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Feeling on the Surface: Touch and Emotion in Fuseli and Homer*

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There are three hands on view in Henry Fuseli's 1778 drawing 'The Artist Despairing over the Grandeur of Ancient Ruins' (Figure 5). One, a giant fragment leftover from a colossal statue of Constantine the Great, points upwards, so that the index finger touches the edge of the drawing. Another, half obscured, covers the face of the weeping artist. The third reaches, at the end of a long outstretched arm, to feel the surface of the ancient stone. With this right hand, therefore, the artist 'connects' with antiquity, feeling its surface through his skin, even as the gesture enacted by his left expresses the futility of ever really connecting at all.

This red chalk and brown wash drawing has been called a textbook example of the eighteenth-century view of antiquity, insofar as it positions the artist below, after, beneath, literally at the feet of, the fragments of a once complete past.[1] For my purposes, I want to focus on the notion of feeling that this image evokes, and to try to think about how feeling may grant us a form of access to the past that is different from other modes of interpretation.

Three hands, and thus also three deictic gestures: up, across and back towards oneself. Three acts of touching that call into question the distance, or more accurately the depth, between antiquity and ourselves. For it is not just that the artist touches the statue and thereby connects with classics through

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Figure 5 Henry Fuseli, *Der Künstler, verzweifelnd vor der Grösse der antiken Trümmer* ('The Artist Despairing over the Grandeur of Ancient Ruins') (1778–80). Photo by DeAgostini/Getty Images.

the haptic rather than the visual sense. It is that he touches it all the way along his arm, from his index finger to his chest, with the stretch of his reach draped across the marble foot. In an otherwise wholly static drawing, all the action is contained here, in this single line of tactile exchange between the underside of the forearm and the surface of the stone.

Foreclosing sight with one hand, and reaching out to feel a surface on the other, Fuseli repeats the same gesture five years later in an oil painting depicting

Polyphemus as he gropes the back of his ram (Figure 6).[2] Again, one hand moves up and back toward the face, registering deep but hidden emotion,[3] while the other reaches forwards, and – through the act of feeling – suggests intimacy. As with the earlier drawing, here the depth of feeling transmitted by the act of touching registers despair at what has been lost. In Homer's epic, that feeling is voiced at *Odyssey* 9.444–57:[4]

> Last of all the flock the ram went out of the doorway,
> loaded with his own fleece, and with me, and my close counsels.
> Then, feeling him, powerful Polyphemos spoke a word to him:
> 'My dear old ram, why are you thus leaving the cave last of
> the sheep? Never in the old days were you left behind by
> the flock, but long-striding, far ahead of the rest would pasture
> on the tender bloom of the grass, be first at running rivers,
> and be eager always to lead the way first back to the sheepfold
> at evening. Now you are last of all. Perhaps you are grieving (*potheeis*)
> for your master's eye, which a bad man with his wicked companions
> put out, after he had made my brain helpless with wine, this
> Nobody, who I think has not yet got clear of destruction.
> If only you could be one with me and only be given a voice,
> (εἰ δὴ ὁμοφρονέοις ποτιφωνήεις τε γένοιο)
> to tell me where he is skulking away from my anger . . .'[5]

As his words make clear, Polyphemus cannot, despite his fingers' massive span, grasp the knowledge of what lies beneath (in the painting, as in Homer, the legs of Odysseus are easily perceptible to us). Regardless of the familial way in which the giant pets his ram, Fuseli's painting stages an irreparable moment of rupture between two periods in time ('the old days' and 'now') as between the beings themselves. This is particularly obvious at the end of the speech, when the giant wishes that the ram were endowed with voice and laments the impossibility of *homophrosunē* (like-mindedness) between them: 'If only you could be one with me and be given a voice' (456). *Homophroneō* is used elsewhere in the *Odyssey* to express the like-mindedness of a husband and wife, but here the final aching syllables of *homophroneois* are full of frustration and desire (the optative form in *-ois* introduces an unattainable wish, as it also evokes the 'oi' of *oimoi*, the Greek words for 'alas', while the opening of the mouth around *e-oi*, is perhaps also captured in Polyphemus' 'extraordinary open mouth' on the canvas).[6] The

