The Mocking Homer of the Exegetical Scholia to the *Iliad*

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What sort of person could have produced the *Iliad*? Someone young and energetic, or someone wise with experience? A comfortable court poet, or an impoverished beggar constantly seeking his next audience? One who had seen many cities, or one whose blindness allowed him to see beyond the minds of other men? A firm patriot, or one appreciative of diverse cultures? A serious man, or one with a sense of humour?

Ancient readers of the *Iliad* tackled some of these questions with considerable vigour, despite having no reliable biographical foundations with which to work. More recently scholars have raked over these ancient reconstructions of Homer, at first assuming that they contained nuggets of truth, then with increasing scepticism and frustration, and then in search of insights about one of the questions that motivates this issue of *Seminari Romani* and the series of talks on which it is based – how ancient readers constructed an author out of their texts, and not just the author *qua* author, but as an individual with opinions and a life beyond their literary output.[1] This paper focuses on one such question, and on the comments related to it in one group of ancient sources, namely the scholia to the *Iliad*, especially the exegetical ones.[2] It is the last question mentioned above: was the *Iliad* read as the product of a man with a sense of humour?

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[1] Graziosi 2002 is of particular value for the last approach mentioned.

[2] For basic orientation on the scholia see Nagy 1997, Montana 2019, Dickey 2007, pp. 18-23 with further references. Erbse 1969, pp. xlviii-lvi is a more detailed introduction to the transmission of the exegetical scholia; Montana 2013 uses a papyrus from c.500 CE to discuss their development. In a citation such as 'Σ *ex.* 1. 332b (AbT)', Σ means 'scholion', *ex.* refers to the ascription of the scholion

I choose this question for various reasons. First, it has not received as much attention as the accounts of Homer's blindness or his travels, nor does it play a prominent role in studies of the scholia, even though ancient commentators present ideas on the subject which differ in interesting ways from standard modern views.[3] More broadly, this topic forms a suggestive contrast with the 'seriousness' of epic, and of the *Iliad* in particular, as a school text widely studied in antiquity with an earnest sense that it could inculcate morality, and one that contains much in the way of death and misery but few 'laugh out loud' moments. This dominant seriousness of the *Iliad* evidently contributed to the idea that Homer was the 'father of tragedy' – as famously expressed by both Plato and Aristotle.[4] Yet as we will see the scholia – especially the exegetical ones – frequently ascribe more comedic intentions to Homer, almost always in the specific range of biting ridicule directed at his characters, or at groups that they could be thought to represent.

I begin with a case study on the scholia's usage of διασύρει, which introduces several significant concepts for our topic even though I conclude that the scholia do not characterise Homer's activity with this word (§1). We will see the different approaches in ancient scholarship to distinguishing or merging the voice of the author and characters, the idea of generic propriety in analysing the *Iliad* in terms of ridicule, the value of studying word-distributions to see which words

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to the exegetical class, '1. 332b' is the numbering in Erbse's edition, and AbT are the mansucripts in which the scholion appears. Scholia on *Odyssey* 1-10 are cited using Pontani's numeration.

[3] For example, none of 'comedy', 'humour' or 'satire' appears in the index of Nünlist 2009, which is otherwise a detailed guide to literary interests of scholiasts on various authors. Nünlist does mention (p. 214) some of the terms to be analysed below.

[4] Plato *R.* 10. 395b-c, Aristotle *Poet.* 1448b 34-449a 2. Pagani 2018 discusses how this tradition appears in the exegetical scholia, including some remarkable phrases such as 'Homer first imported this into tragedy' that conflate epic and tragedy as genres (Σ *ex.* 1. 332b (AbT), 6. 466 (bT)). See De Jong 2016 for further ways in which the relationship of Homer to tragedy can be taken.

were felt to be appropriate to Homer's activity, and the scholia's general attitude to Paris. §2 then considers the scholia's claims about how the *Iliad* relates to the genre of *silloi*, and especially to κωμῳδία. I show that although the latter word had a broader sense of 'ridicule', its narrower connection to the genre comedy was significant. Paris and Thersites are both cast, in terms reminiscent of Aristotle, as θρασύδειλοι ('brash cowards'), a stock figure of drama. This category, more surprisingly, is supposed to include Hector, and §3 will show how the exegetical scholia often resort to Homer's 'mockery' of Hector, and of the Trojan side generally, in moments of success rather than failure, to force through the principle that Homer was pro-Greek. The converse of this, explored in §4, is how the scholia elsewhere avoid the implication that Homer was ridiculing or criticising the Greeks (other than Thersites). I end with some conclusions and suggestions for further research.

1. Scholiastic words and speakers

My attention was first drawn to this topic by a recurrent difficulty in my work on an English translation of the *scholia vetera* to *Iliad* 3-6.[5] The scholia frequently contain third-person singular verbs whose subjects are ambiguous: is the claim about a character's activities or about Homer's?[6] One approach to the question is to examine the distribution of each verb, potentially alongside cognates and near-synonyms, between comments on passages of narrative and comments on embedded speeches. A distribution skewed heavily towards discussion of character-text may indicate that a certain verb was deemed inappropriate for describing the poet's activities. Jasper Griffin, in an article whose title inspired my section heading, drew attention to the fact that within the Homeric epics certain words are limited mainly or exclusively to direct speech.[7] Analogous effects exist within

[5] Under contract with Cambridge University Press. My volume will follow one by Bill Beck covering *Iliad* 1-2.

[6] I temporarily adopt the scholia's perspective, in which Homer is conflated with the omniscient primary narrator that he crafted: see Nünlist 2009, p. 133.

[7] Griffin 1986. These patterns are strengthened when one allows the primary narrator to focalize a character's perspective: De Jong 1987, pp. 136-145.

the scholia, where certain words are limited mainly or exclusively to discussions of the characters' activities. This is noteworthy given the heterogeneous journeys of ideas in the scholia from a wide range of ancient readers, through bottlenecks such as '*c*', the late-antique compilation from which the extant exegetical scholia derive, and onward to medieval manuscripts via extended phases of copying and excerption. Such patterns may betray the editorial hand of the creator of *c*, though often he simply juxtaposed different comments on the same phrase; or they may reflect pre-existing trends in critical vocabulary, which did not however seep widely into other ancient discussions of the *Iliad*.

Consider the example of διασύρει in Σ *ex*. 3. 39c (bT). Hector is rebuking Paris, who has challenged the Greeks but then retreated as soon as Menelaus came forward. He calls Paris εἶδος ἄριστε, 'best in appearance', and this is not a compliment: 'appearance' carries the emphasis. In the version presented in the 'Townleianus' (British Library, Burney 86), which is generally truer to the inherited ideas of these scholia than the *b* family, the comment runs:

> ἐφ' ᾧ μεγαλύνεται, τούτῳ αὐτὸν διασύρει. ὄνειδος δέ ἐστιν οὐχ ὁμοιούμενον τῇ ψυχῇ...
> He rips into him (lit. 'pulls him to bits') using the very feature in which he takes pride. It is a source of shame when it does not match one's soul.

The verb διασύρει describes criticism with a mocking or belittling tone, identifiable here in the conversion of 'best-looking' into an insult.[8] Should a reader take the implied subject to be Homer or Hector?

