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ELTON T. E. BARKER

The *Iliad's* big swoon: a case of innovation within the epic tradition?*

Abstract: In book 5 of the *Iliad* Sarpedon suffers so greatly from a wound that his 'ψυχή leaves him'. Rather than dying, however, Sarpedon lives to fight another day. This paper investigates the phrase τὸν δὲ λίπε ψυχή in extant archaic Greek poetry to gain a sense of its traditional referentiality and better assess the meaning of Sarpedon's swoon. Finding that all other instances of the ψυχή leaving the body signify death, it suggests that the *Iliad* exploits a traditional unit of utterance to flag up the importance of Sarpedon to this version of the Troy story.

Keywords: Homer, *Iliad*, soul, resonance, Sarpedon

As the initial phase of combat intensifies in the *Iliad*, two descendants of Zeus meet on the battlefield and exchange blows. One, Heracles' son Tleptolemus, is killed outright; the other, the Lycian Sarpedon, is pulled from the fighting with his life hanging by a breath. After appealing to Hector to make sure that his body is taken back to Troy should he die, Sarpedon is carried to a rock by his companions, where he has Tleptolemus' spear removed from his thigh: at this point, the *Iliad* narrates, 'his ψυχή left him and a dark mist fell over his eyes' (τὸν δὲ λίπε ψυχή, κατὰ δ' ὀφθαλμῶν κέχυτ' ἄχλυσ, 5.696). To modern ears, the notion of psyche leaving the warrior would appear to denote death, as the common translation 'he lost his spirit' implies and, with customary sensitivity to Homeric formula, Lattimore makes explicit with his rendering 'he lost his life'. Yet Sarpedon does not in fact die: and in the wake of his recovery critics have been left to struggle for an explanation.¹ Some scholars have

* This paper has received astute criticism from friends Joel Christensen, Kyriaki Konstantinidou and Chris Pelling, audiences (of prior versions) at the 2008 Classical Association of Canada conference in Montréal and at Uppsala University, and, after being resuscitated by Marco Fantuzzi, the two anonymous referees of *Trends in Classics*. If it still struggles for breath, the fault lies with me. All translations are mine, adapted from the Loeb Classical Library.

1 Lattimore 1951. The trend goes back to antiquity: the D scholia on this line gloss ⟨Ἐλίπε ψυχή⟩ as Ἐλίποψύχησεν, a compound form that appears to derive directly from the *Iliad's* unit of utterance. Significantly, the earliest attestations of this word

talked of the confusing nature of ‘formular flexibility’;² others have speculated on the nature of the soul itself,³ thereby raising the problem of what is meant by the term ψυχή in the first place. In a recent book, Michael Clarke argues convincingly against rendering ψυχή as ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’, or even ‘life breath’, on the basis that any of these translations import too much of later notions into the Homeric word;⁴ instead he reconstructs the Homeric idea of ψυχή from its occurrences in the two poems themselves.⁵ While his in-depth analysis has led to a far greater appreciation for the Homeric ψυχή as both the ‘last gasp’ of a dying man *and*, simultaneously, an ‘insubstantial shade’,⁶ even his study reveals that instances of the ψυχή leaving the agent nearly always indicate death.⁷

Taking another look at the semantics of the half line τὸν δὲ λίπε ψυχή, this paper examines all instances of the collocation of λείπω with ψυχή in extant archaic Greek poetry in order to reconstruct a sense of its traditional

differ, reflecting the ambiguity of its usage here, hovering somewhere between life and death. Thus, in the Hippocratic corpus λιποψυχέω means to faint (e.g. [Hp.] *Mul.* 174.5; *Acut.* 11.13; *Mor.* 5.1.25; 7.1.10, 24, 84; *Aph.* 7.8; *Hum.* 1.32; 2.16; *Nat. Mul.* 9.3; 11.4; 14.4; *Ep.* 16.28. Cf. *Plu. Mor.* 695a), whereas in the Aesopic tradition it denotes death (*Aesop. Prov.* 77.1, 7; 115.1, 5; 115.2, 5; 115.3, 5; 117.1, 7; 117.3, 6). See further n. 48 below.

- 2 Kirk 1990, 128 on *Il.* 5.696. He notes that ‘this description of a warrior losing and then recovering consciousness’ contrasts with the apparent meaning of λίπε ψυχή (the soul ‘leaving’ the body), which ‘normally implies death’. Cf. Sullivan 1988, 158, who observes that, of the thirteen examples of ψυχή as an active element, twelve signify death; only this case differs.
- 3 For discussions on the nature of the soul using this passage, see e.g.: Nehring 1947; Onians 1951, 93–122; Garland 1981, 48; Bremmer 1983, 14, 53; and Sullivan 1988, 158–60.
- 4 Snell 1953, 9, by connecting ψυχή to ψύχειν (to breathe), draws on an association that goes all the way back to antiquity: the scholia vetera on *Hom. Il.* 5.696 gloss Sarpedon’s swoon as a loss of breath: [ψυχή] ψυχὴν ἐνταῦθα τὸ πνεῦμά φησι. Cf. Claus 1981, 59–60; Bremmer 1983, 21–4; Sullivan 1988, 152, 158; Mitevski 2000, 163; and Janko 1992, 224 on 14.517–19. Clarke 1999, however, categorically states that the ψυχή is *not* ‘the breath of life’ (57), *but* ‘the last gasp of breath exhaled by the dying man’ (60). In making this distinction he draws on the stem ψυχ- that denotes a breath or wind that is essentially *cold* (144–7); cf. Onians 1951, 95.
- 5 Clarke 1999, 25–7.
- 6 Clarke 1999, 214.
- 7 According to Clarke 1999, 130, ‘whatever a ψυχή is, it is not part of the make-up of the living man, and *its meaning is restricted to the moment of death*’ (my italics). He subsequently calls Sarpedon’s loss of ψυχή a ‘less clear example’ of swooning (142). See further n. 13 and the discussion of the epic’s other swooners in the last section of this paper below.

