

THE POLITENESS OF ACHILLES: OFF-RECORD CONVERSATION STRATEGIES IN HOMER AND THE MEANING OF *KERTOMIA**

Abstract: This article examines social interaction in Homer in the light of modern conversation analysis, especially Grice's theory of conversational implicature. Some notoriously problematic utterances are explained in terms of their 'off-record' significance. One particular off-record conversation strategy is characterized by Homer as *kertomia*, and this is discussed in detail. The article focusses on social problems at the end of Achilles' meeting with Priam in *Iliad* 24, and in particular on the much-discussed word ἐπικερτομέων (24.649).

HOMER's dialogue is often very subtle. A famous example is the white lie with which Odysseus defends Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 7. He pretends that he refused an offer by her to accompany him to her father's palace (*Od.* 7.298-307), although she had actually told him to make his own way there (*Od.* 6.255-315). Odysseus' tact is not signalled explicitly, and it has been denied that such nuances are to be found in Homer at all.¹

One possible response to such scepticism is the accumulation and analysis of examples. Analysis can be done in a fairly informal way, appealing to such readily intelligible concepts as delicacy and tact. There is, however, something to be gained from a more systematic approach which exploits the resources of modern conversation analysis. This may seem laborious when applied to relatively simple examples, but can be useful in analysing more complex conversation strategies. Sociolinguists find dialogue in literary works a useful source of evidence even for populations where experimental data are available. Literary dialogue has the advantage of being completely transparent in terms of context. All relevant factors are in principle available for anyone to test. Experimental data, by contrast, are inevitably incomplete and opaque, as well as being subject to distortion by the prejudices of the investigator or the artificial nature of the experiment.² Conversation in literary works will of course be designed to serve literary purposes, not necessarily to reflect the patterns of everyday speech in any straightforward way. In the case of Homer, the object of the exercise is not to reconstruct the speech practices of any particular historical period, but rather to use the methodology of conversation analysis to give a more exact account of human interaction as it is represented in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

The present discussion will focus on a category of utterances which Homer characterizes by words with the root κερτομ-. There are 21 examples of such words in Homer, nine in the *Iliad* and twelve in the *Odyssey*. They are as follows, with the translations offered by *LSJ*: κερτομέω ('taunt', 'sneer at', 'mock by false statement', 'make game of', *Il.* 2.256, 16.261; *Od.* 2.323, 7.17, 8.153, 13.326, 16.87, 18.350), ἐπικερτομέω ('mock', *Il.* 16.744, 24.649; *Od.* 22.194), κερτομίη ('mockery', *Il.* 20.202, 433; *Od.* 20.263), κερτόμιος ('mocking', 'taunting', *Il.* 1.539, 4.6, 5.419; *Od.* 9.474, 20.177, 24.240), and φιλοκέρτομος ('fond of jeering', *Od.* 22.287).³ It will be assumed in what follows that all these words refer to a single type of activity, which will be referred to as *kertomia*. Discussions of *kertomia* in Homer have tended to focus on one example in particular, where the usual translations as 'taunting' and the like have seemed especially inappropriate. This is at *Il.* 24.649, where the participle *epikertomeôn* introduces a speech by

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¹ See the discussion by J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford 1980) 50-80, esp. 61-2.

² Cf. R. Brown and A. Gilman, 'Politeness theory and Shakespeare's four major tragedies', *Language in Society*

18 (1989) 159-212; M. Sifianou, *Politeness Phenomena in England and Greece. A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Oxford 1992); E. Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address* (Oxford 1996) 30-42.

³ κέρτομος ('mocking', 'delusive') does not occur in Homer.

Achilles to Priam. The importance of a correct interpretation of this word can hardly be overstated, since it not only indicates Achilles' attitude to Priam at this intensely moving and memorable point of the *Iliad* but also has implications for his whole state of mind at the end of the poem. More generally, the issue has a bearing on the nature of Homer's characterization and the degree of subtlety that can be found in his dialogue.

SLEEPING UNDER THE COLONNADE

The conclusion of Achilles' meeting with Priam in *Iliad* 24 presents social problems which go well beyond the baffling *epikertomeôn* (649). The two men have taken food and wine, and Priam then expresses the desire to sleep. Achilles has beds made up for Priam and his herald in the porch (πρόδομος, 673) under the colonnade (αἴθουσα, 644). This is outside (ἐκτός, 650) the main room (μέγαρον, 647) in which they have been dining. Achilles' 'tent' is a full-scale house, and the terminology is familiar from descriptions of other big houses in Homer. There has been much discussion both of the exact meaning of this terminology and of its relationship to the archaeological remains of Mycenaean palaces.⁴ The main point here is that Priam is to pass the night in a liminal space which is distinct from the interior of the building where Achilles himself sleeps.

When the beds are ready, Achilles addresses Priam (*Il.* 24.649-55):

τὸν δ' ἐπικερτομέων προσέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς·
ἐκτὸς μὲν δὴ λέξο, γέρον φίλε, μή τις Ἀχαιῶν
ἐνθάδ' ἐπέλθῃσιν βουλευφόρος, οἳ τέ μοι αἰεὶ
βουλὰς βουλευούσι παρήμενοι, ἢ θέμις ἐστί·
τῶν εἴ τις σε ἴδοιτο θοὴν διὰ νύκτα μέλαιναν,
αὐτίκ' ἂν ἐξείποι Ἀγαμέμνονι ποιμένι λαῶν,
καί κεν ἀνάβλησις λύσιος νεκροῖο γένηται.

Then swift-footed Achilles said *epikertomeôn* to Priam: 'You must sleep outside, dear old man, in case one of the Achaean counsellors comes here – they are constantly joining me to discuss plans, as is the normal way. If one of them were to see you here in the quick black night, he would immediately report it to Agamemnon, shepherd of the people, and that would mean delay in the release of the body.'⁵

The two men arrange a truce for the burial of Hector's body, and go to bed. Thus ends their meeting.

The social problem in Achilles' speech is that in Homeric society it is entirely normal for guests to sleep outside under the colonnade while the host sleeps inside, and there is therefore no reason for him to explain to Priam why he is to sleep there (cf. *Od.* 3.399, 4.297, 7.345). This arrangement represents in spatial terms the intermediate status of the guest between insider and outsider. The significant distinction is between those who are part of the household and those who are not, rather than between different categories of guest. There is no evidence that guests were made to sleep outside because they could not be trusted with nocturnal access to the inner quarters.⁶ The most favoured guests sleep under the colonnade, and express no surprise or resentment at being asked to do so. Nor is there any evidence that a bed under the colonnade was regarded as uncomfortable or undignified, and therefore inappropriate for an elderly or

⁴ For discussion and further references, see H.L. Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments* (London 1950) 415-16; S. West, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* 1 (Oxford 1988) on *Od.* 3.399; A.F. Garvie, *Homer Odyssey Books 6-8* (Cambridge 1994) on *Od.* 7.336.

⁵ Translations from the *Iliad* are taken, with minor adaptations, from the version by M. Hammond (Harmondsworth 1987).