[8] Rhetorical treatises describe διασυρμός in various ways. Some class it as a form of εἰρωνεία, separation of surface meaning from the intended point: Ps.-Herodian *On Figures* 18 exemplifies with the sarcastic use of μαντεύεσθαι at *Od.* 20. 380, Cocondrius p. 236 with Thersites being addressed as a λιγὺς ἀγορήτης in *Il.* 2. 246. 'Philo' *Diff.* σ167 makes διασυρμός the point of a σκῶμμα, Origen *Cels.* 3. 22 aligns it with κατάγελως and βωμολοχία, and with χλεύη in 4. 33. It is among the glosses on κωμῳδίαι in Photios *Bibl.* κ1316.

Trying to answer the question by looking sideways to other strands of Homeric criticism runs into an impasse: one can find ancient interpreters who cite the passage either as an example of Homer demonstrating his moral viewpoint, or as an example of the limits he observed in passing judgement on his characters. Plutarch says, in his treatise on how children should be taught to interpret poetry in order to prepare them for a philosophical life (*Quom. Adol.* 34e-f):

> ἄριστα δ' εἰρηκότος Ὁμήρου τὸ 'Δύσπαρι εἶδος ἄριστε' καὶ τὸ '΄Έκτορ εἶδος ἄριστε' (ψόγου γὰρ ἀποφαίνει καὶ λοιδορίας ἄξιον ᾧ μηδέν ἐστιν ἀγαθὸν εὐμορφίας κάλλιον), …
> It is excellent where Homer has said 'Paris-ide, best in appearance' and 'Hector, best in appearance' [17. 142]: he declares that the man whose finest quality is beauty deserves censure and insults.

As often in this essay, Plutarch finds it convenient to gloss over the distinction between what characters say and what Homer endorses, so that the moral authority of Homer can be applied directly in drawing a lesson from the text.[9]

By contrast, Eustathios uses this passage to delineate Homer's attitude towards mentioning his characters' failings. More precisely, Eustathios expresses three views which are slightly different. First, when discussing the initial description of Paris in *Il.* 3. 15-22, he jumps ahead to Hector's criticism and uses it to show that the epithet θεοειδής (v. 16), applied to Paris by the narrator, means 'looking like a god' rather than 'godlike' more generally, and is intended as a back-handed

[9] Hunter and Russell 2011, pp. 2-17 contextualise Plutarch's overall approach against the scholia and earlier Homeric scholarship. Where helpful, e.g. to preserve consistency, the distinction between author and speaking character was often observed by ancient interpreters: Nünlist 2009, pp. 116-124, Graziosi 2016.

compliment since the similarity is only skin-deep.[10] Immediately thereafter, he considers the view of Σ *ex.* 3. 16b (bT) that θεοειδής is a genuine compliment, though limited in scope and tempered by two ulterior motives: to make it harder to dismiss the criticism of Paris as pro-Greek bias, and to increase our disgust when Paris' spirit does not live up to his figure.[11] Eustathios sees a different motivation:

> εἰ δέ γε καὶ ἀληθῶς ἐπὶ ἐπαίνου εἴρηται, σημείωσαι, ὡς οὐ σκωπτικὸς ὁ ποιητής, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς μὲν ἐπαινῶν θεοειδῆ τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον λέγει, ἀφ' ὧν ἔχει καλῶν, τὰ δὲ ψογερά, τὸ 'Δύσπαρι, εἶδος ἄριστε' καὶ τὰ ἑξῆς, οὐχ' ὁ ποιητὴς ἀλλ' ὁ Ἕκτωρ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ κατέλεξεν.
> If, however, this [θεοειδής] was said out of genuine praise, note that the poet is not prone to ridicule. In person, he praises Alexander and calls him 'godlike' based on the qualities that he has, whereas the list of criticisms ('Paris-ide, best in appearance', etc.) came not from the poet but from Hector against his brother.

Here the inclusion of some praise for Paris is presented apparently as a matter of the poet's personality staying aloof from ridicule. Thirdly, when Eustathios reaches Hector's speech itself, he rephrases this second idea (i. 597):

> Ὅτι σκοπὸν ἐνταῦθα θέμενος Ὅμηρος καὶ σκῶψαί τι τὸν οὐκ ἀγαθὸν Ἀλέξανδρον αὐτὸς μὲν οὐ ποιεῖ αὐτόθεν τοῦτο ἀγαθολογεῖν εἰωθώς, ὡς προείρηται, καὶ μὴ θέλων σιλλογραφεῖν καὶ ἅμα, ἵνα μὴ καὶ ὡς φιλέλλην αὐτόθεν ὑποπτεύηται, Ἕκτορι δὲ τῷ γνησίῳ ἀδελφῷ τὰ τῆς ὕβρεως ἀνατίθησιν, ὃς καὶ εἶχε παρρησιάζεσθαι κατὰ τοῦ Πάριδος.

[10] *Parek. Il.* i. 591 van der Valk.

[11] The final words of the scholion (τὴν μορφὴν καταισχύνει, 'he brings shame on his figure') contain a seed of humour: αἰσχύνω is both 'shame' and 'disfigure' (e.g. *Il.* 18. 24). Similarly Σ *ex.* 3. 370 (bT) has Homer 'extend' (παρέτεινεν) Paris' disgraceful showing in the duel, when Menelaus drags him by the helmet strap, which is thereby literally 'extended'. These touches of scholiastic humour correspond to their overall interpretation of Homer's treatment of Paris in book 3.

> (Be aware) that Homer, having set his sights here on including some mockery of the negative character Alexander, does not do this directly himself, since his custom is to say positive things, as mentioned above, and since he does not wish to write *silloi*, and also to avoid instant suspicion given his pro-Greek stance. Rather, he ascribes the elements of affront to Hector, the true-born brother who had the right to speak openly against Paris.

Eustathios incorporates the scholiast's point about maintaining a veneer of narratorial objectivity, and more importantly for us his emphasis now is not on Homer's avoidance of τὸ σκώπτειν, but on how when he wanted to include it he found a suitable character. This is a matter of generic propriety, of keeping epic separate from *silloi*, to which I return below in §2.[12]

Plutarch and Eustathios take contrasting approaches to the relationship of Homer's voice and Hector's. While the existence of both options in ancient criticism is important, it does not help us with identifying the subject of διασύρει. We can however turn our attention instead to the usage of the verb (προ)διασύρω in the exegetical scholia as a whole. All eight other uses of the verb are found in discussions of direct speech, and this is likely to represent a statistically significant skewing since direct speech forms less than 45% of the *Iliad* overall.[13] While it is certainly possible that our passage was anomalous, the likelihood is that the creator of the exegetical compilation *c* envisaged Hector as

[12] On Eustathios' attitudes to Homeric σκώμματα and insults see van den Berg 2022. For his idea of Homer using characters' taunts over defeated enemies to 'tickle' the reader with humour (*Parek. Il.* iii. 938) see also Pizzone 2016, p. 235.

