Homer and Euripides:
Remarks on Mythological Innovation in the Scholia

This paper analyses two exegetical strategies adopted by ancient scholars to explain Euripides’ mythological innovations and variations with respect to Homer through a selection of scholia. The first approach considers Euripides a (mis-) reader of Homer. The dramatist regards an epic passage as the reference text, but fails to understand its wording correctly: he, therefore, reproduces uncritically the model, even though inspired by a genuine impulse to emulate; this circumstance de facto equates the tragedian with a sort of exegete and represents his deviation from the epic text as the locus of an implicit (erroneous) interpretation. The second approach evaluates the work of Euripides, comparing it with the Homeric poems, by means and in the light of concepts of literary criticism. The tragedian creates a good or bad product depending on whether his innovation achieves a certain poetic result: an implausible or unrealistic description of a character is contested, whereas a strategy to enhance the emotional impact of the dramatic moment is recognised and perceived as a careful and conscious artistic operation, hence possibly praised.

Keywords: Ancient Scholarship, Exegetical Activity, Greek Scholia, Literary Comparison, Literary Criticism.

Introduction

The poetic treatment of myth was a much debated topic in Hellenistic and Roman scholarship\(^1\). In this discussion, Homer occupied a unique position: he was the authority maintaining the traditional version of a legend and the fundamental poetic model of the subsequent literature\(^2\). Ancient critics paid specific attention to the divergence of a narrative from the common or widespread account, and their attitudes towards this issue were various, depending on both the characteristics of the texts analysed and the knowledge or interests of the commentators themselves. Ancient exegetes\(^3\) assessments of Euripides’ innovations provide a rich and varied sample of such phenomenon: different approaches reflect numerous critical trends, which produced multiple results. For the sake of clarity these can be arranged in two categories, bearing in mind that

\(^1\) Nünlist 2009: 257-264 provides an account of the major questions that ancient commentators addressed when dealing with mythological issues; see also Nünlist 2015: 738-739 s.v. Mythology.

\(^2\) In a survey on the citations from Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes in the scholia to these authors, in those to Theocritus and Apollonius Rhodius and in the *Etymologicum Magnum*, Montanari 1992: 78-84 shows that the citations from Homer noticeably outnumber all the others; only in the scholiastic corpus to Aristophanes the citations from the comic poet prevail. The commented author is normally the most quoted after Homer. With a different and complementary perspective, Scattolin 2007 analyses some scholia to Sophocles and Euripides where ancient scholars cited together with or instead of Homer authors who appear to be a better comparison.
well-defined demarcations are not always possible due to the nature of the
scholia, our main source on the subject. On the one hand, there are neutral an-
otations which, e.g., indicate the mythological variants between Homer and
Euripides as a simple matter of fact\textsuperscript{3}, or attribute to the dramatist the use of a
model different from the Homeric poems\textsuperscript{4}. On the other hand, there are more
articulate comments expressing or implying value judgments, which often
blame but at times, on the contrary, defend or even appreciate the mythological
alteration and thus the poetic invention introduced by Euripides, whose origin
and reason they attempt to recognise. To the latter class belong two interpreta-
tive methodologies distinguished in terms of theoretical assumptions, critical
tools and explanatory objectives: the first one considers the tragedian a (mis-)
reader and exegete of Homer; the second one evaluates his work by means and
in the light of concepts of literary criticism. This paper aims to examine these
two exegetical strategies in order to shed light on a specific aspect of how poet-
ic works were read and studied in Hellenistic and Roman epoch; the focus is on
the reasons and the interpretative perspectives of the ancient commentators.

This investigation is conducted on four scholia from Euripides’ corpus -
the richest among the surviving scholiastic collections of the tragedians\textsuperscript{5} -
which exemplify the critical approaches under examination: three of them are
relative to the Hecuba and one to the Rhesus\textsuperscript{6}; the inclusion of two scholia
from the Iliad and one from the Odyssey to relevant passages cited as reference
or comparison texts within the tragic annotations enriches and broadens the re-
search. It is worth remembering that the scholia are the result of the compila-
tion of material drawn from various sources, which preserve the work of Hel-
lenistic and Roman scholars in a fragmentary and scattered condition. In these
annotations, the expressions introducing citations and/or establishing compari-
son between authors are varied but often stereotyped, and their choice does not
seem to comply with a codified scheme; moreover, they are concise and con-

\textsuperscript{3}E.g. Sch. Eur. Ph. 12: καλοῦσι δ’ Ἑκάστην με: ἀσφαλίζεται τὴν ὀνομασίαν τῆς ἥρωινς, ἐπεὶ
ioi παλαιότεροι Ἐπικαστήν <αὐτὴν> καλοῦσιν, καὶ Ὄμηρος “μητέρα τ’ Ὁδίπτοδοκό ήδον, καλὴν
Ἑπικαστήν” (Od. 11, 271).

