

Homer's Verbal Mimesis in the *Iliad*'s Exegetical Scholia

Bill Beck

HOMER'S ADMIRERS have long observed correspondences between form and content in Homeric poetry.¹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus praised Homer for his readiness "to imitate the things he represents through language, not only in the choice of words but also in their arrangement" (*Comp.* 20.7);² Dio Chrysostom marveled at Homer's astonishing ability to "inject great upheaval and confusion into the mind" of his readers by matching the sound of his words to the phenomena they describe (12.68); and Plutarch noted that Homer selected and arranged his words in order to achieve a mimetic effect (μμητικῶς, *Quaest.conv.* 747E).³

¹ The notion that poetic form should match its content appears as early as Aristophanes' *Frogs*, where Aeschylus remarks that "big thoughts and ideas must beget the words to match" (1058–1059); cf. Pl. *Cra.* 426C–427C.

² The following editions are used: the *Iliad*, H. van Thiel, *Homēri Ilias*² (Hildesheim 2010), which best approximates the vulgate text; Iliadic scholia, H. Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homēri Iliadem* (Berlin 1969–1988); Eustathios' *Parekbolai* to the *Iliad*, M. van der Valk, *Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis commentarii ad Homēri Iliadem pertinentes* (Leiden 1971–1987); Demetrius' *On Style*, L. Radermacher, *Demetrii Phalerei qui dicitur de elocutione libellus* (Leipzig 1901); Dionysius' *On Literary Composition*, G. Aujac and M. Lebel, *Denys D'Halicarnasse, Opuscules rhétoriques III* (Paris 1981). Translations of Dionysius and Ps.-Longinus are taken, with occasional modifications, from S. Usher, *Dionysius of Halicarnassus: The Critical Essays II* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1985), and D. A. Russell, *'Longinus': On Sublimity* (Oxford 1965). Uncredited translations are mine.

³ Cf. Eust. *Parek. Il.* I 223.31–32: "the poet intentionally either harshens or

Taking their cue from ancient and Byzantine readers, critics in the modern period have approached the topic of verbal mimesis in Homeric poetry with renewed vigor. In the preface to his translation of the *Iliad*, Alexander Pope remarked that Homer's expression is never too big for the sense, but justly great in proportion to it:

Tis the Sentiment that swells and fills out the diction, which rises with it, and forms itself about it ... Thus his measures, instead of being fetters to his sense, were always in readiness to run along with the warmth of his rapture, and even to give a farther representation of his notions, in the correspondence of their sounds to what they signify'd. Out of all these he has derived that harmony, which makes us confess he had not only the richest head, but the finest ear in the world.⁴

Following Pope, William Gladstone regarded Homer as "wonderful in his adaptation of sound and sense," devoting several pages of his primer on Homer to the way that he "varies incessantly the velocity of his movement, and the weight of his tread, in due proportion to the subject he is exhibiting."⁵ More recently, Alexander Shewan,⁶ David W. Packard,⁷ and W. B.

smooths out his words and their arrangement in accordance with the circumstances being described."

⁴ *The Iliad of Homer* I (London 1729) 9–11. Homer thus served as a model for Pope's own versification, exemplifying his conviction that the sound of poetry "must seem an Eccho to the Sense" (*An Essay on Criticism* [London 1711] 22).

⁵ W. E. Gladstone, *Homer* (London 1878) 143.

⁶ A. Shewan, "Alliteration and Assonance in Homer," *CP* 20 (1925) 193–209, at 204–205, argues that Homer used high frequencies of "gutterals, often with ρ, ... in descriptions of cutting, breaking, or smashing"; labials and dentals to represent "quick or repeated movement"; sibilants "when a very unpleasant effect is intended"; long vowels and diphthongs to express solemnity, "wonder, admiration, or surprise"; and rho both "in descriptions of flowing water" and "in references to forcible, noisy, or difficult action, and breaking or tearing."

Stanford⁸ worked to substantiate Gladstone's praise, with studies on the mimetic effects of various aspects of Homer's language.⁹ Despite some skepticism about the extent to which syntactic, sonic, and rhythmic effects can be plausibly regarded as intentional, much less intentionally mimetic,¹⁰ several

⁷ D. W. Packard, "Sound-Patterns in Homer," *TAPA* 104 (1974) 239–260, performs a statistical analysis of sound densities in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to assess whether apparent correspondences between sound and sense are likely to have been intentional. Though Packard is more neutral and cautious than Shewan or Stanford, he is nevertheless sympathetic to their approach.

⁸ Building on his study of sound in ancient Greek literature (*The Sound of Greek: Studies in the Greek Theory and Practice of Euphony* [Berkeley 1967]), Stanford argues for instances of intentional verbal mimesis and acoustic effects ("Varieties of Sound-Effects in the Homeric Poems," *College Literature* 3 [1976] 219–227) and in ancient Greek poetry generally ("Sound, Sense, and Music in Greek Poetry," *G&R* 28 [1981] 127–140).

⁹ Other discussions of verbal mimesis in Homer include S. E. Bassett, *The Poetry of Homer* (Berkeley 1938) 156; M. W. Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (Baltimore 1987) 117–119, and *The Iliad. A Commentary* V (Cambridge 1991) 57–58; S. Gurd, "Auditory Philology," in S. Butler et al. (eds.), *Sound and the Ancient Senses* (New York 2018) 187–197, at 194–197; P. LeVen, "The Erogenous Ear: Mythologies of Listening," in *Sound and the Ancient Senses* 187–197, at 222–224. L. P. Wilkinson, "Onomatopoeia and the Sceptics," *CQ* 36 (1942) 121–133, defends critics who argue for the correspondences of sound and sense in ancient Greek and Roman poetry.

¹⁰ E.g. W. Leaf, *The Iliad*² (London 1900–1902) ad *Il.* 3.49 ("apparently accidental"), 6.511 ("It is dangerous to lay too great stress ... on the rhythm"), 13.158 ("as usual a mere accident"), 18.485 ("clearly accidental"), 20.217 ("shews how little stress can be laid upon any supposed design in such phenomena"), 23.116 ("The line has attained a fame, perhaps beyond its merits, as an imitation of the sound of the stamping feet"). J. A. Scott, "Effect of Sigmatism as Shown in Homer," *AJP* 30 (1909) 72–77, and O. J. Todd, "Sense and Sound in Classical Poetry," *CQ* 36 (1942) 29–39, criticize the tendency among modern critics to ascribe meaning to highly sigmatic verses in Homer and tragedy respectively. Finally, G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad. A Commentary* I (Cambridge 1985) 131, argues that assonance and alliteration are "a spasmodic feature of the epic style, often with no determinable purpose," and (at 271) that "alliteration, although not infrequent, is usually unconnected with special semantic effects" in Homeric poetry.

modern commentaries abound with notes on the mimetic qualities of Homer's language.¹¹

Though critical appreciation for Homer's verbal mimesis has been a standard feature of Homeric criticism and commentary since antiquity, few works devote such close and sustained attention to, or argue as creatively for, the mimetic potential of Homer's verse as the compilation-commentary from which the exegetical scholia to the *Iliad* derive.¹² This article gathers together and examines the comments from this scholiastic corpus that posit a connection between form and content, and argues that the critics behind these scholia had a deep conviction in the mimetic quality of Homer's verse, a distinctive and idiosyncratic conception of verbal mimesis in poetry, and a good deal of confidence in their ability to identify it.¹³

The article has three parts, corresponding to the three forms of verbal mimesis observed in the exegetical scholia. Part 1 focuses on scholia that argue for the mimetic value of Homeric mimesis. Part 2 examines scholia that comment on the mimetic correspondence between the sounds of Homer's words and the

¹¹ W. B. Stanford, *Homer: Odyssey*² (London 1958), and N. J. Richardson, *The Iliad. A Commentary* VI (Cambridge 1993), are particularly sensitive to the mimetic potential of sonic effects in Homeric poetry.

