

Arist. *Poet.* 1461b1–3: a broad hint at Zoilus?*

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In *Poetics* 25 (1461b1–3), Aristotle mentions critics who tend to misunderstand the text or read it inaccurately and thus criticise not the actual work, but rather their ideas on it. Some of the extant fragments of Zoilus (4th c. BC), the best-known and the most notorious critic of all the Aristotle's contemporaries, imply that his critique was sometimes based on misreading and misinterpreting of the text so he could be one of those whom Aristotle meant. This article deals with three fragments attributed to Zoilus (two of them are found in the Scholia to the *Iliad*, the third one is quoted in Ps. Longinus' *De Sublimitate*), each containing criticism towards certain passages in Homer's poems. On closer examination it turns out that all the inconsistencies Zoilus postulated can be explained, should we read the text more carefully. Hence Zoilus dealt not with what is written but rather with what seemed to him to be convenient for his criticism.

Keywords: Aristotle, *Poetics*, literary criticism, rhetoric, Zoilus of Amphipolis.

Discussing critics and criticism in chapter 25 of the *Poetics*¹ Aristotle demands, 1461b1–3:²

κατὰ τὴν καταντικρὴ ἢ ὡς Γλαύκων λέγει, ὅτι ἔνιοι ἀλόγως προϋπολαμβάνουσι τι καὶ αὐτοὶ καταψηφισάμενοι συλλογίζονται, καὶ ὡς εἰρηκότος ὃ τι δοκεῖ ἐπιτιμῶσιν, ἂν ὑπεναντίον ἢ τῆ αὐτῶν οἴησει.

ὅτι rec : τι vel τί Ξ ἔνιοι codex (?) Victorii (Ar) : ἔνια Ξ τι B : om. Π εἰρηκότος B : -ες Π

“[An interpreter should act in the way] opposite to those described by Glaucon, who says that certain [critics] presume some illogicality of their own beforehand and go on to infer censoriously as if what seemed to them had actually been said, should it only contradict their own notion.”

An example of such reckless censure is provided further (1461b4–8),³ still without any particular reference. Alfred Gudeman hints at the possibility to refer this criticism

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¹ It is generally believed that this chapter contains excerpts from Aristotle's *Απορήματα Όμηρικά*, see e. g. Bywater 1907, 323; Rostagni 1945, 134; Lucas 1968, 232.

² The text quoted is Kassel 1965. The passage is included among the fragments of Glaucon of Teos by Pozdnev 2017, 20.

³ The critics erroneously suppose that Icarus was a Spartan and Telemachus should have met him there. But his name was, in fact, Icadus and he was from Kephallenia. The example must be taken from

to “obstretractores Homeri” like Zoilus of Amphipolis.⁴ Ingram Bywater mentions Zoilus as the most recognised critic of that time.⁵ I will try to prove that judging by the extant fragments, Zoilus’ criticism sometimes was indeed based on misunderstanding and misinterpretation, whether intended or not, of Homer’s text, so he probably was one of those whom Aristotle had in mind.⁶

Although Zoilus’ name is proverbial for punitive criticism, the extant testimonies reveal almost nothing certain about his life and personality.⁷ He worked in ca. mid-4th c. BC., practiced rhetoric and wrote on grammar, history and Homer’s poetry (Suda s. v. Ζωίλος);⁸ among his pupils was Anaximenes of Lampsakos (*ibid.* s. v. Ἀναξιμένης). The most important of his works, Κατὰ τῆς Ὀμήρου ποιήσεως or Καθ’ Ὀμήρου,⁹ consisted of nine books: conceivably, this is the main source of the extant fragments. Zoilus’ fragments, preserved mostly in the homeric scholia, were first edited in the FGH;¹⁰ this collection was then revised and extended by Ulrich Friedländer,¹¹ after whom and FGrHist¹² these texts are cited below.

The fragments demonstrate a variety of grounds for censure¹³ suggesting that Zoilus’ attacks on Homer formed no part of interpretative commentary or aesthetic treatise but rather a kind of rhetorical exercise, a criticism for criticism’s sake. The intention to criticize instead of making an attempt to understand and explain is exemplified by Zoilus’ critical remark, cited in Schol. ad *Il.* 23, 100–101. The soul of Patroclus leaves at the same moment when Achilles tries to embrace his friend:

ψυχὴ δὲ κατὰ χθονὸς ἦῤτε καπνός
ᾤχετο τετριγυῖα: ταφῶν δ’ ἀνόρουσεν Ἀχιλλεύς.

