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ARCHILOCHUS' COLOGNE EPODE AND HOMER'S QUIVERING SPEAR  
(FR. 196A.52 *IEG*<sup>2</sup>)

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ARCHILOCHUS' COLOGNE EPODE AND HOMER'S QUIVERING SPEAR  
(FR. 196A.52 IEG<sup>2</sup>)\*

Archilochus' First Cologne Epode reaches its climax with an explicit description of ejaculation (fr. 196a.52–53):

λευκ]ὸν ἀφῆκα μένοc  
ξανθῆc ἐπιψάβ[ων τριχόc.

I released my white force, touching her blonde hair.

Scholars have exerted much effort and ingenuity in attempting to identify the precise sex act implied by this description, a debate to which I shall contribute only a little here.<sup>1</sup> My main objective is rather to highlight a hitherto unrecognized literary resonance in these verses – a resonance that demonstrates the mischievous sophistication with which Archilochus manipulates his epic heritage.

It has long been recognized that the Cologne Epode's closing lines contain a number of epic echoes. The speaker's 'white force' (λευκ]ὸν ... μένοc, v. 52) adapts the 'white foam' from Cronus' severed genitals in the *Theogony* (λευκὸc ἀφρόc, 190–91),<sup>2</sup> while the girl's 'blonde hair' (ξανθῆc ... [τριχόc, v. 53) reworks a formula that appears only twice before in the *Odyssey* to describe the handsome Odysseus as Athena transforms him into an old man (ξανθᾶc ... τριχᾶc, 13.399, 431).<sup>3</sup> In both cases, Archilochus bathetically reapplies epic diction to a far more mundane scene of iambic seduction.

My main focus here, however, is another phrase with epic associations: ἀφῆκα μένοc ('I released [my] force', v. 52). Ever since the publication of the Cologne papyrus, scholars have noted how this phrase adds a 'sexual twist' to a pre-existing Homeric idiom (ἀφίει μένοc), appropriating the language of martial heroism for the narrator's sexual adventures.<sup>4</sup> What has escaped notice, however, is Archilochus' further adaptation of the original phrase's wider context, which adds far more point to his subversive reworking.

ἀφίει μένοc occurs only three times in the *Iliad*, always in the same repeated phrase. On each occasion, μένοc refers not to the might of a god or mortal, as some scholars have claimed, but rather to that of

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<sup>1</sup> Proposals range from full intercourse (Casanova (1976); Henderson (1976) 169–74) and intercrural sex (Livrea (2012) 36–37) to fellatio (Eckerman (2011)) and masturbation (Calder (1979)). For a thorough list of proposals, see Swift (2019) 367. I side with those who regard the description as intentionally and pointedly ambiguous, designed to provoke audience members' erotic imaginations: Swift (2015) 21–23; cf. Slings (1980) 330–34, (1987) 51; Swift (2016) 268, (2019) 367–68; Allan (2019) 85.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Merkelbach–West (1974) 111; Schirren (2003) 95, 98; Allan (2019) 85. Merkelbach's supplement λευκ]ὸν is widely accepted in view of this echo, as well as Dioscorides' apparent later imitation (ἀπεσπείεθη λευκὸν μένοc, *AP* 5.55.7) and the effective colour contrast with the girl's 'blonde hair': Swift (2019) 383. For a full list of other proposed supplements, see Nicolosi (2007) 245–46.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolosi (2005) 251–54, noting the *Odyssey*'s contrast of youth and old age, which resonates here with the speaker's comparison of Neoboule and her youthful sister (vv. 24–41). The original editors' τριχόc is the most convincing supplement for the poem's final word, not only because of this Odyssean echo (thus Nicolosi (2007) 247–49), but also because of the noun's playfully ambiguous reference: it can evoke both cephalic and pubic hair (thus Swift (2019) 383–84). Contrast Tammaro's κόμηc ('hair of the head', *apud* Degani (1977) 22) and Livrea's euphemistic θύρηc ('door': (2012) 36–37, comparing πυλέων, v. 21; cf. too θύρα]c, Hipponax fr. 92.14 IEG<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>4</sup> 'Sexual twist': Swift (2019) 383. Cf. already Van Sickle (1975a) 9, (1975b) 147–48; Campbell (1976) 153; Schade (2015) 53; and Nicolosi (2007) 245, who contrasts Aristotle's far more prosaic τὸ σπέρμα ἀφιᾶειν ('they release semen', *Hist. an.* 489a10; cf. *Gen. an.* 717b12).

a quivering spear.<sup>5</sup> Twice it relates to a spear that has missed its target and lies fixed and trembling in the ground (16.610–13 = 17.526–29):

ἀλλ' ὃ μὲν ἄντα ἰδὼν ἠλεύατο χάλκεον ἔγχος  
 πρόσω γὰρ κατέκυψε, τὸ δ' ἐξόπιθεν δόρυ μακρὸν  
 οὔδει ἐνικίμφθη, ἐπὶ δ' οὐρίαχος πελεμίχθη  
 ἔγχος· ἔνθα δ' ἔπειτ' ἀφίει μένος ὄβριμος Ἄρης.