[13] To apply Fisher's exact test one would need the percentage of exegetical scholia on direct speech, rather than the percentage of hexameters containing direct speech. The passages are Σ *ex. Il.* 2. 284-5a2 (bT), 3. 39c, 5. 419, 6. 166, 200-5, 14. 264-6, 9. 632-3b (T), 20. 246-55, 9. 637-8b (b). Similarly Σ 6. 201 (Ge), making a separate point from Σ *ex.* 6. 200-5 but with the same wording, Σ *Od.* 2. 253e διασυρτικῶς. Only in the case of *Il.* 3. 39 and 6. 166 is the subject ambiguous.

the subject. This matches the interpretation of the reviser in family *b*. He ran together the scholia that Erbse prints separately as 3. 39b-c:

> ἠθικῶς τὸ τῆς παρονομασίας προσέρριψε τῷ ὀνόματι δυσχεραίνων, ὡς καὶ ‘Κακοΐλιόν’ πού φησιν ἡ Πηνελόπη, καὶ τῷ εἴδει αὐτὸν διασύρει...
> It conveys character that, in annoyance at his name, he threw in the example of paronomasia – just as Penelope somewhere says ‘Ev-Ilium’ – and rips into him for his appearance…

Here the term ἠθικῶς and especially the emotion of ‘annoyance’ make it clear that Hector was taken as the subject of διασύρει in the inherited text.[14]

The distribution of διασύρω brings us by another route to an idea we encountered in Eustathios: certain speech acts were perceived to be unsuited for Homer, while being appropriate for his characters. Within the exegetical scholia, διασύρω is not alone. The stems of εἰρωνεία (thirty-one instances) and σαρκασμός (twelve instances) are always used in analysis of characters’ words, in ways that mean they never need to be attributed to Homer or the primary narrator.[15] We will see below that the stem of κερτομία is applied occasionally to Homer but only to his attitude towards non-Greeks. Other stems are predominantly used of Homer’s activities rather than those of his characters (κωμῳδέω, and the rare but colourful ἐπιμωκάομαι, μυκτηρίζω). One finds similar differentiation in terms for criticism which lack the nuance of ridicule. ἐπίπληξις/ἐπιπλήσσω and ἐπιτιμάω commonly

[14] Kroll 1918, p. 69 already noted that ἠθικός and related terms predominantly appear in Homeric scholia describing direct speech. On the word δυσχερής in the exegetical scholia see below, §4. The abrupt change of tense between προσέρριψε and διασύρει suggests that *b*’s version was a result of combination, rather than T’s version being a result of division.

[15] Σ *Od.* 1. 29e partly deviates from this: irony is offered alongside several other accounts of how Aegisthus can be called ἀμύμων ‘blameless’. The line is narrator-text, but presenting Zeus’s focalization.

describe characters but not the poet, and stems including those of ἐλέγχω and κατηγορέω, when used of Homer, display the same imbalance as κερτομία.[16]

2. Epic, *silloi, komoidia*

We saw Eustathios saying that Homer's sense of propriety prevented him from ridiculing Paris directly, since by doing so heroic epic would slip into *silloi* – the genre of *ad hominem* hexameter invective whose most famous exponents were Xenophanes and Timon. In fact, the exegetical scholia admit one passage of the *Iliad* where Homer did write *silloi*, namely the cameo of Thersites in *Iliad* 2:

> ἤδη δὲ οὐ Ξενοφάνει, ἀλλ' Ὁμήρῳ πρώτῳ σίλλοι πεποίηνται, ἐν οἷς αὐτόν τε τὸν Θερσίτην σιλλαίνει καὶ ὁ Θερσίτης τοὺς ἀρίστους.
>
> *Silloi* have been composed first not by Xenophanes but already by Homer – in the lines where he lampoons (*sillaínei*) Thersites himself, and Thersites mocks the leaders.[17]

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[16] ἐλέγχω can also be used of 'revealing' positive traits, as seems to be the case with Menelaus' eagerness to have his rightful place in the chariot race clarified (Σ *ex.* 23. 610 (bT)), and Σ *Od.* 1. 132a. Perceptions about which verbs were 'off-limits' for describing Homer's activity no doubt varied. One example is that Homer ἐπιπλήττει Thersites according to Ps.-Plutarch *On Homer* 149.

[17] From Σ *ex.* 2. 212b (bT); perhaps one should read αὐτός for αὐτόν. Despite his views about Paris, Eustathios comments here that Homer used the εἶδος of *silloi* on several occasions (*Parek. Il.* i. 311). He otherwise only applies the term to when Athena and Hera tease Aphrodite at *Il.* 5. 418-425 (ii. 115), and when Eurymachus teases Odysseus at *Od.* 18. 354-355 (*Parek. Od.* ii. 184, taken in passing to show that Homer originated the seriocomic style of satyr play, so far as Eustathios understood it). He takes 'blameless Aegisthus' (see n. 15) as another sign that Homer avoids *silloi* 'except when absolutely necessary' (i. 13 = Cullhed 2016, p. 60). Eustathios does not seem to have a consistent idea about whether *silloi* were delivered in the poet's voice or in embedded speech; Timon assigned much of his books 2-3 to the voice of Xenophanes.

Since Xenophanes was notoriously critical of Homer, there is a particular edge to the idea that credit for inventing this genre should be transferred from the former to the latter.[18] The same scholion preserves in brief a biographical tradition that Homer had a steward called Thersites who had mismanaged his estate but then bribed the jury not to condemn him, so that Homer's only recourse was to condemn him to ignominy through his song.[19] This kind of tradition, best known from how the Pseudo-Herodotean *Life* (4-9, 26) explains the characters of Mentor, Mentes, Phemius and Tychius, invests the author with lively personal attitudes that can be inferred from his treatment of his characters, and so forms a natural pair with the interpretative framework I am discussing here.

The scholia mention *silloi* only here. By contrast, they contain a far more expansive strand that connects a related speech genre, κωμῳδία, to passages of the *Iliad*. As well as the dramatic form 'comedy', the word extends via the 'ridicule of named individuals' characteristic of Old Comedy to 'ridicule' more generally. However, unlike the terms noted at the end of §1, the scholia apply this stem frequently to Homer's activity (sixteen occurrences, mostly exegetical) and almost never to that of speaking characters.[20] This suggests that for the creator of compilation *c* κωμῳδέω, while clearly

[18] For Xenophanes and Homer see esp. 21 B 10-12 D-K. Timon *SH* 834 describes Xenophanes as Ὁμηραπάτης ἐπικόπτης, 'assailer of Homeric deception'.

[19] Σ 2. 212b (AbT), and more fully Eustathios *Parek. Il.* i. 311. There has been some interaction with the Pseudo-Herodotean *Life* 15-16, where Thestorides offers to host Homer but steals his poetry.

[20] The clearest exception occurs in the aftermath of the Thersites episode, which attracted particular discussion of humour. In Σ *ex.* 2. 289-90 (AbT), it is natural to understand Odysseus as the subject of κωμῳδεῖ when he comments to Agamemnon that the other Greeks are 'like young lads and widows'. This is how Eustathios took it (*Parek. Il.* i. 337). The term κωμῳδία is not in the critical arsenal of the extant scholia on the *Odyssey*, which is perhaps surprising given the broader recognition of the *Odyssey* as the more amusing of the two epics. Satyrus says that Homer was the origin of certain plot devices favoured in Euripides and in new comedy (*Life of Euripides* fr. 39(7)): these include recognition by jewellery, so Satyrus was presumably thinking of the *Odyssey*. Ps.-Longinus (*Subl.* 9.

less specific than 'I write a comedy', still had a connotation of genre that made it more applicable to an author than to characters, unlike many other words in the neighbourhood of 'I ridicule'.

