ON HOMER'S WINGED WORDS

I

A VERY familiar feature of Homeric style are the lines or phrases which introduce a speech.[1] We have, for instance:

τοῖσι δ' ἀνιστάμενος μετέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς (*Il.* 1. 54)

τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς (*Il.* 1. 84)

τὸν δ' ἠμείβετ' ἔπειτα ποδάρκης δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς (*Il.* 1. 121)

Such sentences set forth fully and simply the mere act of saying, answering. This is quite different from what we find elsewhere. To appreciate the difference, compare Virgil's usage:

Aeolus haec contra: (*Aen.* 1. 76)

dictis maerentia pectora mulcet: (ibid. 197)

illum talis iactantem pectore curas (ibid. 227)
tristior et lacrimis oculos suffusa nitentes
adloquitur Venus:

ac prior 'heus' inquit 'monstrate . . . (ibid. 321)

tum genitor veterum volvens monumenta virorum (3. 102–3)
'audite, o proceres', ait . . .

In Virgil, as in modern narrative, the act of saying is barely mentioned or left out altogether. At times the transition from indirect to direct speech comes abruptly, without warning (*Aen.* 2. 657 ff., 675 ff., 10. 825 ff.). On the other hand, the stress falls on the speaker's position within the general narrative. We are thus drawn away from the actuality of speech to a broader frame of reference. The characters seem to be more concerned with the distant implications of the action than with the present moment. Their motivations and fortunes cover the years. They merge, therefore, into legend, history, romance; and the words they speak illustrate their extending roles.

It is far different in Homer. The verb of saying is never omitted. There is nothing like interjected ἔφη, *inquit, said he.* Nor is there any sudden transition from indirect to direct speech. The act of speaking is always underlined, sharply separating the spoken words from their context.[2] This is in keeping with the focus on single acts which we find throughout the poems.

II

The Homeric expressions of 'saying' introducing a speech present a great similarity of form—time and again such phrases as τὸν δ' αὖτε προσέειπε, τὸν δ'

[1] On these, see H. Fournier, 'Formules homériques de référence avec verbe "dire" ', *Revue de Philologie* xx (1946), 29–68; Mark W. Edwards, 'Homeric Speech Introductions', *H.S.C.P.* lxxiv (1970), 1–36.

Fournier stresses the influence of metre to the detriment of meaning, Edwards shows how 'formulaic economy' yields to variations of expression. Both these scholars are thus chiefly concerned with the range of 'formulaic' diction—the former to affirm its overriding importance, the latter to point out its limitations. Though they provide useful classifications, neither of them dwells on the characteristic value of the words themselves.

[2] Except *Il.* 23. 855, where see Leaf's note.

ἠμείβετ' ἔπειτα . . . The greatest and most impassioned speeches are introduced by these equable phrases. We have, on the one hand, the intense exchange of words, and, on the other, the terse formulation of the utterance. The contrast is evident. We are shown, in each case, the moment of articulation. Men and women are thus caught in the act of speaking out; and this act is essentially the same whatever they may say.

It is true, of course, that we also find in Homer more descriptive ways of introducing a speech: 'he spoke with harsh' or 'gentle words' or 'he encouraged, rebuked, implored, commanded . . .' or, again, 'angered, weeping, smiling, looking askance he spoke . . .' Even in such cases, however, the act of speech stands out gathering to itself a tone or a mood; it does not come as a matter of course after a narrative climax.

We may thus safely say that the value of speech as voice is never lost. This is remarkable in poems filled with action. The tide of events is not allowed to drown so basic an element of human nature. To Homer's eyes natural acts lost none of their significance for being habitual and familiar. He thus treated speech in its own right. This is especially apparent in such phrases as μῦθον ἔειπε, φάτο μῦθον, ἔπος φάτο, ἔπεα μετηύδα (*Il.* 2. 59, 24. 598, *Od.* 20. 111, *Il.* 8. 496, etc.), where the accusatives μῦθον, ἔπος, ἔπεα are internal to the act of speaking. We should translate 'spoke word' and not 'said the following words'. What these phrases convey is the word itself and the moment it is uttered, not the following speech and message.

III

The idea of words as something self-existent and not a mere means of communication is beautifully implied in the Homeric phrase ἔπεα πτερόεντα. The epithet is self-explaining, words have wings in that they fly from the speaker's mouth to the listener's ears.[1] For Homer this was hardly a metaphor. He perceived in words a concrete reality: breath gathering into voice, sound formed into meaning and travelling through the air.

That the phrase is not merely conventional but reflects the poet's feeling may be proved by looking into the way in which words and their nature are conceived throughout the poems. Consider the following:

1. The expression

ποῖόν σε ἔπος φύγεν ἕρκος ὀδόντων

Il. 4. 350, 14. 83, *Od.* 1. 64, etc. It gives a physical sense of something just said and released beyond recall: words seem to escape from the teeth's enclosure like birds from a cage.

