Two Notes on the Invocation of the Muses at Iliad 2.484-93

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(1) πάρεστε (*Il.* 2.485)

ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαί ἐστε, πάρεστέ τε, ἴστέ τε πάντα

Kirk, like almost all commentators and translators, understands πάρεστε to mean '[you] are present everywhere'.[1] Leaf also translated the word this way ('are present at all that happens'), but he added that 'stand at the poet's side' was an alternative.[2] Actually, 'stand at the poet's side', or as I would prefer to phrase it, 'you are at hand', is much the better translation. In Leaf's first translation the preverb denotes a location, in the second a relationship, i.e. the availability of someone or something to a person or for a purpose. The latter is the regular usage of πάρειμι both in epic Greek and later.[3] The translation 'are at hand (for me)' presents no problem in the context, since in the previous line the poet has specified his relationship to the Muses (ἔσπετε νῦν μοι, Μοῦσαι κτλ. 2.484: 'Tell me...'). The probability of 'are at hand (for me)' is also enhanced by the fact that the invocation is a kind of prayer,[4] and it is normal in Homeric prayers to say something about the relationship of friendship between the praying mortal and prayed-to god, since this friendship usually serves as the basis for the appeal.[5] At *Il.* 10.278-79, for example, Odysseus calls upon Athena as 'you who are always with me (...μοι αἰεὶ...παρίστασαι) in all my troubles'.[6]

It is puzzling that the translation 'you are present everywhere' should have won nearly unanimous approval,[7] since it is very doubtful that in Homeric Greek πάρειμι

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1 Kirk on *Iliad* 2.485-86 (167). Also cf. B. Snell, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes*[4] (Göttingen, 1975), 127: 'ihr...seid bei allem dabei'; G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, 1979), 16; P. Pucci, *The Song of the Sirens* (Lanham, MD, 1998), 36; J.S. Clay, *The Wrath of Athena* (Princeton, 1983), 19; W.G. Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Epic Poetry* (Baltimore, 1984), 128; S. Goldhill, *The Poet's Voice* (Cambridge, 1991), 70; M. Finkelberg, *The Birth of Literary Fiction in Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1998), 48; S. Perceau, *La parole vive: Communiquer en catalogue dans l'épopée homérique* (Louvain, 2002), 157; G. Ledbetter, *Poetics Before Plato* (Princeton, 2003), 21; J. Latacz, *Homers Ilias: Gesamtkommentar*, (Munich, 2000-), Bd.2, Fasc. 2, 142 on *Iliad* 2.485-86; R.J. Cunliffe, *A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect* (Norman, 1963; orig. London, 1924), 314 ('are present [at all that happens]').

2 Leaf on *Iliad* 2.485 (v.1, 85).

3 For the Homeric occurrences see H. Ebeling, *Lexicon Homericum* v.2 (Leipzig, 1880), 137; Cunliffe (n. 1), 314.

4 Noted by D. Lateiner, 'Homeric Prayer', *Arethusa* 30 (1997), 252.

5 S. Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1997), 28-31.

6 Also compare *Il.* 5.116, 10.285, and *Od.* 2.262.

7 Apart from Leaf, Thalmann (n. 1), 128 is the only scholar known to me who even mentions a possible alternative to 'present everywhere', and he rejects it peremptorily.

ever means simply 'be physically present in a place', much less 'present everywhere'. Advocates of 'you are present everywhere' or 'present at all that happens' would have a hard time finding parallels to support it. Even where πάρειμι is complemented by an adverb indicating a place (e.g., ἐνθάδε), or the context strongly implies one, the place where the subject of πάρειμι is present is never just a physical location, but rather the vicinity of certain persons (or the equivalent of persons)[8] who bear a close relationship to that subject. For example, at *Il.* 15.665 τῶν...ἐνθάδ'...οὐ παρεόντων refers to the families of the Greek fighters who are not present with them at Troy as they defend their fleet against assault. At *Od.* 11.66 οὐ παρεόντων refers to Odysseus's wife and father, who are not simply absent from a certain location, the Underworld (where Odysseus happens to be at this juncture), but far away *from Odysseus*, for they are at home where he left them. At *Od.* 15.74 παρεόντα refers gnomically to a guest and the host's obligations to him (Menelaos is addressing Telemachos); the significance of the subject's 'presence' is thus not fundamentally the physical location *where* he is, but the host *in whose home* he is staying.

