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# 'NONSENSE' IN COMIC SCHOLIA*

In 1968 E.K. Borthwick, with a brilliant conjecture, cleared up a passage from Aristophanes' *Peace* that had been considered 'nonsense' since antiquity. 'Bell goldfinch' (κώδων ἀκαλανθίς) the line seemed to be saying: a jumbled idea at best, gibberish at worst (1078).[1] The scholium reads ad loc.: ταῦτα δὲ πάντα ἐπίτηδες ἀδιανοήτως ἔφρασεν, 'all this is said as deliberate nonsense', and later scholars generally follow suit (W.W. Merry, for example, in his 1900 edition of *Peace* refers to the line as 'magnificent nonsense').[2] But Borthwick showed that this was not the case: 'even nonsense expressions in Aristophanes', he writes, 'are not haphazard collocations of incongruous words signifying nothing'.[3] What, then, to do with the ancient scholar (and those later ones) who failed to understand the passage, claiming it instead to be 'nonsense'?

In this article I will study this and other comic scholia which label passages from Aristophanes as 'nonsense', focussing especially on the term ἀδιανόητα[4] ('unintelligible', 'nonsensical') but also on less frequent expressions such as οὐδὲν λέγει and ἀνοηταίνει. I will begin by providing an overview of these scholia and the Aristophanic passages which inspire them, and then consider the history of the term ἀδιανόητα, asking how far back the scholarly habit of not interpreting (that is, suggesting that something is 'nonsense') might be drawn. This allows for comparison of the comic scholia to the scholia of other genres where the scholarly habit of claiming 'nonsense' or 'obscurity' is equally widespread. The conclusion that emerges from this comparison is that ancient scholarship on comedy is different from the scholarship on any other literary genre. In the study of other genres, ancient critics consider ἀδιανόητα or 'nonsense' to arise exclusively from the mistakes of other critics, and treat it as axiomatic that an author such as Homer could not possibly have 'nonsense' in his text. In comic scholarship, however, 'nonsense' is treated as its own, positive

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[1] I will quote and discuss this *Peace* passage more fully in the next section.

[2] W.W. Merry, *Aristophanes Peace* (Oxford, 1900), ad 1078: 'We must be careful not to spoil the magnificent nonsense of this oracle by importing too much common sense into it.' Cf. P. Mazon, *Aristophane La Paix* (Paris, 1904), ad loc.: 'il ne faut pas trop presser ce magnifique galimatias', quoted by J. van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Pax* (Leiden, 1906), ad loc. with hesitant agreement ('itaque assentiendum fortasse …'); B.B. Rogers, *The Peace of Aristophanes* (London, 1913), ad loc.: 'But the language is purposely obscure and enigmatic, something in the manner of Lycophron'; M. Platnauer, *Aristophanes Peace* (Oxford, 1964), ad loc.: 'it would certainly be unwise to extract much sense …'.

[3] E.K. Borthwick, 'Beetle, bell, goldfinch, and weasel in Aristophanes' *Peace*', *CR* 18 (1968), 134–9, at 134.

[4] Although ἀδιανόητ– appears with various adjectival and adverbial endings in the scholia, I will generally use the neuter plural form ἀδιανόητα for convenience.

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entity: ἀδιανόητα, it seems, are placed there by the author on purpose. If one considers, with Aristotle, that the laughable in comedy consists of a 'certain mistake' (ἁμάρτημά τι, *Poet.* 5, 1449a34–5), it is not difficult to see why ancient scholars may have treated such linguistic 'mistakes' differently.[5] 'Nonsense' for ancient comic scholarship was not something to be excised from the text, but saved and enjoyed, it seems, owing to the particular functions that were thought to be characteristic of comedy alone.

## *ADIANOĒTA* IN COMIC SCHOLIA

To begin with Borthwick's *Peace* passage: the comic hero Trygaeus has ascended to heaven on a dung-beetle and rescued the goddess Peace; now back on earth, he makes the necessary preparations for his wedding banquet. As usually happens at this point in Old Comedy, a series of so-called *alazones*[6] appear on stage, attempting either to spoil the imminent celebration, or to acquire, by hook or crook, a slice of the feast. One such party-crasher is a religious professional named Hierocles, who claims that it is not yet a propitious moment to make peace and instead that one should wait until the 'lion sings to the lamb' (1076). Hierocles continues with his oracle in this way (*Pax* 1077–9):

> ὡς ἡ σφονδύλη φεύγουσα πονηρότατον βδεῖ
> κώδίνων Ἀκαλανθὶς ἐπειγομένη τυφλὰ τίκτει,
> τουτάκις οὔπω χρὴν τὴν εἰρήνην πεποῆσθαι.
>
> Just as the stink-bug farts most wretchedly in its flight,
> and Acalanthis hastening her labours bears blind pups,
> so you should have not yet made peace.

This is the text as it now stands since Borthwick's 1968 conjecture, but before he discerned the mythological figure Acalanthis in Hierocles' words, the text was even more obscure. The second line read: χὴ κώδων ἀκαλανθὶς ἐπειγομένη τυφλὰ τίκτει, 'and the *bell goldfinch* in its haste bears blind pups'. There is, of course, no such ancient species of bird named the 'bell goldfinch', but it is rather an unusual, even absurd, collocation. As such, it posed a significant problem for ancient scholars.

Of the ten scholia vetera collected for this line in Holwerda's edition, two claim it to be 'nonsense' (ἀδιανόητ-, 1078a–b), two are devoted to the word κώδων (c–d) meaning 'bell', four are devoted to the word ἀκαλανθὶς meaning 'goldfinch' (e–h), and two respectively to the proverb about dogs bearing blind pups (i) and Hierocles' reason for rejecting peace (j). Of the two scholia reporting that the line is 'nonsense', the first, found in the Venetus Marcianus (V),[7] the Laurentianus (Γ)[8] and the Bodleian Holkhamensis (Lh) manuscripts,[9] simply reads: 'This also [is] nonsense'

[5] I will discuss this passage further in the 'Conclusions' section.

[6] A modern, not ancient, term for these characters who appear in the latter part of comedies to spoil the coming celebration (see F.M. Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy* [London, 1913], 132–53). For Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 2.7, 1108a19–26, 4.7, 1127a13–26; cf. *Tractatus Coislinianus*, ch. 12 with R. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy: Towards a Reconstruction of 'Poetics' II* [London, 2002 (1984)], 216–18) an *alazōn* is simply a 'boaster' and laughable for that reason.

[7] Venetus Marcianus 474, twelfth century.

[8] Laurentianus plut. 31.15, beginning of fourteenth century.

[9] Oxoniensis Bodleianus Holkhamensis 88, beginning of fifteenth century.