\textsuperscript{4}E.g. Sch. Eur. Tr. 822: Λαμεδοδοῦντε παί: τὸν Γανμηήµον καθ’ Ὄμηρον (Il. 5, 265; 20, 231)
Τρωῶς δότα παῖς Δαιμονίδοντος νῦν ἐπεκ ἀκολούθησας τὸ τὴν μερὰν Ἰλίαδα πεπνηθόη (…) ἱαρίδος
τῶν (fr. 29 Bernabé = 6 Davies = 6 West) etc.

\textsuperscript{5}An overview of the scholiastic corpus to Euripides, with indication of the main studies on it
and its editions, is provided by Dickey 2007: 31-44 and 2015: 505-508; for further bibliog-
raphy and an accurate catalogue describing the witnesses that transmit the scholia and scholarly
material to Euripides see also Mastronarde 2010-in progress.

\textsuperscript{6}The Rhesus has been transmitted as part of the ‘Euripidean Selection’, a repertoire of ten plays
also comprising Hecuba, Orestes, Phoenissae, Hippolytus, Medea, Alcestis, Andromache, Tro-
ades and Bacchae, all equipped with scholia except the last one, but it is generally assumed to
be the work of a poet of the 4th c. BCE. Rhesus’ hyp. (b) shows that the question of its attribu-
tion had already been raised in antiquity; this is, however, the only surviving evidence of a de-
bate on the issue in ancient times. It has been observed that conversely the scholia lean e silen-
tio towards the attribution of the play to Euripides, revealing no doubts about its authenticity.
What matters the more for the purposes of this paper is that ancient scholarship on Rhesus
shows a patent affinity in content, form and methodology with the scholarship on Euripides’
other tragedies, following the same path during the Hellenistic and at least the beginning of the
Imperial era; see Merro 2008: 9-61, esp. 24 ff.; Fries 2014: 22-55.
The Murder of Agamemnon with an Axe

In the exodus of the *Hecuba*, Polymestor predicts that Clytemnestra will kill Agamemnon with an axe.

A scholion argues that the νεώτεροι, among whom Euripides is obviously included, added the detail of the weapon because of a misreading of the verse in the *Odyssey* which states that Aegisthus ambushed Agamemnon at a banquet and slew him as an ox at a manger. According to the interpretamentum, the comparison means that the Atreides was murdered when he should have been resting after his labours, an implicit allusion to the exploits of the war and the return from Troy, but later authors did not understand the symbolic meaning of the image and represented it as real with the addition of the axe. Hence, they reproduced uncritically the model, even though inspired by a genuine impulse to emulate, distancing themselves from it due to incorrect exegesis, which might be otherwise defined as the consequence of a too literal interpretation.

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1 Tosi 1988: 59-86 emphasises the importance of recognising the link between the cited and commented texts, in order to understand reason, meaning and purpose of the citations; Tosi 2013 analyses some examples where this operation is complicated by a possible corruption in the connection between the interpretamentum and the commented text, or by the ambiguous explanation provided by ancient scholars on controversial passages. For an analysis of the citations by Hellenistic and Roman scholars and an attempt to classify them see Montana 2016: esp. 73-74. In particular on poetic citations in tragic scholia, within contexts and for purposes of literary criticism, see Grisolia 1992.

2 For an overview of the most important features of the scholia see Wilson 2007: esp. 50-68. On the main stylistic and formal conventions and some recurrent topics in this kind of material see Nünlist 2009: 8-14. For a definition of ‘scholion’ and ‘scholiastic corpora’, a history of the arrangement and development of such collections, as well as a critical discussion of the modern debate on this issue see Montana 2011, with bibliography.


4 Aristarchus often regarded the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as a reservoir of information and a source of inspiration for later authors, who could also develop stories and details starting from the epic text (*e.g.* Sch. *Ariston*. II. 9, 575a1; Sch. *Ariston*. II. 24, 527-528a; Sch. *Ariston*. II. 24, 735a). The scholar of Samothrace also detected examples of wrong interpretations or pseudo-literary reworkings of Homer: *e.g.* Sch. *Iliad*. 22, 351b: οὖν ἐκ τ' αὐτῶν <χρυσός> ἐρόσθενη ἀνάγοντας εἰς ἄμετρα λέξεις ἐν τῇ Ἀρείᾳ Ἀτη καὶ ἀντιστάθηναι γραφῷ εἴτ' ἐκ τούτου σῶμα ἐν Φρέζων (*TrGF* 3: 364-370); cf. Sch. *Ariston*. II. 8, 70a; Sch. *Ariston*. II. 22, 210a1. On the relationship between Homer and the νεώτεροι in the use of the
Not understanding that the verse in Homer: “after inviting him to a banquet, as one kills an ox at the manger” is instead of: “Clytemnestra slew as an ox this man who was to get pleasure after his labours”, the younger authors added that he was killed with an axe. Therefore, it is necessary here to mark with a critical sign the verse: “this man as well, lifting high the axe”.

