

The Poetics of Loss in Greek Epic

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Study of lament has begun to be a major part of the feminist reinterpretation of epic, including both textual study and anthropological accounts of female lament in modern Greece. Sheila Murnaghan draws on this scholarship to trace a continuum from male lament, which turns the speaker back toward an affirmation of *kleos* and epic purposes, to female lament, which ignores the death-defying fame that epic provides as compensation for heroic loss. Murnaghan's essay makes an important contribution to debates about just how subversive lament can be in epic. In spite of the ways that female lament can seem to disrupt or challenge the heroic code, Murnaghan argues that epic cannot do without lament, since lament not only begins the process of generating praise from grief but also presents the body of the enslaved and mournful widow as inspiration for the creation of the husband's unending fame. Murnaghan's interpretation leads us to form a more polyvocal and performative—and less monumental—theory of epic than more traditional readings would, one in which the poem's celebration of martial and heroic values coexists with the challenges to those values raised by lament.

The classical epic exhibits a complicated, ambiguous, and sometimes troubled relationship to the genre of lamentation. The lament is at once constitutive of epic and antithetical to it, one of epic's probable sources and a subversive element within epic that can work against what epic is trying to achieve. Lamentation thus has an important role to play in current attempts to rethink the nature of epic, to challenge a vision of epic that can be summed up in the term "monumental." This vision, which is embodied both in critical accounts of the epic and in the claims various epics make for themselves (and which this brief summary inevitably caricatures), presents epic as a massive, univocal, and celebratory form of high art.

As a genre of poetry performed on a particular social occasion and having an important function within a major and pervasive social ritual, lament helps us to find the connections between epic and more occasional, more popular poetic forms; it allows us to trace epic's dependence on the "speech genres" of ordinary communal life¹ and to appreciate epic's more dialogic, polyvocal dimensions. For written products of oral traditions such as the Homeric epics, focusing on the poem's connections to lament helps us to recognize works like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as originally themselves

forms of performed and performative speech embedded in specific social occasions.

As a genre of which the chief practitioners are women, lamentation also has an important role to play in feminist reappraisals of epic. The laments incorporated into the larger structures of epic may bear traces of authentic women's voices and offer women's perspectives on actions that are carried out primarily by men and primarily to promote male interests. For the Homeric epics, these projects are furthered by an ongoing, living tradition of women's laments in rural modern Greece, which have been collected and studied by anthropologists such as Anna Caraveli-Chaves, Loring Danforth and Nadia Seremetakis. The connection between these contemporary laments and those preserved in ancient Greek literary sources was established in Margaret Alexiou's groundbreaking work *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* and has been further analyzed by Gail Holst-Warhaft in her recent study *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature*. Through modern Greek women's laments, the Homeric epics can be placed in a poetic tradition that is performed, nonliterary, tied to ritual, female-authored, and remote from the supposed mainstream of Western European high culture: a tradition very different from the Homer-Virgil-Dante-Milton sequence on which comparative studies of the epic often focus.

Finally, the content of lamentation gives it an equivocal relationship to epic. As a grieving response to the loss of an individual, lamentation is an urgent expression of that person's value, and so is a form of praise. Lament is thus prototypical of epic as a genre that confers praise—*kleos* in Homeric epic—on the actions of heroes, and more particularly on the actions of dead heroes, who have earned their right to be praised through the manner of their deaths. Thus laments, along with panegyrics delivered to living leaders, lie at the source of many traditions of heroic poetry. But, unlike panegyric, lament is praise inspired by the speaker's sorrow and regret at the subject's loss. As C. M. Bowra puts it, "Lament is born from grief for the dead, and though praise is naturally combined with it, grief has the chief place."²

Lamentation threatens to undermine the *kleos*-conferring function of epic because it stresses the suffering caused by heroic death rather than the glory won by it; lamentation calls into question the glorification of death sponsored by martial societies and the epics that celebrate them. The anti-epic dimension of lament is explored in this volume for Roman epic by Elaine Fantham. In the drama of epic's realization of its generic identity, the female-dominated subgenre of lament plays a role analogous to that of epic's female characters in its heroes' realizations of their goals: ordinary yet marginal, indispensable yet subversive. And this is also the role of the locality Greece in the drama of epic's achievement of its place at the heart of the Western European tradition.