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(ἀδιανόητον καὶ τοῦτο). What specifically the 'also' refers to is likely the previous line, 1077, beginning at ὡς ἡ σφονδύλη …, which is marked as ἀδιανόητα in these manuscripts as well.[10] That scholium reads: σίλφη τίς ἐστιν ἡ σφονδύλη βδέλλῃ προσομοία, δυσώδης ὄντως (ΓLh). ἄρχεται δὲ ἀδιανόητα λέγειν τοὺς χρησμῳδοὺς μιμούμενος καὶ τὰ τῶν χρησμῶν λοξά (VΓLh), 'the σφονδύλη is a certain cockroach[11] resembling a leech, quite malodorous. He begins to speak unintelligible things, in the manner of the oracle-mongers and the ambiguous oracles.' λέγειν suggests Hierocles as the agent here and the idea is simple enough: Hierocles is speaking unintelligible words because he is an oracle-monger and this is what oracles are supposed to sound like. The text, the scholiast claims, is supposed to be nonsensical. The second scholium (b) makes a similar claim for line 1078: ταῦτα πάντα ἐπίτηδες ἀδιανοήτως ἔφρασεν τὸ ἀσαφὲς τῶν χρησμῶν μιμούμενος. ἐπεὶ καὶ παρ᾽ ἱστορίαν λελέχθαι· οὐδὲν γὰρ τῶν ζῴων ὅτι μὴ κύων[12] σπεύδουσα τὰς ὠδῖνας τοὺς κύνας τίκτει τυφλούς (VΓLh), 'he said all these things as deliberate nonsense, mimicking the obscurity of the oracles. Since in fact it seems to have been spoken contrary to enquiry (παρ᾽ ἱστορίαν): for [it is said] in regard to no animal that a bitch bears blind pups if she hastens her labours.' Although the second line is a bit compressed,[13] the first line is reasonably clear. The nonsense is 'deliberate' (ἐπίτηδες) and the unintelligible words are intended to be there. The reason the ancient scholar can defend this, it seems, is due to the fact that the line is a mimesis (μιμέομαι) of the way in which oracle-mongers usually speak.

There are some dozen entries like these in comic scholia,[14] most of which push further than μιμέομαι for the function of such 'nonsense', and use stronger words such as διαβάλλω, fixing the source of the unintelligible speech more squarely on the shoulders of Aristophanes. Consider the following passage from Aristophanes' *Birds*. Like Trygaeus in *Peace*, Peisetaerus here in *Birds* has already built his dream-city in the sky, and now one of these so-called *alazones* is attempting to take a slice of Peisetaerus' hard-earned success. Instead of the oracle-monger Hierocles, in this passage arrives a well-known dithyrambic poet by the name of Cinesias. Although the professions of poet and religious quack are different, the effect of the two scenes, as the scholiasts testify, is rather similar. Here is the passage from *Birds* (*Av.* 1372–8):

> Κι. ἀναπέτομαι δὴ πρὸς Ὄλυμπον πτερύγεσσι κούφαις·
> πέτομαι δ᾽ ὁδὸν ἄλλοτ᾽ ἐπ᾽ ἄλλαν μελέων.
> Πε. τουτὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα φορτίου δεῖται πτερῶν.
> Κι. ἀφόβῳ φρενὶ σώματί τε νέαν ἐφέπων …

[10] Less likely is the 'lions singing to lambs' of 1076, which receives the comment τὸ ἀδύνατον εἶπεν in the same manuscripts.

[11] S.D. Olson, *Aristophanes* Peace (Oxford, 1998), ad 1077–9 reports K.J. Dover's suggestion that the σφονδύλη 'may be *Ocypus olens*, which produces a terrible smell when handled and resembles a chain of vertebrae, precisely as the name suggests'.

[12] V reads κύων μόνον σπεύδουσα.

[13] The sense of the παρ᾽ ἱστορίαν line is: despite the fact that enquiries have shown that a rushed labour does not result in blind pups, Hierocles' oracle claims otherwise. For the 'redundant or sympathetic negative' of ὅτι μὴ κύων, see H.W. Smyth, *A Greek Grammar for Colleges* (New York, 1920), 622–3. For the proverb, cf. Archil. fr. 196a 39–41 and Aesop, *Fab.* 223, with Olson (n. 11), ad loc.

[14] For ἀδιανόητ–, see Σ ad *Vesp.* 1309, *Pax* 1077, 1078, *Av.* 66, 952, 1001, 1375, 1377, 1395 (cf. schol. rec. ad *Nub.* 236; the different *Plut.* 806 will be dealt with below); for ἀνοηταίνει, see Σ ad *Av.* 1004; for μηδὲν λέγει, see Σ ad *Av.* 950b; for ληρ-, see Σ ad *Eq.* 950b; for φλυαρ–, see Σ ad *Eq.* 1001b (cf. schol. rec. ad *Nub.* 392 ff., Tzetzes ad *Ran.* 226a, 358a and *passim*).

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Πε. ἀσπαζόμεσθα φιλύρινον Κινησίαν.
τί δεῦρο πόδα σὺ κυλλὸν ἀνὰ κύκλον κυκλεῖς;

C. I fly up to Olympus on light wings:
I fly sometimes on the route of one song, at other times on another.
P. This major transport needs wings.
C. With fearless mind and body, embarking a new …
P. Greetings, limewood Cinesias.
Why do you circle your sickly foot here in a circle?

At this point various scholia identify sentences from this exchange as 'unintelligible'. At line 1376a (ἀφόβῳ φρενὶ …) five manuscripts report εἰς τὸ ἀνόητον, which Dübner (= *TLG*) had earlier read as εἰς τὸ ἀδιανόητον.[15] On the following line (1377a) there is ἐπίτηδες δὲ ὡς ἀσαφῆ αὐτὸν διασύρει, 'he lambasts him deliberately as obscure',[16] as well as a line occurring in the Ravenna and in four other manuscripts[17] that deserves consideration for expansion of the thought (1377b: to the lemma σώματί τε νέαν ἐφέπων): ἐπίτηδες ἀδιανοητεύεται θέλων διαβαλεῖν τὰ Κινησίου ποιήματα ὡς ἀδιανόητα, 'he deliberately writes unintelligibly wishing to lambast the poems of Cinesias as unintelligible'. Here the verbs ἀδιανοητεύεται θέλων διαβαλεῖν clearly has Aristophanes as the agent: it is Aristophanes who depicts Cinesias' poetry as unintelligible by writing unintelligibly himself. The key adverb which again reveals the scholar's task here is ἐπίτηδες: it is not enough simply to realize that a line is unintelligible, rather a scholar must see that it is intentionally unintelligible. Thus the scholar discovers and articulates the author's motivation for deliberately writing ἀδιανόητα: in this case, Aristophanes is revealed to do so for the sake of slandering and lambasting the target of his mockery, namely Cinesias.

## HOMERIC SCHOLIA FOR COMPARISON

There are a number of such comic scholia, but before considering more 'nonsense' examples from them it is necessary to underscore how exceptional these comic scholia are when compared to the scholia of other literary traditions, such as epic. Consider, for example, the following passage from *Iliad* Book 7, where Nestor recounts his ancient battle with the fearsome Ereuthalion. The transmitted scholium, since it deals with critical signs, is attributed to the first-century B.C.E. grammarian Aristonicus of Alexandria and his book *On the Signs of the Iliad* (Περὶ Σημείων Ἰλιάδος).[18]

[15] V = Venetus Marcianus 474, twelfth century; E = Estensis α.U.5.10, fourteenth century; G = Venetus Marcianus 475, fifteenth century; M = Ambrosianus L39 sup., fourteenth century; Lh = Oxoniensis Bodleianus Holkhamensis 88, fifteenth century. Cf. N. Dunbar, *Aristophanes* Birds (Oxford, 1995), ad 1376–7: the phrase 'probably imitates the pleonasm typical of dithyramb …, for "fearless mind and body" is hardly a meaningful distinction'.

[16] ΕΓ$^{3}$. For a study of 'obscurity' in ancient scholarship, see A.-M. Kanthak, 'Obscuritas—eine Strategie griechischer Wissenschaftsliteratur?', in U. Schmitzer (ed.), *Enzyklopädie der Philologie: Themen und Methoden der klassischen Philologie heute* (*Vertumnus* Bd. 11) (Göttingen, 2012), 157–85.