2. *Od.* 8. 408–9

ἔπος δ' εἴπερ τι βέβακται
δεινόν, ἄφαρ τὸ φέροιεν ἀναρπάξασαι ἄελλαι.

The Phaeacian Euryalos has offended Odysseus and now appeases him. He

[1] The prevailing view is that the phrase is a metaphor from the flight of birds or, with less taste, from archery: see W. B. Stanford, *Greek Metaphor* (Oxford, 1936), 136–7. The ancients, on the other hand, took πτερόεντα simply as 'swift'. See Ebeling, *ad v.*

I think that ἔπεα πτερόεντα is no more a metaphor than, say, μήδεα πυκνά. What we consider an abstract entity is for Homer a concrete self-existing thing, and it does not need figurative treatment.

does not tell him that he is sorry for what he said. The word, once given out, cannot be retracted; it exists on its own strength; only storms and winds can blow it away.

3. *Il.* 3. 221–3

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ ὄπα τε μεγάλην ἐκ στήθεος εἵη
καὶ ἔπεα νιφάδεσσιν ἐοικότα χειμερίῃσιν
οὐκ ἂν ἔπειτ' Ὀδυσῆϊ γ' ἐρίσσειε βροτὸς ἄλλος.

Voice surges from Odysseus' breast into words that fly through the air like flakes of snow. See how the words are given a glorious reality of their own. The whole passage contributes to this effect. Odysseus is ungainly beside Menelaus, but when he speaks he is different, as if his words reflected their light upon him.

4. *Od.* 8. 170

ἀλλὰ θεὸς μορφὴν ἔπεσι στέφει.

Cf. 11. 367. It is remarkable that the word μορφή 'shape' recurs in Homer only in the two passages just quoted, and in these it refers to words.

5. *Il.* 2. 213

ὃς ἔπεα φρεσὶ ἧσιν ἄκοσμά τε πολλά τε ἦδη.

Thersites' unruly words are present within him, ready to be bandied about. Feeling is a word as yet unspoken but solidly existent: in *Il.* 14. 91

μῦθον, ὃν οὔ κεν ἀνήρ γε διὰ στόμα πάμπαν ἄγοιτο

'a word that no one would pull out of his mouth'. Hence the phrase τῇ δ' ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος 'the word lay unwinged (i.e. unspoken) within her.'[1]

6. Such forms of expression as ἔπος . . . πιφαύσκων (*Od.* 22. 131, 247, cf. *Il.* 10. 202), μῦθον . . . πεφασμένον (*Il.* 14. 127), ἔπος ἔκβαλον (*Il.* 18. 324), ἔπος προέηκεν (*Od.* 14. 466) which render the act of speaking as 'to make manifest, to cast forth a word'.

7. *Il.* 2. 41 θείη δέ μιν ἀμφέχυτ' ὀμφή. Compare *Il.* 11. 466, 16. 78, *Od.* 6. 122, 17. 261. In these passages voice is a palpable essence spread around the hearer.

Words, in Homer, brood in the mind, impatient to come out. Once uttered, they are irrecoverable, and alight on receptive ground. 'Flexible is men's tongue', Aeneas tells Achilles (*Il.* 20. 248–50); 'many sayings lie upon it of all kinds, and wide is the range of words hither and thither; whatever word you say you might hear.' It is as if words hovered round the world beyond any person's will. This movement, however, is not a matter of course. What sets it off is expression that cannot be withheld. The self-existence of 'winged words' is one and all with their spontaneity.

IV

We may now try and find out what occasions prompt in Homer the phrase ἔπεα πτερόεντα—why and when it recurs at all. We cannot, of course, lay down

[1] For other interpretations of this phrase, see W. B. Stanford's commentary on *Od.* 17. 57 (*The Odyssey of Homer* [Macmillan, 1967], ii. 282–3); Frederick Combellack, 'Words that die', *Classical Journal* xlvi (1950), 25 n. 7.

any rules, but only notice predispositions and tendencies. Once a form of expression is conceived, it runs its course wearing itself away. A basic pertinence, however, lies at its root; and it is our task to recover it.

There are essentially two statements on the subject: on the one hand, G. M. Calhoun's[1] contention that the phrase is used in connection with certain feelings descriptive of character, and, on the other, Milman Parry's[2] rebuttal that

[1] George M. Calhoun, 'The Art of formula in Homer—ἔπεα πτερόεντα', *Classical Philology* xxx (1935), 215–27.

