnon, the shepherd of the people, formally convokes the second assembly. In some detail the narrative describes the people gathering. Under such institutional management, expectations are raised of a rousing speech before battle.41 The heralds heralded, the people gather really swiftly, but first...—the elaborate portrayal of

39 For the assembly of book 2 as restoring order and reasserting the kings’ dominance, see Donlan (1979), 60–1; Lincoln (1994), 34. The line of critics queuing up to condemn Thersites is well documented in Rankin (1972) and Rose (1988). Scodel (2002), 209 discusses how Odysseus and Nestor ‘use strikingly inclusive language’ to reunify the group in preparation for the Catalogue of the Ships.


41 II. 2.50–2: αὐτὰρ ὁ κηρύσσων αὐτὸφθόνοις κέλευσε | κηρύσσων ἄγορήθη κάρη κομόωντας Ἀχαίοντος· | οἱ μὲν ἐκήρυσαν, τοι δ’ ἦγείροντο μαλ’ ἦδα. ‘But Agamemnon ordered the clear-voiced heralds to gather the long-haired Achaens to an assembly. And they gave the summons, and the people gathered quickly.’ These lines return almost verbatim at the beginning of the Odyssey’s first act of assembly (Od. 2.6–8). While it may be the case that the Odyssey is responding directly to this scene from the Iliad (or an Iliadic tradition of assembling), using the theory of resonance articulated above (Act I, introduction, n. 1) allows us to regard both scenes as resonating within a broader epic tradition and both epics as manipulating the formulae in various ways for interesting effects.
public gathering breaks off suddenly as, instead, Agamemnon first calls a council (βουλήν δὲ πρῶτον μεγαθύμων ἵζε γερόντων, 2.53). Significantly, this is the only time that the Achaean council (βουλή) is introduced without the ritual formula ‘when their desire for food and drink had been put away’. After this unanticipated break, when the narrative returns to the assembling, ‘divine Rumour’ has wrested control from Agamemnon’s heralds (2.93–4), who are struggling to maintain order in the face of the multiplication of views. In spite of the formulaic beginning, then, this assembly seems unduly chaotic and the instituting individual—in this case Agamemnon—appears to have lost control of it, until the heralds eventually make the people cease their clamour (2.98). After all, Agamemnon has convoked the assembly on the basis of a deceptive dream (2.5–34). Authority is still under investigation in the context of assembly.

This already unstable frame is compromised still further by another surprise: Agamemnon not only relates his dream to the council, but introduces a plan—not anticipated by the narrator—to ‘test’ the army (2.73–5). He will only pretend to give up on Troy in order to provoke his men to a greater effort.


43 For rumour as a corrosive discourse and a speech act not sanctioned by the community, see Lincoln (1994), 78–9. Thalmann (1988), 7 identifies the dream as one feature that problematizes the legitimacy of Agamemnon’s authority.

44 For bibliography on Agamemnon’s test see Knox and Russo (1989), 351, n. 2, to which may be added McGlew (1989) (sympathetic); Haubold (2000), 54–9 (unsympathetic). According to Cook (2003), 172, ‘the problem lies not with the plan, but its execution’. On Agamemnon’s assertion that ‘it is the custom’ (ὡς ἑρείπος ἑστίν, 2.73), see Reinhardt (1991), 159, who asks ‘Wieso? Weshalb?’. On the use of this phrase, see n. 82 below with accompanying text.

45 Commentators are much troubled by these narrative dislocations. Kirk (1985), 124–5, n. 86, comments: ‘Behind the paradoxes and confusions of the testing-motif in its present form one is probably right to detect other versions, in the earlier tradition or in the monumental poet’s own repertoire.’ Leaf (1960), i. 47 similarly asks: ‘How, then, are we to explain this wonderful medley of inconsistent and self-contradictory motives? The conclusion seems inevitable that we have a fusion of two quite different continuations of the first book.’
is far wide of the mark: not only has Zeus deceived him with a lying dream, but his hopes are expressly set in opposition to what the tale will tell. The *Iliad* is not going to fulfil his desire that Troy will fall ‘that very day’: Agamemnon’s authority is resisted by the narrative thrust of the *Iliad* itself.\(^{46}\)

The council, in the form of Nestor, duly sanction Agamemnon’s plan, but with serious misgivings.\(^{47}\) The mood of uncertainty continues when Agamemnon finally addresses the (re)convened assembly. Addressing the assembled ranks as ‘friends, Danaan heroes, attendants of Ares’ (‘ὁ φίλοι, ἥρωες Δαναοί, θεράποντες Αρρη’, 2.110), Agamemnon recasts his men as individuals, hoping to inspire them to share in his dream of capturing Troy;\(^{48}\) instead, he succeeds only in arousing their desire for home. His complex ploy of saying one thing when meaning another—hardly an advisable strategy to pursue in the context of an open debate—\(^{49}\) goes catastrophically wrong as the army are so taken in by his argument of despair, from which they are supposed to dissent, that they rush to the ships.\(^{50}\) It takes Odysseus to get everyone back in line with a combination of persuasive guile and brute force.\(^{51}\) Even then, when order (noisily, 2.209)\(^{52}\) returns, the tale takes another unexpected turn: enter Thersites.

\(^{46}\) Scodel (2002), 210 describes Agamemnon’s dream as creating ‘an ironic distance between characters and audience’. Though she shows how Odysseus and Nestor unite characters and audience with the goal of taking Troy, she seems rather to underestimate the lasting distance between what Agamemnon hopes—and Odysseus and Nestor argue for—and the tale the *Iliad* will tell. Cf. Haubold (2000), 59.

\(^{47}\) Nestor somewhat wryly comments: ‘if anyone else of the Achaeans had told us of this dream, we might say he was a liar and turn away from it’ (2.80–1). As for Agamemnon’s idea to test the army, Nestor passes over that without mention.

\(^{48}\) See Haubold (2000), 55–9. Cf. Griffin (1995), 77, who considers this line to be ‘appropriate to a mass assembly’.

\(^{49}\) As we will see in the case of Nicias’ speech to the Athenian assembly Ch. 4, sec. 3 below.

\(^{50}\) Zeus ‘devised evil deception’ (κακὴν ἄπαθεν βουλεύσατο, 2.114), Agamemnon says, hoping to deceive the assembled group that he has given up on the war. Of course, it is Agamemnon who has been deceived by Zeus, who truly has ‘devised evil deception’. And Agamemnon fails. Or, perhaps he succeeds rather too well, since the army are so taken that they share his defeatism.

\(^{51}\) Against the view that this simply represents a reassertion of authority, Hammer (2002), 88 argues: ‘in restoring order, Odysseus does not necessarily restore Agamemnon’s power. For what holds the political field together now is not people acting together, but force.’ Seen in this light, Odysseus’ demand that there be ‘one king’ (‘ἐἷς κοιρανός ἐστι’, 2.204) as he ‘plays the role of being king’ (ὁ γε κοιρανέων, 2.207) could be pointed: see Thalmann (1988), 12.

\(^{52}\) This description later characterizes a Trojan assembly (7.346).
So far we have seen that the ways in which the assembly of book 2 is convoked continues the investigation of Agamemnon’s authority. Now, after Odysseus’ apparent restoration of order, a voice from below takes the opportunity to perform on the epic stage. The strain on the narrative in allowing such a figure to speak is such that the character’s introduction is the most detailed and evaluative of its kind. First, the narrator draws attention to the inappropriateness of Thersites’ language: ‘of measureless speech’ (ἀμετροτετράγωνος, 2.212), he knew ‘many disorderly words’ (ἐποίησεν ἀκονίμα τε πολλά, 2.213) to cause strife with the kings idly, not with due order, but whatever he thought would be funny for the Argives (μάλλιν, ἀλλ’ ὃδε κατὰ κόσμον, ἑρωτήμεναι βασιλεύσιν, ἄλλ’ ὃ τι ὁ εἰσάγων γελοῖον Ἀργείων, 2.214–15). Then Thersites’ ‘shameful’ (ἀμέτροτετράγωνος, 2.216) appearance is described: he was ‘bandy-legged’ and ‘lame’ (φολκός, χωλός, 2.217), his shoulders ‘stooped’ (κυρτῶ, 218) and his head ‘warped’ (φοξός, 2.219). As Bruce Lincoln remarks: ‘Before we are permitted to hear what he says... the text is at pains to describe him in such a way as to emphasize his anomalous nature, and to shape the attitude we will adopt toward him.’

But just what is at stake in Thersites’ deformation comes to light in the lines that follow (2.221–4):

At that time with shrill cries he again uttered abuse against divine Agamemnon. With him the Achaeans were exceedingly angry and had indignation in their hearts. But he shouting loud abused Agamemnon with a speech.

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53 On these lines and their application to Thersites’ subsequent speech, see R. P. Martin (1989), 109–13. Raaffa (2004b), 43–6 suggests that the fact that Odysseus disciplines Thersites on the basis that the other had not spoken well (2.212–13) complicates the notion that this episode demonstrates the exclusiveness of freedom of speech to an elite.

54 Lincoln (1994), 21 (my italics).
After the explicit condemnation of Thersites’ appearance, the narrator shifts into an altogether less certain mode when it comes to assessing the impact of Thersites’ speech. The issue centres on the interpretation of the two pronouns, the dative τω (to) and the nominative ὅ. Do both refer to Thersites, to stress his isolation, as in: ‘The Achaeans were angry with him (Thersites); in spite of this he (Thersites) abused Agamemnon’?55 Or does the first pronoun mark out Agamemnon as the object of malcontent, the second Thersites as the one figure who dares voice the rank-and-file’s complaints: ‘The Achaeans were (all) angry with him (Agamemnon); but it was Thersites …’?56 The choice rather depends on what the Iliad is adjudged to be doing. At the moment when the narrator enters the debate, the audience must make a judgement.57

As it is, the audience are not given an opportunity to witness dissent from—or with—Thersites; embedded audience reaction is deferred until after Odysseus has spoken and beaten him up. Then the narrator comments (2.270–4):

οί δὲ καὶ ἀχνύμενοι περ ἐπ’ αὐτῷ ἤδο γέλασαν·
ἀδε δὲ τις εἴπεσκεν ἰδὼν ἐς πλησιόν ἄλλον·
‘ὡ πότοι, ἢ δῆ μυρί’ Ὀδυσσεῦς ἐαθλὰ ἔφρη
βουλάς τ’ εξάρχων ἀγαθάς πόλεμὼν τε κορόσων·
νῦν δὲ τόδε μεγ’ ἄριστον ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἔρεξεν …’

But [the Achaeans], although they were pained, laughed sweetly at [Thersites]. And thus would one speak looking at his neighbour: ‘Well, well, Odysseus has done many noble deeds in leading good counsel and conducting war; but now this thing is by far the best he has done among the Argives . . .’

Again, while the forcefulness of the sentiment is not in doubt, interpretation is far less easy, as the diverse critical response demonstrates.

55 Kouklanakis (1999), 49 comments: ‘the voice of dissent is given a brief, but substantial, space to be expressed, only to be cast in the most negative light, that is, as the product of a lonely and freakish mind.’ See also Kirk (1985), 140, n. 220–3.
56 This translation takes the αὕτηρ as strongly adversative: so Postlethwaite (1998), 93–5; cf. Leaf (1960) i. 65, n. 222.
57 Scholars tend to smooth over the linguistic difficulties of this section. Scodel (2002), finding the ambiguity frustrating (‘Unfortunately, the lines that describe the emotional state of the Achaean audience are difficult’), enters the scene to cast her own judgment: ‘It is far likelier that the army is angry with Thersites’ (p. 205, my italics). Description gives way to prescription: how the critic thinks the scene should be interpreted comes to the fore.
Here the problem lies with the disjunction between the group’s gang-laughter and the concessive particle that denotes their mindset: ‘although they were pained.’ For Gregory Nagy, laughter comes at the expense of the blame poet. According to Marcel Detienne, ‘Odysseus’ treatment of Thersites, the epitome of the man of the démos, reflects the limits of egalitarian speech’. Peter Rose provocatively suggests that the joke may be in fact on Odysseus: beating up this miserable wretch is, apparently, ’his best deed yet!’ Thus, in their very modes of responding to the violent suppression of dissent, scholars tend to betray their own ideological positions. Laughter opens the audience up to criticism even as they are invited to sanction the reassertion of authority.

Joking apart, this situation potentially represents an altogether more serious moment in the Iliad, for at least two reasons. First, there is the prominence of Odysseus and Odyssean echoes in this episode, significantly just after Achilles has removed himself from the scene. It is Odysseus to whom Athena goes to carry out Hera’s bidding, just as it

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58 According to de Jong (1987), 82, the ‘someone’ (τις) speech represents a communal voice; cf. S. Richardson (1990), 82, with 224, n. 28.
59 Postlethwaite (1998), 93 analyses this ambiguity in the light of the narrator’s introduction. See also Rankin (1972), 43, n. 25; Rose (1988), 20; Cook (2003), 180–2. On the troubled laughter of this scene, see Halliwell (1991), 281.
60 Nagy (1979), 260–3; cf. Lowry (1991). According to Nagy (1979), 259–64, the Iliad represents Thersites as an object of ridicule, as if he were a figure from the rival genre of blame.
61 Detienne (1996), 103; cf. Lincoln (1994), 26. We should note, however, that there is little indication from the narrator that Thersites should be seen as a man of the démos, even if such a term can be usefully applied to Homeric epic.
63 As Rose (ibid. 10–11) puts it: ’For those who view the Thersites passage as evidence of the poet’s ideology there is almost an irresistible temptation to stand up and be counted for or against’ (his italics).
64 While it would be easy to condemn the Iliad for brutally asserting the hierarchy here, Thersites’ suppression still has significance: although politicians, and even social theorists like Giddens, stress participation within institutions, even so democratic openness must be sustained at some level by exclusion.
65 Haft (1990; 1992). She, however, sees the relationship between the two epics as complementary, not agonistic. A similar situation comes about after Achilles reaffirms his distinction in book 9; immediately afterwards, Odysseus undertakes a dangerous, and somewhat digressive, night expedition. This episode belongs to the one book of the Iliad—book 10—whose authenticity is most often doubted by scholars, presumably because it appears the most Odyssean.
had been Achilles in book 1.\textsuperscript{66} It is Odysseus who, as we have seen, restores order in the assembly and silences Thersites, significantly naming himself as the father of Telemachus in the process.\textsuperscript{67} It is Odysseus too, in his second speech to the assembly, reminds the Achaeans of the prophecy that Troy would fall only after much suffering, in the tenth year, thereby correcting Agamemnon’s misplaced haste.\textsuperscript{68} All of these elements—his proximity to Athena, his control over the assembly, his epithet as Telemachus’ father, the hints at a return—point to an \textit{Odyssey} (or an Odyssean tradition at any rate). It is as if Odysseus threatens to hijack this, his rival’s, narrative. What is more, in Proclus’ summary of the \textit{Cypria}, it was \textit{Achilles} who prevented a disgraceful flight to the ships;\textsuperscript{70} here Odysseus usurps that role in the wake of Achilles’ withdrawal from the action. The fallout from Achilles’ act of dissent extends to opening up his epic narrative to his rival.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{66} 1.193–200. It is striking, though, that Odysseus departs from Athena’s advice, all the more so since those instructions had been relayed to Athena herself by Hera. Athena is told by Hera to ‘restrain each man with soft words’ (\textit{σοις ἄγανοις ἐπέθεσαν ἑρήντες φῶτα ἐκαστον}, 2.164); Athena repeats this instruction to Odysseus \textit{verbatim} (2.180). Indeed, ‘whenever Odysseus came upon ‘a king or an outstanding man’ (\textit{ὅπως των μεν βασιλέων καὶ ἔξωχων ἄνδρα κρίχει}), he does ‘restrain him with soft words’ (\textit{τὸν δ’ ἄγανοις ἐπέθεσαν ἐρημίσασκε}, 2.189). But ‘whenever he saw a man of the people’ (\textit{ὅπως δ’ αὖ δήμῳ τ’ ἄνδρᾳ οἶδοι}, 2.198), he harangues (and physically beats) him (2.199–206). Odysseus’ violent streak in the context of suppressing dissent, which will become all too apparent in the \textit{Odyssey}, is already present in the \textit{Iliad}.

\textsuperscript{67} 2.260. The only other time Odysseus is named as the father of Telemachus is 4.354. In the speech immediately following, he earns the epithet ‘sacker of cities’ (\textit{πτολίπορος}, 2.278), again, one of only two uses in the entire poem (the other being in the ‘Doloneia’, 10.362). See Haft (1992).

\textsuperscript{68} 2.299–302.

\textsuperscript{69} The Achaeans’ flight to the ships ‘would have led to a premature return’ (\textit{ὑπέρμορα νόστος}, 1.155), had it not been for Hera’s intervention. The subject of \textit{nostos} is also teasingly prominent in Odysseus’ second speech in the assembly: 2.284–329, esp. 289–98.

\textsuperscript{70} Proc. \textit{Chr.}, p. 105.9–10 OCT. While this scene possibly owes its origins to the \textit{Iliad} (as a manifestation of either the ‘Cypria’\textprime s derivative status or else Proclus’ rendering of it), it is quite plausible that both scenes resonate within a broader tradition in which the Achaeans rush to the ships.

\textsuperscript{71} While suggesting a rivalry, this argument does not rest on the primacy of one text over the other; rather, it suggests that the Homeric poems may be considered as representative of competing traditions, the one privileging Achilles, the other Odysseus, and that a tension between the two surfaces here. See further the final assembly, sec. 4 below.
Second, the scene of laughter has the effect of co-opting the onlookers back into the hierarchy: in the words of William Thalmann, through laughter the audience adopt the language and values of their betters, ‘such are the complex dynamics of their laughter as it brings them back to submission’. Such a dynamic includes potentially the audience of the poem—which is important if we reflect on the fact that Thersites’ dissent is closely modelled on Achilles’. In this context it is worth reconsidering the opening frame: Thersites ‘reviled the kings, recklessly and in no due order, but whatever he thought would raise a laugh’ (ἀλλ’ ὅ τι οἱ εἰσαίτω γελοίοιν Αργείουσι | ἔμμεναι, 2.215–16). One possible problem with Thersites is the impression that he is only interested in parody, with the consequent danger that the audience may, if persuaded by Thersites, trivialize Achilles’ challenge to Agamemnon and overlook the significance of what Achilles had done when he called that first assembly. In other words, the audience may fail to take dissent seriously. No wonder tradition has it that Achilles killed Thersites . . .

Odysseus’ beating-up of Thersites draws attention to the exercise of authority which, paradoxically, opens it up to analysis. Thus, even as it suppresses a voice of dissent, the *Iliad* makes its audience aware that this

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73 Whitman (1958), 161. See also Postlethwaite (1998), who analyses the speech as a rehearsal of and commentary upon the quarrel; Reinhardt (1991), 162, who calls the scene a ‘Nachspiel’ on the book 1 assembly; Schadewaldt (1987), 152, with n. 2, who labels Thersites’ speech a ‘Zerrspiegel’ of Achilles’ anger. Rose (1988), 19 questions those critics who condemn Thersites’ speech as a disorderly aberration when it seems so closely modelled on Achilles’ complaints.
74 Halliwell (1991), 281 draws attention to Thersites’ role as a ‘habitual entertainer’. He comments: ‘His aim of providing what he thinks γελοίοιν (215) implies that he has, or aspires to, the function of a γελωτοποιός (as Plato shrewdly calls him at Rep. 10.620c).’ But ‘Thersites’ mockery is, on this occasion, out of place, and isolates him. His taunts are, ironically, too close to the bone, as their echoes of Achilles’ polemic against Agamemnon in book one intimate.’
75 Judging by Proclus’ summary, Rosen (2003), 123 speculates that in the *Aethiopis* Thersites is seen as a ‘bona fide’ satirist, i.e. one who displays an attitude of comic self-righteousness endorsed by the narrative in which it is embedded (his italics). The difference, according to Rosen, is in the performance context: in the *Aethiopis* stasis arose over the death of Thersites’ (Proc. Chr., p. 105.25–8 OCT) because he was killed at a feast, whereas in the *Iliad* he is beaten out of the assembly. It seems that epic dissent does not equal comic abuse. Halliwell (1991), 281 similarly comments: ‘Laughter here is inevitably caught up in the highly charged action of the entire crisis for the army and its leaders.’ Cf. Rosen (2003), 134.
is what it is doing.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, even as the \textit{Iliad} sets out boundaries to dissent, it does so in a way that involves its audience in the process of reflecting on it and in setting the boundaries themselves. Through their experience of the narrative, the audience are involved both in managing dissent and realizing the potential of the assembly as an institution where the management of dissent best takes place.

\textbf{It’s the custom to fight with words}

The next Achaean assembly opens as if it is going to replay the events of book 2. Not only is Agamemnon again seen convoking the assembly to raise the spectre of return; he quotes \textit{verbatim} from that earlier speech his recommendation that they should leave.\textsuperscript{77} But now Agamemnon is in deadly earnest: the repetition of his earlier words cruelly exposes how far misplaced his earlier hopes had been and how dependent the Achaeans all are on Achilles.\textsuperscript{78}

On this occasion, however, Agamemnon’s proposal of flight provokes a fierce rejoinder by Diomedes.\textsuperscript{79} Significantly, he frames his speech by emphasizing the right of reply in the assembly (9.32–3):

\begin{quote}
Æτρείδη, σοι πρώτα μαχήσομαι ἀφραδέοντι
ηθέμες ἑστὶν, ἄναξ, ἀγορη σὺ δὲ μὴ τι χολοθῆς.’
\end{quote}

‘Son of Atreus, first with you I’ll fight since you’ve lost your wits; it’s the custom, lord, in the assembly. And you, don’t get angry.’

\textsuperscript{76} As Rose (1988), 13 remarks: ‘It is impossible to attempt to “manipulate” or “manage” a serious discontent without somehow reminding the audience of the grounds for that discontent—without therefore running the risk of heightening the very discontent one intends to contain and co-opt.’ See also Lincoln (1994), 6, who comments: ‘In a state of latency or occultation, persuasion and coercion alike are constitutive points of authority, but once actualized and rendered explicit they signal—indeed they are, at least temporarily—its negation.’

\textsuperscript{77} 9.18–28 = 2.111–18, 139–41.

\textsuperscript{78} Lynn-George (1988), 81; Hammer (2002), 89; D. Wilson (2002), 72. She notes (contra Griffin (1995), 77) that the gathering Agamemnon is addressing is a public assembly, ‘as the remove to a private council make clear’ (p. 197, n. 3).

\textsuperscript{79} For Diomedes as a second Achilles, see: Andersen (1977); Griffin (1983), 74–5; Schofield (1999), 29. Lohmann (1970) calls this scene ‘Die Spiegelung zur Streitszene im ersten Buch’ (p. 217), and specifically identifies Diomedes as playing the role of Achilles’ ‘Double’ (p. 221).
Diomedes not only flags his disagreement with Agamemnon; he also self-consciously parades his act in the precedent established by Achilles in this poem. The end of that first assembly had concluded with the two speakers ‘fighting with words’ (μαχεσαμένω ἐπέεσαι, 1.304). Here Diomedes explicitly states that he ‘will fight’ (μαχήσομαι) with Agamemnon. The verbal echo resonates with the authority of Achilles’ opposition in book 1.

That is not all. Diomedes’ assertion goes one step further: he states that ‘it is the custom’ (ἡ θέμις ἐστίν). John Foley glosses the expression used here as follows: “The Assembly seems institutionally a place where disagreement, perhaps for the sake of entertaining all factions and all possibilities, is allowed without fear of personal reprisal.” Such a description appears apt for our study. In section 1, it was suggested that the Achaean assembly is a place where disagreement is allowed. Yet it was also pointed out that the assembly of book 1 needed an Achilles to guarantee dissent without fear of reprisal: without him, Calchas would not have spoken up and the source of the community’s woes—Agamemnon’s refusal to return Chryseis—would have remained unexposed. Precisely the problem with the assembly of book 1 is that it was not able to allow dissent institutionally. Moreover, as Jasper Griffin has noted, the phrase ‘it is the custom’ is only ever used by characters: ‘the poet’, he explains, ‘never commits himself to expressing, from his own mouth, the idea that something is correct, in line with timeless usage.’ The significance of the fact that it is Diomedes who says ‘it is the custom’ should not then be overlooked: Diomedes applies the phrase prescriptively, not descriptively, to provide for himself the authorization to speak in opposition to Agamemnon. That is to say, contrary to

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80 It is important that we interpret Diomedes’ intervention in the light of his earlier silence when (inappropriately) chastised by Agamemnon (4.368–400, with Diomedes’ silence at 401–2 and Sthenelus’ strenuous defence, 404–10): the fact that Diomedes does speak up here lends weight to the significance of his speech and its social import. He was also the Achaean who stood up in the assembly to reject the Trojans’ offer of compensation (7.400–2)—thereby pre-empting Agamemnon’s own response (7.406–11).

81 J. Foley (1991), 175, n. 79 (my italics).

82 Griffin (1986), 38. Hammer (2002), 89–90, 115–34, recognizing the need to examine themis in ‘the context of the enactment of relationships within the epic’, sees its invocation ‘not as the incoherence of custom or oral culture, but as an aspect of regularization in which themis is stated as a public claim’ (p. 127). He locates the change, however, in the understanding of political space in the character (Diomedes) and not the poem’s audience (pp. 132–3).
Challenging authority in the Iliad

Foley’s claim, the assembly does not simply exist as institutionally a place where disagreement is allowed; Diomedes makes it so in his opening salvo and sanctions it as the place where fighting with the king’s point of view is not only possible but essential. Furthermore, he can do that because of the precedent Achilles had set down. By book 9, then, the assembly can indeed be legitimately regarded as ‘institutionally a place where disagreement is allowed’. Now there is no longer need for an Achilles to answer Agamemnon: Diomedes institutionalizes dissent.

The use of an institutional framework is taken up more explicitly in the scene that follows. Nestor intervenes with the proposal that the whole army take their meal (‘δόρπα τ’ ἐφοσπλοιόμεθα’, 9.66), while Agamemnon gathers the leaders together to take counsel (‘βουλήν βουλεύσῃ’, 9.75). By connecting the taking of a meal to deliberation, Nestor formally glosses the formula ‘once they had put away their appetite’ (9.92) that precedes every Achaean council. In this council, Nestor’s more direct criticism of Agamemnon, especially his appeal that Agamemnon should act for the common good, demonstrates the utility of this more intimate setting.

Under Nestor’s supervision the Achaean community appears to manage dissent within an institutional framework. In the context of book 9, indeed, both assembly and council are vital to the health of the

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83 Schofield (1986), 14 glosses the importance of this speech by drawing a connection with the prowess Diomedes has shown in battle.
84 According to Giddens’ understanding of structuration as set out in the Prologue above, Diomedes, by so blatantly and self-consciously participating within the institution, helps to reproduce it.
85 See n. 42 above. For the understanding of the belly (gaste) as the enemy of good deliberation see Hesiod, Th. 26–8, with Pucci (1987), esp. 165–72, 181–208. By providing an occasion for allotting proper ‘shares’ (timai), communal meals perform a socially stabilizing role. On the proper distribution of ῥυμαί among the gods, see Clay (1989).
86 Nestor stipulates that the leader’s role is not only to declare an ἐρως but to listen to one as well (ἐπικοίνωσε, 9.100), and act for the communal good ( eius ἄγαθον, 9.102). Thus he prepares his advice: αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν ἔρεω ὡς μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι ἄριστα (9.103).
87 The narrative signals his move to more intense negotiation with marked vocabulary: ὑθαίνειν μήτιν (9.93). These events represent a striking reversal of the similar episode in book 2. In Iliad 2, Agamemnon had first tried out his idea of a test in the council before testing the troops in the assembly, with near-catastrophic results. In the assembly of Iliad 9 Nestor notably corrects Diomedes: while praising his spirit, he identifies that his words have not found a solution to the crisis, presumably because the king’s honour is at stake. Hence he moves the assembly to council, in which, in more
community and to the telling of the tale. Had it been left to the ‘lord of men’ Agamemnon, the Achaeans would now be returning home and the audience would be on a nostos narrative. Instead, the careful framing of dissent offers an escape from the predicament that the leader had precipitated and, with equal importance, it allows the narrative of the Iliad to be told: the audience remain at Troy with Achilles. Dissent is being made integral both to the well-being of the Achaean community and to the Iliad’s Troy story narrative.

In saying this it is important to identify the involvement of the poem’s audience, who are not only being led through the activation of various institutions, but are also invited to reflect upon that process. A case in point relates to the role of the main player in moving affairs to council, Nestor. His powers of negotiation have won praise from Hellenistic critics onwards; some recent scholars, however, have expressed anxiety over his evident support for the king. He defers to Agamemnon in the quarrel with Achilles (1.277–9), in accepting the validity of Agamemnon’s lying dream (2.79–83), and at the prelude of the embassy (9.103–5)—all of which deepen the crisis. Though it can be said that Nestor represents the virtues of the tradition, equally he could be understood as a remnant of a past when everyone was indeed deferential to the king on the basis of status alone. Indeed, Peter Rose has suggestively called Nestor’s (and Odysseus’) adherence to an absolute notion of Agamemnon’s authority ‘residual’. This is interesting, because in the Odyssey Nestor, along with Odysseus, is shown


88 The critical embassy to Achilles follows directly.
89 For a discussion, see O. Murray (1965), 177; cf. Schofield (1999), 29.
90 See Taplin (1992), 90. Christensen (2007), 137–41 argues that Nestor’s reluctance to dwell on the details of Agamemnon’s dreams shows his desire to reunite the group behind their leader at all costs and avoid further dissent.
91 In particular, Nestor excels in his ability to spin a tale, as his manipulation of Patroclus testifies. See R. P. Martin (2000).
92 Rose (1997), 163. Hammer (1997b) suggests that Nestor understands the basis of leadership in a more traditional way, as one of ‘might’, which should be contrasted to a more ‘interdependent’ notion of politics—a ‘politics of mediation’—embodied in the figure of Achilles (pp. 20, 21); cf. Hammer (2002), 127–42. (It seems rather perverse, however, to describe Achilles as a proponent of moderation.) For the role of Odysseus and Nestor in supporting Agamemnon, see Sale (1994), 32–3. Schofield (1986), 29 comments: ‘much of Nestor’s advice is intended to bolster Agamemnon’s authority, even when ... it opposes his will.’ According to Schofield, ‘tact is the hallmark of Nestor’s euboulia’. We might also recall the narrator’s ‘Theogonic’ introduction of Nestor (1.249–52): see n. 22 above.
to be no lover of debate—at least when a divisive outcome results. Even as the text establishes the boundaries to the institution of the assembly, the audience are invited to think about their role in legitimizing or suppressing dissent. Who can dissent (Thersites)? How can one dissent properly (Diomedes)? And when (Nestor)?

One later occurrence of the word *agora* underlines the progressive nature of the *Iliad*’s narrative. As a prelude to an important one-off speech by the otherwise minor Achaean warrior Thoas, the narrator underlines his skill as a speaker (15.283–4):

*ἀγορῇ δὲ ἐπιάμων Ἀχαιῶν*

*níkων, ὅπποτε κούρου ἐρᾶσιαν περὶ μέθων.*

In the assembly, few of the Achaeans could beat him, whenever the young men vied with words.

Given our argument so far, this introduction is highly significant precisely because of its ordinariness: it affords a brief glimpse of a world closer to home, where dissent in the assembly is a normal activity, a ‘whenever’. Moreover, the detail that it is a young man’s sport could suggest that debating in the assembly is part of what one has to do to prove oneself a man. Whereas in the first assembly the strife (*ἐρίς*) between Agamemnon and Achilles was represented as a crisis, even if Achilles’ dissent had been necessary, the implicit premise here is of the

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93 See e.g. his description of the catastrophic debate after the fall of Troy (*Od.* 3.148–50), on which see Ch. 2, sec. 2 below. Nestor’s dislike of internal strife is clear from his intervention in *Iliad* 1, when he attempts to direct conflict against its proper source—the Trojans (1.254–8). Whereas fighting with words in the assembly is valorized in the *Iliad*, however precarious that value may be (and Achilles himself expresses regret for his strife with Agamemnon at 19.56), in the *Odyssey* strife remains a constant source of danger.

94 If one chooses to be more sceptical about Nestor’s role, one may want to distinguish between the two institutions which provide a framework for the Achaean community, the council and assembly. From what I have said, the former appears more fully formed, restrictive and more closely associated with the king; the latter is less ordered, open to everyone’s gaze and more highly competitive. In other words, the poem represents the council as a more conventional arena for decision-making than the newly activated and empowered arena of public debate. Haubold (2000), 60 comments, ‘institutional progress is not the *Iliad*’s prime interest’, which, however, may lend rather too much authority to Nestor’s management.

95 Hammer (1997b), 9 observes that Thoas uses the formula *πειθώμεθα πάντες* as a sign of his concern to persuade his audience, and as a correction of Agamemnon’s initial failure in the opening assembly.

96 Christensen (2007), 246–55 discusses this example as part of a rhetorical training implicit in the *Iliad*’s representation of debate and manifest, for example, in Diomedes’ progress over the course of the narrative.
social acceptability of strife. As a matter of fact, this narratorial gloss on the assembly is typically passed over in discussions of debate, perhaps because, by this stage in the narrative, strife—in the form of dissent—has been made institutional in the Achaean assembly.

Contrary to standard criticism of the Achaean assembly that points to the absence of a strong figure to impose agreement and the indiscipline in the political process that results,\(^{97}\) my opening two sections have suggested that this initial impression of weakness comes to be seen as a potential source of strength: by virtue of Achilles’ challenge to Agamemnon’s authority, the Achaean assembly is transformed into an arena that can accommodate different points of view. Before facing the question whether and in what way Achilles can be received back into the community (in the assembly of book 19), it is worthwhile considering briefly the \textit{Iliad}’s two other communities, the Trojans and the gods, both of which offer alternative ways of thinking about the assembly.

3. \textbf{OPPOSITION CONTROLLED IN THE ILIAD’S ‘OTHER’ GROUPS (ILIAD 2, 7, 8, 18, 20)}

So far I have been discussing scenes of assembly among the Achaeans, and have suggested that dissent becomes gradually institutionalized within that community. This section will consider the two other groups who hold assemblies in the \textit{Iliad}, the Trojans and the gods, as a useful counterpoint to the story so far. The Trojans, while enjoying similar institutional possibilities, do not make the most of them, but remain committed to the royal house in obedience to Hector. Dissent among the gods is a more problematic idea, given the catastrophic repercussions that would ensue were the gods to descend into strife. Nevertheless, even among this group it is possible to discern progress in the way dissent is managed towards a more collective involvement in debate.

\(^{97}\) In contrast to the Achaeans’ grim discipline in war: 3.8–9.
Leaning on his spear he spoke

On first inspection there seems to be little to distinguish the Trojan and Achaean assemblies. Indeed, unlike later representations, such as in tragedy, there is little sense of an ideological divide between ‘Greeks’ and ‘barbarians’. The institutional equivalence of the two groups, however, has recently been challenged by Hilary Mackie, who claims that the way in which the two groups talk differ from each other: the Achaeans, she argues, participate in a discourse of blame, the Trojans in speeches of praise. Although some of her methodological assumptions may be open to question, her observation that the Trojans lack an official context for blame is important. As we will see, the Trojan agora is not an institution that accommodates dissent; moreover, that difference offers one explanation for their eventual defeat.

There are four Trojan meetings in their agora. The first occurs in juxtaposition to the Achaean assembly in book 2, but nevertheless exhibits some startling differences. The Trojan assembly is narrated briefly from the perspective of Iris, the divine messenger, who comes upon the assembly already in session (2.788); we do not hear how the assembly was set up, who set it up, or the reasons for doing so. No doubt these differences are in part due to narrative concerns: we have just witnessed a long, confused and contentious Achaean assembly; a further scene of debate now would serve merely to detract from the poem’s impetus. Nevertheless, we may identify several important features that characterize the Trojan assembly more generally. First, Iris addresses the royal household alone, Priam (‘ὁ γέρων’, 2.796) and Hector (‘Εκτόρ, ο’),

99 According to E. Hall (1989), 15, there is no difference ‘between the constraints imposed upon Agamemnon and Priam or Hector by the institutions of civic debate’.
100 One problem is that her central dichotomy appears to rest on an awkward distinction between public and private discourse: H. Mackie (1996), 40 assigns conative/persuasive speech—speech that is orientated towards the addressee—to the Achaeans, and aesthetic speech—speech that is directed towards the self—to the Trojans. For the basis of her theory, she acknowledges her debt to Jakobson’s model of communication: cf. Jakobson (2000). This model, however, has been criticized by Bakhtin, who asserts that all utterance is directed towards another and must take into consideration the addressee: see Prologue, n. 55 above. One further problem is that Mackie’s interpretation of the different categories appears to derive from a post-romantic view of poetry as being individually experienced.
σοί δὲ μάλιστα’, 2.802). Second, Hector alone responds (2.807), and he is responsible for dissolving the assembly (αἱ Ἰῳ δὲ λυῶν ἀγορῆν, 2.808). Third, the Trojans are assembled at the doors of Priam’s house (οἱ δ’ ἀγορὰς ἀγώρευον ἐπὶ Πριάμου θύρας, 2.788; cf. 7.346); by contrast we later learn101 that the Achaeans assembly is located at the ships of Odysseus—not those of Agamemnon, the nominal leader of the expedition—in the ‘middle’ of the line (11.807–8).102 Even the place of the Achaeans assembly, then, points to its independence from the king;103 it is public territory, symbolizing its importance and accessibility to the group as a whole. The detail that the Trojan assembly takes place outside Priam’s palace suggests a different dynamic at work: the royal family presides over debate.

That point is borne out by the most developed Trojan assembly in book 7. Three figures speak, which matches the number of speakers in all four Achaeans assemblies, if the speeches of Calchas and Thersites—both marginal figures in some sense104—are discounted. Yet that point of similarity serves to underline the differences. All three Achaeans assemblies proceed in the same way: first, the institutionalizing agent speaks; then one of the other leaders expresses a contrary view; lastly, a third party adjudicates in a way that confirms neither position definitively.105 Once again the Trojan assembly is already in session; its institutionalizing agent is not named. Its first speaker is Antenor, who, by urging the return of Helen, represents an Achilles-like figure

101 11.807: in the context of the critical meeting between Patroclus and Nestor.
102 But see 7.382–3, where the Trojan herald Idaios finds the Danaans ‘in assembly beside the stern of Agamemnon’s ship’ (τοῖς δ’ ἐστὶ ἐν ἀγορῇ Δαναοὺς θεράπων Αἵρης | ἔν πάρα πρωτῷ Αθηναῖον): cf. Janko (1992), 131–2. The possible reason for the location of this assembly (which remains undramatized bar Diomedes’ brief rejection of the proposal) could derive from its purpose, as an offer of recompense to Menelaus.
103 This point further differentiates the Achaeans assembly from the council, which takes place in Agamemnon’s tent (9.89–90).
104 Prophets enjoy an ambiguous relationship to power throughout Greek literature, having special access to divine knowledge but lacking power in other means, as Calchas’ fear of Agamemnon makes clear (1.78–84). On Calchas as marginal, see Redfield (1994), 95–6. On prophets more generally, see now Flower (2008).
105 That provides, in the assembly of book 1, Achilles as the institutionalizing agent, Agamemnon as the contestant, Nestor as the mediator; in book 2, Agamemnon, Odysseus and Nestor respectively; in book 9, Agamemnon, Diomedes and Nestor respectively—though only in book 9 does the assembly proceed quite so simply as that.
speaking up in the assembly for the benefit of the community. The two responses that follow, however, show the Trojan assembly operating according to a very different set of dynamics. Antenor’s proposal meets with a fierce rejoinder from Paris, who claims that the gods must have taken his wits away if he is proposing to return Helen. The swift and forceful gagging of a speaker in the assembly recalls Odysseus’ suppression of Thersites, but with none of the attendant problems that we had observed there: here Priam adjudicates and rules in favour of his son. His opening address, ‘hear me, Trojans’, represents more even than an appropriation of Antenor’s words; elsewhere, ‘hear me’ (κέκλυτε) is used exclusively in proclamations that include the whole community and whose recommendations are granted, which makes this the only case in which a proposition—Antenor’s—is countered: in effect, Priam’s appropriation embodies both the definitive silencing of a dissenting voice and a ringing endorsement of his son’s alternative proposal. The third-person imperative to Idaios to take this message to the Achaeans signals both his judgement and the end of the debate. Any dissent is effectively quashed.

Yet the subject of this assembly concerns the unquestionably important decision whether or not to return Helen. This critical issue has already been raised in a gathering of the Trojan elders in book 3.

106 Thus Antenor is the first figure from outside the royal house to speak on public matters; but he is an important figure in Trojan society, as his role in the Achaean embassy (remembered at 3.203–24) testifies. Indeed, there he is represented as being something of an authority on speech, weighing the relative merits of those by Menelaus and Odysseus (3.212–24). He is clearly no Thersites, who can be effectively silenced because he lacks the credentials to speak: R. P. Martin (1989), 111.

107 Paris’ formulaic opening, ‘These things you advise are no longer dear to me’ (αὐτὲς οἴκησας εἴρησε νεώσας ἀγοράσεις, 7.357), is only otherwise used by Hector, again when silencing dissent (12.231; 18.285).

108 κέκλυτε μὲν Τρώα, 7.348 (Antenor), 7.368 (Priam).

109 κέκλυτε is used for proposing and commenting on a duel (3.86, 97, 304, 456; 7.67); Zeus addressing the assembly of gods (8.5, 497; 19.101); exhorting a comrade (17.220). Cf. H. Mackie (1996), 91, who cites κέκλυτε as only used to address the Trojan army.

110 Ἰδαίος ἵτος, 7.372. Idaios then reports the offer of recompense to the Achaeans (7.384–97). Helen, however, is crucially not part of the deal, though Idaios himself seems to will it (ἡ μην Τρώας γε κέκλυται, 7.393). Even the bearer of the message expresses his dissatisfaction with the decision that has been made but, crucially, it is not heard in the Trojan institution and it is made without the power to change anything.

111 3.146–60. The narrator calls them ‘the elders of the δῆμος’ (δημογέρωντες, 3.149).
These otherwise anonymous figures recognize that, while her beauty makes her well worth fighting over, still they ought to give her back. Two features of this scene shed further light on the institutional apparatus enjoyed by the Trojans. First, the physical context: the elders ‘sat by the Skaian gates’ (ἦατο ἐπὶ Σκαίησι πύλησι, 3.149). Crucially, these elders do not sit in council (boule); rather, they occupy a space by the city’s gates, on the very margins of the city, displaced spatially and figuratively from the centre of power.112 Second, the narrator’s gloss: even though they were ‘good public speakers’ (ἀγορηταὶ | ἔσθλοι, 3.150–1), they ‘sat like cicadas’ which through the forest sit on trees setting forth their delicate voices (τεττίγεσαν ἑοικότες, οἳ τε καθ’ ὠλην | δευδρέω ἐφεξόμενοι ὡπα λειρόεσαν ἰείσα, 3.151–2). This image of cicadas is highly suggestive of their lack of political clout:113 these are people who could have something to say on the war, but who have no power to influence the situation.114 Although the community is in dire straits, their deliberation amounts to no more than the idle chattering of cicadas.

The third Trojan assembly takes place in book 8, as the Trojans enjoy unprecedented success on the battlefield. Leading his men away from the ships to clear ground, Hector ‘makes an assembly’ (Τρώῶν αὖτα

113 H. Mackie (1996), 41 interprets this scene as indicative of the Trojans’ greater poetic capacity. Schein (1984), 171 remarks that these old men ‘are respected for their wisdom and for the power of their oratory’, but acknowledges that they ‘have no effect on the conduct of the war’. Though he sees Troy as a polis—and Troy’s many epithets indeed mark it out ‘as a product of human labor and cultural achievement’ (p. 169)—his description of the city’s social organization in fact stresses the importance of a single family, that of Priam and his two sons (pp. 171–2). As a result this chapter contests his conclusion that Troy’s social organisation is ‘more complex than that of the Greek army’ (p. 171): what the depiction of Troy does add is an awareness of inadequacy of political responses when familial issues dominate the public arena, as they will do in the Odyssey in Chapter 2 below.
114 In book 7, when the herald Idaios returns to the Trojans with the Achaeans’ rejection of their proposal, he delivers his message ‘standing in the middle’ (στὰς ἐν μέσοις, 7.417), echoing his original announcement to the Achaeans (7.384). The language of ‘the middle’ suggests that the proposal was open to debate. Indeed, in the Achaean assembly it is not the offended king (Menelaus) nor the nominal leader (Agamemnon) who responds directly, but one of the other kings (Diomedes) who speaks on behalf of the community. By way of contrast, the Trojans simply ‘put on their armour straightaway’ (τοὶ δ’ ὑπελέξωντο μᾶλ’ ὃκα, 7.417), without any further deliberation.
With the exception of his dissolution of the assembly in book 2, Hector’s establishment of an assembly here heralds the one instituting act among the Trojans; in it Hector, the Trojans’ ‘support’, delivers a speech on his people’s behalf. Yet the manner of his institutionalizing act raises concerns (8.492–6):

\[
\text{έξ ἔπων ἀποβάντες ἐπὶ χθόνα μῷθον ἄκουν,}
\text{τὸν ὦς Ἐκτορ ἀγόρευε Διὶ φίλος· ἐν δ’ ἀρα χειρὶ}
\text{ἔγχυος ἔχει ἐνδεκάπηκχν πάροιθε δὲ λάμπετο δούρος}
\text{αἵματι χαλκεῖη, περὶ δὲ χρύσους θέε πόρκης,}
\text{τῷ δ’ γ’ ἐφεισάμενος ἔπεα Τρώεσσι μετηύδα.}
\]

They stepped to the ground from behind their horses and listened to his speech, which Hector dear to Zeus made. In his hand he held a spear of eleven cubits long, and a bronze spearhead shone on its shaft, and a ring of gold held it. Leaning on this spear he spoke words to the Trojans.

After the narrator’s introductory speech tag, ‘Hector spoke’ (‘Εκτορ ἀγόρευε, 8.493), the expected speech does not yet come: instead, a further three lines of description follow that identify two important issues. First, he convokes this assembly holding not the skέπτρον, the symbolic instrument that gives a king the right to speak in the Achaean assembly, but the emblem of military control, the spear. Second, the terms used to describe his speech significantly differ. ‘Leaning on his spear,’ the narrator relates, ‘Hector spoke his words (ἔπεα) to the Trojans.’ Yet he previously notes that Hector’s men ‘stepped to the ground from behind their horses and listened to his speech (μῷθος)’. This initial use of μῷθος, the marked, authoritative term of the pair with

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115 Otherwise, the Trojans ‘gather to an assembly’ (2.788; 18.245–46), or else simply ‘are’ in the ἀγορῇ (7.345).

116 ‘The name of Hektor himself is an agent noun derived from the verb ἐκχό in the sense of ‘protect’, as is attested precisely in the context of Hektor’s protecting the city of Troy’ (5.473–4; 24.729–30): Nagy (1979), 146. For the classic study of the tragedy of Hector, see Redfield (1994), whose Hector is paradigmatically a man of the polis.

117 See n. 25 above, with accompanying text.

118 Griffin (1983), 13. See also the scholia Σb on ll. 8.494; cf. Reinhardt (1961), 182–5. The spear, no doubt, reflects the immediate military context in which Hector delivers his speech; nevertheless, it has important consequences for how his words are taken, and, it should not be forgotten, all Achaean assemblies take place in a martial context but with very different results.
\[\varepsilon\pi\varepsilon\alpha\] presents Hector’s speech from the perspective of his audience\(^{119}\) for the Trojans, Hector’s speech is a command. Indeed, no Trojan speaks after Hector has spoken in an assembly, neither here nor at any other time in the epic. Hector may set up an assembly, but there is no debate. Whereas the Achaean assembly is always a site of contention, the Trojan agora is frequently used by Hector for announcing his plan.\(^{120}\)

The fourth and final Trojan assembly represents a contest between Hector and Poulydamas, the Trojan seer, whose credentials as a wise advisor have already been established in three previous exchanges with Hector.\(^{121}\) The end-game of their exchange takes place when the stakes could not be higher: Achilles has announced his return. With the Trojans encamped outside their city in fear, this assembly lacks the signs of institutional security: its place is the battlefield, the time is

\(^{119}\) According to R. P. Martin (1989), 47–59, a μι\θος is a command, a speech act demanding acceptance, while \(\varepsilon\pi\varepsilon\alpha\) is the unmarked word of the pair. It is a term that is conspicuously absent from the narratorial descriptions of Achaean assemblies, though it is sometimes used by the characters to label each others’ speeches.

\(^{120}\) So too 2.788, 18.245–46. Since these scenes occur in the context of the battlefield, it could be argued that they represent the unquestioned nature of Hector’s military command—surely important for the Trojan defence of their city. To a certain extent, then, the context skews the way in which the Trojan assembly functions and is interpreted. Nevertheless, the lack of dissent is shown to be a problem, particularly in the last example, as we shall see.

\(^{121}\) On Hector and Poulydamas, see esp. Redfield (1994), 143–52; Schofield (1986), 18–22; Taplin (1992), 157–61; Christensen (2007), 387–411. Poulydamas’ first words of advice to Hector establish his credentials as a wise advisor (12.60–80), soon after which comes their first confrontation. While this debate occurs in the midst of battle, the language of ‘the middle’ (ἐν μέσσωσι, 12.209) flags Hector’s hostile rejection of Poulydamas’ reading of the divine sign and the lack of an institutional context for interpretation. In their second encounter Hector accepts Poulydamas’ advice, but in such a way that again underlines his authority: Hector takes Poulydamas’ exhortation to ‘consider πᾶσα βουλὴ’ (13.741) to mean the ‘whole plan’. Yet πᾶσα can also be taken distributively with βουλὴ to mean ‘each and every idea’—a meaning Hector rules out with his response: see Smyth (2002), 96, n. 337, where πᾶσα is denoted as ‘all, entire, every’, along with p. 296, n. 1174; Cunliffe (1963), 316. It may also be significant that Poulydamas draws attention to the problem of social status in prefacing his advice to Hector: ‘Hector, always you rebuke me in assemblies, although my counsel is good—since it is not in the least seemly for one of the people to speak beside the mark, neither in council nor in war, but always to increase your power’ (‘Εκτὸς, ἀεὶ μὲν πῶς μοι ἐπιπλήσασες ἀγορήσαι | ἐσθλά τὰ πραξεῖσα, ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδὲ ἐσκεῖ | δήμον ἄν τα παρεξ ἀγορεύειν, οὐτ’ ἐνι βουλὴ | οὔτε ποτ’ ἐν πολέμω, σῶν δὲ κράτους αἰεὶ ἀξέιν’, 12.211–14). Interpreting these difficult lines as bitterly sarcastic, Schofield (1986), 19, n. 30 understands Poulydamas as saying that he ‘is as good as a commoner whose job, if he speaks at all, is to support Hector’s cause with appropriate deference’.
With the safety of the community at stake, two narratorial framing devices become critically important. With the first the narrator explicitly ranks one of the speakers over the other: while Hector ‘wins’ with the spear, Poulydamas ‘wins’ with words (ἀλλ’ ὅ μὲν ἄρ μῦθοισαν, ὅ δ’ ἐγχεὶ πολλὸν ἐνίκα, 18.252). Poulydamas, who once more recommends an orderly retreat, is clearly favoured. Hector, however, roundly condemns Poulydamas’ advice and proclaims that he won’t allow any of the people to be persuaded (οὐ γὰρ τις Τρώων ἐπιτείθεται· οὐ γὰρ ἔσω, 18.296). Once more he hectors opposition into silence. In fact, the Trojans praise his speech to the heavens, which prompts the narrator to enter the scene of judgement (18.310–13):

ὅς Ἐκτορ δαρέσων· ἐπὶ δὲ Τρώες κελάδησαν,
νήπιοι· ἐκ γὰρ σφενῶν φρένας εἴλητο Παλλᾶς Αθῆνη.
"Ἐκτορὶ μὲν γὰρ ἐπήγαγαν κακὰ μητίςωντι, Πουλυδάμαντι δ’ ἄρ ὦ τις, ὅς ἐσθλὴν φράξετο βουλήν.

So spoke Hector, and the Trojans noisily acclaimed him—the fools: Pallas Athena had taken away their wits. They praised Hector, though he gave bad counsel, but no one praised Poulydamas, who had spoken good sense.

The Homeric narrator rarely intrudes into his narrative to cast judgement; yet here he condemns the embedded Trojan audience, appropriating a term that Hector himself had used to describe his rival: they are ‘fools’ (νήπιοι, 18.311; cf. 18.295). No one in a Trojan deliberating arena ever speaks after Hector has spoken; here, that degree of control is figured as a problem, as the narrator—no less—cries out for dissent. It is significant, moreover, that the narrator calls the

123 On Homer’s objectivity, see Griffin (1983), 103–43; S. Richardson (1990), 165–6.
124 Hölkeskamp (1998), 37, n. 88 cites an example of ‘free’ debate in the Trojan ἀγορά in the Odyssey (Od. 8.505–10). But in that context the Trojans come to the wrong decision: see Ch. 2, sec. 2 below. As we shall see, the Odyssey sets a different agenda, which explores the problems of debate.
125 Hector’s death is a narrative goal and therefore something that the narrator must support, even against his own dissent. Similarly counterfactuals are regarded as markers of the possibility of divergence from the tradition: Lang (1989); Morrison (1992); Lowden (1993).
(internal) audience fools, not Hector, whose advice they applaud. It helps affirm the importance of dissent: the assembly should be a place of debate.

On first viewing, the order enjoyed by the Trojans in their assemblies appears to be something to be admired, in comparison to the chaos of Achaeans attempts to debate. Moreover, in other respects Troy more obviously represents a polis environment, where one might expect the origins of a political community: and, indeed, from the brief glimpses one gets of life inside Troy that appears to be true of the religious life there depicted. Yet, on closer inspection, not only does the control exerted over the assembly by Priam’s family appear to be a crippling factor for political relationships within Troy; as we have seen, the Iliad’s investigation into the management of dissent takes place within the Achaeans assembly, which points to that arena as the origins of a political community, however fledgling and fragile that may be.

Thus, this brief examination of scenes of assembly among the Trojans would appear to bear out the claims made above regarding the Achaeans assembly. In contrast to the gradual accretion of the properties for dissent that have been witnessed in the Achaeans assembly, the Trojan assembly, lacking an Achilles-like figure to challenge the royal family, notably fails to develop the institutional support for dissent: voices other than Hector’s are marginalized or silenced, to the extent that even the narrator himself objects.

There remains one other group to consider, whose assembling may shed further light on the achievement of the Achaeans: the assembly of the gods.

127 The army camp, with its lack of an obvious institutional framework, becomes something of a paradigm—a model that is good to think with—on the Athenian tragic stage, including both examples discussed below in Act III. An important point here must be the relatively equal status held by the Achaeans kings. This means that, when they are gathered, speakers have to demonstrate something more than a simple assertion of power, a scenario that remains possible in the Trojan assembly, which basically represents the hierarchy of one community. For the armed camp as both like and not like a polis, see Hornblower (2004), 243–63—on evidence mainly from Thucydides and Xenophon.
Obey my word, lest . . .

Given Zeus’ incontestable supremacy, the idea of the gods debating may appear somewhat incongruous. Indeed, two of the formal divine assemblies in the *Iliad* appear as little more than showcases for Zeus’ power: both are convoked by him and take place in his house. In book 8 his all-inclusive address: ‘Hear me all you gods and goddesses’ (‘κέκλυτε μεν πάντες τε θεοί πάσαι τε θέαναι’, 8.5), gives the sense of a proclamation rather than an invitation to debate. In book 20, although there is a stronger gesture towards openness, as Poseidon ‘sits in the middle’ of them and addresses Zeus (Ἅξ ή αρ ’ ἐν μέσοσοι, 20.15), no debate follows. Poseidon just wants to know what Zeus has in mind. Zeus’ power is unassailable.

Nevertheless, at several points over the course of the narrative strife threatens to break out on Olympus. The first, and most pointed, example occurs at the end of book 1, in juxtaposition to the strife just witnessed in the Achaean camp. In response to Thetis’ supplication on behalf of her son Zeus nods, a reaction that shakes Olympus and prompts Hera’s suspicions—but she is quickly cowed into silenced by Zeus’ threat of force. The troubled mood among the gods is broken only by Hephaestus’ Ganymede impression, which provokes laughter and returns the gods to feasting. Thus, the first scene on Olympus ends with a very different mood from the scene of internal strife witnessed in the Achaean camp, which is important both for artistic reasons and for showing the divine world in a different light. But, while the tension is released, this scene has important implications for thinking about dissent on Olympus. Achilles had prompted his mother to go to Olympus in the first place by telling her to remind Zeus of the time when she had helped him against the other Olympians. The story of the gods fighting belongs to the past, as represented in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, and

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128 Lucian plays on this incongruity by presenting his epic Zeus as familiar with Demosthenes, addressing the assembled divinities as ‘citizen gods’ (ὁ ἀνδρες θεοί, *Iupp. Trag.* 15.2).

129 ‘He enquired about Zeus’ plan’ (Διὸς δ’ ἐξείρησε βουλήν, 20.15).

130 1.493–611.


132 1.394–407. Hephaestus’ lameness (1.590–4) belongs to that background story too, as pointed out by Graziosi and Haubold (2005), 71–2.
it has been suggested that the end of *Iliad* 1 recalls that ‘Theogonic’ world. Moreover, the threat and subsequent removal of divine strife also serves to cast into human relief Achilles’ dissent. As Laura Slatkin suggests, ‘what informs the human stature of Achilles is Thetis’s cosmic, theogonic power—her role in the succession myth’. His challenge to Agamemnon, which marks the establishment of the Achaean assembly, paradoxically confirms Zeus’ power: while Achilles’ dissent helps to establish the assembly as an arena in which debate may take place, it also leads to the death of the race of heroes. In this way, the *Iliad* both conforms to the tradition of Zeus’ plan and offers a brave new world: in the wake of the death of the heroes and the confirmation of Zeus’ everlasting hegemony a human world of institutional security is born.

These events at the end of *Iliad* 1 do not only shed light on the achievement of the Achaean assembly, in that Achilles is the guarantor of Zeus’ authority and the catalyst for the possibility of institutional dissent among men; it can also help us put into perspective the divine assemblies we previously noted. Given the importance of strife to cosmic security, it is important that Zeus is seen to be in control: but the nature of his control seems to change over the course of the

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133 ‘In the overall context of early Greek epic, this is easy to understand: by the time in which the *Iliad* is set, the pantheon has reached a stable hierarchy under the rule of Zeus and the gods know that they can only lose from a confrontation with him.’ Graziosi and Haubold (2005), 71.

134 Slatkin (1991), 101. She continues: ‘If Themis had not intervened, Thetis would have borne to Zeus or Poseidon the son greater than his father, and the entire chain of succession in heaven would have continued: Achilles would have been not the greatest of heroes, but the ruler of the universe. The price of Zeus’s hegemony is Achilles’ death.’ Cf. Murnaghan (1997), esp. 21–8, 41–2. This myth appears to be (ironically) recalled by Achilles himself in his very appeal to his mother to supplicate Zeus: he describes Briareus, the figure who helps Zeus reclaim power, as ‘mightier than his father’ (*πιος πατρος αμέινον*, 1.404).

135 D. Wilson (2002), 54 describes how the *eris* between Achilles and Agamemnon recalls the ‘mythological foundations of the war and even beyond it to the rise of the Olympian order... Their quarrel thus enacts the cosmic struggle for dominance that would have occurred had Zeus mated with Thetis.’ The simile at 16.387 underlines the important religious dimension to our documentation of dissent. Zeus himself oversees the process of making judgements in the assembly. See esp. Hes. *Op.* 194, 221 and *Theog.* 85. On the justice of Zeus in the *Iliad*, see Lloyd-Jones (1983), 1–27. Graziosi and Haubold (2005), 72 comment: ‘In terms of the overall logic of Homeric and Hesiodic epic heroes come into existence precisely so as to ensure the permanent stability of the Olympian world order under Zeus.’ Cf. Clay (2003), 171.
narrative. For one thing, the *Iliad* traces a shift from a personal quarrel in Zeus’ palace, which could threaten world security, to a debate in an assembly, however strictly controlled that might be. It may also be noted that the second assembly reveals greater participation, since it is Poseidon who initially addresses it and sets the agenda.

This movement towards the establishment of a divine assembly with ordered dissent under Zeus’ ultimate authority is confirmed by the final, and most significant, example. At the beginning of book 24, with Achilles still abusing Hector’s body, Apollo raises the issue before the assembled gods.136 Three aspects of this scene are of fundamental importance to my argument. First, Apollo’s intervention marks a striking reversal of book 1, when he intervened at the behest of his priest.137 As we have seen, throughout the whole of book 1 the gods act on individual impulse for individual concerns.138 Here, however, Apollo intervenes because of what he perceives to be an injustice: he speaks up for the ‘dumb earth’, which Achilles is shaming by his treatment of Hector’s body.139 Second, rather than acting on his own accord for his own personal gratification, as he had done in *Iliad* 1 in support of his priest, Apollo takes his complaint to a divine assembly, and argues for a particular course of action to be adopted. This demonstrates a shift not only to speech and discussion but also to a communal setting. Lastly, although he provokes Hera’s wrathful response, a compromise is reached by Zeus’ arbitration. Zeus’ power is no different substantively from his earlier involvement in the plot, but it manifests itself differently. Whereas before he made his plans on the basis of a personal

136 24.32. While there is initially no linguistic indication that the gods are in assembly, the form of two speeches set in opposition to each other with a third adjudicating between them certainly suggests as much. That view is soon afterwards confirmed when Iris and Thetis find the gods all ‘gathered’ around Zeus (*ἀγοράπεις, Il. 24.99): the root of the word ἀγοράπει is clearly perceptible. See the note by Garvie (1994), 241 on the Phaeacian assembly (*Od. 8.24*).

137 For the many correspondences between *Iliad* 24 and *Iliad* 1, see esp. Macleod (1982).

138 See esp. Hera’s continual interference: e.g. 1.54–5, 195–6.

139 ‘For he [Achilles] shames the dumb earth in his wrath’ (*κορμήν γὰρ δὴ γαῖαν δεικτεί μενεναικών, 24.54*).
supplication, Zeus now sits in judgement in an assembly directing events to their peaceful resolution.\footnote{90x199542710_0029-0202_Barker_chap2-3 Final Proof page 78 29.4.2011 10:44am}

Dissent, then, is even important among the gods, provided, of course, that it takes place under Zeus’ guidance. But it is interesting to note that the \textit{Iliad} again locates the management of dissent within the institution of assembly over the course of its narrative. The sense of achievement in making dissent institutional is the subject of my final section.

4. PUTTING A VALUE ON DISSENT (\textit{ILIAD} 19)

Achilles roused the Achaean heroes

Given the progress of the assembly as an institution that can accommodate dissent traced in sections 1 and 2 above, the fourth and final Achaean assembly already appears out of place. Moreover, its place in the narrative is further challenged by the fact that Achilles has \textit{already} made the decision to return to battle.\footnote{91x199542710_0029-0202_Barker_chap2-3 Final Proof page 78 29.4.2011 10:44am} It is true, but only up to a point, that this assembly formally marks reconciliation between Achilles and Agamemnon; this final section will show that many of the same issues relating to leadership, authority and contest return in the narrative’s ongoing exploration of the value of dissent.\footnote{92x199542710_0029-0202_Barker_chap2-3 Final Proof page 78 29.4.2011 10:44am}

Significantly, the narrator marks the convocation of this assembly in the most elaborate terms yet (19.40–6):

\begin{verbatim}
αὐτῷ ὁ βῆς παρὰ βίνα βαλὸς δίος Ἀχιλλεὺς
αμεραλεί αἴχοις, ἀράσιν ἠ ἴος Ἀχαιοῦς,
καὶ β’ οἱ περ τὸ πάρος γε νεόν ἐν ἀγώνι μένεσκοι,
\end{verbatim}

\footnote{90x199542710_0029-0202_Barker_chap2-3 Final Proof page 78 29.4.2011 10:44am} The question whether Zeus’ plan extends to Thetis’ supplication has been the source of controversy since antiquity. For studies on the polysemy of Zeus’ will, see Murnaghan (1997); Clay (1999). The image of Zeus presiding over the assembly is where the \textit{Odyssey} chooses to begin.

\footnote{91x199542710_0029-0202_Barker_chap2-3 Final Proof page 78 29.4.2011 10:44am} When Agamemnon calls the Achaeans together in books 2 and 9, he too has already made up his mind (to fight/to flee). But, while he uses the assembly as little more than an arena in which to declare his view, both debates are far more wide-reaching. The same is true here: Achilles establishes the assembly to announce his view, but debate ensues nevertheless.

Divine Achilles walked along the shore, shouting terribly, and he roused the Achaean heroes. And even those who before used to wait in the agôn of the ships—those who were both helmsmen and wielded the ships’ oars and, when beside the ships, were stewards giving out the food—even they at that time came to the agora, since Achilles had appeared, and for a long time he had ceased from grievous battle.

Many elements are striking about this description. First, the group whom Achilles gathers are not the laoi but—uniquely—‘Achaean heroes’, a generic marker of the Iliad’s status as heroic epic poetry. Second, the odd detail that ‘everyone came’, even those who before used to wait in the agôn of the ships, represents the last usage of this curious phrase, which occurs only for the duration of Achilles’ absence from battle. In other words, the last time that all these people gathered was in the assembly of book 1: this opening frame invites reflection on the relations of these two assemblies to each other and the progress made over the course of the narrative.

Achilles, as the institutionalizing agent, speaks first, and explicitly reflects on the narrative of the Iliad. His speech, addressed to Agamemnon alone, concedes the disastrous effect of their quarrel—seen from the perspective of the Achaeans as a whole (‘αὐτὰρ Ἀχαίοις | δηρῶν ἐμῆς καὶ σῆς ἔριδος μνήσεσθαι ὑμῖν’, 19.63–4)—and advises against ‘being

143 The mention of heroes in the proem (1.2–3) immediately locates the Iliad in a past era familiar to us from Hesiod’s myth of five ages, the ‘race of heroes’ being the age before ours (Hes. Op. 156–73).

144 The inclusiveness of this assembly is matched by the divine assembly immediately subsequent to it (20.5–10). The stakes are being raised.

145 The standard gloss is that the phrase νεῶν ἐν ἀγῶνι ‘maintains the original sense of ἀγών, “gathering” . . ., whence derives its post-Homeric sense “contest”’: Janko (1992), 275–6, n. 426–8; cf. Leaf (1960), ii. 132, n. 428; Willcock (1978), 236, n. 298; M. Edwards (1991), 240, n. 42–5; N. Richardson (1993), 200–1, n. 258. But see Ellsworth (1974), who proposes that agôn even here signifies ‘contest’: it occurs only while Achilles is absent from the field, as an indication of the increased threat to—or battle for—the Achaean ships. Now ‘they came to the agora at that time because Achilles appeared who for a long time had ceased from warring’ (my italics). See Prologue n. 32 above.

146 This possibly explains why Achilles here puts their quarrel down to the sake of a woman (ἐἶνεκα κούρης, 19.58), as Ajax had complained (9.637–8). Cf. M. Edwards

Challenging authority in the Iliad
always angry’ (‘αιεὶ μενεανέμεν’, 19.68). In response the embedded audience, silent throughout the first assembly, rejoice.147 But they are frustrated in their desire for the story to press ahead;148 fault-lines in the assembly re-emerge as, first, Agamemnon tries to maintain control over the events, and then Odysseus intervenes.

The narrator’s framing of Agamemnon’s response immediately challenges a complacent reading of the assembly: Agamemnon speaks from where he is sitting,149 not in the middle (οὔ δ’ ἐν μέσον, 19.77). Since these details are considered noteworthy, it is probably right to surmise that customarily the speaker stands in the middle of the group, signifying his words as public property and in the public interest.150 By remarking that Agamemnon does not stand in the middle, the narrator at the very least poses a question regarding how this assembly should be understood;151 but perhaps it also suggests the king’s continued unwillingness to enter into a contest of words.152 While being an antagonistic gesture

(1991), 241, n. 56–73. The greater self-reflection that Achilles shows, first in responding (progressively) to the speakers in the embassy (see esp. 9.644–8) and then in replying to Patroclus (16.49–60), reveals a growing political maturity on Achilles’ part, which will be important in his leadership over the contests in the funeral games. On Achilles’ ‘self-reflexive rhetoric’ (in the embassy), see R. P. Martin (1989), 192; cf. Hammer (2002), 170–97; Farenga (2006), 76–95. On the politics of mediation, see Hammer (1997b) and n. 169 below.

147 19.74. ἐχάρισαν occurs at one other place after a speech, when the Greeks and Trojans, having heard the oaths, rejoice thinking that the war will soon be over (3.111). There too, embedded audience reaction is premature.

148 Owen (1947), 191 perceptively notes how the poet anticipates our reaction by ‘representing Achilles as exasperated almost beyond endurance by the very thing that is exasperating us’. Page (1959), 313—perhaps unsurprisingly—is exasperated.

149 Standing to speak appears to be the common posture: Arend (1933), 116–18. There has been debate over whether Agamemnon really is sitting (since it is so odd), but see Clay (1995), 72, nn. 1–8.

150 As Detienne (1996), 91–102 explains, putting goods into the middle (es meson) is to put them into the common domain, rendering them common property and, therefore, ‘up for grabs’. The expression es meson is later applied to speeches. See n. 159 below, with accompanying text; cf. the Prologue above.

151 Thornton (1984), 128–9 regards these gestures as those of a supplicant posture, a view criticized by Taplin (1990), 75. M. Edwards (1991), 243–5, nn. 76–84 interprets Agamemnon’s seated position as publicly demonstrating physical incapacity to contrast with Achilles’ recent battle-shyness.

152 He avoids addressing Achilles directly (Πηλείδη... ἐπέθεισθαί, 19.83), which represents his strategy throughout; cf. 19.189. See M. Edwards (1991), 245, n. 83.
in itself, Agamemnon’s pose seeks to maintain a hierarchical position, exactly of the kind that was previously challenged in the assembly.

Even in this last assembly, then, Agamemnon still appears concerned to cling on to his authority. First, he prefaces his speech by saying that ‘it is good to listen to the man standing, nor is it right to interrupt him’ (‘ἔστασθαι μέν καλὸν ἀκοῆς, οὐδὲ ἔοικεν ἦν βιβάλλειν’, 19.79). The only other occurrence of a cognate form of ἦν βιβάλλειν is ἦν ποβλήδην (1.292), used of Achilles interrupting Agamemnon in the original quarrel. Agamemnon’s generalization, then, appears pointedly aimed at Achilles’ challenge to his authority. Second, Agamemnon relates an example of the power of Deception (Ἀτη), which uniquely among exempla told by characters quotes the words of gods and applies the lesson to his own situation. By doing so Agamemnon aligns himself to Zeus, as if this were his version of the Iliad! Yet, even as he demonstrates Zeus’ deception, similarly the example escapes his control, since he can also be regarded as playing Eurystheus to Achilles’ Heracles. Once more he fails conspicuously to control the narrative and his authority is irrevocably undermined: his last words of the epic are in this debate.

Yet the assembly escapes Achilles’ control as well, as his march to war is halted by a third party, Odysseus.

154 Vivante (1990), 99 suggests that Agamemnon has made the example up. Certainly it is right to note the spin Agamemnon puts on it.
155 On understanding the concept of responsibility from this example, see Williams (1993), 52–5. Lohmann (1970), 11–17 explores how Agamemnon interlaces his own ἄτη with that of Zeus.
157 Hera tricks Zeus into making a promise, the effect of which renders Heracles subservient to Eurystheus. According to Heiden (1991), the exemplum demonstrates the ‘dialogic’ process of communication, which has implications for Agamemnon’s use of the exemplum too.
158 It ‘ironically establishes him as a parallel to Eurystheus, and Achilles as a parallel to Herakles. Agamemnon’s own ultimate inferiority to Achilles is then indirectly recognised’: O. Davidson (1980), 200. Rabel (1991) maintains, however, that Agamemnon comes off best in this match-up.
Let us remember

Odysseus intervenes to insist on following formal procedure: first reconciliation, second eating. Agamemnon then replies to Odysseus, Achilles answers Agamemnon, Odysseus Achilles—no two speakers in this assembly respond directly to each other.\textsuperscript{159} At one level, the a–b, b–c, c–a structure avoids replaying the contest between Achilles and Agamemnon. At another, it allows tensions to remain latent. So, for example, Odysseus’ address to Achilles resonates pointedly with Agamemnon’s first words to Achilles in the initial assembly.\textsuperscript{160} Furthermore, Odysseus’ intervention holds up the telling of the \textit{Iliad} and Achilles’ deeds. In reply to Agamemnon, Achilles exhorts: ‘now let us remember battle’ (‘\textit{νῦν δὲ ὑπηχὲτα ἁρμῆς ἀλὺσ μᾶλ’’}, 19.148–9). When Odysseus objects, he stresses that nothing is of concern (‘μὲν \textit{ἄρμα καὶ ἄργαλεός στῶνος ἄνδρών’}, 19.214), a line which seems almost to epitomize the \textit{Iliad}’s scenes of bloody warfare.\textsuperscript{161} Even so, Odysseus insists on remembering to eat.\textsuperscript{162} In doing so, he not only reduces the symbolic significance of fasting to the essentials—the impracticality of fighting on an empty belly; given the importance of the belly to the Odyssean tradition,\textsuperscript{163} Odysseus’ obstruction could also be

\textsuperscript{159} There is a fundamental practical point here; as Detienne (1996), 93–5 explains, Odysseus’ proposal that Agamemnon has his gifts of recompense carried into the middle (‘οἰστε ἐς μέσουν ἄγορόν’, 19.173) equates to a redistribution of booty and avoids placing Achilles under obligation to Agamemnon. This is not just about gift-giving; Briseis has to be formally returned with an oath that she is intact for the reconciliation to be perceived as effective. On the significance of ‘the middle’, see esp. the Prologue above.

\textsuperscript{160} ‘Don’t, though you are noble, divine-like Achilles’ (‘\textit{μὴ δὴ οὖτος, ἄγαθος περ ἐὼν, θεοεκελ Ἀχιλλεὺ’}, 19.155 = 1.131). There may also be something unsettling about the way this hero, who is famous from the rival epic tradition for tricky persuasiveness, (stage-)manages the assembly and keeps a powerful check on dissent. Cf. Hammer (1997a) 358, who notes the importance of Odysseus’ manipulation of social ritual (being aimed at co-opting Achilles back into the system), but does not regard it as potentially aggressive.

\textsuperscript{161} In an imagined contest between ‘Homer’ and ‘Hesiod’, the king judges ‘Homer’ inferior on such a basis: \textit{Certamen} 205–10.

\textsuperscript{162} ‘μεμηχαθαὶ πόλις καὶ ἐδητύνο’, 19.231.

\textsuperscript{163} The sentiment ‘for no man fasting can fight a whole day’ crops up in Odysseus’ tale at \textit{Od}. 9.161, 556; 10.183, 475; 12.29. The practical importance of eating is also stressed by Agamemnon (\textit{Il}. 2.381), Diomedes (9.705–6) and, as we have seen, Nestor
regarded as programmatic. Achilles’ resistance to Odysseus would then be a rejection of the Odyssean tradition by using the memory of grief as a stimulus to attaining glory. Even so, the telling of his tale is held up by the intrusion of gift-giving and eating. It is the very strength of the Iliad’s strategy of dissent, however, that it accommodates a spectrum of diverse perspectives, even those from a rival poetic tradition.

The assembly of book 19 clearly does provide some sort of closure to the disruption and strife that have gone before. Everyone is present; Achilles and Agamemnon are not allowed to fall out again; Odysseus employs due procedure to formalize reconciliation in the public gaze. Nevertheless, counter-productive forms of dissent still pervade and render the consensus precarious in many ways. The Iliad’s final assembly, in staging a debate over the efficacy of its narrative strategy of managing dissent, enacts the very strength of that strategy by allowing differences to remain.

This chapter began by remarking on the widespread interest in the Iliad’s position in a socio-political framework, as well as observing the failed attempts at locating the Iliad with any certainty in that landscape. Its objective has not been to consider whether or not the assembly existed as an institution in Homeric society, but to explore the context, form and structure of debate as it is represented in the Iliad. Paying special attention to the narrative, it has been suggested that the Homeric agora has proven so controversial because scholars have approached the Iliad’s (9.65–73), who manipulates the need for food to establish a council of leaders. For Odysseus’ appetite and its reception, see Stanford (1963), 67–70.


166 However that may be, the Iliad never shakes off the suspicion of unilateralism entirely: Achilles’ retreat to his ships is a retreat into a unilateral assertion of his own authority, in reaction to the failure of his open dissent in the public arena of debate—a suspicion that the Odyssey appears to exploit to the hilt in its resonant interplay with its rival, as we shall see.
institutions by looking for a ‘ready-made’ system, whereas this chapter has shown that it is more fruitful instead to consider the assemblies as part of a series of struggles that progressively explore the possibility for, and value of, dissent in the community. When Achilles lays down the challenge to Agamemnon in the first assembly, the structure does not exist that can support such an action, which is why Athena must intervene; but by the time of the assembly in book 9 Diomedes can say that fighting talk in the assembly ‘is the custom’; the assembly of book 19 invites reflection on that achievement.

This approach to debate in the *Iliad* differentiates this study from previous attempts to place its narrative in an emerging institutional framework. Richard Seaford, for example, emphasizes the poem’s ritual ending as anticipating the fifth-century *polis*: with Achilles’ reception of Priam in *book 24*, the poem outlines a different, ritualized conception of relationships. Dean Hammer has suggested that the *Iliad* should be regarded as a serious document of political thought by virtue of its examination of authority as dramatized by Achilles’ withdrawal from the group. He regards Achilles’ role in the funeral games of Patroclus as founding a new kind of political relationship, based on ‘the recognition and successful mediation of difference’. Hammer’s understanding,
therefore, of the *Iliad*’s performance of political thought, privileges Achilles’ performance in book 23. Gregory Nagy posits an even earlier moment on Achilles’ shield in book 18 for the *Iliad*’s allusion to a political community.\(^{170}\) In contrast, this chapter has argued that the *Iliad* initiates a process towards a political community *from its very beginning* through the disruption caused by Achilles’ dissent in the assembly, which takes place under divine patronage and which requires the involvement of the audience themselves for its management.

Indeed, the scenes in both book 18 and book 23 can be seen as an intrinsic part of this process. Achilles’ shield has attracted much comment for its extended description of scenes of nature and civilization,\(^{171}\) and particularly for its representation of a trial scene (18.497–508), in which claim and counter-claim are represented\(^{172}\) before an audience actively engaged in the contest.\(^{173}\) We may note that the context for this law court is, again, the *agora*, only this time the civic framework appears as fully institutional, with various roles ascribed to different members of the community.\(^{174}\) Moreover, as a representation of conflict, this scene invites reflection on the narrative of the *Iliad* itself,\(^{175}\) which has been all about conflict, both martial and political. Indeed, the conflict

\(^{170}\) ’In the end . . . the logic of the litigation scene spills over, paradoxically, into the logic of an ever-expanding outermost circle—that is, people who are about to hear the *Iliad*. These people, I argue, are to become ultimately the people of the *polis’* Nagy (1997), 206.


\(^{173}\) Loraux (2002), 99–100.

\(^{174}\) As well as the two claimants and watching crowd—both the *demos* to whom one claimant testifies (δήμω πιθανόκα, 18.500) as well as the people more generally (λαοί, 502)—there is also an arbitrator (ὗτος, 501), heralds (κήρυκες, 503) and a panel of elders (οἱ γέρωντες, 503). In addition, two talents of gold lie ‘in the middle’ (ἐν μέσον ἓν, 507), to be awarded to whomever gave the straightest judgement. The lack of precise articulation of these roles and the relationship between them embodies part of the transformative power of the scene, since it can be interpreted in different ways by different people. Farenga (2006), 119 equates the elders of this scene with kings, since ‘their goal was to render publicly a “straight” decision (dike ἑ) acceptable to the litigants’, like Hesiod’s king (Hes. *Th.* 81–93—discussed by Farenga at pp. 113–16). This overlooks the possibility that the shield scene portrays a more fully developed civic body, particularly in terms of the institutional framework such as we see on the shield.

represented by the *Iliad* here finds its ultimate realization in a scene that reaches beyond epic.\(^{176}\) And this happens, it should be noted, on the shield of *Achilles*—the figure who had precipitated this poem’s investigation into dissent and who may ultimately be regarded as responsible for the establishment of the assembly as a place that can accommodate contest.\(^{177}\)

If this appears too great a stretch of the imagination, Achilles’ role in Patroclus’ funeral games is more clearly expressive of this new kind of politics that the *Iliad* is (presenting itself as) founding.\(^{178}\) The act he performs time and time again during this episode is to set up contests in honour of his fallen comrade: ‘Achilles stayed the people there and sat them in a wide *agôn* (ἀὐτῶρ Ἀχιλλεὺς | αὐτῷ λαὸι: ἐφυκε καὶ ζηγανεν εὐρών ἀγώνα, 23.257–8). By this act Achilles establishes another institution, the games or the *agôn*, as he had similarly earlier set up the Achaean assembly. In addition, this act gains significance in the light of the earlier semantic use of the *agôn* to indicate the ‘contest’ over the Achaean ships. That contest is now over: Achilles has killed Hector and forever removed the threat from their ships.\(^{179}\) Instead, the *agôn* can now be played out peacefully and cooperatively: this is the clearest example of Achilles legitimizing contest.\(^{180}\) Indeed, three further points

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\(^{176}\) Indeed, the whole scene resonates strongly with Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, which, according to Graziosi and Haubold (2005), 56–60, 139, comes after the Homeric poems in the epic construction of the cosmos.

\(^{177}\) The contemporary resonance of the hero’s shield is made emphatic in Virgil’s reworking of this scene. His hero Aeneas carries into battle a shield that depicts Augustus’ victory at Actium (Verg. *Aen.* 8.625–731). For its teleological form, see Zetzel (1997), 198–9; for its future history, see Barchiesi (1997), 275–8.

\(^{178}\) Hammer (1997b; 2002), esp. 140. Farenga (2006), 145 connects the two scenes: ‘Like the *ekphrasis* on Achilles’ shield, the games describe scripts that are self-contained narrative digressions from the *Iliad*’s unresolved major conflicts, and by analogy the scenes on the shield and the games offer an ideal solution to the intractability of those conflicts.’ For Farenga, however, both scenes ‘dramatize ways a *basileus* may perform a *dike* consistent with *themis*’ (p. 145): he does not regard the institutions that Achilles sets up as the place where the people may find security. Christensen (2007), ch. 9 also discusses the importance of the games to the political situation in the Achaean camp.

\(^{179}\) See Ellsworth (1974), with Prologue, n. 32 above.

Challenging authority in the Iliad

may be noted. First, the Achaeans compete for prizes ‘in the middle’ in a form of competition that rewards merit.\(^{181}\) Second, contest spills over into the group looking on, which demonstrates the activity of the audience in the agōn.\(^{182}\) Lastly, Achilles mediates in conflict, a conflict, moreover, that recalls his own.\(^{183}\) Truly, a new kind of politics is born: but one that has been possible by virtue of the audience’s experience of the poem from its beginning.

By experiencing the assembly as a process—that is, as a series of struggles, not as a closed system—the poem’s audience become implicated in realizing it as an institution that makes use of disagreement. It is for this reason that we never quite get to the polis in the narrative itself. As the audience experience the assembly themselves, they come to realize its potential as a central institution of the polis.\(^{184}\) In similar terms Jean-Pierre Vernant describes a process by which the centring of the city ‘on the agora, the communal space’ impacts upon how people mentally view their world.\(^{185}\) Experiencing debate in the Iliad helps construct an audience engaged in thinking about how people interact with each other in the context of an arena in which public concerns are raised and contested. By inviting its audience to reflect on the nature and status of debate—where they are going to draw the lines, the issues that are at stake, and so on—the Iliad surpasses any single (imagined or real) performance context to operate as an aetiological—or

\(^{181}\) See Detienne (1996), 95, with nn. 150, 159 of this chapter, above, and Ch. 3, n. 139 with text, below.

\(^{182}\) See esp. 23.482–7, where Idomeneus challenges the lesser Ajax to a contest of spectating. W. Scott (1997), 221 observes that the agōn puts the emphasis on problems of conduct for contestants and spectators alike, rather than on the skill of the former alone. Hammer (1997b) argues that Achilles resolves the crisis by getting the two parties to imagine themselves as onlookers to a quarrel (23.494). Farenga (2006), 150 talks of the ‘intersubjective perspective’ that Achilles imposes on his peers.

\(^{183}\) See esp. 23.539–54, where Antilochus contests Achilles to award his prize to somebody else in language that resonates with Achilles’ strife with Agamemnon. Achilles smiles in response (23.555–6).

\(^{184}\) Morris (1996), 20 discusses a pre-democratic stage where members of a group, who believe that ‘they are all about equally well qualified to participate in the decisions of the group’, govern themselves ‘through some sort of democratic process’. He denies the relevance of his ‘strong principle of equality’ to the Iliad (p. 31).

\(^{185}\) Vernant (1982), 47–8.
foundational—narrative for a world of ‘today’. The text itself does not perform politics; its audience are the ones performing politics.

Of course, politics is hardly ever exemplary of group decision-making: debates within the Iliad have more than adequately shown that. But, whereas a sense of achievement is felt nevertheless, in the Odyssey that accomplishment comes under the severest examination.

186 The Iliad’s heroic world of the past is exploited ‘for the way in which it can, as a purely fictional world also can, cast light upon the structures of the present world’: Osborne (1996), 33. Farenga (2006), 172 concludes: ‘despite the emergence in the Iliad of prototypical forms of citizen communication and cognition centred around Achilles, the poem’s representations of dispute settlement do not really enact roles and procedures characteristic of citizen participation.’ Perhaps not: but the institutions have been represented in such a way that enables citizen participation to take place among the audience.
2

Sidelining debate in the *Odyssey*

In his influential book on Homeric society, *The World of Odysseus*, Moses Finley writes:¹

Never in either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* is there a rational discussion, a sustained, disciplined consideration of circumstances and their implication, of possible courses of action, their advantages and disadvantages. There are lengthy arguments, as between Achilles and Agamemnon, or between Telemachus and the suitors, but they are quarrels, not discussions, in which each side seeks to overpower the other by threats and to win over the assembled multitude by emotional appeal, by harangues, and by warnings.

The first chapter has already shown that more is at stake in debate than quarrelling leaders alone, and that looking for ‘a sustained, disciplined consideration of circumstances and their implications’ betrays unwarranted assumptions about how debate is represented and neglects its performance in the narrative. On the other hand, it is notable that Finley came to such a conclusion in a work largely devoted to the *Odyssey*, where debate occupies a far less central role in the poem’s story and narrative dynamics. Instead, studies on storytelling dominate Odyssean scholarship: this chapter puts the focus back on debate and attempts to explain just why its presence is far less noticeable.

Though scenes of Achaean assemblies in the *Iliad* tend to valorize, in some measure at least, dissent from authority, at least two figures remain largely opposed to that strategy, Agamemnon and Odysseus: Agamemnon attempts to forestall opposition to his authority by overt displays of

¹ Finley (2002), 106. Finley’s claim—that nowhere in Homer do the Greeks deliberate in the modern sense of a sustained rational discussion—particularly exercises Farenga (2006)—at pp. 10, 32, 66 and 112. Schofield (1986) shows that rational discussion (*euboulia*) does emerge as an important virtue of heroic society: but his analysis is restricted to the *Iliad*. 
his power; Odysseus’ relationship to debate is far more complex and nuanced. He prevents a ‘nóstos beyond fate’ in the Achaean assembly of book 2 (Il. 2.155); he leads the embassy to Achilles in book 9 (Il. 9.192), circumspectly omits Agamemnon’s demand of obedience (9.158–61), and passes over the progress made in the negotiations when he reports back (9.677–92); and he mediates in the debate between Achilles and Agamemnon in book 19, holding up Achilles’ drive to war in the process. His way with words fits Achilles’ initial rejection of Agamemnon’s offer: ‘I hate like the gates of Hades the man who says one thing but keeps another in his heart.’ Odysseus’ rhetoric of consensus threatens Achilles’ swiftness to—and the Iliad’s valorization of—dissent.

Odysseus finds himself much more at home in his narrative tradition: more important to the success of this narrative than debating in the public assembly is the hero’s ability to spin a yarn in the quasi-private setting of the swineherd’s hut or royal palace. This shift in the style of discourse that is valorized, and the kind of location that comes into focus, has profound consequences for the way debate is conceived.
and represented. Viewed through Odysseus' gaze, dissent no longer appears as a profitable means of negotiating crisis: it is, instead, a source of the problem that places the community, with the household at its centre, under threat. Thus, what is usually regarded as the *Odyssey*’s playfulness is in fact deadly serious: debates fracture along partisan lines; detractors from the *Odyssey*’s tale of family reunion are marginalized and silenced; the contest of battle amounts to slaughter behind closed doors. At the same time this highly paradoxical narrative frequently lays bare its highly manipulative strategy, revelling in its suppression of dissenting voices even as it challenges the rival Iliadic tradition.

This chapter explores the *Odyssey*’s more problematic vision of dissent in four parts. The first section examines the assemblies that take place in Ithaca. Although four assemblies are mentioned, only two are treated in any detail, which already demonstrates the narrative’s different approach to debate, borne out by their frame, structure and performance. Though the narrative appears to concede the stage to malcontents and gestures towards openness, it carefully frames those dissenting voices and shows little interest in the assembly as an institution of social cohesion. Section 2 considers a startling difference from the *Iliad* in

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7 Slatkin (2005), 316 usefully summarizes the task facing the *Odyssey* thus: ‘How are the cherished Iliadic ideals of loyalty and effective leadership to be conjured in a poem centering on Odysseus, given his variegated history—especially if that history includes traditions about Odysseus as the sole survivor of his band of men . . . , who is both unsuccessful in protecting his companions from destruction and . . . is responsible for the destruction of the youth of his city? . . . The *Odyssey* thus, against real odds, has the task of making Odysseus into a character with whom its audience sympathizes and whom it wants to see succeed . . . To this end, the poem narrates his journey homeward and depicts its destination in such a way as to generate in the audience a shared stake in Odysseus’ hope of return.’

8 Though the relationship between the two Homeric poems has already been raised in Act I, introduction, n. 1 above, and a methodology for approaching them set out, it is worthwhile returning to that question at the beginning of this chapter, given the high degree to which the *Odyssey* intersects with the *Iliad*. The general methodological approach remains the same: particular story-patterns, themes and word units resonate through a wide epic tradition, which includes the Iliadic and Odyssean narrative traditions. Yet, given that the *Odyssey* at least seems to play off the *Iliad* more directly, this chapter will be concerned to draw out the significance of that interplay. It does not find it necessary, however, to posit that either poem plays off an exact textual version of the other. Pucci (1987), 18 is less worried by the distortions of approaching this relationship through a literary lens: ‘Clearly, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* presume each other, border and limit each other, to such an extent that one, as it were, *writes* the other’ (my italics). Currie (2006) also analyses the epic tradition in terms of allusion between specific texts.

