ON ALCAEUS 42, VOIGT[1]

ὡς λόγος, κάκων ἀ[
Περράμ<ω>ι καὶ παῖσ[ι
ἐκ σέθεν πίκρον, π[
Ἴλιον ἴραν·

οὐ τεαύταν Αἰακίδαι[ς
πάντας ἐς γάμον μά[καρας καλέσσαις
ἄγετ’ ἐκ Νήρηος ἔλων [μελάθρων
πάρθενον ἄβραν

ἐς δόμον Χέρρωνος· ἔ[λυσε δ’
ζῶμα παρθένω· φιλό[
Πήλεος καὶ Νηρεΐδων ἀρίστ[ας
ἐς δ’ ἐνίαυτον

παῖδα γέννατ’ αἰμιθέων [
ὄλβιον ξάνθαν ἐλάτη[ρα πώλων
οἱ δ’ ἀπώλοντ’ ἀμφ’ Ἐ[λένᾳ
καὶ πόλις αὔτων.

As the story goes, of wicked … bitter … from you upon Priam and his sons … holy Ilium … Not such was the pure maiden whom the son of Aeacus wedded, summoning all the blessed gods to the marriage and taking her from the cave of Nereus to the house of Chiron; he loosened the maiden's girdle … the love between Peleus and the best of the Nereids, and within a year she gave birth to a son … of the demigods, happy driver of blond horses; but those and their city died because of Helen.

Throughout this paper I intend to put forward a proposal about the context for which this poem may have been designed, and in which it may have actually been performed: for the purpose, I shall consider several aspects pertaining to the structure and the poetic content of the text, which in my opinion are relevant to the matter.

My approach will therefore be in keeping with the exegetical trend that aims at drawing indications about the performance of ancient texts from their inner components. I believe that this is the least uncertain ground when it comes to making hypotheses on performance, since it minimizes the *a priori* component of the argument, and it neutralizes our tendency to rely on what we call literary genres. When applied to oral poetry (that is, orally composed and orally received poetry), literary genres risk functioning as a burden rather than as an explication: they contribute little to understanding the dynamics of Archaic poetry, whose

shape was notoriously determined by a 'dialogue' (implicit or explicit) between the poet and his public in the *hic et nunc* of every performance; they do not tell us how a particular poem was intended to 'function' when performed. Referring to genres when dealing with oral poetry makes sense and proves to be useful only if generic indications are derived from peculiar, inner features of the poem. To put it in different words: of course genres may be used as descriptive categories of features that are observable in a whole range of texts and that point to the circumstances of their performance; however, they should not be superimposed on the texts or assumed in them on the basis of external, predetermined factors. What is in the texts, especially when it recurs in many of them, may serve as a clue to understanding the circumstances of their performance, but speculations on those circumstances should never be used to explain the texts themselves. Of course, the question of genre can and should be differently confronted in written (that is, literarily conceived) literature. Ancient authors, from the fifth century B.C. onwards, not only *applied* a system of literary genres (this proposition could express our point of view, but is scarcely significant to describe the process from the point of view of ancient authors); they *needed* a system of literary genres to make full sense within the framework of literary tradition and to meet the expectations of their public. But at the time of Lesbian poetry, that is before the spread of literacy, genres were a matter of performative practice, not of speculation or canon: this is why performative circumstances tend to become apparent through the structure of the poems and/or through the thematic choices made within them.[2] It should be stressed that, in my opinion, a *thematic* approach is sometimes more rewarding and less dangerous than an approach based on deictic elements, an approach which seems to be very popular among contemporary scholars: as these scholars have pointed out, deixis is subject to a series of deviations, and tends to create a confrontation between reality and fiction, especially in oral contexts.[3] It is therefore hard to use deixis as an indicator of performative contexts. On the other hand, thematic choices are generally more 'sincere' in expressing the author's intentions, although they need interpretation on a literary ground and interpretation is not always easy or reliable.

1. THE USE OF MYTH AND MYTHICAL *EXEMPLUM*

How could we accurately describe the content of the poem under examination? Is it just a poem on two well-known mythical figures, namely Helen and Thetis? It is

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[2] What I am giving here is but a brief sketch of a highly complicated and much discussed matter: on the difference between genres in oral and literate texts see in particular M. Depew and D. Obbink, 'Introduction', in eid. (edd.), *Matrices of Genre: Authors, Canons, and Society* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 2–5. On the differences between oral poetry and poetry to be read, see C. Calame, 'Deictic ambiguity and auto-referentiality: some examples from Greek poetics', in N. Felson (ed.), *The Poetics of Deixis in Alcman, Pindar, and Other Lyric*, *Arethusa* 37 (2004), 415–43. See also G. Nagy's idea (*Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* [Baltimore, 1990], 362 n. 127) that genres are 'necessary only when the occasion for a given speech-act, that is, for a given poem or song, is lost': he sees genres as what results from the demise of a truly oral context for poetry.

[3] On the performative fictions created by oral poets dealing with deictic elements, see G.B. D'Alessio, 'Past future and present past: temporal deixis in Greek Archaic lyric', in Felson (n. 2), 267–94, at 276–80.

clear that Alcaeus' focus is really on the moral significance of their personalities: interestingly, this significance is not stated in a straightforward way, but pointed out inductively, through the consequences of their deeds, and specifically of their behaviour as wives. Alcaeus does not say that Helen was a wicked woman because she betrayed her husband: he says that her wicked deeds (that is, her faithlessness as a wife) caused the ruin of a city; by the same token, Alcaeus does not say that Thetis was good because she was chaste: he says that her moral qualities were the root of her son's (Achilles') excellence. Here we have the first remarkable peculiarity of our poem: the use of myth as, so to speak, a second-degree *exemplum*. By second-degree *exemplum* I mean that myth and its meaning are explained by referring to other, interrelated myths which may serve to illuminate the former: the saga and its outcome are used as an *exemplum* to determine the nature of a character involved in it, who in turn may possibly function as an *exemplum* for the present of the performance.

Alcaeus in fact does not dwell on the very characters who are, or seem to be, the subject of his poem: we are told nothing of Helen and very little of Thetis, while the focus is immediately shifted to the Trojan War, to Peleus and to the birth of Achilles.[4] Of course there is an easily recognizable connection between the heroines and the myths, since the former are involved in the latter; but it is undeniable that the introduction of those myths marks a significant turn from the heroines to the broader context of saga. It looks as if the two women were intended to function within the poem as 'engines' of the saga rather than poetic subjects in themselves; the saga, in turn, is introduced as a benchmark of their morality.[5]

We have no clear evidence that there is also a first-degree exemplarity at work in our text, but it is not unlikely that the whole discourse might have a significance for Alcaeus' present:[6] if this is the case, we should imagine that Helen and Thetis, who receive a moral characterization within the frame of heroic myth, were intended to function in turn as *exempla* for the participants in the poetic performance. As I shall argue, the initial words of the fragment, ὠς λόγος, speak in favour of an intended first-degree exemplarity: although it does not get an explicit development in our text, it is arguably implied in the overall rhetorical architecture of the poem.