Calhoun's interpretation is based on contents. He quotes the passages in which the phrase recurs, trying to show that they always imply or indicate emotion. He notes (p. 223) 'how this supposedly colorless tag is associated with emotional reactions or with tense situations, and how completely it covers the whole range of human feeling, from mild amusement and quiet satisfaction to hot anger and desperate fear'.

We may object, of course, that there is hardly a passage in the poems that does not denote some tension, and that speech in the most impassioned dialogues (that between Agamemnon and Achilles, for instance, or between Hector and Andromache) is not usually introduced by this phrase. Moreover Homer has more appropriate forms of expression to introduce a particular tone: cf. στερεοῖς ἐπέεσσι, αἰσχροῖς ἐπέεσσι, ἀγανοῖς ἐπέεσσι, etc. Nor would the phrase be very significant if Calhoun's argument were true. We should have to suppose that 'winged words' underline emotion in any given instance. The phrase would again become a 'tag'—not for the purpose of versification in this case, but to earmark a meaning which is otherwise expressed; for the word πτερόεντα does not itself indicate emotion.

What Calhoun takes into account is a purely narrative value. He writes: 'In examining the passages in which the formula is found, I shall treat separately the instances which refer to the principal characters.' Accordingly he illustrates Odysseus' emotions in some fifteen instances. Eumaeus' winged words in *Od.* 17. 349, 552 he attributes to the affection which Eumaeus has previously conceived for Odysseus. Similarly he notes that Achilles speaks winged words more than anyone else in the *Iliad* and proceeds to describe the hero's range of emotion in this connection. It is as if the phrase had the function of descriptively bringing out certain characters or following up trends of feeling that run through the plot.

This is to miss, I think, something that is deeply characteristic of Homer: the rendering of acts in their own right. These are presented in full physical evidence—feet that move, eyes that see, a hand that clasps, a heart that stirs. In each case the act is seen in the nature of its realization, and its connection with the context is existential rather than narrative. It is no different with the act of speaking. Such a phrase as εἵλετο χειρὶ παχείῃ is in this sense equivalent to ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα. Pressure is as distinctive of touch as flight is of speech. Words are winged on the strength of their own nature, and not because they serve some alleged purpose. They fly out when the situation allows it, when there is an opening in the action or a moment of release, and not for any definite purpose. It is arbitrary to encroach on the natural truth of the image, as Calhoun does when for the sake of his thesis he strains the meaning of πτερόεντα into 'quickly spoken', 'animated'. He thus defeats his own deeper purpose. The phrase loses its poetic quality by being so narrowed down.

[2] Milman Parry, 'About Winged Words', *Classical Philology* xxxii (1937), 59–63; now *The Making of Homeric Verse* (Oxford, 1971), 414–18.

Parry's explanation is simply based on grammar and metre. Since the sentence 'spoke winged words' always recurs without the proper name as subject, Parry believes that it is used to introduce a speech 'when the character who is to speak has been the subject of the last verses, so that the use of his name in the line would be clumsy'. Pointing out that *Od.* 1. 122, for instance, requires not 'and Telemachus said' but 'and he said', Parry argues that the poet had no other way of expressing the meaning 'and he said' in a whole hexameter line.

This is surely begging the question. What has to be explained is the very fact which is adduced as a proof: viz., that Telemachus, after performing other acts, speaks winged words. For the phrase 'winged words' is not at all indispensable in such a case. Homer did not need a whole line for the meaning 'he said'. He could very well have let Telemachus do what he does down to the last line preceding his speech, simply joining a verb of 'saying'. This is quite normal in Homer, cf. *Il.* 1. 12–16, 333, 440–1, 5. 799, 7. 190, etc. See also M. W. Edwards, op.

the phrase is nothing but a tag to fill up a complete line when the name of the speaker is left out, having been mentioned just before. I think that both views are wrong. Homer's winged words do certainly have meaning; but this meaning is intrinsic to the act of speaking and not suggestive of any particular feeling. What stands out is not the motivation, but the spontaneity of the expression. Words have wings when they seem to fly out on their own account, unsolicited by any question, unconditioned by the necessities of dialogue, unenforced by any overriding need. That some feeling prompts them goes without saying, no word was ever spoken without it; but the point is, rather, the oblivion of all particular feeling in the rising occasion. It is the moment itself that opens out in words.