referentiality or *resonance*.⁸ Though it may be true, as Kirk insists, that the meaning of τὸν δὲ λίπε ψυχῇ in the current passage substantially differs from its occurrences elsewhere, by collating those other instances we may gain a better sense of how Sarpedon's swoon may have been *heard* by an audience attuned to listening to epic performance, and, consequently, better judge the significance and consequences of that departure from convention.⁹ It will be argued that the resonance of this passage is indeed heavily suggestive of a dying warrior, as all other instances of the ψυχῇ leaving the agent occur in the context of death, and that, as a result, the first use of this combination in the poem is both striking and provocative, in ways that have wider implications for understanding this epic's inheritance of, and position within, its tradition. My proposal is that the *Iliad* exploits a traditional unit of utterance in order to mark Sarpedon out as a hero of special importance in the story being told.

On not crossing the teeth's barrier

The fundamental importance of the epic warrior holding onto his ψυχῇ is categorically stated by the poem's foremost hero, Achilles, when, on two separate occasions during his great speech in rejection of the embassy, he ruminates on the fragility of human existence. First, he stresses the pains that he has suffered in the war, constantly 'casting about his ψυχῇ' when he goes out to fight (ἐπεὶ πάθον ἄλγεα θυμῶ, / αἰεὶ ἐμὴν ψυχὴν παραβαλλόμενος πολεμίζειν, Hom. *Il.* 9.321–2).¹⁰ Later he reflects more generally on what's at stake in fighting, stipulating that 'a man's ψυχῇ cannot come back either by theft or force / once it has crossed his teeth's barrier' (ἄνδρὸς δὲ ψυχὴ πάλιν ἔλθειν οὔτε λειστή / οὔθ' ἔλετή, ἐπεὶ ὄρ κεν

8 Foley 1997, 151–3 suggests that from an oralist perspective it is better to think of 'words' as being defined, not visually by white spaces on a page, but acoustically by *units of utterance*, which comprise the hexameter line; cf. Bakker 1997. The process by which these phrases trigger meaning, by evoking a history of epic performances, Foley 1991, 7 terms 'traditional referentiality'; cf. Foley 1999, 13–34; 2002, 127; 2005; Scodel 2002, 1–2. For traditional referentiality as a method of investigation, see most recently Kelly 2007, 9–14. Graziosi and Haubold 2005 prefer the term 'resonance' (see especially pp. 50–5).

9 On the importance of thinking about the potential audience listening to epic, see: Foley 1991, 37–60; Taplin 1992, 1–11; Scodel 2002, *passim*; Graziosi and Haubold 2005, 50; Kelly 2007, 6, 12–14.

10 On the idea of 'casting about one's ψυχῇ' as if one were rattling lots in an urn: Martin 1989, 192–3.

ἀμείψεται ἔρκος δδόντων, 408–9). In both instances, while ψυχή does not quite equate to the warrior's 'life' as we know it,¹¹ it certainly *does* mean his death once it has departed: it is what Achilles risks each and every time he enters battle; it is the thing that doesn't return to a man once it has crossed his teeth's barrier. There may indeed be a wider significance in having Achilles articulate these concerns about life and death so explicitly.¹² At any rate, as the comprehensive analysis by Clarke shows, Achilles' assertion that, when the ψυχή leaves the warrior, he breathes no more, holds true for the two Homeric poems generally.¹³

The Homeric resonance of ψυχή leaving

Purely from the perspective of Achilles' statements on the ψυχή, then, the departure and subsequent return of Sarpedon's ψυχή makes little sense: when a ψυχή passes the teeth's barrier, it is not supposed to (be able to) return.¹⁴ Apart from the example of Sarpedon, the collocation λείπω with ψυχή occurs on three other occasions in the *Iliad*. The first of these again concerns Sarpedon, when Hera rebukes Zeus for contemplating saving his son against what is fated: instead she insists that Sarpedon be allowed to die at the hands of Patroclus, but, 'after his ψυχή and years of life have left him' (αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν δὴ τόν γε λίπη ψυχή τε καὶ αἰών, 16.453), then Zeus

11 Scholars have noted that the ψυχή only becomes observable once it is 'separated' from the body (Rohde 1950, 4), that is, when death approaches (Sullivan 1988, 151). Cf. n. 16 below. Given the stakes that Achilles sets, it is not surprising, however, that translators render ψυχή as 'life' in this context: so Griffin 1995, 113, who glosses ψυχή at *Il.* 9.322 as 'staking, risking, my own life'; cf. Hainsworth 1993, 115–16; Murray 1999.

12 On Homer's emphasis on mortality, see esp. Griffin 1977; 1983, who contrasts material from the 'Epic Cycle' (though evidence is late: Burgess 2001). On Achilles' gloomy post-death existence in Hades in contrast to rival accounts of heroes' blessed afterlives in, e.g., the *Aethiopis*, see Edwards 1985, 218–19.