Unsurprisingly, the treatment of Thersites is an instance not only of *silloi* but of κωμῳδία. Later in book 2, a simile compares Agamemnon to several gods. Σ *ex.* 2. 478-9a (AbT) notes:

> γραφεῖς μὲν τὸ ἀληθὲς μεταδιώκουσι, τραγικοὶ δὲ τὸ σεμνότερον, κωμικοὶ δὲ τὸ ἔλασσον, ἅπερ ἅπαντα παρὰ τῷ ποιητῇ ἐστι, κωμῳδία μὲν ὡς ἐπὶ Θερσίτου...
> Painters pursue truthfulness, tragedians what is more respected, and comedians what is less. All these things are found in the poet: comedy as in the case of Thersites…

Here the scholiast is influenced by Aristotle's distinction in *Poetics* 2 (1448a 4-18) between genres or representation, including tragedy and comedy, in terms of the moral quality of the objects represented. But there are two obvious differences. First, Aristotle also mentions painters, but distinguishes within that category according to whether the figures represented are elevated, debased, or realistic. Secondly, he says there that Homer represents better people, and so stands apart from comedy. Aristotle doubles down on this generalisation about Homeric characters in *Poetics* 4 (1448b 36-449a 2), by adding that Homer did 'indicate the form for comedy', but only in the *Margites*, which is contrasted to the more 'tragic' seriousness of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In other words, the scholiast draws on Aristotelian critical ideas but in a way that closes the gap that Aristotle set up between the *Iliad* and comedy, allowing at least for Thersites to stand as an exception.[21] The generic connotation

15) speaks of the events on Ithaca as οἱονεὶ κωμῳδία τις ... ἠθολογουμένη, 'a sort of comedy expressed through characterisation'.

[21] On Aristotle's relationship to the scholia, see in particular Cadoni 2010, Bouchard 2016, Mayhew 2019. For Thersites and the relationship of epic to Old Comedy see Rosen 2007, pp. 68-91.

of the ‘comedy’ of Thersites is strengthened by its contrast to the ‘tragedy’ that the scholia find in the preceding debacle where Agamemnon tests the troops’ resolve.[22]

Within the Thersites episode itself, we are told (Σ *ex.* 2. 269d (bT)):

> ἄκρως δὲ τὸ εὐτελὲς τῶν θρασυδείλων κωμῳδεῖ.
> He makes consummate comedy out of the worthlessness of brash cowards.

Thersites looking around helplessly and tearfully after being cudgelled is the ‘cowardly’ part of his θρασυδειλία. The ‘brash’ part is found not only in Thersites’ general behaviour, but in his name, which was related to the Aeolic form of θράσος in Σ *ex.* 2. 212a (bT).[23] Although the term θρασύδειλος may seem particularly suited to Thersites, Σ *ex.* 3. 19 (bT) extends the analysis to Paris and others:

> ἦθος δὲ θρασυδείλων κωμῳδεῖ διὰ Πάριδος, Δόλωνος (T) / Ἴρου (b), Θερσίτου, Ἕκτορος, προπετὲς ἐν ἐπαγγέλματι, δειλὸν ἐν πράξει, ἐπονείδιστον πρὸς τῷ τέλει.
> He makes comedy out of the character of brash cowards through Paris, Dolon (T) / Irus (b), Thersites, Hector – rushing into a promise, cowardly in action, shameful at the outcome.

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[22] See Σ *ex*. 2. 73a (AbT), 144d (bT), 156 (bT), with Pagani 2018, pp. 74-76, 84-86.

[23] Perhaps the scholiast also thought of how Thersites gives prominence to his own military conquests, which is singled out as γελοῖον ‘funny’ in Σ *ex.* 2. 231a and Aelius Aristides 28. 16. Here *b* and T retain different elements of an idea preserved more fully by Eustathios (*Parek. Il.* i. 319-320), that is of interest for the level of visualisation it presupposes: in that line Thersites placed his hand on his *pectus carinatum* as he emphasised the word ‘I’, and the reminder of his ‘unheroic’ body undermines his heroic pretensions. To judge from Eustathios, this gesture may have been seen as a deliberate attempt by Thersites to raise a laugh (as he aimed to do: *Il.* 2. 215), rather than an accident, as the compiler of *b* assumed.

With respect to Paris, Σ *D* 3. 22 gives a more detailed account of Homer's purpose and its impact on the construction of the episode:[24]

> καὶ ἐμοὶ μὲν δοκεῖ, ὅτι, κωμῳδεῖν ἐπανῃρημένος ὁ ποιητὴς, καὶ σχῆμα τῆς ὁπλίσεως καὶ θράσος ἀλλότριον τῶν ὅπλων αὐτοῦ προτέθεικε, ἵν' ἐκ τοῦ μέλλοντος φόβου μείζονα προσοφλήσῃ τὸν γέλωτα.
>
> In my opinion [Paris challenges the Greeks] because the poet, having chosen to make comedy out of him, has first included the form of his armour and a bravery extraneous to those weapons, so that he incurs even more laughter from his imminent panic.

Paris turns up to fight wearing a leopard skin not a breastplate, but still stands in the front and challenges the Greeks. This is not Homer being inconsistent about his bravery or cowardice – rather, he is constructing a subplot that contains a reversal towards bad behaviour and ends in laughter, in other words a comic subplot of how Paris' cowardice gets exposed to the onlookers.[25] The term θρασύδειλος, used both here and of Thersites in the scholion on 2. 269, again has pertinent Aristotelian heritage. According to the *Nicomachean Ethics* it is a frequent characteristic of the ἀλαζών, who has a limited capacity for pretending to be brave (3.7. 1115b 32). In his commentary, Aspasius takes not Paris but the whole Trojan force at the start of *Iliad* 3 as his example.[26] But outside

[24] Erbse 1969 follows Villoison's relocation of the scholion to 3. 19. The identity of ἐμοί in such D-scholia is unclear.

[25] Some ancient treatises on comedy ignore most forms of reversal as a tool for comedy's effects, and Janko 1984 argued that book 2 of Aristotle's *Poetics* was among these. But *peripeteiai* are such a staple of Menander that a later scholiast was likely enough to think in such terms.

[26] p. 83 Heylbut. Cf. *EE* 3. 1234b 2 for the θρασύδειλος as an example of the coexistence of apparently opposite vices. The concept is applied to Dolon explicitly in Σ *ex.* 10. 358b (T), 375a (bT), 390 (Ge), 443. Aspasius' interpretation of the Trojan force builds on ideas that left traces in scholia:

Homeric epic, such brash but cowardly soldiers were one of the most popular recurring figures of comedy, from Aristophanes' *Acharnians* through to Terence.[27] Again, the κωμῳδία of the *Iliad* is handled as a form of ridicule with particular connections to comedy as a genre, through a broadly Aristotelian lens.