Consider the famous passage in which the elders of Troy see Helen passing before them (*Il.* 3. 154–60):

> *οἱ δ' ὡς οὖν εἶδονθ' 'Ελένην ἐπὶ πύργον ἰοῦσαν,*
> *ἦκα πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἔπεα πτερόεντ' ἀγόρευον·*
> *"οὐ νέμεσις Τρῶας καὶ ἐϋκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς*
> *τοιῇδ' ἀμφὶ γυναικὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἄλγεα πάσχειν·*
> *αἰνῶς ἀθανάτῃσι θεῇς εἰς ὦπα ἔοικεν·*
> *ἀλλὰ καὶ ὥς τοίη περ ἐοῦσ' ἐν νηυσὶ νεέσθω,*
> *μηδ' ἡμῖν τεκέεσσί τ' ὀπίσσω πῆμα λίποιτο."*

The sight of Helen suddenly inspires the elders to speak. What emotion is theirs? The thought of Helen's tragic destiny? The impression of her beauty?

cit. 10–12. In the instance adduced by Parry there were, doubtless, many other ways in which Telemachus' acts could have been brought to a close before he spoke. Any appropriate detail could have come to the poet's mind. We could have had, for instance: *καί μιν ἄνευθ' ἄλλων δειδίσκετο φώνησέν τε*: or *οἷος ἄνευθ' ἄλλων· καί μιν πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπε*: or *οὐδοῦ ἐπὶ ξεστῆς· καί μιν πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπε*: or the spear might have been qualified (cf. 100): *ἐδέξατο χάλκεον ἔγχος / βριθὺ μέγα στιβαρόν· καί μιν πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν.*

The phrase *ἔπεα πτερόεντα* must thus be explained on its own merits. The fact that no proper name recurs as its subject in the same line is but a necessary detail of syntax and metre, it is a result and not a cause. It cannot be used to explain the value of the words. Rather the question should be put thus: why is it that the moment of the utterance should be so emphasized as to occupy a whole line? In order to answer, we have to account for the movement of the whole passage—how it leads to the climax of 'winged words'. Parry, on the other hand, argues that Homer could not plan his syntax so far ahead. He writes: 'This would be a very complex sort of verse-making and quite foreign to the way in which such traditional and oral song as that of Homer is composed. The singer of oral narrative rarely plans his sentences ahead . . .' Parry thus denies Homer a talent of expression which we enjoy even in ordinary conversation—as when, for instance, we describe a friend who on some occasion said or did something remarkable, and we so turn our description as to fit that occasion. Here is a spontaneity which Parry seems to ignore. It is neither a question of 'planning ahead' nor of composing from instant to instant through an acquired instinct. Thought prefigures its outcome even at the moment it comes to mind—something of which anyone may be aware in a creative mood.

It may be objected, however, that my argument is subjective and does not amount to any proof. If this be so, let us look at the phrase itself. Consider these points: (1) The phrase is never used merely to introduce a speech, though such a verse as *τὸν δ' αὖ Τηλέμαχος ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα* would be metrically correct. (2) It hardly ever introduces a mere reply in the form *τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα*. (3) In its most frequent form *καί μιν φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα* the pure act of speaking is rendered in extraordinary fullness. Here are sure signs of expressive value. This should give us pause before we elevate Parry's notion of facility in the composition to an aesthetic principle.

Admiration, reproof? All of these, perhaps, and yet none in particular. We may be closer to the truth if we say wonder, surprise. In any case, the emotion is vague, undefined; what matters is the suddenness of Helen's appearance, the startling visualization. The unpremeditated words of the elders bear unsolicited witness. They fly out in the moment of realization. Compare Nausicaa wondering at Odysseus, *Od.* 8. 459–60; Telemachus amazed at his father's youthful beauty, *Od.* 16. 179–81. See also 24. 370–2.

Or take *Il.* 16. 5–6, of Achilles who sees Patroclus weeping:

> τὸν δὲ ἰδὼν ὤκτιρε ποδάρκης δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς,
> καί μιν φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα.

Achilles, of course, pities his friend and that is why he speaks to him. But why are his words winged? It is because of his friend's appearing all at once beside him. The instant moment draws out his words. Cf. *Il.* 8. 350–1, 11. 814–15, 19. 340–1, *Od.* 11. 55–6, 395–6, 10. 375–7. Nor does it matter what the accompanying emotion may be—whether joy as in *Il.* 4. 283–4, 10. 190–1, or reproof as in *Il.* 4. 336–7, 368–9: what stands out in all these instances is a sudden occasion which cannot be passed over in silence.

Recognition similarly produces winged words, not so much because of the emotions involved as because of the shock. Thus Achilles recognizing Athena who dissuades him from attacking Agamemnon (*Il.* 1. 199–201):

> θάμβησεν δ' Ἀχιλεύς, μετὰ δ' ἐτράπετ', αὐτίκα δ' ἔγνω
> Παλλάδ' Ἀθηναίην· δεινὼ δέ οἱ ὄσσε φάανθεν·
> καί μιν φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα.

Achilles is struck, his aggressiveness thwarted, and in the sudden pause his words come up from a new depth. Again, the epithet 'winged' is quite fitting for speech so freshly inspired. The same is true, on a more elemental level, of Antikleia's ghost in *Od.* 11. 152–4. She drinks the blood of life, instantly recognizes her son Odysseus, and her winged words come up as readily as breath finding the air again. Cf. ibid. 471–2, 615–16.

