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Achilles' last stand: Institutionalising dissent in Homer's *Iliad*

Debate in the *Iliad* – what form it takes, what significance that might have, whether or not it even exists – has been a matter of some controversy. One approach has been to examine debate in terms of a formal social context and to extrapolate from this some kind of political or – according to other accounts – pre-political community that the *Iliad* preserves.¹ Scholars, have, however come up with very different ideas about how to describe that society, how to interpret that depiction, or even whether such attempts are fruitful.² An alternative approach focuses on the form of the speeches and analyses them as the production of thesis and antithesis: on these terms the cut-and-thrust of debate is understood as a form of proto-rhetorical theory.³

¹ Much work derives from the anthropologically influenced French school. The Homeric *agora*: R. Martin (1951); Ruzé (1997). Institutions in general: Detienne (1996[1967]); Vernant (1983[1965]); Carlier (1996). The importance of law: Gernet (1955), (1982).

² Is there a polis (Raaflaub (1997)), or not a polis (Finley (2002[1954]))? 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”: Raaflaub (1998) (for); Snodgrass (1974) (against). Scodel (2002) 174ff., warns of interpreting the Homeric epics as ideological productions: the plurality of voices tells against conceiving the texts as having been produced with “propagandistic intent” (179).

³ The Homeric assemblies sort out alternatives; the alternation between argument and counter-argument, constructs a rational, consensus-oriented discourse: Hölkeskamp (1998) 36, 39. Hölkeskamp's understanding of the *agon* as the method of opposing arguments, by which a *rhetra* – a binding word or

All this seems far removed from debate as it is represented in the narrative, which is the subject of this paper. I begin with four preliminary propositions. Previous approaches have tended to homogenise different scenes of debate, with little regard to differences in structure or context.⁴ My first point, therefore, is *to pay careful attention to the differing circumstances and form(s) for debate*, given the limited space here, this means focussing on debate *among the Achaeans*.⁵ The means by which one is able to identify scenes of assembly, and then to observe and account for the differences between them, must begin with the language itself, namely the term *agora* (Homeric *ajgorhv*). Looking at the instances where this term occurs in the context of Achaeans doing debate gives us four assemblies, in books one, two, nine and nineteen.

covenant – is forged by the text, seems too clean-cut and cut off from the drama. Lohmann (1970) is less reductive in his analysis of how speeches, in the way that they are structured, assist the weighing-up of arguments.

⁴ Ruzé (1997) 35, taking the assemblies *en masse*, concludes that 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’ and ‘délibération’ *in action*” (151, 152, my italics). For further discussion and bibliography, see: Momigliano (1973); Taplin (1992) 49; Hammer (1997b) 1-4nn.1-18, (2002) 19-26; Haubold (2000) 11nn.46, 47. R. Martin (1951) 20 warns against treating the assemblies as “une source de documents homogènes”.

⁵ Scholars have tended to treat debate among the Achaeans and Trojans as the same: Hall (1989) 15; Scodel (2002) 96f.; Hammer (2002) 47. See, however, Mackie (1996), who identifies key features of each group to argue that discourse fundamentally differs between the two: the Achaeans speak politically, the Trojans poetically; Sale (1994), who in contrast argues that the Achaeans are more “manifestly monarchical” (11) by being dominated by Agamemnon (21-47). I deal more fully with the question of the institutional difference between the two groups in a forthcoming book.

In and of itself, however, a word carries little significance; only when words are interpreted alongside each other is meaning generated.⁶ So too with Homeric formulae, scholarship on which has come a long way since being first examined by Parry and made largely dependent on metre.⁷ In the present case, the term *agora* by itself defines the event of an assembly of people, or its location.⁸ More important is to ask how an assembly is set up, when, by whom, and with what effect. On this basis, each of the four assemblies is marked by the formula: “x called y to an assembly”.⁹ Such a phrase is not simply formulaic; rather, it provides a particular interpretative framework by means of which both internal and external audiences can realise when an assembly is going on and assess what happens as a result when one is in progress. This brings me to my second point: that *the phraseology surrounding the agora marks it out as a special, institutional, space*.

Following on from this, we can then ask what is special about that location or, in other words, what *kind* of institution is being represented? One thing to note, for example, is how two distinct groups, and the relationship between them, are marked out: the individual who convokes the assembly and the group gathered (the Achaean *laos*). According to Johannes Haubold, the *laos* signify an undifferentiated pre-political social mass who rely (in epic) upon a leader, “the shepherd of the people”, for protection.¹⁰ My third point, then, is that *convoking an assembly establishes a special arena, in which the relationship*

⁶ “Meaning – in the sense of dictionary meaning – means nothing; it only has the potential for meaning.” Morson (1981) 6, based on Bakhtin (1981).

⁷ Foley (1999) esp. 13-34; Scodel (2002) esp. 1-2.

⁸ Benveniste (1969).

⁹ For example, *th' dekaivth/ d j ajgorhvnde kalevssato lao;n jAcilleuv*, 1.54.

¹⁰ Haubold (2000) 1-54.

between the leader and his people is examined, questioned, forged.¹¹ On the one hand, with one exception *no* individual addresses the assembled body *qua* hero:¹² scenes of assembly investigate how the leaders relate to their group.¹³ On the other hand, the act of assembly constructs the *laoi* themselves as a united and cohesive group, in contrast to elsewhere in the epic where they remain largely silent. Clearly they 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.¹⁴ Nevertheless, their reactions are important. No speaker in the Achaean assembly can afford to ignore the people.¹⁵

¹¹ 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 19.276ff., when the *laos* go off to eat, Achilles continues his fast in mourning for his friend; cf. 1.305ff., 9.79ff.

¹² The exception is Agamemnon (*Il.* 1.102), which may not be coincidental given his attempt to use the assembly as a vehicle for self-promotion: see below pp.9-11.

¹³ 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 (*Iliad* 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.

¹⁴ Put most strongly by Strasburger (1997) 50: “The assembly of the army in the *Iliad* and the powerful assembly of the people in the *Odyssey* are mute assemblies, in which the crowd *receives* announcements and institutions” (my italics). R. Martin (1951) 20 more circumspectly understands the competing views in the assembly as showing “la toute-puissance du roi” or, on the contrary, “une puissance populaire”.

¹⁵ Hammer (1998) 337: “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.

Analysing the assembly in this way has the advantage of approaching the subject of debate in a dynamic, not a static, way. This brings me to my fourth point: that *we should pay attention to the performativity of the narrative, or the ways in which understanding debate is informed by experiencing it as a process*. Let me sketch out what I mean by re-focussing the issue of Homeric debate.

Recent studies focussing on the strife between Agamemnon and Achilles have come to conflicting interpretations about the political framework being represented. Donlan and Morris have argued that authority is first threatened then confirmed by Achilles' conflict with Agamemnon.¹⁶ In contrast, Rose and Hammer have suggested that Agamemnon's leadership is far less easy to put back together again after Achilles' challenge to it.¹⁷ 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".¹⁸ Rose also favours a dynamic, "relational" model to describe the internal struggle of the ruling class. But more suggestive to my mind are the terms with which he criticises Morris:

¹⁶ Donlan (1979) usefully raises questions about who has authority and how you get it, 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.

¹⁷ 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". Cf. Osborne (1996) 150-5.

¹⁸ Hammer (1997a) 341.

Morris seems to envision a short-circuited process of artistic production in which the consciousness of the main target audience, the *demos*, contributes no relevant feedback to the generation of the text.¹⁹

Whether or not a *demos* was really the “main target audience” is a moot point; as Scodel has shown, by creating a shared past the *Iliad* helps foster a sense of inclusiveness amongst its listeners,²⁰ which suggests *the poem actively constructing an audience*.²¹ But Rose’s emphasis on feedback raises an important counterpoint to the text generating meaning; that is, *the role of the poem’s audience*.²²

From his vantage point as a political theorist, Antony Giddens has contested the common understanding of institutions as “in some way grinding out ‘docile bodies’”. Instead, he understands structure as being “not ‘external’ to individuals”, but something experienced – and reproduced – by individuals working within that system.²³ I believe that we might profit by analysing the assembly scenes in the *Iliad* in a similar way. What I argue is that “traces of conflict and dissent” *are experienced by the audience of the poem in relation to a particular, institutional arena that is represented: the agora*. To a degree this helps shape an agonistic response to these events; but, equally, the varying responses to each of

¹⁹ Rose (1997) 167.