The murder of Agamemnon is mentioned several times in the Odyssey, with a fluidity of conception and elaboration that is justified in the light of the different contexts and perspectives. The relevant verse recurs two times within the poem: in the section dedicated to the account of Menelaus’ shipwreck in Egypt, when Proteus narrates Agamemnon’s return from Ilium, his emotion at the arrival in homeland and the execution of the ambush by Aegisthus and twenty henchmen (4, 512-537); and in the dialogue between Atreides’ ghost and Odysseus in the Nekyia, when the dead hero recounts the violent massacre carried out against him and his companions by Aegisthus with Clytemnestra’s complicity and support (11, 404-434). The woman, cunning and terrible, here meditates on the death of the husband and kills Cassandra with her own hand brandishing a sword (11, 424: φασιγάνω).

The Homeric δειπνίσσας is referred to Aegisthus, whereas the scholion makes Clytemnestra the subject of the homicide; this discrepancy can be explained by taking into account various factors. First of all, the degree of participation of the woman in the murder is variable already in the epic poem: she is either absent, or an accomplice, or a conspirator and responsible for the crime; the idea that she was the architect of the deceit was afterwards fortunate, as the paradigmatic example of Aeschylus’ Oresteia demonstrate. Secondly, the expression σὺν οὐλομένῃ ἀλόχῳ in Od. 11, 410 might have influenced the ancient commentator: Aegisthus is the nominative in the phrase, but Clytemnestra

myth according to the perspective of Aristarchus see Schironi 2018: 661-686, with bibliography. The notion that a misinterpretation of the Homeric text resulted in a specific detail of a later work is widely attested in the exegetical scholia to the Iliad: e.g. Sch. II. ex. 4, 59b: πρεσβύτατην (sc. Ἀμήν): τιμωτάτην νῦν. πλανηθεῖς δὲ ἐντυσθεὶς Ἡηioctlός νεώτερον φησὶ τὸν Δία (cf. Th. 454-457); cf. Sch. ex. II. 5, 880; Sch. ex. II. 18, 38.

13 Sch. Od. 4, 535 e2 grasps Agamemnon’s desire for rest after his labours, and therefore states that the image of the ox at the manger must be read figuratively; see Pontani 2010: 330 app. ad loc. From another perspective, Sch. Porph.? Od. 535e2 aims to justify the behaviour of the hero and to remove any doubt about his possible weakness for not realising the trap: the reference to the banquet does not mean that he was drunk, and the comparison with the ox does not designate him as an arrogant but a brave man. On the link between these annotations and the tragic scholion see Pontani 2005: 101.
14On these two passages see respectively West 1981: 359-361 and Heubeck 1983: 291-293.
plays an active role in the action as well. Thirdly, Euripides ascribes the murder to the woman: it is, therefore, not illogical to suppose that the ancient exegete cited the Homeric verse making Clytemnestra its subject under the influence of the tragic text.

Sch. Od. 11, 410 observes that Homer does not know the version of the homicide accomplished by means of a clothing, which serves to entrap the victim, and the axe: having the text of the Odyssey as its focus, it records the characteristics of the epic description by subtracting the innovations added by later poets. This neutral remark counters the reasoning of the tragic scholion, which considers the expansion of the traditional representation as the result of an erroneous exegesis.15

Sch. Od. 11, 410 Dindorf

σὺν οὐλομένη ἄλογον ὑπὲρ τῇ ἑπιβουλῇ κάκεινη συνέγνω, τὸν γὰρ χιτῶνα καὶ τὸν πέλεκυν Ὄμηρος οὐκ οἶδεν. Q

With my accursed wife] because she is also complicit in the conspiracy. Homer does not know the clothing and the axe.

Hecuba Spares Odysseus’ Life

In the first episode of the Hecuba, the protagonist begs Odysseus to spare the life of her daughter Polyxena, who has been chosen as a victim to be sacrificed on Achilles’ tomb. The woman tries to persuade the Greek commander by recalling an episode of the final stages of the war when she saved him. Odysseus had entered Ilium in disguise as a beggar and disfigured by wounds that should have made him unidentifiable; nevertheless he was recognised by Helen, who denounced his identity to Hecuba; the queen accepted Odysseus’ supplication and let him leave the city unharmed.