[17] VΕΓΜ.

[18] For Aristonicus, see H. Erbse, *Beiträge zur Überlieferung der Iliasscholien* (Munich, 1960), 174–83; M. van der Valk, *Researches on the Text and Scholia of the Iliad* (Leiden, 1963–1964), 1.553–92; F. Montanari, 'L'erudizione, la filologia, la grammatica', in *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica*, 1.2 (Rome, 1993), 279; F. Razzetti, 'Aristonico fra Aristarco e Didimo: alcune

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Aristonicus is one of the four scholars found in the Venetus A subscriptions, joining the ranks of Didymus and his book 'On Aristarchean Editing' (Περὶ τῆς Ἀρισταρχείου Διορθώσεως), Herodian and his book *On Iliadic Prosody* (Περὶ Ἰλιακῆς Προσῳδίας), and Nicanor and his book *On Punctuation* (Περὶ Στιγμῆς).[19] Here is the passage from Nestor's speech in Book 7 that Aristonicus comments on (7.153, scholium a1). Nestor says that, although everyone else fled the terrifying Ereuthalion,

> ἀλλ' ἐμὲ θυμὸς ἀνῆκε πολυτλήμων πολεμίζειν
> ⁜ θάρσεϊ ᾧ· γενεῇ δὲ νεώτατος ἔσκον ἁπάντων·
> καὶ μαχόμην οἱ ἐγώ, δῶκεν δέ μοι εὖχος Ἀθήνη.
>
> my enduring heart sent me to battle with him in its courage,
> though in years I was youngest of all. So I fought with him,
> and Athena gave me glory.

On the lemma θάρσεϊ ᾧ, Aristonicus writes: ὅτι Ζηνόδοτος 'θάρσει ἐμῷ'. ἀδιανόητον δὲ γίνεται, ἡ ψυχή με ἀνέπεισε τῷ θάρσει τῷ ἐμῷ,[20] '[the *diplē*] because Zenodotus [emended to] "my courage". But it becomes nonsense: the soul persuaded me with my courage.' Aristonicus is explaining here why Aristarchus placed a διπλῆ (>)[21] or, more likely, a διπλῆ περιεστιγμένη (⁜)[22] next to this line. The reason for Aristarchus' διπλῆ, he explains, is that Aristarchus' predecessor Zenodotus had emended the line from 'the soul sent me with its courage (θάρσεϊ ᾧ)' to 'the soul sent me with my courage (θάρσει ἐμῷ)',[23] an emendation which he considers 'nonsense' (ἀδιανόητον) owing, perhaps, to the jumbled psychological agency: how can one's soul, after all, move the soul's possessor by means of the possessor's courage?

Whatever the answer to this puzzle, it is important to notice the substantial difference in ἀδιανόητον's usage here from the earlier comic scholia. The comic scholars were perfectly comfortable arguing that Aristophanes was deliberately writing 'nonsense' for one reason or another; in Homeric scholarship, however, it is treated as axiomatic that Homer could

questioni di filologia omerica antica', in F. Montana (ed.), *Aner polytropos. Richerche di filologia greca antica per F. Montanari* (Rome, 2010), 41–61.

[19] For the 'four-man commentary' or *Viermännerkommentar* (VMK), see van der Valk (n. 18), 1.107–32, 1.536–602; H. Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem: Scholia Vetera*, 7 vols. (Berlin, 1969–1988), 1.xi–xii, 1.xlvii; E. Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship* (Oxford, 2007), 18–23; G. Nagy, *Homer's Text and Language* (Champaign, IL, 2004), 6–8.

[20] The text is from Erbse (n. 19). L. Friedländer, *Aristonici Alexandrini* Περὶ Σημείων Ἰλιάδος *reliquiae emendatiores* (Amsterdam, 1853) [= *TLG*] prints ἡ διπλῆ, ὅτι, but he is following not manuscripts (as he himself says at vi) but previous editions: for example, J.B.G. d' Villoison, *Homeri Ilias ad veteris codicis Veneti fidem recensita* (Venice, 1788) prints ἡ διπλῆ, ὅτι (reported by Erbse, ad loc.). The ἡ διπλῆ περιεστιγμένη explains well what the ὅτι refers to in a text about signs.

[21] A wide-ranging critical sign 'equivalent to a "N(ota) B(ene)" for us' suggests F. Schironi, 'The ambiguity of signs: critical *semeia* from Zenodotus to Origen', in M. Niehof (ed.), *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters* (Leiden, 2012), 87–112, at 89–90.

[22] Schironi (n. 21), 90: 'the so-called *diple periestigmene* ... to mark those passages where [Aristarchus] argued against his predecessor Zenodotus and against his Pergamene contemporary Crates of Mallos', quoting from the list of signs in the *Anecdotum Romanum* (54.11–15): ἡ δὲ περιεστιγμένη διπλῆ πρὸς τὰς γραφὰς τὰς Ζηνοδοτείους καὶ Κράτητος καὶ αὐτοῦ Ἀριστάρχου καὶ τὰς διορθώσεις αὐτοῦ.

[23] Cf. the suggestion of K.B. Brugman, *Ein Problem der homerischen Textkritik* (Leipzig, 1876), 110, reported by Erbse (n. 19), that the words θάρσει ἐμῷ are an interpretation, not a variant reading of Zenodotus.

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not be responsible for anything unintelligible in his text.[24] That is, the only reason nonsense appears to be present in Homer is due to the mistaken conjectures of previous scholars. Scholars like Zenodotus are the ones who create the ἀδιανόητα, not Homer.

Five such scholia are attributed to Aristonicus, two to Nicanor, one to Didymus and two identified as exegetical scholia in Erbse's edition.[25] All of Aristonicus' notes are the same, explaining Aristarchus' earlier διπλῆ by the ἀδιανόητα Zenodotus had still earlier introduced into Homer's text. In none of these notes is there any resemblance to the ἀδιανόητα of the comic scholia, that is, ἀδιανόητα attributed to the poet himself. To take another example of Homeric 'nonsense', here is a passage from *Iliad* 16 that Aristonicus comments on. Now that the Trojans are fighting around the Greek ships, Achilles finally sends his Myrmidons into battle, and as a form of exhortation reminds them of their earlier words (200–2):

> Μυρμιδόνες μή τίς μοι ἀπειλάων λελαθέσθω,
> ἃς ἐπὶ νηυσὶ θοῇσιν ἀπειλεῖτε Τρώεσσι
> ϗ πάνθ' ὑπὸ μηνιθμόν, καί μ' ἠτιάασθε ἕκαστος·
>
> Myrmidons, may none forget the threats
> with which you threatened the Trojans by the swift ships
> during the whole time of my rage, and each blamed me, saying …

Achilles then proceeds to give an example of these words of blame and reproach ('Stubborn son of Peleus, your mother nursed you with bile …', σχέτλιε Πηλέος υἱέ, χόλῳ ἄρα σ' ἔτρεφε μήτηρ, 203). The textual question of line 202 for Aristonicus regards this verb of blame, αἰτιάομαι. To the lemma πάνθ' ὑπὸ μηνιθμόν, <καί μ' ἠτιάασθε ἕκαστος> Aristonicus writes:

