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Antiphonal Lament
Between Achilles and Briseis

by PIETRO PUCCI

Since at least the work of Dieter Lohmann the lament that Briseis utters over the corpse of Patroclos and the lament that Achilles delivers immediately after (Iliad XIX 282-339) have been compared and considered in a sort of parallelism and responson since both characters develop three very similar themes. Achilles’ lamentation by repeating and enlarging the themes used by Briseis produces an intensification of his language, the “amplifizierende Funktion” that Lohmann (1970) attributes to this type of composition. I do not intend to repeat Lohmann’s beautiful analysis of the two passages, nor the perceptive insights of de Jong (1987), but to call attention to some unnoticed points of contact and difference that illustrate an unsuspected relationship between the representation of Briseis and that of Achilles. In the same wake I intend to show some aspects of the oral performance.

One question, often ignored by the commentators, concerns the temporal sequence of the two texts. The first text appears to be repeated only when the second text is uttered or read, and this inevitable temporal succession implies a consequence. It doubles the language of the first text and therefore increases the pathos of the second, reducing the first one to a relatively marginal or weaker posture. It becomes a sort of “second” text though, temporally speaking, it is the first.

My first point concerns the presentation and the framing by the diegesis of the two lamentations. Briseis utters her lament as she performs the rituals of mourning that comprehend the kokuein and the scratching of her breast, throat, and face. She repeats ritual gestures that have their own ceremonial reason, intensity, and rhythm. She is a slave, and probably this explains the radical expressions of her mourning as disfiguring her body, an action that no free woman performs in the Iliad. Free women perform the kokuein but no self-wounding, and they do it in mourning contexts about a dead husband (xxiv 295, iv 259, viii 527) or son (XXII 407-09, 447, XVIII 37,71), a relative or a dear friend (XIX 284, XXIV 703, xix 541). On only two occasions a woman screams (kokuein) outside a mourning context (XXIV 200, ii 361).3

We have to imagine that Briseis’ utterance is fully framed within the

2. Lohmann (1988) shows the parallelism between the groups of mourners, eight women (245-46) and seven men (310-11), and compares the scene with the facing group in the geometrical amphorae of funeral subject.
3. On kokuein, see Krapp (1964) 38. Lig(a) kokuein is used three times in Homer (XIX 284, iv 259, viii 527), the last ex. of lig(a) being connected with aedein (x 254), evidence that the high pitch tone of the voice can be evoked both for mourning and for joyous occasions. We have in XIX 284 the only ritual use of amassō "to tear."
ceremonial ritual that the poet represents, and accordingly that she is thought of as delivering her words as she tears her face. This is what we imagine as readers. As we know from Plato’s third book of the Republic, the rhapsodes in the mimetic parts of the poems were imitating the characters’ roles through the performance of their voice and movements (phasis kai skhēmati). Now it is impossible for us to reconstruct the actual modes and effects by voice and by movements in the utterance of this speech by Briseis, but certainly it had an effect. Sometimes, when a character repeats an earlier speech or parts of it, it is just their different inscription, i.e., the different mood and ways in which their delivery is couched, that constitutes their unique distinguishing feature.4

Achilles, in his turn, ἀρετή αἰσχροῦ ἀνευκατό φωνησέν τε (XIX 314). We do not know whether to understand ἀνευκατό as “drew a sigh” or “lifted up his voice” (see Leaf),5 nor how to translate ἀνευκά. We know, however, that ἀνευκά—a hapax in Homer—is usually used, in the adjectival form, for gōoī initiated by men and women alike,6 and has therefore no gender characterization as on the contrary Briseis’ kokuein has. This distinction goes along with the distinction between the two groups of mourners that Lohmann has underlined (see note 2). Furthermore the expression ἀνευκά implies a thick, repeated, intense activity, a repeated throbbing. In two instances, XVI 481 and xix 516, it characterizes the “heart” (in both cases the κηρὸ).

The diegesis therefore distinguishes the modes of Briseis’ and Achilles’ lamentations, offering the occasion for the singer to produce a specific performance for each lamentation and suggesting even to us readers a different rhythm, a different pitch of voice, a different body movement. Now, both Zumthor (1983) and Meschonnic (1982), speaking on the nature of the oral performance, emphasize the rhythms of the voice and of the gesture, the quality of a specific throbbing and beating of the heart. We have here in the diegesis a pale but sure indication about these oral features.

Having recognized the oral-poetic frame of the two lamentations, let us hear the first one, that of Briseis, beginning with her first theme (287-90):

Πάτροκλε μοι δειλὴ πλείστου κεχαρισμένε θυμῷ,
ζωόν μὲν σὲ ἔλειπον ἐγὼ κλοιήθην λοῦσα,
νῦν δὲ σε τεθηνότα κιχάνοιαι, ὅρχαμε λαῶν,
ἀς ἄνευσκο ὃς μοι δέχεται κακόν ἐκ κακοῦ αἰτέ.

4. For instance the repetition of Agamemnon’s discourses in II 111-18=IX 18-25, II 139-41=IX 26-28 occurs within contextual elements that produce an initial difference, Agamemnon’s self-confidence, the presence of the scepter and its history in the diaireSpeech and the turmoil in Agamemnon’s heart in IX 10 ff., his tears “like a dark fountain that from a steep cliff pours down its black water.” It seems that Agamemnon’s stricken heart from which tears and words pour down is like the rock or cliff that emits a fountain ... still imperceptibly affect us even when we are reading as they suggest the mood in which Agamemnon pronounced those words.