Meyerhoff's (n. 5) discussion of this poem reflects the assumption that it is impossible to disentangle Helen and Thetis from their sagas and to pin them down as centres of autonomous myths: such an assumption is in keeping with the overall approach of his book, which aims at envisaging traditional poetic themes (οἶμαι in the Homeric sense) in order to see what kind of treatment they receive

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[4] As regards Thetis, A.P. Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho* (London, 1983), 193 is right to point out that her relevance is subordinated to the role of Peleus in the second and third strophes, and to the role of Achilles in the fourth: she never actually gets to the centre of the stage. Much the same can be said of Helen, since her character seems to be overshadowed by the theme of the fall of Troy.

[5] Therefore I would not completely agree with Burnett (n. 4), 191 (also D. Meyerhoff, *Traditioneller Stoff und individuelle Darstellung: Untersuchungen zu Alkaios und Sappho* [Hildesheim, 1984], 99 n. 55 about Thetis) when she says that 'it is not two women, but two marriages that are here juxtaposed'. To me, the marriages are not in themselves the main poetic subject: since the outcome of the marriages is used as an *exemplum* to illuminate the morality of the two women, the true subject of the poem resides in the women themselves.

[6] A possibility reasonably proposed by H. Eisenberger, *Der Mythos in der aeolischen Lyrik* (Frankfurt, 1956), 64. *Contra* R. Pfeiffer, Review of D. Lobel, ΑΛΚΑΙΟΥ ΜΕΛΗ. *The fragments of Lyrical Poems by Alcaeus* (Oxford, 1927), *Gnomon* 6 (1930), 316–21, at 317: he considers our poem 'rein erzählendes'.

at the hands of Alcaeus and Sappho. Granted, this approach is perfectly legitimate and, throughout the book, it also turns out to be fruitful. None the less, while I concede that it is easy to speak about 'der Stoff "Helenas Ehebruch als Ursache der Zerstörung Troias"'[7] (Helen is *ipso facto* primarily the cause of the Trojan War: as we shall see, she is presented in analogous terms, from this point of view, in Alcaeus 283 Voigt), the connection between Thetis' marriage with Peleus and the heroism shown by Achilles during the Trojan War is probably less compelling; most of all, the opposition between Helen/fall of Troy and Thetis/birth of Achilles sounds neatly imaginative and artful.

   To sum up the logical process carried on throughout the poem: that Thetis' wedding was approved by the gods is clear from the fact that they all attended it, and Alcaeus implies that their approval was motivated by the bride's purity. Then the poet goes on to say that she gave birth to a son, who in due time was to become a hero. Now, the future hero's birth clearly happens after the marriage: the chronological link is indisputable; but there is no evident or necessary connection between his birth and the fact that he was to become a hero. Still, Alcaeus also manages to work out a connection on the logical level between these two aspects: Achilles' excellence is interpreted as a consequence of his mother's high moral rank (conjugal fidelity being the feminine quality *par excellence*).[8] As we see, for Alcaeus it was a matter of interpreting some mythical traditions according to a predetermined poetic strategy, not just restating a more or less traditional view on some events. This kind of interpretation on the part of Alcaeus goes way beyond the fact, recognized by Meyerhoff, that 'er [Alkaios] bringt zum Ausdruck, was ihn an dem Stoff betroffen macht'.[9]

   How original is this kind of approach if compared with the extant corpus of Archaic poetry? Davies is obviously right to remind us of a well-known fact: already in the Homeric poems we find several passages where a character is mentioned, and his vicissitudes remembered, with an exemplary function.[10] One could also observe that comparisons between women who behaved differently can be found in Homer as well.[11] A brief comparison between the use of *exemplum* in Homer and in Alcaeus is in order here. First of all, as it is apparent from the thorough lists and analyses of Homeric *exempla* in Oehler and Lohmann,[12] in the Homeric poems we can only envisage what we called first-degree exemplarity: the

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[7] Meyerhoff (n. 5), 91.

[8] An awkward argument on the part of Alcaeus? Possibly. What is surprising is the fact that heroism is said to descend from such a virtue as conjugal fidelity. In the Homeric poems someone's heroism, or lack of heroism, is sometimes compared with his father's qualities as a warrior: see *Il*. 5.253, 635–7, 800.

[9] Meyerhoff (n. 5), 113.

[10] M. Davies, 'Alcaeus, Thetis, Helen', *Hermes* 114 (1986), 257–62, at 259. I should make it clear that I do not agree with those who, like W.J. Slater, 'Doubts about Pindaric interpretation', *CJ* 72 (1977), 193–208, at 195, maintain that 'almost every example of its [myth's] use from Homer onward is an exemplum'. The poetic performances by Phemius and Demodocus described in the *Odyssey*, for example, deal with myth (mainly episodes from the Trojan saga) for the pure sake of narration, although they show connections with the plot of the poem. I believe that mythical *exemplum* as a rhetorical pattern has a specificity that is worth preserving for my present argument, and that it does not coincide *tout court* with storytelling of mythical facts.

[11] Meyerhoff (n. 5), 100–1: he mentions *Od*. 11.436–9 (comparison between Helen and Clytemnestra) and *Od*. 24.192–202 (comparison between Penelope and Clytemnestra).

[12] R. Oehler, *Mythologische Exempla in der älteren griechischen Dichtung* (Diss., University of Basel, 1925); D. Lohmann, *Die Komposition der Reden in der Ilias* (Berlin, 1970).

story referred to is narrated straightforwardly as an *exemplum* intended to influence
somebody's behaviour, and not as an *exemplum*, in turn, of the exemplary figure's
morality. Let us consider, for instance, the famous story of Meleager in *Il.* 9.524–99,
narrated by Phoenix to induce Achilles to set aside his anger: the salvation of
the Aetolians by the hand of Meleager, who agrees to put an end to his anger
against his mother to protect his people from the Curetes, is a paradigm of what
Achilles is urged to do in the Iliadic situation. In this case, clearly it is the story
and its significance that are at stake, not the interpretation of Meleager's morality
through his actions. His actions do not call for interpretation: at least in Homer's
(and Phoenix's) view, their moral implications are transparent by themselves. In
other words, Homer judges his characters straightforwardly; he does not dwell on
deriving an interpretation concerning their virtue or vice.

   It is true that some scholars have seen in the Meleager *exemplum* an application
of Homer's irony, since a tragic parallel can be seen between the stories of Meleager
and Achilles after their return from battle: they died soon afterwards. Of course
Meleager's death was known to Phoenix and Achilles, because his story preceded
the Trojan War by two or three generations. Still, Phoenix was almost certainly
unaware that Achilles was in turn about to die: the correspondence between their
ultimate destinies does not play any appreciable part inside the narrative. We have
to be careful in making a clear distinction between the different levels of the
text and of its reception. The irony may involve Achilles, who was aware of his
imminent death, and it most likely involves the hearer/reader of the poem: but,
within my argument, suffice it to say that such an irony has no part in Phoenix's
protreptic intentions, which means that he does not have Meleager's or Achilles'
death in mind when he mentions Meleager. He focusses on a different moment of
their lives: namely, their return in battle.[13]

   This is why Homer only uses 'standard', first-degree *exempla*: the very actions
ascribed to the characters account for their moral connotation, and there is no need
to call the overall saga into question as a benchmark. Homer does not need to
interpret the saga and its characters to make a point. He knows another strategy
for adapting a traditional tale to the situation he wants to illustrate through an
exemplum: to intervene directly in the myth, or at least to modify some of its details
according to his narrative necessities.[14] He plays with the intrinsic polymorphism of
myth rather than with the possibility of putting forward multiple interpretations of
the same stories.[15] In some cases, this confrontation of different mythical versions

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[13] An 'ironic' interpretation of Meleager's story within this passage has been suggested by,
among others, E. Sachs, 'Die Meleagererzählung in die Iliad und das mythische Paradeigma',
Philologus 88 (1933), 16–29. See B. Hainsworth in G.S. Kirk (ed.), *The Iliad*: *A Commentary*,
vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1993), 130 for a comprehensive bibliography on the episode.