13 With the exception of cases where the ψυχή refers to the underworld shade, Clarke 1999 shows that references to ψυχή *all* occur in context of a warrior's *death*: 'περὶ ψυχῆς' signifies the struggle over someone's life (57); when men die they lose this thing or it is taken by the victim's killer (134); and its loss can be its annihilation (137–40). Only the swoons by Andromache, Laertes and Sarpedon seem to offer an alternative view in which 'life' (in the form of θυμός) returns (140–3). See further n. 39 below and the accompanying text.

14 On Achilles' statement, Clarke 1999, 56 writes, 'the idea of its return is seen as something absurd or impossible': but he does not consider the implications for how then to assess its apparent departure in episodes of swooning.

should send Death and Sleep to bear him away to his homeland in Lycia. The last two occurrences are identical, describing the moments when Patroclus and Hector respectively die: on each occasion, after the hero's dying words, the narrative relates how the warrior's 'ψυχή flew from his limbs to Hades, lamenting its fate, leaving manliness and youth' (ψυχή δ' ἐκ ῥεθέων πταμένη Ἄϊδόςδε βεβήκει, / ὄν πότμον γοώωσα, λιποῦσ' ἀνδροτῆτα καὶ ἥβην, 16.856–7 = 22.362–3). In all three instances, then, losing one's ψυχή occurs in a context denoting that person's death.

The interpretation thus far may have been anticipated in the light of Achilles' comments on the nature of the ψυχή: its departure is a signifier of death. Yet there is a further consideration that renders the picture somewhat more ambiguous. In each example a further phrase is needed to make death final: in anticipating Sarpedon's final demise Hera adds 'and his life' (καὶ αἰών) to her description of his ψυχή departing, while the *Iliad's* account of the deaths of Patroclus and Hector specifies that in both cases the ψυχή flies to Hades (Ἄϊδόςδε) letting go of the hero's 'manliness and youth' – physical characteristics with a close association to the warrior whom the ψυχή leaves behind.¹⁵ Thus the collocation of λείπω with ψυχή in the *Iliad* appears to be an unmarked phrase that, while highly suggestive of mortality and only occurring within the context of a warrior's death, requires some further indication to make that death irrevocably the end.

The reason may well be because, as Clarke shows, ψυχή refers just to the 'last gasp' of a dying figure; a person's 'life' in the positive sense of one's mental faculties and spirit, on the other hand, is marked by the 'θυμός' family of words.¹⁶ So, for example, when Odysseus meets his mother in the underworld, she rushes to reassure him that the vision that he sees – the insubstantial shade (ψυχή) that escapes his embrace – is no trick but the way that things are in Hades, 'once the θυμός has left the white bones, and the ψυχή has fluttered out like a dream and flown away' (ἐπεὶ κε πρῶτα λίπη λεύκ' ὅστέα θυμός, ψυχή δ' ἦϋτ' ὄνειρος ἀποπταμένη πεπότηται, *Od.* 11.221–2). This example, though it describes the θυμός as leaving, not the ψυχή, is relevant for a number of reasons, particularly

15 For Clarke 1999, 157 this is a sign that the corpse, and *not* the ψυχή, holds the dead man's identity.

16 For his redefinition of ψυχή as the life that is 'lost or threatened', rather than the life that is 'held and enjoyed', see Clarke 1999, 55; cf. 143. On the latter – the θυμός family of words – see Clarke 1999, 61–126, 143, and Jahn 1987 182–246, who first noticed that the words of θυμός, φρένες, ἦτορ, κῆρ, κραδίη and πραπίδες are interchangeable.

since it deals so directly with the question of death.¹⁷ First, since the ψυχή promptly follows the θυμός by flying away itself, a close correspondence between the two is suggested.¹⁸ Second, that correspondence is underlined by the similarity of the unit of utterance deployed here to describe the departure of the θυμός – λίπε δ' ὄστέα θυμός (or the near equivalent τὸν μὲν λίπε θυμός used elsewhere) – to the *Iliad's* description of Sarpedon's departing ψυχή in the formula τὸν δὲ λίπε ψυχή.¹⁹ A survey of all occurrences of both of these units of utterance reveals that the departure of the θυμός *always* signifies death.²⁰ The impression once again, then, is that the equivalent expression relating to ψυχή should denote death, particularly given the strong correlation between the departure of ψυχή and θυμός.

The three occurrences of the collocation λείπω with ψυχή in the *Odyssey* bear out the close association with death. The next two instances both occur in book fourteen, during the meeting of the disguised Odysseus with his faithful servant, the swineherd Eumaeus. In the first Eumaeus bemoans what he supposes to be the fate of his master by graphically imagining dogs and birds stripping his bones of flesh, misgivings which lead him to conclude that 'his ψυχή has left him' (ψυχή δὲ λέλοιπεν, *Od.* 14.134): evidently here there is no doubt that Eumaeus uses the notion of the departed ψυχή to mean death, though the perfect tense may be important for making that meaning explicit. Later in the same scene the narrator describes Eumaeus preparing a great sacrifice in honour of his guest by hitting a pig over the head with an oak club: 'and its ψυχή left it' (τὸν δ' ἔλιπε ψυχή, *Od.* 14.425–6). This is the only other instance in Homeric poetry of the exact same unit of utterance used of Sarpedon's swoon. Unlike that case in the *Iliad*, it is used without ambiguity in the context of certain death as the pig is duly slaughtered for ritual (τοῖ δὲ σφάξάν τε καὶ εὔσαν, *ibid.*)²¹

17 For Heubeck and Hoekstra 1989, 90 on *Od.* 11.217–20, Anticleia's answer to her son neatly summarizes 'the main points of Homeric belief concerning the ψυχή': cf. the bibliography that they cite there. But see Clarke 1999, 205, who rightly emphasizes that Anticleia is explaining why *she* slips through her son's embrace.