Figure 6 Henry Fuseli, *Polyphem, geblendet, betastet am Ausgang seiner Höhle den Widder, unter den Odysseus entweicht* ('Polyphemus, blinded, feels at the exit of his cave his ram, under whom Odysseus is escaping') (1803). Private collection. Image courtesy of the Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft.

yearning which generates the final omicrons and iotas of *homophroneois* and *genoio* emerges from the convergence of feeling and speaking (*epimassamenos prosephē*, 9.446) with which the passage began. It is only under the pressure of

the Cyclops' touch, in other words, that we are driven to understand the sense of loss that physically connects Polyphemus to his ram.[7]

As we look at these images side by side, it is easy – as with many of Fuseli's drawings – to spot similarities in structure and composition. The body of the sheep in the Polyphemus scene occupies approximately the same space within the frame as the body of the artist in the scene upon the ruin, and the legs that emerge from beneath the ram in the former are similar in composition to the legs of the artist in the latter.[8] The giant hand and foot of the colossus establish a discrepancy in scale that is similar to the discrepancy established by the giant Polyphemus, whose ram is about the same size, relative to him, as a cat would be to a normal man. In other ways, though, the terms of the comparison are crossed. For it is Polyphemus' ram which looks up in the second drawing, while the giant himself, like the despairing artist, bends his face forward in one hand and feels with the other. And instead of feeling a fragment, Polyphemus grasps for something that is overloaded, complete in itself but also superfluous, with extra limbs added on (cf. 9.445). When compared along these lines, we can now see that high and low, left and right, have been reversed to turn the meaning of Fuseli's earlier drawing into something slightly more complicated. For in the Polyphemus scene the emotive acts of feeling and touching no longer react to but are represented in the vast and damaged body of the past. In the Cyclops we see antiquity, the great ruin, itself despairing as it tries blindly to feel its way between the world as it was then and the world as it is now. This second image, most importantly, shows us antiquity touching back, with a grasp that is – like the modern artist's – despairing and insufficient.

I am interested in the Cyclops' touch because it provides a warm-blooded response to what is often classified as the 'feel of antiquity', or what we might usually describe as the cold feel of smooth marble beneath our own living hands. Of course, we cannot really feel the past, but that is not to say that we don't imaginatively do so. Using the haptic sense as a mode of 'reading' or 'connecting' to the past fuses with the idea that we can tap into some unique or special quality, some kind of essence, only through the fingers. As Eve Sedgwick writes in *Touching Feeling* (2003: 17), to touch or feel is to sense through both our interior selves (as in 'being touched') and our exterior ones (by ourselves touching) in a curious overlaying of surface and depth. Moreover, as she points out, 'a particular intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions'.

Figure 7 Leon A. Borensztein, photograph of Judith Scott (1999). Reprinted with permission.

Of central importance to *Touching Feeling* is a picture of the artist Judith Scott embracing one of her yarn sculptures, made from bits and pieces of fabric and found or stolen objects (Figure 7). This third image resonates quite intriguingly with the play between surface and depth of feeling that we have

seen already in Fuseli's work. The portrait of Scott evokes both the outstretched arm of Fuseli's artist (in each of the three images a single forearm plays a decisive role) and the intimacy and emotion of Polyphemus' touch.

Sedgwick chose the photograph for the cover of her book because, as she writes, 'it conveys an affective and aesthetic fullness that can attach even to experiences of cognitive frustration' (24). The artist Judith Scott, born deaf and with Down Syndrome, was mute throughout her life, and just as this photograph of her privileges touching over viewing, so does it also privilege the affective ties that connect us outside the realm of language. Everything about this picture calls out to be read as a kind of immersion in a deep surface,[9] even to the extent that Scott burrows her face into the object she embraces (the yarn, like the ram's back, suggests the quality of an 'overlaid' or 'deep' surface). For Sedgwick, the image is significant because it helps us to interpret using a different set of prepositions. Not 'beneath', 'behind' or 'beyond' – the usual terms in critical exegesis – but instead 'beside'.[10] Just as the introduction to this volume speaks of the importance of lateral thinking, so Sedgwick expresses an attempt in her book to 'explore some ways around the topos of depth or hiddenness, typically followed by a drama of exposure' which she associates with a hermeneutics of suspicion.[11] For both, I think, the ways in which words or ideas can 'resist definition' point towards a form of dispersal, texture, or depth of field.[12]