Scholars of Homer will be aware of three passages besides *Il.* 2.485 (*Il.* 10.217, *Od.* 4.497, and *Od.* 8.491) where πάρειμι is generally thought to mean something like 'present at *events*'.[9] In considering the relevance of these passages to the explication of *Il.* 2.485, it should first be noted that they are not clear parallels, because in each of them the 'events' are made verbally explicit, while in *Il.* 2.485 they are not. Just as importantly, in none of the three passages does πάρειμι lack a sense of the subject's personal involvement *in* the events, and hence in none does its meaning correspond simply to physical 'presence *there* at the events' or presence *as an observer* of them, as the usual translations of *Il.* 2.485 imply. At *Il.* 10.217, αἰεὶ δ' ἐν δαίτῃσι καὶ εἰλαπίνῃσι παρέσται refers to a prize that the addressee will have available to him (probably for sacrifice) on the occasion of feasts; the feasts are not simply a location *where* the prize will be, but an activity in which the addressee and his prize will participate with others. At *Od.* 4.497 μάχῃ... καὶ σὺ παρῆσθα refers to Menelaos's presence *in* the fighting where certain men died. Again, the battle is an activity in which Menelaos himself participated with the Greeks, not just a place where he stood and observed the other men dying.

The best known of the three passages thought to mean 'present at events' is *Od.* 8.491, where Odysseus praises Demodokos for singing 'all the Greeks did and suffered (ὅσσ' ἔρξαν τ' ἔπαθόν τε καὶ ὅσσ' ἐμόγησαν Ἀχαιοί) as if either (he had) been there himself (ὡς...ἢ αὐτὸς παρεὼν) or else heard it from another (ἄλλου ἀκούσας)'. The reader should notice that what Odysseus praises Demodokos for singing is not a body of objective facts ('events') that someone might have observed empirically, but what certain people at Troy did and experienced there. Demodokos therefore sings like someone who knew the Greeks' sufferings because he had been *among* the Greeks, 'as if (he had been)

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8 At *Il.* 15.325 σημάντορος οὐ παρεόντος refers to a herdsman who is not nearby his flock to guard it.

9 *LfgrE* s.v. εἰμί IV.7 lists these three passages, along with *Il.* 2.485, as meaning 'dabei sein (bei Ereignissen)'.

with them', and not just 'present' at the scene.[10] A song as effective as Demodokos's could just as well have been heard from a personal source (ἄλλου ἀκούσας),[11] and this should not be surprising since personal experiences are its theme. Each of Odysseus's two alternatives posits a relationship to persons as the measure of Demodokos's excellent singing. The implied relationship to place is purely secondary. Clearly Demodokos was not present at Troy, and as a blind man he could not have observed anything, even if he had been there. The upshot of Odysseus's praise is to affirm that for a singer like Demodokos, presence at or observation of the narrated events was not necessary.[12]

These usages of πάρειμι show that it would have been quite anomalous for the poet to have used πάρεστε to mean 'present everywhere' or anything like it. But in fact the idea that the Muses were 'present everywhere' would have sounded peculiar even if expressed in different diction. Greek mythical poetry did not routinely (if ever) describe its anthropomorphic divinities as omnipresent, but rather as being in certain particular

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10 Snell (n. 1), 128 flagrantly mistranslates *Od.* 8.491: 'wie einer, der selbst dabei war oder es von einem Augenzeugen gehört hat'. Nothing has been said about an eyewitness. Other scholars have a similar misconception; see G. Walsh, *The Varieties of Enchantment* (Chapel Hill, 1984), 10; Thalmann (n. 1), 128; Goldhill (n. 1), 57; A. Ford, *Homer: The Poetry of the Past* (Ithaca, NY, 1992), 122; Finkelberg (n. 1), 51; Ledbetter (n. 1) 16; Latacz (n. 1), 142.

11 The only effect of Demodokos's singing that the narrator insists upon is its power to move audiences emotionally; see *Od.* 8.64, 73-82, 86-92, 368, and 522-31. Odysseus himself praises Demodokos for singing the Greeks' travails λίην...κατὰ κόσμον (8.489), 'in very good arrangement'. The compliment would seem to refer to the aesthetic form of Demodokos's first song, since κόσμος and cognate terms usually denote a deliberate arrangement (e.g., clothing, jewelry, a military formation); see the discussion of Ford (n. 10), 122-23, who says of κατὰ κόσμον in this passage, 'the phrase should not be pressed too quickly into meaning "true". As "order", *kosmos* is an arrangement that is good, efficient, approved....' Yet Ford eventually arrives at a point close to that of T.B.L. Webster, who explained Odysseus's praise of Demodokos as follows: 'The hearer demands a complete and orderly account (κατὰ κόσμον). Everything that happened must be in it, and there must be no gaps in the narrative'; see T.B.L. Webster, 'Greek Theories of Art and Literature Down to 400 B.C.', *CQ* 33 (1939), 175. Webster's formulation has influenced many subsequent scholars besides Ford, including West (*ad* 8.489; 378), who takes the phrase to refer to a correct traditional sequence of narration. The misconception that Odysseus praised Demodokos for the completeness of his singing may perhaps have arisen from an overly literal reading of ὅσσα κτλ. (8.490). But Odysseus's use of this expression cannot mean that he expected Demodokos to sing a comprehensive and correctly sequenced account, because Demodokos's songs, far from being comprehensive, are short selections (quarrel of Odysseus and Achilles, affair of Aphrodite and Ares, Trojan Horse), and their sequence of performance is flagrantly discontinuous with respect to narrative chronology. When Odysseus himself asks Demodokos to sing he requests a particular episode, rather than relying upon the bard to maintain a traditionally or factually correct sequence.