Eur. Hec. 239-241 Battezzato

οἶδοθ’ ἡνίκ’ ἤλθες Ἄλου κατάσκοπος
dυσχαλήνει τ’ ἁμορφόφος ὁμάτων τ’ ἀπο
φόνου σταλαγμοὶ σήμεν κατέσταζον γέννοι;

Helen retrospectively narrates this exploit at the royal palace in Sparta in Od. 4, 240-264.16 In this account Odysseus also wears rags, pretends to be wounded and is recognised by the woman, but she does not betray him, hoping

15Sch. Soph. El. 442-446, commenting on the horrible mutilation which Clytemnestra carried out on Agamemnon’s corpse, states that each author is free to shape the components of the myth as he wishes, provided that he preserves the essential core of the narrative and creates a text which is coherent from a literary point of view; the innovation from the Homeric model prompts here the critic to emphasise the concept of poetic licence: (...) οὐ δεῖ δὲ διαφωνίαν δοκεῖν εἰναι πρὸς τὸν Ὀμηρόν ἐπεὶ σημαί ήκέδεν ν ἐπὶ φάτνη” (Od. 4, 535 = 11, 411). Ἡρκεί γὰρ τὰ ἄλλα συμφωνεῖν τῷ πράγματι τὰ γὰρ κατὰ μέρους ἔξωθεν ἐχεῖ ἐκάστος ὡς βούλεται πραγματεύσεσθαι, εἰ μὴ τὸ πάν ἐπὶ βλάστη τῆς ὑποθέσεως. Cf. Sch. Pind. O. 4, 31b5.

16On this passage see West 1981: 340-343.
for the victory of the Acheans; the hero easily carries out a massacre of Trojans and returns to the ships; Hecuba remains unaware of the raid and is not even mentioned. The centrality of Helen in the story is supposed to be a creation of the poet of the Odyssey: this episode is useful both to celebrate Odysseus’ typical abilities and, above all, to clarify from the point of view of the woman that she regretted the adultery before the sack of Ilium. Euripides introduced the novelty that Hecuba had once spared the enemy so that she can in turn ask the Greek commander to save Polyxena.

A scholion criticises this invention as implausible, and not corresponding to the Homeric version or conceived in his manner. The dramatist reworks a traditional episode, of which Homer is implicitly identified as the authoritative guarantor, producing something unconvincing: Hecuba would have had no reason to remain silent if she had seen an enemy wandering in the Trojan camp, while Helen did so with verisimilitude. The statement within the scholion “regretting the amorous folly sent by Aphrodites” indicates that Helen repented her behaviour and planned to return to the Greeks; this sentence echoes a line from the account of the heroine in the Odyssey, which further reveals the comparative nature of the commentary.

Sch. Eur. Hec. 241 Schwartz

This invention is implausible and not Homeric: Hecuba would not have kept silent if she had seen an enemy spying upon the Trojans circumstances. Helen, instead, (sc. did so) with verisimilitude: because she regretted the folly sent by Aphrodites.

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17Odysseus’ incursion into Ilium figured in the Little Iliad. Procl. Chrest. 206 (cf. Apollod. Epist. 5, 13) (= Arg. 1 Bernabé = Davies, pp. 52-53 = Arg. West) placed it between the construction of the wooden horse and the theft of the Palladion. In the Little Iliad, Odysseus disguised himself (Procl. i.e.) or was wounded by Thoas at his own request (Sch. Lycochr. 780 = fr. 7 Bernabé = 8 Davies = 8 West); see also fr. 6 Bernabé = 7 Davies incert. loc. intra Ep. Cycl. = 9 West; fr. 10 West. The episode is evoked, as an anachronistic prolepsis, also in [Eur.] Rh. 498-507, 710-719. This version is similar to the Homeric one, from which it differs only on few points: it eliminates the egocentric perspective of Helen’s account; it omits the meeting between Helen and Odysseus, probably as irrelevant; it does not refer to any wounding on the part of the hero, whereas elaborates on his disguise as a beggar; it insists on the idea that Odysseus presents himself to the enemies as a traitor who is at loggerheads with the Atreides; see Fries 2014: 307-311, 385-389.

18See Matthiessen 2008: 286-287; Battezzato 2018: 109, who also notes that Eur. Hec. 240 is “an adaptation of Od. 4.245, where Odysseus … wears σπαύρα κάκ’ (α’)”.


20In the scholastic corpus to Euripides the noun πλάσμα recurs in Sch. Eur. An. 734 to defend the tragedian against the charge of including in his work an anachronistic reference to a historical event of his own time: ἢ πρὸ τοῦ μὲν ἦν φίλη: ἔνιοι φασίν <τὸν ποιήτην> παρά τούς χρόνους αἰνίττοντα τὰ Πελοποννησιακά, σῶν ἀναγκαίον δὲ κατασκοιματίζων τὸν Εὐριπίδην, ἄλλα ἄσκειν πλάσματε κεφαλήσαται. On the meaning of πλάσμα in tragic scholia see Papadopoulou 1999.
The notion of verisimilitude is associated to a component in the construction of the plot and to a demand for consistency in the behaviour of the characters, with respect to the features with which they are portrayed: this is a matter of internal credibility, i.e., a request for textual coherence. This recalls Aristotle’s notions of literary work: the poetic mimesis represents what could and would happen either probably or necessarily; as regards the characters in particular, these must be appropriate and consistent: in drawing them, as in the arrangement of the incidents, it should always be seek what is inevitable or probable, so as to make it inevitable or probable that such and such a person should say or do such and such a thing.