The 'comedy' of Paris in book 3, according to the scholia, continues to the duel itself. Σ *ex.* 11. 17b (T) perceptively asserts that arming scenes like that of Agamemnon prepare the listener for an *aristeia*. This then has to be expanded to account for an exception that proves the rule: Paris' arming scene sets him up to be 'risible' (καταγέλαστος) as he comes off worse. As with Paris' initial challenge to the Greeks, the 'setup' is not only a foil for eventual failure, but foreshadows it.[28] Paris has to borrow sturdier armour, and he takes it from his brother Lycaon. Σ *ex.* 3. 333a (bT) comments:

> κασιγνήτοιο Λυκάονος: κωμῳδεῖται ὡς οὐκ εἰδὼς τὸ συστάδην, ἄλλως τε καὶ δειλὸς Λυκάων, ὃς ἔρριψε τὴν παντευχίαν οὐ φέρων τὸν ἱδρῶτα.
> 'of his brother Lycaon': Comedy is made out of his ignorance of hand-to-hand fighting, particularly since Lycaon is a coward, who threw down his panoply because he could not tolerate the sweat.

The scholiast here assumes considerable foreknowledge on the part of the audience. When we meet Lycaon for the final time in *Iliad* 21, he has abandoned all his weapons from exhaustion, so that he is

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for the basic analogy between the contrast of forces advancing to battle and the contrast of Paris and Menelaus, see Σ *D* 3. 0b in van Thiel 2004, p. 148; the Trojans are like cranes 'fleeing' winter (Σ Hes. *Op.* 448-452); their rowdiness is typical of cowardly animals (Σ *ex. Il.* 3. 5 (AbT)); their belligerence is directed against the tiny Pygmies.

[27] On the development of this figure see Konstantakos 2015.

[28] For the arming type-scene and its foreshadowing effects see Edwards 1992, p. 302, Reitz 2019.

defenseless against Achilles. Some may read this as generating pathos for Lycaon's situation, but Σ *ex.* 21. 48 (bT) and 50 (T) are less generous:

> καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλοντα: ... ἴσως δὲ τὸ φιλόψυχον αὐτοῦ κωμῳδεῖ καὶ διὰ τοῦ πρώτου.
>
> οὐδ' ἔχεν ἔγχος: ὅμοιον τὸ σχῆμα τῷ "ἰοῖσίν τε τιτυσκόμενοι, λάεσσί τ' ἔβαλλον" [3. 80]. ἴσως δὲ καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐξαλλαγῆς χλευάζει τὸ πρόσωπον, ὡς οὐδὲ τῶν ἀμυντηρίων ἑαυτῷ τι καταλιπεῖν ὑπέμεινεν.
>
> 'though unwilling': Perhaps he is making comedy out of his preservation instinct, also through the first occurrence [sc. in line 36].[29]
>
> '(he was not even holding his spear)': The figure is similar to 'aiming at him with arrows, and they hurled rocks'. Perhaps by the alternation [of participle and indicative] he also scoffs at the character, since he could not even bear to keep a single means of defense for himself.

The comments belong together: both contain ἴσως δέ and an idea of ridicule, following a grammatical observation about features of phrasing that confer emphasis. The first comment picks up on the fact that we are told twice that Lycaon was 'unwilling', first to be captured, and now to be killed. The scholiast takes this detail as possible *komoidia* aimed at Lycaon's desire to save his skin.[30] The next scholion in the Townleianus goes on to suggest that the parenthetic comment 'he wasn't even holding

[29] So T. In *b* the end runs … καὶ διὰ τὸ τοῦ τρόπου δειλόν, '… and his cowardice of manner'. The similarity of πρώτου and τρόπου suggests the following corruption: διὰ τοῦ πρώτου (hard to understand) > διὰ τοῦ τρόπου > διὰ τὸ τοῦ τρόπου δειλόν.

[30] Σ *ex.* 15. 3 (bT) goes further and says that Homer constantly 'condemns' (κατηγορεῖ) the non-Greeks by displaying their concern for individual safety. For readers of T, Σ *ex.* 21. 48 appears twice, having also been attached to the earlier occurrence of οὐκ ἐθέλοντα at 21. 36 (f. 229v). Here it occurs directly beneath Σ *ex.* 21. 34b, which describes the Lycaon episode in terms of Homer introducing the 'theatrical form' of *peripeteiai* (see Pagani 2018, pp. 82-83). The reference to drama would foreground the connection of κωμῳδία to 'comedy' in the following scholion.

his spear' at this point creates slightly irregular syntax, which draws attention to how completely inept at the hardships of battle Lycaon is, and so amounts to χλευασμός – a scornful brand of ridicule – by the author.[31]

3. The comedy against Hector and his troops

While many modern readers still find something ridiculous about Thersites, Paris, Dolon, and even Lycaon, the inclusion of Hector in the scholion about θρασύδειλοι cited above (Σ *ex.* 3. 19 (bT)) may be more surprising. My students frequently report that they find Hector the most sympathetic character in the epic, and some prominent scholarship has agreed. Redfield subtitled his 1984 study '*The Tragedy of Hector*', but according to the advice of the scholia, *The Comedy against Hector* would be more apt, at least until his death, at which point they do acknowledge that readers are led towards sympathy with him.[32]

A characteristic example of the scholia's lack of charity towards Hector is Σ *ex.* 11. 501 (T):

> Νέστορα δ' ἀμφὶ μέγαν καὶ... Ἰδομενῆα: κατακωμῳδεῖ τὸ ῥᾴθυμον Ἕκτορος, καθὸ φυγὼν τοὺς περὶ Ὀδυσσέα καὶ Ἀγαμέμνονα τούτοις ἑαυτὸν ἐκδίδωσιν.

[31] The stem χλευ- is infrequent, and used also of characters' speeches (see Σ *ex.* 14. 458 (bT), 475b (T), 16. 617b (bT), and in Σ *D* in glosses on κερτομ-), and of critics of 13. 195.

[32] For an overview of the scholia's attitude to Hector see Richardson 1980, pp. 273-4. Bile and Klein 2008, pp. 122-123, by focussing only on the scholia on books 6 and 22, often imprecisely, concluded incorrectly that 'les scholiastes… ont une opinion très favorable d'Hector', and treated as an exception the claim in Σ *ex.* 6. 362b (bT) that ἀλαζονεία is characteristic of him. On the various interpretations of Hector's character, including in the scholia, see Battezzato 2019, ch. 2, and for Philodemus specifically see Fish 2018, p. 151.

> ‘around great Nestor and Idomeneus’: He is making comedy out of Hector’s preference for an easy time, in that after running away from the men with Odysseus and Agamemnon, he gives himself over to these figures.

In line 360, Hector had been hit on the helmet by Diomedes, and had driven off to relative safety; now we find him fighting in a different part of the battle, while Ajax causes havoc elsewhere. While it is true that Nestor is a second-rate opponent, and Idomeneus is also getting on in years, that Cebriones describes their position as the ἐσχατιή (‘edge, margin’) of the battlefield (11. 524), and that it is Zeus rather than Hector that forces Ajax to retreat (542-544), the scholiasts’ imputation is manifestly partial. Hector was seeing success in a particularly intense area of fighting (499-503). Idomeneus is not such an easy target, as book 13 demonstrates when he is singled out by Poseidon, rallies the troops, and leads them in the fighting (13. 210 ff.). Hector eagerly returns towards Ajax with further success (11. 537-541). Patroclus assumes that he is the cause of the Trojan success (820-821), and the Greeks all fear him (12. 39-40). The scholiast’s phrasing is particularly pointed at ἑαυτὸν ἐκδίδωσιν, ‘gives himself over’, a phrase which normally means ‘surrenders’.