¹² This class of scholia derives from two or more exegetical commentaries produced during the Imperial period (ca. 2nd–4th cent. CE). On the formation of the exegetical scholia see Erbse, *Scholia* I xlviii–li; M. van der Valk, *Researches on the Text and Scholia of the Iliad* (Leiden 1963–1964) I 414–535; M. Schmidt, *Die Erklärungen zum Weltbild Homers und zur Kultur der Heroenzeit in den bT-Scholien zur Ilias* (Munich 1976) 67–69; F. Montana, “Il commentario all'*Iliade* P.Oxy. LXXVI 5095 e gli scholia exegetica,” *ŽPE* 184 (2013) 11–20, and “Editing Anonymous Voices: The *scholia vetera* to the *Iliad*,” in S. Boodts et al. (eds.), *Sicut dicit. Editing Ancient and Medieval Commentaries on Authoritative Texts* (Turnhout 2019) 97–126.

¹³ For good preliminary discussions of this topic see N. J. Richardson, “Literary Criticism in the Exegetical Scholia: A Sketch,” *CQ* 30 (1980) 265–287, at 283–287, and R. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work* (Cambridge 2009) 215–217.

phenomena they describe. The final section discusses scholia that regard rhythm as a mimetic device.

1. *Homer's mimetic tmesis*

Several exegetical scholia argue for the idea that Homer used tmesis in order to represent verbally various forms of disorder, force, or separation. Though ancient critics argued for other forms of syntactic mimesis in Homer,¹⁴ the exegetical scholia are largely unique in their focus on the mimetic potential of tmesis in particular.

1.1. *Disordered words, disordered thoughts*

Several scholia observe a mimetic connection between the psychological agitation of intradiegetic characters and the disorganized language used to describe it. Take *Il.* 8.343, for example, where the narrator describes how the Achaians fled from the Trojans in terror: αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ διὰ τε σκόλοπας καὶ τάφρον ἔβησαν (“but when they crossed over both the stakes and the ditch”). The scholion notes (schol. *ex.* [T] *Il.* 8.343–344):

τῇ παραχῇ τῶν φευγόντων καὶ μονονουχὶ ἐμπιπτόντων τῇ τάφρῳ οἰκεῖον τὸ ὑπερβατόν.

The hyperbaton is appropriate to the confusion of those fleeing and all but falling into the ditch.

The hyperbatic tmesis is “appropriate,” the critic suggests, in that the disorderly arrangement of the words reflects the turmoil and disarray of the panicked Achaian troops. Indeed, the hyperbaton (ὑπερβατόν) is particularly appropriate in this passage, where the separation of the preverb from the host verb graphically and narratively reproduces the separation imposed by the stakes and ditch on the battlefield, forcing readers to ‘cross over’ (i.e., ὑπερβαίνειν) the words τε σκόλοπας καὶ τάφρον

¹⁴ Ps.-Longinus, for example, argues for the mimetic value of the coincidence of the “naturally uncompoundable prepositions” ὑπό and ἐκ in ὑπέκ θανάτοιο in *Il.* 15.628 (*Subl.* 10.6), and suggests that hyperbaton can be used mimetically to reflect a speaker’s “urgent emotion” (22.1–2).

with their ears and eyes, just as the Achaeans cross over (διὰ ... ἔβησαν) the stakes and ditch with their feet.

We find a similar comment in the next appearance of the line at *Il.* 15.1, there describing the panicked flight of the Trojans away from the Achaian camp (schol. *ex.* [AbT] *Il.* 15.1b¹⁺³):

ἡ δὲ διακοπὴ τῆς λέξεως τὸ ταλαίπωρον καὶ δυσδιόδευτον ἐμφαίνει **AbT** τοῖς πολέμοις· **A** [...] ἡ αὐτὴ διακοπὴ καὶ ἐν τοῖς “κατὰ πυρὸν ἄλεσσαν.” **T**

The cutting up of the word [*sc.* διὰ ... ἔβησαν] suggests the distress and difficulty of passage for the enemies ... The same cutting up also occurs in the words “they ground down (κατὰ ... ἄλεσσαν) the wheat” [*Od.* 20.109].¹⁵

Here again, Homer is said to have artfully arranged his wording to communicate more than his words denote (ἐμφαίνει),¹⁶ using tmesis as a mimetic device to reflect textually the physical and psychological difficulty experienced by his characters. The difficulty that readers experience in their attempt to navigate the syntax of the line therefore reflects the distress felt by the Trojans as they attempt to navigate the topography of the Trojan plain.

¹⁵ Ps.-Hermogenes (*On Method of Forceful Speaking* 431.7–14 Rabe) points out that the wording of *Il.* 8.343 (= 15.1) “imitates the experience of those fleeing,” a comment which Gregory of Corinth (VII.2 1252.14–18 Walz) explains as follows: “just as those fleeing cross over the stakes and ditch, i.e. *walk over* [*hyperbainousi*] both the ditches and the stakes, so as to be able to escape the hands of the enemies, so also he himself has made the verse be read in *hyperbaton*.” Cf. Eust. *Parek. Il.* III 688–689, who compares *Il.* 17.521–522, 17.542, 24.358, *Od.* 1.8, 20.109, and Anakreon fr.96a and 96b. Schol. Ar. *Plut.* 65c Chantry compares *Il.* 1.48 and 17.542, and observes that “there is a diaeresis or separation here; a division [τομή] or something of that sort is used by the poets so that the division [τομή] occurs both in the sense and in the word.”

¹⁶ On ἔμφασις see Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic* 211, 291, and F. Schironi, *The Best of the Grammarians: Aristarchus of Samothrace on the Iliad* (Ann Arbor 2018) 164–167.

A similar idea is expressed in the note on *Il.* 24.358, where the narrator describes how Priam's "mind was confused" (σὺν δὲ γέροντι νόος χύτο) by the sudden appearance of a stranger through the darkness. Calling attention to the distance between the preverb (σύν) and the host verb (χύτο), the critic argues that Priam's confusion is vividly illustrated through an analogous confusion in the arrangement of the words: "he has imitated the disturbance of his thought through the hyperbaton," τὴν δὲ παραχὴν τῆς διανοίας μεμίμηται διὰ τοῦ ὑπερβατον (schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 24.358–360).