12 In fact Odysseus attributes Demodokos's singing neither to autopsy nor to report, but to the instruction of 'the Muse or Apollo' (8.488). By analogy with other references to teaching, this would probably mean that the divinities taught Demodokos how to sing, tell stories, and play the lyre, not that he heard their specific words and music and repeated them accurately. A hunter taught by Artemis was successful at taking new game, not at performing reenactments of model expeditions.

places. For an example one need look no further than the line that immediately precedes *Il.* 2.485 in the invocation of the Muses: the poet states that the goddesses have homes on Olympus (Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι *Il.* 2.484). While this verse is too formulaic to determine the context decisively, it certainly suggests a specific and not improbable place where the Muses might be located. Correspondingly, it furnishes no indication whatsoever for the putatively implicit location 'everywhere'.[13]

The routine but forced translation 'are present everywhere' may owe its currency to certain theological assumptions for which the invocation of the Muses is taken to provide support. The poet attributes omniscience to the Muses (ἴστέ τε πάντα), and scholars, thinking that this fantasy requires some explanation, find it in the supposed statement that they are also 'present everywhere'. On this reading the poet had a quasi-empiricist epistemology that embraced divine as well as mortal knowledge, and accommodated the Muses' exceptional knowledge mechanically by according them the power to cover a lot of ground.[14] But the explanation, which we have seen is an illusion that involves misreading the Greek, would also have been intrusive and inept, because Greek mythic poets seldom felt moved to explain how the gods might do things that were impossible for mortals. Early Greek epic narrates many divine marvels without bothering to explain them. Hesiod, for example, says that the Muses breathed into him a voice that could publicize 'things to come and past' (*Theogony* 32), but he never offers the slightest explanation of how the Muses got the information or transferred it to him (if transference of information is even what the passage implies). Homer's invocations other than *Il.* 2.484-93 never supply an explanation of the Muses' power. In the *Iliad* supernatural knowledge of events at one or many locations is explicitly posited several times without reference to divine presence on the spot. Achilles attributes omniscience to his mother Thetis (ἰδυίῃ πάντ' *Il.* 1.365) without implying that she is omnipresent, or explaining her omniscience at all.[15] Glaukos calls upon Apollo (*Il.* 16.514-6) without knowing where the god might be, but in the confidence that Apollo can *hear* him everywhere (πάντοσ'), i.e., whether

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13 An anonymous reader has suggested that πάρεστε acquires the sense 'present everywhere' from the accusative πάντα in the coordinate phrase (πάρεστε τε, ἴστέ τε πάντα). This parsing involves a rather strained zeugma. When a complement of πάρειμι is expressed in early epic it is usually a noun in the dative case and sometimes an adverb or prepositional phrase, but it is never an accusative. Of course, equally strained zeugmatic constructions can be found, but in *Il.* 2.485 there is no particular incentive to find a verbal complement for πάρεστε at all, since πάρειμι is frequently used absolutely and appears to be so used here. In that case the sense 'are at hand' without further specification would only be comprehensible to a listener if it implied availability to a person concretely obvious in the context. The only possibility would be 'at hand for me'.

14 E.g. Snell (n. 1), 128: 'Was wir der Phantasie... zuschreiben, führt... Homer... auf Erfahrung zurück.... die Musen, die überall gegenwärtig sind, haben volle Erfahrung'; similarly Clay (n. 1), 19; Thalmann (n. 1), 128; Goldhill (n. 1), 70; Ford (n. 10), 77; Finkelberg (n. 1), 71; Ledbetter (n. 1), 22.