5. Leaf quotes Herodotus for the former meaning and Ap. Rhod.iii 635 for the latter. The presence of ὃς might be in favour of the latter interpretation.

6. See for instance XVIII 316, XXIII 17 for Achilles’ gōos, and XXII 439, XXIV 747 for Hecabe’s gōos. In the repeated form ἡδινα στενακή (zein) the expression characterizes only males (XXIII 225, XXIV 123, xxiv 317) and once the waves of the sea (vii 274). P. Chantraine derives ἀδινας from ἄδνα, implying a noun ἄδνη.
Both Briseis and Achilles begin by evoking Patroclos, who lies dead torn by the wounds before their eyes (283), through a pathetic apostrophe, i.e., through the ritual and rhetorical construct that engages the dead, as it were, in an impossible dialogue with the living person.

The first word in Briseis' apostrophe, Πάτροκλέ, has an exceptional prosody because of the short ο (P. Chantraine Grammaire Homerique I, 109), and this anomaly might emphasize the strain and the exceptionality of this last address. In the phrase κεχαρισμένε θυμώ the heart figures as the place where joy was stored and felt, not as Briseis' subjective center of emotions. In Achilles' words, on the contrary, the heart will be the subject and will produce a deeper and more excruciating pathos. The segment κεχαρισμένε θυμώ is an expression often repeated in the Iliad and used among close friends. Achilles uses it once for Patroclos (XI 608): διε Μενοτιάδη, τῷ ἐμῷ κεχαρισμένε θυμῶ with a stronger complimentary and possessive nuance because of the initial compliment and of the presence of the accentuated possessive adjective with the article—which is unique in this example. Whether we should remember this line of Achilles to Patroclos when we hear Briseis' phrase is open to speculation, but probably we should; we would begin to see the threads of a dialogue that spins beneath the independent laments of the two characters. In Briseis' speech the pleasure Patroclos gave her is exhibited in a powerful contrast to her despondency (οὐδεὶς ἐμέ, "unhappy me!"). A contrast that uniquely revitalizes the five times repeated expression and its possibly attenuated meaning. With this innuendo, she begins to outline a "private" characterisation of Patroclos which will end with her definition of his kindness, μελίκην αἰεί (300), that is a hapax for the Iliadic heroes.

Lines 288-89 picture the unique situation of Briseis leaving Achilles' tent at I 345 ff. while Patroclos was still alive and returning now (ὡς ἐπὶ 289) to find Patroclos dead, but this unique situation finds its peak in the epithetic form ὀρχασμέ λασὼν that is generic and used for various heroes (Agamemnon, Menelaos, and Achilles). Its generic quality, however, is revitalized here too by a contrast: Briseis addresses this emphatic and praising title to a dead hero (τεθνητα), and the verbal and conceptual contrast produces a pathetic effect analogous to the one that Briseis reached with her previous line when she opposed her unhappiness to Patroclos, joy of her heart.

This repeated epithet rhymes with the closing two preceding verses that end with a formulaic expression: κεχαρισμένε θυμών κλοιόθεν ιούσα / ὀρχασμέ λασὼν, producing a text that at the end of each line receives the stress and the relief of a repeated familiar expression:

7. This hapax was underlined with due emphasis by Codino (1965) 154-155.
8. We do not know the sure meaning of this elusive word, but the examples show that it is used with deference in peaceful (XIV 102) as in military encounters (XVII 12, XXI 221).
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I imply that the repetition of a familiar expression would—here—have the same effect as the repetition of a refrain and accordingly produce an emphasis and a relief at the same time, since the repetition on the one hand increases the forcefulness of the expression and on the other—as the return to the same—produces a sort of pleasure and relaxation. Each verse runs to this effect, and only the last line (290) of this first theme in Briseis’ lament closes without familiar repetitions if not for the paradigmatic position of some of its words here. It closes therefore with a linear rhythm missing the layers of familiar echoes but exhibiting their forceful unrecognized meaning.

Such a rhythm emphasizes the unity of each line, and in fact the meaning runs through each with no enjambments, in a relative simplicity of thought and a strong opposition between the various segments: δειλή / κεχαρισμένη θυμω, Ταῦτα μένε σε στρίβουν εγώ / ουν δέ σε τεθύνοντα κίχανοις, etc.

In the second part of her lament (290 b- 294) Briseis narrates her disastrous experience, the death of her first husband and of her three brothers:

But the husband to whom my father and my noble mother gave me, I saw him before our city mangled by the sharp spear, and my three brothers, dear ones—my own mother bore them, who all met their day of death.