1.2. *Disordered words, divided matter*

In addition to crediting Homer with the verbal imitation of mental distress, the exegetical critics were especially fond of the idea that Homer used tmesis to imitate various kinds of violent separation. For example, when the narrator describes a man slicing through an ox's neck, placing the preverb (διά) after the host verb (τάμῃ) (*Il.* 17.522), the critic writes (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 17.522a):

τὸ μὲν ἐξῆς ἐστι διατάμῃ, τῇ δὲ διακοπῇ τῆς λέξεως μεμίμηται τὸ γινόμενον.

The sequence is διατάμῃ, but through the cutting up of the word he imitates what is happening.

In other words, by subjecting διατάμῃ to tmesis, the poet does to διατάμῃ what the butcher does to the ox, slicing it up and re-arranging its component parts. A similar case is *Il.* 5.161, where the narrator describes how a lion breaks off the neck of a cow, placing the direct object between the preverb and the host verb: ὥς δὲ λέων ... ἐξ ἀνχένα ἄξῃ ("as a lion ... tears off the neck"). The scholion remarks that "the transposition [sc. of τάμῃ from διά] is suggestive of the cut," ἔμφασιν διακοπῆς ἔχει ἢ ὑπέρθεις (schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 5.161), implying an analogy between the lion's dismemberment of the cow and the poet's dismemberment of the verb. This analogy is strengthened by the fact that the word used here to describe the violent division of the cow's body is the same word used elsewhere in the exegetical scholia to signify

tnesis itself, διακοπή.¹⁷

As an activity that involves cutting and breaking, eating was also identified as an object of Homer's syntactic mimesis. In a comment on the line in which Achilles tells Hektor that dogs and birds will "devour you completely" (κατὰ πάντα δάσσονται, *Il.* 22.354), the exegetical scholion links the separation of the preverb from the host verb with the imagined mangling of Hektor's body, noting that "the transposition is suggestive of the cutting up," ἔμφασιν δὲ ἔχει τῆς διακοπῆς τὸ ὑπερβατόν (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 22.354a).

Similarly, when the narrator describes a lion eating a bull, placing the object (ταῦρον) between the preverb (κατά) and the host verb (ἐδηδώς), the critic observes that Homer breaks the verb apart in imitation of the lion in the simile (schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 17.452):

ἡ διακοπή τῆς λέξεως τὸν εἰς πολλὰ διεσπασμένον παρέστησε ταῦρον, οὐ τοῦ μέτρου ἀπαιτοῦντος· παρῆν γὰρ φάναι "ταῦρον κατεδηδώς." καὶ Ἀνακρέων· "διὰ δὲ δειρὴν ἔκοψε μέσην," "καὶ δὲ λῶπος ἐσχίσθη."

The cutting up of the word depicted the bull having been ripped apart into many pieces, though the meter didn't require it, since he could have said ταῦρον κατεδηδώς. Also Anakreon: "and he cut through (διὰ ... ἔκοψε) the middle of the neck," "and the robe was split apart (καὶ δὲ ... ἐσχίσθη)."¹⁸

This concession about meter is telling, because it suggests that the critic recognized that tmesis occasionally served as a compositional aid. As such, our critic would likely have agreed with Dag Haug's conclusion that by the time of the *Iliad*'s composition tmesis had "become a figure that the poets use[d] not only

¹⁷ E.g. schol. ex. (AbT) *Il.* 15.1b¹⁺³, (bT) *Il.* 15.142a, (T) *Il.* 17.452, (bT) *Il.* 17.522a.

¹⁸ Cf. schol. ex. (T) *Il.* 5.161; [Plut.] *De vit. Hom.* B 30; Eust. *Parek. Il.* III 689.3–7.

for their metrical needs, but for stylistic reasons” as well.¹⁹

While the critics of the exegetical scholia were especially alert to the use of tmesis in depictions of corporeal dismemberment, there is at least one case in which the same reasoning is applied to the dismantling of an architectural structure. When the narrator uses tmesis to describe Sarpedon's attempts to “break through” (διὰ τε ῥήξασθαι, *Il.* 12.308) the battlements of the Achaian wall, the critic calls attention to the poet's “suggestive” use of tmesis, noting that the poet ‘breaks through’ the very verbal phrase that he uses to depict Sarpedon's attempts to “break through” the Achaian wall (schol. *ex.* [T] *Il.* 12.308a).

1.3. *Constrained word-order, constrained actions*

Alongside mental distress and physical separation we also find the suggestion that Homer used tmesis to imitate constraint. When the narrator uses tmesis to describe how Athena “made Ares sit in his seat,” ἵδρυσε θρόνον ἔνι (*Il.* 15.142), the critic remarks, “The tmesis conveys the forcefulness of his sitting, since it [sc. the standard form] is ἐνίδρυσεν,” τὸ βίαιον τῆς ἔδρας ἢ διακοπὴ δηλοῖ· ἔστι γὰρ ἐνίδρυσεν (schol. *ex.* [bT] *Il.* 15.142a). Though the critic does not provide further explanation, the implication is clear: the ‘forced’ (i.e. transposed) arrangement of words verbally reflects the ‘forced’ (i.e. involuntary) nature of Ares' sitting.

1.4. *Mimetic tmesis after Homer*

Though the exegetical corpus is unique in its attention to the mimetic effects of Homeric tmesis, this approach appears somewhat less singular when viewed in the context of post-Homeric poetic experimentations involving the use of tmesis as a mimetic device. Most notoriously, Ennius was credited with a particularly bold use of mimetic tmesis, violently splitting the noun *cerebrum* with the verb *comminuit* in his description of a brain

¹⁹ D. Haug, “Tmesis in the Epic Tradition,” in Ø. Andersen et al. (eds.), *Relative Chronology in Early Greek Epic Poetry* (Cambridge 2012) 96–105, at 100–101.

being “split by a rock” (*saxo cere comminuit brum*, fr.609 Vahlen = fr.5 spur. Skutsch).²⁰ Lucretius and Vergil exploited the mimetic potential of tmesis as well, as when Lucretius ‘segregated’ *se* from *gregari* in the phrase *seque gregari* (1.452) and when Vergil ‘surrounded’ *terga* with the component parts of *circumdati* in the phrase *circum terga dati* (*Aen.* 2.218–219).²¹ Although the best-known instances of deliberate mimetic tmesis occur in Latin poetry, the phenomenon can also be found in Hellenistic poetry, as when Callimachus splits περιλαβοῖσα around παῖδα in his description of how Chariklo “embraced her son,” περὶ παῖδα λαβοῖσα (*Hymn* 5.93–94).²² While the critics of the *Iliad*’s exegetical scholia may have been innovative in their identification of mimetic tmesis in Homeric poetry, their conviction that tmesis could serve as a mimetic device was likely informed by the wordplay of more contemporary poets.

2. *Homer’s sonic mimesis*

From syntactic mimesis, we turn to sonic mimesis, the idea that Homer’s choice of words was determined in part by his interest in making their sound correspond to what they describe.

