

~ APPENDIX II ~

Latitudinous Alliteration

AS AN ADDENDUM to the alliterative gradations presented in Part IV, Section 5, I here offer a consummate alliterative example. The bravura passage, with playful cleverness, exploits alliterative multiples in the service of sense or meaning.

ὥς φάτο, τῷ δ' ἄρα θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ὄρινε,	1
βῆ δὲ θέειν παρὰ νῆας ἐπ' Αἰακίδην Ἀχιλῆα.	2
ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ κατὰ νῆας Ὀδυσσεύς θείοιο	3
ἔξε θέων Πάτροκλος, ἵνα σφ' ἀγορή τε θέμις τε	4
ῆην, τῇ δὴ καὶ σφί θεῶν ἐτετεύχато βωμοί,	5
ἐνθά οἱ Εὐρύπυλος βεβλημένος ἀντεβόλησε	6
σκάζων ἐκ πολέμου . . .	7

(h)ōs phato, tō(i) d' ara **thumon** eni **stēthessin** orine
 bē de **théein** para nēas ep' Aiakidēn Achilēa.
 all' (h)ote dē kata nēas Odussēos **theioio**
 (h)ixe **théōn** Patroklos, (h)ina sph' agorē te **themis** te
 ēēn, tē(i) dē kai sphī **theōn** eteteuchato bōmoi
entha (f)oi Eurupulos beblēmenos antebolēse
 skadzōn ek polemou . . .

So speaking he roused
 Patroclus' **spirit**, and **sprinted** he the distance
 Of the ships to Achilles, Aeacus' scion.
 But when in his **running** Patroclus gained the ships
 Of **godlike** Odysseus, where convened assemblies,

And **adjudications**, and where altars stood built
 To the **gods, there** met him Zeus-born Euaemōn's son,
 Eurypylus, to the mid-thigh arrow-smitten,
 From out the battle limping . . .

(Il. 11.901-909 [804-811])

The passage resorts to the orthographic similarity between **theō** 'I run' (here inf. **théein** 'to run' and pres. part. **théōn** 'running') on the one hand; and **theíoio** 'divine' (adj. gen. sing.) and **theōn** 'gods' (masc. gen. pl.) on the other. Here we largely deal with playful soundlikes for their own sake, as there is no inherent association between gods and running. Gods have no need to run. The thought is comic. They simply *go*—often "leaping" to get underway. Once in motion, they "quickly," even "rather quickly," arrive. The messenger god Hermes has winged sandals. These mitigate the notion of his running or even stepping from one errand to the next, including his numerous passages as psychopomp (guide of souls) to Hades.

We thus note in the line-numbered passage above, from lines 2 to 5: **θέειν** (*théein* 'to run'); **θείοιο** (*theíoio* 'of the divine' [Odysseus]); **θέων** (*théōn* 'running'); and **θεῶν** (*theōn* 'of the gods'). The punning is announced by what are two (formulaically joined) *thēta* words, line 1: **θυμὸν** (*thumon* 'heart, spirit') and **στήθεσσιν** (*stēthessin* 'breast'). Line 4, with **θέμις** (*themis* 'law, adjudication') expands the semantic range, given the shared verbal root and intimate connection between law and divinity, i.e., *Themis* and *theos*. The play closes in line 6 with neutral **ἐνθά** (*entha* 'there'). Additional features show the finesse of Homeric passage work. The first plays on the difference in accentuation between **θέων** (*théōn* 'running') and **θεῶν** (*theōn* 'of the gods'). In a prose passage or conversation, the two words, stressed on different syllables, would have discernibly different intonation and, thus, meaning. Theoretically, at least, were **θέων** (*théōn* 'running') spoken *outside* the hexametric line, it would have an *initial* syllable stress, as indicated by its accent mark. But in the Homeric line, since **théōn** and **theōn** end in *omega*-vowel syllables, they are necessarily stressed on *that* syllable, since long syllables, barring exception, are always weighted. The words' meanings are thus here reliant on context alone.