⁶ E.g. Lorimer (n.4) 416: 'Hospitality was extended to all strangers, with or without credentials, and the porch conceded a roof without giving admission ... to the interior of the house.'

distinguished visitor.⁷ Telemachus sleeps under the colonnade at Pylos, where Nestor's invitation suggests that he is receiving the best hospitality that he can offer (*Od.* 3.346-55). Odysseus sleeps under the colonnade in Scheria immediately after Alcinous has made an effusive speech which includes the offer of his daughter's hand in marriage (*Od.* 7.336). He remains a guest, not a member of the family. Odysseus sleeps inside by the fire in Eumaeus' hut, no doubt because it is too small to maintain the spatial distinctions appropriate to a nobleman's house (*Od.* 14.518-22). Penelope, impressed by the disguised Odysseus, invites him to bed down 'in this house' (*Od.* 19.598). Her rapport with the stranger prompts her to accept him not only as a visitor but as a member of the household. Odysseus refuses her offer and spends the night in the porch, thereby indicating that he is not prepared to resume his place in the house on these terms.⁸ He also rejects a luxurious bed (*Od.* 19.336-42, 20.138-43), but sleeping in the porch does not in itself constitute a rejection of luxury. Telemachus and Pisistratus sleep in Menelaus' porch, although they are receiving supremely lavish hospitality from him (*Od.* 4.296-9).

Why then does Achilles volunteer an elaborate explanation for making Priam sleep outside, if it was entirely normal for visitors to do so? This question is not answered by Colin Macleod's suggestion that Achilles is tactfully easing Priam's departure, although it is certainly true that Priam must be able to slip away during the night.⁹ The problem is not why he sleeps outside, but why Achilles feels the need to offer an explanation. There is no hint that Priam ever expected to sleep inside, for example because of the unusual circumstances of spending a night in the enemy camp. Peter Jones suggests that the colonnade of Achilles' tent would have been less comfortable than that of a big house, so that Priam is being fobbed off with rather rough sleeping quarters.¹⁰ Achilles' tent is, however, treated as a full-scale house, and there is no evidence that his colonnade is especially uncomfortable. The formulaic parallels with other hospitality scenes suggest that he enjoys similar facilities for entertaining guests as a nobleman in his home.¹¹ Jones observes that there are hints that Phoenix slept inside (*Il.* 9.617, 658-68), but he is a family retainer rather than a guest.

Achilles' speech may explain too much, but it also explains too little. It treats the possibility of intervention by Agamemnon as no more than an inconvenience. Achilles speaks rather casually, as if he and Priam were friends and Agamemnon likely to cause disruption only on a purely social or administrative level. Furthermore, Macleod (on 649) remarks that 'it is hard to see how Priam by sleeping there [in the porch] would escape the notice of night-visitors'. One explanation would be that the porch is darker than the main room of the building, as is shown by the reference to the torches used by the servants making up the beds (647; cf. *Od.* 4.300, 7.339). The departing slave-women at *Od.* 20.6-8 pay no attention to Odysseus sleeping in the porch. Nevertheless, Hermes forcibly reminds Priam that he is in the gravest danger even in the porch (683-8). His reference to the implications of Priam's being discovered by Agamemnon, recalling Achilles' warning earlier, shows that he is in exactly the same danger outside as he would have been inside. Finally, it is remarkable that Achilles should feel that he has so little defence against nocturnal intrusion. Visitors have hitherto approached his dwelling with extreme deference. Agamemnon's heralds stood 'with fear and respect' (*Il.* 1.331), waiting for him to speak first. The ambassadors 'stood before him' (*Il.* 9.193), and waited for his response.¹² Now he

⁷ E.g. N.J. Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary* 6 (Cambridge 1993) on *Il.* 24.633-76: 'Given Priam's age and status it could have seemed discourteous to make him sleep outside.'

⁸ Cf. R.B. Rutherford, *Homer Odyssey Books 19 and 20* (Cambridge 1992) on *Od.* 20.1: 'It is appropriate that Odysseus, at home but not recognised or accepted as master of the house, should occupy a "liminal" position.'

⁹ C.W. Macleod, *Homer Iliad Book 24* (Cambridge 1982) on 649.

¹⁰ P.V. Jones, 'Iliad 24.649: another solution', *CQ* 39 (1989) 247-50, at 250.

¹¹ See Macleod (n.9) on 448-56, 643-8.

¹² These two scenes seem to envisage Achilles' tent as a less substantial structure than it is in *Iliad* 24. Cf. J.B. Hainsworth, *The Iliad: A Commentary* 3 (Cambridge 1993) on *Il.* 9.185, 192.

speaks as if anyone could wander in without notice. One might also have expected him to express some willingness to defend his visitor from arrest or other harassment, as indeed Zeus promised that he would (156, 185). He unhesitatingly offered protection to Calchas from assault by any of the Greeks (*Il.* 1.85-91), and warned Agamemnon not to lay hands on any of his possessions other than Briseis (*Il.* 1.293-303). He may now be more respectful towards Agamemnon than he was in Book 1 (cf. *Il.* 23.890-1, 24.654), but his failure to guarantee the safety of his suppliant seems odd.

OFF-RECORD CONVERSATION STRATEGIES IN HOMER

Achilles says both too much and too little. A variety of explanations are in principle possible for this, but it seems worth investigating whether such behaviour is explicable in terms of conversational practice in Homer and elsewhere. Achilles' speech can in fact be illuminated by Grice's well-known and influential theory of conversational implicature.¹³ Grice proposed four maxims which specify the principles governing maximally efficient communication. The maxims are: relevance (be relevant), quantity (say no more or less than is required), quality (be truthful, sincere), and manner (be perspicuous, avoid ambiguity and obscurity). Grice did not of course suggest that every utterance meets these conditions. The maxims are the basic assumptions of any talk exchange, and departures from them are always significant. The hearer initially assumes that the speaker is following the four maxims. If any of the maxims appears to have been violated, then the hearer tries to interpret the utterance as conforming to the maxims at some deeper level. This kind of inference is called a conversational implicature. S.C. Levinson observes that 'implicatures are not semantic inferences, but rather inferences based on both the content of what has been said and some specific assumptions about the co-operative nature of ordinary verbal interaction.'¹⁴

The speaker may thus violate the maxim of relevance by saying something apparently irrelevant, thereby inviting the hearer to search for the real relevance of the utterance. The maxim of quantity would be violated by exaggeration or understatement, the maxim of quality by irony or rhetorical questions, and the maxim of manner by vagueness or ambiguity. Interpretation of such clues will often depend to some extent on the speaker's tone of voice or facial expression, and on the hearer's knowledge of the context. In the present case, Achilles breaches the maxim of quantity by saying both too much and too little. He also breaches the maxim of quality by misrepresenting both the threat posed by a possible intervention by Agamemnon and his own capacity to deal with it.

Violations of the Gricean maxims can thus indicate that an utterance has an 'off-record' significance.

A communicative act is done off record if it is done in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act. In other words, the actor leaves himself an 'out' by providing himself with a number of defensible interpretations; he cannot be held to have committed himself to just one particular interpretation of his act.¹⁵

There may often in practice be only one viable interpretation of an off-record communication, but the usefulness of the strategy resides in the degree of formal latitude allowed by an indirect formulation. The speaker can always repudiate the hearer's inference about the off-record

¹³ H.P. Grice, 'Logic and conversation', in P. Cole and J. Morgan (eds), *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts* (New York 1975) 41-58 (based on lectures given in 1967). Cf. S.C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge 1983) ch.3.

¹⁴ Levinson (n.13) 104.