Polyphemus has already been exposed by Odysseus' 'No-man' trick as a creature ill-equipped to manage words. From one perspective therefore the passage from *Odyssey* 9 simply stages Polyphemus as a bad or 'surface' reader. Like a plodding textual critic, the Cyclops cannot perceive the true subtext of the scene before him – the secret beneath the ram's belly – but instead fumbles about on the surface, feeling for what is literally there. He laments the fact that his ram has no voice, yet the scene still suggests that he communicates something to him through his touch, and something is communicated from the ram back to him. We ourselves can feel it in this passage, as we can also feel it in Fuseli's painting.[13] There is something fuzzy at the edges of Homer's text; something woolly, brackeny, foamy, and difficult to make logical sense of.

The verb that denotes the Cyclops' touch, *epimaiomai*, might just refer to a kind of generalized feeling or groping, such as a creature who has been recently blinded might engage in. The verb occurs twice after the blinding, first at 9.441 when Polyphemus 'felt along the backs of all his sheep', and then again at 446,

in the passage we have been studying ('feeling [his ram] he spoke . . .'). It joins a small set of haptic phrases that cluster around Polyphemus after the trauma of being blinded (9.415–18):

> But the Cyclops, groaning aloud and in the pain of his agony,
> felt with his hands (χερσὶ ψηλαφόων), and took the boulder out of the doorway,
> and sat down in the entrance himself, spreading his arms wide (χεῖρε πετάσσας),
> to catch anyone who tried to get out with the sheep . . .

Epimaiomai, as others have observed, is also used at 19.468, during the scene of the discovery of Odysseus' scar ('and she [Eurycleia] knew, by feeling it') (γνῶ ῥ' ἐπιμασσαμένη).[14] Its placement there suggests that, as a mode of interpretation, Polyphemus' thick fingers on the tangled back of the ram do count for something. Those fingers add something to how we read the scene and suggest that surface reading – alongside what we have long called deep or symptomatic reading – figures somehow in our approach to ancient texts.

If my 'something' and 'somehow' in the previous paragraph sound vague, this is because I have strayed into the territory of feelings. Although we have long been instructed to ignore our feelings when approaching the past, James Porter has described classicism as itself an elusive idea that is 'steeped in the language of feeling and affect'.[15] The question, as he puts it, of 'what . . . it feel[s] like to be classical, or to be in the presence of whatever is felt to be classical' is not only raised by the first Fuseli image but accentuated by the textured surfaces of the ram's back. The thick, pliant and especially deep possibilities of both speak to the sense that surfaces have a grain that we might choose to read 'along' or 'with' instead of the more traditional 'against'.[16]

Homer's shallows

In Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, Homer's name emerges through the smooth touch of the fingers upon a small marble bust of the poet, and from there is transposed onto various forms of what we might call deep surface (*Omeros* 1.2.3 [Walcott 1990, 14]):

> "O-meros," she laughed. "That's what we call him in Greek,"
> stroking the small bust with its boxer's broken nose,
> and I thought of Seven Seas sitting near the reek
>
> of drying fishnets, listening to the shallows' noise.
> I said: "Homer and Virg are New England farmers,
> and the winged horse guards the gas-station, you're right."
>
> I felt the foam head watching as I stroked an arm, as
> cold as its marble, then the shoulders in winter light
> in the studio attic. I said, "Omeros,"
>
> and O was the conch-shell's invocation, mer was
> both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,
> os, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes
>
> and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore.
> Omeros was the crunch of dry leaves, and the washes
> That echoed from a cove-mouth when the tide has ebbed.
>
> The name stayed in my mouth.

Together, these thickly textured surfaces accumulate in the poet's mouth, filling out the rounded sound of 'O' or conch shell or recurring wave even as the imagery of the lines is drawn back again and again to the surface. The fishnets reek of the deep, yet their job is also to bring what is underneath to the top and leave it drying on the land. In his description of the water-filled cove, Walcott ends with shallows, at that moment when everything is washed away. Depth, to be sure, has a place in Homer's name; symbolized by the 'mother and sea' in the fourth stanza, or even in the subterranean origins of crops and petrol in the second, but it is what's on the surface that gives substance to the poet's words: the soft texture of foam riding on top of the wave's edge or breaking smoothly against the shore. Homer may have become a New England farmer, but the operative critical metaphor in Walcott's articulation of his name is not digging but feeling; even Virgil, nicknamed 'Virg', puns on 'verge', edge, or brink.