A remarkable feature of this passage is the repetition of the phrase δεδατιγμένου ὄξετ χαλκῷ that is used a few lines before in the diegesis to describe the corpse of Patroclus as it appears to Briseis (283): ως ἦν Πάτροκλος δεδατιγμένου ὄξετ χαλκῷ, a repetition that might suggest that, according to the poet, Briseis receives an analogous experience from the deaths of both her husband and of Patroclus. The adjective κηδείους, postponed with such an emotional effect (Ameis-Hentze), is a rare word in the Iliad. The rhythm of the passage is analogous to the first one: each line closes with a formulaic segment, a familiar expression, while the last verse runs on a different movement, unmarked by commonly repeated expressions, as if to suggest a pause. The expression ὀλέθριον ἡμαρ is found only here and in a few lines (409) in Xanthos’ speech when he foresees Achilles’ own day of death. This unique iteration, therefore, could be called antiphonal to the extent that it responds to Briseis’ expression and

9. As is clear from these remarks I do not consider the effect of this rhythm as being physical—though it might have also been so at the moment of the performance—but textual and poetic. Any reader knows what sort of reactions the encounter of the formula creates: for instance, meeting the formula podas ὄκα τις Ἀκήλεσ at the end of the line means to manage and negotiate the iteration in ways that differ from the usual decoding of the other words, for it means either to skip over it, or to feel the puzzlement of the iteration in such different contexts, or to repeat the whole formula by heart, without reading it. In all these and other possible reactions a stress, a quickening and a relaxation ensue.

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unites the death of Patroclos, Briseis’ husband, and Achilles in one iterated piece of diction.\textsuperscript{10}

The last part of Briseis’ lament is labeled by Lohmann as “unerfüllte Hoffnung” (1970, 103):

\begin{verbatim}
oude mev oude m' esakes, dt' andra emon okus 'Achilleus
ektinein, perseoin de polin theio Mouritos,
klaiiein, alla m' esakes 'Achilleios theio
kouridin allochon theisein, deiein t' evi xypaioi
es theia, dasiein de yaisen meta Myrmidoneis.
to so' amoton klaio tebupota melixou ain. (295-300)
\end{verbatim}

But you would not let me ever weep, not when swift Achilles slayed my husband, not when he plundered the city of godlike Mynes, no, but you kept promising me that you would make of me the legitimate wife of godlike Achilles, that you would lead me back to Phthia on the ships and hold there my marriage ceremony among the Myrmidons. So I weep without rest for your death, you always kind.

The most remarkable point of this passage lies in the bold gesture whereby Briseis explains to her listeners—among whom is Achilles—her position between Achilles, of whom she is the concubine, and Patroclos, whom Achilles holds as his “most dear hetairos.” She uses the authority of Patroclos to assert that it was Patroclos’ design and will that Achilles should choose Briseis as his legitimate wife. Briseis’ gesture is bold and provoking: she continues to outline a private portrait of Patroclos, and she reminisces publicly about the promises that joy-giving Patroclos, the gentle Patroclos, had given her, the (secret?) plans he was elaborating for her happiness. Because of this reminiscing, Briseis crowns her lament with the view of her marriage banquet and festivities among the Myrmidons. Now Patroclos’ death has eliminated the supporter of this plan, the escorter of the lady to the legitimate bed of Achilles, but the plan could still be enacted, if Achilles were willing. Patroclos’ kindness, the mark of his personality, should only continue to speak to his great companion. We will hear later Achilles’ answer to this public display of Patroclos’ plan to marry Briseis to Achilles.

The familiar expression okus 'Achilleus—at the end of the line like the many other ones that qualify the subjects: drxame laow (289), patiter kai potnia mitter (291), mia geivato mitter (293)—emphasizes Achilles’ military virtuosity, since okus 'Achilleus characterizes him as a warrior, for instance in the specific pursuit of Hector at XXI 211, XX 188, 229, etc. Yet okus 'Achilleus makes us think also of Achilles as okymoros (I 417, XVIII 95, 458), and we have only to wait for Achilles’ antiphonal lament, when he will evoke his early death in Troy (328-29), to recognize the appropriateness of this allusive epithet.

\textsuperscript{10} Of course the use of techar with a specific epithet is what is most formulaic in epic diction: see exoxen techar (XXI 100, XXII 202, etc.), moroxen techar (XXV 613, etc.). From this point of view our expression esakes techar is formulaic, but the uniqueness of the epithet in this otherwise repeated expression puts in evidence the imprecision of this heuristic tool that we call the “formula.” Besides, which texts should be included in order to establish the repeated features of the “formula”? The hexametric corpus? Hesiod included? Oh the retroactivated nature of this critical tool, on its weaknesses and shortcomings, see Pucci (1987) 238-40.
The epithetic ending 'Ἀχιλλῆος θείος (297), rhyming in chiasmus with θείοιο Μύνητος (296), declares easily its generic force, but since the chiasmus is never gratuitous it is easy to see what parallels and what contrasts these two kings, Mynes and Achilles, in the terrible experience of Briseis. This closing passage is made emotional and emphatic by the chiasmus (295-96: is Mynes the husband of Briseis? 299), the incredible postponement of klaiein, the repetition of tethnēota (300 and 289), with the concomitant chiastic opposition of the notions dead/alive in 288-89 and 300, where the last word of meilikhon aiei gives an immortal continuity to the living kindness of this dead man.

The whole utterance (287-300) opens and closes with the apostrophe to Patroclos, as if he could listen to her: the abysmal pathos of saying to a corpse: “you are dead, you, joy of my heart... you forever kind” is too ritual to shock us and at the same time it should shock us. For this fictive interaction and address is made possible by the speaking “I” in the paradoxical posture of rhetorically denying that death while simultaneously decrying it. Furthermore this fictive address puts emphasis and directness on the speaking “I,” who accordingly narrates to the dead “you” her pain, the past griefs his death reminds her of, the hopes his death now frustrates. All this sum of pain assumes the same irreversibility as that decried death has, but at the same time it is couched in a fictive address, and almost in an imaginary dialogue. These features intimate the paradoxical nature of the utterance of pity and self-pity, the investment of the “I” in the loss of the other, the rhetorical structure that contains and makes possible that investment. The line by line utterance with emphasis/relaxation at one repeated point outlines a specific rhythm, while each segment takes power and meaning in contrast to the other, as we have seen, joy/pain, life/death.