¹⁵ P. Brown and S.C. Levinson, *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage* (*Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics* 4; 2nd edn, Cambridge 1987; 1st edn, 1978) 211.

significance of the utterance, and take refuge in its literal meaning. This may be because the speaker is afraid to go on record with a potentially offensive utterance, and wishes to leave some scope for evasion of retaliation by the victim or criticism from a third party. Alternatively, the speaker may choose politely to allow the hearer an ‘out’, the formal option of taking the utterance at face value and ignoring its off-record significance. Finally, the contrast between on- and off-record meanings may be a source of irony or humour.

The first example of an off-record communication in the *Iliad* comes very early in the poem, perhaps surprisingly in the mouth of Achilles. He may prefer to say what he thinks (cf. *Il.* 9.308-13), but he is also capable of being indirect. In the assembly of the Greek army at the beginning of the *Iliad*, he says to Agamemnon (*Il.* 1.62-7):

ἀλλ’ ἄγε δὴ τινα μάντιν ἐρείομεν ἢ ἱερῆα,
 ἢ καὶ ὄνειροπόλον, καὶ γάρ τ’ ὄναρ ἐκ Διὸς ἐστίν,
 ὅς κ’ εἴποι ὅ τι τόσσον ἐχώσατο Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων,
 εἴτ’ ἄρ’ ὅ γ’ εὐχολῆς ἐπιμέμφεται εἴθ’ ἑκατόμβης,
 αἴ κέν πως ἀρνῶν κνίσης αἰγῶν τε τελείων
 βούλεται ἀντιάσας ἡμῖν ἀπὸ λοιγὸν ἀμῦναι.

Let us ask some prophet or priest, or an interpreter of dreams (as dreams too come from Zeus), who might tell us why Phoebus Apollo has felt such anger against us, whether he faults our prayer or our sacrifice – if in any way he may be willing to accept the smoke of lambs and goats without blemish, and drive the plague away from us.

Calchas is the only prophet mentioned in the *Iliad* as being attached to the Greek army, and his great prestige (cf. *Il.* 1.69-72) means that he will inevitably be called upon by the Greek leaders in a crisis such as this. Achilles’ proposal can thus refer only to him. Calchas understands this, and immediately stands up and says ‘you ask [κέλευαί] me to tell of the anger of Apollo’ (74-5). Achilles has done nothing of the kind, at least on record, but Calchas rightly identifies an off-record request. Achilles avoids asking him on record about the reason for Apollo’s anger in case he cannot explain it, which would be embarrassing for both of them.¹⁶ A direct order or request by Achilles would have left Calchas no ‘out’ if he were unable or unwilling to answer. It would also have committed Achilles on record to the belief that Calchas might help, which would be awkward if he then failed to do so. Furthermore, if he had asked Calchas directly it might have looked suspiciously as though he had suborned him to attack Agamemnon.

Achilles’ off-record order to Calchas is signalled by violations of the maxim of quantity. He says both too much and too little. He mentions dream-interpreters in his list of potentially helpful religious experts, although there are no dream-interpreters in the *Iliad* and no dream to interpret in the present crisis. He also mentions priests, although there are no priests in the Greek army.¹⁷ On the other hand, he conspicuously fails to mention the distinguished prophet who is present at the assembly and has given useful advice in the past. He speculates about why Apollo is angry and how he might be appeased, but omits to raise the obvious possibility that he was offended by Agamemnon’s treatment of Chryses. The rest of the army had wanted Agamemnon to accept Chryses’ ransom (*Il.* 1.22-3), so Agamemnon’s offence against the priest was clear to everyone. Achilles’ elaboration of superfluous possibilities and omission of obvious ones draw attention to the off-record significance of his utterance.

¹⁶ R.P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes. Speech and Performance in the Iliad* (Ithaca and London 1989) 40, observes that Calchas interprets Achilles’ speech as ‘a specific kind of request’. Martin also remarks (33) that ‘Achilles ... is good at hinting’ (comparing *Il.* 1.202-5, 19.20-7).

¹⁷ Cf. J. Latacz, *Homers Ilias. Gesamtkommentar 1* (Munich and Leipzig 2000) on *Il.* 1.62-3: ‘die zweite Kategorie (Priester) ist grundsätzlich an feste Heiligtümer (Tempel) gebunden ... und erscheint dementsprechend in der Ilias nur auf troianischer Seite’.

Athena uses an equally subtle off-record strategy when she requests Zeus to release Odysseus from Ogygia (*Od.* 5.7-10):

Ζεῦ πάτερ ἦδ' ἄλλοι μάκαρες θεοὶ αἰὲν ἔοντες,
μή τις ἔτι πρόφρων ἀγανὸς καὶ ἥπιος ἔστω
σκηπτοῦχος βασιλεύς, μηδὲ φρεσὶν αἴσιμα εἰδώς,
ἀλλ' αἰεὶ χαλεπὸς τ' εἶη καὶ αἴσυλα ῥέζοι.

Father Zeus, and you other blessed immortal gods: I could wish that henceforth no sceptred king should set himself to be kind and gentle and equitable; I would have every king a tyrant and evil-doer.¹⁸

Athena violates the maxim of quality by saying the opposite of what she means, and violates the maxim of quantity by exaggerating. She then goes on to give an account of Odysseus' plight, but violates the maxim of relevance by omitting to explain why she has made these observations at this particular time. Zeus realizes that she has made an off-record request, and sends Hermes to tell Calypso to release Odysseus. Zeus has the benefit of contextual clues as well as verbal ones, since he knows that Athena is well disposed towards Odysseus. She adopts an off-record strategy both out of deference to Zeus and in order to reduce the humiliation to herself if he refuses. Both deities have an 'out' if Zeus is disinclined to accede to her request.¹⁹

Off-record conversation strategies are especially common in the context of hospitality, and there are three scenes in which Grice's theory of conversational implicature can illuminate subtle interaction between host and guest. In the first of these scenes, Odysseus elicits the offer of further hospitality from Eumaeus by expressing his intention to go into the town in order to beg and to serve the suitors (*Od.* 15.307-24). He violates the maxim of quantity by giving an unnecessarily elaborate account of what he will do in the city, describing the strenuous and degrading activities which await him there. He also violates the maxim of quality by dwelling insincerely on the good treatment for which he hopes from the suitors. Odysseus' insincerity is obvious because Eumaeus has already said enough to make it clear to him that the suitors would be likely to treat him badly (*Od.* 14.59-61, 80-108, 180-2). His suggestion that he is departing because his continued presence would be a burden (309) should probably be seen as another violation of the maxim of quality, since no competent guest would say such a thing if he believed it to be true. A genuine intention to depart must be stated forcefully if the host is not to interpret the utterance as an off-record request to stay longer (e.g. *Od.* 1.303-5, 10.17-18, 483-6, 13.38-46). Commentators may thus be wrong to mock Telemachus for 'the abrupt boyish candour' with which he announces to Menelaus his wish to depart (*Od.* 15.64-6, 87-91).²⁰ A guest who really wanted to leave must give no hint to his host that he might have preferred to stay or that departure will expose him to inconvenience or discomfort. Eumaeus grasps what is required of him and presses Odysseus to stay.

