HOMERIC PRAYER

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Ancient Hellenic prayer, mortal pagan communication with the spirit-world, differs from other types, (say) Danish, Japanese, or Javanese, but modern conceptions of prayer have no better warrant than Homeric examples. What acts, gestures, words, and attitudes constitute any prayer, Hellenic prayer, and specifically Homeric prayer? Total abasement and mystic union with god may be more aberrant or atypical across time and space than aggressive chats or whining. A brief cross-cultural survey (a), introduces an examination of Hellenic prayers, their stages and elements (b), and then we turn to prayers in Homer's *Iliad* (c). Homeric prayer differs from later Greek traditions and literary epiphanies. Heroic mortals stand closer to gods than later thinkers imagined possible.

PRAYER AS A SUBJECT FOR INVESTIGATION

The pray-er talks to god(s), an activity comprehending posture, feelings, thoughts, words, gestures, resolve, energy, and deeds. Prayer is power-talk, a sacred, creative language found in most religious traditions. "Words excel in expressive enlargement." Anthropologists record myths but few prayers, and more ritual acts than ritual words. Not all religions comprehend prayer (normally, invocation and demand or supplication for a boon), but available prayer traditions embrace curses, complaints, and even threats in their canons. A living god is a personal presence.[1] Inadequately examined assumptions of similarity between ancient and modern attitudes

1 Tambiah 1968.202, quotation; Metcalf 1989.3–4, an exception; 11: threats. I thank Bruce Heiden, Rick Newton, and Andrea Purvis for improvements to oral or written versions.

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obstruct understanding of prayer.[2] Homeric prayers, even in a limited and "literary" (no field recordings in Homer!) sample, vary widely in their formulae for establishing a relationship with god, in the ingenuity of their justifications for desired solutions, and in the measured responses that deities flourish.

Pisistratus says to Athena in man's disguise about stranger Telemachus: "He also will make prayer to the immortals, because all men need gods" (*Ody.* 3.47–48). Gods can do what humans cannot. Prayers vividly and fervently focus on human neediness, with or without humility. Even the pray-er who admits fault, crawls before god(s), and acknowledges his stinking state—by his very act—also deems himself worthy of a god's time and attention, implying—whether he is aware of it or not—his own self-importance. Examples from ancient Mesopotamia, and its spiritual offshoot Israel, document a personal religion (aside from the better known communal forms of worship) which bridges the gap between the distantly awesome and the nearby familiar. The supernatural power associated with an individual enables human success, like a parent, and brings "luck." An Old Babylonian letter from mortal Apil-adad offers a petulant complaint about divine disregard: "Why have you neglected me (so)? Who is going to give you one who can take my place? . . . Let your help reach me!"[3]

Humans regularly air grievances and joy. Prayer expresses human gratitude or complaint or a combination, ordinary and extraordinary monologues that mediate between those here, living now, and those beyond, living forever. Prayer transforms helpless victims of fate and mor-

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2 The repetitive and trite nature of non-literary, actual, or observable prayers and chants (e.g., Acts 19:34–36, litanies, and rosaries) controverts preconceptions that good prayer must be spontaneous and heartfelt conversation, neither rehearsed nor learned from another. Context and performance, however, can inspirit tired commonplaces, turning mere words and phrases into ritual substance and spiritual power. Gill 1981.183–86 reconciles the formulaic and creative elements of prayer by reintegrating verbal texts with gestural and paralinguistic performances. His study of Navajo prayer shows that even when the messages are logically "redundant," the physical and emotional delivery, the setting, and the sound produce a "special frame of interpretation." Semiotic redundancy penetrates situational distance and "static." Even verbal redundancy, repetition of name or behest, often signifies the intensity of the pray-er's need. Recent anthropological research sheds limited light on ancient Greek prayer, especially in literature, for text audiences may learn the gods' reaction and many prayers are not "reported" at all. Such comparanda from current reports of non-conforming "prayers," nevertheless, critique post-Christian speculative theology and misleading conceptions of pre-philosophical prayer.

3 Jacobsen 1976.150, 160, cf. 162; a useful corrective to regarding Homeric prayer as unique in stressing the agent's self-importance.

tality into active performers, agents of protective reactions. Prayer, psychologically and constructively, vents an emotional overload. Prayer provides a vertical communication channel for the extraordinary claims of *ad hoc* survivors. Prayer, personal and corporate, then and now, demonstrates a verbal art, a *coping strategy* for surprise: pain, fear, confusion, despair, need, loss, elation, and anger.

Prayer, both a structured behavior and an associated state of being, reminds the more powerful of the less so. Some pray-ers and prayers excel; Chryses, Achilles, and Odysseus, aware of their limits, know the right heroic prayers at the right time. Homer's humans and gods recognize prayer as ritual—stylized speech, gestures, and postures. Prayer, whether protest or call for help, when heard, compels attention and response. If modern disbelievers disattend the excessively solemn and ethical theology of Semitic "purified" prayer, they may better appreciate the anger, vexation, and heightened tension of Homeric believers. In that world, the gods absolutely do exist and meddle regularly.[4]

Prayer activities unite antiquity and the present, but prayers are not always for the same things or performed in the same ways. Men and women continue to move apart (church, bedroom, cemetery, closet, etc.) in order to address an unseen power, to request help or success or insight, and to supply reasons for attention. The current stereotype has private adorants fall to their knees (but stand in public conclave), and in this kneeling posture[5] clasp their hands before them, bow heads downwards, and offer unique or

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4 Caraveli 1986.190–92 and *passim* explores parallel contemporary Hellenic women's lamentations. Achilles' lamentations for Patroclus offer another irregular form of conversation, this time between the mortal living and the mortal dead, both alone and with male and female followers. Such lamentations vent anger and grief in a corporate setting. They also traditionally shape complaints about the lamenter's exposed and isolated survivorship. Homer's perceptive comment on Briseis' and the slave women's self-regarding motives in their lament for Patroclus (*Il.* 19.282–303, esp. 302; cf. 338–39, the lament of the male elders) shows his awareness of this function. Versnel 1981.1–2, 17–24 offers modern parallels for ancient *Gebetsegoismus* and for offensive prayers against enemies. (*Averte mala inimicis* remains part of Catholic prayer-books.)

5 Neither unknown in antiquity nor common. At *Il.* 9.568–71, Althaea kneels for chthonic redress (although πρόχνυ καθεζομένη might imply sitting with legs stretched out); cf. Picard 1936.144–45; suicidal Ajax on a Basel RF lekythos by the painter of Louvre CA 1694; Agora kneeling boy (athlete?) lekythos (*AJA* 37 [1933] 289–96; Petr. *Satyr*. 133. van Straten 1974.175–84 concludes that certain stressful circumstances induced historical Greeks, usually women, to kneel. In art, only posture can render prayer, otherwise undetectable, visible.

repeated liturgical formulas. The Greeks, contrariwise (and for reasons dependent on a bifurcation of divine domiciles), generally stood and raised their separated hands palms up, to the sky, for supraterrestrials,[6] but for subterrestrials, they placed their palms down, on the ground, or hammered their fists on the earth.[7]

Prayers disclose another human attempt to understand and influence surprising and inexplicable phenomena. Prayer negotiates between humans in the flesh and telekinetic spirits.[8] Material, bodily, or spiritual benefits may be desired. In modern monotheistic religions, "prayer shoulders almost the entire burden of establishing relations between human and divine." For the Greeks, however, sacrifice was as important as prayer—or more so. One could not, furthermore, ever slacken one's own efforts (*Ody.* 16.260–65; cf. Babrius 20, 23). God would help those who helped themselves. Earlier examples from the Near East (texts in Jacobsen 1976.146–48) demonstrate the degree of reciprocity and relative status that varies from overwhelmingly unequal to nearly equal. Pagan Greek prayer differs from other traditions in its limited efficacy and restricted functions (Bruce Heiden *per coll.*)

Beginning any earnest Hellenic activity, great or small, secular or sacred (in modern, dichotomized terms), expects prayer. So Timaeus tells Socrates (Plat. *Tim.* 27C), and historical evidence supports the assertion. Crisis and change evoke prayers in all ages, whether it be a plague of

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6 The "François vase," Florence 4209: a sailor in Theseus' crew; also *Il.* 1.351, 450; 3.275, 8.345–47, 15.369, 18.75, 24.301.

7 Divine exx.: *Il.* 14.272–74, 9.568; *H.Ap.* 333, 340. No ancient hymnic liturgies survive (Burkert 1985.73–75). No *credo* existed. Unlike Roman, Greek prayer eschews punctilious adherence to ritual and phrase, lengthy lists of *cognomina*, elaborate, archaic liturgical language, and endless repetition. When Jesus (Matt. 6:7) objects to contemporary prayer-forms, saying "do not babble empty phrases as the gentiles (ἐθνικοί) do," he presumably means Romans, not Greeks. See Sen. *Ep*. 31.5: "tire out the gods"; 1 Kings 18:36–37 addresses length of prayers. Matt. 26:39–44 shows Jesus at persistent, but perhaps not repeated prayer. Jesus unsuccessfully mocked ostentatious pray-ers, and advised followers to pray in their closets (Matt. 6:6). This inhuman, Hebraic restraint did not suit the communal and socially integrative functions of prayer in pagan Greece—or Jewish and Christian communities ancient, medieval, and modern.

8 Other suasive and diagnostic elements of human-divine information exchange include omens, sacrifices, prodigies, purifications, exorcisms, oaths with divine witnesses (see Callaway 1993.15–25), fasts, fixed numbers of Paternosters, and liturgical acts of appeasement, propitiation, and gratitude. Thomas 1971.40–50 reviews medieval chantry and processions. Petitionary prayer on a regular basis was a demand placed on adherents of the Christian churches for at least a millennium. Some Christians have prayed before going out to throw dice or steal others' property (*ibid.* 115).

locusts, earthquake, dying baby, or first haircut, being lost at sea, or fishing for tunny or enemies. If life is a question, prayer is an answer, a therapy for anxiety, a way to cope with the unthinkable, to negotiate the unknown both inside and outside the pray-er. Talking about a thing may make it happen.

