

Beginning With *Ἀρχόμενος*:
The *Batrachomyomachia* Proem and Alexandrian Allusivity

It is only to be expected that a hexameter epic intended for reception as a parody or imitation of Homer's epics would at the very least begin in a Homeric manner. One anticipates that a work like the *Batrachomyomachia* (*BM*), which so clearly advertises its interaction with Homer throughout the poem, would commence with a word comparable to the *Iliad*'s μῆνιν or the *Odyssey*'s ἄνδρα. Given the thematic gravity of the opening words of Homer's epics, a poet producing a Homeric pastiche would, perhaps, think to mirror his model and signal his work's allusion to Homer with a word like δῆριν or λόγος, both of which prominently feature in initial line positions within the proem—anything to showcase the Homeric origins of the poem. This expectation only increases when one remembers that ancient readers such as Martial and Statius also claim to have considered the *BM* a lesser Homeric work (as, for instance, at Mart. 14.183).

In this paper, I closely examine the *BM*'s proem's focus on physical textuality and intertextual allusions to the *Argonautica*, the Homeric Hymns, the Sibylline Oracles, and other 'peri-Homeric' intertexts. I propose that this approach provides a deeper perspective on the ways in which the allusions and divergences from tradition of the *BM*'s proem signal its identity as a uniquely nuanced, scholarly, and Hellenistic poem, thereby shedding light on its specific form of critical interaction with Homer as a threefold mix of imitation, original criticism, and secondary commentary.

Building on the recent treatments of the *BM* by scholars like Adrian Kelly, who has argued that the *BM* poet "was aware of the 'serious' critical discourse about Homer's poetry" and that "by employing the strategy of the 'Homeric mistake', the *BM* advertises its literary affiliations, critical nature, and parodic purpose" (Kelly 2009, 46), as well as Matthew Hosty,

whose 2020 *BM* commentary also treats several of the *BM* intertexts I examine more thoroughly here, I argue that, far from being an evidently Homeric composition from the start, the *BM* in fact takes pains to underscore its non-Homeric elements through the proem. From the start, the *BM* poet subverts his poem's own claim to Homeric composition within its first eight lines by presenting the work as an heir, not only of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* but also—and perhaps more primarily—of the Homeric Hymns, Hesiod's *Theogony*, Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, and Callimachus' *Aetia*.

Works Cited

- Hosty, Matthew. *Batrachomyomachia (Battle of the Frogs and Mice); Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Oxford, U.K: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Kelly, Adrian. "Parodic Inconsistency: Some Problems in the 'Batrakhomyomakhia.'" *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 129 (2009): 45–51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20789890>