> ἡ διπλῆ, ὅτι Ζηνόδοτος, ἓν ποιῶν γράφει χωρὶς τοῦ ι 'μητιάασθε', λαμβάνων ἀπὸ τῆς μήτιδος, οἷον ἐβουλεύεσθε. γίνεται δὲ ἀδιανόητον· διὸ δεῖ σὺν τῷ ι γράφειν ἠτιάασθε …

The *diplē*, because Zenodotus makes one word by writing *mētiaasthe* without the *iota*, taking it from the word *mētis*, with a meaning like 'you were deliberating'. But it becomes nonsense. That's why it's necessary to write *ētitiaasthe* with the *iota* …

[24] F. Schironi, 'Theory into practice: Aristotelian principles in Aristarchean philology', *CPh* 104 (2009), 279–316, at 298 writes: 'there are some interesting cases where Aristarchus argues against Homer himself'; however, it is questionable whether her examples in fact show this. Regarding *Il.* 12.175–80, all six lines are athetized because of being misplaced material from Book 15 (ἀθετοῦνται στίχοι ἕξ, ὅτι παρῴδηνται ἐκ τοῦ [verse 15.414]). Only in this context is 12.176 'laughable' (γελοῖον): 'because what has been said by this point regarding the battle at the wall?' (τί γὰρ εἴρηται ἤδη τῆς τειχομαχίας;) which has not yet happened; 'they have not yet even crossed the trench' (οὐδέπω γὰρ διαβεβήκασι τὴν τάφρον). Also regarding *Il.* 18.38–49, it is only in the context of the lines being 'considered spurious … on the grounds of having a Hesiodic character' (ὁ τῶν Νηρεΐδων χορὸς προηθέτηται … ὡς Ἡσιόδ<ε>ιον ἔχων χαρακτῆρα)—since Homer, unlike Hesiod, generally refers to groups of Nymphs and Muses as groups (κατὰ τὸ κοινόν), not by individual names (ἀλλ' οὐκ ὀνόματα)—that the concluding line is 'laughable' (γελοῖον), i.e. precisely because it is *not* Homer. Her example of 24.614–17a also is athetized and called 'Hesiodic in character' (Ἡσιόδεια τῷ χαρακτῆρι). Inasmuch as Aristarchus is athetizing all of these 'laughable' examples (i.e. removing them to preserve the real Homeric text), it is difficult to understand how this can be an act of 'argu[ing] against Homer himself' (298).

[25] For Aristonicus and ἀδιανόητα, cf. Σ ad *Il.* 5.53b, 7.153a[1] (at 11.413 Erbse reads correctly ἠγνόηται, not ἀδιανόητα as Friedländer [n. 20] prints: the manuscript can be consulted online at www.homermultitext.org), 16.202a, 17.51b[1], 24.293b; Erbse (n. 19) attributes the part of 5.700a identifying ἀδιανόητον to Didymus, 11.102–3 and the part of 18.283a[1] identifying potential ἀδιανόητον to Nicanor; exegetical are 15.679b and 21.363e.

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Zenodotus had written the line not as μ' ἠτιάασθε 'you accused me' but as μητιάασθε 'you were deliberating'. Although Zenodotus was likely interpreting the Myrmidons' subjunctive οἴκαδε … νεώμεθα (205) as deliberative rather than hortatory ('should we return home?' rather than 'let us return home'), there is little to support his reading. 'You deliberated: "Stubborn son of Peleus, your mother nursed you with bile …"' simply does not match the verb to the content of the speech: the speech is one of reproach, not of deliberation. Instead, Zenodotus has mangled the text with his μητιάασθε, or, as Aristonicus says, he has made it nonsense (ἀδιανόητον).

Both the entry at *Il.* 16.202 and the entry at *Il.* 7.153 display a feature characteristic of ancient Homeric scholarship: the nonsense or ἀδιανόητα that appears in Homer has nothing to do with Homer himself. In all of Aristonicus' instances, the creator of the ἀδιανόητα is Zenodotus and his poor emendations to the text.[26] The other Homeric scholia behave similarly.[27]

## *ADIANOĒTA*: A SHORT HISTORY

In comparing the ἀδιανόητα of comic and of Homeric scholia, it should be emphasized that the usage of the word in the Homeric scholia is typical, while the usage in the comic scholia is atypical. Outside comedy, the term is exclusively negative: Homer is the subject over which Aristarchus and the earlier Zenodotus are competing, and so ἀδιανόητα apply only to the rival emendations, never to the subject itself. So too in other areas of science, whether it be philosophy, history or astronomy, the term is applied to rival understandings of the object of study, but never to the object of study itself.

One can sense the term's development from its first attestation in Plato's *Sophist* to the Homeric scholia. Consider the resemblance: in this passage from the *Sophist*, the Eleatic stranger has stumbled upon a conundrum in discussing Parmenides' issue of 'non-being': how can one discuss 'non-being' without referring to it in the singular rather than in the plural (that is, non-being vs non-beings)? To say 'non-being' endows the entity 'non-being' with the attribute of number, which it cannot bear, since it is 'non-being'. Faced with this conundrum, the Eleatic stranger asks (238c10): συννοεῖς οὖν ὡς οὔτε φθέγξασθαι δυνατὸν ὀρθῶς οὔτ' εἰπεῖν οὔτε διανοηθῆναι τὸ μὴ ὂν αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτό, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἀδιανόητόν τε καὶ ἄρρητον καὶ ἄφθεγκτον καὶ ἄλογον; 'thus do you see that it is impossible either to utter correctly or to say or to conceive "non-being" itself without any attribute [for example, singular or plural], but it is inconceivable and unspeakable and unutterable and irrational?'. This first surviving occurrence conveniently provides the word's etymology: that which cannot be conceived (οὔτε διανοηθῆναι) is the 'inconceivable' (ἀδιανόητον), a verbal adjective based on the act of conceiving.

From this point on, the term plays a polemical role in philosophy where opponents' arguments are revealed to be ἀδιανόητα, 'inconceivable'. It is uncertain whether it

[26] Cf. Aristonicus ad 5.53b: ὅτι Ζηνόδοτος γράφει 'χραῖσμεν θανάτοιο πέλωρα'. ἀδιανόητον δὲ γίνεται τὸ λεγόμενον. 17.51b[1]: ὅτι Ζηνόδοτος γράφει 'Χαρίτεσσι μέλαιναι', ἀδιανόητον ποιῶν. 24.293b: ὅτι Ζηνόδοτος γράφει 'καὶ οὗ'. ἔστι δὲ ἀντὶ τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ ἀδιανόητος ὁ λόγος.

[27] Didymus ad 5.700a: ἔνιοι δὲ ἀγνοοῦντες γράφουσιν 'ἀπὸ νηῶν'. γίνεται δὲ ἀδιανόητον. Nicanor ad 11.102–3: καὶ ἀδιανόητόν ἐστι τὸ συνάπτειν 'νόθον καὶ γνήσιον ἄμφω', ad 18.283a[1] ἐὰν συνάπτηται, ἀδιανόητον γίνεται. Exegetical: ad 15.679b ἀδιανόητον δὲ τὸ ἵπποις κέλητα ἵζειν, ad 21.363e ἀλλ' ἄνευ τοῦ υ ἀναγινώσκων ἀδιανόητον ἡγεῖτο καὶ ἡμαρτημένον εἶναι.