Humans muster charms, fetishes, and prayers for aleatory warfare and agriculture, since warriors face imminent death and farmers are often frustrated by sun and rain—not enough, or too much. The helplessness of humans before the weather promotes prayers, regular and in a seasonal cycle. One Eleusinian breadbasket prayer runs: ὖε κύε, "Rain! Give grain!"[9] Men may try to compel divinity by charm or spell, or they may bully and hector divine spirits. Plutarch reports this curtly imperative prayer, part of a scapegoat ritual: ἔξω Βούλιμον. ἔσω δὲ Πλοῦτον καὶ Ὑγίειαν, "Go out, Starvation. Enter Wealth and Health" (*Mor.* 693F; cf. Aesch. *Suppl*. 890–901). Men and women occasionally threaten to destroy divine images, unless the divinity promptly complies with the "request." Religious prayer and magical incantation do *not* clearly divide, despite modern appeals to the petitionary principle, the idea that prayer begs and magic compels.[10]

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9 Hippol. *Haer*. 5.7.34, quoted by H. J. Rose, s.v. "Prayer," in the *OCD*[2]; quaint, simple, but effective, if one judges by longevity. Augustine much mocked (*CD* 4.8, 11; 6.9) Roman paganism's infinite polytheism and parcelled packets of power. He itemizes mobs of divinities to whom humans pray on a marriage's defloration night. Similarly for plants: Seia, Segetia, Tutilina, Proserpina, Nodutus, Volutina, Patelana, Hostilina, Flora, Lacturnus, Matuta, and Runcina are gods of seed, sprout, grain's joints, stalks, envelopes, flowers, sowing and reaping, various rots, funguses, and mildews!

Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible promotes prayer, even prayer contests (see Adkins 1969, introduction). Elijah challenges 850 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:18–40). Elijah the Prayer-Master voluntarily assumes additional handicaps but wins handily anyway. Moses the Magician in Exod. 5-8 competes in wonderwords with Pharaoh's entrepreneurs of the supernatural (cf. Acts 13:6–12).

10 Gager 1992.24–25; Thomas 1971.501–12, curses in Renaissance England. The satisfactory book analyzing prayer as a cross-cultural phenomenon does not yet exist. Anthropologists more often describe rituals than their words. (Tambiah's [1968] influential article provides an exception.) Gill 1981 and Metcalf 1989 illuminate contemporary Navajo and Bornean procedures. Theologians variously describe what God can, and wants to, hear. Ohm's lengthy study (1948) falls between these two stools of description and prescription, yet still betrays Roman Catholic bias. Friedrich Heiler's *Das Gebet* still assumed that only Christians, certain Christians at that, know the "real thing." The assumption necessarily impedes understanding of what Chryses and Odysseus' mill-woman are expecting. Roman and Catholic Augustine *per contra* openly regards prayers as "useful for obtaining favors" (*CD* 5.10). Martin Luther termed prayer the only defense against the devil. Karl Barth said "To be Christian and to pray are one and the same thing." Orthodox Muslims pray five times each day. "Praying is to religion what thinking is to philosophy," according to Novalis (Heiler 1932.viii).

HELLENIC PRAYER

"Prayer and sacrifice are the two fundamental forms of worship in Greek religion."[11] The ethical element, prominent in elite religion and its prayers, is negligible in much popular piety. Indeed, philosophical Socrates argued for a more ethical religiosity and mortal humility (ca. 400 B.C.E., Plat. *Phaedr.* 279B–C), and Apollonius of Tyana employed a non-conforming prayer: ὦ θεοί, δοίητέ μοι τὰ ὀφειλόμενα, "Oh Gods, please give me what I deserve" (ca. 50 C.E., Phil. *VA* 4.40). They were exceptional and unpopular.

The English word "pray" translates various Greek specialized activities and verbs (εὔχεσθαι, ἄρασθαι, λίσσεσθαι, ἱκετεύειν), among which flexible *eukhesthai* appears most frequently. Εὔχομαι has sacral and secular meanings, both semantic fields originating from a stem denoting marked speech asserting a special claim. Either sacral: mortal addressing god in formal tripartite fullness (invocation, claim on attention, and request for aid), or secular: mortal addressing mortal in a context demanding proud, accurate, and contentious assertion. Both usages are distinct from chatter, friendly advice, palace inventories, etc. Expectations of reciprocity, not abasement for entreaty, color both meanings. *Eukhomai* acts are performative speech, declaratory acts with their own unique semiotics that demand response from god or human. The sacral *eukh-* stem in Homer indicates a formal speech-act with the spirit-world, "communication or exchange with divinity" (Muellner 1976.67). We imperfectly translate this as "prayer," and understand "entreaty."

The "secular" *eukh-* stem is to be translated as "undertake," "vaunt," or "boast." The secular vaunt is egocentric (literally, since the subject of verb and dependent infinitive is always the same). It aggresses on an enemy, a political or legal (*Il.* 18.499) opponent, or anyone maintaining a different point-of-view.[12] Muellner has teased out (1976.17–100) two sets of senses, one not derived from the other. Often no prayer at all (in the popular English sense) is implied. *Eukhos*, the victory shout, asserts

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11 Mikalson 1989.81. Hellenic prayer expresses, verbally and nonverbally, a spectrum of attitudes of the human agent toward an intractable world and variably appreciative spirits around him.

12 Muellner 1976.27–28, 36, 57 with n. 79 on "Joe," 66–67, 76, 78, 99, 114. Muellner contends (107) that neither usage (nor a third legal one) is older than the other. "Say" develops into "pray" as "say" develops into "boast" ("contextual specialization," p. 113).

"proudly, accurately, contentiously" various claims to friends, enemies, and even to Hector's patient horses (*Il.* 8.198). Both semantic families of *eukh*-stem words convey self-assertion, asseverating and declaring with pride (Adkins 1969, Muellner 1976). The essential unity of *eukh*- allomorphs is grounded in formal exchange or contention with divinities or other mortals. This fact reflects the psychology, theology, and semiotics of Hellenic prayers, an intense interaction with gods.[13]

The seemingly transparent English word "prayer" in fact denotes but one culturally determined variation (humble entreaty) of a complex of acts and beliefs that vary culturally in context, performance, and ritual baggage. Current North-Atlantic-rim words for "prayer" carry a very different, monotheistic concept.

More than a problem of semantics (Adkins 1969) emerges, if one denies the name of prayer to angry statements expressed by humans to gods. Homeric prayer, in particular, asserts the performer's worthiness—rather than unworthiness, as is often the case in ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Hebrew prayer. Hellenic prayer does *not* focus on submission to gods or spirits. Prayer, then, functions differently for Greeks, ancient and perhaps modern. Hellenes too realize human pitifulness and ephemerality (e.g., *Il.* 6.146–50, 21.106–10; cf. 21.464–66 [divine confirmation]), but they do not choose to shape their prayers on these grounds.[14]

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13 Adkins 1969.25; on 33, he asserts the "psychological unity" of the *eukh*- situations. The uncrossable divine-mortal divide becomes problematic when Hector reports to Ajax that the Trojan women will pray to Hector as a god (*Il.* 7.294–98, Kirk 1985 ad loc.). Hector's *eukhomenos* speech to his horses (*Il.* 8.185–98) "is a perfectly constructed prayer"—but horses are not his gods (Muellner 1976.29–31, Johnston 1992.85–98, talking horses). Nestor reports that he and Zeus received *eukhos* among men (*Il.* 11.761). Later ages understand uncomfortable egalitarian assertions metaphorically, but the texts suggest that live humans can receive prayerful adoration. The supplication procedure and the removal of Sarpedon's corpse from the battlefield to a Lycian barrow for honor also blur the existential line between gods and men. Thetis supplicates Zeus very much the way Phoenix or Priam supplicates Achilles, or Theano supplicates Athena (god-god, human-human, human-god).

14 Jacobsen 1976.146–64: examples of "personal religion" expressed in prayer. His ancient Near Eastern prayers, biblical and archaeological, variously express human unworthiness—yet (paradoxically but undeniably) imply human importance to the godhead. Therefore, Hellenic distinctiveness at prayer may be less extensive. Rick Newton observes that the worthiness rather than the worthlessness of the faithful pray-er provides a contrast between the modern Greek Orthodox and the Lutheran churches that he has attended. "Complaint" is a genre of modern Greek laments for the dead, a form of prayer (cf. Caraveli 1986.184–86).

In *literature*, an included prayer externalizes sentiments of panic or highlights pivotal moments in the narrative. We can momentarily distinguish the literary function (narrative strategy) of a prayer structuring the plot from the practical and religious function that it serves for a needy and urgent character.[15] The literary function, however, must reflect habits of libation, invocation, and propitiation of invisible powers at all levels that contemporary ancient audiences would have recognized.[16]

Achilles, as much as Agamemnon and Phoenix, believes in human-divine cooperation (*Il.* 1.218; cf. 9.497–512): "If a man does the gods' bidding, they surely hear him." Major and minor heroes pray (e.g., Odysseus and Meriones, *Il.* 23.768–72, 872–76). Omissions and their deleterious consequences are noted; if you don't pray or vow, you don't win, e.g., Eumelus and Teucer (*Il.* 23.546, 861–65, once the observation of a character, but once the poet's). The suitors of th*e Odyssey* inappropriately pray and produce rotten sacrifices (Saïd 1979). A divine mermaid with back-channel access to Zeus, Mother Thetis, helps, but Achilles' prayer acts and attitudes conform to standard protocols.

Any event permitted Greek prayer; any transaction of importance or public conclave required it—even daily survival (cf. Hes. *Erga* 338-41, prayer advice for daily life). Crisis evokes prayers, silent, murmured, distinctly loud, or even shouted.[17] Silent prayer is appropriate when the enemy

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15. Achilles' pivotal prayer for Patroclus' *kudos* and return (*Iliad* 16), for instance, is freighted with literary irony and pathos. As an articulated prayer, it demonstrates Achilles' ritual skills. No liturgical fault brings about its disastrous 50 percent satisfaction.