Although no actual women's laments survive from ancient Greece, their power can still be measured in the legal and literary responses they called

forth. Women's laments were felt to be sufficiently threatening to society, whether as spurs to violent revenge or as challenges to the value of dying for the state, that they were officially restricted through legislation, most famously that enacted by Solon in Athens in the sixth century B.C.E.³ In addition, their functions were appropriated for the classical city by two state-sponsored literary genres. In one, the *epitaphios logos*, or public funeral oration, designed to glorify death in battle for the city and minimize its cost in individual suffering, women's laments are submerged in a new official, male-centered discourse.⁴ But in the other, tragedy, women's laments are represented as part of a complex but controlled exploration of the social order and the threats that it faces, especially from the intense personal attachments expressed in lamentation.⁵

Like tragedy, the Homeric epics confront lamentation by representing it, incorporating laments into the larger structures of their plots. This is particularly the case in the *Iliad*, where the final third of the poem is centered on the consequential and much-lamented deaths of Patroclus and Hector. The discussion that follows will focus on how the Homeric epics depict their own relationship to lamentation, particularly as a transitional event that inhabits the border between experience and song. Because laments transcend the distinction between speech and act—in that a song of lament can equate itself with the activity of mourning the dead—lamentation plays a key role in the Homeric epics' remarkably thorough canvassing of the process of epic commemoration, from the moment of heroic death to its eventual glorification in everlasting song.

A sense that lament both is and is not to be equated with epic and with *kleos*-conferring poetry in general is conveniently expressed within Homeric poetry by a lexical distinction. The epics include two different work of lamentation: *thrēnos* and *goos*. The *thrēnos* is the commissioned work of professional outsiders, "composed and performed at the funeral by non-kinsmen." The *goos* is a less formal composition, improvised in response to the grief of the occasion and always sung—or wailed—by the dead man's relations or close friends.⁶ The *thrēnos* clearly represents the kind of formal, enduring artwork that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* see their events as turning into, even though the term is used only once in each epic.

Although rare, those references to *thrēnos* are significant, involving the commemoration in death of the *Iliad*'s two chief heroes, Hector and Achilles. One occurs in the account of Hector's funeral at the end of *Iliad* 24, where we are told that professional singers were the *exarchous thrēnōn*, "leaders of *thrēnoi*" (*Iliad* 24.721). This mention of *thrēnoi* is followed by three speeches labeled *gooi* delivered by Hector's female relatives Andromache, Hecuba, and Helen. The other mention of *thrēnoi* comes in the last book of the *Odyssey*, where we learn that the Muses themselves *thrēneon*, "sang *thrēnoi*" (*Odyssey* 24.61) at the funeral of Achilles. The connection between these *thrēnoi* sung

at Achilles' funeral and enduring *kleos* in poetry as compensation for heroic death is made explicit by the later lyric poet Pindar in a key passage in one of his odes: "Nor did songs desert him when he died, / but the maidens of Helicon stood around his pyre and his tomb / and poured forth a *thrēnos* full of fame [*thrēnon poluphamon*]. / For it seemed just to the gods / that a great man—even though dead—be endowed with the songs of goddesses" (*Isthmian* 8.62–66). And *thrēnos* was the technical term for a genre of lyric poetry that continued the traditions of archaic epic—and may well also have predated epic and contributed to its development.

Although the *thrēnoi* mentioned in the *Iliad* thus fulfill the purpose Homeric epics claim for themselves and are evoked at strategically important moments of summing up in the plots of the two poems, they are not themselves actually represented. Rather, the narratives of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—their accounts of the events that they are converting into *kleos*—contain many references to the more informal, personal, performative, and transient form of the *goos*, and a number of *gooi* are actually quoted within the *Iliad*. The most structurally prominent are the three laments at Hector's funeral mentioned above, but these are preceded by Thetis's proleptic *goos* for Achilles and Achilles' lament for Patroclus in book 18 (*Iliad* 18.52–64, 324–342); by two laments delivered by Briseis and Achilles over the body of Patroclus in book 19 (*Iliad* 19.287–300, 315–337); by the spontaneous laments of Hecuba and Andromache when they learn of Hector's death in book 22 (*Iliad* 22.431–436, 477–514); and by Achilles' further lament for Patroclus during his funeral in book 23 (*Iliad* 23.19–23). In addition, much of the speech of women in the Homeric epics, although not formally marked off as lament, is closely related to the *goos* in language and theme.

As the epics thematize the creation of *kleos* out of the lived experience of heroic society, their many internal depictions of *goos* occupy an intermediate status between that experience and its reflection in song. This intermediate status can be seen in the way in which laments affect their audiences, evoking a markedly personal response in each listener. Far from drawing their listeners' attention to the glorious achievements of their subjects, these laments inspire them to think of their own sorrows, fragmenting their audiences into isolated and private mourners. This is especially clear in the responses of the women, both Achaean women and Trojan captives, who hear Briseis's lament for Patroclus: "Thus she spoke, grieving, and the women groaned in response, / with Patroclus as their excuse [*Patroklon prophasin*] but each for her own troubles" (*Iliad* 19.301–302; cf. 19.338–339, 24.509–512).

