



Rhetoric in Homer? An Analysis of Odysseus' Supplication to Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6 (135-97)

Retórica em Homero? Uma análise da súplica de Odisseu a Nausícaa no Canto 6 da Odisseia (135-97)

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Abstract: This article discusses the possibility of exploring the field of rhetoric within the Homeric poems. Is it adequate to employ the term “rhetoric” in discussions of Homeric poetry? We contend, following Knudsen (2014), that yes, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* provide us with the earliest instances of rhetorical activity in Antiquity. Firstly, we address why some scholars disregard that possibility, then argue why we disagree with them. Finally, we apply the elements of our theoretical discussion to an analysis of Odysseus’ supplication to Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6, focusing on: a) the introduction by the Homeric narrator with the terms *kerdion*, *kerdaléos*, and *meilikhios*; and b) Odysseus’ strategic speaking when trying to convince Nausicaa to provide him with clothes and information about the way to town.

Keywords: Nausicaa; Phaeacians; Odysseus; Rhetoric; *Odyssey*; Homer.

Resumo: Este artigo discute a possibilidade de se explorar o campo da retórica dentro dos poemas homéricos. É adequado utilizar-se do termo “retórica” em discussões sobre poesia homérica? Defendemos, na esteira de Knudsen (2014), que, sim, a *Iliada* e a *Odisseia* provêm as primeiras manifestações de atividade retórica da Antiguidade. Primeiramente, discutimos por que alguns estudiosos rechaçam essa possibilidade, e, em seguida, argumentamos por que discordamos deles. Por fim, aplicamos os elementos de nossa discussão teórica a uma análise da súplica de Odisseu a Nausícaa no Canto 6 da *Odisseia*, explorando: a) a introdução do narrador homérico com os termos *kerdion*, *kerdaléos* e *meilikhios*; e b) a fala estratégica de Odisseu ao tentar convencer Nausícaa a prover-lhe roupas e informações sobre o caminho para a cidade mais próxima.

Palavras-chave: Nausícaa; feácios; Odisseu; retórica; *Odisseia*; Homero.

1 Rhetoric in Homer?

Is it adequate for one to employ the term “rhetoric” when discussing Homeric poetry? There is no short answer to that question, for the answer depends on what one believes to be the definition of such term, a matter that is far from settled. If one locates the birth of rhetoric in the explicit and specific delimitation of the field, in its categorization and its terminology, one is not supposed to consider that rhetoric exists before the Classical Athens of Gorgias, Plato, or Aristotle.¹ Authors in these lines tend to consider that the Homeric poems contain the model of a proto-rhetoric at best, and avoid using the term when discussing them. Ferreira (2010), for example, in her article “The power of rhetoric in the Homeric Odysseus” (“O poder da retórica no Ulisses Homérico”), discusses several of Odysseus’ speeches in which the character makes use of devices that are to be categorized as rhetorical in Classical Athens. Even so, she argues, one is not to label such character-speeches as “rhetorical” yet. According to her, they only represent a kind of “proto-rhetoric”, “oratory” or “proto-oratory” at most. She claims that

In the Archaic period, we cannot use the term rhetoric yet, as in the true meaning of the word which we shall find later in Classical Athens [...]. In a first moment, as the Homeric poems show, filled as they are with councils, assemblies and speeches, there is not yet in the Archaic period a rhetoric in the theoretical sense of the term – as a *tékhnē*, with clear objectives and delineated methods – but an oratory is announced, one that is characterized, as M. A. Júnior states, as a “pre-rhetoric, a rhetoric *avant la lettre*” (FERREIRA, 2010, p. 10, free translation.)²

¹ Cole (1991), Schiappa (1999), Ferreira (2010).

² “No período arcaico, não podemos usar ainda o termo retórica, cuja abordagem na verdadeira acepção da palavra poderemos encontrar, mais tarde, na Atenas Clássica [...]. Assim, numa primeira fase, e como espelham os Poemas Homéricos, semeados que estão de conselhos, assembleias e discursos, no período arcaico não há ainda uma retórica no sentido teórico do termo – enquanto *techne*, com objectivos e métodos delineados – mas anuncia-se já uma oratória, que se configura, como refere M. A. Júnior, como uma ‘pré-retórica, uma retórica *avant la lettre*’.”

Later in the same article, she argues that

Although we are still far away from ‘rhetoric’ as a true *tékhnē*, [...] the Homeric heroes are a sort of legitimate ancestors of the classical *rhētores*, concerned as they are with the selection of which arguments to use, taking their position and their objectives in consideration, as well as the disposition of their addressees (FERREIRA, 2010, p. 28, free translation.).³

According to Ferreira, thus, we cannot speak of rhetoric in the Homeric poems because we cannot find in them the portrayal of a *tékhnē* (“skill”) with clear methodology or terminology as those that will rise in 5th and 4th Century BCE in Athens. However, she claims, we do find the first traces of deliberate and conscious attempts by characters to select their arguments according to what seems more fitting to their immediate situation and their addressees. Therefore, according to her view, one is to consider the Homeric characters simply the ancestors of the classical *rhētores*, as what Ferreira calls “proto-*rhētores*”, or “orators” or “proto-orators”, but not rhetoricians *per se*.