9 They occur at *Od*. 2.6–257; 16.342–408; 20.240–7; 24.421–64.
the way in which assemblies are talked about, an issue that becomes particularly acute when the hero himself takes over the telling of his tale. The narration of debate has the effect of consolidating authority along with the concomitant strategy of suppressing dissent. Section 3 focuses on the end-game of book 22, when Odysseus and his son meet the suitors head-on in battle. The battle scene serves as a useful extreme case for thinking about the general representation of contest within this epic. In its competition with the rival Iliadic tradition, the Odyssey’s narrative succeeds in marshalling the forces to rally behind Odysseus and reduces the opportunity for remaining neutral. The final section reconsiders the Odyssey’s renowned self-reflexivity in the light of the enquiry into dissent. Divine assemblies serve to frame the action of the poem. By being so explicitly related to the poem’s structure, they expose the constructedness of this particular account.

1. HOW TO RENDER DISSENT AS ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (ODYSSEY 2, 24)

In contrast to the Iliad, only two human assemblies are represented in any detail in the Odyssey, in books 2 and 24.\(^\text{10}\) As a result of their relative positions at the onset and closure of the poem, they frame the events that take place on Ithaca and invite reflection on them. Moreover, neither assembly seems to achieve a great deal. Telemachus ostensibly calls the first in order to complain of the suitors’ disgraceful behaviour in his home; but he cannot, or does not, resolve that matter in this institution. Nor do the suitors form any kind of cohesive opposition through their collective dissent. The last assembly is convoked at a time when rumour of the suitors’ deaths is abroad, but again the assembly serves to mark the disunity of the group. Thus, the Odyssean assembly is shown to be incapable of managing dissent properly, and resolution occurs in battle instead. Unlike the Achaean assemblies in the Iliad, this pair of assemblies does not open ‘a space in which the joint efforts of

\(^{10}\) Using the term ἀγωγὴ provides six instances of assembly—two in Phaeacia (Od. 8.5–46, 109–256; cf. 7.44) as well as the four on Ithaca already mentioned in the previous note. But all are mentioned only in passing, with the exception of the first and last Ithacan assembly.
shepherd and group are co-ordinated with the aim of ensuring the success of social life'.

Instead they expose the inadequacy of formal debate as a means for containing and making use of opposing voices.

**It’s not a public matter**

The first Ithacan assembly establishes various points of contact with the assemblies from the *Iliad*. Most obviously, the setting-up of the assembly (Od. 2.6–9) exactly matches the lines with which Agamemnon convokes the assembly of *Iliad* 2 (Il. 2.50–3). Not only does this suggest a common formula for convoking an assembly; it also establishes a connection between the two scenes of assembly. But each operates differently within its narrative. In the *Iliad* the elaborate convocation of the assembly to some degree relies on the precedent established by Achilles prior to it: the more formal tokens of its establishment exist precisely because one has already taken place and established the assembly as an institution that may accommodate dissent. That is not the case in the *Odyssey*: this assembly is the first for the Ithacans. One effect of the resonant pattern triggered by the elaborate formula is that the audience have yet to ascertain what the assembly means to the Ithacans.

Another point of comparison occurs between the modes of the two institutionalizing acts. In the first Achaean assembly of the *Iliad*, Achilles calls the people to assembly after Hera had put it into his mind (Il. 1.55). Here, Telemachus calls the people to assembly on the advice of Athena. I noted above the prominence of Athena in the opening episodes of the *Iliad*, when she intervenes to prevent Achilles from striking down Agamemnon and to prompt Odysseus into restoring order—both times at the behest of Hera. Her role in the *Odyssey,*


12 αὐτὰρ ὁ κηρύσσας λαγυφθόγγοις κέλευσε | κηρύσσας άγορήθε κάρη κομόωντας Ἀχαιός | οἱ μὲν ἐκήρυσσον, τοὶ δὲ ἐγείροντο μάλ' ὀδικα, Od. 2.6–8 = Il. 2.50–2 (with αἶψα ἐκ τοῦ αὐτάρ ὁ ὑπ’ ἡλίου ἐκ τῆς Αθηνᾶς τῆς ἐπιστολῆς).

13 Haft (1992), 228–9 compares the speeches of Agamemnon and Telemachus.

14 Knowledge of the assembly experience from the broader Epic tradition, such as the *Iliad*, could play a part in that assessment.

15 Il. 1.194–218; 2.156–82.
then, comes as no surprise, especially given her close association with Odysseus, of which the *Iliad* also shows awareness. The manner and effect of her role, however, are rather different. In the *Iliad* Athena acts as a conduit for Hera, whose interventions elicit little comment from the Homeric narrator and have ambiguous results. Athena’s role in the first Ithacan assembly, on the other hand, is extensively developed. She broaches the subject in consultation with Zeus (*Od*. 1.90), before appearing to Telemachus in the form of Mentes (1.271–3):

> 'εἰ δὲ ἂγε νῦν ἕννει καὶ ἐμῶν ἐμπάξεο μῦθον
> αὐρίον εἰς ἄγορὴν καλέσας ἥρωας Ἀχαιόν
> μῦθον πέφρασε πάσι, θεοὶ δ᾽ ἐπὶ μάρτυροι ἔστων.'

‘Come, now, pay close attention to me and fulfil my instructions. Tomorrow call the heroes of the Achaean to assembly, declaring your word to all, and let the gods be your witnesses.’

First, the level of Athena’s guidance may be noted: she carefully stage-manages the first Ithacan assembly and directs its outcome, *even before it takes place*. Athena not only determines the agenda of the assembly; she also directs its outcome. Second, she does so in a way that underpins Telemachus’ authority: he is to ‘declare his word to all’. The word here is *μῦθος*, that authoritative speech act used, as noted above, for denoting both Hector’s advice before the Trojans and Agamemnon’s dismissal of Chryses. Whereas Agamemnon fails to enforce his word due to the actions of a god, Telemachus is invited to declare his word *by a god*. The lines that follow his formal convocation of the assembly show Telemachus in a similar light. He enters carrying a spear; Athena showers grace over him; all the people gaze in wonder at him; he sits on his father’s throne; the elders make way for him (*Od*. 2.9–14).

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16 Given Athena’s closeness to Odysseus, as is demonstrated by her involvement in both of his Iliadic achievements in the assembly of book 2, his night adventure of book 10, and the foot-race in book 23, then we may—retrospectively, at least—feel anxiety about her tug on Achilles’ hair. Achilles takes it as a sign of her closeness to him (*Il*. 1.201–5), but its ultimate fulfilment comes with the death of his best friend, Patroclus, and his own.

17 In each case Hera responds to a crisis in the Achaean camp, but fails to resolve the matter conclusively: Hom. *Il.* 1.194–6, 2.155–65; cf. 1.55–6.

18 See Ch.1, n. 119 above.

19 Agamemnon’s ‘mighty word’ (*κρατερός μῦθος*, *Il*. 1.25). See Ch.1, sec.1 above.
Everything is done to underline his authority. Only the interruption by a third party threatens the peace: enter Aegyptius.

Just as the ground has been prepared for Telemachus to speak, the narrative springs a surprise: an unheralded character is introduced as the first speaker. Unlike all the other institutionalizing agents who convocate assemblies in the *Iliad*, Telemachus does not speak first. The scenario brings to mind *Iliad* 2, where the many narrative dislocations served to destabilize Agamemnon’s authority.

Moreover, the narrator’s lengthy description of old man Aegyptius recalls the *Iliad*’s difficulty of incorporating Thersites into its narrative body (*Od*. 2.15–24):

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τοίς δ’ ἐπειδ’ ἵρως Αἰγύπτιος ἡρχ’ ἀγρεῦειν,
δό δὴ γῆρας κυφός ἔην καὶ μνήμη ἤθη.
καὶ γὰρ τοῦ φίλου νιός ἀμ’ ἀντιθέω Ὀδυσσῆι
Τριακοσίων εἰς ἐπιστὸν ἐβή κοίλης ἐνι γημαίνιν,
Ἀντίφος αἰχμητῆς· τὸν δ’ ἄγριος ἐκταῖνε Κύκλωψ
ἐν σπητὶ γλαφυρῷ, πύματον δ’ ὀπλάσατο δώριον.
τρεῖς δὲ οἱ ἄλλοι ἔσαν, καὶ ὁ μὲν μνηστήραν ὀμιλεῖ,
Εὐρίνομος, δύο δ’ αἰὲν ἔχον πατρῴα ἔργα·
ἀλλ’ οὖθ’ ὅς τοῦ λήθετ’ ὀδύρομον καὶ ἀχεύον.
τοῦ δ’ γε δάκρυ χέων ἀγαρῆσατο καὶ μετέειπε·
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The first to speak to them was the hero Aegyptius, who was hunched over in his old age and knew countless things. And—since his dear son went to Ilion rich with horses with god-like Odysseus in hollow ships, Antiphus the spearman; and wild Cyclops slew him in his deep cave, and the last whom he made his dinner; and he had three other sons, one of whom, Eurynomos, was companion to the suitors, while the other two looked after their father’s affairs; but he did not forget Antiphus, lamenting and crying for him—it was in tears for him now that he addressed the assembly and spoke.

The lengthy narratorial description offers several reasons for thinking that Aegyptius presents a similar challenge to the authority of the king as Thersites had done, though one with a great deal more potential. First, Aegyptius is not only one of the elders of the community; he is also a ‘hero’

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20. ‘Exceptionally, the first speaker of the assembly is not its convener’: de Jong (2001), 47.
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(ηρως), the highly marked term that evokes the glory of a past era. As a figure who ‘knew countless things’, he is in fact more of a Calchas than a Thersites. Second, his description resonates with the language used of two powerful figures: the detail that ‘he did not forget’ his son recalls Zeus’ assurance to Athena (made just prior to this scene) that he has not forgotten Odysseus; his shedding of tears is a formula used of Agamemnon in *Iliad* 9, and thus evokes the shepherd of the people weeping for the predicament of his flock. It leaves an impression of a speaker of some authority, who has good grounds to speak—not at all like a Thersites, who could be literally beaten from the speaking arena.

Aegyptius is weeping for his son. The phrase ‘mourning for him’ suggests that his son is dead; indeed, an explanatory clause starting καὶ γάρ supplies the detail: ‘And, for his dear son had been killed, he wept for him and spoke thus.’ In this way, the γάρ-clause acts something like a parenthesis. But there is more: Aegyptius has four sons, of whom two were living with their father, one was living it up with the suitors, while the fourth, the one for whom he sheds tears, was no longer living at all. This son, Antiphus, having gone to Troy with Odysseus, has been eaten by the Cyclops. The detail is remarkable, advertising the briefest trailer of future events and posing some pretty awkward questions for the narrative to come: how did Antiphus end up as someone’s dinner? And what has gone wrong with Odysseus’ return home for this to have occurred? With Aegyptius’ concern for his son uppermost in his mind as he rises to speak, the assembly threatens to stage an almighty challenge to the son of Odysseus—as had been the case in the first Achaean assembly of the *Iliad*, when Achilles had sponsored a voice in dissent of Agamemnon.

21 See Act I, intro., n. 18 above.
22 ‘How could I forget godlike Odysseus?’ (πώς ἂν ἔπειτ’ Ὀδυσσής ἐγώ θείου λαθοίμην’, Od. 1.65).
23 ‘Among them Agamemnon stood crying’ (ἀν δ’ Ἀγαμέμνων οἵ ἵστατο δάκρυ χέων, Il. 9.13–14).
24 Heubeck, West, and Hainsworth (1988), 130 n. 17 comment: ‘the following parenthesis should probably be taken as giving the reason why he was first to speak, not as an explanation of [line] 16.’
25 No doubt the Homeric narrator can risk jolting his audience like this because Odysseus’ encounter with Cyclops was so well known. For the popularity of Cyclops in art, and its independence from Homer, see Snodgrass (1998), 89–100. For folklore in the *Odyssey* more generally, see Page (1973). For the usual tactic employed by the Homeric narrator of careful preparation, see S. Richardson (1990), 132–5.
But there is a crucial point to make: Aegyptius does not know any of this information, which has caused commentators some anxiety:26 ‘According to the scholia these lines were athetized, presumably by Aristarchus; we do not know why, but these details are a slight distraction and we need to remind ourselves that we are being told more than Aegyptius himself or anyone else in Ithaca knew.’ These lines are a slight distraction and we need to remind ourselves that we are being told more. Far from presenting a challenge to authority, therefore, this narratorial description invites the audience to play along with the tale being told and become complicit with it. The gloss affords a glimpse of an alternative story that would tell of Odysseus’ wanderings in chronological sequence from a third-person perspective in which the victim is named and his loss explored through his father. But the Odyssey has another way of narrating that episode, through the eyes of the hero himself. And, when he recounts the events of Cyclops’ cave, Odysseus conspicuously avoids naming Antiphon or any of his other companions.27 In the case of this first Ithacan assembly, the prospect of dissent is introduced in such a way as to threaten the story that is going to be told.

*If only Aegyptius knew...* Yet, when Aegyptius speaks, he doesn’t mention the fate of his son because he doesn’t know. The parenthesis shuts him out. Far from challenging Odysseus’ son when he speaks, Aegyptius articulates a series of questions that in fact provide a framework for Telemachus’ response.28 Thus Aegyptius’ tears, shed in ignorance of his son’s fate, serve to draw a connection to Telemachus, tearful and ignorant of his father’s fate. In addition, Aegyptius further discloses that no assembly had taken place since Odysseus’ departure.29 Not only does he fail to ask the difficult questions; he also suggests the reason why he doesn’t: the Ithacan people have not been accustomed to debating

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27 Odysseus names only three of his companions, Polites, Elpenor and Eurylochus, each of whom is in some way to blame for his own downfall—according to Odysseus. S. Richardson (1990), 100 observes the ‘curious’ incident of the omission of Antiphon’s name when Odysseus narrates his adventures: he accounts for it by pointing to its relevance here for Antiphous’ father. For the importance of naming in relation to Odysseus, see Goldhill (1991), 1–5.
28 Od. 2.30–2, 42–4.
29 Heubeck, West, and Hainsworth (1988), 131 nn. 26–7 interpret the fact that no assembly had been held for nearly twenty years as indicating ‘that the poet regarded the institution as peripheral to the political organization of Ithaca’ (my italics). See also Scully (1990), 101, with bibliography (pp. 195–6, nn. 5, 6).
issues in public without their leader. This is a community still very much dependent on its leader and lacking the institutional security of the kind that an assembly should provide—and that has been seen actualized over the course of the *Iliad*.

Given the potential disruption Aegyptius could have caused, it is no wonder that Odysseus’ son is pleased with the old man’s speech (*Od.* 2.45). In fact, the narrative frame carefully identifies Telemachus with his people. As he enters the ἄγορή, ‘all the people held him in admiration’; after he speaks, ‘pity for him gripped all the people’. A consensus dominates the beginning of this assembly, as if Telemachus’ concerns exactly matched the concerns of the people.

In fact, though, Telemachus states the contrary. In answer to Aegyptius’ series of questions regarding the reason for their gathering, Telemachus announces that he has called an assembly ‘not out of any public concern’ (*Od.* 2.44) but for his own need: he is looking to find some relief from the suitors who are eating him out of house and home. Ideally, private and public affairs would match, particularly if the private dealings of the ruling house were the issue. Yet, not only does Telemachus’ formulation of the assembly’s business sound provocative—private need is expressed in opposition to public concerns—it is also difficult to ascertain the level and nature of public support. In spite of the narrator’s passing comment that all the people pitied Telemachus, what the people think, or even who they are, remains something of a mystery as the assembly progresses. So too, therefore, does the public value of this assembly.

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30 ‘Ithaka has had no civic assembly, no ruler, and therefore no “government” for twenty years. And one may well imagine that it had little enough before and will have little enough in the future.’ Halverson (1985), 138. Elsewhere, Halverson argues that political interpretations of the *Odyssey* are unwarranted, since ‘in fact there is no throne, no office of king, indeed no real Ithakan state’: (1986), 119.

31 τῶν δ’ ἄρα πάντες λαοὶ ἐπερχόμενον θυγάτερο, 2.13.

32 ὁκτὼς δ’ ἐλε ἄνω ἄπαντα, 2.81. See Haubold (2000), 111.

33 He addresses the assembled group using a series of second-person plural verbs: e.g. νεμεσισθήσῃ, 2.64; αἰδεάσθητε, 2.65; ὑποδεῖλατε, 2.66; σχέσθησθε φίλοι 2.70, etc.

34 Scully (1990), 103 draws an interesting comparison to Odysseus: ‘When responding to Alkinoos’ question: “Tell me your land [gaiα], your district [dēmos], and your city [polis]” (8.555), Odysseus ignores the question about polis, choosing instead to speak about his island . . . [and] continuing his reply, he speaks only of the oikos.’ According to Scully, this is part of the *Odyssey’s* general reticence in citing Ithaca as a polis (p. 104).

35 Three suitors speak in the assembly, but just how representative they are of the people is open to question, particularly when both Telemachus and Mentor appeal over the heads
It is a far cry from the circumstances in which the first assembly of the *Iliad* was established, when Achilles called an assembly on behalf of the whole community precisely as a response to a wilful assertion of the king’s.

After Aegyptius’ opening speech, nothing is heard of him again. Instead two speakers rise to defend Telemachus and the house of Odysseus; three suitors make their complaints, two of whom, Antinous and Eurymachus, turn out to be the most prominent members of this group. The sheer number of speakers already implies a degree of social cohesion lacking within the community. Furthermore, the community fractures along highly partisan lines, those with Telemachus, and those against him.36

Those with Telemachus are Halitherses, the bird-interpreter, and Mentor, overseer of Odysseus’ household. Both are introduced by the formula, ‘with good intentions for them he addressed the assembly and said’ (δ ἀφιν έὐφρονέων ἀγορήσατο καὶ μετέειπε, 2.160 = 2.228), a formulaic line which is also used to introduce Nestor’s conciliatory speech in *Iliad* 1 and which resonates more broadly with Nestor’s public role.37 Telemachus’ supporters, then, gain sanction through association with a character whose kindly words consistently aim at maintaining, or restoring, group unity.38

Yet, like Aegyptius before him, Halitherses is introduced as a ‘hero’ (2.157). The fact that no fewer than *two* characters address the Ithacan assembly as heroes suggests a context very unlike that of the assembly in the *Iliad*, in which debate was instituted as an essential part of the well-being of the community.39 Instead, the tag of ‘hero’ suggests an

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36 de Jong (2001), 45–6 provides a useful summary of the assembly’s rigidly oppositional format. She comments: ‘the structure of the exchange is largely irregular, which conveys the heated atmosphere’ (p. 45).

37 ll. 1.253. Of the fifteen instances of this formulaic line in Homeric poetry, no fewer than five introduce Nestor (ll. 1.253; 2.78; 7.326; 9.95; Od. 24.53). From all the other attributions, only Halistherses is introduced in this way more than once (the other occasion is at Od. 24.453).

38 de Jong (2001), 57 notes how Mentor’s speech is ‘plugged’ by the narrator’s commendatory speech introduction of l. 228.

39 No character addresses an assembled body in the *Iliad* as a hero, with the exception of Agamemnon in book 2, when he is clearly trying to pursue his own goal of taking Troy.
individual unfettered by social ties, acting independent of, and in opposition to, the communal institution.  

Similarly, Halitherses speaks after Zeus has sent two eagles who, ‘upon reaching the middle of the multi-voiced assembly’ (ὅτε δὴ μέσην ἀγορὰν πολύφημον ἰκέςθην, 2.150), tore at each other. Although Zeus frequently sends bird signs in the *Iliad*, none occur in the context of an assembly. The only comparable scene is Poulydamus’ interpretation of the divine sign, when a snake is dropped by the eagle ‘in the middle’ (μέσῳ δ’ ἐν, *Iliad* 12.206) of the Trojans—but that lacked any formal institutional context. Unlike Poulydamas, moreover, Halitherses speaks from a position of unassailable authority: his interpretation matches the reason the narrator has already given us, that Zeus has sent his eagles in support of Telemachus. There is no room for ambiguity here; this is no seer speaking in enigmatic terms from the sidelines.

Just as Halitherses speaks up in the assembly to underline his (and Zeus’) support of Telemachus’ rebuff of Antinous, so Mentor speaks on behalf of Telemachus’ rebuke of Eurymachus. The narrator even more closely identifies Mentor with Odysseus, as guardian of the household and Odysseus’ ‘companion’ (ἐταῖρος, *Odyssey* 2.225). Later, Odysseus will narrate the fate of his companions, though their culpability in the loss of their homecoming has already been introduced in the poem’s opening lines; while we have even briefly heard of the fate of one such

that day: *Iliad* 2.110–41. See Haubold (2000), 55–8, with n. 47. See Act I, intro., n. 18 above.

40 The success of Odysseus’ story is reliant upon him ridding himself precisely of this bond between leader and λαοῖ, most of whom he will end up killing: Haubold (2000), 126–43.

41 In the assembly of *Iliad* 2 Odysseus himself relates an embedded prophecy: Haft (1992). But the two assemblies are very different. In fact, that assembly of *Iliad* 2 in some way foreshadows the problems of assembling in the *Odyssey*. Its prophecy (delivered by Odysseus!) is coming to fulfilment.

42 See Ch.1, n. 121 above.

43 The narrator is unequivocal in the condemnation of the companions: ‘Odysseus, though he desired it greatly, couldn’t save his companions, for they died by their own recklessness, the fools’, (ἀλλ’ ὁδ’ ὁς ἐτάρους ἔφράσατο, ἐνεμεύς περ’ | αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέραν ἀγαθοθαλήσαν δόλων, | νήπιοι, *Odyssey* 1.6–8). For the phrase ‘they died by their own recklessness’, see Ch. 3, n. 132 below. According to de Jong (2001), 230, νήπιοι ‘belongs to the character-language’—which makes its appearance in narrator-text even more striking. Cf. Griffin (1983), 126; de Jong (1987), 86–7. It is striking that the narrator’s judgement, so sparingly used in the *Iliad*, is immediately called in to use in the *Odyssey*. 

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significantly, however, the first sight of one of Odysseus’ companions portrayed in the narrative is not a member of the troubled group whom we are yet to see, but a loyal retainer of the household. The narrator carefully prepares us for assessing that group’s demise by first demonstrating the service of a true companion of Odysseus, whose form is even regularly assumed by Athena. Like Halitherses before him, Mentor addresses his speech to the Ithacans in general: this, however, apparently does not mean the whole group. In concluding his petition Mentor delivers his advice to the ‘rest of the people’ (νῦν δὲ ἄλλῳ δήμῳ, 2.239) alone, by complaining that they all sit there in silence while the suitors carry on with their antisocial behaviour (2.240–1). Therefore, while appearing to direct his speech towards everyone, Mentor appeals over the heads of the suitors to the rest of the community, who are imagined as standing by and watching the events unfold. There is no attempt to engage the suitors in debate; rather, Mentor places emphasis on the broader community as judges of the events on Ithaca. This assembly does not promote a collective enterprise for resolving the crisis in the community; instead, it sidelines the suitors and invites judgement to be cast upon them.

The marginalization of the suitors is confirmed by their representation in this assembly. At the end of Telemachus’ first speech in the assembly, the narrator comments (2.80–1):

οὐς φάτο χωόμενος, ποτὲ δὲ σκῆπτρον βάλε γαίη,
δάκρυ’ ἀναπήσας. οἶκτος δ’ ἐλε λαϊν ἀπαντα.

So he spoke in anger, and he threw the sceptre to the ground, bursting out into tears. And pity held the whole people.

While the line ‘he threw the sceptre to the ground’ (ποτὲ δὲ σκῆπτρον βάλε γαίη) may well resonate within a broader epic tradition, in which assembly scenes are similarly disrupted, this is one case in which a

44 Antiphus (2.19–20)—though he is not labelled as a companion at this point.
45 See e.g. 2.268; 22.206; 24.548.
46 ‘Hear me now, Ithacans’ (κέκλυτε δὴ νῦν μεν’, 2.229); cf. 161. κέκλυτε is the address used by Antenor and Priam, in their appeals to the Trojans: see Ch.1, nn. 108, 109 above.
47 This strategy mirrors Telemachus’ opening gambit, in which he tries to drive a wedge between the Ithacans and the suitors by talking about the latter to the former: see de Jong (2001), 48.
comparison to the *Iliad*—or at least an Iliadic tradition in which Achilles features prominently—may be worthwhile, for the language and image of these lines powerfully resonates with the key moment in the first Achaean assembly when Achilles expressed his utter disaffection with Agamemnon and the group by throwing down the sceptre in their midst. Telemachus’ act, then, replays the Iliadic Achilles’ symbolic act of dissent. But the association of Telemachus with the figure of dissent from the rival tradition is immediately corrected by the *Odyssey*: after throwing down the sceptre, Telemachus bursts into tears. With his message of restraint and compromise together with his youthfulness, he does not *really* make an Achilles after all. Nevertheless, the resonant pattern that has been established serves another function too. Picking up the sceptre in the *Iliad* was Nestor. Yet here, in the *Odyssey*, the next speaker exploits the crisis by presenting a story that is potentially disruptive of the narrative: the honey-tongued voice of a Nestor is replaced by the hectoring Antinous. If the audience *were* expecting a figure of compromise, the suitor’s words would sound out of key from the very beginning of his speech when he labels Telemachus ‘a lofty orator’ (δυσαγόρη, 2.85).

First of the suitors to speak, Antinous, presents the goal of their enterprise: marriage to Penelope. In his portrait of this lady, he paints a picture of Penelope as tricky, weaving (and unweaving) tapestries. Significantly, this view of the female threat to male dominance is, in fact, the norm in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus and his men find themselves in constant danger from female figures, such as Circe, the Sirens, Calypso, even Nausicaa; Agamemnon provides the potential paradigm for Odysseus—murdered on his

48 ‘So spoke the son of Peleus, and he threw to the ground the sceptre studded with golden nails, and sat himself down’ (ὡς φάτο Πηλείδης, ποτί δὲ σκέπτρον βάλε γαϊὴν | χρυσέως ἴλους πεπαρμένον, ἔξετο δ’ αὐτοῦ, *II*. 1.245–6). See Jaeger (1939), 27.

49 Again, we need not posit an actual allusion to the *Iliad* here, since it makes sense for a figure of reconciliation, such as Nestor, to speak after such an act. Knowledge of the assembly experience from the broader epic tradition, such as the *Iliad*, could play a part in that assessment.

50 This contrasts to the narrator’s comment that all are sympathetic (2.81). Antinous’ very name already marks him out as an enemy of reason: he is ‘Anti-mind’: N. Austin (1975), 206.

51 On ἴβαινα, see Rutherford (1992), 151 (on *Od*. 19.139–56) especially for this word’s association with trickery.
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return home by his wife. Antinous’ depiction of Penelope, therefore, correlates with the narrative’s presentation of women elsewhere. The suitors have a genuine case to present: Penelope is a tricky woman;52 the wooing of a woman can be the subject of epic song.53

Along these lines, recalling the language used to denote the Greek forces at Troy, the suitors consistently present themselves as engaging in a heroic endeavour to rank alongside the Iliadic tradition of the war at Troy. Antinous refers to the suitors as ‘the sons of the Achaeans’ (νίς Ἀχαιόν, 2.115) or even as ‘the suitors of the Achaeans’ (μυηστήρεσ Ἀχαιόν, 2.87)!54 The next suitor to speak, Eurymachus, goes still further (2.196–207):

‘οί δὲ γάμον τεύχονται καὶ ἀρτυνέουσιν ἔδινα πολλά μᾶλ’, ὅσα ἐδικεῖ φίλης ἐπὶ παιδὸς ἐπεσθαί. οὐ γὰρ πρὶν παίσασθαι ὄνομα νίς Ἀχαιῶν μνησίοις ἀργαλέης, ἐπεὶ οὐ τινα δείδημεν ἔμπης, οὔτ’ οὐν Τῆλέμαχον, μάλα περ πολύμυθον ἑνώτα· οὔτε θεοπροφίς ἐμπαξώμεθα, ἣν σὺ, γεραιέ, μιθέαι ἀκράιατον, ἀπεχθάναι δ’ ἐτι μάλλον. χρήματα δ’ αὐτὲ κακῶς βεβρώσαται, οὔδε ποτ’ ἵσα ἐσεται, ὅφρα κεν ἢ γε διατρῆταιν Ἀχαιών ὡν γάμον· ἡμεῖς δ’ αὐτὸ ποτιδέγμνοι ἡματα πάντα εἶνεκα τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐρυδαίνομεν, οὔδε μετ’ ἄλλας ἐρχόμεθα, ἂς ἐπιεικές ὀπιεῖμεν ἐστίν ἐκάστῳ.’

‘Let him urge his mother to go back to her father’s, and they will arrange the marriage and sort out the wedding presents, many of them, as is fitting for a beloved daughter. For I don’t think that the sons of the Achaeans will give up on their harsh courtship, since we don’t fear anyone and certainly not Telemachus though he speaks a lot. Nor do we care for any prophecy, which you, old man, may tell us, which won’t be accomplished, and will make you even more hated. And his possessions will be eaten away badly, nor will there be any compensation, while she delays the Achaeans for her marriage, and while, we

52 Recent scholars have indeed unveiled a tricky Penelope. See Murnaghan (1987a), 118–47; Winkler (1990a); Katz (1991); Thalmann (1998), 193. Felson-Rubin (1994) shows how Agamemnon (typically) misreads Penelope as rather simplistically a faithful woman.

53 If the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women is anything to go by, in which we see the long list of Helen’s suitors. See R. Hunter, ed. (2005). Cf. Pind. 9.111–18; Hdt. 6.126–30.

54 Cf. 2. 90, 106, 112, 128. Eurymachus: νίς Ἀχαιόν, 2.198; cf. 204.
waiting in expectation every day, strive for the sake of excellence, nor do we go after any others, who would be fitting for any of us to marry.’

Eurymachus’ description of how they ‘strive for the sake of ἀρετή’ (2.206), in their desire not ‘to cease from ‘painful suitoring’ (παύσε οθαν...μυηστός ἀργαλέης, 2.199), resonates with the language of the Iliad. In the Iliad the adjective ἀργαλέως qualifies war, strife, fear, and so on. Its application to ‘suitoring’ is not as surprising as it may at first seem, given that even in the Iliad many characters relate the fighting at Troy to a battle over a woman. Here, by reworking Iliadic language and motifs, Eurymachus aligns the suitors with the Achaean group fighting at Troy. From his perspective we get a glimpse of the suitors displaying their heroic credentials in an Iliadic guise. At another level, however, the comparison fails to hold. It is a particularly narrow reading of the Iliad that reduces it to a battle over a woman; it is equally true that it is somewhat perverse to accept the suitors’ characterization of themselves as the ‘sons of the Achaeans’. Because of the way in which this narrative has already marginalized the suitors, the audience are invited to see through their game and reject the presumption that they are the equivalent of an Iliadic group; by doing so, these voices of dissent are rejected and their suppression sanctioned.

This is an important point. The Odyssey’s display of its contest with a rival epic tradition is no idle play: its playfulness conceals, or rather defers, the question of what is really at stake. The Iliadic resonances serve to distance the suitors and mask the Odyssey’s aggressive persuasion

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56 See esp. Achilles, as he makes explicit the connection between Agamemnon taking his woman and Paris’ rape of Helen (II. 9.337–43).

57 The suitors have already been marginalized authoritatively by Athena, who calls them ἄβριζοντες ὑπερήφανος, 1.227: they display a marked lack of hospitality to the new arrival (Athena in disguise) and belated curiosity only after (s)he has gone. Similarly, Slatkin (2005), 319 observes that, while the suitors think they are entitled to court Penelope, ‘the poem puts its audience in the position of knowing that Odysseus is very much alive, thus reinforcing our sense of the suitors’ behavior as inappropriate and pernicious’.
of its audience. The suitors find themselves in the wrong narrative. They are wooing a woman who already has a man.\textsuperscript{58}

The suitors’ repeated rejections of Telemachus’ attempts at mediation serve to underline their obdurate self-regard. In marked contrast to the cohesive support for Odysseus, they consistently represent themselves as individuals contesting for the right to marry Penelope: a different suitor speaks each time; individually they try only to silence the previous speaker, and fail to appeal to the people. In the words of Johannes Haubold, the suitors ‘resist social formation’.\textsuperscript{59} In fact, it is left to one last and otherwise anonymous suitor, Leocritus, to dissolve the institution of assembly.\textsuperscript{60} Even the suitors aren’t that interested in dissent, at least not in the \textit{Iliad}’s terms of institutional progress.\textsuperscript{61} They comprise a group badly disunited and radically marginalized from sympathy.

So far our analysis of the first Ithacan assembly has shown its utter lack of effectiveness: the debate fractures along partisan lines; opinions become entrenched; prospects of resolving the crisis are shattered. While sharing some of these features, the opening Achaean assembly in the \textit{Iliad} demonstrated the need for and value of dissent, even if it also explored its problems. No such valorization is evident here. Instead, it is precisely those struggling to consolidate the authority of Odysseus’ family who receive sympathetic treatment from the narrative’s representation of debate: the dissenting voices are configured as the problem.

One proposal is made, which gets to the heart of the matter. In his speech Antinous champions an immediate, open decision: ‘send away your mother and command her to wed whomever her father bids’ (‘μητέρα σήν ἀπόσεμψον, ἰσωρωθή δὲ μν γαρέσαι | τῷ ὅτε τε πατήρ κέλεσαι’, 2.113–14). But the son of Odysseus avoids taking up the challenge at this time. Instead, very deliberately he defers contest.\textsuperscript{62}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} On the ‘difficulty of choosing between “a man”, “the man” or even “man”’ as an adequate translation of ἀνδρα— the first word of the Odyssey— see Goldhill (1991), 1–5 (quotation from p. 1); cf. Slatkin (1986), 262–3; Kahane (1992).
\item \textsuperscript{59} Haubold (2000), 111.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Leocritus appears only once more, killed at the hands of Telemachus (22.294).
\item \textsuperscript{61} Haubold (2000), 111. Cf. Ritoók (1999).
\item \textsuperscript{62} Telemachus refuses to throw his mother out of his home with his father still possibly alive, especially since he would have to pay back Ikarios and would provoke his mother’s furies (2.130–45).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
That is not all. While it is left to a suitor to dissolve the assembly, Telemachus has already introduced a new narrative direction (209–13):

‘Εὐρύμαχος ἦδε καὶ ἄλλοι, ὅσοι μνημήρες ἀγανοί,
ταῦτα μὲν οὐχ ὕμεας ἐτῇ λίσσαμει οὐδ’ ἀγορεύων·
ηδὴ γὰρ τὰ ἱσασι θεοὶ καὶ πάντες Ἀχαιοὶ.
ἀλλ’ ἄγε μοι δότε νῆα θοήν καὶ εἰκόν’ ἑταϊρῶν.’

‘Eurymachus and all you other suitors, I no longer entreat you in these matters nor do I speak about them. For the gods and all the Achaeans know it already. But, come, grant me a swift ship and twenty companions.’

With these words Telemachus overtly shies away from direct confrontation. Done with all this assembly talk, he will instead sail off with his own set of companions in search of news of his father’s return (νόστον πενθόμενος, 2.215). In so doing, the son will return home like the father. This is, after all, what Athena had counseled when prompting Telemachus to convene the assembly in the first place (1.279–305). The first Ithacan assembly, therefore, represents just how the Odyssey will be different from the Iliadic tradition: in place of open dissent in the institution of the assembly, this narrative demonstrates the futility of debate and the need for more subtle arts. Whereas the Iliad’s assembly becomes the institution in which the young men of the Achaeans can prove themselves as men by contesting with each other, Telemachus’ maturation lies elsewhere: he must travel in the footsteps of his father. The assembly proves to be a dead end.

The first human assembly, carefully prepared under the guidance of Athena, sets in motion the twin narrative goals of Odysseus’ homecoming and Telemachus’ maturation. The narrative sets up Aegyptius as someone who legitimately and authoritatively could criticize the ruling house; but it displaces all the critical arguments to the suitors, who are disqualified by their own recklessness from passing comment.
and whose dissent actually aligns them with the rival epic tradition. The structure, in which the suitors are set against figures of authority, indicates how this narrative figures debate and dissent, not as a necessary and cohesive part of society as in the *Iliad*, but as a threat to its telling. There is a glimpse of an alternative rival story, but its presence and effect are limited radically. There can be no debating with the suitors.

**More than half were not going to return**

We saw in the *Iliad* that the first Achaean assembly initiated a progressive exploration of debate culminating in the institutionalization of dissent within that arena. The first Ithacan assembly also marks the beginning of a process, but one that leads to an increasing marginalization of contest. The fact that only one other debate on Ithaca attracts anything like the narrative attention of those we studied in Chapter 1 shows the *Odyssey*’s lack of interest in the assembly.

The next Ithacan assembly actually occurs in book 16, though it is prematurely cut short. Upon hearing of Telemachus’ imminent return, the suitors convok an assembly (αὐτοὶ δὲ ἐξ ἀγορῆν κίον ἀθρόοι, 16.361). Following the same trend of social division, they ‘did not allow any of the young men or any of the elders to sit with them’ (οὐδὲ τιν’ ἄλλον | εἶναι οὔτε νέων μεταίζειν οὔτε γερόντων, 16.361–2). This is an assembly that does not aim to bring on the young men in rivalry or lay down the conditions by which the community may benefit. It is just for themselves.

Yet, their deliberations over how to prevent Telemachus’ return have already been rendered futile by the narrative’s pre-emptive strike: news of his return has already been relayed to Penelope by the herald, who ‘spoke in the middle of the serving maids’ (μέσησαι μετά διωρήσαν ἔειπεν, 16.336) to deliver his one-line announcement (relayed in direct speech). Eumaeus then takes Penelope to one side (ἀγχι παραστίας, 16.338) to whisper in her ear the details. Important communication now takes place ‘in the middle’, not of the assembly, but of female

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68 The suitors do meet soon after the first Ithacan assembly (4.658–74) to plot an ambush against Telemachus. But not only is the language of the assembly absent from this scene; their meeting serves only to show that events have bypassed them—Telemachus has already sailed off in search for his father without their knowledge.

69 Cf. e.g. *Il.* 14.281–300.
servants, and critical information is relayed in hushed tones, not in direct speech before the people. It is with such secret meetings and whispered asides that the battle for control in the *Odyssey* will be determined. The real arena of power lies away from the public forum, in the private conference. The suitors will never again enjoy such a public arena as the assembly to express their dissent; its belated and curtailed convocation here demonstrates the marginalization of debate in this narrative.

Although the suitors meet once more, the remaining Ithacan assembly to be treated in any detail occurs only after the suitors have been finally and decisively removed from the scene. Coming already too late, its place in the narrative relates to this poem’s paradoxical display of its authorizing strategies even as it undertakes the violent suppression of dissent. The significance of that final assembly is evident from its framing. The people gather to assemble in grief at the news of their sons’ deaths (24.412–21). It is Rumour herself that acts as the institutionalizing agent who sets up the assembly. Running amok, Rumour performs in a similar manner to what she had done when wresting control from Agamemnon in the *Iliad*’s second Achaeian assembly. Rumour’s role as a corrosive discourse is no less threatening here, as she carries news of the suitors’ deaths throughout the *polis*. This assembly is set up as if it will explore the consequences of the leader’s slaughter of his people.

The first speaker whom the narrator introduces promises as much (24.421–5):

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70 See the note by Rutherford (1992), 224 on ll. 240–7: ‘This short and curious episode, which ends so inconclusively, provides the final example of a meeting of the suitors: these have formed a series in which the effective action of the suitors has steadily diminished.’ He relates the ‘abortive conference’ to the inversely increasing respect with which Odysseus (disguised as a beggar) and his son are held. The narrative demonstrates ‘the authority of Telemachus and his family’ and the fact that ‘the suitors are losing control of the situation’.

71 Nagler (1988), 81 locates the climax of the *Odyssey* with the reunion between Penelope and Odysseus: ‘the restoration of the *oikos*, as an economically and socially functioning institution, capable of continuing to build and service the network of social bonds with other such institutions through *xenia*, is the theme of return and its hero.’ This is true up to a point: but the last book explores the political aftermath of Odysseus’ return in such a way that brings the public forms of negotiating crisis—the assembly, battle—into collision with the restoration of Odysseus’ *oikos*. 
Sideling debate in the Odyssey

But when they were all assembled and gathered in one place together, then Eupeithes stood up among them and spoke. For there lay unforgettable sorrow on in his mind for his son Antinous, the first whom divine Odysseus slew. Shedding tears for him now he addressed the assembly and spoke.

Unusually, the narrator intrudes after the verb of speaking, metēeiπε, to explain Eupeithes’ reasons for speaking: his son, Antinous, has just been killed. Both structure and sentiment recall the introduction of Aegyptius in the first Ithacan assembly, though the differences are important too. On the one hand, in this case the audience have experienced the narrative of the son’s death: they are in a position to assess the extent and merit of the father’s loss. On the other, Eupeithes poses an even greater threat, by presenting an alternative version of those events. His narrative is far from absurd, since not only does it chime with the (paradigmatic) doomed return of Agamemnon, but it also resonates with Agamemnon’s failure as a leader in the Iliad: according to Eupeithes, Odysseus has ‘lost his people’, by which he means both the men with whom Odysseus went to Troy and his folk at home (‘άλεσε μὲν νήσα γλαφυρᾶς, ἀπὸ δ’ ἄλεσε λαοὺς’, 24.428). Whereas the Odyssey itself differentiates these two groups from the ‘people’ by labelling them as ‘companions’ and ‘suitors’, Eupeithes collapses the distinction by associating both with the group at large. In this light, Odysseus is seen not so much as the hero ‘who experiences pain’, as the leader ‘who

72 See Heubeck (1954), 40 for parallels between the two assemblies.
73 Eupeithes’ death is required so that the ‘triumphant ‘true’ tale’ may then be complete. Along with the silencing of Eurymachus, ‘in each case the proposition is rejected by authorised speakers and the proponent is killed’: Haubold (2000), 108, 125.
74 The phrase ἀπὸ δ’ ἄλεσε λαοὺς can also indicate the agency of the subject, as if Eupeithes is saying that Odysseus has ‘destroyed’ his people. There is similar key narrative ambiguity in the Iliad at 18.82 (Achilles bemoans ‘losing’ Patroclus) and 22.104, 107 (Hector imagines the Trojans blaming him for ‘destroying’ his people). The last example is particularly interesting, since Hector admits ‘I have lost the people because of my own recklessness’ (‘ἀλεσα λαῶν ἀπαθαλίῃς ἐμῆσαν’, Il. 22.104)—a description that resonates strongly with the Odyssean suitors. See Ch. 3, n. 132 below.
causes pain’ for his people. Interestingly, Eupeithes even deprives Odysseus of his name, labelling him simply ‘this man here’ (ἀνήρ ὁδή, 24.426). Not only is this a threat to Odysseus’ epic renown—one needs a name to be able to gain glory; by evoking the narrative’s first word, ἄνθρωπος, this narrative threatens to unravel the Odyssey's depiction of its hero as a, or rather the, paradigm.

The narrative frame puts that threat into context by its resonance with other highly charged passages within the broader epic tradition. Eupeithes addresses the assembly as Agamemnon also does, in tears (τὸ νῦν ἄγορήσατο καὶ μετέειπεν, 24.425); Eupeithes’ tears, however, have the same unifying effect as Telemachus’ had done (ὁς φῶς δάκρυ χέων, οίκτος δ’ ἐλε πάντας Αχαιών, 24.438). The shift in paradigm, from doomed Iliadic leader to sympathetic heir-apparent, marks out the potential danger of his speech.

How much of a threat is ‘Mr Persuasive’ going to pose? Just as it looks as if a crisis-point has been reached, as ‘pity took hold of all the Achaeans’, two other characters suddenly appear. Medon, accompanied by the divine bard, offers unqualified backing for Odysseus: as he puts it, he has seen a ‘god’ (Ἐλῆθα ἔγιν αἰθήμενον, 24.445). With one exception, nowhere else in Homeric epic does a character turn up while an assembly is in session and address the assembled group. By doing so, Odysseus’ herald assumes control over both the public assembly and the narrative space, in a gesture that is particularly marked:

75 See Stanford (1952) and Rutherford (1986), 157, n. 63 for a discussion of Odysseus’ name and its significance within the Odyssey’s narrative. See also Rutherford (1992), on Od. 19.406–9, where the hero’s name is explicitly etymologized.
76 That is what is at stake in the famous Cyclops episode: having given Cyclops the name of ‘no man’ in order to trick his way out of the cave, Odysseus feels the need—as the Iliadic hero still—to broadcast his name (Od. 9.502–5). He does so in order to gain renown. The result, in which Odysseus barely escapes from Cyclops’ rock and curse, valorizes the hero’s strategy of deceit and disguise he employs on Ithaca.
78 ἀν Ἀγαμέμνων ἰσημένα δάκρυ χέων, II. 9.13–14. The same hexameter line, however, is used of the sympathetic figure of Aegyptius (Od. 2.24).
79 Od. 2.81.
80 The only other example of a character turning up to address an assembled group occurs when the Trojan herald, Idaios, arrives in the Achaean assembly while it is in session to deliver the official Trojan response to Achaean demands (II. 7.382–411).
Medon takes centre-stage (ἐν μέσσωσι, 24.441), having come directly from the house of Odysseus (ἐκ μεγάρων Ὄδυσσης, 24.440). Furthermore, Medon gains immediate support from Halitherses, the bird interpreter who had shown his allegiances in the first Ithacan assembly, and who also happens to turn up during the course of this assembly. He reinforces the point by pronouncing a clear prohibition—‘let us not go’—in answer to Eupeithes’ call-to-arms. Along with the (silent) bard, these two rescue Odysseus’ tale from its opponents, by configuring dissent as not only inappropriate but just plain wrong.

The outcome of the assembly, therefore, seems rather perverse. Although ‘green fear’ had gripped them all at Medon’s account of events, even so, ‘more than half leapt up with a great shout’ (οἱ δ’ ἀρ ’ἀνήξεν μεγάλῳ ἀλατήῳ ὑμίσεων πλείους, 24.463–4), and go off to join Eupeithes’ revolt. The omens do not bode well, however. Singing out Eupeithes at their head, the narrator adds that he ‘was not going to return’ (ἀπονοστήσεω, 24.471). The brief and subtle fast-forward to the fatal outcome of this act of dissent leaves us in no doubt as to its lack of wisdom. Moreover, the explicit mention of no return is highly charged. Since the Odyssey presents a ‘return’ narrative, we might expect the word ‘return’ to be on everyone’s lips. Yet, in actual fact, this is only the second and last deployment of the compound verb ἀπονοστέω in the entire epic. Intriguingly, its only other occurrence describes Alcinous’ reassurance that the Phaeacians will see Odysseus

81 μὴ ἱμεν, Od. 24.462 answering Eupeithes’ repeated ἱμεν, 24.432, 437.
82 τοὺς δ’ ἀρὰ πάντας ὑπὸ γλαρῶν δέος ἦρει, 24.450.
83 The narrator brings out the success—and potential danger—of Eupeithes’ speech by a pun on his name: ‘they were persuaded by Mr Persuasive’ (ἀλλ’ Ἐυπείθει ἐπήδου, 24.465–6). See Scully (1990), 196, n. 6.
84 While words based on the root νοστ- are unsurprisingly common in Homeric poetry (some 132 instances), there are only six examples of νοστ plus the prefix ἀπο. Of these four occur in the Iliad, all of which relate somehow to not returning: 11.1.60 (Achilles wonders whether they will return home without having accomplished their expedition); 8.489 (Hector thought they were going to return after having defeated the Achaeans; 12.115 (Asius was not going to return); 17.406 (Achilles thought that Patroclus would return again). Moreover, both Herodotus and Thucydides use the verb in significant contexts: Herodotus at the close of hisThemopylae narrative (7.229.2, 31; cf. 1.82.8; 4.159.6; 6.27.2); Thucydides’ solitary usage comes at the end of his Sicilian narrative to emphasize the Athenians’ loss of their collective νοστ- Allison (1997b) 512–14.
In this version of the ‘returns’ it is only Odysseus who makes it home safely. The point of no return has been reached for opponents of Odysseus and his tale.

Debate appears far less central to the narrative of the *Odyssey* than it had been in the *Iliad*. Only two human assemblies occur in the entire epic that are explored in any detail. Moreover, the ways in which they are framed, structured and developed show the limitations of this arena. Neither assembly resolves the crisis in the community or, indeed, shows much interest in resolving the crisis: they serve as little more than a forum in which the battle-lines may be drawn up and support for Odysseus be made manifest. Telemachus begins the epic with much to learn: he learns that his path to maturation lies elsewhere than in the assembly, in which his attempts to rid his house of the suitors fail. He must learn instead to use speech in a different, less open way, and become more like his father, the figure who says one thing while keeping another in his heart. This is crucial: concealment and suppression of real opinions—recognized traits of both the hero and his narrative, and illustrated here by his son—sit ill with the idea of open debate. On the other hand, the suitors, who to some extent sponsor a more open contest and like to think of themselves as akin to the great heroes from Troy, also fail to socialize their dissent: their opposition to Telemachus takes place on an individual, or at any rate, a factional basis with little interest in the wider community. Indeed, resonances with scenes of assembly from the Iliadic tradition of the war at Troy serve to under-

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85 Alcinous tells Odysseus, ‘I think that you will go back home and not be forced back again’ (‘το τ' ου τι πάλι πλαγχθέντα γ' άιω | άψ άπονστήσεω’, 13.5–6). This reassurance strikingly resonates with Achilles’ first words in the *Iliad*, when he tells Agamemnon, ‘I think that now we will be forced to go back home’ (‘νίν άμμε παλπλαγχθέντας άιω | άψ άπονστήσεω’, *Il.* 1.59–60). Of course, Achilles is the paradigmatic hero who never does make it home.

86 Scully (1990), 102–3.

87 Rutherford (1996), 67 similarly comments on the difference in speech between the two epics: ‘Men in the *Iliad* deal with one another openly and in full awareness of each other’s status and strength. . . . In the *Odyssey*, where the mortals do not deal so honestly with one another, the characters dwell in a state of uncertainty.’ Interestingly, he also observes that, ‘although the *Odyssey* has a public dimension. . . . it is arguable that the central family relationships are more important’ (p. 69). The *Odyssey*’s different strategy towards dissent has much to do with its more family-centred orientation.
mine support for them, while the narrative itself further puts strict limits on the value of their dissent. Not only do the suitors fail to form a cohesive group in the institution of assembly in order to speak on behalf of the community; the narrative frame and structure of the assemblies present the suitors and their relations in a particular light, as enemies of the tale being told.

2. HOW TO AUTHORIZE DEBATE

*(ODYSSEY 3, 8, 9–12)*

So far we have been exploring the ways in which debate is portrayed within the institution of the Ithacan assembly, in which the community fractures along partisan lines, with one side, the group supporting Telemachus and Odysseus, clearly favoured over their opponents, the suitors and their families. This section focuses on the form of representation that scenes of assembly take in the *Odyssey*. As we saw, the author of *On the Sublime* claims that the *Odyssey* was more ‘diegetic’ than the *Iliad*. Modern scholars tend to read this stress on narrative in the light of the *Odyssey*’s self-reflexivity. But what happens to debate in these circumstances? Dramatized assembly scenes loom large in the *Iliad*; few assemblies are narrated, and even those that are tend to be a character’s reflection on a debate that has already been dramatized. In the *Odyssey*, however, debate is talked about on several occasions. Nestor and Demodocus recall the Trojan War in presenting an alternative vision of debate from that of the *Iliad*. When Odysseus himself takes up the story, he emphasizes the threat of debate to his journey home.

*We were always with the same mind*

The assembly is not the place it was in the *Iliad*, where contest dominates and the young prove themselves men; Telemachus must prove himself a man—his father’s son—by going on a journey. His ‘Odyssey’ takes him first to the court of Nestor, where he learns about the disastrous returns of the Achaeans, which, contrary to more common extant versions, is precipitated by *internal conflict*, not by Achaean
sacrilege at Troy’s fall. Athena, who plays a key role in punishing the Achaeans in other accounts, sends επίς on the two sons of Atreus (3.136–50). Their strife manifests itself in an assembly.

The details of a god sending επίς, an internal crisis within the Achaeans, an assembly in which contesting views are expressed, two speakers joined together in ‘painful words’—all of these elements resonate with the first Achaeans assembly that opened the Iliad. But the Iliad depicts the assembly being set up for the benefit of the community: Achilles provides the means by which a solution to the Achaeans’ crisis may be found, by sponsoring Calchas’ words, even though that is to challenge Agamemnon’s authority. Here, however, Nestor relates how strife leads not to the construction of a political community but to social disintegration and a catastrophic division of the Achaeans army. He gives a view of dissent as it looks like from the perspective of one of the leaders.

It is significant that the description of the Achaeans assembly misfiring comes from Nestor. I suggested above that, while performing the role of chief negotiator and social stabilizer among the Achaeans, Nestor can appear rather too close to Agamemnon; he does everything he can to shore up Agamemnon’s authority and keep the group at large united behind their leader. That is the case here too—and it impacts upon his representation of the Achaeans assembly. Nestor emphasizes the problems of dissent as he relates how the two sons of Atreus pursue different courses, which contrasts, in Nestor’s view, with the previous conduct

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88 In the so-called Sack of Troy. Cf. M. Davies (2003), 72–3. He elides different accounts in his description of the strife between the sons of Atreus: ‘At the start of Proclus’ résume [of the Returns Home] we read that Athena caused a quarrel to break out between the two brothers Menelaus and Agamemnon over the question of sailing off from Troy. The tradition of this quarrel also occurs in Od. 3.135 ff., where we are told that Menelaus was for sailing home straight away, while Agamemnon wished to keep the army back and appease Athena by a sacrifice of hecatombs. The hostility of this goddess (which underlies both accounts) is to be explained, of course, in terms of Ajax’s earlier crimes’ (p. 77).

89 See Ch. 1, nn. 90–4, with accompanying text.

90 Everything is wrong with this assembly: ‘When these two called all the Achaeans to assembly, wildly, in no due order, as the sun was setting, and the sons of the Achaeans arrived heavy in drink, these two spoke their commands, on account of which they assembled the people’ (‘τῷ δὲ καλεσαμένῳ ἄγοντι ἐς πάντας Ἀχαιόν, | μαφ, ἀτὰρ οἴκ κατὰ κόσμον, ἐς ἥλιον καταδύντα, | οἱ δὲ θληθοί οίνῳ βεβαρησθεὶς υἱεὶς Ἀχαιῶν, | μιθν μυθεάσθην, τοῦ εἶνεκα λαὸν ἄγειραν’, Od. 3.137–40).
of the assembly under his and Odysseus’ management. The two of them at any rate never dissented from each other in the assembly (‘οὔτε ποτ’ εἶν ἄγορῃ δίχ’ ἐβαζόμεν οὔτ’ ἐνί βουλὴ’, 3.127); they were always of the same mind (‘ἄλλ’ ἐνα θυμὸν ἔχοντε νόῳ καὶ ἐπίφρον’ βουλῃ’, 3.128). In Nestor’s eyes, precisely the problem with the Achaean assembly is the potential for contesting views to be heard.

Both Homeric assembly scenes—the assembly of *Iliad* 1 and the reported assembly of *Odyssey* 3—represent the institution as a place of strife and potential disorder. But, whereas the *Iliad* stresses the importance of dissent, Nestor focuses on its negative consequences. The difference in perspective extends to representation: the comparable first Achaean assembly scene is played out before the audience’s eyes; this scene in the *Odyssey* is narrated by one of the characters who is involved in it, and who inevitably puts his own spin on it. Furthermore, Nestor’s narration has relevance for Telemachus. We have just witnessed the failed experiment of debate on Ithaca; here Telemachus is being shown in no uncertain terms the disastrous consequences of allowing open discussion of critical issues; he learns, in addition, that his own father never used to allow such loose talk. Nestor’s story demonstrates to Telemachus the importance of keeping a tight control over public discourse. The management of dissent is an important part of his maturation to become more like his father.

His father paints a similar picture of debate on his travels. Upon Odysseus’ arrival in the city of the Phaeacians, the narrator describes the distinctive features of the urban space which catch his hero’s eye, including ‘assemblies of heroes’ (ὑπών ἄγοραί, 7.44). This remarkable description of the assembly, with its association to the prior race of men (the heroes), fits with the image of Phaeacia as being some kind of Golden Age society. Moreover, it suggests a world before the estab-

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91 Hammer (1998), 338 interprets this report of the assembly literally: he concludes that such a division happens when people use the forum of assembly to argue their own interests. But that is exactly what Nestor is doing here when he gives a report of that assembly.

92 The context of the assembly—its timing and place—must be important here; but it is significant that Nestor emphasizes the value of consensus not just for this occasion but for any.

lishment of an institutional framework, such as that which we saw mapped out in the *Iliad*. Most striking of all, however, is the subsequent absence of debate in the account of Odysseus’ stay in Phaeacia, in spite of this institutional form.\(^9^4\) Instead, the assembly is used for other functions. While Alcinous takes his guest to the assembly, it is Athena who is responsible for gathering the Phaeacians *en masse*, with the explicit purpose of securing Odysseus’ return home.\(^9^5\) After announcing his intention to see Odysseus home, Alcinous then breaks up the assembly so that they can all get back to feasting and listening to their bard (8.40–5). Directly after Demodocus’ first song (on the quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus, 8.73–82), Alcinous takes the Phaeacians back to the assembly (8.109) to display their athletic prowess to their guest in games. Given the charge of the word *ἀγών* for signifying contest in the *Iliad*, particularly when Achilles institutionalizes the games in the Achaean camp, its omission here is arresting: contest is largely absent from Phaeacian life; the assembly is a continual place of wonderment.\(^9^6\)

There are two exceptions when the term *ἀγών* is used. The first occurs, as it happens, in the games. Odysseus has just endured taunts from one of ‘the best of the Phaeacians’ (8.116), Euryalus, about his lack of athletic prowess (8.159–64), and has proven his worth not only with a powerful speech (8.166–85) but also in deed worth (1988), 342; cf. Slatkin (2005), 321. See also N. Austin (1975), 153–62, who sees Phaeacia as ‘the paradigm of the ideal community, in which human craftsmanship is united with natural advantages’ (p. 156); and Garvie (1994), 22–7, who discusses the Phaeacians’ position as the fulcrum of Odysseus’ story, easing his passage from a fantasy world to human society.

\(^9^4\) As R. Martin (1951), 29–30 remarks: ‘Pas de discussions, pas de protestations; le roi parle en maître, donne ses instructions, et se retire’; cf. Deneen (2000), Havelock (1978), 92–3 suggests that the Phaeacians possess an assembly because that is what civilized societies are supposed to have.

\(^9^5\) ‘[Athena] was devising the return of great-hearted Odysseus’ (νόστον Ὑδροσάγιοι μεγαλήτορι μητίωσα, 8.9). The goddess’ role in convoking this assembly suggests once again the appropriation of public space for the privileging of Odysseus or his household. Indeed, in this case, that gesture is quite explicit: Athena heralds the arrival of a stranger who ‘is like the gods in form’ (δέμας ἄθλωτοι οὐμοίοις. 8.14). Athena herself contributes to achieve this desired effect (8.17–23).

\(^9^6\) Odysseus is ‘amazed’ when he first spies the Phaeacians’ assemblies (θαύμαζεν δ’ Ὑδροσάγιοι, 7.43); the gathered Phaeacians ‘gaze in wonder’ at Odysseus (πόλλοι δ’ ἀράθημα ἄθλωτοι ἵδοντες | νῦν Λεύρταν δαίμονα, 8.17–18); the best men of the Phaeacians went to *wonder* at the contests (οἵ ἄρσοι ἄθλων ἄθωμαν ἄθωμαν, 8.108).
(8.186–198)—aided and abetted by Athena’s guiding hand and announcement of victory. In this context, the narrator comments that Odysseus rejoiced at seeing ‘a friendly companion in the contest’ (ἐταίρον ἑννέα λεύσα ἐν ἄγων, 8.200).97 The one occasion when the agôn is mentioned, then, is in relation to possible dissent breaking out.98 But Athena’s involvement, Odysseus’ swift and conclusive answer and Alcinous’ verdict99 all serve to marginalize this one dissenting voice, who soon after makes amends himself in word and deed (8.401–5). Even in the games there are no contests, and certainly no possibilities for dissent.

With the games having almost got out of hand by portraying real contest, Alcinous intercedes and moves the group back to the symposium. It is here that the only other instances of ἄγων occur in the entire narrative, all in relation to the dancing that accompanies Demodocus’ singing.100 Whether or not this usage indicates a heightened awareness of the rivalry of poetic performance, it is striking that Demodocus’ final song about the Trojan horse—in response to Odysseus’ request—dwells on a negative portrait of the assembly.101 The Trojans are represented as debating whether to throw the horse from the cliffs, set it on fire or bring it inside the walls (8.506). Unlike scenes of Trojans debating in the Iliad, no members of the royal house are represented as intervening; a genuine debate ensues, in which the Trojans as a group make a collective decision. Yet, though the Trojans debate a lot (πόλλα ἄγοντα, 8.505), they agree on the wrong course of action. In the end, according to this song, Odysseus’ ruse works only because the Trojans debate. How the master of deception must have loved the irony of that.

97 The description of Athena as a ‘friendly companion’ again serves to marginalize the problematic group whom we are yet to see.
98 The confusion of the agôn with the assembly seems to show the lack of interest in public institutions among the Phaeacians. Instead, they seek refuge in the alternative, and quasi-private, institution of the symposium (8.250–5). On the phrase ἐν ἄγων, Garvie (1994), 279, comments: ‘“in the assembly”, i.e. “among the assembled crowd”, rather than “in the place of contest”; cf. Il. 23.273, 448, 495, etc.’
99 In the coda to this episode, Alcinous judges that Odysseus has ‘shown his excellence’ (ἀρετὴν φανέρω, 8.237), after Euryalus had ‘abused him in the games’ (ἐν ἄγων | νείκαισθαν, 8.238–9).
100 8.259, 260; cf. 380.
101 As de Jong (2001), 216 comments: ‘the angle chosen here is that of the Trojans, looking at the Horse from the outside.’
Act I: Epic

I set up an assembly

Directly after the Trojan-horse story, Odysseus takes over the telling of his tale, in the course of which he describes the convocation of three assemblies. All are introduced by the same formula: ‘And at that time I set up an assembly and spoke among them all’ (‘καὶ τότε ἐγών ἀγορὰν θέμενος μετὰ πᾶσιν ἐκεῖνοι’, 9.171; 10.188; 12.319). Odysseus sets up all three assemblies; only he speaks; nothing is heard from his men, other than the description of them carrying out his orders. This portrait of the assembly recalls Hector’s domination of the Trojan assembly in the Iliad. Indeed, when Odysseus’ men do gather to deliberate together, their debates take place impromptu with Odysseus asleep, external to any recognizable formal structures. And they always end with disastrous consequences—for themselves.

One example that is quite typical occurs when Odysseus returns to his men after having overcome the witch Circe (10.414–23):

‘... ὥς ἐμὲ κείνοι, ἐπεὶ ἵδον ὀφθαλμοῖα,
δικρύνοντες ἱχνον· δόκησε δ’ ἄρα σφίας θυμός
ὡς ἔμεν ὡς εἰ πατρίδι ικολαιτο καὶ σῶλον αὐτῆς
τρηχείᾳ Ἰθάκης, ἔνα τ’ ἔτραφεν ἡδ’ ἐγένοτο.
καὶ μ’ ὀλοφυρόμενοι ἐσπε περεόντα προσηύδον·
“Σοί μὲν νοστήματα, διοτρεφές, ὡς ἔχάρμην,
ὡς εἰ τ’ εἰς Ἰθάκην ἀφικοίμηθα πατρίδα γαίαν·
ἀλλ’ ἄγε, τῶν ἀλλῶν ἔταρών κατάλεξον ὀλθηρον.”
ὡς ἐφαν’ αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ προσέφην μαλακοῖς ἐπέεισιν,
νήμα μὲν ἄρ πάμπρωτον ἐρύσομεν ὑπειρώνθη...’

‘So these men, when they saw me with their eyes, in tears held me. And the spirit in them made them feel as if they had arrived back to their fatherland and the very city of rugged Ithaca, where they were born and raised. And in tears they addressed me with winged words: “With your return, o divine-nurtured,

104 10.31–55; 12.338–65. The last example ends with Odysseus’ men explicitly having their homecoming taken away from them by a god (θεὸς δ’ ἀποαινέον νόστον, 12.419).
we are as happy as if we should have arrived back in our fatherland. But come, recount the destruction of our other companions.” So they spoke; and I addressed them with soft words: “Let’s drag the ship up the land...

When his men see him they are happy—in the words of the narrator (Odysseus himself)—‘as if they themselves had arrived back in Ithaca’. Immediately, Odysseus allocates his men direct speech that repeats this sentiment *verbatim*. With the idea of ‘return’ very much brought to the forefront of the audience’s attention and on the lips of his men, Odysseus’ reply is pointed: he orders his men to ‘haul the ships onto land’ and follow him to Circe’s dwelling. In contrast to his men’s thoughts of a return to Ithaca, Odysseus’ exhortation to ‘haul the ships up the land’ marks exactly the opposite direction to a communal return. And yet, the crew ‘immediately obey’ (οἱ δὲ ὀκα πίθοντο) their leader, who had spoken ‘with soft words’ (μαλακοὶς ἔπεεσαί).

Only Eurylochus dissents from Odysseus’ command, and with good reason. First, the disjunction between the group’s expressed desire and their immediate compliance with Odysseus’ command suggests both his persuasive ability, and its threat; after all, Circe herself had given Odysseus these instructions (10.401–5),105 and his use of ‘soft words’ suggests, if not outright deception, at least the power of his persuasion.106 Second, Eurylochus is the most sceptical and reliable of the companions, the man who had seen with his own eyes his men turn into pigs (10.229–60); it is, therefore, no surprise that he should remain unconvinced. Eurylochus’ dissent appears legitimate.107

Yet, the audience know that his fears are misplaced. They know that Odysseus has vanquished the witch and rescued his companions. They know that his soft words carry no threat. They have witnessed the

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105 ‘Odysseus-narrator faithfully records the execution of Circe’s orders’: de Jong (2001), 264.
106 Odysseus speaks with ‘soft words’ to his men twice in this episode (10.70, 442). Back on Ithaca, he instructs his son Telemachus to use ‘soft words’ on the suitors expressly in order to beguile them (16.286; 19.5). The only other instances occur in the *Iliad*, when Achilles asks his mother to supplicate Zeus (*Il*. 1.582), and when Paris explains that Helen had persuaded him to return to battle (*Il*. 6.337).
107 In particular, Eurylochus’ subsequent accusation (*Od*. 10.431–7) not only identifies Circe’s threat but also recalls Odysseus’ misjudgement in leading his men into Cyclops’ cave. Rutherford (1986), 151 observes: ‘we may well feel that there is some truth in what the rebellious Eurylochus says.’
narrative from which Eurylochus and the rest of the companions have been shut out (when Odysseus, using protection provided by Hermes, beds the witch). What this knowledge does is to render Eurylochus’ anxiety misplaced. His dissent is reasonable, but—crucially—wrong. Even before we hear it, the narrative marginalizes the question that threatens to open up the narrative, Eurylochus’ ‘ah, fools, where are we going?’ (‘α δείλοι, ποι’ ιμευ’, 10.431). Everyone else is going off with Odysseus.

Angered by Eurylochus’ dissent, Odysseus contemplates drawing his sword (10.438–42):

‘ός έφατ’, αὐτάρ ἐγώ γε μετά φρεσί μεμψήρεα, 
σπασάμενος τανύσκες ἄδρ παχέως παρά μηροῦ, 
τῷ οἱ ἀποτιμήσας κεφαλὴν οὐδάσσει ἀπέλασαι, 
καὶ πηρὸ περ ἐστὶ μάλα σχεδόν· ἀλλὰ μ᾽ έταϊροι 
μειλιχίως ἐπέεσσίν ἐρήμτουν ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος.’

“So he spoke, but I was divided in my mind, whether to draw my sword from my thick thigh, and cut off his head and throw it on the ground, even though he was nearly related to me by marriage; but my companions, first one and then another, held me back with soft words.’

In the epic tradition that has come down to us, these lines resonate powerfully with the beginning of the Iliad, when Achilles angrily drew his sword in dissent from Agamemnon. Once again, we can imagine that this image, while only now extant in the Iliad, may have had much greater currency throughout the oral tradition. But while, for methodological reasons, one would not want to see this as a quotation from the Iliad (as we have it), the comparison between the two scenes is

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108 ‘We are left to assume that Eurylochus has drawn the right conclusions from his previous observations (212ff., 259ff.) and forebodings (232, 258): Heubeck and Hoekstra (1989), 66.

109 Heubeck and Hoekstra (ibid. 66) gloss Odysseus’ reaction as ‘modelled on Il. i.189–92’. The relevant lines from the Iliad, with verbal correspondences underlined, are as follows (1.189–94): ούς πάσοι· Πηλείων δ’ ἄχος γένετ’, ἐν δὲ οἱ θυροὶ στήθεσαν λασίοις διανύσα ἐμμήριζεν. | η’ δ’ ἐχε χαγαν ἐξ ἔρυσαμενοι παρὰ μηροῦ | τοὺς μὲν ἀκατήσαν, οὗ Ἀχερόνθι ἐναρίζειν, | η’ χολὸν παύσειν ἐρήμτουσε τῆς θημοῦ.

110 See n. 8 above. Interestingly, Sophocles’ Ajax begins in the wake of a similar gesture from the hero: Ajax has reached for his sword to strike down the Achaeans leaders—which would seem to suggest that such an epic event achieved a certain fame in the popular imagination, perhaps occasioned by the Iliadic version. Again, the
suggestive of their different narrative strategies towards dissent, and the possibility of resonant interplay between the two traditions unmistakably remains. While in the *Iliad* it is Athena who intervenes to check Achilles as he reaches for his sword, and who personally negotiates a contract with the dissenting figure, the goddess is notably absent from the scene in the *Odyssey*. Here, instead—according to Odysseus—‘all the other companions’ hold the hero back. The significance of Athena’s absence derives not only from the general absence of named gods in Odysseus’ narration; it is important that we see Odysseus’ men—to a man—step in to check their leader. If an Iliadic tradition is being activated here, that gesture is all the more pointed. This is a hero who does not require a god to check a rash act; he listens to his men and allows himself to be persuaded. Odysseus—he is the narrator at this point, it should not be forgotten—allows a figure of dissent to intrude briefly into his narrative, before reasserting his majesty through the response of the group at large: he doesn’t silence the dissenter, his men do; and he is man enough to check his anger without recourse to divine intervention. Thus, while there seems room for constructive debate and persuasion after all, the outcome serves to cast Odysseus in a better light and leave Eurylochus out in the cold.

Frozen out of the narrative plan, the latter is obliged to follow meekly along, fearful of Odysseus’ reproaches (10.447–8). Ironically, it will be Eurylochus’ dissent from Odysseus’ instructions that finally condemns all of Odysseus’ men to death (12.339–52). Eurylochus is preserved in order to account for the loss of all Odysseus’ men: his dissent has a value after all.

The different perspective on debate that the *Odyssey* offers is nowhere clearer than in its many scenes of narrated assembly: the ways in which the assembly is represented are inevitably influenced by the speaker’s own focalization and situation. This introduces an important feature to our investigation. We had previously seen how the Ithacan assemblies were set up in such a way as to confirm support for Odysseus and his house: this section has extended that idea by exploring the cases in which characters themselves talk about the assembly. Not only is this in important point for our study is what this gesture says about dissent. Indeed, Sophocles maximizes the disruptive potential of dissent, by having Athena (who intervenes again) merely deflect, rather than prevent, the blow. See Ch. 5 below.
itself a departure from the *Iliad*’s series of dramatized assemblies; the *Odyssey* explores the tension between the communal act of assembly and the personal stake the focalizing agent has in representing it. Seen through the eyes of someone engaged in debate and who has had to suffer the consequences of it, assemblies are configured as ineffectual and damaging. It is as if that first Achaean assembly in the *Iliad* were being seen through the eyes of an Agamemnon. In this way, the *Odyssey* exposes the fiction of openness in (any) debate: there are always controlling forces at work.

### 3. HOW TO KILL YOUR PEOPLE AND GET AWAY WITH IT (*ODYSSEY* 22)

When faced by Eurylochus’ opposition, Odysseus described himself as ‘being in two minds’ whether to check his wrath or draw his sword. This kind of formula, to do *x* or *y*, also occurs in the *Iliad*; but there is a marked difference of usage between the two epics that sheds light on the *Odyssey*’s thematization of dissent.\(^{111}\) The first and paradigmatic case in the *Iliad* depicts Achilles’ hesitation to check his anger or strike down Agamemnon (*Il. 1.188–92*). Only Athena’s timely intervention prevents him from transgressing the boundaries of the assembly; yet, it still precipitates a series of events far from that which Achilles imagined (such as the death of his best friend). Being in two minds has real consequences for Achilles and represents a real choice—one, moreover, that is inherently unstable and produces unforeseen and calamitous results.\(^{112}\) No such uncertainty inhibits Odysseus’ self-addresses in the *Odyssey*.\(^{113}\) Where the choice had been a real one in the *Iliad*, Odysseus

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\(^{111}\) For monologues in direct speech, see Arend (1933), 106–15; Sharples (1983).

\(^{112}\) All instances of this type of internal monologue in direct speech in the *Iliad*, bar one, occur in the context of divine presence (*Il. 5.671; 8.167; 169; 10.502; 12.199* or else are divinities themselves deliberating (*2.3; 14.159; 16.647; 20.17*). The exception is Deiphobus, who chooses a ‘third’ way (*13.455*). Russo (1968), 290 draws a distinction between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: ‘the sub-patterns that tend to dominate the scenes of pondering in the *Iliad* are not carried over intact into the *Odyssey*... Gods never intervene to solve a mortal’s dilemma of choosing between two alternatives’ (emphasis in the original). Cf. Barnouw (2004), 109–20.

\(^{113}\) Odysseus endures at *Od.* 17.235; 18.90; 20.10; Telemachus at 16.73. See Barnouw (2004), esp. 2–3, who interprets Odysseus’ division of mind as ‘visceral
will, eventually, get to do both $x$ and $y$: he swallows down his anger and endures numerous insults from the suitors precisely in order to gain a vantage-point from which to strike down his opponents.\textsuperscript{114}

Odysseus’ deliberations frame my final analysis of contest in two important ways. First, it shows the lack of a real crisis for Odysseus: in spite of indications to the contrary, he has his cake and eats it. Second, resonant echoes in the \textit{Odyssey} of the rival Iliadic narrative tradition of the war at Troy pave the way for Odysseus’ triumph over opponents to his tale.

\section*{Looking darkly at him}

Events come to a head in the fallout from the trial of the bow, when Odysseus reveals himself to the suitors. The scene that follows, described by Pietro Pucci as ‘Iliadic’,\textsuperscript{115} is remarkably anti-Iliadic in its context. Whereas physical conflict in the \textit{Iliad} remains restricted to the battleground, as one would expect, here in the \textit{Odyssey} it breaks out in practical thought’ (p. 3). There are four occasions when Odysseus does appear to have to make a choice. One occurs within Odysseus’ first-person narrative: the choice whether or not to leap overboard when his ship is cast back by the winds (10.50–5) is not really an option, since to jump overboard would mean certain death. Two other examples occur at the moment of meeting Nausicaa (6.141)—when he considers how to supplicate her (on which see Barnouw (2004), 110–11)—and his father (24.235)—when he debates whether to test him too. Scholars find the last example particularly troubling: see esp. Page (1955), 111–12. For subtle analyses (albeit of very different kinds) that give meaning to this difficult scene, see Rutherford (1986), 161–2; Henderson (1997). The closest Iliadic example is provided by the bard, pondering whether to supplicate Odysseus (\textit{Od}. 22.336): see the end of this section.

\textsuperscript{114} Odysseus’ inner deliberations, as well as his many sufferings, have lent themselves to the picture of this hero undergoing a moral transformation, particularly with a view to exacting justice: see Rutherford (1986); Segal (1994), 195–227; Barnouw (2004), 37–74; Farenga (2006), 174–261. Rutherford’s discussion begins with a survey of the ancient evidence for the moralistic reading of Odysseus’ character. The popularity of Odysseus among later philosophers (see Buffière (1956), 365–91; Stanford (1963), 118–27; Barnouw (2004), 121–48) is suggestive of the \textit{Odyssey}’s most striking difference from the politics of the \textit{Iliad}: the ‘philosophy of the \textit{Odyssey}’ in Rutherford’s words. See n. 152 below.

the halls of the returning king.\textsuperscript{116} The shift from public to private space continues the \textit{Odyssey}'s trend in marginalizing open conflict and bringing it within the bounds of Odysseus' control.

In fact, the suitors are so comfortable feasting in Odysseus' palace that they imagine themselves to be in a sympotic setting.\textsuperscript{117} Even after Odysseus has shot Antinous through the neck (as he was drinking his wine), and he stands, stripped of his beggar's garb, on the threshold of his palace, the suitors chastise 'the stranger' (ξεῖνος, 22.27) as if he had not meant to kill Antinous! Thus, even with Odysseus in his naked glory before them, they still do not recognize him, nor the kind of narrative they are in. They have been so far marginalized from the narrative focus that they don't realize that they are in an epic, where contest is deadly, and the playful games of the symposium will lead to death and slaughter.\textsuperscript{118}

One primary means by which the audience are aligned with Odysseus' point of view is through the \textit{Odyssey}'s interplay with the \textit{Iliadic} tradition of the war at Troy.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{116} While Lowenstam (1993), 164 puts it too strongly when he comments: 'the palace and not the \\textit{agora} becomes the place for contest (ἀγών) of the bow and the subsequent slaughter and revenge' (since when is the \textit{agora} ever a place for slaughter?), he rightly identifies the critical shift in location, from public to private.

\textsuperscript{117} The narrator makes the contrast between the occasion and the events to take place explicit, when he describes Antinous as having 'no thought of murder' as he drank his wine (φῶνος δὲ οὐκ ἔνθαμ ὑμῖν | μέθυλετο, 22.11–12). He continues: 'For who would believe that one man among many dining, even if he were especially strong, could work his death and black fate?' (τίς κ’ οἴοντο μετ’ ἀνδράσι δαιμόνινος | μοῦνον ἐνὶ πλεόνεσι, καὶ εἶ μᾶλα καρπερός εἶη, | οἱ νεῖξαι μανταστόν τε κακῶν καὶ κήρα μέλαιναν; 22.12–14).

\textsuperscript{118} This helps to develop Murnaghan's (1987\textsuperscript{a}) insight that the suitors fail to read the signs of this narrative properly. For the suitors as thinking that they are at a symposium and not in an epic, see Barker and Christensen (2006), 30–2.

\textsuperscript{119} In a line omitted from many manuscripts, the narrator describes the suitors' panicked reaction to Antinous' death: 'each man looked about for how he could escape sheer death' (πάπτων δὲ ἐκαστος ὅπη ψύχοι αἰτὼν ὀλέθρου, 22.43). In order to explain its common omission, Russo, Fernández-Galiano, and Heubeck (1992), 207 point to Eurymachus' sceptical response: they conclude that this line, taken from the \textit{Iliad}, 'overplays the suitors' fears, when they still think a deal is on the cards'. But that is part of the point: the disjunction between the narrator's description of doom and Eurymachus' offer of recompense displays how far removed the suitors are from the reality of their situation. Furthermore, this line is used of the Trojan reaction to Patroclus, whom they wrongly think is Achilles returning to battle (\textit{Il}. 16.282; cf. 14.507): in the \textit{Odyssey} the suitors would be right to fear since it is (an Achilles-like) Odysseus.
the belated recognition that Odysseus really has returned, Eurymachus, the most prominent suitor after Antinous, offers recompense, as Odysseus and his two companions had similarly done in the embassy to Achilles in *Iliad* 9.\(^{120}\) Odysseus, however, firmly rejects the proposal by adopting an Achillean pose. First, the narrator prepares the ground by tagging Odysseus’ reply to Eurymachus with the description, ‘looking darkly at him’ (τῶν δ’ ἄρ’ ἐπόδρα ἵδων, 22.60), just as Achilles had done with Agamemnon in their verbal confrontation in *Iliad* 1.\(^{121}\) Next, as Russo, Fernández-Galiano, and Heubeck have observed, ‘the construction [of Odysseus’ response (22.61–3)] οὐδ’ εἰ… οὐδὲ… ὁς… occurs, for example, in Achilles’ similar rejection of Agamemnon’s offer’ (*Il*. 9.379–85). In addition, they note that Achilles’ following lines (*Il*. 9.388–91) ‘continue with expressions of contempt for the proposals related by *Odysseus*.\(^{122}\) Here, it is Odysseus himself who contemptuously dismisses any prospect of reconciliation. Lastly, Odysseus’ rejection of ‘paternal possessions’ (πατριαί πιάντα, *Od*. 22.61) resonates with the rejection by Achilles of Agamemnon’s attempt to assert his

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\(^{120}\) The general context of offering material recompense for salvation connects these two scenes, but more particularly: (a) Eurymachus’ acknowledgement that, without such gifts, ‘one could not blame you for being angry’ is the same line used by Phoenix in his appeal to Achilles (πρὶν δ’ οὐδεὶς νεμέοντος κεχολωθαί, *Od*. 22.59 = *Il*. 9.523), the only other time this phrase is used; (b) Eurymachus’ language of reparation that the community will offer, ἀρεσάμενοι, occurs in exactly the same line position as Nestor’s proposal to Agamemnon that he offer recompense to Achilles (*Il*. 9.112; cf. 19.138): Russo, Fernández-Galiano, and Heubeck (1992), 230. According to Haubold (2000), 119–23, Eurymachus’ offer of recompense confronts the potential problem of Odysseus’ vengeance: not only could the killing of all the suitors be interpreted as excessive; from an epic perspective, it would represent the leader losing all of his people.

\(^{121}\) This formula appears to have an Achillean tonality to it. It first occurs at *Il*.1.148 to introduce Achilles’ verbal assault against Agamemnon. It is applied to: (1) Achilles on four further occasions (*Il*. 20.428; 22.260, 344; 24.559); (2) Odysseus and Diomedes three times each, resonating with the initial example of Achilles (*Il*. 4.349 and 411; cf. 2.245; 5.251; 10.446; 14.82); (3) Glaucus, in reaction to Hector (*Il*. 17.141); (4) Hector, trying to silence Poulydamas (12.230; 18.284; cf. 17.169); (5) Zeus, silencing Hera (*Il*. 5.888; 15.13). In the *Odyssey*, the phrase is used only of Odysseus (*Od*. 8.165; 18.4, 337, 19.70; 22.34, 60, 320), with the exception of Antinous (17.459) and Eurymachus (18.388), whose Achillean-like reactions give them away to Odysseus’ teasing questioning. Holoka (1983) interprets this phrase as denoting the class status of the speaker.

\(^{122}\) Russo, Fernández-Galiano, and Heubeck (1992), 232 (my italics).
authority over Peleus. Thus, at the point of crisis, when Eurymachus speaks like an Odysseus with words of compromise, the narrative answers back with Odysseus’ Achilles-like response. But this ‘Achilles’ conforms to an Odyssean world of order and control: Odysseus’ evocation of Achilles silences dissent. The Odyssey invites its audience to recognize its resonant interplay with its rival tradition, but playing the game of allusion-spotting risks—like the suitors—overlooking what is at stake in the contest.

He cut off his head while he was still talking

The end of the contest forcefully brings the question of its representation to mind by means of a series of parallel supplications made by Leiodes, Medon and the bard respectively. The theme of supplication dominates the Iliad, which is framed by parallel examples of an elderly figure entreating a powerful king, the first of which is rejected, while the latter example is accepted. The Odyssey briefly reprises that series in this episode, as Odysseus first rejects and then accepts supplication.

The first supplication is by Leiodes, the one surviving suitor, who, as he supplicates Odysseus, draws attention to his status as some kind of seer (θυσακός, 22.318)—as if he should be spared for this reason. The clash of seer and leader in the context of a supplication resonates strongly with the beginning of the Iliad, where Agamemnon spectacularly failed to silence either the suppliant (Chyrses) or the seer (Calchas) with his exercise of authority. The situation turns out to be rather different for Odysseus (Od. 22.326–9):

ως ἄρα φωνήσας ξίφος εἰλπετο χειρὶ παχεῖῃ
ekείμενον, ὥ ἡ Ἀγέλαος ἀποπροέηκε χαμάζε
cτεινόμενος: τῷ τῶν γε κατ’ αὐχένα μέσον ἔλασσε.
φθεγγομένου δ’ ἄρα τοῦ γε κάρη κονιήσων ἐμίχθη.

123 For example, Agamemnon’s offer of his daughter in marriage (Il. 9.141–8; cf. 283–90) is countered by Achilles’ assertion that his father will find him a bride (9.388–400). Deneen (2000), 65 observes that Odysseus must become more like Achilles.

124 In the human realm, no supplication is successful during the course of the narrative until Achilles receives Priam’s entreaty. That scenario was not always the case, however: Achilles had been willing to accept supplication prior to the narrative of the Iliad, as the episode between Achilles and Lycaon makes clear (Il. 21.34–135). Cf. Il. 11.123–48.
So speaking Odysseus took in his thick hand a sword that was lying on the ground, which Agelaus had dropped to the floor when he was killed. With this sword then he cut through the middle of Leoides’ neck. And while he was still speaking his head fell to the floor and mixed with the dust.

The image is both memorable and shocking: Odysseus cuts off Leoides’ head while he is still talking. Furthermore, the instrument he uses is the sword of Agelaus: the weapon of ‘the leader of the λαός’ is used to silence the last remaining suitor. In a supreme authorial gesture, the Odyssey definitively, and brutally, silences dissent. But—and this is equally important—it does not shy away from doing so. It confronts the ugliness of Odysseus’ victory, even as it has shown the value and necessity of it.

Following this unfavourable precedent, not surprisingly the bard hesitates to carry out his supplication. Fortunately for all concerned, Telemachus intervenes and the bard is spared.

As the doors close on the slaughter, Odysseus silences Eurycleia’s victory-song: by doing so he paradoxically advertises his famed deceptiveness. Odysseus’ control over the production of fame is symptomatic of a narrative that marginalizes dissenting voices, even as it reveals, and revels in, its strategy of suppression.

4. HOW TO STAGE-MANAGE EPIC

(ODYSSEY 1, 24)

The Odyssey’s control over dissent most startlingly comes to the fore with the divine framing of the poem: Zeus and Athena act as a catalyst...
for, and bring to an end, the narrative. In the *Iliad* the divine assembly acts as an important extreme-case scenario that shows the extent of the progress made by the Achaeans. The assembly scenes on Olympus are contrasted with the assemblies performed by the Achaeans: Zeus does not, and cannot, brook dissent, since the stability of the cosmos depends on it; on the other hand, the activity of his potential cosmic usurper, Achilles, by standing up to Agamemnon, confirms Zeus’ ultimate and everlasting authority. The *Odyssey* explores the tensions within this model by substituting the divine assembly as the yardstick by which to measure all other assemblies in the narrative.

**Zeus calls an assembly**

The first words in direct speech of the *Iliad* had been uttered by Chryses, a marginal figure whose plea before the collected Achaeans leads to a crisis in Agamemnon’s leadership and prompts Achilles’ response—to call an assembly. The *Odyssey* also opens with a programmatic first speech and assembly, but inverts the dynamic between authority and dissent. The first speaker of the *Odyssey* is Zeus, the ‘father of gods and men’ himself—the authority. He too convokes an assembly in response to a crisis. But the security of his community is not at stake (for how could it be, when he is in charge?); rather, the issue is one of interpretation. Humans, Zeus complains, fail to interpret the signs given to them properly and come to a bad end as a result; then, they have the gall to blame the gods! Read in the light of Achilles’ consolation to Priam that all humans receive a portion of ills from the jars of Zeus (*Il.* 24.522–33), these words act programmatically to distance the *Odyssey* from the Iliadic narrative tradition. This epic is going to lay stress on mankind’s pains being self-inflicted: Odysseus’ companions, Aegisthus here, the suitors later on—all come to a bad end ‘because of their own recklessness’ (*aφήσων ἀτασθαλίησιν*, *Od*. 1.34). [132]

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[131] This idea, announced right at the beginning of the *Odyssey* in relation to the loss of Odysseus’ companions (1.7) and made generic of mankind by Zeus, introduces an important theme. Eurylochus tries to make Odysseus responsible for their troubles...
As an example Zeus cites Aegisthus’ demise at the hands of Orestes, which acts as a counter-model to the Odyssey’s story over the course of narrative. In its first manifestation here, Zeus entirely empties it of the moral trauma that will infect its tragic later representations: the focus on Aegisthus makes it a case of revenge pure and simple. And so it must be, if it is to act as the paradigm for Odysseus’ vengeance on the suitors: for the Odyssey, the slaughter of the suitors needs to be constructed as (morally) unproblematic and inevitable. Furthermore, Aegisthus is introduced as a paradigmatically poor listener: he failed to interpret his warnings properly, which is why he perishes. Zeus’ speech is aimed at an audience of the events as a warning to get interpretation right.

Zeus thereby establishes the assembly, not as an arena that allows dissent, but as the stage for displaying authoritative interpretations of the events. Indeed, the subsequent exchanges between Zeus and Athena bear this impression out. Athena immediately concedes (10.437), but he is answered decisively by Odysseus at 12.300 with a warning that anticipates their self-inflicted downfall. The description then transfers to the suitors in the aftermath of their destruction (22.317, 416; 24.438). See Rutherford (1986), 151 with n. 37, and de Jong (2001), 12, who notes that the root ἄταθαλ- occurs only once—Od. 1.7—in narrator-text, while of the twenty-eight occasions it is used in character-text the majority (fifteen) refer to the suitors. Particularly significant is 22.416 for the way Odysseus’ indictment recalls Zeus’ opening speech: ‘Gods’ fate and their own wicked deeds conquered these men: for they paid no attention to any mortal on earth, whether base or noble, who came their way. So by their own recklessness they met a shameful end’ (’τούσδε δὲ μοιρ’ ἐδάμασσα θεῶν καὶ σχέτλα ἐργα’ | οὐ τινὰ γὰρ τεῖςκον ἐπιθυθεὺς ἀθρώπον, | οὐ κακὸν οὐδὲ μὲν ἐθῆλον, ὅτις σφεῖς εἰσαφικοτοῦ | τῶ καὶ ἄταθαλίσασι αἰεικά πότεμον ἐπέσαν’, 22.413–16). Its two occurrences in the Iliad are also significant: the first describes the failed heroes from the competing tradition of the ‘Seven against Thebes’ (Il. 4.409); the second is used by Hector to describe his own errors (Il. 22.104) as he faces death.


As Slatkin (2005), 318 comments: ‘By recalling this story [of Aegisthus] Zeus links the goal of return to that of revenge, bringing to the fore the ethical and political dimensions of homecoming. . . . Considerations of culpability, and larger questions of theodicy largely downplayed in the Iliad, are put squarely on the table in this poem.’

As Kullmann (1985), 5 puts it: ‘Taking the fate of Aegisthus, the adulterer, as an example, Zeus, in a kind of cabinet meeting of the gods, expounds the principles of his rule over the world.’
her father’s complaint against mankind, but denies its relevance to Odysseus, whom she upholds as a man who does listen. Zeus agrees, and sets in motion the narrative that will lead to his return. The result is an assembly bereft of tension or of contesting points of view. ‘[D]ans l’Odyssee,’ Roland Martin comments, ‘nous entrons dans une atmosphère politique assez différente,’ one in which consensus reigns.