But he looked ahead and avoided the bronze spear; he stooped forward, and the long spear was fixed in the ground behind him, and the spear-butt quivered; but there at length did mighty Ares release its force.

And in its only other appearance, it describes a spear shaking to the final pulses of a dying heart (13.442–44):

δούπησεν δὲ πεσών, δόρυ δ' ἐν κραδίῃ ἐπεπήγει,  
 ἢ ῥά οἱ ἀσπαίρουσα καὶ οὐρίαχον πελέμιζεν  
 ἔγχος· ἔνθα δ' ἔπειτ' ἀφίει μένος ὄβριμος Ἄρης.

He fell with a thud, and the spear was fixed in his heart, which made even the spear-butt quiver with its dying palpitations; but there at length did mighty Ares release its force.

In each case, Ares ‘releases the force’ of the spear, stilling its vibrations.<sup>6</sup> In the Homeric context, this is a vivid touch of battlefield detail: it stresses the divine forces that work in the background of the war, and forms part of a wider set of Homeric scenes of stuck or quivering spears (*Il.* 13.503–5, 17.523–24, 21.171–72, 22.274–76). But in his reuse of the phrase, Archilochus offers a pointedly iambic reinterpretation of the Homeric scene, bringing out the innuendo latent in the idea of a ‘quivering spear’ (~ erect phallus) and its ‘release of force’ (~ ejaculation). In effect, he legitimizes his own lurid description by pinpointing its Homeric roots.

Archilochus is not alone in sexualising the spear. The weapon proved a recurring emblem for the phallus, especially in Attic comedy,<sup>7</sup> and later writers similarly exploited the innuendo of its vibrations.<sup>8</sup> On occasion, they also – like Archilochus – reworked earlier epic descriptions of the weapon: according to Suetonius (*Vesp.* 23.1), the emperor Vespasian described a well-endowed man as ‘brandishing his far-shadowing spear with long strides’, a phrase originally applied to the Iliadic Ajax (μακρὰ βιβὰς, κραδάων δολιχόσκιον ἔγχος, *Il.* 7.213), while Ausonius’ *Cento Nuptialis* later adapted the *Aeneid* to similar effect, reframing Pandarus’ ‘spear-cast’ in Book 9 as the commencement of penetrative sex.<sup>9</sup> Of course, unlike Vespasian and Ausonius, Archilochus does not mention a spear explicitly. Instead, he relies on his audience’s appreciation of the wider contextual resonance of ἀφῆκα μένος, which is a plausible allusive move in view of the rarity of the language involved: these are the only four instances of ἀφιέναι μένος in extant Greek poetry. Given the triple repetition of the phrase in Homer, Archilochus may simply be working with the traditional resonance of a more widely established formula from the epic tradition.<sup>10</sup> But it is equally possible that he is responding to a version of the *Iliad* much like our own. After all, scholars have

<sup>5</sup> Contrast Andrisano (1983) 19 n. 45: ‘è Ares in persona a sottrarre la forza al guerriero ferito’; Allan (2019) 85: ‘a god or warrior releasing or checking his might’; Swift (2019) 383: ‘intangible warrior might’.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Il.* 13.562–63: Poseidon deprives a spear-point of its μένος (ἀμενήσων); see Janko (1992) 102–3.

<sup>7</sup> See Henderson (1991) 120 §47 on δόρυ (‘spear’: Ar. *Lys.* 985), 123 §65 on πέλιτη (‘shaft’, cf. καταπελάσσονται: *Ach.* 160), 123–24 §67 on σονύιον (‘javelin’: Cratinus fr. 443 *PCG*). For a visual parallel, Daniel Hanigan points me towards the Edessan Pig Stele (*SEG* 25:711, II/III CE), where the phallic chariot (φαλλοῖο δὲ ἄρμα) is adorned with what looks like a spear; the sexual undertones are strengthened by the common slang use of χοῖρος: Henderson (1991) 131–32.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Seneca, *Phoen.* 468–69: *tremetem iamque cupientem excuti hastam*, ‘the trembling spear that longs to be discharged’; cf. Frank (1994) 204. For *hasta* = *membrum virile*, cf. *Priap.* 43.1, 4; Adams (1982) 19–20.