For this reason, Ferreira’s article seems contradictory: the title mentions the “Rhetorical power of the Homeric Odysseus”, but within it she contends that we are not to employ the term “rhetoric” to discuss Homeric poetry. Should her title be perhaps “The proto-rhetorical power of the Homeric Odysseus”? In any case, the fact is that in the opinion of Ferreira (2010), as well as in that of Cole (1991), and Schiappa (1999), what defines rhetoric is the specific terminology and categorization carried out by Gorgias, Plato and, most prominently, by Aristotle in Classical Athens. In that sense, we are only to regard character-speeches in Homer as proto-rhetorical or (proto) oratorical at best. That view, however, is not unanimous. Rachel Knudsen, in her book *Homeric Speech*

³ “Apesar de estarmos ainda muito longe da ‘retórica’ enquanto verdadeira *technê*, [...] os heróis homéricos são uma espécie de antepassados legítimos dos retores clássicos, preocupados que estão com a selecção dos argumentos a utilizar, conciliando a sua atitude com os objectivos visados e a índole dos interlocutores.”

and *the Origins of Rhetoric* (2014), plays down the importance of the categorization and terminology carried out by Plato and Aristotle, and contends that there *exists*, indeed, a *tékhnē* in the speech of the Homeric characters, as attested in several passages in the poems. The sheer evidence that such a *tékhnē* exists, she argues, would be enough for us to consider that rhetoric is, in fact, present in the epics.

Firstly, Knudsen (2014) remarks that the understanding of Homer as the father or inventor of rhetoric is not original to her work. Several ancient authors already claimed this in the past, although such view is considered outdated by scholars such as Cole (1991), Schiappa (1999), and Ferreira (2010). Knudsen wishes, therefore, to simply rescue the conceptions from ancient times and defend that yes, we can find the oldest manifestations of rhetorical activity in Ancient Greece in the Homeric poems:

That Homer was the father or inventor of rhetoric is not an original claim, though it is now considered an outdated one. The contention of this book is more pointed: that Homer not only demonstrates rhetorical practice in the speech of his characters, but that the patterns of persuasion that he depicts embody, in very specific ways, the rhetoric identified in theoretical treatises from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, and that reached its fullest expression in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Contrary to the characterization of Homeric speech found in modern histories of rhetoric – that it consists of “native eloquence” or inspiration – I contend that the Homeric narrator presents speaking as a technical skill, one that must be taught and learned, and one that varies according to speaker, situation, and audience (KNUDSEN, 2014, p. 3-4).

Thus, Knudsen argues, Homeric characters are not simply eloquent or inspired when they talk. They can be very well trained on the tailoring of technical persuasive speeches and are capable of talking with calculated intent. Of course not every character is a great speaker, but there are those who are renowned for it (the best examples being Odysseus

and Nestor), who assess “speaker, situation and audience” and then, after conscious deliberation, come up with the words that shall work to their best advantage in a specific situation. Knudsen argues, thus, that there is indeed in Homer an awareness regarding the techniques that govern proper, persuasive and profitable speaking, and this is why she claims that rhetorical activity is already present in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*.

In the end of her introductory chapter, Knudsen (2014, p. 8-14) compiles and explores 13 passages from the *Iliad* in which we find evidence for the existence of a *tékhnē* of persuasive speaking in Homer. I shall reproduce her categorization of evidences into four groups, mentioning short passages that illustrate each one:⁴

- 1) Character-speeches are evaluated according to certain standards: completeness, directness, ability to persuade, etc. As an example, we have Nestor criticizing Diomedes for not being complete in his arguments (“*ἀτὰρ οὐ τέλος ἵκεο μύθων*”). He then, compliments the young hero for attempting to speak and for saying fair things, but states that he, himself, being older and more experienced, will complete what was left out. “I will go over everything (*πάντα διίξομαι*)” (Hom. *Il.* 9.53-62). Nestor thus evaluates and judges the quality of Diomedes’ speech, specifying what was wrong with it (it was not complete), and correcting it himself (going over everything).
- 2) Discrimination of speakers according to their speech-abilities. A famous passage depicts Antenor, a Trojan herald, distinguishing the speaking style of Odysseus and Menelaus: Menelaus spoke quickly (*ἐπιτροχάδην*) but much clearly (*μάλα λιγέως*), and he was no long speaker (*ἐπεὶ οὐ πολύμυθος*) or idle-talker (*ἀφαρμαρτοεπής*). But when Odysseus let out his great voice (*ὅπα τε μεγάλην*) from his chest, his “words came drifting down like the winter snows (*ἔπεα νιφάδεσσιν εἰκότα χειμερίησιν*)”, and “no other mortal man beside could stand up against Odysseus (*οὐκ ἂν ἔπειτ’ Ὀδυσῆϊ γ’ ἐρίσσειε βροτὸς ἄλλος*)” (Hom. *Il.* 3.212–224). This would show that different men can use different techniques of speech to move their audiences, and that there was a discrimination of speaking styles.

⁴ The translations from Greek into English are Knudsen’s (2014, p. 8-14).