A further point to bring out relates to the narrative’s orientation towards its external audience. Some four books later, after taking us on Telemachus’ journey abroad to visit Nestor and Menelaus, the narrator returns us more or less to the self-same scene on Olympus. Speaking first this time, Athena complains that ‘no one remembers divine-like Odysseus’ (‘ὡς οὖν τις μέμνησαι Ὡδυσσήος θείοιο’, 5.11)—which is precisely the concern one is likely to raise after four books of an Odyssey without Odysseus! Once again, Athena’s question fails to stimulate a debate: Zeus is whole-hearted in his support, merely pausing to comment: ‘Did you yourself not plan this?’ (‘οὐ γὰρ δὴ τούτον μὲν ἐβούλευσας νόον αὐτή’; 5.23). Once again the divine assembly appears to be more of a management committee than a debating chamber, even as the doublet of assembly scenes on Olympus draws attention to the artificiality of the narrative. Debate here is not represented in terms of reproducing dissent, but instead works to reveal the constructedness of this account.

136 Athena’s question, ‘Did not Odysseus please you with sacrifice . . . ?’ (Od. 1.60–1), opens a comparison to the Iliad, where Zeus similarly enjoys Hector’s sacrificial observance. While Zeus does not save Hector from the consequences of conflict, he does manage the return of his body for burial, in recognition of Hector’s piety (Il. 24.34, 69–70). See Rutherford (1986), 148, n. 19.

137 R. Martin (1951), 27. In his view, ‘nous assistons au progrès du logos’. This chapter lays emphasis instead on the impression that dissent has no place in the Odyssey’s divine assembly. In fact, from the beginning dissent has been marginalized: Poseidon, who alone opposes Odysseus’ return, is absent (Od. 1.17–21). Furthermore, as de Jong (2001), 14 shows, Athena’s opening speech (1.48–62) plays on the connection between Odysseus’ name and his suffering.


139 On Athena’s facilitating role in the Odyssey, see Clay (1983). Cook (1995) associates Athena’s prominence with Athens, exploring the interpenetration of the Odyssey with Athenian cult. He concludes that ‘the authorial perspective is consistently that of Zeus and Athene as guarantors of justice’ (p. 180).
Let us forget

At one level, then, the *Odyssey* strips away any pretence of debate in the divine assembly, reducing it to little more than a setting out of objectives between Zeus and Athena. At another, however, it displays their control, not only over the machinations of the wider mythological cosmos, but also over the direction and shape of this narrative. This could suggest that the *Odyssey* stands at a later stage of cosmos construction, when no dissenting voices from Zeus are even heard, and/or that it is more self-conscious than the *Iliad* about the necessity of power. Either way, it presents a narrative highly aware of its own construction and of its influence over its own reception.

The third and last meeting between Zeus and Athena occurs as the narrative itself draws to a close, and dissent (in the form of the suitors’ relatives) has finally broken out on stage (24.471–88). With civil conflict looming large on the horizon, Zeus repeats his earlier assurance that everything has happened as Athena had planned, underlining their dual management of the narrative. He then issues a series of edicts: ‘let [Odysseus] rule always’ (’ὁ μὲν βασιλευέτω αἰεί’, 24.483); ‘let them be friends with each other’ (’τοῖ δ’ ἀλλήλους φιλεώτων’, 24.485). Zeus’ sentiment here resonates with the end of the *Iliad*, in which warrior and victim form some kind of bond of reconciliation and a truce allows the burial of Hector—all under Zeus’ guidance.

Yet, for all that Zeus engineers the meeting between hero and suppliant, Achilles asserts that he will return Hector’s body because he wills it so. The *Odyssey*’s manufacture of an ending is far more explicit: Zeus’ exhortative ‘let them be friends with each other’ glosses over some rather stark and fundamental differences within the community that, up

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140 This would be in line with the view that ancient Greek hexameter poetry charts out a history of the cosmos: Graziosi and Haubold (2005).

141 24.478–80. It should be noted that all indications of an institutional space are absent from this scene on Olympus. We are now in the realm solely of narrative manipulation.

142 Heubeck (1954), 40–54. Nevertheless, the truce there had been uneasy: even as Achilles promises a pause from fighting (Il. 24.657–70), he disrupts the conciliatory mood by ushering Priam out of his tent with the threat of Agamemnon’s anger should Priam be seen (24.650–5); and the Trojans *still* post guards *just in case* the Achaeans attack (24.799–800). See Lynn-George (1988), 230–76.

143 Il. 24.560–70, esp. 560–1: ‘I myself am minded to release Hector to you’ (’νοεώ δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται τοι δύσας’).
until this moment, had been represented along partisan lines: just how are the suitors’ and Odysseus’ families expected to get along now? In the absence of explanation, Zeus enjoins: ‘Let us put oblivion on the slaughter’ (‘φόνοι ἐκλῆσιν θέωμεν’, 24.484–5). Where Priam had brought about a connection between himself and Achilles by asking the Iliad’s protagonist to remember (μνήσαι, II. 24.486), Zeus asks us all to forget. His orders display the desire to control both the narrative and interpretation of it.

Yet it does not end there. It is only after Eupeithes, that last dissenting voice, has been done away with—and god knows how many others with him—144—that Athena finally intercedes to halt the slaughter: she calls out to the Ithacans to ‘hold back from grievous war’ (‘ἰσχεσθε πτολέμου, Ἰθακήσιοι, ἀργαλείοι’, 24.531).145 Even then, this is not the end of the story, as Odysseus continues his slaughter of the dissenters until, finally, Zeus’ thunderbolt and yet another intervention by Athena halt his pursuit. When Athena held Achilles back by the hair at the beginning of the Iliad it precipitated his withdrawal and a narrative based on dissent; here, Athena is barely able to hold Odysseus back, prevent further slaughter and bring an end to his return.146 At its conclusion, the narrative paradoxically suggests the precariousness of its control over alternative voices; in the end, it presents itself as just one version of Odysseus’ return.147

144 The narrator merely mentions that ‘Odysseus would have killed them all and taken away their homecoming’ had not Athena intervened (καὶ νῦ κε δὴ πῶςαν ἀλεαν καὶ ἔθηκαν ἀνόστους, 24.528).
145 In fact, not only does Athena desist from intervening right away; on the contrary, she actively incites Odysseus and his followers into battle against the suitors’ families (24.502–4, 516–20). Critics, however, tend to elide the assembly that asserts the truce with Athena’s final intervention. See e.g. Schein (1996), 9, who comments: ‘Zeus and Athene impose a truce ... after Laertes kills Eupeithes’ (my italics).
146 The end of the Odyssey has much troubled scholars since Aristarchus, who puts the end at Od. 23.296: see S. West (1989), 118. See esp. Page (1955), ch. 5. For a defence of the ending as we have it, see Erbse (1972); Moulton (1974); Wender (1978); de Jong (2001), 565–6. For a judicious weighing up of the arguments, see Rutherford (1996), 74–7, who thinks much of book 24 is likely to be the work of a later poet, though he concedes that ‘it is hard to believe that nothing was said about the reclaiming of the kingdom’ (p. 77). We might note that the Odyssey goes some way to anticipating and, to a certain extent, to setting up this crisis by having Teiresias prophesy that Odysseus’ homecoming will not end on his arrival back home—a prophecy made roughly halfway through the poem (11.90–137).
147 In certain scenes (see esp. 13.221–439, but also e.g. 20.30–53) Odysseus enjoys an almost exclusive direct vision of divinity of the kind he is refused in the Iliad (where he only hears Athena at II. 2.182; cf. II. 10.512) in comparison to e.g. Achilles, who ‘immediately recognized Pallas Athena’ (ἀντίκα δ’ ἐγνό | Παλλάδ’ δ’ Αθηναίην, II. 1.199–200). See Pucci (1987), 42.
The Odyssey narrates quite a different vision of the assembly from the Iliad. Debate is seen through the eyes of a figure involved in it and trying to exert control over it. More generally, agonistic confrontations are displaced from the Iliadic arenas of social cohesion and differentiation (the assembly, games, even the battlefield) to the more intimate surroundings of the palace, the swineherd’s hut and the bedroom.® Dissenting voices are marginalized from arenas of power and, subsequently, suppressed.® Contrary to the Iliad’s model of institutional dissension, the Odyssey performs a narrative of Odysseus’ return. It insists upon a self-conscious awareness of a self-authorizing strategy, implicating the audience in the celebration of Odysseus’ tale at the expense of competing narratives.

Faced with such a performance, critics tend to adopt self-contradictory positions. On the one hand, they note the text’s powerful ethical drive whereby Odysseus returns to slaughter all his enemies. On the other, they celebrate its playfulness and its openness in allowing different interpretations—typically in comparison to the Iliad.® Like Odysseus, the audience are invited to hear the Iliad (or the Iliadic tradition of the war at Troy at least) as a Siren song, as Odysseus sails on to Ithaca and home.®

This epic Act began with Longinus’ distinction between contest in the Iliad and the Odyssey’s focus on storytelling. That distinction has been confirmed by the present analysis of debate, in which it has been shown that the Iliad privileges dissent as necessary and desirable to the institution of the áγορα, even given its potentially troubling repercussions, and while

® On the intimacy of scenes in the Odyssey, see Lowenstam (1993); Felson-Rubin (1994).
® Schein (1996): ‘Odysseus overcomes his enemies completely and unambivalently’ (p. 9) versus ‘The Odyssey [in contrast to the Iliad], like its cunning, shifty, adaptable hero, is harder to get a handle on’ (p. 39). Deneen (2000), 65: ‘It is ultimately [Odysseus’] ability to act apolitically and even amorally that will restore justice to Ithaca’. Rose (1999) criticizes Thalmann (1998) precisely for arguing that the Odyssey requires a relatively closed reading. Rose is right—if we take only the view of the social order. But this is to neglect the fact that, in the Odyssey, ‘low’ social characters have a voice because they have a role to play. The accommodation of ‘alternative possibilities’ (Rose (1999), 338) is, like everything else, a ploy.
recognizing the need for good management of it. In the *Odyssey*, by contrast, dissent is marginalized, as the narrative instead privileges Odysseus’ return. This observation concerning the thematization of dissent extends to an understanding of the differing narrative strategies of each epic. By being invited to witness and experience the institutional possibilities for dissent, the audience of the *Iliad* plays a part in realizing a political community. On the other hand, the demands placed on an audience of the *Odyssey* turn out to be paradoxical and troubling: little opportunity is given to heed the virtues of dissent; yet it is equally difficult to ignore the violence with which dissenting voices are suppressed.

The *agōn* between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* bequeaths to the tradition two alternative ways of thinking about the dialectic between authority and dissent which explores the problems of Achilles’ challenge to Agamemnon or the allurements of Odysseus’ speech. Act II will confront the problem of dissent in the construction of a historical narrative, when being an authority matters, as we have seen in Odysseus’ narration of debate. Act III then considers the responses of tragedy to the fallout from Achilles’ dissent, in the fully institutionalized environment of the dramatic festival in Athenian democracy.

As we leave the epic debate, however, spare a thought for the losers, Thersites and the suitors. By making a big deal out of asserting authority, the *Iliad* leaves open the possibility that the principle of dissent may be extended. It may even be said that the *Iliad* provides the basis for dissent that will give a platform for later Thersiteses to enter the debate. Defending Thersites in fact becomes something of a topos in rhetorical treatises. No one is heard defending the suitors.

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152 Imhoof (1990) explores this relationship from a philosophical perspective, and notes how Odysseus’ polytropic form proves a suggestive, and successful, model for a wide range of intellectual groups. Cf. Dencen (2000), esp. 11, 54; Barnouw (2004). The trend may be traced back to Plato’s *Hippias Minor*, where Socrates argues that it is Odysseus—paradoxically—who is the most honest of the two heroes: see esp. Pl. *Hi. Mi.*, 369–371. Cf. this chapter, n. 114 above.

153 ‘Each time these lines are read, other possibilities emerge, and if Thersites’ tears rendered him ridiculous to the Achaeans, they have come to evoke rather more sympathy from many modern readers’: Lincoln (1994), 88.

ACT II

HISTORIOGRAPHY
Introduction: writing in dissent

In Act I I explored the varying representations of debate in Homeric epic, reaching the conclusion that the two narratives adopt very different strategies towards dissent. From the beginning of its narrative, the *Iliad* presents debate as part of a collective enterprise to be undertaken in the Achaean assembly. As the narrative progresses, dissent becomes institutional in a way that intersects with the poem’s broader movement from a time of heroes to a world which prefigures that of the poem’s audience, however that is conceived. On the other hand, the *Odyssey* explores debate from the perspective of the authorizing agent and exposes fault-lines in its establishment and performance. In so doing, the *Odyssey*’s representation of debate stresses responsibility: not only are the characters within the narrative held to account for their dissent, but the audience too are made to reflect on their process of judgement, lest they find themselves on the side of suitors or companions ‘who perished through their own recklessness’ (*σφετέρησαν ἀτασθαλίσαν δάλων*, *Od*. 1.7, etc.).

Act II considers how debates work in historiography, taking as case studies two forerunners of this genre, the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides.¹ Since antiquity these two authors have been regarded not only as founding the genre but also as bequeathing to it starkly contrasting methodological practices.² For a long time considered a naive

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¹ For the different stages of history’s reinvention, see Iggers (1993). For discussions of the problem of writing history, see: White (1978); Barthes (1986), 127–54; Ankersmit and Kellner, eds. (1995).

compiler of outlandish stories, Herodotus’ more open compositional style, in which he frequently juxtaposes different accounts of the same event, has won increasing favour with contemporary critics.\textsuperscript{3} His rival accounts, it is said, unsettle an authoritative narrative and empower the reader, thus opening up a dialogue between the text and its readers.\textsuperscript{4} On the other hand, by giving his sources no voice in his narrative, Thucydides, once upheld as the archetypal historian for his perceived ‘objective’ approach to history, is now regarded as allowing his readers no way in to his narrative; he is the controlling author; his word is final.\textsuperscript{5}

If we apply our focus on debate and our methodology from Act I, however, a rather different picture of both authors emerges.

As composers of an extended narrative that, at least in part, seeks to document the progress and outcome of a war, both Herodotus and Thucydides work within the context established by the Iliad’s poem of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Thucydides and Lucian, How to Write History*. One of the ways in which the relationship between the two authors may be reconfigured is in terms of perspective: Herodotus enquires into past events, Thucydides writes up a war he was recording from its beginning. It is interesting to note, for example, that, when he writes about the past, Thucydides seems to adopt a Herodotean voice-print: see R. Fowler (1996), 76–80; cf. Pelling (1999a), 327. V. Hunter (1973), suggestively describes Thucydides as a reporter; Greenwood (2006), 129 notes in passing that Thucydides writes ‘a factual narrative about contemporary events’. While not the subject of this book, it is questionable whether Thucydides would have regarded himself as writing history.

\textsuperscript{3} Dewald and Marincola (2006), 1–7 survey the twentieth-century rehabilitation of Herodotos.

\textsuperscript{4} For Herodotus’ ‘dialogism’, see esp. Dewald (1998; 1999). According to Dewald (1987), these interventions combine to obstruct reading and make the reader aware of the problems of composition. See also Gould (1989); Thomas (2000); Dewald (2002); Pelling (2006a); Griffiths (2006). Pelling (2000), 83 puts this most succinctly, and makes the comparison to Thucydides explicit: ‘Herodotus’ text is “dialogic” . . . . Multiple viewpoints and interpretations co-exist in the text; and the interaction between text and reader is itself a two-way “dialogue”, with each continually putting questions to the other . . . . That is not Thucydides’ way. Where Herodotus opens questions up, Thucydides’ tendency is to close them down, to impose a single “monologic” view imperiously on his readers.’ This chapter will try to complicate that opposition by interpreting Herodotus’ openness as a tactic to gain authority and Thucydides’ assertions as provocative challenges. For a different approach to the potential ‘responsible dialogism’ of Thucydides’ narrative, see now Dewald (2005), 22.

Introduction: writing in dissent

conflict. The Iliad too is important for thinking about the compositional fabric of both narratives and their use of direct speech: though debates feature most prominently in Thucydides, and in a highly stylized way, they are present too in Herodotus, along with other kinds of less formal speech act. Given the high degree of direct speech in Homeric epic generally, it may just be the case that this was the way one composed a narrative of extended length. Yet, the extent and variety of direct speech is still a feature that sets the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides apart from later manifestations of this genre and thus requires comment. On the other hand, there are two basic, and interrelated, points which distinguish both Herodotus and Thucydides from Homeric epic: they are writers and they are self-styled authorities.

First, the use of writing radically severs the historians from both the tradition of narrative composition, which they inherit from Homer, and their own cultural environment, which was dominated by oral public performance. ‘To write, in the landscape of Herodotus and other contemporary authors,’ argues Debbie Steiner, ‘is to enter the world of the tyrant, to set oneself on the side of the autocrat, the oppressor, the enslaver.’ Steiner here is thinking about the representation of tyrannical figures in the histories as using writing; but her argument has clear application to the historians themselves. By writing prose accounts of their great wars, both Herodotus and Thucydides occupy a position of

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9 Though we know little about the ‘original’ context of performance for the Homeric poems, we do know that they were later put on at grand public festivals, such as the Great Panathenaia: see Act III, intro., n. 1 below.

10 Steiner (1994), 128.

11 Darius, for example, undertakes a policy of inscribing his reign, in which he (literally) maps out his territory: he takes with him, on his conquests, a group of scribes: Steiner (1994), 142–9.

12 Ibid. 142 notes in passing that Herodotus’ modus operandi is similar, in the sense that his practice of observing and recording mirrors the project of conquest and
some ambivalence in their respective societies, ideologically at least on the margins of a society that privileged the spoken word in the polis’s public institutions. Moreover, in Homeric epic direct speech is the compositional element the poet himself uses, and the public context of debate matches the performance context of the poem itself. In written discourse, however, debate represents an alternative, competing form of expression; and when a historian narrates an assembly, that context differs fundamentally from the one in which he himself composes. This should prompt us to ask what effect writing down debate has on its representation, and what happens to the production, and management, of dissent as a result. In turn, this question introduces a second point that distinguishes the historians from Homer: the issue of authority.

Although both Herodotus and Thucydides are indebted to Homeric narrative in a number of ways, such as in the extended use of direct speech, the narratives they generate represent a radically different scenario: they are authors of their own narratives in a way that a Homer, whose authority derives from the Muse and whose compositional elements are largely inherited from an oral tradition, is not. The historian is personally responsible for his text: his authority is constructed by his own testimony and by the manner in which he delivers his evidence. The place of debate, then, can be a key moment of anxiety in possession by the kings. Christ (1994) and Thompson (1996), 79–111 both stress how Herodotus differs from the despot in the nature of his investigation.


14 Most (1990), 47–8 identifies the role of writing as being crucial in marking authority: by naming himself, ‘the author identifies the text as his text, the one he has produced and which can now, since it is written, be compared word for word with other people’s texts’. For prose as a genre of argument and the mode of expression favoured by the natural scientists, see: G. E. R. Lloyd (1987); Thomas (2000). On the historian’s authority, see Marincola (1997); cf. (2001). For a survey and discussion of cause, responsibility, origin (aiρία): Darbo-Peschanski (1997).

15 For authorial voice in Herodotus: Dewald (1987; 2002); Marincola (1987); Calame (1995), 75–96; de Jong (1999); Brock (2003). In Thucydides, see esp. Rood (1998a), 3–23; Gribble (1998); Dewald (2005). The issue is nicely summed up by Marincola (2006), 15: ‘Whereas the poets rely for the authoritativeness on the god or muse who is invoked at the beginning of their poems, Herodotus has no appeal to the
the historian’s text, since it marks the point when voices other than the author’s are drawn upon and incorporated somehow in the broader narrative, while remaining the responsibility of the author’s as much as his own narratorial voice. Josiah Ober, for example, understands Thucydides’ representation of debate in the form of an *agon*—the typically Athenian means of representing difference of opinion and coming to judgement—as a response to and criticism of the formation of democratic knowledge: in contrast to assembly debate, with all of its deficiencies and flaws, stands Thucydides’ narrative. Yet, while there is much to commend this approach, not least its recognition of Thucydides’ appropriation of the *agon* for his own means, it overlooks the performance of debate within the narrative, and fails to take into consideration the historian’s investment in his representation. From this perspective, Herodotus and Thucydides find a precedent for their composition in the other Homeric poem, the *Odyssey*, when for three books Odysseus takes over the telling of his tale. And, just as we have seen that Odysseus’ relationship to debate was compromised by his narration of it, so the historians similarly cannot remain outside debate or untouched by the issues it raises: they are already implicated in debate by their personal involvement in its construction within the narrative they tell.

Since direct speech represents the one moment in a historian’s narrative—apart from source citation—when voices other than the author’s are incorporated, and since debate represents the most stylized manifestation of direct speech, in the form of a contest of voices, an

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16 Thucydides’ methodological statement (1.22.1–2) acutely demonstrates the author’s anxiety about including these alien voices. On the theory of dialogism, which tries to assess the dynamic between the narrator’s voice and those of his or her characters see Prologue, n. 68 above. While Bakhtin’s theory derives from the study of the modern novel, his broad analysis is especially relevant for thinking about the historian’s bind, whose very authority rests on the incorporation of voices other than his or her own into the narrative.


18 On the influence of Odysseus on ancient historiography, see Marincola (2007), whose study explores five aspects of Odysseus’ persona that prefigure the historian: as explorer, sufferer, leader, narrator, and liar. Hartog (1998), 132–3 consider whether Odysseus is ‘un historienne avant la lettre’.
Analysis of debate offers a unique opportunity to think anew about the historian’s authority. In particular, debates have been considered problematic in Herodotus and Thucydides respectively for two reasons. First, why do more formal debates seem to take place among the Persians than among the Greeks, though Herodotus’ narrative elsewhere criticizes despotic (barbarian) regimes and celebrates (Hellenic) freedom? And second, why does Thucydides represent debates in a much more formal way, and yet then show that they achieve nothing?

The aim of the next two chapters, then, is to explore how the strategies familiar to us from epic get reworked as a result of the historians’ peculiar engagement with debate. Chapter 3 argues that Herodotus inherits the narrative model of a war between east and west from Homeric epic but represents debate differently. The Greeks, for the most part, are shown to cherish and pursue the values of freedom: but its performance and achievement happens in spite of debate; the institutional arena of the assembly is no longer the privileged place for dissent to be expressed and managed, but an arena dominated by self-interest and fraught with division. On the other hand, the Persians, though lacking an adequate institutional framework in which to express dissent like their Trojan counterparts, are represented as conducting the most formal debates: this challenge to the readers’ assumptions about freedom is underpinned by Herodotus’ framing of debate, in which he turns back the question of debate on to his readership. At every turn, then, Herodotus prompts dissent from his representation, reproducing an Odyssean enquiry into the inadequacies of public debate. In turn, his sketch of the decision-making processes of the various communities lends authority to his narrative: here the author’s dissent from institutional debate acts as a lure for eliciting authority from the readers as the narrative positions itself as a place to rank alongside the public space of assembly.

Thucydides’ narrative, Chapter 4 argues, takes over Herodotus’ appropriation of debate. In this light Thucydides’ more explicit authorial voice may be read as a self-conscious gesture of his self-positioning in

19 Studies of source-citation, especially in Herodotus, have been the subject of much interest in recent years: Fehling (1989); Darbo-Peschanski (1987); Dewald (1987; 2002); Lateiner (1989); R. Fowler (1996, 2006); O. Murray (2001a, b); Luraghi (2001, 2006); Griffiths (2006).
dissent from his polis' institutions. Fundamental to this move is his representation of debate as agón. As many have observed, Thucydides' portrayal of debates is remarkably formal; yet, they rarely seem to achieve anything. It will be argued that, crucially, Thucydides does not reveal what the decision should have been, but rather presents his readers with a reconstruction of the two most opposed opinions given at the time of speaking. Thus the act of writing down debate accurately empowers his readers by giving them the means of analysing political discourse. At the same time, however, the narrator also draws attention to his role in the reconstruction of the debate, particularly when debate appears to malfunction. By entering the debate, Thucydides takes a stand, like an Achilles. His challenge is to his readers to dissent properly: using his representation of debate, they can come to a better understanding of how politics works.
3
Herodotus’ Odyssean enquiry

Herodotus begins his enquiry in the tradition of the *Iliad*, with not only his promise to record deeds so that they should not be ‘without glory’ (ἀκλέα), and his opening question of the cause of conflict, but also his even-handed approach to both Greeks and barbarians.¹ Homeric epic influence is clear too from his narrative composition, in which Herodotus employs the medium of direct speech at regular intervals as a way of enlivening his narrative, and as a means to investigate the conflict between Greek and barbarian.² At the same time, however, Herodotus signals his difference from previous traditions by signing his work: ‘This is the display of the enquiry of Herodotus of Halicarnassus’ (Ἡρόδοτου Ἀλικαρνασσείου ἱστορίης ἀπόδεξις ὑδε, 1.1).³ It is the thesis of this chapter that Herodotus’ personal involvement in the construction of his text fundamentally alters the dynamics between dissent and authority—which manifests itself in the way debate is represented. That personal stake in his narrative recalls the precedent established by the other Homeric poem, the *Odyssey*, the opening lines of which Herodotus also reworks at the end of his proem as he reconfigures his narratorial persona in the shape of an Odysseus, ‘who saw the cities of many men and knew their minds’.⁴

² Drawing attention to Herodotus’ use of speeches, Flower and Marincola (2002), 7 comment: ‘their very number and variety show H[erodotus] an imitator of Homer and the product of a primarily oral society.’
⁴ πολλῶν δὲ ἀνθρώπων ἰδεῖν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω, *Od*. 1.3; cf. Herodotus: ‘I will proceed with my account, coming upon cities of men both small and great alike’ (προβήσωμαι ἐς τὸ πρόσω τοῦ λόγου, ὁμοίως σιμικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἄστεα ἀνθρώπων ἐπεξεργάζω, 1.5.3). Marincola (2006), 14 suggestively comments: ‘Like Odysseus, Herodotus goes through the “cities of men” examining and testing them, and telling their
At one level Herodotus’ difference comes to the fore in his display of the sources on which his enquiry is based. In the very first section of his work, the so-called ‘false proem’, Herodotus demonstrates his historical method by citing competing versions of the origins of the conflict with the barbarians, all relayed in the indirect discourse that shows that these accounts represent the views of other peoples, and capped by the narrator’s steadfast refusal to cast judgement either way. Herodotus’ citation of rival accounts creates an open texture to the narrative, which Leslie Kurke describes when she talks of the ‘jostlings and uneasy juxtapositions of different perspectives’ as ‘competing within a kind of open agora of logoi’. She is not the only critic to draw a connection between the composition of Herodotus’ narrative and the external world of the Greek polis. Deborah Boedeker puts that even more strongly when she writes: ‘Herodotus’ new genre reflects in essential ways the politics he explicitly admires... [H]is account—like the freedom of speech (ἰσγγορία) that he says made Athens successful (5.78)—gives many different voices their say, even while showing that not all speak with equal veracity and wisdom.’

The emphasis of these critics, and others who have studied Herodotus’ narrative composition, is that Herodotus’ text somehow corresponds to the ideological context of the political culture from which it ultimately derives, a context which privileges rival speeches in the public space of the assembly.
The image both scholars draw upon acknowledges the particular cultural environment in which Herodotus operated: for Kurke, it is the _ agora_; for Boedeker, the notion of freedom of speech. But the claim that Herodotus’ text represents an _ agora _ or reproduces freedom of speech requires more careful consideration. As we have seen in Homer, the Achaean _ agora _ is the place where disagreement among the heroes and dissent from the authority of Agamemnon’s leadership is accommodated and made institutional for the benefit of the community at large. In Herodotus’ day that ideal is realized in the Greek _ polis_—whether in the form of oligarchy or democracy—as citizens group together to debate publicly issues affecting the community and to carry out the decisions that are made. Ideologically at least, Herodotus’ written text is on the margins of such an environment. Lacking the communal sanction that the assembly—or, for that matter, Homeric poetry—enjoys, Herodotus’ composition cannot be automatically presumed to replicate exactly the public structures embedded in the culture at large.

The moment when such an anxiety arguably most comes to the fore is when Herodotus represents debate. As we have already seen, scholars tend to regard Herodotus as admiring and showing a commitment to freedom; and many have put that in terms of an ideological polarity between free Greeks, on the one hand, and slavish or despotic barbarians, on the other hand. It is certainly true that Herodotus’ narratorial voice more often than not overtly supports the cry for freedom, while his narrative bears out the challenge to autocratic regimes. Yet, such a view

11 Certainly, by virtue of coming from the margins of the Greek world, and writing in prose, Herodotus should not be regarded as uncomplicatedly reproducing democratic values. For Herodotus on the margins of his culture: Kurke (2000); Goldhill (2002), 10–15. See also Redfield (1985) for a discussion of the link between travel and knowledge in Herodotus.
rather overlooks a certain fuzziness in moral and political categories that cannot be neatly assigned to a strict Greek and barbarian polarity: it is quite clear that Herodotus is no straightforward champion of Greek ideals. Moreover, it is the curious feature of Herodotus’ representation of debate that it does not conform to the ideological division already identified in the *History* between free Greeks and despotic barbarians, though that depiction could quite easily have been drawn from debates in the *Iliad*. Instead, Herodotus represents the Persians debating as frequently as—if not more than—the Greeks. Indeed, debate among the Greeks lacks that sense of achievement which had been so important to the narrative of the *Iliad*. Rather, it is precisely in the institutions of the Greeks where debate goes awry and fails to resolve the issues.

The investigation into debate, then, has the potential to rethink the extent and nature of the Greekness of Herodotus’ narrative; it also has implications for thinking about his dialogism. As I mentioned above, the recent scholarly trend has been to regard Herodotus as a dialogic author on the basis of the open texture of his narrative composition: he displays his sources to his readers to assess, accept or reject according to their judgement. In itself this may rather oversimplify the matter: recent scholars have reframed Herodotus’ open-source presentation as a lure, by which means the narrator gains authority for his voice. But this chapter will suggest a similarly nuanced portrayal of Herodotus’ representation of debate and relationship to dissent. One reason why debate in Herodotus does not conform simply to the *Iliad*’s precedent is

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13 Dewald (2003) argues that the Greeks too suffer from despotic regimes, in the form of tyrants. It is the thesis of Pelling (1997b) that the Greek–other stereotype is difficult to sustain over the course of the narrative. Plutarch, at any rate, did not view Herodotus as straightforwardly pro-Greek, if his *On the Malignity of Herodotus* is anything to go by. For other studies that complicate the simple Greek–barbarian polarity, see Moles (1996); Flower and Marincola (2002); M. Flower (2006); Forsdyke (2006). See also Irwin and Greenwood (2007), 29–33; Osborne (2007); Fearn (2007); J. Henderson (2007).

14 ‘The author’s refusal to pass judgement becomes a lure for the reader to adopt a critical position, to engage in the process of *historiē*’: Goldhill (2002), 28. For similar, though more reserved, comments, see Boedeker (2000), 113: ‘All these rhetorical characteristics contribute to give the *Histories* its uneven, anything-but-seamless character that places the audience in the position of confidante and even collaborator with the speaker’; Dewald (2002), 287: ‘*We are inclined to trust* this voice because it is so open in its own firm declaration of tentative provisionality’ (all my italics).
because of the author’s personal stake in its construction and presentation.
Since written debate can never represent exactly the real-life conditions
of debate on the ground in the polis agora, it remains for us to investigate
its role within the historian’s narrative in terms of its impact on the reading
process.\footnote{While taking a somewhat different approach, Pelling (2006a)
intersects in a number of ways with this chapter, including his concern to analyse ‘how deliberation works’ (p. 103, his italics) and document the different way of speaking ‘in different political systems’ (p. 103). In this way it is hoped that the present study may go some way to answering Pelling’s call for a more detailed analysis of Herodotus’ speeches (p. 104). Thompson (1996) has similarly prepared the ground by discussing Herodotus’ insights ‘regarding the creation and evolution of political community’ and ‘international relations’ (p. 3)—though the present discussion will emphasize Herodotus’ role in that construction.}

In this context it is worthwhile noting a point made by Jacoby almost
a century ago. While Herodotus’ use of direct speech is highly varied,
with speeches ranging from pithy sayings and conversations to full-
blown formal debate,\footnote{On efforts to define speech in Herodotus: Hohti (1976), 7, 139; Heni (1976), 18–22.} Jacoby distinguished between what he termed ‘novelistic’ speeches of books 1 to 6 and ‘political-historical’ speeches of books 7 to 9.\footnote{Jacoby (1913), 492.} Though such a distinction may not be quite so clear-cut, and unarguably rests on anachronistic terminology, nevertheless it provides a useful framework for thinking about the potential performance of speech in the narrative, particularly given the results of the analysis of the Iliad, which had suggested that the assembly underwent a kind of evolutionary development over the course of the narrative. Certainly, it is striking that the early examples of direct speech in Herodotus tend to be conducted in private circumstances among notable individuals, the later exchanges in public among citizen bodies. In this way Herodotus’ narrative mimics the progression of historical time, as the reader moves from an elite culture to the world of the polis.\footnote{Solon is an interesting figure to use given his connections to Athenian democracy—as Herodotus himself makes clear (1.29): see sec. 3 of this chapter below and Irwin (2005), who shows how Solonian elegy intersects with Athenian politics. On Herodotus’ Solon echoing Solon’s poetry of the symposium, see Chiasson (1986); Erbse (1992), 12–15; Harrison (2000a), 36–8; Pelling (2006a), 118, n. 11. The confrontation between Solon and Croesus also represents speaking back to power: Payen (1997); Greenwood and Cartledge (2002); Pelling (2006a), 104–6 and esp. (2006b). Solon’s disruptiveness in the court of Croesus is perhaps already suggestive of how Herodotus’ narrative departs}
may even be reconfigured as a movement from competitive exchanges in and over knowledge, such as we might find in the symposium, to the kind of public debate witnessed in the *Iliad*. Significantly, as I have already pointed out, Herodotus’ text stands at this divide between the private and public: it will be argued that lacking an equivalent publicly sanctioned performative context of its own, its narrative attempts to construct a place for itself in the community in the way it represents speech.\(^\text{19}\)

The present chapter is structured around Herodotus’ self-positioning within the publicly oriented culture of his time, taking first his representation of Greeks debating, then comparing those scenes to examples of Persians debating, and finally assessing the narrator’s own role in framing debate. Section 1 catalogues and examines the ways in which debate is represented as being carried out among the various Greek communities. Scholarship tends to focus on Herodotus as a supporter of freedom and of the Greek cause; but representations of debate do not always unequivocally bear out this analysis. One example that demonstrates this point particularly well is when the Ionian tyrant Aristagoras persuades the assembled Athenians to support his rebellion—a decision that Herodotus explicitly identifies as ‘the beginning of evils for Greeks and barbarians alike’. More arrestingly, given the success of the Hellenistic coalition’s repulse of the Persian invasion, Herodotus continues to demonstrate the flaws in debate. The major problem appears to be the lack of any inter-*polis* means of accommodating dissent. As a result, the crucial decision to stay at Salamis is only hit upon, Herodotus shows, by the actions of an individual operating outside the formal institution of debate.

Section 2 compares these results with the scenario of Persians debating. The very fact of Persians debating already shows an extension to, and departure from, the *Iliad*; more significantly, it also appears to

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\(^{19}\) Greenwood (2006), 3 similarly draws attention to the ‘complex entity that is Herodotus’ text, for which there is no precedent’. On Herodotus’ invention of his genre, see also Lateiner (1989), 13–51; R. Fowler (1996); Kurke (2000); Boedeker (2002); Goldhill (2002), 10–15.
contradict Herodotus’ narratorial persona, which promotes Greek freedom in the face of Persian despotism. To a certain extent this depiction can be explained—in the terms established by the analysis of the *Iliad* above—as exploring the difficulties of dissent under the influence of an all-powerful individual, who occupies a position that in itself is not contested. Yet, that description fails to account adequately for Herodotus’ insistent representation of Persians not only debating but conducting debate in the most formal terms of the *History*. Furthermore, it is not so easy for the reader to judge exactly where debate goes wrong, even when they patently lead to wrong decisions (both practically and morally) being made—such as the invasion of Greece. This section concludes with an examination of the notorious debate on the constitutions, in which a group of Persian nobles discuss particular forms of government, before choosing to elect a monarch. An analysis of the ways in which the strategies of each speaker intersect with its context in Herodotus’ narrative will show how this episode challenges Greek assumptions of the superiority of their political practice by presenting a Persian perspective on freedom.

The final section hones in on a further, and even more notorious, aspect of the Constitutional Debate: anticipating the disbelief of his (Greek) readership, Herodotus, as narrator, insists that it really did happen. The author’s critical, and contentious, entry into the debate demonstrates in the clearest terms yet the difference of this narrative from its Homeric counterpart of the *Iliad*. Unlike the Homeric narrator, the historian is a player in his text, with the result that the role of the narrator in framing debate becomes much more influential and more highly charged. Where there tends to be minimum narratorial gloss on debates in Homer, in Herodotus the frame receives far greater attention: this is the moment when he introduces into his text first-person voices other than his own. Thus representations of debate do not stand alone in the *History*: instead, the historian’s voice becomes implicated in the debate and, in turn, complicates assessment of the scene of judgement. Drawing a connection between Herodotus’ representation of debate

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and the role of notable individuals operating outside their political institutions, it will be argued that Herodotus represents debate in such a way that reveals the benefit of his enquiry in a common culture that lacks common, inter-poleis institutions.

1. GREEKS DEBATING BADLY  
(HERODOTUS 5, 7, 8)

The portrait of Greeks debating is familiar to us from the *Iliad*, where the assembly as the place for debate had been set up as a response to a crisis in the Achaean camp precipitated by the autocratic behaviour of the king. At first sight it would appear that representations of debate in Herodotus evoke such a world, as moments of crisis in a war against an eastern enemy are marked by scenes of Greeks debating in the assembly, such as when the Athenians discuss various interpretations of an oracle they receive on the eve of war in their assembly. Yet, for all the narrative’s emphasis on Greek claims to and the importance of communal decision-making, debate fails to play a decisive role in the story of Greek self-determination, and in fact often runs counter to it: a series of debates in book 5 explore the Athenians’ newly won freedom in relation to their role in the Ionian revolt—‘the beginning of evils for Greeks and barbarians’. Instead, limitations to and fault-lines within debate come to the fore on a regular basis; the progress of formal debate over the course of the narrative appears more disjointed and fragile; and no institutional framework seems capable of accommodating dissent on a Panhellenic scale. All of these issues come to a head in Herodotus’ extended narrative of the infighting in the Greek camp before Salamis.

They reported the oracle to the people (7.141–3)

Herodotus’ departure from the *Iliad*’s representation of debate is evident from his narrative structure. Although many different forms of direct speech occur in the *Iliad*, ranging from the informal to more formal modes of communication, such as prayer, exhortation, battlefield flying and political advice, set-piece debate dominates from the beginning of the narrative. Set-piece debates and assembly scenes,
however, are almost entirely absent from the first half of Herodotus’ History, during which communication is figured on a more ad hoc basis according to personal relations in private locations. In this way Herodotus’ narrative re-creates the impression of an early history, when key institutions such as the assembly had yet to be founded and speaking in public was the preserve of elite individuals.

A good example of the institutional progress reproduced by Herodotus’ narrative comes to light through a study of the stories told about the Delphic oracle. During the narration of Croesus’ consultation of the oracle, Herodotus gives a detailed account of the Spartans’ rise to dominance in Greece (1.65–9). By means of this structure he juxtaposes the personal exchange between the eastern despot and the god, which sees Croesus fail to grasp the oracle’s ambiguity, with the Spartans’ own successful interpretation of the oracle through collective response: more than one man is engaged in the enquiry. Still, we remain at an early stage of polis development here: Herodotus

21 The dialogue form is particularly prominent in the exchange between Croesus and Solon (see Pelling 2006b), which may also suggest an echo of a sympotic context. See n. 18 above.

22 The standard works on the Delphic oracle have establishing authenticity as their aim: Parke and Wormell (1956); Crahay (1956); Fontenrose (1978). But see Maurizio (1997), who identifies the role of the audience in authorizing oracles; Harrison (2000a), esp. 122–57, who explores the mechanisms by which belief was sustained and reinforced; and Kindt (2003), who proposes a narratological approach that understands the use of obscure language as a strategy ‘that draws the reader into the search for meaning in the story’ (p. 64), and (2006), where she argues that Herodotus draws upon oracular obscurity to authorize his own project. Barker (2006) attempts to make the case that Herodotus represents the oracle in such a way as to turn back the enquiry onto his reader to perform as a self-critical citizen when reading. On the importance of the self in citizenship, see Farenga (2006).

23 ‘Kroisos presumes an unproblematic gift exchange between his dedicatory offerings to Apollo at Delphi and the god’s oracular responses, only to discover too late that the two represent discrete and incommensurable “economies”’. Kurke (1999), 152. Lateiner (1989), 184–5 contrasts the despot’s law with the self-discipline promoted by self-governing institutions, such as those of Greek poleis: but this explanation fails to consider the marginality of Herodotus’ own prose. See Kindt (2006), 48, who explains the oracle’s prominence at the beginning of the History on the basis that ‘Herodotus has to establish his authority as the narrator of a text outside the conventional contemporary genres.’

24 Kurke (1999), 154 suggests that ‘the oracle seems to align itself with civic structures’. Kindt (2003), 106–7, however, emphasizes Lichas’ isolation.

25 Quite literally: at the beginning of his account, when the Spartan’s were the worst governed of all the Greeks, Herodotus relates an oracle which heralds Lycurgus as a god (1.65.2), after which Herodotus relates the founding of the Spartan constitution under his guidance (1.65.3–4). See Crane (1998), 79–81.
concentrates on the act of one (named) individual and his working out of the puzzling text. The oracle itself is not represented as being the subject of debate.

That happens only as Herodotus’ narrative journey nears its culmination in the Persian Wars. Faced by the Persian invasion, the Athenians consult the Delphic oracle (7.139.6–140.1).26 Uniquely, having received an oracle foretelling disaster in unoracular-like blunt terms, the Athenians are encouraged to consult the oracle for a second time.27 Though only slightly less doom-laden, this oracle is taken back to Athens, where it is debated by the people in assembly (7.142.1). It is striking that the consideration of and deliberation over the oracle’s ambiguity is formalized by its reception in the Athenian assembly and the process of debate that ensues.28 Moreover, the debate works: the recognized authorities on oracles countenance a course of action that proves to be disastrous;29 but a prominent Athenian, a man called Themistocles, gives an explanation of the oracle that the Athenians find more convincing than that of the experts, and advises a course of action that proves to be successful.

Many scholars have taken this episode to show the benefit of debate;30 but, while that may be one of the points which this episode

26 This oracle has typically prompted the question of its authenticity: e.g. Robertson (1987). For a critique of this approach, see Maurizio (1997), 308, 329–30.
27 Unlike most critics, Maurizio (1997) reads the two oracles alongside each other, concluding that ‘these two oracles reflect a crisis in the very definition of Athens as a city’ (p. 331).
28 By noting that ‘there were many other opinions’ (γνώμαι καὶ ἄλλαι πολλαὶ ἐγράφησε, 7.142.1), before narrowing his focus to the two he records, Herodotus displays a self-consciousness in his structuring of this episode normally ascribed to Thucydides (e.g. 3.36.6).
29 Herodotus goes on to describe the payback for those who insist on the literal meaning of the ‘wooden walls’: still believing that the wooden walls of the Acropolis would save them (8.51.2), all are killed when the Persians storm the barricades (8.53.2).
30 Manetti (1993), 34 comments: ‘The discrete binary logic of the dialectic alternative gives way to the continuum of the graded logic of the preferable. It could well be that the discussion so far has caused us to lose sight for a moment of the fact that the object in debate is a prophecy of Apollo. This is significant, for the logic applied to the interpretation of the divinatory response is precisely the same as that which governs political assemblies’ (italics in original). For democratic debate as contesting notions of priestly authority, see Detienne (1996), 89–106; Vernant (1991), 303–17.
raises, it is not the main thrust of the narrative. First, Herodotus does not represent the assembly as a set-piece debate: that is, as a pair of formal speeches in direct discourse set in opposition to each other, such as is found in Thucydides. Second, he focuses again on the skill with which the riddle of the oracle is solved and the individual brilliance of the man interpreting it. It is true that Themistocles acts within the communally sanctioned context of the assembly, which is essential for the successful challenge to the ‘official’ versions of the oracular interpreters; but it is his clever, less literal interpretation which Herodotus dwells on; the assembly seems incidentally important for ‘putting together’ the oracle in the right way. Third, Herodotus’ introduction of Themistocles as a ‘man newly prominent among the Athenians’ (ἡ δὲ τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἄνήρ ἐσ πρῶτοι νεωστὶ παριῶν, 7.143.1) picks up on the first word of the Odyssey, which notoriously introduces its hero as a/the ‘man’. As we shall see, Herodotus’ representation of Themistocles seems to draw heavily on the Homeric Odysseus; and, in the light of the conclusions made above about Odysseus’ problematic role in the assembly, this is just one other means by which Herodotus draws attention away from the institutional framework to the action of individuals operating within it. Indeed, there have already been indications in the narrative that debate among the Greeks is less of a clear-cut benefit to the community at large.

For, it seems, it is easier to deceive the many (5.49–97)

The first assembly portrayed in Athens occurs when the tyrant of Miletus, Aristagoras, comes seeking help for a rebellion against Persia in Asia Minor (5.97; cf. 5.55). Book 5 in general hones in on current affairs in Greece, from which point speeches become more frequent and

31 The description of Themistocles ‘putting together’ (συμβάλλεθαι, 7.143.1, 2) the pieces of the oracular jigsaw recalls Herodotus’ earlier description of the Spartan Lichas (1.68.3, 68.3, 68.5), and appears to be a key index to his own reasoning (at 2.33.2, 112.2; 4.15.1, 45.2, 87.2; 6.80; 7.24, 184.1, 187.2; 8.30.1) and to the reasoning of others (2.33.2; 3.68.2; 5.1.3; 6.107.2, 107.2, 108.1; 7.10, 142.2, 189.2; 8.94.2). For συμβάλλεθαι as ‘the intellectual process promoted by the narrator of the Histories’, see Irwin and Greenwood (2007), 7. See also Hohti (1977); Munson (2001), 83–5; Barker (2006), 16–17, 21–2; Irwin (2007), 47–56. 32 ἄνδρα, Hom. Od. 1.1. See Goldhill (1991), 1–5 and Ch. 2, n. 58 above.
more formal, as Herodotus begins to investigate the kinds of discourse which are heard in the civic context. The example of Aristagoras is telling because his speech to the Athenian assembly is read in the context of his earlier attempt to persuade the Spartan king Cleomenes to come over to his cause (5.49–55); the two episodes, furthermore, are separated by a digression on the rise of Athenian democracy (5.55–96), during which a certain Soclees of Corinth speaks in favour of freedom (5.92). The deliberate and nuanced interlocking structure suggests some uncomfortable insights into the excesses and limitations of freedom.33

Aristagoras’ attempts to solicit support for the Ionian revolt take him to the two greatest Greek powers, Sparta and Athens.34 Herodotus’ description of Aristagoras’ speech in Athens makes the connection to his earlier speech in Sparta explicit: ‘coming before the δῆμος Aristagoras said the same things as he had done in Sparta about all the good things in Asia’ (ἐπειθῶν δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν δῆμον ὁ Ἀρισταγόρης ταυτὰ ἔλεγε τὰ καὶ ἐν τῇ Σπάρτῃ περὶ τῶν ἁγιῶν τῶν ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, 5.97.2). Only this time his arguments, which included promising the earth,35 meet with a favourable response, leaving the narrator to conclude (5.97.2):

πολλοὺς γὰρ οἶκε εἶναι εὐπετέστερον διαβάλλειν ἡ ἔνα, οἱ Κλεομένεα μὲν τῶν Λακεδαιμόνιον μοῦνον οὐκ οἶος τε ἐγένετο διαβάλλειν, τρεῖς δὲ μυριάδας Ἀθηναίων ἐποίησε τοῦτο.

For, it seems, it is easier to put one across the many than the one, if he couldn’t put one across Cleomenes the Lacedaemonion, one single man, but the thirty thousand Athenians he could.36

34 Interestingly, Croesus had consulted the same two powers when he was looking for an alliance to launch a pre-emptive strike against Persia (1.59–69). See Gray (1997); Moles (2002), 37–8, 52; J. Henderson (2007), 293. Cf. Pelling (2007), 192–4.
35 καὶ οὐδὲν ὅ τε οὐκ ἐπισχέτο οἷα κάρτα δεόμενος, 5.97.2.
36 See Pelling (2007), 179, 183–5 for the translation of διαβάλλειν as ‘putting one across [x]’ or ‘throwing words about’. As Pelling comments, ‘εὐπετήσ [how easy everything is] and διαβάλλειν are almost Aristagoras’ signature tunes’ (179).
Something of that ease is reproduced by the narrative, which relates his persuasion of the Athenians in one line: the absence of direct speech emphasizes the lack of discussion in the assembly. The speed with which the Athenians are persuaded is particularly noticeable after the lengthy and drawn-out episode of Aristagoras at Sparta. Here Aristagoras certainly lives up to his name, ‘the best at public speaking’.

Not that Cleomenes’ rejection of Aristagoras’ overtures is quite so simple. The protracted discussions involve three stages. In the first Aristagoras, ‘entering into discussion’ (ἀπικνεόμενος δὲ ἐς λόγους, 5.49.2) with Cleomenes, stresses the suffering of the Ionian Greeks and their slavery at the hands of foreigners, and then offers Persia as an enticement, supplementing his argument with a map he has brought to display visually her riches. Next, after a two-day delay, Cleomenes simply asks Aristagoras how long it takes to get to Susa. Here, Herodotus points out, Aristagoras makes the fatal error of telling the truth (it was a thirty-day journey from the sea, 5.50.2), presumably reasoning that by stressing Persia’s size he would make its conquest all the more attractive. He did not reckon with conventional Spartan conservatism, however, and his protestations are spurned. Yet even that is not quite the end of the matter, since Aristagoras pursues Cleomenes as a suppliant until, finally, Cleomenes’ daughter suddenly exclaims: ‘Father, the stranger will corrupt you if you don’t get up and leave’ (‘Πάτερ, διαφθερέει σε ὁ ξείνος, ἵν μὴ ἀποστάσε ἔση’, 5.51.2). Thus Cleomenes successfully resists being persuaded ultimately as a result of the intervention of his daughter, a figure who in the male world of the Greek polis would not even have a voice: she only has a say.

37 See Pelling (ibid. 180, n. 5—who notes, however, that this does not mean that Aristagoras’ name is fictional. Cf. Moles (2007), 259. We might be reminded of the significance of Eupeithes’ name—another figure who was good at public speaking and persuades people to adopt a disastrous course of action: see Ch. 2, n. 83.
38 Ἰῶνων παιδας δούλους εἶναι ἀντ᾽ ἑλευθέρων ὄνειδος καὶ ἄλογος μέγιστον μὲν αὐτοῖς ἡμῖν’, 5.49.2.
39 δεικνὺς δὲ ἔληγε ταῦτα ἐς τῆς γῆς τὴν περίοδον, τὴν ἐφέρετο ἐν τῷ πίνακι ἐνετειμημένην, 5.49.5. How and Wells (1912), ii. 21 interpret Herodotus’ map as filling in the details of Aristagoras’ map, whereas Thomas (2000), 235 sees the narrative as corrective of it. Cf. Pelling (2007), 195–201.
in Herodotus’ text. From this perspective the Aristagoras episode appears to be less about the ease with which the many are persuaded than about the role of the individual—even one so marginalized as the king’s daughter—in political affairs. Significant too is the difference in context: Aristagoras persuades the Athenians in their assembly, but is thrown out of Cleomenes’ home. Politics in Herodotus is not straightforwardly carried out in formal public institutions.

Aristagoras’ persuasion of the Athenians hardly counts as trivial. By promising aid for the ‘free Ionia’ cause, the Athenians set themselves on a collision-course with Persia: as Herodotus headlines, ‘these ships were the beginning of all evils for Greeks and barbarians’ (αὕται δὲ αἱ νέες ἀρχῆ κακῶν ἐγένοντο Ἐλληνεις τε καὶ βαρβάρωις, 5.97.3). This line, a near quotation of the Iliad’s description of the beginning of the Trojan War (ἀρχέκακοι, Il. 5.62–3),\(^{41}\) has a powerful and provocative effect: far from blindly supporting the cause for Greek freedom, Herodotus exposes the inconsistencies and fault-lines within the rhetoric of freedom, which makes the Athenians’ lack of proper discussion in their assembly of the issues at stake the cause of all evils.\(^{42}\) After all, the paradox of hearing a tyrant wax lyrical on freedom seems to have escaped the notice of all involved—bar, one cannot help thinking, our narrator.

Herodotus gives good reason for worrying about the idea of freedom and its manifestation in debate by the manner in which he has structured this episode. Separating Aristagoras’ two scenes of attempted persuasion, Herodotus digresses to consider the establishment

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\(^{42}\) How and Wells (1912), ii. 57, following Macan, call this remark ‘a glaring instance of the political naïveté of Herodotus’. But see Pelling (2007), 186, who suggests that, in the light of Herodotus’ previous digression, there is a good case for the Athenians to accept Aristagoras’ argument as a pre-emptive strike. He notes too the closeness of this idea of fear to Thucydides’ ‘truest’ explanation for why the Spartans and Athenians came into conflict (on which see Ch. 4, sec. 1 below). This is also one of the reasons Herodotus gives for Croesus’ pre-emptive strike against Persia (1.46). On Aristagoras’ speech as intersecting with contemporary debates on Panhellenism and its directions, see M. Flower (2000), 69–76.
of Athenian democracy.43 ‘Driven out from Sparta,’ Herodotus narrates, ‘Aristagoras went to Athens, which had become free from tyrants in the following way’.44 On the agenda is the issue of freedom, the very message Aristagoras has been trying to peddle. Indeed, Herodotus enters his text to comment on the growth of Athens, which, he argues, ‘makes clear’ (δηλοῖ) that ‘equality in speaking is a good thing, seeing that while the Athenians were being tyrannized they were no better in war than any of their neighbours, but when they had been freed from tyranny they were by far the best’.45 According to Herodotus, ‘this shows that while they were oppressed they were willing to fare badly, since they were working for a master, but when they were freed each man was eager to work hard for himself’.46 Here is the Herodotus familiar to many readers of the History: Herodotus the freedom-fighter and supporter of Greek ideals in the face of foreign despotism.47 But the way Herodotus expresses that freedom already suggests a more complex picture: being free, the Athenians fought better than their neighbours. Herodotus’ comment marks a shift in the narrative, from treating Athenian internal affairs to exploring their conflicts with other Greek cities, first Thebes, then Aegina, finally Sparta itself.48

The Spartans had initially helped the Athenians throw off their yoke of tyranny. Yet, as Herodotus explains, when they saw the growth of Athenian power, ‘they realised that a free Attica would be a match for them, and that the only way of weakening their rivals and making them

44 ἀπελαυνόμενος δὲ ὁ Ἀρισταγόρας ἐκ τῆς Σπάρτης ἀνες ἐς τὰς Ἀθῆνας γενομένας τυραννῶν ὥδε ἐλευθέρας, 5.55.
46 δηλοὶ ὅπειρα ὅτι κατευθύνεται μὲν ἐθελοκάκεον ἀν αὐτίνῃ ἐργαζόμενοι, ἐλευθεραθέντων δὲ αὐτὸς ἐκαστὸς ἐσωτερικῶς προσεκρινόμενον κατεργαζόμενο, 5.78.
48 See Pelling (2007), 186–9 on the ambiguity of the cry for freedom and its interconnectedness with other episodes in Herodotus’ narrative, such as the Samians’ brief foray into popular rule (3.142–8). On Herodotus’ critical evaluation of Athenian democracy more generally, see Raaflaub (1987); Moles (1996), (2007); Dewald (1997); Irwin (2007).
obedient to authority was to establish a tyranny in Athens’. With this in mind, they summon the former tyrant Hippias along with their allies, and set up an assembly. This is the first time in the History that an assembly is formally convoked among the Greeks: like its Homeric precedent, the assembly is set up in response to a crisis in the wider Greek community; but far from demonstrating the importance of speaking freely and resisting authority, the Spartans convoke this assembly precisely in order to suppress Athenian freedom and reassert their authority over the Greek world. As they put it: ‘we gave up the city to an ungrateful people, who once they had gained their freedom flung us out’ (Herodotus, 5.91.2). This is not the language of a straightforward encomium of Greek freedom versus foreign despotism; rather, here the Spartans play the role of an Agamemnon responding to the dissent of an Achilles or, from their perspective, an unworthy Thersites. So it is that they recommend to the assembled group that they restore Hippias as tyrant of Athens. The assembly, one of the achievements of the Iliad’s foundational narrative, becomes a tool for the reassertion of authority by the would-be rulers of the Greek world.

Having set up an assembly, however, the dynamics of debate cannot be so easily controlled by the Spartans. Silence greets the Spartans’ speech, but Herodotus is careful to indicate that this signalled disapproval, not agreement: ‘most of the allies did not welcome the speech’ (Herodotus, 5.92.1). Thus the narrator himself affirms the principle of dissent on which an assembly is founded. With the rest keeping silent (Herodotus, 5.92.1), however, it is left to one Soclees of Corinth to speak up. As has been noted recently, the gesture of speaking up when

49 νόμο λαβόντες ὡς ἐλευθερον μὲν ἑών τὸ γένος τὸ Ἀττικῶν ἱσόρροπον τῷ ἑωτὰῶν ἄν γίνοτο, κατεχόμενον δὲ ὑπὸ τυραγνῶν ἀσθενείς καὶ πειθαρχέεσθαι ἐτοιμῶν, 5.91.1. As Moles (2007), 247 notes: ‘unappealing in its aim of subjugating Athens to Spartan rule, this political analysis is, nevertheless, substantially the same as Herodotus’ own at 78, almost as if the Spartans have “read the text”.’

50 Dan Hogg draws my attention to a pertinent parallel in Dionysius of Halicarnassus. The decemvirs (under Appius Claudius) convene a debate in the Roman Senate in such a way as to silence dissenting voices and reinforce their own authority; in the end, though there is more than one vote, the decemvirs only consider the result of the first, and so they declare their motion passed: Ant. Rom. 11.4–22. For the relationship of speech and action in Dionysius, see Hogg (2008).
all others are silent resonates with various moments in the *Iliad*, particularly when Diomedes—paradigmatically, we saw above—responds to Agamemnon’s defeatism with a vigorous challenge to his authority. Soclees’ subsequent speech—the longest in the whole of the *History*—is critical for thinking about the dilemma of freedom.

Soclees begins with an initial *adunaton*, which emphasizes the topsy-turvy state of affairs that will come about should the Spartans’ proposal be adopted: ‘truly the sky will be below the earth and the earth above the sky . . . now that you Lacedaemonians are destroying the rule of equals and making ready to install tyrannies in cities.’ This opening has an epic tone to it, and even recalls Achilles’ precedent in standing up to a wilful assertion of authority such as we saw in *Iliad* 1, which is here reworked as an act of defiance against a similar attempt to assert illegitimate rule. Dwelling then on the evils of tyranny, first-hand experience of which the Corinthians have suffered, Soclees pointedly suggests that the Spartans should try it themselves before seeking to impose it on others (5.92.a.2). The very fact that he can speak in this assembly illustrates the benefit of their newly won freedom that the overthrow of tyrannical government has brought his city (5.92.a.2).

He ends by invoking the ‘gods of Greece’ (*hépikaleóménoi ὑμῖν θεοὺς τοὺς*). Semantically, *hépikaleóménoi* is more complex than it at first appears, for it can be translated as *invoking* or *hailing* the gods, and this is the more likely of the two meanings in the context.

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51 See Hom. *Il.* 9.28–30; cf. 693–5; Pelling (2006a), 101. See also Ch. 1, sec. 2 above.
52 On the significance of the context of this speech, see Moles (2007), 246 and esp. 264: ‘Soclees’ speech comes roughly halfway through the *Histories*, at the centre, or “crossing”, of the narrative, when the Persians, tyrannical imperialists, are “crossing” into Greece.’
53 ‘ἡ δὴ ὁ τε ὦφανος ἐνέρθη ἐσται τῆς γῆς καὶ ἡ γῆ μετέωρος ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὦφανοῦ . . . ὅτε γε ὠμείς ὁ Λακεδαμώνιοι ἰσοκρατίας καταλύσατε τυραννίδας ἐξ τὰς πόλεις κατάγεις παρασκευάζεσθε’, 5.92.a.1.
56 Pelling (2006a), 106 draws attention to a meta-literary aspect of this argument, ‘as Herodorus’ text gives to others the experience of tyranny that—so Soclees claims—leaves so indelible an impression and inescapable a conclusion’. Cf. Stadter (1992), 782; Moles (2002), 40; Raaflaub (2002), 186. Moles (2007), 255–6 also explore the meta-quality of Herodotus’ narrative and the correspondences between Herodotus and Soclees.
Herodotus’ Odyssean enquiry

‘Ελληνες’, 5.92.5) and pleading with the Spartans ‘not to set up tyrannies in our cities’ (‘μὴ κατιστάναι τυραννίδας ἐς τὰς πόλεις’, 5.92.5), such as restoring Hippias to power ‘contrary to right’ (‘παρὰ τῷ δικαίῳ’, 5.92.5). The response of the embedded audience overwhelmingly shows dissent from the Spartan plan, as ‘when they heard Soclees speaking freely, every one of them held his tongue no longer, but expressed the Corinthian’s opinion, and urged the Spartans not to meddle with the affairs of any city in Greece’.\(^{57}\) The episode ends with freedom affirmed and attempts at suppressing it by means of despotic government resisted by the very means by which the Spartans had hoped to exercise control—through the assembly.\(^{58}\)

Even here, however, Herodotus’ narrative resists a straightforwardly encomiastic reading.\(^{59}\) Immediately after Soclees’ speech, and before describing the allies’ acclamation, Herodotus narrates Hippias’ warning that ‘surely the Corinthians would long for the Peisistratidae more than anything else, when the appointed days would come for them to be plagued by the Athenians’ (ὥ μὲν Κορινθίους μάλιστα πάντων ἐπιποθήσειν Πεισιστρατίδας, ὅταν σφὲ ἢκωσι ἡμέραι αἱ κύριαι ἀνασθαι ὑπ’ Ἀθηναίων, 5.93.1). Indeed, Soclees had quoted an oracle, prophesying the birth of a lion, ‘mighty, savage, which will loose the knees of many’ (‘καρπερὸν ὦμηστήν πολλών δ’ ὑπὸ γούνας λύσει’, 5.92.5). In the context of his tale, the lion clearly refers to Cypselus the Corinthian tyrant as part of Soclees’ attack on autocratic rule in his city. But, given the atemporality and ambiguity of oracles, as well as Hippias’ intervention at the end of his speech, it is equally plausible to read this oracle differently, and regard the lion as Athens, another tyrant ready to make the Corinthians suffer more, and nurtured by this very speech by Soclees.\(^{60}\) After all, as Herodotus’

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\(^{57}\) ἐπείτε δὲ Σωκλός ἤκουσα εἴπαντος ἔλευθερος, ἀπὸ τις των φωνήν Ῥήγος αἰρέτο τοι Κορινθίου τὴν γνώμην. Λακεδαιμονίωσι οἱ ἐπεμπάροντο μὴ ποιέων μηδὲν νεώτερον περὶ πόλιν Ἑλλάδα, 5.93.2.


\(^{59}\) Moles (2007), 257–63 discusses the negative aspects.

\(^{60}\) On Pericles as the lion-cub, see Hdt. 6.131.2; cf. Moles (2007), 262, n. 85. The image of the lion-cub is a popular one in the Athenian imagination: Aesch. Ag. 717–36; Ar. Eq. 1037–44 (Cleon), Ran. 1431–2 (Alcibiades).
readership will be very much aware, the Corinthians will suffer most at the hands of Athenian imperialism; Thucydides, of course, tells that story—but even by the later stages of Herodotus’ *History* the two cities are at one another’s throats. The oracle’s injunction to the Corinthians to ‘consider well’ (‘ταῦτά νω νῦν ἐφ’ ἄριστες’, S.92.3), then, seems pointedly aimed at the difficulty of judgement on an issue so complex as freedom.

The fault-lines opening up here are going to be increasingly important, and increasingly troubling, for Herodotus’ readership. Were Sol- cles and the Corinthians wrong to uphold the values of freedom, when Sparta and Hippias were trying to suppress Athens? Or if we think that they were not wrong, since the Athenians helped win the war against the Persians, would we feel the same way after conflict has broken out among the Greeks? And yet, do we imagine that the situation would have been any better had Athens been strangled at birth? Were the Corinthians really wrong not to countenance the suppression of Athens, even given everything that we now know? Would we have sided with a tyrant?

The Spartans try to characterize the Athenian democracy as mob rule—well, they would say that, wouldn’t they? But, when Herodotus returns to Athens, his assessment of the assembly’s decision appears to bear out such a judgement, gnomically remarking that it was easier to fool the many than the one. (Not that he had used Cleomenes’ rejection of Aristagoras as an opportunity to praise Spartan decision-making either.) While his readers may be supporters of freedom, perhaps even of democracy, and hold dear the idea of a coalition of the willing standing up to Persian despotism, and even as he himself comments to that effect, our narrator insistently probes the problems of freedom and the ideology of debate. At one level, Herodotus clearly shows the


62 Moles (2007), 259 worries: ‘How can “equality of speech” be the wonderful thing that Socles, the allies, the Athenians and, apparently, Herodotus himself think it is, when the narrative attests its failures as well as its successes?’
value of dissent, as the Corinthians stand up for the right of each Greek city to rule itself and not to be suppressed by others, foreign or otherwise (especially by those who claim to be supporters of freedom): the arena of the assembly again acts as the conduit for dissident voices to be heard. At another level, however, Herodotus offers no simple and glorious message concerning freedom. The Athenians assembly—the most evolved form of free expression—is the institution that a single individual, himself a tyrant, can easily deceive. Herodotus’ digression, which interprets the rise of Athenian democracy as a success story of freedom, also gestures towards its potentially disastrous consequences. Freedom is important and should be fought for; but it’s also messy and, paradoxically, can lead to slavery.

These issues—the importance of freedom, the growing sense of conflict within the Greek coalition forces, the problematic representation of debate—come to a head in Herodotus’ narration of the Greek assembly on the eve of the battle of Salamis.

At Salamis there was a great battle of words63 (8.40–82)

By book 8 of Herodotus’ History the situation in the Greek camp has reached crisis proportions. In spite of a heroic to-a-man defence of Thermopylae, the Persian juggernaut shows no signs of slowing: the Athenians have been forced to abandon their city to the Persian invasion force; the Greek coalition has retreated to Salamis before pondering its next move. The debate that follows is the most complex in the whole of the History. At stake is the future of Greece, no less.

Both the context—whether to sail away or not—and the chaotic form of the pre-Salamis debate resemble the assembly scene of Iliad 2 which was analysed above.64 In Homer, Agamemnon convenes the assembly to

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63 On the debates before Salamis, see Munson (1988); Graham (1996); Pelling (1997b); Blösel (2001); Harrison (2002), 568–9; Bowie (2007), 130–71.

64 So now Bowie (2007), 144–5: 'The scene is given a particular significance by its intertextual relation with the assembly in Iliad 2. There, where Agamemnon falsely recounts his dream (Il. 2.139–54), there is a noisy and unthinking flight of the Greeks to their ships, as happens here when the message of the capture of Athens’ Acropolis is brought. Then, as the Greeks flee, Odysseus is prompted by Athena and gives impassioned and sententious advice to the individual commanders he stops (155–97), just as Themistocles, encouraged by Mnesiphilus, will advise Eurypides in private. Once the assembly is reconvened, there is an acrimonious dispute between Odysseus and Thersites
test the resolve of his troops, and finds that their desire for home almost leads to a ‘nostos beyond what was fated’ (ὑπέρμορα νόστος, Il. 2.155). It takes a combination of Odyssæus’ wiles (and brute force) and Nestor’s organizational capacities to wrest control back and prepare the troops for battle. Something similar happens here, as Eurybiades plays the role of the coalition leader not totally in control of his troops, and Themistocles is given an Odyssæus-like guise to prevent the flight to the ships, which has already been prefigured by his introduction as a man’ prominent in Athens.65

Herodotus’ representation of debate, however, differs radically from the assembly in *Iliad* 2, especially with respect to the degree and nature of the narratorial framing of the debate. ‘When the commanders of the cities that have been mentioned came together at Salamis,’ Herodotus relates, ‘they deliberated, and Eurybiades proposed that anyone who wanted to should declare his opinion whether he deemed it best to make a sea battle in the territory still under their control… Of the opinions that were spoken most fell out in favour of sailing to the Isthmus and fighting at sea in defence of the Peloponnese.’66 Here Herodotus presents a picture of Greeks debating openly;67 but the majority of arguments favour the

(211–77), which is here twice imitated in the exchange between Themistocles and Adeimantus… Odyssæus then addresses Agamemnon before the whole assembly, arguing for the continuation of the siege (284–332); and Themistocles similarly makes a speech in the assembly of generals, which is addressed specifically to Eurybiades. Odyssæus saves the Greek expedition, just as Themistocles is about to engineer the Greek victory.’ Even from this summary account, however, the ‘just as’ in Bowie’s conclusion may be contested: the strong resonances of *Ilid* 2 also serve to highlight the differences, such as the lack of divine machinery. The present discussion focuses on the difference in *form* of Herodotus’ account.

65 See n. 32 above. For Themistocles as a fifth-century Odyssæus, see Fornara (1971), 72–3; Moles (2002), 48; Marincola (2007), 30–1.  
66 ὡς δὲ ἐς τὴν Σαλαμίνα συνήλθον οἱ στρατηγοὶ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰρημένων πολιῶν, ἐβουλεύοντο, προθέτος Ἐυρυβιάδεω γινώμην ἀποφαίνεισθαι τῶν βουλόμενον, διὸν δοκεῖ ἐπιτριθέσατο εἰναὶ ναυμαχίην ποιέσθαι τῶν αὐτοὶ χωρέων ἔγκρατες εἰσὶ… αἱ γνώμαι δὲ τῶν λεγόντων αἱ πλείοντα συνεξέπιπτον πρὸ τῶν ᾿Αθηναῖων πλώσαντας ναυμαχέαν πρὸ τῆς Πελοποννήσου, 8.49.1–2.  
67 Bowie (2007), 136 comments: Eurybiades democratically throws the debate open to all.’ That may be putting it a little strongly, given that Eurybiades, a Spartan commander, is presiding over a debate of commanders from both democracies and oligarchies. Nevertheless, Bowie is right to draw attention to the resonance of τῶν βουλόμενον with the formula that opens the Athenian assembly: ‘Who wishes to speak?’ (τίς ἀγορεύειν βολεταί). See Ch. 1, n. 4 above.
option of retreating to the Isthmus, which not only reveals the self-interest motivating the different coalition members, but also directly contradicts the assertion that the narrator has already made, when he insisted that a retreat to the Isthmus would have spelt disaster for the Greek effort.\textsuperscript{68}

Worse is to follow. While the discussion was still going on, a messenger arrives with the news that Athens had fallen to the Persians and that the city is now on fire.\textsuperscript{69} The news of Athens’ sack puts the assembled commanders into a panic, sending many of them rushing to their ships, and prompting the rest to resolve to defend the Isthmus.\textsuperscript{70} It is at this point, only ‘after they had broken up the conference’ (οἱ διαλυθέντες ἐκ τοῦ συνεδρίου, 8.56), that Herodotus moves into direct discourse for the first time to relate the speech of Mnesiphilus, an Athenian man whom Themistocles receives on his ship, and who tells the Athenian commander in no uncertain terms that he must ‘go and try to upset what had been decided’ (Ἰθι καὶ πειρῶ διαχέαί τὰ βεβουλευμένα’, 8.57.2), to prevent the coalition from disastrous fragmentation.

While interest has tended to focus on the nature of Herodotus’ source, my concern here is with the narrator’s representation of debate.\textsuperscript{71} Herodotus in fact shows remarkably little interest in the workings of the debate, in contrast to the assembly with which it so closely resonates in the \textit{Iliad}. Throughout this episode he draws attention to the external factors which influence opinion, such as the Persian occupation of

\textsuperscript{68} 7.139. On Herodotus’ portrayal of Athens see Bowie (2007), 92 for a bibliography.

\textsuperscript{69} With the sack of Athens, the Persians actually meet one of their main objectives. What with the death of one of the Spartan kings, from a Persian perspective their expedition to Greece may not have been regarded as that much of a failure after all.

\textsuperscript{70} οἱ δὲ ἐν Σαλαμῖνι Ἑλληνες...ἐς τεσσαῦρον θόρυβον ἀπίκειτο ἀστε ἐν τοῖσιν στρατηγῶν οὐδὲ κυρωθῆλθα ἐμοὶ τὸ προκείμενον πρῆγμα, ἀλλ’ ἐς τές νέας ἐσπειρον καὶ ἱστια ἄειροντο ὡς ἀποδειγμένοι τοῖσι τε υπολειπομένοις αὐτῶν ἐκφυτῆ πρὸ τοῦ Ἡθμοῦ ναυμαχίας, 8.56. As Bowie (2007), 145 comments: ‘θόρυβος: the panic is a little odd, since the Greeks cannot have expected a virtually undefended Acropolis to survive long, and H[erodotus] does not say what happened to those who set sail, but it is to be understood as part of the parallelism of this section with \textit{Iliad} 2.’ θόρυβος acts as a prelude to the so-called Constitutional Debate (3.80), on which see sec. 2 below. For the occurrence of θόρυβος in scenes of debate in tragedy, see Ch. 6, n. 85 below.

\textsuperscript{71} On Themistocles and Mnesiphilus, see Burn (1962), 293; Frost (1971); Podlecki (1975), 71, 230. Lateiner (1989), 254, n. 51 comments: ‘The erratically ungenerous treatment in the \textit{Histories} of a few persons such as Cleomenes and Themistocles was a result of Herodotus’ failure to recognize hostile sources.’ That observation would now more likely be read as part of the depth and nuance of Herodotus’ narrative.
Attica. On the other hand, he reserves direct speech for the moment when the assembly breaks up, as he relates the viewpoint of the otherwise anonymous Mnesiphilus and his communication with Themistocles. Thus, the critical strategy of staying to fight at Salamis is attributed to a meeting that takes place external to the assembly: this is where the fate of the Greek coalition is decided: it is not decided—as so many issues had been in the Iliad—in the institution of formal debate. A summary of the rest of the episode bears out this analysis. Themistocles goes to Eurybiades’ ship, where, making Mnesiphilus’ ‘arguments his own’ (8.58.2), he persuades the Spartan commander to reconvene another assembly, at which Themistocles first of all silences the reluctant Corinthian admiral Adeimantus (8.59.1), before making clear to Eurybiades the strategic advantages and patriotic ideals of fighting at Salamis. In place of learning what Eurybiades—or any of the other commanders—thinks of this argument, however, the reader finds Themistocles once again embroiled in controversy with Adeimantus on his right to speak in the assembly. Pricked, finally, to threaten withdrawing the Athenian fleet from the alliance, Themistocles succeeds in persuading Eurybiades to change his mind and stay at Salamis. More news

72 Bowie (2007), 145: ‘Here, for the first time since events after Thermopylae (7.234–7), direct speech becomes prevalent.’ He observes that ‘it is much used from here until 68 to mark the crucial moment when the decision on where to fight is taken by both sides’, but does not comment on its striking occurrences outside the formal arena for debate.

73 Pelling (2006c), 83 draws attention to another difference between Herodotus and Homer. Whereas Athena intervenes in the Iliad, ‘in Herodotus the Athena-figure is Mnesiphilus, who puts ideas into Themistocles’ mind: for the moment the divine role has been taken over by human inspiration.’ As Pelling notes, however, while this omission may say something about the Greek victory, the gods cannot be left out of the picture long, which suggests that even as Herodotus plots ‘how traditional story-patterns come to operate in a different world’, it is not possible to ‘limit those newer explanatory strands to the human and secular’ (p. 84).

74 He omits mentioning the likelihood of the coalition fracturing, which had been Mnesiphilus’ point, for, as Herodotus explains, it would have been unbecoming to accuse any of the confederates to their faces (8.60.1). See Pelling (2006a), 120, n. 34.

75 We learn that in response to the defeat at Thermopylae the Peloponnesians have been busy fortifying the Isthmus in panic (8.71–3). As Bowie (2007), 161 comments: ‘We now briefly see what is happening further south. 73 is a catalogue of shame to be set against the more glorious list in 43–8, and Herodotus is forthright in his condemnation, which picks up his earlier firmly expressed opinion that the wall was anyway quite useless (7.139).’ In the Iliad, of course, the Achaeans wall affords them little protection, and won’t survive long after Troy’s fall: see esp. Il. 12.1–37.
arrives, however, which first starts a campaign of whispers against Eurybiades, then breaks out into open resentment, leading to yet another assembly being convoked, where the same arguments are made. ‘At this point,’ Herodotus relates, ‘Themistocles, seeing that his judgement was going to be defended by the Peloponnesians, slipped secretly away from the meeting and sent a man in a boat to the Persian camp’, to deliver a message to Xerxes announcing his friendship and warning him that the Greeks were about to flee. News of the blockade fails to stop the Greeks from further argument, until a deserter from Xerxes’ camp arrives: only then do the Greeks finally prepare for battle.

It is clear even from this summary that the representation of debate before Salamis cannot easily be accommodated into a reading that privileges institutional dissent. The abrupt changes of direction or the influence of external factors demonstrate more than adequately the precariousness of Greek institutions of debate. The assembly is clearly seen as ineffectual: its first sitting is influenced by news of the capture of Athens; Themistocles determines its second by threatening the commander-in-chief with desertion; a third eventually sits, more-or-less spontaneously as a response to further worrying news—and its outcome is again pre-empted by Themistocles acting independently of it; lastly, when Aristides arrives with his report, he finds the Greeks still quarrelling. As Herodotus puts it: ‘There was a great pushing and shoving of words among those at Salamis’.

76 τέλος δὲ ἔξερράγη ἐς τὸ μέσον, 8.74.2.
77 σύλλογος τε δὴ ἐγίνετο καὶ πολλὰ ἐλέγετο περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν, 8.74.2.
78 ἐνθαῦτα Θεμιστοκλῆς ὁς ἔσσωσί τη γινώσκῃ ὑπὸ τῶν Πελοποννησίων, λιθῶν ἔξερχεται ἐκ τοῦ συνεδρίου, ἐξέλθων δὲ πέμπει ἐς τὸ στρατόπεδον τὸ Μήδων ἀνθρά πλοίοι, 8.75.1.
79 τῶν δὲ αὐτῶν ἐγίνετο λόγων ἀμφισβασίη, 8.81.
80 Thompson (1996), 92 reads the chaos of the assembly more positively: ‘As opposed to the Persian council, which follows a predictable procedure and has a clear beginning and end, the gathering of the Greek council before Salamis is marked by its lack of structure and its irresolution. . . . The Greek commander is so receptive to the opinions of others that he cannot bring the debate to a proper close, for even when all seem decided on a course of action, there turns out to be an opening for further debate. This inability of the Greeks to agree on and stick to one decision results directly from their perception of their leadership as both compliant and fallible.’
81 ‘[W]hat decides the issue is the threat that, unless the allies agree to fight, the Athenians will sail away to Italy (62.2). That shows the truth in Themistocles’ original fear that fragmentation would be the danger—but only because the Athenians themselves bring the fear so close to realisation. Thus the debate is short-circuited; then a
This is a contest of words from which there is no way out.

The institutional workings of the assembly remain something of a mystery; at one time it seems that the coalition makes the decisions by voting; at another that Eurybiades can make the call on his own. Instead, Herodotus shows far greater interest in the actions of individuals, particularly when they are operating outside an institutional framework.

So, Herodotus tells us, Aristides was the ‘best and most honourable man there was in Athens’ (Ἀριστεύς ἄνδρα γενέσθαι ἐν Ἀθήναις καὶ δικαιώσας, 8.79.1), though he had been ostracized by his people. Similarly, Herodotus notes explicitly that Themistocles acts ‘outside the assembly’, when he sends his tricky message to the Persian king—the significance of which Herodotus again underlines by a shift into direct speech.

This picture of disruption in the assembly is all the more powerful given the strong resonances of this account with the assembly of book 2 of the Iliad. On the most basic level, in both cases the coalition forces are further acrimonious debate (74, cf. 78) is again short-circuited, this time by Sicinnus’ message, a different type of speech, a piece of Themistoclean trickery: Pelling (2006a), 112. Pelling, however, concentrates on the rhetoric of the speakers: ‘The Greek debate was not merely a shambles in its conduct; it was also one where Themistocles did not speak his mind . . . He has to resort to arguments which are second-best’ (ibid.).

For the use of ὀθησομένοι λόγοι to mean ‘a battle of words’, see also Herodotus’ description of the debate between the Tegeans and Athenians before Plataea (9.26.1), a ‘metaphorical’ usage which ‘presages the actual combat, where the battle ends with just such an action’: Flower and Marincola (2002), 147–8. See also Pelling (2006a), 97 with n. 60 for the Iliadic resonances of the big ‘push’ (Ἀθησομένοι). Herodotus offers important testimony to the widespread association of debate with battle that we see in the fifth century, though that association has already been anticipated in Homeric epic. See Prologue, n. 25 above, on Athenian tragedy.

This point is implicit in Bowie’s commentary on this scene: ‘As often in H[erodotus], direct speech is used for the crucial news, conveyed in the private discussion between Themistocles and Aristides (79–80), while Aristides’ speech to the council is in indirect speech; the focus remains on the main characters and their relationships’ (Bowie (2007), 168, my italics) Herodotus’ focus is on the individuals, not on the institutional framework in which they operate.

Bowie (2007), 169 observes that the just and aristocratic Aristides was often contrasted to the scheming and democratic Themistocles. Here Herodotus brings the rivals together, outside the political arena.

In a typically paradoxical manner, Themistocles hits upon the true situation in his deceptive letter to Xerxes (8.75): the Greeks really are as fractious and on the point of flight as he makes out. Cf. Pelling (2006a), 112.
formally called to assembly (συνελέξθησαν, 8.59) by their commander-in-chief to discuss the prospect of flight. In both scenes too the assembled Greeks eventually reaffirm their commitment to fighting, but only after a protracted series of assemblies and much infighting. Indeed, their commitment to staying depends largely on the action of an individual, who prevents the flight to the ships and the fragmentation of the coalition, acting on the instructions from a third party. Where Odysseus held back the ships on the advice of Athena in the Iliad, Themistocles does the same in Herodotus, this time following the advice of a mortal.

Significantly, however, the two episodes also differ in their treatment of dissent. We saw in the chapter on the Iliad how book 2 continued the exploration of dissent within the assembly by repeatedly calling into question Agamemnon’s ability to manage debate: the crisis comes to a head when a voice from below, Thersites, invades the epic stage, only for Odysseus to take charge and reassert the control of the leaders. When Eurybiades recalls the assembly for a second debate, these same issues over who can speak resurface. First, Adeimantus chides Themistocles for ‘jumping the start’, which in turn prompts Themistocles to retort: ‘Yes, but those who start too late don’t win’ (‘Oι δὲ γε ἐγκαταλειπόμενοι οὐ στεφανοῦνται’, 8.59.1).\(^{86}\) Whereas this initial banter had been ‘mild’ (τὸτε μὲν ἡπίως, 8.60.1), Herodotus then reports Themistocles’ furious response to further provocation (8.61.1–2):

\[
\text{ταῦτα λέγοντος Θεμιστοκλέως αὐτὸς ὁ Κορίνθιος Αδείμαντος ἐπεφέρετο, αὐτὸς\;} \text{πολὺ ἦστι πατρὶς καὶ Ἐὐρυβιάδην οὐκ ἔων ἐπισφηξεῖν ἀπὸ λὰν \text{αὐτῷ ἢδον: πόλιν γὰρ τὸν Θεμιστοκλέα παρεχόμενον ἐκέλευε οὕτω γνώμας συμβάλλασθαι. ταῦτα δὲ οἱ προέφερε, ἢτι ήλύκεσαν τε καὶ κατείχοντο αὐτῷ Αθηναίοι τὸτε δὴ ὁ Θεμιστοκλέης κείον τε καὶ τὸὺς Κορίνθιοὺς πολλά τε καὶ κακὰ ἔλεγε, ἑωντοίσι \text{τῳ ἔδολου λόγῳ ὦσ εἰς καὶ πόλις καὶ γή μέζων ἦ περ ἐκείνοις, ἐστ’ ἀν ἀνεκράται νέες σφι ἐσοι πεπληρωμέναι.}
\]

While Themistocles was speaking, the Corinthian Adeimantus again attacked him, ordering him to keep quiet since he was a man without a country, while

\(^{86}\) We can imagine that the punchy, epigrammatic quality of the exchange is one reason which recommended itself for inclusion within Herodotus’ narrative: see e.g. Plutarch’s Life of Themistocles 11. Nevertheless, it is significant that the first speech act, which Herodotus chooses to quote from the assembly, is an example of witty banter rather of sustained political argument. Shapiro (2000) discusses the use of competing generalizations in Herodotus’ speeches, an aspect which is important too in Thucydides’ representation of political discourse: see Ch. 4, n. 144 below.
also trying to prevent Eurybiades from putting any matter to the vote at the behest of a man without a city. Rather, he ordered Themistocles to get himself a city before he offered his advice. He said these things because the Athenians had been driven back and were oppressed. On this occasion Themistocles heartily abused both Adeimantus and the Corinthians, making it quite plain that they [the Athenians] had a city and land much stronger than theirs, while they had a full quota of two hundred warships.

Adeimantus adopts the position of a Homeric hero and tries to disallow Themistocles from speaking on the basis that he was no longer a man who had a city—a peculiarly elitist argument based on the importance of a property qualification for determining citizen rights, particularly the right to speak in the assembly. But Herodotus’ narrative resists that assimilation: it has already represented Themistocles as an Odysseus-like figure, a portrayal that is cashed in here as it is Themistocles—as Odysseus—who prevents the Greeks from rushing to their ships. Adeimantus’ labelling of Themistocles as a Thersites nevertheless flags up the difference between the two scenes of assembly: whereas the Homeric Odysseus is the one who restores order to the assembly and reminds the Achaeans of their duty and the benefit of fighting at Troy, this Odysseus struggles to perform within the institution of assembly.87

Herodotus’ description of the end of the debate—‘These men skirmished with words at Salamis’ (οὖτω μὲν οί περὶ Σαλαμίνα ἔπεσι ἀκροβολισάμενοι, 8.64.1)—reworks the Homeric narrator’s description of the first Achaean assembly (ὡς τῷ γ’ ἀντιβίοις μαχεσαμένω ἔπεσαν ἣν ἀντιτην, Il. 1.304–5).88 But, as we have seen, any hopes that the Greek assembly will prove an institution that can make use of dissent—as it had in the Iliad—are soon dashed: ultimately Themistocles

87 Adeimantus tries to cast Themistocles as a Thersites figure, ineligible to address the assembly on the basis of his lack of a city: but it is in fact Themistocles’ language that resonates with Homer’s Odysseus in his upbraiding of Thersites. Cf. Bowie (2007), 181 (on 8.92.2) and 215 (on 8.125).

88 Pelling (2006a), 111 comments: ‘So this is “freedom” in action, in its most unregulated and roistering form: and the language used to describe it—“skirmishing” (64.1)—suggests that the bellicosity which should have been spent on the Persians is being spent on one another.’ This description usefully draws attention to problems with how freedom is practised as opposed to its rhetoric: but it is also important to note the Homeric precedent for this kind of language. Pelling’s description actually recalls Nestor’s intervention in that opening debate of the Iliad. What is entirely lacking in Herodotus, however, is a sense that dissent becomes incorporated within the institutional fabric of the community.
succeeds in getting the Greeks to stay and fight only by operating on his own initiative outside the assembly (ἐκ τοῦ αὐνεδρίου, 8.75.1). Whereas the *Iliad* investigates debate and challenges authority in such a way that makes dissent institutional in the Achaean assembly as part of its foundational narrative, Herodotus investigates debate and challenges his culture’s deliberative institutions, which are shown to be inadequate to the task of managing dissent in the face of inter-poleis rivalry.

In this section, I have explored various examples of debate scenes among the Greeks. Such episodes do not occur in the *History* until well over halfway through the narrative, as if the text were mimetic of historical progress: formal debate is not represented until the institution of assembly has become part of the fabric of the Greek polis. When assemblies do occur, they are found wanting at various levels: full-length speeches representing political discourse are rare, as Herodotus more frequently focuses on individuals performing within the institution; unlike in the *Iliad*, where scenes of debate realize a sense of achievement, Herodotus appears to show little interest in institutional progress. For the narrative he is telling, the assembly is often the problem rather than a means of finding a solution.

This shift in the representation of Greeks debating from the *Iliad* to Herodotus derives from two interlocking factors. First, the circumstances of representing debate are different in Herodotus, not least because of his role as an author of his text. The extent to which the narrator is now involved in framing debate matches the extent of his responsibility in writing down these other voices. Second, and following on from this, the institution of the assembly that is founded in Homer occupies a more hazardous position in Herodotus’ world. As the example of the debate at Salamis shows, particularly by virtue of its resonance with the *Iliad*, it fails adequately to accommodate dissent, principally because citizens from different cities are trying to deliberate together. The portrayal of Greeks debating in Herodotus is more nuanced and problematic than it had been in Homer because the historian is confronting the problem of inter-poleis debate: precisely what is lacking is any kind of institution that can deal with dissent among the competing communities.

This is where the role of the narrator comes in. In the way he represents debate misfiring, Herodotus presents his own text as a way of dealing with the issues concerning which the Greek assemblies are
instituted and yet are seen to fail the test. At Salamis we find that Herodotus not only represents the confusion over debate among the Greeks; he also narrates a comparison to decision-making in the Persian camp:89 while the Greeks in their assembly behave wilfully and even autocratically to suppress dissent, the Great King Xerxes acts democratically by soliciting other people’s opinions about how to conduct the forthcoming battle—though he remains sole arbiter and judge. The paradox of Persians debating in defiance of and as a challenge to Greek assumptions is the subject of the second section.

2. PERSIANS IN DEBATE (HERODOTUS 3, 7, 9)

In the previous section we have seen how scenes of formal debate among the Greeks do not conform to any simple form or stereotypical notion of utility. Indeed, in their varied representations we have seen the Greeks struggle with concepts of freedom, autonomy and collective action within one institution—the assembly—which is supposed to guarantee such ideals. In the last example that we looked at, the debate before Salamis, Herodotus not only emphasized Themistocles’ activities outside the institutional arena of the assembly to hold the ships back; he also presented the Persians conducting their own debate according to the principles of collective participation.

This section tackles head-on the problematic issue of Persians debating. Working with the ‘self–other’ conceptual framework, scholars tend to describe debate among the Persians as flagging up the problem of speaking before the king, a feature that characterized the above study of the Trojans in the Iliad.90 While that is certainly true for some of the scenes, such as the debate on the eve of the battle of Plataea, it proves an

89 8.66–70. On the comparison of the two scenes of deliberation, see Pelling (2006a), 111; Bowie (2007), 153–61. On Artemia’s advice, see Munson (1988). Bowie (2007), 159 comments: ‘[8.69.2] is a remarkable instance of how the opposition between Greeks and barbarians can be deconstructed in H[erodotus]. In theory, the Greek camp operates in a relatively democratic way, with decisions made by the assembled commanders, whilst the Persians are ruled by a monarch. In practice, here at least, Themistocles acts in an autocratic manner in defiance of the other commanders, whilst the King gives the order to follow the majority verdict.’