16 Previous studies of Greek prayer in both life and literature include the following: Versnel 1981 studies mentalities in non-literary contexts. Nägelsbach 1884.197–207 efficiently surveys Homer's practice. Sittl 1890.174–99 and Grajew 1934 *passim* focus on the gestural aspects of prayer. von Fritz 1945 analyzes Greek prayers in various epochs of antiquity; Strittmatter 1925 produces a Homeric survey or check-list; Muelder 1929/30 offers literary analysis; Arend 1933 describes typical elements of Homeric prayer-scenes; Corlu 1966, Adkins 1969, and Muellner 1976 analyze prayer vocabulary (esp. the difficult semantics of εὔχομαι). Beckmann 1932 anatomizes the contents of Homeric prayers; Mabel Lang 1975 describes their formal and contractual distinctions; Mikalson 1989 surveys hundreds of responses to prayer in tragedy. Duckworth 1966 and Morrison 1991 examine one narratological function, Homer's use of them to anticipate onrushing developments—just before they occur. No other device keys audience expectations as frequently (Morrison 1991.146). Other anticipatory techniques include human prophecy, divine promise and portent, and the narrator's omniscient comments, sometimes in the form of hypotheticals (Louden 1993, Morrison 1992). Cameron 1939 locates Sappho's prayer to Aphrodite in Homeric precedents.

17 See *Il.* 1.450, 3.296–301, 3.275; *Ody.* 1.378, 2.143, 9.526–36. Occasions when an expectable prayer does not appear (e.g., just before warriors die) may protect the gods

is near, as Ajax explicitly notes (*Il.* 7.194; preference for private communication: 1.35; *Ody*. 2.260, 12.333). Running or swimming, prudent Odysseus cannot waste energy on words or risk filling his lungs with water.[18]

Some Homeric expressions of desperation appear prayer-like, although they may (now, to the differently religious) seem impertinent complaints, slander, or even attacks.[19] Heroes expostulate with, and rebuke, the gods. For instance Ajax, in frustration and despair at Trojan progress toward the ships, voices this reproachful "prayer" (*Il.* 17.645–47):

> Ζεῦ πάτερ, ἀλλὰ σὺ ῥῦσαι ὑπ᾽ ἠέρος υἷας ᾽Αχαιῶν,
> ποίησον δ᾽ αἴθρην, δὸς δ᾽ ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδέσθαι.
> ἐν δὲ φάει καὶ ὄλεσσον, ἐπεί νύ τοι εὔαδεν οὕτως.
>
> Father Zeus, draw the Achaeans free from the mist;
> Make bright the air; give sight to our eyes. In shining
> Daylight destroy us, since to destroy now be your pleasure.

"Mystic extinction of the personal ego in the deity" (von Fritz 1945.6) is not a Homeric option. Homeric man and god remain remote and mutually impenetrable even when face-to-face. They preserve an unencroachable kernel of selfhood, beyond suasion or sympathy. Thus, epic heroes demonstrate a different relationship between humans and gods. This self-sustaining attitude determines not only Odysseus' prayers, but Sappho's to Aphrodite, and Sophoclean Ajax' to Zeus, Hermes, the Erinyes, Thanatos, and Helios (see *Ajax* 823–65, von Fritz 1945.16). The undaunted attitude is at once more separate *and* more equal.

People have always worshipped with their bodies and muscles as well as their mouths. Posture expresses sentiment. The Persians prostrated themselves, a nonverbal sign of abject submission, slaves to their divinities,

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from charges of indifference or incompetence. Glaucus' indictment of Zeus for not defending Sarpedon (*Il.* 16.522) is framed carefully to remain true.

18 *Il.* 23.769; *Ody.* 7.82–85, 5.444. Ignoble desires, such as success in sexual pursuit or slandering neighbors leads to whispered prayers (*psithyros*; Pind. *Pyth.* 4.97ff.). The murderer's prayer will not be heard (Eumaeus' sarcastic point to his guest, *Ody.* 14.406, but cf. *Il.* 24.569–70 for the reading ἀλιτοίμην, not λιτοίμην).

19 One inappropriately (i.e., from outside the bounds of the target culture) determines the boundaries of human-divine messages if one terms these communications "pseudo-prayers," prayers in form but actually elaborate expletives, like contemporary "Christ Almighty!" or "God damn!"

as did some fervent apostolic Christians.[20] The Greeks were less ceremonious, more direct about "reaching out to touch someone." They stand, face upwards and arms held up to heaven for Olympian Apollo, Zeus, or Athena (*Il.* 6.301, 7.177, 24.301, 307; cf. 1.450, 3.275, 5.174, 18.75). For local Thetis or river Spercheius, Achilles "ritually" faced the sea or westwards to Thessaly, in the "right direction" (*Il.* 1.351, 23.141–45). For chthonic powers of revenge, such as the avenging Furies, they grasped or pounded the ground, as furious Althaea does to summon her siblings' subterranean spirits.[21] Odysseus' summoning of the spirits of the dead beyond Ocean requires several inverse procedures (*Ody.* 11.24–50; cf. 3.278, 14.272)—black for white, down for up, etc.

Modern translations of Homeric poetry, like any cultural transfer, gloss over distinctions among kinds, stages, and elements of Greek prayers. The Greeks manipulated prayers of various *kinds* that the *Iliad* illustrates:

1. Future-oriented prayers (with or without vows) request or wish for benefits to oneself such as help, healing, horrid mishaps for enemies, or directions for sailing (εὐχαί is here the normal word). Selection of the right target-god is essential, but Zeus may be pestered for anything.

2. Past-oriented prayers concern atonement and propitiation (λιταί: usually used of human-human supplication). Phoenix supplies the ideology (below).

3. Gratitude rarely appears in *any* extant pagan prayer (Versnel 1981.4, 42) although ex-voto attestations are innumerable. Prayers of thanksgiving (προσευχαί) are not found in Homer or Vergil (closest cases, *Il.* 1.470–74, 10.462–65).

4. Curses present negative prayers for other mortals' harm (ἀραί; 39 occurrences in Homer). Homer does not differentiate clearly between prayer and curse, essentially one specialized kind of prayer, one that has fallen into ritual desuetude. Chryses, an *arētēr*, speaks his death-wish for the Achaeans, a curse, that ignites the *Iliad*'s plot.[22]

Amyntor, father of Phoenix, proffers a clear curse. He solemnly curses his son with childlessness, evoking the Erinyes, Underground Zeus,

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20 Paul 1 Cor. 14:25, Innocentius in Aug. *CD* 22.8; prostration still provides a postural part of Roman Catholic priestly ordination.

21 *Il.* 9.565; cf. Hera, *H.Ap.* 332–33, 340; Paus. 8.15.1–3. Picard 1936 establishes distinctions between prayers to heavenly and earthly deities. He illustrates a pelike from Kameiros, p. 147, Hermes swatting the ground with a pole.

22 Watson 1991.48; *Il.* 1.37–42, 9.566, 17.37; *Ody.* 2.135; see Watson 1991.13, Corlu 1966.251–60.

and Persephone, because Phoenix had seduced Amyntor's own mistress (at his mother's request). The gods accomplished the imprecation (*Il.* 9.447–57). Victims of family crimes invoke the Erinyes. Curses (as we know from extant curse tablets) favor gods of the Underworld, usually invoked in triads.[23] Parental blessings are the most desirable to obtain and, conversely, when parents are hostile, their curses are most fearful. Telemachus fears that his mother might evoke a daemon and Erinyes, should he chase her from her husband's house.[24]

5. Complaints are the form of Hellenic prayer most alien to Euro-Americans. To delete this category, however, elides a significant difference between Protestant-defined English-speakers and Homer's heroes. Helen trades blistering insults with Aphrodite when she expresses justified outrage at the sex goddess' manipulative swindling and treachery (*Zornrede*: *Il.* 3.380-420). Some call this exchange a dialogue or brawl (*Zank*: Nägelsbach 1884.206) rather than prayer, because of the mortal's petulant attitude and the goddess' physical presence and immediate, threatening answer. But Helen's bitter words, her human approach and address to god, constitute an attempt (that fails) to petition a superior, to better her situation.[25] Heroic Helen's prayer is answered promptly and in person, although not as she wished. Gods are everywhere in Homer and in Hellas. Menelaus likewise rants at Zeus and insults him as "ultra-mischievous (οὔ τις σεῖο θεῶν ὀλοώτερος ἄλλος, *Il.* 3.365 = *Ody.* 20.201, spoken by the sympathetic cowherd Philoetius; cf. *Il.* 22.15, Achilles to Apollo). Divinity's undependability queers Achilles' great prayer on behalf of Patroclus' well-being. The gods can be σχέτλιοι, especially Zeus (*Il.* 2.112, 8.361, 24.33), and are reviled as such. This strong word of condemnation exceeds "hard-hearted." It implies merciless, wicked, and intolerant obstinacy to the point of cruelty or foolishness (Aphrodite to Helen, 3.414). The gods are deceptive (Zellner

23 *Il.* 9.454, 568; Soph. *Aj.* 835ff. with Stanford's notes; cf. Eur. *El.* 677–78, Heliod. *Aeth.* 8.9.12; also Gager 1992. Chthonian contact is common, as Picard 1936 demonstrates.

24 *Ody.* 2.134–37; cf. Plat. *Leg.* 931B–C; Plut. *Amat.* 766C. The Athenian priestess Theano refused to curse Alcibiades on the grounds that she was a priestess of positive prayers, not curses (εὐχων, οὐ καταρῶν ἱέρειαν γεγονέναι, Plut. *Alc.* 22.5).

25 Morrison 1991.147 n.3 avoids all speech to a god without a clear request, in order to focus on one phenomenon (Iliadic prayer as foreshadowing with one significant variation: Theano). He thus excludes expressions of emotion, goodwill, despair, reproaches, oaths, and conversations between gods and mortals. He therewith ignores two crucial interchanges: *Il.* 3.380–420, a female hero criticizing a goddess, and *Il.* 22.14–20, Achilles telling Apollo that he wishes he could get even with the god: "I would take my revenge on you, had I the power."

1994.309 n.6) and ungenerous to their creatures, so complaints are justified.[26] If one defines prayer as "humans addressing themselves directly to gods," then one observes that Homeric pray-ers in communicating complain and accuse as much as request. They remonstrate and upbraid the gods (*Il.* 1.352–56, 8.236–41, 12.164–65), who respond or not.