Second, we note in line 2 of the quoted passage the extraordinary patronymic, in always emphatic line-end position: Αἰακίδην Ἀχιλῆα (acc.)—in

Greek alliteratively pronounced *Aeakidēn Achilēa*, but Anglicized (with soft “c”) to ‘Aeacides Achilles’. It is Achilles designated *not* by his father Peleus’ name, as at the opening of the poem (and elsewhere):

μήνιν αἶδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
mēnin aeide thea Pēlēiadeō Achilēos

Sing, Goddess, the wrath of **Peleus’ son, Achilles**

[*Il.* 1.1]

He is instead designated but by his *grandfather* Aeacus’ name—Achilles’ own name added to the name-designating formula which alliteratively fills half the line. Achilles is otherwise designated solely as **Αἰακίδην** ‘Aeacides’ (acc.) at mid-line and in one place only [*Il.* 9.191]. He is many times referred to as **Αἰακίδαο** ‘Aeacides’ (gen.) in line-end position [*Il.* 2.860], the patronymic—**Αἰ-α-κί-δα-ο**—especially handy for its dactylic line-closing rhythm: — ◡ ◡ | — ◡. Accordingly, the unique **Αἰακίδην Ἀχιλῆα** ‘Aeacides Achilles’ (acc.), at line-end position, catches the listener off guard, being in one way formulaic; in another not. But there it is, testimony to the composer’s improvisational skill in an already teeming clever passage. Achilles, as no other character, has his particularities. Everything about him is special, Homeric references to him included.

Finally, we note the following in line 6, above:

ἐνθά οἱ Εὐρύπυλος βεβλημένος ἀντεβόλησε
entha (f)oi Eurypulos beblēmenos antebolēse

There the **wounded** [*beblēmenos*] Eurypylus **met** [*antebolēse*] him.
 [*antebolēse* (aor.) from *anti-ballo* ‘hit upon, meet by chance’]

Noteworthy is the plenary alliteration (*b-l-ē-s*) and the inevitable assonance of three words containing thirteen syllables and expressing little more than the casual encounter of wounded man and friend. No sound-sense import, but mere sub-finesse in an already outstanding passage. The clincher in this last pattern, however, is the embedded semantic association in Greek—call it an “in-joke”—between the words “wounded” and “met,” both formed on Gr. *ballō* ‘I throw’ (Eng. ball, ballet, ballistic). Thus, when *met* hard by an object, one is *wounded*. Here, a wounded man (*beblēmenos*) meets

(*antebolēse*) his friend whose name—*Eurypulos*—contributes to an alliteratively rich and punning three-word unit.



The second example displays alliteration with purposefully archaizing intent. It is nothing less than the opening of the *Odyssey* itself. In fact, it entails the last line alone of the poem’s opening, which sends an alliteratively unequivocal message—as if to say, this *is*, and will be treated as, an antique poem, even in in what Homeric audiences considered their “modern” times. The poet begins by invoking the Muse to tell of Odysseus, the “man of many turns,” who suffered much on both land and sea upon his return from Troy. The adventures are many, so the poet ends the invocation as follows:

τῶν ἀμόθεν γε, θεά, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπὲ καὶ ἡμῖν
tōn (h)amothēn ge theā, thugatēr, Dios eipe kai (h)ēmin

From some one of these (events), **goddess, daughter** of Zeus, tell us also

(*Od.* 1-10)

The second word **ἀμόθεν** ((h)amothēn) is a compound of **(h)amos** ‘some, someone, some one’ (archaic equivalent of otherwise Homeric and classical *tis* ‘some, someone’) and the archaic suffix **-θεν**. The doubly marked archaic compound in the poem’s very invocation signals a plentiful antiquity, even as it sounds alliteratively smart or up to date with the addition of two further θ/th sounds in the same line (tōn (h)amothēn ge **theā, thugatēr**). Such contrivance is all in the epic “day’s work,” this one appearing emphatically at the outset. The word **(h)amothēn** is, further, a hapax, with no instance of the unsuffixed **(h)amos** anywhere in Homer. Note also the secondary “γ/g” alliteration: (h)amothēn **ge** theā, thugatēr. The singular choice of **(h)amothēn** could thus be no more purposeful in its archaizing, alliterative, and metrically galloping effect (five dactyls with final spondee). One thinks of the opening line of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*: “Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,” where Middle Eng. whilome/whylome (‘formerly’)—Old Eng. whil /whilum—clearly announces the archaizing intent of an epic focused on bygone knight-hood. Homer exploits alliteration not only for its own sake but also to

announce, in his own time, how remarkably an archaic/archaizing poet he is—in diction, style, and theme.

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