The unforgiving analysis is an overreaction to the fact that the Greeks are doing badly in book 11, which might raise doubts about the beloved principle of the exegetical scholia that Homer is pro-Greek.[33] So too when Hector attacks with major success in book 8. First he urges on his men, and alludes to a plan to burn the Greek ships (8. 182), then he urges on his horses, expressing the hope to get the Greeks to board their ships and leave that evening. On the latter passage, Σ *ex.* 8. 196-7 (T) has the acid comment:

[33] They describe Homer as φιλέλλην twelve times. See the wider range of passages gathered in Schmidt 2011. Modern studies moderate the picture of Homer’s tendentiousness, but have found several areas in which Greeks and Trojans are handled unequally: Scott 1921, p. 206 is a useful summary, van der Valk 1953 more mercurial; see above all Stoevesandt 2005.

καὶ πῶς πρὸ ὀλίγου καῦσαι ἤθελεν αὐτάς; κωμῳδεῖ τοίνυν τὴν βαρβαρικὴν μεταβολὴν ὁ ποιητής.

How come just now he wanted to burn them? It follows that the poet is making comedy out of his barbarian change of mind.

The Greeks cannot board ships that Hector has set on fire. By holding the two exhortations to an inappropriate standard of logical compatibility, the scholiast manages to convert this moment of Trojan victory into ridicule against the supposed fickleness of non-Greeks. Meanwhile Hector's first exhortation is taken by Σ *ex.* 8. 180 and 182 (bT) to exemplify ἀλαζονεία (in the sense of unjustified expressions of one's own success), a term which as we saw is closely associated with the θρασύδειλος as a character type in Aristotelian ethics and as a figure in comedy. Hector's confidence is untimely: until recently, the Trojans were penned in, and firing the ships is still several steps in the future.[34]

The scholiasts' use of the stem ἀλαζον- is implausibly partisan: of around 45 instances, all involve either the Greeks avoiding ἀλαζονεία or the Trojan side (or the god Ares) displaying it.[35] This can involve some evident unfairness: Achilles' claim to military supremacy is part of a cultural norm of self-praise while Hector's is ἀλαζονεία typical of his 'barbarian character'; it is ἀλαζονεία when Hector attributes his success to divine support but also when he neglects to do so.[36] Hector is in fact the main ἀλαζών in the scholia, with about twenty passages enlisted to bring out this trait. However,

[34] The scholiast does admit that forward planning is a suitable quality for a general. A similar ambivalence occurs in Σ *ex.* 18. 293-4 (bT): mentioning divine support is suitable for a general, self-centring as the target of that support is said 'with barbarian boastfulness'. The scholia approve when Diomedes makes his victories contingent on Athena's support: Σ *ex.* 5. 260 (bT), 11. 366a.

[35] For earlier phases in the assignment of boastfulness to non-Greeks to create the value-laden discourse of 'barbarians' see Hall 1989, pp. 124-125. On Trojan boastfulness in the *Iliad* see also Mackie 1996, pp. 60-84.

[36] See respectively Σ *ex.* 18. 105-6c (A), 7. 90b2 (b), 11. 288-9 (T), 16. 833-4 (bT).

frequently it is taken to be emblematic of non-Greeks as a whole: besides the examples already mentioned, see e.g. Σ *ex.* 8. 182 (bT) ἀλαζονείαν βαρβαρικὴν ἔχει, his words 'contain barbarian boastfulness', and the very similar wording in Σ *ex.* 8. 515b (T).

The stem κωμῳδ-, as applied to Homer's activities, follows much the same pattern: other than Thersites and Ares (Σ *D* 5. 906), Homer's purported targets are non-Greek. Sometimes they are individual, as we saw with Lycaon, but Homer can be presented as making fun of non-Greeks as a category. Earlier in book 8, Zeus decides to intervene to stop Diomedes from penning all the Trojans inside Troy 'like lambs'.[37] The scholia judge that through this simile Homer τὴν βαρβάρων δειλίαν κωμῳδεῖ, 'is making comedy out of the cowardice of barbarians' (Σ *ex.* 8. 131b (bT)). At the start of book 10, the Greeks look out at the worryingly near Trojan camp and hear the music of pipes: this is taken to demonstrate 'barbarians' lack of perceptiveness', because they should be more thoughtful of their casualties and aware of the need to rest; the D-scholion there has a slightly different idea, that Homer is 'again mocking the barbarians' rowdiness'.[38]

As with Hector's alleged ἀλαζονεία, that passage involves the Greeks at a low ebb. So too when ἐπιμωκάομαι, found just once in the scholia, is applied to Homer's attitude towards the Trojans and their allies at 12. 177-178, where fire is said to rage around the wall of the Achaean camp. Lines 175-181 were absent from Zenodotus' text, and athetized by Aristophanes and Aristarchus. Aristonicus suggests that one objection was the sudden appearance of fire, which Hector still needs to call for at 15. 718 (Σ *Ariston.* 12. 175a1). In response, the fire was justified in various ways: it could

[37] As alluded to above: it is this passage that makes Hector's exhortation too brash according to Σ *ex.* 8. 180.

[38] Σ *ex.* 10. 13b (T), containing τὴν βαρβάρων δὲ ἄγνοιαν κωμῳδεῖ, Σ *D* 10. 13, with σκώπτειν. Otherwise, the scholia use σκώπτω of how characters speak to each other. 'again' in Σ *D* picks up on the start of book 3, which interpreters used as a prompt to construct a theme of Trojan θόρυβος: see Σ *ex.* 4. 433 (bT), 437, 7. 306-7b, 435a2 (b), 8. 542 (AbT), *Ariston.* 13. 41a (A).

have been sparked by rocks striking the wall; it adds vividness; it is metaphorical for the 'heat' of battle. Then there is a final alternative (Σ *ex.* 12. 177-8b):

> δύναται δὲ καὶ κυρίως πῦρ λέγειν, ἵνα καὶ τὸ τεῖχος αὐτὸ ἐμπρῆσαι ἐπιχειροῦντας εἰσάγῃ τοὺς βαρβάρους, **AbT** καὶ τὸ 'λάϊνον' ἐπήγαγεν ὥσπερ ἐπιμωκώμενος αὐτοὺς ἐπιχειροῦντας ἐμπρῆσαι λίθους. **bT**
>
> He can also mean 'fire' literally, in order to introduce the barbarians attempting to set fire to the wall itself, and he added 'of stone' as if in mockery of their attempt to set fire to stones.

This explanation attempts to make something of the emphasis that one might expect given that the Greek words for 'wall' and 'of stone' are separated: the fire has not just appeared suddenly, as Aristonicus said, but done so in an unlikely place. On the other hand, the gods are watching and the fire is described as θεσπιδαές, 'blazing preternaturally', so one can easily read the burning stones as appropriate rather than problematic. The Trojans' foolishness could clearly have been expressed in many more direct ways, and seems largely irrelevant to the narrative – unless, that is, you are a scholiast with an entrenched view of Homer's desire to belittle non-Greek characters, which needs to be asserted particularly when those characters have the upper hand.