Dolon’s Camouflage and Four-footed Walk

In *Il.* 10 Dolon, preparing to carry out a night raid on the Achaean camp, equips himself with a bow and a spear, and wears a grey wolf skin and a tattered cap.

*Iliad* 10, 333-336 West

άυτικα δ’ ἀμφ’ ὤμοιον ἐβάλλετο καμπύλα τόξα,
ἐξεπετο δ’ ἐκτοσθέν ῥινόν πολιοῦ λύκοιο,
κρατι δ’ ἐπι κτείνῃ κυνήγην, ἔλε δ’ οξόν ἀκοντα.
βῆ δ’ ἵναι προτί νής ἀπὸ στρατοῦ (…)23.

The author of the *Rhesus* describes Dolon wearing a wolf skin and a helmet made from its skull; going beyond the epic model, he images that the hero will move on all fours and imitate the gait of the animal.24

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23See also *Il.* 10, 458-459. Hainsworth 1993: 188 defines this episode “a truncated arming and departure scene”. In the arming scenes of the *Iliad* the standard order of the weapons is: 1) greaves, 2) corset, 3) sword, 4) shield, 5) helmet, 6) spear; see Kirk 1985: 313-314. Dolon takes no greaves, neither corset, nor sword or shield.

24The scene adheres to the pattern of the Homeric description, but focuses on the wolf helmet and skin, suggesting the association between Dolon and the animal; the usual weapons would spoil his stratagem. The chorus provides a lyrical repetition of the four-footed walk: τετράπους / μὴν ἔργον ἐπίγαιον / θηρὸς; (255-257). There are attic vase-paintings of the early fifth century BCE which portray Dolon thus fully attired, and one even crawling on all fours (Paris, Louvre CA 1802 [circa 480-460 BCE], *LIMC* III.1 s.v. Dolon B 2 (p. 661), III.2 (p. 525)). Hence, this was not an invention on our poet’s part. Dolon’s mimicry seems to be a genuine early variant of the myth, whose relationship with *Il.* 10 is difficult to define; *Rhesus* happens to be the only
A scholion finds it not credible that Dolon walks on his hands and on his feet like a wolf, and adds that Homer does not represent him clothed in its skin to suggest an assimilation of the hero with the animal. The terms of the relationship between the epic and tragic texts are not explicit, but this association implies either a generic comparison or a derivation of the latter from the former.

The scholion disapproves the representation of the camouflage because the crawling on all fours turns out not to be credible - absolutely or in the literary fiction, or perhaps as regards in particular the stage performance. If the ancient commentator actually considers the Iliad to be here the model of the Rhesus, then he criticises the poet for artificially elaborating a detail of the epic description which Homer exploited in a different and, implicitly, appropriate manner: this deviation would thus be conceived as the consequence of an over-interpretation of the Iliadic passage, whose reception is also contested as defective from a literary point of view.

extant poetic source of this version. It is uncertain whether Dolon acted out the movements while describing his disguise and walking; two surviving cases of dramatic entry on all fours are the terrified Pythia at Aesch. Eum. 34-38 and the blinded Polymestor at Eur. Hec. 1056-1059: with the latter the Rhesus shows verbal echos. See Bond 1996: 259-260; Fries 2014: 191-197, 200, 213.

On this scholion see Merro 2008: 175.

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Cf. Arist. Poet. 1460a 11-18: the marvellous, which causes pleasure, should be portrayed in tragedy, but epic affords greater scope for the inexpllicable, that is the chief element in what is marvellous, because we do not actually see the persons of the story. Beyond a certain point the marvellous becomes incredible and, therefore, loses its effect; in particular the inexpllicable risks being ridiculous in drama.
The Children of Hecuba

In *Il.* 24 Priam reaches Achilles’ tent to ransom the corpse of Hector. He addresses a plea based on the association between himself and Peleus, two old fathers without the protection of any son. The comparison, however, does not produce an equation, but shows that Priam is more unfortunate: he has lost all his sons during the war and is now forced to beg the enemy who killed the best defender of Ilium; on the contrary, Peleus still rejoices knowing that his only heir is still alive, and hopes for his return. The king explains that of his fifty children nineteen were born from a single womb, *i.e.* Hecuba, and the rest from other women in the house.

