



The Muses' Playground

The Example of the *Iliad*

Metre matters

μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρὶ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε,
πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν
ἥρώων,

Metre matters: Example 1

- Fast-moving first line (DDSDDD), naming Achilles in the 'clearer' second half: helps identify this character as the pivot of the plot
- Slow-moving third line (SSSDDD), spondees dealing with the death of many: helps identify the theme of war death
 - The swiftness and mercilessness of such death highlighted by the DDD at the end of the line
- => Use the metre to support your readings.
Commentaries will usually include material on unusual metrical features, so this can be done even if you don't have Greek

Muses matter

Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans. Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades, and many a hero did it yield a prey to dogs [...] And which of the gods was it that set them on to quarrel? **It was the son of Zeus and Leto**; for he was angry with the king (Hom. // 1.1-9)

- The bard as a holder of privileged knowledge?
- Direct address to the muse... ...and what seems like a direct answer: the answer to the bard's question is the 'muse's narrative'
- The bard's specific skill also demonstrated in his moving between a minor issue (A's wrath) and its wide-reaching effects

‘Bardic’ narrative / Character narrative: Contrasting narratives

It was the son of Zeus and Leto; for he was angry with the king and sent a pestilence upon the host to plague the people, because the son of Atreus had dishonoured Chryses his priest. Now Chryses had come to the ships of the Achaeans to free his daughter, and had brought with him a great ransom: moreover he bore in his hand the sceptre of Apollo wreathed with a suppliant's wreath and he besought the Achaeans, but most of all the two sons of Atreus, who were their chiefs.

“My child, why do you weep? What sorrow has come upon your heart? Speak out; hide it not in your mind, that we both may know.” Then with heavy moaning spoke swift-footed Achilles to her: “You know. Why then should I tell the tale to you who knows all? We went forth to Thebe, the sacred city of Eetion, and laid it waste, and brought here all the spoil. This the sons of the Achaeans divided properly among themselves, but for the son of Atreus they chose out the fair-cheeked daughter of Chryses. However, Chryses, priest of Apollo, who strikes from afar, came to the swift ships of the bronze-clad Achaeans, to free his daughter, bearing ransom past counting, and in his hands he held the wreaths of Apollo who strikes from afar, on a staff of gold, and he implored all the Achaeans, but most of all the two sons of Atreus, marshallars of the people.

Contrasting different types of narrative

- ‘In a pattern which we will come to observe as typical of the *Iliad*, the presentation of action in narrative is subsequently followed by the attempt of a character to give definition and meaning to what has occurred from his or her own point of view in the drama’

(Rabel, 1997, 43)

- Either:
 - narrator >< character
 - character >< character
- May be used to underline the complex nature of the matter told
- ...so don't just look for the 'privileged bardic narrative' but also for its interactions with other stories told

Careful!

The example of Chryse and Achilles

- Transference of knowledge:
- *The old man trembled and obeyed him. He went off without a word along the shore of the sounding sea. But when he found himself alone he prayed fervently to King Apollo, son of Leto of the lovely locks.*
- *But this was not at all to Agamemnon's liking. He sent him packing, with a stern warning in his ears. So the old man went home in anger; but Apollo listened to his prayers, because he loved him dearly.*
- 'Sometimes, even Homer sleeps...'

Iliad 1: Showcasing Homer's narrative

- The *Iliad* covers 51 days in the ninth year of the war against Troy (from Chryse's appearance at the Greek camp to the burial of Hector)
 - *In medias res*
- By and large, the story moves chronologically
- With only few exceptions, important events on this time line are shown to the audience
 - Storyline A: in focus, key events
 - Storyline B: 'off-stage', no key events take place
- This means that the narrator must employ a number of techniques to give background

Iliad 1.8-305 (De Jong, 2007, 35)

- D: Apollo caused Agamemnon and Achilles to quarrel
 - C: ...for he sent a plague...
 - B: ...because Agamemnon did not treat Chryse with respect...
 - A: ...when Chryse came to ransom his daughter...
 - C: ...Apollo sent a plague...
 - D: ...and Achilles and Agamemnon quarrelled
- A combination of ring-composition and 'epic regression'

Capturing the beginning of the war?

- The first book of the Iliad evokes both the beginning and the aftermath of the Trojan war
 - Agamemnon mentions Clytaemnestra and plans to bring home a woman as bounty – evoking the *nostos* of Agamemnon
 - ‘It was no quarrel with the Trojan spearmen that brought *me* here to fight. They have never done *me* any harm. They have never lifted cow or horse of mine, nor ravaged any crop that the deep soil of Phtia grows to feed her men; for the roaring seas and many a dark range of mountains lie between us.’
 - ‘The truth is that we joined the expedition to please you; [...] to get satisfaction from the Trojans for Menelaus and yourself.’
- This continues in Books 2 and 3, which also bring to the audience’s mind the start of the war:
 - The catalogue of ships (Book 2), emphasis on getting there
 - The duel of Paris and Menelaus (Book 3), emphasis on the abduction of Helen
 - The teichoskopeia of Helen (Book 3), emphasis on Helen’s past life

Analepses: Repetitions

- Hom. *Il.* 2.668f: These had sailed, in their fifty ships, under Achilles' command. But now the sound and fury of war did not concern them at all. There was no-one to draw them up in battle order; for the great Achilles of the nimble feet was lying by his ships, sick at heart for the gentle girl Briseis [...] **But he was not destined to lie idle for long.**
- Can be either of material within the story or of events outside it or before it – warrior obituaries best example of this in the *Iliad*
- Can come from either the all-knowing narrator or from characters in-story:

Analepsis by character: Nestor

- ‘You are both my juniors. And what is more, I have mixed in the past with even better men than you and never failed to carry weight with them, the finest men I have ever seen or shall see, men like Perithous and Dryas, shepherd of the people, Caeneus, Exadius, the godlike Polyphemus and Aegeus’ son, Theseus of heroic fame. [...] Those were the men whom I left my home in Pylos to join. I travelled far to meet them, at their own request. I played my independent part in their campaign. And they were men whom not a soul on earth today could face in battle.’
- But cf. Ov. *Met.* 5 and Nestor’s appearance there alongside some of these heroes

Prolepses: Glimpses of the future

- Both through the all-knowing narrator (implicitly through the Muse) and through characters
- De Jong distinguishes, here too, between internal and external prolepses
- Character prolepses: not always reliable
- Divine character prolepses: sometimes supporting structure, helps the reader know what to expect
 - Seers and prophecies

Calchas and Athene

- ‘But could we not consult a prophet or a priest, or even some interpreter of dreams – for dreams too are sent by Zeus – and find out from him why Phoebus Apollo is so angry with us?’ [Achilles’ suggestion]
- ‘The Archer-King will not release us from this loathsome scourge till we give the bright-eyed lady back to her father [...] When that is done, we might induce him to relent.’ [Calchas’ advice]
- ‘Come now, give up this strife and take your hand from your sword. Here is a prophecy for you – the day shall come when gifts three times as valuable as what you now have lost will be laid at your feet in payment for this outrage.’ [Athene speaks to Achilles]



Are prolepses spoilers?

- What would the ancient audience know?
- What are the effects of a proleptic statement like Athene's?
- Many other instances will comment on fate and futility of character action



Rubber-band time

- Homer's time does not move at a constant pace – this, too, has been connected with the oral origins of the text
 - ...but is common enough in text-bound literature too!!
- Retardation
 - Unexpected inclusion of a simile or a type scene
 - Through ekphrasis – cf. lecture on Cat. 64!
- Ellipses
 - Particularly of external material