90 See Ch. 1, sec. 3 above.
insufficient explanation of the paradox that the most formal scenes of debate take place in the king’s court rather than in a Greek assembly. Two such debates are particularly interesting for thinking about the issue of dissent: Xerxes’ council of war, and the debate on the constitutions. Coming at critical moments of Persian history, both debates challenge the (Greek) readers’ bias against the barbarian and their preconceived notions of the nexus between freedom and debate.

**No one spoke against (9.41–3)**

Just as debates among the Greeks cluster around critical decisions, such as whether to support the Ionian rebellion or fight at Salamis, so debates among the Persians intersect with key stages of their conflict against Greece. The last scene of debate on the eve of the decisive battle at Plataea presents a good place to start, since it shows most starkly what is at stake: it explicitly raises the problem of speaking truth to power.91

The debate takes place between two types familiar from other narratives, the warrior figure who has power and the wise advisor.92 Here the debate is between Mardonius, the man of action, and Artabazus: but, in fact, the debate at Plataea represents the last of a series of confrontations between Mardonius and a man of words,93 which recalls the series of confrontations between Hector and Poulydamas that culminate in an impromptu assembly on the eve of the equally decisive battle in the *Iliad*.94 As in the Homeric scene, the framing of the debate is crucial, and affirms the roles they are playing: Mardonius, the impatient...


92 For wise advisors or ‘warner’ figures in Herodotus, see Bischoff (1932); Hellmann (1934), 77; Lattimore (1939); Immerwahr (1966), 73–83; F. Solmsen (1982), 78–109; cf. Flower and Marincola (2002), 7 with n. 48. On Herodotus’ Artabanus and Thucydides’ Archidamus: Pelling (1991). On Poulydamas, see Ch. 1, n. 121 and accompanying text.

93 For Artabazus’ alter ago Artabanus, see below.

94 Herodotus description even resonates with epic formulaic language: ‘During those ten days nothing happened beyond what I have mentioned. But when the eleventh day came about...’ (μέχρι μὲν νυν τῶν δέκα ἡμερῶν οὐδὲν ἐπὶ πλεῖστοι ἐγένετο τούτων ὡς δὲ ἐνδεκάτη ἐγερόμενε ἡμέρῃ... 9.41.1). Flower and Marincola (2002), 181 observe the ‘thematic resemblance’ of this episode to two scenes of deliberation involving Hector and Poulydamas in the *Iliad* (II. 12.200–50; 18.243–313). They comment: ‘Both Mardonius and Hector are too headstrong and stubborn to listen to sound counsel and their...
warmonger, ‘entered into speeches’ (ἐνθαῦτα ἐς λόγους ἔλθων, 9.41.1) with Artabazus, whose credentials as ‘a Persian of repute with Xerxes among the elite’ (ὅς ἐν ἀλέγοιαι Περσαίων ἦν ἀνήρ δόκιμος παρὰ Ἑρέχη, 9.41.1) are advertised in a similar manner to Poulydamas’. More striking still is his advice: given the advantage of the Persians’ present position, we might have expected Artabazus to recommend staying where they were; in fact he advises retreat to the safety of Thebes. Yet this proposal makes sense with Poulydamas’ advice in mind, which had been to fall back behind Troy’s walls (II. 18.254–82). In both scenes the man of action counters by steeling his men for conflict, a battle-cry which carries the day without opposition.

Again, however, there is an important difference, and that again points to Herodotus’ position as an author of his text. As we saw in the section on the Iliad, the narrator—uniquely—enters into the debate to cast his judgement on the Trojan ‘fools’ (νηπιοι, II. 18.311). In contrast, Herodotus’ voice-print is all over this debate. Most obviously, Herodotus narrates both sides in indirect discourse, accompanied by a commentary designed to direct his readers’ judgement: apparently the Thebans thought Artabazus especially gifted with foresight (ὡς προειδότοι πλεῦν τι καὶ τοῦτοι, 9.41.4), while Mardonius’ opinion is presented as reckless (ἀγνωμονεστήρ καὶ οὐδαμῶς συγγυνωσκομένη). Yet, ‘no one spoke against his judgement’ (τοῦτω δὲ οὕτω δικαίωντος ἀντέλεγε οὐδεῖς, 9.42.1): the reason—supplied by Herodotus through word-play—is that Mardonius’ opinion ‘conquers’ (ἐκράτει) because he has been assigned ‘command’ (κράτος) by the king (9.42.1). This debate is controlled by the individual who possesses power, a power moreover that is solely derived from an individual who is not even present. Thus, when Mardonius asks whether anyone eagerness for a pitched battle proves their undoing.’ Yet, the Persians, unlike their Trojan counterparts, clearly hold the upper hand in terms of position: see the next note.

95 On the line ἐνθαῦτα ἐς τό τείχος τό Θῆβαιων (9.41.2), Flower and Marincola (2002), 182 comment: ‘this can only mean “to go inside the walls” and cannot be construed as taking up a position near Thebes, which was less than 10 kilometres away (contra H[ow] and W[ells (1912)] 306; Hignett [(1963)] 315). It is extraordinary if H[erodotus] really thought that this was a viable plan’—which misses the force of the Iliadic resonance.

96 Just as Hector had urged his men to fight so Mardonius urges his to engage in battle ‘in the Persian way’ (νόμῳ τῷ Περσαίῳ, 9.41.4).

97 See Ch. 1, n. 123 with accompanying text.

Has heard of any oracles, Herodotus remarks that ‘no one said a word’ (σιγώντων δὲ τῶν ἐπικλήτων, 9.42.2), adding, ‘while those who did know them said nothing out of fear’ (τῶν δὲ εἰδότων μὲν, ἐν ἀδείᾳ δὲ οὗ ποιειμένων τῷ λέγειν, 9.42.2).99 Here, only the narrator’s dissenting voice is heard, as the authority of the king’s representative silences any possibility for dissent among the Persians.100

Even those men whose experience would be invaluable to the community have no power in the community to influence things. When questioned by his (Greek) interlocutor on why he does nothing with the premonition of disaster he possesses, a certain Persian replies: ‘This is the most hateful thing for men: to understand many things and have power over none’ (ἐξήλθη δὲ ἄδιων [ἐστι] τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις αὕτη· πολλὰ φρονέντα μηδενὸς κρατέει, 9.16.5).101 Nowhere is Persian institutional weakness more evident than here, with the fact that the Persian, who predicts his side’s defeat and who offers this insight into his culture, remains anonymous.

This example of debate demonstrates the lack of dissent among the Persians, and serves as part of the explanation for their subsequent defeat. While both of these points find a precedent in Homeric narrative, the role of the narrator suggests a different relationship to the representations of debate. What is a unique example of narratorial intervention in the Iliad is commonplace in Herodotus. His frequent and insistent intervention in the portrayal of debate reveals his position as an author of his text and his role in generating dissent. That factor is seen more clearly in the debate that presages the run-up to war.

If contrary opinions are not spoken . . . (7.8–19)

The discussion above has shown how the critical ‘coming together in words’ on the eve of the battle of Plataea is determined by Mardonius’...
status as the king’s chosen representative, which seems to reflect a deeper malaise in Persian culture pertaining to the lack of an institutional apparatus for accommodating dissent. The assembly concerning the crucial question whether or not to go to war against Greece exhibits similar problems, but can be less easily explained by the lack of dissent in the Persian assembly. In particular, it is necessary to examine the curious, and complex, interaction between the scene of debate and the framing of it, in relation to a series of dreams experienced by Xerxes.  

The manner in which Herodotus describes the setting up of this assembly immediately distinguishes it from the scenes of debate among the Greeks. In the manner of a Homeric king, Xerxes acts as an instituting agent, establishing an assembly of Persian nobles (σύλλογον ἐπίκλητον Πέρασων τῶν ἄριστων ἐποίεσε, 7.8.1) in order that he might learn what everyone else thought (ἀν γνώμας τε πορθηται σφέων καὶ αὐτός ἐν πάσι εἰπῃ τὰ θέλει, 7.8.1). The tension between collective discussion and individual desire is brought out by the language and style of Xerxes’ subsequent speech. He addresses the assembled group as ‘Persian men’ (ἀνδρες Πέρσαι, 7.8.a.1), as if this were a citizen-body to whom he was speaking, and insists that he follows Persian custom when advocating an aggressive foreign policy. Yet, from the onset his discourse slips into a first-person mode that betrays his personal concerns: he wants to take vengeance on the Athenians for what they had done to Persia and his father. His concluding appeal brings the problem of dissent to the fore: ‘These things must be done now in this way; but so I don’t seem to you to be deliberating on my own, I put the affair into the middle and order anyone who wishes to do so to make known his opinion.’ Xerxes’ language of openness—
setting the affair ‘into the middle’ and inviting ‘whoever wishes’ to speak—sits uneasily with the language of necessity and command.\(^{106}\)

The mixed signals Xerxes’ speech invites—convoking an assembly to help him reach a decision—elicits contrasting responses. First to speak is his general Mardonius, whose speech, addressed to Xerxes alone as ‘master’ (‘\(\Omega \ δέσποτα,\)’ 7.9.1), merely bolsters the king’s call to arms: it leaves no doubt as to the power of the throne. Silence greets his words: Herodotus has delayed narrating internal audience reaction until after Mardonius’ speech—we are not told what the ‘Persian men’ thought of Xerxes’ speech: now Herodotus interprets the nobles’ silence as a lack of courage to voice a contrary opinion.\(^{107}\) The problem of dissent before a figure of authority again is made a pressing issue. This time, however, a speech is heard in opposition, as Artabanus, the king’s uncle, speaks. Addressing Xerxes as ‘king’ (‘\(\Omega \ βασιλεύ\)’, 7.10.a.3, 10.η.1), and thereby reaffirming his nephew’s legitimate, constitutional status, Artabanus provides a theoretical justification for hearing two sides to the question in the most formal terms heard in the History (7.10.a. 1–2):

\[
\text{‘μὴ λεχθείσεων μὲν γνωμέων ἀντιέων άλληλης οὐκ ἐστὶ τὴν άμεινω αἱρεώμενον ἐλέσθαι, ἀλλὰ δὲ τῇ εἰρημένῃ χράσθαι, λεχθείσεων δὲ ἐστὶ, ὁπέρ τῶν χρυσῶν τῶν αἰτίματον αὐτῶν μὲν ἐπ’ ἐωτοῖο οὐ διαγινώσκομεν, ἐπεάν δὲ παρατρίψωμεν ἄλλῳ χρυσῷ, διαγινώσκομεν τὸν ἀμείνω.’}
\]

‘If opinions that are contrary to each other are not spoken, then it is not possible to choose which one is better; rather, one has to use the one that is spoken. But if they are spoken, then we can discern the better, just as we don’t discern the purity of gold by itself, but, whenever we rub it with other gold, we then discern the better.’

\(^{106}\) ‘Several phrases in that sentence capture mantras of Greek, especially democratic, debate: “to express his opinion”; “place the matter before you”, literally “into the middle”, where all around may regard it as equally theirs; “anyone who wishes”, so familiar from Attic decrees. But it is only “so that I may not seem to be self-willed”. This is already a travesty of debate, at least as Greeks would understand debate’: Pelling (2006a), 108–9 (his italics). Forsdyke (2006), 234 uses this debate to argue that Herodotus’ narrative both ‘points to the lack of truly free and open debate in Persia’ and ‘suggests that democratic debate in such poleis as Athens may suffer from the same dangerous tendencies as occur in the Persian debate’.

\(^{107}\) σιωπώντων δὲ τῶν ἄλλων Περσῶν καὶ οὐ τολμώντων γνώμην ἀποδείκνυσθαι ἀντίγνῃ τῇ προκειμένη, 7.10.1.
Only after preparing his audience in this way does he present his advice to the king, and then turn his attention to criticizing Mardonius for speaking vain words and slandering the Greeks, which makes it impossible to come to a fair appraisal of the situation. Nowhere else in Herodotus is there such a clear-articulation and powerful justification of the importance of dissent in the process of deliberation.

The fact that the value of dissent is asserted so forcefully in a debate among Persians is only one paradox of this scene. Xerxes’ initial angry rebuke of Artabanus suggests the behaviour typical of a tyrant or, for that matter, an Iliadic Agamemnon getting angry at his recalcitrant seer, Calchas. Xerxes goes further, insisting that Artabanus would be in big trouble were it not for the family connection that binds them: a debate in which even the king’s uncle should not dissent from the will of the king is no debate at all.

But Herodotus then narrates that Xerxes changes his mind as Artabanus’ argument eats away at him. This is not the behaviour of the typical (eastern) despot who asserts his will over everyone else, after all.
In fact, Herodotus’ representation of Xerxes’ responses to this debate is multi-layered and defies any simple explanation. At night, Herodotus continues, following the king’s change of mind, a dream-vision comes to Xerxes, instructing him to change his mind back again and resolve to invade Greece. Contrary to expectations, however, when morning comes Xerxes simply ignores the dream-vision ‘and summoned a meeting of the same people as before’, where he informs them of his change of mind; ‘when the Persians heard him they were delighted and bowed before him’. The tension between the power of the king’s word and the arena of debate—expressed most visibly by the sight of the Persians gladly receiving his speech and bowing—remains; yet, even so, Xerxes’ public admission of his mistake, and his willingness to accept what he now regards as the better advice, is noteworthy and challenges notions of the lack of debate among the Persians. The Great King shows himself to be not only tolerant of dissent—eventually—but also unshakeable in resolve. Agamemnon had never behaved like this.

The dream-vision, however, is not so easily put off, and it now returns to Xerxes in an even more belligerent mood (7.14). Terrified, Xerxes persuades Artabanus to assume his garb, sit on the throne and pretend to be him (7.15–16). Yet, neither deceived not deterred, the dream-vision condemns Artabanus for being the man who had tried to dissuade Xerxes from invasion, and issues an ultimatum that the king obey its instructions or else (7.17). Equally terrified, Artabanus persuades Xerxes to change his mind back again, and the two of them then ‘laid the whole matter before the Persians’—and, with that, the invasion of Greece is settled.

Thus the dream vision is absolutely critical to the Persians’ decision to invade Greece: but what do we make of it? In his introduction to

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116 F. Solmsen (1982), 89 notes the over-determination of the episode when combined with the following dream narrative: ‘Xerxes’ behaviour in the stormy crown council session would have sufficed to account for the fateful decision [to invade Greece].’

117 ἡμέρης δὲ ἐπιλαμβάνετο ὑπερήφανον μὲν τοῦτον λόγον οὐδένα ἐποιέετο, ὁ δὲ Περσῶν συναλασσάς τοὺς καὶ πρῶτον συνέλεξε, 7.13.1.

118 Πέρσαι μὲν ὡς ἦκουσιν ταῦτα, κεχαρηκότες προσεκύνησαν, 7.13.3.

119 Σέργης τε ὑπερεπήθετο ταῦτα Πέρσαι καὶ Ἀρτάβανος, 7.18.4.

120 See e.g. Immerwahr (1954); Germain (1956); Del Corno (1982); S. West (1987). F. Solmsen (1982), 82–99 comments on the difference ‘in outlook and conception’ of the prior scene of council with this dream sequence, in which ‘responsibility is attributed to a deity or other superhuman figure’ (p. 89). Pelling (1999b), 21 explores the ‘earthly counterparts to much of the dream’s content’, in particular the imperialistic project ‘as embedded in the way the court works’.
its first appearance, Herodotus tells us that the story is what ‘the Persians say’. Well, given the catastrophe that subsequently befalls them, perhaps they would say that a god was involved, wouldn’t they? Yet, both Xerxes and, in particular, Artabanus are highly sceptical of the dream-vision; Xerxes initially tries to ignore it; Artabanus rationalizes away the likelihood of a divine source in the manner of the latest Ionian philosophy.\textsuperscript{121} Furthermore, there are also striking echoes of a Greek tradition: the narrative of a dream—apparently deceitful—appearing to a king to urge him to war unmistakably recalls the beginning of the second book of the \textit{Iliad}, when Zeus sends the false dream to Agamemnon.\textsuperscript{122} Here too a dream follows on from a debate in which the king gets angry, only in this case Xerxes demonstrates a great deal more self-control and reflection than Agamemnon. Lastly, the uncertainty of the dream-vision is reproduced by Herodotus’ narrative, in which the language of appearances dominates.\textsuperscript{123}

Herodotus’ ascription of the story to ‘what the Persians say’ could lead his Greek readership to regard the story sceptically and put it down to Persian guilt for starting the war. But that would mean not only ignoring the strong resonances with the \textit{Iliad}; it would also entail acting out the role of single authority enforcing his judgement over all others. That is to say, if we dismiss the divine narrative as ‘just Persian’, we put ourselves in danger of closing down debate as Xerxes had initially done. Similarly, while Herodotus’ (Greek) readers may take a sceptical stance as a reasonable response to a Persian story about a ‘god’ telling them to do it, that position has already been taken in the story by Artabanus and, it appears, he is wrong. Readers overlook the ineffability of the dream sequence at the risk of acting out the role of the despot in debate by rejecting a perspective that fails to conform to their assumptions. Artabanus himself acknowledges the doubtfulness of the vision, even

\textsuperscript{121} See e.g. \textit{On Regimen} 4.88. Cf. Thomas (2006), 62.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Il.} 2.5–36, esp. l. 20. See How and Wells (1912), ii. 131; Immerwahr (1954), 34–5; Fehling (1989), 204–5.
\textsuperscript{123} ‘It seemed to Xerxes that a tall man of noble appearance stood beside him and spoke’ (ἐδόκει τῷ Σέρξης ἄνδρα οἷς ἐπεισάλμα μέγαν τε καὶ εἰπεῖον εἰπεῖν, 7.12.1); ‘it seemed to Xerxes that it flew away after speaking’ (τὸν μὲν ταύτα εἰπόντα ἐδόκει τῷ Σέρξης ἀποπάσαθαι, 7.13.1); ‘it seemed to Artabanus that the dream uttered these threats and was then going to burn out his eyes with hot irons’ (ταῦτα τῇ δή ἐδόκει Αρτάβανος τὸ ὀνειρόν ἀπειλεῖν καὶ θερμοίσαι ἐκκαλεῖν αὐτὸν μέλλειν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς, 7.18.1).
as he concedes its point: ‘since some god is eager and, so it seems, some heaven-sent destruction descends on the Greeks, I change my mind.’ If we thought it was going to be easy to condemn the Persians for their invasion of Greece, we had better think again.\textsuperscript{124}

Herodotus chooses to mark one of the most critical moments in the \textit{History}—the decision to invade Greece—with a debate. In his instituting of an assembly the Persian King explicitly demonstrates his authority and will: this is an assembly lacking an institutional framework for dissent and deficient of any purpose other than an opportunity for the king to air his opinion; in spite of the language he uses, he doesn’t set out to establish a Greek-style debate. As a result, what follows is not really a debate at all: Mardonius panders to the king, Artabanus directs his attack against Mardonius, Xerxes issues his judgement. Though Artabanus establishes a theoretical basis for challenging the king’s view, only his family connection presents him with an opportunity to speak in the first place, and saves him once he has angered the king. On this reading, the possibility of dissent in the Persian court is raised only to be silenced. Yet, the debate \textit{does} work: Artabanus’ carefully framed dissent makes Xerxes think again and reach a judgement that is more favourable to all. Contrary to expectations, then, it appears that it is possible to dissent in the Persian court. (And it is striking that the most formal articulation of the benefit of antilogy occurs here in the Persian court before the king, not in any Greek assembly.) Moreover, it is a decision by which Xerxes stands; it takes the intervention of the dream-vision to get the move to war back on track. Greek assumptions about debate are being severely tested.

\textsuperscript{124} ἑπεὶ δὲ δαμοκή τις γίνεται ὅρμη, καὶ Ἐλλήνας, ὡς οἶκε, φθορὴ τὶς καταλαμβάνει θεόλατος, ἐγὼ μὲν καὶ αὐτὸς τράπομαι καὶ τὴν γνώμην μετατίθεμαι.

7.18.3. Pelling (1999b), 21 comments: ‘We are still left with questions, but no answers, about this “divine” element.’ Our worries may go deeper if we think that the dream was intended to deceive, as it had been in the \textit{Iliad}; so Harrison (2000a) 132–6; cf. Immerwahr (1954), 33; Said (2002a), 144. As Scullion (2006), 197 puts it: ‘The divinity’s motivation, conceived as that of an existent Persian god, is bafflingly opaque, both on the view that he is simply ordering and on the view that he is deceiving both king and “wise advisor” into undertaking a doomed invasion.’
We are free because of one man (3.80–3)

While debate among the Persians is still figured as a problem, particularly before the battle of Plataea where dissent from authority is supplied only by the narrator himself, even so it does not lend itself easily to such a one-dimensional and partisan model of interpretation as one might have expected, given the importance of freedom to the narrative. Indeed, in the critical debate on whether or not to go to war, readers may find it difficult to condemn Xerxes without also implicating themselves: if we interpret his dream as a (Persian) fabrication, we risk acting like an autocrat in suppressing other voices; if, on the other hand, we accept the validity of the dream-vision, then we have to accept the possibility that the Persians do debate.

Nowhere is the paradoxical relationship to debate enjoyed by the Persians better illustrated than in the first example of formal debate in the History, the so-called Constitutional Debate, during which three Persian nobles discuss the best form of constitution, isonomia, oligarchy or monarchy.125 Not surprisingly, given the dramatic date of 522 for this debate, scholarly reaction has been almost uniformly sceptical, each pointing out that the whole scenario, and in particular Otanes’ speech on isonomia, reads like a fifth-century sophistic exercise in assessing the best constitutions.126 As Francois Hartog puts it, the Persians seem to be ‘speaking Greek’.127

The debate on the constitutions is embedded in two wider plot movements, one that documents the Persian expansion that will eventually lead to conflict with Greece; the other that traces the transition of

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125 The bibliography on this famous debate is extensive. See esp. Dihle (1962); Burn (1972); Lasserre (1976); Hartog (1988), 325–7; Moles (1993), 118–20; Thompson (1996), esp. 68–78; Pelling (2002); Dewald (2003), 28–30.

126 ‘The language and arguments of Otanes’ speech clearly derive from the language of Athenian political debate in Herodotus’ own day and have numerous parallels in contemporary Athenian literature’: Gould (1989), 15; cf. How and Wells (1912), i. 277–8. Paul Cartledge puts it even more strongly. He writes: ‘in 522 there had been no democracy anywhere in the world; it was one thing to set up or tolerate democracy at the western extremity of the empire among Greeks and quite another to establish it as the norm for the governance of the empire as a whole, beginning with the Persian court... In fact, the “Debate” is a pioneering exercise in Greek political philosophy, originating no earlier than 500’: Cartledge (2002), 109, 110.

power from one Persian monarch to another. Herodotus’ starting-point is Cambyses, who carries out the invasion of Egypt, the size, culture and history of which—so carefully mapped out by Herodotus in the previous book—suggests that even to attempt such an undertaking is mad—and Cambyses is.\footnote{Whether his madness is the cause for or the result of his attack on the holy Apis calf remains a matter of some doubt. When Herodotus recounts the story at 3.29, he carefully documents that it was the Egyptian response that he went mad as a result of the attack (3.30), whereas the narrator is non-committal, especially in his identification that Cambyses had been inflicted from birth by the ‘disease which some call sacred’ (τὴν ἱδρυν ὄννημα κόινώς τενές, 3.33)—as if the narrator were drawing on the latest Ionian science to cast doubt on the divine causation of Cambyses’ madness. Yet, at the moment when Cambyses gives himself the fatal wound, Herodotus notes that it was the same place where the Apis bull had been struck (3.65). One cannot help feeling the presence of the ineffable, even as Herodotus constructs a scientific enquiry of sorts.} There is little doubt of the disastrous consequences of autocracy when someone like this is in charge: prominent figures are insulted, alienated or murdered; military forces are overstretched or soundly beaten; no one can act or speak freely without fear. Before narrating Cambyses’ demise, however, Herodotus inserts two stories about Polycrates of Samos and Periander of Corinth, which afford the reader a comparison between a Persian single ruler and Greek versions of the same kind of government.\footnote{On Herodotus on tyrants, see Waters (1971); Dewald (1985); McGlew (1993); Christ (1994); Gray (1996). For the question whether all tyrants are represented in the same way, see Dewald (2003).} The stories of the Greek tyrants not only show the corruptive influence of these individuals over their cities; they also raise the problem of succession.\footnote{Herodotus’ accounts of the Greek tyrants emphasize that beyond the usurper himself, the individual finds it difficult to retain power. One reason for that seems to be that this kind of autocratic power is not embedded in the institutional framework of the culture. Dewald (2003) comes close to identifying the problem of succession among Greek despots when she mentions in passing that ‘tyrants’ sons have problems’ (45): see the comparison by G. E. R. Lloyd between the institutional contexts for Greek and Chinese scientific practice discussed in the Prologue above, especially his conclusion that, while competition exists in China, there is never any questioning of the institution of emperor itself. As we shall see, that description fits rather well with the situation of the Persians.} When returning to Cambyses, then, the reader has in mind the question whether Persian monarchy may be regarded in the same way, or whether it is part of the institutional fabric of the culture.\footnote{‘This interlacing raises an expectation that the constitutions episode will have suggestions, not merely for the Persian court where it takes place, but for the Greek world as well’: Pelling (2002), 131. Herodotus himself seems alert to the potential difference in}
That question becomes all the more urgent after Cambyses’ death, when the Magi take advantage of a power vacuum to install their own puppet dictator, the false Smerdis. (The ease with which this transition is achieved already suggests that Persian culture all too easily assimilates itself to one-man rule.) A group of seven not-so-easily-duped Persian nobles gather to discuss the situation in an assembly that anticipates the debate on the constitutions (3.71–3) by introducing the lead players (Otanes, Darius), their arguments and the outcome. Otanes is the prime instigator of the conference, desperate to avoid the risk of another tyrant like Cambyses; but it is Darius who carries the day, by reducing Otanes to silence and winning unanimous support from everyone else. Yet, it is only because the conspirators debate that Darius is able to propose his (successful) plan and have it adopted.132 Moreover, Darius succeeds because he uses lies to close down dissent: not only is lying often celebrated in Greek narratives; it is expressly not what Persians usually do.133 The Persians, especially Darius, already sound Greek.

the way kingship is thought about. In his explanation of how it was that the territories in the east came to have individual rulers again, after having won their freedom against the Assyrians, Herodotus takes the example of Deioces (1.96–101), which has been interpreted as paradigmatic by both Steiner (1994), 130–2 and Dewald (2003), 27–8. Steiner argues that Deioces’ city, with its concentric walls and his palace occupying the centre, is expressive of his power, in contrast to the Greek polis where (ideologically at least) the centre is taken by the public space of the agora. Dewald suggests that ‘the various aspects of the Deioces story are articulated as a series of causally connected steps in a historical process, indeed almost as a recipe for how to found an autocratic government’ (p. 27). But while she notes that Herodotus frames this episode with the word ‘tyrannis’—the free peoples ‘came into tyranny’ (ὡδὲ αὐτὶς ἐς τυραννίδας, 1.96.1) because Deioces ‘desired tyranny’ (ἐρασθεὶς τυραννίδας, 96.2); and Deioces ‘strongly armed himself with tyranny’ (ἐκφάτισε ἐκωτὸν τῇ τυραννίδῃ, 100.1)—she overlooks the point that the people themselves use different terminology: they see their chosen leader in terms of monarchy (βασιλείας and its derivatives at 1.97 twice, 98 four times, 99 twice). That is to say, whereas the embedded audience see Deioces as a legitimate king, the (Greek) narrator interprets the rule of one man as a tyranny. Herodotus’ awareness of the problem of one-man rule has implications for the way he constructs his narrative and, in particular, represents debate.

132 The paradox is brought out by Gobyras, who, by addressing the assembled group not only as ‘friends’ but also as ‘men’ (ἄνδρες φίλοι’, 3.73.1), echoes the language used by citizens when addressing one another. See Ch. 5, n. 114 below on occurrences of this phrase in Athenian tragedy. There is a further irony too, however, since Otanes is no less self-interested than Darius: the imposter is sleeping with his daughter (3.68–9).

133 Hdt. 1.136.2. For drawbacks of Persian truth-telling, see Thompson (1996), 79–111.
Having overthrown the false Smerdis, the seven meet again to discuss no less important a subject than the future of Persia. Otanes’ opening words gesture towards regime-change, as he ‘called upon them to put the affairs for the Persians into the middle’ (Ὀτάνης μὲν ἐκέλευε ἐς μέσον Πέρσῃς καταθεῖνα τὰ πρήγματα, 3.80.1). As we saw above, the phrase ‘putting x into the middle’ denotes a transformative act, making an object of private ownership into public property, which Detienne illustrates with the agon in Iliad 23, when Achilles puts prizes ‘into the middle’ to be competed over. Here, Herodotus extends that application to debate: Otanes proposes that the seven debate openly the future of Persian affairs, thereby signalling a contest of words, in which arguments are put forth ‘into the middle’ of the group, to be contested, evaluated and judged. Again, the narrative’s most formal articulation of the ideology of debate occurs in the context of a Persian assembly.

The language of openness enshrined within this phrase has obvious relevance for Otanes’ speech, which proposes the most radical form of open constitution, rule of the majority. Yet, in spite of his commitment to ‘equality before the law’ (ἰσόνομη), Otanes ends up devoting most of his speech to articulating the ills of tyranny. While this is not so very unexpected in itself, given the Persians’ recent miserable experience of kingship, he has little to say of substance other than a cliche about the idea of freedom and equality, the basis of his radical proposal that they should hand power over to the people. Similarly, Megabazus, the

134 By stretching its semantic range to incorporate debate scenes, Herodotus himself plays a key role in formulating the ideological charge of this phrase, which becomes one customary way of marking debate in Athenian tragedy. For this expression as denoting discussions on stage: Athena invites Poseidon to parley with the words: φέρω δὲ σοι | κωνὸς ἐμαυτῆ ἐς μέσον λόγον (Εὐρ. Τρ. 54; cf. 61); cf. Ἱλ. 1033. For the communal import of this expression in Herodotus see: 1.68.1, 141.21, 166.5; 2.30.16; 3.80.29, 82, 11, 84.9, 119.3; 4.173.4: 5.91.23, 109.12; 6.14.10, 39.12; 7.144.3, 229.2; 9.87.8, 117.6. A similar point may be made about Herodotus’ use of the term ἀγῶν. From books 1 to 6 ἀγῶν is taken to mean simply ‘games’—its Homeric meaning. Once the war narrative has begun, however, its meaning encompasses a more abstract notion of ‘contest’, thence the idea of ‘battle’ itself. The extension of this term’s semantic range is played out in an oracle scene (a byword for polysemic discourse): the Spartans, finding the traditional notion of ἀγῶν as an ‘athletic contest’ insufficient to answer the oracle, hit upon its alternative meaning to denote ‘battle’ (9.33.2–4).

135 Indeed, he does not once mention the Persians as a group. This will be important: see n. 141 below.
advocate for oligarchy, criticizes the idea of popular power by discussing it in relation to monarchy; his own preferred constitution is relegated to little more than a footnote, and hardly presents an attractive, well-thought-out alternative. In contrast, Darius’ entire speech is geared towards telling the story of how all constitutions—no matter what their initial orientation—gravitate towards monarchy. Here Darius appropriates the language of freedom—characteristic, at least notionally, of Greek constitutions such as democracy and oligarchy—and recasts it with a Persian slant, as national liberty rather than individual freedom: ‘Where did we get freedom from, and who gave it to us?’ (‘κόθεν ἣμιν ἐλευθερία ἐγένετο καὶ τεῦ δόντος’; 3.82.5). This is what debate looks like from a Persian perspective: even when the Persians don’t have a king, they speak as if they were before one. Darius is the one speaker who knows the language his countrymen speak and understands their fear of dissent. The way the Persians speak, even about concepts of freedom and dissent, is deeply embedded within a monarchical institutional framework.\footnote{136 This point came up in discussion of the ‘Constitutional Debate’ in the professorial seminar on ‘Speeches in Herodotus’, Hilary term, Oxford 2005, for which I thank in particular Chris Pelling and Dan Hogg. For the embedded nature of monarchical rule in Persia, as confirmed by this debate, see Thompson (1996), esp. 76–8.} It comes as no surprise that Darius wins the vote hands down.

Even so, for Herodotus’ Greek readership the scene’s manifold paradoxes will be apparent. The Persians set up an assembly to debate what constitution they ought to have; various proposals are set forth into the middle; and . . . they vote for a king!\footnote{137 By conducting a debate among themselves, the conspirators are actually practising the oligarchic form of government that Megabyzus proposes, and which receives the least attention from both conspirators and scholars.} Furthermore, once the resolution for a king has been passed, the seven set the rules of competition: ‘that any one of the seven who wished could enter the king’s presence without an announcement, unless the king happened to be sleeping with a woman, and that the king should not marry outside the family of the seven revolutionaries.’\footnote{138 \( \piορέναι \varepsilon \tauα \ βασιλεία \ πάντα \ των \ βουλόμενων \ των \ \varepsilonπτα \ \ανε \ \δουγγυλέως, \ \varepsilon \ \muη \ τυχχήγε \ \\varepsilonδον \ \μετα \ \γυναικος \ \βασιλευς, \ \gammaαμέων \ \\deltaη \ \\varepsilonξειναι \ \\gammaλλοθεν \ \\τη \ \\βασιλει \ \η \ \\εκ \ \\των \ \\ςουπεραναστάτων, \ 3.84.2. \) Yet, even though Herodotus’ narration of their discussions again suggests a correspondence between debate and . . .}
freedom—they set about planning ‘for the common interest’ (τάδε δὲ ἐσ τὸ κοινὸν ἐβούλευσαν, 3.84.2) their vote for monarchy sits uneasily with the rhetoric of freedom. The only man to remain free in the newly established monarchy is Otanes: the exponent of ‘equality before the law’ has ruled himself out of the running to be king. Indeed, the narrator guarantees the nature of this freedom by noting that Otanes’ family alone remains free ‘up to this day’ (καὶ νῦν, 3.83.3). On the other hand, his fellow conspirators are soon to discover that freedom has important, and fatal, limitations in a monarchy.

Herodotus’ narrative on Persian internal affairs, which has documented the madness of the king and exposed his successor as a fraud, puts the Persian institutional framework on the agenda: look what happens in a culture where one-man rule is the norm: even a madman or slave can be king! Regime-change is just the thing that could put Persia’s house in order; yet the Persians vote for monarchy. So, even when they do debate, the Persians don’t get it right.

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139 ‘The expressions ἐς μέσον and ἐν μέσῳ are exactly synonymous with ἐς κοινὸν, ἐν κοινῷ. Thus the meson or middle defines the common or public domain (the ξυνόν), as opposed to what is private, individual’: Vernant (1983), 190. Vernant contrasts this notion of public space to the pyramid structures of political space in Eastern Kingdoms. See Prologue above, esp. n. 62. If these are the normative expectations of a fifth-century Greek, Herodotus’ application of the phrase ‘into the middle’ to describe political activity in Persia is particularly challenging.

140 Herodotus’ narration of Otanes’ decision not to compete resonates with his earlier description of Otanes’ arguments: ‘he put these arguments into the middle’ (ἐλέξε ἐς μέσον αὐτοῖς τάδε, 3.83.1); Otanes ‘was not going to compete with them but instead stood aside from the middle’ (οὕτως μὲν δὴ σφι οὐκ ἐνηγανίζετο ἀλλ’ ἐκ μέσου κατήστο, 3.83.3). In contrast, from this point on the remaining six are labelled ‘rivals’ (ἀνδρεῖς στασιώτας, 3.83.2).

141 We might well ask, however, where Otanes’ concern for the well-being of his people is now. It is interesting that the only time he mentions the Persians en masse (καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν Περσαίων, 3.83.2) is when he absents himself from them.

142 Intaphernes comes to sticky end when he is denied entry to see the king (3.118–19).

143 Cf. Otanes (3.80.2). Dewald (2003), 29 notes: ‘It is not surprising, given the immediate narrative context, that Otanes makes the judgement he does, since Cambyses’ reign, just ended, has exemplified most of these traits.’

144 Thus the debate on the constitutions acts to undermine fatally Persian capacity to dissent and represents, in the words of Norma Thompson, ‘a debate to inhibit all future debates’ in Persia: Thompson (1996), 77. She continues: ‘The defining moment for the Persians was the debate in which the Persians failed to transcend their challenge and were induced into a state of resignation by Darius. The Greeks, too, are shown at an early stage debating the future course of their rule’ (p. 88).
But not only has Herodotus invited his readers to imagine what freedom looks like from the other side, that a people are free because of the rule of one man;\(^{145}\) he also lays down a challenge. For, he tells us, the Persians really did debate these issues. His entry in the debate at the point of representing it makes it difficult not to think of the ideological import of holding a debate.

3. THE NARRATOR ENTERS THE DEBATE  
(HERODOTUS 1, 3, 9)

Over the previous two sections we have seen how the ideals of debate that had been so carefully explored and worked out in the *Iliad* become subject to the most intense scrutiny in Herodotus’ narrative: the assembly is not the reason why the Greeks stay and fight at Salamis; the most formal debates occur among the Persians. While it is far from the case that dissent is institutional within the king’s court, Herodotus does subvert expectations that debate is not possible under a monarchy: his readers, no less than the Persians themselves, are challenged to think about debate, its utility, shortcomings and consequences.

This last section brings to the fore a feature of debate that, while having remained in the background for the most part during this investigation, sets Herodotus apart from Homeric epic: that is, the role of the narrator in representing debate. Arguably, the most complex framing of debate in the *History* occurs when Alexander of Macedon delivers an appeal from Mardonius which, in turn, quotes Xerxes: the self-conscious constructedness of the speech is matched by the Athenians’ staging of a debate before

\(^{145}\) Darius concludes, ‘I hold, therefore, that we are free because of one man’ (‘έχω τοῖν αὐτοῖς λευθερωθέντας διὰ ἕνα ἄνδρα’, 3.82.5). All through his speech, he insists on calling the rule of one man ‘monarchy’ (μοναρχία, 3. 82.1, 4 (twice), 5), whereas Otanes slides between monarchy (3.80.3, 6) and tyranny (3.80.4), and Megabyzus dismisses tyranny in one line (3.81.1). See n. 131 above on Deioces. One reason for the ‘failure’ of the Constitutional Debate perhaps then results from the incapacity of Otanes and Megabyzus to translate the ‘Greekness’ of their ideas into Persian; Darius wins because he tailors his proposal to the Persian mind-set, which betrays an acceptance of inevitability, commitment to the system, and a partiality for eminently rational, unambiguous arguments. Hartog (1988), 326 comments: ‘Whereas, for Otanes, monarchy is something opposed to the ancestral customs, for Darius it is in conformity with them.’ See also Thompson (1996), 72–6.
their Spartan allies. This debate serves as an appropriate conclusion to our enquiry by focusing on the role of the narrator; indeed, to a certain extent the interest in rhetoric anticipates Thucydides’ close examination of debate. But we start this last section with the most notorious example of narratorial framing in the *History*: when Herodotus enters his text to assert that the Constitutional Debate did actually take place.

**Unbelievable to the Greeks (3.80.1)**

Before narrating the debate on constitutions in Persia, Herodotus makes the following statement (3.80.1):

`ἐπείτε δὲ κατέστη ὁ θρόνος καὶ ἕκτος πέντε ἥμερέων ἐγένετο, ἐβουλεύοντο οἱ ἐπαναστάτες τοῖς μάγοις περὶ τῶν πάντων πραγμάτων, καὶ ἐλέγχθησαν λόγοι ἀπιστοῦ μὲν ἐνίοτε Ἑλλήνων, ἐλέγχθησαν δὲ ὅπως.`

When the commotion had calmed five days later, those who revolted against the Magi deliberated on the whole affair, and words were spoken that to some of the Greeks are unbelievable, but nevertheless they were spoken.

Herodotus goes out of his way to stress that this debate really happened. It is possible, as I have suggested above, that the Persians speak in a Persian manner when they discuss those issues: nevertheless, those issues (the three forms of constitution) and the manner of their articulation (a formal debate) still seem so very Greek. As a result, most scholars either assert that Herodotus has a good source for his account146 (though he neither names any source nor assigns responsibility to another), or else they condemn him outright for lying.147 The vast majority of critics remain utterly unconvinced by the narrator’s protestations of veracity.

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146 How and Wells (1912), i. 277: ‘Probably H[erodotus] is following the account of a Hellenized Persian.’ According to Immerwahr (1966), 101, n. 71, ‘disbelievers no doubt based their opinion on the unlikelihood of democratic political currents in Persia; the existence of such was proved to Herodotus by Mardonius’ actions in Ionia in 492 B.C. (6.63).’ Herodotus’ comment certainly lays down a challenge, particularly if we posit an Athenian audience. So Irwin and Greenwood (2007), 26, n. 64, who suggest that ‘Herodotus once again anticipates Athenian isonomia by another group, generating comparisons and inferences which some in his audience would no doubt hardly find flattering’.

The problem facing the reader lies not only in the impression that the subsequent debate does not bear out Herodotus’ narratorial statement; it is the fact that Herodotus’ narratorial statement is so strong in its affirmation. As Christopher Pelling argues, Herodotus seems to go out of his way to point out its incongruity: ‘The “Greekness” of the debate is not something which somehow crept in under Herodotus’ guard . . . ; it is something to which he himself draws attention.’ It seems that ‘Herodotus has issued a broad interpretive challenge’. That is to say, far from exercising a definitive authoritative judgement, the authorial irruption into debate casts the debate and the reading of it as a moment of a crisis. Indeed, Herodotus explicitly refrains from casting judgement on whether the Persians could or could not debate these issues; instead, his statement that the debate really happened pushes the question of its status and worth onto the reader. In addition, it is not only a debate that poses some serious questions about the nature of freedom, the role of debate in achieving that, the best kind of polity one could have—though these are all important; by virtue of his provocative frame, Herodotus writes his reader into the debate.

This is a key point: the writing of the reader into the debate has the effect of transforming Herodotus’ narrative from an individual enquiry into a text with which and through which one can think politically. Its re-creation of debate to some degree mimics that most characteristic of Greek institutions, which lies at the heart of all discussions on freedom, provides the context for those discussions, and serves as the means of achieving freedom: the assembly. This public arena, where issues are taken up, debated and resolved by the citizen group at large, Herodotus appropriates for his narrative. But, by appropriating it, Herodotus transforms that institution and replaces it with his textual enquiry: by remaining disbelieving, his readers play out the role already assigned to them by the text. The frame thrusts each and every reader into an

148 Pelling (2002), 125. Moles (1993), 120–1, however, argues that ‘it was rhetorically necessary, even at risk of attack, to maintain the illusion of strict historicity’.
149 Thompson (1996), 68. She adds that the reader must have ‘the intellectual courage to answer it in kind’.
150 As Pelling (2002), 154–5 puts it: ‘Greeks may find this Persian toying with free speech and democracy incredible, but they should not. As they, and we, look at different peoples and cultures, they may turn out as not so Other after all, or Other in very unpredictable ways.’
ongoing debate about Greekness. Thus, in his representation of debate, Herodotus not only resists the position of tyrant; his call to debate works to authorize his project in the wider community’s ‘contest of voices’. This Constitutional Debate is not just, or rather, not even an example of tub-thumping Greek pride in their institutions; it is a challenge to the reader to renew them in the form of reading about them.

**Solon left town (1.29–33)**

Herodotus’ direct address of his readers as a prelude to the first formal debate of the *History* demonstrates his involvement in the representation of debate even as he reproduces the debate in his narrative. More generally, by writing, Herodotus operates on the margins of his community, outside sanctioned institutional contexts. Significantly, a number of historical agents reprise this role over the course of the narrative.

The first, and most revealing, figure is Solon. For many authors, Solon was good to think with, especially regarding Athenian democracy. Herodotus’ interest in Solon, however, lies not so much in his...

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152 Dewald (2003), 28 makes the point that both the Deioces episode and the Constitutional Debate contain ‘as an implicit premise the notion that at base, people (at least, the important people) choose their form of government’. Identifying the role of the group at large is important for thinking about the performativity of Herodotus’ narrative and its ambiguous relationship to the idea of freedom. See also the Epilogue below, for a discussion of the (premature) democratization of Samos (3.142–3).

153 Demaratus e.g. the exiled Spartan king who accompanies Xerxes on his invasion of Greece, or Croesus himself, the ex-Lyidian confidante of Cyrus the Great. On the former, see most recently Holland (2005); Forsdyke (2006), 233; Stadter (2006), 244. On Croesus, see Pelling (2006b). Redfield (1985), 117 makes the point that both Lycurgus and Solon—traditional lawgivers in other accounts—are both represented in Herodotus as operating on the margins of their cultures: Lycurgus ‘made his people capable of mixing with strangers by himself mixing with strangers’, while Solon ‘borrowed a *nomos* from Amasis of Egypt and enacted it in Athens’ (1.177.2).

154 Plutarch explains e.g. that the Athenians, frustrated from being able to question and harangue Solon, or to compel him to change or even explain the laws, were obliged to work the laws out for themselves (Plut. *Sol.* 14.4. Cf. *Mor.* 152c). On Solon and Croesus as illustrating a principle of democracy, see Kurke (1999), 148–50; Wohl (2002), 232–3. On Solon and Athenian democracy, see Loraux (1984; 2002).
relation to Athens’ institutional framework as his departure from it. According to Herodotus, Solon ‘made the laws for the Athenians and then left town for ten years’ (ὅς Ἀθηναῖοισι νόμους κελεύσασι ποιήσας ἀπεδήμησε ἔτεα δέκα, 1.29.1–2). Apparently, he went on a sightseeing tour around the ancient world, but this was just an ‘excuse’ (κατὰ θεωρίης πρόφασιν ἐκπλώσας); in actual fact his departure meant that the Athenians ‘were unable to dissolve any of the laws he had established, since they were bound by great oaths to use the laws for ten years’ (αὐτοὶ γάρ οὐκ οὖν τε ἣσαν αὐτὸ ποιήσαι Αθηναίοι· ὥρκοις γὰρ μεγάλοις κατείχοντο δέκα ἐτεα χρήσασθαι νόμοι τοὺς ἀν σφὶ Σώλων θήται, 1.29.2). Solon’s first port-of-call is Croesus—a chronological impossibility that has exercised many critics. But such anxieties pass over Herodotus’ vital observation that Solon leaves Athens so that the laws he instituted can be given a chance to work: in his absence the Athenians are not able to ‘undo’ the laws he had set down, but instead must ‘use’ them. Herodotus’ Solon, then, enjoys a peculiarly marginal relationship with his polis: while he establishes its laws, he himself operates entirely independent of its institutional framework in Herodotus’ narrative.

In this way, Solon may act as a suitable precedent for Herodotus, who similarly establishes a framework which the community at large can use in his absence. Herodotus’ Solon demonstrates how an individual operating on the margins of his community can still talk like a Greek of the polis. Indeed, more than that: this individual author can stimulate his community to act like Greek citizens of a polis precisely by pursuing freedom and engaging in debate—in its textual form. His journey through debate ultimately replicates Odysseus’ position within debate.


156 Herodotus’ use of Solon seems to reflect an astute reading of Solon’s poetry. The emphasis by Herodotus’ ‘Solon’ on life’s uncertainty picks up on Solon, fr. 13.63–70W; the uselessness of wealth in the face of death (fr. 24.1–10W); and the dangers of excess (fr. 6.3–4W). See also n. 18 above.

157 Similarly, Solon’s ‘happy men’ are seen as happy in respect of their association with the polis, whereas Croesus looks only to his personal wealth: Kurke (1999), 147. On the proverbial nature of Solon’s remarks, see Gould (1989), 81–2.
as he composes an enquiry for his readers to adopt and pursue.\footnote{On Herodotus as an ‘alter ego of the great Odysseus’ (Moles (1993), 96), see n. 4 above. This current study puts the onus on the complex dynamic between the narrative voice and the narration of debate, which had been a feature of the study of the Odyssey in Ch. 2 above. The most striking example of Herodotus’ presence in debate is his representation of the debate over the Athenian decision to fight or to medize.} That nexus of freedom, reading and debate structures our final scene of debate, which confronts the spectre of Athenian medizing before the battle’s lost and won.

**Alexander said Mardonius said Xerxes said . . . (8.140–4)**

After the resounding Greek victory at Salamis, one could be forgiven for thinking that the Persians’ defeat was inevitable: with their supply route under threat and their ability to gain a stranglehold in Greece severely hampered, Xerxes returns home. Yet not all is lost: they send Alexander of Macedon to Athens as their kingmaker in one final attempt to break up the Greek coalition. This critical debate is the most elaborately staged of all debates in the *History*.\footnote{See Bowie (2007), 229–38. Lang (1984), 106–13 discusses tetrads, and this scene on p. 111.} Alexander speaks on behalf of and as both Mardonius and Xerxes; the Athenians do not respond immediately, but wait for the Spartans to turn up. More than in any other debate in the *History*, the reader is aware of the written medium through which debate is being represented.\footnote{Crane (1998), 242 describes how the Athenians’ delay ‘brings out the self-consciously theatrical nature of this episode’.} And all this, it should not be forgotten, takes place in the home of debate itself, Athens.

The cast-list for this debate to end debates is impressive. The Persian commander in Xerxes’ absence, Mardonius, has good reasons for soliciting an Athenian alliance: with them on board, he could expect to gain mastery over the seas, an expectation, Herodotus is quick to point out, which was perfectly reasonable (8.136). Speaking for him at Athens is Alexander of Macedon, who is chosen for two reasons: he was connected to the Persians by marriage, and he enjoyed a special relationship with
the Athenians. On the other side, the Spartans, though late as usual, are also eager to send envoys, since they remembered an oracle which predicted that the Medes and Athenians would drive them out from the Peloponnese (8.141). In the middle are the Athenians, courted and shunned in equal measure by these warring parties, as much responsible for the debate as they are the judges of it. It is they, for example, who, by dragging out their business with Alexander, ensure that all parties are in Athens at the same time (8.141).

The themes of the speeches are relatively straightforward. Alexander proposes that, given the current situation, it would be in the Athenians’ self-interest to mediate. The Spartans don’t even address Alexander’s arguments or the threat of the Persian army. Instead they stress the negative consequences for the Athenians were they to opt out of the Greek coalition: it would be dishonourable (especially given the fact that the Athenians had precipitated the crisis), and inappropriate (given the Athenians’ traditional role as liberators, 8.142.2). Conclusively, they describe Alexander as ‘smoothing over’ Mardonius’ arguments: foreigners are not to be trusted (8.142.4).

It is Herodotus’ structuring of the debate, however, that catches the eye. The reader does not hear Xerxes’ arguments from the horse’s mouth, but through an ever-receding ring of voices (8.140.a.1–2, 2–3, β.1): 163

In fact, Alexander’s career shows him to be the perfect go-between: he had sent envoys to persuade the Greek army to abandon Thessaly (7.173); yet he will also warn the Greeks of an attack by Mardonius at Platea (9.44–6). On his skilful diplomacy, which lays the foundations of Macedonian power, see Hammond (1989), 43–8; Scaife (1989); Badian (1994).

Bowie (ibid. 229) calls this narrative technique ‘nesting’. F. Solmsen (1982), 103 suggests that ‘to have Alexander speak first in the name of the king, then in that of Mardonius, finally in his own was Herodotus’ brilliant device of rendering the offer increasingly attractive’.

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163 Bowie (ibid. 229) calls this narrative technique ‘nesting’. F. Solmsen (1982), 103 suggests that ‘to have Alexander speak first in the name of the king, then in that of Mardonius, finally in his own was Herodotus’ brilliant device of rendering the offer increasingly attractive’.
When [Alexander] arrived in Athens, having been sent by Mardonius, he said these things: ‘Athenian citizens, Mardonius says these things: “A message comes to me from the king with these words: ‘I put aside all the wrongs against me . . .’ These are the instructions which I have been compelled to carry out, unless there should be any blame on your part. But I say this to you: Why now are you so mad as to take up arms against the king? . . .” Mardonius, O Athenians, ordered me to say these things to you. And I won’t mention anything about my goodwill towards you . . .’

This speech remarkably displays three levels of direct speech and a threefold appeal to Athens, each revealing distinctive stylistic traits: Xerxes magnanimously offers an amnesty; Mardonius threatens the imminent deployment of superior forces; Alexander plays upon his special relationship with the Athenians and the daunting prospect of their unique position in-between two armies (μεταίχμιον, 8.140,β,3). At one level, then, this gives an apt demonstration, if one were needed, of where the power lies: the pyramid structure stresses the authority of the most remote figure, Xerxes, whose ‘long arm’ (χείρ ἀπερμοίκης, 8.140,β,2) tangibly extends to this debate in Athens, though by now he is far away in Persia. As a result, promises of freedom and assurances of autonomy ring hollow, as even the mode by which they are communicated depend on the king’s word.

At another level the complex arrangement of a speech within a speech draws attention to the artificiality of Herodotus’ representation of debate. Unlike an epic poet, who may adopt the voice of any of his characters, or a tragic poet, who stages a debate with actors taking the role of different characters, the prose-writing historian can never fully assimilate his voice to those of his historical agents. His debates are scripted performances within a wider world written from a first-person vantage-point. This debate rips away the veil from the representation to serve as a reminder of the extent to which the text is transmitted and of the author’s role in its construction.

The constructedness of the episode is raised again when Herodotus comes to relate the Athenians’ response (8.141,2). The Athenians drag out their business with Alexander until the Spartans are present, before whom they advertise their commitment to the Greek cause and

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'Greekness' (τὸ Ἑλληνικόν, 8.144.2). This term is highly charged. With the exception of the accounts of Persian wise men that opens Herodotus’ enquiry, this term is absent from Herodotus’ text until the Persians invade. Then, in a rare, and provocative, statement, the narrator asserts that Greece would have been doomed had it not been for the Athenians, and their commitment to ‘Greekness’: ‘by choosing that Greece should remain free, they alone roused all the rest of the Greek world.’ Now, the Athenians articulate ‘Greekness’ at greater length, and the elements they raise are their common blood, language, religious ritual and customs.

165 Crane (1998), 241 comments: ‘The Athenian response (8.144) is remarkable not only for its high-minded disdain for danger and material advantage but also for its formulation of “Hellenism” as a positive value worthy of defence.’ According to Price (2001), 372 τὸ Ἑλληνικόν represents “an overarching notion, “the Hellenic entity” or “the whole Hellenic world” as opposed to just “Hellas” in a geographical sense’. He goes on to make the claim that most fifth-century expressions of Hellenic identity ‘never had an ultimately political purpose’ (p. 374). Part of what both Herodotus and Thucydides are doing, this section argues, is recasting Hellenism as something political as well as cultural. Only their narratives, however, are able to transcend the inward-looking political institutions of each individual polis.

166 Hdt. 1.4 (twice). The Persian wise men use the accounts of the mythological rape of women to account for the enmity between the two peoples. As they put it, they claim the ‘barbarian nations’ (ἔθνεα βάρβαρα) as their own, while Europe and ‘the Greek area’ are separate. That is to say, the notion of ‘Greekness’ is introduced by the Persians, as an external group looking in, rather like Herodotus’ own activity on his travels, on which see Redfield (1985); on Hellenicity, see esp. J. Hall (2002), 172–205. In this sense a strong claim may be made that Herodotus, from his perspective on the margins of the Greek world, constructs a sense of Greekness in his enquiry. In one other example of τὸ Ἑλληνικόν before the later books, Herodotus claims that the ‘Greek stock’ have used the same language from its beginning (1.58).

167 ἐλώμενοι δὲ τὴν Ἑλλάδα περινεία ἐλευθέρην, [τοῦτο] τὸ Ἑλληνικόν πῶς τὸ λοιπὸν... αὕτω αὐτοὶ ἴδον οἱ ἐπεγειράντες, 7.139.5. This ideal is immediately put to the test when the Greeks send a delegation to Gelon in Syracuse to make common cause (7.145). It fails.

168 ‘And again [we have done this because of] Greekness in common blood and common language and common shrines of and sacrifices to the gods, and common customs, all of which the Athenians could not betray’ (‘αὕτω δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικόν ἑνὸς ὀμαλῶν τε καὶ ὀμόθυμου καὶ θεών ἱδρυματα τε καὶ κοινα καὶ θυσιαν ἤθεα τε ὀμότροπα, των προδόταις γενέσθαι Ἀθηναίους οὐκ ἀν εἴ ἔχοι, 8.144.2). The rhetoric of a common Greece does not get much more sub-thumping than this. Price (2001), 71 makes the point that ‘Hellenic loyalty and unity, and more importantly the strengthening of Hellenic institutions,...is one of Herodotus’ great themes’. This study goes further: it suggests that Herodotus’ enquiry not only represents that ‘Greekness’, but also reproduces it—by virtue of which it goes some way to replacing Hellenic institutions, such as
with Herodotus’ prior assertion, this makes for a particularly striking rhetorical tour-de-force. And it occurs at the climax of a critical debate that ultimately determines the fate of Greece and the ‘Greek thing’, the importance of which Herodotus has made clear by his careful writing of this debate. The ideals of freedom and Greekness win out in the arena which both guarantees and reproduces those values, the arena of debate.  

And yet... There is something already manufactured about this debate, and not only with respect to Herodotus’ representation of it. The Athenians have deliberately dallied in their response to Alexander in order that they could give this speech before their comrades-at-arms, and rivals, the Spartans: this is, in many ways, a show of loyalty and commitment to the common cause. Moreover, within the space of seven chapters the Athenians will be making another speech to the Spartans, only then it will be the Athenians who appeal to the Spartans to honour their alliance (9.7; cf. 9.6, 11.1–2). Indeed, there the Spartans show such a demonstrable lack of interest in the Athenians’ fate that their behaviour provokes a frustrated response from the narrator as he tries to account for their change in attitude (9.8). It is the precarious nature of freedom and Greekness that invests Herodotus’ overtly stylized debate in Athens with so much charge. Unlike the Persian king, whose presence lurks in the background oppressing free speech, or the assembly, which after all tend to be limited to each individual polis and cannot support interpolitical action.

169 Pelling (2006a), 113 comments: ‘Such rhetorical power captures the emotive force of freedom, and the Athenians are given the best freedom tunes—better even than the harsher, more Spartan version which we saw with Demaratus, talking of the Greek “fear” of law and custom (7.104.4–5).’

170 Athenian confidence appears severely shaken by the Spartans’ own delay of coming to their aid, with the result that they threaten to medize after all (9.11.1–2). The Spartans are, of course, on the way, so the rupture does not occur at this point. But scholars have been alert to the contemporary resonances such near-misses have: Fornara (1971), 86; Raaflaub (1987), 239–40; cf. Crane (1998), 241–6.

171 Pelling (2006a), 113–14 wonders whether the Athenian speech of 9.7 is the disingenuous part, rather than the behaviour of the Spartans: ‘Something is being unmasked here, but what? Perhaps it is the fine rhetoric itself of 8.143–4; perhaps the Athenians would indeed have come to terms with Persia. But more probably it is the threat itself that is being exposed as simply a negotiating trick, a way of applying pressure to the Greek allies.’

indeed unlike the Athenians, who set up a debate in order to show off their resolve to the Spartans, Herodotus’ representation of debate challenges authoritative dictates and explores the fault-lines opening up in the coalition’s commitment to freedom. In particular, with its abrupt juxtaposition to the scenes of in-fighting that follow, Herodotus invites his reader to scrutinize just what holds the fragile coalition together and question what it means to be Greek and what exactly ‘Greekness’ consists of. Exposing the discourse of freedom to scrutiny, Herodotus anticipates Thucydides’ analysis of and challenge to political rhetoric.

In Herodotus debate is not an opportunity to feel smugly complacent about one’s place in the Greek world, though that is the position adopted here both by the Athenians within the assembly and by the Spartans afterwards; rather, it is an invitation to reflect on the apparent failure of debate and the instability within the concept of freedom and Greek identity. In other words, debate is an invitation to perform one’s role as a citizen, scrutinizing argument and making one’s own judgement. Only, in this case, one does not have to do this within the institution of the assembly in the centre of one’s own city; one can do it by reading and taking on Herodotus’ enquiry. Reading debate can be a political act of defiance to rank alongside the defence of Greece.

At the beginning of this chapter I emphasized Herodotus’ debt to Homeric epic in his representation of debate. That he should even include formal scenes of debate in his history of the Persian War recalls the narrative strategy of the Iliad; yet the influence goes deeper than that, since it provides one means for his investigation into why Greeks and barbarians came together. To put it simply, scenes of Greeks

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173 One element of this is Thucydides’ deconstruction of το Ἑλληνικόν from the very beginning of his history (1.1.1). See Price (2001), 375, who argues that ‘every single element of Herodotus’ definition is corrupted or destroyed in Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian War; and J. Henderson (2007), 300–1, who observes that, while Herodotus headlines the ‘beginning of evils for Greeks and barbarians’ (Ἑλλησι τε και βαρβάροις, 5.97.3), Thucydides reduces the evils to ‘strictly “for Hellenes” [τοῖς Ἕλλησι μεγάλων καικῶν ἀρχει, 2.12–3]’ (p. 300 with n. 42). He also talks of ‘the psychosis of Thucydides’ narrative drive—toward Spartan admirals, Persian money, Athens thrust back into Asia, history re-wound’ (p. 294). Xenophon takes Thucydides’ deconstructive strategy one stage further, by writing about ‘Greek things’ (plural)—in the Hellenica.
debating illustrate their commitment to freedom, while Persians failing to debate shows the institutional failings of a system that seeks to exclude possibilities of dissent from the king.

Debate is not, however, simple in Herodotus. As section 1 showed, Greeks debating fails to suggest that sense of achievement founded in the *Iliad*, even though Herodotus’ text maps out a similar diachronic progression of debate over the course of the narrative: the Athenians are held responsible by Herodotus for beginning all the evils after being collectively deceived in the assembly; at Salamis the coalition of the willing barely holds together, and only does so because of the actions of individuals operating outside the institutional framework. On the other hand, section 2 highlighted the paradox that the most formal debate scenes in Herodotus take place in the Persian court. Readers may be rightly sceptical of the possibilities of dissent before the king, but Herodotus’ representations of debate challenge them to review their expectations and renew their own practice of dissent. Section 3 explored this last point further by drawing attention to the performance of notable Greek individuals external to their community’s institutional framework. A parallel was suggested to the status of the narrator, who as a writer of prose occupies the margins of his society. In the end, Herodotus lacks the very institutional structure that poetry enjoys, he lacks the communal sanction that epic receives; his authority becomes the issue. One way in which he attempts to construct a communal voice is by taking over the public scene of debate; he writes into his text this institutional framework. But it does not remain the same in his hands. The dissenting strategies his debates reproduce invite the reader to adopt Herodotus’ enquiry as his own.

The assembly is by no means as fundamental to the narrative of Herodotus as it had been to the *Iliad*. In this way, as in many others, Herodotus’ enquiry reflects more the *Odyssey* and its uncomfortable relationship to scenes of debate. Yet, the assembly remains a key ideological marker. As book 1 draws to a close, Herodotus narrates the Greeks’ first close encounter with the growing power of Persia. The Spartans send heralds to warn Cyrus not to harm any Greek city in Ionia. Cyrus’ response is telling (1.153.1):
I've never yet feared men, for whom there’s a place set aside in the middle of the city where they gather together to swear oaths and deceive each other. Such men, if I am of sound mind, will not only have the sufferings of Ionia to chatter about but also their own.

Cyrus explicitly confronts and challenges the Greek ideal of the agora, reconfiguring the arena of institutional dissent as the market-place where people swear and cheat on each other and idly chatter. The assembly undergoes a similar revolution in Herodotus. From the centre of the Greek city, as it had been the centre of the Iliad’s narrative about the Trojan War, the assembly occupies a rather marginal position in Herodotus, in terms of both its narrative frequency but also its value, even when it is represented: assemblies are shown to come to nought; critical decisions are taken and enacted outside the institutional structure. Instead, it seems, the onus is placed on the individual. For sure, the individual performs as part of a community on behalf of a community; but his (or even her) actions are often undertaken in opposition to the community’s institutional framework. Thus we see Greek figures who think and act in a way that underlines their cultural heritage of debate, but external to institutional arenas: Demaratus accompanies the Persian king, informing him of the Spartan (institutional) difference; Themistocles succeeds in dissent, only after he continues it outside the assembly. This seems to prefigure how Herodotus imagines his own role—or perhaps better, the role of his reader—as being a product of a particular kind of institutional thought (debate), but as being independent of its institutional manifestation (the assembly). The interest in the individual operating outside institutional arenas takes us back to the Odyssey, suggesting a Herodotus who plays an ‘Odysseus’-like figure constructing his own narrative.

The problem Herodotus’ enquiry seems to expose is the inability to establish, or the plain lack of, institutions that extend beyond any one Greek city-state. His narrative sets about investigating the problem of debate on a Panhellenic level where institutions are notably lacking, exploring the institutional differences between different Greek poleis even as the rhetoric the Greeks utter reflects a common identity. We see the problem as Themistocles has to operate outside the assembly after...
having just given a moving speech about Panhellenism; or when the Athenians have to go to Sparta to appeal for the aid that had been promised, having just previously been so sure of their value and the cohesiveness of the coalition.

Herodotus’ text itself offers one way of overcoming the lack of interpoleis institutions, constructing a sense of Greekness, and achieving the common aim. His constant invitation to dissent is a lure for gaining authority for his account readers debate themselves into non-dissent. Herodotus’ text can work to reproduce a ‘Greek’ way of doing things, but it does so in a way that encourages doing that by reading—thereby setting up his narrative in competition with the institutions that structure debate and politics in the community. In this way we see how debate in Herodotus differs from that in Homer, since he uses it to authorize what he is doing.

This approach reflects a shift from dissent as being represented in the Iliad, to dissent being part of what the historian is doing when authoring and writing a prose narrative. Thus we have moved from examining the contrast between differing groups deliberating, through to considering the role of the individual in endorsing dissent. I believe that this observation is important for two reasons. In the first place it suggests that the common perception of Herodotus’ dialogism is in need of revision. This is normally understood with respect to the narrator’s setting up of rival accounts between which the reader can judge. But we have seen how a Greek–barbarian polarity structures speech, even when the Persians are seen to be debating; clear authorial backing of one speaker over another is marked; a Hellocentricism underpins heteroglossia. That is not to say that dialogism does not exist; only that we ought to recognize that its basis is in Greek political thought. It is the inherent Greek bias in debate that Herodotus’ authorial statement draws attention to prior to the constitutional debate, where we witness

174 As J. Henderson (2007), 289 puts it: ‘We have it coming to us. Read Herodotus. We must read Herodotus. What this prose epic wants and demands.’

175 ‘Herodotus goes to considerable pains to show that he has a vested interest in nothing but telling what has been told before him’: Dewald (1987), 168. ‘[The] superposition of layers of narrative and the interplay of utterances from different sources are fundamental to the narrative’s ability to persuade the addressee to believe it’: Hartog (1988), 294.
the historian taking a controversial stand in a tactic that Thucydides frequently employs in his own narrative.

This brings me to my second point. Herodotus does not simply reflect Greek ideals or represent scenes of dissent: by virtue of writing, he also takes part in dissent, using the idea of contest to make a space for his voice to be heard in the community. Furthermore, he makes reading his enquiry reflect the normative behaviour of a Greek citizen involved in the affairs, not only of his own polis, but also of the wider Greek world. Lastly, he introduces the notion that reading could be part of the construction of such a citizen.

It is a precarious achievement, however. Even as Herodotus’ narrative draws to a close, more and more infighting between vying Greek cities takes place as dissent threatens to break out beyond any institutional confines. Herodotus’ response has been to use his written enquiry into human relations to condition his reader into dissenting more responsibly. It is testimony to his success that his successor, Thucydides, who writes up how that factitious coalition finally breaks down, takes this as the premise for his narrative.
4

Thucydides writes debate

Whereas the majority of modern critics emphasize the distinction between Herodotus and Thucydides, ancient readers conceived of that relationship rather differently.¹ The story goes that at one of Herodotus' public performances of his enquiry, a young Thucydides listened and wept.² Regardless of its authenticity, this anecdote is revealing of the ancient reception of the two authors: Herodotus' work was indebted to and in some degree reproduced an oral tradition; Thucydides, while influenced by Herodotus, went on to write an account of a war with a more starkly sombre mood.³

Chapter 4 also posits a closer relationship between the two writers than that usually allowed by modern criticism, based on this book's unique focus on debate. The conclusions from the last chapter drew attention to Herodotus' involvement in representing debate: the marginality of his written word and his personal stake in constructing

¹ On Thucydides' powerful influence on the way history was done (at least in modern times), see Hornblower (1987), 13–33; cf. Lateiner (1989), 220–4.
authority go some way towards explaining the paradoxical picture of Persians debating and Greeks operating outside civic institutional structures. Where Thucydides departs from Herodotus is in the extent and nature of his representation: unlike Herodotus, who shows little interest in the processes of debate, Thucydides makes its accurate representation his aim. He investigates decision-making processes within the polis institutional framework.¹

But before investigating Thucydides’ representation of debate, it is first necessary to gauge and assess the nature of his narrative voice, which appears so very different from Herodotus’. According to most scholars of the past generation, Thucydides constructs his narrative in such a way that the voices of others are suppressed.⁵ It is certainly true that, unlike Herodotus, he does not display the sources on the basis of which he has constructed his narrative, which prevents the reader from asking about its composition.⁶ It is also true that the effect of this omission is to create a narrative that directly equates to its subject-matter without, it appears, the mediation or intervention of the narrator in the seeming

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¹ In her analysis of Lucian’s *How To Write History* (specifically on para. 42), Greenwood (2006), 114 suggestively comments that ‘according to Lucian, Thucydides conceived of the impartial, critical, stateless model of history-writing in response to the reception of Herodotus’ work’. Important here is the description of a ‘stateless model of history-writing’: this chapter will argue that, while Thucydides’ reporting is not restricted to any one state (such as Athens), its target—political deliberation—represents an appropriation of the political field by a written text. This may help to explain Thucydides’ almost exclusive narrative focus on men (i.e. citizens): Crane (1996). On the importance of political judgement (σωφρόνεια): Edmunds (1975); Crane (1998), 42–4. Huart (1973) discusses the range of meanings of this word. For the radical import of Thucydides’ writing more generally, see Greenwood (2006), 1–18; cf. Crane (1998).

⁵ See the seminal work of Loraux (1986b), responding—in the wake of poststructur­alist criticism—to the emphasis on Thucydides’ objectivity in such authors as Cochrane (1927), de Romilly (1963) and Adcock (1963). Challenges to that model of Thucydides, however, had been made before: Cornford (1907) on traditional thought patterns in Thucydides; V. Hunter (1973) on Thucydides’ artfulness. There is still much potential in this approach, which explores Thucydides’ objectivity through rhetoric: see Woodman (1988); Crane (1998) esp. 8–10, 261–2; Kurke (2000); Greenwood (2006). See esp. Dewald (2005), whose recent ‘stylometric’ study on Thucydides demonstrates rather well how individual units piece together the events and influence greatly their reception. These studies generally put more emphasis on the emotional connection to events: so Connor (1977; 1984); Orwin (1994).

⁶ ‘Thucydides the historical investigator presents himself as having conducted his investigations in so rigorous a way as to render his account of them magisterial and definitive: this is the end of investigation’: Gould (1989), 111.
achievement of objectivity. As Leslie Kurke has argued, however, scholars ‘have been too quick to construct Thucydides in the pattern of a modern scientific historian’, when ancient readers had a very different answer: they recognized Thucydides as a ‘master of enargeia (“vividness”), who used that technique (and others) to engage readers’ emotions at a visceral level’. Furthermore, the latest work on Thucydides’ authorial statements has suggested a more provocative voice, that prompts critical engagement rather than encourages unmediated access to the author’s thoughts. Indeed, this voice, which represents the historian making a judgement in his narrative as an interpreter of the events, itself seems to derive from Herodotus, such as when he claims that the Athenians were ‘the saviours of Greece’. In addition, building on her work on narrative composition in Herodotus, Carolyn Dewald has recently undertaken a stylometric analysis of Thucydides which provides a useful framework for analysing the ways in which narrative units relate to each other. This study continues the recent trend by

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7 Building on Loraux, Edmunds (1993) claims that, ‘the establishment of the historian-subject’s authority can succeed only to the extent that he disappears, only to the extent that the reader will consent to take the writing as the equivalent of the war’ (p. 841). If we concede to Thucydides’ text the possibility of ‘absolute mimesis’, we must also concede to him ‘absolute authority’.

8 Kurke (2000), 132, commenting on Plutarch’s analysis of Thucydides’ account of the great harbour battle at Syracuse (Plut. Mor. 347a). She continues: ‘Part of [the] effect of immediate emotional engagement is achieved by the absence of explicit authorial intervention and commentary, so that events seem to be conjured up directly before the reader without any mediation.’ Cf. Hornblower (1987), 35; Debnar (2001), 21. Contemporary scholarship’s preference for Herodotus’ compositional style derives at least in part to our own cultural context, in which the historian’s tactic of allowing the events to ‘speak for themselves’ has been deconstructed in recent criticism: see e.g. White (1978), 51–80; Barthes (1986), 131–9.

9 According to Gribble (1998), 56, narratorial interventions do not provide a solution: they are really no more than pointers towards answers that can be found in the narrative. Rood (1998), 134 similarly contends that it is ‘dangerous to read Thucydides’ analysis at ii.65 as his final thoughts on Athens’ defeat, without respect for its context’. See also Marincola (1997), 6.

10 νῦν ἄθηναίους ἀν τις λέγων σωτήρας γενέσθαι τῆς Ἐλλάδος οὐκ ἂν ἀμαρτάνοι τὰληθέος, Hdt. 7.139.5. Herodotus gives the Athenians praise in spite of their objectionable status during the period of his writing, which had seen the Athenians enslave much of the Greek world.

arguing that Thucydides’ representation of debate not only introduces other voices onto his stage, but also puts interpretation under the spotlight in a way that, potentially at least, even destabilizes the narrator’s own voice.

Influenced by the previous scholarly consensus regarding Thucydides’ authority, Josh Ober has read the historian’s narrative in opposition to the methods and values of Athenian democracy. Whereas ‘democratic knowledge’ was investigated, worked out and put into effect in the assembly on the basis of opinion—as in ‘it seemed best to the démos’—Thucydides asserts his account’s difference and superiority on the criteria of accuracy and objectivity. According to Ober, then, Thucydides’ representation of debate in the form of the ἀγῶν demonstrates the inefficacy of public debate by exposing the faulty, partial arguments and perspectives of the historical agents. In contrast stands the historian’s narrative, by means of which he establishes himself as the sole arbiter of truth about the war.

This chapter sets out to challenge Ober’s interpretation of political dissent in Thucydides by re-evaluating the use of debate. Basing his approach on a model of dissidence in the United States during the Cold War, Ober posits an opposition between debate and narrative. The argument developed here, based on the narratological and cross-generic study that this book offers, will explore how debate works as part of Thucydides’ narrative. On the one hand, Thucydides structures debate as an ἀγῶν in such a way as to empower the reader to look into

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12 Thucydides’ logos represents a counter-knowledge to the formulation of democratic knowledge: Ober (1998), 58–9, with n. 15.
13 See also Ober (1989).
14 On ἀκριβεία, see Crane (1996), 34–5, 50–74.
15 The ἀγῶν ‘obscures the dialectical tendency of Athenian public debate’ and ‘presents Assembly debate as precisely the sort of contest for audience applause that Thucydides himself has explicitly renounced as a basis for his own text’: Ober (1998), 103.
16 ‘[I]t is through being confronted with Thucydides’ text itself—which presents itself as a disinterested narrative and analysis of great political events . . . —that they will come to an understanding of [human nature and the nature of power]: Ober (1998), 61.
17 Ober (ibid. 46, n. 63) explains that he has taken his idea of dissent from the title of an American journal, which had offered a new US brand of left-wing political criticism in the wake of Stalinism: see Prologue, n. 43 above, with accompanying text.
18 Debnar (2001) similarly seeks to refocus attention away from Thucydides’ authorial voice towards analysing the effect of his speeches on embedded audiences.
arguments of the kind that dominated the political decision-making arena and that compelled its listeners to adopt certain courses of action. From this perspective, ‘the speeches are so constructed that a careful reader can see into—or see through—the speaker’s reasoning’. On the other hand, because of Thucydides’ strategy of direct imitation, as articulated by Kurke above, his representations of debate also have the effect of propelling readers into the hurly-burly of warring words, which, to a certain extent at any rate, puts them at risk of being seduced by the arguments reproduced. Crucially, for the most part Thucydides avoids directing his readers’ judgement onto the circumstances for, and outcomes of, the debates. When he does intervene, as in the fallout from the decision to launch an expedition against Sicily, that too is significant, for it demonstrates the ultimate failure of deliberation within his polis’ institutional framework during times of conflict and, as such, represents a reworking of the Iliad’s foundational narrative of dissent.

This chapter is structured according to three propositions: that Thucydides introduces his narratorial voice as a challenge to rival interpretations in a way that emphasizes its argumentativeness; that he represents debate in such a way as to recoup it for his written project; and that the historian’s voice becomes implicated in the agony by virtue of the way it embeds debate in the narrative. Section 1 reconsiders the

19 ‘The diction and style of [Thucydides’] speakers, often so dense as to border on the incomprehensible if delivered in the hubbub of an actual assembly, were designed to provoke careful reading and reflection’: Yunis (1998), 239. See, however, Debnar (2001), n. 21 below.


21 Debnar (2001), esp. 20–3, makes precisely this point. According to her interpretation, ‘the difficult, condensed, and abstract style Thucydides created for political oratory offers readers an experience comparable to that of an audience listening to actual speech’ (p. 20)—by which she means that Thucydides aims to reproduce not the transcripts of the speeches delivered but the experience of them. She later concludes: ‘If verbatim reports of speeches had been included in the History, our task would most likely be easier. As it is, the language of the speeches complicates their logic and disguises their rhetorical ploys even for an audience who can study, contemplate, and reread the work over time.’ (p. 233) This chapter will argue that an essential part of that agonizing process is Thucydides’ representation of debate as agony.

22 According to Edmunds (1993), 831: Thucydides ‘made the fact of writing, the mode itself of communication, part of his historiographical strategy’. Debnar (2001), 20 agrees: ‘Thucydides transformed an essentially oral genre—deliberative oratory—into a literary one.’
narrator’s authority in the light of his inclusion of speeches. While conventional views of Thucydides suggest that he demands absolute authority from his reader, a closer inspection of his methodological claims will show that his statements of authority are overtly contentious and seek to provoke a considered response. Section 2 analyses the place in Thucydides’ narrative when alternative voices do come to the fore, in scenes of debate. Unlike Herodotus, who had shown little interest in the institutional workings of the assembly, Thucydides investigates the failure of, and fault-lines in, debate in relation to their institutional contexts, and not just in Athens but across the Greek world. By reproducing assembly debate, he exposes his readers to the kind of political discourse they would be subject to in their own polis, but also equips them with the tools for analysing that discourse. One effect of taking a stand, however, is to get involved in the agon. Section 3 examines how that manifests itself in the role the narrator himself plays in framing debate. It will be argued that Thucydides’ representation of debate as agon cannot be so easily hacked off from the body of the narrative that surrounds it. Yet, nor is it the case that readers can so easily disengage themselves from the agon when battling through the narrative, but must also take responsibility for making judgement. Thucydides’ strategy of writing up debate as agon implicates both author and reader in fighting over—and fighting for—Greece.

1. THE NARRATOR’S AUTHORITY AND THE ROLE OF THE READER (THUCYDIDES 1, 5)

Throughout the course of his narrative Herodotus appears at his readers’ side, offering suggestions about how to interpret a particular event, cajoling them into assessing different accounts, displaying whence he got his information. Yet, he avoids making a general methodological statement. On one rare occasion Herodotus claims that he is obliged to say the things that are said (but not necessarily to believe them), and that this approach should stand for his whole account (Hdt. 7.152.2). But this statement of principle emerges in the context of a story about the Argives’ medization: in this highly charged context, his insistence on relating every account that comes his way stresses the difficulty of
treated all stories in the same impartial manner and challenges the very principle he enunciates.\(^{23}\)

Thucydides is quite different. He does not appear at his readers’ side with remarks, speculations or criticisms. On the contrary, he remains generally absent from his text, thereby giving the impression that the events speak for themselves without his mediation. As noted above, while this has led some scholars to suggest that Thucydides aims at investing his narrative with total authority, ancient readers observed that the directness of his representation increases his narrative’s vividness and power. In line with the properties of immediacy, Thucydides explicitly enunciates his methodological approach before he begins his narrative. This example is important for what Thucydides has to say about his record of both events and speeches, but it also presents an opportunity to examine his claims to authority and the role of the reader. A similar moment of anxiety surfaces at the point where his narrative begins, as the narrator lays out the causes of the war. On both occasions, the narrator’s statements of authority are to be seen as contentious and a stimulus to exercising judgement.

It seems best to me

Following his opening statement of subject, the war between the Athenians and Peloponnesians, Thucydides conducts a brief foray into the history of the Greek world. Having worked his way up to the present circumstances, he then breaks off to describe how he has constructed his narrative (1.20.1):

\[
tά μὲν οὖν παλαιὰ τοιαύτα ηδόροι, χαλεπὰ δὲντα παντὲ ἐξῆς τεκμηρίω πιστεύειν, οί γὰρ ἀνθρωποὶ τὰς ἀκοὰς τῶν προγεγειημένων, καὶ ἤν ἐπιχώρια σφίαν ἣ, ὁμοίως ἀβασανότως παρ᾽ ἀλλήλων δέχονται.\]

I found out about these ancient events, though it is difficult to trust in every piece of evidence in succession. For people accept hearsay about prior times from others uncritically, even if it concerns their own land.

\(^{23}\) ‘The moment at which he declares that his principle is to repeat what has been said ... is one where one of the most controversial subjects of all is at stake, the terrible question of who medized in the period of the Persian wars—hence the importance of his claim not to believe everything either’: Thomas (2000), 214.
With these lines Thucydides sets his account apart from others like it on the basis of his greater effort, painstaking research and more vigorous standards, and clearly invites his readers’ concurrence. Nevertheless, this section also reveals a marked distribution of tenses that sheds light on Thucydides’ self-fashioning as an author of his composition. On the one hand, he refers to his act of research as an act undertaken in the past, using either the aorist or imperfect depending on aspect. On the other hand, he uses the present tense to refer to other readers of the past. In turn, these distinctions suggest a significant difference in the conception of the task at hand. Thus Thucydides refers to his own research in secondary sequence, indicating that the act of research itself belongs to the writer’s past and cannot be accessed by the reader. When he relates the opinions of his contemporaries, however, he slips into primary sequence in recognition that these accounts represent interpretations subject to the judgement of the reader. In this view, when Thucydides uses the present tense he does so in the context of relating competing opinions, among which his voice (albeit the best) is just one.

That is not to say that all these opinions ought to be considered deserving of equal merit. Unlike other writers who receive hearsay without examination (1.20.1) and turn towards easier things (ἐπὶ τὰ ἐτοίμα μᾶλλον τρέπονται, 1.20.3), Thucydides contends that his account derives from hard work and a concern to test the evidence. For proof he cites three examples of mistaken belief: two relate directly to Herodotus’ enquiry and are usually understood as straightforward corrections; the third contests his contemporaries’ understanding of the

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24 Thus he assigns one-time actions the aorist (ἡδρόν, 1.20.1; χαλεπὸν τὴν ἀκρίβειαν αὐτὴν τῶν λεγέντων διαμημονεύσαι ἢν ἔμοι, 1.22.1; οὐκ ἴσιωσα γράφειν, 1.22.2), and those that indicate a continuous process of investigation the imperfect (ἐπιστόνως δὲ ἴηράκετο, 1.22.3; ὅς δ᾽ ἀν ἐδόκοι, 1.22.1; ὅς ἔμοι ἐδόκει, 1.22.2).

25 οἱ ἀνθρώποι . . . δέχονται (1.20.1); τὸ πλῆθος οἴνονται (1.20.2); οἱ ἄλλοι Ἑλληνες οὐκ ἄρθρος οἴονται (1.20.3).

26 Edmunds (1993) distinguishes between Thucydides’ use of the aorist to denote the historian’s labours, his act of research, which coincides with the effacement of his personality in the creation of third-person objectivity, with his use of primary tenses to refer to the act of writing. He sums up: ‘Thucydides is a third person who wrote a συγγραφὴ in the past; Thucydides is a first person present to the reader at any given time’ (p. 838).

27 See Gould (1989), 111; Dewald (1998); Ober (1998), 54. Gomme (1945), 136–7 thinks Thucydides has other writers and common opinion in mind as well as Herodotus. As both Thomas (1989), 238–82 and Hornblower (1991), 57 point out, Herodotus and
tyrannicide story, a challenge which, given the myth’s associations with the founding of democracy, strikes at the heart of Athenian civic ideology.²⁸ In contrast to these rival claims, Thucydides’ account ‘will present facts that have been “tested” and so are more reliable than the hodgepodge of often erroneous beliefs held by the Athenian masses’.²⁹ It is a short step from this description to the conclusion that Thucydides provides his readers with the text from which they may derive the correct interpretations of what happened in the war.

But is it the right step? Thucydides’ methodological claim to have written a more accurate account than his contemporaries is usually taken to refer to his narrative of the war, as if he has just been demonstrating his own historiographic method.³⁰ Yet, a close inspection of the grammatical construction of this section reveals a somewhat different picture. The narrator’s comment that no one would err thinking such things as he himself has come to from the evidence gathered (ἐκ δὲ τῶν εἰρημένων τεκμηρίων ὅμως τοιαῦτα ἂν τις νομίζων μάλιστα ἀ δύσλθον οὐ χ ἀμαρτάνω, 1.21.1) forms a ring circling back to his version of the distant past and strikes a concluding note: the next sentence, starting with ‘and this war’ (καὶ ὁ πόλεμος οὕτως), marks a new beginning.³¹ On this reading the present war, Thucydides’ narrative, operates according to a different set of principles: the methodological claims regarding accurate and painstaking reconstruction relate only to Thucydides’ competitive reading of the past, not to his project of writing up

Thucydides seems to be in agreement over the fall of the Peisistratid tyranny. Arguably it may be truer to say that Thucydides is correcting the way Herodotus has been read rather than Herodotus himself. Indeed, the structural similarity of Thucydides’ ‘Archaeology’ to Herodotus’ ‘false preface’, in that both sections represent the historians’ foray into past times before beginning their own accounts, already suggests a more nuanced reading of the relationship between the two writers. So R. Fowler (1996), 76: ‘His language and technique in [the archaiologiai of Books 1 and 6] are thoroughly Herodotean, suggesting that [Herodotus’] methods were acknowledged as the appropriate way to determine the truth about the remoter past’; cf. 80. See also Allison (1997a), 239–41.

²⁸ Wohl (1999).
²⁹ Ober (1998), 54.
³⁰ See e.g. Connor (1984); Loraux (1986b), 159; Edmunds (1993); Ober (1998).
the war which he followed from its inception (1.1.1). If the reader is to draw any conclusions from these claims for thinking about the narrative before him, it ought to be that interpretation is an active process requiring a great deal of hard work. Far from gaining any insight into the composition of his text, however, the reader gets instead a brief glimpse of Thucydides as a reader of history.

This explanation leaves open the question of the relevance of Thucydides’ methodological claim to his narrative. The transition from Thucydides’ reading of the past to his writing of the present is made in one sentence, containing the remarkable conceit that his war will be judged greater than all others on the basis of the facts themselves (καὶ ὁ πόλεμος οὗτος ἐκαστοι ἡ μελλόντες πολεμήσειν ἡ ἐν αὐτῶ ἤδη ὄντες, ἀληθῶς τὰ ἁκρίβειαν αὐτῶν τῶν λεγθέντων διαμηνυμέναι ὡς ἐμοί τε ὧν αὐτῶν ἦκον καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ποθεὶ ἐμοὶ ἀπαγγέλλοινοι· ὅς δὲ ἀν ἐδοκοῦν ἐμοὶ ἐκαστοί περὶ τῶν αἰεί παρόντων τὰ δέοντα μάλιστ’ εἶπεν, ἐχομένω ὅτι ἐγνώσατα τῆς ἐμπαθείας γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεγθέντων, οὕτως εἰρηται. And all the things that they said in word either while preparing to go to war or when they were already involved in it, it has been difficult to remember with accuracy what was said both for me, what I myself heard, and for those who informed me. Therefore, as it has seemed best to me that each say what was necessary about the present circumstances, while keeping as close as possible to the general purport of what was really said, so it has been said.

52 Ober (1998), 56. According to Ober: ‘It [the truth about the war] has become a self-evident matter of visual perception.’ Cf. Loraux (1986b). Kurke (2000), 133 notes Thucydides’ authorial effacement, but puts this down to his concern to represent the war’s suffering (1.23.1): ‘This is Thourkydides’ real theme, and his seeming authorial objectivity is not the goal, but the means by which he conveys to the reader as immediately and vividly as possible the experience of the war.’

The awkwardness of the translation represents an attempt to render the difficulty of the ideas being expressed here, which have been the source of much contention. The first point to notice is Thucydides’ subdivision of the ‘facts’ (εῦρα) of the war into two further categories, events (εὐρα) and speeches (λόγοι), which already reveals a degree of self-consciousness about narrative composition and particularly the representation of speech that had not been the concern of Herodotus. The narrator’s anxiety about following correct procedure for citing other people demonstrates, if nothing else, the importance with which speeches are held in this narrative.

What Thucydides has to say about his recording of speech is also significant, however. He wrote down ‘what was necessary, keeping as close as possible to the general thought of what was said’, which raises several fundamental, perhaps even contradictory, ideas. First, Thucydides says that he wrote down what he thought they should say on any given occasion. On the one hand, it is difficult to judge what Thucydides means by this, other than relating a speech that fits the circumstances and the character of the speaker. On the other hand, the label


35 Hornblower (1991), 59 comments: ‘There is nothing like it in [Herodotus]. More remarkably, it is hard to parallel in any writer later than Th[ucydides]. In particular, most historians went on making up speeches without showing any kind of bad conscience about doing so’ (italics in the original). So too Pelling (2000), 118: ‘the original audience, accustomed as they were to epic, Herodotus, and logographers, might rather be struck by any concern for accuracy’ (his italics). Cf. M. Finley (1985), 12–15; Yunis (2003), 201.

36 τὰ δεόντα μᾶλιστ’ εἰπεῖν, ἔχομένῳ ὧτι ἐγχύτατα τῆς λειμασίας γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶν λεχθέντων, 1.22.1.

37 Pelling (2000), 115 notes two aspects which Thucydides cannot presumably be saying: that he gave his speakers the right policies to urge (‘otherwise we could not explain the existence of head-to-head debates, with both speakers urging diametrically opposite policies’); or that he gave them the best arguments (if he had, he did a bad job of it, since ‘recent scholars, especially Macleod, have ruthlessly exposed the frequency with which the arguments are contradictory or self-unmasking’).
'what was necessary' (τὰ δὲόντα) comes directly from the rhetorical schools; that is to say, though the narrator is talking about the voices of other people, he makes it clear that he is inextricably involved in their representation, thereby priming the reader against taking the speeches as the very words spoken. Second, Thucydides juxtaposes the contentious idea of authorial interference, expressed provocatively as a rhetorical exercise, by a less controversial idea expressed in appropriately milder terms: he wrote the speeches according to what was necessary, 'keeping as close as possible to the general thought (γνώμη) of what had actually been said'. In other words, while admitting that he has had to compose the speeches themselves, Thucydides shows an acute concern that those speeches derive from their particular circumstances and in some way reflect the actual speeches that were delivered. On this reading, the general perspectives, if not the precise phrasing or argument, may legitimately be regarded as those of the historical agents, not those of the author.