²⁰ Homeric epic is “the genre of social cohesion”: Scodel (2002) 182. Cf. Graziosi (2002) 171-80, 253-5. A shared past: Ford (1992) 6, 18; Scodel (2002) 88.

²¹ Bakhtin (1981) 257: “Every literary work faces outward away from itself, towards the listener-reader, and to a certain extent this anticipates possible reactions to itself.” Cf. Todorov (1984) 54-6.

²² Reader response theories make a similar claim by regarding reading as “an event”: Iser (1978[1976]) 127. They tend, though, to analyse the text detached from its social context. When Fish (1980) speaks of “interpretative communities” (14), he means by this strategies of reading that are in vogue in the academy. This has been criticised by Said (1983) 14f., who argues that reader response theory can lead to an essentially private, internalised event and, worse, a self-confirming authority within academic institutions. This caveat is particularly meaningful for those of us who analyse texts that were publicly performed.

these crises *involve the audience in realising 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, to some extent, made institutional during the course of the *Iliad* may help us get away from the notion that the *Iliad* in some trivial sense presupposes a socio-political framework, or – which is a more sophisticated version of the same approach – challenges or questions such a framework. I suggest that the *Iliad*, by virtue of its varying representations of debate, places a responsibility on the audience to work through the scenes of assembly and realise its potential as a forum for managing dissent.

The figure to whom we owe this is Achilles. It is Achilles who is the one agent willing and able to stand up to Agamemnon in the assembly that opens the epic. Yet his challenge precipitates an even greater crisis in Achaean community – his withdrawal. The two subsequent assemblies chart out a process of doing dissent without Achilles. Achilles returns for the final assembly; but, by continuing to resist attempts at control, he turns the debate onto the utility of debate itself and its place within the narrative strategy of the *Iliad* as a whole.

I. *On the tenth day Achilles called the people to an assembly:*

Setting the stage for debate

The authoritative invocation to the muse ushers onto stage not one of Homer's heroes but Chryses, a priest of Apollo, whose words of supplication to the king are – remarkably

²³ Giddens (1984) 14, 27. Cf. Bourdieu (1990[1980]) 130 on *habitus*.

– the first of the epic in direct speech.²⁴ The reaction they provoke opens the *Iliad*'s narrative of conflict and dissent (1.22-4):

*e[nq j a[lloi me;n pavnte" ejpeufhvmsan jAcaioi;
aijdei'sqai q j iJerh'a kai; ajglaa; devcqai a[poina:
ajll j oujk jAtrei?dh/ jAgamevnmnoni h{ndane qumw'/.*

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.

The Achaeans acclaim Chryses' supplication *en masse*, but Agamemnon takes it personally and, rounding on Chryses, sends him away in fear.²⁵ The assertion of the king's "mighty word" (*kraterovn mu'qon*, 1.25), however, is *not* the final word. Apollo obstructs the simple equation of speech and power with a plague on all their houses (1.44-52). In response, Achilles calls an assembly (1.54). The community in crisis sets the stage for the first assembly.²⁶ And the community is in crisis because of a wilful assertion of authority. On the agenda of the first assembly then is the relationship between speech and power.²⁷ In effect, it is what debate is all about.

²⁴ On Chryses: Redfield (1994[1975]) 94. On this scene in general: Scodel (2002) 65-89, 99-114.

²⁵ Griffin & Hammond (1998) 72 show how Agamemnon makes his assertion of authority personal by the emphatic use of the first-person pronoun.

²⁶ There is some doubt whether Chryses' supplication takes place in an "assembly". Ruzé (1997) includes it in her list of assemblies, though the term *ajgorhv* is not used. By swiftly taking us to a crisis point, the omission of any description of the assembly's institutional frame has a clear dramatic function. But perhaps the meaning runs deeper: how is it that Agamemnon *can* send Chryses away? What might the lack of formal trappings imply?

²⁷ On the correspondence between the Chryses-Agamemnon / Agamemnon-Achilles scenes: Krischer (1971).

Take heart and speak: valorising the challenge to authority

The problem of debate is immediately raised by the figure who, knowing past, future and present, ought to be able to benefit the community – Calchas, the seer. Invited to speak by Achilles, Calchas initially refrains from doing so out of fear of the man “who exercises power greatly over all” (*oJ*)” *mevga pavntwn jArgeivwn kratevei*, 1.78-9), “him whom the Achaeans obey” (*oiJ peivqontai jAcaioiv*, 1.79). The middle voice of *peivqo* suggestively plays on ambiguity over whether the Achaeans are persuaded by *or* obey Agamemnon.²⁸ In turn, this question raises an issue that goes right to 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?²⁹ Calchas leaves us in no doubt about his view: the Achaeans obey Agamemnon “for the king is stronger” (*kreivsswn ga;r basileuv*”, 1.80). 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 the authority of the king.

We can see this in action as throughout the assembly Agamemnon attempts to control debate. He agrees with the tenor of Achilles’ demand that he must return his prize – but names and shames prominent individuals over whom he can exert his power (1.137-9). He pays lip-service to a third party’s plea for compromise – before launching on a tirade against his rival: “But this man is minded to be above *all* (*pavntwn*); over *all*

²⁸ Hammer (1997b) deconstructs Agamemnon’s leadership using Achilles’ question: “How shall any of the Achaeans readily obey you?” (1.150). Cf. Hammer (2002) 82-92.

²⁹ Agamemnon’s detractors: Taplin (1990), (1992); Alvis (1995) 21; Rose (1997); Hammer (1997b), (2002). His defenders: 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: Murray (1965).

(*ḗpavntōn*) he wishes to hold sway and to be king over *all* (*ḗpavntēssi*) and to instruct *all* (*ḗpa'si*)” (1.287-91). An important issue is raised here: Agamemnon seeks to hold on to power, but the extravagance of his language, which displays excess in *every which way*, suggests otherwise. He loses his grip entirely as, uniquely in epic, he is interrupted and Achilles gets the last word. Even as Agamemnon grabs at power, authority slips from his grasp.

Indeed, he spectacularly fails to silence opposition. His demand for recompense from the group (*leuvssete ga;r tov ge ḗpavnte*”, 1.120) opens up another site of contention, Achilles’ jibe against him as the “most profit-loving of all” (*filokteanōwtate ḗpavntōn*, 122). His personal threat against Achilles provokes Achilles’ individual response: fine, I’ll go home (1.169-71). Most revealing of all is his initial entry into the debate (1.106-7, 112-4):

mavnti kakw'n, ouj ḗwv potev moi to; krhvguon ei\ḗa”:

aijeiv toi ta; kavk j ejsti; fivla fresi; manteuvesqai...

... ḗpolu; bouvlomai aujth;n

oi[koi e[cein. kai; gavr rJa Klutaimnhvstrh" ḗprobevboula,

kouridivh" ajlovcou...

Seer of evil, never yet have you said to me something agreeable, but always evil things are

dear to your heart to prophesy... I really wanted to have her [Briseis] at home. For, let me

tell you, I think more of her than Clytaemnestra my wedded wife...

Agamemnon’s abuse of the seer appears somewhat over-the-top as a response to the revelation of the plague’s cause. But behind his address of Calchas as “seer of evil” and the temporal indicators “never”, “always” the poem’s audience might be tempted to recall different contexts, other tales – namely Aulis where Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter to launch the ships following Calchas’s prophecy to the letter. Scodel has recently argued that “the tradition” has to be established in the process of performance.³⁰

³⁰ It is not, as scholars often assume, simply a collection of reified reminiscences: Scodel (2002) esp. 1-41.

Nevertheless, she implies a degree of control over the production of allusion that, in this case at least, seems unwarranted. In fact, at stake here is precisely the *lack of control* exerted over the narrative by Agamemnon.³¹ By having him label Calchas as the seer who has “always” prophesied him evil (the sacrifice of Iphigeneia?), and then by having him rank his concubine (a Cassandra?) above his wife Clytemnestra, the *Iliad* invites its audience to imagine events in which Agamemnon’s authority – even life! – are seriously compromised. His loss of command over the telling of the tale signalled by these ominous echoes of traditions, whose relevance to the present tale must be assessed by each and every spectator, implicates the audience in the resistance movement. Dissent from Agamemnon is underscored by the narrative, which threatens to fracture and unwind in directions contrary to what the “king who exercises power greatly over all” had intended.