The scenes of reunion strike a similar note. When people meet again after a dramatic separation, it is as if a revelation took place, and the crowning moment breaks into winged words. Thus Penelope speaks to Telemachus meeting him after she feared him dead (*Od.* 17. 36–40). Similarly Eumaeus (16. 17–22). Even more striking is the way the companions of Odysseus welcome him back from Circe's house (*Od.* 10. 410–18). They thought he had perished under her spells, and now he appears before them. Like calves that sally out welcoming their mothers, they cluster around him, they are as moved as if they were back in Ithaca, and with a wail they speak winged words. Notice, in all these instances, the participle ὀλοφυρόμενος. This wailing is neither of grief nor joy. It does not describe any particular feeling. It marks most simply the quickening of the senses in the moment they are touched off into voice and made articulate in winged words. We seem to touch on the very source of expression. Even so those of Odysseus' friends who had been transformed into swine give out a cry (*Od.* 10. 398):

> πᾶσιν δ' ἱμερόεις ὑπέδυ γόος.

What is this sweet cry? A sign of human speech just recovered and welling up from within.[1]

Moments of realization and enlightenment fill the poems, as the characters are brought face to face. Any meeting, visit, approach no sooner takes place than it becomes a compelling matter, an occasion for expression. Winged words thus come from Telemachus when he sees Athena waiting at the door unattended, and he is suddenly roused, runs to meet her (*Od.* 1. 118–22), cf. 4. 20–5, 13. 221–7, *Il.* 15. 87–9. So Theoclymenus abruptly joining Telemachus, *Od.* 15. 256–9. A warrior addressing another, unexpectedly, in the battlefield, *Il.* 8. 99–101, 13. 459–62, 16. 534–7, 17. 215–19, cf. *Od.* 22. 99–100. Gods suddenly intervening, *Il.* 4. 86–92, 5. 121–3, 14. 135–8, 17. 71–4, 18. 166–9, 20. 330–1, 22. 214–15, 226–8, *Od.* 2. 267–9. This is most pointedly the case of Thetis speeding to comfort Achilles (*Il.* 18. 70–2).

There need not be any particular encounter. The moment for winged words may come of itself through some arresting development of the action. Again they are winged because unsolicited. Such are those of Hecuba in her last appeal to Hector, *Il.* 22. 81. Or those which Hector hurls after striking down Patroclus, *Il.* 16. 829, cf. *Il.* 22. 377, 20. 448, *Od.* 18. 104. Circe so speaks the moment her spell is broken, *Od.* 10. 324; Odysseus when he checks Eurycleia's cry of triumph over the slain suitors, *Od.* 22. 410; Irus in his unprovoked challenge, *Od.* 18. 9; Leiodes taking an opportunity to pray for his life, *Od.* 22. 311, cf. 342, 366, *Il.* 21. 73. Or, again, the occasion may be less weighty, but equally sudden and unsought—as when the words accompany the giving of a gift, or in greetings and good wishes. Cf. *Od.* 8. 442, 13. 58, 17. 349, 20. 198, 24. 399.

Elsewhere the occasion is all contained in the speaker's mind, as when dawning decision compels him to speak, *Il.* 2. 5–7, *Od.* 19. 1–3, cf. 15. 202–8.

Or painful thought comes up eliciting winged words as well as tears. So Peisistratus thinking of his dead brother Antilochus (*Od.* 4. 189)

> τοῦ ὅ γ' ἐπιμνησθεὶς ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα.

Any sudden perception, anything noticed even casually, may likewise suggest abruptly a sense of participation and occasion winged words. In *Od.* 4. 76–7 Menelaus overhears Telemachus talking to Peisistratus about the splendour of his house and speaks out:

> τοῦ δ' ἀγορεύοντος ξύνετο ξανθὸς Μενέλαος
> καί σφεας φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα.

Cf. *Od.* 17. 541–4, 16. 5–7.

Or sudden danger looms ahead, and one character turns to another with winged words. So in *Il.* 14. 1–2:

> Νέστορα δ' οὐκ ἔλαθεν ἰαχὴ πίνοντά περ ἔμπης,
> ἀλλ' Ἀσκληπιάδην ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα.

Cf. *Il.* 5. 241–2, 711–13.

[1] ἱμερόεις γόος has been strangely interpreted as equivalent, or similar, to ἵμερος γόοιο 'desire of crying'. So Faesi, Merry and Riddell, Stanford. Surely such a use of the adjective is quite unhomeric. Nor does such a meaning make any sense in this passage. We should let ἱμερόεις mean as usual 'lovely' 'sweet', and we should accept the originality of the Homeric sentence in its obvious sense. I take ὑπέδυ as 'emerged from within', cf. *Od.* 6. 127, 20. 53. We could then take πᾶσιν as a dative of 'interest', cf. *Il.* 1. 599.