Odysseus' off-record request is designed to test Eumaeus' hospitality without causing offence (*Od.* 15.304). Hosts can similarly use off-record strategies to test their visitors without risking a breach of the norms of hospitality. Telemachus does so shortly afterwards when Eumaeus

¹⁸ Translations from the *Odyssey* are taken, with minor adaptations, from the version by W.H. Shewring (Oxford 1980).

¹⁹ Eumaeus expresses off-record advice to Telemachus in the form of a question about his intentions (*Od.* 16.137-45). See E. Minchin, 'Verbal behaviour in its social context: three question strategies in Homer's *Odyssey*', *CQ* 52 (2002) 15-32, at 18-19. In Gricean

terms, Eumaeus breaches the maxim of quantity by including detail about Laertes which is unnecessary to the ostensible meaning of his utterance.

²⁰ W.B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer* 2 (2nd edn, London 1965; 1st edn, 1948), on *Od.* 15.65-6. It is open to question whether Telemachus' words at *Od.* 4.594-9 are forceful enough, but the fact is that he does not depart then.

presents him with the problem of dealing with the disguised Odysseus (*Od.* 16.65-7). Eumaeus seems to have been assuming that Telemachus would equip the stranger and send him on his way (*Od.* 14.515-17, 15.337-9), but does not presume either to offer advice or to vouch for Odysseus on the basis of his acquaintance with him. Telemachus launches into an elaborate and emotional account of the problems in his house, and stresses his own inability to protect a guest there. Telemachus' outburst is superfluous, because he has not been asked to receive the stranger into his house and has two satisfactory alternatives to offer. He could either equip the stranger and send him on his way (*Od.* 16.78-81), or supply Eumaeus with the resources to look after him in his hut (*Od.* 16.82-4). We should therefore interpret his exaggerated complaint as a breach of the maxim of quantity which signals an off-record request to the stranger to offer some assistance. Odysseus understands this, and volunteers an enthusiastic denunciation of the suitors and an apology for not being able to do more to help.

Telemachus subjects the prophet Theoclymenus to a similar test. Telemachus was sacrificing to Athena by his ship before leaving Pylos when he was approached by Theoclymenus, a fugitive desperate to escape from the relatives of a man he had killed (*Od.* 15.223-81). Telemachus took Theoclymenus on board, and promised him hospitality in Ithaca. When they arrived there, Telemachus announced his own plans and gave orders to his crew, but made no provision for his suppliant. Theoclymenus unsurprisingly asks where he is supposed to go. Telemachus explains that his own house is unsuitable to receive visitors, and suggests that he seek lodging with Eurymachus, one of the leading suitors (*Od.* 15.513-24).

The problems with Telemachus' behaviour were crisply outlined by D.L. Page:

You cannot stay with me, says Telemachus to his new friend, but I can strongly recommend the hospitality of my most dangerous enemy; not that you will often find him at his home – he spends his time in my palace, being easily the foremost competitor for my mother's hand and for the place that is my father's.²¹

Replies to Page have not been convincing. The more mainstream suggestions have been as follows: that Telemachus hits upon Eurymachus only as a first thought or in a moment of pessimism; that Eurymachus has no quarrel with Theoclymenus and is bound by the normal laws of hospitality; and that Theoclymenus has to go somewhere, and Eurymachus is rich and influential enough to be an effective host.²² No parallels are offered for the unlikely practice of lodging guests with one's enemies, and Eurymachus has in any case shown unremitting contempt for the laws of hospitality. There is no reason to suppose that he would accept Theoclymenus as a guest, or that he would treat him decently if he did so. The problem that Theoclymenus has to go somewhere is readily solved by the loyal, willing, and efficient Peiraeus.²³

The flaw in Page's account of the situation lies in his describing Theoclymenus as Telemachus' 'new friend'. His proposal would indeed be remarkable were this the case. Theoclymenus is actually a complete stranger whom Telemachus has obligingly rescued from men determined to kill him. Theoclymenus could for all he knew be a friend of Eurymachus, and therefore someone to whom it would be dangerous in the extreme to give hospitality.

²¹ D.L. Page, *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford 1955) 84.

²² E.g. W.J. Woodhouse, *The Composition of Homer's Odyssey* (Oxford 1930) 163; G.S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge 1962) 240-1; A. Thornton, *People and Themes in Homer's Odyssey* (London 1970) 73; B. Fenik, *Studies in the Odyssey* (*Hermes Einzelschrift* 30, Wiesbaden 1974) 236-9; A. Hoekstra, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* 2 (Oxford 1989) on *Od.* 15.513-22.

²³ Cf. N. Austin, 'Telemachos polymechanos', *CSCA* 2 (1969) 45-63, at 58-9; *id.*, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1975) 190-1. Austin himself revives the view of C.H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, MA 1958) 341 n.13, that Telemachus tries to solicit an omen by uttering the opposite of what he believes and hopes, but he admits that there are no parallels for such a practice.

Telemachus' speech thus amounts to an off-record question to Theoclymenus about his views on Ithacan politics, something which it would be impolite to ask him directly. Telemachus breaches the maxim of quantity by giving an exaggerated account of the virtues of Eurymachus, and the maxim of quality by making a suggestion which any genuine friend of his could only find offensive, not to say alarming. If Theoclymenus accepted the suggestion without complaint, then Telemachus would be well rid of him. As things turn out, he is given the opportunity to demonstrate both his goodwill and his prophetic ability by interpreting an omen, and Telemachus immediately makes more appropriate arrangements for him.

KERTOMIA IN HOMER

It was mentioned above that there is a particular verbal problem relating to the speech in which Achilles invites Priam to sleep outside in *Iliad* 24. This is the verb *epikertomeôn* (649) with which it is introduced. None of the meanings suggested for *kertomia* words by *LSJ* ('mocking', 'taunting', etc.) has been thought suitable either to the tone and content of Achilles' speech or to his behaviour towards Priam generally. Walter Leaf agreed that *epikertomeôn* does indeed mean 'taunting' here, but suggested that it expresses Achilles' attitude to Agamemnon rather than to Priam ('as though he bitterly assumed that his enemy would thwart him at every opportunity').²⁴ This approach has not found much favour, since elsewhere the victim of *kertomia* is always either the addressee of the utterance or at least within earshot of it.

Some scholars have therefore tried to find ways of weakening the force of *epikertomeôn* here so as to make it appropriate to Achilles' apparently friendly demeanour towards Priam. Suggestions include *μετρίως χλευάζων*, 'with gentle mockery' (Eustathius 1369.53), 'laughingly' (*LSJ*), 'teasing', 'mystifying' (Macleod (n.9), *ad loc.*), 'in a bantering tone' (Willcock),²⁵ 'in a gently provocative or mocking tone' (Richardson (n.7), *ad loc.*). Other examples of *kertomia* in Homer do not give much encouragement to these milder translations. Two examples refer to challenges to enemy warriors, three to vaunts over defeated foes, and six to the hubristic behaviour of the suitors and their henchman Melanthius. The context of *kertomia* has actual or threatened violence in eleven cases (*Il.* 1.539, 2.256, 16.260, 744, 20.202, 433; *Od.* 9.474, 20.177, 263, 22.194, 287), and actual or likely anger in four more (*Il.* 4.6, 5.419; *Od.* 8.153, 24.240). *Kertomia* is associated with words denoting insult, outrage, or provocation like *νεικέω* (*Il.* 2.224, 20.251-4; *Od.* 20.267), *ὀνειδίζω* (*Il.* 2.255), *ἐρεθίζω* (*Il.* 4.5, 5.419, 16.261; *Od.* 9.494), *λώβη* (*Il.* 2.275; *Od.* 2.323, 18.347), and *ὑβρις* (*Od.* 16.86, 18.381).