The conditions for challenging authority had been set by Achilles. It is not immediately apparent why Hera should turn to him to assemble the Achaeans, only that action is required to find a solution to Apollo’s wrath. It is essential to note, then, that the first assembly is expressly convoked for the benefit of the community.³² In fact, in his

³¹ Referring to this example, Scodel (2002) 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.” Indeed not; but the audience are clearly invited to follow it: Dowden (1996) 58. Nor do I 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 the violence of his language.

³² Emphasised by Taplin (1992) 63.

resistance to Agamemnon's attempts to pull rank, Achilles couches his argument in exactly these terms.³³

Nevertheless, Achilles is a unique individual, whose speech is endowed with a special power.³⁴ The proem hints at things to come by setting Agamemnon "lord of men" against "divine-like Achilles" (*jAtrai?dh" te a[nax ajndrw'n kai; di'o" jAcilleuv"*, 1.7): whereas Agamemnon is defined in terms of his social relationships, the epithet identifying Achilles hints at his divine origins. When the seer Calchas explains to the assembly that he knows what is wrong but fears saying it, it is Achilles who speaks up (1.85, 88-90):

qarshvsa" mavla eijpe; qeoprov pion of ti oi\sq:
... ou[ti" ejmeu' zw'nto" kai; ejpi; cqoni; derkomevnoio
soi;; koi vlh/" para; nhusi; bareiva" cei'ra" ejpovsei
sumpavntwn Danaw'n, oujd j hIn jAgamevmona ei[ph/".
Take heart and speak whatever prophecy you know... Not any one of all the Danaans
shall lay heavy hands on you beside the hollow ships, while I am alive and looking on the
earth, not even if you mean Agamemnon.

It is Achilles who sponsors the assembly as the place where opinions should be freely given and freely heard, even if those views challenge the king.

It is important to bear in mind both Achilles' defence of the right to speak *and* his divine connection when interpreting this assembly. For, by its end, Achilles has asserted his individual will and in doing so cursed the community he had claimed to

³³ Gernet (1955) 15 points out how Achilles connects his personal "prize" (*gevra*) to the "what lay in common" (*xunhvi>a keivmena*, 1.124). Cf. Alvis (1995) 21. Donlan (1979) 58 makes the case that Achilles' "leadership authority" is grounded in his relationship to the group.

³⁴ His language is full of superlatives, he uses multiple numbers to emphasise his argument, he coins neologisms: Griffin (1986); R. P. Martin (1989) 147-9, 171, 185.

support. His withdrawal to his tent dominates the poem thematically and structurally.³⁵ The narrator’s description of how Achilles and Agamemnon “stood apart fighting with violent words” (*w*) “*twv g j ajntibivoisi macessamevntw ejpevessin/ ajnsthvthn*, 304-5) is to the point.³⁶ It appears, then, that this first assembly has simply replaced one crisis with another. Strife (*eris*) has not been kept within the institution. To explore how dissent has gone wrong – even when it had been necessary – and what we might surmise about that, I turn to the two interventions in the debate.

☞ *there came Athena*: mediating conflict

The one Achaean to intercede in the struggle of words is described in glowing terms by the narrator: Nestor is the “clear-voiced orator”, from whose tongue “flowed speech sweeter than honey”, who had seen “two generations of men pass”.³⁷ The speech that flows forth justifies such a description: invoking a past paradigm, he invites the two warring parties to draw the lesson from it; addressing each according to a subtle distinction of status – Achilles is *karterov*” (280), Agamemnon *fevrtero*” (281) – he accommodates different readings³⁸ and, thus, creates an opportunity for negotiation.

³⁵ Hammer (1997a), discussing Achilles as a *metanastés*, a position that “gives him (at least in his mind) a privileged perspective of the artifice of Achaean society” (353), regards Achilles’ dissent as showing not so much an “anti-cultural” strain as “the value of non-coerciveness” (355). Cf. Hammer (2002) 94ff. As I see it, Achilles’ dissent is very much *cultural* in a context that struggles to make use of it.

³⁶ The next time the assembly is described it is as the place where “men win glory” (*ajgorh; kudiavneira*, 1.490); *kudiavneira* □ otherwise appears only with *mavch* (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”.

³⁷ The description echoes the portrait of the good king at Hesiod *Tb.*, 82-90, 96-7.

³⁸ Including assessing his role. Though Nestor speaks measuredly, he favours Agamemnon’s authority by deploying Agamemnon’s own description of himself as *fevrtero*” (1.186) and Achilles as *karterov*” (1.178):

Yet, for all his persuasiveness, the speech fails; neither figure shows any willingness to compromise and the assembly abruptly breaks up. Nestor's intervention has shown the desirability of mediation; but the fact that it fails defers providing any answer to the crisis. Both aspects combine to implicate in the debate over mediation the poem's audience, who are left, like Nestor, 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 public³⁹ – lies on the ground, moreover suggests that Nestor's intervention comes too late.⁴⁰ Divine intervention has already moved the conflict on and beyond.

At line 194, as Achilles reaches for his sword with the aim of bringing the debate to a swift and decisive end (Agamemnon's, he hopes!), Athena appears.⁴¹ As scholarship on this epiphany testifies, her intervention, far from resolving the crisis, challenges interpretation and stresses human responsibility in making judgement.⁴² Erbse suggests

Reinhardt (1961) 74n.15. See pp. 29-30 below. The narrator complicates matters still further by describing *Achilles* as “by far the mightiest” (*polu; fevertato*, 2.769) in the catalogue of the ships.

³⁹ The *skeptron*: Reinhardt (1991[1961]) 159-60; Lynn-George (1988) 47-9; Easterling (1989). Ruzé (1997) 52 asserts that: “La parole qu'ils prononcent avec le sceptre ne souffrira pas la contradiction ou alors le sceptre lui-même sera mis en action pour rappeler à l'ordre l'outrecuidant.” Along similar lines, Mondi (1980) argues that the *skeptron* is the symbol of royal privilege. But see Detienne (1996[1967]) 95: taking hold of the *skeptron* confers on the individual the right to speak. It is an “impersonal” act, representing the sovereignty of the group. Cf. Gernet (1981[1968]) 188.

⁴⁰ The untimeliness of human intervention: Lynn-George (1988) 163-4, 168-9, 172-3, 272-6.

⁴¹ The suddenness of her arrival: M. Edwards (1987) 180-1. Cf. Reinhardt (1961) 68-73.

⁴² 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[1949]) 30-4 denies Homeric man a sense of self; cf. Williams (1993) 21-6 for a critique. I have learnt much about telling divine presence from Alex Stevens (2002).

that Athena has to intervene since none of the other kings *could*.⁴³ At first sight this would seem to neglect Nestor, who, as we have seen, makes the attempt; but Erbse is right, I believe, in the sense that there is *at this point* no human means for accommodating Achilles' dissent in the institution of assembly, regardless of how greatly he had been motivated to speak on behalf of the community.

This raises four issues fundamental to the rest of my enquiry. First, Athena's intervention 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.⁴⁴ Nor can it, however, be allowed to transgress into naked force. The potential violence of an Achilles needs to be excluded as a socially acceptable reaction in debate.⁴⁵ This provides an authorising of, but equally a careful bounding to, dissent. Dissent cannot, and does not, equal violence.

Second, it identifies the individual who had convoked the assembly, Achilles, as a problem in it. Athena compensates Achilles for not drawing his sword with the possibility of greater license in his verbal assault.⁴⁶ It is this license that renders Nestor's intervention futile before the act. Similarly, when Achilles with his last words in the assembly promises an immediate and demonstrative end to contest,⁴⁷ he has *already* sworn an oath that his mother, Thetis, will take up to Olympus. In this way, Achilles' challenge *demonstratively* exceeds the frame of this assembly.

⁴³ Erbse (1986) 138f.

⁴⁴ On the contrary, Achilles' labelling of Agamemnon's behaviour as *hubris* (1.203) is endorsed by Athena (1.214). This kind of verbal collusion between a mortal and a divinity is highly unusual. I thank the anonymous *PCPS* referee for drawing this to my attention. Cf. Griffin (1986) 52.

⁴⁵ A contest of words leading to combat is not debate but flying, which is more appropriate to the battlefield: Parks (1986), (1990); R. P. Martin (1989) 65-77.

⁴⁶ Lynn-George (1988) 45-6. For Achilles' dissent (after Athena's intervention) as blame: Nagy (1979) 226; cf. 35n.5.

Following on from this, I suggest that the assembly does not 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 affirmed authority. The next two Achaean assemblies pursue this beginning by exploring how dissent may be managed within the institutional framework – but they occur 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. It opens a space into which the poem’s audience are invited to enter and work out what they think about debate.