It remains for us to analyze also and simultaneously the attenuation or dissemination of specific meaning that occurs through the folds and the meshes of the formulaic or repeated segments. They of course produce emphasis/relaxation just because they function as refrains, but they refer to and evoke other contexts and texts. In this way they constitute also the source of an attenuation or indeterminacy of meaning. But I will discuss this point with the analysis of Achilles’ own utterance.

After Briseis’ mourning in tears, the group of women intone their lamentations and Patroclos for each of them is “a pretext” (prophasin) to weep about...
her own misery (301-02). In consonance with Briseis’ emphasis on the loss of her husband and then on the gentle Patroclus who was promoting her marriage with Achilles, the miseries (këdea) that the women weep for should be analogous and refer to the death of their men and their consequent fall into servitude. The text suggests the paradoxes we have already felt in the case of Briseis: (1) the women’s crying turns into a mourning about themselves as pity turns into self-pity and the other into an alter ego; (2) the living beings mourn about their future death, while the actual dead is rhetorically alive so as to be told about his past death.

Yet with the remark that Patroclus was for each of them a “pretext” about her own misery (këdea), the Iliad reaches a sublime vastness and intensity. It seems to suggest that there is a reason for the specificity of the lamentations of the women in the mourning cries, in their gestures of pain and self-destruction. On the one hand their disfiguring gestures mime the death of the person they mourn for, but, on the other, they lament for themselves, i.e., for the specific female condition, as slaves in this case, or dependent upon a male in many others (see, for instance, XXIV 725 ff.). Accordingly, as they decry, by miming death, the loss of their man, they might simultaneously intimate that he represents their servitude and their metaphorical death (often marriage is metaphorically described as a form of death for the parthenos), a servitude-death that is paradoxically also their freedom and life.14

It is instructive to compare the antiphonal comment of the diegesis after Achilles’ lament (338-39). Here the chiefs do not lament for their own misery (këdea), suffering, or death but for “whatever” (ta) they have left at home, we assume their possessions, wives, children, and slaves. The comparison is antiphonal and differential: as the women hear Briseis mourning for Patroclus, they weep for their lost men, miming their deaths, themselves images of servitude and death; but the men, after Achilles’ mourning, lament for having abandoned their possessions, of which wives and slaves are a part. We have a perfect chiastic structure: males lament for being deprived of those possessions, the females; and these, in turn, lamenting for their males’ deaths, in fact lament also for their own deaths inasmuch as they are “possessions” of the males.

After the presentation of the women, the diegesis begins to prepare the context of Achilles’ antiphonal mourning and it describes the care of the Athenian chiefs for the hero (303-07): “The Achaean chiefs clustered around Achilles begging him to eat. But he, weeping, refused: ‘I beg you—if any of you my comrades will listen to me—do not press me to satiate my heart with food and drink, since such dreadful pain has reached me...’” (μή με πρὶν σίτοιο κελεύετε μηδὲ ποτήτος / ἅσσοσθαι φιλὸν ἥτορ, ἐπεὶ μ’ ἄχος αἰνὸν ἢ κάνει...). A different, gruesome sort of nurture satiates his heart, the blood of his enemy, as the diegesis says immediately after when the chiefs leave Achilles and only a few of the faithful ones try vainly to console him (312-13):

14. For the relationship between marriage and death for the parthenos see Loraux (1985), and Vernant (1990) 197 ff.
In the same vein the text will make clear that Achilles’ heart wants “to glut (asai) Ares with Hector’s blood” (XX 78, XXII 267). This is a gruesome inversion since Achilles’ heart refuses to satiate its appetite with food and drink but needs to glut Ares with the blood of the enemy. He longs for a bloody ritual that deeply upsets the normal biological rhythm of life. In Book XXII Achilles will wish that his heart and his menos would impel him to eat Hector’s body raw (346-47). The odd centrality of the “heart” in all these passages should not pass unnoticed. Both source of anthropophagous appetite for blood and stern rejection of all food in an ascetic communion with death, the heart is the circulating term that receives here a rhythm and a function contradicting those of the normal biological life.

These are the premises of Achilles’ lament for Patroclus. The food Patroclus prepared for him leads Achilles to think of the dear friend now that he, miming the asceticism of death, refuses all food (315-21):

Truly you too, sometimes, my doomed, my dearest friend, would set before us a tasty meal yourself, here in the tent quickly and expertly, while the Achaeans hastened to carry lamentable Ares against the Trojans, breakers of horses. But now you lie mangled and my heart fasts from drink and food, that are inside the house, for desire of you.

Like Briseis, Achilles begins by addressing Patroclus with a “thou” and an expression about Patroclus’ preciousness for himself, “my dearest friend” 18—

15. The same expression is used by Diomedes in V 288-89; a similar one for the spear XXI 70, 168, etc. The terms asai, aatos, etc., produce a series of generic expressions evoking martial hatred, weapons, animism, animals feeding on corpses, etc.