In all the instances quoted the phrase marks a starting-point. Even when it introduces a speech which follows upon another, it most often indicates not so much a reply as a reaction and a fresh step in the dialogue. Thus in *Od.* 5. 116–17 Hermes has just spoken to Calypso and Calypso replies:

> ὣς φάτο· ῥίγησεν δὲ Καλυψώ, δῖα θεάων,
> καί μιν φωνήσασ' ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα.

A similar sequence in *Il.* 15. 34–5, *Od.* 2. 361–2, 4. 548–50, 12. 294–6, 13. 250–3, 287–90, 17. 458–9, cf. *Il.* 10. 162–3, 13. 748–50. At times there is a longer interlude with the intervening emotion growing in intensity. This is most notably the case in Odysseus' reply to his mother's ghost (*Od.* 11. 204–9):

> ὣς ἔφατ', αὐτὰρ ἐγώ γ' ἔθελον φρεσὶ μερμηρίξας
> μητρὸς ἐμῆς ψυχὴν ἐλέειν κατατεθνηυίης.
> τρὶς μὲν ἐφωρμήθην, ἐλέειν τέ με θυμὸς ἀνώγει,
> τρὶς δέ μοι ἐκ χειρῶν σκιῇ εἴκελον ἢ καὶ ὀνείρῳ
> ἔπτατ'· ἐμοὶ δ' ἄχος ὀξὺ γενέσκετο κηρόθι μᾶλλον,
> καί μιν φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδων.

Cf. *Il.* 19. 12–20, 23. 596–601, *Od.* 13. 287–90, 23. 32–4.

We might compare with these certain other instances in which a dialogue between two persons extends to a third one. In *Od.* 23. 112, for instance: Telemachus chides Penelope for remaining aloof from Odysseus, she replies with reticence, whereupon Odysseus solves the difficulty intervening with winged words. Cf. *Il.* 4. 68–9, 12. 364–5, *Od.* 8. 343–6, 17. 396. Again the phrase tunes us to something new—not in mood only, but in the broadening scene.

Are we now in a better position to say why and where the poet uses the expression 'winged words'? It is easier, perhaps, to say where it does *not* occur. It is significant that we hardly ever find it for the meaning 'to answer' in such a line as 'answering he said winged words.'[1] Nor does it introduce any of the great dialogues: what matters there is the interplay of characters rather than the utterance itself. Nor, again, does it occur where the reason for speaking is obvious—for instance in asking 'who are you?' to a newly arrived stranger. Nor in solemn statements where the words seem prepared in advance—in an oath or a prayer to the gods. Nor, on the other hand, where anger or any one-sided passion channels speech in a determined direction—as when Achilles or Thersites attacks Agamemnon.

Winged words thus mostly come when the mind is free, quick, receptive, sympathetic; they are neither aggressive nor self-conscious but naturally effusive. What the phrase points out is, therefore, the inherent spontaneity of speech: sense-perception instantly transformed into the airy substance of words. 'He saw . . . and he spoke winged words'—the connection is as simple as this, and as baffling. Here is utterance in its purest form. Outside the pressure of drama, it presents the wonder of voice made suddenly articulate—the vocal

[1] We have *καί μιν ἀμειβόμενος ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα* in *Il.* 15. 48, 23. 257 where *καί μιν φωνήσας* etc. would have been more like Homer; in *Il.* 7. 356 *ὅς μιν ἀμειβόμενος ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα* where the relative phrase seems quite exceptional; in *Od.* 9. 409 *οἱ δ' ἀπαμειβόμενοι ἔπεα πτερόεντ' ἀγόρευον* of the Cyclopes replying to Polyphemus. It is remarkable that this usage is so rare, considering the many possible occasions.

element rather than the message, the distinction of significant sounds rather than the speaker's tone.[1]

V

We might compare with ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα the phrase

ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε

'spoke word and called'.[2] Again it stresses the act of speech in itself and by itself, again it introduces a fresh address or marks a new step in the dialogue.

Most often another phrase precedes: ἔν τ' ἄρα οἱ φῷ χειρί or χειρί τέ μιν κατέρεξε. We thus have:

ἐν τ' ἄρα οἱ φῷ χειρὶ ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε

and χειρί τέ μιν κατέρεξεν ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε.

This is significant. We are given an outline of what happens when two persons meet: a clasping of hands, a caress, and a speech. It is as if the poet were hastening to present his characters and bring us to the ensuing scene.