However these difficult ideas should be understood, one thing is clear: the two parts of this sentence, the ambiguous claims of τὰ δὲόντα and γνώμη, have to be worked through by each and every reader. For some critics it represents an unresolved contradiction, for others the problem may be resolved with careful deliberation; for some it
provides a general map for thinking about Thucydides’ speeches, for others each speech requires individual consideration without the application of any general procedure.42 The way Thucydides has formulated his methodological concerns obliges each reader to confront both the meaning of this methodological claim and the relationship of the speeches to the narrator’s voice. In fact, by taking up a position vis-à-vis this claim, readers may find themselves part of the debate: it will make a difference to interpreting the speeches just what position each reader chooses to adopt.43

Turning to the facts themselves, the ἔργα, at first sight we seem to be on surer ground.44 Thucydides stresses that the ἔργα have been recorded ‘not according to as it seemed best to me’ (οὐδ’ ὡς ἡμοὶ ἔδόκει, 1.22.2), by which he seems to signal a qualitative difference in the veracity of the events in comparison to the difficulty of recording speeches.45 Yet, Thucydides immediately complicates the notion that his ἔργα could even be regarded as objective entities by conceding that the events too are inevitably dependent on perspective, whether that point of view belongs to him or to any of his sources (1.22.3). In addition, in the next clause Thucydides writes that he

42 In her examination of 1.22.1, Debnar (2001), 18 suggests ‘that we cannot extract from it a neat recipe measuring out the objective and subjective ingredients of Thucydides’ speeches.’ Her assertion, however, that there is no proof that any of Thucydides’ speeches could not have been delivered (Debnar (2001), 19–20; cf. Kagan (1975), 77) seems rather to contradict her emphasis on the literariness of their rhetoric (Debnar (2001), 22–3, 233). The difficulty of Thucydides’ speeches was notorious even in antiquity: Dion. Hal. Thuc. 49.

43 There is a further point to be made here about Thucydides’ interest in speech. According to Price (2001), 82, ‘each speech illustrates the first two principles of stasis rhetoric, revealing an instability (and eventual disintegration) in the vocabulary of the basic standards and values of Hellas’. The narrator’s later analysis of the transvaluation of words in the Corcyraean stasis illustrates this well (3.82.4): but Thucydides’ representation of debate also shows that no context exists in which speech can extend beyond purely parochial concerns. Like Herodotus, Thucydides offers his prose narrative as a means of negotiating a way out of political crisis that engulfed the Greek world. His debate scenes provide a context in which a reader may form political judgement more soundly: see secs. 2 and 3 below.


45 Furthermore, his use of the verb δοκεῖ in the third person matches the formula used by the demos when it makes its resolutions. According to Ober, this shows that ‘the facts themselves have been removed to a realm beyond interpretation,—and certainly beyond the interpretive capacity of ordinary citizens sitting in public Assembly.’: Ober (1998), 59.
'goes after' the ἔργα; even as he stresses his impartiality, then, Thucydides makes it clear that he is actively engaged in the construction of his narrative. While he might not appear insistently like a Herodotus at his reader’s side to worry about the composition of his narrative at any one particular point, his general comments concerning his narrative composition show that he is acutely aware of its limitations and pitfalls.

The cause least apparent in speech

After his methodological statement, Thucydides rarely enters his text again: his narrative is presented before his reader as the finished article, with few doubts, speculations or alternative scenarios offered. Yet, an indication of its potential for provocation comes to the fore at the very beginning of the formal narrative of war. The question posed of the reader relates to the issue, not of composition, but of interpretation: what was the cause of the war (1.23.5–6). He uses the term ἔπεξεπλών (1.22.2), which he employs elsewhere to describe the motion of attacking the enemy: Connor (1984), 27; Crane (1996), 36. See Crane (1996), 70 and Moles (1999) for the tension between writing and memorializing. The same verb is used by Herodotus in a similar context: see Ch. 3, n. 4 above.

Exiled from his city and separated from the practices of empire, Thucydides ultimately turned his full energies to the pursuit and analysis of evidence: Crane (1996), 37. In fact, Thucydides brings his methodological section to an end by explicitly inviting reflection on the task of reading. As a result, expectations of how to decode the text are infinitely deferred, as Thucydides instead promises some future benefit for those who look at his monument closely without clear indication what those benefits may be perceived to be, for whom, in what way. For the relation of τὸ σαφὲς to the future see: Woodman (1988), 24; Moles (1993), 107–9. Nicolai (1995) discusses modern (pp. 13–16) and ancient (pp. 17–25) responses to these fateful words.

On account of which they dissolved the peace treaties, I wrote up first the causes and differences, so that no one need enquire further on account of which this war between the Greeks broke out. For the truest cause, and the one least apparent in speech, I consider that the Athenians becoming great and putting fear on the Lacedaemonians compelled them to war.

Thucydides’ reassurance to his reader that the work has been done and that no further research (τοῦ μὴ τινα ζητῆσαι ποτε) need be done has prompted some critics to claim that this marks the end of investigation: the reader has only to read the text to find out the causes of the war. But the sequence of tenses identified earlier marks an important distinction here between the act of writing—the aorist ‘I wrote’ (προῦγραψα)—and an act of judgement—the present ‘I consider’ (γροῦμαι). The construction of the text belongs necessarily to the past and, as a result, cannot be accessed by the reader: the reader must simply accept Thucydides’ narrative as the basis for any account on the war. The narrator’s judgement, however, belongs to the present: the cause of the war is a matter of opinion.

At one level this might not materially appear to make much difference: Thucydides’ interpretation determines the point from which he begins his narrative. Nevertheless, he makes the beginning difficult to read as anything other than a personal judgement: ‘I wrote down the causes (αἰτίαι),’ Thucydides explains, ‘but the truest cause (πρόφασις) was this.’ On the face of it, Thucydides subordinates the first cause to the second, since otherwise it would make no sense for him to claim the second cause as the ‘truest’ one. But that interpretation immediately presents a problem, since the usual word for ‘cause’ or ‘beginning’ is αἰτία; yet, that is exactly the term which Thucydides passes over here. Instead, Thucydides uses the word πρόφασις to denote the ‘truest cause’, when it usually means ‘excuse’, as it does everywhere else in his narrative. Normally, then, πρόφασις would be contrasted with αἰτία,

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50 ‘He invites his reader to agree to his judgment on the basis of the facts he presents (1.21.2, cf. 5.26.2) and not to continue inquiry on the origins of the war, for which he provides the truest explanation (1.23.5–6): Edmunds (1993), 842.
51 In addition to n. 49 above, see Pearson (1952; 1972); Rawlings (1975) on prophasis. Cf. Allison (1997a), 115–19.
52 Gomme (1945), 153 notes that both words have a wide range of meanings, and appear to shift in sense over the course of the narrative: ‘In 1.118.1 what are here the αἰτία are called the πρόφασις and in 1.146, where he sums up the previous narrative
but in a negative way: normally it means precisely the opposite to the ‘true cause’; but, here, Thucydides uses πρόφασις to designate the ‘truest cause’. In expressing his opinion, therefore, Thucydides draws upon deliberately provocative—even paradoxical—language.53 The narrator passes judgement; but readers cannot avoid exercising their own judgement either, and moreover, in such a way that brings their expectations into conflict with the narrator’s opinion.

At another level, identifying the cause of conflict and demonstrating the difficulty of defining the origins goes back to the Iliad (Il. 1.6–10). Similarly, Herodotus states as his opening aim the discovery of the ‘cause’ (αἰτία) of the war between Greeks and barbarians (Hdt. 1.1.1), only to proceed with a playful reworking of prior competing claims before asserting the validity of his own enquiry.54 Here Thucydides invites speculation into the very nature of causality and what constitutes a ‘cause’ by prompting an investigation into the relationship between αἰτία and πρόφασις. That picture becomes all the more complicated when the ‘truest πρόφασις’, ‘the one least apparent in speech (ἄφανεστάτην δὲ λόγον)’, is very noticeably raised in the very first speech of the narrative.55

Far from being represented as unproblematic assertions of authority, Thucydides’ narratorial incursions into his text pose a series of questions that involve the reader in pondering the issues raised by the narrative. One effect is to set into relief Thucydides’ interpretative claims: while the composition of the text is irrevocably and inevitably in the past (for how could a reader gain access to the information available to the

(24–88, 119–45), he uses first the same words as here, αἰτία καὶ διαφορά, then σπονδῶν γὰρ ἔχεινος τὰ γεγονόμενα ἢ καὶ πρόφασις τοῦ πολέμου, the external occasion of the war, referring to the same events as αἰτία καὶ διαφορά. He concludes: ‘there is thus no linguistic reason, and no reason of style, against taking αἰτία and πρόφασις as of equivalent meaning in this passage.’ Cf. Cornford (1907), 57–68. See most recently Moles (2011).

53 The αἰτία have true explanatory force: Heath (1986); πρόφασις, a human construct, can be distinguished from αἰτία, something ‘natural’: Allison (1997a), 115–19, 192.
55 The Corcyraeans make it the linchpin of their appeal to the Athenians: φόβῳ τῶν ὑμετέρων 1.33.3. Gomme (1945), 168 notes in passing that ‘this was Thucydides’ view of the true cause of the war’. Cf. Hornblower (1991), 78. Neither commentator makes anything of the tension between Thucydides’ description of the cause as the ‘one least apparent in speech’ and its presence in the first speech of the narrative. But see Moles (2011).
Thucydides writes debate

author?), what one does with that material, and the conclusions one
reaches, is not dictated. In fact, the narrator appears to express his
opinions in a deliberately provocative and contentious manner in
order to prompt debate.

By way of comparison to the openness of the *agon* that will be argued
in section 2, it might first be instructive to consider the other formal
device that Thucydides draws upon to represent speech: the dialogue.

**Take up anything untoward that we say,
and judge (5.85–113)**

Dialogue enjoys a similarly long narrative history as debate, but it is
associated with a rather different context: not the public arena of the
assembly, but the elite, private space of the symposium.56 Featuring
prominently at the beginning of Herodotus in his depiction of Croesus’
meeting with Solon, it occurs liberally throughout the rest of the
*History*. The picture is very different in Thucydides, who represents
only two dialogues in the whole of his narrative.57 The first, a drawn-
out, triangulated exchange between the Plataeans, Spartans and Athe-
nians, demonstrates the overweening influence of the two major powers
and the difficulty of maintaining neutrality once conflict has begun: the
Plataeans are obliged to remain in the war by their Athenian allies, who
are not even present during the formal negotiations.58

The infamous example of the Melian dialogue illustrates a similar
point, as the Athenians first send an expedition to Melos on the basis
that the island’s continued neutrality constitutes a threat to their
empire, and then enter into discussion with the leading oligarchs:

57 Gomme (1945), 144 notes the difference from Herodotus. For a helpful table of
speeches, with a bibliography, see W. West (1973a and b); cf. Debnar (2001) 221, n. 1.
See also H.-P. Stahl (1966; 1973); Immerwahr (1973); Raubitschek (1973); Hammond
58 Thuc. 2.71–4. The drawn-out episode serves to emphasize the absent presence of
the Athenians without overtly condemning either side. Indeed, scholars have been
generally approving of Archidamus’ behaviour: Debnar (2001), 96–101; cf. Orwin
(1994), 58. This low-key beginning, during which responsibility for the breakdown of
negotiations is not dwelled upon, will, of course, lead to the ultimate destruction of
Plataea: see sec. 3 below. In this light, the judgement that this exchange has a ‘disap-
pointing outcome’ (Debnar (2001), 101) may seem rather inadequate.
from its low-key beginnings Thucydides sets the stage for the extraordinary scene of dialogue that follows. The fact that the Athenians invite the Melians to parley ‘before doing wrong to the land’ (πρὶν ἀδίκησιν τι τῆς γῆς, 5.84.3) may suggest, as it has to one scholar at least, a humanitarian aspect to the episode: the Melians are at least given the opportunity to surrender. In addition, the dialogue form could indicate an exchange of ideas not determined by authorial dictate, particularly given the striking absence of narratorial commentary throughout the whole episode. Significantly, however, the dialogue does not represent a negotiation or lead to compromise: each new path sought out by the Melians is ring-fenced and closed off by the Athenians, in much the same way as the Athenian forces blockade the island. This dialogue at any rate does not seem so much a means of exchange to open up new ways of thinking as a manifestation of power.

In this light, the opening frame takes on additional import. Here Thucydides draws explicit attention to the way the dialogue is set up.


60 Bosworth (1993). It is perhaps truer to say that Thucydides avoids representing a scenario from which easy lessons can be drawn: the Melians are also culpable in their susceptibility to fine-sounding rhetoric; cf. Connor (1984), 153. On the other hand, the justification that ‘we all know’ that the strong rule over the weak (cf. Andrewes (1960), 6) earns a fierce rejoinder from Crane (1998), 238–46, who compares the Athenians’ rejection of pity to their previous representation in Herodotus.

61 Andrade (1993–4) interprets the absence of evaluative comment as a sign of polyphony: ‘La objetividad de Tucídides se funda en éste su frecuente enmascararse detrás de los personajes, en dejar oír sus voces sin emitir, en muchos casos, señales claras de un juicio de valor ni determinar sus palabras insertándolas en un discurso monológico autoral’ (‘The “objectivity” of Thucydides is based on his frequently hiding behind the mask of his character, on letting their voices be heard without expressing, in most cases, clear signals of value-judgement, and without determining their words by inserting them into a monologic authorial discourse’: p. 21). Cagnetta (1990) comments that the problem with the dialogue is that there is no judge. Recent scholarship on Plato has emphasized the possibility of ‘dialogism’: Griswold, ed. (1988), esp. the contributions by Desjardins, Griswold, and Mittelstrass; and Euben (1994; 1996). But see Barber (1996) for a strong rebuttal. The ways in which Plato frames his dialogues is crucial: Goldhill (1993); J. Henderson (2000); cf. Prologue, n. 67 above.

62 Price (2001), 200–1 suggests that the Athenians articulate their position as if they were relaying an extended speech, which is barely disguised by the dialogue form. The overtly blunt language of Thucydides’ Athenians has attracted critical attention: Crane (1998), 242, 246–7 notes that the first occasion the Athenians speak, they already refer to arguments based on their Persian War service as cliche 1.73.2). Deininger (1987), 123–30 discusses the sophistic background to the ‘might is right’ claim.
The Melian representatives, members of the ruling oligarchy, prevent the Athenians from speaking before the people (οὔς οἶ Μῆλιοι πρὸς μὲν τὸ πλῆθος οὔκ ἔγαγον, 5.84.3)—presumably because they fear lest the Athenians, given their experience in democratic rhetoric, persuade the ὀνήματι. Instead, at the suggestion of the Athenians, the two sides enter into dialogue. The Athenian proposal suggests a concern to meet the Melians on their own turf: indeed, their intention to ‘instruct’ their interlocutors recalls the elitist tradition of wisdom dialogue.

There is more, then, to these initial skirmishes than a choice over the form which the discussion will take: the difference in form reflects an ideological divide between democratic debate on the one hand, and aristocratic dialogue on the other, between the form Thucydides adopts elsewhere, and this unique example from which he absents himself.

Yet, in spite of the overt absence of the narrator, the Melian dialogue occupies a clear place in the narrative. As many scholars have noted, Melos signals a prelude to the attack against Sicily, which the narrator has already identified as the cause of Athens’ eventual defeat in the war. Paradoxically, then, at the point when author appears to absent himself, the more likely the reader is to endorse Thucydides’ narrative of Athenian defeat, particularly if this episode is reread after the Sicilian episode. As, indeed, the Athenians so clearly demonstrate, the dialogue form restricts the discussion and closes off dissent. The next section will argue that the ἀγῶν, as a means of representation, is much less focused and not so easily controlled.

63 This is what the Athenians suspect at least: ἑπειδή οὐ πρὸς τὸ πλῆθος οἶ λόγου γίγνονται, ὅπως δὴ μὴ ἐνακολούθησαν οἱ πολλοὶ ἐπαγωγὰ καὶ ἀνελεγκτὰ ἐπιπλοῦσιν ἔμμοι ἀπατηθῆσαι (γεγυνάκομεν γὰρ ἵνα τούτῳ φρονεῖ ἕμμοι ἢ ἐκ τῶν ἄλλων ἄγωγή), 5.85.
64 καθ’ ἑκατὸν γὰρ καὶ μηδ’ ὑμεῖς ἐνὶ λόγῳ ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ μὴ δοκοῦν ἐπιτηδείως λέγεσθαι εἰ δὴς ὑπολαμβάνετε κρίνετε. καὶ πρῶτον εἰ ἀρέσκει ὡς λέγομεν εἰπατε, 5.85.
65 Loraux (1998), 267 describes this dialogue as: ‘Choix politique aristocratique—ou, du moins, anti-démocratique.’
67 Thuc. 2.65.10.
2. THE DIALOGIC AGÓN (THUCYDIDES 1, 3, 8)

The previous section analysed Thucydides’ statements on his methodology for constructing his narrative and found that, contrary to the assumptions of most critics, the narrator’s utterances are not simply to be seen as assertions of authority, but as thought-provoking propositions. Thucydides is well aware of his responsibility for constructing the narrative, and does not attempt to disguise his hand in its composition; yet, at the same time, his reader cannot fail to recognize the narrator’s point of view, which seems to be expressed in such a way as to provoke an inquisitive response. Thus Thucydides appears to stake his authority on adopting a position of dissent—and challenges the reader to do the same.

This section considers Thucydides’ representation of debate. It is generally accepted that Thucydides shows strong disapproval of debate and, in particular, of those conducted within Athens. Yet this view overlooks two crucial features that set Thucydides in relation to Herodotus: like Herodotus, Thucydides shows a keen awareness of the problem of the lack of debate; unlike Herodotus, however, he represents debate in a formal manner, in terms of both examining its institutional context and representing it within the narrative. By representing debate as an agón Thucydides both demonstrates its limitations in the context of the public assembly, and opens up possibilities of its utility for a reader. In this way, Thucydides is not only critical of debate, as it is practised in the assemblies around Greece; he also utilizes it for reproducing a political culture within his text.

No one still spoke in opposition

In line with the dominant view of Thucydides’ authorial persona, the scholarly consensus holds that Thucydides shows strong disapproval of debate, particularly of those debates conducted in the democratic framework of his city, Athens.\(^{68}\) It is certainly true that the narrator exposes a succession of speakers deceiving the démos in the assembly, a picture

which has much in common with Aristophanes’ comedies and even recalls Herodotus’ judgement that it was easier to deceive a mass of people than a single individual. Yet, the narrator demonstrates an equally sceptical view of the lack of debate in the political communities in and around Greece.

The awareness of the problem of the lack of debate comes to the fore in Thucydides’ description of two scenes of civil strife, as if the absence of a forum for public debate were the symptom of, and even a contributory factor to, a deeper malaise. The first, and paradigmatic, example of civil strife is Corcyra, which is shot through with language of competition. People ‘competed in every way’ (παντὶ δὲ τρόπῳ ἄγωνιζόμενοι, 3.82.8) to carry out the most terrible acts; a culture of ‘competition in being clever’ (ἔνσεσες ἄγωνίσμα, 3.82.7) prevailed; those citizens who tried to take the ‘middle way’ (τὰ δὲ μέσα τῶν πολιτῶν, 3.82.8) were killed, either because of envy or else because of ‘their failure to join in the ἀγὸν’ (οὖν ἔνσεσες ἀγωνίζοντο, 3.82.8). Instead of opening up a middle ground, in times of war and, in particular, of civil strife competition between citizens leads to the dissolution of the civic body; the ἀγὸν here is both symptom and cause of the worsening situation, and debate suffers. As a result, the community’s valorization of dissent, which in the Iliad had been founded as a response to civil strife, here breaks down in its midst: ‘He who was violent was always trustworthy, he who disagreed (ὁ δὲ ἀντιλέγων) was held in suspicion’ (3.82.3). Thucydides’ narrative not only confronts the way politics is being done in the community; it also challenges the achievement of the Iliad. If you want to debate properly, don’t look to the conventional political institutions, which are so easily corruptible in difficult times, or to traditional epic narratives, which give a fancifully idealistic portrait of debate. Thucydides’ narrative tells it how it is.

69 See Ch. 3, sec. 1 above. Cleon (4.17) and Alcibiades (5.45) respectively pull the wool over the δήμοι eyes by manipulating assembly procedure and style. For Thucydides’ (possibly misleading) representation of Cleon’s prominence in the Pylos debate, see H. Flower (1992).


71 Hence his emphasis on ‘keeping as close as possible to the general thought (ἡ ἐφικτάσθη γνώμη) of what was actually said’, 1.22.1: see sec. 1 above, and esp. n. 4 on γνώμη.
By book 8, the last extant book of Thucydides’ work, the civil strife which had so afflicted Corcyra now infects Athens.兴趣ingly, the site in and over which Thucydides denotes the shift in power from the democracy to the plotting oligarchs is the assembly. Though debate continues under the tutelage of the four hundred, Thucydides wryly observes that ‘no one still spoke in opposition’ (ἀντέλεγε τε ουδείς ἔτι τῶν ἄλλων); anyone who did immediately died ‘in some convenient way’ (ἐκ τρόπου τῶν ἐπιτηδείου, 8.66.1–2). Presently the city’s affairs are presided over by behind-the-scene shadow-puppeteers, aristocrats like Antiphon, ‘a man who never came before the δήμος nor before any other αγών if he could help it’ (ἐς μὲν δήμου οὐ παριών οὐδ’ ἐς ἄλλον ἀγώνα ἐκούσιος οὐδένα, 8.68.1). While Thucydides’ attitude towards debate is normally taken as uniformly critical, here he identifies the suppression of debate as the problem: the oligarchs do away with all who try to speak against them, and use the assembly as little more than a rubber-stamping chamber. Moreover, the suppression of alternative perspectives is commonly held to be the position of Thucydides. But

72 Until recently book 8 was condemned as either unfinished or simply dull: Cornford (1907), 244. Building on more stylistically sensitive criticism by Macleod (1983), 141 and Connor (1984), 210–30, recent critics have drawn attention to the different effects Thucydides’ shift in narrative technique produce. According to Rood (1998), 251–84, ‘Thucydides suggests through echoes of his earlier narrative that the war is entering a new, complex phase, and that this phase will be unexpectedly long’ (p. 253). Dewald (2005), ch. 6 shows how closely the Aegean narrative of book 8 corresponds stylistically to the Sicilian expedition by presenting a single, continuous story.

73 On the bitter irony of Thucydides’ description, see Connor (1984), 223 n. 25: ‘An epitédios, “a suitable one,” was someone you could rely upon, a good friend. The word becomes a feature of oligarchic language, meaning someone who was suited to the oligarchy, that is who could be relied upon to support it, 8.48.2; 54.3; 63.4; 64.4; cf. 5.76.2 . . . To say that someone died “from some suitable means” catches the tone of oligarchic speech while showing how widely it can be extended to mask the violence of the conspirators.’

74 Greenwood (2006), 95 comments: ‘In Book 8 the oligarchic revolution marks the breakdown of democratic politics, which derived its stability precisely from its engagement in institutionalized conflict.’ She, however, stresses the unflattering picture of the δήμοι in the oligarchic revolution (pp. 89–97). Elsewhere she connects the δήμοι silence here (8.66) to a series of critical sketches of the Assembly, notably the silence of those who disagreed with the decision to sail to Sicily (6.24.4); Greenwood (2004), 185–9. As the stasis in Corcyra shows, however, the problem of the lack of dissent (especially during times of war) extends beyond Athens.

75 But see Farrar (1988), 131: ‘Thucydides’ History is an argument: it both justifies itself (that is, shows that history is the proper way to think about—and in—politics, and
Thucydides writes debate

his commentary here—all the more effective for its terseness—shows the clear undesirability of debate in which only one voice is heard.\(^{76}\) In fact, it may be significant that one of the ways in which Thucydides succeeds in portraying the chaos inflicting the Greek world in book 8 is precisely by not representing any debates at all. In this world, which shows the ever-increasing disintegration of the institutional fabric of Greek culture, there is no place for conventional politics, only for the Odyssean adventures of individuals such as Alcibiades.\(^{77}\)

Thucydides’ answer to the limitations to and corruption of conventional politics is the narrative he constructs, but not in the sense that it provides the solution; on the contrary, his narrative offers a response by means of its capacity to put its readership through the process of doing politics. Rather than retreating into the murky and terrifying world of an Antiphon who never entered the \(\alpha\gamma\omicron\omicron\nu\)\(\theta\omicron\), Thucydides writes back by representing debate in the form of \(\alpha\gamma\omicron\omicron\nu\). Institutional debate is not possible in that world of shadowy politics, which has already seen Corcyra tear itself apart, with Athens sooner or later to follow; it is not only possible, but necessary, in its recuperation by Thucydides.

that it makes historical judgement possible) and justifies also a particular set of actions in a particular context… Thucydides did not seek to close off reflectiveness or the collective exercise of judgement, but to shape it.’ Ober, however, reads Farrar’s ‘shaping of judgement’ as ‘control of interpretation’, which, he claims, ‘would be regarded as antidemocratic by fifth-century Athenians’: Ober (1996) 123.

\(^{76}\) Price (2001), 326 compares Thucydides’ account of the establishment of the four hundred to Aristotle ([\textit{Ath. Pol.}] 8.69–70), in which the ‘matter-of-fact statement that the Athenians had no choice (\(\mu\alpha\mu\alpha\omicron\omicr...
They say that . . . (1.32–43)

Speech in Herodotus takes many different forms, with liberal scatterings of conversation, dialogue and single speeches in the manner of epic narrative; assembly talk is just one form among many. Moreover, Herodotus demonstrates a capacity to represent debate more formally, especially as his narrative approaches the recent past and enters a period when Greek cities would have enjoyed a developed institutional framework. Yet, the fact that debate remains less prominent in form and role is significant: Herodotus sets his enquiry in competition with the public institution of assembly, where politics—including deliberation, exercising historical judgement, and interpreting oracles and so on,—is usually done. The way debate is represented in Herodotus—frequently outside an institutional framework—reflects his own ambiguous participation in civic affairs, as a prose-writer crossing over and straddling more than one particular polis.

Thucydides represents debate in a radically different manner. Gone is the sheer variety of different forms: Thucydides reduces heterogeneous opinions to a model of speech and counter-speech, where, within carefully bounded parameters, opposing speakers compete with each other to try to persuade a judging audience. Even those speeches that are not formally set in paired opposition form some kind of agonistic relationship with other speeches or events. On occasion Thucydides appears

78 It is striking that Herodotus, when recording the more familiar, recent past of Greece, represents speech in a more formal, argumentative style as, for example, with the agon between the Athenians and Tegeans (9.26–8), on which see Flower and Marincola (2002), 147–58.

79 Cogan (1981), 1 notes eight debates out of twenty-seven speeches. For Yunis (2003), Thucydides’ antilogizing of speech has the result of putting ‘opposing views into sharpest possible antithesis with no accommodation for synthesis’ (p. 204). On Thucydides’ debt to Protagoras, see Yunis (1998), 234–9; (2003), 204; cf. Farrar (1988); Allison (1997a), 248.

80 So e.g. Pericles’ first speech before the Athenians answers the Corinthian ultimatum at the Spartan congress; his second speech answers the reported speech of Archidamus (on which see Connor (1984), 49–51 with n. 58); the funeral oration is answered by the plague: Parry (1989). Yunis (2003), 204 comments: ‘Taken as a group, all the Thucydidean speeches function in a similar manner to a single antilogy, except with a broader, more complex range of perspectives. As a fixed written text, each speech crystallizes a political insight conditioned by one set of circumstances and one speaker’s agenda. No single speech, not even any of those of Pericles, has ultimate authority; all compete in the reader’s mind for interpretative potential.’
Thucydides writes debate 227

even to stress the artificiality of his presentation.\textsuperscript{81} Thus, even when other voices make it onto Thucydides’ stage, they are strictly policed, which again suggests the narrator’s dominant role in presenting the material. Nevertheless, how one should approach Thucydides’ debates remains an important question.\textsuperscript{82}

While dialogue appears in various informal manifestations in previous narrative works, including Herodotus’ *History*, in characteristic fashion Thucydides formalizes its structure and manufactures a scene akin to a dramatic performance without the mediation of the narrator. But, as we have seen far from lacking authorial guidance, the dialogue form exerts strict control over the material it presents: whether it is the Athenians blocking the Melians’ every attempt to escape the hard-headed logic of their situation, or Thucydides’ reader applying that same logic of imperialism to assessing the Sicilian expedition, little opportunity to dissent presents itself.

But the Melian dialogue stands unique in Thucydides narrative; by far the most common form of quotation is public speech in the assembly. Left at that, this would demonstrate Thucydides’ interest in investigating deliberation within the community’s broader institutional framework, in a significant departure from Herodotus; it is also important to note that Thucydides’ enquiry is not aimed solely at his city’s democratic processes, but also at the decision-making capacities of all the Greek city-states, including Sparta and Sicily.\textsuperscript{83} But Thucydides’

\textsuperscript{81} So e.g. he balances the Corinthians’ condemnation of perceived Athenian aggression by providing a detailed point-by-point Athenian rejoinder, introduced by the casual remark that ‘there happened to be some Athenians present’ (1.72.1). For a discussion of the Athenians at Sparta, see Gomme (1945), 252–6. The fact that the Athenians are talking to Spartans might account for their bluntness: Pelling (2000), 122.

\textsuperscript{82} How are the debates paradigmatic? According to Cogan (1981), the speeches represent a change of policy, one standing for the status quo, the other for change. As the war proceeds, these changes are made for the worse. It is questionable, however, whether the debates do mark a change in policy. Following the Mytilenaean debate, the next revolting ally of whom we hear, Scione, receives the punishment that Cleon had earlier recommended. Furthermore, it seems somewhat problematic to conclude that Cleon, in that debate, represents the status quo. His adherence to tradition is a rhetorical ploy and ought to be regarded as such: Macleod (1983), 94.

\textsuperscript{83} Ober’s selection of what debates to analyse—those concerning Corcyra, Mytilene and Sicily—reflect his own preconceptions, which are to explore the assembly in Athens. It is important to note, however, that since Thucydides does not restrict his use of the *agôn* to Athens, he cannot be exposing debate only there. For the debates at Sparta, see Debnar (2001).
rerecking of debate as *agōn* also reproduces the tension between assembly deliberation and its textual representation. To test the thesis that Thucydides employs the *agōn* as a reading strategy for prompting informed dissent, the rest of this section focuses on the first scene of formal debate as a case study: that is, the debate between the Corcyraeans and the Corinthians delivered in Athens prior to the war.84

While Thucydides’ narrative of the war begins simply enough, with the laconic ‘Epidamnus was a city’ (*ἐπὶ δαμνὸς ἦσστι πόλις*, 1.24.1), a series of events rapidly unfold which paradigmatically exemplify the upheaval this war causes.85 The Corinthians and Corcyraeans are drawn into the internal conflict in Epidamnus in support of parties that paradoxically represent their ideological opponents: the oligarchic Corinthians come to the aid of the Epidamnian democrats; the democratic Corcyraeans, the oligarchs.86 Fearing defeat at the hands of superior forces, the Corcyraeans send a delegation to Athens to ask for an alliance; hard on their heels are the Corinthians, who fear lest these two powerful navies should form a coalition against them. Thucydides then records the speeches that were made on either side in the Athenian assembly.

The Corcyraeans employ a number of strategies by means of which they hope to gain the Athenians’ favour. According to the later rhetorical treatises, it was standard to appeal to justice when soliciting an alliance: the first word of the Corcyraeans’ speech is δίκαιον, ‘it is right’ (1.32.1).87 As the sentence continues, however, δίκαιον serves not so much to represent a claim to justice as to introduce a key theme of the speech: ‘it is just,’ the Corcyraeans, propose, ‘to teach you how it will be expedient.’ In this way the idea of justice slides into its conceptual

84 See Debnar (2001) for a similar analysis of Thucydides’ speeches in relation to their embedded audience.
86 Crane (1998), 97–105 discusses the puzzling nature of this introductory narrative from an alternative perspective: that is, its intensely emotional aspect, when Thucydides’ usual ruthless exposure of sentimentality might have been expected. He notes that the Corcyraeans were ‘puffed up’ (*ἐπαιρύμενοι*, 1.25.4) because of the occupation of their island by Phaeacians, whose glory (*κλέος*) was their ships. We see here the potent force of myth on contemporary politics.
opposite of expediency.\textsuperscript{88} On the one hand, this could suggest a sleight of hand on the part of the Corcyraeans, as they introduce the notion of expediency through the language of justice. Alternatively, it could be Thucydides’ reconstruction of their speech that draws attention to the dissonance between their expression of conventional values and the self-serving tenor of their argument.\textsuperscript{89}

The tension between these two elements—imitation of the speakers’ persuasive strategy and its exposure—becomes more apparent from the next line. Referring to themselves as objects of a third-person directive, ‘the Corcyraeans ordered us’ (‘Κερκυραίοι δὲ...ἀπέστειλαν ἡμᾶς’, 1.32.2), the speakers configure themselves as impartial representatives without a personal stake in what they have to say. It is only after they have introduced their usefulness to the Athenians (1.33.1) that they become bolder in their modes of address. Using a series of prefixes and personal pronouns, they align their fate with the Athenians’ in common cause against the Corinthian threat: the Corinthians have attacked them first (‘προκαταλαμβάνεται’, 1.33.3) as a pre-emptive strike against Athenian power (‘ἐσ τὴν ὑμετέραν ἐπιχείρησιν’, 1.33.3): this should bring them together ‘in common hatred’ (‘τὸ κοινὸ ἔχθει’, 1.33.3). Having established a special relationship with their audience, the speakers next use language that recalls their opening third-person address: ‘if they should say that it is not just that you receive their colonists’ (‘ἡν δὲ λέγωσιν ὡς ὦ δίκαιον τοὺς σφετέρους ἀποίκους ἡμᾶς δέχεσθαι’, 1.34.1)—only now, however, the Corinthians are relegated to the position of outsiders, left trying to claim what is just or not.\textsuperscript{90} Similarly, it is no longer the Athenians who need instructing, but the Corinthians: ‘Let them learn’ (‘μαθήτων’, 1.34.1). The reader thus gains an insight into how language performs as the Corcyraeans move closer to the Athenians in terms of address and drive a wedge between them and the Corinthians.

\textsuperscript{88} The scholiast on 1.32 reads: ‘The speech of the Corcyraeans places greater emphasis upon expediency than on what is just, that of the Corinthians justice more than expediency.’ Cf. Macleod (1983), 55; Crane (1998), 105–8. See also Heath (1990).

\textsuperscript{89} Connor (1984), 34, n. 33 notes the weakness of the Corcyraean position from the perspective of traditional values: ‘They had no claim on Athenians either by kinship or by past services.’ Cf. Cogan (1981), 10–13.

\textsuperscript{90} The Corinthians are now relegated to the third person, whereas before the speakers referred to themselves in such a way.
Of interest too is the means by which the Corcyraeans make the case for their usefulness, having initially acknowledged their position of weakness in having to solicit the Athenians for an alliance (1.32.4–5):

Our previous thinking, which we considered wise since we didn’t risk being dragged into someone else’s war by someone else’s policy, has turned out to be not good planning and lacking strength. Since we see that we’ll be unable to survive with only our own resources, and the danger is great if we are overpowered by them, it is necessary for us to get help from you or from any other, and we ought to get sympathy now that we venture on an opposing course of action having kept ourselves to ourselves, not for any sinister reason, but rather in an error of judgement.’

Prior to the present crisis their thinking (ἡ δοκοῦσα ἡμῶν) had been that being in an alliance (ἐμμαχία) meant having to share in the dangers (ἐμμαχεῖαι). It has turned out (πετόχκε), however, that they now face a truly great danger (μεγάς ὁ κίνδυνος), since they have been left alone (ἐςκῆς ἕσκῃ, 1.32.4) of allies. Therefore, they must (ἀνάγκῃ) reverse their previous policy, which they now recognize as having been made in error (ἀμαρτία), and seek an alliance—a change of mind that ought to elicit sympathy (ἐγγενήμη). To seasoned spectators of the theatre, this appeal has a suggestive ring about it: it strikingly recalls the language of tragedy and the image of the isolated hero.91 Indeed, some of the terminology reappears to anticipate Aristotle’s reflections on the kind of ‘error’ a character should make if he is to be considered truly tragic, particularly the distinction that their error is of an intellectual kind (ἀποιλεία), not a moral error.92

The resonance with the tragic stage—if that is what is going on here—has two practical benefits. First, the Corcyraeans are able to

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91 See e.g. the description of the typical Sophoclean hero: Knox (1983).
92 Arist. Poet. 1453a.
avoid begging for pity explicitly, which would ultimately undermine their claim to usefulness. Second, they can manipulate the Athenians’ self-image both as the defenders of the weak and as having the intelligence to see their mistakes. Thucydides’ record of the Corcyraeans’ speech, whether or not, or to what extent, it represents the words actually spoken, is important both for imitating the persuasive force of the arguments used, on the one hand, and for giving the reader the means by which to analyse those arguments on the other. The opportunities for analysis are further greatly enhanced by Thucydides’ juxtaposition of this speech with the Corinthian response.

After the end of the Corcyraeans’ speech, Thucydides immediately relates what the Corinthians said. Thus, at this point between the speeches at any rate the narrator avoids giving any indication of audience response. This juxtaposition of speeches without mediation by narratorial commentary continues with very few exceptions throughout the narrative, so that the observations made here may be regarded as applicable for thinking about the agōn more generally in Thucydides. The absence of narratorial commentary between the speeches already suggests that interpretation is going to be a complicated business, which continues the trend of representing assembly scenes witnessed in the Iliad.

The formality of the agōn, however, is markedly different from anything we have seen in other kinds of narrative, including Homeric epic. The status of the Corinthians’ speech as a reply is brought out in a number of ways. The Corinthians offer another ‘account’ (λόγος, 1.37.1), explicitly tag their opponents’ arguments with ‘they say’ (φανεί, 1.37.2, 37.5; 39.1), and even counter the Corcyraeans’ opening gambit on justice (δίκαιον) with their own on necessity (ἀναγκαίον, ‘it is necessary’, 1.37.1). The formal opposition, exemplified by this paradigmatic agōn, invites comparison of the rival strategies used by the two groups.96

94 Thus, while their policy for them has proven against their own interests (ἀξίωματος, 1.32.3), for the Athenians it must seem only illogical (ἀλόγον, 1.32.3).
95 Hornblower (1991), 75.
96 For a theoretical justification of antilogy, see Artabanus, Ch. 3, sec. 2 above. The formal opposition of speeches receives much attention during this period as, for example,
The Corcyraeans had shown the utmost care to present themselves in the best light to the Athenians, first as impartial commentators on their own predicament, then as potential comrades-in-arms against a common enemy. The Corinthians address the Athenians in quite a different way: a demand for equality runs through their speech; indeed, they speak as if their relationship to Corcyra were equivalent to Athenian rule over their subjects. Having identified a difference in the style of address, the reader is left to ponder the significance of the change, for which various possibilities may apply. The Corinthians’ concern for equality suggests a more traditional view of inter-poleis relationships based on the long-standing idea of reciprocity, as befitting a city that Thucydides has already identified in his ‘Archaeology’ as being largely conservative. Then again the emphasis on equality could point to their conception of relations with the Athenians as being one of equals, which would indicate an underlying friction already present between the two powers. It is important to note that Thucydides does not provide the answer to these or any other speculations: once equipped with the knowledge that this speech fails (if this was indeed news), the reader may suspect that the Corinthians failed to show sufficient flattery or, at least, the care to appeal to Athenian self-image; but whether or not a lack of respect was the reason for their failure, or even if there were a lack of respect, is not made explicit.


97 ‘We consider it worthy to get the same from you’ (‘νῦν παρ’ ἡμᾶς τὸ αὐτὸ ἀξιοῦμεν κομίζεισθαι’, 1.43.1); ‘give back exactly the same’ (‘τὸ δὲ ᾧν ἀνταπόδοτε’, 1.43.2).

98 ‘Each should discipline his own allies’ (‘τοὺς αφετέρους ἐξμιμάχους αὐτῶν τινα κολάζειν’, 1.43.1).

99 1.13.2–5. Corinth is said to have been the first to adopt the state-of-the-art triremes, and fought in the first sea-battle (ironically with the Corcyraeans), but there is a sense that their great power lies in the past: Thucydides notes that the ‘ancient poets’ (παλαιοὶ ποιηταί) called the place wealthy (1.13.5). Crane (1998), 122 suggests that ‘when the Corinthians state their case at Athens, they frame their position in the traditional language of bilateral relationships’. This could explain why scholars have found their arguments unconvincing: Kagan (1969), 231–6; de Ste Croix (1972), 70–1; Salmon (1984), 285–8.

100 Indeed, their very language of equality could suggest an aggressive act of appropriation of a key Athenian ideal: here the argument would be that their city too is based on a sense of equality, though one that looks very different from the Athenian version, democracy. For a suggestive parallel, see Darius’ version of Persian freedom, Ch. 3, sec. 2 above.
Of particular interest for thinking about the process of judgement is the response of the Corinthians to their opponents’ reconfiguration of a previous policy as an intellectual error.\textsuperscript{101} The Corinthians contest their opponents’ pitiable colouring of ‘error’ (ἀμαρτία) with their insistence that they ‘have erred’ (‘ἀλλα τε ἡμιαρτήκασι’, 1.38.5) and that they are deserving of punishment. Where the Corcyraeans had sought to empty their ἀμαρτία of moral baggage by putting it down to an intellectual mistake, the Corinthians reinvest it with moral culpability and responsibility.\textsuperscript{102} This has implications for the judges too, who are warned that the proposed alliance (the ἐμμαχία) will in effect be a ‘ἐμ-ἀδικεῖν’: that is to say, the alliance won’t lead to a share of the ‘profit’ (as the Corcyraeans claim\textsuperscript{103}), but rather to share of the wrong-doing. Decision-making in this context can never be purely intellectual, without moral responsibility, free from risk. The judges may well find themselves being judged too.

\textbf{And they had in mind too Italy and Sicily (1.44)}

This first \textit{agōn} has exposed the reader to the persuasive strategies used by both groups and, in part due to the juxtaposition of competing voices and in part due also to Thucydides’ writing up of the speeches, also equips the reader with the tools to unlock those strategies. What Thucydides does not do, however, is to provide the reader with a particular interpretation of the speeches that could be considered authoritative. In fact, in the scene of embedded audience reactions that follows, the narrator complicates any notion of a simple, discrete judgement.

In contrast to all other scenes of debate examined in this book in epic, Herodotus and tragedy, Thucydides also narrates the audience’s response in some detail. This point already suggests that Thucydides is as much interested in the decision-making process itself as in the delivery of speeches. His commentary raises other important concerns too (1.44.1–3):

\textsuperscript{101} See nn. 91–2 above, with accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{102} They are guilty of οὐρος, ἐξουσία and βία (1.38.5). \textit{Hubris} in particular is heavily loaded in traditional Greek thought, and is a favourite topic for elegists such as Solon and Theognis. See Fisher (1992); D. Cairns (1996). The Corinthians’ emphasis on excess also resonates with the dialogue between Croesus and Solon which begins Herodotus’ narrative.
\textsuperscript{103} See sec. 1 above.
And the Athenians, after listening to both sides, and with there being two assemblies, in the first they accepted the arguments of the Corinthians no less, and in the second they changed their mind and made an alliance with the Corcyraeans, but not a full alliance, rather a defensive one in which to help each other... For they considered that they too would be war with the Peloponnesians, and they had no wish for Corcyra, with such a navy, to fall into the hands of the Corinthians, but for these two powers to wear each other out... And at the same time it was well apparent that the island [of Corcyra] lay on the voyage to Italy and Sicily.

The extended description of the scene of judgement is interesting for several reasons. First, and foremost, the narrator describes the difficulty of coming to a decision, as the Athenians first vote one way and then another: if anything is clear it is that there is no easy resolution to the crisis of judgement facing the Athenians. Indeed, their final decision can be said to represent something of a compromise: they offer the Corcyraeans an alliance, but not the full alliance (ξυμμαχία) that was proposed, rather a defensive alliance (ἐπιμαχία). Their decision marks a ‘third way’ between losing Corcyra to a dangerous enemy, and provoking that enemy into war.104 Thus the judges enter the ἀγών by a performance of mediation, which might be thought of as paradigmatic for making judgement.

Yet, the profound repercussions of assuming the middle ground are explored in some detail over course of the narrative that follows. As the Corcyraeans and Corinthians come to blows at sea, the Athenians initially remain on the sidelines as spectators, with explicit instructions not to engage the enemy unless Corcyraean land was threatened (1.45.3). Eventually, however, a point is reached (ἐς τούτο ἀνάγκης, 1.49.7) when,

seeing the Corcyraeans in difficulties, the Athenians can no longer ‘still make the separation’ (διεκέκριτο οὐδὲν ἔτι, 1.49.7), and enter the battle to assist them ‘without evasion’ (ἀπροφασίστως, 1.49.7). Another critical moment has been reached; another act of judgement must be made. And another scene of direct speech between the two opposing forces marks the significance of the moment: the Corinthians bluntly accuse the Athenians of having done wrong (‘ἀδικεῖτε, ὁ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι’, 1.53.2); in response, the Corcyraeans clamour for the heralds to be executed (ἀνεβόσαν εὐθὺς λαβεῖν τε αὐτοὺς καὶ ἀποκτεῖναι, 1.53.3). For both of these embedded audiences, then, there has been no ambiguity in reading the original Athenian decision and subsequent intervention as anything else than full support for the Corcyraeans, even as the Athenians themselves deny it. Nevertheless, an important shift has taken place: whereas their previous decision had been to offer a defensive alliance (ἐπιμαχία, 1.44.1), now, in the midst of conflict, they refer to their relationship to the Corcyraeans simply as an alliance (ξυμμαχία, 1.53.4). The fallout from the ἀγών shows how the judges’ compromise becomes compromised in itself. As a paradigm, it shows what is at stake in making a judgement.

A second feature of note emerges from a close inspection of Thucydides’ insight into the Athenians’ reasoning underpinning their decision. According to the narrator, ‘it seemed to them that there would be war with the Peloponnesians, and they did not want to lose Corcyra, which had such a large navy, to the Corinthians’. On the face of it, the Athenians would appear to have accepted the Corcyraean argument that war was inevitable (1.33.3). Furthermore, that assessment relates directly to the ‘truest cause (προφάσις)’, which the narrator had earlier

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105 The verb is associated with making judgement: LSJ III, 399.

106 In doing so the Athenians try to maintain their role of mediators: they proclaim that they are not looking to start a war, in line with their instructions (1.53.4; cf. 45.3). But as Hornblower (1991), 96 notes: ‘the alliance stipulated that Athens should help if [and only if] Corcyra territory was attacked... In fact, the Athenian commanders, whatever they now say, have gone beyond their instructions and the terms of the alliance’ (italics in the original).

107 Gomme (1945), 176 considers ξυμμαχία to be of wider import, so that it includes ἐπιμαχία within its scope; but his claim is based on this passage. See de Ste Croix (1972), p.xiii for a definition and discussion of these terms.

108 ἐδόκει γὰρ ὁ πρὸς Πελοποννησίους πόλεις καὶ ὃς ἔσσεσαί αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὴν Κέκριμαν ἐβοῦλοντο μὴ προέσθαι τοῖς Κορυθηίοις ναυτικοῖς ἐχοῦσιν τοσοῦτον, 1.44.1.
flagged. Yet there is a striking difference between these two judgements. At the beginning of his account Thucydides had claimed ‘that the Athenians, by becoming great and making the Lacedaemonians fearful, compelled them to war’.¹⁰⁹ The narrator’s special insight identifies the Spartans as the object of necessity and the cause of the war.¹¹⁰ In the judgement of the ἀγών, however, Thucydides indicates that the Athenians considered themselves to be under compulsion when they made their decision to accept the Corecyraean alliance. On that basis it is the Athenians who were under compulsion to go to war.¹¹¹ The shift is significant for various reasons. It not only suggests that Thucydides does not provide one single way of reading the ἀγών; it also shows how previous judgements, including those by the narrator himself, get drawn into the contest. In spite of the emphasis on necessity, therefore, human decision-making remains important.¹¹² Moreover, reading is configured as a continuous process of re-examining the text, reassessing one’s assumptions, reflecting on one’s previous interpretations.

¹⁰⁹ τοῖς Ἀθηναῖοις ἃγοντας μεγάλοις γεγομένοις καὶ φόβον παρέχοντας τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις ἀναγκάζει ἐς τὸ πολέμειν, 1.23.6. See sec. 1 of this chapter above. Scholars are divided as to whether the Corinthians themselves accept the premise of the Corecyraean argument that war is inevitable: de Romilly (1963), 21; Cogan (1981), 14. Whereas Cartledge (1979), 225 suggests that Thucydides’ ‘permanency of value’ belongs to ‘his unswerving insistence, for purposes of historical interpretation, on the amorality of interstate relations’, Crane (1998), 108 argues that ‘the amoral events in the History often provide the dark background against which Thucydides’ emotional and principled attitudes stand out’.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Though the infinitive ‘to compel’ lacks an object, Rood (1998), 222, n. 67 rules out the possibility that it is the Athenians who are the group being compelled. Yet, the fact that he has to argue this point suggests a certain ambiguity in the syntax, which has prompted different scholarly reactions: see the bibliography cited there. On Thucydides as putting the blame on the Spartans, see Badian (1993).¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ We might also recall that the moment of Athenian intervention in the sea-battle, which brings them into conflict with the Corinthians, is marked by the expression ἐς τοῦτο ἀνάγκης, 1.49.7.

¹¹² The combination of necessity and human decision-making resonates with the dual determinism so prevalent in Greek thought, particularly in tragedy. Indeed, a striking parallel presents itself. In the famous parodos of Aeschylus’ Ἀγαμέμνων, the chorus describe how Agamemnon ‘put on the yoke of necessity’ (ἐσεὶ δὲ ἀνάγκας ἐδω λέπανον, Aesch. Ag. 217) when he decided to sacrifice his daughter. We might note not only that the same symbiosis of necessity and judgement prevails, but the context is similar too: Agamemnon’s act also begins a war. Fraenkel (1950), 127 notes related metaphors in Herodotus. See also Dover (1973).
In Thucydides’ reworking of a publicly performed judgement, the performance of the reader as a judge comes under scrutiny.

The analysis of the *ago* thus far has shown the complexity of judgement experienced by both the embedded audience and reader. A third and related feature derives from the fact that the Athenians debate the resolution twice. According to Ober, the ambiguity of the Athenian decision—the double debate—demonstrates the weakness of the democratic system: they cannot make up their minds which decision they should make.\(^{113}\) Yet, it is important to note again that Thucydides’ narrative in no way reveals the answer that the Athenians should have made. Besides, the passing comment has a rather different effect: it points to the narrator’s hand in the *construction* of this *ago*. That is to say, Thucydides does not represent the Athenian debate over the eventual decision to accept (conditionally) the Corcyraean alliance: rather, he reproduces for his reader the arguments with which the Athenian *demos* had to grapple.\(^{114}\) His readers, no less than the Athenian *demos*, find themselves in a position of having to make a judgement.

In fact, the paradigmatic quality of this *ago* comes to the fore in the explanation of judgement. In tracing the Athenian thought-process for eventually accepting a defensive alliance, Thucydides notes that the Athenians *were also* (ἄμω ἄδε, 1.44.3) influenced by Corcyra’s proximity to Italy and Sicily. The mention of Sicily is striking, and yet has aroused little comment from critics.\(^{115}\) But Sicily will become the turning-point of the war, according to Thucydides’ representation of events and his own narratorial judgement in the wake of Pericles’ death, and as a result of the Athenians’ departure from their great leader’s strategy (2.65.10). And yet, here the narrator reveals that Sicily was *already* on the agenda—this even before the beginning of the war, and well before Pericles’ sudden disappearance from the scene. This passing note has the

\(^{113}\) Ober (1998), 103.

\(^{114}\) Though the Spartans and Athenians were grimly aware that war was likely, ‘no speaker gives the impression that their choice is inevitable’ and ‘the two-day agonising over the decision (1.44) suggests that the assembly could genuinely have gone either way’: Pelling (2000), 113.

\(^{115}\) Gomme (1945), 177 notes the importance of the West for trade, but he does not consider the implied contrast with the narrator’s judgement on Athenian conduct of the war at 2.65.10. Nor does Hornblower (1991), 88, who notes that the Athenians have accepted the Corcyraean arguments (36.2).
potential not only to destabilize a reading of this *agon* and the Athenian attempt at negotiating a compromise, but even to call into question Athenian foreign policy under the stewardship of Pericles.

Ober takes the ambivalent judgement by the Athenian audience as a sign of the limitations of debate; but Thucydides’ presentation is hardly any clearer and, indeed, prompts a whole series of questions. It appears to be no coincidence that Thucydides locates his first *agon* in Athens: it is not so much the beginning of the war that is made the object of the readers’ judgement, as their judgement being made the beginning of the war;¹¹⁶ and even as each reader scrutinizes the Athenian judgement, all are made to reflect upon the formation of their own judgement.¹¹⁷ The fact that Thucydides locates a debate at the start of his narrative also evokes the beginning of the *Iliad*, which began with a debate. And, just as the *Iliad* establishes the assembly as an institution that can accommodate dissent from its opening scene, so Thucydides’ narrative demonstrates how reading the written agon can inform political judgement.

This section has analysed Thucydides’ representation of debate. Unlike Herodotus, whose speeches differ enormously in form and location as he conducts an enquiry outside any civic institutional framework, Thucydides investigates how individuals relate to their poleis and their institutions. His debates do not simply constitute an examination of speech acts—the relationship of words to action; his deliberate and stylized setting of speech against speech marks an appropriation of the *agon*, the public form for judging and evaluating argument. At one level, it is a means of deconstructing political rhetoric: the reader gets to see different and competing strategies employed, and their success or failure to persuade. But it is also a way of positioning the reader: in experiencing debate every reader must find their place in between the positions mapped out.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ An ultimatum: Cogan (1981). It does not catapult the Athenians into war, but it is the critical moment: Ober (1998).

¹¹⁷ Ober (1998), mindful of the tension with the ‘truest cause’ statement, comments on the *agon*: ‘Without entering into the debate, it seems fair to say that Thucydides’ text as a whole encourages the reader to feel that the Corcyraeans have seriously overstated the war’s proximity’ (p. 75). But Ober *does* enter the agon, as his language implies: ‘Answering the question of whether the Assembly made the right decision in this case depends on how one interprets Thucydides’ discussion of the causes of the war’ (p. 79).

¹¹⁸ Debnar (2001), 233 concludes: ‘This may be Thucydides’ greatest accomplishment: to allow his readers to become both participants and analysts of the war between Athens and Sparta.’
The proposal that the debate between the Corcyraeans and Corinthians acts as a paradigmatic agon for Thucydides’ narrative also recalls the Iliad’s opening assembly. Whereas in Homer dissent is made institutional in the form of the Achaean assembly, in Thucydides the reader gets a clear insight into the failure of the Athenian assembly as an institution of adequate deliberation. But its reverberations are felt far beyond Athens: all forms of public speaking, acting and thinking are brought into question by the narrative. As the last section will show, Thucydides’ narrative challenges the way politics is done.

3. FORMING A POLITICAL READER
(THUCYDIDES 3, 6)

The previous section explored Thucydides’ representation of debate as agon in terms of both challenging its primacy as the place of deliberation within the community and recouping it for reading his narrative. It showed that, unlike Herodotus, Thucydides investigates debate throughout the whole Greek world in its institutional manifestations. But it is not simply the case of showing debate going wrong; for example, there is little suggestion that the first debate between the Corcyraeans and Corinthians was mishandled or adjudicated badly by the Athenians. Rather, Thucydides’ imitation of the political cut and thrust of debate fashions a monument which, while free from the actual limitations of a real-life assembly—the chaotic atmosphere, the lack of preparatory thought, the fatal repercussions, and so on—is accurate enough to put his reader through the critical process of decision-making.

Since many studies have shown the utility of Thucydides’ representation of debates for assessing the speakers’ arguments in line with the results of the enquiry in section 2 above,119 the rest of this chapter considers a feature that has attracted far less interest: the ways in which Thucydides sets up debate and embeds it within his narrative. Thucydides’ frames of debate have been described as ‘normally brief, straightforward, and factual’, with the purpose of keeping the readers focused

on the speeches ‘from which they are expected to derive almost all the instruction that these reports are designed to convey’. Yet, the textual frames around debate mark key points of tension in the narrative when Thucydides concedes his stage to voices other than his own. From that point of view alone they would be worth studying; but Thucydides’ narratorial voice also increasingly becomes important for assessing the speeches. This section will tackle three key agon scenes which, for various reasons, have been condemned for showing debate going wrong: the debates that discuss the fates of Mytilene and Plataea, and the assembly that leads to the launching of the expedition against Sicily. It will show the ways in which Thucydides frames the agon to inform political judgement to the extent that, in the final assembly scene, the narrator himself enters the debate as the Athenians rush to the ships. In Iliadic terms, Thucydides takes an Achilles-like stance in dissent from the way debate is being conducted in his community, and issues a challenge to his reader to do the same.

There was an agon nevertheless

The first clear-cut instance of overt narratorial framing of debate occurs in Athens after Pericles has died. At the climax of the debate over

120 Westlake (1973), 90–108 (quotations are from pp. 91 and 95). For the importance of narrative framing, see n. 61 above.
121 Pelling (2000), 121 observes that ‘scholars are often puzzled when a preamble seems at odds with the speech which follows’, and goes on to suggest that ‘it is better to take the preamble and speech as complementing one another, with the speech picking up selected highlights of the argument for dissection, but not necessarily keeping anything like the balance of the original’. This section will extend that line of analysis to suggest that the frame is often in tension with the speeches which it embraces, thus providing potential for dialogue between the two.
122 ‘Thucydides designed his history as a political argument, a justification of a certain kind of politics and political analysis’: Farrar (1988), 126. Whether we want to go as far as Farrar and claim that Thucydides’ response to concerns about democracy was democratic is questionable—and Ober (1996), 126–32 in his review certainly questions the claim; but it is important to note that Thucydides investigates deliberation within the institutional framework of his community and reproduces those debates in his narrative.
123 The debate at Sparta on the eve of the war is complex, but narratorial mediation is kept at a minimum (the decision itself receives no comment from Thucydides, 1.87.3–5)—though the introduction to the Athenian speech is dissonant with the speech that follows, as has already been noted. With respect to the speeches of Pericles, as has been mentioned above, all are set in some form of opposition in the narrative, but receive little
whether to kill or not to kill the entire male population of the revolting city Mytilene, Thucydides writes (3.49.1):

ϯathon δὲ τῶν γυνώμων τούτων μάλιστα ἀντισάλων πρὸς ἄλλος οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἔλθων μὲν ἐς ἀγώνα ὅμως τῆς δόξης καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῇ χειροτονίᾳ ἀγχώμαλοι, ἐκράτησε δὲ ή τοῦ Διοδότου.

After these opinions had been spoken with almost equal force against each other, the Athenians came into a conflict nevertheless of opinion, and the show of hands was very near; the view of Diodotus won out.

‘Not an easy sentence’, writes Simon Hornblower laconically.124 Problems of interpretation centre especially on two issues. First, the position of ‘nevertheless’ (ὁμοίως), after ἀγώνα and halfway through the sentence, is odd, and has prompted fierce debate among Thucydides’ commentators along with attempts at emendation. Gomme, for example, transfers ὅμοιως to after the δέ- clause, which clarifies the syntax (after δέ) and meaning—‘and, nevertheless, Diodotus’ opinion won the day’—but fails to explain why it is where it is.125 For Hornblower, its positioning suggests a decision made ‘irrespective of the reasoning which had been advanced’,126 that is, the Athenians came into an ἀγῶν in spite of [the arguments made]. The point is—and this is the second problem—that back in chapter 36 Thucydides had introduced the debate by describing how the Mytilenean ambassadors had ‘easily persuaded’ (ἐπείσαν ἱκόν,
3.36.5) the Athenians to reconvene the debate and not kill them all.\textsuperscript{127} The reader is led to expect a decisive decision in favour of some more lenient resolution—only for a struggle over whether to exact the death penalty to occur nevertheless.\textsuperscript{128} Apparently, then, the debate almost doesn’t do the right thing. It is in part for this reason that Ober regards Thucydides as condemning the agôn per se.\textsuperscript{129} Closer attention, however, needs to be paid to Thucydides’ opening frame (3.36.4–6):

kai τῇ ὑστεραίᾳ μετάνοιᾳ τις εὐθὺς ἦν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἀναλογισμὸς ὁμὸν τὸ βούλευμα καὶ μέγα ἐγνώμασι, πόλιν ὅλην διαφθείραι μᾶλλον ἦν τοῦς αἰτίους. ὡς δ’ ἠθνὸν τοῦτο τῶν Μυκῆναίων οἱ παρόντες πρέπεις καὶ οἱ αὐτοῖς τῶν Ἀθηναίων εξιμετάσκασσοτε, παρεσκέυασαν τοὺς ἐν τέλει\textsuperscript{130} ὡστε αὖθις γνώμαις προθενέας καὶ ἐπεισαις βάσιν, διότι καὶ ἐκεῖνος ἐνήλθον ἦν βουλόμενον τὸ πλέον τῶν πολιτῶν αὖθις τινας σφάιν ἀποδοῦναι βουλεύσεισα. καταστάσις δ’ εὐθὺς ἐκκλησίας ἀλλαὶ τε γνώμαι ἀφ’ ἑκάστων ελέγοντο. καὶ Κλέων ὁ Κλεανέτου, ὁπερ καὶ τὴν προτέραν ἐνεικήκη ὡστε ἀποκτείναι, ὥν καὶ ἐς τὰ ἄλλα βιαστάτος τῶν πολιτῶν τῷ τῇ δήμῳ παρὰ πολὺ ἐν τῷ τότε πιθανότατος, παρελθὼν αὖθις ἔλεγε.....

And on the following day straightaway they had a change of mind, and reflected that a decree which condemned the whole city not only the guilty was savage and excessive. And the Mytilenean ambassadors who were present and their Athenian supporters perceived this, and they urged those in authority to put the judgement again; and they persuaded them easily, because it was clear also to those men that the majority of citizens wanted to have the opportunity to

\textsuperscript{127} On the ‘r awness’ of the decision (ὁμὸν τὸ βούλευμα, 3.36.4): Connor (1984), 82, n. 6; Rhodes (1994), 203.

\textsuperscript{128} ‘The Athenians, notwithstanding their change of feeling, now proceeded to a vote in which the show of hands was almost equal, although the motion of Diodotus carried the day:’ Crawley, in Strassler (1996), 183. Cf. Arnold (1839), 410; Classen and Steup (1892), 99.

\textsuperscript{129} ‘The Mytilenean debate is clearly a contest (agôn) of words; this is implied by Thucydides’ introductory and concluding comments... and is underlined by Cleon’s terminology.... The nature of the debate as a contest is emphasized by Thucydides’ selection for presentation of the two most-opposed arguments delivered that day, a narrative strategy that obscures the dialectical tendency of Athenian public debate.... It presents Assembly debate as precisely the sort of contest for audience applause that Thucydides himself has explicitly renounced as a basis for his own text:’ Ober (1998), 103.

consider the judgement again. And straightaway they established an assembly, and many opinions were spoken on both sides. And Cleon, son of Cleaenetus, he who prevailed in the previous assembly with the decision to kill them all, and who was the most violent of all the citizens and by far the most persuasive to the dēmos at that time, he came forward and spoke again . . .

There are several points worthy of note. First, a string of conjunctions links the surrender to the decision about it; but, with the exception of a solitary γάρ, all are neutral indicators—καί, δέ and τέ—which puts the onus on the reader to work out the process that first leads to condemnation, and thence to a change of heart. Second, that change of mind prompts a reopening of the debate. In the Corcyraean ἀγών analysed above, the narrator also drew attention to a change of mind and a subsequent assembly; but there Thucydides had represented the initial debate when the petitions had been presented, not the debate among the Athenians about what to do, nor indeed their subsequent change of mind. Here, however, it is the reconvened assembly that Thucydides represents, which in effect puts the efficacy of decision-making on the agenda. This will be a debate on debate, ‘as much about how to conduct debate in the ekklesia as about the fate of Mytilene’.

Third, certain words in Thucydides’ framing here indicate the duality of the ἀγών discussed in section 2 above. As events move towards reconvening the assembly, Thucydides plays upon the meaning and sound of two adverbs to hint at the tension between imitating debate and writing it down, the dynamic between the actual moment of debate (‘straightaway’, εὐθὺς) and its timeless represented form (‘again’, ἄδειθς). The slippage between the two adverbs gestures towards the reading process on the basis that Thucydides’ addressee is both subject to the immediacy of debate but free to read the debate again at leisure. As discussed above, the effect of the ἀγών both propels readers into the hurly-burly of warring words, and empowers them to look into arguments of the kind which dominated the political decision-making arena and compelled its listeners to adopt certain courses of action.

131 From 3.36.1–6 there are no fewer than six (clause-connecting) καί’s and six δέ’s. The solitary γάρ is at 3.36.2.
132 Gomme (1956), 315. See also Connor (1984), 82, who writes: ‘A surprising amount of this debate is devoted to argument not about the punishment of the islanders but about the role of discussion in Athenian decision making.’ For extensive bibliography on this problematic ἀγών: Hornblower (1991), 422–3, 462.
133 See nn.18–22 above, with accompanying text.
Lastly, Thucydides labels the first speaker in the Mytilenean debate as the ‘most violent of the citizens and by far the most persuasive to the δήμος’, in the first instance of explicit narratorial guidance of a speech seen so far in the narrative. The first occasion this happened in the *Iliad* was when the narrator disqualified Thersites as a non-hero from speaking in the epic assembly.¹³⁴ It is interesting, then, that Cleon has been compared to Thersites for the regurgitation of arguments first articulated by the Achillean Pericles;¹³⁵ and there does seem to be a distant echo of the narrator’s evaluation of Thersites that he would say whatever would please the Achaeans in Thucydides’ description of Cleon as the most persuasive speaker to the δήμος. Yet there is also a critical difference. When Thucydides labels Cleon in Thersites-like terms, he does so from the perspective of someone who knew him and, having been exiled from his city, presumably as someone who had suffered at his hands.¹³⁶

The narrator’s assessment of Cleon, furthermore, is fundamental for approaching the subsequent ἀγών. For, far from giving his enemy a poor speech, Thucydides exposes his reader to the full force of Cleon’s rhetorical pyrotechnics. One particular strategy which Cleon employs is especially telling: Cleon makes the fact that they are even having a debate the bone of contention (3.38.4):

‘αὕτωι δ’ ὑμεῖς κακῶν ἀγωνοθετοῦντες, αἵτινες εἰώθατε θεαταὶ μὲν τῶν λόγων γίγνεσθαι, ἀκροαταὶ δὲ τῶν ἔργων.’

‘You are to blame, you’ve set up contests just for the spectacle, you lot who are accustomed to be spectators of words and listeners of deeds.’

Here the speaker berates the assembly for treating deliberation about political affairs as just a game. In fact, throughout his speech Cleon draws on the language of the ἀγών to play on any anxieties the audience might have had about their capacity to decide policy.¹³⁷ Representing his audience as taking delight in the spectacle rather than making, and sticking by, decisions, Cleon thus presents a damning critique of

¹³⁴ See Act I, ch. 1, sec. 2 above.
¹³⁶ ‘For all its famed appeals to objectivity, (writes Goldhill (2002), 32) ‘a sense of loss veins this history.’ In fact, as the citizen who has been exiled from his city’s institutional arenas, Thucydides runs the risk of appearing like Thersites.
¹³⁷ Cf. 3.37.4; 37.5; 38.3; 38.4; 38.6.
Thucydides writes debate

democratic decision-making. Critics of democracy and of democratic deliberation need point no further than this speech. But this speech represents the world according to Cleon: it was his proposal that had been carried the previous day; he wants his audience to stand by their initial ‘savage decision’; he doesn’t want them debating this issue again. To achieve this end he deploys all the tools of his trade to attack rhetoric: the king of spin makes a show of renouncing spin. Cleon pulls out all the stops to shock and awe his audience into submission and show just why they aren’t qualified to make a judgement—even as he demands that they do, and swiftly. Cleon’s authority depends on suppressing dissent.

Three points are worth highlighting from the fallout of this agon. First, the role of the reader is again stressed at the moment of the narrator’s entry into the narrative. Thucydides warns us explicitly that Cleon, this most violent of citizens, is the most persuasive. By parading these superlatives Thucydides not only takes a stand, he is seen to take a stand, with the result that his reader must enter the debate and take a position, whether that is in agreement or not with this judgement.

138 This is a highly sophisticated and cynical representation. Thucydides has the demagogue talk about the dangers of demagoguery. Rather than political debate—says the politician debating the point—there is here just a display of competitive speechmaking. Listening with passive pleasure means a failure of the ideals of active participation in government. The brilliantly sophistic rhetorician, Cleon, thus dismissively scorns the tools of rhetoric—as the ideals of democracy become a twisted token in his violently persuasive argument: Goldhill (2002), 40.

139 Hesk (2000), 253–4 discusses how Thucydides’ design emphasizes the strategic nature of the speakers’ rhetoric and anti-rhetoric, leaving the reader to decide the difficulty of deciding which of these speakers recommend the best policy. See also Macleod (1983), 93–5.

140 ‘It would be more natural to hear speeches and watch actions, but the reversal emphasises the remoteness of the audience from the real world of real action’: Rhodes (1994), 207–8. ‘The rhetoric is effective; but the distinction is, of course, false (for in the theatre there is no difference between ðeáraí and ákroáraí), and disappears in the next clause, when they listen to words’: Gomme (1956), 304. Cf. Allison (1997d), 198–205, Greenwood (2004), 178–81 suggests that Cleon’s criticism comes close to Thucydides’ own attitude: ‘In fact, the scenario that Cleon describes and describes could apply to Thucydides’ History, where the audience really are spectators and listeners of speeches and deeds’, (p. 180).

141 Gomme (1956), 298 comments on how this is Cleon’s first appearance ‘and he is at once judged’. Connor (1984), 85, n. 15 warns against thinking that “introductions” of this sort are intended as a comprehensive judgement of the character or that they are intended to substitute the historian’s evaluation for the reader’s.
Second, Thucydides’ representation of Cleon’s attack on assembly debate is persuasive. On the face of it, the Mytilenean debate works, since the ‘savage decision’ (3.36.5) to kill every male is reversed; yet the response of scholars has been almost universally critical of it.\textsuperscript{142} Indeed, seduced by Cleon’s representation of debate as \textit{agôn}, scholars readily reproduce his criticism of the assembly as the place where spectators vie with each other in their enjoyment of sophisticated word-games. The narrator asks his reader not to be taken in by Cleon, even as Cleon repeatedly warns his audience not to be taken in—as indeed they are. In this way the narrator issues his judgement; but he does not make it any easier for his readers to judge.\textsuperscript{143} Rather, by putting the criticisms of the assembly into the mouth of the arch-demagogue, Thucydides does more than demonstrate the danger of political rhetoric; his text \textit{performs} the danger of that rhetoric—and the danger too of succumbing to it.\textsuperscript{144} As Cleon’s speech demonstrates all too well, the speaker’s rhetoric is not so easy to see through and analyse. (No one said it was going to be easy.)\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{142} This is implicit in the translations that read the ‘coming into an \textit{agôn} nevertheless’ against the ease with which the Athenians were persuaded from carrying out Cleon’s proposal. Macleod (1983), 119 grimly remarks: ‘the Mytilenean debate, partly through both speakers’ refusal of pity, partly through their criticisms of the Athenian assembly and democracy, shows how tenuous [the qualities of free speech and reasoned argument] are.’ See, however, Wolin (1996), 69, who argues that the Mytilenean debate actually ‘best reveals the demos learning how to be an actor’.

\textsuperscript{143} Hornblower (1987), 166, n. 51 observes that Thucydides’ attitude towards Cleon is more complex than we might have expected given this introduction. Cf. Hornblower (1991), 423: ‘It is a curious but undeniable feature of Kleon’s speech that it contains much that Thucydides himself, who disliked the man, \textit{seems to have agreed with} (my italics). Cf. Rhodes (1994), 204–5. Greenwood (2004), 178–81 also draws attention to the correspondences between Cleon’s criticism and Thucydides’ methodology.

\textsuperscript{144} Both speakers draw heavily on gnomic expressions, which represent a readily useable, and thereby compelling, form of knowledge: Cleon (3.37, 39, 39.5, 40.1), Diodotus (3.45, 3–6). The strategy suggests a conscious aim to present their resolutions (\textit{γνώμαι}) in terms of the timelessness of a maxim (\textit{γνώμαι}): for example, Macleod (1983), 93 notes how Cleon passes off his decree (\textit{φήμαι}) as the law (\textit{νόμος}). Diodotus’ series of gnomic statements attempt to bring the Mytilenean predicament home to the Athenians, a point made by Daniel Tompkins in his unpublished paper ‘Thucydides Constructs His Speakers: Pericles and Diodotus’, delivered at Ohio State University (Spring Term, 1998). See also ch.3, n. 86 above on gnomic expressions in Herodotus. In both cases, the use of these ‘sound-bytes’ of community wisdom are being held up for scrutiny by the writer.

\textsuperscript{145} ‘And for listening to, [my account] perhaps will appear not so enjoyable given the absence of storytelling’ (καὶ ἐς μὲν ἄκρόσων ἴσως τὸ μὴ μιθώδες αὐτῶν ἀτρέπτεστερον φανεῖται, 1.22.4).
The reader too is put in danger of falling foul of the rhetorical tricks of the most persuasive speaker as if present in the assembly; but each reader is also able—quite unlike the historical agents who were there the first (and only) time—to enter the debate again, and again . . .

Third, Thucydides’ closing frame writes his reader into the αγών by posing the question of the misplaced δεμος. Is the δέ- clause to be taken as a supplement (‘and Diodotus’ opinion won out’), or else as strongly oppositional (thus: ‘There was a contest in coming to a decision, but Diodotus’ opinion won out’)? Is the audience coming into an αγών in spite of Cleon and his attempt to stop them from dissenting, or as a result of it? And what difference would either interpretation make to a conception of democratic debate, or of politics more generally, or even of the reading process? Public oratory, such as that exemplified by Cleon, deploys a coercive kind of rhetoric that gives the people what they want to hear in order to gain power over them. By contrast, Thucydides’ reader is challenged to go beyond the temporary attractions of the representation to attain to a more reasoned awareness of the dangers inherent in it.

Locating the problem with the αγών depends on a kind of reading that this αγών warns against: if readers accept that

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146 ‘Thucydides’ skill in accommodating rhetorical speech to his contemplative work has ensured that even readers are in danger of falling prey to the rhetorical guile of his speakers’: Debnar (2001), 22.

147 This is particularly true given the speech with which Thucydides balances Creon’s excesses: ‘in the last analysis Diodotus no more than Cleon offers any protection to Athens’—so Macleod (1983), 100. In other words, Thucydides does not give his reader an easy way of negotiating the challenge Cleon’s rhetoric poses. Ober (1998), 94–104 passes judgement on the Athenian assembly as a result of both speakers’ rhetoric. Yunis (1996), 99–101 and Saxonhouse (1996), 72–86 are more positive in their assessment of Diodotus.

148 A selection of translations demonstrates the different ways these issues have been understood: ‘The Athenians, in spite of the recent change of feeling, still held conflicting opinions, and at the show of hands the votes were nearly equal. However, the motion of Diodotus was passed’: Warner (1954); ‘The Athenians were at contention which they should decree; and at the holding up of hands, they were both sides almost equal, but yet the sentence of Diodotus prevailed’: Hobbes, in Grene (1989); ‘[The arguments] were almost equally strong, but there was nevertheless a struggle between the two opinions; the show of hands was very near, but the motion of Diodotus prevailed’: Hornblower (1991), 438.

149 Hesk (2000), 258, argues that Thucydides’ negative image of the decision-making process inculcates a ‘sense of irony and insecurity in the reader’: Thucydides refuses ‘to provide any clear approval or endorsement for either speaker’ (p. 258). Similarly, Connor (1984), 91 concludes: ‘We are left then with unresolved and complex reactions.
the *agôν* is corrosive of deliberation, then are they being seduced by the arch-seducer Cleon?\textsuperscript{150} Even as Thucydides delivers his judgement on Cleon—even when we might think that it is imperative that he does so given that at stake are people’s lives,\textsuperscript{151} the future of his political community, and the authority of his text—he makes persuasion a question.

**What (good) have the Plataeans ever done for us?**

At the same point in the summer when the Athenians were putting down the rebellion in Mytilene and were debating over what punishment to exact, the Spartan siege of Plataea was drawing to a successful—even peaceful?—close as they successfully persuade the besieged Plataeans to surrender and submit to arbitration.\textsuperscript{152} Two speeches then follow, one by the Plataeans, one by the Thebans, in which both parties appeal to their Spartan adjudicators. This next section explores Thucydides’ framing of that debate, which also attracts criticism from scholars for its inconclusiveness. Indeed, many critics have drawn parallels to the deliberations over the fate of the Mytilenaeans.\textsuperscript{153} Thucydides’ representation of debate goes far beyond a narrow critique of Athenian assembly practice to encompass—and challenge—political decision-making more generally. But more particularly, having set up a law-court context for deciding the fate of the Plataeans, Thucydides puts his reader into the position of an adjudicator, not only of the relative merits of either party, but also of those doing the judging.

We have wanted Diodotus to win and acclaimed him. Yet his victory, not only at the practical level but also at the theoretical level, is unsatisfactory.’

\textsuperscript{150} Being persuaded by the (most persuasive) speaker who warns us against being persuaded—who is persuading whom here? Euben (1996), 336 makes a similar case for the complexity of reading Plato.

\textsuperscript{151} Thucydides structures his narrative to emphasize the drama, as the second trireme arrives in the nick of time to prevent the first ship carrying out its ‘monstrous action’ (*πράγμα ἄλλοκτον*, 3.49.4). Is this Thucydides’ judgement (Gomme (1956), 325) or ‘more likely’ the view of the sailors (Hornblower (1991), 440)? Cf. Pelling (2000), 276, n. 31.

\textsuperscript{152} This episode brings to an end a narrative arc that includes the failed negotiations between the Plataeans, Spartans and Athenians that Thucydides had represented in a triangulated dialogue: see Thuc. 2.71–8. See Cagnetta (1984).

The setting up of debate is the most elaborate yet (3.52.2–5). With the besieged Plataeans at the end of their tether, the Spartan commander offers them an escape-rope: the promise of a fair trial. Assured that only the guilty would be punished ‘and none contrary to justice’ (παρὰ δὲ κην ἐν ὃνδε, 3.52.2), the Plataeans accept the terms and surrender. So far, so good: expectations are raised of the intercession of the due process of law in the conduct of the war. Even as this very proposal is being made, however, the narrator removes the mask of impartial legitimacy worn by the occupying power: the Spartans made this offer—the narrator reveals with a delectable instance of mind-reading—so that they would not have to return the city once any future peace-deal was made.154 The rope being offered the Plataeans is one with which they may hang themselves. But the narrator’s observation not only offers the promise of a special insight;155 his cutting remark undercuts the very ground on which judgement is (to be) made. It demands that the reader delve more deeply into what lies beneath the surface meaning of words and resist rushing to judgement.

The scene of judgement next comes under scrutiny as five judges from Sparta arrive (οἱ ἐκ τῆς Λακεδαιμονίου δικασταὶ πέντε ἄνδρες ἄφικοντο) and lay down the law: ‘no accusation was brought against the Plataeans, and lay down the law: “Have you done any good to the Spartans and their allies in the present war?”’156 The Spartan judges reduce considerations of justice to a single question of present self-interest dressed up in an adherence to traditional ethics: whether or not the Plataeans had done them ‘some good’ (ἀγαθὸν τι).157 The Spartans rule by trying to rule out all concerns other than the

154 The Lacedaemonian commander didn’t want to take Plataea by force, ‘(since he had received orders from Lacedaemon to this effect, that, if one day a peace treaty was made with the Athenians, and both parties agreed to give up all the places which they had taken by war, they wouldn’t have to give back Plataea since the inhabitants had surrendered willingly)’ (εἰρήμενον γὰρ ἂν αὐτῷ ἐκ Λακεδαιμονίου, ὥσπερ, εἰ σπονδαὶ γίγνοντο ποτὲ πρὸς Ἀθηναίους καὶ ξυγχωροῦν ὅσα πολέμω χωρία ἔχουσιν ἑκάτεροι ἀπόδιδονται, μὴ ἀνάδοτος εἰς ἡ Πλάταια ὡς αὐτῶν ἑκόνων προσχωρησάντων, 3.52.2).

155 Goldhill (2002), 36.

156 ἐλθόντων δὲ αὐτῶν κατηγορία μὲν οὐδεμία προστέθη, ἡρώτων δὲ αὐτῶν ἐπικαλεσάμενοι τοσοῦτον μόνον, εἰ τι Λακεδαιμονίων καὶ τοῖς ξυγχωροῦν ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ τῷ καθεστώτι ἀγαθὸν [τι] εἰργασάμενοι εἰσίν, 3.52.4.

157 The brevity of the question, even the focus on ‘something good’, is typically Spartan! Cf. Debnar (2001), 126.
immediate circumstance; the interpretative framework they establish is vigorously anti-historical. The issue at stake, then, is greater than about the Plataeans’ war ‘guilt’ or even about the Spartans’ capacity to judge that. It is about the relevance of taking a historical perspective for making (proper) political judgement.¹⁵⁸

As it is, Thucydides’ narrative exposes how the Spartans spectacularly fail to keep the question to a simple one-word answer: two contrary responses have the effect of bringing the whole process of judgement under scrutiny. The Plataeans, realizing the question was an effective noose around their necks, ‘begged to speak at greater length’ (οἱ δὲ ἐλεγον αἰτησάμενοι μακρότερα εἰπεῖν, 3.52.5), in effect opening up the question to different possibilities and, in particular, expanding its frame of reference beyond the present circumstances.¹⁵⁹

We are not told what the Spartans thought about this; instead, Thucydides propels his reader headlong into the Plataeans’ desperate appeal. Immediately afterwards the Thebans, ‘fearing lest because of this speech the Lacedaemonians might yield in some way’ (δείσαντες πρὸς τὸν λόγον αὐτῶν μὴ οἱ Λακεδαίμονοι τι ἔνδοσι, 3.60), also ask to speak; their wish—this time we are told—is granted. (The Spartans—wanting to hear both sides—are impartial, after all, aren’t they?) By structuring his account in this way, in the form of a set-piece ἀγὼν, Thucydides installs a law court in the text, which is highly apposite given the legal resonances of the frame when judges from Sparta seek a verdict on the Plataeans’ guilt. It serves to place readers not only on par with the Spartan dikasts as assessors of the Plataeans’ fate, but also as judges of the judges themselves.

Turning now to the scene of judgement, the Spartan response comes as something of a surprise, and duly shocks (3.68.1):

οἱ δὲ Λακεδαίμονοι δικασταὶ νομὶζοντες τὸ ἐπερώτημα αφῆν ὁρθῶς ἔξευ, εἴ τι ἐν πῷ πολέμῳ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἀγαθὸν πεπόνθασι... ἀδίσε ὁτα ἐν ἕκαστον

¹⁵⁸ The most striking example of the need to know your history for making political judgement is Thucydides’ account of the mutilation of the Herms (6.53–60; cf. 1.20.2). Because the Athenians hold mistaken beliefs about the tyrannicide, they readily give in to their fears about Alcibiades, which leads precisely to what they fear: he goes over to the Spartans. See Wohl (1999).

¹⁵⁹ Debnar (2001), 126–30 discusses how the Plataeans effectively try to make room for a response ‘by claiming to perceive a lack of clarity in their question’ (p. 127). This makes, as she notes, a pointed inversion of Sthenelaides’ earlier claim not to be able to understand the Athenians’ lengthy speech (1.86.1).
The Lacadaemonian judges decided that their question, whether they had received any benefit from the Plataeans in the war, was right... So they made them come forward again, one at a time, and put the same question, whether they had done any good to the Lacedaemonians and their allies in the war, and when they said no they led them off and killed them, and made none an exception.

After Thucydides’ representation of two extended set-piece speeches, the Spartans simply restate their question: ‘What (good) have the Plataeans ever done for us?’ This classic instance of repetition, which recalls the use of epic formulae, frustrates many scholars, including Simon Hornblower, who bemoans that ‘the Spartans simply repeat their original question as if the speeches had never been delivered at all... The message of the Plataian Debate is that it would have made no difference if there had been no debate at all.’\(^{160}\) After the elaborate setting up of a law-court \(\alpha\gamma\omicron\), the self-appointed judges judge on the basis of their original question.\(^{161}\)

The reader waits in vain, however, if expecting explicit condemnation by the narrator: the narrative relates the pitiful fate of the Plataeans without comment.\(^{162}\) The narrator’s subdued rhetoric is much more in keeping with the Spartans’ refusal to be swayed from their original question or, for that matter, the Thebans’ appeal to present self-advantage. Yet, that is not to say that the speeches make little or no difference to the reader. It may well be the case that the Thebans’ speech appears the more convincing because of its focus on the present situation, whereas the Plataeans come across as wistful and desperate.\(^{163}\) But the Thebans’

\(^{160}\) Hornblower (1991), 446, 462 (his italics).

\(^{161}\) The Spartans, it should not be forgotten, are no lovers of long speeches. Herodotus tells the story about how the Samians’ lengthy petitions for assistance are punctured by typical Spartan laconic wit: ‘The Spartans at this first sitting answered that they had forgotten what had been said at the beginning and could not understand what came after. After this, the Samians made a second sitting and didn’t say anything; instead they brought in a bag and merely remarked ‘the bag needs flour’—to which the Spartans replied that the word ‘bag’ was superfluous’ (Hdt. 3.46.1–2).

\(^{162}\) Thucydides’ underwhelming rhetoric has given rise to the belief that his narrative represents a kind of ‘Realpolitik’: see the discussion of Crane (1998), 21–35.

\(^{163}\) Debnar (2001), 133 observes that ‘as the Plataeans approach the end of their speech, their argument becomes increasingly emotional’. 
notable neglect of the past also has the effect of rendering their speech hollow and overtly expedient, particularly after the Plataeans’ own focus on their glorious past record fighting for Greece against Persia, and particularly when so much of the Plataeans’ speech shows familiarity with Herodotus’ narrative of that war. Indeed, a familiarity with Herodotus’ narrative is revealing in two additional ways. First, Thucydides’ representation of the trial of the Plataeans resonates powerfully with a similar scenario in Herodotus near the end of the battle of Plataea when the Spartans besiege the city of...Thebes! Negotiations there lead to the besieged surrendering those who had fought for the enemy, under the expectation that these men would have the opportunity to defend themselves (Hdt. 9.87); instead, the Spartans summarily execute them (9.88). The parallel is striking: the Spartans (again) act with ruthless disregard for speech. But then, at least, they seem to have acted with regard to justice. In the present case, however, Thucydides describes how the Spartans ‘thought they were no longer under obligation to the treaty’ (3.68.2), since they had urged the Plataeans to maintain their neutrality (3.68.1): the narrator’s disclaimer, ‘so they claimed’ (ηξείου), could have

164 For the lack of persuasiveness of the Thebans, see ibid. 136–45. Hornblower (1991), 456–7 notes that the Thebans’ claim that their government at the time of the Persian Wars was a family clique (3.62.3) ‘is one of the few passages in a Thucydidean speech which is evidence for a fact about earlier Greek history not otherwise known from Herodotus or from [Thucydides] own narrative (p. 457)’. This point too would seem to detract from the force of their speech. Cf. Hornblower (1992).

165 Hornblower (1992), 148–9. The Plataeans’ description that they are surrounded ‘on all sides’ (πανταξιθευ, 3.53.3) chimes with one of the moments of the Persian War, when the Greek fleet found itself trapped at Salamis (Hdt. 8.80.2; cf. 7.25.2), only now the Plataeans are surrounded not by the enemy’s physical presence but by their own mental desperation. On this word suggesting the ‘claustrophobic ineluctability’ of the Pylos and Sicily episodes, see Rood (1998), 199, n. 74. Their glowing war record (3.54.4) includes their participation in the sea-battle at Artemisium, for which Herodotus had singled them for praise (Hdt. 8.1.1), and the final victory at, of course, Plataea (Hdt. 9.25–88). Their reminder to the Spartans of their former plea for an alliance (3.55.1) draws on Herodotus’ fuller account (Hdt. 6.108), in which the Spartans themselves advise the Plataeans to seek an alliance with the Athenians, advice which, Herodotus coolly observes, ‘did not come from any goodwill’ (Hdt. 6.108.3)—a narratorial judgement that rings ominously in Thucydides’ agon.

166 Herodotus notes that Pausanias let Attaginus’ sons go, judging them free of guilt: but the rest supposed that they would be put on trial and could get off by bribery (9.88).
been lifted straight from Herodotus. With it, with Herodotus, Thucydides
devastatingly calls into question the Spartan judgement.

Second, defining features of Hellenism that had interwoven Hero-
dotus’ text—glory, freedom, a sense of Greekness itself— are un-
wound systematically and with crushing effect: the rotten Thebans
condemn their rivals in a grim stalemate of words; the land in which
the Greeks won freedom is enslaved under the Spartan slogan of libera-
tion. The narrator’s commentary is short on emotion and pathos, but
is all the more effective as a result. In fact, the subtle resonances with
Herodotus’ Persian War account, put in the mouths of the unsuccessful
defendants, demonstrates more powerfully than the narrator himself
could have expressed the fall from the ideals of Greekness represented in
Herodotus. Moreover, the underlying Herodotean resonances ob-
struct the dismissive reading such as that which the judges themselves
had performed: the agon makes its reader acutely aware of what is lost in
the Spartans’ reductive line of enquiry. While the Spartans make a
pretence of legal niceties, it is Thucydides’ narrative that institutes a
trial and helps obstruct complacent reading.