16. The image polémou stóma is repeated in XX 359 as stoma hasminé by Achilles himself, as he takes over this expression from the diegesis. The antiphonal repetitions between diegesis and mimesis would deserve a long study.

17. Commenting on these passages and on these connections, Nagy (1979) 136 writes: “The elders of the Achaeans are imploring Achilles to eat (XIX 303-04), but he refuses and insists on keeping a fast (XIX 304-308, 319-21); while he is fasting, he actually reminisces about the meals that Patroclus used to serve up to him (XIX 314-18, especially 316). This grim juxtaposition of two images, the bloody jaws of war and the hero who goes without meals while Patroclus lies unavenged, is only part of a ghastly Iliaic theme that finally comes to a head at the moment when a victorious Achilles is standing triumphant over the sprawled figure of a dying Hector and says: I wish that somehow my menos and my thumós impelled me to slice you up and eat your flesh raw, for the things you did” (XXII 346-47). Nagy, then, analyses the famous similes in which Achilles is compared to a carnivorous lion whose thumós impels him to its dais “feast” of sheep, and correctly concludes that “here the menos and the thumós of Achilles are bringing our hero to the verge of a bestial deed.”

18. On this philia in the mournings, see Ecker (1990) 118, n. 314.
compare Briseis’ “joy of my heart.” Through this pathetic address Achilles remembers him when he was alive and then he states: “But now you lie mangled” in antiphony with Briseis’ “and now...I come back and I find you dead.”

I touch upon these repetitions Lohmann and others have pointed out to frame the general antiphonal correspondence within which I would like to show striking differences and unexpected responses. First, the insistence on the heart refusing food. While Briseis had spoken of Patroklos as “joy of my heart,” Achilles’ heart is the source of sterner, irregular distressing desires and impulses. He mentions the regular meals Patroklos prepared in the domesticity of the klistē, only to state after the recognition (“now you lie mangled”) that “my heart fasts from drink and food, that are inside the house, for desire of you.” The paradoxical nature of the apostrophe to the dead extends to Achilles’ statement since the heart, seat of life, ceases to have its normal desires and longs for death, and with this longing prepares the next procession of deaths, imaginary and real, of the father, of the son, and of himself. The heart dictates its needs and imposes them on Achilles: it is a living organ inside Achilles, functioning as a natural force, impelling as an animal instinct. Its will is not negotiable. Achilles makes it clear: “do not keep pressing me that I should satiate my heart with food and drink...” (306-07). “My heart fasts from drink and food...” (319-20). In a few lines he will say: “My heart was hoping that only I would die...” (θυμός ἐνι στήθεσαν 328).

This repetition, this insistence, could be judged in different ways. Truly, by being the repeated subject of will and desire, the heart becomes a sort of label for the whole person, a melodramatic substitute for Achilles, and accordingly risks becoming a subject for all seasons, a dead figure of speech. On the other hand, however, the melodrama is serious, emotionally raised to its highest diapason, producing itself with a tremendous directness and unbeatable simplicity. Accordingly, this exhibition of the heart produces a double-bind effect. On the one hand it becomes the figure of speech that allows a simple or naive psychology to operate. One may say that the heart allows Homer to give account of many decisions without troubling to find psychological motivations. As the lion’s heart impels him to attack the sheep, so the warrior’s heart impels him to fight the enemy. The heart in this interpretation would function mechanically as a symbol for human instinct and dim awareness.

On the other hand, however, this exhibition of the heart can be felt as increasing the depth of pathos and as enhancing the hero’s deeply felt awareness of his existential destination. For Achilles’ heart would be symbolic of his extreme sensitivity, of his readiness to expose and parade his emotional temper and whims, his existential attitudes. Let us notice for a quick contextual comparison that Sappho in her poem I (poikilothron’ athanat’ Aphroditai) mentions her heart three times (thumos 4, 18, 27) as the center of her emotional reactions. Especially when his heart impels Achilles to pulsate in accordance with the frightening and ascetic companionship of death, to read in it the hero’s existential awareness is stronger than simply recording the mechanical repetition of the heart as a dead or vague figure of speech. But the menace of this dead, vague symbol does not vanish easily from our reading.
The double-bind effect that I am describing for this repetition of the notion of “heart” affects of course all the repetitions of familiar phrases, “formulae,” iterated segments, verses, etc., that constitute so largely the epic diction. These iterations, on the one hand, ennoble and aggrandize—as already Milman Parry had pointed out—the pathos or the effect of the diction and define by way of repeated contexts some specific area of meaning or rhetorical emphasis. But, on the other, they connect and evoke too many contexts, and in the act of accommodating themselves to all these contexts they are forced to assume some indeterminacy. Accordingly, the singular signification or emphasis is lost and the repeated phrase sounds attenuated, a vague indicator, a mere ornament. In extreme cases its stressing power is tonal rather than cognitive. Within these double-bind effects, however, the readers are not completely powerless. They may favour what may finally be the stronger way of reading the text, the cognitive aspect of the repetition, its allusive, antiphonal, polemical function, though they remain aware of the metaphysical complicity upon which this choice depends.