- 3) Discrimination of target-audience: the same character may employ different strategies when talking to different addressees. A good example is the narrator's description of the different approaches of Odysseus according to whether his recipient is an important man or a man from the people:

Whenever he encountered some king, or man of influence (τινα μὲν βασιλῆα καὶ ἕξοχον ἄνδρα), he would stand beside him and with soft words (ἀγανοῖς ἐπέεσσιν) try to restrain him [...] When he saw some man of the people (δήμου τ' ἄνδρα) who was shouting, he would strike at him with his staff, and reprove him (ὁμοκλήσασκέ τε μύθῳ) (Hom. *Il.* 2.188–206).

Thus, we have evidence that a character may adopt one kind of strategy when addressing a certain type of person, and another strategy for a different type.

- 4) References to instruction and knowledge in speaking: Speaking is something that can be taught and learned, and a matter in which one may be knowledgeable or ignorant. Knudsen presents two famous examples, one of each kind: a) Phoenix's statement in *Iliad* 9 that he trained Achilles to be "a speaker of words and one accomplished in action (μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμεναι πρηκτιῆρά τε ἔργων)" (Hom. *Il.* 9.442–43); b) In *Iliad* 18, the narrator contrasts the abilities of Polydamas as the one excellent in speeches and Hektor as the one excellent with the spear: "But he [Polydamas] was better in words (μύθοισιν), the other [Hektor] with the spear (ἔγχει) far better." (Hom. *Il.* 18.252). Thus, we notice that already in Homer speaking can be taught, and one can be good or bad at it, or one may be better than another.

Knudsen argues that these four kinds of evidence denote that speaking can indeed be understood as a defined kind of *tékhnē* in the *Iliad*, and therefore one can contend that rhetoric exists in Homer. If there is a rhetorical technique, there is rhetoric. Of course, one shall find no systematization or categorization of techniques in epic poetry. But that

has to do with the fact that a poet makes poems, not treatises on speech. It is not the aim of a bard to provide his audience with technicalities or to dwell on the categorization of things, but rather to delight and amuse, and to provide them with entertainment. If methodology and terminology for the art of speaking ever existed over the composition timespan of the Homeric poems, we are not to expect that they would be recorded systematically in technical or methodological terms in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. But this does not necessarily mean that they did not exist, or that we have to disregard the possibility of their existence simply because they are not clearly categorized. There is evidence and documentation of rhetorical techniques in the poems, as demonstrated in the four categories of examples mentioned above, and in many other instances (including the *Odyssey* one we address further). So even if the rhetoric of Homer is not *the* rhetoric of Plato or Aristotle, because of the lack of their own terminology, it is still *some* rhetoric.

In her book, Knudsen (2014, p. 5-6) openly states her preference for the *Iliad* as a source of evidence for rhetorical speaking. She claims that it provides us with more material in comparison to the *Odyssey* because of the vast occurrences of public speaking in assemblies or in the battlefield, whereas the latter provides us mostly with one-on-one speeches, with the major exception of the *apólogosi* (Odysseus' narrative of his adventures for the Phaeacians from Books 9 to 12). In this article, we must disagree with her perspective in that regard, as we believe that the *Odyssey*, in comparison with the *Iliad*, is actually *the* rhetorical poem *par excellence*. Apparently, Knudsen has it backwards: even if we do not disagree that the *Iliad* contains several occurrences and examples of rhetorical speaking, we contend that rhetorical speaking constitutes the very backbone of the *Odyssey*, being a central element in the narrative development poem. Let us remember to begin with that its protagonist, Odysseus, is the most famous and apt of rhetorician of the entire epic tradition (perhaps Nestor could be on par, but the Gerenian horseman was not given the role of a protagonist in the Homeric epic).

We elaborate by disagreeing with two of Knudsen's criteria: 1) she implies that one-on-one speaking does not qualify for good

evidence of rhetoric, as if it were necessary that a speech be directed at an audience, and not at a single person, in order for it to be labeled as rhetorical. That seems erroneous: there can be a *lot* of rhetoric involved in one on one speaking – in fact, the passage we analyze in detail here fits this case. 2) She tends to prioritize quantity over quality. Yes, the *Iliad* might contain a great number of persuasive speeches, but Odysseus' performance of the adventures is the lengthiest rhetorical character-speech in the entire Homeric epic, and it is filled with strategic speaking, as we argue in detail in Semêdo (2018b), elaborating on the pioneering work of Most (1989). Furthermore, persuasive speaking is one of Odysseus' most invaluable skills for his return home. It plays a prominent role in many of his strategies for his journey back and his defeat of the suitors: he convinces the Cyclops to drink wine, and leads him to believe that his name is “no-one”; he convinces the Phaeacians to send him home; he convinces Eumaeus to let him spend the night at his hut while disguised as a beggar; he tries to convince Penelope, still disguised as a beggar, that Odysseus is about to return, etc. And these are just cases involving Odysseus, when we could quote many others: Alcinous' prompting the hero to reveal his identity,⁵ Telemachus' convincing the assembly that he is to go on a search for his father, Penelope's convincing the suitors she would only marry one of them after weaving a shroud for Laertes, etc. Of course, Knudsen does not deny that the *Odyssey* contains many instances of rhetorical speaking, but it seems out of place to play down its potential, while we believe it is a much more profitable poem than the *Iliad* as far as an investigation of rhetoric in Homer is concerned.