What Thucydides’ text does is to use the agon to open up contest far
beyond the boundaries of this single scene to take in the events of and
narrative about the past. To make better judgement, the reader needs

167 For the importance of the Persian Wars for Hellenic self-definition, see esp. E. Hall (1989). Price (2001), 110 draws an explicit connection between the Plataeans’ speech and the Athenians’ definition of ‘Hellenic identity and duty in terms of gods and shrines, common practices and sacrifices, honor (πολεμί) and justice, heroism and reputation (δόξη),’ etc., at Hdt. 8.144.2—see ch.3, sec. 3 above. According to Price, ‘the anachronism has a point. The Plataeans’ language and themes recalled a bygone age which contrasted dramatically with Hellas at war with itself. The battleground for Hellenic freedom had become an Hellenic butchering ground.’
168 Debnar (2001), 146.
169 As Hornblower (1991), 446 recognizes.
170 However fragile and inconsistent they may be in Herodotus, as we have seen. On the power of the Plataean appeal to their past glory, see Gomme (1956), 346; Debnar (2001), 136.
171 ‘So [the Plataeans’] exordium, rhetorically hopeless, is rich in history. The Spartans, concerned only with their immediate interests (68.4), still make a show of their reputed virtue by allowing a kind of trial, whose apparent purpose is to establish guilt or innocence, merit or demerit (52.2, 53.4). But this trial is a travesty of legal forms’: Macleod (1983), 105.
172 Even the named Plataeans chosen to speak are significant in this context, the sons of ‘Mr River-boundary-between-Plataea-and-Thebes’ and ‘Mr Always-to-be-remembered’.
to take account of, and adopt, a historical perspective. Thus, when the Spartans repeat their question, it is not simply repetition, as Hornblower complains: in Thucydides’ hands the *agóν* allows the reader to resist attempts by the more powerful to marginalize opposition and silence the weak. More particularly, this *agóν* empowers the reader to dissent from the tyranny of the present. Through these implicit means, prompting but not controlling interpretation, Thucydides assigns political value to the *reading of history*.¹⁷³

ODeśire fell upon all alike to sail

This section has so far examined the frames of two crucial debate scenes which are usually interpreted as showing debate going wrong. In both, the historical agents are seen to manipulate the deliberative process to elicit assent from their audience. In both, the narrator invites dissent from those manœuvres in the way he sets up an *agóν*. By these means, Thucydides recoups the *agóν* as a way of coming to an informed judgement. It is important to note again that Thucydides does not provide any clear-cut solution to the debates, even as he enters the text to direct his reader’s interpretation: though he explicitly condemns the demagogue, Thucydides still leaves his readers exposed to the full force of Cleon’s powerful rhetoric; the Spartans’ judgement passes without comment. To close this chapter, I will consider one last example of a failed debate. In the assembly that represents the launching of the catastrophic expedition to Sicily only the narrator dissents properly.

The Sicilian debate is the most elaborately framed of all assembly scenes in Thucydides. From the beginning of book 6, the narrator marks out the danger of the expedition in ways that reveal his personal investment in the narrative and recall the start of his war narrative. Since the Athenians are ignorant of Sicily, its geography and history, he

supplies a second ‘Archaeology’;[174] when ambassadors come from Egesta, he states bluntly that they said many things that were not true (οὐκ ἀληθῆ, 6.6); Thucydides even uses the word with which he had denoted ‘the truest cause’ (προφάσις, 6.8.4), only now it is used with its customary meaning of ‘an excuse’. All these reminders of the beginning of his account and the first debate over Corcyra serve to accentuate the difference between the two episodes: this ἀγῶν is not about the ambiguity of the claim or the difficulty of coming to a judgement. Instead, Thucydides establishes the ἀγῶν when the assembly reconvenes to discuss the practicalities. The decision has already been made.

Though the issue is no longer under discussion, Nicias nevertheless raises his voice in dissent. Previous speech introductions have been important for gauging the words that are spoken, but this is the most revealing yet, since the narrator expressly reads the speaker’s mind. According to Thucydides, Nicias was ‘unwilling’ (ἀκούσιος) to command and speaks up, ‘thinking that the city had not deliberated rightly’ (νομιζόντων δὲ τὴν πόλιν οὐκ ἄρθρως βεβουλεύσατο, 6.8.4). Gone is the gesture of the author absenting himself from the framing of debate, which had given the Corcyraean ἀγῶν its sense of impartiality. Whereas the majority of critics point to debate degenerating at Athens, we might be struck instead by the increasing conspicuousness of the narrator’s involvement in its representation.

That point comes across even more forcefully in the introduction to Nicias’ second speech (6.19.2):

καὶ ὁ Νικίας γυν Murphy ἀδικ ἀπὸ μὲν τῶν αὐτῶν λόγων οὐκ ἂν ἐτί ἀποτρέψειε, παρασκευὴς δὲ πλήθει, εἰ πολλῆς ἐπιτάξει, τάχ’ ἂν μεταστήσειεν αὐτοῖς, παρεδότων αὐτοῖς αὕθις ἔληγεν τοιάδε.

And Nicias knew that he could not turn them from their plan with the same arguments, but with the magnitude of the preparation, if he should order a huge undertaking, he could perhaps change their minds. So he came forward and spoke again to them with such words.

[174] 6.1–6. Whether or not the Athenians were so ignorant of Sicily is debatable: Plutarch records the animated discussions of Sicilian topography that took place all over Athens (Plut. Vit. Nic. 12.1). Gomme, Andrewes, and Dover (1970), 197 consider this account as not incompatible with Thucydides’ picture, on the basis that the picture veterans painted ‘was not necessarily more accurate, or more conducive to cool thinking, than the reminiscences of uneducated observers usually are’.
This is the only time in the narrative that one speaker speaks twice in the same debate. Already somewhat out of place, Thucydides exaggerates the effect by reading Nicias’ thoughts for a second time, yet with a crucial difference. While the narrator had conveyed an important insight into the speaker’s thinking on the previous occasion, that speech had been clearly directed towards tempering his audience’s enthusiasm for the armada. In this second case, however, the narrator’s introduction is absolutely fundamental to a reading of the speech. For without it, Nicias’ second speech could be read as useful advice to the Athenians to take the expedition seriously enough. Instead, the reader is informed not to take Nicias’ words at face value, but to interpret them as part of a complex, and somewhat paradoxical, plan that exaggerates the difficulties and resources in order to dissuade his audience from attacking Sicily.\footnote{175}

The result is catastrophic, as the Athenians, as it were, ‘rush to the ships’ (6.24.2). Nicias, Agamemnon-like in formulating a plan to say one thing when he means another, becomes Agamemnon-like in his misreading of the mood of the audience: his distinction between young and old dissolves as ‘erōs’ for the expedition fell on all alike (6.24.3), and a terrifying consensus silences all those who wished to dissent: even those who disagreed with the decision kept silent.\footnote{176} Here Thucydides not only again enters the text to inform his reader that the opposite (τούχαντιον, 6.24.2) happened to what Nicias had hoped; his is also the only dissenting voice to be heard: Thucydides points out that the Athenians were ‘too much’ in love with the expedition.\footnote{177} Here the

\footnote{175} It is ironic, given that Nicias thinks that he is exaggerating the difficulties and the Athenians accept his dire predictions at face value, that his fears come true nevertheless.

\footnote{176} εί τῷ ἄρα καὶ μή ἢρεσκε, δεδίως μή ἀντιχειροτονών κακόνων δόξειν εἶναι τῇ πόλει ἄσχεται ἤγεν, 6.24.4.

\footnote{177} ὡστε διὰ τὴν ἀγάν τῶν πλεόνων ἐπιθυμιῶν, 6.24.4. One of the problems, at least among the youth, is the ‘desire for sights and sightseeing’ (πόθος ὁφείως καὶ θεωρίας, 6.24.5). The importance of ‘sightseeing’ (θεωρία) to Herodotus’ narrative is well documented (Munson 2001), and its prominence here does not seem accidental: Redfield (1985), 98. Indeed, Redfield’s analysis of the ‘link between philosophy and theoría’ (p. 102) in Herodotus offers a way of thinking about Thucydides’ perjorative insinuation against sightseeing here. As Redfield shows, Herodotus’ strategy of connecting wandering and wisdom owes much to an Odyssean tradition (see also now Marincola (2007), 3–20). In Thucydides’ Athens it is as if Herodotus’ enquiry has stimulated a spirit for Odyssean adventure among the youth—a taste for philosophical investigation undertaken by each individual. Thucydides subtly corrects this attitude by writing up the
narrator is the hero trying to hold the troops back from rushing to the ships.\footnote{178}

As we saw in Chapter 1 above, Agamemnon’s miscalculated attempt to provoke his men to dissent from his testing speech belongs to a vigorous examination of the assembly as a place of institutional dissent. Here Nicias’ failure to provoke his audience to dissent exposes the failure of the civic institutional framework at Athens to accommodate dissent. In the hubbub of the assembly, political decision-making is subject to irrational forces and group pressure. In its place, then, Thucydides authorizes his own dissenting voice as the only voice capable of resisting the pull towards uncritical consensus. Yet, even as he writes Athens’ tragic downfall, he demonstrates his commitment to the polis; even as he reveals the failings of the assembly, Thucydides enters the agon and exposes his own position to risk to an extent that Herodotus as a narrator rarely does. The reading position with which we are left is highly unstable\footnote{179} and challenging.\footnote{180}

Sicilian Expedition not as an Odyssey but as an Iliad, with a political emphasis on collective suffering. See following notes.

\footnote{178} For Homeric allusions in the Sicilian narrative: C. Mackie (1996); Allison (1997b); via Herodotus: Allison (1997a), 88–91; Rood (1999). On Nicias as an Agamemnon-like figure, see Allison (1997b), 510; Zadorojnyi (1998). The Homeric correspondences that Allison (1997b) draws to the Athenians’ actions are significant for revealing the complexity of Thucydides’ account, since at times they recall the Iliadic Achaeans, at others the Odyssean suitors (pp. 503–5): who are the Athenians more like? For Thucydides, emphasis on suffering as an epic feature, see Woodman (1988), 29. On the importance of the issues behind the phrase ‘many pains’ in epic poetry, see Barker and Christensen (2008).

\footnote{179} Thucydides represents a seductive image of the Sicilian debate; but, significantly, the Sicilian Expedition is not the end. With the words: ‘Few out of the many returned (διόγοι ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐπ’ αἰώνοι ἀπεναστήσαν), 7.87.6), Thucydides gestures towards an Odyssey to come: see Allison (1997b), 514. While Ober (1998), 121 sees the Sicilian debate as concluding Thucydides’ critique of democratic deliberation, he is forced to concede that this view does not square with the actual events (which Thucydides would have witnessed): ‘If, having completed her study of the history, Thucydides’ fourth-century reader now believes that she understands the processes by which Athens shook itself apart, she remains at a loss to explain how the shattered fragments of a polis were so quickly reassembled under the apparently discredited aegis of démoskrattta, and in the absence of a leader in the Periclean mold. In sum, the historical facts of democratic Athenian resilience after the crises of 411 and 404 cannot easily be accommodated within the critical/theoretical framework that the author introduced at the beginning of the text and developed in his presentation and analysis of Athenian assembly speeches.’ Thucydides is well aware of this, as he embarks on the Odysseus-like adventures of Alcibiades in book 8.

\footnote{180} ‘Thucydide n’est pas un colleague’: Loraux (1980).
This last section has shown the importance of the frame that surrounds the scenes of debate in Thucydides’ narrative. The dynamic between the frame and the representation of debate draws attempts at judgement into an *agon*, to the extent that the narrator himself makes a stand. Thucydides begins his narrative, seeing (δρόν) that, as he puts it, ‘all the Greek world takes a stand against each other, some immediately, others after thinking about it’ (καὶ τὸ ἄλλο Ἐλληνικὸν δρόν ἔνιστάμενον πρὸς ἑκατέρους, τὸ μὲν εὐθὺς, τὸ δὲ καὶ διανοούμενον, 1.1.1). The prominence of τὸ Ἐλληνικὸν—a term Herodotus seems to have coined—right at the beginning of his narrative suggests Thucydides’ close engagement with this concept, which turns out to be its deconstruction. Having established the veracity of the idea of the ‘Greek thing’ in the Archaeology, Thucydides shows how it comes under increasing strain as the events of the war unfold, particularly when stasis takes hold of Corcyra; it returns finally to give the catastrophe of the Sicilian expedition a suitably comprehensive climax. Significant too are the appeals made to this idea in speeches, which explicitly evoke Herodotus’ narrative: the Plataeans pin their hope of survival on the possibility that ‘the Greek thing’ still means something—and fail; while the Spartans themselves later appeal to the ideal in their peace proposal, even as they offer the Athenians joint hegemony over the rest of Greece. By its representation of debate as *agon*, his narrative

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181 1.6.6, 15.3. Price (2001), 333 comments: ‘It may be said that the reader enters into the narrative of the war proper instructed in the idea of Hellas as a unified entity.’
182 ὕστερον γε καὶ πᾶν ὡς εἶπεῖν τὸ Ἐλληνικὸν ἐκνήθη, 3.82.1; cf. 83.1. Price (2001), 273, n. 139 notes the connection between Thucydides’ opening line and his comment in the stasis section: ‘These are statements so striking, and singled out as unusual by Thucydides himself (ὡς εἶπεῖν), that an ancient reader of the History in scrolls was likely to remember them, if he remembered any particular phrase from one scroll to the next.’
183 7.87.5. The only other use in the narratorial voice is Thucydides’ description of the battle of Mantinea, where the ‘greatest Hellenic army’ assembled (5.60.3).
184 3.57.3. See esp. ‘what good have the Plataeans done for us?’, above.
185 This example is particularly interesting: if they—the Athenians and Spartans—make peace, the rest of the Greek world would honour them, because it would be weaker (ὥσιν γὰρ καὶ ὦσιν ταῦτα λεγόντων τὸ γε ἄλλο Ἐλληνικὸν ἵστε ὅτι ὑποδέχεσθαι οἷὰ τὰ μέγιστα τιμήσει, 4.20.4)—which represents a striking reworking, and inversion, of the Athenians’ appeal to ‘Greekness’ made before the Spartans in Herodotus: see Ch. 3, sec. 3 above. The Spartan speech itself is later echoed by Alcibiades (6.90.4). Its only other occurrence describes Themistocles’ machinations with the Persian king (1.138.2)—again
performs that difficulty of remaining neutral and impartial. In this ever-divisive world, even those who seek neutrality and impartiality cannot afford to be simply ‘spectators of a debate’. Thucydides’ writing in the *agon* politicizes reading.

This chapter has explored representations of debate in Thucydides’ narrative of the war between the Athenians and the Peloponnesians. It started by meeting the objection that Thucydides’ construction of his narratorial voice rules out possibilities of debate in his narrative. It was found that, on the contrary, Thucydides’ narratorial voice is distinct from his narrative by being opinionated and provocative. In the light of the narrator’s comments on the problems caused by a lack of debate in the Greek communities during the war, section 2 analysed Thucydides’ representation of debate as *agon* from the perspective of its utility for reading. Thucydides does much more than show debate going wrong—it is not even clear that the Athenians come to the wrong decision about Corcyra, though it leads to war; by aiming for an accurate representation of speech, Thucydides exposes the reader to the full force of a speaker’s rhetoric, but also equips the reader with the tools, particularly by the process of comparison, to analyse and gain greater awareness of the strategies of persuasion. In the last section attention was turned to Thucydides’ framing of the assembly scenes in order to bring to the fore his management of debate. It was shown not only that he represents debate to educate his reader in political judgement by *not* providing an authoritative way of interpreting the debates; his voice also enters the debate in dissent.

As the tragic climax of the Sicilian expedition approaches, Nicias is still to be found trying to dissent from the decisions that have been made. On this fateful last occasion, he uses a letter to express his discontent with the expedition (7. 8.2). The reasoning given (by the narrator) closely

186 Can one—or should one—remain neutral in stasis? A much-disputed law of Solon (*Ath. Pol.* 8.5) apparently legislated for people to take sides in stasis and not remain neutral: see Osborne (1990), 100–2; Loraux (2002), 102–3.

187 As Gomme, Andrewes, and Dover (1970), 386 observe: ‘Not even Gyippos’ victory and the decisive progress of the counter-wall (6.3f.), the sufferings of the crews based on Plemmyrion (4.6), or the description (8.1) of Nikias’ apprehensions prepare the reader fully for the tone of hopelessness which pervades this letter.’ Cf. Zadorojnyi (1998), 300 puts the ‘puzzling pessimism pervading the letter’ down to ‘Nicias’ assimilation to Agamemnon’.
intersects with Thucydides’ own methodological concerns discussed in 1.22.1–4: since Nicias ‘feared lest the messengers would not report things as they were, either through an incapacity to speak or having left behind the memory of it or because they spoke to curry favour with the mob in some way, he wrote a letter’, as a result of which ‘the Athenians could counsel on the truth’. Moreover, at the conclusion of his letter (7.14.4), Nicias declares that he will speak the truth (‘ικανόν γεγονός τοι γνωσιαίς διηλώσαι’), not what is pleasant, though that is what the δῆμος likes to hear (‘τὰ ζήστα ἀκούει’).

With this Nicias expresses anxieties similar to those articulated by Thucydides himself. Given such a clear coincidence of language and ideas, it is not surprising that critics have identified Nicias’ attitude with the author’s own understanding of his written account, particularly in terms of its opposition to assembly debate in privileging truth over pleasure. Some chapters later, however, Thucydides returns to narrate the letter’s reception in Athens, during which the secretary reads out the letter only after the messengers have already

188 φοβούμενος δὲ μὴ οἱ περιπόμενοι ἤ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ λέγειν ἀδυνασίαν ἤ καὶ μνήμης ἐλληπείς γεγονόμενοι ἢ τοῦ ὀχλῶν πρὸς χώρων τι λέγοντες οὐ τὰ δυτὶ ἀπαγγέλλονται, ἐγραφεὶν ἑπιστολήν. 7.8.2.
189 Αθηναίους βολεύοσαθα περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας, 7.8.2.
190 See Thucydides’ methodological statement, 1.22.1–4. The relationship of Nicias’ letter to Thucydides’ enterprise is discussed by Edmunds (1993), 838–44; Allison (1997a), 225–30; Greenwood (2004), 181–5; (2006), 76–81. As Greenwood (2006), 80–1 puts it: ‘Nicias attempts to transcend the problems of oral communication, the shortcomings of human memory and the pressures that Athenian mass audiences could bring to bear on speakers. This attempt is framed in terms that remind the reader of Thucydides’ historiographical project and his discussion of the difficulties involved in conveying a clear account of speeches and events at 1.22.1–4.’ None of these critics, however, focuses on the significance of what subsequently happens to the letter for thinking about Thucydides’ own writing—though Greenwood (2006), 81 notes in passing that ‘Nicias’ letter is only partially successful’. It is particularly striking that Nicias applies the word ‘accuracy’ (ἀκριβεία, 7.13.2) to describe the state of the fleet.
191 Edmunds (1993), 842 interprets the letter as demonstrating Thucydides’ belief that writing can achieve an ‘absolute mimesis’. Allison (1997a), 226 regards the written word as containing the truth and able to duplicate itself: several scholars, however, have explored the problematic authority of the written logos in Plato’s Phaedrus. According to Nightingale (1995), 168, Plato shows how the written word is no more secure than the spoken word on the basis that it cannot respond to questioning. Ferrari (1987), 205 agrees, pointing to Socrates’ observation that it cannot choose its audience (274b6). Mittlestrass (1988) suggests how Plato may have found an answer in his dialogue form: by being somehow incomplete, it can partially suspend its textual character.
spoken about the situation, and only after they have answered any queries. That is to say, once in the hands of the messengers, the letter becomes a mere tool: subject to the action of its carriers, it is open to manipulation, misinterpretation or even misrepresentation. Moreover, the letter itself becomes a problem. In contrast to the prior, verbal process of investigation, in which the assembly is engaged (according to Thucydides’ narrative), the authority of the letter is immediately conceded by the Athenians—though they then rush to the opposite conclusions.

The very absence of narratorial commentary at this point conversely makes the reader aware that the letter ought to have been discussed. By focusing on the performance of the letter in the assembly, Thucydides suggests the possible reception of his own written account within an Athenian institutional context, and dramatizes its failure. The written word is allocated an authority which it cannot sustain, and ultimately fails because it does not allow for dissent.

193 ‘They spoke to them, and if anyone had a question they answered, and they gave them the letter; and the secretary of the city came forward and read it out to the Athenians’ (ἀνέπηρίσας τίς τι έπιστολήν καί έτη έπηρίσας, καί τήν ἐπιστολήν ἀπέδοσαν, οδ. γραμματεύς ό τής πόλεως παρελθὼν ἄνγεγω ταίς Αθηναίοις δηλούσαν τοκεῖοι, 7.10).

194 They elect a new general, and send even more troops to Sicily—which not only misunderstands Nicias’ intention but also adds significantly to the impending catastrophe. Zadorojnyi (1998) suggestively compares Nicias’ letter to Agamemnon’s test of his troops in Iliad 2. He argues that Nicias is using the same strategy, namely to play up the hardships in order to effect a change for the better: ‘That is what Nicias really wants, not permission to withdraw from Sicily’ (p. 301). While largely in agreement with Zadorojnyi on the correspondences between Nicias and the Iliad’s Agamemnon, this study sees that as part of Thucydides general Iliadic colouring of his portrait of the Sicilian Expedition and the Peloponnesian War in general. In particular, this letter seems to rework Nicias’ earlier speech, in which—according to Thucydides—he had tried to trick his audience (6.19.2): from this perspective, therefore, Nicias’ letter seems rather to replay Agamemnon’s speech of despair to the Achaeans in Iliad 9, when the commander has given up on Troy in all seriousness. Like Agamemnon, Nicias is rebutted: but the commitment to stay will condemn even more Athenians to their deaths. Unlike in the Iliad, these Greeks aren’t going to sack Troy (Syracuse), nor are they going to make it home (7.87.6): see n. 179 above.

195 The similarity of this episode with Herodotus’ own account of a climactic sea-battle is highly suggestive. In the midst of the failed debates at Salamis, Themistocles writes a letter, whose authority is immediately accepted by its recipient. There, however, Themistocles acted explicitly outside his community’s institutional framework, and the recipient of the intentionally deceptive letter was the Persian king: Thucydides, on the other hand, internalizes the problem of the written text by having the letter misinterpreted in the assembly.
Where debate was failing in the city’s institutions, in Thucydides’ text the *agôn* is transformed into something useful (ἀφέλμα, 1.22.4).\(^{196}\) By being part of something that can be possessed (κτήμα), the *agôn* is not limited by its extra-textual manifestation where, as a contest piece (ἀγωνίαμα), it is subject to the instant moment of hearing.\(^{197}\) By being part of something that can be read, reread, put down, picked up again, Thucydides’ representation of the *agôn* empowers the reader to look into (σκοπεῖν)\(^{198}\) clearly (τὸ σαφῆς) language in performance.\(^{199}\) As Thucydides writes in the *agôn*, so he stimulates controlled dissent. This marks a significant step towards the formalizing of speech and its study under the rubric of rhetoric.\(^{200}\) At the same time, however, the *agôn* is not a purely intellectualized experience and emptied of passion; Thucydides’ text is not a rhetorical treatise. On the contrary, his narrative also captures the cut and thrust of argument and counter-argument. It makes the reader aware of what is at stake, often when the narrator’s own language is studiously sober.

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\(^{196}\) A catchword in political debate: Nightingale (1995). To claim utility for one’s own account would be essential for anyone entering the contest of voices, but is especially urgent for a writer, as someone who has chosen not to participate in the customary political life of the citizen.

\(^{197}\) Greenwood (2004), 189–95 draws attention to the importance Thucydides puts on his exile, which allowed him, because of the leisure (καθ’ ἡσυχίαν), to reflect on matters more (5.26.5). As Greenwood points out, ἡσυχία is usually associated with political inactivity, and she cites Thucydides’ ancient evidence that he composed not for ‘men of the *agora*’ (ἀγοραῖος ἀνθρώπως) but those of a ‘free education’ (ἀγορῆς ἐλευθέρου, Dion. Hal. *Thuc*. 50). This chapter alternatively has argued that Thucydides uses his leisure to transform the way politics was thought about and done, by projecting his text as the locus for discussion instead of the public assembly, democratic or otherwise.

\(^{198}\) The term σκοπεῖν is never used ‘neutrally’ in the narrative in a description of a character’s action. When not used by the narrator qua author, it occurs only in direct speech or focalization. It is used, then, only prescriptively for the reader. It is a key term in debate, occurring some 225 times in the Demosthenes corpus.

\(^{199}\) For τὸ σαφῆς see Woodman (1988), 23–8, who connects it to the feature of vividness (ἐναρξεῖα), which Plutarch sees as characteristic of Thucydides’ narrative: Plut. *Mor.* 246–7. See n. 8 above. See also Edmunds (1975), 155–63; Greenwood (2006), 26–33.

Writing in the *agôn*, then, Thucydides explores the constant, ongoing contest over the representation of contest. He not only investigates the assembly as an institution and criticizes public debate for making wrong decisions; he also brings that public form to bear on reading his text and, in doing so, recoups debate as a means toward forming responsible political judgement.\(^{201}\) His use of the *agôn* does not demonstrate the superiority of his written text; his narrative *performs* that superiority by opening readers up to a process of monitoring and self-criticism each time they enter the *agôn*. Far from providing the reader with the solution to the crisis of debate, the ways in which Thucydides frames debate reproduce the crisis of interpretation and implicate the reader into doing politics this way. His narrative does not appeal to a ‘ready-made’ group of critics;\(^{202}\) it *constructs* a political community—a different kind of political community, for sure: one with a text in front of them, but political nevertheless—foraged in the agony of reading all about it.\(^{203}\) By this means Thucydides provides some kind of potential for getting beyond the purely parochial concerns and debates of his speakers.\(^{204}\) This is writing for thinking politically.

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\(^{201}\) ‘It is not by chance that the invention of historical prose (with its special critical contract between author and reader) takes place as democracy (with its culture of public judgement and personal responsibility) comes into being’: Goldhill (2002), 43–4. Farrar (1988) also regards Thucydides as embedded in a particular kind of political society (p. 12), and suggests that ‘his response to concerns about democracy was democratic’ (p. 126) without fully articulating what that might look like or what it might mean.

\(^{202}\) One of the criticisms levelled at Ober (1998) is his conception of elite writers as a “virtual community” of critics, like contributors to a journal: J. Roberts (2000), 482; Harris (2000); Rhodes (2000). For a more nuanced attempt at contextualizing Thucydides: Kurke (2000).

\(^{203}\) Hornblower (1991), 439 suggestively glosses *agôn* at 3.49.1 as stressing ‘not so much the competitive aspect of the oratorical display… but the emotional struggle of the voters, almost an “agon” (a word derived from ἀγών) of decision-making’. That struggle is also the readers’. The language of competition pervades the climactic battle of Syracuse harbour (cf. 7.61.1, 64.2, 70.3). Not only does Thucydides challenge his (Athenian) readers’ expectations by presenting this catastrophe from the perspective of the Syracusans and their Spartan allies as a ‘beautiful contest’ (καλὸς ἄγων, 7.68.3; cf. καλὸς ἄγωνισμα, 7.56.2, 59.2; 86.2; ἀξίος ἄγων, 7.56.3; cf. 7.66.1); in the scene that won Plutarch’s admiration for vividness, Thucydides also describes the spectators as enduring ‘a mighty conflict and tension of mind’ (πολὺν τὸν ἄγωνα καὶ ξύστασιν τῆς γνώμης ἐχέ, 7.71.1). Thus he extends the notion of the *agôn* to anxiety or, as one might say, agony: see Béant (1961), under ‘anxietas’; sec. III. 6 of *LSJ* 19.

\(^{204}\) Price (2001), 376 notes that ‘in light of the main themes of the Archaeology and the main focus of the war narrative, Thucydides’ Hellas had a fundamental political potential’ (emphasis in original); but he does not place an emphasis on Thucydides’ construction of a new way of doing politics, as this study does. Readers of the (Greek) world unite.
ACT III
TRAGEDY
Achilles’ dissent from Agamemnon at the beginning of the *Iliad* has generated a variety of responses. The Homeric epics—the foundational poems of Greek literature and culture—establish competing narrative strategies for thinking about the contest of words. In the *Iliad* dissent is valorized in the Achaean community to the extent that challenging the king is affirmed as an important, if not defining, feature of the assembly. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, relentlessly marginalizes political dissent in its privileging of Odysseus’ homecoming and tale of endurance. Similarly, Herodotus’ cross-cultural odyssey around the Mediterranean, in which debates are represented as taking place outside a *polis* environment or else in the Persian court, promotes his own written enquiry as an alternative means of engaging in political activity. In turn, Thucydides takes an Achilles-like stance in his representation of the assembly as *agôn* in a more direct challenge to the way deliberation is carried out in the various political decision-making bodies of his time, as he recoups assembly speech by writing it up in such a way that puts the reader through the process of exercising proper political judgement.

This journey has taken us to Athens: where Homer was performed at the Panathenaia;¹ where Herodotus was said to have recited sections of his ‘historia’; where Thucydides fought as a general. It is the place where dissent becomes fully institutionalized in the

¹ On Homer performed at the Panathenaia, see Parke (1977), 34; Goldhill (1991), 167–73; Nagy (1999); Haubold (2000), 145–90.
It is here that tragedy, Athens’ response to Homer, is performed.

Act III investigates representations of debate on the tragic stage. Since tragedy in and of itself may be regarded as staging a contest of voices between the protagonists before an embedded audience (the Chorus), it will be important to consider more broadly the question of the thematization of dissent. It will be shown that tragedy inherits many of the features from epic, including many of the same story patterns and characters, but explores the issue of dissent from the perspective of those looking on.

The politics of Athenian tragedy has reached something of an orthodoxy over the past decade, with the cultural context of performance at the city Dionysia coming under particular scrutiny. As a festival which all the citizens could be expected to attend, it was an event where the polis put itself on display. Certain features reinforced the interconnectedness between the institution of tragedy and its broader political framework, such as the procedure for selecting the judges. Before the festival, each of the ten Attic tribes provided a list of fifty of their...

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2 G. E. R. Lloyd (1979) locates contest at the origins of democracy, while Wolin (1994) stresses the importance of renewal and revolution to democracy. As we saw above, Ober (1998) explores political dissent in Athens, but from the perspective of those marginal to the dominant political hegemony, the ‘elite’. Such an approach has been criticized by Euben (1997), 91–108 precisely on the basis of its premise that dissent is something external to democracy. Hesk (1999; 2000) has shown one way in which Athenian drama may contribute to the debate, through the strategy of ‘anti-rhetoric’. Cf. Halliwell (1997).


4 Tragedy is now used in discussions on the theory of democracy. See esp. Euben (1990; 1997), and the edited volumes by Euben (1986) and Goff (1995).


6 As Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 58 puts it, it was an ‘effective advertisement of the wealth and power and public spirit of Athens’. For the ‘theoric fund’, see Csapo and Slater (1995), 287–8, 420–1. For participation in democracy in general, see Sinclair (1988); Ober (1989; 1998). For the difficulties of non-participation, L. Carter (1986).

7 The theatre and theatrical space: Scodel, ed. (1993); Green (1994); Wiles (1997; 2000); Rehm (2002). The dramatic productions: Sommerstein et al. (1993); Silk (1996). Gelrich (1995) has a good discussion about the problems of this approach, with the warning that the posited context is also a text that requires interpretation (p. 40).

8 See Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 95–9.
members. From this list, the chief archon selected one name at random from each of the tribes, leaving ten citizens to judge the contest. When it came to compiling the scores, the archon counted, at random, just five of the ten votes cast. This elaborate procedure does not simply reflect a concern to avoid corruption; it also substantiates the principle that each individual has a role in the collective. Now, no man of the δῆμος, no Iliadic Thersites, need be excluded on the basis of status alone.9

Recently, however, opposition to reading tragedy so politically has been growing increasingly vocal, for a number of reasons.10 First, it is not clear how or to what extent the extra-dramatic material is relevant to an analysis of the plays themselves.11 Second, and related to this point, the understanding of the politics of tragedy has tended to be limited to the actions and words of the characters, and to identifying references to contemporary figures and ideas—that is to say, on what is political.12 While taking a broader definition of politics, as for instance ‘things to

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9 It is on the basis of his demagogy, and not his class, that Thersites is attacked by Neoptolemos and Philoctetes in Sophocles’ Philoctetes (438–42). In fact, his identity merges with Odysseus’—the king who beat him (and others) up to enforce class distinctions in the Iliad (II. 2.265–8; cf. 2.199).

10 See esp. Griffin (1998; 1999), prompting a defence of reading tragedy and politics by Goldhill (2000). See also Seaford (2000) and Heath (2006) for alternative views on the social function of tragedy. In September 2007 the University of Reading held a conference to address the central question ‘Why Athens?’, that explored the extent to which tragedy was distinctively Athenian, Pan-Hellenic and/or political. See D. Carter (2011) for the edited volume of these proceedings.

11 One of the problems is that tragedy, in the end, is performance not theory: Winton and Garnsey (1981), 38.

12 Such a reductive approach has prompted at least one scholar to ask: ‘Were the spectators really looking through the surface meaning and content of the action for subtle hidden political messages?’: Griffin (1999), 91. He has in mind such critics as Goldhill (1987) and Rose (1995), but his criticisms are far-reaching. See e.g. Podlecki (1966), who marks an early attempt at looking for politics based on direct allusion; or Meier (1990; 1993), who, while more subtle in showing how tragedy educates the citizen into citizenship, also remains focused on uncovering ‘messages’ in themes. For a survey of the various positions: S. Said (1998). The fact that tragic action occupies a place somewhere else in time and space—cf. Zeitlin (1990)—would seem to militate against this kind of direct one-to-one mapping. Cf. Pelling (2000), esp. 1–17. Sommerstein (1997) talks about how aspects of the action [of Aeschylus’ Suppliants] were designed to recall recent events. When confronted too directly with their (self-induced) troubles, the Athenians react badly, as with their response to Phrynichus’ Sack of Miletus recorded by Herodotus (Hdt. 6.21), a story which may have come into being precisely because it explains tragedy’s avoidance of the here and now.
do with the *polis*, can help meet some of these anxieties (such as allowing the fruitful discussion of concepts such as gender and family), this also raises a third concern: to what extent should tragedy even be regarded as a specifically Athenian or democratic art form? After all, tragedy came to be disseminated throughout the Greek and Roman worlds and recognized as a genre in its own right, one not specifically associated with Athens.

In trying to account for its successful transition from its Athenian-led production to Hellenic-wide consumption, Pat Easterling has talked about tragedy’s double vision—its interplay between the heroic and the contemporary. Again, the broad compass of this book has the

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13 D. Carter (2007), 67 provides the following definition of ‘political’: ‘a concern with human beings as part of the community of the *polis*, a definition that owes much to Macleod (1983), 28: ‘a concern with human beings as part of a community.’ Rhodes (2003) questions the assumptions underlying the view that tragedy can (or should) be seen as democratic. See also Finglass (2005), who argues for more precise terminology to be used in talking about a play’s politics.

14 D. Carter (2007), 35–43 critiques what he calls the ‘democratic assumption (p. 35)’. Tellingly, he concentrates his attack on the paucity of references to Athens or her institutions. In contrast, this book focuses on the agonistic form of the drama and the process the audience undergoes in their experience of the contest of words: along with the prominence of such issues as frank speaking or speaking back, the agonistic form suggests a democratic tonality to tragedy, while not disallowing its relevance to enfranchised citizens of Greek city-states elsewhere. On the political rhetoric of tragedy, see Ober and Strauss (1990). See also Halliwell (1997), who discusses how tragedy reveals ‘the latent patterns, and the lurking anxieties, of a cultural mentality which sustained and mistrusted rhetoric in equal measure’ (p. 141); and Hesk (2000), who shows how Attic drama in general exposes the rhetorical strategies common to Athenian political discourse.


16 Easterling (1997c), 25: ‘The plays they watched were distinctively Attic in dialect and style, close enough to contemporary speech to be easily accessible to them, but also identifiable, through their manifold links with epic and lyric poetry, as part of a large, rich and extremely self-conscious tradition with a strong Panhellenic pedigree.’ She calls this ‘heroic vagueness’ (ibid.). See also: Easterling (1985; 2005); Pelling (2000), 163–7; Rehm (2003), 21–39, esp. 34. Hesk (2007), 79 makes the point that ‘many Greek poleis had assemblies and judicial bodies even though they were not democratic (or not as democratic as Athens) and thus their explorations of, and allusions to, notions of “the civic” in relation to heroic myth would still be pertinent’; cf. 84–5. For the concept of ‘zooming’ in (and out) of particular fields of reference, see Sourvinou-Inwood (1989), 166.
advantage of exploring debate’s various manifestations diachronically, which should help bring into focus the ways in which tragic double vision may work. The first aspect to consider is who debates on the tragic stage—which immediately brings to light tragedy’s difference from epic: speech is no longer the preserve of the male hero. Instead, different kinds of figures, namely women, slaves and barbarians, all now have a voice, and that freedom of speech is even extended to the group at large, since the Chorus have an important mediating role no matter what their precise relationship may be to the audience. In this way tragedy’s difference from epic may be configured in terms of focalization: in tragedy the Athenians created a public dialogue marked by an egalitarian form beyond their imagination in actuality’ (p. 125, her italics).

17 For women in tragedy, see esp. H. Foley (1981), 127–68; (2001); Zeitlin (1996), 341–74. For a recent survey of tragedy’s marginal voices see the chapters of Mossman and Ebbott in Gregory, ed. (2005). H. Roisman (2004) discusses women’s free speech, drawing a distinction between its public good and its subversiveness when used for personal expression alone. While recognizing that ‘tragedy legitimises the value-system necessary to the glorification of Athens’, E. Hall (1997), 118 argues that ‘the polyphonic tragic form, which gives voice to characters from all such groups, challenges the very notions which it simultaneously legitimises’. In her view, ‘Athenian tragedy is thus a supreme instantiation of what Marxists call art’s “utopian tendency” . . . ; in tragedy the Athenians created a public dialogue marked by an egalitarian form beyond their imagination in actuality’ (p. 125, her italics).

18 In the recent cultural analysis of tragedy, some scholars have come to regard the Chorus as representing in some shape or form the citizen-body: see e.g. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988), 24; Longo (1990); Calame (1999). For a critique of this position, see Griffin (1999). While it is important to observe the individuality of each Chorus, some general remarks may be made, including the basic point that the identity of a Chorus changes the way the events are seen. On this aspect of focalization, see Gould (1996) and Goldhill (1996), 254, whose response to Gould stresses the possibility of shifting registers. Cf. Easterling (1997a), 163–5. Rehm (2003), 113 draws attention to the ‘inclusive sweep of choral lyric’ which, he argues, ‘opens the world of tragedy to realms beyond ideological time-serving’. Wilson (2011) draws attention to the high frequency of citizen involvement in choruses in Attica, particularly in the re-performance of drama in the demes, which provides an alternative means of thinking about the democratic/Athenian aspect of tragedy from the one offered in this book. On the choregia as an Athenian institution, see P. Wilson (2000). On demes as the building-blocks of Athenian democracy (‘deme-oocracy’), see Osborne (1990; 1996), 294–9; cf. (1985a).

19 Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988), 25 argue that the ‘democratic moment’ of tragedy relates to the way the hero ‘has ceased to be a model [and] has become, both for himself and for others, a problem’. See also Lada-Richards (1997), 91; cf. Knox (1983). Yet, as we have seen, both Homeric epics already configure the hero as a problem for his group. See Haubold (2000), esp. 28–35, where he points out that the leader’s loss of his people is embedded in the very formulae of Homeric verse.
contrast to the exclusive focus on the individual’s concerns in epic, tragedy puts a great deal more stress on responses to the hero.20 Moreover, in the light of our central focus on debate, another important feature of tragedy comes to the fore. Not only is tragedy, as a dramatic art form, freed ‘from the dominance of authorial stance as represented by a privileged narrator’;21 more destabilizing still, tragedy also represents debate in its most extreme form, as characters do battle in and over words.22 Indeed, in tragedy debate is not restricted to a particular discrete context; it is part of the very fabric of the form itself. Thus my analysis of tragedy’s representation of debate will explore the staging of dissent more generally—who speaks, when, with what consequences?—beyond the scene of formal debate itself.

Nevertheless, the formal debate scene—or agon—will constitute an important part of the next two chapters, particularly since problems of interpretation have dominated scholarship on the tragic agon. This study has so far proposed that debate is best understood in relation to the institutional context of the assembly: the agon itself has had only passing reference—limited primarily to the isolated examples of Patroclus’ funeral games in the Iliad and Thucydides’ chosen form to represent debate.23 As I have just mentioned, however, tragedy is dominated by debate, the most formal aspect of which is the agon: the scene that sets paired speeches in opposition to each other—though articulating a precise definition of the agon has been one of the problems that scholars have faced.24

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20 Wiles (1997), 177 suggests a democratic aspect to staging in Athens, in the way that it empowers the audience over the actors in contrast to, say, staging of drama in Elizabethan England. See also Wiles (2000), 89–127.
21 Rehm (2002), 244.
22 Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988), 43 bring out tragedy’s struggle of and over words, but limit it to the actors on stage: for the audience, ‘the language of the text can be transparent at every level’. See, however, Mossman (1995), 204, who comments: ‘The physical fact of having two people conversing with each other, rather than a single author relating a story, means that a dramatist can use each character to enunciate a different view. It also means that the impression left by a scene on stage to which two or more people have contributed will be a complex one, progressively redefined by each and every speech.’ For similar expressions, see E. Hall (1997), 118–24; Allan (2000), 118–48.
23 See esp. pp. 86–8 above.
24 M. Lloyd (1992), 1 bases his study of the agon in Euripides on the simple-enough formulation: ‘a pair of opposing set speeches of substantial, and about equal, length.’ But even this innocent-looking definition proves to be difficult to sustain and has been criticized by his reviewers: Dunn (1992), 121 comments that in spite of ‘the regularity of
artificiality of the *agôn* form is another, a criticism which has been levelled with some frequency at Euripides’ plays. This has prompted some scholars to explain its currency according to Athenian cultural life, in particular the audience’s fondness for rhetoric and legislative practice. Yet, as we shall see, the law-court model of finding in favour conclusively of one side or the other is insufficient to account for the tragic *agônes*, which frequently appear not to achieve anything, least of all a resolution to the crisis. For this reason alone, it is necessary to take account of the play as a whole when analysing the *agôn*, in order to explore how it works in context and draws the rest of the play into its field of contest. It will be argued, moreover, that a better way of approaching the *agôn*, particularly in its problematic cases, is through this book’s central claim, that representations of debate explore issues of dissent and authority.

The subject of dissent is an important one in contemporary democracy; but it has relevance for our study of tragedy too. A recent study of ancient notions of freedom of speech by Arlene Saxonhouse has drawn attention to its importance to Athenian democracy. Using the example of the Chorus in Aeschylus’ *Persians*, who sing of the consequences of Xerxes’ defeat at the hands of the Athenians as meaning that ‘no
longer will men keep a curb upon their tongues’, 29 Saxonhouse comments: ‘The Athenian practice of free speech—parrhesia, the saying of all by the unbridled tongue—becomes a hallmark of the democratic regime.’ 30 While her study is important for thinking about the general cultural context of frank speech, Saxonhouse does not relate tragedy’s representations of these issues to the broader institutional framework. 31 Neither does Nick Croally who argues that: ‘we cannot help but be struck by the quirky nature of Athenian ideology when, at the potent central event of civic discourse called the Great Dionysia, at the very moment when Athens’ power is most celebrated, it seeks to affirm itself by putting itself at risk.’ 32

In line with the discussion above, Act III of this book explores tragic debates, and in particular the agon, in terms of dissent. This argument extends beyond identifying the agon as putting responsibility on the

29 The Chorus continue, ‘for the people are free to speak freely, now that the yoke of power has been broken’ (οὐδὲ ἐτε γλῶσσα βροτοίαν | ἐν φυλακαίς· λέλυται γάρ | λαὸς ἐλεύθερα βάζειν, | ὅς ἐλύθη ζυγῶν ἀλκᾶς, Aesch. Pers. 591–4).


31 Indeed, she analyses Thucydides and Plato for their anxiety concerning the ‘potentially tragic and destructive consequences of this practice when it was taken out of the context of the Assembly’: see ibid. 30. Dunn (1996), 162–3 regards parrhesia as both ‘a prerogative of the democratic assembly’ (p. 162) and a source of ‘the violent upheaval of this period (p. 163)’. He considers Orestes as ‘the first work to portray this freedom of speech as a negative and dangerous license’ (p. 163). As we shall see, both tragedies under investigation here already show anxiety about frankness of speech, even as an onus is placed on characters to speak back. With the exception of one fragment of Aeschylus, parrhesia only occurs in Euripides: what it means to be Athenian (Hipp. 422; Ion 672, 675); a general condition of belonging to a city (Phoen. 391); the tragic agon (Elec. 1056; cf. 1049); the trait of a demagogue (Or. 905). Cf. Bacch. 668. On the basis of this evidence (collected under Ch. 3, n. 94), Raaflaub (2004a) suggests that parrhesia becomes the watchword for democracy in opposition to isogoria, which had prior aristocratic connotations. As he puts it: ‘it was crucial to maintain in political life not only the principle that all citizens were allowed to speak but the farther-reaching principle that they could say whatever they wanted’ (p. 225).

32 Croally (1994), 162 (my italics). Pelling (2000), 179 interprets tragedy’s questioning differently and more in line with this book’s emphasis on institutions: ‘We can see this questioning as itself ideologically authorised: one of the marks of the good citizen is to feel the problems which the polis raised, or at least to feel them in the right setting; and the tragic theatre was the right setting.’ Segal (1981), 47–51; Cf. Pelling (1997d). Chapter 6, however, will argue that one of the aspects that is most disturbing about Euripidean tragedy is how neither the agon, nor the play itself, contains or makes sense of dissent.
audience to judge, although that is important;[33] rather, the entire tragic performance represents an investigation into dissent that reproduces multiple viewpoints and transfers the responsibility to manage them onto the audience.[34] From this perspective, this study may meet the objections raised above against the politics of Athenian tragedy, since the question becomes not so much what is political about tragedy, as how it is political.[35] Investigating the staging of dissent helps bring to light the point that politics takes place in the act of interpretation.[36]

As a brief illustration of the benefit of approaching tragedy’s contest of voices and the agôn in terms of dissent rather than through a law-court model, it may be fruitful to consider the paradigmatic example of a law-court representation on stage in Aeschylus’ Eumenides. The Oresteia more generally has generated much debate regarding its political orientation.[37] From the beginning of the trilogy the conditions for and nature of power have been under examination;[38] but political demands come to a head in the Eumenides, as Aeschylus sets the play in Athens and the conflict within the confines of a law court—specifically

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33 Croally (1994), 160 argues that the central contest of words between Hecuba and Helen in Euripides’ Trojan Women undermines secure definitions and ‘throws the responsibility for deciding who won the war and who won the debate onto the audience’.

34 We are no longer restricted to one particular place (the assembly) or form (the agôn): tragedy itself—its very structure—is agonistic and institutional.

35 Pelling (2000), 17: ‘there is . . . a sense in which a text illuminates the dynamics of its own occasion, “how” rather than “what” the audience would think in a particular context.’

36 It is interesting to note that Demosthenes privileges spectating over acting: ‘You taught, I studied; you initiated, I was initiated; you were the public secretary, I addressed the assembly; you were third actor, I spectated; you were cat-called, I hissed’ (K/A/C228/C223/C228 À/C243 Æ/C229/C242 ¡æ/C220/C236/C236 Æ/C244 Æ/Kçg/C228/C154 Kç/C239/C223/C244 ø/C237 Æ/C229/C242 Ø/C229/C237/0/C242 Æg/C228/C154 Kçg/C228/C244/C229 Ø/C239/C253/C236 Å/C237/0/C229/C242 Ø/C229/C242 Àg/C220/C221 Ø/C229/C254 À/C238/C221/0/C240/C244/C229/C242 Æ/g/C228/C154 Àg/C228/C244/0/C244/0/C244/0/C239/C237, Dem. de Car. 285). Glossing this quotation, Goldhill (1999a), 5, comments: ‘To sit as an evaluating, judging spectator was to participate as a political subject.’ For the etymological (and conceptual) connection between ‘theory’ and ‘theatre’, see Euben (1990), 4–5, 232–3, and Rehm (2002), 3–6.

37 See e.g. Thomson (1941); Dover (1957); Dodds (1960); Podlecki (1966), 63–100; (1986); Macleod (1983), 20–40; Jones (1987); Euben (1990); Sommerstein (1989), 25–32; (1992); Bowie (1993); Said (1993); Rosenbloom (1995); Griffith (1995; 1998); Goldhill (2000).

38 Clytemnestra’s vengeance upon her husband, for example, which the Odyssey had portrayed as a straightforward act of adultery, in Aeschylus takes the form of a coup d’état. Macleod (1983), 20–40 emphasizes the close integration of the trilogy’s political themes.
identified as the Areopagus—established by Athena.\(^3\) The politics of that gesture appear all the more pointed given the contemporary fractious history surrounding the Areopagus’ curtailment of powers,\(^4\) but the unresolved debate over whether or not Aeschylus supported those changes illustrates most clearly the limitations of such direct political referencing as this.\(^5\)

Instead, Aeschylus’ representation of the law court displays something of the double vision raised above, in that it exhibits a certain vagueness in form and procedure and singularly fails to replicate legislative practice.\(^6\) Specifically, the agộn-scene between the Furies on the one hand, and Orestes and Apollo on the other, with Athena and Athenian citizens as judges, diverges from the law-court model in two important ways. First, the judgement is crucially decided by Athena’s casting vote (736–43), after the human jurors reach some kind of split

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\(^3\) Remarkably for a tragedy, the scene changes, as we are invited to reflect on a move from Delphi, where Orestes could not ultimately gain freedom from pollution, to Athena’s polis, the ‘city of words’ (cf. Goldhill (1986), 57–78). Rehm (2002), 88–91 interprets the beginning of the Eumenides in a way that maximizes the trilogy’s gradual movement towards greater openness, ‘beyond what lies hidden behind the skêne’ to ‘the plein-air court on the Areopagus’ (p. 91). Similarly, Wiles (1997) argues that the drama undergoes an increasing democratization in terms of its action, shifting ‘away from the private towards the public, away from a society based on the oikos towards a society which put civic identity first, away from the enclosed acropolis towards the open agora’ (p. 84). Cf. Cartledge (1997), 15. The harmonious picture of the trilogy’s transition to social justice (see e.g. Kitto (1956), 78–86), however, has been criticized by Goldhill (1986), 33–56, who argues that the language of dikê is appropriated by characters and critics alike.

\(^4\) For the reforms of Ephialtes in the Areopagus’ council: Sealey (1964); Wallace (1989); Bearzot (1992); Marr (1993); Saïd (1993); Braun (1998).

\(^5\) See e.g. Podlecki (1966), 63–100; J. Cole (1977); Calder (1981); Meier (1990), 82–9, 106–8. As Pelling (2000), 172 notes, while one may infer Aeschylus’ enthusiasm for an Argive alliance, ‘it is harder to be sure of his position on the 462/1 Areopagus reforms’. Cf. Sommerstein (1989), 32; Bowie (1993), 11.

\(^6\) On the extent to which the law court in Euripides’ Orestes departs from its real-life counterpart, see Sommerstein (1989), 16–17; Easterling (2005); and esp. Pelling (2000), 165: ‘Eumenides provides the charter-myth for the Areopagus, but the trial procedures do not seem very specific to that court: they provide a prototype for any (at least, any Athenian or democratic) court to follow’ (his italics). Sommerstein (2010), however, argues that ‘the trial of Orestes bears a much closer resemblance to an ordinary Athenian trial before a heliastic jury than to a homicide trial on the Areopagos.’ If this is the case, then it is possible to regard Aeschylus as ‘simultaneously encouraging his audience to see the members of this “council of dikastai” as performing the same function which they themselves had performed or (if not yet thirty years old) would one day be performing, as dikastai in the regular Athenian courts’. 
decision. This is particularly interesting since Athena’s vote establishes the precedent for acquittal on the basis of an equally divided vote: but the reason for doing so—her very personal and rather odd patriarchal prerogative—and the means by which she achieves it—casting a ballot to make the vote equal, or else casting the deciding ballot once the votes are equal—underlines the ambiguity of the scene of judgement, which a law-court model cannot fully explain.

Second, the law court that Athena establishes not only does not secure a consensual judgement over the evils of the house of Atreus—the split decision shows that the human jurors recognize faults on both sides; it also fails to bring the conflict to an end. On the contrary, the Furies challenge Athena’s judgement and threaten Athens with a kind of superhuman dissent. Their violent insurrection is only quelled after prolonged negotiation with Athena, who in the end offers them a place within the Athenian civic framework.

Athena’s critical role recalls her intervention in the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles, which had helped generate a series of responses that led ultimately to the Iliad’s instituting of dissent within the Achaean community. Something similar happens in the Oresteia, which further draws out the significance of the double vision of heroic and contemporary. In the first play Agamemnon’s death leaves the Chorus, his people, without a leader and struggling for survival in the face of tyrannical suppression. In this last play Athena significantly addresses

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44 It may that our understanding of the law court, however, is in need of revision. Cohen (1995), 20 argues that lawsuits 'should not be conceptualized as a disease-like entity which interrupts the "ordinary" life of a society', but rather as an integral part of it. Indeed, he suggestively describes the law court as an agon (pp. 66–7, 112). Similarly, Johnstone (1999) stresses the process of negotiation and the performance of citizenship. Osborne (1985b) uses the term 'open-texture' to describe the accessibility of law to every citizen, which emphasizes participation in making it work. This image of the people as the ultimate authority over the laws accords much better with the version of the tragic agon that is discussed below.

45 See Goldhill (1986), 29–32.

46 As Taplin (1977), 407 suggests, it may have been more sensible for Athena to expel the Erinyes: but they are here to stay, and Athena exploits their power for the benefit of the city. On the complications Athena’s intervention brings to the drama, see Winnington-Ingram (1949).

47 At the moment of his death, the Chorus splinter and speak separately, symbolizing their loss of identity as a people, now that the king is dead. On the remarkable splintering of the choral voice here, see Taplin (1977), 393. On the comparable challenge to choral
the Athenian audience as an epic group—the ‘Attic people’ (Ἀττικὸς λεώς, 681)—as she herself acts as the institutionalizing individual in an aetiology for the Areopagus’ role within the Athenian community. Yet this tragic law court, as we have seen, does not impose a definitive solution on tragic conflict; rather, it is left to Athena and not the law court to manage dissent for the benefit of the community.

Thus the tragic ἀγῶν offers something different from the law-court model, by not so much solving as providing an opportunity to explore the problem of conflict: it makes the audience responsible for legitimizing and managing disagreement and dissent.

Following the approach that this book has adopted thus far, Chapters 5 and 6 will each take one case study respectively to suggest how the ἀγῶν and the theme of dissent more broadly work in the genre of tragedy. The two case studies in question, Sophocles’ Ajax and Euripides’ Hecuba, have been chosen primarily because they have been considered problem plays, especially with regard to the role of the ἀγῶν: they present, then, a good opportunity to test whether the hypothesis presented in this book can satisfactorily account for these problems. In brief, both plays suffer from sharp breaks in their dramatic action which have been thought to detract seriously from their artistic worth. That

identity in Sophocles’ Ajax, see Ch. 5, sec. 3 below. It does not appear to be coincidental that the institutionalization of dissent in a tragic ἀγῶν grows out of Agamemnon’s tragedy, the king whose problematic authority in epic makes dissent necessary and desirable.

For the role of the Athenians in the Eumenides, see Chiasson (1999–2000).

Goldhill (1984), 262–83 is particularly emphatic regarding the lack of conflict resolution, though see Seaford (1995). Wilson and Tapping (1993) suggest that Aeschylus’ representation of the Furies evokes the idea of tragedy itself; certainly, their insistence on dissent does seem to be a typical feature of tragedy.

As Euben (1990), 56 argues: ‘tragedy’s distance from the urgency of daily decisions—which drove the council, assembly and juries—allowed it to develop a uniquely theoretical perspective.’ Simultaneously, however, as part of a drama, it also provoked its audience ‘into participating in the task of deconstructing and reconstructing a world that was both familiar and other’ (p. 58).

The ἀγῶν, in the form of the contest of words, is such a common feature in tragedy that it has simply not been possible to extend this scope further, not, at any rate, if one wants to contextualize fully the ἀγῶν-scenes and analyse the theme of dissent as it functions within each play. It is hoped, nevertheless, that by undertaking a detailed analysis of a sample pair of tragedies a more general application may emerge and help to shed new light on some major problems customarily associated with the study of Athenian tragedy.
break is most obvious in the *Ajax*, given the fact that the protagonist commits suicide with a little under half of the play remaining; but a similar criticism has been levelled also at the *Hecuba*, whose protagonist undergoes a radical shift from sufferer to doer, prompting many critics to attribute to her a decline in moral standards. In addition, the *agōn* in both plays is identified as either a major cause or alternatively a manifestation of the problem. The second half of Sophocles’ play leaves the stage open to petty figures to wrangle over the fate of the hero’s body in a double *agōn*; the final *agōn*-scene in Euripides’ *Hecuba* attracts the usual criticisms of Euripides’ *agōn* as artificial and lacking resolution.

A related point of interest is the relationship of both plays to Homeric epic. Both plays are located by some means or other in the ‘fallout’ from dissent dramatized at the beginning of the *Iliad*:52 Sophocles’ play derives from Ajax’s refusal to accept the judgement on awarding the arms of Achilles; in Euripides, the authority given to the brooding shade of Achilles casts a shadow over the events of the play. At another level, the thematization of dissent is explored through the actions and words of their protagonists in ways that rework the rival epic strategies. Thus, while Ajax’s Achilles-like persona has been well documented, this study analyses Ajax’s armed insurrection as an extreme replaying of Achilles’ dissent from Agamemnon. On the other hand, Hecuba’s transformation from victim to avenger mirrors Odysseus’ narrative of vengeance, only for the violent consequences of her actions and words to come under investigation.

It will be argued that this pairing represents two paradigmatic tragic responses to the dynamic between dissent and authority that has been traced through representations of debate from Homeric epic through historiography to the Athenian dramatic stage. Chapter 5 will show that Sophocles exploits an Iliadic strategy that explores and valorizes dissent from the authority of the king, Agamemnon. This tragedy, however, differs radically from the *Iliad* since it explores Ajax’s dissent from the perspective of those looking on, Ajax’s concubine-wife, his half-brother and the Chorus. Such an approach makes sense of the much-maligned

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52 Michelakis (2002) includes these two plays in his study of Achilles in tragedy, though his analysis of the repercussions on the social environment is undertaken from the perspective of the hero’s death.
second half of the play by showing how Ajax’s dissent is managed and set within an institutional frame: first, by means of Teucer’s defence in the *agón*; second, through Odysseus’ intervention, which allows burial to take place. It will be argued that Ajax’s dissent is not only made institutional in Athens; it makes up part of the process the audience themselves engage in while active in spectating. The fact that dissent, even given the negative example of Ajax’s violent action, can be assimilated to, and by, the process of democratic debate marks the extraordinary recuperative powers of tragedy.

Chapter 6, on the other hand, will show that Euripides exploits the alternative Odyssean narrative strategy to devastating tragic effect. It will be argued that this play privileges the justice of Hecuba’s revenge, as though this female, foreign, ex-royal slave were an Odysseus returning home to avenge himself on the suitors. The play’s Odyssean-like insistence on the authority of her suffering culminates when an on-stage judge sets up an *agón* in order expressly to deal with the fallout from her revenge. In this way, Euripides establishes the most extreme test-case of the capacity to control and make use of dissent within the institutional framework of the *agón*. Yet, as the play ends with Polymestor’s unrestrained dissenting voice ringing out, the audience is left alone to deal with dissent and face the consequences of their own judgement outside the security of any institutional framework, even that of the play itself.
Speaking back in Sophocles’ *Ajax*

We first hear of Ajax’s tragedy in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus reports that he sees Ajax standing apart from all the other spirits.\(^1\) When Odysseus tries to address him, Ajax ‘answered not a word’.\(^2\) His silence marks a continuing challenge to the victory won by his rival, taking his dissent to the grave—and beyond. Elsewhere too in narrative traditions Ajax is a ‘doer of deeds’ rather than a ‘speaker of words’,\(^3\) seemingly having little in common with the democracy’s constitution of words.\(^4\) Yet the Athenians also knew Ajax as one of the eponymous heroes of the ten Attic tribes honoured in cult.\(^5\)

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4 On democracy as a constitution of words, see Dem. 19.184. While it would be incorrect to suggest that tragic characters were tailored to democratic models, Aristophanes’ *Euripides* criticizes his rival on the basis that he depicts silent figures. It is significant that doing the opposite—giving a voice to all—he regards as democratic: ‘[in my plays] I made the wife speak, the slave no less, and the master, the maiden and old crone... For what I did was democratic’ (ἀλλ’ ἔλεγεν ἡ γυνὴ τέ μοι χω δούλος οὐδὲν ἦττων χω υπεστής χή παρθένος χή γραφὸς ἀν... δημοκρατικοί γὰρ αὐτ’ ἕδρων, *At*. *Ran*. 948–52).

5 For details: Kearns (1989), 46, 80–91, 141–2; Shapiro (1989), 154–7; Bradshaw (1991), 99–125, esp. 113–15. See also: Jebb (1896), pp. xxx–xxxii; Garvie (1998), 5–6. In his great tour of Greece Pausanias recounts that there was a statue of Ajax in Athens, as well as an altar to his son, Euryptes: Paus. 1.5.1; cf. 1.35.3. Herodotus relates that before Salamis the Athenians prayed to Ajax, and afterwards dedicated a trireme to him (Hdt. 8.64, 121).
Sophocles’ play captures something of this duality. The first scene after the parodos stages a tableau of a despairing Ajax, surrounded by butchered animals, trying desperately to maintain his dignity in silent resolve; by the end, Ajax’s body is carried off for burial in an aetiology for, though not a performance of, his ritual. The disjunction between the two visions of Ajax is reproduced by the structure of the play, in which Ajax’s monologues that lead to his death give way to debates over his dead body. That abrupt transition tends to be interpreted ideologically, as the suicide of the last, great Homeric-style hero, who cannot, and will not, change his ways to fit in with the new environment, thereby leaving the stage to the bickering of lesser men who appear to embody the pettiness of contemporary demagogues. In this interpretation the second half of the play comes in for particular criticism, which crystallizes around the agon over Ajax’s body, for being an unwarranted incursion of the Athenian love for debate into the hero’s tragedy, with a consequent loss of dramatic effect. Even those critics who emphasize the importance of burial fail to explain adequately Ajax’s radical shift from outcast to cult-like figure and the significance of the agon in relation to the earlier events.

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6 As usual, Jebb is alive to the tension. ‘Ajax, at the beginning of the play, has been shown in the deepest humiliation… Yet this Ajax is the same to whom the Athenian spectators… had been taught to pay divine honours’: Jebb (1896), p. xxx.


9 The scholiast on line 1123 condemns the exchanges in the agon, saying that ‘such clever things do not belong to tragedy’: τὰ τοιαῦτα αφέτημα ὁμοίως ὅπερ οἰκεία τραγῳδίας. Reinhardt (1979), 32 comments: ‘as a method of representing the opponents, the agon appears to our minds to be unduly restricted by the formal nature of its construction. Instead of situations which develop from the nature of the pervading hostility, there is a ready-made schema, a mere substitute for it’ (his italics). See also Holt (1981), 281–2.

10 This approach was first proposed by Jebb (1896) and has been taken up by more recent critics: Burian (1972); Easterling (1988); Henrichs (1993); Seaford (1994),
This chapter will explain the role of the agôn according to Sophocles’ thematization of dissent more broadly. In a remarkable move, Sophocles does not represent the judgement of arms itself. Instead, he dramatizes its aftermath—the consequences of Ajax’s dissent from that decision. Clearly this displaces an authoritative view of that judgement, leaving the audience to piece together the events from the competing perspectives of the characters; but it also places the experience of being a spectator under the spotlight, since Sophocles explores the fallout from the hero’s dissent through those figures most affected by his refusal to accept the judgement of arms—his men, his concubine-wife, his brother.

The study of the play takes place in three stages. The first section establishes Ajax as a figure from a bygone era, in the mould of an Iliadic ‘shepherd of the people’, on whom both his men and family depend. More particularly, Ajax’s representation both follows his Iliadic persona as the second-best of the Achaeans, but also shows a debt to the Iliad’s portrait of Achilles. The play’s opening scene, which stages a dialogue between the hero and Athena, recalls the beginning of the Iliad, where Athena came down from Olympus in order to prevent Achilles from butchering Agamemnon. In Sophocles’ play, however, the hero’s dissent is not so much checked as redirected, as Athena deflects Ajax’s murderous intent onto the cattle. Crucially, too, we see things from the perspective not of the agent (Ajax) but of an audience (Odysseus). The rest of the section assesses responses to Ajax’s frank speaking articulated by his men and his concubine-wife, Tecmessa.

In the light of the play’s emphasis on dissent, the problematic agôn between Teucer and the Atreidae accrues additional significance. Section 2 argues that the agon, though ostensibly about burial, explores the issue

392–405; Rehm (2002), 137–8. Miralles (1997), 40 wonders: ‘E la morte di Aiace non istituisce, chiaramente, per gli Ateniesi un culto eroico che protegga la città?’ (‘For the Athenians, does Ajax’s death not clearly establish a heroic cult that protects the city?’).

11 As, it seems, Aeschylus had done in the ὅπλων κρίσις. According to March (1991–3), 4–6, Aeschylus also innovated by making the judges of the contest not the Trojans (as at Od. 11.47) but the Greeks themselves. Whether or not the source for Sophocles is Aeschylus or Pindar, the idea that the Greeks as a collective have made judgement (Soph. Aq. 441–9, 1135–6, 1239–49) is already suggestive of the increased importance of the role of spectator that is set out here, especially because we do not witness that vote. Murnaghan (1986b), esp. 177, sees the play as a whole as re-enacting Ajax’s trial, this time for the attempted murder of the Atreidae.

of authority more generally. At one level Teucer’s defence of Ajax is seen as legitimate resistance to the Atreidae’s denial of burial; at another, the very means by which he achieves this—by drawing on anti-Spartan prejudice and by echoing the *Iliad*—invites a re-evaluation of the principle of dissent. The *agôn* spills over its dramatic frame and implicates the audience in re-viewing and re-evaluating Ajax’s initial defiance.

There remains the problem of Odysseus’ intercession in the crisis, who, though Ajax’s avowed enemy, paves the way for burial to take place. The last section investigates the problem through the Chorus’ role in the drama. It will show that, from the parodos, the Chorus are seen as Ajax’s ‘people’ (*laos*), which not only evokes an Iliadic world but, more pertinently, establishes their relationship to Ajax as one of dependence. Confronted by their leader’s suicide, the Chorus are threatened with a loss of their identity; but, as they experience the debates of the *agôn*, they take on a new role, with the result that in the impasse at the climax of the *agôn* the Chorus take the lead by inviting Odysseus to mediate. The Chorus’ transformation from an epic people to a quasi-political group culminates in the performance of the audience, who must also make a judgement if a way is to be found out of the agon other than continued violence.

1. **THE FALLOUT FROM DISSENT**

I stayed his hand

The play begins in typical Sophoclean fashion with a dialogue between two characters who introduce the plot of the play. Odysseus, searching for information about what had happened during the night which has seen cattle—and the odd herdsmen—slaughtered, has come to Ajax’s tent, where the goddess Athena awaits him, ready to act as his guide. With a deity giving instructions, and with her mortal interlocutor clearly seeing himself in a position of ignorance (15, 33, 35), a model of learning is quickly established.

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13 Hesk (2003), 40–1 discusses the ‘implied’ stage directions that result from this dialogue. Heath (1987a), 166–7 notes Sophocles’ departure from usual practice by presenting an immortal interlocutor. Dobrov (2001), 61–2 interprets Odysseus’ reference to Ajax’s tent (*skêne*, 3) as a metatheatrical reference to the actual stage building. The suggestion of a play within a play will be important.
There is more to it than the founding of a simple pedagogic model, however. The god exhibits a striking air of familiarity with her mortal counterpart. Her first words—the first words of the play—establish a sense of camaraderie between the pair: ‘Always, son of Laertes, I watch you, as you hunt to try to seize something from your enemies’ (ἀεὶ μὲν, ὁ παῖ Λαρτίου, δὲ δορκά σε, | πείραν τιν' ἐχθρῶν ἀρπάσαι θηράμενον, 1–2). With Athena playfully toying with her favourite, Odysseus, we could almost have landed on an Odyssean Ithaca, were it not for a striking difference: Odysseus does not see Athena; he hears only her voice (ὁ φθέγμα Αθάνας, 14). This, after all, is not an Odyssean world where the hero enjoys unrestricted, and unmediated, access to the goddess, but an Iliadic state of affairs which introduces Odysseus’ mortal perspective. Indeed, it is likely that Athena appears high up on the skēnē building, physically separated from the human actors.

Once she has filled in the details of the night’s shocking events, Athena proceeds to call Ajax on-stage, much to Odysseus’ distinct unease. Yet, Athena has so maddened Ajax that he neither sees Odysseus nor the state he is in. Thus deluded, Ajax boasts that he has stained his hands with the blood of the Achaean leaders, ‘so that never again shall they refuse honour to Ajax’ (ὡσ' ὁποτ' Ἀιανθ' οἳδ' ἀτμάσουσε στι, 98). While his sentiment shocks, it is by no means unprecedented: having had his honour slighted (by being passed over for the arms of Achilles) Ajax acts according to customary moral standards.

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15 The Iliadic Odysseus only hears Athena as well: ὁ δὲ ξινεύηκε θεὰς ὅπα φωνευάνη, Il. 2.182; cf. Il. 10.512. Achilles does enjoy a full epiphany with Athena (Il. 1.194–222), but that is due to the presentation of his special relationship with the divine and even then fails to gain his immunity from mortal suffering.
16 For questions of staging, see: Seale (1982), 176, n. 3; Heath (1987 a), 165–7; Mastronarde (1990), 278; Rehm (2002), 125–6; Hesk (2003), 43–4. Pucci (1994), 27 argues that Athena’s invisibility is made visible to the audience in order to stress the tragic vision of man.
17 When we see Ajax again, he will, in fact, be surrounded by the beasts he has slaughtered in mistake. It is his realization that he has erred so wide of the mark that plunges him into a despair from which he will never recover.
18 Heath (1987 a), 173 suggests that we—the modern audience—should not be put off by the violence of Ajax’s dissent: though from our perspective it might seem morally reprehensible for an individual to act in this way, from an ancient Greek viewpoint Ajax has his honour to defend, and desperate times call for desperate measures. For proof of his argument that Ajax is not being condemned for thus defending his honour, Heath cites the Homeric precedent of Achilles’ impulse to kill Agamemnon. See also Garvie (1998), 11–12.
other hand, it can hardly be the case that this kind of dissent is to be approved: by turning on his comrades, Ajax has broken the bonds of philia. Indeed, both Tecmessa and the Chorus are truly shocked by what Ajax has done and foresee disastrous consequences for themselves.  

Nevertheless, Ajax’s actions resonate strongly with a scene explored earlier in this book: when dissent in the Achaean assembly gets so out of hand that Achilles deliberates whether to strike down Agamemnon or check his wrath. There we observed that Achilles actually goes for his sword, before being physically restrained and then persuaded to keep his weapon sheathed. This memorable scene in the *Iliad* gets reworked in Sophocles’ play with three important differences.  

First, there is the action itself. Frustrated by his perceived injustice at the hands of the Greek leaders, Ajax takes the matter into his own hands and reaches for his sword. Unlike the epic precedent, however, Athena intervenes not to stay his hand, but to deflect his blow. It is almost as if the scene offers a window onto the beginning of the *Iliad*, where Achilles does draw his sword, where dissent does stray into violence. Second, there is the outcome. In the *Iliad* Athena offers Achilles recompense for not striking down Agamemnon: he will gain honour threefold for obeying her. In Sophocles’ play the result of Athena’s intervention is hardly auspicious.

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19 See e.g. the Chorus at *Aj*. 141–7, 196–200; Tecmessa at *Aj*. 214–20, 271–7. Many scholars have regarded Ajax’s tragedy as punishment by Athena for his pride: Bowra (1944), 32–3; Kitto (1961), 122; Winnington-Ingram (1980), 13; Stanford (1981), p. xxvi. See, however, Garvie (1998), 243–53, who points out that the language of hubris is most often applied to Ajax’s enemies. In his discussion of Ajax’s hubris (pp. 141–8), Hesk (2003), 148 concludes that Ajax may ‘embody the kind of hubristic behaviour which, while transgressive in societal or legal terms, is sometimes necessary in the face of tyranny and injustice’. Important here is the issue of ‘big talking’, which manifests itself differently over the course of the play: see esp. sec. 2 below. For the influence of the ‘traditional’ ancient Greek ethical code on Ajax’s behaviour: Blundell (1991).  


21 Athena may not say that Achilles is wrong to stand up to Agamemnon, but her intervention serves to prevent his dissent from Agamemnon from transgressing into violence, which would prove catastrophic for the Achaeans. See Ch. 1, n. 31, with accompanying text.  

for the agent: Ajax’s armed defiance misses its target and he strikes down sheep instead, because of which he will suffer crippling humiliation. The comparison to the *Iliad*, therefore, is instructive for underlining the point that taking individual action outside institutional means of redress—such as killing your leaders when you disagree with them—cannot, and does not, gain sanction.23

On the face of it, Athena’s mediation in the *Iliad* serves to add to Achilles’ glory: any of its negative consequences—such as the fact that it sets in motion a train of events which will culminate in the death of his friend, Patroclus—are left unexpressed at the time. It is hard to see Athena’s role in Sophocles’ play, however, as anything other than damaging for the hero, given the manner in which Athena has staged the action24—which introduces the third, and most important, difference between the two scenes. The *Iliad* explores dissent from the agent’s perspective, from Achilles’ initial withdrawal to his rejection of the embassy: we learn only in piecemeal fashion what other Achaeans thought about his action; the important thing is what Achilles says, thinks and does.25 Sophocles, on the other hand, puts the response of others intensely and immediately under the spotlight.

It is worth taking a look at the way each episode is represented to highlight the difference in emphasis and the consequences that follow. In the *Iliad*, after Athena explains her intervention, Achilles makes the following remark (*Il.* 1.218): ‘Whoever obeys the gods, they listen to him especially’). Throughout the exchange, Achilles’ views and actions are under scrutiny. The hero himself draws the moral from his dialogue with the goddess: being allowed the final say confirms the epic’s interest in his response. Immediately afterwards, he criticizes the rest of the Achaeans for not standing up to Agamemnon in the way he deems appropriate or

23 ‘The Achaeans could not but see a traitor in Ajax on account of his onslaught’: Kamerbeek (1963), 14. See also Jebb (1896), p. xxix. For an analysis of the *Iliad* along these lines, see Ch. 1, sec. 1, above. In his subsequent exchange with Agamemnon, Achilles foreshadows Achaean deaths at Hector’s hand (*Hom. Il.* 1.240–4), a point that is reinforced in the following scene with Thetis (1.408–12).

24 At least, at this point in the play: see, however, sec. 3 below.

25 Nestor attempts to mediate the conflict; the heralds go to take Achilles’ prize ‘unwillingly’ (*Il.* 1.327); Thersites sees the quarrel as adding grist to his mill against Agamemnon (*Il.* 2.239–42); Nestor persuades Agamemnon to make recompense (*Il.* 9.104–11).
adequate (Il. 1.231). Sophocles crucially alters the dynamic. On the one hand, now it is Athena herself who draws the episode to a close. Her conclusion—that ‘the gods love those who are moderate’ (τοὺς δὲ σόφρονας | θεοὶ φιλοῦσι καὶ συνογοῦσι τοὺς κακούς, 132–3)—offers a sentiment akin to Achilles’ expression, but strikes a quite different note. Achilles’ words were a sign that he accepted Athena’s intervention; when Athena herself with similar language caps the episode, the stress on the god’s power is uppermost, the understanding of the human agent less so.

On the other hand, the human in dialogue with the god is no longer the central agent, who is looking to dissent from the Achaean commander(s); now he is a bystander, the onlooking Odysseus, for whose benefit, it seems, Athena has staged this scene.26 It is his response to Ajax, and not Ajax’s action itself, that is at issue here: the scene puts Odysseus’ judgement under scrutiny. When Athena invites Ajax on-stage, she expressly invites Odysseus to gloat at his enemy’s fall from grace: ‘Is not laughing at one’s enemies the most delightful kind of laughter?’ (οὐκον γέλως ἡδιστος εἰς ἔχθρον γελάν; 79). Her conclusion accords with the perceived wisdom of harming one’s enemies;27 yet, Odysseus’ response to the spectacle is quite different (121–4):

I pity him in his misery, though he is my enemy, since he has been yoked to evil delusion, not looking out so much for his fate as for my own.


27 The scholiast on line 79 describes Athena’s speech as ‘harsh’ (σκληρόν). Similarly, de Romilly (1976), 22 condemns the Athena of the prologue as ‘une déesse cruelle’. A note on line 82, however, offers an alternative view. The scholiast here (different from the one previous?) observes a distinction between the god—who can speak freely (μετὰ παρρησίας)—and Odysseus, who as a mortal ‘sees only the moment’ (τὸν καιρὸν ὄργα). Mortals have to gauge what is appropriate to say at any one moment, whereas deities do not need to worry about that: cf. Cairns (1996) on ἱβρίς. Stanford (1981), 67 observes that ‘Athena here expresses… the normal heroic attitude, that nothing is more pleasant than to be able to exult and gloat over the misfortunes of one’s enemies’. 
Odysseus rejects Athena’s invitation to gloat, even as he acknowledges Ajax as an enemy. As Pat Easterling has pointed out, Athena’s advice would seem to suggest that we should take Ajax ‘as a cautionary example and avoid any kind of arrogance towards the gods. But these are not the terms in which Odysseus himself “reads” the scene that he and we have witnessed.’ In fact, Odysseus pities Ajax precisely because he sees a relevance to his own mortal predicament (οὐδὲν τὸ τοῦτον μᾶλλον ἦ τοῦτον σκοπῶν, 124). Faced by the gruesome spectacle offered by the goddess, Odysseus’ thoughts turn away from the maddened Ajax, and turn inwards in contemplation of a common humanity. He pities him. In this way, Sophocles invites his audience to regard Odysseus in a way far removed from his usual tragic guise of a glib orator.

This opening section has shown that the scene between Athena, Odysseus and Ajax resonates with the beginning of the Iliad, when Athena intervened in Achilles’ quarrel with Agamemnon; but, far from restraining Ajax, she allows his dissent to transgress into violence, which not only maximizes his shame but also exposes him to legitimate reprisal. In addition, through the figure of Athena, Sophocles changes the focus of the scene: whereas in the Iliad Athena enjoys an individual audience with the dissenting heroic agent that excludes everyone else from their dialogue, in Sophocles’ tragedy Athena stages a play through

28 Easterling (1993), 82.
29 ‘The effect reminds [the audience], paradoxically, not of their security as distant, quasi-divine onlookers but of their involvement as mortal participants, capable of human pity which they, like Odysseus and in contrast to Athena, can still feel’: Segal (1995), 6. For the extent to which Odysseus’ sentiment may be seen as radically challenging traditional Greek ethical behaviour—or not—see Vlastos (1991), 192–4.
30 Just as Odysseus had earlier shown fear of being in Ajax’s presence (l. 82), now he feels pity for him—these are, of course, the two emotions that, according to Aristotle, represent the function of tragedy: Arist. Poet. 1450’30–1, 1452’29–30, 62’12–13. See Heath (1987a), 5–17 for a discussion of these ‘first principles’ and pp. 168–9 for their application to Ajax. Cf. Hesk (2003), 46.
31 See e.g. the portrait of the devious orator that the Chorus paint when they enter (ll. 148–58). Dobrov (2001), 64–5 suggests that Odysseus gains an ethical awareness from Athena’s staging of Ajax’s tragedy that he will later bring to bear on resolving the crisis of burial. Whether or not he is right to see Odysseus as acquiring that attitude here, this initial depiction of Odysseus will be critical to the final scenes and is suggestive of the emphasis on spectating that is the focus of this chapter. Garvie (1998), 124 similarly comments that Odysseus’ ‘remarkable attitude, which is more attractive than that of the goddess and evidently beyond her understanding, foreshadows the final scene of the play’ (my italics). Cf. Taplin (2003), 41; Hesk (2003), 45–6.
which she invites the spectating Odysseus to draw the lesson from her deception of the protagonist. This shift in focalization anticipates the play’s movement from presenting Ajax’s dissent to exploring its consequences when he is dead.\footnote{That is not to say that Ajax is not given the opportunity either to defend himself (see esp. ll. 430–80) or express his anguish (ll. 646–92); rather, it is to stress that the play expressly explores the reactions of those affected. Interestingly, when Ajax does have his say, he does so particularly in the guise of a ‘Hector’: the hero whose personal relations are under focus in the \textit{Iliad}. See n. 43 below with accompanying text.} Yet, the different responses of Athena and Odysseus already suggest different ways of responding to Ajax. That process continues in the scenes that follow, when first the Chorus of Ajax’s men and then Tecmessa enter to articulate the impact of Ajax’s predicament on them all.

\textbf{I suffer anguish}

The Chorus’ entry continues the orientation of the opening scene, with an extension of the interest in audience response to a group of onlookers, except that these spectators associate themselves with Ajax.\footnote{As a group they are discontinuous (at least to begin with) from the rest of the army: Soph. \textit{Aj}. 138, 151, 162, 164, 186, 196; Ajax is in no position to help them. See Budelmann (2000), 195–272. See also Winnington-Ingram (1980), 24; Segal (1995), 21; Michelakis (2002), 148–50.} Their entrance song has the primary function, then, of establishing their identity as Ajax’s men and setting out their concerns given the present circumstances. Immediately aligning their fate with Ajax, they describe how they shrink in fear whenever a ‘slanderous word from the Danaans’ (\(\lambda \gamma \omicron \sigma \varsigma \varepsilon \kappa \Delta \alpha \varnothing \omega \nu \varsigma \kappa \alpha \kappa \omicron \theta \rho \omicron \omicron \varsigma \varsigma \varepsilon \iota \beta \eta\), 138) strikes their lord. According to the Chorus, this is the case now (\(\omega \varsigma \kappa \alpha \iota \nu\), 141), as ‘a great commotion holds them in infamy’ (\(\mu \varepsilon \gamma \alpha \lambda \omicron \iota \theta \omicron \omicron \beta \nu \omicron \iota \kappa \alpha \tau \acute{e} \chi \omicron \omicron \upsilon \varsigma \eta \mu \dot{m} \dot{a} \varsigma \mid \varepsilon \pi \iota \delta \upsilon \omicron \varsigma \lambda \kappa \lambda \dot{i} \varsigma \iota\), 142–3).

The Chorus’ song raises two important considerations. First, it locates the source of its woes as ‘evil rumour’ (\(\kappa \alpha \kappa \alpha \varphi \acute{a} \tau \omicron \varsigma\), 186, 191), a ‘slanderous word’ (\(\lambda \gamma \omicron \sigma \varsigma \kappa \alpha \kappa \omicron \theta \rho \omicron \omicron \varsigma\), 138). Thus one speech act is replaced by another: in place of Ajax’s verbal—and physical—assault on the Achaean leaders is the report of it. In the opinion of the Chorus, moreover, the blame for the transmission of such an evil report lies with Odysseus, whose glib oratory has convinced the army that Ajax is
This is the Odysseus familiar to the tragic stage, as the demagogic orator. Second, ‘infamy’ (δυσκλεία) is something that greatly preoccupies Agamemnon in the Iliad. Similarly, the last words of the parodos, in which the Chorus announce that they are ‘fixed in anguish’ (ἐμοὶ δ’ ἄχος ἐστακέν, 200), recalls the anguish articulated by Homeric heroes, paradigmatically Achilles himself. In this play, however, it is the Chorus who voice the fear of infamy, the feeling of pain. On the one hand, this demonstrates the Chorus’ dependency on their leader along the lines of the discussion above on Homer’s people. On the other hand, the focus has changed in tragedy: now that once silent (though important) group in epic gets the opportunity to articulate their response to the events which affect both themselves and their leader. It is as if Sophocles has put on stage Achilles’ Myrmidons to air their grievances.

And not only the group: Ajax’s woman, Tecmessa, also faces the disastrous consequences of her man’s dissent. Her eyewitness report of the previous night’s misadventures brings clarity to the wild rumours that have been circulating, and starkly expresses the predicament that they all face now that Ajax has overstepped the mark.

Significant here is the description of Odysseus as the spawn of Sisyphus (χ’ τὰς ἀσώτων Σισυφόδων γενέας, 189): the association of Odysseus with the arch-trickster Sisyphus presents a deeply suspicious view of Odysseus’ rhetoric.

Nagy (1979), 69–71 speculates on the etymology of Achilles’ name as meaning ‘pain for the people’.

Rose (1995), 71 argues that Sophocles presents a ‘particularly unheroic image of the ordinary sailors’ to emphasize Ajax’s heroic stature. That may be true; but it passes over the resonances with Homeric epic. Hesk (2003), 27–30 discusses the extent to which the Chorus’ language happens to ‘reverberate with Homeric soundings’ (p. 29). At this point in the drama, he notes, the Chorus’ glowing description indicates ‘a dissonance between their conception of Ajax as a warrior of epic proportions and the audience’s current understanding of him as an enfeebled figure who is very much under the sway of Athena’ (ibid, his italics).

See Act I, intro. above, with Haubold (2000), 14–46. It is interesting (as Haubold notes, pp. 8–11) that Aristotle assimilates the tragic chorus to Homer’s people: ‘Of the ancients only the leaders were heroes, and the people were human beings: whence derives the Chorus’ (οἱ δὲ ψηφιόις τῶν ἀρχαίων μόνοι ἦσαν ἦρωες, οἱ δὲ λαοὶ ἄθρωσιν, ὄν ἐστιν ὁ χορός, Arist., Pr. xix 48.922).

Achilles admits as much (Il. 16.200–9), which is picked up by Hermes (Il. 24.403–4).
After her report, Tecmessa’s first task is to lure Ajax out of his tent where he has been sitting in ominous silence since his first appearance. This scene clearly evokes the beginning of the play, when Athena enticed Ajax onto the stage in a state of maddened exultation: here, however, Ajax is brought out in his right mind to face the consequences of his actions. Not that he is ready to back down: while both the Chorus and Tecmessa try to conciliate him (349–429), Ajax remains committed to dissent, as both his men and his wife plead with him to tone down his language, or express unease about it. Furthermore, his unrelenting grievance against the Greek leaders has a tangible effect on the play’s structure, as he responds to the iambics of his interlocutors in lyric monody. The verbal manifestation of Ajax’s earlier physical assault brings to the fore the problem of his dissent. In the shifting forms of immoderate speech acts, from the wild rumours flying around to Ajax’s careless insults, the play demonstrates how dissent may get out of hand if not properly managed.

After some 100 lines or so, Ajax abruptly shifts into iambics by delivering a substantial speech in answer to Tecmessa’s worries (430–80). With the change in metre heralding a more reflective register, Ajax explains and justifies his refusal to accept the judgement of arms (440–9). This, the first occasion that a report of the judgement of arms has been given, presents Odysseus’ victory as a travesty of justice: ‘the sons of Atreus have made their minds over to a man without scruples’ (νῦν δ’ αὐτ’ Ἀτρείδαι φωτὶ παντουργῷ φρένας | ἐπραξαν, 445–6) and shunned his own might (ἀνδρός τοῦδ’ ἀπώσαντες κράτη, 446). As well as representing Odysseus in the negative light usual for his appearances on the tragic stage, Ajax represents himself in Achillean terms. He is dishonoured by the Argives (ἄτιμος Ἀργείοις, 440); he raises the possibility of returning home—only to dismiss the idea (460–5). Indeed, according to Ajax, had Achilles been alive to judge the contest, he would have given the arms to

40 So, the Chorus: ἐβήμα φώνει, 362; μηδὲν μεγ’ εἴτης, 386; Tecmessa: μή αὖδα τάδε, 368; ἐβήμα φώνει, 591; the messenger (reporting Ajax’s words to his father): ὁδ’ ψυχόμενος κάθρόνισ ήµείσατο, 766. Ajax is described as ‘uttering evil words’ (κακὰ δεινάζων ῥήματα, 243) and ‘laughing loudly’ (γέλων πολύν, 303). While Ajax’s terrible words seem to attract the goddess’ wrath, the issue of frank speaking will be reworked when Teucer enters the scene and faces up to the twin Atreidae. See sec. 2 below.
none other than himself. Ajax seeks to justify his dissent by casting doubt on the legitimacy of the judgement and by casting himself in the role of the Iliadic Achilles. Finally, like Achilles too, Ajax speaks forcefully and insists on the finality of his word: \(\pi\acute{a}n\,\acute{\alpha}\acute{k}\acute{i}k\acute{o}as\,\lambda\acute{o}g\acute{\o}n\) (480).

Yet his speech is very far from being the last words on the subject: Sophocles gives Tecmessa a speech in reply of very nearly equal length (485–524). As many scholars have noticed, the portrait of a wife trying to dissuade the hero from pursuing a fateful course of action recalls the scene between Hector and Andromache in the Iliad. But there are a number of differences between the two scenes that relate to the discussion at the beginning of this Act on the staging of dissent. In the first instance Sophocles has reversed the scene so that the woman answers her man, which throws emphasis onto the female voice. Next, in his answer to Andromache Hector uses a generalizing speech that imagines what people will say about him when they see his wife in slavery; here, Tecmessa herself articulates these same concerns using the same rhetorical device. The reversal is all the more striking given the fact that, unlike Andromache, Tecmessa is no regal wife but a slave girl, Ajax’s concubine. It is as if Briseis had been given a voice to complain to Achilles about his extreme

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41 ‘If Achilles were still alive and were to judge victory in supreme valour for his own arms, no other but I would receive them’ (\(\varepsilon\,\xi\acute{o}n\,\acute{A}k\acute{h}l\acute{a}\acute{e}\acute{i}s\,t\acute{h}ών\,\u03c0\acute{p}l\acute{\o}w\,t\acute{h}ών\,\acute{w}n\,\acute{p}ēr|\,k\acute{r}ινε\acute{n}e\,\acute{e}m\acute{e}l\acute{\e}\,k\acute{r}ά\acute{t}οs\,\acute{a}\acute{r}ι\acute{σ}t\acute{e}i\acute{s}\,t\acute{h}i\acute{\i}\), | ὀικ ἀν τις αὐτ’ ἔμαρθεν ἄλλος ἀνή’ ἐμοῦ, Aj. 442–4).

42 Cf. Il. 9.430–1.


45 Hector: ‘Some day someone seeing you crying will say: “Here’s the wife of Hector, who was best at fighting of the Trojans, when they fought about Ilion” (\(\kappa\acute{a}i\,\pi\acute{o}t\,t\acute{h}e\,\epsilon\acute{p}\acute{t}η\acute{n}e\,\i\acute{d}ο\acute{n}\,κα\acute{t}α\,\d\acute{a}r\acute{k}ω\acute{\i}\,\chi\acute{e}\acute{o}\acute{w}σα\,) | “\'Εκτωρος\,\acute{h}\acute{e}\,\gamma\acute{w}γι,\,\acute{d}e\,\acute{a}\acute{r}ι\acute{σ}t\acute{e}\acute{\e}\acute{s}e\acute{a}\,\mu\acute{a}\acute{χ}ε\acute{s}e\acute{i}α\,) | Τρ\acute{\i}\acute{o}\acute{w}ν\,\i\acute{p}\acute{\i}\acute{p}\acute{o}d\acute{\i}\acute{m}ο\acute{\i}\acute{\o}\acute{n},\,ὅτε\,\‘\omicron\,\acute{A}θ\acute{h}ι\acute{m}ι\acute{m}α\acute{χ}ο\acute{n}τα\,)\, Il. 6.459–61); Tecmessa: ‘One of my masters will let fall bitter words like these: “See the concubine of Ajax, whose strength was the greatest in the army, and the servitude she nourishes instead of envy” (\(\kappa\acute{a}i\,t\acute{h}e\,\pi\acute{k}\acute{r}ωn\,\pi\acute{r}ό\acute{s}θ\acute{h}ε\acute{g}m\acute{a} \d\acute{e}\acute{s}τη\acute{t}ου\,\acute{e}ραι\,|\,\l\acute{o}γ\acute{\o}ι\,\i\acute{l}\acute{a}\acute{p}t\acute{o}\acute{n},\,\acute{t}\acute{h}ε\acute{t}e\,t\acute{h}e\,\acute{m}ε\acute{u}\acute{v}e\acute{t}e\acute{n} | Α\acute{\i}\acute{a}ν\acute{t}ος,\,\acute{d}e\,\m\acute{e}\acute{g}\acute{h}\acute{o}t\acute{o}n\,\i\acute{a}\acute{x}u\acute{e} \,s\acute{t}\acute{r}\acute{a}τ\acute{o}\acute{u},\,ο\acute{i}α\,\i\acute{a}\acute{r}\acute{t}\acute{e}\acute{i}\acute{a}s\,\acute{a}νθ’ \,\ό\acute{s}\acute{h}o\acute{n}\,\z\acute{h}\acute{λ}\acute{o}u\,\t\acute{r}ε\acute{f}e\acute{i},\, Aj. 500–3).