Let us begin with an interesting example. After the pathetic address to Patroclus and the linear text of lines 316-17, Achilles utters line 318: Τρεστιν ἐφ’ ἵππον ἁμοιν φέρειν πολύδακρων “Ἄρης. It is used only one other time in the _Iliad_, by Hector (VIII 516), and in Hector’s mouth it is of course correct because the Achaeans bring a war that, as such, is always full of tears, but it is especially so for the Trojans. In that passage (VIII 516) Hector incites the Trojans to make the war full of tears also for the Achaeans, but it remains clear that the war is the source of griefs for the Trojans. It is therefore understandable that Priam may naturally speak of the _polemon poludacrun_, the _lacrimabile bellum_ (III 165), and that so does Andromache (XXII 487), and even Iris speaking to Helen (III 132). But why should Achilles care that the war bring tears to the Trojans if it were not for the fact that the war against the Trojans has brought tears also to him? Achilles is the only Achaean in the whole _Iliad_ to term the war full of tears. Through Achilles’ use of this line we realize that Achilles is the only _aristos_ among the Achaeans to suffer a loss comparable to that of the Trojans. By way of sharing the same dictional treasure, Achilles and Hector are shown to share an analogous destiny in the war and Achilles and Priam to enter a spiritual community well before Book 24.

This conclusion is strengthened and supported by another remarkable feature, the use of δυσάμμορο in line 315. This word is repeated by Priam to define Hecabe as the unlucky mother of Hector (XXII 428) and by Andromache to define herself and Hector together (“I and you δυσάμμοροι,” XXII 485 and XXIV 727). It is therefore a word used by mourners for themselves and also for the dead. In all Homer nobody else but these characters and Achilles uses this adjective.

These allusions would discriminate Achilles among all the Achaean heroes and label him as the only one who is not ideologically fully determined by the political tenets the poem stages. He is represented as being insensitive to the political allegiance of which Agamemnon or Odysseus are described as cham-
pions, and accordingly he is viewed by the poem either as an emotional individualist, even as a possible traitor, or as the hero who more closely symbolizes the poetic tenets. In this passage Achilles’ negative position toward the common goal of the war is strongly emphasized when he will say (324-25): “I fight against the Trojans in a distant land for the sake of blood-chilling Helen,” labeling Helen with a violent hapax. We are reminded of Achilles’ un compromised rejection of the war in Book IX.

To some extent Achilles must appear within this spectrum of characterization, from traitor to sublime hero, because of the difficult posture of the epic poet. The poet in fact cannot disentangle the poem from the political implications it has for the kings he is singing for, and accordingly he cannot disavow the political principles of the war. On the other hand, however, he is essentially in complicity with the hero who, by choosing to die, simply, for kleos, perfectly implements the function of epic poetry, i.e., to grant immortal kleos. If his song must be immortal, the death it magnifies must have the same immortal grounds, namely no real, immediate purpose, but the same gratuitousness and necessity as those of the song. 19

The reader may suspect that I am deriving a lot of heavy implications and consequences from the mere repetition of a verse. But I am purposely activating the effects of the repetition in order to produce a full and meaningful reading of it. Let us see some other examples. We have summarily described the phrase κεχαρισμένε θυμιότατε that Briseis addresses to Patroclos. The same phrase is used for Diomedes three times in a whole formulaic line that is successively addressed to him by Sthenelos, Athena, and Agamemnon in the fifth and tenth books; then it is uttered by Achilles in an affectionate address to Patroclos in XI 608; finally we encounter this κεχαρισμένε θυμιότατε in Briseis’ utterance in her lament. To the extent that Achilles too calls Patroclos “dear to the heart,” Briseis’ expression has some quotational or antiphonal force. As we have seen, the remaining part of the line: Πάτροκλε μοι δειλή πλείστον increases the expressive force by a semantic contrast, while putting all the terms in their fixed paradigmatic slot.

The line that Achilles stitches together by using three separate formulas: ἐμὸν κήρ, πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύσως, and ἐνδού ἐνύτευσω is new because these phrases are never used together and because some of the expressions are loose, that is, unrepeated, like ἀκμηνον (hapax in Homer) and σὴ ποθῇ which never occurs with that rhetorical emphasis. Besides, the expression coheres fully with the sentiment Achilles has already expressed twice. The combination of syntagmatic and paradigmatic iterations creates the final adonius in line 319 σὺταύτῃ ἐμὸν κήρ, that metrically corresponds to the familiar formula σὺ ταύτῃ Ἀχιλλεύσ. The identification of Achilles with his heart is metrically suggested.

The position of σὴ ποθῇ at the beginning of the line and with strong enjambement is unique. But the force of the expression lies also in its internal rhyming, σὴ ποθῇ, and in the stop after this rhyming, as the expression closes the sentence. This expression of sorrow and desire for a person is also used, for

19. On the gratuitousness and necessity of epic poetry as kleos, see Pucci (1988), especially 146-51.
instance, for Odysseus (XI 471), but it is used in the conditional mode, “if he dies.” For Patroclus, on the contrary, it is real (XVII 690). Finally the audience is forced to reach the pathetic conclusion that the desire (pothê) Achilles wanted the Achaeans to feel for himself (IX 240) has been transformed into Achilles’ desire and sorrow for Patroclus.