Like the ram's back, which transfers touching to a thicker medium, Walcott's act of 'feeling through' Homer's name moves from fingers on a cold marble bust to the rich, foamy, crunchy taste of one poet's name inside the mouth of another. But it is the sea, which – as both the *Omeros* passage and Shane Butler's

essay in this volume show – reflects perhaps best of all the ever-revolving question of surface and depth.

In the *Iliad*'s description of the destruction of the Achaean wall, Troy is famously obliterated when washed smooth by the force of several rivers and covered over with sand (12.30–1):[17]

> λεῖα δ' ἐποίησεν παρ' ἀγάρροον Ἑλλήσποντον,
> αὖτις δ' ἠιόνα μεγάλην ψαμάθοισι κάλυψε . . .
>
> and made all smooth again by the hard-running passage of Helle
> and once again piled the great beach under sand . . .

What is left behind, in Homer's configuration, is not the surface of a ruin or fragment but literally nothing. The past is washed away into smoothness, becoming a curious kind of aesthetic object whose absence and impossibility, as Porter has argued, paradoxically recalls its past.[18] But the temptation has also been strong among critics to see Homer as similarly flat – as all shiny surface without lacuna, shadow or depth.[19] This widespread practice has something to do with Homeric style: the paratactic nature of epic verse, its lack of suspense, the strung-along way in which it presents temporal events (aka Zieliński's Law), the apparent absence of interiority, or 'deep self', among the characters, the extensive use of description, and the supposed 'immediacy' of composing without writing.[20] This makes of Homer a curiously shallow and surface poet. In honor of the title of this volume, here is one of those critics explaining why Homer is not 'deep':[21]

> Homeric speech does not yet know this aspect of the word 'deep'. It is more than an ordinary metaphor; it is almost as if speech were by this means trying to break through its confines, to trespass on a forbidden field of adventure. Nor does Homer show himself conversant with the specifically spiritual facet of 'deep knowledge', 'deep thinking' and so forth. The words βαθύφρων and βαθυμήτης are, it is true, formed by analogy with Homeric expressions, but they are πολύφρων and πολύμητις, 'much-pondering' and 'much-thinking'. Just as lyric poetry specializes in compounds formed with βαθυ-, so Homer uses the prefix πολυ- to express an increase of knowledge or suffering: πολύιδρις, πολυμήχανος, πολυπένθης, etc., 'much-knowing, 'much-devising', 'much-suffering.' Quantity, not intensity, is Homer's standard of judgment.

According to his analysis, the word *bathu* (deep) is underutilized in epic and far subordinate to *polu* (many) compounds. Although Snell overstates his case, the distinction he raises between 'depth' and 'multiplicity', as well as between 'intensity' and 'quantity', is a fascinating one. What does it mean that depth, classified in the same sentence as 'more than an ordinary metaphor' and a 'forbidden field of adventure', is not admitted into our reception of Homer? We may think of the classical past as deep because so far away, yet we also insist on making the earliest parts of that past shallow, smooth, and transparent.[22]

For the remainder of this paper, I will suggest that we are mistaken in doing so, and I will argue that an important kind of depth lies on the surface in Homeric epic. I think it is important to point this out because it counters our practice of reading antiquity along the lines of either smooth, polished surface, as if a pristine ruin, or as archaeological site or archive which we dig through in our continued effort to reveal the long-buried secrets of the past. One might also say that reading Homer on the surface means stopping to pay attention to the trivial details, filler words, and various stylistic elements that we might otherwise skip over.[23] To read depth on the surface is to pay attention to affect over action, as scholars such as Sedgwick (2003) and Brinkema (2014) have suggested, and to rethink surfaces as unstable forces with their own intensities.

Let's start with one seemingly innocuous word, the participle *dakruoessai* ('weeping') used to describe the Nereids as they emerge from the sea at the behest of Achilles at *Iliad* 18.65–7 (translation mine):

> . . .αἱ δὲ σὺν αὐτῇ
> δακρυόεσσαι ἴσαν, περὶ δέ σφισι κῦμα θαλάσσης
> ῥήγνυτο·
>
> . . .they went with [Thetis]
> weeping, and about them the wave of the water
> was broken.