2.1. *Onomatopoeia*

The most straightforward cases for Homer’s sonic mimesis

²⁰ See J. E. G. Zetzel, “Ennian Experiments,” *AJP* 95 (1974) 137–140.

²¹ W. H. D. Rouse, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura*, rev. M. F. Smith (Cambridge [Mass.] 1992) 254, cites several other passages where “the tmesis is similarly appropriate to the sense.” H. A. J. Munro, *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*⁴ II (Cambridge 1893) 70, lists twenty-nine instances of tmesis in *De Rerum Natura*, many of them clearly mimetic. On mimetic tmesis in Lucretius see S. Hinds, “Language at the Breaking Point: Lucretius 1.452,” *CQ* 37 (1987) 450–453.

²² S. A. Stephens, *Callimachus. The Hymns* (Oxford 2015) 258. For a particularly bold (albeit non-mimetic) instance of tmesis in Hellenistic poetry see the new edition of Ps.-Simonides *FGE* 44 Page = 105 S Sider in F. Pontani and M. G. Sandri, “New Poetic Fragments from a Neglected Witness of Ps.-Trypho’s *De Tropis*: Callimachus, Ps.-Hesiod, Ps.-Simonides,” *CQ* 71 (2021) 240–252, at 243–245.

are instances of onomatopoeia,²³ a much-admired feature of Homeric poetry in antiquity. Dio Chrysostom, for example, praised Homer for proving himself

not only a maker of verses but also of words, giving utterance to those of his own invention, in some cases by simply giving his own names to things and in others adding his new ones to those current, putting, as it were, a bright and more expressive seal upon a seal. He avoided no sound, but in short imitated the voices of rivers and forests, of winds and fire and sea, and also of bronze and of stone, and, in short, of all animals and instruments without exception, whether of wild beasts or of birds or of pipes and reeds. He invented “clangs” (καναχάς) and “booms” (βόμβους), “crash” (κτύπον), “thud” (δοῦπον), and “rattle” (ῥαβον), and spoke of “roaring rivers,” “whizzing missiles,” “howling waves,” “raging winds,” and other such terrifying and truly extraordinary phenomena, thus injecting great upheaval and confusion into the mind.²⁴

Many exegetical scholia concern onomatopoeia. ἀποβλύζων is regarded as a phonetic approximation of a child coughing up liquid (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 9.491–495), λαφύσσει is said to mimic the sound of lions feasting on a cow (schol. ex. [A] *Il.* 17.64), and λάψοντες (“lapping up,” *Il.* 16.161) is described as being “onomatopoetically coined from the sound that arises when dogs and wolves drink,” ὀνοματοπεποιήται δὲ ἡ λέξις ἀπὸ τοῦ γινομένου ἤχου ἐν τῇ πόσει τῶν κυνῶν καὶ τῶν λύκων (schol. ex. [AbT] *Il.* 16.161b).²⁵

²³ I use this term in the strict sense of a word coined in deliberate imitation of a sound.

²⁴ Dio Chrys. 12.68–69; transl. adapted from J. W. Cohoon, *Dio Chrysostom. Discourses 12–30* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1939). Cf. Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 16; [Plut.] *De vit. Hom.* B 16.

²⁵ Other words identified as onomatopoetic include λίγξε (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 4.125a), μύκον (schol. ex. [b] *Il.* 8.393b), μηκάδες (schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 11.383b), κρίκε (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 16.470a), βέβρυχεν (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 17.264a), and χρόμαδος (schol. ex. [AbT] *Il.* 23.688).

In cases where the meaning of a word was uncertain, the exegetical scholia occasionally appeal to a word's sound to substantiate a lexical argument. For example, in support of the suggestion that the Homeric *hapax* χέραδος refers to "all the filth streaming together from the waters," the critic adds that the word was coined onomatopoetically, "in imitation of the sound that occurs from the dragging," κατὰ μίμησιν τοῦ ἤχου τοῦ γινομένου κατὰ τὴν σύρσιν (schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 21.319e). Similar is the argument that the Homeric *hapax* ὀρέχθρον should mean "moan," given that it was "coined in imitation of the harsh sound" that animals emit when they die, κατὰ μίμησιν ἤχου τραχέος πεποιήται τὸ ῥῆμα (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 23.30b).

2.2. *Harsh sounds, harsh content*

As the preceding example attests, the critics of the exegetical scholia were attentive to Homeric euphony as a vehicle for verbal mimesis, though notably not as an end in itself, in the manner of euphonists like Pausimachos of Miletos.²⁶ Specifically, they argue for the relation between 'harsh' (i.e. cacophonous) language and 'harsh' (i.e. violent or negative) content.²⁷

2.2.1. *Harsh sounds, forceful actions*

Many scholia argue that Homer deliberately used cacophonous sounds to depict violent and forceful actions, in order to

²⁶ The only exegetical scholia concerned with euphony for its own sake are (1) schol. ex. (T) *Il.* 14.291a, where Homer is said to attribute the more euphonious name to the gods, in cases where a single referent has one name among humans and a different name among gods (cf. schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 20.74b); (2) schol. ex. (AbT) *Il.* 17.5c, on Homer's avoidance of cacophony; and (3) schol. ex. (T) *Il.* 17.755b¹, where Homer is said to have referred to a group of starlings as a νέφος ("cloud") "because of euphony." On the euphonists, see R. Janko, *Philodemus: On Poems, Book 2* (Oxford 2020) 131–154.

²⁷ On 'harsh' language see Pausimachos frs. 138–139, 142, 145 Janko. On the connection between sonically harsh language and conceptually harsh content see Dion. Hal. *Comp.* passim, especially 12–23; Hermog. *Id.* 1.7. On the haptic metaphor see A. Purves, "Rough Reading: Tangible Language in Dionysius' Criticism of Homer," in *Sound and the Ancient Senses* 172–187.

convey more vividly the harshness of the content. Take, for instance, the comment on *Il.* 5.216, where Pandaros vows to break his bow with his bare hands upon his return home, using the particularly sibilant phrase *χερσὶ διακλάσσας* (“having broken in my hands”). According to the exegetical scholion, Homer used unpleasant assonance as a mimetic device (schol. *ex.* [bT] *Il.* 5.216a):

διὰ τῆς ἀναδιπλασιάσεως τοῦ σ τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς συντρίψεως τῶν
κεράτων γινόμενον κτύπον ἐμιμήσατο.

Through the repetition of the sigma, he imitated the noise that arose from the breakage of the horn-bows.