[14] L. Edmunds, 'Oral story-telling and Archaic Greek hexameter poetry', in J.A. López Férez
(ed.), *Mitos en la literatura griega arcaica y clásica* (Madrid, 2002), 17–33, where further
bibliography is mentioned. Along this line of thinking, L. Edmunds, 'Epic and myth', in
J.M. Foley (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Epic* (Malden, MA and Oxford, 2005), 31–44, at 39
has gone beyond the case of mythical *exempla* and argued that part of the overall significance
of epic poetry for its hearers resided in 'the difference between the folktale(s) and Homer's
adaptation'. A similar point about Pindar is made by Slater (n. 10).

[15] Many scholars think that the Meleager *exemplum* itself is an adaptation of a different tradi-
tional story designed to fit the Iliadic protreptic context. A strong case has been made by M.M.
Willcock, 'Mythological paradeigma in the *Iliad*', *CQ* 14 (1964), 141–54. A similar point of
view is expressed by J. Bremmer, 'La plasticité du mythe: Méléagre dans la poésie homérique',
in C. Calame (ed.), *Métamorphoses du mythe en Grèce antique* (Geneva, 1988), 37–56, at 50–1.

becomes explicit and takes a rather competitive stance: the poet mentions and rejects some versions of a story in order to submit an alternate version of the same story, which he claims to be true. This poetic strategy, which explicitly denounces the normal practice of adapting myths, is already attested in Homer, at least *in nuce* (see *Il.* 5.635: about Sarpedon being generated from Zeus; here, however, it sounds like a rhetorical expedient on the part of Tlepolemus rather than a real confutation of a mythical tale: in fact, no alternative version is proposed). It gets its clearest formulation at the beginning of the 'Homeric' hymn to Dionysus (*Hymn. Hom. Bacch.* 1–7), where several traditions about the god's birth are mentioned and discarded; and in Stesichorus' 'palinode' song, where the poet refers to his former poem on Helen and states: οὔκ ἐστ' ἔτυμος λόγος οὗτος (fr. 192 Campbell: no matter whether the poet or a character is speaking here).

Since it is difficult to define the chronological relations between the Homeric epics and Lesbian poetry,[16] I would not argue that Alcaeus was the first to undertake the task of deriving a moral interpretation of the characters from the part they played in the saga as a whole. None the less, as we saw, no such approach can be detected in the Homeric poems (although of course a more straightforward manner of moral evaluation applies to many of Homer's characters and *exempla*), nor would it be easy to envisage a similar effort in poetry of Alcaeus' time, even in the very corpus of Lesbian poetry: if we consider two major poems where Helen is mentioned within this same corpus (Alc. 283 Voigt; Sapph. 16 Voigt), we find that her figure is treated in more 'neutral', or in less 'marked' terms. According to Alcaeus 283 Voigt, she was forced by love to abandon her family and to follow Paris, and this caused many Trojans to die: as well as in our poem, a causal link is drawn between Helen and the ruin of Troy (possibly the name of Achilles occurred too: the conjecture [δῖος Ἀ]χί[λλ]ευς at line 18 was first advanced by A. Vogliano, *Il nuovo Alceo: da un papiro di Oxyrhynchus* [Rome, 1952], 6–7). However, in Alcaeus 283 Voigt we have a simple statement of fact: there is no moral judgment about Helen, at least as far as we can understand from the surviving lines; the case is clearly different in Alcaeus 42 Voigt, where a reference is made to κάκων – possibly referring to a word meaning 'deeds' – and the nexus οὐ τεαύταν marks an opposition between Helen and the 'pure' Thetis.[17] In Sappho 16 Voigt once again Helen is introduced as an *exemplum*, but this *exemplum* is significantly framed within a sort of apologetic discourse: Helen's choice to abandon her family and to follow her desire is adduced as a proof of Sappho's argument that ὄττω τις ἔραται is κάλλιστον. Much the same can be said of the Sisyphus *exemplum* in Alcaeus 38 Voigt: here the apologue illustrates the principle that no one can avoid death in due time. I shall not dwell on the problematic case of the so-called

[16] M.L. West, 'The view from Lesbos', in M. Reichel and A. Rengakos (edd.), *Epea Pteroenta* (Stuttgart, 2002), 207–20 is remarkable, among other things, for making it clear that Lesbian poetry reached its peak when the Ionian epic tradition was still flourishing, probably also in the island of Lesbos itself: the Homeric poems may have represented, for Alcaeus and Sappho, very recent masterpieces they were *beginning* to become familiar with.

[17] *Pace* Burnett (n. 4), 195. I find it difficult to believe that κάκων [ἔργων?] may refer to 'past Dardanian crimes': such a reading introduces a double motivation for the fall of Troy (namely, those Dardanian crimes and Helen's behaviour) that seems irrelevant to the point Alcaeus is making here. I acknowledge that, if we take κάκων [ἔργων?] as referring to Helen's crimes, the turn of the period sounds a bit redundant; still, in my opinion, this is explicable on account of the emphasis the poet intends to put on Helen as the cause of the fall of Troy (ἐκ σέθεν), and on her moral wickedness (κάκων [ἔργων?]).

'new Sappho' poem: our understanding of the Tithonus *exemplum* is limited by
the fact that we do not know whether or not the poem continued after line 12 to
include the four lines (23–6) transmitted by *P Oxy.* 1787 fr. 1. In all these cases,
the *exempla* are used to support an argument about a *gnômê*: there is no interest
in evaluating the characters' morality by itself. Under such circumstances, we are
clearly dealing with first-degree exemplarity.