At first glance, the detail that the Nereids are weeping seems somewhat irrelevant, especially because the section of the *Iliad* following the death of Patroclus is filled with tears. But the doubling of the wet, salty surface of the Nereids' face with the wet, salty surface of the broken wave as the women

emerge from the sea calls attention to a somewhat complex transition from interior to exterior and from depth to surface. As the exteriorization of one's interior self, tears attain a surface visibility once they have welled up within the eye and for the duration of their passage down the face, but in their near-immateriality, near-invisibility, and their one-word mention in the poem, they cry out to be ignored. No sooner have they materialized on the Nereids' cheeks than the seawater washes them off.[24]

Like Walcott's fishing nets, Homer surfaces the deep, bringing the thirty-four Nereids up from under the sea. But their tears can hardly be called deep: the goddesses carry their emotions on the surface of their faces, and even the tears themselves are in some sense false. How can anyone cry underwater, how can a tear appear on a wet face that breaks through the waves?[25] Even worse, here the Nereids are crying without really knowing why they are crying, for they have not yet, supposedly, learned of Patroclus' death. Their tears could then be seen as utterly stylized, as shallow as the surface of the water they emerge from. But the truth is that we don't really know what the Nereids know and how much they care:[26] their tears are, like the wave before it breaks, transitory and fragile – hard to read and hard to grasp. Indeed, their doubling with the water's surface makes clear what is always true about weeping: tears are hard to depict. Witness Fuseli's artist and Polyphemus, who both cover their faces as they weep.[27] In this scene, as I have mentioned, the tears are no sooner expressed than displaced, washed away by the wave's break into the sibilant θαλάσσης (18.66).

Why then does *dakruoessai* emerge at this precise point in the text, at the very moment of the face's contact with the water's surface? The breaking curve of the sea pulls into its swell the multiple tears of the nymphs (there are thirty-four of them in all, so how many individual drops of water are produced by each pair of eyes?), transforming *bathu* into *polu* as the sea rolls back and forth from a limitless horizon. It is a quick moment of transition, and quickly forgotten. But this twofold eruption of troubled surfaces leaves a small trace of feeling in the poem that is different from the heartfelt lament of Thetis from the depths for a son who will never return to her.[28]

In this sense Snell is right – it is not depth that gives the Homeric sea its intensity but the waves that roll across its surface and crash against beach and headland. The beach, hit repeatedly by the breaking wave of the sea, is *poluēxes*

('much-resounding'), not *bathuēxes*, and this ongoing rush of waves is a recurrent motif in the poem (4.422–6):[29]

> As when along the thundering beach (ἐν αἰγιαλῷ πολυηχέϊ) the surf of the sea strikes
> beat upon beat as the west wind drives it onward; far out
> cresting first on the open water, it drives thereafter
> to smash roaring along the dry land, and against the rock jut (ἄκρας)
> bending breaks itself into crests spewing back the salt wash . . .

I have discussed elsewhere the juxtaposition of sea and land in the *Iliad*'s description of the magical foals of Tros running along the edge of the shore (20.226–9).[30] There the word for surface (*akron*) registers two differently resistant planes – one not breaking ('they ran on the surface [*akron*] of the stalks of the wheat but did not break it') the other subsisting only as the form of a break stable enough to run along ('they would run along the surface [*akron*] of the break of the grey surf'). In both cases, as with the breaking wave of the sea around the Nereids' faces and Walcott's 'sibilant collar on a lace shore', Homer focuses attention on the transient surface.

As a form, therefore, the surface of the sea – like the tear on the face – is transient and contingent. In a famous simile from *Iliad* 16, the Myrmidons readying for battle are compared to wolves whose jaws are stained with blood after feeding on a stag. After their feast, having gathered around a dark-watered spring, the wolves drink from the water (16.159–62):

> . . .πᾶσιν δὲ παρήιον αἵματι φοινόν
> καὶ τ' ἀγεληδὸν ἴασιν ἀπὸ κρήνης μελανύδρου
> λάψοντες γλώσσῃσιν ἀραιῇσιν μέλαν ὕδωρ
> ἄκρον, ἐρευγόμενοι φόνον αἵματος·
>
> . . .till the jowls of every wolf run blood, and then go
> all in a pack to drink from a spring of dark-running water,
> lapping with their lean tongues along the black edge of the surface
> and belching up the clotted blood.