18 Cf. Clarke 1999, 133–6.

19 The similarity of these expressions is noted by Merry and Riddell 1886, 462 on *Od.* 11.221.

20 It occurs eight times in Homeric epic, and once in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, all with this meaning: *Il.* 4.470; 12.386; 16.410, 743; 20.406; *Od.* 3.455; 11.221; 12.414; *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 361.

21 By itself the expression τὸν δ' ἔλιπε ψυχή could conceivably simply indicate that the pig was stunned before the ritual slaughter, though that is not how the phrase is usually rendered: see, for example, Dawe 1993; cf. Rieu 1946; Clarke 1999, 134.

The final example sees Odysseus pondering his moves in preparing to face his rival Irus in the beggar's punch-up (*Od.* 18.90–4, 98–100):

δὴ τότε μερμήριξε πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς,
 ἢ ἐλάσει' ὥς μιν ψυχὴ λίπτοι αὔθι πεσόντα,
 ἦέ μιν ἦκ' ἐλάσειε τανύσσειέν τ' ἐπὶ γαίῃ.
 ὦδε δέ οἱ φρονέοντι δοάσσατο κέρδιον εἶναι,
 ἦκ' ἐλάσαι, ἴνα μὴ νιν ἐπιφρασσαίαιτ' Ἀχαιοί ...
 κὰδ' δ' ἔπεσ' ἐν κονίησι μακῶν, σὺν δ' ἦλασ' ὀδόντας
 λακτίζων ποσὶ γαῖαν· ἀτὰρ μνηστῆρες ἀγαυοὶ
 χεῖρας ἀνασχόμενοι γέλω ἔκθανον.

At that time, much-enduring great Odysseus pondered whether to hit him so that his ψυχὴ would go out of him, as he went down, or only to stretch him out by hitting him lightly. And in the division of his heart this way seemed best to him, to hit him lightly, so the Achaeans would not be suspicious ... [Irus] fell, bleating in the dust, with teeth set in a grimace, and kicking at the ground with his feet; and the haughty suitors held up their hands and died laughing.

Odysseus' hesitation turns on how hard he should punch Irus: should he hit him 'so that his ψυχὴ would go out of him' (ὥς μιν ψυχὴ λίπτοι) or stretch him out by hitting him only lightly. While the *Odyssey* does not spell out what is meant here by ὥς μιν ψυχὴ λίπτοι, it seems pretty certain that this conditional form of our unit of utterance signals death, for otherwise it would be difficult to explain why Odysseus would fear provoking the suitors' suspicions; as it is, after all, even though Odysseus hits him only lightly, Irus is still felled by the punch and bleeds profusely from the mouth and ears.²² What is more, the narrator cleverly exploits the mood of death in the air by transferring the motif to the suitors themselves, who *die laughing* (γέλω ἔκθανον, 100) at the sight of their one-time favourite bleating in the dust.²³ The fact that Odysseus chooses *not* to hit Irus so hard that his ψυχὴ should leave him seals the fate of his foes, who fail to recognize in Irus' escape a sign of their own impending doom.

Finally, the collocation of λείπω with ψυχὴ occurs in only two other places in extant archaic Greek poetry outside the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In its

22 As rendered by modern English translations, such as: 'Odysseus considered carefully whether he should hit to kill outright or ...' (Rieu 1946); or 'so that his life left him as he fell there' (Dawe 1993).

23 Russo, Fernandez-Galiano and Heubeck 1992, 53 note that 'in an oddly parodic way, this metaphor anticipates the literal death of the suitors, also to be caused by Odysseus, in reality rather than in a figure of speech'.

only other instance in hexameter epic there is little doubt that death is signified, since the formula ‘his ψυχή left’ is completed by the expression ‘the light of the sun’ (τῶν δέ χ’ ὁμοῦ ψυχή λείπῃ φάος ἠελίοιο (*Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 272)).²⁴ Similarly unequivocal is the description in Pindar’s third *Pythian* of the death of Thetis’ son, ‘who lost his ψυχή in battle because of an arrow’ (ἐν πολέμῳ τό-/ξοις ἀπὸ ψυχὰν λιπῶν, *Pi. P.* 3.100–2). While reminiscent of the epic examples discussed above, however, this case diverges in at least two important ways. First, the use of the preposition ἀπὸ (out, away from) with λείπω makes the soul’s departure more explicit and final.²⁵ Second, there is a telling switch in the grammar to the hero as the subject of the verb with ψυχή as the object, as if making the hero more responsible for the loss of his life.²⁶ That the hero is Achilles has additional significance: Achilles, the hero whose statements mark the *Iliad*’s emphasis on mortality, as we saw above, performs a similar role for Pindar, as the classic example of the human condition.

Near-death experiences in the *Iliad*

Throughout the whole of extant archaic Greek poetry, then, the collocation λείπω with ψυχή signifies death. In itself it is not always the sufficient condition to express that end: frequently some other indication is needed to make the loss of life clear, particularly in the *Iliad*. But there is in no case in which the departure of the ψυχή does not relate however indirectly to the death of the agent, as the typical translation ‘he lost his life’ for τὸν δὲ λίπε ψυχή indicates. That leaves Sarpedon’s swoon as the lone

24 Additionally, the collocation of λείπω with the expression φάος ἠελίοιο *always* indicates death, as in ‘he/she leaves the light of the sun’: *Il.* 18.11; *Od.* 11.93; Theognis 569; Eur. fr. 816.11 [Kannicht]. Tsagalis 2008, ch. 2 discusses this imagery in fourth-century BCE Attic grave epigrams.