Miscellaneous prayers include unritualized wishes directed to divinities (*Il.* 1.18–19, 4.119–20, 9.240, 17.498–99 [Automedon]; *Ody.* 2.33–34, 15.180, 17.240–46, 21.210–11); oblique or informal requests or questions to an Olympian (*Il.* 1.201–02, 353–54; 20.104 [Apollo urges prayer!], 21.279–80, 22.304–05; *Ody.* 5.299–312, 445–50; 13.363–65); and "conversational prayers" (Purvis 1995) addressed more to a mortal interlocutor than to a god, the ostensible referent, such as "bon voyage" comments and guests' "thank you notes" in prayer form (*Il.* 16.97–100, *Ody.* 3.446, 7.311–15, 331–33; 8.464–66, 15.110–11).[27] The implied author also prays to the Muses to help him (*Il.* 1.1, 2.484–87, 11.218, 14.508, 16.112; *Ody.* 1.1 only). The poet's oral performance is privileged by the Muses, *extra*-textual guarantors. The heroic pray-er's prayers are privileged in another way: the marked speech of petition reminds, persuades, and demands of the gods *in* the text to respond to an emergency. Oaths also entreat gods to participate in the human drama (e.g., *Il.* 19.255–65).

Formal Greek prayer ritual consists of four *stages*, all found in Homer, but never twice quite the same. Some prayers, especially those formed in battle, omit all except the prayer request/command/complaint. But the following steps are typical of the rite (Arend 1933.64ff., Burkert 1985.73–75), judging from forty prominent Homeric examples.

1. Cleansing: the hands, at least, are washed (*Il.* 1.449, 6.264–68, 16.230, 24.303; *Ody.* 2.261, 12.336; cf. Hes. *Erg.* 724, 740).

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26 Obstinate cruelty: *Il.* 2.112=9.19, 8.361, *Ody*. 5.118, 12.279, 371–73; 13.293. Ungenerous: *Il.* 24.527–33, *Ody*. 8.63. Insult prayers would be an unexpected subset. See the threats of Odysseus at Eur. *Cycl*. 354–55, Babrius 119, Suet. *Calig*. 5, Epict. *Diss*. 3.4.7 (Versnel 1981.39–40).

27 Morrison's 1991 selection also disregards brief, informal prayer and verbal outbursts of strong emotion, like "Jee-zus" or "Herakles Help Me," more recorded by later ages. Prayer-shaped expressions of gratitude and frustration, and exasperated ejaculations, are addressed to a responsible god, e.g., Ζεῦ πάτερ, Ζεῦ ἄνα, Ἄπολλον Ἀποτρόπαιε (*Il.* 7.179, 3.351 [Zeus is invoked by name 33 times in the *Iliad*]; Ar. *Aves* 61, no epithet with Apollo's proper name appears in the vocative in the *Iliad*; cf. *Ody*. 8.339). Like the irregular "conversational prayers," a rather paradoxical appellation, some Homeric god-talk fits no modern category (e.g., *Il.* 12.164–66, 17.19, 23.273–74). Purvis 1995 discusses *Odyssey* chat-prayers; here they are more common. Xenic wishes for divine favor for a friend are expressed to the friend (e.g., *Ody.* 7.311–15, 330–34).

2. Praying itself, piously precise or perfunctory, to the elements of which we return below. Homeric prayers *can* be highly articulated or simple, e.g., breathless Odysseus in the Funeral Games footrace (*Il.* 23.770; cf. *Ody.* 3.445) says:

> Κλῦθι, θεά, ἀγαθή μοι ἐπίρροθος ἐλθὲ ποδοῖιν.
> Listen, Goddess. Be kind. Make my feet fast!

3. Sacrifice: bloodletting, butchering, and burning meat constitute half of Greek piety (*Il.* 1.447–68, 2.422–27, Kirk 1985 ad loc.) These tokens of honor (τιμή, γέρας) include lustral water and coarse barley meal. Resentful Agamemnon complains to heaven that he never passed an altar on the way to Troy without cutting carcasses for Zeus (*Il.* 8.236–44; cf. *Ody.* 3.178–79).

4. Libation: pouring wine for a god can precede (*Il.* 3.295–96, 16.225–31, 24.306), accompany (*Ody.* 13.50–57), or conclude elaborate ceremonies of prayer (*Il.* 1.447–71, 16.253–54).

No single Homeric prayer performance contains all possible elements of the prayer itself (2, above). The prayers and sacrifices of Chryses and Nestor (*Il.* 1.447–74, *Ody.* 3.418–63) and Achilles' pivotal prayers to Thetis and Zeus are exemplary.[28] Later Greek literature (e.g., Sappho's invocations or Attic tragedy; cf. Mikalson 1989) may present parts for the whole of a familiar rite. Basics include:

a. Formulaic postures and gestures, standing, looking upwards, raising of the hands, χεῖρας ἀνασχεῖν (van Straten 1974.161), or contact with some significant object such as land or a staff (esp. for oaths, e.g., *Il.* 1.234). There is body language and body prayers, ritualized forms of nonverbal communication with god.[29] Prayer gestures and postures contain their own symbolism, power, and (nonverbal) messages. They materialize the appeal (Picard 1936.143); the rituals make the message unambiguous.

b. Call to the godhead: name and aliases (ἀνάκλησις, e.g., *Il.* 16.233; cf. Pl. *Crat.* 400D). Often κλῦθι (12 times), since god may be far

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28 The generic word for prayer-talk is always *epos*, never *mythos* in the *Iliad* (Martin 1989.38–39: cf. *Il.* 5.816–17, 14.234, 16.236). *Epos* marks prayer as a personal appeal and often exhibits possessive adjectives (e.g., *Il.* 8.8), unlike more impersonal *mythos*.

29 Seven times in the *Iliad*, three times in the *Odyssey*, humans or monsters (*Ody.* 9.527) extend both arms in the proper direction: e.g., *Il.* 1.350–51, 23.143, 24.301; or engage in other handwork, such as turning palms down, touching (*Il.* 14.272), or beating the earth (Picard 1936.152 and n.2; van Straten 1974.183 on kneeling, an exceptional posture).

away or otherwise occupied. The divine capacity to recognize a prayer (*Il.* 3.277, 16.515) is expressed both to remove excuses and to call attention and acknowledge power. Homeric prayers can be publicly uttered before many participants (*Il.* 19.249–76), limited to a small circle of friends, or private, when the individual speaks aloud to his god or thinks "to" him or her in silence.[30] The right god must not be forgotten, as Calydonian Oineus discovered with Artemis, but one does not always know to whom a prayer must be directed (*Il.* 9.533–40; *Ody.* 2.262, 5.445: ὅτις ἐσσί; cf. *Ody.* 6.150).

c. Cult-titles, homes, favorite shrines and other haunts, and sundry epithets: e.g., Apollo as mysterious *Smintheus* and *Argurotoxos*, Silverbowman. Titles often specify the god's relation to Zeus, spouses, and domiciles. Epithets often predicate power such as "Earth-holder" or "Most glorious and great" (*Il.* 2.412, 24.308, etc.).

d. Aretalogy or declaration of the god's powers and achievements. This praise justifies the choice of target-god. Subordinate clauses in prayer-beginnings affirm the relevance of the god: "You who can do it," "You who avenge the dead," or "You who are most murderous of gods" (*Il.* 16.515, 19.258, 260; cf. Apollo to Ares: 5.455; *Ody.* 20.201). The god's past favors *to* the pray-er or services *by* the pray-er (*Gegengabe*, if any) to the god appear here. This aretalogy attempts, among other things, to discharge obligations created by former favors received (Versnel 1981.63 n.263). Vows may be made, as Achaeans and Trojans, also Achilles do (*Il.* 4.86–104, 23.144–49). But *no* justification for divine interference need appear. Chryses' well-remembered first prayer (1.36–42) with its precedents is *not* typical of the prayers that follow. His specialist's skill (ἀρητήρ) furnishes one paradigm for success (cf. *Ody.* 3.55–64).[31]

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30 Gods, including Zeus and Poseidon, are not always omniscient (*Il.* 1.423–27, 14.160, 15.16–33; *Ody*. 1.20–27; *pace* Zellner 1994.313). American mass prayers before Southern football games are closer to Homeric prayer than to Christian prayer, as Jesus and Calvin describe it. In Dallas, Texas, as Jennifer T. Roberts informed me in 1982, God is beseeched in the name of Jesus Christ, Bevo the Austin Bull, and Peruna the Methodist Mustang. The rite recalls "primitive" fears of omitting the right name or power. For non-Homeric silent prayer, cf. Hdt. 1.47.3, 2.181.4. Elements b, c, and d sometimes overlap, as Andrea Purvis mentioned to me.

31 No justification: *Il.* 7.179–80; Beckmann 1932.44–45; von Fritz 1945.19 alleges that the crassest commercial forms are "not very numerous" and refers to *Il.* 1.37, *Ody*. 4.762ff., Callinus F4 as exceptional. Prayers are parodied, both in comedy and in epic itself. Surprise requests in prayers, such as Ar. *Acharn.* 435–36, show Hellenic willingness to laugh at rituals. See Kleinknecht 1937 and Horn 1970 on comedy. Hera's prayer to Hypnos

e. The kernel of prayer is usually an imperative verb, a "request" for intercession: e.g., "Break Diomedes' spear" or "Let not the sun go down until I have hurled headlong the fortress of Priam blazing." Demand or request sometimes include further symbolic gestures, originally a form of sympathetic magic. In the *Iliad*, a curse-prayer affirming an oath requests that the brains flow "as does this wine," if the oath be transgressed (3.298–301; cf. 6.306, 2.413–14, 9.183–84, 19.264–65):

> Ζεῦ κύδιστε μέγιστε, καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι,
> ὁππότεροι πρότεροι ὑπὲρ ὅρκια πημήνειαν,
> ὧδέ σφ᾽ ἐγκέφαλος χαμάδις ῥέοι ὡς ὅδε οἶνος,
> αὐτῶν καὶ τεκέων, ἄλοχοι δ᾽ ἄλλοισι δαμεῖεν.
>
> Zeus, most glorious and powerful, and all other gods,
> Whichever side first does harm contrary to this oath,
> Pour out their brains, like this wine, on the earth,
> Theirs and their children's, and let their wives be spoil
> for others.