<sup>9</sup> *intorquet summis adnixus viribus hastam*, ‘he casts his spear, applying all his strength’, *Cento Nuptialis* 117 = Virg. *Aen.* 9.744; cf. Adams (1982) 19, 74.

<sup>10</sup> Oralists have typically taken three instances as ‘the minimum criterion of typicality’: Kelly (2007) 10.

identified other plausible direct allusions to Homeric epic in Archilochus' corpus, especially those that repeat rare Homeric phrases as here.<sup>11</sup>

In either case, however, the larger resonance of the epic phrasing may also carry further point. In all three Homeric passages, the quelling of the spear's force signals failure and disappointment, linked either to a fruitless spear-cast or the convulsions of a mortally wounded heart. In Archilochus, by contrast, the release of the narrator's μένος marks not failure but success, the sexual climax that he has longed for – a neat inversion. At the same time, however, the Homeric spear's 'force' is always released only *after* it has already penetrated something, be it the ground or a bodily organ (οὐδὲι ἐνικκίμφθη, 16.612 = 17.528; ἐν κραδίη ἐπεπήγει, 13.442). For audiences attentive to this wider context, Archilochus' use of ἀφῆκα μένος might suggest a similar scenario at the end of the Cologne Epode: perhaps we are to imagine that the speaker 'releases his force' after a similarly penetrative act. Besides parodying and debasing epic, this Homeric resonance thus adds a further hint towards how we might read the poem's enigmatic close.

In any case, this epic reworking demonstrates the sophistication with which Archilochus harnessed his epic heritage. It is perhaps the most outrageous and knowing example of a strategy that pervades his poetry: he frequently eroticizes military and epic language, including at least one other description of ejaculation in fr. 43, where he appropriates the traditional epic device of the simile to compare a man's overflowing ejaculation to that of a stud donkey.<sup>12</sup> But in its more immediate context, this epic reworking also caps an overarching pattern within the Cologne Epode itself. The whole poem has carefully negotiated an ongoing clash between the generic conventions of epic and iambus.<sup>13</sup> By tracing his description of ejaculation back to Homer's quivering spear, Archilochus ends by collapsing the gap between the two genres even further – an outrageously playful move.

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<sup>11</sup> Besides the other echoes in fr. 196a.52–53 noted above, see e.g. κήδεα ... σπονόνετα (fr. 13.1 = *Od.* 9.12); νεκύων στείνετο (fr. 17a.9) ~ στεινόμενος νεκύεσσι (*Il.* 21.220); ἄλοδ ἐν πελάγεσσι (fr. 8.1 = *Od.* 5.335); κερροπλάστην (fr. 117) ~ κέρρα ἀγλαέ (*Il.* 11.385); see Swift (2019) 21–22; cf. Adkins (1985) 41–44; Bowie (2010) 63–66. Cf. too πείκομαι ὡς με κέλεαι (fr. 196a.19) ~ πείκομαι ὡς με (or ὡς cὺ) κελεύεις (*Il.* 23.96), another unique Homeric phrase (Degani (1977) 14; Koenen (1980) 197); and also perhaps ἀπτήνεσσι (fr. 175.3), which may echo the Homeric hapax legomenon ἀπτήσι in Achilles' comparison of himself to a mother bird (*Il.* 9.323), resonating ironically against the narrative of the Fox and Eagle Epode. For the repetition of Homeric hapax legomena in archaic and classical Greek poetry more generally, see Nelson (forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> For Archilochus' tendency to eroticize military language, see Swift (2019) 36. On fr. 43, see Allan (2019) 70–71; Swift (2019) 266–68. For another phallic metaphor in Archilochus' poetry, cf. Gerber (1973) on the 'blind eels' of fr. 189 (τυφλάσ ἐγγέλλουσας).

<sup>13</sup> See Swift (2015). This clash is reflected in the poem's combination of iambic and dactylic rhythms: Griffiths (1995) 92. For the reuse of epic language in the Cologne Epode more generally, see Risch (1975); Andrisano (1983); Nicolosi (2005). Note too the possible pun on θυμός ('heroic spirit') and θῦμος ('penis') at fr. 196a.3: Merkelbach–West (1974) 103; Miralles and Pórtulas (1983) 144–45, 149; cf. Hipponax fr. 10 *IEG*<sup>2</sup>.

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