As they lap the black edge of the surface (μέλαν ὕδωρ ἄκρον) with their narrow tongues, they belch up blood (literally 'spew'; ἐρευγόμενοι is elsewhere used of the sea sending forth a spray of foam), mixing the gore of blood (φόνον αἵματος) into the black water. In a chiastic act of regurgitation, from recto to

verso, interior to exterior (κρήνης μελανύδρου ... μέλαν ὕδωρ ἄκρον) the wolves bring back to the surface, in reverse order, the red blood (αἵματι φοινόν ... φόνον αἵματος) that stained their jaws two lines above. Like the affective, although practically invisible, overlaying of tears onto the water's break, or like the sand washed smooth in the Achaean wall's destruction, the blood that disappears into the dark spring's running surface leaves barely a trace of itself behind. But the streak of *phonos* – slaughter, gore, blood, hunger, desire – that slips into the water from the bellies of the wolves was first kindled in the eager spirits of the Myrmidons. The dark surface of the water, which first caught in its currents the flow of Patroclus' tears at the beginning of the book (16.2–4: 'standing by him [Patroclus] wept warm tears [δάκρυα θέρμα χέων] like a dark-watered spring [κρήνη μελάνυδρος] which drips dark water [δνοφερὸν χέει ὕδωρ] from a steep rock') now draws into its orbit the promise or threat of blood for Achilles and his men.[31]

The traces of affect in δακρυόεσσαι and φόνον αἵματος that linger briefly on the edges of Homer's world never make it to the depths. They offer no traction for the practice of deep reading.[32] Insistently buoyant, their special affinity is to the place of the surface, suggesting that certain structures of feeling survive only on the exterior. What is revealed through them is not hidden or repressed meaning but quite the opposite: something that momentarily breaks onto the surface, appearing as a form of 'seeming', an over-spilling of emotion and sensibility that rapidly disperses.

As we have already seen in the description of the weeping Nereids, the skin and the sea stand as two especially responsive modes for the notion of 'feeling on the surface'. In the last section of this paper, I will consider two of the *Iliad*'s passages where the skin is grazed by an arrow and flooded with blood: the wounding of Menelaus in book 4 and of Aphrodite in book 5. Both of these wounds turn out to be trivial and both privilege the superficial – *akron* – as a site of potential and desire. First, in *Iliad* 4 (130–47), Pandarus shoots an arrow at Menelaus that is not supposed to harm him, for we are told at the very opening of the passage that Athene brushes it away from his skin as she also directs it within (*en*), through (*dia*) and straight through (*diapro*) the multiple pieces and elaborate layers of Menelaus' armor until it scratches or inscribes (*epegrapse*) the topmost surface of his skin (*akrotaton chroa*, 4.130–40, 146–7):

She brushed it away from his skin (ἀπὸ χροός) as lightly as when a mother
brushes a fly away from her child who is lying in sweet sleep,
steering herself the arrow's course straight (ἴθυνεν) to where the golden
belt buckles joined and the halves of his corselet were fitted together.
The bitter arrow was driven against (ἐν) the joining of the war belt
and passed clean through (διά) the war belt elaborately woven:
into (διά) the elaborately wrought corselet the shaft was driven
and the guard which he wore to protect his skin and keep the spears off,
which guarded him best, yet the arrow plunged through (διὰπρό) even this
also
and it grazed (ἐπέγραψε) the man's skin on its very surface (ἀκρότατον)
and straightaway from the cut there gushed a cloud of dark blood.
...
so, Menelaos, your shapely thighs were stained with the colour
of blood, and your legs also and the ankles beneath them.

As the arrow passes through and through, it seems both to reach and fail to reach its target: certainly the interlacing of *dia* with *akrotaton* suggests both interior and exterior, or depth before the edge. One might say that the arrow's course plots a fantasy of reaching the surface, one that is superficially validated by the immediate rush of Menelaus' blood.[33] But as this new blood flows over the skin like a stain or dye, so does it also wash through and renew the surface, beginning to reform the contours of the body, from its well-formed thighs all the way down to its shins and ankles.