46 H. Foley (2001), 90 makes the connection: ‘Sophocles’ spear-bride Tecmessa... resembles in part the other loving slave concubines of the Iliad such as Achilles’ Briseis, but also, in her famous attempt to persuade Ajax not to abandon his family and commit suicide, adapts the words of Hector’s virtuous wife Andromache.’ She concludes that ‘Tecmessa implicitly gains a symbolic recognition as “wife” for which the Iliad’s Briseis futilely longed’ (p. 91).
form of dissent. In fact, the scene between Hector and his wife is not the only scene from the *Iliad* that potentially informs this episode. Given Ajax’s self-presentation as an Achilles figure, Tecmessa’s speech also resonates with the attempts made at persuading Achilles in the *Iliad*. Thus, by stressing her isolation Tecmessa also plays a Phoenix, as she tries to tie the hero into a network of obligations (490ff.). Or, by supplicating Ajax and enjoining him to remember, she recalls a Priam, his father. Or, by recommending to the hero the pleasures of life, she appears as a Briseis.

Most strikingly of all, in her repeated demand for respect, she cites Ajax himself. In addition, it is important to note that it is only when Tecmessa speaks that the audience become aware of the potential Iliadic paradigm of Hector and Andromache, by virtue of which emphasis is again placed on the female response to the hero. Therefore, although Ajax subsequently reasserts his voice and brings this contest of words to an end, it is Tecmessa’s speech that initiates the process of translating Ajax’s dissent for the wider group. The rest of the play explores the social consequences of Iliadic dissent in relation to the Athenian tragic space.

As Ajax enforces his will to silence, those around him are left to talk about the impact on them. It is not only a question of their dependency; the play stages Ajax’s dissent as seen from their perspective. A Briseis joins with Achilles’ Myrmidons to voice discontent about their leader’s
big talking. By doing so, they not only initiate a process of assessing the value of dissent; they also act out that very value themselves by dissenting from their man.

Thus, when Ajax commits suicide the play has not yet run its course, for Sophocles has left a series of questions: the λεωσ (sailors from Salamis) have lost their shepherd, Tecmessa and her child their shield; now Ajax’s body is at the mercy of his enemies. Who will protect them, how, and with what consequences for this play’s examination of dissent form the subject of the next section.

2. SPEAKING BACK IN THE AGÓN

In coming to his senses, Ajax is made to face the shame of his nocturnal activities coming to light. Exposed to the harsh glare of public scrutiny on stage, Ajax resists all attempts by his philoi (the Chorus and Tecmessa) to turn aside his dark thoughts. Instead, he retreats to a deserted beach, where he removes himself from the spectacle by falling on his sword. With this last act Ajax silences himself, but in a way that affirms his lasting defiance of the Greek leaders.

As Ajax falls silent, so does much of the commentary on the play. Ever since Aristotle, indeed, scholars have been impressed by the stature of the Sophoclean hero; but here is one play in which the hero kills himself barely halfway through the action. In its wake Sophocles stages not one but two formal debates, which for most scholars mark an unfortunate lessening in the dramatic tension.

53 They think that they have won him over when he speaks of change (Aj 646–92)—the so-called ‘deception’ speech. For this scene’s pervasive ambiguities, see Ferguson (1970); Goldhill (1986), 189–92; Hesk (2003), 76–95; its misleading rhetoric: Taplin (2003), 128–31; Heath (1987a), 185–90; its resonances with hero cult: Seaford (1994), 392–9.


55 See e.g. Reinhardt (1979), with n. 8 above. M. Lloyd (1992) compares Sophocles favourably to Euripides, because he (Sophocles) ‘avoids formality and incorporates agonés
Indeed, the hero-centric focus of much scholarship has had the effect of dictating the terms with which the *agón* is studied—as a contest between the protagonists, with a concurrent expectation that it ought to resolve the conflict. The present section goes on to suggest that the *agón* may be understood better in line with this chapter’s focus on the responses to the hero and the thematization of dissent. While the two debates arise ostensibly over the question of burial, both soon turn to issues of authority and power, in ways that invite a reassessment of the principles by which Ajax stood in his defiance of the Atreidae. Thus, although the dual *agón* fails ultimately to secure Ajax’s burial, it continues the process towards the reception of the hero in the community.

**You came as king of Sparta (Sophodes, *Ajax* 1040–1162)**

One of the main criticisms of the *agón* in *Ajax* is the judgement that it demeans the tragedy: in the wake of Ajax’s suicide, less impressive figures clash over the great man’s body; Ajax’s eloquent soliloquies are replaced by petty bickering and insults; tragic grandeur yields to modern-sounding debate and point-scoring.\(^56\) Since the discovery of Ajax’s corpse, Teucer has been leading the lamentations over the dead body: the contemplative and respectful repose that has been built up is abruptly shattered by the arrival of Menelaus (1047–54), who comes on stage to deny burial.\(^57\)

\(^{56}\) For criticism of the post-heroic figures of the Atreidae and including Teucer, see Bowra (1944), 38; Stanford (1981), pp. xlv–clvi; Torrance (1965), 279; Gellie (1972), 22–3; Garvie (1998), 216. Taplin (2003), 149 comments: ‘Teucer, though desperately courageous, again cannot lift himself above the low level of dispute.’ While Goldhill (1986), 195 regards Menelaus and, in particular, Agamemnon as ‘far removed from their Homeric counterparts’, this study has shown that Agamemnon’s authoritative attitude is entirely familiar from the *Iliad*.

\(^{57}\) Denial of burial is an extreme form of punishment and potentially transgressive. While there is evidence for it, examples also show the concern to ensure burial: Themistocles’ bones were said to have been brought home and buried in Attica secretly, though he was a traitor (Thuc. 1.138.6); the Athenians themselves claim that they buried the Argive dead (Hdt. 9.27.3); cf. Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.33. See Parker (1983), 45, n. 47. It is a theme that seems to have been of particular interest to Sophocles, if *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus* are anything to judge by.
The new atmosphere is apparent from the beginning of the scene. Immediately on entering, Menelaus sets about berating Teucer in a manner that reflects his scant regard for his opponent and conveys a sense of his own superiority: he doesn’t address Teucer by name, but instead calls out insultingly, ‘You there, I’m telling you ...’ His insulting, base style serves a point: it is an expression of (his conception of) his power and authority over his antagonist. By the very force of his language Menelaus sets out to brook no argument. Indeed, the denial of burial, according to Menelaus, is his decision and the decision of army’s ruler. The clumsy repetition of δοκούντα, the prescribed formula for decision-making in the Athenian assembly, reveals his very different, and dictatorial, perception of the decision-making process: he and his brother—the ruler of the army he presumably refers to—make the decisions in this world. But even here Menelaus fails to deny Teucer a response. On both occasions Teucer replies with a sarcastic rejoiner.

Thus, this opening stichomythic exchange sets the tone for the following, as first Menelaus tries to rule out dissent, and Teucer responds in defence of his half-brother and the importance of speaking back. We may now begin to appreciate Ajax’s earlier complaints against the judgement of arms.

Menelaus follows up these opening manoeuvres by launching into a self-righteous speech that interprets Ajax’s action as insubordination (1067–72):

εἰ γὰρ βλέποντος μὴ δυνήθημεν κρατεῖν,
πάντως θανόντος γὰρ ἀρέσκειν, κἂν μὴ θέλησιν,
χειρὰν παρευθύνοντες. οὐ γὰρ ἔσθε ὁπον

58 οὗτος, σὲ φῶνα, Αἴ. 1047. ἀντον; here clearly intended to be rude as, e.g. in O.T. 532: Stanford (1981), 192.

59 δοκούντα εἶμι, δοκούντα δὲ ὁς κραίνει στρατοῦ, Αἴ. 1050. For the Athenian assembly formula ‘it seemed best’, see ch. 4, n. 45 above and ch. 6, n. 58 below. Hesk (2003), 110 comments: ‘Menelaus is immediately provocative: Teucer must not arrange burial for Ajax’s corpse (1047–8). The Bowman asks him why. Because he and Agamemnon have decided on it, says the king. Here is the unattractive rigidity and inviolability which he and his brother will maintain throughout.’

60 See esp. Teucer’s opening reply: ‘For whose sake have you wasted that speech?’ (τίνος χάριν τοσόθ’ ἄνθλωσας λόγον; Αἴ. 1049), which draws explicit attention to the evaluation of speech.
Why, if we were not able to have power over him when he was alive, then we shall rule him now that he is dead, even if he’s unwilling, directing him with our hands. For, while he was alive, he never wanted to listen to my words. Yet it is typical of a bad man, though only a commoner, to claim the right not to listen to those in authority.

A string of moral platitudes on authority follow, by which means Menelaus emphasizes the importance of maintaining discipline in the face of such insurrection. But, however commendable the generalizing sentiments may be, it is not difficult to observe the personal motivation behind them. Particularly striking is his description of Ajax as ‘a commoner’ (δημότης). One commentator has glossed this remark as a ‘grotesquely insulting description of Ajax’, which ‘leaves us in no doubt that Menelaus is wrong’.61 Whether that is the case or not, the collapse of the world of epic (represented by Ajax) into the world of the everyday audience (the δῆμος writ large) not only challenges Menelaus’ claim—the Iliad had certainly not represented Ajax as anything other than a major hero62—it also invites the audience to think about the issue of status in Athenian democratic culture through the example of Ajax and his half-brother.

The Athenian colouring of this debate is further underlined by Teucer’s reply, and cast in significant terms. In defending Ajax from Menelaus’ accusations of insubordination, Teucer asks (1099–1102):

οὐκ αὐτὸς ἐξέπλευσεν ὡς αὐτοῦ κρατῶν;
ποῦ σὺ στρατηγεῖς τούδε; ποῦ δὲ σοι λέων
ἐξεστ’ ἀνάσασέν ὁν ἀδήμον’ ὡς ἤκουσέν;
Σπάρτης ἀνασὰς ἦλθες, οὐχ ἠμῶν κρατῶν.

Did he not sail out as master of himself? How are you his commander? How is it possible that you rule over the people whom he brought from home? You came as king of Sparta, not as master over us.

61 Garvie (1998), 223, n. 1071–2. Heath (1987a), 200 puts it even more strongly: ‘as if Ajax were some recalcitrant Thersites!’
62 Menelaus’ insult ‘cannot have found favour with an Athenian audience—not just because of its snobbery but because of its lack of “fit” with Ajax’s aristocratic grandeur and Athenian associations’: Hesk (2003), 111.
This barrage of questions immediately challenges Menelaus’ authority in ways that recall the Iliadic Achilles. First, Teucer corrects Menelaus’ assumption of control: he does not possess authority over them (οὐχ ἤμων κρατῶν, 1102), because he is not their king. On the contrary, Ajax was their leader (1101). The direct challenge to the king’s exercise of power resonates with Achilles’ stand against Agamemnon’s use and abuse of authority in the debate that opens the Iliad.

Second, Teucer goes on to claim that Ajax ‘did not go to war for the sake of your wife’ (οὐ γὰρ τῇ σῆς οὖν ἐστρατεύσατο | γυναικός, 1111–12). The emphasis on fighting on account of a woman echoes the Iliadic Achilles directly: in rejecting the embassy, Achilles had railed against the hypocrisy of fighting at Troy over Menelaus’ wife, when his woman, Briseis, had been taken away by Agamemnon.

In section 1 above it was suggested that Ajax has been largely modelled on the Iliadic Achilles in terms of his dissent from the Achaean leaders and relations to the Chorus and Tecmessa; here, Teucer appears to evoke Achilles himself in his own rebuttal of a son of Atreus. Thus, the echoes of the Iliadic Achilles combine to draw the two half-brothers together, as Teucer inherits Ajax’s on-stage persona as a heroic figure.

Equally importantly, Teucer’s reprise of the role of the Iliadic Achilles carries more weight in denying legitimacy to the Atreidæ’s assertion of authority than those previously associated with Ajax’s act of defiance, which was offset by Athena’s staging arrangements. That is particularly true given the contemporary resonance with which Sophocles recasts dissent in Teucer’s mouth. Teucer laces his criticism of Menelaus with a peculiarly Athenian edge: Menelaus lords it over...
Spartans, not over Ajax and his people. The Iliadic precedent of Achilles challenging Agamemnon’s authority here is reworked in the form of Teucer’s defiance of Spartan hegemony. Peter Rose suggests that Ajax’s impiety toward Athena emerges as a ‘model for Teucer’s thinking big in the face of Spartan attacks on free speech and independent action’. Providing a ‘model’ puts it rather too strongly: nevertheless, it is significant that Teucer’s language taps into Athenian anxieties about authority, particularly the very Spartan kind of unquestioned obedience.

In Athens, on the other hand, the relationship between dissent and authority appears to be balanced very differently—at least as far as this tragedy presents the issue at this point. The ἀγών, which by its very structure puts the onus on a contest of voices and dissent from monological expression, here represents the brother and joint-leader of the army singularly failing to assert his word and silence opposition to it. Indeed, Teucer underpins his defence with a forceful critique of Menelaus’ speech act: he will not be cowed by the violence of Menelaus’ language. In like manner to Achilles in the Iliad, Teucer stands up to authority—but here, on the tragic stage, the onus lies especially on what one says and how one says it.

The interest in speech and speaking continues in the stichomythic exchange that succeeds the ἀγών. Introducing Teucer’s low rank as an archer, Menelaus sarcastically remarks on his opponent’s boldness of...
speech, which prompts the response: ‘it is possible to think big with justice’ (ἐίν τῷ δικαίῳ γὰρ μέγ’ ἔξεστιν φρονεῖν, 1125). Where previously Ajax’s ‘big talking’ had been configured as dangerous and inappropriate, now this kind of speaking back is being recast in a more positive light, as legitimate defiance of Menelaus’ attempts to pull rank. In the end, after his final word and order meets with a sound rejection, Menelaus resorts to a fable (1142–9):

Though a man, bold in his tongue, urge sailors to sail during a storm. But you wouldn’t have heard a peep from him when he was in the storm’s grip, he was hidden under his cloak, letting the sailors walk over him at will. So too with you and your loud mouth: a mighty storm blowing up from some small cloud will put a stop to all your shouting.

The popularity of the ‘ship of state’ allegory in political or quasi-political discourse demonstrates Menelaus’ last attempt to reassert control over his antagonist and, in particular, to suppress a response. But,
the speech act he chooses, with its barely concealed message, suggests his lack of control. In fact, Teucer replies with a fable of his own that parades the artificiality of this kind of speech act: ‘Or am I speaking in riddles?’ (μῶν ἡνιχάμην, 1158). The low character with the bold tongue not only sees off his opponent but also exposes the authoritative strategies inherent in that man’s language. The ἀγών, along with the stichomythia that follows it, is absolutely fundamental to the drama: it privileges speaking back to power and initiates a process of rethinking Ajax’s own dissent.

The first ἀγών takes place, not so much over the issue of burial as is demanded by the strict narrative context, but over the general issues of authority and language. Menelaus’ sententious moralizing is countered by Teucer’s ideological distinction between a Spartan-like authority and a legitimate resistance to it, which begins the process of reassessing the value of dissent and recouping it in terms of Athenian, democratic, practice.


74 Winnington-Ingram (1980), 64, n. 21 labels Teucer’s attempted use of the fable as ‘characteristically incompetent’. But see Heath (1987a), 200, who notes that Teucer is fully aware of the limitations of the fable by his ‘deliberately scornful tone’; and Hesk (2003), 116, who suggests that, since Menelaus’ intended meaning is so obvious, ‘Teucer chooses an allegorical rejoinder which is not really an allegory at all, but a mockingly transparent parody of Menelaus’ unsophisticated riddle’.

75 Menelaus’ accusation that the man (meaning Teucer) speaks with a ‘bold tongue’ (γλώσσῃ θρασύς, 1142) is suggestive of the kind of frank speaking that tragedy puts on stage. A related compound is used by the Chorus of Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, in their assessment of Clytemnestra’s justification for killing her husband: ‘We are amazed at your speech, how bold-tongued you are!’ (θαυμαζόμενοι των γλώσσας, ὡς θρασύτατος, Aesch. Ag. 1399). Euripides uses the same collocation for Agamemnon’s description of Polymestor (Hec. 1286—see Ch. 6, n. 129 below) and Tyndareus’ description of Orestes: ‘Since you are brazening it out, not curbing your tongue...’ (ἔπει διὰ θρασύνης κοιχ ὑποστέλλῃ λόγῳ, Eur. Or. 607). On frank speaking in Orestes, see Barker 2011.

76 With his final words Menelaus makes explicit the threat of force that has underpinned his speech: ‘I’m off, since it would be shameful if someone should find out that I’ve been chastising with words when I could use force’ (ἀπειμα· καὶ γὰρ αἰσχρόν, εἰ πάθοιτο τίς | λόγοις κολάζειν ὃ βιαζόσθαι πάρα, 1159–60). Again, Teucer makes a suitable rejoinder that not only appropriates and trumps Menelaus’ expression—‘indeed, it’s most shameful for me,’ (κάμοι γὰρ αἰώχισεν, 1161)—but also evaluates his language: it’s shameful ‘to listen to a vain man speaking foolish words’ (κλέειν | ἀνδρὸς ματαίου φλαίρ | ἐπη μυθουμένου, 1161–2).
Don’t you remember . . .? (Sophocles, Ajax 1223–1315)

Menelaus eventually departs with a last insult ringing in his ears: ‘Be off with you then, since for me too it is utterly shameful to listen to a vain man spouting foolish words’ (ἀφερπὲ νυν χάμοι γὰρ αἰσχιστον κλέειν | ἀνδρός ματαίου φλαιρ ἐπὶ μυθομένου, 1159–60). The outcome of this first agón is clear: the Achilles-like Teucer sees off Menelaus in the guise of Iliadic Agamemnon, concerned above all with obedience to his word. Yet, a little over sixty lines later, with only a short choral lyric dividing the action, Agamemnon himself arrives on stage. There follows a virtual replay of the first agón, as another son of Atreus again tries to harangue Teucer into silence—and is again met by fierce resistance. But the repetition does not amount to structural frigidity, as it has appeared to some scholars. For one thing, the appearance of Agamemnon so soon after Menelaus stages a visual symbol of the Atreidae’s attempted domination of the arena of speech. Furthermore, this second agón represents a significant escalation in the crisis, as both speakers more directly consider Ajax’s past record, with repercussions for thinking about his dissent.

In the wake of Menelaus’ departure, the Chorus announce that ‘there will be an agón of great strife,’ (ἔσται μεγάλης ἔριδος τις ἀγώνι, 1163), which both anticipates more trouble and formally indicates the contest of words as an agón. There is nothing formal about its setting up, however (1223–8):

ΤΕΥΚΡΟΣ καὶ μὴν ἔδων ἔσπευσα τὸν στρατηλάτην Ἀγαμέμνονι ἡμῖν δεύτο τὸν ὀρμώμενον- δήλος δὲ μούστι σκαίον ἐκλύσει στόμα.

ΑΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ σὲ δὴ τὰ δεινὰ ῥάματ᾽ ἀγγέλλουσι μοι τλήναι καθ᾽ ἡμῶν ὄσσι ἀνοιμοκτεὶ χανεῖν. σὲ τοι, τὸν ἐκ τῆς αἰχμαλωτίδος λέγω.

TEUCER I made haste since I saw the general, Agamemnon, rushing on his way here to us. And it is clear to me that he is about to unloose his foolish tongue.

AGAMEMNON You they tell me have dared to open your mouth wide with such impunity to utter terrible words against us. You, I mean, the son of the captive-woman.
Teucer only just manages to make it back on stage to announce Agamemnon’s entry before Agamemnon launches directly into a long tirade, with not even a passing word of introduction or address. Thus, in spite of the fact that the same issues seem to return—Teucer objects to his opponent’s speech, while Agamemnon is derisive of his opponent’s status—the opening skirmishes that introduce this second agôn reveal a considerable upping of the ante. In particular, both antagonists show a concern about proper speaking: Teucer anticipates Agamemnon’s vitriol by remarking that the king comes with the intention of loosening his foolish tongue; Agamemnon, on the other hand, immediately shows contempt for his opponent by describing Teucer’s open mouth and the terrible words it utters. Agamemnon emphasizes too Teucer’s lowborn status, which, to his mind, disqualifies his antagonist from speaking. It is the nature and meaning of that open mouth that this latest agôn, and the play more generally, explores.

Initially it appears that Agamemnon has been tipped off by his brother, since he responds directly to one of Teucer’s arguments discussed above: ‘[you declared that] Ajax sailed—so you say—as his own leader’ (ἀλλ’ αὐτὸς ἄρχων, ὡς αὐ φῆς, Αἴας ἔπλει, 1234). But Agamemnon extends the point to have Teucer claim that the Atreidae had not come as rulers either over Ajax’s men or the Achaeans as a whole (1229–34). Agamemnon’s exaggeration of his opponent’s case reveals his anxiety over this issue and his concern to maintain his grip on authority.

That serves as an introduction to the most extended discussion yet of the contest of arms (1239–50). According to Agamemnon, the contest they set up over the arms of Achilles is likely to prove bitter if Teucer is

77 Agamemnon uses a word, χαβεῖν, from the Aristophanic stage: Ar. Ach. 108, 109, 878; cf. Vesp. 324. As Hesk (2003), 120 puts it: ‘status and speaking rights are immediately at issue.’

78 On the problematic status of bastards in fifth-century Athens, see Ogden (1996). On the marginality of Teucer’s illegitimacy: Ebbot (2003; 2005). Hesk (2003), 121 draws attention to how ‘Teucer’s “deconstruction” of Agamemnon’s “Greekness” and “nobility” speaks to (and perhaps questions) the exclusionist and elitist tendencies of Athenian civic identity in particular and Hellenic chauvinism in general’. Similar issues such as these are again ‘up for grabs’ when Euripides’ Agamemnon establishes an agôn at the end of Hecuba. See Ch. 6, sec. 2 below.
allowed to continue to defame them.\textsuperscript{79} It is notable that Agamemnon uses the first-person plural to denote the establishment of the contest, and that he associates Teucer’s bad words with not yielding to the decision of the majority. In this way Agamemnon represents himself as the upholder of civic justice and impartial judgement, while Teucer’s dissent is aligned with illegitimate abuse and assaults from ambushes—very unheroic behaviour.\textsuperscript{80} Indeed, as Agamemnon puts it, ‘from such turns as these, there could never be the institution of any law, if we are to thrust aside those who have justly won and bring to the front those who were behind’.\textsuperscript{81} Here Agamemnon voices a fundamental anxiety of any society that has communal decision-making at its core. For contests to benefit the group as a whole, they must be predicated on the necessity and desirability of reaching a consensus that all parties can accept; dissent cannot be allowed to go on outside the institutional arena. According to Agamemnon, then, the problem with the defiance of Ajax and now Teucer stems from their inability to accept or, at least, abide by democratic based rule. Since Ajax had submitted to the arbitration of the group as a whole, he ought to have accepted the majority decision (in favour of Odysseus); similarly, Teucer risks committing the same offence by refusing to obey the present dictate that denies burial.

Thus Agamemnon’s argument presents an important challenge to this book’s general thesis that representations of debate reproduce dissent from authority. As Agamemnon’s concerns make plain, dissent is not always a good thing, even, or especially, in political cultures—such as democracy—where decisions (ideally at least) are taken on a majority basis with the good of the majority in mind. The degree and kind of dissent makes a difference: it is, for example, of vital importance that dissent does not continue outside the civic institutional framework.

Yet the figure who articulates these concerns is Agamemnon. His intervention has history: this is the figure from the \textit{Iliad} who had gone to some lengths to suppress dissent. And here he is doing the

\textsuperscript{79} \textgreek{πικραῖς ἔσογμεν τῶν Ἀχιλλείων ὀπλῶν | ἀγώνας Ἀργείασι κηροῦσιν τότε, | εἰ πανταχοῦ φανοῦμεθ' ἐκ Τειύκρον κακοί, Aj. 1239–41.}

\textsuperscript{80} The exception that proves the rule is Odysseus, both in his Odyssean but also \textit{Iliadic} guise (cf. \textit{Iliad} 10).

\textsuperscript{81} \textgreek{ἐκ τῶνδε μέντοι τῶν τρόπων οὐκ ἂν ποτε | κατάστασις γένοιτ' ἂν οὐδενὸς νόμον, | εἰ τοῖς δίκῃ νικώντας ἔξωθήσομεν | καὶ τοὺς ὅπισθεν ἐξ τὸ πρόσθεν ἄξιομεν, Aj. 1246–9.}
same thing: his concerns about dissent are expressed with a view to silencing opposition. There are further doubts about the way Agamemnon applies his argument about dissent. On the one hand, he elides the judgement of arms with the decision to deny burial. While the former judgement may indeed have been carried out by the group for the benefit of the group, there is no reason to suppose that the same would be true of the issue of burial: Menelaus has already made it plain that it was his decision, and the decision of his brother, alone. Agamemnon’s argument, which could relate to the judgement at arms, is less applicable for thinking about Teucer’s opposition.

On the other hand, Agamemnon uses the general worries about dissent in an attempt to silence Teucer. First, he attacks the fact that Teucer is even contemplating speaking back to him and his brother: ‘By speaking with a free tongue,’ he claims, Teucer ‘commits hubris’ (ιβρίζεις κᾶξελευθεροστομεῖς, 1258). This equation of frank talking with hubris shocks, particularly in an Athenian context in which frank speaking was upheld as an ideal. Indeed, Agamemnon’s unique compound verb, ἕξελευθεροστομεῖν, resonates with highly charged moments in other tragedies, when frank speech is under threat. He backs up this attack with an even more outrageous claim: that he won’t be able to understand Teucer’s reply in any case since that man is a barbarian and doesn’t

82 See n. 59 above, with accompanying text. It should be noted again that Sophocles significantly has avoided representing the contest of arms. As a result, ‘the audience can only wonder whether the vote was free of “sleaze”: Hesk (2003), 123. Hesk goes on to suggest that, ‘if the majority of judges genuinely voted in favour of Odysseus, then surely Agamemnon is right to point out that majority verdicts must be accepted?’ (his italics). That is to say, Agamemnon’s arguments do have force and ‘should make us uneasy’. On the other hand, it is difficult to ignore Agamemnon’s personal stake in this argument.

83 Aeschylus uses the compound twice, on both occasions to describe the frank speech of a sympathetic character. In the Suppliants, the king Pelasgus sends the Egyptian herald away with the words: ‘You’ve heard the truth from free-spoken lips’ (σαφῆ δ’ ἄκοινες ἔξελευθεροστόμου, Aesch. Supp. 948); in Prometheus Bound, the Chorus tell the hero: ‘You give too much freedom to your tongue’ (ἄγαν δ’ ἐλευθεροστομεῖς, Aesch. PV 180). While both occasions demonstrate an anxiety over frank speaking (in both, violence will ensue), the general impression is positive, particularly since the characters speaking so frankly occupy the sympathetic focus. The same is not true, however, in the one instance in Euripides: his Hermione draws attention to her grandiose wealth on the basis of which she asserts her right to speak freely (ἄσοι ἐλευθεροστομεῖν, Eur. Andr. 153). Sophocles uses the collocation twice, at El. 1256 and OT 706.
speak Greek (1262–4)84 Here, the proponent of civic decision-making is unmasked as a blustering stage tyrant, seeking to deny his opponent the right of reply. The strongest assertion of the problem of dissent turns out to be the clearest indication that dissent is needed.85

Agamemnon speaks to enforce his will and silence opposition; but he fails to circumvent the formal structure of the tragic agôn, which duly supplies a response through the figure of Teucer (1273–9). In turn, Teucer poses a string of questions that not only sets a challenge to Agamemnon but also threatens to open up the debate which Agamemnon had tried to close down. ‘Do you no longer remember?’ (οὐ μνημονεύεις οὐκέτ’ οὔδέν, 1273), Teucer asks—before describing a set of circumstances when Ajax proved his worth: when the Achaeans were shut in behind their walls, the ships were alight, and Hector stood above the trenches.86 The issue of remembering Ajax is in itself no trivial matter. From the very first scene of this play Ajax’s assault on the Achaean leaders has won almost universal condemnation and sullied his reputation to such an extent that he killed himself rather than remain alive and face the shame. Now Teucer invites the audience to look beyond the narrow confines of this play to recall his previous great deeds on behalf of the community. But what Agamemnon and the audience are being invited to remember is also significant. The picture of Ajax

84 ‘The pretence that Teucer does not speak intelligible Greek brings the speech to its offensive end’: Garvie (1998), 239, nn. 1262–3. Stanford (1981), 213, nn. 1262–3, is so disturbed by Agamemnon’s claim that he finds it ‘hard to believe that 1263 is not an explanatory Interpolation . . . [C]ould he possibly say that Teucer, born and bred in Greece, and his comrade in arms for nine years, spoke a foreign language?’ This explanation neglects the way in which the tragic agôn draws material from outside its immediate context, including the world of the audience and contemporary anxieties regarding who can speak, into its contested arena. On the other hand, we should also not overlook Agamemnon’s rhetorical strategy: like his brother before him, he tries to forestall any response. Stanford touches upon this rationale when he cites the interpretation of οὐκ ἔπαινω as ‘I do not give a hearing to’. This, as Stanford notes in passing, is suggestive of a law court: Agamemnon is attempting to disqualify Teucer from speaking.

85 Agamemnon attracts Heath’s censure for not taking up the issue of burial. But Agamemnon’s ‘irrelevant maxims’ (Heath (1987a), 201) are very relevant for thinking about how to regard Ajax and what is at stake for an Athenian audience to bury him with ritual honours.

86 ἴνικα | ἔρκεων ποι’ ὑμᾶς ἐντὸς ἐγκεκλημένους, | ἢδη τὸ μηδὲν ὄντας ἐν τρωπῇ δορός, | ἔρρισαν ἐκθέαν μοῦνός, ἀμβὲ μὲν νεών | ἄκρασιν ἢδη ναυτικοὶς <θ’> ἔδωλοις | πυρὸς φλέγουντος, ἐς δὲ ναυτικὰ σκάφη | πηδῶντος ἀράδην Ἐκτορος τάφρων ὑπερ, 

Ag., 1273–9.
fighting off the Trojan fire from the ships, or standing up as the only man ready to face the Trojan hero, derives from the *Iliad*. Teucer’s representation of Ajax’s past record, then, relies on and implicates the audience’s extra-dramatic knowledge, which is crucial for the dynamic of the *agōn*. Agamemnon’s strictures against dissent may be acutely pertinent to a system of government—like Athenian democracy—that bases its governance on communal decision-making; but Teucer’s exploitation of the audience’s familiarity with the *Iliad* obstructs any complacent acceptance of that principle and, instead, prompts each audience member to assess the validity of Ajax’s individual case in relation to their recollection of the epic representation. In ways such as these, the tragic *agōn* transfers responsibility for sanctioning and policing dissent from the tragic actors to individual members of the audience.

In the conclusion to his discussion of the *agōn*, Malcolm Heath writes: ‘Teucer’s overwhelming victory in the verbal contest is entirely satisfying to our sense of antipathy.’ Teucer’s frank speaking—the gaping open mouth that ‘utters terrible words’ (*τὰ δὲ εἰσὶν ῥήματα*, 1226), according to Agamemnon—contributes fully to the dramatic impact of the play. But more is at stake than emotional response or theatrical appeal alone, since that same gaping open mouth has been ideologically marked in the play. At one level, in his rebuttal of the twin kings of Sparta, Teucer demonstrates the necessity and desirability of dissent as a democratic prerogative. He even rehabilitates Ajax in terms that make the issue of his dissent—if not its manifestation—look both seemly and valuable after all. At another level, the *agōn* reproduces a contest of voices, which puts responsibility for judgement on individual members of the audience. This experience is not just a reflection of the audience’s ‘real-life’ familiarity with debate in the law court or assembly; the tragic

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88 Heath (1987a), 208. Hesk (2003), 104–23 also emphasizes the dramatic appeal of Teucer’s resistance to the Atreidae, but tempers that praise with the importance of the *polis*, which has been raised by both Menelaus and Agamemnon. Murnaghan (1987b), 188 sees Teucer’s *agōn* with the Atreidae as his own *aristeid*.
agôn stimulates the proper management of dissent precisely because it does not present an end to the crisis, as the final section will explore in more detail.

3. MEDIATING CRISIS

Contrary to much scholarship on the play, the dual agôn has proven critical not only for a dramatic appreciation of Ajax’s tragedy but also for thinking about the issues for which the great man had stood. The beginning of the play had—explicitly, under Athena’s guiding hand—staged Ajax’s refusal to accept the judgement of arms in a brutally harsh light; events succeeding that opening offered a more favourable view of Ajax from the perspective of his men and wife; but it is not until the agôn that the audience is invited to think of Ajax’s dissent in a more socially constructive way. This results from both the bullying tactics of the Atreidae, who equate their judgement with that of the group at large, who view their antagonist as socially inferior without even the right to speak, and who portray alternative views as acts of insubordination, and Teucer’s Ajax-inspired resistance to such overt expressions of authority.

Yet, it is important to note that the agôn marks only the beginning of the process of re-evaluating Ajax. On the one hand, the Atreidae, as leaders of the army, clearly possess the authority and power to deny burial. On the other hand, Teucer has shown, with the forcefulness of his language, that he will not be cowed into submission. The possibility of recourse to physical means of preventing burial remains; but that option is complicated by the ritual dynamics of the scene.89 Thus the contest of words looks as though it may propel the drama headlong into physical conflict. In addition to these concerns, there still remains the question of Athena’s ‘hateful’ role in staging Ajax’s shame.90

89 As Rehm (2002), 133–4, 137 has explained, the mere presence of Teucer, together with Ajax’s wife and child, creates a sacred space around the body. For the creation of a ritualized space around the body, see Burian (1972), esp. 152–3; Easterling (1988), 93–5; Henrichs (1993), 170–3.

90 Athena as ‘harsh’ is the scholiast’s description, see n. 27 above.
Perhaps this is why, far from resolving the crisis, the agon has led only to impasse. The Chorus not only fail to endorse Teucer’s rebuttal of Agamemnon; even more remarkably, they turn to Odysseus (1316–17):

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άναξ Ὄδυσσει, καιρὸν ἴσθι ἐληλυθώς,
εἰ μὴ ἐξωγένως, ἄλλα συλλύσαι πάρει.
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Lord Odysseus, know that you have come at the critical moment, if you are here not to join in with the quarrel, but to join in untying it!

The Chorus’ invitation to Odysseus to intercede is remarkable for several reasons. First, his return to the stage comes as a complete surprise. Stichomythia often follows an agon, but it is highly irregular for a third party to enter while one of the agon speakers (in this case Teucer) is sidelined. Besides, the Chorus announce Odysseus’ entrance when they might have been expected to comment on Teucer’s response to Agamemnon; there has been no suggestion that Odysseus would make a reappearance, and the switch from the two agon speakers to a third party is sudden, with few dramatic precedents. Second, it is—an anyway—something of a shock for the Chorus to turn to Odysseus in this way. Up to this point in the play the Chorus have uniformly and consistently condemned Odysseus as wily, deceptive and self-seeking—in fact, as Odysseus is most often represented in tragedy and as we would have expected, given the Chorus’ close association with Ajax. Yet here the Chorus address their appeal deferentially to ‘Lord Odysseus’, in the hope that he comes with the intention of solving the crisis (συλλύσαι, 1317); the passing mention of the alternative—if you haven’t come to join in the quarrel (εἰ μὴ ἐξωγένως)—draws attention to exactly the sort of expectation borne of the Chorus’ earlier response to

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91 On this and the gist of the proceeding argument, see Barker (2004b). The present study represents a more fully developed discussion of that argument.

92 ‘Mais la stichomythie attendue ne se présente pas telle quelle: à peine Teucros a-t-il achevé son discours, Ulysse arrive.’ The scene then moves towards ‘un débat de ton amical’: Duchemin (1968), 57.

93 There is one Sophoclean parallel: the sudden appearance, again of Odysseus, in the Philoctetes 1293. In that play there is no doubt that his intervention is shocking and sinister.

94 This is their first mention of Odysseus, after having depicted him in his usual (tragic) guise ‘making up such slanderous words’ (τοιούθεν λόγους ψιθύρους πλάσσων, 148).
Odysseus. Their change of attitude presents something of a conundrum.  

This last section will attempt to explain that conundrum by reassessing the question and role of the Chorus. As mentioned above, the Chorus are introduced in terms that relate to an epic model of a Homeric people dependent on their leader. It will be shown that this model is threatened and irrevocably fractured by Ajax’s suicide, since the Chorus are left without their leader. The rest of the play explores their gradual re-emergence as a group capable of independent thinking and assessment, as testified by their involvement in the contests of words. Their final turn to Odysseus makes sense only from the perspective of Sophocles’ audience, who gained a privileged insight into this Odysseus at the beginning of the drama.

Now it is a concern for me to dance

Section I suggested that the identity of the Chorus in this play coincides approximately with the depiction of the Iliadic group, the *laos*. The Chorus’ entry song demonstrates their commitment to, and dependence on, Ajax, their leader. This relationship, if nothing else, should make one pause before dismissing the second half of the play as an irrelevance or lacking in drama: Ajax may be dead, but Sophocles has left us with the question of what will happen to the group. Its dependence on Ajax is shown in dramatic terms when, remarkably for a Chorus, they leave the stage in search of their leader and return divided as the body is found. Ajax’s suicide puts at stake his group’s very existence.

95 As Stanford (1981), 220, n. 1316 remarks, ‘the change of mood has not been motivated in the play’. Garvie (1998), 243, nn. 1316–17 agrees that the Chorus’ trust in Odysseus ‘is scarcely consistent with the hostile view of Odysseus shared by all Ajax’ friends throughout the play’. Considering it ‘probably fruitless to try to explain the change of attitude in terms of the chorus’ psychology’, he suggests that ‘Sophocles merely uses the chorus-leader to introduce the sudden change of mood to prepare the audience for what in fact is going to happen’.

96 J. Davidson (1975), 168 suggests that the Chorus are forced to revise their judgement ‘when, at his second appearance, Odysseus assumes the rôle foreshadowed in the prologue’.

97 On this decisive break, see Taplin (2003), 42, 148–50. Cf. Jebb (1896), 134, nn. 866–78; Stanford (1981), 165, nn. 815 ff; Garvie (1998), 195–6, nn. 719–865. Such is its dependence that when Ajax is found dead, the Chorus’ thoughts turn to the *nostos* (l. 896) that collectively they have now lost. As mentioned above (Act III, intro., 47),
In a recent analysis of Sophoclean language and community, Felix Budelmann has shown the interest in the group many of his plays display, and suggests that Sophoclean Choruses invariably find salvation at the end of the drama. The Chorus in Ajax are no different: by expanding their horizons beyond the individual on whom they depend, the Chorus become less isolated as the play progresses and gain security by the time the play draws to a close.  

More can be said, however, about the form which that horizon takes. As we have seen, the Chorus’ first words are ‘son of Telamon’ (Τελάμων ἥλην, 134), which clearly mark their dependence on one man. From their next ode, however, the Chorus start on a process of discovery. In this first stasimon they address not Ajax but ‘glorious Salamis’ (ὁ κλειν ὁ Σαλαμῖς, 596), which indicates not only a common place of origin, but also one with close associations to Athens. In the third stasimon the Chorus’ song charts a course from the plains of Troy to the Attic coast (1185–1222), which not only maps out a (prospective) return from Troy, but also symbolically represents this play’s appropriation of epic subject-matter. By evoking the events at Troy in the context of bringing them home to Athens, the group on stage assume the role of a Chorus in tragedy, positioning the play in and against an epic backdrop.

The second stasimon is particularly interesting in this light. Ajax has just given the impression to Tecmessa and the Chorus that he has put aside suicidal thoughts: the Chorus respond joyously, and express their desire to dance. This example has been taken to show that ‘the sailors simultaneously realize their dramatic character as Salaminians as well as their choral identity as performers of the choral dance’. But, as far as this case is concerned at any rate, the Chorus’ reaction points to a gap between the dramatized ‘reality’ on the one hand and the Chorus’ something similar happens with the Chorus of Aeschylus’ Agamemnon at the point of his death.

99 There might even be a recollection of the famous Delphic ‘wooden-walls’ prophecy to the Athenians: ὁ θεῖ Σαλαμῖς, Hdt. 7.142.2. Along these lines, Stanford (1981), 136, nn. 596–9, labels the Chorus’ reference anachronistic, since Salamis could not really be called famous until after the Persian defeat. Garvie (1998), 181, nn. 596–8, on the other hand, sees no such anachronism.
100 ‘Now it is a concern for me to dance’ (νῦν γὰρ ἔμοι μέλει χορεύσαι, Aj. 701).
understanding of it on the other, which, in fact, makes the existence of the group seem even more precarious. The Chorus are dancing, but they are dancing *mistakenly* for their leader.102

The Chorus’ shift in identity comes to a head in the dual *agon*. Before the first *agon* takes place, the Chorus align themselves unswervingly, and completely, alongside Teucer in such a way that he appears to replace Ajax as the focus for the Chorus’ affiliations (1040–3). In their first speech-dividing couplet, the Chorus offer a brief, if pointed, critique of Menelaus’ speech by drawing a distinction between his ‘wise thoughts’ (γνώμαι σοφαί, 1091) and his application of these worthy-sounding principles to the present case. Indeed, the Chorus implore Menelaus not to be *hubristic* (μὴ...δῆμος γένη, 1092). It is the Chorus, then, who raise the possibility that the Atreidae are the ones guilty of hubris by insisting on denying burial.103

But as the debate advances, so the Chorus appear to shift position. Thus, the Chorus express dissatisfaction with Teucer’s riposte to Menelaus, commenting that, though Teucer’s words are just, harsh words bite (τὰ σκληρὰ γὰρ τοι, κἂν ὑπέρδική, δάκνει, 1119). There is no suggestion that Teucer is wrong to stand up to Menelaus; but neither do the Chorus’ words represent a ringing endorsement.104 Teucer is right to defend Ajax, but the very means by which he sets out that defence results in impasse, since positions on either side become entrenched, and the characters—and this includes Teucer—fail to find a way out of the crisis.

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102 This will manifest itself dramatically when the Chorus depart the stage in search of their leader. Taplin (2003), 42 notes only one other parallel for leaving the stage empty: when the Furies leave in pursuit of Orestes, which heralds a remarkable change of scene (Aesch. *Eum.* 230–1).

103 This strong assessment of Menelaus’ speech raises an important question: what do the *gods* think? Moreover, it challenges Menelaus’ portrayal of Ajax as an insubordinate who behaved in a hubristic fashion towards his betters. Hesk (2003), 112 comments that, while these sentiments may evoke Athenian obedience to the laws, ‘Menelaus still revolts us because of his *application* of these principles of discipline to the particular case of Ajax and his refusal to grant a burial’ (his italics).

104 Segal (1981), 440, n. 133 understands the Chorus’ comment as criticism of Menelaus’ attack on Teucer. This would still leave the problem that it says nothing positive about Teucer’s speech. Jebb (1896), 165, nn. 1091f. draws a distinction between the Chorus’ dramatic function and their dramatic character: ‘The dramatic function of a Chorus required that these Salaminian sailors, while loyal to Ajax, should recognise the sound elements in the speech which they have heard.’
This is particularly true when the Chorus anticipate still more conflict in the wake of Teucer’s success in seeing off Menelaus. At the end of the first debate the Chorus comment: ‘There will be a contest of great strife: Teucer, as fast as you can, hurry and see to a shallow grave for him, where he will possess a dank tomb, a memorial for always for men.’

Such an explicit indication of a contest of words is striking in Sophocles, it being the only example of its kind in the extant corpus. For the first time we see the Chorus taking a stand and gaining a degree of control over the situation: sending Teucer off to find some ‘shallow grave’ for Ajax’s body, they set in motion the crucial process of honouring Ajax.

Furthermore, in reply to Agamemnon’s speech in the second agon, the Chorus appeal to both speakers (ὑμῖν ἀμφότερον, 1264–5)—Agamemnon and Teucer—to be moderate. The Chorus not only show themselves fully aware of the limitations of such a contest of words; they also begin to acquire a different identity.

In contrast to the parodos, where they felt at the mercy of rumours and the persuasive tongue of Odysseus, here the Chorus weigh up the speeches and offer a balanced appraisal of the debate, while remaining fully supportive of Ajax’s burial, shifting from being the laos dependent on their leader to being a Chorus with a degree of independence from any character. Furthermore, this new role comes about in the democratic speech-environment of the agon. The fact that this agon, at least, does not lead to resolution is precisely the point.

Teucer’s rebuttal of Agamemnon decisively ends the agon. But the audience is not given decisive guidance for interpreting it. The actors’...
bickering has led to an impasse, as the Chorus correctly judge. Instead, the Chorus now turn to a new speaker and thus pave the way for a route out of the crisis, for this third-party will indeed negotiate the burial of Ajax. By entering the ἀγών, the Chorus start out on a path to a more secure future.109

Yet it still remains to be seen why the Chorus turn to Odysseus, the slandering demagogue and their bitterest enemy, to negotiate a way out of the impasse.

It is to you, Lord Odysseus, we turn

So far we have seen the progress of the group on stage, from being a λαός dependent on their leader to a Chorus performing as commentators on the action. A strong indication of that shift to a more active role is the Chorus’ refusal to endorse fully Teucer’s harsh words against the Atreidae and their invitation to a third party to intervene. Yet that third party turns out to be the hated Odysseus. It is not as if the Chorus have previously displayed a different attitude from their leader regarding Odysseus. In their entry song, the Chorus express their suspicion of and hatred for Odysseus as ‘the one who fabricates whispering words’ (τοιούτους λόγους ψιθύρους πλάσσων, 148), ‘he who arrogantly mocks’ (καθυβρίζων, 153), ‘he who is of the forsaken race of Sisyphus’ (χῶ τάς ἀσώτων Σισυφίδαν γενεάς, 189). So too, in the immediate aftermath of Ajax’s death, the Chorus’ thoughts turn to Odysseus, who—they imagine—‘no doubt grows insolent in his black heart, the much-enduring man, and laughs with much laughter at these maddened pains, alas alas, and with him the two kings,

109 For the Chorus finding salvation by the end of the play, see Budelmann (2000). Many scholars have understood that salvation in terms of ritual: Burian (1972); Easterling (1988); Henrichs (1993); Seaford (1994), 392–405; Rehm (2002), 133–8. Observing the importance of the Chorus’ description as ‘sons of Erechtheus’ (l. 202) and Salaminian sailors (with their associations with Athens, ll. 859–60), Hesk (2003), 49 notes that they ‘are closer than most tragic choruses to the Athenian démos in terms of identity’ (his italics). He also observes that they are neither a ‘fundamentally degraded image . . . of the Athenian démos’ (Rose (1995), 70–1) nor ‘ideal’ Athenian citizens (Gardiner (1987), 74–8); but his conclusion that ‘they exhibit a mixture of positive and negative traits’ (p. 50) overlooks the movement of the Chorus as they, along with the spectators watching this play, experience the drama. It is not simply the case that the play ‘dramatises Ajax’s journey towards cult-heroic status’ (Hesk (2003), 141): it also enacts through the Chorus the audience’s progress towards recognition and acceptance of that status.
the sons of Atreus, when they hear him’. Laughter is Ajax’s great fear and a primary motivation for his ultimate decision to kill himself: at this point in the play, at any rate, the Chorus appear to confirm that fear and imagine Odysseus as the figure most likely in his hubris to find Ajax’s fate agreeable. As late as their discovery of Ajax’s body, therefore, the Chorus are still blaming Odysseus. Yet, after the agon, it is Odysseus to whom the Chorus turn, a change which appears unmotivated by the standards of consistent characterization.

Odysseus’ response to the Chorus may help shed light on their about-face. Addressing the Chorus as ‘men’, Odysseus relates that he ‘heard the sons of Atreus shouting over this brave corpse’ (βοήν Ἀτρειδῶν τῶν ἐπ’ ἀλκί μοι νεκρῶ, 1319). It is striking that Odysseus describes Ajax’s corpse as ‘valiant’, a Homeric adjective which resonates strongly with Ajax’s past conduct in the Iliad. At the same time, he explains his on-stage presence as a response to the war cry of the sons of Atreus, which also strikes a Homeric note, but one more suited to the battleground than the arena of debate. It already seems that Odysseus will offer a new way forward out of the agon.

Less striking, but equally significant, is Odysseus’ address of the Chorus as ‘men’ (ἀνδρές, 1318). This form of address is not only ‘courteous’ and indicates Odysseus’ ‘conciliatory temper’; it also marks a noteworthy change in status for the Chorus. In instances prior to the agon, the Chorus are addressed according to their status as Ajax’s people; it is only in the agon that the Chorus are called simply ἀνδρές.
Speaking back in Sophocles’ Ajax

(1093), the title Odysseus uses here. Moreover, while ἄνδρες may be simply rendered as ‘men’, it also often has the connotations of ‘citizens’. While Teucer is the first to intimate a new path for the Chorus, when he addresses them as ‘men’ in the agon, it is Odysseus’ use of this form of address that acknowledges their right to judge—an ability the Chorus have been learning in the agon.

Thus, even with his initial response Odysseus bears out the Chorus’ faith in him and answers them as citizens. That Odysseus responds in this manner should come as no surprise for the audience, since they have already seen him in action. Indeed, Sophocles has gone to some lengths in order to establish Odysseus as a sympathetic figure from the very beginning of the play. Once Ajax leaves the stage to return to the slaughter within, Athena turns to Odysseus to draw the moral: ‘Do you see’, she asserts, ‘the magnitude of the power of the gods?’ (ὦ δῶς τὴν θεοῖν ἱχνίν ὅση; 118). Scholars find Athena’s tone here harsh, and the lesson harsher. But, significantly, rather than taking the opportunity to gloat at his enemy’s misfortune, Odysseus draws a very different lesson (121–6). He reflects on his own situation and expresses pity for his enemy. This ability—to witness the spectacle of man fallen from grace and reflect on the lessons that has for the human condition—is

messenger similarly equivocates between two epithets, glossing ‘men’ with the defining marker ‘friends’ (ἄνδρες φίλοι, 719), as he introduces word that Ajax’s life is threatened.

The messenger’s more equal address of ‘men, friends’ suggests they both belong to the same group, both dependent on Ajax.

Other usages in Sophocles suggest a coherent pattern, in which the Chorus—with varying degrees of explicitness—are connected to a citizen-body. There are four other occasions when Sophocles use the vocative ‘men’ (ἄνδρες). On two occasions ‘men’ is glossed by ‘citizens’ (πολίται) to clarify the Chorus’ citizen status: OT 512; OC 1579. Cf. Aesch. Ag. 855. Each of these Choruses explicitly represents a citizen body. A third example begins Creon’s famous speech in Antigone (l. 162), the later section of which Demosthenes quotes as an example of civic conduct (19.247–48). The last, Neoptolemus’ address to his sailors at Philoctetes 974, offers the closest parallel to the present case. It is perhaps no coincidence that this play is much studied in relation to the institution of the ephebeia: Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988), 161–79; Lada-Richards (1998). For the initiatory role of the Chorus in general: Winkler (1990b); Nagy (1995); Calame (2001).

See n. 27 above.

Odysseus recognizes Ajax as an enemy, yet never the less expresses pity for him on the basis of their common humanity. See the discussion in sec. 1 of this chapter above, particularly nn. 28–31.
highly suggestive of a spectator’s response to tragedy, which is telling, given that the beginning of the play has been set up by Athena. Therefore, when the Chorus turn to Odysseus to resolve the crisis, the audience might well consider him the ideal figure to negotiate a compromise, having already witnessed Odysseus’ humanity. But—it should not be forgotten—the Chorus have not been party to this. It makes no sense for the Chorus to act as they do ‘in character’; it makes sense only for the audience, with their knowledge of the opening scene. The audience are invited to supplement the Chorus’ focalization with their own, and to take over from where the Chorus leave off.

The importance of this collapse of identities becomes apparent in the last scene, as the question—is Odysseus friend or foe?—comes under intense scrutiny. In order to overcome the seemingly intractable division between the Atreidae and Teucer, Odysseus aims at eliciting consent. On the one hand, he consistently exploits his personal connection to Agamemnon (1328–9, 1353); he absolves Agamemnon of all responsibility for the decision to allow burial, so that blame falls on Odysseus himself and him alone (1368); most strikingly of all, he seeks to bolster Agamemnon’s authority by—paradoxically—requesting that he yield: ‘Stop! You win by being won over by your friends’ (παύσαι: κρατεῖς τοι τῶν φίλων νικώμενος, 1353). On the other hand, he draws a series of associations with the Chorus (αὐγγενόμην, 1322, αὐμβαλεῖν, 1323); he calls Ajax noble (1355) and praises his excellence (ἀρετή, 1357); and he even concedes the title of the best of the Argives (ἄριστον Ἀργείων, 1340) to his rival. The last example is particularly striking, since the whole tragedy has been predicated on the contest between Odysseus and Ajax about this very issue. And his claim undoubtedly

119 Easterling (1993), 83 suggests that ‘the action of the play simply fails to yield to analysis in the moral terms reportedly proposed by Athena’. Segal (1995), 18–19 also stresses the human perspective—or humanity—of this scene.

120 Holt (1981), 287, n. 29 notes that ‘Odysseus’ position as an enemy of Ajax (which he mentions at 1336, 1347, and 1355) is a powerful help in persuading Agamemnon’. He, however, reads Odysseus’ intervention as solving the crisis of, and to a certain extent correcting, the ἀγών, which again betrays a concentration on the agents rather than on the positioning of the audience.

121 As Odysseus concedes to Athena in the prologue (l. 78), and to Agamemnon in the stichomythia (ll. 1347, 1355).
jars. Moreover, the painfully deliberate manner in which Odysseus concedes the title—‘I could not dishonour him, so as not to say that in him I saw the best of the Argives’ (οὐ τὰν ἀτυμάσαιμ’ ἄν, ὡστε μὴ λέγειν ἣν ἀνδρ’ ἤδειν ἀριστον Ἀργείων, 1339–40)—makes it difficult for his interlocutor to refuse him. Odysseus’ successful manoeuvring of Agamemnon off-stage is, then, indebted to his traditional portrait as persuasive, collusive, manipulative...

With Agamemnon’s departure from the scene, the drama moves towards ritual and reconciliation. Teucer carefully but categorically rejects Odysseus’ offer to ‘join in with the burial’ (συνθάπτειν, 1378), ‘for fear of doing a thing displeasing to he who is dead’ (μὴ τῷ θανῶντι τοῦτο δυσχερές ποιῶ, 1395); Odysseus responds by expressing his desire to participate, but accepts Teucer’s prerogative to exclude him (1400–1). Stichomythia, which so often leads to communication breakdown in tragedy, here leads to an acceptable consensus. On this occasion, Odysseus’ non-dissent has a positive end in setting the stage for ritual, though he remains excluded from it. The play cannot, or will not, fully suppress Ajax’s implacable anger: but different opinions are allowed to coexist alongside his own.

In the light of this ending, it is time to reassess the manifestations of dissent in this drama and, in particular, Athena’s role in staging the crisis. First, the play explores the fallout from Ajax’s dissent through the

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123 ‘Odysseus, the statesman and the trickster of epic, uses the uncertainties of moral evaluation to make possible Ajax’s burial’: Goldhill (1986), 160. See also Worman (1999), 35–68, who traces Odysseus’ bad reputation on the tragic stage back to his ability in Homeric epic to adapt his persona to each addressee in order to gain a favourable reception and establish his authority. Kirkwood (1965), 64 sees Odysseus here as exclusively Iliadic, not the Odyssean trickster.

124 The Iliad again provides a precedent. There Achilles breaks the mood of thoughtful repose brokered between himself and Priam with the anticipated threat of Agamemnon’s sudden appearance: II. 24.653–5.

125 Blundell (1991), 101–4 emphasizes that the play ends as a cooperative endeavour; Segal (1981), 138 suggests that there is continuing tension. The truth is perhaps somewhere inbetween, since Odysseus helps to set the stage for, but is not involved in, Ajax’s burial.
eyes of those looking on. At the beginning this was presented in explicit, metatheatrical terms, as Athena brings Ajax on to the stage and Odysseus watches in the wings as a spectator of and a commentator on the opening scene. But throughout the play an emphasis has been placed on responses to the hero, from Tecmessa challenging Ajax’s monological lamentations, to Teucer recasting dissent as a social good in opposition to the Atreidae’s attempted denial of burial. Such an interpretation not only makes sense of the whole play, including the events that follow after Ajax’s suicide; it also shows the value of the double agon, which invites a reassessment of Ajax’s worth to the Argives and challenges the authority of the Atreidae.

Second, a primary player in the tragedy’s focus on spectating is the Chorus, who undergo a role-change from an epic group dependent on their leader to a Chorus performing in a tragedy. They express their insecurity, as Ajax is marginalized; their hope, as Teucer arrives to protect them; but it is only when they enter the agon that they open up a route to a more secure future, one that has its seeds in the Chorus’ growing independence. With the agents in the agon failing to reach an agreement, it is left to the Chorus to initiate a third way, with their invitation to Odysseus to get involved. Ultimately, the play ends as it began, with Ajax offered as an example to behold—but this time it is the Chorus who invite the audience to reflect on Ajax, both man and play (1418–20).

Third, the mediating role of the Chorus closely intersects with the involvement of the audience. At the very moment when the Chorus are finding their voice in the double agon, the audience is invited to reassess the value of Ajax’s opposition to the Atreidae. Furthermore, it is the Chorus’ appeal to Odysseus that initiates the final movement, which makes sense only from the perspective of the audience, who have already witnessed the new and improved Odysseus in the opening scene. In addition, the Chorus’ intervention presents the audience with the fundamental problem of how to think about Odysseus. In this way,

126 ‘Many are the things for mortals to learn once they’ve seen them; but before they’ve seen them there’s no seer of the future, of what will happen’ (ἡ πολλὰ βροτοῖς ἔστων ἱδούσαν | γνῶναι πρὶν ἱδεῖν δ’ οὐδείς μάντις | τῶν μελλόντων, δ’ τι πράξει, 1418–20).

127 Are they also prepared to put aside their doubts about Odysseus? Can they turn to Odysseus and keep him at arms’ length? Ultimately, can they accept the desirability of
the Athenian audience are invited to take over whence the Chorus left off. As the group who have found security in the institutional framework of the Athenian polity, the audience are well qualified to assume the role left to them by the Chorus, most obviously in the form of the ritual that they perform in honour of Ajax but that the play stops short of staging. In fact, this play reworks the process by which the group finds security within civic institutions.

Fourth, a major part of the process that the Chorus experience in their transformation from an epic people to a quasi-civic body and that, in turn, the audience are invited to undertake in interpreting the drama is the management of dissent. Ajax’s anger is allowed to continue to reverberate through the ages, as Teucer excludes Odysseus from participating in the burial on the basis that Ajax would turn in his grave. Yet, as we have seen, the play—in the form of the double agon—also dramatizes the importance of dissent, particularly in opposition to Spartan-like authoritarian individuals. The Chorus roundly abuse Odysseus throughout, but turn to him for a solution as the crisis reaches an impasse; Teucer excludes Odysseus from actively participating in the ritual, but he does allow him to stand by and watch as a spectator allowing differences to remain? Rose (1995), 64 complains that Odysseus is a relatively ‘colorless’ character. That may be the point: what hue he takes will depend on through what lens we choose to see him.

128 See Easterling (1988), 96, 98. Rehm (2002), 137–8 suggests that the ‘cortège bearing [Ajax’s] body out of the theatre of Dionysus moves the action away from Troy and into the world of Athens’. In this way, the ‘point of death, the place of the body, the status of the dead man, all move expansively outward, a process that culminates in Ajax’ future role as a civic hero of Athens, his story told in its theater and his cult celebrated in the agora’ (p. 137).

129 In his study of Homer’s people, Johannes Haubold distinguishes the epic λαός from the λεώς of the classical Athenian imagination: the latter, he argues, have now found the security within the polis’ institutions that their epic forebears once lacked. While granting that Haubold’s distinction holds true for the actual Athenian audience of Homeric epic (Haubold is talking about the Panathenaic festival), what I suggest here is that the tragic group—the Chorus—are a great deal less secure. In fact, as this chapter has tried to show, the play enacts the securing of their survival by locating for them a role within the institutions of Athens. See Haubold (2000), 145–96, esp. 163. Cf. Seaford (1994).

130 Aj. 1393–5. The hero’s anger is an important feature of cult: by observing ritual, one hopes to redirect the hero’s anger against one’s enemies. Considering Athena’s role in Ajax’s tragedy, this ‘may prove another instance of the pattern wherein a god is antagonistic to a hero in myth, yet associated with the hero in ritual’: Bradshaw (1991), 114, n. 34. On ritual antagonism: Nagy (1979), 289–300.
(1381–99). Dissent is made useful, not by being silenced or else privileged to the extent of justifying violence, but by letting differences and uncertainties remain. Dissent is not only thematized in tragedy; this play shows how it is part of a process, as the audience are drawn into managing dissent for themselves.

Lastly, all of these points suggest a new way of thinking about Athena and the tragedies that take place in her city. Ajax was enshrined in the epic tradition for taking his dissent to the grave. In this play, too, we see the limitations of Ajax’s dissent, which leads to his attempted murder of the Greek leaders and, ultimately, to his suicide. Nor can Teucer resolve the crisis, though he demonstrates the positive value of standing up to the overbearing authority of the twin sons of Atreus. Athena, however, has prepared the ground, by staging the scenario and inviting the watching spectator(s) to draw a particular lesson. Odysseus’ response reveals the potential to interpret the events differently and to come to a human understanding of the events as, in her absence from the rest of the play, the human agents both on—and off—stage must work out and work through the crisis that she has set up. But, if we end up with a greater awareness of what is at stake in dissent, then that is because of, not in spite of, Athena’s role. Where epic narrative had left Ajax silent in the shadows of Odysseus’ tale-telling, in the democratic theatre differences are free to remain to the extent that both Ajax and Odysseus can occupy the same stage in honour, though not necessarily together.

Ajax’s act of suicide enshrines his dissent eternally in silence. In fact, his last words, ‘as for rest, I shall tell it to those below in Hades’ (τὰ δ’ ἀλλ’ ἐν Ἄιδου τοῖς κάτω μιθήσομαι, 865) powerfully conjure up the dead Ajax with whom we are presented in the Odyssean underworld. But, whereas Sophocles’ Ajax reproduces his epic gesture, the play does not end with it:

131 Cf. Segal (1981), 150, who sees Odysseus’ flexibility as denoting ‘secular humanism’; or Maslanka (1995), who regards the play as setting out a new kind of relationship between man and an amoral divinity (Athena). This is fine as far as it goes, but I prefer to see the potential for man to construct a moral system under the gods’ care, however distant that may be. See Budelmann (2000), 186, who speaks of ‘the simultaneous impact and inscrutability of the divine’, which engages the audience in a critical debate over divine responsibility. Murnaghan (1987b), 180–1, connects Athena’s role in this play of ‘activating the evaluative mechanisms of the city [i.e., the trial] and of drama’ to ‘her traditional association with culture and civic order and specifically her institution of the trial in the Eumenides’. 
Ajax’s last word is not only received in contest with others’; it prompts a range of responses, all of which participate in the investigation into the role of dissent within the community. Unlike their epic counterparts, who remain largely silent, Ajax’s group and concubine-wife are given a voice to articulate the impact of the hero’s dissent on them. The hero’s half-brother reproduces dissent from authority, but this time in a legitimate fashion that initiates a process of reassessing its value. Finally, the Chorus, who instigate the play’s striking turn to Odysseus, implicate the audience’s own judgement, since they too must put aside prejudice and be prepared to respect Odysseus’ role in mediating the crisis. Thus the play stages the beginning of the *Iliad* in such a way that all are made responsible for exercising judgement, and Sophocles suggests a place, an institutional place, for dissent after all on the tragic stage.

Two further points emerge for thinking about tragedy more generally. First, the shift in focus that dissent undergoes can help counter criticism of the *agôn* as being neither a generic part of the action nor resolvable. These readings focus on the characters, whereas this chapter has shown that the *agôn* in *Ajax* is directed as much towards the *spectators*: the first makes Teucer’s dissent desirable and Athenian; the second more directly involves the audience by inviting them to recall Ajax’s role in the *Iliad*. As a result, the *agôn* stimulates a process of reviewing, re-evaluating, fundamental to the audience’s judgement of Odysseus and, consequently, to their interpretation of the play as a whole. While the actions and words of the tragic protagonists remain important, the tragic *agôn* turns the focus just as much onto the judgement-making process of the audience. From an Athenian, democratic perspective, the spectators are agents too.

Second, this point suggests one way in which tragedy functions within the democratic polity of Athens. The audience experience judgement as a *process*, rather than a single event; that is, as a self-monitoring exercise, rather than as the assertion of an authoritative solution. In short, the tragic *agôn* represents decision-making as a process of self-reflection that puts the onus on individual responses within a collective framework. It is tragedy’s capacity for prompting self-reflexivity through dissent, for engaging individual responsibility within the

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132 For a view of the Chorus along these lines, see Budelmann (2000), 231–44.
collective process, that makes it such an integral part of Athenian civic life. As the audience members watch tragedy, they are not merely invited to reflect on or even question democratic ideology; they also participate in an institutional framework to reproduce it and to perform as citizens.\footnote{Both Rose (1995), 81, n. 14 and Goldhill (2000) have suggested ways in which democratic ideology is able to recoup difference.} Entering the tragic \textit{agôn} is one element to performing as a democratic citizen.

It’s a performance that Euripides puts to the test.
6

Beyond the *agōn* in Euripides’ *Hecuba*

The hero’s suicide with little under half of the play still remaining provides one of the reasons why Sophocles’ *Ajax* has been regarded as a problem play. The double *agōn* in its second half is a manifestation of the problem, since the formality of two sets of opposed speeches strikes the modern audience as unnecessarily artificial and the intensity of the wrangling destroys the tragic dignity of Ajax’s last monologue; besides which, the *agōn* fails to resolve the crisis. Yet, as we have seen, an analysis of the play through the lens of dissent can account for its perceived structural weaknesses and make sense of its dramatic, as well as ideological, impact.

Euripides’ *Hecuba* suffers from many of the same anxieties with respect to its form and, in particular, the role of the *agōn* in the drama.¹ The first half of the play stresses Hecuba’s suffering, establishing the former Trojan queen as the archetypal tragic victim at the mercy of fickle fortune. When, in response to her son’s murder, she exacts revenge, it appears to mark a decisive break in the action of the play and in Hecuba herself, from sufferer to doer. Moreover, the brutality of that

¹ It is interesting to note that Hecuba’s tragedy follows directly on from Ajax’s suicide in Ovid’s reworking of the tradition in his *Metamorphoses*. Ov. *Met.* 13.1–578. Moreover, while Ovid represents the contest of arms between Ajax and Odysseus—Ovid, of all people, was not going to pass up the opportunity of representing law-court rhetoric—he allocates Hecuba a long monologue as the centre-piece of her episode. This shift in Ovidian narrative dynamics from debate to monologue may help shed light on the different strategies towards dissent employed by our two case studies as, in contrast to the debates over Ajax’s image, Euripides’ *Hecuba* projects a monological view of the protagonist’s suffering—until the drama’s conclusion. I thank Duncan Kennedy for bringing Ovid’s connection of the two stories to my attention. Mossman (1995), 248–51 indicates how Ovid ‘follows the narrative order of [Euripides’] play very faithfully’ (p. 248). She also speculates that it is in this play that Hecuba ‘first takes a central role’ (p. 213).
vengeance is itself problematic and has tended to prompt one of two critical reactions: either to condemn the play for its broken-backed structure that depicts—unwarranted—atrocity; or else to condemn Hecuba herself as an example of how a noble character is corrupted by excessive suffering.

Although critics nowadays may be less inclined to dismiss the play for being a poorly worked whole of two halves, the view that Hecuba represents a noble character’s fall from grace is still commonly held and warrants further consideration. Some critics have countered this view by arguing that Hecuba is not simply a passive figure in the first half of the play: her rebellion against the decision of the Greek army, in which she urges her daughter not to take her fate lying down, prefigures her response to the news of Polydorus’ murder, when she successfully wins from Agamemnon the right to act. While it may be true, however, to say that both halves of the play have in common Hecuba’s refusal to accept the circumstances dictated to her, that approach is hardly sufficient to account for the marked shift in perspective of Hecuba from suffering victim to raging avenger. A stark manifestation of the play’s and Hecuba’s descent into the sordid realm of contemporary

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2 The play’s ‘broken-backed’ structure is the label applied by Mossman (1995), 3, describing previous scholarship on Hecuba. See also Kovacs (1987), 79; Michelini (1987), 132; Gregory (1999), p. xvi. For a strong defence of the play’s unity, see Heath (2003), who notes the popularity of this play in other periods less critical of the notion of (justified) atrocity than modern sensibilities.


4 Heath (2003) charts the play’s fall from grace. See also Nussbaum (1986), 319; Michelini (1987), 3–51, with bibliography (Ch. 5, nn. 1, 4).


6 Kovacs (1987), 81 sees the contrast between the determination by Hecuba (and Polyxena) to assert their will and the Greeks’ adherence to the will of the majority as the central feature of the play.
Athenian politics appears to be the final *agōn*, in which Agamemnon explicitly sets up a trial to judge between Hecuba and Polymestor: yet it not only fails to resolve the crisis, but even leads to an escalation in verbal violence.7

This final chapter sets out to investigate Euripides’ play in terms of the thematization of dissent, though this example is handled rather differently from the case analysed in Chapter 5 above. It has been argued that Sophocles’ *Ajax* makes the case for re-evaluating the role of dissent in the community and bringing it back within a civic framework through both Teucer’s anti-Spartan rhetoric of the *agōn*, and the progress of the Chorus over the course of the drama. Seen from this perspective, it was felt that Sophocles’ play reworks the dynamics exhibited by the *Iliad*, in which dissent is located at the heart of the community and made institutional over the course of the narrative. It will be argued here that Euripides’ *Hecuba* re-enacts the strategy for exploring dissent from the other epic narrative, the *Odyssey*, by plotting the protagonist’s pursuit of vengeance as necessary and desirable—with, however, a radical twist.8 In Euripides’ play, the avenger is not the returning hero from Troy but a foreign woman, former queen turned slave—in other words, the ideological ‘other’ of Athenian self-definition.9 Consequently, her act of vengeance, though sympathetically manufactured to a degree comparable to that enjoyed by the epic Odysseus, ultimately represents the revenge of a figure who stands outside, and threatens, the carefully policed Hellenic order. She, unlike Odysseus, is not a figure of authority, but a figure through whom Euripides can

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7 ‘The end of the play, it has to be admitted, is weak in dramatic logic. It is hard to know whether Euripides uses the trial-scene (*Hec.* 1129 ff.) to help out this weakness theatrically, or the debate is his chief purpose’: Collard (2003), 72.

8 Echoes of the *Odyssey* in the play have been identified before, but they have been taken to show Hecuba’s transformation into an agent of Odysseus-like persuasive guile: see esp. Segal (1993), 162–3, 185, and p. 349 n. 96 below. This approach, however, focuses on evaluating Hecuba’s character in terms of moral decline with little regard to the effect of Odyssean resonances on *watching* the play.

9 See esp. Segal (1990a). The subject of the barbarian and Greek self-definition has spawned a huge bibliography in recent decades. Studies that have emphasized the ‘other’ as barbarian include Goossens (1962); Cartledge (2002); Harrison (2000b); and esp. E. Hall (1989). Studies that have challenged the polarity in tragedy are Synodinou (1977); Vidal-Naquet (1997); Rehm (2002); Said (2002b), 62–100, 236–69. For an extensive critique of E. Hall’s discussion of Greek self-definition, see Papadodima (2008).
explore the possibilities for, and problems of, dissent outside a civic institutional framework.\textsuperscript{10}

This chapter recounts Hecuba’s odyssey in three stages, charting the play’s disjointed journey from sacrifice to revenge and thence to its terrible conclusion. Each stage, moreover, engages with, and tries to account for, a feature that has caused critics anxiety. The first section examines the events leading to the sacrifice of Polyxena, which comes to a head in the ‘near-agón’ scene between Hecuba and Odysseus. This agón is problematic precisely because the anticipated contest of words fails to materialize and Polyxena goes off willingly to her death. By examining this agón in context, it will be shown that Euripides has constructed an episode which aims at establishing harmonious accord over Polyxena’s (beautiful) death and Hecuba’s wretched suffering. The second section sets out how Euripides’ drama continues to stress Hecuba’s suffering and promote her case for revenge in a way that recalls Odysseus’ own triumphant homecoming. Culminating in a formal agón that is only tenuously connected to the surrounding events and that markedly fails to resolve the crisis, this scene puts the actions of the on-stage judge under scrutiny, who expressly tries to put a stop to the violence and redirect Hecuba and Polymestor towards performing within the safe environment of a contest of words. It will be argued that, by these means, Euripides tests the agón as an institution that can accommodate extreme differences of opinion, and finds it wanting. The final section examines the fallout from the agón, which propels the conflict towards its harrowing conclusion in a grotesque display of one-upmanship between the blinded Polymestor and the savage Hecuba. Here Euripides presents his audience with a tragic version of the Odyssey that opens the doors onto the grim aftermath of revenge, which the Odyssey had conspicuously closed.\textsuperscript{11}

By removing any institutional

\textsuperscript{10} The impression of a world lacking institutional security, in spite of the fact that the Greeks hold a full assembly and Agamemnon sets up a law court, is magnified by the play’s location on the Chersonese. As Rehm (2002), 177 remarks: ‘by its very impermanence, the transit camp constitutes a “moral no-man’s-land” where the civilized values of the polis (such as they are) cannot be guaranteed.’ See also Conacher (1961), 16–18; Segal (1993), 171–2; Zeitlin (1996), 172–6.

\textsuperscript{11} In particular, this chapter will draw upon the Agamemnon ‘palimpsest’ that Thalmann (1993) has uncovered (quotation from p. 128). Whereas Thalmann reads the palimpsest as Euripides’ critique of the Trojan War (pp. 130–6), Aeschylus’ Oresteia (esp. p. 150) and, more generally, his whole culture (p. 157), the present study will
Aim to face up to their individual responsibilities for judging action.

1. CONSTRUCTING CONSENSUS

In the narrative tradition of the Trojan War saga, Hecuba is overwhelmingly represented as the archetypal suffering spectator. In the *Iliad* she looks down from Troy’s battlements to see her son die on the plain below. The cyclic epics apparently told of her witnessing her husband’s slaughter at the altar by Achilles’ son. Her tragedy, as Shakespeare powerfully reminds us, is in her watching. The first half of Euripides’ play explores Hecuba’s tragedy through the lens of her looking on. From her opening words, in which Hecuba appeals to the Chorus to lift her up, she draws attention to herself as a receptacle for the audience’s reaction to the events. Indeed, there is in Hecuba’s

explore Euripides’ thematization of dissent in terms of the play’s shift in narrative paradigm, as the Odyssean template suffers increasing interference from the *Agamemnon*. Like Thalmann, then, the palimpsest will be discussed in a more coherent way than the array of closets from which the *Orestes* draws, according to Zeitlin (2003), in which she coins the term ‘palimpsest’.

12 Mossman (1995), 254–6 assesses the iconography of Hecuba. She suggests that Euripides has innovated by portraying Hecuba as ‘the central active figure rather than a bystander, an observer, a mourner’ (p. 256); cf. H. Foley (2001), 286. Alternatively, it might be said that Euripides stages the drama of Hecuba’s spectating until her discovery of Polydorus’ body little over halfway through the play.

13 *Iliad* 22.79–89. There is nothing passive in Hecuba’s watching: even in the Iliadic precedent, Hecuba desires to eat out Achilles’ heart (*Iliad* 24.212–13).


15 In the scene of Hecuba’s tragedy recited by the first player, the language of sight dominates: ‘But who, ah woe!, had seen the mobled Queen... | Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steeped | ’Gainst Fortune’s state would treason have pronounced. But if the gods themselves did see her then, | When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport... | The instant Burst of Clamour that she made... | Would have made milche the Burning eyes of Heaven’ (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II. ii). Interestingly, Polonius interrupts to ask: ‘Looke whe’er he ha’s not turn’d his colour, and ha’s teares in’s eyes.’ To whom does his ‘looke’ apply, the actor playing Hecuba or to Hamlet looking on? Much is being made here of the activity of spectating, in relation not only to Hecuba, whose tragedy is in her spectating, but also to the spectator of Hecuba’s tragedy, in this case Hamlet himself.

16 ‘Bring the old woman in front of the house, my children, bring your fellow slave, once queen, women of Troy,keeping her upright’ (áγετ’, ὅ παῖδες, τὴν γυναῖν πρὸ

security for managing dissent, Euripides puts the onus on his audience to face up to their individual responsibilities for judging action.
consistent description of herself as victim more than a hint of this drama’s self-consciousness as a spectacle. While these events relating Hecuba’s misery are dramatized, little opportunity is given to see the protagonist as anything other than a figure worthy of sympathy. Only in her supplication of Odysseus is there a brief glimpse of a more sinister Odyssean palimpsest underlying this script.

The most striking way in which the play constructs a uniform viewing of Hecuba occurs through two scenes of debate that manage Polyxena’s sacrifice. The first takes place off-stage and shows the degree to which dissent becomes minimized when debate is reported. The second almost presents an *agon*, but ultimately fails to set up a contest over the rights and wrongs of killing Polyxena.

In the full assembly of the Achaeans

The event dominating the first, and more favourably received, half of the play is the sacrifice of Hecuba’s daughter, Polyxena. The decision to sacrifice Polyxena is narrated by the Chorus in their entry song. First of all, the Chorus identify that the decision belonged to the Greek army: an exercise of collective resolve took place within a full assembly (*πλήρει ἔννοω*, 107). Next, their report of the assembly proceedings represents the debate that ensued (116–41). To begin with, initial suggestions of disagreement are raised as a ‘wave of great strife clashed’
Beyond the agōn in Euripides’ Hecuba

(πολλῆς δὲ ἔριδος συνέπαισε κλάδων, 116) and ‘opinion went in two ways, divided among the spear-carrying army of the Greeks’ (δόξα δὲ ἔχορει δίχ’ ἀν’ Ἑλλήνων | στρατῶν αἰχμητήριον, 117–18). A μὲν | δὲ construction follows that sets out the difference of opinion, which manifests itself in speakers coming forward to articulate both sides, including Agamemnon, leader of the army and champion of the Trojan cause.

Thus far the picture of the debate has suggested a balance between the two sides, though a closer look reveals a quite different scenario. First, the defence of Polyxena is compromised by the figure supporting her, Agamemnon, who’s in bed with Cassandra, so to speak. Second, speaking in favour of sacrifice are forebears of the Athenian polis, the ‘twin sons of Theseus’ (τῶ Θησείδα, 122), who were, the Chorus explain, ‘orators of double-speeches’ (διασῶν μυθῶν | βρήτρες ἡσαν, 123–4). As well as their obvious connection to Athens, the authority of their speech is conveyed by the fact that, though there are two of them, they speak with one mind (γνώμη δὲ μᾶ, 124), which recalls the management of the assembly under the ‘one mind’ (ἐνα θημῶν, Hom. Od. 3.128) of Nestor and Odysseus; moreover, unlike the passing reference to Agamemnon’s defence, their speech is quoted in indirect discourse. Lastly, the end-balance relayed by the Chorus’ narrative between the speeches—‘and the rivalries of the arguments that were put forward were more or less equal’—is critically disrupted by Odysseus’ entry into the debate. Labelled as ‘the cunning liar, the sweet-tongued people-pleaser, the son of Laertes’ (ὁ ποικιλόφρων | κόπης ἥδυλόγος δημοχαριστής | Λαερτιάδης,

20 τοῖς μὲν διδόναι | τήμβρο σφάγιον, τοῖς δ’ οὐχὶ δοκοῦν, Hec. 118–19.
21 This is precisely the point that the sons of Theseus take up. Mossman (1995), 74–5 notes that the contrast between Agamemnon’s personal reasons and the communal bond of Achilles’ geras is brought out by the jingle τὰ δὲ Κασσανδρᾶς λέκτρα | τῆς Ἀχιλλείας | . . . λόγχης (Il. 127–9).
22 Critics have noticed that the phrase ‘orators of double speeches’ evokes a world of sophistic discussion, in which the ability to speak on either side of any question is valued. The fact that they don’t, but instead voice only one concern, further underlines the lack of debate. See Michelini (1987), 143; Kovacs (1987), 140, n. 19.
23 As we saw above (Ch. 2, sec. 2), the one time their management of the assembly fails is catastrophic: the two sons of Atreus came into strife, and condemn the Achaeans to a homecoming of woe: Hom. Od. 3.130–50. As Nestor puts it, a ‘twofold plan’ (δίχα βούλη, 3.150) found favour with the Greeks, by which means Zeus assigned them an evil doom (3.153).
24 σπουδαῖ δὲ λόγων καταπενθεμένων | ἡσαν ἴσαι πάς, Hec. 130–1.
131–3), there is no doubt as to the key influence of that intervention.\textsuperscript{25} In its teleological drive towards recording the outcome of debate, the Chorus construct the fate awaiting Polyxena and Hecuba as, ultimately, irrevocable.\textsuperscript{26} Dissenting voices are marginalized as a decisive consensus is reached over the necessity of sacrifice.

Such has been the compelling nature of this representation that many interpretations have been convinced by that necessity, though it is worthwhile looking more closely at Odysseus’ influential argument in favour of it.\textsuperscript{27} According to the Chorus, Odysseus persuaded the army ‘not to shun the best of the Danaans’ (\textit{μὴ τὸν ἀριστὸν Δαναῶν πάντων . . . ἀπωθεῖν}, 134–5). The phraseology ‘best of’ suggestively echoes the \textit{Iliad} and its staging of contest over the ‘best of the Achaeans’\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, Odysseus later defends the decision before Hecuba on the basis that the Greeks need heroes, and those heroes need to be obeyed: ‘For us, Achilles is worthy of honour, woman, because he died beautifully as a man for Greece’ (\textit{ημίν δ’ Ἀχιλλεύς ἄξιος τιμῆς, γνώι, θανῶν ὑπέρ γῆς Ἐλλάδος κάλλισταν ἀνήρ}, 309–10).\textsuperscript{29} Homeric epic and

\textsuperscript{25} On the use and abuse of persuasion in this play, see Buxton (1982), 170–86. Jouan (1984), 9–10 identifies Odysseus as a typical Euripidean demagogue.

\textsuperscript{26} The Chorus announce upfront that the Greeks had resolved to sacrifice Polyxena (\textit{Hec}. 107–9).

\textsuperscript{27} Kovacs (1987), 82–3, for example, comments: ‘The Greek army is relentlessly public-minded, almost collectivist, in its actions and attitudes. They will not allow any private motives or feelings to influence the public and impersonal pursuit of their national interest. They are not portrayed as cruel, and in fact are rather kindly when their own interest is not at stake. They are, however, inflexibly committed to their own public good. Private feelings of pity exist but have no influence on the public policy.’ See also Heath (2003), 257–8, who emphasizes the army’s moral dilemma posed by the need to honour their hero. Grube (1941), 217–18 observes that Odysseus makes a compelling case for sacrifice by putting the communal claim over the individual. Cf. Adkins (1966).

\textsuperscript{28} Used of Achilles at \textit{Il}. 1.244, 412; 16.274. On the significance of the phrase ‘best of the Achaeans’ in Homer, see Nagy (1979), 26–41. Gregory (1999), 64 notes: ‘It is as if Odysseus can assume that the Greek soldiers, like the Athenian spectators, are familiar with the \textit{Iliad}, and can use the Homeric phrase to remind them of the threat to the community posed by an angry, aggrieved Achilles, whether alive or dead.’

\textsuperscript{29} King (1985), 55 wonders how we should take Achilles’ words on Odysseus’ lips, ‘whom tradition had turned into Achilles’ diametric opposite’. Her thesis is that echoes of the \textit{Iliad} serve as a rejection of a male-centred warrior ethic which exposes the \textit{Iliad} as a myth: ‘Achilles becomes a vehicle for carrying to its logical and ultimate barbarity the heroic system of using human prizes as measures of \textit{time}’ (p. 53). The argument being made here stresses rather the Greeks’ commitment to Achilles’ demand as a particularly narrow reading of the \textit{Iliad}—the \textit{Iliad} summed up as a soundbite, as it were. The audience, far from being encouraged to ‘(mis)remember’ the Iliadic scene (King (1985), 54), are invited to reflect on the difference, and on what is lost in the narration of it.
contemporary concerns merge as Euripides’ play exposes one way in
which the Iliad could be read in fifth-century Athenian culture, as a
relatively straightforward source of heroism and inspiration to others.

Yet the precise terms laid down by Achilles’ shade, as reported by the
Chorus, makes somewhat different reading (113–15):

‘Ποι δή, Δαναοί,
τὸν ἐμὸν τύμβον
στέλλεσθ’ ἀγέραστον ἄφεντες;’

‘Where are you going, Danaans, leaving my tomb without its prize of
honour?’

The language of Achilles’ shade clearly evokes the opening of the Iliad, in
which Agamemnon had claimed to be without a prize and demanded
one. There, it had been Achilles who had stood up to the king and
asserted the principle of the communal distribution of booty: now, it is
Achilles’ ghost who demands not to go without a prize. With Odysseus
making the plea not to dishonour Achilles, it is as if Euripides has provided
a reflex conclusion to draw from the Iliad’s narrative of honour slighted
and asserted—to submit to Achilles’ demands without question. The
dissenting voice of epic has in tragedy paradoxically become the authority,
which in part derives from the fact that from tragedy’s perspective the Iliad
is the authority. Somewhere lost in translation is the Iliad’s depiction of
Achilles as a disruptive force and sponsor of dissent.

30 The quotation of Achilles’ ghost adds to the dramatic vividness of the demand, as
Mossman (1995), 74 notes. But it also lends a ‘presumption of fidelity’: Gregory (1999),
p. xxv.
94 associates the demand of Achilles’ ghost with news of Agamemnon’s sexual relations
with Cassandra: ‘both the desire of Achilles’ ghost for the sacrifice of the virgin Polyxena
and Agamemnon’s for Cassandra invades the political arena in a divisive fashion that
recalls the quarrel among the two heroes over concubines at the opening of the Iliad and
thus creates a sense of inevitable repetition of violence.’ Although Achilles’ ghost’s
demand is far less unequivocal (as will be seen), Foley’s argument draws attention to
the presence of the Iliad behind the events being narrated on stage, and the pressure they
exert on the interpretation of the current scene. Barrett (2002) makes the case that
messenger speeches—which to all intents and purposes the choral parodos represents in
this play—draw on Homeric epic for authority.
32 Homer is the paradigm to which Aristotle continually returns when discussing the
art of tragedy: see Act III, intro., n. 3 above. On the problem of canonization, see
Goldhill (1993), 151, who remarks, ‘the classics enter later culture all too often as a series
of authoritative and authorising quotations: the tag, the motto.’
And yet Euripides has structured the scene so that Achilles should still be seen as a figure of division and conflict. In spite of the number of critics who talk about the necessity placed on the Greeks to sacrifice Polyxena, the Chorus’ quotation leaves the object of its claim unexpressed: the shade itself appears not to have demanded a specific prize, even though, in the lines that follow, the Chorus report the debate over whether or not it was best to give a sacrificial victim to Achilles’ tomb (117–19). That is to say, the Chorus seem to take for granted the crucial premise that the prize to be offered should be a human sacrifice. Worse is to follow as a further premise is soon conceded: the debate over whether or not to offer a sacrificial victim easily, and almost imperceptibly, slides into the decision to sacrifice Polyxena. Neither premise for debate, however, is a necessary condition to satisfy the shade’s demand.

Instead of an Achilles who contests Agamemnon’s claim not to go without a prize, then, Euripides presents an Achilles who obtains universal acceptance that he deserves a prize—a girl at that, as if the Greeks had read a script of the Iliad and were attempting to forestall his wrath. But this Achilles is but a shadow of his former self. He is, in fact, more like his shady self from the Odyssey, who finally receives due honour from Agamemnon and is hailed as the ‘best of the Achaeans’, even as the Odyssey leaves him in Hades while tracing the triumphant homecoming of his epic rival Odysseus. It is noteworthy, then, that the figure who holds up Achilles as an authority is again Odysseus, this time as a means of maintaining army discipline. In Odysseus’ mouth, Achilles, the figure of dissent in the Iliad, whose withdrawal from the community

33 Cf. Gregory (1999), pp. xxviii–ix. She explores how Polyxena’s sacrifice is articulated by three different characters, Polydorus (Hec. 40–4), Hecuba (Hec. 171–96) and Odysseus (Hec. 303–20), each of whose versions reveal their characterization. It remains the case, however, that ‘the audience has heard from the chorus (110–40) that Achilles made no such demand’ (p. xxviii).

34 ‘[T]he characters of the play debate the meaning of the appearance of Achilles’ ghost and the need to preserve his memory. In an era ravaged by [the Peloponnesian] war and social upheaval, Achilles belongs to a past, a past which becomes problematic and questionable, open to conflicting viewpoints, used in different ways and to different ends’: Michelakis (2002), 19.

structures its entire narrative, has crystallized into the authority that no one can or is willing to dispute.36

An agôg of groans

Euripides immediately follows the choral parodos and its decision of the assembly with a scene in which Odysseus announces its verdict and Hecuba attempts to dissent from it, without success.37 Odysseus appears on stage as self-professed herald of the assembly’s proceedings. ‘The Achaeans’, he comments, ‘have resolved’ (ἐστάλη αὖ Ἀχαῖοι, 220) to sacrifice Polyxena.38 The scenario of reporting back on a debate has a precedent in Homeric epic, when it was again Odysseus who reported back to the Achaeans after the embassy to Achilles.39 In both cases Odysseus reports only the final outcome of the debate, which has the effect of leaving out the process of negotiation as well as the difference of opinion encountered. It is striking too that Odysseus’ pronouncement to Hecuba echoes the formula of the Athenian assembly.40 But more to the point, Odysseus presents himself as simply the spokesman of the group, here to educate Hecuba (διδάκαυ, 299), as if he had no role or personal stake in the deliberations, when it was quite clear from the Chorus’

36 Talthybius later describes the construction of Polyxena’s pyre in way that draws on the image of burial (Hector’s) at II. 24.782–9. In fact, it is a kind of Iliad without the strife. Here we see the people and Agamemnon working together, joined by the connective particle τε λαοὶ δ’ ἐπέφερον Ἀγαμέμνων ι’ ἄνα κεῖσεν μεθείλας παρθένων νεών, Eur. Hec. 553–4. Cf. the opening of the Iliad and the divided reaction to Chryses’ appeal (II. 1.22–5), ch. 1, sec. 1 above.