Lastly, this suggests a way of looking at the *Iliad* in broader, more cosmic, terms. To explain, I consider more precisely *how* Athena’s intervention is represented. Athena appears at the behest of Hera, who holds dear (*filei'n*) both Achilles and Agamemnon.⁴⁸ As we noted above, Athena in effect divorces dissent from violence, and to that extent validates it as a mode of political interaction. On the other hand, this is achieved not through any already existent public arena (such as an assembly), but rather through a personal bond of *philia*, a special relationship between god and 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 this public institution – yet. This assembly is a first – which explains why the issue of speech and power is so central to it and why Achilles’ challenge is so problematic. To all intents and purposes, before Achilles calls an assembly, the Achaeans simply did not possess the capacity to discuss

⁴⁷ “Try me so that *these here* may recognise who is best” (*peivrhσαι ίνα γνωρωσι και; οιδε*, 1.302).

⁴⁸ *a[mfw oImw'" qumw'/ filevousav te khdomevnh te* (1.209).

public concerns in the open. Now an assembly has been established, the audience are to learn what that means as they experience the event of assembly in the narrative.⁴⁹

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 *eris* 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 debate: who can dissent, and in what ways can you dissent properly?

II. Responding to Achilles: making dissent institutional

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 man who is excluded from being able to speak by 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 valorising dissent. I suggest, however, that the

⁴⁹ The anonymous *PCPS* reviewer objected here that one “can’t really speak, for instance, of the first assembly in the poem as the first assembly experienced by the audience when it is so clear – and embedded in the formulae – that the procedures and experiences of the assembly pre-exist the *Iliad*”. I entirely agree – but I find it significant, regarding this first assembly, that: a) formula is kept to the bare minimum (“Achilles calls an assembly”); b) *Hera* puts the idea into Achilles’ mind. (Similarly, if we consider Chryses’ supplication, indications of an institution are entirely absent.) I do not mean to imply that “in reality” no one had ever heard anything like this before; rather that the *Iliad* presents it as such.

text goes further, by virtue of involving its audience in the process of thinking through what dissent means.

The most shameful: framing Thersites

Having plunged the Achaean camp into strife, the narrative soon appears to get back on track for a tale of Troy's sack. The king convokes a second assembly, a voice of opposition is silenced, and two wise advisors prepare for the mustering of the troops.⁵⁰ Yet, how we get there is rather more complex.⁵¹ I analyse first how Agamemnon seeks to reaffirm his authority; secondly, how the narrator frames Thersites' speech. I will show how 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 themselves.

Agamemnon 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. Nothing of the sort occurs however (2.50-3):

aujta;r oJ khruvkessi ligufqovggoisi kevleuse
khruvssein ajgorhvnde kavrh komovwnta" jAcaiouv":
oiJ me;n ejkhvrusson, toi; d j hjeivronto mavl j w\ka.
boulh;n de; prw'ton meqaquvmwn ilze gerovntwn...

⁵⁰ The assembly of book two as restoring order and reasserting the kings' dominance: Donlan (1979) 60-1; Lincoln (1994) 34. The 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.

⁵¹ For problems in book two in general: Reinhardt (1991[1961]) 107ff.

But Agamemnon ordered the clear-voiced heralds to gather the long-haired Achaeans to an assembly. And they gave the summons, and the people gathered quickly. But first [Agamemnon] sat down a council of great-hearted elders...

The heralds heralded, the people gather really swiftly, but first... The elaborate portrayal of public gathering breaks off, suddenly, as Agamemnon calls a council. Significantly, this is the only time that the council (*boulhv*) is introduced *without* the ritual formula “when their desire for food and drink had been put away”.⁵² After this unanticipated break, when we return to the assembling we discover that “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, this assembly seems unduly chaotic and the instituting individual – in this case Agamemnon – appears to have lost control of it. We recall that Agamemnon had convoked the assembly on the basis of a lying dream. Authority *is* still a question.⁵³

This already unstable frame is compromised still further by another surprise: Agamemnon not only relates his dream to the council but introduces the plan – not prefigured by the narrator – to “test” the army (2.73-5).⁵⁴ Commentators are much troubled by such narrative dislocations:

⁵² Using *boulhv* with the formulaic phrase *aujta;r ejpei; pousio" kai; ejdhtuvo" ejx elron elnto* gives three councils: 2.432, 7.323, 9.92. Cf. Mackie (1996) 21-23; Carlier (1996) 8f.; Ruzé (1997) 31ff.; Hölkeskamp (1998) 19. Donlan (1979) 65 mentions in passing that the formulas of *boulhv* and *ajgorhv* suggest a structural deep-rootedness of group authority. See also Schofield (1999) esp. 21-30.

⁵³ Rumour as a corrosive discourse and a speech-act not sanctioned by the community: Lincoln (1994) 78-79. Thalmann (1988) 7 identifies the dream as one feature that problematises the legitimacy of Agamemnon’s authority.

⁵⁴ For bibliography on Agamemnon’s test see Knox & Russo (1989) 351n.2, to which may be added: McGlew (1989) (sympathetic); Haubold (2000) 54-9 (not). On Agamemnon’s assertion that it is the custom (*hl qevmi" ejstin*, 2.73), see Reinhardt (1991[1961]) 159, who asks “Wieso? Weshalb?”

Behind the paradoxes and confusions of the testing motif in its present form one is probably right to detect other versions, in the earlier traditions or in the monumental poet's own repertoire.⁵⁵

The usual suspects: other versions, earlier traditions, recent insertions. But commentary *is* needed. What we can say is that the frame displaces an authoritative telling. Possibilities of dissent extend to the interpretation of what is going on.

Agamemnon's speech provides a good example of this. First, Agamemnon tests the army in the unshakeable belief that he will take Troy that day. He's far wide of the mark, however: 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 challenged by the narrative direction of the *Iliad* itself.⁵⁶

Second, there is the issue of the test itself. Zeus "counselled evil deception" (*kakh;n ajpavthn boulevsato*, 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* "counselled evil deception". And Agamemnon fails. Or, does he succeed rather too well? After all, the army are *so* taken in that they rush to the ships. This is a speech from which the embedded audience are supposed to dissent, but they don't. As a result, when it comes to the staging of authority, when Odysseus beats

⁵⁵ Kirk (1985) 124-5n.86. Leaf (1960[1886-8]) 47: "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."

⁵⁶ 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 underestimates, I feel, the lasting distance between what Agamemnon hopes – and Odysseus and Nestor argue for – and the tale the *Iliad* will tell. Cf. Haubold (2000) 59.

up Thersites, the poem's audience are already on less than sure footing. Are we going to get it right?

The army rush to the ships. Odysseus gets them back in line with persuasion and coercion.⁵⁷ Even then, when order (noisily, 2.209) returns, the tale takes another unexpected turn: enter Thersites.

The strain on the narrative in allowing a voice from below to be heard on the epic stage is manifested by the fact that the character introduction is the most detailed and evaluative of its kind (2.212-19):

*Qersivth" d j e[ti mou'no" ajmetroepH;" ejkolwv/a,
o]" e[pea fresi; h]/sin a[kosmav te pollav te h]/dh,
mavy, ajta;r ouj kata; kovsmon, ejrizevmenai basileu'sin,
ajll j o{ ti oiJ ei[saito geloivi>on jArgeivoisin
e[mmenai: ai[scisto" de; ajnh;r uJpo; [Ilion h\lqe:
folko;" e[hn, cwlo;" d j e{teron povda: tw; dev oiJ w[mw
kurtwv, ejpi; sth'qo" sunocwkovte: aujta;r u{perqe
foxo;" e[hn kefalhv, yednh; d j ejpenhvnoqe lavcnh.*

Thersites of measureless speech alone kept chattering, who knew many disorderly words in his mind, idly not with due order to cause strife with the kings, but whatever he thought would be funny for the Argives. He was the most shameful of men that came to Ilios: he was bandy-legged and lame in one foot, his shoulders were humped, stooping together over his chest, and above them his head was warped, and little hair grew on top.

⁵⁷ Against the view that this simply represents a reassertion of authority, Hammer (2002) 88: “[I]n 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.” Odysseus’s call for there to be “one king” (*ei* “*koivrano*” *e[stw*, 2.204) as *he* “plays the role of being king” (*koiranevwn*, 2.207) could have an edge: Thalmann (1988) 12.