Other scholars have thus accepted that *epikertomeôn* expresses a degree of hostility, and emphasized the latent tension in the scene.²⁶ Achilles responded angrily to Priam's impatience to see Hector's corpse (559-70), and was aware that he might even be provoked to kill him (582-6). Scholars have commented on Priam's various gaffes.²⁷ Mark W. Edwards thus suggested that *epikertomeôn* 'may be intended to convey that he [Achilles] and Priam, though recently united in hospitable meal and understanding of each other's grief, must remain formal enemies ... The proper stage direction might be "distantly"; translation should not perhaps be more specific than

²⁴ W. Leaf, *The Iliad* (2nd edn, London 1900-02) on 649. Cf. N. Postlethwaite, 'Akhilleus and Agamemnon: generalized reciprocity', in C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite and R. Seaford (eds), *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford 1998) 93-104, at 102-3. Postlethwaite suggests 'boasting his superiority [sc. over Agamemnon]' for *epikertomeôn*, but fails to consider other examples of *kertomia* in Homer. See also, in the same volume, G. Zanker, 'Beyond reciprocity: the Akhilleus-Priam scene in *Iliad* 24', 73-92, at 85.

²⁵ M.M. Willcock, *The Iliad of Homer: Books XIII-XXIV* (London 1984) on 649.

²⁶ E.g. E. Minchin, 'The interpretation of a theme in oral epic: *Iliad* 24.559-70', *G&R* 33 (1986) 11-19.

²⁷ E.g. O. Taplin, *Homeric Soundings. The Shaping of the Iliad* (Oxford 1992) 269, 273; Martin (n.16) 144-5; J.M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad. The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago and London 1975) 218; R.J. Rabel, *Plot and Point of View in the Iliad* (Ann Arbor 1997) 202.

“curtly” or “gruffly”.²⁸ The first problem is that these translations bear little or no relation to other examples of *kertomia* in Homer. The second problem is that Achilles’ speech is apparently polite, and Priam responds in kind.

J.T. Hooker introduced a useful new concept into the interpretation of *kertomia*, arguing that it indicates ‘the provocation of another person into behaving in a certain way, whether that is the behaviour desired by the speaker ... or is not desired by him’.²⁹ This interpretation does not, as he observes, work for the three examples of *epikertomeôn*, including the very passage which he was trying to explain. Hooker thus makes the rather desperate suggestion that the word and the passage are imperfectly adapted from another version of the *Iliad*. Jenny Strauss Clay developed Hooker’s notion of provocation, and argued that the provocation is indirect. She suggested that *kertomia* is ‘a subtle way of manipulating someone to do what you want him to do without explicitly saying so’.³⁰ Achilles is thus trying to provoke Priam ‘indirectly and gently’ to go back home immediately because he is in danger, but Priam fails to take the hint. There is a danger here of the tail wagging the dog, with an interpretation which works for *Il.* 24.649 at the cost of distorting the meaning of *kertomia* everywhere else. Clay has little to say about those passages where *kertomia* is clearly ‘mockery’ or ‘taunting’, and there is no particular emphasis on any intention to elicit a response (e.g. *Il.* 16.744; *Od.* 2.323, 16.87, 18.350, 20.177, 22.194).³¹

Clay may not have given an altogether convincing account of *kertomia*, but she has made a significant contribution to the understanding of the concept by introducing the idea of indirectness. The way forward may lie in the direction of Grice’s theory of conversational implicature, discussed above, with its ability to explain how the off-record significance of an utterance can be interpreted by the hearer. All the examples of *kertomia* in Homer seem, in fact, to encode an offensive or provocative meaning in a form of words which is less overtly offensive or even ostensibly polite.³² The question arises of why anyone would want to employ an off-record strategy in order to be offensive. The reason is partly that it allows the speaker an ‘out’ in the case of retaliation by the victim or criticism from a third party. More subtly, the victim is deprived of an on-record offence to which to respond. Sometimes the victim is altogether unaware of what is happening.

Taunts and vaunts thus exploit off-record strategies in order to allow the speaker an ‘out’ in case the victim retaliates, and several examples are characterized as *kertomia*. The danger of retaliation is especially great when the addressee is Zeus. Hera asks him ‘with *kertomia*’ after the visit of Thetis which god was plotting with him, and accuses him of habitually making decisions without consulting her (*Il.* 1.539). Her question is an off-record criticism, since she is well aware that he was plotting with Thetis to help the Trojans (536-8, 555-9). She violates the maxim of quantity by exaggerating, and the maxim of quality by employing rhetorical questions.³³ Zeus has enough clues to grasp her real meaning, but exploits the ‘out’ afforded by her

²⁸ M.W. Edwards, *Homer Poet of the Iliad* (Baltimore and London 1987) 312-13.

²⁹ J.T. Hooker, ‘A residual problem in *Iliad* 24’, *CQ* 36 (1986) 32-7, at 35. Hooker’s useful catalogue of κερτομ- words in Homer omits *Od.* 2.323 and 22.287.

³⁰ J.S. Clay, ‘*Iliad* 24.649 and the semantics of ΚΕΡΤΟΜΕΩ’, *CQ* 49 (1999) 618-21, at 621.

³¹ An ancient derivation of κερτομέω from κῆρ + τέμνω was revived by Jones (n.10), translating ‘pierce to the heart’, ‘cut to the quick’. Critics (e.g. Richardson (n.7) on *Il.* 24.649) observe that *kertomia* often has no such effect. M.J. Clarke, “‘Heart-cutting talk’: Homeric κερτομέω and related words”, *CQ* 51 (2001) 329-38, argues that τέμνω means ‘divide’ rather than ‘pierce’, and that division of the mental apparatus describes confusion or indecision. *Kertomia* will thus be ‘talk that is liable to

temporarily confuse the person addressed’ (335). The weakness of this etymological approach is shown by the fact that few if any of the examples of *kertomia* in Homer seem to be ‘talk that is designed to cause confusion and uncertainty’ (336).

³² *Kertomia* is thus a species of irony, which typically involves an opposition between two levels of discourse or awareness. See D.C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London 1969) 19-20. Muecke’s analysis of the techniques of ‘impersonal’ irony (67-86) contains much that is relevant to *kertomia*.

³³ Rhetorical questions are formally insincere because they purport to seek information which the speaker in reality already possesses. Cf. Brown and Levinson (n.15) 223-5.

off-record strategy to give a reply which treats her utterance merely as an information-seeking question. She is thus forced to go on record with her complaint, and provokes the anger from Zeus which her initial off-record strategy had (at least ostensibly) been designed to evade.

Athena employs *kertomia* when she addresses Zeus after the wounding of Aphrodite (*Il.* 5.421-5). Her tone is superficially polite, and she begins with the common politeness gambit of apologizing in advance for any offence which her words may cause (cf. *Il.* 9.33, 10.115, 145, 15.115, 16.22; *Od.* 1.158, 24.248).³⁴ She breaches the maxim of quality by offering suggestions about Aphrodite's injury which are obviously false, and breaches the maxim of quantity by exaggerating. These breaches give clues to the real significance of her utterance, which is an off-record taunt. Zeus is explicitly stated to be the object of this provocation (419), and it is his reaction which is described. Aphrodite herself is also within earshot, and it is common in *kertomia* to talk about someone in the third person in their presence, thus causing offence but giving no handle for a reply.