In regarding high frequencies of sibilants as cacophonous, the critic here follows the conventional opinion, expressed most memorably by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who remarked that the sigma is “neither charming nor pleasant and is very offensive when used to excess” (*Comp.* 14.20).²⁸ Similar reasoning likely underpins the comment on *Il.* 17.58, a highly sibilant line in which the narrator describes how a strong gust of wind “up-roots” (*ἐξέστρεψε*) an olive sapling from its trench and “lays it low” (*ἐξετάνουσσε*). The critic observes that the poet, “having used words that are smooth, here made the narrative harsh, together with the content,” *λείοις δὲ χρησάμενος τοῖς ἔπεσι νῦν συνετράχυνε* [*συνεπάχυνε* bT corr. Bekker] *τῷ πάθει τὴν ἀπαγγελίαν* (schol. *ex.* [bT] *Il.* 17.58a). We may also consider here the interpretation of *Il.* 23.392, where the narrator uses the phrase *ἵππειόν δέ οἱ ἦξε θεὰ ζυγόν* (“and the goddess broke his horses’ yoke”) to describe how Athena broke Eumelos’ chariot during the funeral games for Patroklos. Here we find the suggestion that Homer “made the narrative harsh, imitating the sound of the chariots breaking,” *ἐτ(ρ)άχυνε τὴν ἀπαγγελίαν μιμούμενος ψόφον ἄρμάτων κλωμένων* (schol. *ex.* [bT] *Il.* 23.392).²⁹

²⁸ Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 9.4.37, 12.10.32; Athen. 467A (= Aristoxenus fr.87 Wehrli).

²⁹ Richardson, *CQ* 30 (1980) 284, takes the comment as a reference to the

Consonant clusters were also regularly regarded as harsh. Immediately after Athena disables Eumelos' chariot, the driver is thrown from the car with such force that his forehead is "crushed" (θρυλίχθη, *Il.* 23.396). In reference to the consonant clusters θρ- and -χθ-³⁰ the exegetical scholion notes that "the onomatopoeia of θρυλίχθη conveys the confusion of the wounded character," ἡ ὀνοματοποιία τοῦ θρυλίχθη τὴν ταραχὴν τοῦ θραυσθέντος προσώπου δηλοῖ (schol. *ex.* [bT] *Il.* 23.396).³¹ The attention to the onomatopoeic harshness of consonant clusters here may also help us to understand the apparent onomatopoeic value of several of the words identified as onomatopoeic elsewhere in the exegetical scholia.

In some cases, words of unusual length and formation were regarded as harsh. When Apollo strikes Patroklos with such force that his eyes "whirled around" (στρεφεδίνηθεν, *Il.* 16.792), the critic notes that the poet "represents the force of the blow by creating a harsh word from two words with the same meaning," referring to the combination of στρέφομαι and δινέομαι: ἐκ δύο δὲ ὀνομάτων ταῦτο δηλούντων τραχεῖαν συνθεὶς τὴν προσηγορίαν τὴν βίαν τῆς πληγῆς παρίστησιν (schol. *ex.* [bT] *Il.* 16.792b).

Elsewhere, repeated sounds qualify as harsh. In a comment on the line in which Menelaos' spear "was lodged" (ἡρήρειστο, *Il.* 3.358) into Alexandros' breastplate, it is observed that "the force of the blow is conveyed by the harshness of the verb," τὸ βίαιον τῆς πληγῆς δηλοῦται τῷ τραχεῖ τοῦ ῥήματος (schol. *ex.* [bT] *Il.* 3.358). On the recurrence of the line at *Il.* 7.252, the critic comments that the poet "made the syllables harsh, conveying the force of the attack," ἐτράχυνε τὰς συλλαβάς, τὴν βίαν τῆς

"harsh brevity of ἦξε," an interpretation reinforced by the fact that ἦξε is a contraction of ἔαξε.

³⁰ On the mimetic harshness of -χθ-, cf. schol. *ex.* *Od.* 5.402b2 Pontani; Stanford, *Sound of Greek* 112.

³¹ Cf. Eust. *Parek.* *Il.* IV 753.8–10.

εἰσόδου δηλῶν (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 7.252). In these examples, the repetition of -ηρ- in ἡρήρειστο is felt to figuratively assault our ears, just as the spear literally attacks its target.³² A similarly echoic effect is observed in the phrase αὔον ἄϋσεν (“rang out raspingly,” *Il.* 13.441): “it is possible to hear the sound of the breastplate being split,” ἔστιν ἀκοῦσαι σχιζομένου θώρακος ψόφον (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 13.441b).³³ Elsewhere, when the poet uses a series of forms ending in -ων in his description of the sound of shields (σακέων), horsehair helmets (ἵπποκόμων τρυφαλειῶν), and gates (πυλέων) being struck (βαλλομένων), the critic comments on the contribution of sound to sense, noting that “the similarity in the ending of the words has suggestiveness,” ἔμφασιν ἔχει ἡ (ὁ)μοιοκαταληξία τῶν λέξεων (schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 12.339–340).³⁴

2.2.2. *Harsh sounds, rough waters*

Harsh-sounding language was also thought to have been a means by which the poet imitated roughly flowing water. When the narrator speaks of the “seething (παφλάζοντα) waves of the tumultuous (πολυφλοίσβοιο) sea” (*Il.* 13.798), the scholiast emphasizes the correspondence between the harshness of form and content (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 13.798–799):

μοι δοκεῖ καὶ τὸν ἦχον μιμήσασθαι διὰ τῆς περὶ τὴν σύνθεσιν τῶν στοιχείων τραχύτητος, παφλάζοντα πολυφλοίσβοιο.

³² On the harshness of rho see Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 14.19; schol. ex. *Od.* 5.402b2 Pontani; Eust. *Parek. Il.* I 779.4–13, II 398.3, III 409.24, 572.14–16, IV 98.6–8, 191.5–7; *Parek. Od.* I 175.37–46, 323.39–40, II 21.18–21.

³³ On the onomatopoetic value of ἄϋσεν see also schol. ex. (bT) *Il.* 13.409–410: “The language is extremely vivid. For with the spear not making impact, but skimming across it, he perfectly imitated the sound of the shield. And with the word ἄϋσεν he indicated a light sound, but one that extends over a great distance, with the spear grazing the rim.” Cf. Eust. *Parek. Il.* III 494.15–18.

³⁴ On *homoiooteleuton* see §2.2.4 below.

He seems to me to imitate even the sound through the harshness of the letters in combination: *παφλάζοντα πολυφλοίσβοιο*.³⁵

Similarly, in a comment on an extended simile describing how the sea roars (*βρέμεται*) and resounds (*σμεραγεῖ*), the critic observes that the poet used onomatopoeias to make the verse harsh “in conformity with the subject-matter,” *συμφυῶς τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ* (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 2.210a).³⁶

Some comments pertain specifically to the extent to which Homer’s verbal mimesis of sea-sounds contributes to the audience’s ability to visualize a scene. When the narrator uses an extended simile to describe how a river “roars” (*βέβρυχεν*), headlands “bellow” (*βοόωσιν*), and the sea “booms” (*ἐρευγομένης*), the scholion observes (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 17.263c):

συμπράττει δὲ τῇ φαντασίᾳ καὶ ἡ τῶν φωνῶν τραχύτης καὶ ἡ ἐπέκτασις τοῦ βοόωσιν.

Both the harshness of the sounds and the diectasis of *βοόωσιν* contribute to the visualization.³⁷

The reader’s impression of the scene, then, is formed not only by the meaning of the words, but also by the way they sound.