After summarizing the main arguments that lead to the possibility of speaking of a Homeric rhetoric, and advocating for the importance of persuasive speaking in the *Odyssey*, we now turn to a practical example that reinforces these claims: Odysseus' supplication to Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6.

⁵ Alcinous' clever attempts are discussed at length in Semêdo (2018b)

2 The rhetoric of Odysseus' supplication to Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6 (Hom. *Od.* 6.135-97)

Odysseus' encounter with Nausicaa takes place after the hero wakes up naked and, as the narrator describes in Hom. *Od.* 6.137, terrified (*smerdaléos*), all dirty with crusted salt (*kekakōménos hálēmī*). The hero makes contact, the servants get scared, but Athena grants the Phaeacian princess courage (*thársos*) for her to stand fast (Hom. *Od.* 6.138-141). At that point, Odysseus has reached his lowest point in his journey, having become, indeed,

no-one, nothing but a stray anonymous stranger. He has lost everything: his crew, his ships, his weapons, even his clothes. He has no material means to deal with any hardships he may come across. His appearance is scary, and his cunning and his words are the only means that he has left to face this encounter with the girl (SEMÊDO, 2018a).

Thus the narrator describes his thoughts on how to handle the situation:

[...] ὁ δὲ **μερμήριζεν** Ὀδυσσεύς,
ἢ γούνων λίσσοιτο λαβὼν ἐνώπιδα κούρη,
ἢ αὐτὸς **ἐπέεσσιν** ἀποσταδὰ **μειλιχίοισι**
λίσσοιτ', εἰ δείξειε πόλιν καὶ εἴματα δοίη.
ὥς ἄρα οἱ φρονέοντι δοάσσατο **κέρδιον** εἶναι,
λίσσεσθαι **ἐπέεσσιν** ἀποσταδὰ **μειλιχίοισι**,
μή οἱ γούνα λαβόντι χολώσαιτο φρένα κούρη.
αὐτίκα **μειλίχιον καὶ κερδαλέον** φάτο **μῦθον**.⁶

[...] and now Odysseus *pondered* (*merméríksen*) whether to supplicate the well-favored girl by clasping her knees, or stand off where he was and with *pleasing words* (*epéessin ... meilikhíōisi*) ask if she would show him the city, and lend him clothing.

⁶ The Greek text is by Murray (1919).

Then in the division of his heart this way seemed *more profitable* (*kérdion*) to him,
 to stand well off and supplicate with *pleasing words* (*epéessin ... meilikhioisi*),
 for fear that, if he clasped her knees, the girl might be angry.
 So he made a *pleasing and profitable speech* (*meilikhion kai kerdaléon mûthon*)⁷
 (Hom. Od. 6.141-8, our stress marks)

In this section, we wish to discuss the importance of the terms in italics: “to ponder (*mermērízein*)”, “pleasing words (*meilikhia épea*)”, “more profitable (*kerdion*)” and “pleasing and profitable speech (*meilikhios kai kerdaléos mûthos*)”.

Firstly, the process of *mermērízein*, “pondering”, is crucial to Odysseus at this point: there is no room for mistakes, and he needs to choose the most fitting strategy for the delicate situation at hand. He must assess his options and analyze the pros and cons of each potential move. He cannot be impulsive, he has to deliberate carefully, and then make the best decision. This “best” decision is literally, in Greek, the “more profitable” (*kerdion*) one, the one that will grant him most gains. The term *kerdion*, a comparative, has the same root as that of the noun *kérdos*, “gain”, “profit”, and the adjective *kerdaléos*, “profitable”. Roisman (1990), in her article “Kerdion in the Iliad: Profit and Trickiness”, demonstrates that *kerdion* is a very peculiar adjectival form within the Homeric dialect: it has no positive degree (a “neutral”, non-comparative or superlative form),⁸ and is usually translated as “best” or “more profitable”. Its superlative, however, *kérdistos*, is usually translated as “trickiest” or “most cunning”. There is, thus, a shift in meaning between the comparative and the superlative forms, from “more profitable” into “trickiest”. In her article, Roisman contends that such shift is far from odd, and is, in fact, very natural: she shows, analyzing several passages where *kerdion* occurs, that the term

⁷ All English translations are from Lattimore (1966), with a few modifications where necessary.

⁸ Schmitt (1973) suggests that a certain *kordús*, in Hesychius, K-3598 L could be the positive degree of the adjective. Such word, however, does not occur in Homer.

always carries a nuance of cunning or trickiness in its meaning, as if the profit acquired at a given situation were always the result of one's skills and slyness in obtaining it. Her piece focuses on the *Iliad*, but the same conclusions she draws could be very well applied to the *Odyssey*, and, most of all, to the passage with Nausicaa at hand.

