

THE CONQUEST OF DEATH: SOME THEMES IN
ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL GREEK POETRY

by

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B.A., University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, 1974

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
Classics

ACCEPTED

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to the required standard

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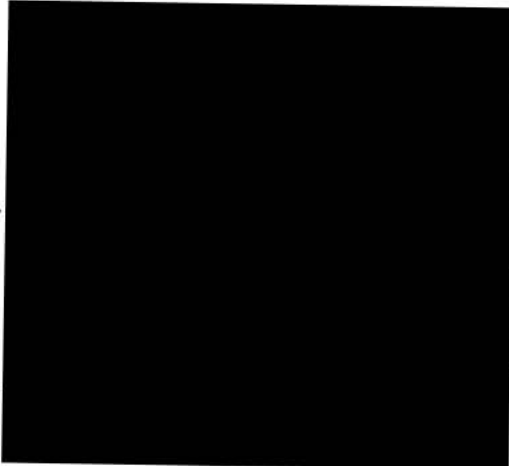
Abstract

This thesis is an examination of some themes and ideas about death which appear in Greek poetry from Homer to Euripides. My approach is two-fold in that I illustrate the skillful technique of poets who treat these themes, and the important Greek moral values which these attitudes towards death reflect. I concentrate on themes that involve two familiar ideas: death is an escape; death is inescapable.

The first Chapter deals with poetic expressions of death as a release. I begin with Homeric examples of the wish to die, and discuss the appearance of this wish in some fragments of love-poetry. I then move to Greek elegists and their attitudes towards poverty and old age, both painful situations from which death would be sought as an escape. The ensuing section is an appraisal of poetic technique in the use of certain conventional themes on the release of death; it closes with a passage that demonstrates how highly the Greeks valued "honor" and "friendship". A survey of selected Greek tragedies in the Chapter's final section serves to illustrate more clearly the life and death importance of these values; "honor" and "friendship" are worth dying for in Sophocles and, in Euripides, worth living for.

Chapter Two is an examination of the manner with which the Greeks came to terms with death: their own, and that of someone dear. The first part concentrates on the persistent poetic expression of the Greek longing for a glorious death, and the effort to avoid "shame"; these

attitudes in part explain the soldier's ability to withstand bravely the approach of danger. My primary concern here is the demonstration of the importance of these moral values, and I employ the exhortations and advice in the surviving fragments of the elegiac military protreptic to achieve this goal. Finally, I include a fragment of Archilochus which clarifies the Greek attitude towards fate and also deserves a discussion of poetic technique. The emphasis in the second part of this Chapter is on the poetic treatment of familiar themes of consolation on the death of another. I end with a brief discussion of Euripides' Alcestis, a play that aptly demonstrates the effectiveness with which a skillful poet might utilize traditional themes and also shows human characters face to face with the fact of death, their own and that of others.



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I have adopted the numbering and texts of the standard editions. These, along with other works frequently cited, are shown in abbreviated form and are found in full in the Bibliography (a), page 79. Passages cited without abbreviations come from the Oxford Classical Texts, except for Pindar and Bacchylides which are taken from the Teubner editions of Snell and Maehler.

Acknowledgments

I would like to record my gratitude to the University of Victoria for providing the awards that enabled me to spend two profitable years of study on Vancouver Island. For their interest and encouragement during my research I am indebted to all the members of the Department of Classics, in particular to Professor D. A. Campbell who opened many doors, and to my colleague R. T. Barnett who assisted in various ways. My wife Susan gave me immeasurable support. I am sincerely grateful to the members of my Committee for their patience and comments. I extend my warmest thanks to my Supervisor Dr. S. E. Scully, whose understanding and enthusiasm made the production of this thesis rewarding and exciting from beginning to end; to him I dedicate this thin volume.