These private, unarticulated experiences of grief stand at one end of a spectrum of possible responses to song presented in the Homeric epics. Next to them one might put Telemachus's weeping in book 4 of the *Odyssey* when he hears Menelaus and Helen tell stories about the Trojan War. Telemachus's weeping is to be compared to Odysseus's in book 8 of the *Odyssey*, triggered

by an actual performance of songs from the Trojan cycle by a professional bard. Odysseus's weeping is pointedly juxtaposed to the different response of the Phaeacians, which presumably most nearly reflects the response that epic expects for itself: in contrast to that of the women around the body of Patroclus, the response of the Phaeacians is communal (and one function of song dramatized in that episode is its capacity to promote social cohesion), detached from the experiences involved, and at the same time attentive to them. For audiences like the Phaeacians, epic song promotes forgetfulness of one's own personal concerns. Like the performers of praiseworthy acts, the listeners who allow that praise to be realized cannot properly perform their function if they are distracted by grief.⁷

As brief embedded narratives, the laments in the Homeric epics hint at a broader range of experiences than those that are selected to form the subjects of epic song, telling stories that are peripheral to the main plots of the larger epics or pointedly excluded from those plots. The memories evoked in laments are often of private moments, out of the arena of public, heroic action, such as the words of encouragement Briseis remembers hearing from Patroclus when her husband and brothers had all been killed (*Iliad* 19.295–299) or Hector's interventions on Helen's behalf amid the behind-the-scenes reproaches uttered in the Trojan court (*Iliad* 24.768–775). Unlike epic itself, which claims to provide an accurate record of past events,⁸ the lament is, in part, a fictional genre, in that its speakers dwell on fantasies, hoped-for events that now can never take place: for example, the deathbed parting of Hector and Andromache, in which, as she regretfully imagines it, he would have stretched out his hands to her and would have spoken a special *pukinon epos*, a "wise word," that she could always have remembered in her grief (*Iliad* 24.744).

Between them, as they mourn Patroclus, Briseis and Achilles tell what is in effect a version of the story that the *Iliad* itself cannot tell, the impossible alternative to the *Iliad's* plot, Achilles' return to Phthia, a version in which Patroclus acts as Achilles' surrogate. Briseis evokes Achilles' marriage to her, which Patroclus was to have brought about: "You said that you would make me the wedded wife/ of Achilles, and would lead me in ships/ to Phthia, and would celebrate the marriage feast among the Myrmidons" (*Iliad* 19.297–299). Achilles imagines Patroclus filling in for him as father to Neoptolemus, introducing Neoptolemus to his patrimony: "Before this my heart in my chest had hopes/ that I alone would die far from horse-pasturing Argos,/ here in Troy, and you would go back to Phthia,/ so that you might bring back my son from Scyros/ in a swift, dark ship, and you might show him everything:/ my possessions, my slaves, and my great, high-roofed house" (*Iliad* 19.328–333).

Spoken largely by women, laments are the medium by which a female perspective on epic action makes its way into these male-centered texts.⁹ Like

the modern Greek women's laments that descend from them (or from their real-life models), these public opportunities become testaments of what it is like to be a woman in a world focused on male interests and values. "Tears become ideas," to borrow a phrase from the anthropologist Stephen Feld, and the unsettling experience of loss generates a description of the social structure as seen by its most vulnerable members. Extending the status of mourning as an imitation of death, lamenting women provide accounts—verbal imitations—of the social death they experience when they lose the men through whom they are defined. Thus Andromache's laments for Hector stress her future as a captive, recalling her speech to him in book 6 where this prospect is linked to her total dependence: "Hector, for you are my father and my revered mother, / and my brother, and you are my flourishing husband" (*Iliad* 6.429–430).

For Briseis, who has a similar history, Patroclus's death is a *kakon ek kakou*, "evil following on evil" (*Iliad* 19.290), one of a string of misfortunes consisting of the deaths of the men through whom she has known her place in the world: first her husband, then her brothers, now Patroclus, whom she was counting on to attach her to Achilles and resituate her in Phthia. With Patroclus's death, Briseis has been derailed on her widow's journey from the care of her husband back to her original family and on to a new husband. The link between lamentation and the social dislocations to which women are subject is made clear in a speech of Penelope's to the disguised Odysseus in *Odyssey* 19. There she describes her unresolved relationships to Odysseus (who is absent but not certainly dead) and to Telemachus (who is in transition from being a reason to stay in Odysseus's house to being a reason to leave it) as the causes of her constant mourning—she grieves and laments while going about her daily tasks—and of her similarity to the nightingale, whose song is a perpetual expression of female lamentation (*Odyssey* 19.509–553).¹⁰

Particularly interesting in this respect is Helen in her lament for Hector in *Iliad* 24, since she, like Briseis, represents a complicated variant on the wife who has lost her husband and is herself lost without him. Helen in Troy has clearly been a displaced person, whose sense of self-worth is no longer adequately expressed in her relationship to her nominal husband Paris and who is surrounded by blame from the other Trojans. It appears she has been attempting to repair her status, and her sense of her own value, by forming a link to the more admirable Hector. This effort is reflected in her seductive attempt to get him to sit down and stay when he visits her and Paris in book 6, where she also voices her regret at having followed Paris to Troy in the first place (*Iliad* 6.344–358). In book 24 she mourns Hector as a kind of champion who protected her position among the Trojans. She addresses him as "by far the dearest of all my brothers-in-law" and describes how "I never heard an evil or rude word from you, / but if someone else in the halls should speak one, / one of my husband's brothers or sisters or brothers' wives, / or

my mother-in-law (my father-in-law was gentle always),/ you would check that person, advising against it" (*Iliad* 24.768–771). Like other speech forms embedded in the Homeric epics, lament is an agonistic genre, and mourning can be a competitive event.¹¹ Helen's jibe at the previous speaker, Hecuba, brings to light a normally hidden world of competition among women, centered on the validating attention of men.