Roisman assesses several passages in which words with the root “*kerd-*” are used. Her first conclusion is that “*kerd-* terms”, as we shall call them, hold a different nuance in meaning in comparison to other words that simply denote profit in Homer, such as *óphelos*, *onínemi* and *eis agathón*. According to her, *kerd-* terms always carry the underlying meaning of “skill” and “trickiness” behind the “profit” one. Such profit, she argues, is always the result of one's tricks or abilities. At the same time, *kerd-* terms are also different from other terms that simply denote guile or deception in Homer, such as *dólos*, *apátē*, *mekhanē* and *polumékhanos*, in that they emphasize the gain or profit that is the result of one's ability or trickery (ROISMAN, 1990, p. 25-26). Thus, *kerd-* terms are different from other words for profit in that they indicate that this profit is the result of skill and slyness. But they are also different from terms which only mean deception insofar as they emphasize the profit that is the result of the trick at hand.

In her article “Homeric κέρδος and ὄφελος”, de Jong (1987) stresses the difference between the words *kérdos* and *óphelos*, both of which can be translated as “advantage”. *Kérdos* refers to one's advantage for themselves, whereas *óphelos* denotes an advantage acquired on behalf of others. De Jong points out that the other meanings for the terms suggested in Liddell; Scott; Jones (1940) (besides “advantage”) illustrate the case very well: “gain”, “profit” for *kérdos*, and “assistance”, “help” for *óphelos*. This indicates that one points to more self-centered objectives, while the other points to a more altruistic attitude. We conclude, thus, that *kerd-* terms always denote a person's gain for themselves. And as we have seen in Roisman's arguments, that gain is always acquired by means of trickery. Quoting Roisman's conclusion: “*kerdion* carries the notion of a personal, self-serving end, pursued with wily or cunning resourcefulness” (ROISMAN, 1990, p. 35).

Both de Jong and Roisman make special remarks about the formulaic expression “upon consideration, this seemed to be better (οἱ φρονέοντι δοάσσατο κέρδιον εἶναι)”,⁹ the one that occurs in the passage between Odysseus and Nausicaa here addressed. Such formula introduces “the alternative chosen by a character, who has pondered upon which course of action to follow: in all these cases the question involved is what is best for him, the character deliberating, to do” (DE JONG, 1987, p. 80). Roisman (1990, p. 26) notes that the line concludes a larger formula of inner deliberation whereby a character weighs different alternatives and comes up with the most profitable one for himself. In the passage in question, the process of deliberation is indicated by the verb *mēmerizein*, which leads to Odysseus’ choice of the more profitable/smart alternative: a profitable speech (*kerdaléos mûthos*), one that involves, as the adjective in Greek denotes, cunning and trickery, and that shall bring gains to himself. In this case, the “gains” the hero wishes to obtain shall be made clear during his supplication: clothes and information about the city from the girl.¹⁰ And the means for him to obtain that, the narrator emphasizes, are his pleasing words (*meilikhia épea*), and his pleasing and profitable/tricky speech (*meilikhios kai kerdaléos mûthos*).

The adjective *meilikhios* means “pleasing”, “gentle”, “kind” (CUNLIFFE, 1977). The underlying idea, though, is that the pleasing and gentle thing, “*meilikhion*”, is consciously used to cajole one’s addressee into something advantageous for the speaker. It is a device that brings something in return for the one pleasing another. Apart from some speculative etymological hypotheses, Chantraine ([1968] 1999), Frisk (1970), and Beekes (2010) all agree that it is much probable (Beekes even says “undoubtedly”) that *meilikhos* (and, by extension, the adjective *meilikhios*) is related by folk etymology to *méli*, “honey” due to phonetic similarity. This means that both audience and poet probably

⁹ The expression appears in the following passages: Hom. *Il.* 13.458; 14.23; 16.652; Hom. *Od.* 5.474; 6.145; 10.153; 15.204; 18.93; 22.338; 24.239.

¹⁰ Odysseus states what he wants from the girl quite clearly: “Show me the way to the town and give me some rag to wrap me in (ἄστυ δέ μοι δεῖξον, δὸς δὲ ῥάκος ἀμφιβαλέσθαι)” (Hom. *Od.* 6.178).

acknowledged a connection between the two terms, even if merely due to their similarities in sound. That conception works well for a synchronic analysis within the economy of the *Odyssey*: in Homeric Greek, the sound of *méli* (honey) and the root of *meilikhios* (pleasing) resemble one another.

On the semantic level, the connection does not seem far-fetched, either: we can find three possible interpretations for what a “honey-like”/pleasing speech may mean. Firstly, that the speech itself is soft and sweet, that it is pleasant, enjoyable, soothing. Secondly, that the speech in question softens and sweetens its addressee: they become gentler because of it, and therefore more well-disposed towards what is being said and the person saying it. Thirdly, that the one who speaks becomes sweet, that is, likable, to the eyes of their addressee due to the speech. A combination of all three interpretations also seems acceptable: a *meilikhios mûthos* is a sweet talk that makes the one addressed gentler, and that makes the speaker sweeter to the eyes of the addressee. Such a connection between honey and one’s speech is not unparalleled in Homer: in Hom. *Il.* 1.249, the narrator states that Nestor’s stream of words flowed “sweeter than honey (*μέλιτος γλυκίων*)”. Thus, we find a practical example which suggests a possible connection between *meilikhios* and *méli* in a semantic level besides the phonetic one: within the economy of Homeric poetry, a pleasing, convincing speech can be very well compared to honey.