σὺν Ὀρσέαι δέ νιν
καμάξομαι τερπνὰν ἐπιστάζων χάριν

Pindar Isth. 4

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this Thesis formed in my mind when I first began serious study of the poets who belong to what we can call the lyric age of Greece: the time from Homer to Pindar. I was fascinated by the emphasis that Rudolf Pfeiffer, in a 1929 Philologus article,¹ places on the sense of amēchania, the "helplessness" which these poets exhibit. Dodds (GI 29) likewise stresses this "human insecurity" which he takes to imply an increased awareness of divine hostility after the Homeric age. When I found that Snell, Lesky and Fränkel similarly treat the importance of this prevailing tone of amēchania in the lyric poets, I began an earnest study to trace the beginnings and the later development of this sense of "helplessness" in Greek poetry.

I examined the poems that expressed the human pains of life, love and death, and I searched for what I thought might be the result of their helplessness: the desire to escape. As I went back into Homer, or forwards towards tragedy, I slowly discovered that this sense of amēchania was not a limited characteristic of certain poets, but one of the whole human condition. With Lloyd-Jones (JZ 36-54), I saw that the realistic Archilochus and the pessimistic Ionians did not represent a sudden change from the Homeric attitudes towards moral values and the gods; they are simply the first poets to our knowledge who speak of

¹ "Gottheit und Individuum in der frühgriechischen Lyrik," Philologus 84 (1929) 137-52, repr. in Ausgewählte Schriften (München 1960) 42-54.

another world.

After the fantastic world of Homer where Olympians and mortals walked the same ground, and before the world of the Presocratics where science began to increase man's sense of control, the earth was populated by unassuming men whose amazement at such mysteries as water flowing from a spring and whose awareness of a powerful but incomprehensible natural order confined their concept of reality to the tangible, immediate present. The lyric poets speak with urgency about recognizable mortal suffering and frustration. The amēchania in their poetry is a feeling that persists even today; it is the feeling of being in circumstances well beyond our control.

Although my survey of the Greek lyric poets covered a variety of familiar themes, I saw that their poetic reactions to death, coupled with their desire to escape, provided me with all the scope I needed to present the results of my inquiry. Poems about death are universal and, though numerous, thematically limited. Thus, I grasped this opportunity to choose the best examples of poets who attempted to treat an idea so familiar as to demand skillful technique. In addition, I found that their reactions to death offered by contrast some insight into the Greek view of life. Lattimore's (TGLE 44f) succinct outline of the nebulous attitude of the Greeks towards an afterlife shows that they could be certain only that death meant a separation of body and soul, the end of life. For these Greeks, "this life is all" (Adkins MR 155). My survey of their reactions to death helped me understand what that life was about.

CHAPTER ONE

THE RELEASE OF DEATH

Visions of the afterlife offered no encouragement to the Greeks. The fate of the dead, in general belief, was a shadowy non-existence regarded with abhorrence by the living. I do not intend to follow the path of Rohde's Psyche, for we must understand that the Greeks' only definite opinion about death was that it was not life; it was black night, as opposed to the sweet light of day; it was without sensation or substance; it was not being. If, then, death was the end of life, and if life caused pains which could not be borne, death was welcomed as "the Releaser". When we hear the cry for the release of death in Greek poetry from Homer to Euripides, we hear as well the urgent wish to relieve unendurable troubles with an absolutely final remedy.

Euripides' Macaria, who volunteers to sacrifice her life for the Heraclidae, walks off to her doom with these words (593-96):

εἴη γε μέντοι μηδέν. εἰ γὰρ ἔξομεν
 κάκει' μερίμνας οἱ θανόμενοι βροτῶν,
 οὐκ οἶδ' ὅποι τις τρέψεται. τὸ γὰρ θανεῖν
 κακῶν μέγιστον φάρμακον νομίζεται.

May there be nothing [underground]. For if we, the mortal dead, will feel anguish there as well, I do not know where one might turn. For death, it is thought, is the greatest remedy for troubles.

(a) The Wish For Death

The monumental war which the Iliad records began with the abduction of the world's most beautiful woman. Helen is consistently presented in the poem as being ashamed of her role as this ἀρχὴ κακῶν. With the first words she speaks in the epic, she wishes that things had been different (3.173-76):

I wish that vile death had been pleasing to me, when once I followed your son here,... But that did not happen, and so weeping, I languish.

