

The recently published *Repertorium Homericæ Poesis Hexametricum* by James Dee provides much valuable statistical information concerning the Homeric hexameter. We learn, for example, that the pentadactylic hexameter (five dactyls plus the final spondee) is by far the most frequent pattern found in the *Iliad and Odyssey*. But the performance of pentadactyls can vary greatly according to the narrative contexts of these verses.

Take for example the frequently occurring formulaic line in the *Iliad*:  
 ton d'apameibomenos prosephe podas okus Akhilleus (replying to him, swiftfooted Akhilleus said), or the equivalent in the *Odyssey*: ton d'apameibomenos prosephe polumetis Odysseus (...many-wiled Od. said). These lines are merely transitional and therefore neutral in tone.

More expressive is a line such as the frequently occurring: ton d'ar' hypodra idon prosephe polymetis Odysseus (looking grimly at him, many-wiled Odysseus said), with the phrase hypodra idon (looking grimly) adding a strong emotional element.

Most different from the above neutral pentadactyls are those lines which express exceptional rapidity and forward propulsion, lines which I refer to as "rushing dactyls". Here are two of many examples in the *Iliad and Odyssey*:

In *Iliad* 5.223, Aeneas, urging Pandaros to attack raging Diomedes, brags about his own swift horses, saying, kraipna mal'entha kai entha diokemen ede phebesthai (most quick are they both to pursue and to flee hither and thither). Three elements in this rushing dactyl can be observed:

1. The accelerating pace of the five consecutive dactyls.
2. The combination of three elements of alliteration: palatal (kappa), dental (theta/delta), and labial (pi/phi/beta), a combination of sounds which reinforce the forward surge of the line.
3. The presence of a signal catalytic word, here, the word kraipna (quickly). Other signal words found in rushing dactyls are aipsa (quickly), karpalimos (quickly), autika (immediately), oka (quickly). In this line, the rapidity is further emphasized by the rocking assonance of entha kai entha.

In *Odyssey* 22.99, Telemakhos, having killed one of the suitors, rushes now to rejoin his father: Be de theein mala d'oka philon pater' eisaphikanen (he started to run and quickly reached his dear father). Here once again we can hear the accelerating pace of the consecutive dactyls, the reinforcing alliteration of the labials (beta/phi/pi), and the dentals (delta/theta/tau), plus the signal word, oka (quickly).

The powerful effect of these rushing dactyls can of course best, or perhaps only, be perceived by an oral reading of Homer's poetry, including the use of the restored pronunciation, without which much of the alliterative effect would be lost. There are many other elements which closely connect the sounds to the sense of Homer's poetry, such as assonance (honde domonde), and onomatopoeia (trikhtha te kai tetrakhta dieskhisen is anemoio).

But that is a fine subject for another paper. I'll conclude this paper by reading aloud several other examples of rushing dactyls.