*Il.* 24, 493-497 West

αὐτάρ ἐγὼ πανάκτωμος, ἐπεὶ τέκον υἱός ἀρίστους
Τροίη ἐν εὐφείᾳ, τὸν δ’ οὐ τινὰ φημι λέξεισθαι.
πεντηκοντά τε οὖν ἔκαθεν, ὁτ’ ἠλθὸν υἱῶς Ἀχαίων
ἐννεακοίδεκα μένοι μὲν ιὴς ἕκ νηδόας ἔκαθεν,
τοὺς δ’ ἄλλους μοι ἐτκτον ἕνι μεγάρισι γυνάκες.

In *Il.* 6, 243-250 Homer states that inside the Trojan palace there were fifty nuptial chambers of the sons of the king and, on the opposite side in a courtyard on the upper floor, twelve of his daughters. A total of twenty-two children of Priam are mentioned within the poem: five are born from Hecuba, two from Laothoe and one from Kastianeira, while the mother of the others remains unknown. The number and identity of the children of Priam and their mothers were variable in antiquity, which therefore became a matter of debate: *e.g.* Apollodorus (3, 12, 5) reported fifty children, and according to his catalogue Hecuba gave birth to fourteen, of whom ten sons and four daughters; Simonides (559 Campbell = 272 Poltera = 559 *PMG*) and Theocritus (15, 139) attributed specifically to the queen twenty children. The number fifty recurs in both Euripides’ *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*: in the first tragedy Priam is indicated as the father of the children, in the second Hecuba, while mourning the imminent sacrifice of Polyxena and her own fate, laments the loss in a way that makes her appear to be mother of them all, *i.e.*, not specifying whether Priam fathered children with other women.

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28Besides Hector and Paris, the other sons of Hecuba are Antiphos (*Il.* 11, 101-104), Deiphobos (*Il.* 22, 233-234), and Polites (*Il.* 13, 533-534). The sons of Laothoe are Lukaon and Poludoros (*Il.* 21, 84-96); the son of Kastianeira is Gorguthion (*Il.* 8, 302-305); cf. Richardson 1993: 325-326.
29On the number of Priam’s children in ancient sources see Fowler 2013: 527-528.
Since this affirmation creates a supposed divergence from Homer, a scholion resorts to different solutions to solve the problem. 

Sch. Eur. Hec. 421 Schwartz\(^3^2\)

She says this to increase the suffering: for she gave birth to nineteen children only. Homer: “nineteen were born to me from the self-same womb”. Or because she includes the illegitimate ones due to her disposition towards her husband \(^3^3\). The trope is called syllepsis: she did not beget them, but Priam from other women.

The scholion considers the Homeric version as the correct one. In the first section it reports, via a phraseology which assumes the point of view of the heroine, that Hecuba says to have fifty children to increase the suffering: the ancient commentator acknowledges the novelty introduced by Euripides but, instead of expressing a negative assessment, illustrates it as a strategy to enhance the emotional impact of the scene; this device is perceived as a careful and conscious artistic operation, which therefore deserves to be investigated\(^3^4\). According to the explanation, Euripides represents Hecuba as claiming to have a greater number of children in the dramaturgical fiction: hence, the deviation from the model is only apparent, because it is the consequence of an artificial statement of a character on the stage; this seems to exclude that in the perspective of the ancient exegete the dramatist intended to take an objective position on the number of Hecuba’s children. This scenario depicts a relationship between Homer and Euripides where the mythological alteration aims to a specific poetic effect. In the second section, the interpretamentum alternatively sug-

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\(^{33}\) The opposite of deliberate deviation is invention without reason or improvisation: cf. Sch. Eur. Hec. 3: (...) πολλάκις δὲ ὁ Εὐριπίδης αὐτοσχεδίαζε ἐν ταῖς γενεαλογίαις, ὡς καὶ ἑαυτὸ ἐνίοτε ἐναντία λέγει. Extemporaneous creation is perceived as an extreme and unsuccessful form of alteration of the standard narrative: from a literary point of view, it implies lack of reason, neglect in composition, in manipulation and in exposition of the material, hence risk of incoherence.
gests that the queen includes among her children those born from other women. Finally, it refers to the syllepsis, a rhetorical figure whereby an expression/predicate semantically belonging to one subject is attributed to two or more: here Hecuba would equate herself with her husband in respect to the number of the children he overall generated; this number would thus appear exaggerated, but not invented. It should be taken into account that Euripides makes Hecuba express herself with the majestis plural ἡμεῖς; the ancient critic might have thought that it was indeed a plural, and for this reason talked about the syllepsis; Polyxena’s reference to her father at the end of the preceding verse might have favoured this interpretation. Whereas the solution appealing to the amplification of the suffering concerns the emotional effect, the explanation by means of the syllepsis pertains to the rhetorical mechanism through which such an amplification takes place.