Here Priam is kind to her, and so is Hector, who will hear her express this same wish again (6.344-48). The last time Helen speaks, she is weeping over Hector's body; she says (24.764): "I wish I had died first" (i.e., before coming to Troy). Helen's characteristic wish throughout the Iliad is unattainable, as she realizes: no mortal can undo what is done. Nonetheless, her wish is most striking; it represents a drastic curse on her own existence, and reflects the immediate shame that she feels before the ruling family of doomed Troy.

Elsewhere in the Iliad, the shame of an imagined or imminent situation often produces a conditional death-wish. In Book 4, Agamemnon fears that if Menelaus, recently wounded by Pandarus, were to die, the expedition would have been a failure and the Trojans would stamp on his brother's grave and mock his own defeat. He shudders and concludes (182): "Then may the wide earth gape open for me!" Faced with the same possibility of inglorious defeat, a nameless Achaean in Book 17 urges the fight for Patroclus' body by advocating death before disgrace (416-19):

Here may the black earth gape open for us all; that would be much better for us if we let the horse-taming Trojans drag this body off to their city and win glory.

This cold preference for destruction to disgraceful failure persists, as we shall see, even in the world of fifth-century tragedy.

Ironic foreshadowing gives a special poignancy to the conditional death-wishes of Hector and Andromache in the famous *ὁμιλία* of *Iliad* 6. With pathetic accuracy, they imagine the life Andromache might have after Hector's death and the ensuing fall of Troy. She affirms (410-11): "When I lose you, it would be better for me to sink into the ground." He replies (464-65): "May a mound of earth cover me dead before I hear your cry as they carry you off into captivity." For Andromache the unbearable horror of the loss of her φίλος (529f; 411f) and for Hector concern for what people will say (459f) and the pain of their separation (462f) would make them both want to quit life. That this terrible situation will come to pass is known to both (409f and 447f), and so their words have a striking sense of urgency. Hector's wish is, of course, granted but Andromache's is not. At the poem's close, we leave the woman contemplating her future misery and lamenting that Hector did not die in her arms and speak his final words to her (24.725-45).

The urgency evident in these Homeric death-wishes attains full power in the immediate death-wishes of the personal lyric poets. How many lines have been lost from the following fragment of Sappho (94LP) we cannot know; what remains opens (1-11):

τεθνάκην δ' ἀδόλως θέλω·
 2 ἄ με ψισδομένα κατελίμπανεν
 πόλλα καὶ τόδ' ἔειπ. [
 ὀλιμ' ὡς δεῖνα πεπ[όνθ]αμεν,
 5 Ὑάπφ', ἧ μάν σ' ἀέκοισ' ἀσυλιμπάνω.
 τὰν δ' ἔγω τάδ' ἀμειβόμαν·
 χαίροισ' ἔρχεο κάμεθεν
 8 μέμναισ', οἴσθα γὰρ ὡς σε πεδήπομεν·

αὶ δὲ μὴ, ἀλλὰ σ' ἔγω θελω
 θμναίσαι[... (.)]. [... (.)]..αὶ

11

..[] καὶ κάλ' ἐπάσομεν.

'And honestly I wish I were dead.' Weeping she left me;² she said much and also this: 'What bad luck has been ours! Sappho, truly, I leave you against my will.' I gave her this answer: 'Go and fare well, and remember me; you know how we cared for you. If not, yet I would remind you... of our happy experience.'

The strength of the emotions which held two lovers at the moment of their unavoidable separation is effectively portrayed by the dramatic presentation of their conversation. Sappho's speech conveys the joy and depth of their relationship, and her lover's the sorrow of their ineluctable good-bye; the first line of the fragment conveys the pain. The wish to die is urgent and immediate.³

There have been many discussions about whether this first line is spoken by Sappho or by her departing lover; any answer is beyond proof and unnecessary as well, for the thought suits either speaker. The expression, the words, belong to the poet: Sappho. A lover's wish to die may be even at this time a convention, but the poet's succinct phrase seems to reflect a genuine emotion.⁴ Ἀδύλας is often employed in the formula of solemn treaties and is rare in poetry (Page S&A 76), but as Campbell notes (GLPS 278), it may have been a common expression, like the English "honestly". In my opinion, Sappho is giving a common thought a genuine emotional quality with this word: "you may have heard this before, but this time I really mean it."