Zeus himself employs *kertomia* on one occasion. He mentions the possibility of ending the war in order to provoke Hera (*Il.* 4.7-19). He does not propose this course of action explicitly, and does not even address her directly.

By raising the possibility of reconciling the Achaeans with the Trojans, he intends to inflame the anger of the pro-Achaean goddesses Athene and Here and so achieve his real aim, the resumption of the general conflict after Menelaus' hollow victory [in the duel in *Iliad* 3].³⁵

When Hera interprets his utterance as a proposal to end the war, he could if he wished have denied that he had made any such proposal, or even that he was talking to her at all. He thus manages to provoke her without committing himself on record to any particular proposal.

The suitors in the *Odyssey* are addicted to *kertomia*. Telemachus expects it from them (*Od.* 16.87), and promises to protect Odysseus from it (*Od.* 20.263). He has good reason for his fears. When Philoetius vaunts over the dead suitor Ctesippus he addresses him as φιλοκέρτομος ('fond of *kertomia*', *Od.* 22.287), and alludes to the occasion when he threw an ox-foot at Odysseus at a banquet. That was Ctesippus' only other appearance in the *Odyssey*, and the speech which he made before throwing the ox-foot should thus be understood as *kertomia* even though it was not so described at the time (*Od.* 20.292-8).

κέκλυτέ μευ, μνηστῆρες ἀγήνορες, ὄφρα τι εἶπω·
μοῖραν μὲν δὴ ξείνος ἔχει πάλαι, ὡς ἐπέοικεν,
ἴσην· οὐ γὰρ καλὸν ἀτέμβειν οὐδὲ δίκαιον
ξείνους Τηλεμάχου, ὅς κεν τάδε δώμαθ' ἵκηται.
ἀλλ' ἄγε οἱ καὶ ἐγὼ δῶ ξείνιον, ὄφρα καὶ αὐτὸς
ἦε λοετροχόωι δῶηι γέρας ἠέ τωι ἄλλωι
δμῶων, οἱ κατὰ δώματ' Ὀδυσσῆος θείοιο.

High-hearted suitors, hear my words. For some while now the stranger has had his portion no less than the rest of us; rightly so – it would not be just or honourable to deny his due to whatever guest of Telemachus comes to this house. And now I also should like to make him a gift in friendship, so that he in turn can offer a present – to the bath-woman, perhaps, or to some other servant of King Odysseus.

Ctesippus' speech is in itself almost perfectly polite, but its true significance is made clear both by the context and by the violation of the maxim of quality in his incongruous suggestion that a

³⁴ Cf. I.M. Hohendahl-Zoetelief, *Manners in the Homeric Epic* (Mnemosyne Supplement 63, Leiden 1980) 22-7.

³⁵ Hooker (n.29) 33.

beggar will exchange gifts with a bath-attendant.³⁶ The effect of Ctesippus' *kertomia* derives from the contrast between the on-record discourse of the aristocratic banquet and the off-record implication that Odysseus is a contemptible beggar who has no place in such an environment. Eurymachus makes similar gestures to politeness at the beginning of his jibe at Odysseus' baldness (*Od.* 18.351-5). The force of Eurymachus' *kertomia* lies in the contrast between his relatively polite on-record suggestions and the off-record implication that they are wholly inappropriate to this ugly and idle beggar.

Telemachus experienced the *kertomia* of the suitors when he asserted his maturity and proposed to sail to Pylos. Two individual suitors respond with derisive speeches which are characterized as *kertomia*. The following is the first of them (*Od.* 2.325-30):

ἦ μάλα Τηλέμαχος φόνον ἡμῖν μερμηρίζει.
 ἦ τινας ἐκ Πύλου ἄξει ἀμύντορας ἡμαθόεντος,
 ἦ ὅ γε καὶ Σπάρτηθεν, ἐπεὶ νύ περ ἴεται αἰνῶς·
 ἦ καὶ εἰς Ἐφύρην ἐθέλει, πείραν ἄρουραν,
 ἔλθειν, ὄφρ' ἔνθεν θυμοφθόρα φάρμακ' ἐνείκηι,
 ἐν δὲ βάλῃ κρητῆρι καὶ ἡμέας πάντας ὀλέσσει.

Beyond all question, Telemachus is plotting our deaths. He will bring back men to fight for him, from sandy Pylos or else from Sparta, so fierce is his appetite for slaughter. Or perhaps he means to make his way to the fruitful soil of Ephyra and bring from there those poisons that will destroy a man; he will drop them into our mixing bowl, and that will be the end of us all.

This speech breaches the maxim of quantity by exaggeration and elaboration, signalling the off-record taunt that Telemachus is manifestly incapable of any such *démarche*. He had insisted that he was no longer a child (νήπιος, 313), but the suitors pretend to take him seriously with ironic euphemism while implying an adult discourse from which he is excluded (*cf.* Hermes' 'you have treated me with *kertomia* like a child', Aesch. *PV* 986). Achilles similarly treats Aeneas like a child (νηπύτιον, 200) when offering him ironical advice which encodes an off-record threat. Aeneas characterizes this as *kertomia* (*Il.* 20.202).³⁷

The Phaeacians have something of the suitors' taste for *kertomia*, and Athena throws a mist around Odysseus to defend him from it (*Od.* 7.17). A subtle example is Laodamas' invitation to the disguised Odysseus to participate in the Phaeacian games.³⁸ Odysseus refuses, characterizing the Phaeacians' behaviour as *kertomia* (*Od.* 8.153).³⁹ Some scholars have treated the invitation as genuinely polite, and regarded Odysseus as taking offence where none was intended.⁴⁰ There are indeed no violations of the Gricean maxims in Laodamas' speech, and the clues to the off-record insult are contextual. He and Euryalus have talked about Odysseus in the third person in his presence, which is common in *kertomia* (*cf.* *Il.* 5.421-5, 16.744-50; *Od.* 2.325-36, 18.351-5, 20.292-8).⁴¹ The Phaeacians are confident of their skill in athletics, and thus that they

³⁶ *Cf.* Rutherford (n.8) on *Od.* 20.292-5.

³⁷ Hector implicitly characterizes a one-line threat by Achilles as *kertomia* (*Il.* 20.433), where the assonance ἄσσοι ... θᾶσσοι suggests 'grim sarcasm' (Macleod (n.9) 51).

³⁸ See generally M. Dickie, 'Phaeacian athletes', *PLLS* 4 (1983) 237-76, at 246-51; W.J. Slater, 'Symptotic ethics in the *Odyssey*', in O. Murray (ed.), *Sympotica. A Symposium on the Symposium* (Oxford 1990) 213-20, at 217-19.

³⁹ 'The plur. [κελεύετε] either includes Euryalus, whose words Odysseus may then be assumed to have heard ..., or is addressed to all the young men, of whom

he takes Laodamas to be merely the spokesman' (Garvie (n.4) on *Od.* 8.153).