25 Further good examples of this trend are supplied by the scholia, who use the collocation λείπω with ψυχή to denote death, even though, as we have seen, they use the compound λιποψυχέω to describe fainting. See, for example, the scholia vetera on *Il.* 16.272: Ὑπνω καὶ Θανάτῳ διδυμάοσιν: τελευτῶντων γὰρ ἐκλείπει παντελῶς ἡ ψυχή, καθευδόντων δὲ συστέλλεται ἡ δύναμις τῆς ψυχῆς; and on *Il.* 19.27b: ἐκ δ’ αἰῶν πέφαται: τὸ ‘ἐκ δ’ αἰῶν πέφαται’ οὐ παρέργως κείται, ἀλλ’ ὅτι τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπολιπούσης τὸ σῶμα εὐχερῶς αἱ μυῖαι λυμαίνονται τοῖς νεκροῖς σώμασι.

26 There is a third difference too: as Clarke 1999, 297 notes, for the archaic poets in general (and as borne out by this example) ψυχή now refers not to a warrior’s (final) breath but ‘also life – life that is defended, held, and actively enjoyed by living men’.

exception where the departure of the ψυχή doesn't lead to death, but where the hero gets a second wind.

Given the traditional referentiality of the phrase τὸν δὲ λίπε ψυχή to mean something akin to 'he lost his life' that we have reconstructed from the collocation of λείπω with ψυχή in extant archaic Greek poetry, we might well wonder with modern scholars just how Sarpedon manages to come back to life. Significantly, however, the *Iliad* itself goes to some lengths to describe that recovery (*Il.* 5.696–8):

τὸν δὲ λίπε ψυχή, κατὰ δ' ὀφθαλμῶν κέχυτ' ἀχλὺς·
αὖτις δ' ἀμπνύσθη,²⁷ περὶ δὲ πνοιῇ Βορέας
ζῶγρει ἐπιπνεῖουσα κακῶς κεκαφηότα θυμόν.

And his ψυχή left him, and mist covered his eyes.
But he breathed again, and Boreas' breath
breathed life into him after he painfully gasped for his θυμός.²⁸

When the spear is pulled out of his thigh, Sarpedon's ψυχή leaves him and mist falls over his eyes: but these two indications of death, the departure of the soul and mist falling over the eyes,²⁹ are quickly followed by Sarpedon's resuscitation. To emphasize the fact, the narrative repeats the word for breath three times in short succession in three different forms: Sarpedon 'breathed' (ἀμπνύσθη) again, when Boreas' 'breath' (πνοιῇ) 'breathed' (ἐπιπνεῖουσα) life into him.³⁰ It is as if the *Iliad's* poet here has to work hard to clarify that Sarpedon has not died after all, contrary to any expectations that an audience may have had having heard that 'his ψυχή left him'.³¹

27 There is some debate whether ἀμπνύσθη or should ἐμπνύσθη be read. The *OCT* of Allen reads the latter, as it does in the descriptions of the recoveries of Hector (*Il.* 11.359) and Andromache (*Il.* 22.475), though elsewhere ἀναπνέω is used for revivals (*Il.* 14.436; 16.111; 22.222; *Od.* 5.458; 24.349). On the other hand, other instances of ἐμπνέω only appear to refer to those situations when the gods breathe life into the winded hero (*Il.* 10.482; 15.60, 262; 17.502; 20.110; 24.520). See Clarke 1999, 139–43.

28 The expression κακῶς κεκαφηότα θυμόν is difficult. Clarke 1999, 143 argues that 'κεκαφηότα seems to be an intransitive perfect from of the same verb as ἐκάπυσσεν in Andromache's swoon: just as she gasped out her ψυχή when she collapsed, so [Sarpedon] is revived when he is in a dissipated state in respect of his breath'; cf. Nehring 1947, 113–18. This interpretation draws a further connection between two of the epic's key swooners, Sarpedon and Andromache.

29 The phrase κατὰ δ' ὀφθαλμῶν κέχυτ' ἀχλὺς is otherwise used *only* of death-scenes: *Il.* 16.344; 20.421; *Od.* 22.88. Cf. Aceti 2008, 44.

30 Emphasis is also lent by alliteration: Kirk 1990, 129 on *Il.* 5.697–8.

31 See S. Richardson 1990 on the importance for the oral poet to keep his audience with him.

If this is right, and the *Iliad* is having to counter assumptions based on the traditional referentiality of a particular unit of utterance to suggest an alternative meaning, this still does not explain why the poet would want to surprise his audience in such a way in the first place. To answer that question, I turn to the four other examples of fainting that occur in the *Iliad*, involving Aeneas (5.308–17), Hector (11.349–60, 14.419–39) and Andromache (22.466–74) respectively. It is notable that each of these figures has an experience akin to that of Sarpedon, as the image of dark night descending over their eyes combines with the description of their ‘life’ (θυμός or μένος) being shaken in some way to take them to the brink of dying.³² In the end, however, they don’t, for all three are key characters in the story of the war at Troy: they *cannot* die, at least not at these moments within the plot.