Aphrodite is similarly grazed at the very edge (*akrēn*) of her soft (*ablēchrēn*) hand in *Iliad* 5. The desire of Diomedes, who reaches out and leaps after the goddess, like the desire of the arrow as it passes through Menelaus' armor, leaves its trace as a form of surface affect on the soft edge of her hand, a temporary disequilibrium, discoloring, or change of texture that also reflects on the mood of the poem (5.334–40):

Now as, following her through the thick crowd, he caught her,
lunging in his charge far forward the son of high-hearted
Tydeus made a thrust against the soft surface (ἄκρην) of the hand with the
bronze spear,
and the spear tore the skin driven clean on through the immortal
robe that the very Graces had woven for her carefully,

over the palm's base; and blood immortal flowed from the goddess,
ichor, that which runs in the veins of the blessed divinities.

The editors of a recent collection on affect theory talk of affect as a kind of 'bloom-space', always full of potential, of never-quite-knowing, and of an indeterminate stilling, or over-spilling, of the present.[34] The spread of blood (or *ichor*) across the skin, tears across the sea's surface, or the fingers of Polyphemus across the ram's back all leave only ineffable traces on the action of their stories. What I have tried to do in the second half of this paper is not just to come to terms with the alluring fantasy that we ourselves might touch the surfaces of antiquity[35] (and if we could touch them what would they feel like?), but also to try to work out how – in Homer at least – those surfaces might react to the touch. Whether, in short, they can guide us towards reading, experiencing, or even feeling the ancient world in a different way.

We have seen in these last Homeric examples some of the ways in which *akron* breaks, resists, withholds, and transmits the flood of emotion and expression between interior and exterior. By trying to read on the surface, in some way or other, we end up perhaps no closer than Sappho's apple pickers, for whom the fruit that 'turns red on a high branch / high on the highest branch' (ἐρεύθεται ἄκρῳ ἐπ' ὔσδῳ / ἄκρον ἐπ' ἀκροτάτῳ) is always out of reach.[36] In pointing so insistently to a reduplicating (*akrō . . . akron . . . akrotatō*) surface that can never be touched, the fragment teases the reader with multiple strategies: deixis, erasure, and then deflection ('. . . and the apple pickers forgot – / well no, they didn't forget – were not able to reach').[37] Yet the apple pickers' ambivalent desire still leaves its mark on the surface of the fruit, an apple that is both sweet and – at the moment we turn our attention to it – reddening with the blush of being felt for.[38]

In his essay for this volume, Shane Butler has spoken of how Homer's *oinopa ponton* crashes into the margins of verse, 'forever churning away at the same vowels and consonants', and how that same sea, through the sense of depth and infinitude which it conveys, in some senses resists definition. I have tried in my essay to focus on a different kind of depth; one which lies on the surface of Homer's poem, both literally and litorally (borrowing from Billings' figure on the shore).[39] I have suggested that what rests on that surface is neither stable nor flat, but is, rather, responsive to, and responsible for, its own particular depths of feeling and reading.

Notes

1 Myrone (2001: 6). See further Nochlin (1994: 7): 'Modernity, in this memorable red chalk and sepia wash drawing, is figured as irrevocable loss, poignant regret for lost totality, a vanished wholeness.' For recent modifications to this reading (based on the plausibility of its title, attributed by Gert Schiff) see Pop (2015: 70–2 & n. 3).

2 The painting served as a prototype for an engraving of the same subject used as an illustration for Francis Isaac du Roveray's 1806 lavish reissue of Alexander Pope's translation of the *Odyssey* (Pop 2015: 200–1).

3 The painting suggests emotion rather than pain, despite Polyphemus' recent blinding. Note the highlighting of his mouth and knuckles against the dark colouring of the picture. Pop reads pain, shame and 'irredeemable loss' (2015: 203–12) in the scene.

4 Fuseli's engraving of this scene (n. 2, above) illustrated Pope's translation of these lines, as quoted in Pop (2015: 204).

5 Translations of Homer are by Richmond Lattimore (occasionally modified) unless otherwise noted.

6 Pop (2015: 204).

7 See further Buchan (2004: 18–35). I discuss a different aspect of the Cyclops' touch in Purves (forthcoming).

8 For a further rendition of these legs – but in a sexual pose – see Fuseli's drawing 'Symplegma with a Man and Three Women', *c.* 1809–10 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

9 I borrow the notion of immersion in the surface from Schmitt (2012: esp. 14–15).

10 Sedgwick (2003: 8, 23). See also Apter and Freedgood (2009: 145).

11 Sedgwick (2003: 8).

12 Butler, this volume (39).

13 In the painting, as Pop notes, the lighting on the wool draws attention to the giant's sense of touch, 'amplified by affection' (2015: 207).