⁴⁰ E.g. Jones (n.10) 247; Garvie (n.4) on *Od.* 8.133-57, 145, 146; Clay (n.30) 619. Better is J.B. Hainsworth, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey 1* (Oxford 1988) on *Od.* 8.145: 'The offence lies in the challenge to a guest, especially to a guest in Odysseus' condition.'

⁴¹ *Cf.* H.N. Pelliccia, *Mind, Body, and Speech in Homer and Pindar (Hypomnemata 107, Göttingen 1995)* 169-70, 179-80, 270-1; *id.*, 'The interpretation of *Iliad* 6.145-9 and the symptotic contribution to rhetoric', *Colby Quarterly* 38 (2002) 197-230, at 203 n.15, 214 n.45.

will beat him (100-3). Odysseus, despite his evident strength (134-7), is in a bad physical and psychological state (137-9, 149, 182-3, 230-3). He does not look like an athlete, and seems likely to make a fool of himself if he competes. Euryalus makes this clear in his overtly offensive challenge (159-64), but the underlying assumption was already present in Laodamas' initial proposal. Odysseus could have left Laodamas' insult off record by availing himself of the 'out' and politely refusing his invitation, but he chooses to give an explicit interpretation of the *kertomia* (cf. *Il.* 20.202, 433; *Od.* 13.326), and forces the Phaeacian noblemen either to back down or to perform the insult on record (cf. Zeus and Hera at *Il.* 1.539-67, discussed above). He runs the risk of being accused of overreacting to an inoffensive invitation. Laodamas insults Odysseus off record in the first instance partly in order to protect himself against precisely this type of riposte, but largely to emphasize the exclusion of this stranger from the aristocratic world of the games.

Four examples of *kertomia* exploit the victim's ignorance of the true significance of what is happening. Odysseus' vaunt over Polyphemus (*Od.* 9.475-9) begins by evoking his unawareness at the time of his crimes of the nature of the man whose companions he was eating, and of the punishment which was in store for him: 'Cyclops, your prisoner after all was to prove not quite defenceless – the man whose friends you devoured so brutally in your cave. No, your sins were to find you out.' Odysseus only goes fully on record in the last two lines of the speech: 'You felt no shame to devour your guests in your own home; hence this requital from Zeus and the other gods.' Odysseus later accuses Athena of mocking him with a false statement that he is in Ithaca (*Od.* 13.326-8). Her words are inoffensive in themselves, but he is always on the *qui vive* for *kertomia* and wrongly believes that she is amusing herself with an off-record joke.⁴² She adopts a playful tone, treating Odysseus as childishly simple (νήπιος, 237), and keeping him in suspense about where he is until the end of the speech. He plays a similar game himself with Laertes, when his actual words are quite polite (*Od.* 24.240).⁴³ Finally, there is one case where *kertomia* consists of actions rather than words. Wasps are provoked by mischievous boys, with the result that they attack innocent passers-by (*Il.* 16.259-62).⁴⁴ The boys perpetrate an off-record offence against both the wasps and the travellers. The pleasure of the *kertomia* for the boys is that only they are in possession of the full truth, and wasps and travellers may never know who has caused all the trouble.

Kertomia is highly appropriate to the battlefield vaunt, where the victor exploits contrasts between the (verbally) off-record reality of his victim's plight and an ironical on-record account of it. Patroclus thus vaunts over the dead Cebriones (*Il.* 16.744-50):

τὸν δ' ἐπικερτομέων προσέφησ', Πατρόκλεες ἱππεῦ·
ὦ πόποι, ἦ μάλ' ἐλαφρὸς ἀνὴρ, ὡς ρεῖα κυβιστᾶι.
εἰ δὴ που καὶ πόντῳ ἐν ἰχθυόεντι γένοιτο,
πολλοὺς ἂν κορέσειεν ἀνὴρ ὅδε τήθεα διφῶν,
νηὸς ἀποθρῶισκων, εἰ καὶ δυσπέμφελος εἴη,
ὡς νῦν ἐν πεδίῳ ἐξ ἵππων ρεῖα κυβιστᾶι.
ἦ ῥα καὶ ἐν Τρώεσσι κυβιστητῆρες ἔασιν.

Then, horseman Patroclus, you spoke *epikertomeôn*: 'Oh, this is a really agile man, a ready acrobat! I should think he would be good too if he was out on the fish-filled sea – this man could feed a large number with the oysters he could find, diving off a ship, even in rough weather, to judge by his easy tumble to the plain from his chariot. Oh yes, the Trojans have their acrobats too!'

⁴² Clay (n.30) 620 sees a reference to Athena's earlier attempt to elicit a reaction from Odysseus (248-9), but his complaint here is that she is continuing to deceive him, long after the game of concealed identities is over.

⁴³ Cf. generally A. Heubeck, 'Zwei homerische πεῖραι (ω 205 ff.-B 53 ff.)', *Živa Antika* 31 (1981) 73-83.

⁴⁴ On the boys' game, see J.T. Kakridis, *Homer Revisited* (Lund 1971) 138-40; R. Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary* 4 (Cambridge 1992) on *Il.* 16.259-65. For *kertomia* meaning almost 'practical joke', see *Soph. Phil.* 1235-6; *Eur. Cyc.* 687; *Alc.* 1125; *Hel.* 619; *IA* 849.

Patroclus' humorous compliment implies a conversational context which is cruelly at variance with Cebriones' death-spasm. The off-record significance of his utterance is signalled partly by its context and partly by violations of the maxims of quantity and quality.⁴⁵ Clay suggests that this is a case where 'the addressee fails to hear the provocative statement', but it is hard to see what Patroclus could have been manipulating Cebriones into doing even if the latter were not obviously dead.⁴⁶ Eumaeus' vaunt over Melanthius employs a similar strategy (*Od.* 22.195-9). His words are ostensibly quite polite, but their off-record significance is clear both from the context and from their somewhat exaggerated style. The effect of the *kertomia* again derives from the contrast between the utterance's comparatively inoffensive ostensible meaning and its menacing off-record significance.

Finally, there are two cases where *kertomia* is so transparent as to be virtually on-record abuse. This is no doubt evidence of the social ineptitude of the perpetrators. Melanthius shares his new masters' taste for *kertomia*.⁴⁷ His threat to the disguised Odysseus (*Od.* 20.178-82) violates the maxim of quantity by employing understatement, as well as violating the maxim of quality by employing rhetorical questions. His threat is formally off record, although the literal significance of his utterance is obvious. His *kertomia* is very crude, in keeping with his coarse and abusive character. Thersites' *kertomia* (*Il.* 2.256) is also quite crude, at best only minimally off record and including a good deal of on-record abuse. The exaggerated rhetorical questions which he addresses to Agamemnon are humorous (*cf.* 215) off-record criticisms, rather than sincere attempts to seek information.

'Sarcasm' is the best English translation of *kertomia*, although missing its distinctive element of ironic politeness. *Kertomia* operates from a position of superiority, or at least temporary advantage, toying with the victim's inability to retaliate against or even understand the taunt. The offence is off record, encoded in words or behaviour which are ostensibly less offensive or even polite.