This point emerges most explicitly in the description of Aeneas’ swoon: ‘and now would the lord of men, Aeneas, have perished, *had not* the daughter of Zeus, Aphrodite, noticed’ (καί νύ κεν ἔνθ’ ἀπόλοιτο ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Αἰνείας, / εἰ μὴ ἄρ’ ὄξυ νόησε Διὸς θυγάτηρ Ἀφροδίτη, *Il.* 5.311–12). The supplementation of Aeneas’ swoon with the counterfactual, ‘and now would the lord of men perished’ – as if the *Iliad could* allow Aeneas to perish in ignorance of his role in other traditions – draws attention to this poem’s ability and willingness to push the story to the limits.³³ The same is true, albeit in rather different ways, with the example of Hector, who is near fatally wounded not once but twice. First, he is injured by Diomedes at the beginning of his day of ascendancy, which results in his physical collapse as ‘black night covered his eyes’ (ἄμφι δὲ ὄσσε κελαινὴ νύξ ἐκάλυψε, *Il.* 11.356) – only for him to revive

32 Kirk 1990, 129 comments: ‘Thus the four main descriptions in *Il.* of losing consciousness, in respect of Aineias, Sarpedon, Hektor and Andromakhe, draw in different ways on formulaic terminology primarily designed for describing death.’ Cf. Kirk 1990, 92 on *Il.* 5.309–10; cf. N. Richardson 1993, 156 on *Il.* 22.466. Clarke 1999, 139 n. 16 objects: ‘But this cannot be right, if only because several of the expressions used (e.g. ἀπὸ δὲ ψυχὴν ἐκάπτουσε) bear no resemblance to the formulae that we actually see Homer using for death.’ But see the discussion of Andromache’s swoon below. Sullivan 1988, 161 similarly describes fainting as a kind of death.

33 See Morrison 1999, 139, who suggests that description of Aphrodite’s rescue ‘must give a jolt to the audience who up through line 310 is hearing what sounds very much like a description of the death of Aeneas’. Generally, these moments are called ‘if not situations’ by de Jong 1987, 68–71; ‘pivotal contrafactuals’ by Loudon 1993, 181; and ‘reversal passages’ by Morrison 1992, 61. See also: Lang 1989; Nesselrath 1992; Schmitz 1994; Heiden 1997, 225.

swiftly.³⁴ Later, while Zeus nods in post-coital slumber, Hector is hit hard by a boulder thrown by Ajax and carried from battle ‘gasp[ing] heavily’ (βαρέα στενάχοντα, *Il.* 14.432), regains his breath to look around him (ἀμπνύνη καὶ ἀνέδρακεν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν, 436), only subsequently to suffer the relapse of black night falling over his eyes (τῷ δὲ οἱ ὄσσε / νύξ ἐκάλυψε μέλαινα, 438–9), as the blow was still overcoming his θυμός (βέλος δ’ ἔτι θυμὸν ἐδάμνα, 439).³⁵ With his life having been pushed to the very limits, then, it again takes divine intervention to save the day, this time in a lengthy drawn-out episode that occupies the greater part of one book (*Il.* 14.419–15.271).³⁶ Furthermore, that recovery is instigated by Zeus no less and directly related to his grand design for Troy (*Il.* 15.59–71).³⁷

The last near-death experience is the most telling of all. This is Andromache’s swoon when she learns of her husband’s death: at first ‘dark night covered her eyes’ (τὴν δὲ κατ’ ὀφθαλμῶν ἔρεβεννὴ νύξ ἐκάλυψε, *Il.* 22.466) and ‘she gasped out her ψυχή’ (ἀπὸ δὲ ψυχὴν ἐκάπτυσσε, 467); soon, however, ‘she breathed again and her θυμός returned to her breast’ (ἢ δ’ ἔπει οὖν ἀμπνυτο καὶ ἔξ φρένα θυμός ἀγέρθη, 475–6) in a description that resonates strongly with Sarpedon’s own recovery.³⁸ Beyond the similarity in their recovery, however, is the mention of the departure of the ψυχή. As Clarke (1999, 141) notes, ‘the verb ἐκάπτυσσε is difficult, but if it

34 Morrison 1999, 139 n. 50 notes that the expression ἀμφὶ δὲ ὄσσε κελαινὴ νύξ, used only of Aeneas (*Il.* 5.310) and Hector here, is, in fact, ‘not used to signify death’, even though ‘on the surface the phrase “dark night” (κελαινή νύξ) appears to have an identical sense as “black night” (ἔρεβεννὴ νύξ) in the line τὸν δὲ κατ’ ὀφθαλμῶν ἔρεβεννὴ νύξ ἐκάλυψε which always signals death’. Even this clinical assessment is not quite clinical enough, however, since the latter phrase, while used to denote death at *Il.* 5.659 and 13.580, describes what is ultimately only a swoon at 22.466.

35 Even here, though his ‘life’ (θυμός) was under threat, it is described only as being *subdued*: his θυμός does not leave him – thus preserving our previous claim that τὸν μὲν λίπε θυμός and λίπε δ’ ὄστέα θυμός represent unequivocal formulas for death.

36 See Janko 1992, 213: ‘Hector’s duel with Aias ... arouses tension because, until 432, we are unsure whether he still lives, so grave is the blow he suffers (418ff.); his revival and renewed fainting (433–9) are added to remove any doubt.’ Cf. Morrison 1999, 141.

37 See especially Zeus’ instructions that Apollo rouse Hector to fight, ‘and breathe life into him again’ (αὖτις δ’ ἐμπνεύσῃσι μένος, *Il.* 15.60). Two of the *Iliad's* three other fainters, Andromache and Sarpedon, also receive a second life (θυμός). Clarke 1999, 143 makes the important point that, while it is often the ψυχή that gets breathed out, it is *always* the breath of θυμός (life in its positive sense) that is regained.