15 If, as a reader has suggested, Achilles is understood to refer only to 'all the background events', the passage would still illustrate the same point: Achilles does not explain how Thetis knows about those events, and *a fortiori* he does not explain that she knows about them because she was present when and where they occurred.

he is present or not. Helios can witness oaths because he 'sees and hears everything' (*Il.* 3.277), which means that he knows *without* being everywhere.[16]

The idea that *Iliad* 2.485 offers an explanation of the Muses' omniscience, much less one implying a quasi-empiricist epistemology that bases omniscience on omnipresence, would be anomalous and highly implausible even if no alternative interpretation were available. It should therefore be abandoned. The interpretation of πάρεστε as 'you are at hand (for me)' accords perfectly with the regular usage of πάρειμι, with the normal relationship of Muses and poet, and with the immediate context in this passage.

(2) χάλκεον...ἦτορ (*Il.* 2.490)

οὐδ' εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἶεν,
φωνὴ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη

In *Il.* 2. 490 ἦτορ is often translated as 'heart'; e.g. de Jong ('a bronze heart')[17] and Latacz ('ein erznes Herz').[18] Pucci[19] prefers 'breast of bronze', as does Ford.[20] These translations should seem odd, because in the immediately preceding phrases the poet has mentioned tongues, mouths, and voice, all of which clearly have to do with his physical vocal apparatus. The English word 'heart' does not indicate the vocal apparatus, nor does 'breast'. But parts of the vocal apparatus, namely the lungs and trachea, are inside the chest cavity or 'breast'. Accordingly the context of the passage would suggest that the poet here uses ἦτορ to refer to his vocal apparatus, not to the 'heart' in either the anatomical or metaphorical sense.

Translation of χάλκεον ἦτορ as 'brass lungs' or 'brass windpipe' would not be at all inconsistent with the usual usage of ἦτορ in Homeric poetry. The Homeric word ἦτορ belongs to what Clarke has called 'the θυμός family', a group of expressions used without sharp or stable distinctions to denote consciousness, feeling, thought, and the physical location of those activities in the body: 'Homer's understanding of thought and emotion revolves around a close-knit group of phenomena: the ebb and flow of breath, the flow of fluids into and out of the breast, and the soft liquidity of the organs around and below the lungs'.[21] Homeric poetry regularly uses ἦτορ in vague association with the respiratory apparatus, without specifying one anatomical organ, such as the lungs or the trachea, as its referent.

Nevertheless expressions that vaguely gesture toward a type of referent can indicate something more specific where the context supplies appropriate cues. In certain Homeric passages the terminology applied to the respiratory apparatus in general refers fairly clearly to the upper tract rather than the lower. When Andromache exclaims that the

16 Also compare Theognis 375 and the prophecy of Teiresias at *Od.* 11.100-37.

17 I.J.F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers*[2] (London, 2004), 48.

18 Latacz (n. 1), fasc. 1, 31.

19 Pucci (n. 1), 43.

20 Ford (n. 10), 72.

21 M. Clarke, *Flesh and Spirit in the Songs of Homer* (Oxford, 1999), 53-126; quoted passage on 106. Many years earlier Onians had suggested that ἦτορ might denote the bronchial tubes, since whenever the adjective μεγαλήτωρ modifies a specific part of the anatomy it is the θυμός; see R.B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* (Cambridge, 1951), 81.

ἦτορ inside her chest is shaking up into her mouth (πάλλεται ἦτορ ἀνὰ στόμα, *Il.* 22.452), the feeling she describes must correspond to a constriction of the throat.[22] The association of the ἦτορ with the ingestion of food and drink (*Il.* 9.705-6) suggests the organ that we call the esophagus, but that folk anatomy scarcely distinguishes from the windpipe.[23] Most intriguingly, several passages in the *Odyssey* describe the ἦτορ as 'snapped off' (κατεκλάσθη φίλον ἦτορ).[24] Onians points out that 'the only other Homeric uses of κατακλάω refer to the physical snapping of a stalk or spearshaft'.[25] Among the physical organs in the chest the image of a stalk suits only the trachea. Since occurrences of κατεκλάσθη φίλον ἦτορ refer only to metaphorical damage they do not clinch the case, and lexicons translate ἦτορ in this phrase in a psychological sense like 'spirit' or the metaphorical 'heart'. Still, of the various Homeric organs that may metaphorically indicate something like 'spirit', ἦτορ is the only one said to snap like a stalk. This suggests that among the organs associated with consciousness, respiration, and the interior of the chest, the ἦτορ was uniquely imagined as stalklike. This could only be the trachea.[26]

The idea of brass lungs and/or windpipe would not have seemed far-fetched to an audience of early Greek epic. The description of Achilles' shout from the Achaian rampart in *Iliad* 18 explicitly compares the hero's voice to a trumpet:

> ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἀριζήλη φωνή, ὅτε τ' ἴαχε σάλπιγξ
> ἄστυ περιπλομένων δηίων ὕπο θυμοραϊστέων,
> ὣς τότ' ἀριζήλη φωνὴ γένετ' Αἰακίδαο.
> οἱ δ' ὡς οὖν ἄϊον ὄπα χάλκεον Αἰακίδαο... (*Il.* 18.219-22)
>
> As when a note sounds loud and brilliant, when a trumpet screams
> because murderous enemies surround a city—
> like that Achilles' voice then became loud and brilliant.
> And when they heard Achilles' brazen voice...