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appears in Aristotle, as might be expected,[28] but it is especially prevalent among the Epicureans who appear to have reduced rival views to ἀδιανόητα as a specific form of argumentation.[29] Among historians, it can be found in Polybius, who is often eager to show rival accounts to be nonsensical or inconceivable.[30] Among scientists it is frequent in Galen, and also found in the first-century B.C.E. astronomer Geminus.[31] The Homeric scholars are simply facing the text in the same agonistic way in which philosophers face issues of metaphysics, historians face the past, and scientists face medicine, astronomy and other fields of enquiry. The subject they treat, for example 'the past', cannot itself be nonsense, but the rival treatments of the past (or whatever object of study it happens to be)—these are the cobwebs that must be cleared, these are the ἀδιανόητα.

What is anomalous is the usage of the term found in the comic scholia. Only once in the comic scholia does this agonistic and more typical form of ἀδιανόητα appear. It occurs in Aristophanes' *Wealth*: after Wealth has been allowed into the house, and after a choral interlude, Chremylus' slave enters the stage, and gives the following speech (*Plut.* 802–5a):

> ὡς ἡδὺ πράττειν, ὦνδρές, ἐστ' εὐδαιμόνως,
> καὶ ταῦτα μηδὲν ἐξενεγκόντ' οἴκοθεν.
> ἡμῖν γὰρ ἀγαθῶν σωρὸς εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν
> ἐπεισπέπεικεν οὐδὲν ἠδικηκόσιν.
> [οὕτω τὸ πλουτεῖν ἐστιν ἡδὺ πρᾶγμα δή]
>
> What a pleasure it is, gentlemen, to live the good life
> especially when one doesn't have any household expenses.
> A heap of goods has burst in upon us,
> even though we didn't do anything wrong.
> [Such a pleasurable thing indeed it is to be wealthy]

On this last line, which is found in all the manuscripts but has been removed by modern editors,[32] a scholium found in the Venetus Marcianus (eleventh century) and other manuscripts reads ἀδιανόητος ὁ ἴαμβος.[33] As one modern commentator explains, the

[28] Arist. frr. 949, 1 and 949, 2 Gigon (= Sext. Emp. *Adv. Phys.* 1.412–13 ed. Mutschmann and *Adv. Geometras* 57–9 ed. Mutschmann), clearly regarding the same passage of Aristotle on the question of 'widthless length' (μῆκος ἀπλατές); cf. Arist. fr. 5 Gigon (= Ath. 8.335 ff.) regarding the son of Sardanapalus.

[29] Epicurus, *Ep. Hdt.* 46, *Ep. Pyth.* 96, fr. 34 Arrighetti. Phld. *De signis* 19, 21, 36, 57 De Lacy. For the 'Epicurean use of inconceivability as an empirical test', see P.H. De Lacy and E.A. De Lacy, *Philodemus. On Methods of Inference* (Naples, 1978), 106 n. 48, 157, 161 (on 'inconceivability as a criterion of inference distinct from contraposition'); on Epicureans devoting 'much of their time to the refutation of philosophers of other schools', see De Lacy and De Lacy (this note), 153–4.

[30] Polybius regarding Ephorus at 12.25.4; cf. 3.36.3 (30.22.8 refers to music, not to historiography).

[31] Gal. *De sect.* 1.105.3, *De instr. odor.* 5.5.4, *De plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 2.5.60, 2.5.61.2, 2.5.61.3, *De comp. med.* 13.463.11, *In Hipp. de natura hominis* 15.55–6; *In Hipp. prorrh. comm.* 16.613, despite being a commentary on Hippocrates, accuses Hippocrates of nonsense, but this is because, unlike Homeric commentaries, the subject is medicine, not Hippocrates (cf. the treatment of Chrysippus' *On the Soul* in *De plac. Hipp. et Plat.*, citations above); ἀδιανόητα of a more textual nature at *In Hipp. epidem. comm. iii* 17a.679, *In Hipp. vi epidem. comm*. 17b.258; Geminus 5.63; 16.30 is with the sense of 'fool, idiot'—LSJ s.v. ἀδιανόητος II, *DGE* II; cf. Pl. *Hp. mai.* 301c.

[32] Cf. A.H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes Wealth* (Warminster, 2001), ad loc.; N.G. Wilson, *Aristophanis Fabulae* (Oxford, 2007), ad loc.; K. Holzinger, *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar zu Aristophanes'* Plutos (Vienna and Leipzig, 1940), 243–4.

[33] E = Estensis α.U.5.10 (fourteenth century); θ = Laurentianus conv. sopp. 140 (fourteenth

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line is 'meaningless' because it 'repeats the content of 802, and breaks the connection between the general statement in 804–5 and the detailed enumeration of blessings in 806–818'.[34] Just as Tzetzes's later gloss of line 802 ἡδὺ πρᾶγμα … ἐστὶν εὐτυχεῖν καὶ πλουτεῖν, some earlier paraphrase must have entered into the manuscript tradition, although, as a scholiast soon discerned, once the line moves from the margin to the Aristophanic text itself, it becomes ἀδιανόητος, 'nonsense'.[35]

Similarly, then, to Aristonicus' treatment of Zenodotus' emendations, in this case a scholar has essentially removed an earlier scholar's emendation, and has explained his reason for doing so by writing that the text as it stands is 'nonsense' or 'unintelligible'. This is clearly not the 'deliberate nonsense' of Aristophanes which the scholiasts above were identifying. In the case of the *Wealth* scholium, as in the case of all such scholia, the act of removing the text and the act of claiming it to be 'nonsense' go hand in hand.

## DATING COMIC *ADIANOĒTA*

The majority of comic scholia, unlike the *Wealth* scholium, identify nonsense in the Aristophanic Ur-text, as if nonsense were a positive entity in comedy and not simply a mistake of later editors. What is interesting about these instances of ἀδιανόητα is that their identification marks a stopping point for the scholar's work, a moment of interpretative closure, as it were. While Homeric scholars emend the text at the point of ἀδιανόητα, the comic scholar interprets no further and allows the text to remain nonsensical. It has already been seen that the Homeric ἀδιανόητα have the first-century B.C.E. Aristonicus as the earliest name attached to them, whether or not it was a term that Aristarchus earlier had used. The question that follows is: when does this positive comic type of ἀδιανόητα first arise in literary criticism? Two names appear here: Didymus (*fl.* first century B.C.E), the first editor or compiler of Aristophanic commentaries, and Symmachus (*fl.* C.E. 100), the second editor.[36]

To begin with Symmachus: the note attributed to him appears at *Birds* 1001. At this point of the play, another of these so-called *alazones* appears on stage: the geometer Meton, who wishes to present his city-plans for Cloudcuckooland. When questioned

century); N = Neapolitanus II F 22 (*c.*1320); Barb. = Vaticanus Barberinianus gr. 126 (fifteenth century); Ald. = the lost MS which Musurus used in his Aldine edition in 1498.

[34] Sommerstein (n. 32), ad loc.

[35] The line of course is not 'meaningless' in any strict sense—i.e. the line is easy enough to understand—nor is it in a strict sense that Sommerstein (or, it seems, the ancient scholar) uses the word. The objection of 'meaningless' here rather indicates that the line otiosely repeats, and thus does not cohere well with, lines 802–5. For further discussion of 'cohesion' and how a line is or is not 'intelligible', cf. M.A.K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (New York, 2014 [1976]), 1–30.