    In my opinion, the focus on the interconnections between mythical characters
rather than on the characters themselves accounts for another remarkable feature of
our poem: namely, the fact that those characters are for the most part referred to
obliquely and indirectly, not by name. This is almost certainly the case for Thetis
and Achilles. The treatment of Thetis is particularly striking, for Alcaeus uses no
fewer than three periphrases to indicate her within just four lines (8–11): $\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\theta\epsilon\nu o\nu$
$\ddot{\alpha}\beta\rho\alpha\nu$; $\pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omega$; $N\eta\rho\epsilon\ddot{\imath}\delta\omega\nu$ $\dot{\alpha}\rho\acute{\imath}\sigma\tau[\alpha\varsigma$. We do not read Helen's name either, but
there is a strong possibility that her name was actually mentioned in line 15 and
perhaps also in line 1 or 2, as $\dot{\epsilon}\kappa$ $\sigma\acute{\epsilon}\theta\epsilon\nu$ in line 3 seems to require:[18] in this case
the mention of the name is almost inevitably conveyed by the apostrophe. A direct
mention of Peleus indeed occurs at line 11, but he is alluded to earlier in the poem:
at line 5, he is indicated by means of his patronymic; his name is considerably
delayed in the rhetorical pattern of the poem. Now Meyerhoff (n. 5) is certainly
right to observe that such an extensive use of periphrasis does not hamper the
overall intelligibility of the poem, since all the periphrases are rooted in traditional
patterns of myth and are therefore quite easy to decode.[19] But this is not the whole
story. In the terms of Genette's narratological model, this argument falls under the
category of 'motivation', in that it explains why the use of periphrasis is possible
in this context; but it tells us nothing about its *fonction*, that is about the artistic
goal the poet intended to achieve through it.[20] In my opinion, the *fonction* has to do
with the fact that Alcaeus' focus is on the interconnections between the characters
of myth, rather than on the characters themselves; or better, it has to do with his
attempt at illuminating the characters by means of showing how their actions,
rooted in their moral nature, influence other characters' vicissitudes.

    It is time to sum up what we have observed up to now. Our poem is original
if compared with the Homeric epics, because there is an effort to derive a moral
judgement from the connections between the single characters under discussion and
the saga (second-degree *exemplum*). On the other side, our poem is highly original
within the domain of Lesbian poetry (that is, Alcaeus himself and Sappho), because
apparently it was quite unusual for this poetic 'school' to moralize myth the way
Alcaeus does here. I insist that, when making guesses about a possible context
for the performance of our poem, it is essential to reflect upon such an interpre-

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    [18] Both Voigt and Lieberman integrate Ἐ[λένᾳ at line 15, according to the consensus of the
editors. D.A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), 1.256 integrates Ὤλεν' in line 1.
Ὤλεν' had also been proposed at line 2 by Page in D.L. Page, *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta*
(Oxford, 1955), 278. W. Rösler, *Dichter und Gruppe: Eine Untersuchung zu den Bedingungen
und zur historischen Funktion früher griechischer Lyrik am Beispiel Alkaios* (Munich, 1980),
231–2 proposed to refer $\dot{\epsilon}\kappa$ $\sigma\acute{\epsilon}\theta\epsilon\nu$ to Aphrodite; his hypothesis is based on the assumption that
Alcaeus 42 Voigt is the continuation of Alcaeus 41 Voigt, where Aphrodite is mentioned at line
19. This view has been convincingly refuted by G. Tsomis, *Zusammenschau der frühgriechischen
monodischen Melik: Alkaios, Sappho, Anakreon* (Stuttgart, 2001), 264 n. 6.
    [19] Meyerhoff (n. 5), 100, on Helen.
    [20] I refer to the terminology used in the valuable treatment of these themes in G. Genette,
'Vraisemblance et motivation', *Communications* 11 (1968), 5–21, esp. 19–21.

tative, judgmental stance toward the mythical figures involved: the peculiarity of this feature demonstrates *a fortiori* the necessity to take it into due consideration.

2. THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR SAGAS: HELEN, THETIS, ACHILLES

Before attempting such a guess, however, it is important to evaluate the choice of the three exemplary figures of the poem, Helen, Thetis and Achilles, and to analyse what aspects of their personalities are called into question. Of course Helen and Thetis are characterized in opposite terms, although, as we said, indirectly: Helen stands on the bad side; Thetis on the good. None the less, for everyone who is aware of their vicissitudes (this was obviously the case for the poet and his public) it is impossible not to feel that there is more at stake. Most of the scholars who have dealt with this poem have pointed out, more or less persuasively, a whole set of mythical issues that are not mentioned in the poem but are, so to speak, naturally conveyed by it: I will confine myself to briefly recapitulating these issues. While Helen is not a surprising choice as a model of conjugal unfaithfulness (although, as we shall see, different versions of her story were known), Thetis sounds quite peculiar as an *exemplum* of feminine virtue:[21] according to a well-known tradition attested, for example, in *Il.* 24.79–84, she left Peleus' house after giving birth to Achilles, and her myth is often linked to a situation of danger for Zeus' supremacy, that is of turmoil in the cosmic order.[22] Moreover, Achilles himself is problematic in this context: granted he was the most outstanding of the heroes in the Trojan War, he none the less died young because of the very war in which he showed his prowess. From this point of view, Achilles is one of the many who died at Troy and is therefore ultimately a victim of Helen's behaviour: hardly ὄλβιος! This means that the opposition drawn by Alcaeus between the two poles (Helen versus Thetis–Achilles) can easily be questioned and turned into a continuum.[23]

At any rate, we have to be wary of a fundamental difference between Thetis and Achilles, although this difference seems to have been overlooked by commentators. The presentation of Thetis may well be partial if compared with the whole body of myth concerning her, but it is coherent in itself: it was simply a matter of choice for Alcaeus to accept a version of the myth where she just acts as a faithful wife, and to keep out of his argument contrasting versions of her story. As Race (n. 23) has rightly pointed out, the mention of Chiron in line 9 is consistent with the positive general connotation surrounding Thetis' myth in this poem: he is in fact 'the proverbial educator of youth' (see already Hes. *Theog.* 1001; frr. 40 and 204.87 Merkelbach–West; Pind. *Pyth.* 4.102–6 and 9.29–66), and 'his presence

[21] A.W. Gomme, 'Interpretations of some poems of Alkaios and Sappho', *JHS* 77 (1957), 255–66, at 258.

[22] On the multiple interconnections between Thetis, her marriage to a mortal man and the divine world, see R. Reitzenstein, 'Die Hochzeit des Peleus und der Thetis', *Hermes* 35 (1900), 73–105; A. Lesky, 'Peleus und Thetis im frühen Epos', *SIFC* 27/28 (1956), 216–26; and M. Mayer, 'Thetis', *RE* 2.1.206–42. Reitzenstein and Lesky are mostly interested in establishing the mutual 'genealogical' relations between the versions of the Thetis myth. See also L.M. Slatkin, *The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the Iliad* (Berkeley, 1991).

[23] Burnett (n. 4), 196–7; W.H. Race, 'Sappho, fr. 16 L.–P. and Alkaios, fr. 42 L.–P.: romantic and classical strains in Lesbian lyric', *CJ* 85 (1989–90), 16–33, at 23.

in the poem ensures the proper moral end of the union'. As regards Thetis, in my opinion it is legitimate to invoke the famous principle according to which what is concealed or left out in a narration should be forgotten by the hearers/readers, even if they are perfectly aware of what is omitted.[24] If we have different versions of the same myth, a single, coherent version need not be considered if these versions are independent of one another from the narrative point of view.[25]

On the other hand, I doubt that a similar line of reasoning could be applied to Achilles: in this case, we are not confronted with two diverging versions of a myth, but with the developments of a single, coherent myth. In other words, Achilles is *both and at the same time* a hero and a victim of his own heroism: his doom is intrinsic to his prowess, so that the two sides of the coin cannot be separated. Homer deliberately insists on pointing out this doubleness: in the celebrated dialogue between the weeping hero and his mother in *Il*. 1.352–427, again and again emphasis is put on the fact that his fate is to die young and to have no part in the pleasures of a prosperous old age. The dialogue between Achilles and Odysseus in the Underworld (*Od*. 11.471–503) is even more interesting in this respect: the celebration of the *kleos* earned by the hero and expressed in Odysseus' words coexists with the curse of immature death in Achilles' own words. We also recall that a prophecy concerning Achilles' fate occurs when he is about to perform his greatest deed: the killing of Hector (*Il*. 22.358–60). In sum, the tragic destiny awaiting Achilles functions like a halo that surrounds every act of prowess performed by him when he is still a young, victorious warrior: this is why he ranks among the most intriguing and poetical characters depicted in the Homeric poems.