The scholia to II. 24 relative to Priam’s plea bring out concepts of literary criticism worthy of comparison. Sch. ex. II. 24, 490 observes that the contrast between the condition of Priam and the one of Peleus increases the pity, because, while the first lost fifty sons, the second has only one but still alive. Similarly to the tragic scholion, an association is established between the detail of the deceased sons and the poetic capacity to produce a more intense feeling on the part of or towards the person who suffered the loss: this effect is achieved in the Hecuba by the exceptionality of the number in absolute terms, and in the Iliad by both this feature and the contrast that it produces between the circumstances of the characters.

Sch. ex. II. 24, 490 Erbse σέθεν ζώοντος: ἱψήσος τὸν ἐλεον, εἶπε ὡς μὲν τὸν ἑνα ἕχει, ὡ δὲ τῶν πεντήκοντα ἁφῆρηται. b(BCE) T
[While he hears of] you as yet alive: he (sc. the poet) increased the piety: if at least the one (i.e. Peleus) has one (sc. son), the other (i.e. Priam), on the contrary, has been deprived of fifty.

Sch. ex. II. 24, 496b points out that it is credible that a woman gives birth to nineteen children, whereas it would not be credible if she had fifty, as Baclesides’ Theanus. Homer’s clarification on the number of Hecuba’s children is thus conceived as a realistic feature of the description, because it could be plausible also outside the literary fiction.

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36 The scholia to the Iliad recognise πιθανότης as an aspect of Homer’s style in general, which is especially shown in the way the poet gives realistic and circumstantial details of places or characters; see Richardson 1980: 278; cf. Nünlist 2015: 735-736 s.v. Mimésis, 741 s.v. Persuasiveness (pithanotēs), 747-748 s.v. Realism, Lifelike.
The ability to generate emotions is a topic in ancient reflections on literature. The scholia to Homer and Euripides appeal to different notions in relation to the variety of context and content of the passages analysed. In the Iliad, the number of children is a substantial component of Priam’s plea: the antithesis between his unfortunate condition and the one of Peleus is perceived as a strategy to enhance the pity. Ancient scholars often praised Homer’s capacity to portray intense emotions, inducing affection and sympathy towards the character, and to create vivid and powerful scenes: the link between him and tragedy is particularly evident when feelings characteristic of this genre are evoked, according to Aristotle’s definition of tragedy as a work which produces, through pity and fear, the catharsis of this kind of sufferings. In the Hecuba, the information on the number of children gains relevance in relation to the misfortune of the queen: the deviation from the model is conceived as a means of increasing her suffering, which has an impact on the dramatic moment; πάθος is one of the distinctive qualities of tragedy and the ability to arouse it was often highlighted by ancient critics. The recognition of this literary purpose may conceal an appreciation of the artistic device on the part of

38 The ode narrates the embassy of Menelaus and Odysseus to Troy to demand a diplomatic return of Helen and her possessions. In the chronology of the myth this episode belonged to the events of the Cypria (Arg. Bernabé = Davies, p. 32 = Arg. West); it was known to the poet of the Iliad (3, 203-224; 11, 138-142). Theanus, priestess of Athena and wife of Antenor, is mentioned at the beginning of the text, which is unfortunately mutilated by some verses: here it should have referred to the fifty sons of the woman. Dithyrambic chorus consisted of fifty singers, and it is possible that the children of Antenor and Theanus formed the chorus here; if this were the case, this fact would explain their number; cf. Maehler 2004: 157 ff.

39 Richardson 1980: 274-275; cf. 270-271. The scholia to the Iliad make numerous and varied references to the tragic genre while analysing the Homeric poem: on this exegetical approach see Pagani 2018.

40 Garzía 1989: 3-4 and Grisolia 1992: 55-56 comment on a selection of tragic scholia dealing with πάθος; for a collection of scholia on πάθος in tragedy see Trendelenburg 1867: 123-128. The noun πάθος means first ‘that which happens (to a person or thing)’, then an unpleasant experience, viewed either subjectively as an emotion or objectively as a misfortune. Arist. Poet. 1452b 9-13 defines it as one of the three elements of a tragic plot: δόο μὲν οὖν τοῦ μόθου μέρη ταῦτ᾽ εστὶ πεπράσσετα καὶ ἀναγνώρισες, τρίτον δὲ πάθος, τούτον δὲ πεπράσσετα μὲν καὶ ἀναγνώρισες εἰρήται, πάθος δὲ ἐστὶ πράξεις φθαρτή ἢ ὀδυνηρά, οὖν οὐ τε ἐν τῷ φανερῷ θανάτω καὶ αἱ περιοδινίαι καὶ τρόσεις καὶ ὁσα τοιάτα.
the ancient commentator, who does actually not find any risk of poetic failure or improbability in the use of a high number.