[36] For Didymus, see Dickey (n. 19), 7; J. White, *The Scholia on the Aves of Aristophanes* (London, 1914), xxv–xxix (at xxix: 'not the notes of a dullard'; cf. S. West 'Chalcenteric negligence', *CQ* 20 [1970], 288–96); P. Boudreaux, *Le Texte d'Aristophane et ses commentateurs* (Paris, 1949), 91–137; van der Valk (n. 18), 1.536–53; L. Pearson and S. Stephens, *Didymi in Demosthenem Commenta* (Stuttgart, 1983), iii–xiv; C. Gibson, *Interpreting a Classic: Demosthenes and his Ancient Commentators* (Berkeley, 2002), 51–75; P. Harding, *Didymos: On Demosthenes* (Oxford, 2007); for Symmachus, see White (this note), xlix–liii; Boudreaux (this note), 144–60; W.J.W. Koster, 'De Phaino et Symmacho commentatoribus Aristophanis', *Mnemosyne* 26 (1973), 225–9; S. Trojahn, *Die auf Papyri erhaltenen Kommentare zur alten Komödie* (Leipzig, 2002), 141–2; Dickey (n. 19), 29–31.

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about the strange props he is holding, he answers, with typical alazonic flair (*Av.* 999–1003):

> κανόνες ἀέρος.
> αὐτίκα γὰρ ἀήρ ἐστι τὴν ἰδέαν ὅλος
> κατὰ πνιγέα μάλιστα. προσθεὶς οὖν ἐγὼ
> τὸν κανόν' ἄνωθεν τουτονὶ τὸν καμπύλον,
> ἐνθεὶς διαβήτην—μανθάνεις;
>
> Measurers of air.
> For air is, to begin with, on the whole
> like a casserole lid in form. Thus I, adding
> this bent ruler from above, and inserting
> a compass inside—you understand?

'Not at all', says Peisetaerus. And the scholia follow suit. To the lemma 'προσθεὶς οὖν' is written: Δίδυμος· τοιοῦτος ἀήρ ἐστι τῇ γῇ περικείμενος, ὅμοιος πνιγεῖ, καθαπερεὶ πῶμά τι περικείμενος. τὰ δὲ ἑξῆς, φησὶ Σύμμαχος, ἐπίτηδες ἀδιανόητα. 'Didymus [says] such air is surrounded by earth, like a casserole lid, as though it had a cover on it. What follows, says Symmachus, is deliberate nonsense.'[37] Here is clearly an example of that comic sort of nonsense for which Aristophanes himself is responsible, not some later scholar. It is not to be excised from the text as some sort of mistake but instead is 'deliberately' there. It exists in the text, one assumes, to lambast the geographer Meton, and ultimately create pleasure for the audience: Meton is not to be taken seriously, he is foolish, an object of derision, and one reason the audience can register this is by his 'unintelligible' speech. In regard to Aristophanes, however, Symmachus' comment is a positive expression of ἀδιανόητα: Aristophanes intended the nonsense to be there. Thus, one might date such comic interpretation at least to Symmachus and the first century C.E.

The citation attributed to Didymus, who compiled his variorum edition roughly a century before Symmachus, provides more difficulties. At *Wasps* 1309, the slave Xanthias is reporting the events of the symposium-gone-wild that he has just witnessed. Among the highlights of the event is Lysistratus' 'comparison' (εἰκών) of Philocleon to potentially insulting comparanda—potentially, that is, depending on how the audience and Philocleon interpret them (*Vesp.* 1309–11):

> εἶτ' αὐτόν, ὡς εἶδ', ἤκασεν Λυσίστρατος·
> 'ἔοικας, ὦ πρεσβῦτα, νεοπλούτῳ τρυγὶ
> κλητῆρί τ' εἰς ἀχυρὸν ἀποδεδρακότι.'
>
> Then Lysistratus drew the following 'likeness'
> when he saw [Philocleon's behaviour]:
> 'You are like nouveau-riche wine dregs, old man,
> and like a juror running off to the bran-heap.'

MacDowell in his commentary ad loc. explains that the 'nouveau-riche unfermented wine' means that Philocleon is 'like a young man who has just inherited property,

[37] R = Ravennas 429, tenth to eleventh century; V = Venetus Marcianus 474, twelfth century; E = Estensis α.U.5.10, fourteenth century; Γ = Laurentianus plut. 31.15, fourteenth century; M = Ambrosianus L39 sup., fourteenth century. The scholium at 1001a seems to be derived from this. Ad 1004, διόλου ἀνοηταίνει reiterates the verdict.

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including slaves, and has not yet learned how to treat his slaves properly, but enjoys the novelty of beating them'. Although it is true that Philocleon has just beaten his slave before Lysistratus' remark, Didymus refuses to interpret the words νεοπλούτῳ τρυγί so confidently. At 1309 the scholium of the Venetus Marcianus manuscript reads regarding the lemma ἔοικας ὦ πρεσβῦτα: Δίδυμός φησιν, ὅτι ἀδιανόητα σκώπτει, ὡς ἐνταῦθα. τὸ δὲ 'τρυγὶ' εἰς γεγηρακότα, 'Didymus says that he mocks unintelligible things, as here. But the "dregs" has to do with him being old.'[38]

What to make of this scholium? There are a number of questions: for one, how much of it goes back to Didymus: is it the whole scholium, or just the first sentence? One would expect the δέ of the second sentence to be adversative since it is paradoxical to claim a statement to be unintelligible and then to decipher it. If this is the case, Didymus' comment likely consists of the first sentence: Aristophanes or Lysistratus is mocking 'unintelligible things', full stop.[39] The second sentence, on the other hand, would be from another scholar who, unlike Didymus, *is* able to decipher the meaning. To support this view it should be noted that the Laurentianus manuscript reports another scholium, which simply reads: τρυγὶ] ὅτι γέρων, 'dregs: because he is an old man'.[40]

It would seem, then, that the scholarly habit of identifying 'nonsense' in comedy can be traced at least as far back as Didymus in the first century B.C.E. Considering that Didymus is chiefly thought of as a compiler, the habit likely goes back further still, perhaps to Aristarchus, but such speculation may be saved for later. For now, however, there is one last obstacle in naming Didymus as a *terminus ante quem* for this positive usage of ἀδιανόητα, and that is the meaning of the term itself. Not far removed in time from when Didymus was writing appeared a rhetorical meaning for ἀδιανόητα rather distinct from the denotation ('nonsensical', 'unintelligible') that I have been using throughout this article. Although I will ultimately suggest that this rhetorical meaning is unlikely to have influenced Didymus' own usage, it is nevertheless worthwhile to explore the possibility that Didymus, when he wrote that Aristophanes 'mocks ἀδιανόητα', may have meant something altogether different.

## MODERN *ADIANOĒTA*

Scholars of ancient Greek may be surprised to hear from other disciplines about a Greek rhetorical term called *adianoēta*. Bonnie Honig in her 2013 book *Antigone, Interrupted* writes about the rhetorical term in this way: 'Adianoeta is a sort of pun or double entendre that carries "two separate meanings, one 'obvious' and one more subtle"' (88). The political scientist cited for this usage of the term is James Martel and his 2011 book *Textual Conspiracies*: 'Rhetorically speaking', he writes, 'this understanding can be seen as Machiavelli employing the rhetorical figure of *adianoeta* (literally "not noticed"), wherein words or phrases are understood to have two separate meanings, one "obvious" and one more subtle' (98). If one turns to R.A. Lanham's *Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Berkeley, 1968), one similarly finds that *adianoēta* is

[38] So reads the Venetus Marcianus (V), according to Koster 1309a; but there is considerable variation of the scholium among the different MSS.

[39] Alternatively Didymus is saying that everything but 'τρυγί' is 'indecipherable'.