As Lincoln comments: “Before we are permitted to hear what he says... the text is at pains to describe him in such a way as to emphasise his anomalous nature, *deformed* appearance, and to *shape* the attitude we will adopt toward him.”⁵⁸ The narrator’s entry into the debate to describe Thersites’ appearance *forms* our response to Thersites. But just what is at stake in Thersites’ deformation comes to light in the lines that follow (2.220-4):

e[çqisto" d j jAcilh'i> mavlist j h\ n hjd j jOdush'i):

tw; ga;r neikeiveske: tovt j au\t j jAgamevnmnoni divw/

ojxeva keklhvgn levj j ojnevdea: tw'/ d j a[r j jAcaioi;

ejkpavglw" kotevonto nemevsshqevn t j ejni; qumw'/.

aujta;r oJ makra; bow'n jAgamevnmnona neivkee muvqw/:

Most hateful he was to Achilles above all and to Odysseus, for he would abuse the pair of them. At that time with shrill cries he again abused 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.

The audience must make some tough choices here. How are we to take the dative pronoun *tw'P*? How adversative is the “but” (*aujtavr*) which precedes the nominative pronoun *oJ*? Do both refer to Thersites, to stress his isolation?⁵⁹ (Thus: “The Achaeans were angry with Thersites. In spite of this he abused Agamemnon.”) 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?⁶⁰ (“The Achaeans were (all) angry with Agamemnon. *But* it was Thersites...”) The choice rather depends on what we think that the *Iliad* is doing. What position we opt for depends on what position we

⁵⁸ Lincoln (1994) 21 (my italics).

⁵⁹ Kouklanakis (1999) 49: “[T]he 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.” Cf. Kirk (1985) 140n.220-3.

⁶⁰ Postlethwaite (1998[1988]). Cf. Leaf (1960[1886-8]) 65n.222.

adopt for ourselves. At the moment when the narrator enters the debate, the audience are asked to make a judgement.⁶¹

As it is, we 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):

οἱ δὲ καὶ ἀκνυμένοισι περὶ εἴηαι αὐτῶν ἠΐδου, γεύσασσαν:

ὦ δὲ θεῶν τι εἰπέσκον ἰδῶν, ἐν εἴηαι πῆσιβον ἀλλόν:

ὦ πόπποι, ἠὲ δὴ; μῦρον ἰδῶν ἰδῶν; "ejsqla; e[orge

boulav" t j ejxavrɔwn ajgaqa;" povlemovn te koruvsswn:

nu'n de; tovde mev j a[riston ejn ἰδῶν ἰδῶν e[rexen...

But [the Achaeans], though 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 here thing is by far the best he has done among the Argives..."

The internal audience together laugh *and* draw the lesson.⁶² But critical response has been far less univocal, invited by the disjunction between the group's gang laughter and the narrator's – startling – insight into their mind-set: "though they were pained".⁶³ For Nagy, laughter comes at the expense of the blame poet.⁶⁴ For Detienne, "Odysseus' treatment of Thersites, the epitome of the man of the *demos*, reflects the limits of

⁶¹ 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" (205, my italics).

⁶² Verbalised in the form of a "someone" (*tis*) speech, a communal voice: de Jong (1987) 82. Cf. Richardson (1990) 82, with 224n.28.

⁶³ Postlethwaite (1998[1988]) 93 analyses this ambiguity in the light of the narrator's introduction. Cf. Rankin (1972) 43n.25; Rose (1988) 20.

⁶⁴ Nagy (1979) 260-3. Cf. Lowry (1991).

egalitarian speech.”⁶⁵ Rose provocatively suggests that the joke is in fact on Odysseus: beating up this miserable wretch is, apparently, “his best deed yet!”⁶⁶

Perhaps this situation represents an altogether more serious moment. Haft observes the prominence of Odysseus and Odyssean echoes in this book, significantly just after Achilles has removed himself from the scene.⁶⁷ It is as if Odysseus threatens to take control of this, his rival’s, narrative. What is more, in Proclus’s summary of the *Cypria*, it was *Achilles* who prevented the disgraceful flight to the ships. Here Odysseus usurps that role in the wake of Achilles’ withdrawal from the action. The fall-out from Achilles’ act of dissent extends to opening up his epic narrative to his rival.⁶⁸

Why we laugh becomes a question. Responding to the violent suppression of dissent, scholars tend to betray their own ideological positions.⁶⁹ Laughter opens us up to criticism even as we are invited to sanction the reassertion of authority. Is the joke on us?

Joking apart, this is deadly serious. Thalmann suggests that laughter co-opts the on-lookers back into the hierarchy.⁷⁰ I propose that this potentially includes the audience

⁶⁵ Detienne (1996) 103. Cf. Lincoln (1994) 26.

⁶⁶ Rose (1988) 21.

⁶⁷ Haft (1990), (1992). She, however, sees the relationship between the two epics as complementary not agonistic. Seibel (1995) goes further and identifies Thersites as Odysseus’s “alter ego” (386), a connection taken up by later literature; in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, Thersites is cited with Odysseus as a spin merchant (438-42).

⁶⁸ In suggesting a rivalry, I do not imply primacy of one text over the other; I mean rather to suggest 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, pp. 31-8 below.

⁶⁹ Rose (1988) 10-11: “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.”

of the poem – which is important if we consider that Thersites’ dissent *is* closely modelled on Achilles’.⁷¹ Is there a danger, therefore, that we trivialise Achilles’ challenge to Agamemnon? 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*” (*ajll j of tiv oiJ ei[saito geloivi>on jArgeivoisin / e[mmenai*, 2.215-16). Is one problem with Thersites the fact that he is *only* interested in parody and that, as a result, we may fail to take dissent seriously? Are we in danger of missing the significance of what Achilles had done for us by calling that first assembly? No wonder tradition has it that Achilles killed Thersites...⁷²

Odysseus’s beating up of Thersites draws attention to the exercise of authority which, paradoxically, opens it up to analysis. Even as it suppresses a voice of dissent, the *Iliad* makes us aware that it implicates us into this act. As Rose 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

⁷⁰ 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:” Thalmann (1988) 21.

⁷¹ Whitman (1958) 161. Cf. Postlethwaite (1998[1988]), who analyses the speech as a rehearsal of and commentary upon the quarrel; Reinhardt (1991[1961]) 162, who calls the scene a “Nachspiel” on the book one assembly; Schadewaldt (1987[1966]) 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.

⁷² The *Aethiopsis* – judging by Proclus’s summary – showed Thersites in a rather different light “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*”: Rosen (2003) 123. The difference, according to Rosen, is in the performance context: “*stasis* arose over the death of Thersites” (*Chrestomathia* p.105.25 OCT) because he was killed at a feast, whereas here he is beaten out of the assembly. Epic dissent does not equal comic abuse (134).

heightening the very discontent one intends to contain and co-opt.”⁷³ We might go further and say that, even as the *Iliad* sets out boundaries to dissent, it does so in a way that involves its audience in thinking about it and in setting down those boundaries themselves. In this way, we are involved in managing dissent. And, in doing so, we begin to realise the potential of the assembly as an institution that valorises dissent.

To fight with words is the custom: institutionalising dissent

The next Achaean assembly opens as if it is going to replay the events of book two. We again see Agamemnon convoking the assembly to raise the spectre of return, only this time he is in deadly earnest.⁷⁴ Different too is the response. On this occasion, Agamemnon’s proposal of flight provokes a fierce rejoinder by Diomedes, in terms that significantly emphasise his right to speak in the assembly (9.32-3):

jAtrei?dh, soi; prw'ta machvsomai ajfradevonti:

h) qevmi" ejstivn, a[nax, ajgorh'/: su; de; mhv ti colwqh'/".

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.

Diomedes not only flags his disagreement with Agamemnon. He also self-consciously locates his act in the precedent established by Achilles.⁷⁵ The end of that first assembly had concluded with the two speakers “fighting with words” (1.304). The verbal echo

⁷³ Rose (1988) 13. Or Lincoln (1994) 6: “In a state of latency or occultation, persuasion and coercion alike are constitutive points of authority, but once actuated and rendered explicit they signal – indeed they are, at least temporarily – its negation.”

⁷⁴ Lynn-George (1988) 81ff.; Hammer (2002) 89.