A more complicated relationship between sound and sight is expressed in a comment on the passage where the narrator de-

³⁵ R. Janko, *The Iliad. A Commentary* IV (Cambridge 1994) ad loc., explains: “bT also note that 798f. ... contain alliteration in *l*, *p* and *z* (to convey the crashing of the waves), quadruple assonance in *-τα* and epithets referring to different aspects of the waves—*παφλάζοντα* to sound, *κυρτά* to shape, *φαληριόωντα* to colour.”

³⁶ Eustathios (*Parek. Il.* I 310.15–17) clarifies the logic: “The simile is praised for the harsh onomatopoeias, i.e. *ἡχῇ*, *πολυφλοίσβου*, *βρέμεται*, *σμεραγεῖ*, through which the expression is made harsh in accordance with the sense.” Cf. Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 16.1. On the harshness of *σμεραγεῖ* cf. schol. ex. (bT) *Il.* 2.463c, discussed below (§2.2.4).

³⁷ Cf. Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 15.14; Eust. *Parek. Il.* IV 50.14–22. On the relationship between sound and *φαντασία* in the Iliadic scholia see G. M. Rispoli, “*φαντασία* ed *ἐνάργεια* negli scoli all’*Iliade*,” *Vichiana* 13 (1984) 311–339, at 331. On *diectasis* see §2.3 below.

scribes how a storm-tossed ship is “hidden under sea-foam” (ἄχνη ὑπεκρύφθη, *Il.* 15.626). The critic writes (schol. *ex.* [bT] *Il.* 15.625–626):

ὁ δὲ κόμπος τῶν λεγομένων καὶ ὁ ψόφος τῶν ὀνομάτων οὐκ ἔῴ
 ἰδεῖν τὴν ναῦν ἀφρῶ κεκαλυμμένην.

The sound of what is described and the noise of the words prevents one from seeing the ship, enveloped in foam.

In this example, the high density of cacophonous consonant clusters in ἄχνη ὑπεκρύφθη is supposed to approximate sea-foam both in its sound and in its effect. Just as the foam prevents an observer from seeing the ship beneath, the reader analogously struggles to ‘see’ beyond the consonant clusters that are used to describe it.³⁸

2.2.3. Harsh sounds, negative emotions

Harsh sounds were also interpreted as verbal imitations of psychological distress.³⁹ For instance, when Agamemnon uses the *hapax* ἀλαλύκτεται (*Il.* 10.94–95) to express his terrified agitation on the eve of the Great Day of Battle, the critic, taking the verb as a derivative of ἀλάλημαι (‘wander’), notes that “further disturbance has been introduced by the excessive

³⁸ See J. Porter, *The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece: Matter, Sensation, and Experience* (Cambridge 2010) 356, on “how easily auditory and visual signals cross over” in ancient literary critical discourse. Cf. Eust. *Parek. Il.* III 495.5–9 and especially III 773.11–14: “In this passage see how the poet characteristically harshens his language in accordance with the subject-matter, using many harsh and hard-to-pronounce words, including ὑπεκρύφθη, which is cacophonous, like ἐβλάφθη and all the other words of this sort.” While Ps.-Longinus also praised the mimetic qualities of this passage, his analysis focuses on syntactic rather than sonic mimesis: “Notice also the forced combination of naturally uncompoundable prepositions: *hupék*, ‘away from under’. Homer has tortured the words to correspond with the emotion of the moment, and expressed the emotion magnificently by thus crushing words together” (*Subl.* 10.6).

³⁹ Similarly, Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 15.15 identifies “extremity of emotion” as an object of Homer’s verbal mimesis.

addition of the letters,” τῷ δὲ πλεονασμῷ τῶν στοιχείων ἐπιτετάρκται (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 10.94). In other words, the verb describing Agamemnon’s mental distress is itself ‘disturbed’ by the superfluous addition of the cacophonous combination -υκτ-.

2.2.4. *Harsh sounds, great size*

Less straightforward than the connection between harsh language and harsh content is the idea that Homer used verbal sounds to convey great size or extent.⁴⁰ In the comment on the line in which a meadow is described as resounding (σμαραγεῖ) with the cries of birds (*Il.* 2.463), the critic observes that “the harshness of the onomatopoeia σμαραγεῖ extended the size of the meadow,” τὸ τραχὺ τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σμαραγεῖ ὀνοματοποιίας τὸ τοῦ λειμῶνος παρέτεινε μέγεθος (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 2.463c).

The critic also regarded *homoioioteleuton* as a means by which Homer sonically imitated size. Take *Il.* 21.239, where the narrator describes how Skamandros protected the Trojans by concealing them in “eddies deep and wide” (δίνησι βαθείησι μεγάλησι). Commenting on the repetition of -ησι, the exegetical scholion observes that “the *homoioioteleuton* gives the river expansiveness,” τὸ ὁμοιοτέλεuton δίδωσι πλάτος τῷ ποταμῷ (schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 21.239).⁴¹ The repetition of -ησι(v) may also be at issue in the note on *Il.* 12.134, where Leonteus and Polypoites are likened to oak trees, “fixed in the ground with big, long roots,” ῥίζησιν μεγάλησι διηνεκέεσσ’ ἀραρυῖαι. The critic remarks that Homer “hints at the great size,” τὸ μέγεθος ἐμφαίνει, of the two

⁴⁰ The suggestion that phonetic sounds may correspond to physical qualities of their referents can be found already in Pl. *Cra.* 427C, where the name-giver is said to have assigned alpha to size, eta to length, and omicron to roundness. Cf. Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 15.15, who identifies “greatness of body” as an object of Homer’s verbal mimesis, and Demetr. *Eloc.* 48–49, 105, who connects harsh language with “greatness” and “bulk.”

⁴¹ Cf. Eust. *Parek. Il.* IV 490.12–16. Richardson, *The Iliad. A Commentary* VI ad loc., concurs, adding that “This effect is increased by the slow pace of the spondaic opening and the way in which the words grow in length.”

commanders “through the sound of the words,” τῷ δὲ ψόφῳ τῶν ὀνομάτων (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 12.134).⁴²

2.3. Coincidences of vowels, echoes

More commonly, the coincidence of vowels was regarded as a means by which Homer achieved an echoic effect, suggesting a relatively straightforward correspondence between the sounds of the narrative and those of the story.⁴³ When the narrator uses the form βοάα to describe a wave that “bellows,” the critic notes (schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 14.394b):

διὰ τῆς ἐκτάσεως τοῦ στοιχείου μεμίμηται τὴν ἐπὶ πλείονα ἑκτασιν τοῦ ἤχου, ὥς ἐπὶ τοῦ “ἡτόνες βοόωσιν.”

Through the extension of the letter, he imitates the extension of the sound over a greater period, as in “beaches bellow” [*Il.* 17.265].