Critics have noted that the laments delivered at Hector's funeral recall the speeches of the same three women earlier in the poem, and especially during the episode in book 6 when he encounters all three of them during his return to Troy. As noted above, Andromache in both places dwells on her future as Hector's widow, and Helen couples regret at her past behavior with an attempt to establish a tie to Hector. Hecuba's lament focuses on the favor shown to Hector by the gods, especially as expressed in the miraculous preservation of his body, and this recalls her maternal concern for his physical needs, as expressed in her attempt to get him to drink wine in book 6 and her pointing to her once-nourishing breast as she tries to keep him from facing Achilles in book 22.

This thematic repetition can be read as a formal device, a way of providing closure by making these laments sum up each speaker's previous role. But it can also be understood as an index of how fully women's speech is in general identified with the genre of lamentation, so that the themes of laments naturally show up in speech that is not marked as such. Penelope's metalament in *Odyssey* 19 makes it clear that lamentation is her perpetual mode, and it is striking how much of other women's speech in the epics shares the themes of formal laments. In this respect, epic resembles tragedy, the form that has been characterized as an appropriation and reworking of women's laments, in that women become speakers there primarily when something has gone wrong, and so their proper language is that of complaint.

For example, when in the story of Meleager told by Phoenix in *Iliad* 9, Cleopatra, Meleager's wife, succeeds where all others have failed in inducing Meleager to fight, her intervention is described in terms that suggest a lament.¹² We are told that she *lisset' oduromenē*, "implored him grieving," and the content of her speech is a compressed version of one of the topoi of formal lament, the sufferings of a fallen city: "She told him all/ the troubles that come to people whose city is captured./ They kill the men; fire reduces the city to dust,/ and strangers lead away the children and the long-robed women" (*Iliad* 9.591–594). Cleopatra's identity as a mourner is underscored by her alternative name, Alcyone, which she gets from her mother, who like the halcyon, another bird who represents perpetual lamentation, constantly mourns her rape by Apollo.

Similarly, Richard Martin has pointed out that two speeches by women in the *Iliad* that are labeled with the term *muthos*, which designates speech that is also a significant form of social performance, are both effectively laments.¹³

One is Helen's response to Priam's request for an identification of Agamemnon during the scene on the wall in book 3 (*Iliad* 3.171–180). Helen's *muthos* begins with a statement designed to cement the relationship to Priam she later celebrates in her lament for Hector: "You are revered by me, dear father-in-law, and admired." It evokes the lost home and family she has left behind and includes a wish to have died rather than to have acted as she did: since she did not die, she is in a constant state of grief, *to kai klaioussa tetēka*, "therefore I am wasted away with weeping." Like Penelope, who often expresses her sense of loss by voicing doubt about whether her life with Odysseus really happened, Helen concludes by identifying Agamemnon as her brother-in-law "if this ever was." The second *muthos* uttered by a woman in the *Iliad* is spoken (or rather "wailed," *kōkusen*) by Hecuba to Priam as he departs for the Achaean camp to ransom Hector's body (*Iliad* 24.200–216) and expresses grief both for her dead son and for her husband, who she feels sure will never return.

While lamentation is the main mode of female speech, it is not exclusive to women. Throughout the Homeric epics men are portrayed as uttering *gooi* and draw on the topoi of lamentation in their other speeches. This is particularly the case with Achilles, who is the only male character whose *goos* is actually quoted in Homer, and who stands out for his preeminence in all the speech genres of heroic life.¹⁴ Achilles' use of lamentation is not, however, to be understood simply as a sign of his verbal competence; it is also a mark of the unusual, marginalized position he adopts in his project of winning *kleos* by staying out of battle rather than entering it. Achilles' alienation from male Achaean society leads him into a closer association with lamentation, which is registered in a variety of ways: his close tie to his mother Thetis, a figure especially identified with lamentation; his vision of himself in his speech to the embassy in book 9 as a mother bird, the archetypal figure of lamentation, as we have seen (*Iliad* 9.323–327); and most overtly in his actual laments, especially the one in book 19, which follows on and echoes the speech of Briseis, who is not only a woman but also a slave.¹⁵