38 Morrison 1999 discusses the near-death experiences of Aeneas, Hector and Andromache as a series – but not Sarpedon.

is cognate with the noun *καπνός* ... it must mean that Andromache emits the *ψυχή* as an evanescent puff of breath.' If this is right, then Andromache's swoon is the only instance in the *Iliad* other than in the case of Sarpedon where the *ψυχή* is said to leave the body and yet the person does not die.³⁹ Important here is precisely the difficulty of the verb *ἐκάπτυσσε*, which, by its uniqueness, invites listeners to imagine Andromache's near fatal reaction to Hector's death:⁴⁰ while, in the end, her life is not actually threatened, and her *θυμός* returns, her near-death experience symbolically demonstrates the importance of her husband to her – Hector was her life.⁴¹ Even if we grant, however, Clarke's point that the expression *ἀπὸ δὲ ψυχὴν ἐκάπτυσσε* bears 'no resemblance to the formulae that we actually see Homer using for death' (139 n. 16), and so can stand as an unambiguous unit for denoting fainting, that conclusion does not hold true for the case of Sarpedon's swoon, because, as we have seen, the collocation of *λείπω* with *ψυχή* otherwise signifies death.⁴²

With a skilful manipulation of traditional referentiality, in which Sarpedon dies and then comes back to life, the poet brings *this* hero's importance in *this* narrative to the attention of its audience, with the result that Sarpedon is elevated alongside the arguably more established figures of the Trojan War saga, Aeneas, Hector and Andromache. Support for this proposal comes from the three other instances of the collocation *λείπω* with

39 There is one example in the *Odyssey* too, when Laertes, so overcome by his son's sudden revelation, gasps out his *ψυχή* (*ἀποψύχοντα*, *Od.* 24.348), before breathing again (*ἄμπνυστο καὶ ἔξ φρένα θυμὸς ἀγέρθη*, 24.349). The near-fatal shock serves to emphasize the importance, and precariousness, of their reunion.

40 The verb *ἐκάπτυσσε* only recurs in Quintus of Smyrna (6.523).

41 With characteristic alacrity, Segal 1971, 53 was alert to the possibilities of artistry in formulaic composition even as the controversy surrounding it was taking off: using Andromache as an example he shows how Homer applies language from battlefield deaths to emphasize her suffering, 'boldly and unexpectedly applying the familiar formulas to new and unfamiliar contexts'. Cf. Morrison 1999, 141–2. For Andromache, Hector is her husband, father, mother and brothers (*Il.* 6.429–30), on which see Kirk 1990, 216–17 on *Il.* 6.429–30; cf. sections 4 'Difficult encounters' and 4.4 'Hector and Andromache' of Graziosi and Haubold 2010.

42 In this light it could well be a decisive factor that the verb *λείπω* is used to denote Sarpedon's swoon. Spina 2000, ch. 3 explores its semantics in funerary epigrams, which indirectly testifies to its importance in the Greek vocabulary of death: see especially his first category of epitaph, 'to leave one's life' (in the form of one's body or soul) pp. 58–62; cf. Tsagalis 2008, 65–7, 77–81. Spina notes in passing (54 with n. 14) that the association of *λείπω* with death goes back to Homeric epic, in two phrases, *λείπειν φάος ἡελίοιο* and, the phrase under investigation here, *τὸν μὲν λίπε ψυχή* (or *θυμός*).

ψυχή in the *Iliad* that were discussed above. When the combination next occurs, it is used expressly to signify Sarpedon's death, as Hera warns Zeus off from saving his son, inviting him instead to look after Sarpedon's body once its 'ψυχή and years of life have left him' (ἐπήν δὴ τόν γε λείπη ψυχή τε καὶ αἰών, 16.453). This moment is all the more highly charged given Sarpedon's earlier recovery, and serves to mark his death as the first important fatality in the *Iliad's* narrative. Indeed, the fact that Zeus miraculously intervenes *not* to save his son *but* to ensure his burial could well be another sign of the *Iliad's* realignment of heroic values towards more human, mortal concerns.⁴³ That is not all: his death marks the beginning of the *series* of important fatalities – next Patroclus, finally Hector – to whom the only other two instances of the collocation belong.⁴⁴ That is to say, the deaths of these three heroes, the greatest to die in the *Iliad*, are connected not only logically – Patroclus' killing of Sarpedon leads directly to his own death at the hands of Hector, who in turn will be killed by Achilles as a result – but also formally⁴⁵ and linguistically: the same couplet, used for the deaths of both Patroclus and Hector, reworks the collocation λείπω with ψυχή for use in what is now ostensibly a death formula 'and his ψυχή flew from his limbs to Hades, lamenting its fate, leaving manliness and youth' (ψυχή δ' ἐκ ρεθέων πταμένη Ἄϊδόςδε βεβήκει, / ὄν πότμον γοώσωσα, λιποῦσ' ἀνδροτήτα καὶ ἦβην, *Il.* 16.856–7; 22.362–3).⁴⁶ What had started off as an example of dissonance with the tradition – the hero survives the departure of his ψυχή – resolves itself in the end, as the customary interpretation of the unit of utterance to mean

43 Apparently in the *Aethiopsis* Zeus does intervene to save his son Memnon. For a comparison between the two episodes, see Aceti 2008, 231–69; cf. Rohde 1950, 84 n. 28; Janko 1992, 375 on *Il.* 16.431–61. On Sarpedon as a paradigm for thinking about the problematic status of a demi-god, see Delattre 2006. On the *Iliad's* growing emphasis on human concerns, see Graziosi and Haubold 2005.