[40] 1309b Koster, written by a second hand in the manuscript ($\Gamma^3$, Koster xxi for discussion).

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'[a]n expression that has an obvious meaning and an unsuspected secret one beneath' (2), although the definition is presented without citation.

It is strange that a word meaning 'nonsensical' should come to mean something like 'double entendre', as if through not having an 'intelligible' meaning an utterance should assume at least two, but it is even stranger that, when one turns to ancient Greek dictionaries like LSJ, *GI* or the *DGE*, no such definition appears under the entry for ἀδιανόητος. The same omission occurs in Byzantine and in later Greek dictionaries.[41] One might therefore suspect the term to be a fabrication of modernity were it not for a single passage of Quintilian. Because Quintilian's usage of the term is so odd and otherwise unattested for antiquity, it is worth quoting in full. Quintilian writes (8.2.20.1):

pessima uero sunt *adianoēta*, hoc est quae uerbis aperta occultos sensus habent, ut cum dictus est caecus 'secundam uiam stare', et qui suos artus morsu lacerasse fingitur in scholis 'supra se cubasse'. ingeniosa haec et fortia et ex ancipiti diserta creduntur, peruasitque iam multos ista persuasio, ut id demum eleganter atque exquisite dictum putent quod interpretandum sit. sed auditoribus etiam nonnullis grata sunt haec, quae cum intellexerunt acumine suo delectantur, et gaudent non quasi audierint sed quasi inuenerint.

Worst of all, however, are *adianoēta*, that is to say, expressions which have a clear verbal sense but a hidden meaning, as when the blind man is said to 'stand at the side of the road', or when the man who had rent his own limbs with his teeth is said, in a school exercise, to have 'sat at table above himself'. These things are thought ingenious, powerful and audaciously eloquent and the conviction has now become widespread that nothing is elegant or refined unless it needs interpreting. Some audiences also enjoy these things, because they delight in their own cleverness when they understand them, and rejoice as if they had not so much heard them as thought of them for themselves.[42]

Since Quintilian's examples are, it seems, purposely obscure, they are not much help in elucidating his thought. But the examples suggest that, for Quintilian, *adianoēta* are not exactly double entendres but riddle-like tropes where the surface level is obscure (and thus the name *adianoēta*). That the *adianoēta* are *uerbis aperta* likely means that they are linguistically without aberration and thus pose no obscurity on that front.[43]

Is it possible that Didymus, when he wrote 'He [Aristophanes or his character] mocks ἀδιανόητα, as here', actually meant something closer to Quintilian's rhetorical term? If so, he would have meant that Aristophanes' character Lysistratus mocks Philocleon in a way that is 'unintelligible' at the surface level but carries along with it a hidden meaning. Considering the sympotic context of the mockery—where those clever enough to register the riddling meaning can laugh at Philocleon's expense, while Philocleon himself is left in the dark—this reading of Didymus is not without

[41] It is also omitted in dictionaries of Greek rhetorical terms: cf. R.D. Anderson Jr., *Glossary of Greek Rhetorical Terms* (Leuven, 2000); H. Lausberg ([trans.] M.T. Bliss, A. Jansen, D.E. Orton; [edd.] D.E. Orton and R.D. Anderson), *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric. A Foundation for Literary Study* (Leiden, 1998).

[42] Translation from D.A. Russell, *Quintilian. The Orator's Education. III. Books 6–8* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

[43] For discussion of Quintilian's *adianoēta*, see J. Cousin, *Études sur Quintilien. Tome II: Vocabulaire Grec de la terminologie Rhétorique dans L'Institution Oratoire* (Amsterdam, 1967 [1936]), 29 s.v. ἀδιανόητον; J. Cousin, *Quintilien. Institution Oratoire. Livres VIII–IX* (Paris, 1978), 279–80; F. Ahleid, *Quintilian. The Preface to Book VIII and Comparable Passages in the Institutio Oratoria* (Amsterdam, 1983), 147–8; J. Pucci, *The Full-Knowing Reader* (New Haven, 1998), 61–3.

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its temptations. In such a scenario both lines of the scholium could be attributed to Didymus, since the second line (τὸ δὲ 'τρυγὶ' εἰς γεγηρακότα, 'the "dregs" has to do with him being old') provides the interpretation of the mockery, rhetorically 'unintelligible' on the surface level.

This interpretation of the Didymus scholium, although tempting, is unlikely to be correct. Although the word ἀδιανόητα is a very common one, I have not found a single Greek usage that confirms Quintilian's report. Commentators often cite as a parallel ps.-Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Art of Rhetoric* 16,[44] where the author discusses a type of rhetorical figure found in Odysseus' speech to Achilles in *Iliad* 19. Ps.-Dionysius writes regarding the passage (9.16.25–6): καὶ λέγει τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς παραινέσεως τὴν αἰτίαν, εἶτα τὴν παραίνεσιν ἀδιανοήτως, 'at the beginning he explains the reason for the advice and then gives the advice *adianoētōs*'. That is, Odysseus first explains to Achilles why he is advising him in regard to the Myrmidons (he is older, wiser and so forth, 19.216–19),[45] and then deploys an obscure simile about harvests (19.221–4),[46] which, ps.-Dionysius claims, 'concludes the advice' (καὶ ἡ εἰκὼν πέρας τῆς συμβουλῆς, 9.16.25). One immediately notes, however, that ps.-Dionysius, unlike Quintilian, does not call this figure itself an example of *adianoēta*. More crucially, he does not consider the obscure simile itself to be the 'figure' (σχῆμα) at all; rather he claims the proemium as the beginning of the 'figure' (9.16.33). The parallel thus dissolves upon closer inspection: to grant so much significance to a passing adverb (translating ἀδιανοήτως as, for example, 'in the fashion of rhetorical *adianoēta*') overlooks the figure ps.-Dionysius is in fact discussing, only part of which includes a simile spoken 'in an unintelligible way' (ἀδιανοήτως). The only other citation given for Quintilian's rhetorical term—Cousin's parallel of Joannes Sardianus's ninth-century comment on Aphthonius—is badly misread.[47]

Thus, although Quintilian is *prima facie* evidence that ἀδιανόητα was a Greek rhetorical term, there is no trace of this rhetorical meaning in Greek writers either before or after Quintilian, although the word itself, with its usual denotation 'unintelligible' / 'nonsensical', is common. This absence is likely owing to the loss of numerous Greek rhetorical treatises, but one should not reject the possibility that this meaning

[44] Russell (n. 42), 336 n. 32; Cousin (n. 43), 29 s.v. ἀδιανόητον, although not specifying this passage, writes 'La terme n'a dû passer qu'assez tard de la langue commune dans la langue de la critique, vers l'époque de Denys d'Halicarnasse.' Cf. S.D. di Accadia, *I Discorsi Figurati I e II* (Rome, 2010), 177. M. Heath, 'Pseudo-Dionysius: *Art of Rhetoric* 8–11', *AJPh* 124 (2003), 81–105 has recently dated the text to a generation after Quintilian, suggesting Aelius Serapion (*fl.* C.E. 130) as its author.

[45] Cf. 9.16.33: αὐτὸ τὸ προοίμιον τοῦ σχήματός ἐστιν ἀρχή, 'the proemium itself is the beginning of the figure'. He refers to *Il.* 19.217–19 as the proemium at 9.16.16.