These allusive and discriminating repetitions, like all the precedent analogous cases, whatever the intentions of the poet, emerge and take textual shape through a combination of contingency and determination, chance and necessity, choice and mechanical routine. I have read them favouring the positive aspects of these features (determination, necessity, choice), aware that this reading is authentically threatened by the contingency, chance, and mechanical routine that combine in the production of these repetitions. This condition increases also the spectrum of the possible significations of these allusive repetitions. But this reading is today necessary, for its metaphysical force has been too often ignored, both by the proponents of Homer’s mechanical formulaic diction and by the readers of an Homeric “written” text. In other terms, this way of making sense of the Homeric repetitions has to be proposed and tried in order to assess fully the force and the creativity of this poetic means, though the reader should also be aware of the negative side, along which, of course, the repetition cannot declare and sustain a specific set of intentions.

The next theme in both Briseis’ and Achilles’ lament is the idea of an evil succeeding an evil (290 and 320), and Achilles’ recognition that Patroclus’ death is more grievous for him than the death of his father and even of his son is a much more poignant assertion than Briseis’. However, his assertion, by treasuring personal emotional attachments over family connections, remains in the wake of her ideology. It would be impossible to hear a similar statement from an Odysseus, for instance. He develops this idea with great intensity for seven lines (321-27) through inserted details, additions, and crescendos. One has the impression that he simply cannot achieve a sufficiently cumulative effect to express his despair:

| οὔ μὲν γάρ τι κακώτερον ἄλλο πάθωμι. | οὔς᾿ εἰ κεν τὸν πατρὸς ἄποφθεγμένου πυθόμην. |
| οὔς᾿ εἰ κεν τὸν πατρὸς ἄποφθεγμένου πυθόμην. | ὡς τοῦ νῦν θύειν τέρεν κατὰ δάκρυνον εἴθει. |
| χρὴτε τοιοῦτο ὡς τοῦ ἀλλοτρίῳ ἡμῖν ἱδώρ. | εἴθετο ποιησάμενης ἐλείνης τρόποιν πολεμίζοις. |
| χρὴτε τοιοῦτο ὡς τοῦ ἀλλοτρίῳ ἡμῖν ἱδώρ. | ἥτο τὸν ὅσ σκύρος μοι ἐν τρέφεται φίλος υἱός. |
| εἴ τοι εἰς τοῖς νόμοις πολεμίζοις. | εἰ τοῖς εἰς τοῖς νόμοις πολεμίζοις. |

there is no more evil blow that I could suffer, not even if I should learn of my father’s death, who now in Phthia pours tender tears in the absence of such a son of his, myself, I who fight against the Trojans in a distant land for the sake of blood-chilling Helen; or the death of my dear son, reared for me in Scyros, if godlike Neoptolemos is still living.

Achilles places himself between his father and his son, both of whom he imagines possibly dead, in order to emphasize the exclusive pain he feels for the
hetairos who lies really dead before him. He tells him and himself that he would prefer them to be dead rather than him, his comrade. This devaluation of his family ties before Patroclos seems to feminize Achilles and make of him a mirror image of Briseis. His pitiful description of Peleus’ grief (322 ff.) hinges around the formula of line 323, τέρεν κατὰ δάκρυον εἶβει, which is used elsewhere for female characters, and here is used for the old Peleus. Achilles had already used this phrase with an ironic innuendo referring to Patroclos in XVI 11, when he had compared his comrade in tears to a little girl who runs weeping to her mother (himself!). In this feminine transfer of his and his comrade’s attitudes, one could read the socially and politically marginal position of the hero, rejected by and refusing political power; but, with the deepest implications for Achilles’ characterisation, we could read in that feminine transfer the sign of his fully emotional suspension to his unique destiny of death. This pitiful transfer of feminine tears to the old father Peleus goes along with Achilles’ violent accusation of Helen as “giving the chills,” a hapax, and his dismissing the war as a senseless fight for such a creature.

After the father and the son, he extends this funeral parade to himself in the last part of his lament (328-37):

πρὶν μὲν γάρ μοι θυμὸς ἐνι αὕτης αἰνέσασιν ἐξολτεῖ
όλων ἐμὲ φίλεσοβοι ἀπ’ Ἀργεῖος ὅποθετοιο
αὐτοῦ ἐν Τροίῃ, σὺ δὲ τῇ Θηῆνῃ νεκροῖ
ὡς ἄν μοι τὸν ποίῳ θοῦ ἐνὶ νη μελαία
Σκυρόθεν δεισαὐγοὺς καὶ οἱ δεέξιας ἱκαστα,
κτίσιν ἐμὴν διωάς τε καὶ ψυχεφῃς μέγα δώμα.
ὥσ γάρ Πηλῆα γ’ ὀλοίμαι ἡ κατὰ πάμφων
τεθύμεν, ὁ ποῦ τυττόν ἔτι ἡμεῖτ’ ἀκάκησοβαι
γὰρ τε στυγερῷ καὶ ἐμὴν ποτίδευμεν αἰεῖ
λυγρήν ἀγγελικήν, δὲ ἀποσφημένου πυθήται.

For, before now, my heart in the breast had hoped that I alone would die far from horse-pasturing Argos, here in Troy, and that you would return to Phthia and would lead my child home from Scyros, fast in the black ship, and show him all my possessions, the servants and the large house with its high roof. For I fear that Peleus is already utterly dead, or perhaps in his last breath of life suffers for hateful old age, forever waiting the sad news until he learns that I am dead.