⁷⁵ Diomedes as a second Achilles: Griffin (1983[1980]) 74f.; Schofield (1999) 29. Lohmann (1970) calls this scene “Die Spiegelgelung zur Streitszene im ersten Buch” (217), and specifically identifies Diomedes as playing the role of Achilles’ “double” (221).

draws on the authority of Achilles' opposition in book one. But Diomedes' assertion goes one step further: "it is the custom" (*h) qevmi" ejstivn*), he says. 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.⁷⁶

Such a description appears apt for our study; but it should not be overlooked that a character speaks these lines. According to Griffin, the phrase "it is the custom" is only ever used by characters: "the poet never commits himself to expressing, from his own mouth, the idea that something is correct, in line with timeless usage."⁷⁷

What I suggest is that Diomedes applies the phrase to provide for himself the authorisation to speak in opposition. That is to say, he is being not merely descriptive but prescriptive. The assembly does not simply exist as the place where disagreement is allowed; Diomedes makes it thus in his opening salvo and sanctions it as the place where contesting with the king is not only possible but essential.⁷⁸ We might say he *institutionalises* dissent. By the time we get to book nine, the assembly can indeed be legitimately regarded as "institutionally a place where disagreement is allowed". We no longer need an Achilles to answer Agamemnon.

⁷⁶ J. Foley (1991) 175n.79 (my italics).

⁷⁷ Griffin (1986) 38. Hammer (2002) 89-90, 115-34, recognising the need to examine *themis* in "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" (127). However, he locates the change in the understanding of political space in the character (Diomedes) and not the poem's audience (132-3).

⁷⁸ Schofield (1986) 14 glosses the importance of this speech by drawing a connection to the prowess shown in battle.

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 should go off to take their meal (*dovrpa t j ejfoplisovmesqa*, 9.66) while the leaders take counsel (*boulh;n bouleuvsh/*, 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.⁷⁹ 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 gathering.⁸⁰ The description of the kings meeting for a meal provides an explicit institutional frame of reference for the discussion that follows.

Under Nestor’s supervision the text shows the Achaean community managing dissent within an institutional framework.⁸¹ In the context of book nine, indeed, both assembly and council are vital to the health of the community *and* to the telling of the tale. Had it been left to the “lord of men” Agamemnon, the Achaeans would be returning home and we 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: we remain at Troy to negotiate (with) Achilles. Dissent is being made integral both to the well-being of the

⁷⁹ See n.51 above. For the understanding of the belly (*gasthr*) as the enemy of good deliberation see Hesiod *Tb.*, 26-8, with Pucci (1987) esp. 165-72, 181-208. By providing an occasion for allotting proper “shares” (*timaiv*), communal meals take on a socially stabilising role.

⁸⁰ Nestor stipulates that the leader’s role is not only to declare an *epos* but to listen to one as well (*ejpakou'sai*, *Od.* 9.100), and act for the communal good (*ejj' ajgaqovn*, 9.102). Thus he prepares his advice: *aujta;r ejgw;n ejrevw w|' moi dokei' ei'nai a[rista* (9.103).

⁸¹ The narrative signals his move to more intense negotiation with marked vocabulary: *u|faiivnein mh'tin* (9.93).

Achaean community *and* to the narrativisation of the fall of Troy. The institution of the assembly does not exist somehow prior to the *Iliad*, but because of it.

In saying this, I place emphasis on 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 to point is the role of the main player in moving affairs to council, Nestor. Though praised for his negotiation skills by Hellenistic critics in particular,⁸² some recent scholars have shown anxiety at Nestor's deference to authority. He defers to Agamemnon in the quarrel with Achilles (1.277-9), in accepting the validity of Agamemnon's lying dream (2.79-83),⁸³ and at the prelude of the embassy (9.103-5) – all of which worsen the crisis. Though it could be said that Nestor represents the virtues of the tradition,⁸⁴ equally we could understand him as a remnant of a past when everyone was indeed deferent to the king on the basis of status alone. Indeed Peter Rose has suggestively called Nestor's (and Odysseus's) adherence to an absolute notion of Agamemnon's authority "residual".⁸⁵ This is interesting, because in the *Odyssey* Nestor, along with Odysseus, *is* shown to be no lover of debate.⁸⁶ Even as the text establishes the boundaries to the institution of the assembly, we are made to think about our role in

⁸² For a discussion, see Murray (1965) 177. Cf. Schofield (1999) 29.

⁸³ See Taplin (1992) 90.

⁸⁴ Especially in his ability to spin a tale, as his manipulation of Patroclus testifies: R. P. Martin (2000).

⁸⁵ Rose (1997) 163. Hammer (1997b) suggests that Nestor adheres to a "might-is-right" notion of kingship, which should be contrasted to a more "interdependent" notion of politics – a "politics of mediation" – embodied in the figure of Achilles (20, 21). Cf. Hammer (2002) 127-42. For the role of Odysseus and Nestor in supporting Agamemnon: Schofield (1986) 26ff.; Sale (1994), 32ff.

⁸⁶ See, for example, his description of the catastrophic debate after the fall of Troy (*Od.* 3.148-50). Ah, how things were different when he and Odysseus were in control. The two of them never fell out (*ou[te] pot j eijn ajgorh' / divc j ejbazovmen ou[t j ejni; boulh'*, 3.127), but were always of the same mind (*ajll j e[na] qumo;n e[conte] novw/ kai; ejpivfroni boulh'*, 3.128).

legitimising or suppressing dissent: who can dissent (Thersites)? how much dissent should we allow? and when (Nestor)?

If we are more sceptical about Nestor's role, we may want to distinguish between the council and assembly. From what we have said, the former appears more fully formed, restrictive and more closely associated with the king; the latter 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.⁸⁷

One later occurrence of the word *agora* underlines the evolutionary nature of narrative. As a prelude to a significant one-off speech by the Achaean warrior, Thoas,⁸⁸ the narrator underlines his skill as a speaker (15.283-4):

ajgorh' / dev eJ pau'roi jAcaiw'n

nivkwon, oJhpovte kou'roi ejrivsseian peri; muvqwn:

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

The introduction affords a brief glimpse of a world closer to home. And what we learn is that dissent in the assembly is a normal activity, a “whenever”. Given the detail that it is a young man's sport, it is perhaps even part of what one has to do to prove oneself as a man. Whereas in the first assembly, the strife (*eris*) between Agamemnon and Achilles was represented as a crisis, even if Achilles' dissent had been necessary, the implicit premise here is of the *social acceptability of eris*. As a matter of fact, this narratorial gloss on

⁸⁷ Haubold (2000) 60 comments that “institutional progress is not the *Iliad's* prime interest”. This, I believe, lends rather too much authority to Nestor's management. (Haubold makes the comment in the context of Nestor preparing the *Iliad* to accommodate the catalogue of the ships.)

⁸⁸ Hammer (1997b) 9 notes how Thoas uses the formula *peiqwvmeqa pavnte* as a sign of his concern to persuade his audience.

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.

It remains to be seen whether Achilles can be received back into the community. The debate of book 19 explores that issue and invites reflection on the *Iliad*'s achievement.

III *Let us remember*: putting a value on debate

The final Achaean assembly appears somewhat out of place in our enquiry. After all, I have just argued the performance of the assembly culminates in book nine when Diomedes prescribes it as an institution that allows dissent. What can the last scene of assembly add to our understanding? In a sense, this assembly is out of place even in the narrative. We know that Achilles will be returning to battle. The decision has *already* been made. What need for an assembly now?⁸⁹

Its formal institutionalisation is the most elaborate yet (19.40-6):

aujta;r oJ bh' para; qi'na qalavssh" di'o" jAcilleu;"
smerdaleva ijavcwn, w\rsen d j h{rwa" jAcaiouv".
kai v rJ j oi{ per to; pavro" ge new'n ejn ajgw"ni mevneskon,
oi{ te kubernh'tai kai; e[con oijhvi>a nhw'n
kai; tamivai para; nhusi;n e[san, sivtoio doth're",
kai; mh;n oiJ tovte g j eij" ajgorh;n i[san, ou{nek j jAcilleu;"
ejxefavnh, dhro;n de; mavch" ejpevpaut j ajlegeinh".

⁸⁹ Formal reconciliation takes place: Donlan (1979) 62; yet Achilles is hardly reintegrated into the community: Seaford (1994) 67.