Not only is Achilles' role as a speaker of laments atypical, but it is also limited by his ongoing allegiance to his identity as a warrior. This is clear from his earliest responses to Patroclus's death, in the exchanges he has with Thetis at the beginning of book 18. Achilles' situation at that point dramatizes one of the central and most enduring themes of lamentation, the contrast between the living speaker and the dead person.¹⁶ This is underscored at the beginning of the book when, just before he learns of Patroclus's death, Achilles recalls the prophetic words of Thetis, who told him that the best of the Myrmidons would die *eti zōontos emeio*, "while I was still living" (*Iliad* 18.10). In many mythic dramatizations of grief the mourner's survival is treated as more than a matter of chance, as he or she is portrayed as actually responsible for the death of the person who is mourned. A common version of this

is the figure of the murderous mother, most memorably represented by Procne, the woman who becomes the nightingale, whose unending lamentation both expresses her loss of her son Itys and represents her punishment for killing him.¹⁷

Achilles' story also represents the mourner as responsible for the death he mourns, and Achilles voices a painful sense of that responsibility:

nor was I at all for Patroclus the light of salvation,
nor for my other companions, of whom many were broken
by splendid Hector,
but I sat by the ships, a useless burden on the earth.

(*Iliad* 18.102–104)

In the case of the male warrior, his responsibility demands not a state of perpetual lamentation, but the transformation of grief into action. With Achilles, the mourner's characteristic wish to die is modified into a resolution to avenge his loss:

Now there will be even for you endless grief
for your dead child, whom you will not receive again
returning home, since my spirit does not urge me
to live or to go among men, unless first Hector,
struck by my spear, is destroyed in his spirit
and pays back his despoiling of Patroclus, son of Menoetius.

(*Iliad* 18.88–93)

By prefacing his resolve with the grief it will cause for Thetis, Achilles acknowledges that the vengeful action that assuages his mournful wish to die will also itself lead to his death. The difference, of course, is that his death in battle will also bring him *kleos*, as his words later in the same speech make clear:

Now let me gain good glory [*kleos esthlon*],
and make some one of the long-robed Trojan
and Dardanian women,
wiping tears with both hands
from her tender cheeks, groan bitterly,
so that they may know how long I stayed away from the war.
Don't hold me back from the battle, much as you love me.
You will not dissuade me.

(*Iliad* 18.121–126)

This speech also shows how Achilles' entwined aims of alleviating his pain and increasing his glory involve transferring his suffering to someone else, in this case a Trojan woman. The mourning of the Trojan woman is both requital for the death of Patroclus and a sign of Achilles' power; furthermore, her grief inspires awareness of Achilles' greatness in the particular form in

which he has been demonstrating it throughout the *Iliad*: the Trojans' lack of suffering during his absence from battle.

When Achilles introduces his resolve to fight Hector by telling Thetis she will have to grieve, he registers the way a warrior's glory brings suffering to his friends and relatives as well as to his enemy; this is particularly marked in the case of parents, whose grief for their slain sons responds to a misfortune beyond what is natural or expected. It is hardly surprising, then, that the hero's mother is often portrayed as trying to dissuade him from action, as Achilles anticipates that Thetis will at the end of the speech just quoted. This female impulse to block heroic action is linked to the predominantly female activity of mourning in the lamentlike *muthos* of Hecuba in book 24, mentioned above. There Hecuba explicitly proposes to Priam that, rather than him going off to approach Achilles, he and she should sit apart in the palace and weep for Hector (*nun de klaiōmen aneuthen/ hēmenoi en megarō, Iliad* 24.208–209—although she does go on to add that she wishes she could take revenge on Achilles by sinking her teeth into his liver).

In keeping with Achilles' role as a preeminent warrior, whose function is to turn grief into action, he becomes at the end of his story an advocate of keeping lamentation in its place. In his meeting with Priam in book 24, once he and Priam have experienced their parallel mourning—he for his father and Patroclus, Priam for Hector—the desire for *goos* leaves Achilles' mind and body, and he makes Priam stop mourning too, telling him: *ou gar tis prēxis peletai krueroio gooio*, "There is no practical use to chilling lamentation" (*Iliad* 24.524). This determination marks Achilles' return, however brief, to the world of the male fighting force, for whom lamentation is a transient experience that merely punctuates recurrent action in battle.

The same tension between lamentation and heroic action is found in the meeting of Hector and Andromache in *Iliad* 6. In this episode of transitory connection between husband and wife, Hector, in effect, responds to Andromache by adopting her language. Hector draws on the conventions of female lamentation to express sympathy for Andromache's position, but he also recasts them so as to incorporate an emphasis on achieved *kleos* that is absent or muted in women's own laments. In a characteristically female attempt to restrain a hero's devotion to combat, Andromache asks Hector to return to the city wall and fight more defensively, basing her appeal on her past and future status as a mourner. She evokes her past losses of parents and brothers and urges him to pity her "so that you do not make your child an orphan and your wife a widow" (*Iliad* 6.432). The power of her appeal can be seen in Hector's sympathetic response, in which he echoes her proleptic grief and expands on her one-line account of her future. He speaks of his certainty that Troy will one day fall and says that no one's suffering—not his mother's and father's nor that of his many brothers—horrifies him as much as the thought of hers "when some one of the bronze-wearing

Achaean/ leads you off weeping, having taken away your day of freedom" (*Iliad* 6.454-455).