Why do we not find on such occasions the line

καί μιν φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα

which the poet might well have used? The answer is that the 'winged words'

[1] In more than one third of the instances we have καί μιν φωνήσας (or φωνήσασ') ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα which I would translate 'and breaking into voice he (or she) spoke winged words.' We have the pure emission of sound and the articulation into words. The moment of the utterance is thus given full evidence. Cf. J. Classen, *Beobachtungen über den Homerischen Sprachgebrauch* (Frankfurt, 1879), 115–20.

We might suppose that this was the original form of the expression, or at least the one that best renders the Homeric stress on the act itself. Elsewhere we find it modified to suit the context: καί μιν φωνήσας is replaced with more descriptive participles (καί ῥ' ὀλοφυρόμενος, ἀγχοῦ δ' ἱστάμενος, καί οἱ εὐχόμενος, etc.) or with the name of the person addressed (e.g. αἶψα δ' Ἀθηναίην ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα).

It stands to reason that, through its extensive use, the phrase tends to lose its original value. Thus it seems to lack all poignancy in the mock-heroic battles of the gods—*Il.* 21. 409, 419, 427, cf. 5. 871. In *Il.* 15. 145 of Hera who merely repeats an order of Zeus. So *Il.* 4. 203. We may also note that the whole line καί μιν φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα is omitted by some manuscripts in several instances in which it might have seemed superfluous: *Il.* 4. 369, 10. 191, 17. 219, 21. 73, *Od.* 10. 265, 430, 482. We also find ἔπεα πτερόεντ' ἀγόρευον 'they conversed' without introducing a speech in *Il.* 24. 142, *Od.* 13. 165.

[2] The traditional explanation 'said and called by name', a *hysteron proteron*, cannot be right. It makes the meaning very flat. Besides, the proper name very often does not recur in the speech that follows, and, conversely, there are in the poems countless addresses which have the vocative of the person addressed and are not introduced by this phrase. In *Od.* 21. 248 we even find the phrase introducing a soliloquy, cf. 7. 330. On the contrary, we have a climax: first the simple utterance ('spoke word') and then speech made more specific, pressing, personal ('named'). We may understand ὀνομάζειν as 'naming things by their right name', cf. *Il.* 9. 515, 18. 449, *Od.* 24. 339.

See H. Jacobsohn, 'Zum homerischen ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε,' *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* lxii (1935), 132–40. He rules out any *hysteron proteron*, denying that ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε could mean 'called by name' on the ground that this would require an aorist. He also excludes, however, the meaning 'put into words'. Cf. C. Mutzbauer, *Die Grundlage der griechischen Tempuslehre und der Homerische Tempusgebrauch* (Strassburg, 1909), ii. 113.

imply a lingering moment. They would not have suited, for instance, Andromache's pressing address to Hector in *Il.* 6. 406.

Or compare *Il.* 1. 359–61:

> καρπαλίμως δ' ἀνέδυ πολιῆς ἁλὸς ἠΰτ' ὀμίχλη,
> καί ῥα πάροιθ' αὐτοῖο καθέζετο δάκρυ χέοντος
> χειρί τέ μιν κατέρεξεν, ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε

with *Il.* 18. 70–2:

> τῷ δὲ βαρὺ στενάχοντι παρίστατο πότνια μήτηρ,
> ὀξὺ δὲ κωκύσασα κάρη λάβε παιδὸς ἑοῖο,
> καί ῥ' ὀλοφυρομένη ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα.

Both passages portray an identical situation; but in the first Thetis rushes to Achilles when he has just been wronged, while in the second she instantly finds herself the partner of a common grief which has reached its climax. The two different forms of address seem quite justified: in *Il.* 1. 361 the anxious caress and appeal, in *Il.* 18. 72 an embrace and a wail that exhales in winged words.

Such nuance may even be felt within the same psasage. Take *Od.* 13. 287–90. We have Odysseus just landed in Ithaca and Athena in semblance of a young shepherd. He has just given her a false account of who he is, and she of course sees through him:

> ὣς φάτο· μείδησεν δὲ θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη,
> χειρί τέ μιν κατέρεξε· δέμας δ' ἤϊκτο γυναικὶ
> καλῇ τε μεγάλῃ τε καὶ ἀγλαὰ ἔργα ἰδυίῃ·
> καί μιν φωνήσασ' ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα.

The phrase χειρί τέ μιν κατέρεξε leads us to expect ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε. But no. The caress is abruptly left by itself; there is a pause in which the goddess reveals her true nature; her relation with Odysseus resumes its ancient quality, and what she is going to say is no longer a matter of dramatic urgency. Compare Circe's address to Odysseus in *Od.* 10. 319 and 324.