My final example in this section is one where the interpretative process of assigning marked character traits to Homer is mentioned rather than simply enacted. Σ *ex.* 13. 2 (bT) comments on the moment where Zeus turns his eyes away from the plain of Troy:

> τοὺς μὲν ἔα παρὰ τῇσι…: ἐὰν ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρων λέγῃ, Τρώων καὶ Ἑλλήνων, ἁπλούστερόν ἐστιν· ἐὰν δὲ περὶ τῶν Τρώων μόνων, ἐμφαίνεταί τι ἦθος, κατακερτομοῦντος τοῦ ποιητοῦ ὅτι μάτην ἐπόνουν· οὐ γὰρ ἤμελλον ἁλώσεσθαι αἱ νῆες ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων.
>
> 'He left those men beside the ships...': It is simpler if he is talking about both sides, Trojans and Greeks. If only about the Trojans, an element of character is visible, as the poet teases the fact that they struggled in vain, since the ships were not destined to be captured by the barbarians.

On four other occasions in the scholia, the stem of κερτομία is applied to Homer mocking characters – non-Greeks every time, following the pattern we observed with κωμῳδία.[39] Here, if Zeus 'left *them* to their toil and misery' refers only to the Trojans, the scholiast sees a dismissive rather than a sympathetic attitude to the futility of those toils. This would betray 'an element of character' (ἦθος), i.e. a personal investment, from the poet himself, or as we might insist, from his primary narrator. But the extant scholion does not expand on this idea, including whether it is raised because it is plausible or implausible, and ends up – correctly – preferring the interpretation where both Trojans and Greeks are facing misery beside the ships.

4. Generic and partisan limits of mockery

So far we have seen that Thersites and Ares are exceptions within a broader pattern where the poet's mockery is directed at non-Greeks. Conversely, many scholia are explicitly sceptical about the idea of Homer criticising Greek characters, still excepting Thersites. A few cases specifically oppose criticism with a mocking tone. For example Σ *Ariston.* 19. 49 (A) has this to say on the arrival of Diomedes and Odysseus at the assembly to hear Agamemnon and Achilles' reconciliation:

> ἔγχει ἐρειδομένω: ὅτι συλληπτικῶς εἴρηκεν· ὁ γὰρ Διομήδης μόνος τὸν πόδα τετρωμένος ὑπέρεισμα ἔχει τὸ δόρυ. ὁ δὲ Διονύσιος τὸ σημεῖόν φησιν, ὅτι οἷον μυκτηρίζοντός ἐστι τὸ 'ἔτι γὰρ ἔχον ἕλκεα λυγρά'· δευτεραῖοι γάρ εἰσι τραυματίαι. τοῦτο οὖν λέγεσθαι, ὅτι χρῆσθαι

[39] Cf. Σ *ex.* 5. 21a (bT) on Idaeus' cowardice, redirecting Zoilus' charge that Homer was silly here (see n. 43). Also 5. 193 on Pandaros' avarice, 10. 332b (T) of Dolon's pretensions, 11. 340b on Agastrophus' stupidity. These scholia look past the normal situation in early epic that κερτομία is at the expense of one's addressee (contrast the focus of Gottesman 2008), and at least in Idaeus' case also the usual sense of impoliteness achieved through irony or indirect expression. Naturally the scholia also use the stem of characters' speech.

αὐτοῖς μέλλει εἰς τὸν ἐπὶ Πατρόκλῳ ἀγῶνα πρὸς τὰ ἐναντία τοῖς τραύμασιν ἀγωνίσματα. ὑπεξαιρούμενος οὖν λέγει ὡς δὴ πρὸς τῷ ὑγιάσθαι ὄντων.

'both leaning on a spear': (There is a symbol) because he has spoken with syllepsis: only Diomedes has a foot wound and holds a spear to prop him up. Dionysius says that the symbol is because the phrase 'since they still had painful wounds' is practically that of someone sneering, since they are in their second day of injury; and hence that this comment is made because he intends to use them for the games in honour of Patroclus, in contests incompatible with their wounds. The point of him picking them out is therefore that they are close to fully recovered.

Aristonicus related Aristarchus' marginal symbol to a grammatical inconcinnity. But he also reported an alternative account by 'Dionysius', presumably Aristarchus' eminent pupil Dionysius Thrax, according to whom the remarkable point was the disparaging tone of saying that Odysseus and Diomedes are 'still' wounded just one day after sustaining their injuries.[40] Dionysius *therefore* presented an interpretation with a different tone: the focus is not on the heroes' lingering wounds, but on the fact that they were nevertheless well enough to make it to the assembly; this prepares for their healthy sporting participation in book 23. Dionysius felt, and supposed or knew that Aristarchus had felt, that the sneer was not just remarkable but a problem requiring a solution.

Aristonicus does not record whether the perceived problem was a general one of tone, or a more partisan one where it matters that the potential targets of mockery are Greek. Nor does he when he asserts that ἐμοί is preferable to ἐμῆς in 9. 401 because the latter gives Achilles an ἀλαζονικός sentence (Σ *Ariston.* 9. 401 (A)). As mentioned, later exegetical scholia present a pattern of Homer avoiding criticism of the Greeks that would support the partisan line of thought. Moments of Trojan

[40] This is the only use of μυκτηρίζω in the Homeric scholia; compare Menander *PCG* fr. 607, also of people refusing to take a soldier's wounds seriously. Tryphon I *Fig.* p. 205 treats μυκτηρίζω as involving movement of the nostrils. For Aristonicus' references to 'Dionysius' see Schironi 2018, p. 18; this one is fr. 43 Linke.

success produce particularly interesting examples, much as we saw with ἀλαζών and related words. Thus Zeus's intervention in book 8 makes all the Greeks pale with fear, but Σ *ex.* 8. 77a (bT) chooses to focus on how Zeus's involvement is a way to 'exalt' the Greeks; the fact that they *all* flee avoids shame being attached to any individual (T), or reflects the troops' faith in the usual staunchness of their leaders (*b*). A further intervention from Zeus is ascribed to the poet not wanting to criticise Greeks (Σ *ex.* 8. 335 (b), with μωμῆσαι). When Zeus gives Hector the success of a killing spree at 11. 299-305, this shows that the success is 'illegitimate', and Homer is 'concealing the disrepute' of the victims 'by his succinctness' in cataloguing them.[41] In book 15, Hector boards the ship of the dead Protesilaus, to avoid any living hero being blameworthy for not defending their vessel effectively (Σ *ex.* 15. 705d (bT)). Several scholia use δυσχερής of descriptions of Greek losses that Homer viewed as upsetting, whether personally or for his audience.[42]

However, according to Aristonicus, the principal topic for Aristarchus in a discussion of humour in the *Iliad* was how to avoid it. Time and again his scholia make being γελοῖος ('silly, laughable') a sufficient reason for variants, passages or interpretations to be dismissed; the term seems also to have been a favoured weapon of Zoilus, though without the focus on distinguishing authentic from inauthentic Homeric thought.[43] Only in a small proportion of instances is the respectability of

[41] Σ *ex.* 11. 300b (bT) ἐπικρύπτων τὸ ὄνειδος τῇ βραχυλογίᾳ. The successes are νόθα: Hector, like the many heroes whom Zeus cuckolded, is not the real 'father'. The point about βραχυλογία corresponds to the fact that lists of Greek victims tend to be shorter.

[42] Σ *ex.* 1. 1e1 (T), 8. 78 (bT), 12. 175-81b. All this is certainly not to say that the exegetical scholia never take Homer to be critical of the Greeks. For example, Σ *ex.* 23. 174-6 (bT) says he is ὥσπερ ἀγανακτῶν when he describes Achilles' plan to slaughter Trojans on the pyre of Patroclus as κακὰ ... ἔργα.