Divine Achilles walked along the shore, shouting terribly, and he roused the Achaean heroes. And even those who before used to wait in the agon 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”, which recalls the poem’s location of the *Iliad* in a bygone world (1.1-5).⁹⁰ Second, there is the odd detail that “everyone came even those who before used to wait in the *agon of the ships*”, a curious phrase that only occurs for the duration Achilles is absent from battle.⁹¹ The point is picked up by what follows: “they came to the *agora* at that time because Achilles appeared, *who for a long time had ceased from warring*.” The period of Achilles’ absence relates directly to the duration of the *Iliad*, which had begun with him withdrawing from the group after having upheld the importance of speaking freely in the assembly. This assembly’s opening frame invites the poem’s audience to reflect on the *Iliad* as a whole and assess its narrativisation of dissent. It is a debate on debate.

⁹⁰ The mention of heroes 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 (*Op.* 156-73). Graziosi and Haubold (forthcoming) suggest that archaic Greek hexameter – that is to say Homeric and Hesiodic epic – share a vision of the cosmos and how it developed through time. In this sense they are foundational narratives.

⁹¹ The standard gloss is that the phrase *new'n ejn ajgw'ni* “maintains the original sense of *ajgwvn*, ‘gathering’..., whence derives its post-Homeric sense ‘contest’”: Janko (1992) 275-6n.426-8; cf. Leaf (1960[1886-8]) 132n.428; Willcock (1978) 236n.298; M. Edwards (1991) 240n.42-5; N. Richardson (1993) 200-201n.258. But see Ellsworth (1974), who proposes that *agon* 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. Cf. his 1971 PhD thesis (University Microfilms, Ann Arbor).

Achilles, addressing Agamemnon alone, represents their struggle in terms of its effect on the group: “but I believe that the Achaeans have been long angry about our strife” (*aujta;r jAcaiou;" / dhro;n ejmh" kai; sh" e[rido" mnhsesqai oji?w*, 19.63-4). He even accepts the common soldiery’s view, as formulated by Ajax, that it had all been for a woman (*eifneka kouvrh"*, 19.58).⁹² Now, Achilles urges, they should let bygones be bygones; it is not necessary “to be always angry” (*aijei; meneainevmen*, 19.68). The action of the *Iliad* appears to have been aptly (if over simply) summarised. The assembly could end here. This is, at any rate, how the internal audience react. Denied any kind of response in the first assembly, here they are described as happy now that Achilles has let his rage go.⁹³ Yet the *Iliad* refrains from dissolving the assembly quite yet. Instead, Achilles’ “Iliadic” desire to do battle is frustrated by two opponents of his narrative tale:⁹⁴ first Agamemnon, who again tries to maintain control over the events; more telling is the mediation of Odysseus, who introduces into the narrative an Odyssean motif, the concern for the belly.

The framing of Agamemnon’s response immediately confronts us with the question of what we think is going on: the narrator describes how Agamemnon speaks from *where he is sitting*,⁹⁵ and from a position “not in the middle” (*oujd j ejn mevssoisin*, 19.77). Up until now, the narrator had been silent on how the agent addresses the

⁹² M. Edwards (1991) 241n.56-73. Cf. Ajax *Il.* 9.637-8.

⁹³ *Il.* 19.74. *ejcavrhsan* 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 reaction is premature.

⁹⁴ Owen (1947) 91 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!

⁹⁵ 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) 72nn.1-8.

assembly; using these details it is probably right to surmise that the speaker stands in the middle of the group, thereby signifying his words as in the public interest, open to all, the possession of none⁹⁶ – which fits into our analysis of the assembly as allowing dissent. What then do we make of Agamemnon *not* standing in the middle? Again we find the narrator posing a question in the way the assembly is framed. Again a judgement must be made that impacts upon how the assembly is understood.⁹⁷ From what we have just said about the middle, Agamemnon’s posture suggests an unwillingness to enter into a contest of words.⁹⁸ This is in itself, of course, an antagonistic gesture, but one that seeks to maintain a hierarchical superiority, exactly that which has been challenged throughout in previous scenes of the assembly.

In this last assembly, then, it appears that Agamemnon is still trying to assert his authority. Understood in this way certain oddities of his speech make sense, such as the round about way he prefaces what he has to say (19.79-80):

eIstaovto" me;n kalo;n ajkouvein, oujde; e[oiken

uJbbavllein: calepo;n ga;r e;jpistamevnw/ per e;jo;vnti.

It is good to listen to the man standing, nor is it right to interrupt him. For it is difficult even for one who is knowledgeable.

Agamemnon’s point is less than clear, especially given he is sitting. Rabel though points out that *uJbbavllein* (“to interrupt”) occurs here for only the second time; it was first used

⁹⁶ 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.

⁹⁷ Thornton (1984) 128-9 regards these gestures as those of a supplicant posture, a view criticised by Taplin (1990) 75. M. Edwards (1991) 243-5n.76-84 interprets Agamemnon’s seated position as publicly demonstrating physical incapacity to contrast with Achilles’ recent battle shyness.

⁹⁸ He avoids addressing Achilles directly (*Phlei?dh/... ejndeivxomai*, 19.83), which is his strategy throughout. Cf. 19.189. See M. Edwards (1991) 245n.83.

by the narrator to describe Achilles interrupting Agamemnon in the original quarrel.⁹⁹ Agamemnon's generalisation appears pointedly aimed at Achilles and specifically at the challenge to his – Agamemnon's – authority. Along similar lines he relates a *paradeigma* about the power of the goddess Deception (*Atē*) over all, even Zeus himself. Other characters narrate Olympian action, but none do so quoting the words of gods. Moreover, he applies the *paradeigma* to his own situation not, as in all other cases, to the situation of his addressee¹⁰⁰ – and not altogether surprisingly he aligns himself to the King of the gods!¹⁰¹ This is Agamemnon's version of the *Iliad*.¹⁰² Yet, the example he chooses, in which Zeus discovers his words spinning out of control, spin back on Agamemnon.¹⁰³ Another more appropriate role is open to him, playing Eurystheus to Achilles' Heracles; how Agamemnon would fare in such a comparison is clear.¹⁰⁴ Once more he fails conspicuously to control the narrative, which undermines his authority irrevocably: his last words are in this debate. Once more in the assembly we see the *Iliad*'s agenda of privileging dissent. This is, after all, *Achilles'* narrative.

⁹⁹ The only other use of *uJbbavllein* is the *hapax uJpoblhvdhn* at 1.292: Rabel (1991). Cf. M. Edwards (1991) 244.

¹⁰⁰ Vivante (1990) 99 suggests that Agamemnon has made the *paradeigma* up. Certainly it is right to note the spin Agamemnon puts on it.

¹⁰¹ Lohmann (1970) 77f. explores how Agamemnon interlaces his *alth* with Zeus's.

¹⁰² Rabel (1991).

¹⁰³ Hera tricks Zeus into making a promise the effect of which renders Heracles subservient to Eurystheus. According to Heiden (1991), the *paradeigma* demonstrates the “dialogic” process of communication.

¹⁰⁴ It “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”: Davidson (1980) 200. Rabel (1991) maintains, however, that Agamemnon comes off best in this match-up.

Yet, Achilles' march to war is halted by a third party, Odysseus, who insists on following formal procedure: first reconciliation, second eating.¹⁰⁵ Agamemnon then replies to Odysseus, Achilles answers Agamemnon. Odysseus Achilles. Thus in this assembly no two speakers respond directly to each other. At one level, then, this structuring of the debate avoids replaying the contest between Achilles and Agamemnon or, for that matter, between Achilles and Odysseus. At another, it allows tensions to remain latent. In addressing Achilles, for example, Odysseus quotes Agamemnon's first words to him in that fateful assembly.¹⁰⁶ There may too be something a little unsettling about the way this hero, who is famous from the rival epic for tricky persuasiveness, (stage-)manages the assembly and keeps a powerful check on dissent.¹⁰⁷

A subtle irony underscores this scene that speaks volumes for the *Iliad's* narrative strategy as a whole. Odysseus's intervention holds up the telling of the *Iliad* and the deeds (still to be witnessed) of its hero Achilles. In reply to Agamemnon, Achilles exhorts "now let us remember battle" (*nu'n de; mnhswwmeqa cavrnh" / ai\ya mavl j*, 19.148-9). When Odysseus objects, he is even more explicit: nothing is of concern (*mevmhlen*) to him, but "murder and blood and harsh groans of men" (*ajlla; fovno" te kai; ailma kai; ajrgalevo" stovno" ajndrw'n*, 19.214). This striking line has an epigrammatic quality that could pass off as a summing up of the *Iliad* and its scenes of bloody

¹⁰⁵ Odysseus's proposal that Agamemnon has his gifts of recompense carried into the middle (*oijsevtw ej" mesvshn ajgorhv*, 19.173) equates to a redistribution of booty and avoids placing Achilles under obligation to Agamemnon: Detienne (1996) 93-5. 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.