14 Montiglio (forthcoming 2016); Mueller (2016); Purves 2013b.

15 Porter (2006a: 308).

16 On which see Bewes (2010).

17 Cf. Homer, *Iliad* 7.462.

18 Porter (2011a); Porter (2016: 370–1). See also on the force of rivers, Holmes (2015).

19 See especially Auerbach 1953 (also discussed in Butler, 'Homer's Deep', this volume); Porter (2008b); Purves (2013b).

20 See especially Haubold (2007: 45), who discusses the last two stanzas from *Omeros* quoted above.

21 Snell (1953: 18). Snell has just been discussing the discovery of depth in intellectual and spiritual matters in the archaic poets. See also Stanford (1950).

22 The rhetoric of depth vs. surface has received renewed attention recently in the call for 'surface reading', on which, see Best and Marcus (2009); Love (2010), Love (2013); Schmitt (2012); Schmitt (forthcoming); Lesjack (2013); Freedgood and Schmitt (2014). In *Mimesis*, Auerbach claimed that Christian literature is marked by a struggle between 'sensory appearance and meaning', whereas 'Greco-Roman specimens of reality are . . . perfectly integrated in their sensory substance' (1953: 49, as partially quoted in de Man 1983: 23).

23 Schmitt (2012).

24 Brinkema (2014: 17): 'the tear demands interpretation, but that reading does not point inward toward the depths of the soul – it remains a surface reading always, a tracing of the bodily production of the sign that signifies only its refusal to reveal itself'.

25 Cf. Homer, *Iliad* 16.2–4, where Patroclus' crying resembles dark water flowing from a steep rock, as discussed further below.

26 In the parallel scene of Thetis' emergence from the sea in Homer, *Iliad* 1, she only pretends not to know why Achilles is crying (1.365). In this scene, however, Achilles tells her what has happened as if she did not already know.

27 Pop (2015: 200–5). Cf. Timanthes' unrepresentable grieving Agamemnon, as discussed by Fuseli in his 1801 Royal Academy Lectures. Fuseli asserts there (of Timanthes' gesture of having Agamemnon cover his eyes) 'neither height nor depth, *propriety* of expression was his aim' (Knowles 1831: 52). The quotation is discussed in Pop (2015: 204–5 and n. 161).

28 Homer, *Iliad* 18.52–64. On Thetis' lament, see Tsagalis (2004: 136–9), with bibliography.

29 On this passage, see Martin (1997: 154–6).

30 Purves (2015: 90–91).

31 See n. 25, above.

32 What is often referred to as 'deep' or 'symptomatic' reading is based on a psychoanalytical model of underlying meaning, often attributed to Marxist and psychoanalytic criticism. Jameson (1981) made the case for symptomatic reading explicitly: e.g., 'Interpretation proper . . . always presupposes, if not a conception of the unconscious itself, that at least some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a latent meaning behind a manifest one, or to rewrite the surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretive code' (63).

33 See further, on both of these woundings and the visible significance of blood in the poem, Holmes (2007).

34 Gregg and Seigworth (2010: 9).

35 See Slaney, this volume.

36 Fr. 105a, trans. Carson (1986). For an astute reading of these lines, see Carson (1986: 26–9).

37 On the reduplication of *akro-*, compare Homer, *Iliad* 20.226–9, both in my reading above, and more extensively in Purves (2015: 90–91). For the importance of surface to deixis, see Schmitt (forthcoming).

38 Porter (2006a: 329) has discussed the idea of classicism, when the writer reaches the peak (ἄκρον) of perfection, having a certain blossom or 'bloom' (ἐπανθεῖν), such – as Longinus says – as one finds on the most beautiful statues (Longinus [attributed], *On the Sublime* 30.1). On *akron* and its cognates used by Longinus to represent the sublime, see Porter (2015: 367, 369, and ch. 1, n. 63).

39 Billings, this volume. On Homer as 'the Great Ocean', see Porter (2015: 360–82).