PRAYER IN HOMER

The Homeric gods are not consistently empowered or evenly interested in human beings. This observation fits reality and any literary construct. "Man and god in Homer" exceeds our limited scope (see Nägelsbach 1884 or Griffin 1980.144–204). They are immortal and ageless;

(*Il.* 14.231–80) seems parodic in its context, inversions, and exaggerated commercialism. Achilles wishes to burn Patroclus' corpse, after torching four horses, two dogs, and twelve noble Trojan youths. The pyre refuses to be kindled (*Il.* 23.192–216, cf. the uncooperative fork, knife, hogs, and power-saw of the African-American ballad "The Grey Goose"), just as the Achaean camp dogs and the Earth's worms would not savage and consume Hector's mortal remains (*Il.* 23.184–85, 192; 24.414–15). These curious violations of natural law may be explained by the divine intervention of Trojan-protecting Aphrodite and Apollo. Further, Achilles needs to offer other prayers for the winds to light the pyre. Achilles realizes the omission on his own and steps apart (*Il.* 193, cf. 140 only) to pray to Boreas and Zephyros. (This going apart, cf. Chryses and Achilles in book 1, is not required.) The young wind gods are feasting (cf. *Ody*. 10.8–11, 60–61) at Zephyros'. This explains their diminished alertness to mortal plans. When Iris, however, arrives and uniquely transports human Achilles' prayer, they leap to their feet to welcome her. She repeats the mortal's splendid promises. The screaming winds hastily comply. Achilles' prayer is answered—by howling tempests (192–220). This weird anti-inflammatory situation and unparalleled divine service for a mortal (Arend 1933.58) require explanation.

they eat different food and dwell in a different realm (*Il.* 5.341–42: no grain, wine, or meat with blood). They suffer deception, sexual delusion, and even verbal entrapment (*Il.* 14.159–360; 19.95–133). They enjoy superior *aretē*, *timē*, and *biē* (skill, status, and force). Zeus never condescends to appear to or speak directly to humans at all, unlike almighty Yahweh of the Pentateuch. He transmits heavy hints, however, through lightning and thunder or intermediaries (Hermes, Iris, Thetis). Other tales of the gods provide "comic relief." Homeric gods are both amusing and frightening—like the world they govern. Olympus—a meteorological paradise—is the negative of this world: no wind, rain, snow, or pain (*Ody.* 6.41–46).

Homeric gods look similar to humans, feel similar emotions, and act from similar motives. Homeric gods appear malicious, for instance when Aphrodite jerks Helen's golden chain, or Athena deceives Hector about his back-up (*Il.* 22.214–305). Zeus seems capricious comparing men's greatest efforts to the sandcastles of children—stuff suitable for the gods' destructive play (*Il.* 7.456–63; narrator: 12.15–33, 15.361–64). Their spite and petulance can be all too human.

An impassable gulf between men and gods endures, a boundary that prohibits more than momentary covenants. von Fritz claims that Greek religion was the product of wonder, not fear or morality. In this perspective, prayer invites wondrous events from beings for whom morality is secondary. Phoenix' allegory limits as well as glorifies the power of prayers (and blood sacrifice, incense, and libations), whereas Jesus claims "through prayer, all things are possible" (Matt. 21:22; cf. Phil. 4:6). For the Hellenes, "a man has to work out his own salvation" (von Fritz 1945.35).

Homeric prayer implies some stability, dependability, a horizon of expectation or *themis*. Agamemnon reminds Zeus: "Never did I pass your altar without burning the fat and thighs of oxen" (*Il.* 8.238-40):

> οὐ μὲν δή ποτέ φημι τεὸν περικαλλέα βωμὸν
> νηὶ πολυκλήιδι παρελθέμεν ἐνθάδε ἔρρων
> ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ πᾶσι βοῶν δημὸν καὶ μηρί᾽ ἔκηα.

Menelaus appeals in prayer to Zeus: "Let me punish the Trojans so that a man will shudder before violating a hospitable host (ξεινοδόκον) again" (*Il.* 3.353–54). Such appeals (and *da ut/quia dedisti* formulae) imply human expectations of cosmic regularity and coherence.

Homeric prayers are utilitarian speech, demands to spell immediate relief. Hero pray-ers want success in battle or trauma-healing, some-

times just survival, or they beseech gods for healthy children, accurate shots at game animals. They plead for clear skies, plague on enemies, favorable omens, or a kill (*Il.* 5.118); for strength to fight on, for victory, glory (*kudos*), and/or vengeance. Neediness never ceases; men and gods prefer honor, praise, and admiration to gratitude (Versnel 1981.60).[32] Homeric characters, especially heroes, pray to gods for themselves usually, sometimes for others (*Il.* 6.476–71).[33]

Hopes for healing are common; consider one Iliadic example.[34] Sarpedon dies at Patroclus' hands (*Il.* 16.477–505), while his wounded companion Glaucus cannot help him because Achaean Teucer has incapacitated him. Lycian Glaucus invokes Lycian Apollo, his *Landsman*, and he stresses his pain (515). He briefs the deity on recent events. He points out that blood is running down his arm, his shoulder is aching seriously, and his arm is suffering severe pain. Glaucus cannot continue the fight as he is. He attacks Zeus for inadequate paternal sentiment for his son Sarpedon.[35] Glaucus urgently prays to Healer Apollo who can hear him anywhere (*Il.* 16.515: δύνασαι δὲ σὺ πάντοσ᾽ ἀκούειν): "But you, yes you, Lord, cure this serious wound for me" (*Il.* 523: ἀλλὰ σύ πέρ μοι, ἄναξ, τόδε καρτερὸν ἕλκος ἄκεσσαι). He prays for healing, pain killers, and strength to summon his companions to fight for Sarpedon's corpse (*Il.* 523–26). Apollo hears and answers at once (cf. *Il.* 5.115, 8.236, 15.372, 17.645).

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32 The propitiation of Apollo (*Il.* 1.472) and the suggestion of a thanksgiving prayer, should Hector return safely to the Trojans (*Il.* 7.298), are unparalleled. Heroes rarely and indirectly express appreciation, thank anyone, god or human (*Il.* 23.647–50 offers a human-to-human example). The remarkable *absence* of prayers of thanksgiving, the kind most familiar to contemporary sensibilities (Versnel 1981), enables Beckmann 1932.22–23 to garner but five candidates: *Ody*. 24.351–52, 511–15 [?], 13.356–60, *Il.* 7.298 (wrong), and 10.462–64. None is clearly a *Dankgebet*, none mentions a "thank" word such as χάριν εἰδέναι, and all look for further assistance.

33 No mortal prays to Ares, but no other god enjoys *anadiplosis* of the name in formulaic, prayer-like appeals (called on by Athena and Apollo: *Il.* 5.31, 455). Relatively few gods are specifically addressed. Zeus most frequently receives prayers (32; listed: Beckmann 1932.27); Athena receives nine in both epics, Apollo four, Artemis two in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus prays almost exclusively to Athena; Poseidon gets one indirect prayer in the *Iliad* (9.183–84), but more in the *Odyssey* (e.g., 3.55–61, 9.528–35). The Naiads of Ithaca's springs receive prayers from Odysseus and Eumaeus (*Ody.* 13.356–60, 17.240–46). Achilles prays to the river Sperchius, and the river-God of Scheria receives an anomalous entreaty (*Il.* 23.141–51; *Ody*. 5.445–53).

34 Weinreich 1909 collects relevant ancient traditions; his treatment of divine protection in Homer (p. 13) is inadequate. I have not obtained his *Gebet und Wunder* (1929).

35 522; unfair, as omniscient audiences know; Zeus in grief has been pouring blood-like drops! (Lateiner and Sankovitch, forthcoming).

Apollo stops the pain, dries the blood from the nasty wound, and restores spirit: αὐτίκα παῦσ᾽ ὀδύνας, ἀπὸ δ᾽ ἕλκεος ἀργαλέοιο / αἷμα μέλαν τέρσηνε, μένος δέ οἱ ἔμβαλε θυμῷ (*Il.* 528–29). Glaucus recognizes the answered prayer, rejoices in Olympian response to his neediness, and enjoys a "burst of energy" (Janko 1992.382 ad loc.). He exhorts the Lycian chiefs, rebukes Hector and the Trojans, and returns them to battle (*Il.* 534–53). Prayer works!

Seventy speakers are specified for the *Iliad*'s 677 speeches.[36] Many prominent speeches contain god-talk (talk to god or about god to men). Named heroes produce all but nine speeches, including, of course, most of the prayers. Of the remaining nine speeches delivered by an anonymous *tis*, somebody,[37] five are prayers (*Il.* 2.400–01, 3.297–302, 3.319–24, 7.179–80, 7.200–05). *Die kleine Kaempfer*, the nameless "grunts" of the war, mutter thoughts to their neighbors and utter private prayers that Homer "records." The audience thus learns the masses' opinions, immediate hopes, and expectations.

Nameless Achaean and Trojan soldiers and allies pray privately for rest and for war's end, in contrast to Agamemnon. His official and public prayers and oaths to Zeus, Sun, Rivers, and Earth request indemnities, or loot and mayhem (*Il.* 2.411–20, 3.275–91; cf. 286, 288, 290). Similarly, while Agamemnon prays earnestly for the fall of Troy, the masses pray to save their skins, to escape death (*Il.* 2.412–18, 400–01). So their prayers reflect their real interests and psychology—chiefly an endearing indifference to glory or *kudos*, heroic expectations. Their inner thoughts and wishes are handily *externalized* by prayers. (Another ploy, heroic soliloquy, requires separate treatment.) Homer presents Achaean and Trojan enlisted men sharing the same prayers. The foot soldiers unite in earthy reluctance to provide scalps for heroic coup-counters, the elite warriors.

Agamemnon prays to Zeus, kingliest to kingliest. His prayers, we shall see, reflect his peculiar psychology, his vulnerability, and his resentful self-pity (*Il.* 8.236–46). Similarly, Agamemnon's gestures and postures

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36 Total numbers of various compilers differ: Bassett 1938.78, Fingerle 1939.68, de Jong 1987A.115–16. The comic character Thersites and extended similes also express mass or anti-elite sentiment (82 of 342 similes describe mass behavior, by de Jong's count).