The narrator states, again, that after *pondering* (*mermērizein*), Odysseus decides to come up with a wily move that is most *advantageous* for himself (*kerdion*): a *pleasing (honey-like)* and *profitable* speech (*meilikhios kai kerdaléos mûthos*). The hero delivers exactly what is promised. With a masterful manipulation of his words, he comes up with a most pleasing (and, in this case, blandishing) speech to touch the princess’ heart so that she may grant him what he is after. As we can guess, the hero shall be very successful. So let us now turn to the supplication itself.

Thus, Odysseus addresses the girl:

γουνουῦμαί σε, ἄνασσα: θεός νύ τις, ἧ βροτός ἐσσι;
εἰ μὲν τις θεός ἐσσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν,
Ἄρτέμιδι σε ἐγὼ γε, Διὸς κούρη μέγαλοιο,

εἶδός τε μέγεθός τε φύην τ' ἄγχιστα εἴσκω·
 εἰ δέ τις ἔσσι βροτῶν, τοὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ ναιετάουσιν,
 τρὶς μάκαρες μὲν σοὶ γε πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ,
 τρὶς μάκαρες δὲ κασίγνητοι [...]

‘I am at your knees, O queen. But are you mortal or goddess?
 If indeed you are one of the gods who hold wide heaven,
 then I must find in you the nearest likeness to Artemis,
 the daughter of great Zeus, for beauty, figure, and stature.
 (Hom. Od. 6.149-52)

Odysseus begins his supplication with flattering words by comparing the girl to a goddess in beauty. This is a strategic move: he is trying to make himself likable (or sweet) by praising his addressee, trying to earn her sympathy through blandishment. He goes on with such strategy by praising her beauty, but now shifting the theme from divine likeness to that of familial joy:

εἰ δέ τις ἔσσι βροτῶν, τοὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ ναιετάουσιν,
 τρὶς μάκαρες μὲν σοὶ γε πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ,
 τρὶς μάκαρες δὲ κασίγνητοι· μάλα πού σφισι θυμὸς
 αἰὲν ἔυφροσύνησιν ἰαίνεται εἵνεκα σεῖο,
 λευσσόντων τοιόνδε θάλος χορὸν εἰσοιχνεῦσαν.
 κεῖνος δ' αὖ περὶ κῆρι μακάρτατος ἔξοχον ἄλλων,
 ὃς κέ σ' ἐέδνοισι βρίσας οἰκόνδ' ἀγάγηται.
 οὐ γάρ πω τοιοῦτον ἴδον βροτῶν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν,
 οὔτ' ἄνδρ' οὔτε γυναῖκα· σέβας μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωντα.

But if you are one among those mortals who live in this country,
 three times blessed are your father and the lady your mother,
 and three times blessed your brothers too, and I know their spirits
 are warmed forever with happiness at the thought of you, seeing
 such a slip of beauty taking her place in the chorus of dancers;
 but blessed at the heart, even beyond these others, is that one
 who, after loading you down with gifts, leads you as his bride
 home. I have never with these eyes seen anything like you,
 neither man nor woman. Wonder takes me as I look on you.
 (Hom. Od. 6.153-61)

Odysseus is once again praising the princess' beauty, but this time within the frame of a family theme: he mentions parents and siblings, husband and wife. This is once again an attempt to make himself likable to the girl and earn her sympathy. Thereafter he continues with another flattering move by complimenting her looks (Hom. *Od.* 6.162-8), but now comparing her to a wonderful young tree he once saw:

ὡς δ' αὐτως καὶ κεῖνο ἰδὼν ἔτεθήπεα θυμῷ
 δῆν, ἐπεὶ οὐ πω τοῖον ἀνήλυθεν ἐκ δόρου γαίης,
 ὡς σέ, γύναι, ἄγαμαί τε τέθηπά τε [...]

And as, when I looked upon that tree, my heart admired it
 long, since such a tree had never yet sprung from the earth, so
 now, lady, I admire you and wonder [...]
 (Hom. *Od.* 6.166-8)

So, once again, the hero emphasizes the girl's beauty as part of his directed attempt to please her and make himself more likable to her eyes.

After having established a solid compliment to her beauty under three different frames (divine, familial, natural), he makes another tactical move. He seeks to evoke her pity by portraying himself as a suffering man in desperate need of aid:

[...] **χαλεπὸν** δέ με **πένθος** ἰκάνει.
 χθιζὸς ἐεικοστῷ φύγον ἤματι οἴνοπα πόντον·
 τόφρα δέ μ' αἰεὶ κῦμ' ἐφόρει κραιπναί τε θύελλαι
 νήσου ἀπ' Ὀγυγίης. νῦν δ' ἐνθάδε κάββαλε δαίμων,
 ὄφρ' ἔτι που καὶ τῆδε **πάθω κακόν**· οὐ γὰρ οἶω
 παύσεσθ', ἀλλ' ἔτι **πολλὰ** θεοὶ τελέουσι πάροιθεν.
 ἀλλά, ἄνασσ', **ἐλέαιρε**· σὲ γὰρ **κακὰ πολλὰ** μογήσας
 ἐς πρώτην ἰκόμην, τῶν δ' ἄλλων οὐ τίνα οἶδα
 ἀνθρώπων, οἳ τήνδε πόλιν καὶ γαῖαν ἔχουσιν.