Conclusion

Ancient scholars adopted different critical approaches to elucidate Euripides’ mythological innovations and variations with respect to Homer. Sch. Eur. Hec. 1279 depicts Euripides as a reader of Homer: the dramatist regards the ep- tic text as a model and aims to emulate it, but fails to understand its wording correctly and reproduces it uncritically. The ancient commentator de facto equates the tragedian with a sort of exegete, and ascribes to him a lack of under- standing of which his own text is the result and testimony: Euripides’ work is thus conceived as the locus of an explicit literary exegesis, where the devia- tion from the model is the consequence of an erroneous interpretation. The other examples bring out concepts of literary criticism and use them as criteria for evaluating the texts: mythological innovations cause poetic effects which make the literary product bad or good. Sch. Eur. Hec. 241 and Sch. [Eur.] Rh. 210 criticise the dramatist for creating something not credible: the notion of veri- militude applies in the first case to a request of internal consistency in the behaviour of a character, who is supposed to be represented according to defined features; it corresponds in the second case to a demand for plausibility in the movements and gestures of a character, whose description is expected to be convincing, that is, avoiding any excess of the inexplicable or the marvellous. Sch. [Eur.] Rh. 210 might imply that the literary failure also results from the misinterpretation or over-elaboration of a Homeric detail: this calls for reflec- tion on the fact that the two interpretative methodologies under investigation were not necessarily opposing but potentially coexisting, and their boundaries should not be regarded as always distinct but blurred. Sch. Eur. Hec. 421 rec- ognises the novelty introduced by Euripides as a strategy to enhance the suffer- ing of a character and the emotional impact of the scene; it also offers a possi- ble explanation of the rhetorical mechanism used to achieve this effect. The ancient exegete is interested in the dramatic art of the author: he perceives the

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43 The tendency to equate the commented author with an exegete seems to openly occur when the scholia describe the reception of an earlier work by later authors with verbs like ἀκούοι or ἐκδέχομαι, which refer to the activities of textual criticism and interpretation of the ancient scholars; this meaning on occasion applies also to ἀναγγέλονται, which otherwise refers to the generic act of reading. This phenomenon is clearly attested in the relationship between Homer and Hesiod: see Gennari Santori 2018; Schironi 2018: 695-703; Vergados 2020: 289-316; e.g. Sch. Ariston. II. 2, 527-531: τινὸς τῶν νεωτέρων (cf. Hes. fr. 235, 1) ἀνέγγισαν (with scholarly meaning); Sch. Ariston. II. 12, 22α: ἀνέγγιο τὸ Ησίοδος (without scholarly meaning); Sch. Ariston. II. 14, 119α: καὶ ὁ Ἡσίοδος (fr. 228 M.-W.) δὲ ὁ σύνος ἀκήκοντες, Sch. Hrd. II. 16, 548α: καὶ Ἡσίοδος (Sc. 7) οὗτος ἐξειδέδηκατο. In accordance with this perspective, ancient scholars sometimes explained a lesson of supposed Homeric derivation or imitation by arguing that the commented author came across a certain lesson of the epic text: this author would have had at his disposal a copy of the poems transmitting the variant he adopted or held as a reference: e.g. Sch. Hrd. Od. 4, 1 j (see Rengakos 1993: 29); Sch. Pind. O. 7, 42b (see Phillips 2016: 183-185).
innovation as a deliberate and meditated operation and, therefore, possibly praises it. The adjective ἀπίθανος, the adverb εἰκότως, and the noun πάθος, here associated with the concept of the αὐξητικῶς, are recurring terms in ancient literary criticism. In particular, the urge to search for credibility and verisimilitude as essential components to the creation of the poetic work finally reflects an Aristotelian conception of literature, finding correspondence in the categories enucleated by the philosopher within his Poetics.\(^\text{44}\)

References


\(^{44}\)The central role played by Peripatetic inspirations and methods in the birth and development of Hellenistic philology is now a well recognised feature, see e.g. Montana 2017 and 2020: 148-154, with bibliography and critical discussion of the topic. It is worth remembering that the very idea of a contiguity between Homer and the dramatic genres reached a detailed and systematic elaboration, and a concrete application in terms of analysis and research, with Aristotle. On the one hand, according to the philosopher epic and tragedy shared the same forms, as well as most of their constituent elements (Poet. 1459b 7-12), and Homer was the first to indicate the structures of both tragedy (Iliad and Odyssey) and comedy (Margites) (Poet. 1448b 34 - 1449a 2); on the other hand, the practice of comparing epic and tragedy underpins the Poetics itself, whose closure is dedicated precisely to a comparison between these two genres, to the advantage of the latter (Poet. 1461b 26 - 1462b 15); cf. Pagani 2018: 67-69.


