

The scene in *Iliad* 9 (186-191) in which Achilles sings *klea andron* to or with Patroclus is a well-known locus for scholarly interest in performance of song in the Homeric epics. Chiefly relying on linguistic evidence related to ancient citations of the so-called “Panathenaic Rule,” Nagy (1996, 2009) posits that Achilles and Patroclus are engaging in “rhapsodic sequencing,” a technique of “leaving off” and “taking up” of song thought to be employed by rhapsodes in their performances of Homeric epics. I argue that these techniques can be shown to have analogous connections with the performance of poetry in a more private arena, namely the symposium, and that recognizing the symptotic context of the passage, as was demonstrated by Pelliccia (2002) for *Iliad* 6, is critical for decoding the poetics underlying the scene.

The techniques of rhapsodic and symptotic singing are not dissimilar (Collins 2004). Testimonia which refer to the supposed “Panathenaic Rule” identify a system in which rhapsodes “start up” and “leave off” singing according to a specific order (D.L.1.57.6, [Ps.-Plato] *Hipparch.*228b-c). The poetic gaming of the symposium involves analogous practices. In Aristophanes’ *Wasps*, for example, Bdelycleon instructs his father Philocleon on the technique of the game of *skolion* and advises him to “take up” the song well as the poetic gaming circulates around the room at a symposium (1222, cf. 1224-1226, 1242-1243).

Linguistic parallels between the description of the singing in *Iliad* 9 and testimonia for the “Panathenaic Rule” have led scholars to infer that techniques of rhapsodic sequencing are embedded in the poetics of the narrative. But these techniques are also evident in symposia, offering an alternative interpretation. The description of Patroclus in *Iliad* 9 incorporates language distinctly designated for the trading of symptotic song. The solitary, non-professional setting of singing of song is not typical of poetic performances in the epics which showcase the *aidos* and his skills. Furthermore, when the embassy arrives, Achilles orders Patroclus to set out a larger krater, mix stronger wine, and bring out cups for each man (9.202-203). These are precisely the utensils for a wine-party, and the terminology used suggests that wine and cups were present at Achilles and Patroclus’ storytelling. When the implements are laid out, Odysseus compliments his host’s provisions as is appropriate to the symposium (cf. *Wasps* 1212-1215, Ford 1999) and thus initiates symptotic ground rules for the series of speeches to follow.

Thus the concurrence in technique between certain symptotic and rhapsodic performances invites us to explore the possibility that Achilles and Patroclus are engaged in symptotic performance. These symptotic undertones of the passage serve to heighten the tension of what is already a precarious situation: Achilles is not always well behaved at banquets. He has already quarrelled with Odysseus at one (*Od.* 8.73-77; cf. Sophocles, *Syndeipnoi*) and may have killed Thersites at a drinking party according to the *Aethiopsis* (cf. Rosen 2003). In light of Achilles’ past behaviour, we encounter the Iliadic embassy scene with greater anxiety as to whether on this occasion Achilles will adhere to the rules of the drinking party.