¹⁰⁶ "Don't, though you are noble, divine-like Achilles" (*mh; dh; outw", ajgaqov" per ejwvn, qeoeivkel j jAcilleu'*, 19.155=1.131).

¹⁰⁷ Contrast Hammer (1997a) 358. He notes the importance of Odysseus's manipulation of social ritual (being aimed at co-opting Achilles back into the system), but does not regard it as potentially aggressive.

warfare.¹⁰⁸ Even so, Odysseus insists on remembering to eat.¹⁰⁹ 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,¹¹⁰ Odysseus’s obstruction could also be regarded as programmatic.¹¹¹ Achilles’ resistance to Odysseus would then be a rejection of the Odyssean tradition. Holding onto the memory of grief acts as a stimulus to attaining (his) glory.¹¹²

Yet, even this explanation does not exhaust the possibilities of contest. After all, in spite of Achilles’ flat refusal to sing along to an Odyssean hymn-book, the telling of his tale *is* held up by the intrusion of gift-giving and eating. But that, I suggest, is the very strength of the *Iliad*’s strategy of dissent. It accommodates a spectrum of diverse, even competing perspectives.¹¹³ Its commitment to dissent in the assembly is tested by the intervention of the hero of the rival tradition. By conceding ground to this competing voice, the *Iliad* demonstrates the value of dissent. Who would agree with Achilles that the

¹⁰⁸ In an imagined contest between “Homer” and “Hesiod”, the king judges “Homer” inferior on such a basis: *Certamen* 205-10.

¹⁰⁹ *memnh'sqai povsio" kai; ejdhtuvo"* (19.231).

¹¹⁰ The sentiment “for no man fasting can fight a whole day” crops up in Odysseus’s tale at *Od.* 9.161, 556; 10.183, 475; 12.29.

¹¹¹ Pucci (1987) 165ff. For tension between Odysseus and Achilles in the *Iliad* see n.67 above, with Nagy (1979) on the embassy of book nine. The conflict is taken up in the *Odyssey* with Achilles left in the underworld bemoaning his early death while Odysseus continues on his journey home: A. Edwards (1985).

¹¹² Pucci (1987) 169-71. Achilles only “remembers eating” after – finally – giving up his wrath (24.601).

¹¹³ Saying that, the text 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.

only thing of concern in the *Iliad* is “murder, blood and harsh groans” – least of all Achilles himself?¹¹⁴

The assembly of book nineteen clearly does provide some sort of closure to the disruption and strife that has gone before. Everyone is present; Achilles and Agamemnon are not allowed to fall out again; Odysseus employs due procedure to formalise reconciliation. Nevertheless, counterproductive 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 on debate, enacts the very strength of that strategy.

I began this paper by remarking on the widespread interest in exploring how the *Iliad* might relate to a socio-political framework and the failed attempts at locating the *Iliad* with any certainty in that landscape. My purpose throughout has not been to consider whether or not the assembly existed as an institution in Homeric society, but to explore how the *Iliad* represents debate and what significance might be attached to that. One reason why the Homeric *agora* has proven such a contestable arena of debate could be because scholars have approached the *Iliad*'s institutions by looking for a “ready-made”

¹¹⁴ The closing verses of the *Iliad* passage recited by “Homer” in the *Certamen* – “*Very hard of heart he would have been, who could then have seen that labour with joy and felt no pain*” (203-4) – in the words of Jim Porter, “undercut the scene of war he is describing” (taken from his unpublished paper “Contest and Contestation in the *Certamen*” delivered at the 2002 APA meeting in New Orleans and kindly lent to me).

system.¹¹⁵ I have shown, however, that assemblies are not independent of context but part of a series of representations that progressively explores the possibility for, and value of, dissent in the community. Moreover, by experiencing the assembly as a *process* – that is, a series of struggles not a closed system, the poem’s audience become implicated in *realising* it as an institution that makes use of disagreement. When Achilles dissents from 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 we get to the assembly of book nine with the initial dissenting voice, Achilles, isolated from the community, Diomedes can say that fighting with words in the assembly “is the custom”. The assembly of book nineteen invites reflection on that achievement.

This conclusion differentiates my study from previous attempts to place the *Iliad* in an emerging institutional framework. Richard Seaford, for example, emphasises the poem’s ritual ending as anticipating the fifth-century *polis*: with Achilles’ reception of Priam in *book twenty four*, the poem suggests a different conception of relationships.¹¹⁶ 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 dramatised 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

¹¹⁵ Hammer (1997b) 3: “[I]t is precisely the absence of formalized political institutions that makes any mediation between Agamemnon and Achilles so difficult.” Cf. Finley (2002[1954]) 69-72, 106; Donlan (1979) 65; Ruzé (1997); Hölkeskamp (1998).

¹¹⁶ Seaford (1994) 176: “The reconciliation of Achilles and Priam is often said to represent, as Macleod puts it, ‘the value of humanity and fellow-feeling’ (1982, 16). This is true as far as it goes. But the construction and the power of the scene derived not just from the abstract consideration (natural for us) of shared humanity but from the concrete role of death ritual in social practice, in creating solidarity between potential enemies.”

mediation of difference”.¹¹⁷ Hammer’s understanding, therefore, of the *Iliad*’s performance of political thought, privileges *Achilles’ performance in book twenty three*.

Greg Nagy posits an even earlier moment where, he believes, the *Iliad* alludes to a political community; that is, the trial on Achilles’ shield in *book eighteen*. He writes:

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*.¹¹⁸

With this observation, Nagy implies a connection between witnessing the *Iliad* and the formation of a political community.¹¹⁹ I suggest that the *Iliad* helps to construct a political community by virtue of the ways in which it structures interpretation as institutional. It begins a process towards achieving a political community *from its beginning* through Achilles’ dissent in the assembly, which takes place under divine patronage and which the Achaeans, and the poem’s audience, must deal with.

It is for this reason, I believe, we never quite get to the *polis* in the text itself. The audience themselves, as they experience the assembly, make it work *as* a central

¹¹⁷ Hammer (1997b) 21. He explains (20): “Whereas Nestor is always able to pronounce final judgement on a particular situation, we see in the situation with Achilles [in the Funeral Games] a much more complex, interdependent politics in which decisions give rise to new problems... We have, it seems, a new politics born of and immersed in contending (and not easily resolvable) interests.” Cf. Hammer (2002) 134-43. Hammer, like me, locates the source of the crisis in the struggle between Achilles and Agamemnon in *Iliad* (1), but whereas he sees the funeral games as “political re-enactment” (13ff), the *agora* remains the institution that cannot support dissent (13).

¹¹⁸ Nagy (1997) 206.

¹¹⁹ For the performance of the *Iliad* at the *Panathenaia*: Nagy (1996) 65-112; (1999). Cf. Haubold (2000) 145-90. In this context, the *Iliad* could serve as a foundation narrative for Greek *poleis* and, more specifically, Athens. One answer to Achilles is Athenian democracy.

institution of the polis.¹²⁰ 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.¹²¹ Similarly, I suggest, 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 establishing a place in its narrative to investigate debate, the *Iliad* invites the audience to reflect on where they are to going to draw the lines, over what they will enter the debate. We are invited to look beyond the single (imagined or real) performance context to an *Iliad* that operates as aetiological – or foundational – for a world of “today”.¹²² The text itself does not perform politics, as Hammer suggests. Its audience are the ones performing politics.¹²³

¹²⁰ Morris (1996) 20 discusses a pre-democratic stage where members of a group, who believe “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* (31).

¹²¹ Vernant (1982[1962]) 47-8.

¹²² The *Iliad*'s heroic world of the past is exploited “for the way in which it can, as a purely fictional world can, cast light upon the structures of the present world”: Osborne (1996) 33.

¹²³ The institutional dissent of many friends and colleagues has helped make this performance, especially the following: first, Simon Goldhill – there would have been no point without the agony of his supervisions; Johannes Haubold, who helped me find my voice in the debate; Bruce Heiden, for having inspired my interest in the *Iliad*; the audiences of this paper's various forms at the 2002 CAC in Edinburgh, the Cambridge Literary Seminar and Merton college, Oxford; finally, the anonymous *PCPS* reviewer, Jason König, Kyriaki Konstantinidou, Don Lavigne, Jim Porter and Alex Stevens for helping me produce fewer errors and present a more robust challenge.