44 See Taplin 1992, 183–5, 243–7 for the importance of Patroclus' death in the series of significant fatalities; cf. Clarke 1999, 262; Aceti 2008, 122–33. Garland 1981, 48 suggests that the departure of ψυχή 'is reserved for the deaths of major heroes'.

45 Morrison 1999, 134–6 notes the similar formal patterning of each of the three deaths, particularly in the utterance of dying words (used only of these three heroes), on which see also Aceti 2008, 38–45.

46 See Warden 1971, 96. Clarke 1999, 148–9 goes further and suggests a creative reformulation of the notion of ψυχή in the deaths of Patroclus and Hector of the kind that this paper proposes for Sarpedon's swoon. As he puts it, 'In any other narration of death, at this point the ψυχή or the θυμός would be lost, expired, and dissipated: but here the cold breath of death takes wing, emerging suddenly in a mythical shape out of the visible realities of the battlefield, and it flies off to become one of the wraiths that live out the shadowy afterlife in Hades.'

death reaffirms itself, and as the *Iliad* establishes its place in the tradition that it inherits.⁴⁷

Innovation within tradition

Two points can be briefly made in conclusion, one specific, the other more general. First, it has been shown that the collocation λείπω with ψυχή performs as some kind of marker of death in the Homeric poems, with only its first occurrence in the *Iliad* an exception.⁴⁸ That first example, it has been argued, stands out as unusual and provocative, not only in terms of the later occurrences of the collocation which all help articulate the death of the hero (or pig); it is also likely that the poet has to counter expectations that the collocation λείπω with ψυχή could mean anything other than death. The effect is to establish Sarpedon as a critical hero for the dynamics of *this* version of the Troy story. He stands not only as an important figure in his own right in the *Iliad*, which has to a certain extent already been established earlier in the same book when he criticises Hector's martial ability and his use of language to martial the people (*Il.* 5.472–92);⁴⁹ he is even

47 Interestingly, something similar seems to happen with the more famous example of 'swift-footed' (πόδος ὠκύς) Achilles. Its first occurrence in the *Iliad* presents a situation that so radically departs from what Achilles is famed for, namely being swift of foot on the battlefield, that it seems barely appropriate to the context: 'swift-footed' Achilles gets up to *stand* in the assembly (*Il.* 1.58). The disjunction between context and use stresses the very different situation faced by the Achilles of the *Iliad* of setting up an assembly, which in turn draws attention to the *Iliad's* departure from a standard Troy story: this *epic* focusses on internal conflict among the Achaeans, the importance of speech and, ultimately, Achilles' 'swift-fatedness' (cf. ὠκύμορος, *Il.* 1.417; Slatkin 1991, 36–7). Yet, the traditionality of Achilles' swift-footedness – his martial ability and the physical prowess that sets him apart from all men – we do in the end see, as he chases Hector around the walls of Troy in *Iliad* 22. On the example of 'swift-footed' Achilles, see also Graziosi and Haubold 2005, 51–3.

48 As noted above, the scholia on this line gloss ⟨Ἐλιπε ψυχή⟩ as Ἐλιποψύχησεν. Significantly, this compound, λιποψυχέω, occurs at key moments in the historiographical tradition where the author appears to be reworking Homer: Thuc. 4.12.1; Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.58; Paus. 4.10.3–4. In a forthcoming paper I argue that this reworking of a traditional unit of utterance first catches the attention of Herodotus, whose Iliadic account of Thermopylae includes a similarly provocative use of λιποψυχέω (7.229).

49 Sarpedon is the only figure from the allies to criticise Hector until Glaucus does in book 17, in the wake of his friend's death. For an in-depth discussion of Sarpedon's political importance in the *Iliad*, see Christensen 2007; Aceti 2008, 10–22, 172–8.

more important for initiating a series of deaths, culminating in Achilles' killing of Hector in revenge for Patroclus' death.⁵⁰ Indeed, Sarpedon's swoon anticipates Hector's epic career in important ways: both are removed from battle to be healed and faint rather than dying immediately, thereby making their deaths all the more significant when they occur. And this is brought out by the collocation of λείπω with ψυχή: when it reoccurs, it is Sarpedon's death that is emphasised; and from that point on it returns in a more customary form, as a formula that not only signifies death but also prepares audiences for being taken into the underworld.

Second, an analysis of this kind, which focuses on the potential resonance that a unit of utterance has throughout the world of hexameter epic, allows us to view the *Iliad* deploying formulaic language in innovative and challenging ways. Only as the poem progresses does the formula τὸν δὲ λίπε ψυχή work itself out. In the meantime, the *Iliad* succeeds in marking out the main heroes that will be important for its narrative and, in turn, for its growing emphasis on human mortality. And, since it does this by spinning a traditional-looking phrase in an unusual way, this points to this poem's originality, even as it is composed of entirely traditional units of utterance.⁵¹

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50 It may not be without significance that Sarpedon's near life-threatening wound was gained in single combat with Tleptolemus, son of Heracles, the hero of rival epic traditions. Tleptolemus is killed by a single blow (signified by the *conventional* application of the formula τὸν δὲ κατ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἐρεβεννή νύξ ἐκάλυψε, *Il.* 5.659); Sarpedon, though wounded to such an extent that his ψυχή initially departs, lives to fight and die another day.

51 Oral theory has attracted censure from literary critics for seeming to leave insufficient room for originality: see especially the criticism of e.g. Parry 1971 by Jasper Griffin 1977. Cf. Currie 2006, 5–6. For the 'inventiveness' of Homer, using traditional armoury of the hexameter verse, see e.g. Morrison 1999.

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