37 de Jong 1987B.69 divides *tis* speeches into actual and potential types, 9 and 8 in number respectively. The first type is actually spoken in the narrative; the second type is put in the mouth of a "someone" by a *named* speaker. Hector, e.g., alleges that "And someday someone in Argos may say . . . ." 108 of the 677 speeches have female speakers, sixteen percent.

towards other mortals reveal his psychic strain, both in-awareness ploys and out-of-awareness "leakage." He is insecure politically, socially, and even spiritually.[38]

The episodic book 8 (Kirk 1985.294), an underrated day, produces a good prayer-scene, the military crisis, and thus the vital embassy to Achilles. Both sides pray and supplicate in *Iliad* 8 (Achaeans: 242, 346–47, 488; Trojans: 526). Achaeans do more, because, temporarily, more in need.

Agamemnon flags down retreating Achaeans with a royal red cloth, then chastises and encourages slackers for eight verses. His string of nasty names indicting them for sham and bluster (228: αἰδώς, Ἀργεῖοι, κάκ᾽ ἐλέγχεα, εἶδος ἀγητοί) and his references to the troops' earlier boasting (229: πῇ ἔβαν εὐχωλαί) express exasperation. Then he turns to Zeus with a complaint: "Whom else, Zeus, have you treated so badly, stripping a king of κῦδος?" He reminds Zeus of his frequent past service while expressing angry resentment and characteristic self-pity (238–41, cf. 2.111, 9.18, 19.86; Kirk 1985 ad loc. on the entire episode). Since Achilles' retirement from battle is precisely *his* royal fault, this resentful badgering of Zeus is ironic, an example of Homer's delight in exposing unremedied human blindness (ἄτη, cf. Zeus' reflections at *Ody.* 1.32–43).

He follows complaints with a conventional prayer petition, a minimal request: at least let the Achaeans escape death today (242-44: ἀλλά, Ζεῦ, τόδε πέρ μοι ἐπικρήηνον ἐέλδωρ·). In his intense anxiety (the particle πέρ appears twice), he weeps in frustration and sorrow (245). Remarkably, Zeus takes pity on him, bends his head "yes" in another *volte-face,* and sends a superior omen: a big eagle with a fawn.

Agamemnon's prayer is the *culmination* of thematic parataxis, here allomorphs of Trojan advance/Achaean retreat and commander's demoralization. Homer repeatedly shifts focus (Achaeans, Trojans, Olympians; Trojans, Achaeans, Olympians) and catenates familiar type-scenes in novel combinations. This prayer once more illustrates defective elements of

38 Lateiner 1995.83–103 for "leakage," also Clay 1995: Agamemnon's "apology." As nominal leader, Agamemnon "focalizes" Achilles' needs and fears. He serves as spokesman of Achaean policy to humans—and Achaean prayer to gods. He rapidly fades in importance, however; his three prayers appear early, in books 2, 3, and 8. Menelaus prays twice (*Il.* 3.349–55, 13.631); Nestor, Achilles, Automedon, and Ajax pray to Zeus, once each. Diomedes and Odysseus prefer Athena. On the "Eastern" side, Pandarus and Glaucus pray to Apollo, Theano to Athena, and Hector and Priam to Zeus. It would appear that Trojans prayed less, or, one might better say, Homer focalizes action less frequently from the Trojan side, and for shorter periods.

Agamemnon's social persona, with his god as well as his men. Heiden (1991.11–12) observes that Homer shows us how little humans control even their own meanings. Agamemnon in particular repeatedly undercuts his own intentions by speech, act, and gesture.

Gods usually hear, often react, and *sometimes* grant "reported" Homeric prayers (*Il.* 18.328). Humans interpret success in battle as divine agreement with their prayers (*Il.* 11.364; 6.240–41, 114–15). Gods enjoy receiving petitions (*Il.* 1.474–79, 17.567–70). They usually accede to those that Homer reports. Ordinary Achaean troops want Ajax to face the Trojan champion in the shaking out of lots, and, providentially, his token pops up (*Il.* 7.177–83; unusually succinct!). This responsiveness, like "happy endings" welded onto novels (one definition of fiction, I suppose), recognizes some obligation of reciprocity, some legitimate human claim to divine consideration. Homer, however, relishes the dissymmetries of power and consequence.

When epic prayers fail, the event is strongly marked. Four times positive responses are explicitly rejected or qualified at once (*Il.* 2.419: Agamemnon; 3.302: Achaeans and Trojans; 6.302–12: Theano and Trojan women; 16.249–52: Achilles).[39] Zeus' prior commitments or divine disfavor toward the pray-ers (*Il.* 2.419–20, 3.302, 6.311) may impede satisfaction. Agamemnon, for example, a paradigm of bad "luck," sacrifices and prays to Zeus that the Achaeans sack Troy on day two of the *Iliad* (2.411–18). Homer curtly says that the son of Kronos accepted the sacrifices but rejected the prayer; more exactly, would not *yet* (*Il.* 2.419: οὐδ᾽ ἄρα πώ) accomplish his wish. Otherwise, one god is constrained by a higher god's

39 τοῦ δ᾽ ἔκλυε, κ.τ.λ., *Il.* 1.43, 357, 381, 457; 24.314; *Ody*. 3.62, Athena in disguise prays to Poseidon; 3.218–20, 380–85. Sixty-three percent (19/30) of the prayers meet positive responses (Morrison 1991.149). Prayed-for responses sometimes emerge much later (*Il.* 10.462–65 responds to an earlier prayer, 277–96). Frequently, however, prayerful wishes are not accomplished without explicit pre-notification for the reader. Morrison recognizes only one outright rejection (he means "explicit"), but in addition to Theano's failure, see also Zeus' rejection of Agamemnon's prayer with Aristarchus' anxious comments (ad *Il.* 2.419–20), the nothing that prayer accomplishes at *Il.* 3.297–302 (cf. 4.119–29), the failure to kill the guilty truce-breaker as prayed for (*Il.* 3.320–23), and Menelaus' unanswered prayer hoping to kill Paris (and his reproach: *Il.* 3.351–54 with 364–68). Unanswered prayers in the *Odyssey* include Polyphemus' first request that Odysseus not reach home, the sailors' vows, Odysseus' request for Olympian aid for his crew in Thrinacia, the suitors' lustful prayers, Penelope's direct request for death, and Laertes' reported prayer for a quick death (*Ody*. 9.530–31, 12.344–65, 12.334–38, 1.366 and 18.213, 15.354, 20.60–82, 18.202–03). Mikalson 1989 *passim* examines unanswered prayers in tragedy; pp. 95–97 examine Homeric comparanda.

will, or even Zeus is constrained by Hera, or fate (μοῖρα; *Il.* 1.503–21, 8.208–11, 350–72; 16.433–36: no prayer for or by Sarpedon; Beckmann 1932.85–88; 19.87, 410; 24.209). Gods sometimes face awkward choices, and *Moira* is invoked when prayers will not lead to preferred outcomes. Thus important prayers remain unaccomplished and an explanation is supplied: Agamemnon's impressive request for "early" victory, Hector's beautiful prayer for Astyanax to prosper, and Achilles' astonishing prayer to Zeus, Athena, and Apollo that only he and Patroclus survive the battles and smash Troy (*Il.* 2.412–18, 6.476–81, 16.97–100). Achilles' subsequent tragic double-prayer to Zeus that Patroclus gain *kudos* and return safely (16.241–52; cf.7.202–05, another double prayer) reveals the hero's consuming love and hate, Zeus' constrained responses (here, one granted, one denied by a negative gesture: nodding up), and the ignorance of humans, even Achilles. Thwarting, for the nonce, audience expectation of rapid Trojan annihilation constitutes Zeus' freedom and Homer's. The anomalies, such as Zeus' rejections of some prayers, pleasurably distance the audience from the clumsy king Agamemnon or impetuous Achilles without changing the narrative's direction and goal.

Homeric addresses to gods that reproach or complain deserve further scrutiny (Beckman 1932.19–22: *Klage, Vorwurf, Schelten*). Achilles rebukes his goddess-mother Thetis and Zeus for nasty deceits, while petitioning the latter (*Il.* 21.272–86). Similarly, frustrated Trojan ally Asius (*Il.* 12.162–75) groans, slaps his thighs (a gesture of extreme despair: δή ῥα τότ᾽ ὤμωξέν τε καὶ ὠ πεπλήγετο μηρώ), and vehemently protests Zeus's intolerable governance (ἀλαστήσας). He agonizes aloud in speech, "Zeus father, now even you have become a total bamboozler" (φιλοψευδὴς ἐτέτυξο/ πάγχυ μάλα). Commentators who deem such language "excessive" for divine address do not vouchsafe the source of their knowledge. The thought is natural enough, and not unjustified from Asius' circumstances. Asius makes no request in his outburst, but we hear that Zeus was not persuaded (*Il.* 12.174–75). That is to say, such talk might have persuaded the god. No punishment, however, ensues, indicating the acceptability of heroic outbursts and accusations.

Homeric prayer procedures, then, proclaim human achievement.[40]

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40 Greek prayer indefinitely maintains this self-respecting or arrogant attitude. "Deaf gods and angry men" produce instances of bondage, spitting, and whipping the gods (Hdt. 7.34–36, cf. Versnel 1981.37–42). Nestor eccentrically quotes an earlier prayer within a very urgent prayer (*Il.* 15.367–78). In this calamitous Achaean retreat, the poet "records"

Self-assertions extend from verbal claims of personal worth (speech-acts), to gestures of defiance like scepter-wielding, and to symbolic action and instrumental deeds like animal sacrifice, gift exchange, killing, and love-making. In societies based on shame and fragile honor, competitive touchiness and claims to respect and assistance (reciprocity) tinge divine-human interaction as well as human-human and divine-divine negotiations of status.