At times, however, the two forms of expression appear very close to each other. It is hard to draw precise distinctions in so elusive a matter. It may be said, however, that the simple phrase ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε inserts itself more readily into a narrative sequence. Picking up the sinking rhythm of the feminine caesura, it comes with a heightening stress. A happening is mentioned and forthwith set in a new light by the call that immediately follows. The river Scamander, for instance, is beset with flames and implores Hephaestus, *Il.* 21. 356:

> καίετο δ' ἰς ποταμοῖο ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε.

Cf. *Il.* 3. 396–8, 14. 214–18, *Od.* 6. 251–4, 8. 193–4, 18. 163, 19. 401–2.

VI

The greater part of the poems, as often remarked, consists in direct speech. They do justice to the spoken word; and the Homeric phrase ἔπεα πτερόεντα continually reminds us of it. Homer implicitly glorifies expression.

But why is it so? What quality sustains the prevalent dramatic form? The answer is that dialogue in Homer is individual self-expression and not a con-

venient way of explaining the plot. Take, for instance, the dialogue of Hector and Andromache: it does not subserve the action, it bears on nothing else but on what they actually are to each other. Even where speech blends closely with action, it is not at all supplementary. Consider Thersites upbraiding Agamemnon, or Polydamas Hector. In each case a character stands revealed in speech and produces action *ex novo*, while the facts of the plot serve as a backdrop. This is not the case with other works of literature—narrative poems, histories, novels, plays—in which the characters comment, remember, or prepare discursively for what is going to happen.

By breaking myth into dialogue and catching the dramatic impact of any event, Homer vindicated the human value of words. Here was self-expression finding its way through the turmoil of dumb exploits and putting them in the shade. What we are presented with is no celebration of things past or to come, but some crucial instance unravelling itself. It came down to this: what will anyone say when faced with friend or foe, or in danger, victory, defeat? A sense of drama showed how events are realized subjectively, how words are struck out of sheer occurrence. Think of Hector alone before the walls of Troy or confronting Achilles. He has no memorable message to give. What he says seems as inevitable as the moment that breaks upon him—a soliloquy that runs the whole gamut from weakness to bravery, a last defiance. His words have thus an existential function, they are fundamentally pertinent.

Events rendered as experience, experience articulated into words—this we continually find in the poems. Taken in its broad ideal meaning, the phrase 'winged words' vividly points to this basic process—to the way thought gathers into concrete form, into self-existing words that go their own way.

The natural wonder of speech was thus felt at one with the capacity for expression. Homer saw the one in terms of the other. In so conceiving the magic of words, he followed up his own apprehension of their dramatic force, but he also drew upon an ancient source: the sense of a divine power inherent in speech. We find in the poems several nouns meaning 'voice' which must be so understood:[1] ὄσσα, ὀμφή, φῆμις, κληδών. They all have an active sense—voice as an independent agency, whether as prophecy or divine command or rumour spreading on its own strength. Such must also have been ὄψ*, which is akin to ἔπος. Here was a force both mysterious and real. Homer gave it its due, but his interest lay elsewhere—in self-evident words rather than in messages imposed from without. Hence his ἔπεα πτερόεντα. They retain something of the original mystery, but they are essentially human. It is as if the divine power of voices that reveal and command had been converted into the pure impact of meaning and persuasion. The magic lay no longer in a decisive message, but in the transparency of words simply uttered and heard.

We seem to touch in Homer a point at which words are freed of all adventitious matter and left to the inspiration of the speaker. Their importance does not depend upon an external theme but on the truth of what prompts them. It is fresh experience that gives them natural weight. As soon as they are uttered, brute facts are turned into drama, the impending moment is relieved of its burden and translated into meaning. Speech thus becomes a central event. This is why Homer never opposes deeds to words—a commonplace of classical

[1] See P. Chantraine, *La Formation des noms en grec ancien* (Paris, 1933), 97, 113, 361; H. Fournier, *Les Verbes 'dire' en grec ancien* (Paris, 1946), 227–9.

authors. He sees them, rather, in the same light, as when Phoenix condenses the activity of life in the phrase (*Il.* 9. 443):

μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμεναι πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων.[1]

Speech is the highest achievement of the Homeric heroes.

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[1] Thus in the Homeric phrase ἔργον τε ἔπος τε word and deed are not opposed to each other but form a kind of hendiadys expressing one sole idea: *Il.* 15. 234, *Od.* 11. 346; cf. *Il.* 1. 77, 108, 19. 242, *Od.* 2. 272, 3. 99, 4. 163, 15. 375. We may compare the phrase τελεῖν ἔπος 'to bring about a word', that is 'to perform an action which has been mentioned': *Il.* 14. 44, 23. 544; cf. *Od.* 3. 99, 226, 4. 776–7, 11. 348, 15. 536, 20. 236, *Il.* 22. 454 and Leaf's note. The only examples to the contrary which I can find are *Il.* 16. 630, 4. 400, 18. 106, and they are only the barest hint.