37 The juxtaposition of an offstage assembly and an onstage agôn is present too in the Orestes: Euripides seems particularly concerned to explore the issues at stake in coming to decisions and the ways in which responsibility for decision-making tends to be disowned by a mass audience: see Barker (2011). On the Athenian dêmos absolving itself of responsibility for the catastrophic Sicilian Expedition, see Thuc. 8.1, with the commentary by Gomme, Andrewes, and Dover (1981), 5: it is not only the case that ‘voters ought to be treated as equally responsible with their advisers’; here, ‘Thucydides has emphasized the commitment of the whole city to the enterprise’. In the foreword to his new translation, Tony Harrison, Euripides, Hecuba (London, 2005), p. x recasts the sense of group culpability in starkly modern terms: ‘We may still be weeping for Hecuba, but we allow our politicians to flood the streets of Iraq with more and more Hecubas in the name of freedom and democracy.’


39 II. 9.676–94. See Ch. 2, n. 3 above.

report that it was his intervention which proved decisive.\footnote{He intervenes at the point when both sides were 'more or less equal' (ἣν ίσας πως, Hec. 131).} Narrating debate not only closes down possibilities for dissent; it also removes the individual from culpability for the decision, which instead lies with the amorphous group as a whole—the army. Euripides’ juxtaposition of these two versions of the off-stage debate poses the question of individual responsibility within the process of collective decision-making.

So far, then, this section has shown the overwhelming consensus that surrounds the decision to sacrifice Polyxena. In response to Odysseus’ report, however, Hecuba threatens to break the harmonious mood (229–30):

\textit{αλαί· παρέστηκ' ὡς ἐοικ' ἀγών μέγας, πλήρης στεναγμῶν οὐδὲ δακρύων κενός.}

Alas, it seems a great contest is at hand, one full of groans and not empty of tears.

Hecuba’s explicit indication of an agon raises expectations of a contest of words, such as the kind often witnessed on the Euripidean stage.\footnote{See Prologue, n. 25 above.} Yet, scholars are divided as to whether this instance really does introduce an \textit{agon} or not. While several agonistic features—the stichomythia, the paired set speeches in formal opposition to each other, the presence of a third party (in this case Polyxena) to judge between them—may be identified,\footnote{Strohm (1957), 16, 32 discusses the tripartite structure of the \textit{agon}. Mossman (1995), 56 suggests that the scene becomes an \textit{agon} after the unpromising beginning of Odysseus’ report to Hecuba. Cf. Duchemin (1968), 122. Mossman’s worthy intention to explore Euripides’ manipulation of form nevertheless overlooks interesting distinctions between formal debates. Not all are \textit{agon}-scenes—or, rather, not all \textit{agon}-scenes are contests. Michelini (1987), 142 takes it for granted that the scene in question is an \textit{agon}. Cf. Matthiessen (1974), 12; Hose (1990–1), 114.} the subsequent exchange of speeches between Hecuba and Odysseus lacks bite.\footnote{Collard (1991), 143 concludes: ‘what is missing here for the full \textit{agon} is the tone of irreconcilable and hateful difference.’ M. Lloyd (1992), 8 notes the lack of ‘the angry dialogue after the speeches is normal in the \textit{agon}’—as a result of which he excludes this scene from his analysis of the \textit{agon}.} Hecuba appeals for her daughter’s life on the basis of the debt Odysseus owes to her for having saved his life; Odysseus responds in kind by offering to save Hecuba, but he refuses
to go against the will of the majority to save Polyxena.\textsuperscript{45} In effect Odysseus agrees with Hecuba, but proposes a literal like-for-like trade-off: just as she had once saved his life, so he is prepared to save hers, but only hers. Thus Odysseus avoids open confrontation with Hecuba even as he rejects her appeal.\textsuperscript{46}

Further light may be shed on this scene if one considers how Hecuba makes her appeal. On first inspection it would appear that Hecuba supplicates Odysseus, which is what one would expect, given that she is appealing for her daughter’s life. But, since Greek tragedy comes to us without stage directions, all comment regarding aspects of staging must be based on the characters’ own words and remain provisional. In this case the language that Hecuba uses is particularly striking, especially her apostrophe of Odysseus’ beard (\textit{ἀλλ’ ὁ φίλον γένειον, αἰδέαθητί με, 286}, which has prompted at least one scholar to conclude that Hecuba’s supplication takes place in words alone.\textsuperscript{47} Two further points may support that interpretation. First, when Hecuba responds to Odysseus’ rejection, she makes no mention of the ritual act itself, only of her ‘words that have been cast idly to the winds’ (\textit{oûmôi μὲν λόγοι πρὸς αἰθέρα | φροιύδοι μάτην ῥιβθέντες, 334–5}). Second, when Odysseus thinks that Polyxena is about to supplicate him, he does move away (342–4)—a gesture which would seem to lose its significance had he already spurned Hecuba’s physical supplication.\textsuperscript{48} If Hecuba’s supplication is indeed

\textsuperscript{45} See esp. \textit{Hec.} 303–5.

\textsuperscript{46} He deflects Hecuba’s personal appeal by insisting on strict reciprocity. As a result, his speech appears impersonal. Mossman (1995), 115 suggests that ‘this kind of recourse to imagined public opinion has the effect of generalizing the \textit{illustrandum} while still retaining a lively personal style’. Collard (1991), 145 also observes how Odysseus’ speech avoids a ‘point-by-point’ rejoinder. We might note that Odysseus’ strategy of non-dissent is consistent with his representation in Sophocles’ \textit{Ajax}—though there it had a positive end—and has its ultimate roots in Homeric epic: on which see Achilles’ assessment, ‘I hate like the gates of Hades a man who says one thing but keeps another in his heart’, \textit{Il.} 9.312–13.

\textsuperscript{47} Gould (1973), 84–5 stresses the ritual element of supplication, in particular the act of touching. The implication that follows is that it would have been a most serious act for Odysseus to reject a full supplication, which is not indicated by the text (de Romilly (1986), 160 rather downplays the significance of supplication by glossing Odysseus’ rejection: ‘Mais Ulysse n’est pas un sentimental’). For an alternative view, however, see Mossman (1995), 55–6. I have benefited from discussion with Malcolm Heath on this point.

\textsuperscript{48} Mercier (1993), 155–6 notes that Odysseus’ move away represents his desire to avoid the ‘ritually significant contact’, but does not apply the same criterion to Odysseus’
only verbal, that would represent an effective moment of deferred expectation and a dramatic contrast to her later physical supplication of Agamemnon. But it would also mark an effective deferral of contest, since Odysseus would not be placed under ritual obligation to respect Hecuba’s plea. It has the effect of maintaining a conspiracy of silence over the rights and wrongs of Polyxena’s sacrifice.

Significantly, the epic tradition bequeaths one such example of verbal-only supplication: when Odysseus supplicates Nausicaa from a distance, after having first debated the issue in his mind (Hom. *Od.* 6.139–48). This notable precedent is particularly interesting given the other Odyssean resonances in the episode. Hecuba recalls a moment during the Trojan War when Odysseus, behind enemy lines, was recognized by Helen—a story, which though odd, chimes with the account related by Helen in the *Odyssey*. But Hecuba then goes on to add a bizarre twist to an already remarkable story: apparently, Helen informed her of Odysseus’ presence, with the result that it was she—Hecuba—who had been the one to spare him. It is difficult to know what to make of this account. Odysseus himself readily concedes the point; yet scholars, from antiquity on, have remained unconvinced by it. While there remains the possibility that other versions of the Trojan War saga had narrated just such an episode, it does seem to rejection of Hecuba’s supplication: ‘he successfully evaded the one with a long, discouraging speech, just as now he prudently evades the other by getting out of the way’ (p. 56).

Gould (1973), 84, n. 54 argues: ‘The full ritual act in this scene is constantly expected, constantly deferred and, in the end, does not take place, since Polyxena scorns to supplicate.’

*Od.* 4.244–56. Of course, Helen relates this incident in order to portray herself in the best possible light to her audience—her husband, Odysseus’ son and us.

Gregory (1999), 74 nn. 239–50: ‘The incident which Hecuba recalls to Odysseus is told by Helen in the *Odyssey* (4.242–58). Odysseus, disguised like a slave, entered Troy on a reconnoitering expedition. Helen recognized him but promised to keep his secret, receiving in return an account of the Greeks’ strategy. Euripides grafts onto this story the innovative detail (243) that Helen did reveal Odysseus’ identity to Hecuba. As a scholion on 241 complains, the addition is implausible (ἀπὶθανον): while Helen with her divided loyalties might reasonably hesitate to betray Odysseus to the Trojans, Hecuba would feel no such inhibition. The detail is crucial to Euripides’ purpose, however, because it enables Hecuba to raise the issue of χαρις (136–37n) with Odysseus.’ The scholion on l. 241 reads: ἀπὶθανον τὸ πλαῦμα καὶ ὦν Ὀμηρικῶν οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐσίγησον Ἐκάβη πολέμων θεσαμένη κατοστεύοντα τὸ κατὰ τοῦς Τρώας πράγματα, ἡ δὲ Ἐλενὴ εἰκόνως ἀτην γὰρ μετέστεπεν Λεοφρονίτης.
stretch the realms of probability to the limit to believe either that Hecuba would have been the third party, or that, once informed, she would have kept silent. It is one thing for Helen, the wife of his friend Menelaus, to pity Odysseus and spare him, but quite another for the queen of Troy to keep mum.

All this talk of supplication—Hecuba’s account of Odysseus’ previous plea and her verbal-only appeal—would be right at home in the Odyssey; as it is, it creates a very knowing and compelling piece of theatre. On the one hand, the resonances combine to engage the audience’s sympathy for the heroine, as before the ‘much-enduring Odysseus’ had enjoyed universal sympathy for his circumstances: both suffer excessively and undeservedly at the hands of others. On the other, the specific recollection of one of Odysseus’ labours serves to cast doubt on Hecuba’s desperate pleas—would she have really accepted his supplication?—and to trap her in a tragic retelling of those events. Both aspects ensure that the emotional focus remains on the suffering of the barbarian queen. Her plight is inescapable and most worthy of pity.

The likelihood of Hecuba’s woes eliciting pity from the audience is brought out by the conclusion to the scene. Having failed to win round Odysseus, Hecuba turns to Polyxena and calls on her daughter to appeal to Odysseus as she had previously done, in the hope that Odysseus’ strict application of the like-for-like principle will succeed should he be supplicated by the victim herself. Expectations are again raised of an agōn of words—and again are dashed. Instead of a desperate appeal to her captor, Polyxena in fact willingly embraces death.

53 In her funeral oration over Hector, Helen mentions in passing Hecuba’s reproaches (II. 24.770).

54 Collard (1991), 144 notes: ‘While Od[ysseus’] espionage and Helen’s recognition are in Homer (Od. 4.242 ff., cf. Little Iliad EGP 52.19ff. Davies; Rhes. 710ff.), Helen informing Hecuba seems to be Eur[ipides’] invention here for the moral hold it affords over Od[ysseus], and to win his sympathy for one placed now as he was then himself.’ See also Zeitlin (1996), 196 who, however, goes on to argue that Polymator also recalls Homer’s Odysseus.

55 Right at the beginning of the epic Athena explicitly sets out that Odysseus suffers undeservedly, a point which is immediately conceded by Zeus (Od. 1.45–62).

56 Hec. 334–41.

be regarded as a rejection of the terms set for her and, thus, a show of dissent—she refuses to join in by joining in; but, besides that, it is also a sign of the play’s continued refusal to put the sacrifice and the reasons articulated for it under the harsh glare of a public debate on stage. In the place of an *agon* of words, which might have challenged the assembly’s decision as represented by Odysseus, the audience are to hear Hecuba’s lament—her ‘*agon* of groans’—over Polyxena’s sacrifice, a form of female discourse that, while carrying the potential to disrupt the male public logos, does have a culturally legitimate place in the *polis*. Although in this case the dead warrior is a maiden, and she goes willingly to her death for the good of another *polis* . . .

Passing over this scene because it fails to conform to preconceived notions of an *agon* neglects to consider *why* and *how* it is not an *agon*: interpreting contest must always pay close attention to the rules set down for contest. In this case, the impression of an *agon* that fails to ignite is precisely the point. Instead of putting the army’s collective decision under the spotlight, which is what would have happened had an *agon* been established, by *not* representing a contest of words at this point Euripides defers judgement over whether the sacrifice is right or not. With both Odysseus and Polyxena avoiding direct confrontation and seeking consensus, the decision is allowed to stand uncontested in spite of Hecuba’s vain attempts to the contrary. That is not to say that the audience may not dissent from or feel uncomfortable with the decision; rather, they are not invited to dwell on the matter. For the time being at least, the focus remains exclusively, and insistently, on Hecuba’s suffering, as Euripides propels us towards the tragedy of Polyxena’s fate in a way that makes it appear inevitable. Instead, Euripides will establish an *agon* over the rights and wrongs of Hecuba’s revenge.

58 The public *threnos* is particularly prominent at the end of the *Iliad* (24.719–76). Lucía Romero Mariscal has suggested to me that the *threnos* could in itself be seen as a sort of *antipolitique*, the only possible way of dissent to the *logos* of the city. In certain contexts, especially in tragedy, this kind of female discourse carries within it the potential to disrupt: see e.g. the closing scene of Sophocles’ *Antigone* (1257–1318), on which see Segal (1995), 119–37, esp. 129–32. On the deep cultural conflict between the *threnos* (of women) and the (male) *epitaphios*, see Alexiou (1974), 108; Loraux (1986a), 45–9. Here, however, Euripides’ restriction of the *agon* to a lament seems indicative of the play’s refusal to ignite a contest of words over Polyxena’s sacrifice.
2. TESTING THE AGÔN

After the near-agôn, Polyxena goes off stage to her death, which is reported by Talthybius the herald. At this moment, just when it seems that the queen has suffered all she can, and lies on stage utterly devastated, another messenger enters, who comes bearing still worse tidings: the body of Polydorus, Hecuba’s son, has been found, murdered, it transpires, by Polymestor, a family friend. (Can it get any worse?) From this point on the play shifts gear and focus, as it follows the means by which Hecuba gains vengeance for that betrayal.59

The structural and thematic break between these two episodes is so marked that many scholars have regarded the play as two poorly worked-together halves.60 Alternatively, attempts have been made to explain the sudden change in terms of Hecuba’s individual psychology, and her moral degeneration.61 This next section observes the close structural properties of the play’s two halves—the parallel scenes of (near) supplication and agôn—which bring to light a marked difference in the thematization of dissent.62 Just as the first half of the play had

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59 Various commentators draw an association between the three acts of brutality—the Greek sacrifice of Polyxena, Polymestor’s murder of Polydorus and Hecuba’s vengeance on Polymestor: see Gregory (1999), p. xxiii. In particular, it is suggested that in setting up a trial scene, Euripides ‘creates a situation where the standards of public policy in the assembly confront the standards of private justice in the law courts’: Segal (1993), 211. Cf. H. Foley (2001), 297. Rehm (2002), 183 argues that ‘by their placement and context, these theatrical versions of political and legal practice do not simply mirror what happened in the Athenian polis; they call its efficacy and purpose into question.’ This chapter, however, draws attention to the different effects prompted by Euripides’ representation. By virtue of being narrated by the Chorus, the Greek assembly does not give space to dissent, which reproduces the sense of inevitability of Polyxena’s sacrifice. On the other hand, by setting up an agôn over Hecuba’s revenge, Euripides puts the case that could appear to be the most justified and least problematic under scrutiny.

60 See n. 2 above. Heath (2003), 254–5 argues that there is no break: the Polyxena scene is subordinate to what follows. It should be noted that news of Polydorus’ death has been announced by the character himself in the prologue.

61 See n. 3 above. See, however, Heath (2003); Mossman (1995), 203; Gregory (1999), pp. xxxii–xxxiii.

62 Mossman (1995), 48–68 discusses the play’s structure from the perspective of stagecraft. She argues that ‘to have Hecuba emerge to bad news mirrors the beginning of the play: there she came out fearing for Polydorus and received bad news about Polyxena, and here she comes out assuming that the body will be Polyxena’s, but in fact she receives bad news about Polydorus’ (p. 61).
focused exclusively on Hecuba’s suffering, so the play’s denouement invites endorsement for her revenge up to and including the *agōn*. In the wake of Hecuba’s shocking revenge, Euripides uses the formal contest of words to test the capacity of an institutional framework to make sense of and manage even this extreme manifestation of dissent.

Like a painter stand back and look at me

The second half of Euripides’ play charts Hecuba’s defiance of her dire circumstances—the suffering and state of slavery she endures—as she takes her revenge on the friend who wronged her. Her suffering and act of vengeance both resonate with Odysseus’ epic narrative, but with a major difference. Though Odysseus returns in disguise, and has to endure every kind of humiliation, there is never any doubt that a hero lies beneath the rags of the beggar or that he will exact revenge in the manner of a good epic hero. Hecuba, however, cannot act by her own volition alone. As a woman, slave and foreigner, she represents the figure of the ideological ‘other’ to the Athenian male citizen, he who possesses agency within the city. Hecuba’s revenge not only belongs to a different category from Odysseus’ legitimate slaughter of the suitors; she even requires assistance just to gain the opportunity for revenge. The person to whom she turns is the commander-in-chief of the Greek coalition forces, Agamemnon.

In marked contrast to her earlier scene with Odysseus, Hecuba’s supplication of Agamemnon could not be more explicit. In a remarkable stichomythic exchange, during which Agamemnon vainly tries to engage with Hecuba in dialogue while she continues to talk to herself, the audience are invited not merely to observe ritual supplication in performance but also to reflect on the extremities of Hecuba’s predicament in having to make her supplication. Once again, there is little opportunity to see Hecuba as anything other than the most tragic character of them all.

The scene climaxes in Hecuba’s physical act of touching Agamemnon, when she appeals for pity by inviting Agamemnon to ‘stand back

64 See e.g. διστην—ἐμαυτὴν γὰρ λέγω λέγωσα σέ, Ἄκαβη—τί δράσοι, Hec. 736–7.
like a painter’ and look on what evils she is suffering. At the climax of his report on Polyxena’s sacrifice, Talthybius had made a similar gesture towards the visual arts (558–61):

\[ \text{α} \text{βω\'σα πέτλους} \varepsilon \varepsilon \ \text{ἄκρας} \ \text{ἐπωμίδος} \\
\text{ἐφρη\'σε} \ \text{λαγώνας} \ \varepsilon \ \text{μέ\'σας} \ \text{παρ} \ \text{ώμφαλόν} \\
\text{μα\'στο\'υς} \ \tau' \ \text{ἐδει\'ε} \ \text{στέρμα} \ \theta' \ \text{ός} \ \text{ἀγάλματος} \\
\text{kάλλιστα} \ldots \]

Taking her robe, from the shoulder to the middle of her navel she tore it and showed her breasts, like a statue, beautiful . . .

Talthybius’ turn to sculpture appears to be motivated by his concern to capture the beauty of the scene he is describing. His words draw a path with Polyxena’s moving hand downwards from her shoulder to her navel, as she opens her robe to expose her breasts66—at which point Talthybius’ thoughts turn to the perfect form of a statue. By breaking off his narration at this point, Talthybius draws attention to an art form that transfixes beauty, freeing the body from the decay of human existence. As well as seeing Polyxena as a victim, then, the audience are also invited to view her from the vantage-point of the massed group of (male) onlookers.67 As the aestheticized—and eroticized—moment of sacrifice is maximized, the tragedy of it—the pain, ugliness and

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65 *οἴκτιρον ἡμᾶς, ὃς γραφεῖς τ’ ἀποσταθείς | ιδοὺ με κἀνάθρησαν οὐ’ ἐξω κακά, Ἡεκ.* 807–8.

66 To be sure, there is something assertive, even heroic, in Polyxena’s gesture of baring her breast to the blade; but equally, Talthybius’ report entices his audience to linger on the femininity of her body. So Rehm (2002), 179: ‘Euripides offers a variety of perspectives on the sacrifice of Polyxena: as an existential choice in the face of the inevitable; as a violent exhibition of male bloodletting; as a display of the eroticized female body, transforming men into rapt spectators unable to stop watching what they no longer want to see.’ On the associations of marriage and death, sacrifice and sexual violation of this scene, see Loraux (1987), 39–41, 56–60.

67 Michelini (1987), in 165: ‘Polyxene’s motivation, in so far as it has been established, is noble, brave, and decorous. Further, the picture of her nudity is appealing in the pathetic as well as the sexual sense: it imitates a familiar gesture of supplication that the audience will have recognized and enjoyed. Finally, the combination of apparent innocence and purity with sexual appeal permits us, as Talthybios does, to ogle Polyxene, even as we sympathize with her. The appeal to shameful pleasures is very satisfyingly blended with high moral tone: what audience could fail to indulge themselves?’ See also Rabinowitz (1993), 55–6; Segal (1993), 175–6; Thalmann (1993), 137–47; Rehm (1994), 167, n. 34; (2002), 180; Scodel (1996). The (fatal) attraction of the scene is contested by Mossman (1995), 142–63.
loss—is in danger of being passed over. Moreover, by assimilating the death of a maiden with the (erotic) portrait of a woman, Euripides constructs an image that evokes the spectacle of tragedy itself, which, by its very nature as a competitive art form, presents terrible and terrifying acts in a beautiful way. So far, indeed, the play has been an invitation to enjoy spectating suffering. Oh, what a lovely tragedy!

Repercussions of Polyxena’s sacrifice seem to be passed over as the play shifts gear and focusses on the introduction of Polydorus’ murder and Hecuba’s desire for revenge. Yet, in and of itself the narration of a maiden’s sacrifice has a precedent in the famous choral parodos of Aeschylus’ Agamemnon. It is significant, therefore, that Euripides brings to mind that scene not with respect to the sacrifice itself but in what Hecuba says. Her appeal to Agamemnon to ‘Stand back like a painter and pity me,’ (ἐσθήσασθι καὶ οὐκ ἀνατίθεμαι, 807) echoes the description by Aeschylus’ Chorus of the moment of Iphigeneia’s sacrifice, ‘who stood out as in a painting’ (πρέπεισα ναὸς ἐν γραφαίς, Aesch. Ag. 242). The deferral brings out Euripides’ shift in emphasis onto Hecuba, who, unlike the sacrificial victim, uses the metaphor herself as she performs the role of a tragic victim.

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68 Segal (1993), 174–5 notably resists the temptation: ‘Even critics who recognize the horror of the scene succumb to its alluring mixture of reverence and personal nobility of the victim. These modern critics fall into Euripides’ trap. They confound the admiration that we are supposed to feel for the victim with the circumstances of her killing.’ Cf. Conacher (1967), 149, 153–4; Pucci (1977), 180; O’Conner-Visser (1987), 180; Segal has in mind such critics as Rivier (1975), 154–5; Gellie (1980), 34; Michelini (1987), 160–1, 180. Cf. Vellacott (1975), 209–10.

69 On Euripides’ exploitation of the paradox of enjoying suffering, see esp. Segal (1993), 13–33.


71 The correspondence is noted by Segal (1990a), 9–10.

72 Mercier (1993), 158 suggestively comments: ‘The performance of [the supplication] is a spectacle; to maintain a physically awkward and humiliating act at such length discomforts suppliant, supplicated, actors, and audience alike.

73 Especially offensive to most critics is Hecuba’s use of the fact that Cassandra shares his bed to persuade Agamemnon. According to the scholion on Soph. Aj. 520, this makes Hecuba like a pimp for her daughter: see also Kirkwood (1947), 167; Conacher (1967), 162; Luschnig (1976), 232; Buxton (1982), 176; Tarkow (1984), 134–6; Michelini (1987), 142, 151–2. By contrast, Mossman (1995), 127 sees Hecuba’s language as
metaphor for art, Hecuba explicitly draws attention to the act of spectating. It is an image that appears particularly apt, since it captures a central paradox of watching tragedy. On the one hand, it asserts the activity of spectating, which accords well with the image of the democratic spectator sketched out above: like painters, the audience paint an image of the play’s events in their minds as they watch, and on that picture they base their judgement. Yet, as spectators, the audience are also inevitably detached from the tragic action too, since they neither possess influence over the events nor suffer as a result of them. The second half of Euripides’ Hecuba exploits this tension to the full, as Euripides unwinds the implications of siding with Hecuba. It does so precisely by bringing to the fore associations not so much with the epic Odyssey as with the tragic Agamemnon.

As a result of Hecuba’s supplication, Agamemnon gives unconditional support for her to act as she deems fit in defiance of her situation and status to right her wrong. She wins that assurance, however, by absolving Agamemnon of all responsibility for what will happen: ‘As for the rest—take heart! I’ll arrange everything well’ (τὰ δ’ ἄλλα—θάρασς—πάντ’ ἐγώ θήσω καλῶς, 875). The full significance of that absolution

‘demure’, and Gregory (1999), 143 nn. 826–30, even considers it ‘standard for parental figures in tragedy to make explicit references to their children’s sexual lives’—which earns a disbelieving rebuke from Rehm (2002), 365, n. 51. We might note that Hecuba herself calls attention to the fact that she is pushing her argument to the extreme: it is a ‘foreign argument’ (τοῦ λόγου ξένου, Hec. 824).

74 A point Agamemnon performs as he moves away precisely so as to avoid becoming involved (l. 812): Mossman (1995), 126. Aristotle famously understands tragedy as a spectacle that produces in the audience pity, the compassion that Hecuba asks Agamemnon for herself. See Ch. 5, sec. 1 above on Odysseus as a spectator in Sophocles’ Ajax.

75 See Act III, intro., n. 36 above.

76 The question Hamlet asks: ‘What’s Hecuba to him, or he to her, | That he should weep for her’, Shakespeare, Hamlet, II. ii.

77 Being able to discern the events on stage as representative of a reality, and not as the reality itself, is essential to the role of being an audience, as comedy attests by frequently blurring the lines of demarcation. See e.g. the discussion of Rehm (2003), 9–20.

78 Zeitlin (1996), 213, n.70 suggests that ‘the Aeschylean echoes begin in earnest from the second stasimon, which precedes the king’s [Agamemnon’s] entry onto the stage (659–66) and recalls the Helen ode in the Agamemnon’. The third stasimon (ll. 905–52), in which the Chorus concentrate their ire on Helen, would seem to be a closer intertext with the Helen ode in the Agamemnon (Aesch. Ag. 681–781): so Thalmann (1993), 134–5. Nevertheless, it is significant that the echoes of Aeschylus’ play begin with the entry of the protagonist of that play, especially since Agamemnon is explicitly invited to perform the role of a spectator of Hecuba’s suffering.
becomes apparent very quickly when Hecuba wreaks terrible vengeance on the unholiest of hosts, Polymestor.

**Throw that barbarism from your heart, and speak**

Hecuba’s refusal to accept her current situation lying down takes the form of a violent attack on Polymestor, the friend who betrayed her. With the Chorus enlisted on her side and acting with her, she murders his children in front of his eyes, and then stabs his eyes out.\(^7^9\) Taking revenge on one’s enemies, especially punishing friends who have done you wrong—an eye for an eye—conforms to normative standards of Greek morality.\(^8^0\) Epic narrative, too, has shown that heroic action often tends towards the excessive. Even so, the manner in which Hecuba achieves retribution (deception), and the form it takes (murder of children, blinding), are disturbing.

Significantly, the closest parallel that suggests itself is Odysseus’ brutal actions in the *Odyssey*, his blinding of Polyphemus and his vengeance on the suitors.\(^8^1\) After father and son have exacted a terrible revenge on the suitors, Odysseus openly concedes to his son that their actions may throw up one or two problems—killing over a hundred of one’s own people is generally not regarded as a good thing.\(^8^2\) Yet, it is important to note that, as I observed above, the *Odyssey* constructs a narrative that carefully marginalizes sympathy for that other group: the

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\(^7^9\) We might note again the emphasis on spectating—and in this case the catastrophic consequences related to it. See Nussbaum (1986), 410 for the significance of eye-contact (or lack of it) during Hecuba’s scene with Polymestor.


\(^8^1\) Zeitlin (1996), 195 draws a series of connections between Polymestor and Cyclops: ‘violator of xenia, blinded in revenge, threat of anthropophagy, parting curse. He too inhabits a remote territory by the shores of the sea at which Greeks stop, to their peril, on their journey home from Troy. His name, Polyphemos, most directly evokes the king’s name, Polymestor.’ She argues, however, that Polymestor also resembles Odysseus (pp. 194–7). See also Segal (1993), 184 who, however, takes the identification of Polymestor with Cyclops as a sign of Hecuba’s transformation into her enemy and of her moral decline. This chapter argues that Hecuba is identifiable with Odysseus from the beginning of the play, and sees Hecuba’s character as constructed by the audience as they experience the drama. For a similar articulation of characterisation in Greek tragedy, see Easterling (1990), 99.

\(^8^2\) *Od.* 23.117–22.
suitors come to a bad end ‘because of their own recklessness’. In this way, the returning king’s revenge can be, and is generally, regarded as legitimate. In stark contrast, although Hecuba is the focus of the play’s sympathies, her action takes place from a position of marginality. As a female, slave and foreigner, her revenge cannot be constructed as the reassertion of authority; it is inevitably an act of dissent from the (Greek) occupying powers that control her life, particularly since the object of her fury is their friend and ally. Typically, Euripides has presented an extreme scenario that poses the question whether even this kind of dissent can be regarded as legitimate and beneficial to the community, given the moral bankruptcy of the victim and the moral right of the aggressor, the all-suffering Hecuba.

That test soon presents itself, when Polymestor appears on stage on all fours, dehumanized, and screaming blue murder (1109–13). Soon afterwards Agamemnon arrives, having heard a ‘racket’ (κρανγῆς ἀκόντος ἡλθον, 1109), as if Echo herself were making a ‘rumpus’ (Ἡχῶ διδούσα θόρυβον, 1111) and ‘not quietly shrieking’ among the army (οὐ γὰρ ἰσχυρὸς ἔλακ’ ἀνὰ στρατὸν, 1109–10). The violent physicality of Hecuba’s dissent here is translated into the verbal realm, as Agamemnon describes a series of wildly disproportionate speech acts that have disturbed his army. Such was the noise, indeed, that, according to Agamemnon, had they not known that Troy had already fallen, they might have thought that they were at war again. Polymestor’s

83 οφετέρων ἀνασαθλίγων, Od. 1.7. While first used of Odysseus’ companions, and thereafter mainly of the suitors (see Ch. 2, n. 132 above), it next occurs in the first episode in association with Aegisthus, as Zeus sets out the moral agenda of the Odyssey (1.34–43). Agamemnon’s (tragic) nostos was already paradigmatic in the Odyssey; see Ch. 2, n. 133 above, with text.

84 Of all the tragedians, only Euripides uses κρανγῆς: cf. Hipp. 902; Andr. 1144; El. 695; Ion 893; Or. 1510, 1529.

85 Cf. Hec. 872. In Euripides’ Orestes, the messenger identifies the demagogue as trusting in the commotion (threnοφωτε πίανως, Or. 905). We saw above that the Chorus of Sophocles’ Ajax feel threatened by great commotions going round the Greek camp (μεγάλοι θόρυβοι κατέχουσα ἡμᾶς, Aj. 142; cf. 164). Cf. Soph. Philoct. 1263. For the political connotations of θόρυβος, see Bers (1985). See also J. Roisman (2004), 264 with n. 7, for the picture of tumultuous interchanges that emerges from orations, during which the speakers had to make themselves heard above the clamorous din. Being cowed into silence was not only damaging to one’s speech, it was thought of in terms of disenfranchisement: Montiglio (2000), 116.

86 εἰ δὲ μὴ Φρονόν | πύργους πεσόντας ἦμεν Ἐλλήνων δορί, | φόβον παρέσχ’ ἂν οὐ μέσως οὐκ ἐκτύπος, Hec. 1111–13.
cries evoke the fearful prospect of a Troy undestroyed, as if Agamemnon’s fear in the *Iliad* has been realized, and they were forced to return home without having captured the city. Even more disturbing for Agamemnon, Polymestor’s cries echo his own from Aeschylus’ eponymous play, prompting the clearest suggestion yet that events are about to take a turn for the worse. The fallout from Hecuba’s dissent from her tragic fate has the potential to destabilize the carefully constructed post-war order of the Greek coalition and the life of their leader.

Dissent has transgressed into violence: Polymestor, swearing revenge, bears bloody witness to Hecuba’s revenge for wrong done to her. In response, Agamemnon attempts to reassert order by setting up a contest of words (1129–31):

*ɪσχ’· ἐκβαλὼν δὲ καρδίας τὸ βάρβαρον
λέγ’· ὡς ἀκούσας σοῦ τε τῆσδε τ’ ἐν μέρει
κρίνῃ δικαίως ἀνθ’ ὅσον πάσχεις τάδε.*

Hold on! Throw that barbarism from your heart and speak so that by hearing both you and her in turn I may judge fairly the things that you’re suffering.

Appealing to the fighting parties to put aside their barbaric ways and talk to each other, Agamemnon sets a Greek manner of achieving resolution through the sanctioned contest of words against the violent acts and inarticulate threats of barbarians. His framing of this *agôn*

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88 ὅμως μᾶλ’ ἀνθ’ *Hec.* 1037 = Aesch. *Ag.* 1245; see Meridor (1975); cf. Segal (1993), 187. Evidently, these were memorable lines: Sophocles also reworks them in his *Electra* (l. 1417). On the Aeschylean scene that is being evoked here, Thalmann (1993), 148 comments: ‘The deception and blinding of Polymestor is a citation, verbal and visual, of the scene between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.’
89 For a discussion of ‘barbarian’ as a category that applies to standards of ethical behaviour (as here), rather than exclusively to a person’s ethnicity, see Papadodima (2008).
90 The setting up of a law court may be more pointed than that. As H. Foley (2001), 285 remarks, the trial Agamemnon sets up is ‘unique in revenge tragedy outside the *Oresteia*’. But, whereas the *Oresteia* brings conflict into the institutional fabric of the community (even if Athena has to negotiate the Furies’ dissent outside the law court itself—see Act III, intro., above), the current play pushes dissent to the extreme, so that it is not even brought within the bounds of the play itself. In a comparable case, the *Orestes*, Euripides displaces the act of institutionalization, which the *Eumenides* dramatizes, to another time and place (*Or.* 872–3), thereby adding to the sense of insecurity regarding the play’s capacity to manage dissent. See Barker (2011). Cf. Hesk (2007), 82.
Beyond the agōn in Euripides’ Hecuba

holds the promise—expectation almost—that it can manage even this extreme outbreak of dissent.91 This marks the most extreme version of the agōn’s capacity to make sense of violence and give legitimacy to acts of defiance.

On first impressions, the agōn would appear to bear out the events previously witnessed. Against all evidence to the contrary, Polymestor attempts to rid himself of any culpability for the murder of Polydorus, thereby ensuring that sympathy remains fully behind Hecuba.92 Interestingly, the majority of his speech comprises a report of off-stage events, which is usually given by a third party and understood as an adequate representation of what really happened.93 Here Euripides displaces the authoritative messenger narrative to an antagonist presenting a case in the contested space of the agōn. Not only does the displacement problematize sympathy for Polymestor concerning what has happened; it also has the tangible effect of curtailing the argumentative section of his speech.94 On both scores, as a result, his speech lacks integrity and its capacity to convince is greatly reduced.

While Polymestor is found wanting in terms of his persuasiveness, Hecuba’s measured response amounts to a rhetorical tour de force.95 Her careful point-by-point rejoinder to her opponent’s arguments recalls the persuasive adeptness of an Odysseus, who had previously defeated her in argument.96 More striking still, she deploys a Greek conceit of superiority over barbarians to challenge Polymestor’s proposition that he had acted to benefit the Greeks—though, of course, she is

91 ‘Agamemnon’s appearance at this stage of the action supplies Hecuba with both a social framework and the responsible authority’: Meridor (1983), 15.
92 From his very first appearance, Polymestor has been guilty of ‘sententious generalizations and fluent improvisations’: Gregory (1991), 109.
93 Recent scholarship has challenged notions of objectivity regarding messenger speeches: de Jong (1991); Barrett (2002), who, however, omits Polymestor’s speech from his appendix of messenger speeches (p. 224). So too Gregory (1999), 179, nn. 1132–82 who, while conceding that it displays characteristics of a messenger speech, concludes that ‘it does not . . . meet one crucial criterion: the narrator is not a subsidiary character but one of the principals’. This seems to me to impose too artificial a distinction on Euripides’ manipulation of form and convention.
94 Mossman (1995), 133.
96 Conacher (1967), 162 sees Hecuba’s persuasiveness as a sign that she has learnt from Odysseus the use of rhetorical skills. Cf. Segal (1993), 184.
foreign herself. So devastating is her rebuttal of her opponent that scholars have sought psychological interpretations to account for how a long-suffering female victim could have delivered such a speech, especially given the precise lack of persuasiveness of her earlier speech. In formal terms too, given that the *agōn* restores support for Hecuba in spite of the cruelty of her deed, it appears curiously ‘insulated’ from its embedded context.

Yet, in spite of this insulated impression, dissent is not so easily contained within the institution that Agamemnon has set up. It has already been noted that Polymestor’s speech is utterly unpersuasive. This is true, insofar as it relates to the context of the events that have been witnessed. But Polymestor’s framing of his messenger narrative (1138–44), in which he employs two arguments drawn from outside the drama, resonates more broadly than the events of the play would seem to allow. In the first scenario, Polymestor expects his audience to believe that he killed Polydorus to benefit the Greeks, in order that no Trojan prince would later rise to challenge the Greek hegemony. In the context of the play, this excuse appears entirely specious and unconvincing, since Polymestor’s lust for gold has already been established as his...

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97 ‘Barbarian peoples neither would nor could be friends with the Greeks’ (οὐποι’ ἄν φίλον | τὸ βάρβαρον γένος ἂν Ἔλληναν γένος, Hec. 1199–1202). Cf. Bacon (1961), 151–2; Baldry (1965), 20–4. While this comment would seem paradoxically to condemn the speaker herself, there is some doubt as to whether Hecuba would include the Trojans in the group of barbarian peoples. After all, elsewhere Hecuba speaks of three categories, Greeks, Trojans and barbarians (Eur. *Tro.* 472–8). See Papadodima (2008). Even from an Athenian perspective, it is not self-evident that the Trojans would, or should, be considered barbarians, considering their longevity in ancient Greek literature and their non-barbaric representation in the *Iliad*; see Ch. 1, n. 98 above.

98 The psychological case has been put most forcefully by Nussbaum (1986) and Michelini (1987). For a discussion of the relationship between character and rhetorical context: see Dale (1954), pp. xxvii–xxviii; Conacher (2003), *passim*; and, most recently, Scodel (2000), 132. Buxton (1982), 150 suggests that characters are what they persuade the audience, which comes close to what Easterling says (cf. n. 81 above).

99 As Mossman (1995), 201 puts it, Hecuba’s revenge is ‘insulated from the account of the metamorphosis by the *agōn*, where she is in fact extremely reasonable’. The prophecy then adds to the confusion to create a ‘state of flux’ (p. 203). All in all, Euripides gives us not a ‘most difficult case’ but an ‘easiest case’ and then makes us think about its problematic aspects’ (p. 205). This present study conceives of the *agon* rather differently, as a form that exceeds not only its context in, but the boundaries of, the play itself, with the result that both this representation and the tradition at large are drawn into its contested space.

100 *Hec.* 1134–44.
motivating principle. Yet, killing a young Trojan prince to forestall the possibility of a later revenge attack is a motif not only familiar to the audience; Euripides himself represents the selfsame scenario elsewhere. The killing of an innocent child is an argument that the Greeks themselves have used to justify their actions before now.

The second example occurs after Polymestor has related the off-stage events surrounding his blinding. Having described in horrific detail the women's assault against him and his children, he sums up his suffering by drawing a moral about the role of women (1178–82):

\[
\text{eί τις γυναίκας τών πρώτης ερηκεν κακῶς}
\]
\[
\text{ή νυν λέγων ἔστιν τις ἡ μέλλει λέγειν,}^{103}
\]
\[
\text{ἀπαιτα ταῦτα συντεμῶν ἐγὼ φράσω·}
\]
\[
\text{γένος γάρ οὔτε πόντος οὔτε γῆ τρέφει}
\]
\[
\text{τοῖνοι· ὃ δ' αἰεὶ ἐνυτυχὼν ἐπίσταται.}
\]

If any man has previously spoken ill of women, or is saying so now or is going to say so, summing everything up I make this declaration: neither sea nor land breeds any creature like them. Anyone who has dealings with them knows this well.

At the end of his speech Polymestor generalizes from his particular situation to condemn women as a whole, which is by no means an uncommon strategy in agon speeches. As an argument that is likely to ring true to his audience, however, it fails to convince. Even though his appearances on stage have been brief, Polymestor has done nothing to suggest that he suffers undeservedly at the hands of Hecuba. On the contrary, he has been so self-serving, so utterly disregarding of

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101 Hecuba forcefully rejects his suggestion (Hec. 1195–1216), and wins support from the onstage judge Agamemnon (1245–6).
103 In his (1995) Loeb edition, Kovacs deletes this line. The expression is certainly odd; but it does suggest the difficulty of pinning down Polymestor’s words to a specific context.
guest–host ties, that the audience are more likely to put his comments about women down to the uncivilized and chauvinistic ravings of a Thracian. Once again, therefore, if judgement is restricted to the events of the play alone, Polymestor’s words at best present a dodgy dossier of the events witnessed, at worse simply another example of his remarkable arrogance and misogyny. But, as much as the audience may (want to) dismiss his analysis out of hand, that may prove all the more difficult for the judge of the case, Agamemnon, for whom this description of women carries, or should carry, a particular purchase. The Odyssey portrays Agamemnon on two occasions, both times in the Underworld, and both times complaining that he has ended up there because of his wife. Indeed, in the second Underworld scene Agamemnon doesn’t just condemn his wife’s actions; he offers her as an example to all,\textsuperscript{105} as a negative paradigm of female virtue that potentially condemns all women.\textsuperscript{106} But, just as importantly, Clytemnestra has enacted this role in tragedy before, in Aeschylus’ \textit{Agamemnon}.\textsuperscript{107} When Polymestor makes his sententious criticism of women, then, he operates within a tradition started by the judge, Agamemnon, himself. Polymestor’s conclusion, ‘anyone who has dealings with women knows this well’, directly looks back to Agamemnon’s (future) troubles.

Agamemnon had set up the \textit{agōn} in order to contain violence and manage dissent. By doing so, he provides the clearest example yet of the \textit{agōn}’s capacity to prompt and contain frank speech. In Chapter 5 we saw that Sophocles’ \textit{Ajax} presented the \textit{agōn} as an institution that allows a free and frank airing of views, that does not necessarily lead to resolution, and that does not so much stage the contest between the

\textsuperscript{105} ‘[Unlike Penelope] the daughter of Tyndareos fashioned her evil deeds, when she killed her wedded lord, and a hateful song will be hers among men, and will promote an evil reputation for the race of women, even for one whose acts are good’ (\textit{οἷς Τυνδαρέου κούρη κακὰ μήποτε ἔργα, | κοιμίδον κτείνασα πόσιν, στυγερὴ δὲ τ’ ἀδιόθη | ἔσσετ’ ἐπ’ ἄθρωποις, χαλεπὴν δὲ τε φήμων ὀπάσει | θηλυτέρησε γυναῖκι, καὶ ἡ κ’ εὐεργός ἔργων}, Hom. \textit{Od.} 24.199–202). Cf. Gregory (1999), 184.

\textsuperscript{106} The Chorus try to restrict the applicability of Polymestor’s statement: ‘because of your own misery don’t put the whole race of women together like that and blame them’ (\textit{μηδὲν θρασύνου μηδὲ τοῖς σαυτοῦ κακοῖς | τὸ θῆλυ αὐθείς ὀδε πᾶν μέμψῃ γένος}, 1183–4).

\textsuperscript{107} Noting the correspondence of ll. 1177–82 to Aeschylus’ \textit{Choephoroi} 585–92, Thalmann (1993), 151 suggests that Polymestor’s musing whether anyone in the past has spoken ill of women ‘seems to gesture to Aeschylus’.
characters as much as reproduce that contest among the audience. But the *agon*’s capacity to institutionalize dissent is severely tested by Euripides’ play. In the first place, Hecuba’s actions represent an extreme form of dissent in terms of both what she has done and who she is. Secondly, the ideological emphasis on hearing the other side creates an unusually unsettling effect. Polymestor’s arguments are entirely specious and he is soundly beaten in the debate. But they are specious only if they are kept within the bounds of the play; the tradition may tell a rather different story.\(^\text{108}\) Consequences for judgement reverberate far beyond its immediate context—as Agamemnon, the judge who has already been bought off, and the audience themselves are soon to discover.

3. FRANK SPEAKING AT THE LIMITS

In a bid to control the acts of terrorism that have broken out under his watch, the leader of the Greek coalition forces sets up a debate. The conceit that words can make sense of, and bring an end to, violence represents the ideological force of the *agon* as an institution that can

\(^{108}\) The audience have got some tough decisions to make: does the resonance with the tradition serve to cast a different light on the play, so that we recognize how Euripides has focalized his play through Hecuba’s eyes by giving us a brief glimpse of a different view as the drama draws to a close? (That is to say, do we come to regard Hecuba as a Clytemnestra figure?) Or do we rather see the male tradition itself questioned and condemned by the events of this play, which we have seen through female eyes? (In this case, are we invited to reflect on Clytemnestra as a figure closer to the Hecuba of our play?) Observing the associations of Hecuba with Clytemnestra and Polymestor with Agamemnon, Thalmann (1993), 149 suggests that ‘Polydoros’s death cannot be made to appear a sacrifice for the good of the community; Polymestor does not have even the excuse (whatever it is worth) that Agamemnon did, or Odysseus in this play, though significantly he tries to argue that he does (Hek. 1136–44).’ One feature of the Euripidean *agon* is its capacity to draw on material from outside the present drama: in this way, not only do the characters engage in contest with each other, but the chosen story-pattern of the play itself, even the wider tradition, get drawn into the conflict. See e.g. the case of Helen in *Trojan Women*, whose attempts to blame Aphrodite (*Tro*. 924–50) appear entirely specious in relation to the events of the play, though in actual fact they belong to the tradition (and relate rather closely to the divine prologue Euripides has staged); and Jason, who appears to wander on to the stage directly from his epic tradition (see esp. his emphasis on nautical imagery, the role of Aphrodite and the mention of Orpheus: *Med*. 523–31, 541–3), oblivious of the new song already set in motion by Medea and the Chorus (cf. *Med*. 410–45).
accommodate dissent. On the one hand, both speakers, given the opportunity to air their grievances, are drawn into a political process of argument. On the other hand, by presenting the relative merits of either side in speeches of roughly equal length, the agón invites the audience to engage in a performance of decision-making. In this case, the agón appears to bear out the conclusions already reached: Polymestor proves himself to be utterly despicable by introducing specious claims with little relevance for the events witnessed; his version of events is strongly countered by Hecuba, whose arguments are much more firmly grounded in the action of the play. It is true that ripples of a destabilizing undercurrent have surfaced in the resonances with the broader tradition; but still, the agón confirms the play’s sympathetic focus on the all-suffering Hecuba. Notably, however, the play does not end with the agón. Instead, Euripides stages the brief, but thoroughly disturbing, fallout from the formal contest of words, which pursues the consequences of dissent outside an institutional context.¹⁰⁹

In your face!

The last scene begins conventionally enough with the on-stage justice of the peace, who issues his judgement as if presiding over a law-court case (1240–5). First, Agamemnon admits that it is a burden for him to judge the evils of others, yet judge he must (ἀχθείνα μὲν μοι τὰλλότρια κρινεῖν κακά, | ὅμως δ’ ἀνάγκη, 1240–1). Yet, after his initial hesitancy Agamemnon proves himself to be a most willing judge, delivering a definitive and damning judgement on Polymestor. In his summing up of the case before him Agamemnon concludes that Polymestor murdered Polydorus, not out of any ‘patriotic’ desire to spare the Greeks further casualties, but for gold alone.¹¹⁰ Such amoral behaviour he puts down to an ideological difference between Greeks and barbarians: ‘perhaps for you it is easy to kill a guest, but to us Greeks at any rate it is shameful’ (τάχι οὖν παρ’ ὑμῖν ράδιον εἰνοκτονεῖν: | ἡμῖν δὲ γ’ αἰσχρὸν τοίς}

¹⁰⁹ Gregory (1999), 190, nn. 1254–84 notes that the ‘prophecy of events lying beyond the framework of the action is a regular feature of Euripidean endings’. Cf. Dunn (1996), 66–7. It seems that this is one means by which Euripides’ plays resist closure.

¹¹⁰ ἔμοι δ’, ἵνα εἰδῆς, οὔτ’ ἐκτῆς, οὔτ’ ἐκεῖν ὁμοίως χάριν | οὔτ’ οὖν Ἀχαιῶν ἁρπ’ ἀποκτείναι εἰνον, | ἀλλ’ ἀσ’ ἐχῆς τὸν χρυσὸν ἐν δόμοις σοῖς, Hec. 1242–5.
Beyond the *agōn* in Euripides’ *Hecuba*

‘Ελληνων τῶν, 1247–8). The inclusive ‘to us’ resonates beyond the immediate group of the Greek army, whom Agamemnon has previously conceded would support Polymestor. Rather, Agamemnon’s words invite the audience to regard the *agōn* as affirming the superiority of civilized behaviour over acts of barbarism, words over violence, reason over passion—and having just witnessed Hecuba’s complete victory in the *agōn*, they are likely to.

Yet, such a complacent judgement is complicated by the position of the on-stage judge, Agamemnon, who, as we saw above, sanctioned Hecuba’s vengeance, including its means of exaction, provided that his army don’t get to hear of it. As a judge, then, Agamemnon is critically compromised, since he has already agreed to support Hecuba in her case against Polymestor. Thus Euripides has staged a contest of words in which it is far from clear whether or not the judge bases his judgement on the arguments made before him or else according to his predisposition towards one of the contestants. In fact, given Agamemnon’s history in trying to suppress dissent, which has been traced from the *Iliad* to Sophocles’ *Ajax*, one might be a little sceptical as to his commitment to open debate now. The audience must not only assess the *agōn*, but judge the judge.

The context for the *agōn* makes a difference to its assessment as well. In the first half of this play there had almost been an *agōn* over the fate of Polyxena, only for a consensus over the decision to reassert itself as tragic necessity: the heroine must die. Instead, an *agōn* takes place in the aftermath of Hecuba’s vengeance. By this formal structuring of events, Euripides constructs a debate *not* over the action that the Greeks should have taken, but over the *process* by which the *agōn* is resolved.

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111 *Hec.* 857–63. The application to the Athenian audience is further underlined by the reference to ‘Hellenes’, which represents a contemporary coinage for the more Homeric-sounding ‘Achaeans’.

112 ‘Euripides knew, I think, that his audience would take satisfaction in that revenge... We cannot help conniving at this victory’: Reckford (1985), 118. He goes on, however, to judge how ‘it is also a terrible defeat for Hecuba, and for nobility’, rather than, what is being suggested, that the audience are being made complicit in the revenge.

113 *Hec.* 854–5. After Hecuba’s partial explanation of her plan, Agamemnon’s prayer becomes vaguer still (*Hec.* 902–4). The manner of Hecuba’s revenge may not be quite what he had in mind; but he has given her assurances that he would not interfere.

114 To what extent has Agamemnon ‘pre-judged’ the *agōn* or is compromised by this closeness to Hecuba is a common concern for scholars: Michelini (1987), 155; Mossman (1995), 132.
or should not have taken (to kill or not to kill Polyxena), but over how Hecuba’s action should be judged (whether or not it was right that she acted in this way). Thus, although the agón appears, as one critic has put it, ‘insulated’ from the surrounding events—by refocusing on Hecuba’s cause—it nevertheless poses a question of her act’s legitimacy and whether that most extreme form of dissent can be kept within an institutional framework.

In fact, Euripides dramatizes the agón in such a way as to show its inadequacy as an institution that can deal with dissent properly. For, in spite of the ease with which Agamemnon sums up the contest of words, the agón does not resolve the crisis. As I have previously noted, Polymestor’s portrayal of the play’s events against a familiar backdrop of infanticide and deceitful women has already opened up more disturbing lines of enquiry. Now, in the fallout from the agón, the doors are opened to more sinister horrors lurking within, as the Odyssean Hecuba comes face-to-face with her epic nemesis, Polyphemus.

In a notable failure of the agón to contain dissent, a rapid-fire and vicious stichomythic exchange between the three characters on stage brings the play to a terrifying climax. Now, without his eyes, Polymestor suddenly finds himself endowed with the power possessed by all good tragic blind characters, the power of second-sight—though his knowledge derives from an external source, ‘the Thracian prophet, Dionysus’.115 As Hecuba rather gleefully points out, that knowledge has failed to save Polymestor from his terrible fate (1268). It is interesting, however, that both points—blindness and knowledge of the future—are characteristics shared with the Odyssey’s Polyphemus: both characters are blinded by a weaker foe employing a devious trick in revenge for the murderous transgression of xenia; both prophesy evils to come for the hero with information derived from their special relationship with a divinity.116 Far from containing violence and frank speech within the

115 Hec. 1267. By identifying the source of Polymestor’s knowledge with the god of tragedy, the play already suggests a certain metatheatricality.
116 Od. 9.506–21. See Segal (1993), 184–7. Segal (1990b), 309–10 posits a further parallel: Agamemnon rushes on to the stage (ll. 1109–10) on hearing Polymestor crying out for help (l. 1089), just as the Cyclopes gather on hearing Polyphemus’ cries (Od. 9.399–408). See also Mossman (1995), 191, who notes their general similarities (both Polymestor and Polyphemus are savage and barbarous in temperament, both become frantic and vindictive in their helplessness); and Gregory (1999), 170, who
argōn, the stage becomes infected by the violent speech of the ‘very famous’—or ‘many voiced’—Polyphemus.

Not only do these resonances point to a more vigorous engagement with Odyssean material than has previously been observed; they also point up the differences between the epic tale of heroic vengeance and this tragic version: Polymestor proves to be a much more troubling foe for our hero and her play. After a rapid exchange of insults between the two antagonists, which already suggests that this play is not going to manage dissent particularly well, the power of unlicensed words comes to the fore as Polymestor describes Hecuba’s death and subsequent transformation into a wild dog (1265). Debate has raged as to the precise meaning of that ‘sign’ (σήμα, 1273), whether it symbolizes Hecuba’s moral degeneration, or else whether an interpretation can be found that is more in keeping with the sympathetic focus of the play. In the context of this semiotic crisis, Euripides slyly memorializes the sign as a ‘fixed mark for sailors’ (ναυτίλοις τέκμαρ, 1273), as if the final word were left with sailors—among whom would rank many of the Athenian audience before whom this play is staged.

Yet, what kind of ‘fixed mark’ or final say the audience are to set on the play as it argues that Euripides’ own Cyclops play ‘contains striking echoes of this scene’. Cf. Zeitlin (1996), 194–7, with n. 81 above.

For the term σήμα as designating a hero’s tomb: Nagy (1979), 340–3; (1990), 209–11. Henrichs (1993), 171, n. 22 suggests that the example here presents a bitter twist on the theme of monumentalizing cult and poetry. In general for this scene, see Nussbaum (1986), 410–18.

Erbse (1984), 59 suggests that the image recalls Aeschylus’ Eumenides, in which the Erinyes (divinities that resemble creatures in the form of dogs) transform into benefactor and humanitarian deities thanks to the trial that takes place in a democratic Athens. Orestes is released by a civic institution from the awful consequences of his revenge, while Hecuba loses her humanity and transforms into a bitch in a barbaric place of desolation. This strongly suggests the dog as the symbol of the non-integration in the city, of the contempt of all kinds of nomos. See also Zeitlin (1996), 183–6.

Burnett (1994) argues that dogs were not inevitably negative cultural symbols. In defence of Hecuba, Gregory (1991), 110 notes a suggestive parallel: Odysseus’ heart ‘barked like a dog’ at the insulting behaviour of the suitors (Od. 20.14–16). Has Polymestor ‘seen through’ Hecuba’s Odyssean mask?

Mossman (1995), 199 perceptively comments: ‘It seems probable that [the] divided tradition [regarding Hecuba’s end] is partly the product of the lack of explanation of the metamorphosis in Euripides’ (my italics). See also Gall (1997), who stresses that Hecuba’s metamorphosis is not so much a punishment as a symbol.
draws to a close remains open to question, particularly given more uncomfortable resonances with Aeschylus’ classic portrayal of the subsequent events.\footnote{Clytemnestra describes the beacons which give the message that her husband is returning as a ‘limit and symbol’ (τέκμαρ τοιούτων σύμβολων τε σει λέγω, Aesch. \textit{Ag} 315).} Part of the difficulty of interpreting the whys and wherefores of this ‘sign’ derives from the fact that Hecuba herself makes little of it: ‘it’s of no concern to me’ (οὐδὲν μέλει μοι, 1274), she comments, now that Polymestor has paid his dues (σοι γέ μοι δόντος δίκην, 1274).\footnote{Not appearing to be touched at all by the threat suggests that the metamorphosis may not be all that bad after all. (Or perhaps it is because the transformation is another Euripidean invention, one that Hecuba hasn’t heard of before either.)} As a result, Polymestor changes his line of attack, by casually mentioning Cassandra’s death at the hands of Clytemnestra.\footnote{καὶ σήν γ’ ἀνάγκη παιδα Κασσάνδραν θανεῖν, \textit{Hec}. 1275.} He is on surer ground here, since that prophecy is fulfilled by the audience’s extra-dramatic knowledge of what happens next from the tales either inherited from epic or dramatized on the tragic stage, such as in Aeschylus’ \textit{Agamemnon}.\footnote{Thalmann (1993), 154 draws connections between three of Polymestor’s prophecies and Aeschylus’ \textit{Oresteia}: the mention of Clytemnestra as a bitter housekeeper (l. 1277) evokes Aesch. \textit{Ag}. 154–5; the detail of the bloody bath (l. 1281) picks up on \textit{Eum}. 461; Agamemnon’s plea to be released from toil (ll. 1291–2) replays the first line of the trilogy (\textit{Ag}. 1), on which see n. 139 below.} In any case, now Hecuba is touched, and spits back in his face (ἀπέπτυσε, 1276) the fateful words in the hope of averting a new disaster.\footnote{Cf. Eur. \textit{Hel.} 664; \textit{Hipp.} 614.} By this gesture Hecuba now acts as the figure who tries to close off dissent, while Polymestor assumes her previous role of the marginalized figure standing up to all attempts to silence him. But, as a grotesque prophet-like figure spouting hatred at all and sundry, Polymestor stands as the very antithesis of Hecuba, who has been the sympathetic focus of the play. As a consequence, his dissent poses a fundamental challenge to the notion of it as an acceptable, socially beneficial form of disagreement. His is not the kind of voice that any audience can feel safe with, let alone support.
Won’t you shut his mouth?

Hecuba is not alone in feeling the full force of Polymestor’s tongue-lashing. With eyes that are closed but a mouth wide open, Polymestor keeps speaking, and keeps coming up with bad news of a kind that defies the plot of the play. Turning his sights now onto the judge of the ἀγών, he further prophesies that Clytemnestra will kill Agamemnon as well (l. 1279). Since returning to the stage Agamemnon has maintained the fiction of being an independent figure, untouched by the evils that have broken out, sufficiently distanced from them in order to cast an impartial judgement.¹²⁶ Now Polymestor’s words provoke him to join in with the outing of the child-killer. First, the king issues a gagging order, asking his slaves: ‘won’t you shut his mouth?’ (οὐκ ἐφέξετε στόμα; 1283). This gesture of suppressing dissent is certainly strongly marked, but it recalls one passage which we have previously examined: when, in the Odyssey, Odysseus had cut off the head of the suitor Leiodes.¹²⁷ But where Odysseus had succeeded unequivocally, Agamemnon fails dramatically to silence the dissenting voice: Polymestor simply says: ‘It has been said’ (εἴρηται γάρ, 1284). He is right too: these events have been said before.¹²⁸ Again, knowledge of the extradramatic tradition authorizes Polymestor’s terrible words, even as the on-stage authority tries to override them in a blatant assertion of power. Next, Agamemnon resorts to an even more extreme measure to silence Polymestor: he orders his slaves to throw the prophet out onto some deserted island, since Polymestor ‘speaks with a tongue overly bold’ (λίαν θρασύστομεί, 1286).¹²⁹ The problem of Polymestor is here

¹²⁶ At the beginning of his summing-up Agamemnon had pointedly stated that the ‘troubles of others’ were difficult to judge: γάλλοτρια κακά, Hec. 1240.
¹²⁷ See Ch. 1, sec. 1 above. In Euripides’ Orestes Electra urges the chorus not to wake Orestes: ‘won’t you guard your tongues?’ (φιλασσομένα στόμα, Or. 184). This is a near collocation of Aeschylus’ Agamemnon Chorus, who describe how Agamemnon’s men put a guard on Iphigeneia’s mouth (στόματός τε καλλισπέρω— ρου φυλακᾶ κατασχέιν, Aesch. Ag. 236). Similarly, the Chorus of Aeschylus’ Persians frame the consequences of Persia’s defeat in terms of the opportunity for free speech: ‘No longer will men’s tongues be guarded: for the people are set free to speak freely’ (οὐδ’ ἐτι γλώσσα βροτοῖσιν ἐν φυλακαῖς, Per. 591–3).
¹²⁸ Electra also uses εἴρηται (Or. 1203), though in her case it sums up the tradition-defying plan to take Hermione hostage.
¹²⁹ As we saw above, Menelaus in not very subtle terms indirectly accuses Teucer of speaking with a bold tongue (Soph. Aj. 1141). Agamemnon first orders simply that
explicitly connected to his frankness of speech—his dissent. But Agamemnon’s attempts to restrict that overly bold tongue are again doomed to failure. The mention of a desert island recalls an odd passage from the *Odyssey*, in which Aegisthus is said to have exiled the bard, whom Agamemnon had posted to watch over Clytemnestra, by sending him off to a desert island.\textsuperscript{130} Even in the act of reasserting authority, control again, as always, slips from Agamemnon’s grasp.\textsuperscript{131}

In prefacing his final verdict on the *agōn* between Polymestor and Hecuba, Agamemnon had described the subject of his judgement as ‘foreign’ (τάλλοτρια, 1240), though he recognized the necessity of issuing judgement. His final words in the play severely test that assessment (1289–92):

\begin{quote}
 καὶ γάρ πνοάς
 πρός οἶκον ἡδη τάδε πομπίμους ὄρω.
 εὖ δ’ εἰς πάτραν πλεύσαμεν, εὖ δὲ τὰν δόμοις
 ἐχοῦν’ ἔδοιμεν τῶνδ’ ἀφειμένοι πόνων.
\end{quote}

For in fact I see that the winds are here that will escort us home. May we sail well to our fatherland, and may we see all things well in our houses, escaping from our present troubles.

Drawing attention to Agamemnon’s deployment (once more) of the first-person plural—‘may we sail’, ‘may we see all things well’—Charles Segal wonders whether Agamemnon’s inability to silence Polymestor locates the horrors in the hearts of the audience. Watching these savage, brutalized barbarians, the Athenians, according to Segal, were ‘really watching themselves’.\textsuperscript{132} Segal here is thinking of the direct relevance to contemporary political events:\textsuperscript{133} on this interpretation Euripides is

Polymestor be removed (οὐχ ἔλεητ’ αὐτῶν, δημός, ἐκποιοῦν βίας; 1282); only after further provocation does he issue the command to remove Polymestor to some deserted island (οὐκ ἄσων τάχος | νήσον ἔρμων αὐτῶν ἐκβαλεῖτε ποι, 1284–5).

\textsuperscript{130} *Od.* 3.269–73, esp.: τὸν μὲν ἀοίδον ἄγων ἐς νήσον ἔρμων | κάλλισπεν, 3.270–1. There are other alternatives that resonate internally to the play itself, none of which are pleasant to recall, such as the status of the women themselves, deserted in the aftermath of the war, or the dumping of Polydorus’ body: *Hec.* 27, 699.

\textsuperscript{131} Agamemnon’s attempted assertion of power over a prophet recalls the *Iliad*’s opening scene. There too he failed: Il. 1.106–20. See Ch. 1, sec. 1 above.

\textsuperscript{132} Segal (1993), 190.

\textsuperscript{133} ‘The community of spectators watching the play doubtless wanted to see itself as the humane, pitying audience that Hecuba was trying to create for her suffering. But the
exposing the evils that men do in the name of spreading democracy and freedom. Something like that effect may well be true, though looking for direct political allusion, as noted above, is problematic: if nothing else, it limits the referentiality of these words, when the first-person plural usage suggests precisely a generalizing tone and universal applicability.  

An alternative view may draw attention to the process of interpretation involved in spectating these events. Agamemnon’s emphasis on sight—‘I see that’, ‘may we see’—and use of the first-person plural together serve to implicate the watching audience. After all, Agamemnon’s windy talk recalls other instances when the Greeks prayed for a following breeze on their Trojan trip, ominously when Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter to launch the expedition in the first place. Thus, the evils that Agamemnon had earlier hoped to avoid are brought tragically home as he unwittingly recalls his own miserable end: Agamemnon has already played the role of sacrificing (his own) ‘Polyxena’ to appease a wrathful divinity, and another mother is waiting at home to take revenge. In fact, Agamemnon’s last words, ‘[May we escape] from our present toils’ (τῶν ἀφειμένων πόλων, 1292) quote the first line of Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, spoken by the watchman: ‘I beg the gods for release from these toils’ (Θεοὺς μὲν αἰτῶ τῶν).
At the very end of Euripides’ play, then, the audience ‘hear’ the beginning of another tragedy, which directly negates Agamemnon’s first-person-plural wish for us all ‘to be free from toils’.

But that is not all: the winds carry with them important questions for the audience too. The Greek fleet has been stuck in this marginal space on the fringes of the Greek world because Achilles’ ghost held them back. But, it seems, the winds return only once Hecuba has been allowed to take revenge, as if a divine hand is moving behind the scenes to ensure that Polymestor gets his just deserts.\footnote{Critics have associated the lack of winds with the case at Aulis, as if Achilles’ ghost were like Artemis, holding back the troops: see Collard (1991), 33. But when Agamemnon tells Hecuba that the winds have failed (thus allowing her to take her revenge), this is presented as new information (\textit{Hec}. 898–901). That is to say, the gods are silent over the issue of Polyxena’s sacrifice, but seem to endorse Hecuba’s revenge: Segal (1993), 220; Gregory (1999), pp. xxix–xxxii; cf. Heath (2003). Segal (1989) discusses the problem of the gods in more detail.} Up until the end, judgement had been relatively secure and carefully bounded by the events: Hecuba had suffered so much and was surely right to take revenge. Now, in the fallout from the \textit{agon}, dissent threatens to exceed not only the institution of the \textit{agon}, but the formal framework of the play itself, as a series of questions are not only left unanswered, but are not even worked through in dramatic performance.\footnote{Given the echoes of Agamemnon’s sacrifice of Iphigeneia on behalf of the army’s sailing, what should the audience now make of the decision to sacrifice Polyxena for the exact same reason? Can they keep separate his individual act of sacrificing his daughter from the action of sacrificing Polyxena, an action not only undertaken collectively by the Greek army but decided by consensus? More radically still, does the audience’s view of Clytemnestra’s murder of Agamemnon in revenge for Iphigeneia’s sacrifice change now that they have witnessed and sanctioned Hecuba’s action? For a thorough study of Euripides’ citation of Aeschylus at this point: Thalmann (1993), 148–56. He concludes: ‘There is no ending to this play, only an opening-up onto another text that this one repeats (or that repeats this one?)’ (p. 155), which has the effect of putting ‘the whole of the \textit{Oresteia} in a different context’ (p. 157).} Where the questions end and who in the end controls dissent are matters for all audience members to resolve for themselves.\footnote{Perhaps the bard on the Odyssean desert island is Polymestor acting out his Polyphemus role. Or perhaps Euripides is representing himself as a Polymestor seen in terms of a (male) epic tradition that celebrates the return of the king, as we see in Homer’s \textit{Odyssey}, or else mourns his murder, as in Aeschylus’ \textit{Agamemnon}.}

\footnote{Gregory (1999), 197, nn. 1291–2 notes that ‘a combination of factors seems to ensure the allusion: emphatic position (this is the last line spoken by an actor, whereas the Aeschylean line is the first), prayer form, sense, and shape (in both lines \textit{πῶνος}... \textit{πῶνος} occupies the caesura onward, with the separation of the demonstrative and the noun).’. Cf. Thalmann (1993), 154.}
Up until the end, the many resonances with the *Odyssey* had seemed to project that narrative’s strategy as the dominant paradigm for understanding the play: a long-suffering hero(ine) returns to exact legitimate vengeance on his (or her) wrongdoers. Now, in the aftermath of judging the *agôn*, the events are discovered to have special meaning for the judge; after an epic voyage, the play reasserts a tragic modality. In the final reckoning, the play gestures towards the events that will most assuredly follow: it has been about Agamemnon’s—*nostos* after all, an *Agamemnony*.\(^{143}\) It is as if the audience were to arrive back, not on Ithaca, but in Mycenae, caught up in a net of their own making.

Seeing that her supplication of Agamemnon is about to fail, Hecuba introduces an argument that, according to some accounts, prostitutes her own daughter, Cassandra, by making use of the fact that Agamemnon has taken her to his bed.\(^{144}\) Equally disturbing, however, is the image with which she ends her appeal (835–40):

\[\text{ἐνός μοι μύθος ἐνδήσ ἐτι.} \]
\[\text{εἶ μοι γένοιτο φθόγγος ἐν βραχίοσιν} \]
\[\text{καὶ χεραὶ καὶ κόμαι καὶ ποδῶν βάσει} \]
\[\text{ἡ Δαϊδάλου τέχναισιν ἡ θεῶν τινως,} \]
\[\text{ὡς πάνθ' ἄμαρτῇ σῶν ἐχοιτο γουνάτων} \]
\[\text{kλαίοντ’, ἐπισκήπτοντα παντοίους λόγους.} \]

My speech lacks one thing else: would that I had voice in my arms, and hands, and hair and feet by the arts of Daedalos or one of the gods, so that all together they might seize your knees crying and laying all kinds of arguments upon you.

At this critical juncture of the play, Hecuba transforms herself into a fantastic creature with voices speaking from every limb to argue her case.\(^{145}\) Under such a bombardment of words, it is no surprise that

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\(^{143}\) Gregory (1991), 108 argues that the play reverses the plot of the *Oresteia*: vendetta returns when the appeal to institutional justice fails.

\(^{144}\) See n. 21 above.

Agamemnon expresses his pity and agrees to support her as far as he is able. Thus Euripides sets in train a series of events that will climax in Polymestor himself denouncing both Hecuba and Agamemnon with all kinds of arguments. Voices speaking from every limb presents an appropriate image for the way in which this play gives a voice to all of its characters, even the marginalized and despised.\footnote{Too (1998), 18–50 discusses the Hesiodic portrait of Typhon’s many tongues (Hes. Th. 821–38) in terms of the threat multiple discourses pose to order and the desirability of their containment. Her study takes into consideration Aristophanes’ portrait of the blustering Cleon (Ar. Ach. 510–11), which, she argues, ‘invokes the monster’s utterances as a metaphor for oratorical excess in the classical democratic city’ (p. 19). She notes, however, that the comic poet also ‘queries the constraints placed on social language’ (p. 44). For attempts to portray Aristophanes as a critic of democracy, see Cartledge (1990), who casts the comic poet in an elite paternalistic role; and Ober (1998), 122–55, who sees him as an ‘immanent critic’ (p. 155)—a view Greenwood (2000), 16 suggests makes Aristophanes sound like a civil servant. On more destabilizing portraits of Aristophanes, see e.g. Goldhill (1991), 167–222 on the comic poet’s contribution to his city’s ‘contest of voices’, and Hesk (2000), 248–58 on his exposure of rhetorical strategies used by politicians.}

Throughout Euripides’ play there has been an emphasis on the spectacle and the spectating of tragedy: an apparition gives the opening prologue; a prostrate Hecuba invites the audience to look upon her fallen figure; reports of an off-stage debate are delivered; Hecuba verbally supplicates Odysseus; a messenger describes Polyxena’s sacrifice as if the embedded audience were all gazing at a statue; Hecuba persuades Agamemnon to look on her as a tragic victim; Agamemnon formally establishes an *agōn* with him as presiding judge over it. The movement of the play has not been so much towards Hecuba’s greater action and moral culpability as most critics have made out; rather, emphasis is placed on the increasing involvement and complicity of the audience.

This final chapter has argued that such a strategy resonates with the narrative of the return of the king in the *Odyssey*. Events are staged in order that the audience may see Hecuba as a tragic sufferer at *every turn*—in short, as an Odysseus.\footnote{For the play between much-enduring Odysseus and *Odysseus polutropos*, see Pucci (1987); cf. Stanford (1963), 8–80.} Yet, in the *agōn* Euripides puts to the test the democratic imperative of hearing both sides of the question. At one level, the formal contest of words confirms the judgement on Polymestor’s crime, as if it were possible, and desirable, to make even Hecuba’s violent revenge institutional as a kind of legitimate dissent.
But, even as a civic utility may be found for Hecuba’s acts, dissent spills over the agōn’s institutional frame. Instead of bringing about conflict-resolution, the play gives the stage to the frank speaking Poly-phemic Polymestor, whose prophecies, by virtue of being based on the traditional version of events, succeed in breaking the silence that Agamemnon seeks to impose. The effect that Euripides achieves through privileging dissent at all costs radically destabilizes a complacent view of the play, in view of either the beauty of its depiction of suffering or the justice of revenge. Instead, as the audience learn that Hecuba will metamorphose into the symbol of a raging dog, and Agamemnon will soon be in his own tragedy, they are left to deal with the repercussions alone.\footnote{148} In this way, Euripides removes the comfort of an institutional context such as the agon, or indeed the formal structure of the play itself, for working through the management of dissent. By the end of the play, the audience find themselves not at home in Ithaca enjoying Penelope’s ‘like-minded’ charms after all, but in bed with Clytemnestra. This is the \textit{Odyssey} as tragedy:\footnote{149} Euripides’ \textit{Hecuba} brings troubles home to roost. In the end, each and every member of the audience must take the responsibility for managing dissent. In Euripides’ version of Hecuba’s tragedy democracy begins at home.\footnote{150}

\footnote{148} This lack of institutional security relates to what some critics have called the play’s ‘devastating critique of a world that has lost touch with basic moral values’: Segal (1993), 210; cf. Abrahamson (1952); Reckford (1985), 126. \footnote{149} That is not to say that the \textit{Odyssey} does not have the capacity to provoke some discomfort about its suppression of alternative viewpoints. The point being made here is rather that these worries are explicitly explored, and made significant to the Athenian polis in Euripides’ play. \footnote{150} Zeitlin (1996), 174 notes the absence of polis structure, at least so far as the topography of Thrace is concerned: ‘If the place has a king, it has no citizens in evidence and no city. Polymestor moves only from one dwelling to another (his house, Hekabe’s tent) or else absents himself in the interior of the land (963). A city, the city, was there across the straits. It fell that one night and is now destroyed.’ Whereas it is possible to trace a path towards greater institutional security on the part of a Sophoclean Chorus (see Budelmann (2000), 235–44; Ch. 5 above), Euripides here, and elsewhere (cf. \textit{Tro.}; \textit{Or.}; \textit{Bacc.}, etc.) reverses that movement, towards the dissolution of institutions.
Epilogue

Freedom, by its nature, must be chosen, and defended by citizens, and sustained by the rule of law and the protection of minorities.

(George W. Bush)\footnote{Second Inauguration Speech, Jan. 2005. The quotation continues: ‘And when the soul of a nation finally speaks, the institutions that arise may reflect customs and traditions very different from our own. America will not impose our own style of government on the unwilling. Our goal instead is to help others find their own voice, attain their own freedom, and make their own way.’ Source: \url{http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050120-1.html}. The idea that institutions are enacted by those working within them recalls Giddens’ theory of structuration (see prologue, nn. \textit{S1–3}, with text) and has been a central argument of this book. As we shall see below, Herodotus is, again, a key witness to the paradox of being granted freedom.}

\begin{quote}
oú γὰρ δή, ὃς οἶκας, ἔβολοντο ἐἶναι ἐλεύθεροι.
\end{quote}

(Hdt. 3.143.2)

This book has investigated one of the most characteristic and prominent features of ancient Greek literature—the scene of debate or \textit{agōn}, in which with varying degrees of formality characters square up to each other and engage in a contest of words. It has made the case that such scenes of debate are best understood in relation to a specific institutional context, the assembly, in which issues relating to authority and dissent are played out. Tracing the different manifestations of debate both over different genres and within the same genre, has allowed us to gain a sense of the impact of generic form on the representation and outcome of debates, as well as the rival strategies employed by comparable narratives towards the dynamic between dissent and authority. Both approaches point to the involvement of an audience or readership in the process of working through the possibilities for, or problems of, debate, leading to the construction of an agonistic mentality that intersects with
and informs a broader cultural context in which greater political participation was in development.

The importance of dissent is at once established and questioned by the two foundational narratives of Greek culture, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. From its very beginning the *Iliad* locates strife at the centre of the Achaean community, as Achilles and Agamemnon break up the assembled ranks of Achaean, ‘warring with words’. While much has gone wrong in this opening assembly—Achilles withdraws from the coalition and swears an oath condemning the people—the need for dissent has been clearly demonstrated and the importance of speaking publicly on behalf of the community firmly established, as Achilles first assures Calchas of protection against retaliation from the king, and then asserts the efficacy of decisions that have been communally sanctioned. The means for dealing with the community’s woes do not reside with Achilles, however, but in the institution he sets up. Thus, in what follows, the Achaean assembly continues to explore tensions within the group on the basis of who can or cannot speak, and the consequences that follow from gathering the people together; the series of assemblies (without Achilles) culminate in Diomedes making dissent institutional by appealing to Achilles’ precedent of opposing the king with fighting words. From that point on, strife is socialized within the Achaean community to the extent that all the young men are said to engage in it, and Achilles, upon his return, faces resistance to his desire for immediate battle from the hero of the rival epic tradition.

It is far from the case, however, that the course of these events is easy or without complication: many problems are encountered on the way, and many remain still to be resolved; nevertheless, by the end of the *Iliad* a sense of achievement has been gained, and the assembly has been affirmed as the place where dissent can, and should, take place. That positive outlook is severely tested by the *Odyssey*, which stresses the divisions that debate can open up, rather than its justifiable cause or beneficial outcome. The change in focus matches the narrative’s overall strategy, in which the disguise, deception and endurance of the returning hero, Odysseus, are privileged. From his perspective, debate is shown to be highly disruptive and ultimately destructive: dissenting voices are no longer heard with the prospect of reinforcing the social cohesion of the group at large, but remain on the outside, on the margins, vigorously antisocial, enemies of the tale of homecoming being told.
The inevitable skewing of debate when seen from the perspective of an authority becomes the key issue for thinking about the historians’ representation of debate. On the margins of their culture as writers of prose, the historians must work to gain a voice in their communities’ contests of words: one way in which that may be achieved is through the appropriation of the public space of assembly. That phenomenon is most prominent in the narrative of Thucydides, who investigates the failings of his community’s decision-making—and that of others—by a clear and accurate depiction of institutional debate represented in the form of the *agôn*. But his claim to the superiority of his written text does not lie in the act of appropriation itself; put simply, Thucydides’ representation of debate as *agôn* no more directs readers to a definitive interpretation of their role within the narrative than it provides an interpretation of each individual debate itself. The reader gets a clear insight into the failure of the assembly as an institution of dissent and consent; but far from retreating into the shadows like an Antiphon, Thucydides recoups the *agôn* so that his readers have to perform as independent, free-thinking agents—in short, as citizens—even in the act of reading.

Herodotus too, however, exploits scenes of debate in a way that promotes the value of his narrative. His enquiry into the cause of the Persian Wars problematizes the cultural distinction between Greek and barbarian by showing debate going wrong among the Greeks, while at the same time presenting the most formal debates as taking place among the Persians. By continually challenging his readers to dissent, Herodotus entices them into reproducing his enquiry and discovering a role for reading within the community. Not only does this suggest a more nuanced picture of Herodotean ‘dialogism’ than is usually posited; it also exposes the problem of the lack of a cohesive Panhellenic institutional framework that can sustain or manage inter-poleis relations. His narrative explores that problem and presents itself as one potential solution to the growing crisis facing the Greek world as its fragile coalition implodes and fragments.

No other genre pursues the break-up of social order quite as tenaciously as tragedy in Athens; and here, where dissent has become fully institutionalized within the political framework of the city, and where tragedy plays a critical role in the community’s renewal of itself, it is the aftermath of dissent that comes under the spotlight. Strikingly omitting
the judgement of arms that supplies the backdrop to the events on stage, Sophocles’ *Ajax* explores the fallout from a most extreme act of defiance: the protagonist has taken up arms against the Greek leaders. It is as if the opening scene of the *Iliad* were replayed, when Achilles goes to strike down Agamemnon in frustration at his commander’s heavy-handed grip on authority; only here, on the tragic stage, it is not that act which comes under focus, or the resultant communication between the hero and god, but the consequences which follow from it for the hero and, just as importantly, for his group. At the beginning of the play it seems impossible that Ajax’s dissent can be brought within the bounds of an institutional framework, as he first comes to terms with his failed attempt to kill the Greek leaders, and then turns his sword on himself. But, with the appearance of his half-brother, the value of dissent is enacted as Teucer stands up to not one but two Agamemnons. The process of rethinking dissent comes to a head when the Chorus turn to Odysseus, their most hated enemy, to resolve the crisis: their sudden change of mind and critical influence on the action make sense only from the perspective of the audience, who have previously been witness to his humane pity for Ajax. As the play’s closing scenes negotiate the reception of Ajax into Athenian ritual, the audience must play a role too in assessing the relative achievements of both Ajax and Odysseus and allow differences to remain.

Sophocles’ *Ajax* investigates dissent from the perspective of an extreme manifestation of disobedience and pursues its consequences for those caught up in it: nevertheless, by the end of the play Ajax’s tarnished reputation has been salvaged somewhat, dissent has been recouped as a force for good by Teucer’s acts of defiance, and the audience has been invited to take over the function of their epic forebears, the Chorus, and accept diversity of opinion. Euripides’ *Hecuba* presents a far more troubling vision of dissent. It insists on the justice of Hecuba’s cause, as if she were an Odysseus—though as a foreign female ‘other’ her revenge can never be quite so authoritative as the epic hero’s. Even so, the *agon*, set up by an on-stage judge expressly to deal with the fallout from her dissent, confirms support for Hecuba, as if even her extreme vengeance on Polymestor and his children could be considered institutional. But, in the end, the *agon* is shown to be insufficient in dealing with dissent: speaking back spills over the *agon*’s institutional bounds and spirals out of control, as first Hecuba and then
Agamemnon, the justice of the peace, become the target of Polymestor’s prophetic tongue. The audience too find themselves implicated in the sudden turn for the worse, since, while Polymestor’s arguments stand at odds with the events of this play, they replay other narratives that possess some kind of civic authority. This radically unsettling gesture occurs right at the play’s climax, expressly outside the institutional context of the *agón*, with no space left to work through dissent and no one left capable of controlling it—bar the audience themselves.

Crucial, then, to this study has been the notion of debate as a structural feature within a narrative or drama that is experienced as a process and re-enacted by each and every reader or audience member. The understanding of the generation and renewal of institutions through participation within them is not only a central tenet of the theory of structuration outlined above; it may also be traced back to the texts under scrutiny here. Near the end of his general investigation into different forms of government in book 3 of his enquiry, Herodotus returns to the example of the Samians, who, like the Persians before them, face a crisis of government now that their single ruler Polycrates has met his downfall (3.142). A certain Maeandrius, who has inherited the tyrants’ symbols of authority from Polycrates, the sceptre and power (σκῆπτρον καὶ δόναμις, 3.142.3), proposes placing the rule ‘in the middle’, and proclaims ‘equality’ for them all (ἐγὼ δὲ ἐσ ἡμῶν τὴν ἀρχὴν τιθεὶς ἱσόνομῃ ὑμῖν προαιρομένῳ’, 3.142.3). In return he asks only for six talents from Polycrates’ fortune and, in perpetuity for himself and his ancestors, the priesthood of Zeus the Liberator,2 ‘for whom I built the shrine and now hand freedom over to you’ (τῷ αὐτῷ τῇ ίρῳ ἱδρυσάμην καὶ τῇ ἔλευθερίᾳ ὑμῖν περιτίθημι’, 3.142.4). As scholars have noticed, the language of putting the affairs ‘into the middle’ (ἐς μέσον) and proclaiming ‘freedom’ (ἔλευθερία) represents and reworks the discourse of democracy.3 As we have seen before, however, any claim to put something ἐς μέσον is highly charged, and

2 τοσάδε μέντοι δικαιῶ γέρεα ἐμεωντῷ γενέσθαι, ἐκ μὲν γε τῶν Πολυκράτεων χρημάτων ἔξαίρεται ἔξ τάλαντά μοι γενέσθαι, ἱερουσάνην δὲ πρὸς τούτοις αἰρεῖται ἐμοὶ τε αὐτῷ καὶ τοσί ἀπ’ ἐμοὶ αἰεὶ γιουμένωι τοῦ Δίος τοῦ Ἐλευθέρου, Hdt. 3.142.4.

3 For Jean-Pierre Vernant (1983), 191 this episode is the *locus classicus* for an early articulation of democratic ideology. In particular, he notes the ‘close connections in the political thought of the Greeks between the concept of the centre, μέσον, similarity or
so it proves here. Maeandrius’ offer in fact meets with stiff resistance, as the people prove to be less the grateful group he imagines and actually more like the independent democratic body he supposedly wishes to establish. As a result, realizing that he will be under threat should he give up the power, he retreats into the citadel (\(\text{o} \ \text{αναχώρησε} \ \text{ε} \ \text{την} \ \text{άκροπολιν}, \ 3.143.1\)), from which he and his family retain their hold on power. This leads Herodotus to conclude brusquely: ‘So it seems, the Samians did not wish to be free’ (\(\text{o} \ \text{γὰρ} \ \text{δὴ,} \ \text{ός} \ \text{οίκασι,} \ \text{ἐβούλοντο} \ \text{εἰναι} \ \text{ἐλεύθεροι}, \ 3.143.2\)).

It would be quite easy to assent to Herodotus’ passing judgement here and condemn the Samians for not wanting their freedom. But this would be to miss the subtle irony in Herodotus’ representation of the proposal to hand over power. It is not quite right to say that the Samians do not want their freedom, since Maeandrius decides to hold onto power precisely because he is treated like anyone else and is bluntly told not to expect special privileges; the fact that his offer is met with dissent is, in itself, an enactment of freedom and equality. The point is, rather, one of freedom or equality itself: the depiction of Maeandrius offering to give the Samians their freedom, and the Samians’ refusal to accept this privilege meekly, shows that freedom is not something that can be handed out as if it were an act of charity; it is, rather, a continual equality, \(\text{διοικήσις,} \ \text{iσοτής}, \ \text{and freedom from domination,} \ \text{oυ} \ \text{κρατοῦμενος,} \ \text{αὐτοκρατής}‘. Cf. Vernant (1982), 126–7.

4 Two aspects of this reply are worthy of note. First, Herodotus does not identify any one particular Samian, but uses the vague ‘someone among them stood up and spoke’ (\(\text{τῶν} \ \text{δὲ} \ \text{τίς} \ \text{ἐξαναστὰς} \ \text{ἐπε}, \ \text{Hdt. 3.142.5}\)). Second, the anonymous speaker specifically objects to Maeandrius’ presumption that he has the power to do as he says: ‘But you’re not worthy to rule over us, since you’re low born and a disaster’ (‘\(\text{αὐτὴ} \ \text{οὐδὲ} \ \text{ἄξιος} \ \text{ἐις} \ \text{σὺ} \ \text{γε} \ \text{ημέων} \ \text{ἄρχειν} \ \text{γεγονός} \ \text{τε} \ \text{κακῶς} \ \text{kαι} \ \text{έων} \ \text{ἁλθήσας}, \ 3.142.5\)). Both points signify that the Samians are already behaving freely, even as they reject Maeandrius’ proposal to give them freedom. Moreover, the speaker goes on to hold Maeandrius to account (\(\text{αὐτὴ} \ \text{μᾶλλον} \ \text{δύσος} \ \text{λόγος} \ \text{δώσεις} \ \text{τῶν} \ \text{μετεχείρισις} \ \text{χρημάτων}‘)—a feature typical of democratic government.

5 Dewald (2003), 57, n. 64 notes another irony: ‘the Persian who strips Samos of its population for Darius ca. 515 B.C. and re-establishes Sylson on Polycrates’ throne is Otanes, the same Otanes who propounds the superiority of democracy and the horrors of tyranny in the Constitutional Debate (3.80).’
struggle of becoming and requires continual revolution, re-enactment and renewal.\(^6\) As Michel Foucault has put it, ‘liberty is a practice’.\(^7\)

This book provides one way of thinking about this subject. The texts that have been investigated have shown various ways in which dissent is made necessary to and valuable for the community. They have done this first by exploring how dissent may be managed within an institutional apparatus, and then by involving the audience or reader in this process of management. Each different representation is another contest. Each different response to it is another performance of dissent within that institutional frame. To stress a link between interpretation and an institutional framework as I am doing here is to expand on Vernant’s suggestion that the spatial arena of the *agora* impacts upon one’s mental vision:\(^8\) responses are conditioned by the structures of the text in a way that gives them meaning; at the same time, even as responses are made to those structures, they help to reproduce them.\(^9\) Representations of debate, therefore, reproduce dissent from authority and help construct an agonistic mentality by which one may perform as a citizen, whether that is listening to epic, reading history or watching tragedy.

Much-enduring, much-resourceful, Odysseus silences dissent, whether with a stroke of the sword in epic (cutting off Leides’ head as the suitor is still talking) or with the charm of his words in tragedy (policing agreement with an Agamemnon or a Hecuba). The Odyssean Zeus, father of gods and men, goes further by imposing an end to conflict and enforcing forgetfulness on what has happened. But there are alternatives to the imposition of power or the adherence to authorial dictate. Agamemnon, shepherd of the people, tries to assert his authority and shout down

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\(^6\) Wolin (1996), 63–4 contests the assumption that Athenian democracy relies on its institutional forms, and instead points to the importance of agonistic action. Foucault, in Rabinow (1991), 245, makes a similar point, when he argues: ‘The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and the laws that are intended to guarantee them.’

\(^7\) In Rabinow (1991), 245.

\(^8\) ‘What this urban framework [of the *μέσον*] in fact defined was a mental space; it opened up a new spiritual horizon’: Vernant (1982), 48. See the last section of the Prologue, above.

\(^9\) Johnstone (1999), 132 draws a similar conclusion in his study of the practice of law in Athens: ‘In the courts, male citizens learned and shared certain kinds of knowledge, creating a commonalty of interests and abilities. One of these was the ability to interpret laws in an authoritative manner. The laws themselves did not indicate how to do this; rather, proper interpretative skills were learned and handed down in the culture of the courts among an interpretative community.’ Cf. Cohen (1991, 1995).
opposition, whether that is a recalcitrant seer, a disobedient archer or an 
unwelcome host; he tries too to deny Achilles and the force of his 
instituting act. Yet, ultimately, he cannot make dissent equal disobedience 
or disloyalty. If freedom is truly something to value and aspire to, then 
ways must continue to be found of responding to the challenge that 
Achilles lays down.
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