“The soul like smoke went beneath the ground with a shrill cry: Achilles in astonishment sprang up.”

Glaucón’s treatise (οἶονταί γάρ). Lucas (1968, 247) thinks that it does not correspond well with what is said before, but see Pozdnev 2017, 22.

⁴ Gudeman 1934, 439.

⁵ Bywater 1909, 323; cf. Lucas 1968, 232. However, more up-to-date commentaries (Dupont-Roc/Lallo 1980; Guastini 2010) ignore him. A. Schmitt mentions his name with no reference to the above cited lines: Zoilus goes together with Hippias from Thasos, to whose solving of Homeric problems Aristotle refers in 1461a22 (Schmitt 2008, 716).

⁶ Sometimes scholars mention Zoilius when commenting on the *Poet.* 1461a10 and a14–15 where Aristotle discussed who are οὐρῆας in *Il.* 1, 50 and what means ζωρότερον in ζωρότερον δὲ κέραιε (*Il.* 9, 202); see Bywater 190, 334; Gudeman 1934, 429; Rostagni 1945, 161; Lucas 1968, 241. There are Zoilus’ remarks concerning these two passages of the *Iliad* (both seem to be widely discussed in antiquity): Friedl. 12 = FGrHist 71, 4 and Friedl. 6 = FGrHist 71, 5, but as interesting as they might be these examples of Zoilus’ criticism and methodology are out of scope of the current article.

⁷ For the current state of research see Gärtner 1978.

⁸ Suida s. v. Ζωίλος (= Friedl. fr. 19).

⁹ Gärtner 1978, 1540, 60–1541, 45.

¹⁰ Müller 1848, 85.

¹¹ Friedländer 1895. No new fragments have been added to his collection; later scholars just organized these fragments differently and commented on them.

¹² Jacoby 1986 (¹1926), 109–112.

¹³ In fact, all types of censure based on different grounds mentioned by Aristotle in ch. 25 of the *Poetics* might be found among Zoilus’ fragments. Moreover, at least two issues commented on by Zoilus are also discussed in the *Poetics* (see above, note 6), both could belong to the Homeric questions discussed by the early critics.

Ζωΐλος δέ φησιν ὅτι ‘ἄλλ’ ὁ καπνὸς ἄνω φέρεται.
(Friedl. 36 = FGrHist 71, 16)

“But Zoilus says that smoke rises up.”

Zoilus seems to find himself on the standpoint of hyperrealism,¹⁴ though he should have taken into account that smoke sometimes drifts low over the ground and thus the scene is not *that* fantastic. But even if the catachresis is there, ἡϋτε καπνός gives the idea of insubstantiality of the soul together with precipitancy and subtlety of its vanishing. This is supported by the words Achilles utters immediately after the soul of Patroclus has gone, 103–104:

ὦ πόποι ἦ ρά τις ἐστι καὶ εἰν Αἴδαο δόμοισι
ψυχὴ καὶ εἶδωλον, ἀτὰρ φρένες οὐκ ἐνὶ πάμπαν·

“Oh strange! there is some kind of soul and phantom even in the house of Hades, though the heart (mind?) is not therein.”

Φρένες hardly means reasonability (what Patroclus says is reasonable enough), but rather something that makes a living man differ from an insubstantial soul after death.¹⁵ Another parallel is *Od.* 11, 207–208. Odysseus tries to embrace the soul of his mother:

τρὶς δέ μοι ἐκ χειρῶν σκιῇ εἴκελον ἦ καὶ ὄνειρῳ
ἔπτατ’ ἐμοὶ δ’ ἄχος ὄξυ γενέσκετο κηρόθι μᾶλλον.¹⁶

“Three times she slipped away from my hands like a shadow or dream; and pain grew in my heart even sharper.”

These texts might reflect speculations about the soul and its physical state after death.¹⁷ Smoke naturally rises up, but more important for the poet is the fact that it may go *through* something. And though in this case Zoilus condemns something not made up by him, but really present in Homer, he obviously does not try to interpret the text.