Achilles answers indirectly to Briseis’ intimation following which Patroclos had wished that Achilles would marry Briseis in Phthia and was intending to organize this marriage. The answer is the most radical negation a man can give, for it involves Achilles’ own death here in Troy: “no, he implies, it has never been a question for me to think of marrying Briseis in Phthia, since my heart hoped that I alone would die in Troy and that you, Patroclos, would take care of my son in Phthia.” Briseis is unmentioned and silently excluded from the expectations and the projects Achilles had formulated about himself. The answer to Briseis’ intimation and hope is crude, but not crueler than the assertion Achilles applies to himself as he repeats twice the recognition of his close death. Pathos ensues again from the mention of the thumos that hoped for the death of Achilles only. Other heroes of course speak of their hearts conceiving and holding a hope, but
the hope is always that of winning glory (XII 407, diegesis), destroying the enemy (XIII 813, XV 288), and analogous feats, not a hope of one’s death.

Achilles recognizes that Patroclos will not lead Neoptolemos to Phthia to show him his father’s “possessions, the servants, and the large house with its high roof”: line 333 is repeated two other times in the Odyssey, and is hapax in the Iliad. But it has the resonance of an “internal repetition” in this passage because of Achilles’ mention of Patroclos leading Neoptolemos on the black ship to Phthia to show his domestic possessions:

.constitutes another indirect answer to Briseis’ hope that Patroclos would lead her on the (black) ship to Phthia, as Achilles’ legitimate wife:

Since Achilles knew that he would die in Troy, he had planned another trip and a different escort for Patroclos. But Patroclos is dead and he will not be able to escort Neoptolemos either. In this context Achilles’ possessions seem abandoned, and at any rate lost for him, and the point contrasts strongly with the nostalgia the Achaean chiefs feel for their possessions as they cry in antiphonal response to Achilles (338-39).

In his closing words Achilles fears for the death of his father: Achilles’ last remarks verbally close with a ring compositional repetition as Nagy notices when he illustrates the meaning and the role of the root phthi- (with the play on Phthia) in building the basic principle that the hero must die: see τοῦ πατρὸς ἀποφθιμένου πυθοίμην (322), ὡτ’ ἀποφθιμένου πυθοίται (337), with the perfect reversal of roles (Nagy [1979] 185 and notes). This ring composition privileges here the internal relation between father and son, and it softens Achilles’ previous statement that Patroclos’ death is more painful for him than his father’s death, but it does not exclude the death of Patroclos over whose corpse this mirrored death is evoked. The phrase with ἀποφθιμένου in line 322 and in the closing line 337 is repeated only in these two spots, a sort of “internal quotation” whose force becomes evident only at the end of the passage and remains exclusively active within this passage of Achilles.20

The rhythm of Achilles’ antiphonal lament has larger waves than Briseis’ speech: two or three lines without any strong, repeated, familiar element are followed by one, two, or three lines fully or almost fully formulaic. The motion is slower, more majestic, the breathing more powerful. Let us now read in the rhythm of this passage the several effects that result from it. First, the high pitch zones are those at the end of some themes: see 318, 337, at the development of

20. Likewise the formula of line 319: κείσαι δεδατγμένον partially recalls the more frequently repeated one that has been used by Briseis (283): δεδατγμένον ὤξη χαλκῷ, but because of this proximity Achilles’ phrase takes on an almost antiphonal force.
the theme of fasting (319b, 321a), at the representation of the old Peleus 323-24a, etc. I do not mean that these zones are more powerful and more expressive than the others, but simply that their accent has a different pitch. In fact, as I have shown, very few expressions in this text have the force and the pathos of σῦ ποθὴ (321) which is in no way accented by repetition and metrical fixity. The intensification/relaxation in contrast with the linearity (or lack of familiar echoes) of the unrepeated parts is significant only on a rhythmic register, in terms of more or less chanting, in terms of more or less familiar, pleasurable echoes. If we inscribe these terms in the body language of the poet who “chanted” them, we must imply the tension of his body and soul as he moves through these rhythmic alternations.

Achilles’ antiphonal lament leaves no hopes to anybody: the planned marriage to which Briseis makes allusion is denied, the awaiting of Peleus and Neoptolemos for the return of Achilles is frustrated, the normal rhythm of life of the hero himself is threatened, and Zeus must send him some nectar to save him from destitution (341 ff.). Though Achilles’ mourning lamentation contrasts with some of the themes of Briseis’ lament, it harmonizes with it in some specific aspects. Both lamentations move from a posture of marginality, express an intense emotional force, and point to the mourners’ own death. This analysis has shown the posture of political and existential suspension from which Achilles speaks and I do not need to enlarge on it. I prefer to comment on the last point. Briseis recalls the real death of her husband and brothers and symbolically mimes her own death by disfiguring and staining with blood her face, neck and breast. Achilles, in an ascetic fasting that mimes death, evokes the imagined death of his father and son and mentions his close real death. He is therefore lamenting from the posture more radically marginal and suspended from all human connections, that of his community with death. The readers are better able to perceive in this extreme posture also the signs that point to Achilles’ marginal position in the earlier parts of the poem, his relative detachment from the political allegiance, his commitment to kleos rather than timē, his unique leaning to private attachments (Patroclus, Phoenix, Briseis), and his display of unchecked emotions. It is then not a mere chance that the greatest hero mourns over his comrade in an antiphonal lament with his slave and concubine.