The Trojan priestess Theano, the only female officiant in Homer, inappropriately supplicates Athena for the defeat of Achaean berserker Diomedes (*Il.* 6.302–10). She proposes a contingent offer: ἆξον δὴ ἔγχος Διομήδεος, . . . / ὄφρα τοι αὐτίκα νῦν δυοκαίδεκα βοῦς . . . / ἱερεύσομεν. . . (cf. *Il.* 4.86–104, 23.144–49). This condition constitutes a bribe, and the gods do not dicker. Only here in Homer does a human say to a god, "Give *so that* you receive." Athena, or her statue, nods up (311: ἀνένευε), an ethnogest clearly rejecting the prayer. The certain pro-Achaean outcome of Homer's plot motivates an irregular and inappropriate request-form. An unusual plot requirement, that here the divine gesture, not the prayer, foreshadow events, produces an irregular prayer. Theano's failure at prayer (Morrison 1991.152–56) constitutes Homer's *ad hoc* innovation on a traditional pattern and scene.[41]

The human-divine barrier seems most permeable in the "primitive" book 5, where Diomedes prays to goddess Athena (114–21), then attacks, stabs, and wounds goddess Aphrodite (330–54). Goddess-Mother Dione asserts that many deities (πολλοὶ γὰρ δὴ τλῆμεν) endure harm from human hands. She offers examples: Ares, Hera, and Hades (381–415). Zeus pours blood-like drops to honor his just dead son Sarpedon (*Il.* 16.459; Lateiner and Sankovitch, forthcoming). Mother Thetis bemoans her divine lot with a human son (*Il.* 1.413–18, 18.52–62). Status-hierarchy awareness

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copious detail: raised-arm posture, loud voice, god and epithet, the "if ever" formula of former gifts (sacrifice) and words, the evidence of former divine favor, and the request—expressed both positively and negatively.

41 Goddess Hera bribes her subordinate Hypnos (*Il.* 14.238–76). Diomedes' offer at *Il.* 10.293–95 seems like a bribe similar to Theano's, but the formula *da et dabo* is more open than the "rather insulting" (Lang 1975.311) *da ut recipias*. The announced prayer of the Achaean ambassadors (*Il.* 9.171–72 with 183–84), is first suppressed, then reported indirectly, another procedure foreshadowing prayer-failure: Achilles will not return to battle. Odysseus uniquely cites negative precedent with Athena (*Ody.* 6.324–27). "Hear me now, *since* you did *not* listen to my battered voice before . . . ." The poet notes that Athena heard the hero now and responded (328).

produces grumbling about sons and lovers. Calypso complains bitterly of male gods' gendered privileges of fornication with humans (*Ody.* 5.118–36). Zeus, on Olympus (*Il.* 1.495–594), sits at the head of fractious and unruly vassals. Subordinates must respect their superior's rights, regardless of whether justice is served. Insubordinates suffer painful consequences, paradigms of unruliness punished (cf. *Il.* 1.577–91, 4.55–64, 15.13–34). The gods are οἱ κρείσσονες, the Stronger, a kind of "third world power" between man and chance, nature, luck, and fate—whatever those words mean. But the boundary needs constant patrolling. Prayers are checkpoints of passage.[42]

Zeus can hear prayers from the lowly—from the old, enslaved, barley-mill grinding woman who prays for the suitors' demise, from the goatherd and the swineherd (*Ody*. 20.112–19, 236–37; 21.200–01). But the gods are reluctant to interfere and need coaxing. The gods see drawbacks in exercising their prerogatives. Hephaestus complains (*Il.* 1.573–76): "What fun will parties be, if base things—that is, men—bring us to brawling?" Apollo compares men to falling leaves, and Zeus judges man "the most wretched creature that crawls on earth" (*Il.* 17.446, 21.462–66, 5.441–42). Complex protocols inhibit their interactive participation, as Hera reminds Zeus when he thinks of saving his doomed son (*Il.* 16.433–60). Prayer therefore is never assured of effect.

Humans, small but dangerous, like agitated wasps (*Il.* 16.259–62), are expendable. Zeus and Hera barter cities and human lives (*Il.* 4.51–54). Humans must assert themselves before power, demonstrate their deservingness and worthiness (Adkins 1969.25, 33). Divinities like to be asked for help, but humility and poverty are the worst Homeric basis for exchange, except in the peculiar circumstances of loss of homeland. Chryses' and Achilles' prayers, in the face of superior terrestrial power, launch appeals over their terrene superiors' heads on the basis of a higher worthiness.

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42 Divinities are a projection of human puzzlement. Odysseus says to beautiful Nausicaa: "Oh queen, are you goddess *or* mortal?" (*Ody.* 6.149). Odysseus observes of Polyphemus: "He had a suspicion *or* a god put the idea into him" (*Ody.* 9.339). Athena—who ought to know—in disguise as Mentes says to Telemachus: "You'll think of the words yourself, in your mind, and a god will inspire you" (*Ody.* 3.26–27, so-called "double motivation" or "double determination"). The gods, however, are not merely objectifications of human impulse and wonder. Such reductive modern psychologizing, a rationalist fallacy (see Griffin 1980.144–64), ignores prayers in the *Iliad*—how, when, where, and why they are employed and answered. This survey demonstrates their ubiquitous and momentous influence on Homer's narrative.

Homer, the final poet, smuggles into the traditional stories covering theories of crucial social institutions and world-views, analyses (by simile, allegory, soliloquy, etc.) of heroic mechanisms. Phoenix' homily in *Iliad* 9 explicates the functions and operations that govern Hellenic beseeching of power-spirits. Phoenix wishes to persuade Achilles to assist the Achaean army (434–605, esp. 496–514). Homer's most developed allegory presents an *ad hoc* description of the Λιταί . . . Διὸς κοῦραι, or Supplicatory Prayers, daughters of Zeus. Genealogy reflects, here as in Hesiod, the source of authority and relative importance. Their lineage and commission derive from the highest source. Lame, wrinkled, always late, and capable only of sidelong glances, their physique reflects both limitations on their capability to interfere with others and their *modus operandi*. Speedy Ἄτη, Ruinous Anger, "runs out ahead from underneath" (506: ὑπεκπροθέει, see *Il.* 21.604, *Ody.* 8.125), damaging human lives right and left. The Prayers come later, since they are lame and wrinkled, slower; they act through persuasion and not force, indirectly, thus the oblique glances. But Phoenix notes, "Even the gods will bend to them"; they are στρεπτοί (9.497), "bendable" or open to entreaty in the face of prayer. Phoenix tells Achilles that Zeus has provided voice-activated access to heaven. If men know how to use prayers, and respect entreaty as Zeus does, then Propitiatory Prayers will benefit men, will heal their rifts. What is good enough for Zeus, he conjectures (469–501), must be good enough for mortals. When pious men pray, the gods hear.[43]

Phoenix' analysis fits the narrator Homer's formulae for Chryses' actual success with Apollo (*Il.* 1.43, 381, 457, 474). Phoenix warns Achilles that if a man reject the *Litai*, the daughters themselves pray to Zeus that he destroy such implacable inflexibility (ἀμείλιχος, 572, cf. 158 only: Hades), that is, send *Atē* to him. Both Agamemnon and Achilles reject beseeching requests, virtual prayers, and both encounter the *Atē* of punitive Zeus (reversible blindness to misdeed, supplication, and warnings: death for Agamemnon's battalions, death for Achilles' best friend). Agamemnon explicitly calls his own error the fault of *Atē* (*Il.* 19.91; cf. 2.111; 9.18, 116, 119). Achilles never shifts his blame to others (*Il.* 18.98–100), to his credit, but the mechanism described by Phoenix surely applies.

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43 Of course, Phoenix, himself the proponent of the *Litai*, failed to bend to offers and entreaty, as did his mythic paradigm Meleager. Agamemnon rejected argument, offer, and entreaty and so will the present audience, Achilles. To heed this timely warning is not easy (Scodel 1982.129, 131).

The gods dispense gifts to mortals: wealth, wisdom, beauty, strength, armor, cures, and courage, as well as troubles: wounds, death, pigheadedness, and other evils (*Il.* 1.178, 3.64, 5.51, 5.61, 7.288, 13.727, 17.194–96, 24.525–33: another of the final poet's analyses). "The mind of man is like the day that Zeus sends over him," Odysseus, disguised as a worldly beggar, opines (*Ody.* 18.130–37). Human resources are inadequate to analyze or comprehend the human condition. The gods may exercise wide powers in the human arena. Humans provide the meaningful measure of divine privilege, but the gods regularly corroborate values that humans know of. They do not manage humans like puppets; human effort, decision, and will are decisive in Homer, at least (Zeus, *Ody.* 1.32–39). Humans persuade, honor, beguile, and wound divinities (Athena, Calypso, Aphrodite). Humans arouse pity (*Il.* 15.12, 16.432, 24.33–35) in the gods; Apollo argues for the dignity of corpses (*Il.* 24.18–21).

Addressed to many different gods, sometimes individually, sometimes to a group of two, three, or all (Beckman 1932.27–31), Homeric prayers are one of Homer's *literary* strategies, structuring the plot (see below). "The sequence of events seldom varies" (Morrison 1991.147–49); eighty-six percent of major prayers show all nine of Morrison's formulaic elements.[44] They succeed or fail as ritual performances, but either outcome directs the further action and focuses audience attention.

PRAYERS AS PIVOTS OF THE *ILIAD*'S PLOT

Iliad 1 furnishes background, human and divine characters, and Achaean factions. Its stressful events provide the crux of the plot. Crises in book 1 pivot *four* times on prayers, on appeals for divine acknowledgment and action (1.18–21, 35–43, 351–56 with 393–412, and 451–57). The first book presents various religious business, often in type-scenes: prayers, purification, propitiation, libation, sacrifice, hymn, vows, and oaths.

Chryses' supplication of human Agamemnon fails, but his prayer

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44 Odysseus' crew and Penelope's suitors notoriously fail to follow ceremony for barley and wine: *Ody.* 12.356–65, 20.276–83; cf. Saïd 1979. Individuals never approach the gods through priests or other intercessors. *Basileis* do pray for the success of their collected armed men, as Andrea Purvis mentions to me. The heroes believe that each has some just expectation of assistance, to judge from their prayers. Homer rarely uses priests to pray for communities. Trojan Theano, the one exception, utterly fails. Hector's explicit but ill-advised skepticism towards bird-sign readers seems ironic if not impious (*Il.* 12.237–43; cf. Eurymachus' foolish denial: *Ody*. 2.178–82).

to god Apollo succeeds. His prayer, the first pleading with the invisible in extant Greek literature, launches the narrative (1.35–43). The priest calls on Apollo to avenge the wrong that Agamemnon has done him in refusing Chryseis' reasonable ransom. The Death-Dealing Bow-God hears him and decimates the villain's host with plague—although, unfortunately, not the guilty party, Agamemnon.

