

## Narrative Paradigm and Agamemnon's Apology. *Iliad* 19.74-144

This paper explores the phenomenon of Homeric paradigmatic narrative, responding especially to the research of De Jong,<sup>1</sup> Alden,<sup>2</sup> Willcock,<sup>3</sup> and Austin<sup>4</sup> on this intriguing subject. Compiling the varied – and sometimes contradictory – definitions of paradigm, para-narrative, digression, and analepsis from these scholars, I redefine the concept of narrative paradigm to describe the narration of mythological stories from more-or-less recent times before the main action of the poem, within the speeches of the internal characters that in some way parallels the present characters or situations; in addition I investigate how these narratives function as persuasive rhetorical devices, both internally, as the characters relate to one another, and externally, as the poet relates his narrative as a whole to the audience. I focus on the more problematic examples within the *Iliad*, which complicate the questions of purpose and efficacy of the paradigms. Within different narratives, I locate examples of deception, irony, inefficacy, ambiguity, and irrelevance and suggest possible readings and interpretations for such difficulties.

Having thus defined my thesis, I concentrate on the specific example of Agamemnon's apology (*Iliad* 19.74-144). Using this paradigmatic parallel I show that narrative paradigms are a complex mode of communication between the poet and his audience that show not only the secondary perspective and hortatory purposes of internal characters but also illustrate and develop complex relationships between the figures in the *Iliad* and contribute to the structural unity of the poem by echoing universal patterns and themes. I rely heavily on close textual reading as well as inter- and intra-textual analysis of other Homeric passages. I am especially interested in the multiple possible interpretations of the paradigm, besides the most superficial

---

<sup>1</sup> De Jong 1997 and 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Alden 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Willcock 1964.

<sup>4</sup> Austin 1966.

parallel between Agamemnon and Zeus, and how these interpretations enhance the complexity and richness of the narrative and the poem by contributing to characterization and thematic explication. For example, I explore the characterization of Agamemnon in this passage as he derides Hera for undermining the authority of Zeus, while he makes this superficially apologetic address to Achilles, his supposed subordinate.

I conclude that Agamemnon's "apology" complicates more than it resolves, and this is a unique and vital feature of Homeric paradigmatic narrative. It is distinctive in that the paradigm itself, even superficially, does not seem to contain a true parallel to the present situation; it is especially unique in the different parallels that it offers and the multiplicity of interpretations that are possible to derive from these parallels. It is also unique in the blatant discrepancy between the intention and knowledge of the speaker, Agamemnon, and the understanding of the unity of the poem as a whole and communication between the narrator and the audience. With this paradigm, the poet manages to connect the entire arc of the story from the dismissed supplication of Agamemnon by Chryses in Book 1 to the accepted supplication of Herakles by Priam in Book 24; this is the entire plot of Achilles' wrath that is the expressed subject of the *Iliad*.

#### Works Cited

- Alden, Maureen. 2000. *Homer Beside Himself: Para-Narratives in the Iliad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Austin, Norman. 1966. "The Function of Digressions in the *Iliad*." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 7: 295-312.
- Braswell, Bruce Karl. 1971. "Mythological Innovation in the *Iliad*." *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series 21: 16-26.

- Davies, Malcolm. 1995. "Agamemnon's Apology and the Unity of the Iliad." *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series 45: 1-8.
- De Jong, Irene. 1997. "Homer and Narratology." In *A New Companion to Homer*, edited by Ian Morris and Barry Powell, 305-325. Leiden: Brill.
- De Jong, Irene J.F. 1987. *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad*. Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner Publishing Co.
- Edwards, Mark W. 1991. *The Iliad: A Commentary, Volume v: books 17-20*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Held, George F. 1987. "Phoenix, Agamemnon and Achilles: Parables and Paradeigmata." *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series 37: 245-261.
- Lohmann, Dieter. 1970. *Die Komposition der Reden in der Ilias*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.
- Rabel, Robert J. 1991. "Agamemnon's Iliad." *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 32: 103-117.
- Talpin, O. 1990. "Constructing Agamemnon's Role in the Iliad." in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, edited by C. Pelling, 60-82. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Willcock, M.M. 1964. "Mythological Paradeigma in the Iliad." *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series 14: 141-154.