

Solemnity, Banality and Sarcasm: Provenances of the *Figura Etymologica* in Homer
Todd C. Clary (Cornell University)

The most basic and redundant *figura etymologica* -- same-clause repetition of semantically equivalent noun and verb from the same root -- occurs roughly once every 100 lines in the *Iliad*, and once every 50 lines in the *Odyssey*. Examples include: ἰδρῶ ἰδρῶν ‘sweat sweat’, ῥόος ῥέει ‘the stream streams’, or θανάτῳ θνήσκειν ‘die (by) death’. Given the prevalence of these constructions in Homer, it ought to be surprising that they have never been the subject of systematic analysis until now. Despite, or perhaps because of its frequency recent studies of poetic etymologizing have offered only curt commentary on the *figura etymologica* en route to more recherché categories of wordplay (e.g. Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, 36), while earlier scholars were harshly critical, labeling both Homer and his audiences unsophisticated precisely because they revelled in the figures (e.g. Weiske, 26).

In fact, once some fundamental distinctions among these *figurae etymologicae* are coordinated with overall distributions in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Hesiodic corpus and *Homeric Hymns*, a very subtle and sophisticated principle of selection, based on an acute awareness of the constructions’ prolixity, emerges. The most rudimentary distinction must be made between embedded idioms and nonce coinages. Embedded idioms like δῶρον διδόναι ‘give a gift’ (*Il.* x17, *Od.* x21, *Hes.* x6, *h.Hom.* x5) have a more uniform distribution and are stylistically lower profile than nonce coinages, or hapax figures like τεῖχος τεχνίζειν ‘lit. wall up, or build a wall’ (*Il.* 7.449) or τρυπάνῳ τρυπάν ‘auger with an auger’ (*Od.* 9.384-5) which demand more vigorous adaptation to context, and therefore have a more specialized distribution than embedded idioms.

Next, this basic distinction needs to be integrated with the recognition that particularly solemn and somber sub-contexts in Greek Epic are completely devoid of both idioms and coinages. For instance, although *figurae etymologicae* abound in sacral formulas quite early in every other Indo-European language, and more pointedly in Greek sacral inscriptions of every period, they never occur in Homeric sacrifice scenes (cf. *Il.* 1.458-68 et al.). Another Epic sub-context that shows a marked paucity of such figures, and one that is more significant in terms of accounting for their overall distribution, is battle narrative. In sum, compositional blocks depicting sacrifice, and battle narrative en masse, show a studied avoidance of the figures, and, particularly in the case of sacrifice scenes, it is likely that the poet of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* eschewed existing formulas in the interests of attaining a sober and concise stylistic.

Homeric scenes that depict more mundane activities, on the other hand, like a blacksmith setting up shop (*Il.* 18.468-77), a carpenter plying his trade (*Od.* 23.195-8), a woman getting dressed (*Il.* 14.175-181), or a servant preparing a drink (*Il.* 11.628-41), elicit some of the most unusual nonce coinages, often in quick succession. Emotive contexts may also inspire bizarre figures as when Achilles mimics Hector’s immediately preceding supplication (λίσσομ’ ὑπὲρ ψυχῆς καὶ γούνων, *Il.* 22. 338) in sarcastic denial (μὴ με κύον γούνων γουνάξω, *Il.* 22.345).

In this paper I will set forth the methodologies essential to the stylistic analysis of the *figura etymologica*, and outline its overall distribution in Archaic Greek Epic in terms of solemn and prosaic sub-contexts and emotive overtones.

Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, E. 2007. *Ancient Poetic Etymology: The Pelopids*. Stuttgart.

Weiske, B. 1807. *Pleonasm Graeci*. Lipsiae.