

Suspenseful Iteration in Homeric Epic

- I. **Patterns for τρις μὲν... τρις δέ** (14x in *Il.* and *Od.* combined)
- A. τρις μὲν [subject A], τρις δέ [subject B, who responds/resists in some way], 6x:
Iliad: Diomedes, 8.167-71 (Zeus); Odysseus, 11.462-64 (Menelaus);
Hector, 18.155-60 (Ajaxes); Achilles, 18.228-29 (Trojans)
Odyssey: Odysseus, 9.361 (Cyclops); Odysseus, 11.206-209 (Anticleia)
- B. Same subject in τρις μὲν and τρις δέ clauses, but he somehow fails of his aim or intent in the δέ clause (all followed by **τὸ τέταρτον**):
Achilles, *Il.* 20.438-48; Asteropaeus, *Il.* 21.173-79 (τέτταρον);
Telemachus, *Od.* 21.125-29
- C. Closest parallel to passage II below – Apollo as subject of τρις δέ clause, followed by **τὸ τέταρτον** and speech: Diomedes, *Il.* 5.432-44
- D. Iterative back-and-forth action:
Duel between Diomedes and Ajax, *Il.* 23.813-17; Charybdis' daily cycle, 12.105-106 (within speech of Circe)

II. ***Il.* 16.698-707: Patroclus yields to Apollo**

Ἐνθά κεν ὑψίπυλον Τροίην ἔλον υἷες Ἀχαιῶν
Πατρόκλου ὑπὸ χειρσί, περὶ πρὸ γὰρ ἔγγει θύεν,
εἰ μὴ Ἀπόλλων Φοῖβος εὐδμήτου ἐπὶ πύργου
ἔστη τῷ ὀλοᾷ φρονέων, Τρώεσσι δ' ἀρήγων.
τρις μὲν ἐπ' ἀγκῶνος βῆ τείχεος ὑψηλοῖο
Πάτροκλος, τρις δ' αὐτὸν ἀπεστυφέλιξε
Ἀπόλλων (703)
χείρεσσ' ἀθανάτησι φαεινὴν ἀσπίδα νύσσω.
ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ τὸ τέταρτον ἐπέσσυτο δαίμονι ἴσος,
δεινὰ δ' ὁμοκλήσας ἔπεα περόεντα προσηύδα·
“χάζεο, διογενὲς Πατρόκλεες...”

Then the Greeks would have captured high-gated Troy at the hands of Patroclus, for he was rushing very much in front with his spear, if Phoebus Apollo had not stood atop the well-built tower mulling destruction for him, a helper for the Trojans. Three times he made for the corner of the high wall, Patroclus, but three times *Apollo* struck him aside with his immortal hands, shoving his gleaming shield. **But when for the fourth time** “equal-to-god” attacked, then [Apollo], shouting fearfully, spoke winged words: “Give way, god-born Patroclus...”

III. ***Il.* 16.779-89: Patroclus forges ahead**

ἦμος δ' Ἥλιος μετενίσετο βουλυτόνδε,
καὶ τότε δὴ ῥ' ὑπὲρ αἴσαν Ἀχαιοὶ φέρτεροι
ἦσαν. (780)
ἐκ μὲν Κεβριόνην βελέων ἦρωα ἔρυσσαν
Τρώων ἐξ ἐνοπήs, καὶ ἀπ' ὤμων τεύχε' ἔλοντο,
Πάτροκλος δὲ Τρωσὶ κακὰ φρονέων ἐνόρουσε.
τρις μὲν ἔπειτ' ἐπόρουσε θεῷ ἀτάλαντος Ἄρηι,
σμερδαλέα ἰάχων, τρις δ' ἐννέα φῶτας ἔπεφνευ.
ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ τὸ τέταρτον ἐπέσσυτο δαίμονι ἴσος,
ἐνθ' ἄρα τοι, Πάτροκλε, φάνη βιώτοιο τελευτή·
ἦντετο γάρ τοι Φοῖβος ἐνὶ κρατερῇ ὑσμίνῃ
δεινός: ὁ μὲν τὸν ἰόντα κατὰ κλόνον οὐκ
ἐνόησεν. (789)

While the sun rose to the point of releasing cattle, then, indeed, the Greeks were the stronger, exceeding destiny. They dragged hero Cebriones out of the line of fire and battle with the Trojans, and they stripped the armor from his shoulders, while Patroclus, meditating evil, sprang upon the Trojans. Then three times “match-for-swift-Ares” attacked, shouting terribly, and three times he slaughtered nine men. **But when for the fourth time** “equal-to-god” attacked, then indeed for you, Patroclus, the conclusion of life appeared. For Phoebus, fearsome, met you in harsh battle; he [Patroclus] did not recognize him as he was going through the melee.

Bibliography

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