[43] Zoilus found fault with Circe turning Odysseus' companions into 'wailing piglets' (Ps.-Longinus *Subl.* 9. 14), and with the gods' laughter in Demodocus' song of Ares and Aphrodite (Σ *Od.* 8. 332h); he thought two features of the start of *Iliad* 5 'extremely silly' (Porphyry *QH* on 5. 7b, 20), and

gods or Greek heroes at stake.[44] Occasionally the exegetical scholia offer a more specifically comedic twist to such comments about maintaining a proper seriousness. A lengthy discussion of Machaon's medical skills notes that fevers, purgations, and enemas are 'unsuitable' for the *Iliad* because they are κωμικά.[45] The complaint that Aphrodite acts like a 'fixer' of sexual liaisons for Paris and Helen (Σ *ex.* 3. 383a (bT), with προαγωγός), was surely motivated in part by that role being a staple of new comedy; in response, Aphrodite's appearance is justified as serving Homer's goals in the passage, including that of making Paris a 'laughing-stock' (γέλωτα).[46]

Conclusions

We have seen that the scholia, particularly the exegetical ones, present a side to the humour of the *Iliad* different from the focal points of modern scholarship, namely on the dark frivolity of its gods (especially in books 1, 14 and 20-21), on battlefield taunts, and recently on parodic manipulations of traditional language.[47] And where narratological studies have found a Homeric narrator who is not neutral but still quite 'reticent', this strand of ancient criticism identified an active authorial voice,

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'laughed at' Zeus's use of a balance before the duel of Hector and Achilles (Σ *ex.* 22. 210b (T)); he ἐπέσκωπτεν Homer according to Suda ζ130. I have not yet been able to access the discussions in Fogagnolo 2022. The usage of τὸ γελοῖον in criticism goes back at least to the start of Hecataeus' *Genealogies* (*BNJ* 1 F 1).

[44] E.g. Σ *Ariston.* 5. 838-9 (A), 6. 311a, 7. 195-9, 16. 666b, 24. 25-30, *Did.* 19. 365-8a (A).

[45] Σ *ex.* 11. 515c (T). κωμικά is perhaps 'suited to revelry' rather than 'comic'; a contrast is drawn with Dionysius' *Hunger*, though the scholiast may not have known that that was a satyr play (*TrGF* 76 F 3a).

[46] See also Σ *ex.* 23. 476 (bT), justifying the 'boorish' banter of Ajax son of Oileus about Idomeneus' ageing eyesight as a skilful representation of the mood at a sports event.

[47] See e.g. Halliwell 2008, pp. 51-99, Turkeltaub 2020. Several scholia do discuss the laughter generated by Hephaestus in the divine banquet at the end of book 1: e.g. Σ *ex.* 1. 584b (bT), 588 (T), 2. 212b (bT), *Hrd.* 20. 234c (AbT).

keen to criticise and use satire against characters to further a didactic ethical programme; this voice not only places mockery in the mouths of characters, but also mocks directly. The distribution of some words, such as διασύρω or εἰρωνεία, shows that they were felt more appropriate to describe how characters mock each other rather than the poet's activity, while for κωμῳδέω the scales tilt firmly in the opposite direction. Several words used of Homer's activity contribute to an explicit argument that he was thoroughly pro-Greek, in that the scholia are much readier to see him as mocking non-Greek characters; Thersites, while a prominent exception, is still an exception. These claims about Homeric mockery (and criticism in general), I have argued, often aim to compensate for moments of Trojan success. Finally, the exegetical scholia suggest a particular association of such mockery to the genre of comedy through the usage of κωμῳδεῖν, especially in opposition to ideas about Homer's 'tragic' qualities, and through their focus on comic figures such as the ἀλαζών or θρασύδειλος.

This image of Homer in the exegetical scholia contrasts with other ancient interpretative approaches to his humour. According to Aristonicus and Didymus, lines were often athetized by Zenodotus and Aristarchus for containing something γελοῖον, even concerning figures such as Thersites and Paris whom the exegetical scholia see as a target of ridicule.[48] A sense of generic and rhetorical propriety led Eustathios to insist that Homer was in general not interested in writing *silloi*. When Eustathios says that Homer is the 'father of κωμῳδία' (*Parek. Il.* iii. 488) it is in the context of the characters' battlefield taunts being the original form of personal invective with biting humour, and he clarifies that they certainly do not bring a smile to the addressee. By contrast, when the author of the Pseudo-Plutarchan *On Homer* makes a similar claim about Homer founding comedy (214), he focuses on characters laughing, treating these moments (inadequately) in terms of θυμηδία, 'being in a cheerful mood', and distancing Homer from the subsequent and less valuable invention of explicit insults. When Gregory of Nazianzus wrote to the emperor Julian about Homer being a 'writer of comedies, or is it tragedies?' about the gods (*PMG* xxxv 653.32), he stood in a tradition of objections

[48] Σ *ex.* 2. 226a (AbT), *Ariston.* 231-4 (A), 3. 74a.

to Homer's representation of the gods that is noticeably muted in the exegetical scholia, whose focus on Iliadic humour lay elsewhere.

These alternatives to the approach of the exegetical scholia raise the question of how influential the latter were in their construction of a mocking Homer. The continued existence of such comments in papyrus copies and later manuscripts implies some level of continuing readership, perhaps particularly among teachers. Through education, this very partisan image of Iliadic humour may have gained currency in late antiquity and the Byzantine empire, despite the different line taken in other forms of scholarship or implied in much literary reception. It requires further study to map out signs of this potential influence. And in this article I have focused mainly on establishing the extent to which the exegetical scholia imagine Homer to be mocking certain characters and their types, and the degree to which this created and handed down a chauvinist Homer.[49] There is certainly more to say on the particular topics picked out for mockery, the system of social values that rendered them ridiculous, and the historical impact of the scholia in promulgating such values. While mockery of cowardice or effeminacy are hardly surprising, that of overconfidence may be more suggestive. For example one form of overconfidence, according to the scholia, is to assert divine support rather than hedging it with a conditional clause (n. 34), although this sort of assertion was an ordinary form of piety in thanksgiving offerings. Finally, beside the psychological traits that attract mockery, the scholia assume that physical difference can as well, as in the case of Thersites, or of Diomedes arriving at an assembly on an improvised crutch, so that educational use of this aspect of the scholia could be seen as contributing to the regulatory forces governing attitudes to impairment.[50] But these

[49] Harrison (2020) surveys the range of recent scholarly approaches to the Greek/'barbarian' contrast and the types of source-material on which they are based. The attitude of the exegetical scholia is among the most chauvinist of the options available.

[50] This may be another area, along with his statements about Homer avoiding direct mockery of Paris in book 3, where Eustathios does not go as far as the scholia. For his treatment of squinting and club-footedness, and the influence of canon law upon it, see Perisanidi and Thomas (2021).

are again topics for future study. Let me end here simply by registering that while the impulse of these ancient critics to attribute to Homer a particular taste for ridicule does not strike me as a plausible method of interpretation, it is precisely this implausibility that makes it an interesting and fruitful chapter in the story of the evolving cultural significance of the *Iliad* across its lifespan so far.

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