[46] αἶψά τε φυλόπιδος πέλεται κόρος ἀνθρώποισιν, | ἧς τε πλείστην μὲν καλάμην χθονὶ χαλκὸς ἔχευεν, | ἄμητος δ' ὀλίγιστος, ἐπὴν κλίνῃσι τάλαντα | Ζεύς, ὅς τ' ἀνθρώπων ταμίης πολέμοιο τέτυκται, 'quickly comes a surfeit of battle for men, where the bronze strews most straw upon the ground, but the harvest is smallest, when Zeus inclines the balance, he who is for men the steward of war.' In this speech, Odysseus is advising Achilles to allow the Myrmidons to eat before battle.

[47] Sardianus, like the many commentators above, is calling for an emendation of the word περιών because the sentence καὶ περιὼν ὅλην διέλυσε δύναμιν strikes him as 'nonsense' (ἀδιανόητον), not because the word 'peut être interprété comme équivalant à «l'emportant sur» ou à «faisant le tour de»' (Cousin [n. 43 (1967 [1936])], s.v. ἀδιανόητον) and is therefore double entendre (Sardianus says nothing about these two possible meanings). Nor does Sardianus 'propose finalement, après avoir écarté περιών, le leçon Περσῶν'. He rejects Περσῶν as 'incongruous' (ἀσυνάρτητον), since the 'whole text is about the sack of Troy' (περὶ γὰρ τῆς Ἰλίου ἁλώσεως ὁ πᾶς λόγος αὐτῷ), and so proposes Τρώων (γράφεσθαι οὕτως ὑπέλαβον 'καὶ Τρώων ὅλην διέλυσε δύναμιν').

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never existed in Greek at all: it may be a case of a false loanword.[48] As for Didymus himself, he can be found using the term elsewhere but always with the regular meaning 'unintelligible', 'nonsensical'.[49]

## CONCLUSIONS

In ancient scholarship, 'nonsense' or the 'unintelligible' (ἀδιανόητα vel sim.) is a negative term applied to passages which are deemed incorrect and consequently in need of emendation or removal. Typically, a previous scholar is the source of such 'nonsense', for example Zenodotus, but never the original author, for example Homer himself. By the removal or emendation of such 'unintelligible' passages a scholar can, according to the methodology of such scholarship, recreate the original text. All ancient scholarship follows this line of thought but for one exception: the scholia written on comedy.[50] In these cases alone, the scholia apply terms such as 'nonsense' or 'unintelligible' not with the negative sense of an incorrect text which requires emendation, but positively with the expressed notion that the comic author *intended* certain moments of the text to be nonsensical.

The question that follows—why do the comic scholia behave in this way?—need not generate lengthy discussion here. Aristotle in the *Poetics* famously defines comedy as revolving around a certain 'mistake'. After defining comedy as a *mimēsis* of inferior people according to the laughable aspect of their baseness, he explains the laughable (τὸ γελοῖον) as follows: 'for the laughable is a certain mistake and ugliness which is harmless and non-destructive' (τὸ γὰρ γελοῖόν ἐστιν ἁμάρτημά τι καὶ αἶσχος ἀνώδυνον καὶ οὐ φθαρτικόν, *Poet.* 5, 1449a34–5). It would seem that such 'mistakes' are not to be kept outside of comedy but to be found at its very heart. It is tempting to follow Schironi (n. 24), who persuasively establishes Aristotle as the intellectual father of the theories that Aristarchus and later Alexandrian scholars put into practice, and to add ἀδιανόητα to her list of Aristotelian / Aristarchan terms. But Aristotle, despite his critical interest in διάνοια, never uses the term ἀδιανόητα,[51] which, after all, derives from the verbal form διανοέομαι: not 'lacking διάνοια' but 'impossible to discern a διάνοια' is the sense of the word. The two words are clearly related but not so closely

[48] For lost rhetorical treatises, one suspects a Stoic source: if, according to Chrysippus, all language is ambiguous, shouldn't 'nonsense' be ambiguous as well? For Stoic rhetoric, see K. Barwick, *Probleme der stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik* (Berlin, 1957); for ambiguity, see C. Atherton, *The Stoics on Ambiguity* (Cambridge, 1993). For false loanwords in other languages, cf. C. Furiassi and H. Gottlieb (edd.), *Pseudo-English: Studies of False Anglicisms in Europe* (Berlin, 2015); L. Miller 'Wasei eigo: English "loanwords" coined in Japan', in J. Hill, P.J. Mistry and L. Campbell (edd.), *The Life of Language: Papers in Linguistics in Honor of William Bright* (Berlin, 1998), 123–40.

[49] Cf. Didymus' usage of ἀδιανόητον at Hom. *Il.* 5.700a, discussed above. Zenobius (second century C.E.) in his *Epitome of the Proverbs of Didymus and Lucillus of Tarrha* (Ἐπιτομὴ τῶν παροιμιῶν Διδύμου καὶ Ταρραίου) 2.85.4 also reports a saying which is spoken ἐπὶ τῶν ἀδιανοήτων 'for nonsense' (i.e. spoken to identify something as nonsense; cf. Suda Δ 1031): βέβληκ' Ἀχιλλεὺς δύο κύβω καὶ τέτταρα, a line which originates in Ar. *Ran.* 1400 (see K.J. Dover, *Aristophanes* Frogs [Oxford, 1993], ad loc. for discussion) with much the same bathetic force as the more famous ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν.

[50] The rare exception is when an author is being, for lack of a better word, comic: e.g. Σ ad Lucian 21.1.1 (*Zeus Trag.*): ἀδιανόητος ὅλος ὁ στίχος, ὡς τοῦ Διὸς καὶ τὸ τραγῳδεῖν ἀγνοοῦντος.

[51] See above n. 28.

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that the term can be ascribed to Aristotle's critical vocabulary, and it is equally plausible that the term arose elsewhere.

The spirit of this 'laughable mistake', however, is sensed in the comic scholarship of Didymus and Symmachus. Just as one would not wish to remove τὸ γελοῖον from the comic text—although it is often an Alexandrian reason for athetizing lines in Homer[52]—one would not want to remove the laughable mistakes that might give rise to τὸ γελοῖον, at least according to Aristotle. ἀδιανόητα are one such mistake. The reason why this positive sense of nonsense is unique to comedy should then be clear: such moments of ἀδιανόητα were expected of comedy as one of its vital features, connected to its ability to make audiences laugh. One might compare here the laughable ἀδολεσχία (babbling repetition) of the potentially Aristotelian *Tractatus Coislinianus* to the ἀδολεσχία of Aristotle's *Sophistici Elenchi*, where it is simply treated as a mistake.[53]

To return to Borthwick's emendation discussed at the beginning of this article: what should be done with his treatment of antiquity's 'deliberate nonsense'? Did Borthwick improve the text with his emendation of the 'unintelligible' or did he take something away? Adamantly 'improve', I would say: his text is both clearer and funnier. Still, as I have been arguing, Borthwick can be observed participating in a long tradition of comic scholarship which alone is devoted not just to removing unintelligible lines (for example, in the Aristonicus tradition) but also to defending them (for example, in the Symmachus tradition), as if the unintelligible had its own aesthetic appeal, and that aesthetic were part of comedy's exclusive domain.

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[52] See Schironi (n. 24), 298–300 on τὸ γελοῖον.

[53] *Soph. el.* 3.173a32–40 with Janko (n. 6), 174; cf. S. Kidd, *Nonsense and Meaning in Ancient Greek Comedy* (Cambridge, 2014), 151–5.

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