ACHILLES AND PRIAM

Priam's request to sleep in Achilles' tent is startling and problematic. He takes the initiative in going to bed, which is the prerogative of the guest (*cf.* *Od.* 4.294-5, 11.330-1).⁴⁸ Suppliants and other dependents, by contrast, are usually told by their hosts when to retire (*cf.* *Il.* 9.617-18, 658-62; *Od.* 7.334-43). Priam thus misinterprets his relationship with Achilles. It could be argued that the two men have achieved an understanding which transcends mere etiquette, but the word *epikertomeôn* (*Il.* 24.649) is an irreducible objection to such a reading.⁴⁹ Achilles does not overlook Priam's *faux pas*, although he responds more politely than he did to his earlier gaffe (552-70).

Telemachus employs off-record strategies on two occasions in the *Odyssey* when he feels unable to offer accommodation to visitors. In the first of them, he explains to Theoclymenus that his own house is unsuitable to receive guests, and suggests that he seek lodging with Eurymachus (*Od.* 15.513-24). The striking similarity here is not just that Achilles says that his dwelling is vulnerable to potentially hostile intruders, but that he too proposes to accommodate

⁴⁵ See Pelliccia (n.41) 1995: 168 on the 'self-consciously artificial and flamboyant' language in Patroclus' taunt. Pelliccia (n.41) 2002 discusses the symptomatic connotations of the εἰκάζειν (comparison) which Patroclus employs here (*cf.* *Od.* 18.353-5 for another example in *kertomia*).

⁴⁶ Clay (n.30) 619 and n.7.

⁴⁷ *Cf.* *Od.* 17.217-32, 248-53; J. Russo, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* 3 (Oxford 1992) on *Od.* 17.231-2.

⁴⁸ *Cf.* W. Arend, *Die typischen Scenen bei Homer* (Berlin 1933) 101-5; S. Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome. Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene* (Ann Arbor 1993) 31-2, 67-9.

⁴⁹ Some scholars, however, simply ignore the implications of *epikertomeôn*. One *JHS* reader commented that it is 'little more than a formulaic tag, not to be pressed'.

his guest in a place which is if anything even more dangerous. Hermes makes clear to Priam that he is in danger even sleeping outside under Achilles' colonnade (*Il.* 24.683-8). Later, Telemachus describes to the disguised Odysseus the problems in his house and apologizes for his inability to receive guests there (*Od.* 16.69-77), although he has not actually been asked to accommodate him there at all. Achilles alleges that he has no private domestic space, and that the interior of his dwelling is freely available to the military procedures of the Greek army, even though a visitor would not have expected to sleep there anyway. Both men could have avoided reference to these domestic difficulties and made more effective provision for their visitors. Telemachus' responses are apparently illogical, but make sense in terms of their off-record significance.

Achilles' invitation to Priam to sleep outside is superficially polite. He addresses him as γέρον φίλε ('dear old man'), and gives reasons for his suggestion.⁵⁰ The interpretation of *kertomia* being proposed here has the advantage of explaining how an utterance can be unfriendly in intent while being ostensibly polite. The true significance of *kertomia* is always more or less off record, and its surface meaning relatively inoffensive. What we should expect from Homer's characterization of Achilles' speech as *kertomia* is some violation of the Gricean maxims which would indicate that the speech has an off-record significance. Achilles does indeed violate the maxim of quantity, both by offering a superfluous explanation of why he is making Priam sleep outside and by omitting to give the expected reassurance that he could deal with a possible intervention by Agamemnon. He also breaches the maxim of quality by understatement and insincerity, since he misrepresents both the threat posed by an intervention by Agamemnon and his own capacity to deal with it. He goes on to ask Priam how long a truce he needs for the burial of Hector. This is a generous offer, to which Priam responds with polite appreciation, and Achilles concludes the encounter with a gesture of reassurance (671-2). He may to some extent be placated by Priam's recognition that the war must continue. Nevertheless, his *kertomia* has decisively realigned their relationship. The terms on which Priam goes to bed have been defined in a way which makes clear that what has passed between them does not affect the continuation of the war.

Secondly, there is the question of Priam's departure. He has evidently forgotten the dangers of loitering in the Greek camp (*cf.* Hermes' warning, 683-8).⁵¹ Macleod may not have given an altogether convincing interpretation of the meaning of *epikertomeôn*, but he offers a useful account of Achilles' predicament: 'Achilles knows that his guest must leave by night, and his speech hints at the danger of his remaining. He knows too that a god has escorted Priam (563-7); and he guesses that the same god will help him return, as in fact happens.'⁵² Achilles obviously cannot make plans for his visitor's departure on this basis (e.g. 'When is Hermes coming to collect you?'), but he wants to establish that he knows what is going on and that he resents Priam's disingenuousness. The closest parallel for *kertomia* in such a context is in Hesiod's *Theogony*, when Zeus responds to Prometheus' attempt to trick him. Prometheus has given him a choice between two portions of a sacrificial animal, one of which seems unappetizing but actually contains most of the best meat. Zeus replies (543-4): 'Son of Iapetos, outstanding among all the lords, my good sir, how unfairly you have divided the portions.'⁵³ Hesiod characterizes the speech as *kertomia* (κερτομέων, 545). Zeus's words are polite, although it could be argued that irony is implied by a certain exaggeration (breaching the maxim of quantity) in his address

⁵⁰ On giving reasons as a politeness strategy, see Brown and Levinson (n.15) 128-9; Minchin (n.19) 18 n.19. For other polite formulae in this scene, see Macleod (n.9) on 661, 669.

⁵¹ Cf. Macleod (n.9) on 655: 'If Priam really were seen, something worse than "a delay in the release of the corpse" would happen.' More explicit is Clay (n.30) 619

n.8: 'even Hermes does not say the obvious: that Priam will be killed if found in the Greek camp'.

⁵² Macleod (n.9) on 649.

⁵³ Trans. M.L. West (Oxford 1988). West translates φάτο κερτομέων (545) as 'chided'. In his commentary (Oxford 1966) he offers 'carping' for κερτομέων, and comments 'not in jest but in displeasure'.

to Prometheus. He sees through Prometheus' trick and is angered by it, although he goes along with the deception for his own reasons. Hesiod marks his superiority over his would-be deceiver by giving him three times the rare formula ἄφθιτα μήδεα εἰδώς ('whose designs do not fail', 545, 550, 561), and stressing that he 'recognized the trick and did not mistake it' (551). *Kertomia* is the *mot juste* for a sarcastic expression of superior knowledge expressed in words of ironic politeness.

Priam may not actually be trying to deceive Achilles, but he has nevertheless not felt it necessary to be candid about the role of the gods in his mission to the Greek camp. Achilles is well aware of it, however, having been informed by Thetis of Zeus's wishes (133-40). He was angered earlier by an impatient, even impertinent, request from Priam (552-70), and was especially riled by the implication that he was ignorant of the role of the gods and incapable of understanding what was required of him: 'It is already my own mind to release Hektor to you ... And what is more, you do not deceive me, Priam. I have the wit to see that one of the gods brought you to the fast ships of the Achaians' (560-4). Achilles now employs an off-record strategy to convey a similar response (650-5), implying also that he does not expect to see Priam again. The speech has the light tone which is typical of *kertomia*, as Achilles suggests that intervention by Agamemnon would be a mere social inconvenience. He reaffirms his control of the situation, although Priam grasps little or nothing of his meaning.

Such social and psychological subtleties have often been thought to have no place in Homer. The purpose of this article is to offer a theoretical framework for interpreting a particular category of them, and to contribute something to understanding the puzzling conclusion of the great scene between Achilles and Priam in *Iliad* 24.

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