Closer to what Aristotle means is the fragment quoted in Ps. Longin’s *De Subl.* 9, 14. To give just one example of many “fabulous and incredible things” found in the *Odyssey*, the author makes reference to men turned into swine:

τοὺς ἐν Κίρκης συοφορβουμένους, οὓς ὁ Ζωΐλος ἔφη χοιρίδια κλαίοντα¹⁸

ἐν Faber ἐκ P συοφορβουμένους MSS συομορφουμένους Valkenaer¹⁹

“Those who were at Circe’s kept as swine, Zoilus called them piglets in tears.”

¹⁴ Erbse 1977, 385.

¹⁵ The discussion on the meaning of φρένες is summarised by Richardson 1996, 177–178. The scholar is convinced that the subject was debated in Homer’s time. On ψυχὴ καὶ εἶδωλον, φρένες and the cited passage see also Nägelsbach 1861, 383–398 and 400–402; Rohde 1894, 42–43.

¹⁶ Here and onwards the text quoted is after von der Mühl 1967.

¹⁷ See above references to Rohde and to Richardson’s commentary. It seems to be some kind of a general opinion that Homer’s poetry reflects some insights inherent in his epoch.

¹⁸ Quoted after Russel 1964. See also FGrHist 71, 3 (= Friedl. 7).

¹⁹ Russel does not accept συομορφουμένους, though the passage is quoted with this emendation in FGrHist 71, 3.

This commentary is given with regard to *Od.* 10, 239–241:

οἱ δὲ σωῶν μὲν ἔχον κεφαλὰς φωνήν τε τρίχας τε
καὶ δέμας, αὐτὰρ νοῦς ἦν ἔμπεδος, ὡς τὸ πάρος περ.
ὡς οἱ μὲν κλαίοντες ἐέρχατο.

“And they had heads, voice, bristles and shape of a swine; but their minds were steadfast as before; so they were shut there weeping.”

Commenting on *De Sublimitate* Donald Russel asks, if κλαίοντες means weeping or squealing and if Zoilus was disappointed with “the vulgarity of the description or improbability of pigs shedding tears.”²⁰ It does not seem that Zoilus was interested in pure aesthetic items. His criticism is usually based on the lack of probability, inner logic or piety.²¹ Thus, Zoilus’ remark most probably concerns pigs crying (whether κλαίοντες means shedding tears, or weeping, or both). To be sure, κλαίω (“lament, weep, cry”) never refers to animals except for this passage.²² But even here, does it really refer to *animals*? Despite being turned into swine, Odysseus’ companions were still sane (νοῦς ἦν ἔμπεδος, ὡς τὸ πάρος περ). Κλαίοντες emphasizes it: they do not lose their mind and have natural *human* reactions, being aware of what is happening to them. Heubeck’s commentary²³ adds another detail: in *Od.* 10, 234–238 Circe’s drink makes them completely forget their motherland, but, unlike in Lotus-eaters episode, this amnesia does not mean losing νοῦς and forgetting themselves. Moreover, when they were turned back into people, they started crying again, this time out of joy (10, 398: πᾶσιν δ’ ἱμερόεις ὑπέδν γόος). This proves that in swine’s bodies they remained men and shed tears like men do. Zoilus’ remark thus turns out to be about Zoilus’ own impressions of the text.

Zoilus’ critical comment which is definitely based on substituting his own meanings for those of Homer is found in Schol. ad *Il.* 22, 210. Zeus weighs fates of Achilles and Hector to find out which hero is going to die: ἐν δ’ ἐτίθει δύο κῆρε (“and put there two fates of death”). On this Schol. T comments as follows:

γελᾷ δὲ τὸν μῦθον ὁ Ζωῖλος· ποδαπαὶ γὰρ αἱ Μοῖραι ἐν ταῖς πλάστιγξι, καθήμεναι ἢ ἐστηκυῖαι;
“Zoilus laughed at these words: what do Moirai look like in the scales of a balance, are they sitting or standing?”

If someone would like to answer Zoilus in Zoilus’ own manner, he would probably say that Zeus “put” them, so they should be lying. Yet, there is no need to do it, since the critic makes a mistake mixing up Moirai and Keres.²⁴ Moira is one of the most complicated notions in Homer’s poem.²⁵ What matters for this passage is that although sometimes (especially when it is not an appellative) Keres and Moirai may signify similar or even the

²⁰ Russel 1964, 98.

²¹ See Gärtner 1978; Spindler, 20–21; Blass 1874, 347–348; Apfel 1938, 250–251, etc.

