

§11. Thersites



Then Agamemnon, commander-in -chief, bade the clear-voiced heralds
 summon forthwith the long-haired Achaeans to meet in assembly.
 They then made proclamation. The folk full swiftly assembled.

– *Iliad* 2:50-52

In the passage in Id 2 that includes the Rush for the Ships, the chief speaker for those inclined to depart is the low character Thersites. His lowness links him to Dolon, who also figures in a late passage. But the content of Thersites' speech in part follows the complaints of Achilles in Id 1, when he prefers to take his ships home, rather than serve under Agamemnon.¹ We might compare Thersites' speech with its closest Achillean prototype,² and on its own terms, and then consider the social implications of Thersites himself.

The former is quickly done; the result is a reading of D =- 0-00. For the latter, here are the obvious divisions, and the resulting crosstable:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. 225-234 (11) | Accuses greedy Agamemnon |
| b. 235--238 (3) | To the others: Let us go home |
| c. 239-242 (4) | Agamemnon has dishonored Achilles |

<i>Thersites</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>
<i>a</i>	~	0-00	0-00
<i>b</i>	0-00	~	0-00
<i>c</i>	0-00	0-00	~

The last part (c) is a peroration, not a repeat from anything in Id 1, but rather a summary of the quarrel. It amounts to a further indictment of Agamemnon.

¹The motif of departure surely had its beginning in that Id 1 passage; it was picked up at 9:26-28 by the despairing Agamemnon, when it was countered by the saner advice of Diomedes. That passage shares some words with the Id 2 addition and was thus probably the immediate source for it.

²respectively 1:149-171 (23 lines) and 2:225-242 (18 lines).