[...] The *hard sorrow* (*khalepòn ... pénthos*) is on me.
 Yesterday on the twentieth day I escaped the wine-blue
 sea; until then the current and the tearing winds had swept me
 along from the island Ogygia, and my fate has landed me
 here; here too *I must have evils to suffer* (*pátho kakón*); I do not

think it will stop; before then the gods have *much [suffering]* (*pollà*) to give me.

Then *have pity (eléaire)*, O queen. You are the first I have come to after *much suffering (kakà pollà)*, there is no one else that I know of here among the people who hold this land and this city.

(Hom. *Od.* 6.169-77, our stress marks)

As we have tried to emphasize by the words in italics, Odysseus fills this part of his speech with many emotional terms that point to his misery: hard suffering (*xalepòs pénthos*), to suffer evil (*kakòn páskhein*), many sufferings (*kakà pollà*). Thus, he drives home his pitiful state through his words, which is made all the more evident to the eyes of the princess in combination with his terrible appearance. He presents himself as one worthy of pity, and when finishing this speech and concluding his strategy, begs explicitly: “take pity (*eléaire*)!”, and states that he does not know anybody in those lands. Odysseus also makes it clear that he has no friends, no companions, no family around. The contrast between the glad familial situation which he set beforehand in the compliment to Nausicaa’s beauty and his current state of loneliness certainly amplifies the effect of evoking her pity (a device Aristotle will later call the evocation of “*páthos*”). Firstly, he paints the image of a happy family in his compliment to the girl (“your father, mother and brothers are lucky to have you”), then he makes it clear that he is alone and has no one around. This magnifies his condition (“you have so much, I have nothing”), and contributes to the feeling of commiseration he intends to evoke in Nausicaa.

Thereafter, having tried to catch the girl’s sympathy with compliments to her beauty, and having evoked her pity from his self-portrayal as a suffering lonesome man, an unmistakable instance of what later rhetoricians will call *captatio benevolentiae*,¹¹ he states precisely what he wants from her, to know the way to town and to receive clothes:

¹¹ *Captatio benevolentiae* is a device usually employed in the beginning of a rhetorical piece (*exordium* or *prooemium*), whereby a speaker tries to make themselves more likeable to their addressees. The specific term appears for the first time in Boethius’ commentary on Cicero’s *Topica* (Boethius, *In Ciceronis Topica I*, c. 500 A.D.), but the idea behind

ἄστυ δέ μοι δεῖξον, δὸς δὲ ῥάκος ἀμφιβαλέσθαι,
εἴ τί που εἴλυμα σπείρων ἔχεις ἐνθάδ' ἰοῦσα.
σοὶ δὲ θεοὶ τόσα δοῖεν ὅσα φρεσὶ σῆσι μενοινᾶς,

Show me the way to the town and give me some rag to wrap me
in, if you had any kind of piece of cloth when you came here,
and then may the gods give you everything that your heart longs for;
(Hom. *Od.* 6.178-80)

This is good timing. After his calculated moves to touch the princess with his speech, he stresses quite clearly the things which he needs. Having a clear objective makes it easier to convince the girl: she knows exactly what he wants. Then, to finish the speech, he will once again use a blandishing move:

ἄνδρα τε καὶ οἶκον, καὶ ὁμοφροσύνην ὀπάσειαν
ἐσθλήν· οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρεῖσσον καὶ ἄρειον,
ἢ ὅθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχῃτον
ἀνὴρ ἠδὲ γυνή· πόλλ' ἄλγεα δυσμενέεσσι,
χάρματα δ' εὐμενέτησι, μάλιστα δέ τ' ἔκλυον αὐτοί.

may [the gods] grant you a husband and a house and sweet agreement
in all things, for nothing is better than this, more steadfast
than when two people, a man and his wife, keep a harmonious
household; a thing that brings much distress to the people who
hate them
and pleasure to their well-wishers, and for them the best reputation.
(Hom. *Od.* 6.181-5)

Once again, the theme of family is brought up, this time with an emphasis in the positions of husband and wife, and Odysseus closes his speech wishing the girl good fortune, something that reinforces his chances of earning her sympathy, and, as a consequence, of her granting him what he requests.

it is strongly present in Cicero's *de Oratoria* (2.115), and as far back as Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1415a35). In both passages, each author stresses the importance of earning an audience's sympathy for the success of a rhetorical speech.

One detail that works to the hero's advantage very well is that Nausicaa has the idea of marriage in her mind: she has gone to the river to wash her clothes because Athena inspired her to do so, so that she may have clean clothes for her own wedding (Hom. *Od.* 6.25-40). As Malta (2017, p. 8) has noted, the Homeric narrator imbues the encounter between Odysseus and the girl with an erotic tone: Odysseus is naked, except for a leafy branch to cover his male parts (Hom. *Od.* 6.127-129); he is compared to a lion about to attack its prey just before addressing the girl and her maids (Hom. *Od.* 6.130-4). The girls are, in turn, playing without their veils, which implies that they are in a way also partially naked (Hom. *Od.* 6.100). Nausicaa is then compared to Artemis, goddess known for her purity and virginity, and who is also associated with the rite of passage of marriage (Hom. *Od.* 6.102).¹² So it seems very convenient for the hero to bring up the figures of wife and husband in two opportunities, one in the middle, one in the end of his speech: this certainly fits very well the present context involving the girl. We may argue that even if Odysseus is unaware of the details of the plans of Athena, it is not absurd to think that he supposes the girl would be glad to hear about that topic. He is an observing cunning man, so it is definitely plausible for him to guess that a girl her age, who is much probably unwedded (otherwise her husband should probably be with her) is very prone to be thinking about marriage. So it seems adequate to propose that, yes, Odysseus is well aware that marriage is a good topic for him to explore in his *kerdaléos* ("profitable") and *meilikhios* ("pleasing, honey-like") speech.