Hector's use of the "ascending scale of affection"¹⁸ to identify Andromache as the one for whom he grieves most links this speech to more formal laments, in which that motif is common as a way of asserting the intensity of the speaker's pain. Thus Achilles, in his lament for Patroclus in book 19, proclaims, "I could not suffer anything worse, / even if I were to learn of the death of my father" (*Iliad* 19.321-322); and Priam responds to the news of Hector's death by thinking of Achilles, who has killed so many of his sons, "for none of whom, much as I grieve, do I mourn so much / as for one, for whom sharp grief will carry me down to Hades: / Hector" (*Iliad* 22.424-426).¹⁹

Hector follows this expression of concern with an even more detailed vision of Andromache's future humiliation as she is forced, suffering and against her will, to weave and draw water for her captors. But he then shifts gears to import into this vision an account of his own future *kleos*, for which Andromache will serve as a carrier. Turning his attention away from her pain, he imagines what she will signify to someone looking at her, and actually quotes that imaginary onlooker's words of praise for him:

And someone might say, looking at you shedding tears,
 "This is the wife of Hector, who was the best at fighting
 of the horse-taming Trojans, when they fought around Ilion."
 (*Iliad* 6.459-461)

Even while grieving for Andromache, Hector is concerned with his future reputation, fantasizing about the figure he will cut in the eyes of a detached spectator at a later time, when what is best remembered is who was the best fighter and when the fighting around Troy has become a memory from the past. He briefly reconceives Andromache's captivity in a foreign land, not as a hardship, but as a means for transmitting his fame to a distant place and a different time. Thus this vision links the content of lament (the theme of the captive woman) to lament's possible function of promoting praise. The intrusion of this bit of proto-*kleos* here shows the inevitable limits of Hector's engagement with the language and perspective of lamentation. And, in any case, Hector's quasi lament itself comes already prefaced by his explanation of why he cannot honor his feelings of grief:

My spirit does not command me [to fight defensively]
 since I have been trained to be excellent always
 and to fight among the foremost Trojans,
 winning *kleos* for my father and for myself.
 (*Iliad* 6.444-446)

It has been suggested that Hector's projection of his own future *kleos* here is typical of him in particular, part of a pattern in the *Iliad* of characterizing

Hector as “a man already living in the poetic tradition that is to overtake him.”²⁰ A similar quotation of future praise occurs in his next speech, his prayer to Zeus for his son Astyanax. There Hector’s imagination fixes on the successful transmission of glory from father to son, which makes heroic achievement complete:

Zeus and the other gods, grant that this one,
my child, be, even as I am, outstanding among the Trojans,
and great in force, and may he rule over Ilium.
And may someone one day say, “This one is greater
than his father,”
as he returns from battle. And may he bear bloody spoils,
having killed an enemy man, and may he delight the heart
of his mother.

(*Iliad* 6.476–481)

Shortly afterwards, in book 7, there is also a passage in which Hector imagines the tomb of a man whom he has slain as inspiring a eulogy similar to that evoked by Andromache: “This is the tomb of a man who died long ago,/ whom once shining Hector killed as he was excelling” (*Iliad* 7.89–90). The similarity of these passages points up how Hector’s speech to Andromache assigns to his beloved wife a role that is typically that of a defeated enemy and thus supports the vision of heroic warfare as ultimately self-defeating expressed by Andromache when she opens her appeal to Hector with the words “Your force will destroy you” (*Iliad* 6.407). Indeed, Andromache performs in Hector’s fantasy a function much like that of the unnamed Trojan woman whose mourning Achilles envisions as a mark of his success in avenging Patroclus. Since that woman is, in the event, Andromache herself, the *Iliad* reveals that Andromache’s suffering actually benefits both of the mortal enemies Hector and Achilles: both win glory by causing her grief.

Although Hector’s fantasy of Astyanax’s future glory also incorporates Andromache as an enthusiastic observer of her son’s achievements, Andromache’s own laments for Hector share none of his interest in his future fame.²¹ In general, the concern of lamenting women for their own sufferings means that they have no use for what concerns a warrior most: the disembodied reputation that outlives the services through which it is earned.²² Their stress on the discontinuity created by death leads them to underrate the sense of unbroken tradition on which the notion of heroic immortality through *kleos* rests. This can be seen in the lament of Hecuba when she first learns of Hector’s death:

Child, I am wretched. Why should I live, suffering
as I am bitter sorrows,
since you are dead? You who were for me night and day
a boast [*euchōlē*] throughout the town, and a benefit

to all the Trojan men and women in the city, who revered
 you like a god. For you were for them a great glory [*kudos*]
 while you were alive. But now death and fate have come upon you.