The epic diectasis⁴⁴ is here explained not as a peculiarity of Homeric morphology developed to accommodate the meter, but as a mimetic device, used to imitate the echoic sound of a wave crashing against the shore. The same reasoning is applied to the form βοόωσιν, which depicts the “bellowing” that occurs when two currents collide (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 17.263–265):

ἔστιν ἰδεῖν ... τὰς ἐκατέρωθεν τοῦ ποταμοῦ θαλασσίας ἡτόνας ἡχούσας, ὃ ἐμιμήσατο διὰ τῆς ἐπεκτάσεως τοῦ βοόωσιν.

It is possible to see ... the headlands on either side of the river echoing, which he imitated through the diectasis of βοόωσιν.⁴⁵

⁴² It should be noted, however, that in MS. T the lemma is ῥίζησιν διηνεκέσι and in the b-MSS. the number linking text to scholia is placed over διηνεκέεσσ', suggesting that the sound of διηνεκέεσσ' may also be at issue.

⁴³ Cf. Demetr. *Eloc.* 299, who discusses the echoic quality of coincidences of vowels and their contribution to the forceful style.

⁴⁴ On epic diectasis see P. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique*⁵ I (Paris 1973) 75–83; G. Horrocks, “Homer’s Dialect,” in I. Morris et al. (eds.), *A New Companion to Homer* (Leiden 1997) 193–217, at 208–209.

⁴⁵ Cf. schol. ex. (bT) *Il.* 17.263c (discussed in §2.2.2); Eust. *Parek. Il.* IV 51.14–52.2.

The mimetic qualities of this passage were indeed much admired in antiquity,⁴⁶ and one scholion maintains that it was in fact this instance of mimetic diectasis that led Solon to burn his poetry in despair (schol. *ex.* [AbT] *Il.* 17.265):

Σόλωνά φασι τὸν νομοθέτην ... θαυμάσαντα κατακαῦσαι τὰ ἴδια σκέμματα· τῆς γὰρ ἐπαλλήλου τῶν ὑδάτων ἐκβολῆς ἡ τοῦ βοόωσιν ἀναδίπλωσις ὁμοίαν ἀπετέλεσε συνφδίαν.

They say that Solon the lawgiver ... burned his own drafts in amazement, for the duplication in βοόωσιν produced a harmony similar to the successive discharge of the water.⁴⁷

Uncontracted genitives offered critics another opportunity to find intentional mimesis in coincidences of vowels caused by peculiarities of Homeric morphology. Since Homeric and Koine Greek formed the genitive plural of \bar{a} -stems differently (-άων or, rarely, -έων in Homeric Greek; -ῶν in Koine), genitive plural forms in -άων or -έων stood out to later readers. So when the poet uses the genitive plural participle ἀγνυμενάων to depict the sound of branches “breaking” due to violent winds (*Il.* 16.769), the critic argues that the uncontracted form sonically imitates the echo described in the simile (schol. *ex.* [T] *Il.* 16.769b):

ἡ ἐπὶ <τῆς> παρατελεύτου μακρότης παρίστησι τὸν ὑπὸ τῆς συμπτώσεως τῶν κλάδων ἐπεκτεινόμενον ἦχον.

The length of the penultimate syllable depicts the sound being extended by the collapse of the branches.

By a similar line of reasoning, the use of the genitive plural ending -έων in *πυλέων* is said to be “suggestive,” presumably of

⁴⁶ Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 15.14; Arist. *Poet.* 1458b; Pausimachos fr.77 Janko.

⁴⁷ Cf. Eust. *Parek.* *Il.* IV 52.2–6: “This simile, they say, caused the destruction of the imitations of Solon or, according to some, Plato. For it is said that the former, making onomatopoetic words and setting himself against Homer’s verbal creativity, when he came across such a word as βοόων and was unable to make the same sound as this onomatopoeia, burned his drafts, lest he come second to the poet.”

the resounding din of battle: ἔμφασιν ἔχει ... ἡ ἐπέκτασις τοῦ στοιχείου τοῦ πυλέων (schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 12.339–340).

2.4. *Liquid sounds, liquid matter*

As observed above (§2.2.2), several exegetical scholia argue for the intentional use of harsh-sounding language to describe roughly flowing waters. On at least one occasion, the inverse is suggested: that Homer imitated the sound of smoothly flowing water by means of “liquid” language.⁴⁸ When the narrator uses a particularly high frequency of vowels and diphthongs to describe one of the Trojan springs “flowing like hail or cold snow or ice formed from water” (ἦ δ’ ἐτέρη θέρει προρέει εἰκυῖα χαλάζῃ, / ἦ χιόνι ψυχρῇ ἦ ἐξ ὕδατος κρυστάλλῳ, *Il.* 22.151–152), the scholion comments that the liquidity of the language suits the liquidity of the content it describes: “He made the line liquid by the use of vowels with the same sound,” ὕγρὸν δὲ ἐποίησε τὸν στίχον τῇ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῶν φωνηέντων παραλήψει (schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 22.152); the passage ‘flows,’ just as the spring does.⁴⁹ This observation appears more compelling when one recognizes that the graphemes ι, ει, η, η, υ, υι, and οι were all pronounced /i/ in the Imperial period, such that fifteen of the thirty-one vowels and diphthongs in *Il.* 22.151–152 would have been phonetically equivalent for the critics behind the exegetical corpus.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Comparison with schol. ex. (T) *Il.* 22.135, which points out the liquid quality of the “juxtaposition of the vowels” in the phrase ἦ ἡελίου ἀνιόντος, suggests that vowels and diphthongs, and in particular graphemes representing /i/, were characteristic of “liquid” language. It is notable that the critic makes no mention of the sonorants that were more commonly regarded as “liquids” in other ancient grammatical works (i.e. λ, μ, ν, ρ). On “liquid” consonants see Dion. Thrax *Ars* 7 (*GG* I.1 14.7–9); schol. Dion. Thrax *GG* I.3 322.7; Hdn. *Orth.* *GG* III.2 541.18; Hsch. λ 8 Latte.

⁴⁹ On the artful euphony of hiatus in this passage cf. Gell. *NA* 6.20.4–5. On the euphony of concurrences of vowels in general see Demetr. *Eloc.* 68–73.

⁵⁰ C. Brixhe, “Linguistic Diversity in Asia Minor during the Empire: *Koine*

3. *Homer's rhythmic mimesis*

Given that modern commentators are generally more attentive to the mimetic potential of Homer's use of rhythm than to that of his use of sound or syntax, it is somewhat surprising that rhythmic mimesis receives comparatively less attention than other forms of mimesis in the exegetical scholia. Despite this disparity, interest in the correspondence between the *Iliad's* rhythms and its content is nevertheless evident, especially in cases where dactylic rhythms were felt to match the swift pace of the action described. When the narrator uses a purely dactylic line to describe how Zeus's nod makes Olympus quake (κρατὸς ἅπ' ἀθανάτοιο· μέγαν δ' ἐλέλιξεν Ὀλυμπον, *Il.* 1.530), it is observed that "through the speed of the syllables he depicts the trembling of the mountain and conveys the speed of the movement," τῷ δὲ τάχει τῶν συλλαβῶν τὸν τρόμον τοῦ ὄρους διαγράφει καὶ τὸ ταχὺ τῆς κινήσεως δηλοῖ (schol. *ex.* [AbT] *Il.* 1.530c).⁵¹ Individual phrases could also be recognized as instances of rhythmic mimesis, even when they were located within lines of otherwise unremarkable prosodical shape. When the narrator uses the short, dactylic expression κατὰ τεύχε' ἔδυν ("they put on their armor," *Il.* 4.222) to describe the arming of the Achaian troops before the first pitched battle of the poem, the exegetical scholion notes that Homer "adapted the expression to the haste of those arming themselves," συνωκείωσε τὸν λόγον τῇ τῶν ὀπλι-

and Non-Greek Languages," in E. J. Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language* (Malden 2010) 228–252, at 232–234.