Achilles quarrels with Agamemnon and abandons his Achaean allies. He, then, like Chryses before him, goes apart and appeals to Thetis in a strangely informal way (1.348–57).[45] He prays for revenge through and to the face of his divine mother Thetis. He wants her to get Zeus to avenge the wrong that Agamemnon has done Achilles' honor by seizing Briseis, Achilles' own prize. His mother agrees to forward this prayerful petition.

Agamemnon gives up Chryseis in the face of Chryses' answered prayer for destruction. Grateful Chryses again prays to Apollo (1.447–56). He appeals on logical grounds: since Apollo has honored his prayer once, he might well do so again. And Apollo does oblige both him and the sacrificing, feasting, and chanting Achaeans (propitiation: 1.457–74).

The prayer that now hangs unanswered is Achilles', for the prayer-answering gods have flown south to Ethiopia for holidays. When Zeus returns to Olympus, Thetis supplicates him (1.493–531). Although a god unusually prays to a god here,[46] she appeals "more as Achilles' mother than as a goddess" (Lang 1975.310). Zeus, after hesitation and double entreaty, gestures positively; he nods down to indicate assent (κατανεύω: 1.514, 524, 527–28). Because of her past favors to Zeus, he agrees to honor her son by punishing Agamemnon and the Achaeans. Defeat in battle rather than plague will now afflict the Achaeans until her son regains his special status.

Achilles, some days later in book 16, commences the epic's last movement when he delivers the *Iliad*'s most articulated prayer, the weirdest invocation, and lengthiest aretalogy (16.233–52). The "expansion aes-

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45 Muellner 1976.22–23; Slatkin 1991.63 comments that "All the requisite features [of a prayer], in fact, seem to be missing." The divine-human divide is here elided, in part by the genealogical relationship, in part by the non-standard "prayer" form.

46 The only other god-prayer: Hera beseeches the cadet-god Hypnos, a situation inverting their respective powers (*Il.* 14.238–76). At *Ody*. 3.55–61, Athena in human guise unnecessarily prays to Poseidon, humorous divine disguising among humans. See Janko in Kirk IV: 1992.188; Stanford, comm. ad loc., objects to the "pious fraud," but underrates Homer's sense of humor. Kleinknecht 1937 ignores Homeric evidence.

thetic" of Achilles (Martin 1989.205–39) appears in his prayers as well as in his dialogues. After formal cleansing and libation, he stands, stares toward heaven, and prays:

> Ζεῦ ἄνα, Δωδωναῖε, Πελασγικέ, τηλόθι ναίων,
> Δωδώνης μεδέων δυσχειμέρου· ἀμφὶ δὲ Ἕλλοὶ
> σοὶ ναίουσ᾽ ὑποφῆται ἀνιπτόποδες χαμαιεῦναι.
> ἠμὲν δή ποτ᾽ ἐμὸν ἔπος ἔκλυες εὐξαμένοιο
> τίμησας μὲν ἐμέ, μέγα δ᾽ ἴψαο λαὸν ᾽Αχαιῶν,
> ἠδ᾽ ἔτι καὶ νῦν μοι τόδ᾽ ἐπικρήηνον ἐέλδωρ.
>
> Zeus above, Zeus of Dodona, Pelasgian one,
> Thou who dwell far away, Ruler of the Dodonian shrine,
> Where winter is severe and your interpreters sleep
> on the ground with feet unwashed,
> As you heard my *epos*-prayer before *and* accomplished it,
> So now again, accomplish this my wish.

This "give because you gave" prayer,[47] expanded and ornamented with five divine epithets, marks the decisive moment in Achilles' trajectory. Achilles, on the frontier of human, even heroic, control of events around him, appeals directly for Olympian help. Patroclus is about to do battle for the Achaeans in Achilles' armor and thus turn the Trojans back. The prayer steers the action to disaster. Achilles had obtained Achaean defeat. Now he prays for two favors conflicting with that one. He wants Zeus to grant Achaean Patroclus victory and *kudos*, *and* to return him safe, after the Trojans retreat. Achilles has now asked for contradictory wishes; earlier, for Trojan victory with dead Achaeans, but now, for Achaean victory with dead Trojans. He finds out what happens when friendly otherworld powers respond to *all* your summonses.

Zeus grants Achilles' new prayer part #1, namely, Patroclus gains great *kudos*, but not new prayer part #2, namely, the safe return of Patroclus, as the poet "with devastating concision" tells us (250; Janko 1992 ad 16.249–52). Patroclus dies; Achilles soon realizes that direct access to divine powers is a two-edged sword, an irony exploited by Attic tragedy

47 *Il.* 16.236–38 repeats 1.453–55 and thus echoes an effective prayer formula, *da quia dedisti.*

(Mikalson 1989.81, 87). Thetis underlines the irony, asking him what is wrong, did he not get just what he prayed for (18.75). What he prayed for had a terrible cost. Paralyzed momentarily, he realizes that he himself is to blame. Prayer formulae, usually elements of salvation, have become instruments of destruction. His laments (e.g., 18.30–35, 79–93; 19.21–27, 59–64, 315–37; 23.10–23), calling on divinities as well as the dear departed, are partly complaints, partly prayers.

The poem's resolution, book 24, shows us that supplicatory prayer bends even fierce Achilles. Gods and humans share supplication, ritualized entreaty. The half-god, half-man is supplicated by his royal enemy Priam. The king falls to his knees and kisses Achilles' hands (24.478–86). Homer uses the word λισσόμενος for Priam's prayerful entreaty, a word formed from the same root as *Litai*, the personified Prayers. Short-sighted Agamemnon did not respect the entreaty in book 1; hard-hearted Achilles did not honor the earnest (if questionable) entreaties in book 9. They have suffered for their scorn of compensation that should not have been refused and for disregard of Supplications. Here, however, Achilles honors his enemy's prayer-like entreaty and conforms to the will of the gods. The Supplicatory Prayers unite Achaean and Trojan. Existential Homer here shows gods who care, men who feel and respond to their enemies' grief—a surprising but satisfying literary closure.

CONCLUSIONS

Humans widely believe that gods respond to prayer, really attend to mortals' predicaments. Greek prayer often places adorant's acknowledgement of inferiority far behind adoree's recognition of the performer's worth in calibrating expectation of beneficial material exchanges.

Homeric prayers, a literary utilization of actual Greek prayers, are "persuasive" speech-acts in a traditional, ideologically influential oral-epic text. Recognizable to an audience that did pray without the benefit of instant authorial omniscience about divine responses, prayers in epic are configured to direct the plot and divert the audience. Entreaties man-to-man look very similar to those addressed by humans to gods, or lesser gods to greater (e.g., Hephaestus, *Ody*. 9.305–20). The lack of deference is revealing.

The student of epic finds that prayers shape, focus, and foreshadow plots and sub-plots as well as aid characterization of protagonists. Prayers foreshadow events which occur with, or without, explicit divine

assistance. They alert audience expectation. Prayers signal moments at which humans face extreme threats. The telephonic requests urge reversals of direction from inside the plot. They can be persuasive or dissuasive. Prayers argue for or against various possibilities among the range of the plot's "permitted outcomes." Analogously, pivotal contrafactuals (outcomes that cannot occur, in the form, "if only *x* had now done *y*, then *z* would have occurred") hypothesize "forbidden junctures" at critical moments. Imagined outcomes provide the audience with alternatives to mull over for the plot's continuation.[48]

Homer has prayers steer his narrative through crises. The prayer is proleptic: *like* a prophet's prophecy it provides an embedded flash-forward. It looks towards an immediate and practical goal (cf. Nägelsbach 1884.199). But, *unlike* the prophet's privileged foreknowledge, the prayer remains more contingent, therefore less confidently predictive.[49]

Books 1, 9, 16, and 24 present the crucial plot developments in Homer's *Iliad*. The action of these books hinges on prayers. Similarly, in the *Odyssey*, here generally excluded for another study (cf. Purvis 1995), Polyphemus' prayer motivates the wanderings, Odysseus' prayers more than once save him from drowning, and various Laertid sympathizers pray effectively in the second, Ithacan half. Eumaeus' and the decrepit miller-woman's prayers provide dramatic irony and "proof" that Odyssean prayers are answered.

The *Iliad* is less optimistic about prayer. The *Iliad*'s warp and weft are battle and human-to-human speech. Similes, hypotheticals, and the gods supply contrast, relief, other imaginable outcomes, and reflection. Prayers can and do determine events. Prayers in the *Iliad* are less often (than in the *Odyssey*) answered as the pray-ers wish. The *Iliad* is less comic.

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48 Louden 1993.184; cf. Morrison 1992.70 n.19: violations of poetic tradition. "Homer works his text" (Louden 1993.188) by employing syntactical patterns with significant variations: such phrases as "And now Troy would have fallen, if X had not . . ." supply one schema with several variants, narrational contrafactuals. Repeated consultations of one's own heart before battlefield *aristeiai* in the *Iliad*, various recognitions of the beggar in the *Odyssey*, and prayers *in extremis* offer multiforms of type-scenes. Repetitions with variation—utilizing epithets, formulae, and blocks of lines that constitute multiforms or allomorphs—reinforce one essential set of contents (Louden 1993.192, 195).

49 The pray-er mirrors the horizons and social values of the heroic world. He shares his fellow battlers' emotions and ignorance. The prayer is an "embedded focalization" in de Jong's terminology, an urgent observation from one character's viewpoint. When a hero refers to past services—his, his family's, or the addressed god's—the past is tied to the future in the present. "As you God, *once* did *X*, *now* I pray, that you *next* do *X* again!"

Prayer in both epics often foreshadows the direction of the narrative. But prayer in the *Iliad* has more than "one narrative function" (Morrison 1991.152). It also expresses exasperation, exhaustion, frustration—the edge of human agony where divinity lurks—the abyss. Prayer offers windows on heroic psyches. Iliadic prayer, then, marks a man or group pushing the envelope, at the edge of human capacity, skill, or suffering. Epic pray-ers speak persuasively, still, as humans at the limits.

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