Now this intrinsically tragic connotation of Achilles can hardly be kept out of our poem, for a couple of important reasons pertaining to its very structure: first of all, because the mention of Achilles is not strictly necessary for the point Alcaeus is making about Thetis; as we said, her morally positive nature had already been 'demonstrated' by mentioning the participation of the gods in her wedding. Since Alcaeus chose to introduce Achilles in the poem even if he could well have chosen not to, we have to conclude that he did so on purpose. In the second place, Achilles has to be interpreted with respect to the Trojan tale for the simple reason that every element of the poem has to do, although from different perspectives, with the Trojan tale itself: how could we pretend that Achilles played no part in it?[26]

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[24] This principle has been formulated by E. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus' Agamemnon* (Oxford, 1950), 2.97 (on Aesch. *Ag.* 158), apropos of Iphigenia. Several scholars have seen in our poem an application of it: Rösler (n. 18), 222; Meyerhoff (n. 5), 108–13; Davies (n. 8), 258.

[25] Quite interestingly, Mayer (n. 22), 219 points out that Pindar gives five different accounts of the myth of Peleus and Thetis (*Pyth*. 3.154; *Nem*. 3.56; 4.88; 5.41; *Isthm*. 8.60). As Mayer notes, each time he deals with parts of their saga according to his narrative or celebratory needs. By the same token, it is not surprising that Alcaeus chose a positive version of the Thetis myth, since he intended to depict Thetis as a positive *exemplum*: he was free to discard other, contrasting versions of her myth, or other parts of the tale that held no interest for him.

[26] Rightly Burnett (n. 4), 192: 'the song in this way enfolds the engendering and birth of Achilles within the Trojan disaster, as if this second but earlier set of events were the core or the clue to the first'. Indeed, I regard the implications of the characters in the Trojan tale as the unifying aspect of the poem. This consideration should suffice to refute the view advanced by D.N. Maronitis, 'The heroic myth and its lyrical reconstruction', in id., *Homeric Megathemes: War-Homilia-Homecoming*, (tr. D. Connolly, Lanham, MD, 2004), 77–88: according to him, the opposition between Helen and Thetis exemplifies the literary opposition between the epic world and poetry on the one side (Helen and the ruin of Troy) and lyric sensitivity on the other (Thetis and her purity). His linguistic analysis of the poem, which aims at detecting a contrast between

It is as if Alcaeus stopped just one step before drawing the very conclusion of his argument, because this step would not be in keeping with the point he is making throughout the whole poem: without this last step, the poem sounds conceptually consistent but irresistibly 'open' with respect to the saga which constitutes its background. An interesting parallel to this poetic technique (that is, going through a myth without mentioning its outcome) can be found in Bacchylides, at the end of his fifth epinician (lines 162–75).[27] In this passage Heracles asks the soul of the dead Meleager if he has any sisters he could marry, and Meleager suggests Deianira. Everyone is reminded that in the course of the story Deianira, after marrying Heracles, becomes responsible, if unwittingly, for her husband's death (see the story of the robe smeared with the centaur Nessus' blood that turned out to be a burning poison). Now, although nothing of this story is included in Bacchylides' account, we cannot help thinking about it, most of all because of the pessimistic, tragic atmosphere pervading the epinician: the soul of Meleager has just tearfully narrated (line 94) his sad story to Heracles, describing how he died because of Artemis' anger against his father Oeneus, and Heracles has just commented that the best for men is never to be born (lines 160–1). Moreover, the whole story of the dialogue between Heracles and Meleager in the Underworld is in fact an *exemplum* that Bacchylides introduces to substantiate his gnomic sentence that no man is fortunate in all things (lines 53–5).

By the allusion to Heracles' doom which is implicit in the mention of Deianira, Bacchylides seems to claim that the gnomic sentence just pronounced by Heracles with reference to Meleager can be applied to Heracles himself, and to anyone else. We have no reason to suppose that the part of this story which is omitted would not have influenced the reception of the epinician, since there is a deep poetic consistency between what is concealed and what has been said. Heracles turns out to be like Achilles: their heroism is indissolubly linked to their misfortune. Clearly, the death of Heracles due to Deianira is not a straightforward consequence of their marriage: it is just posterior in time. However, the poetic mood of the poem and its very argument seem to require a consideration of the tragic outcome of their union: otherwise, the hint about the prospective marriage would have no appreciable relation to the rest of the argument.

Let us compare the use of the poetic strategy under examination (to repeat, sparing the explication of the consequences of what is said) in Alcaeus and in Bacchylides. In the latter poet it is consistent with his statement of a tragic issue *ante litteram* (the universality of sorrow), while in Alcaeus it is complicating: the part of the tale which is omitted points against the argument which is being worked out, or at least it helps to alter our perception of it. Despite these differences, however, both Alcaeus and Bacchylides achieve the goal of expanding the limits of their poems beyond the poems themselves into the broader realm of myth.

epic and lyric language in the two sections, seems to me contentious and unpersuasive. On allusion to parts of a myth that are not explicitly narrated in lyric poetry, cf. B. Currie, *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes* (Oxford, 2005), 364–5, with bibliography.

[27] Good starting points for the vast bibliography on this poem are: A. Rengakos, 'Zu Bakchylides' Erzahltechnik', in A. Bagordo and B. Zimmermann (edd.), *Bakchylides, 100 Jahre nach seiner Wiederentdeckung* (Munich, 2000), 101–12, at 104–5, and, from a narratological perspective, I.L. Pfeiffer, 'Pindar and Bacchylides', in I. de Jong, R. Nünlist and A. Bowie (edd.), *Narrators, Narratees, and Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature* (Leiden, 2004), 213–32, at 227–8.

3. A COMPLETE POEM?

One further problem concerning the structure of the poem has now to be addressed: the expression ὡς λόγος in the opening line. A lot of scholarly work has been carried out about this expression, in order to establish whether it is compatible with the beginning of a poem or has to be interpreted as the mark of a turning point within a broader discourse. This obviously calls into question the completeness of the poem: while the *koronis* visible in *P Oxy.* 1233 fr. 2 col. II after line 16 indicates that the poem actually ended with the last line we read (καὶ πόλις αὔτων),[28] the question of its beginning is open. Fraenkel[28] lists several passages, in Greek prose and poetry, where a proverb or a mythical *exemplum* is introduced in a wider context through a similar connective formula (just to quote a couple, Cratin. fr. 169 Kassel: ὡς μὲν ἀνθρώπων λόγος; Soph. *OT* 715: ὥσπερ γ' ἡ φάτις); Meyerhoff and Tsomis[29] have added a few. The list would be much longer if we also included the cases where a myth is introduced by a *verbum dicendi* (for example *Il.* 24.615: φασί, or the 'new Sappho', line 9: ἔφαντο).[30] All these scholars are in broad agreement about the fact that ὡς λόγος, along with other similar expressions, is not customarily used to begin a poem, while it often inaugurates a mythological section inscribed in a wider discourse: they consequently consider our poem incomplete.[31] For my part, in order to evaluate the force of this argument, I prefer to turn it into an *argumentum ex silentio*: what we can say is really that none of the openings we know from Archaic Greek poetry is marked by ὡς λόγος or similar expressions. If we take this point of view, it is all too obvious that we are not in a position to rely much on such an argument, for a very simple reason: how many beginnings dealing with myths do we know from Archaic literature, which we can take with some certainty as beginnings? Only a very small number.