At *Theogony* 311 Hesiod describes Kerberos as χαλκεόφωνον, which West explains as 'as loud as a trumpet', citing *Il.* 18.219-22.[27] But the passage, which also describes Kerberos as 'eating raw meat' (ὠμηστήν) and 'fifty-headed' (πεντηκοντακέφαλον), suggests that brassiness was part of the dog's anatomy (at least metaphorically) as well

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22 Cf. Clarke (n. 21), 105: 'she describes her ἦτορ as rising and quivering in her throat'.

23 Clarke (n. 21), 91 makes the related point that 'because Homer does not distinguish the lungs in particular from the lower breast as a whole, the digestive and respiratory processes go together'.

24 *Od.* 4.481, 4.538, 9.256, 10.198, 10.496, 10.566, and 12.277.

25 Onians (n. 21), 82.

26 One might add that all the passages in the *Odyssey* where the ἦτορ is said to snap involve some interruption of dialogue, and therefore they might suggest a particular feeling when the sudden onset of discouragement was experienced as a sort of choking that disabled speech. The three exceptions seem to confirm the rule. At 4.481 and 9.256 the downcast interlocutor actually does reply, but this is especially explained (ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς κτλ.), which serves to emphasize the fact that the snapped ἦτορ would have been expected to preempt any reply. At 12.277-78 a group (Odysseus' companions) experienced the snapped ἦτορ, but one of them replied. In the other cases a snapped ἦτορ is prelude to inarticulate wailing.

27 West on *Theogony* 311, 253.

as of his sound. Loud volume and piercing timbre are not the only characteristics that voices and trumpets may share; they are also comparable in terms of their physical shape and mode of operation: both produce sound by expelling air through a narrow pipe. Thus a brazen voice might not only sound like a trumpet, but actually be a kind of trumpet, a wind-pipe made of brass. Kerberos and Achilles sounded like they had that kind of respiratory/vocal apparatus. At *Il.* 5.785 the famously vociferous Stentor is described as μεγαλήτορι χαλκεοφώνῳ, 'possessing a gigantic ἦτορ and voice of brass'.[28] The association here of the ἦτορ with a voice of brass suggests that the brass sound was conceptualized as produced by a special vocal apparatus that explicitly included the ἦτορ.[29] Therefore at *Il.* 2.490 the expression χάλκεον... ἦτορ must envision a vocal apparatus made of brass, like a trumpet inside the poet's chest. The poet is imagining a 'brass windpipe'. A translation less grating to the literary ear might be 'brass throat' or 'brass "pipes"'. The suggestion of a trumpet in the invocation of the Muses is apposite, since trumpets were (almost certainly) used in actual military maneuvers like the mustering in *Iliad* 2, which the Muses are invoked to relate.[30]

Latacz explains that the metaphor of 'bronze' or 'brass' in *Il.* 2.490 arises from armor and weapons;[31] but he is probably mistaken. The metaphor more likely arises from a musical instrument, albeit one used by soldiers: the trumpet.

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28 Edwards on *Iliad* 18.222, 172 brings together Achilles' brazen voice, Stentor's, and the invocation in *Iliad* 2, but then disappointingly concludes that the brazen ἦτορ of *Il.* 2.490 might reflect 'some confusion of mind' on the part of the poet.

29 The frequent use of μεγαλήτωρ of Homeric heroes without a particular physical denotation forbids us to regard its application to Stentor here as conclusive in itself.

30 The *Iliad*, however, never mentions trumpets used in the Trojan War. On the relationship of the invocation to the muster of the Achaians on Day One of battle in the *Iliad* and the catalogue of the ships that sailed to Troy at the war's outset, see T. Krischer, 'Die Entschuldigung des Sängers (*Ilias* B 484-493)', *RhM* 108 (1965), 1-11, and B. Heiden, 'Common People and Leaders in *Iliad* Book 2: The Invocation of the Muses and the Catalogue of Ships', *TAPA* 138 (2008, forthcoming).

31 Latacz (n. 1), 143.