²² According to *Lexicon Homericum* and *Lfgre*, see Ebeling 1987, 810–811; Beck 1982 and LSJ, s. v.

²³ Heubeck 2006, 56–57.

²⁴ One of the scholiasts also admitted that in this case Keres and Moirai represent the same notion. Some commentaries seem to agree with it (see Erbse 1977, 312), though the scholium may have been added when the difference had already become unnoticeable.

²⁵ There is a great amount of literature dedicated to this concept, starting from Nägelsbach 1861, 120–148. See Eitrem 1932, 2453–2459; Nilsson 1992, 361–368 with references.

same notions,²⁶ they are different creatures with different functions²⁷ and this distinction is very present in Homer's poetry.²⁸ While Moira is a more general idea of human fate (from the very beginning till the end), Keres may be referred only to death or the death lot.²⁹ Hesiod mentions Keres as children of Night along with Moirai (*Theog.* 211, 217). Ker has its iconography: it is a female wearing dark clothes tinted with blood (as described in the *Iliad* (18, 538). The motive of Kerostasia was adopted in tragedy and gradually changed to Psychostasia.³⁰ According to LIMC, the weighing is usually depicted as scales on which two little figures of heroes (or, rarely, two little winged figures) are set; Keres on scales should probably resemble those whose lots they signify.³¹ The Kerostasia of Achilles and Hector in *Il.* 22 has a parallel in *Il.* 8, 68–74: Zeus weights death lots of the Achaeans and the Trojans.³² Moirai are usually depicted with tools for spinning.³³ In the *Iliad* this image occurs twice: 20, 127 (Αἴσα spanned Achilles' fate) and 24, 209 (Hector's fate was spinned by Μοῖρα). In fact, it must be hard to weigh somebody's Moira: there are just three of them for all people, and a fate they spin for smb. is never personified. Intending to satirize Homer's idea of gods, Zoilus eventually replaced it with his own.

As said above, Zoilus was probably not interested in explaining the text. What he does is focusing on inappropriate details and trying to mock them. Still, sometimes the assumed inconsistency results from wrong presupposition. Zoilus referred the smoke-comparison in *Il.* 23, 100 to a wrong notion, ignored the sense which crying has in *Od.* 10, 241 and laughed at weighing Moirai, i.e. something he made up himself instead of what stands in *Il.* 22, 210. In doing this he did exactly what Aristotle describes in *Poetics* 25 when talking of those who criticise not Homer's text, but rather their own ideas of it.

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²⁶ Apart from Keren, Homer uses also μόρος and αἴσα and derivatives when speaking about death (see Eitrem 1932, 2457, 49–51); there is also an expression μοῖρα θανάτοιο (e. g. *Od.* XVII, 326 et al.) as well as κῆρ θανάτοιο (*Il.* 2, 302; *Od.* 11, 171 et al.), but in this case μοῖρα is unpersonified. *LfggrE* evens Keres and Moirai, when both mean unpersonified faith or death (see Vlachodimitris 1982, Sp. 1404, 32–33)

²⁷ On Keres specially see Malten 1924; Nilsson 1992, 222–225 with many references; a brief summary of recent works and analysis of iconography may also be found in LIMC (Vollkommer 1992, 14–23; for quite an extensive bibliography see p. 15–16).

²⁸ Keres are mentioned in both poems several times, see Vollkommer 1992, 14.

²⁹ When in *Od.* 11, 171 Odysseus asks his mother's soul which κῆρ θανάτοιο conquered her, he wants to know how she died (see Heubeck 2006, 87).

³⁰ Vollkommer (1992, 15) mentions a number of episodes of Kerostasia from epos and tragedy. The change from Kerostasia to Psychostasia (i.e. to weighing Psychai instead of Keres), happened in Aeschylus' tragedy, although the iconography remained the same.

³¹ See Vollkommer 1992, 19–20 with references to LIMC VI/2 (e. g. pictures on pp. 11–12. and a large amount of other examples).

³² Richardson 1996, 129–130. A detailed analysis is given in Kirk's commentary to the 8th book (Kirk 1995, 303–304).

³³ Numerous examples in LIMC VI/2 on pp. 375–379; commentary and descriptions are in LIMC VI/2 (see de Angeli, 1992, brief summary and bibliography on pp. 636–338).

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