I believe that the problem should be addressed from a somewhat different perspective. The comparative evidence does not tell us that ὡς λόγος or similar expressions were used to start a poem, but such evidence is not strong enough to rule out such a possibility. However, that evidence may rewardingly be used to

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[28] Fraenkel (n. 24) 2.148–9 (on Aesch. *Ag.* 264): note that he quotes passages introducing not only myths but also proverbs (by the way, he is commenting upon a proverb: ὥσπερ ἡ παροιμία). His interest is actually focussed on the ellipse of the verb which often characterizes what we may consider different forms of common wisdom (myths and proverbs).

[29] Meyerhoff (n. 5), 92–3; Tsomis (n. 18), 263–4. Tsomis's comparison of our expression with Homeric ὡς ἔφατ' (at 263 n. 5), however, seems misleading. The Homeric formula does not mark the passage from the level of myth to another level: rather, it marks the passage, within a narration, from an internal to an external focalization within the narration of the same myth. Moreover, while ὡς λόγος in Alcaeus is proleptic, ὡς ἔφατ' is epanaleptic.

[30] L. Edmunds, 'The new Sappho: ΕΦΑΝΤΟ (9)', *ZPE* 156 (2006), 23–6 provides a comprehensive list of the expressions used to introduce a mythical *exemplum*, in both Archaic and Classical literature, where a derivative of λέγειν or of φημί occurs (a more random list can be found also in Oehler [n. 12], 70–1).

[31] Among those scholars, Meyerhoff (n. 5), 100 is by far the most 'agnostic'. Already U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, *Erinnerungen* (Leipzig, 1914), 230–1 argued that a strophe is missing at the beginning of the text, where more explicit blame of Helen would have been expressed (same argument in Oehler [n. 12], 72). Rösler (n. 18), 221–4 maintains that two strophes detailing the fall of Troy are missing. Others have neglected the question posed by ὡς λόγος and argue that our poem is complete: see for example H. Jurenka, 'Neue Lieder der Sappho und des Alkaios', *WS* 36 (1914), 201–43, at 226–30; Pfeiffer (n. 6), 317; Maronitis (n. 26); and (more cautiously) G. Lieberman, *Alcée: Fragments* (Paris, 1999), 36 and 207 n. 73.

address a different question: what could be the *function*, and what the *rhetoric* of ὡς λόγος, that is, of an expression introducing an established version of a myth? In general, we know that myth naturally affirms itself as myth, and that a poet need not state explicitly the mythical nature of its subject. It follows that if the poet claims explicitly that he is about to introduce a myth (that is, if he says: 'I will now tell a myth'), he is probably trying to create a gap between the ordinary level of his poetry and the mythical frame he wants to open. In this respect, it is worth noting that an expression such as ὡς λόγος is remarkably different from the usual (although not exclusive) manner of introducing *exempla* in Pindar, that is: relative-aorist-ποτε-aorist participle.[32] In fact, while the Pindaric manner aims at 'sewing' the *exemplum* into the body of the poem, ὡς λόγος separates the two dimensions: although their structural function is analogous, their rhetoric is noticeably different. Other expressions relating to *exempla* express an intermediate rhetorical value: for example, καὶ γάρ ποτα … ἔφαντο in the 'new Sappho', line 9 inscribes the *exemplum* in an infinitive subordinate isolating the *exemplum* from the time frame of the poem; none the less, the combination of particles καὶ γάρ connects logically and rhetorically the two dimensions. The same combination of particles occurs several times in Homer,[33] where it marks the introduction of an *exemplum* spoken in the mouth of a character (see for example *Il*. 24.602, where Achilles is speaking about Niobe). In the Homeric occurrences, this combination is functional to the need for a gap to be created between the main narration, dealing with mythical tales, and the sub-tale which is about to be introduced and which in turn deals with myth: in short, it serves to inscribe myth into myth.

What indications can we grasp from this picture? First of all, in my opinion, ὡς λόγος and the rhetorical value it conveys indicate that Alcaeus 42 can hardly be imagined in isolation (as we shall see, this does not exclude the possibility that our poem may be complete in itself); otherwise, Alcaeus would not have needed to remark by that expression that he was about to introduce a myth, or a pair of mutually connected myths. Most of all, it indicates that these myths create a parenthesis within the poem, and are subordinated to some other, broader discourse. We could ask what this broader discourse might have been like: another myth, or a subject relating to the present of the poet? In the first case, we should imagine a multiple exemplarity at work since, as we saw, our poem already includes within itself a second level of exemplarity: can we suppose a chain of myths used in mutual relation to illustrate one another? It seems much more reasonable to think of an argument pertaining to the situation in which the performance of the poem took place: this would enact the first-degree exemplarity I mentioned at the beginning of the paper. I would add that the apostrophe ἐκ σέθεν, with its deictic vigour (it is an example of *deixis am Phantasma* according to Bühler's categories),[34] fits well with the idea of a poem connected with its own present: it gives a 'real' presence to Helen, and to the moral attitude she stands for, in the eyes of the public; it drags her vividly into the urgent controversy on values that probably constituted the ideological frame of the poem.

[32] Edmunds (n. 30), 23 n. 2, with bibliography.
[33] Edmunds (n. 30), 24.
[34] K. Bühler, *Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language* (transl. by D. F. Goodwin, Amsterdam, 1990, from K. Bühler, *Sprachtheorie: Die Darstellung der Sprache* [Jena, 1934]), 140.

More generally we could also wonder if a sixteen-line poem confronting two mythological characters, but not actually narrating their stories could be considered poetically self-sufficient by its Lesbian hearers: we are not in a position to give the question any definitive answer, but if Alcaeus' poem actually consisted of sixteen lines, we would have to agree with Wilamowitz (n. 31), who spoke of this poem (which he regarded as complete except for an initial stanza, dealing according to him with Helen) in terms of a Hellenistic-like composition.

