Commentary: Ψ.69-92

In this passage, Patroclus' ghost, who is standing over the sleeping Achilles, speaks final words to his dear friend. He requests his own burial so that he may finally proceed into the land of the dead, and he asks that Achilles let their bones be buried together. He briefly recalls their youth together.

69-73, 75. ἐμέ. Starting with this first line where Patroclus suggests that Achilles has forgotten him, he begins to repeat the first person pronoun in an attempt to remind his friend of his existence.

Ἀχιλλέου. Patroclus' ghost ends this line, 80, and 83 with the vocative. This repetition reflects his insistence and the sense of urgency that he wishes to evoke. It also establishes intimacy between the speakers and calls to mind the etymology of Achilles' name, ὅχος.

70. ἀκηδείς, ἀκηδεῖς, impf.

71. ὅτι τάχιστα can be taken with either θάπτε or περήσω. Parallels suggest however that the phrase be taken with the imperative (e.g. X.29-30). This would make περήσω a subjunctive of purpose.
72. The notion that the unburied may not join the other spirits of the dead noticeably contradicts Elpenor’s story in λ.51-83 as well as the ghosts of the suitors in ω.186. For this reason, Nitzsch chose to athetize 72-74.

73. ποταμὸς presumably refers to the Styx (see Θ.369) which is featured in later legends of the underworld. However, the river could also refer to Okeanos, which must be crossed in λ.13-23 and ω.11-14.

74. εὐρυπυλὲς Ἀιδὼς δῶ. This phrase also appears in λ.571. It is enigmatic, since it is hard to understand how the ghost who cannot enter πύλας Ἄιδοω might wander inside the palace at the same time. One solution is that the problematic phrase indicates only the threshold of the underworld. This would agree with the story of Odysseus, who never ventured farther than the gates of Hades during his katabasis.

75. τήν χεῖρ’ demonstrates a deictic usage of the article. It perhaps reflects a much later construction indicating possession, such as in Attic, ‘your hand’.

Ωλοφύρομαι is generally taken as a present indicative with the unusual meaning, ‘I
entreat’, but there are no other examples of this sense for the word. It might also be an aorist subjunctive indicating purpose as in 71, ‘give me your hand, so that I may lament’.

76. νίσομαι, pres., possibly with fut. sense.

77-91 are quoted by Aeschines in his oration Against Timarchus (Aeschin. 1.149) in order to argue that Achilles and Patroclus were lovers. This is the longest quotation from Homer in any classical writer.

79. ἀμφέχανε, the translation 'has opened its jaws for me' is indicated by the comment of a scholiast: κατέφαγε καὶ κατέπιε.

γεινόμενόν περ, 'at my very birth'.

81. Both εὐηγενέων and εὐηγενέων appear as acceptable possibilities in different versions of this line.

83. ἐμὰ σῶν. The inclusion of these two words together is an interesting stylistic device that mirrors the meaning of the line. Patroclus places 'mine' and 'yours' together just as he wishes Achilles will place their bones together.

84. ὡς corresponds to ὡς in 91.
The shortening of the augment is problematic since it is not found elsewhere in Homer. This has led Buttmann to propose the intransitive aorist ὡς τράφομέν περ instead. Aeschines' use of the second aorist also supports this theory.

85-90. This backstory may be an attempt to reconcile the conflict between Λ.765 where Patroclus is living in Peleus' house and Σ.324 where Achilles promises Menoitios that he will bring Patroclus safely back to Opous, “from which we naturally suppose that he started”.¹

86-89. The successive use of the names of three different fathers (Menoitios, Amphidamus, and Peleus) within the span of four lines stands out as unique. This focus on paternal relations perhaps foreshadows Priam's upcoming request for the ability to bury his son.

86. ὑπό, 'by reason of'.

87. Exile here takes the place of commutation by fine as the penalty for unpremeditated homicide. A fine was perhaps more typical in Homeric times (see I.632-36). However emigration because of murder also appears in Ω.480-481 as well as in the cases of Epeigeus (Π.570-76) and Phoinix (Λ.478-82).

88. ὀμφ' ἀστραγάλοισι, 'over (the game of) knucklebones'. This is the only Homeric mention of this game that became so popular in later Greece.

90. Both ἔτραφε and ἔτρεψα are possible readings. The latter is more likely since it reflects the line's transitive meaning.

91. νῶιν ὅμη. As in 83, these words are placed next to each other to further intensify the meaning of the line.

92. This line was most probably interpolated from ω.74. There Thetis brings the funerary vessel for Achilles after his death. Here we must assume that she gave it to him when he left for the war, “an act of incredible ill-omen”.

Bibliography