(*Iliad* 22.431–436)

Hecuba here speaks of Hector's fame as it was when he was alive, using terms—*euchōlē*, “boast,” and *kudos*, “glory”—that are closely related to *kleos*, the term for eternal fame as realized in epic song, but connote the more provisional, time-bound character of a living person's reputation.²³ Her language actually attributes Hector's fame to herself and to the Trojans, reflecting the way in which such fame is shared between the living hero and his beneficiaries, who at once confer that fame by honoring him and partake of it. Here the widespread tendency of lamenters to dwell on the contrast between past and present²⁴ becomes an assault on the continuity of fame, which is what the Homeric warrior values above all else (as Hector's apology to Andromache, quoted above, makes clear). The praise contained in Hecuba's lament is undercut by the way she presents Hector's glory as tied to his living presence. In the context of Homeric poetry, then, women's laments are subversive, not just because they dwell on the negative consequences of heroic action, but because they ignore the death-defying *kleos* that provides a positive compensation for heroic sacrifice and constitutes a major function of epic itself.

Andromache's two laments for Hector focus on her widowhood wholly as a state of humiliation and pain and include a very different vision of Astyanax's future from that in Hector's prayer. In the first of them, she describes how Hector's physical death will lead to social death for his son. She predicts that Astyanax will be dispossessed of his ancestral lands, and gives a detailed account of the life of an orphan, whose father's death makes him *panaphēlika*, “entirely cut off from his contemporaries” (*Iliad* 22.490). Included in this account is a quoted taunt that counters and inverts the quoted praise in Hector's prayer. As the orphaned child begs for food at a noble banquet,

a child with both parents living shoves him away from the feast,
 striking him with his hands and taunting him with reproaches,
 “Go away, you! Your father is not feasting with us.”

(*Iliad* 22.496–498)

Andromache sees Hector's death as disrupting the communication of glory between father and son in both directions. As she puts it, “Neither can you be for him, / Hector, a benefit, since you have died, nor he for you” (*Iliad* 22.485–486). Instead, it brings to fulfillment the opposite, a bitter heritage of misfortune transmitted to Andromache from her father and shared by her with Hector. This community of suffering is stressed in Andromache's language: Hector's death proves that she and Hector “were both born to a

single fate" (*Iliad* 22.477–478); she describes her father as raising her *dus-moros ainomoron*, "he ill-fated, me bitter-fated" (*Iliad* 22.481), and herself and Hector as having produced Astyanax *su t'egō te dusammoroi*, "you and I ill-fated both" (*Iliad* 22.485). Andromache here resembles Briseis, for whom Patroclus's death belongs to an endless chain of misfortunes that was briefly suspended while he lived, a vision that is similarly conveyed through verbal repetition in Briseis's lament: *hos moi dechetai kakon ek kakou aiei*, "how evil following on evil comes over me always" (*Iliad* 19.290). Patroclus's death both activates and extends Briseis's previous misfortunes, the death of her husband and the destruction of her city, which Patroclus, while alive, had prevented her from mourning (*Iliad* 19.295–297).

In her second lament, delivered at Hector's funeral, Andromache again stresses Astyanax's ruined future and this time draws a direct connection between the battlefield achievements on which Hector prides himself and the suffering that await her and Astyanax. Addressing Astyanax, Andromache envisions two terrible futures for him:

And you, my child, either you will
follow me and there you will perform unworthy labors,
toiling for an ungentle man [*pro anaktos ameilichou*],
or some one of the Achaeans
will hurl you, taking you by the hand, from the tower,
to a grievous death [*lugron olethron*],
enraged because Hector killed his brother,
or his father or his son, since indeed many Achaeans
bit the vast earth at the hands of Hector.
Your father was not gentle [*ou gar meilichos*]
in grievous combat [*en dai lugrē*].

(*Iliad* 24.732–739)

Hector's success in combat is intimately tied to both versions of Astyanax's future, both the murder that would be an avenging imitation of Hector's own actions and enslavement to an oppressive master, with whom Hector is identified by the echo of *ameilichou*, "ungentle" in *ou gar meilichos* "not gentle." Similarly, the grievous combat in which Hector participated is linked by the adjective *lugrē* to the grievous death, the *lugron olethron*, of Astyanax and—a few lines later—to the grievous sufferings, the *algea lugra*, of Andromache herself (*Iliad* 24.742).

In the line that immediately follows this passage, Andromache identifies Hector's lack of gentleness as the reason that he is lamented:

Therefore [*tō*] the people mourn him in the city,
and you have imposed unbearable lamentation and grief
upon your parents,
Hector, and to me especially you have left grievous sufferings.

(*Iliad* 24.740–742)

This suggestive *tō*, “therefore,” links the praise implicit in lamentation to the brutality essential to combat.