Nausicaa's immediate response makes it explicit that Odysseus has hit the mark with his supplication. She begins expressing her compassion for his pitiful state (*Od.* 6.187-191), and then confirms:

¹² Vernant (1985, p. 1479-80), for example, associates Artemis with the transition of childhood into womanhood after marriage: when marrying, the young virgin girl must die so that the adult woman may rise. This motive is vividly represented in the story of Iphigenia, depicted in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*: the virgin girl who was promised to marry Achilles is sacrificed to Artemis. We have thus the death of a maiden in the name of the goddess within the context of a wedding: symbolically, the girl must die to give place to the married woman.

οὐτ' οὖν ἐσθῆτος δευήσεται οὔτε τευ ἄλλου,
ὧν ἐπέοιχ' ἰκέτην ταλαπείριον ἀντιάσαντα.
ἄστυ δέ τοι δείξω, ἐρέω δέ τοι οὔνομα λαῶν.

you shall not lack for clothing nor anything else, of those gifts
which should befall the unhappy suppliant on his arrival;
and I will show you our town, and tell you the name of our people.
(Hom. *Od.* 6.192-4)

Thus, we have explicit confirmation that Odysseus' rhetorical efforts have been entirely successful. The girl responds stating that she will provide him with the exact two things he asked for in his profitable speech, clothes and the way to town, plus a little extra: gifts and the name of her people.

3 Closing remarks

We would like to conclude this article with a quotation from Knudsen (2014) that reinforces the possibility of reading the Odysseus' supplication to Nausicaa as a directed, conscious and technical rhetorical effort:

A central tenet of this investigation is that rhetoric is, in the classical Greek conception, a *tékhnē*. It is a skill – learned, taught, and employed with calculation and intention. The first step in any act of rhetoric is gathering information: information about human nature and its points of susceptibility to persuasion; information about the particular audience and its points of susceptibility to persuasion; and information about the techniques of speech that tend to induce persuasion for any given situation or audience. Equipped with this data, the rhetorician may then proceed “scientifically”: he makes a prediction about what words will best achieve the desired effect or incite the desired action in his audience, and then crafts his speech accordingly. The success or failure of the speech – judged by favorable or unfavorable audience response – constitutes the outcome of his experiment (KNUDSEN, 2014, p. 38).

Thus, we can conclude that Odysseus' pondering, his deliberation, his *mermerízein*, has led him indeed to make the best and most profitable

of decisions: a naked, terrifying man has managed to obtain the favor of a beautiful young princess for himself. This, as we have tried to demonstrate, is not simply the result of impromptu inspiration or natural eloquence. It is the result of a calculated and technical effort, one in which the hero, after assessing his immediate context, his addressee and her probable points of susceptibility of persuasion, comes up with a conscious, deliberate, and well-constructed speech. Several of the techniques employed in this speech of a Homeric character will later be categorized in the field of rhetoric, as we signaled in some instances. Are we to disregard the existence of rhetoric in Homer simply because those devices are not named in the poem? We believe not. Odysseus, thus, we argue, can be considered a very apt *rhētōr*, a skillful manipulator of words, and a sensible speaker who says the things he thinks will have the greatest impact on his addressees in order to convince them to get him what he wants. This is what he accomplishes with Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6: by carefully choosing his words and tailoring a profitable and pleasing speech (*meilikhios kai kerdaléos mûthos*), he is successful in achieving everything that he was after when tailoring his speech.

The scene in question is a mere preamble to the much larger movement within the *Phaiakís* from *Odyssey* 6 to 13: all throughout Odysseus' stay in the land of the Phaeacians, the hero will make extensive use of rhetorical strategies to convince the locals, most importantly their royal couple, Alcinous and Arete, to send him home and grant him gifts. In Odysseus' encounter with Nausicaa, thus, Homer presents us the hero's credentials as an apt rhetorician in order to prepare us for his grand performance among the Phaeacian nobles, which begins with his sudden appearance in the royal palace in *Odyssey* 7,¹³ and which culminates with the most magnificent of rhetorical pieces in Homeric poetry, his narrative of the adventures from *Odyssey* 9 to 12, thanks to which he secures his conveyance back to Ithaca with many riches.¹⁴

¹³ For an analysis of Odysseus' (and Alcinous') rhetorical strategies in *Odyssey* 7-8, see Semêdo (2018b) and the second chapter of Semêdo (2018c).

¹⁴ For the rhetorical nature of Odysseus' performance of the adventures, see chapter 4 of Semêdo (2018c).

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