It is time to look at the reverse of the coin. Are we to agree with those scholars who considered our poem incomplete and argued for the loss of one or more stanzas at the beginning? First of all, it seems highly unlikely that a hypothetical missing strophe (or strophes) dealt with Helen or Thetis or both, as Wilamowitz and Rösler suggest (see n. 31): ὡς λόγος clearly marks the *beginning* of the mythical section. Is it arguable, then, that this strophe dealt with the present situation of the performance or, more probably, with timeless subjects like moral issues (e.g. the opposite consequences of morally contrasting behaviours)? In both cases, a problem is raised by the fact that line 16 indisputably marks the *end* of the poem. We have indeed no evidence of poems ending on a mythical *exemplum*: in all the cases we can discuss with some certainty, we observe that the moral the poet intends to draw from the *exemplum* is explicitly asserted at the end of the *exemplum* itself, according to a circular A-B-A pattern.[35] Just to quote a particularly clear example, we can reconsider the Meleager story in *Iliad* 9: its exemplary meaning (the necessity to control one's anger) is stated by Phoenix before he starts his narration (lines 524–6), and again the same concept is reasserted at the end of Phoenix's speech (lines 600–5), and directly applied to the case in question (how Achilles should behave in the present circumstance). The same structure, although in much more concise terms, is evident in Alcaeus 38 Voigt, where the Sisyphus *exemplum* (lines 5–10) is clearly framed between two references to the present of the performance.

Moreover, we should not overlook the fact that the poem as we have it starts off without any truly connective expression or conjunction.[36] Of course, this is not in itself a proof that our text is complete, since a poem may well include a section asyndetically related to what precedes it. However, *this* section, being an

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[35] Oehler (n. 12); H. Eisenberger, *Der Mythos in der Äolischen Lyrik* (Frankfurt, 1956), 48–51; Edmunds (n. 30), where this point is used to argue for the unity of the sixteen-line 'new Sappho'. On ring composition in the Homeric speeches, see Lohmann (n. 12), 5–8; on ring composition in general, see W.A.A. von Otterlo, *Untersuchungen über Begriff, Anwendung und Entstehung der griechischen Ringkomposition* (Amsterdam, 1944) and now M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles. An Essay on Ring Composition* (New Haven, 2007). It should be stressed that I am referring to *exempla* here *stricto sensu*, that is to small narratives inserted in a broader narrative context and explicitly related to that context. Of course myth may have a more general paradigmatic function: this is often the case with mythical sections in choral lyric, where structure is far more open and harder to schematize than in monodic poetry. In many cases occurring in choral lyric I would not speak of mythical *exemplum*, but of mythical paradigm, because myth is employed according to its general function of interpreting reality, both in the past and in the present. One could cite Pindar's *Nemean* 1, where, towards the end, Heracles' youth is remembered and no final reference is made to the dedicatee of the epinician, Chromius. In this case we cannot envisage a circular structure, as myth entirely occupies the second part of the poem: Heracles is introduced here as a mere paradigm of the excellent man whose prowess is manifest since the very first action he accomplished (in Heracles' case, strangling the snake sent by Hera). Of course, Chromius is implicitly urged to follow Heracles' behaviour, but the interplay between Chromius and Heracles is purely general, and no specific analogy is drawn between them or their stories.
[36] Tsomis (n. 18), 263.

exemplum, would indeed seem to require a connection to what it is intended to be an *exemplum* of. This is what regularly happens with *exempla*: a pronoun and/ or an adverb signals the link between the argument and the myth, or a character involved in it. Sappho 16 Voigt, where Helen's flight with Paris serves as *exemplum* of the prevalence of personal preferences, provides suitable evidence of this: in line 6, $\tau[o]\hat{\upsilon}\tau(o)$ refers back to the general point to be exemplified ('what each person likes is the most beautiful thing'), while $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ anticipates the meaning of her story and its relation to the point under discussion.

So far we have observed that Alcaeus 42 can hardly be thought of as a complete unity, but on the other hand we have also noted that it is unlikely to be part of a longer poem: the thematic and stylistic features we have discussed seem to point towards such a paradox. It is now time to become more constructive and to put forward a possible solution for this paradox. For the purpose, I would like to resume a reading of the poem, proposed long ago by Jurenka (n. 31), which seems to have enjoyed little fortune with later scholars since it is almost always mentioned, when it is mentioned at all, as a target for confutation.[37] Still, in my opinion it represents the most convincing attempt to draw a coherent meaning from the poetic peculiarities I have been describing until now. This interpretation was proposed in an extremely concise comment by Jurenka soon after the papyrus preserving the poem had been published. He argued that our poem is complete, but that it has to be framed in the context of symposia: it would represent a response given by Alcaeus to a former song, performed by someone else, in which Helen's beauty had been praised. Jurenka supposes a sort of eristic *Stimmung* in this kind of symposiastic performance: every poet would deal with a topic in such a way that the next one could easily address the same theme or character in order to make a different, even contrasting point.

What Jurenka describes indeed corresponds to a very well-known form of symposiastic poetry, namely the *skolion*. As Collins has made clear,[38] the ancient sources do not use this term in a completely homogeneous way: in some of them (e.g. Ar. fr. 223 Kassel, where Alcaeus is mentioned) *skolia* is used in a very broad sense, apparently simply to indicate 'lyric' compositions. In other passages, however, the word *skolia* seems to refer to a distinct type of symposiastic poetry: in particular, Plutarch (*Quaest. conv.* 1.1.5) and the scholiasts on Plato, *Gorgias* 451e and Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1222 offer precious and fundamentally coherent descriptions of what distinguished *skolia* in the proper sense from lyric, even symposiastic poetry as a whole. Even more importantly, Athenaeus (15.693f–696a) preserves 25 poems that he calls 'Attic *skolia*', and in so doing he gives us direct testimony for this kind of poetry. These sources, taken together, make it clear that the *skolia* were poems sung in succession, each song capping the previous one during a single 'session' of singing: every singer would pick up the point the former had

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[37] See in particular C.M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry: From Alcman to Simonides* (Oxford, 1956), 169.

[38] D. Collins, *Master of Game. Competition and Performance in Greek Poetry* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 84–98. He gives an excellent presentation of the ancient testimonies about *skolia*. Good general discussions of *skolia* can be found in A.E. Harvey, 'The classification of Greek lyric poetry', *CQ* 49 (1955), 157–75 and in E. Cingano, 'Entre skolion et enkomion: réflexions sur le genre et la performance de la lyrique chorale grecque', in J. Jouanna and J. Leclant (edd.), *La poésie grecque antique* (Paris, 2003), 17–45.

made in order to support or to correct it, or anyway to carry on the argument by introducing new topics.

Of course, Collins is again right to point out that such a practice is not exclusive to *skolia*, since we know that similar features were typical of (at least some) epic performances:[39] I refer to the ἐξ ὑποβολῆς basis according to which epic poems were performed in Archaic and Classical times.[40] There is, however, clearly a major difference: while the latter practice served the need to break monumental epic poems into smaller parts in order to make them compatible with the physical limits of the singers, *skolia* served the purpose of allowing a multi-voiced dialogue in which every singer could display his or her skill and wit. At any rate, the similarity between *skolia* and ἐξ ὑποβολῆς epic performances indicates that it is not so much the *skolion* as a genre that is at stake here, but more generally a practice of performing poetry which allowed several different poetical units to interact with one another.

For the present purpose, among all the testimonies on *skolia* quoted above, I would like to call attention to two of the *skolia* transmitted by Athenaeus (15.695c):

ιε΄. παῖ Τελαμῶνος, Αἶαν αἰχμητά, λέγουσί σε
        ἐς Τροίαν ἄριστον ἐλθεῖν Δαναῶν μετ' Ἀχιλλέα.
ις΄. τὸν Τελαμῶνα πρῶτον Αἴαντα δὲ δεύτερον
        ἐς Τροίαν λέγουσιν ἐλθεῖν Δαναῶν καὶ Ἀχιλλέα.