⁵¹ Cf. Eust. *Parek.* *Il.* I 223.28–32: "The word ἐλέλιξεν is praised by the ancients on the grounds that the speed of the movement of Olympus is clear through the speed, lightness, and purity of the pronunciation of the syllables, as will be also evident elsewhere. For throughout his works the poet intentionally either harshens or smooths out his words and their arrangement in accordance with the circumstances being described." Cf. also Eust. *Parek.* *Il.* I 667.2–8, IV 203.12–15; Pausimachos fr.73 Janko.

ζομένων σπουδῇ (schol. ex. [bT] *Il.* 4.222b).⁵² Correspondences between rhythm and content in character speech were also identified. Thus, when Odysseus speaks a stretch of highly dactylic lines in his interrogation of Dolon, the critic observes that Homer used dactylic rhythms mimetically (schol. ex. [T] *Il.* 10.409–411):

ἐνεργὸν καὶ ζωτικὸν τὸ τοῦ λόγου τάχος· μεμίμηται γὰρ τοὺς ἐν ἀγωνίῳ σπουδῇ κατεχομένους καὶ ἐν ὀλίγῳ πολλὰ μαθεῖν σπουδάζοντας.

The speed of the sentence is vigorous and lively, since he imitates men constrained by agitated haste and eager to learn a lot in a short time.

More remarkable is the interpretation of *Il.* 12.208, the metrically defective⁵³ line that describes how “the Trojans shuddered when they saw the writhing snake” (Τρῶες δ’ ἐρρίγησαν ὅπως ἴδον αἰόλον ὄφιν) fall from the sky. While some critics sought to restore metrical integrity on orthographic grounds, schol. ex. (T) *Il.* 12.208c argues that the metrical anomaly was an intentional mimetic effect:

μείουρος ὁ στίχος. ... οἱ δὲ “ὄ(π)φιν” φασίν· ἐμφαντικώτερον δὲ ἐχρήσατο τῇ τοῦ στίχου συνθέσει, καίτοι γε ἐγχωροῦν εἶπεῖν “ὅπως ὄφιν αἰόλον εἶδον”· τὴν γὰρ κατάπληξιν τῶν Τρώων καὶ

⁵² See Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic* 215. The brevity of the expression may also be relevant here.

⁵³ Its final foot is pyrrhic, when it should be spondaic or trochaic. Several ancient critics quoted *Il.* 12.208 as an example of a “mouse-tailed” verse. Note, however, that M. L. West, “Unmetrical Verses in Homer,” in O. Hackstein et al. (eds.), *Language and Meter* (Leiden 2018) 362–379, at 370–371, suggests that “originally there may have been no irregularity at all, as there is some reason to assume an Ionian pronunciation of ὄφιν (a word that does not occur elsewhere in Homer) as ὄπις, with a doubled labial. The word appears with the same scansion in Hipponax (28. 6 West = 39. 6 Degani), and there are analogies with other disyllabic paroxytone words containing an unvoiced aspirated stop.”

τὸν φόβον παρίστησι τῷ τάχει τοῦ στίχου εἰς βραχεΐας τελευ-
τῶντος συλλαβάς.

The verse is mouse-tailed.⁵⁴ ... Some say it is “ὄπφιν.” But he arranged the verse rather suggestively, even though it was possible to say ὅπως ὄφιν αἰόλον εἶδον. Indeed, he portrays the Trojans’ consternation and fear through the speed of the verse, ending as it does in short syllables.

In other words, by making the line metrically defective, so that its final foot not only defies expectations but also demands explanation, Homer inspires in his audience a feeling analogous to the perplexity felt by the Trojans when presented with an anomalous and portentous phenomenon. What the metrical shape of ὄφιν elicits in readers is precisely what its referent provokes in the Trojans.⁵⁵

Remarkable as this interpretation is, it is not without parallel. In his discussion of the forceful style, Demetrius cites *Il.* 12.208 as an example of mimetic cacophony (*Eloc.* 255):

There are cases in which cacophony produces forcefulness, especially if the subject-matter requires it, as in the Homeric example: Τρῶες δ’ ἐρρίγησαν ὅπως ἴδον αἰόλον ὄφιν. It was possible to have composed the line more euphoniously and preserve the meter: Τρῶες δ’ ἐρρίγησαν ὅπως ὄφιν αἰόλον εἶδον. But then neither the poet nor the snake would have seemed so forceful.

Comparing the similar interpretations offered by Demetrius and the exegetical corpus helps to illuminate the distinctiveness of the latter’s approach to Homer’s verbal mimesis. Both betray an interest in the correspondence between form and content, but schol. *ex.* (T) *Il.* 12.208c proposes a closer and more straightforward connection between the narrative and the story.

⁵⁴ See previous note.

⁵⁵ Traces of the influence of this interpretation can be found in John of Sicily’s (11th cent.) commentary on Hermogenes’ *On Types of Style*, where he notes that Homer composed *Il.* 12.208 with a metrical anomaly “in imitation of the emotion provoked by the snake” (VI 490.16–17 Walz).

While Demetrius argues that the potency of the snake is mirrored by verbal forcefulness produced by “cacophony,” the exegetical critic brings the world of the reader and the world of the story into closer connection, arguing that readers and characters each experience the same feeling at the same time.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Appealing to Homer's use of verbal mimesis allowed the critics behind our exegetical scholia not only to encourage their readers to appreciate Homer's poetic virtuosity and to demonstrate their own critical acumen, but also to account for peculiarities of Homer's language and preemptively to depict apparent flaws as poetic virtues. Why did Homer separate verbal components that belong together? Why did he use strange forms and cacophonous words? Why don't all of his hexameters scan properly? To all these would-be ζητήματα the exegetical corpus offers the same response: Homer was pushing the limits of his language and artistic medium in his desire to bring the world of the story more vividly into the world of his readers.⁵⁷

November, 2022

Dept. of Classical Studies
Indiana University
rb14@iu.edu

⁵⁶ A different kind of mimetic interpretation is recorded by an h-scholion on this line, which notes that “some say that through this verse Homer represented the figure of the snake, since its tail is very slight.” See Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic* 215–216.

⁵⁷ Versions of this article were presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Classical Studies in January 2021 and at the Classical Association Conference in April 2022. I thank the audiences on both occasions for their feedback. In particular, I would like to thank Oliver Thomas and the journal's anonymous referee for their helpful comments and corrections.