As she gives voice to her role as the bearer of Hector’s *kleos*, Andromache’s words fill in what Hector’s gloss over when he imagines her enslaved and mournful figure as the inspiration for a detached assessment of his excellence as a warrior. Making a connection that recalls Achilles’ declaration in book 18 that he will reestablish himself as a warrior by making a Trojan woman mourn, Andromache insists that the creation of *kleos* begins with grief for the hero’s friends and enemies alike. In doing so, she gives an implicit analysis of why heroic epic cannot do without lamentation, the genre in which “grief has the chief place,” even though laments often seem to subvert epic’s purposes or at least to distract us from epic’s central claims. Before it can be converted into pleasant, care-dispelling song, a hero’s achievement is measured in the suffering that it causes, in the grief that it inspires.²⁵

NOTES

1. For this approach, see Martin 1989, 44.
2. Bowra 1952, 10.
3. On this legislation, see Alexiou 1974, 14–23; Holst-Warhaft 1992, 114–119.
4. On the *epitaphios logos* as representing a deliberate rejection of the lament, see Loraux 1986, 42–50.
5. Holst-Warhaft (1992, 127–170) interprets tragedy as an appropriation and denigration of women’s laments. Foley (1992) paints a more ambiguous picture, arguing that tragedy registers both the danger of lament and the authenticity of the issues it raises.
6. Alexiou 1974, 11–14.
7. On grief (*penthos*) as antithetical to *kleos* and on the audience’s noninvolvement in the story as an essential element in the realization of *kleos*, see Nagy 1979, 95–100.
8. For this aspect of Homeric poetics, see Ford 1992.
9. On the laments of the *Iliad* as occasions when women emerge as commentators on the events of the poem, see Easterling 1991.
10. On this speech, see further Murnaghan 1992, 262–263. On the widespread association of birdsong with mourning, see Alexiou 1974, 97; and Feld 1982.
11. For mourning as the occasion of similar competition among women in modern Inner Mani, see Seremetakis 1991, 89–92, and pp. 130–144 for a case in which a woman makes use of lament to disclaim rather than to claim a relationship with a dead man (she has been engaged to him but wants to remain free for another marriage). For non-Greek depictions of women competing as mourners, see Ovid *Amores* 3.9.53–56; Holst-Warhaft 1992, 7.
12. As Nagy (1979, 111) points out.
13. Martin 1989, 87–88.
14. See Martin 1989, esp. 222–223, for this characterization of Achilles. Martin places Achilles’ affinity for lament within the context of his deployment of the larger

heroic speech genre of recollection, classifying lament as a version of recollection (pp. 131, 144–145). Although Martin is surely right that lament's connection to future fame also allies it with other commemorative genres (see p. 86), the classification of lament as simply a form of recollection overlooks the range of its themes, which include fantasy and speculation about the future as well as memories of the past, and obscures the degree to which a man who laments is using a mode of speech that is primarily feminine and antiheroic.

15. For a detailed reading of the relationship between Achilles' and Briseis's laments that stresses Achilles' marginalization, see Pucci 1993.

16. Alexiou 1974, 171–175.

17. Loraux 1990, esp. 77–100. On the relationship between that figure and the lamenting mothers of Homeric poetry, such as Hecuba, Thetis, and Penelope, see Murnaghan 1992.

18. For the expression, see Kakridis 1949, 18–27, and, for its application to this episode, pp. 49–53. Kakridis identifies the motif as a link between this episode and the story of Meleager, the narrative in which a wife successfully uses the language of lament to persuade her husband to fight to defend her (although there as an alternative to not fighting at all rather than, as in Hector's case, fighting too aggressively).

19. See also *Iliad* 24.748, 762.

20. Martin 1989, 136–137.

21. Andromache seems no more concerned with Hector's *kleos* as a source of reflected glory for herself than as a compensation to him for his loss of life. She herself expresses no interest that would be met by the consideration raised by G. S. Kirk (1990, 222) in his attempt to soften the element of exploitation in Hector's words at 6.460–461: "His reaction to Andromakhe's imagined fate might seem strangely self-centered; that would be typically heroic, but Hektor knows she will be remembered mainly through himself." In general, Homeric women in their laments represent themselves as losing the kind of status conferred by fame, stressing the annihilating displacement suffered by women whose male defenders are gone. Cf. Penelope in the *Odyssey*, who twice explicitly declares that her *kleos* has been compromised by Odysseus's absence (*Odyssey* 18.251–255, 19.124–128). Cf. also *Iliad* 22.431–436, discussed below.

22. As Holst-Warhaft (1992, 112–113) points out, none of the three women who lament at Hector's funeral praises him as a hero in battle.

23. On the distinction between *kleos* as the term for fame that transcends mortality and its near doublets, *kudos* and *euchos*, which is equivalent to *euchōlē*, see Mueller 1976, 82, 110.

24. Alexiou 1974, 165–171.

25. Sultan (1991) gives a suggestive account of modern Greek Akritic song as a genre in which, similarly, women's interests are opposed to male heroic action and yet women's voices are essential to the process of making heroic glory immortal.

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