

Ten Mouths and Ten Tongues: Mass, Elite and the Dialogue of Narrative Voices in the *Iliad*

Iliadic invocations of the Muse open up a dialogic space for the interplay of narrative voices that privilege either mass or elite agency. Pedrick reads the *Odyssey* proem as a dialogue between the bard and the Muse; Bakker (2009, 2013) observes the interpenetration of Odysseus' and the narrator's voices in the *Odyssey*. I draw on their work to offer a new understanding of Iliadic narrative structure. The voices in Iliadic invocations cut across neat distinctions between narrative and character-speech: they are both subsumed within and obtrude from the narrative voice.

Some Iliadic invocations privilege elite agency, but also suggest the potential for dialogue between different voices. The proem focuses on an elite actor and his psychology: the wrath of Achilles. The common soldiery is objectified, both grammatically and physically, reduced to the prey (*helōria*) of dogs and birds. However, the potential for different perspectives on the action is suggested by the address to the Muse, who is called upon to contribute to the narrative, and by the interjection at line 8: "Which of the gods sent those two together to quarrel and fight?" Perhaps this was originally a question from the audience, guiding the bard to start at a certain place (Martin forthcoming); but as we have it, this voice is not clearly distinguished from the narrative voice of the poem. The invocation at 14.508-10 mirrors the proem in its social exclusivity and in its implications of dialogism. Again a question is asked ("tell me who first of the Achaeans seized *andragria*..."), suggesting a conversation between two voices. Again these lines privilege elite agency: a list of prominent Achaeans follows. And again the masses are reduced to mere objects: they are described with the unparalleled term *andragria* – roughly, "men-as-quarry."

The potential for dialogism suggested by these two invocations is actualized in the invocation that heads the Catalogue of Ships, which focuses on both mass and elite agency (for mass and elite perspectives in book 2 and elsewhere cf. Rose 1988, 2012). A voice puts a question to the Muses – who were the leaders of the Greeks? – and then states that it will not name the multitude: it could not do so even with ten mouths and ten tongues, unless the Muses should remember their numbers (2.488-92). What follows undercuts the authority of the speaker who promised to ignore the masses. The catalogue lists not only the leaders and the ships, but also the different peoples. Reading this back into the invocation, we see a suggestion there of multiple voices (“ten tongues, ten mouths”), and of a contest between mortal voices and the Muses’ immortal voices: the former privilege elite agency; the latter remember the multitude.

As a further example of this contest of voices, I move beyond Iliadic invocations to consider the words of a character – Achilles. Martin (1989), drawing on the “ten tongues, ten mouths” image (p.224), observes that Achilles’ diction resembles the main narrative in its expansiveness. Moreover, like the narrator and Muse, Achilles is depicted as a singer (9.186-91). His voice is thus able to join the conversation of narrative voices, and the contest over the poem’s mass or elite focus. Achilles’ song may, like the Catalogue of Ships invocation, give prominence to both mass and elite agency. He sings *klea andrōn*, a phrase that could highlight elite warriors, those primarily concerned with *kleos* (“renown”), but whose second element could also embrace the commoners (cf. Agamemnon, *anax andrōn*, “lord of men”). That Achilles might have egalitarian concerns in mind is suggested by his explanation soon after that no man’s soul (i.e., neither commoner nor chieftain?) is *heletē*, “to be seized” (9.409). This statement contrasts with the objectivizing term *helōria*, used of the commoners in the proem. The voice

that opens the proem insists on Achilles' importance above all others; Achilles himself suggests an alternative, more egalitarian path that the epic could have taken.

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