

Speech-Act Theory and the *Diapēira* of *Iliad*
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The *Diapēira* of *Iliad* 2 is often used as a touchstone for the epic's characterization of Agamemnon. Throughout the history of the interpretation of the epic, however, readers have vacillated over the import of this scene. Although many modern scholars have read Agamemnon's test as a mistake, they do not clarify *why* it is a mistake (in the epic's terms) and they frequently ignore ancient commentators who view it differently. While some recent work has demanded that we develop a more nuanced understanding of the scene (e.g., Russo and Knox 1989), we lack a well-thought methodology for evaluating it.

In this paper, I address this problem by applying distinctions provided by speech-act theory as developed by J. L. Austin (1975) and John Searle (1969). Even though scholars have successfully used these theories to elucidate the place of speech in Homer (e.g., Martin 1989 and Roochnik 1990), no one has applied speech-act theory to this specific problem. The framing of Agamemnon's test, however, makes it fertile ground for the application of speech-act's distinctions. Often overlooked in interpretations of the *diapēira* is that before the council of kings Agamemnon characterizes his speech as an act (a test: ἔπεσιν περήσομαι/ 2.73) and he articulates his illocutionary intention (the troops *will* flee) which turns out to be, in Austinian terms, the eventual perlocutionary effect. In fact, this is one of the few times in the *Iliad* where a speaker expresses his speech's intended effect.

Applying these distinctions makes it clear that Agamemnon *means* for the test to have the results it does and countermands by implication the popular interpretation that Agamemnon is an inept speaker. I will set out the structure and rhetoric of his speech to argue that Agamemnon's language is not necessarily the problem. Rather, he himself is a poor 'reader' of his circumstances and has underestimated the political dangers of the events of book 1—an argument borne out by the divine intervention and virtuoso speeches by Nestor and Odysseus that follow the test.

Bibliography

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