Several features deserve to be pointed out in this pair of *skolia*. First of all, their mythological subject: they are intended to answer the question: 'who was the best of the Achaeans who went to Troy after Achilles?'. Moreover, we note that myth is exploited, so to speak, as a field for discussion: the second *skolion* corrects, or at any rate caps the mythological content of the first. It is very interesting to note the crafty procedure used to achieve this goal: while the first *skolion* deals with the heroic status of Ajax, the second exploits the mention of Telamon in the patronymic formula which is used in the first *skolion* to produce a shift in the argument. The point under discussion is no more the 'ranking' of the heroes, but the temporal relation of their deeds. Telamon, in fact, took part in a former expedition of a Greek army against Troy: the reference is, in all likelihood, to the participation of Telamon in the expedition arranged by Heracles against the Trojan king of that time, Laomedon (see Apollod. 2.6.4 and 3.12.7); of course Ajax took part in the later and more famous expedition. This shift conveys a modification in the functional meaning of the word Ἀχιλλέα which is found at the end of both the *skolia*: in the first it conveys that Ajax was the best *after* Achilles, while in the second it means that Ajax went to Troy *with* (that is, at the same time as) Achilles.[41]

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[39] Collins (n. 38), 88–9.

[40] The ancient testimonies concerning this kind of ἐξ ὑποβολῆς performances are quoted and fully discussed e.g. in G. Nagy, *Poetry as Performance. Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1996), 59–86.

[41] καί is not actually found in the only manuscript that transmits the sixteenth *skolion*, while the fifteenth *skolion* is preserved in three manuscripts which unanimously give καί: in this case, μετ' is accepted by the editors on the ground of Eustathius' authority. Bowra (n. 37), 379 maintains that the traditional principle that fathers are better than sons underlies the second *skolion*. This hypothesis is plausible, but unnecessary: the shift from military prowess to temporal priority is made clear through the substitution of πρῶτον … δεύτερον for ἄριστον.

Another interesting feature of the two short texts is the recurrence of λέγουσιν: the mythological theme is stated as such, probably in order to distance these mythological *skolia* from other *skolia* performed on the same occasion and dealing with something else (no wonder that in Athenaeus' anthology these two *skolia* are framed by non-mythological *skolia*). It is clear that λέγουσιν corresponds to ὡς λόγος in Alcaeus' poem: given the strong relationship existing between the *skolia* and the circumstances of their performance, it is not surprising that expressions of this kind were regularly employed to mark a deviation from the contingency. We may also note that the second *skolion* exploits the patronymic used in the first in order to cap it: the mention of Telamon as father of Ajax triggers the consideration that Telamon himself was involved in another sack of Troy. This way of capping may take us back to Alcaeus, where as we saw the insistent use of patronymics broadens the scope of the poem and calls further characters into question: the more characters there are involved in the poem, the easier it is for another poet to say something new or different. The two short poems on Ajax transmitted by Athenaeus seem to confirm that such a 'technique' could well be exploited in the context of skoliastic performances.

Taken together, all these features indicate that the two *skolia* under examination are less unlike Alcaeus' poem than might seem to be the case: despite the far greater complexity of the latter, these texts share the interest in the Trojan tales and the employment of several rhetorical solutions.

We should also recall that, according to both ancient authorities and modern scholarship, Alcaeus was actually involved in the composition of *skolia*: Aristophanes in *Thesmophoriazusae* 160–3 and in fragment 223 Kassel lists poets like Ibycus, Stesichorus and Alcaeus as authors of poems that were sung during symposia, possibly (we submit) as *skolia*; most importantly, the eighth *skolion* in Athenaeus' collection is an adaptation of an Alcaic stanza which belonged to a poem by Alcaeus (fr. 249.6–9 Voigt). This means that a strophe by Alcaeus had been sepa-rated from its poetic context and reused as a *skolion*.[42] In the case of our poem, however, it was probably intended by its own author for a performance in a *skolia*-like context: as we saw, the choices made by Alcaeus in terms of thematic issues, cast of characters and word disposition seem to indicate the intention to participate in a performance of *skolia*. In my opinion we are not dealing here with a case of skoliastic reuse, but with a poem intended to be a *skolion* from the beginning.

Moreover, I submit that Helen and Achilles represented particularly fitting and stimulating subjects for poems conceived for skoliastic performance. As we saw, in fact, Achilles' destiny is in itself complex, and therefore open to opposite interpretations; Helen was a controversial figure as regards both the plot of her story (did she go to Troy with Paris? Did she remain in Sparta, as Stesichorus in the 'Palinode' and Euripides argue? Was she detained in Egypt by King Proteus while she was on the way to Troy, as Herodotus 2.118–19 maintains, citing the Egyptian version of the story?) and the interpretation of its significance (we have already mentioned the 'fatalist' attitude of Sappho 16 Voigt, which is quite in line with Homer's non-judgemental treatment of her figure but not with Alcaeus' stance

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[42] Bowra (n. 37), 374–5. On the reuse of Alcaic poems in Attic banquets, see Rösler (n. 18), 97–8, and E. Fabbro 'Sul riuso di carmi d'autore nei simposi attici (*Carm. Conv.* 8 P. e Alc. 149 V.)', *QUCC* 41.2 (1992), 29–38.

towards her).[43] To deal with Helen and Achilles meant to stimulate other singers to submit alternate readings of their stories.

What, then, about Thetis, the most 'confusing' presence in the poem? It makes sense to believe that she was introduced mainly as a foil to make a point about Helen and to allow a shift towards her son Achilles. However, the choice itself is interesting and hardly casual: first of all, because she is herself an easily questionable choice as an *exemplum* of model wife, if other aspects of her saga are taken into account; secondly, because as mother of Achilles she is linked to the Trojan tale, just like Achilles himself and Helen. The fact that the three main characters of the poem share a common ground (namely, the Trojan War) confirms our feeling that the choice to introduce Thetis into the debate was not casual. If we assume that this poem was intended to answer a former poem where Helen's beauty had been praised, as Jurenka sensibly suggests, we could imagine that the following poem may have dealt with such a theme as 'the unhappiness of Thetis and Achilles': she was the unhappy, inconstant wife of an old man despite the grand beginnings of their marriage, and her son's lot was to die young despite the immortal glory he was to earn for himself.

If this line of interpretation is correct, we can account for the two interrelated features of our poem which we have been discussing throughout this paper: the 'open' structure of the argument and the peculiar, somehow disputable choice of the characters who are supposed, broadly speaking, to exemplify virtue and vice. Both these features can be explained if we regard our poem as a segment of a poetic contest during which Alcaeus' point was made in response to other singers' points, and was intended in turn to trigger a reaction on the part of those who were to sing after Alcaeus.

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[43] In this context it is important to note that testimonies like those of Stesichorus, Sappho and Herodotus indicate the antiquity of the controversy about Helen's story and its significance: no wonder that by the time of Alcaeus a poetic contest could deal with such a theme.