² Campbell GLPS 278 notes that every other stanza ends with a pause. Gerber E 75 thinks "weeping many tears" is smoother, because he takes the first line to be spoken by Sappho. Either interpretation is possible; see below.

³ Fränkel EGPP 170-88 stresses these elements of Sappho's poetry.

⁴ This is Bowra's view, GLP 192, and agrees with U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Sappho und Simonides (Berlin 1913, repr. 1966) 50.

A portion of P.Oxy. 2322 contains 18 continuous lines by Anacreon (347 PMG) which tell two seemingly distinct stories.⁵ Efforts to connect the poem have been, in general, unsuccessful.⁶ The second half contains a vividly dramatic wish for death (11-18):

	οἰκτρὰ δὴ φρονεῖν ἀκου[
	τὴν ἀρίγνωτον γυναῖ[κα
	πολλάκις δὲ δὴ τόδ' εἰπ[εῖν
14	δαίμον' αἰτιαμέ[ν]ην·
	ὧ]ς ἂν εὖ πάθοιμι, μήτηρ,
	εἶ] μ' ἀμείλιχόν φέρουσα
	π]όντον ἐσβάλοις θυίοντα [
18	π]ορφ[υρ]έοισι κύμασι[
].[]..[]..[

I hear that the easily-known lady has pitiful thoughts and that often she says this, damning her luck: 'How well off I would be, mother, if you carried and tossed me into the ruthless sea that rages with dark-gleaming waves.'

This "easily-known lady" "often"⁷ repeats her wish which here is described in the conventional image of the sea's destructive power. The uncertainty about the context makes it difficult to determine exactly what the usually frivolous Anacreon is telling us. His introduction to the woman's speech is not very sympathetic, and her words display more artistry than emotion. The lack of context again limits comment on another fragment of Anacreon which is a death-wish in a

⁵ Cf. Bowra GLP 278-82, and B. Gentili, Anacreon (Rome 1958) 52, 206-18.

⁶ PMG app.crit. simply has the caustic "ii sunt qui opinentur carmen novum incipere," and Page is as brief in CR ns 9 (1959) 237; J. A. Evans, "A Fragment of Anacreon (P.Oxy.2322)," SO 38 (1963) 22-24, suggests the woman in the second half grieves because she cut the baby's hair in the first; Gerber E 223 is convinced that they are two poems, yet his text prints them together!

⁷ I have noted a similarity between these lines and Sappho 96 LP 2-5, but I cannot suggest that Anacreon is mimicking the Lesbian. In Sappho's fragment, B. Marzullo, Maia 5 (1952) 85f. sees a proper name: Arignota.

first-person expression (411a PMG):

ἀπό μοι θανεῖν γένοιτ'· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἄλλη
 λύσις ἐκ πόνων γένοιτ' οὐδάμα τῶνδε,

Would that I die: for there can be no other release at all from
 these troubles.

The statement is explicit and direct; except for comment on tmesis and hyperbaton, we can say no more than this. These lines are quoted for the sake of the meter by Hephaestio (Enich.12.4,p.39 Consbr.) and because they follow after Anacreon's famous fragmentary image of "Love, like a blacksmith,..." (413 PMG), many are inclined, without factual basis, to take this death-wish in the context of a lover's pains.

The poets, of course, frequently connect the themes of love and death. A well-known poem by Sappho which describes the physical symptoms of her love when jealousy inflames it, thereafter concludes (31 LP 15-16):

τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύης / φαίνομ'

And I seem not far short of death.

And another tantalizingly fragmentary text contains the phrase (95 LP 11): κατθάνην δ' ἕμερός τις, "a certain longing to die". That this destructive desire of Sappho was caused by an unsatisfied love is "an obvious but unverifiable conjecture," according to Page (S&A 86). Helplessness and suffering because of love is a popular theme in Anacreon as well.⁸

Just as it remains impossible to determine what misfortune was so acute as to make death preferable in Anacreon's fragments, there is a

⁸ E.g., 47 LP, 102 LP, 130 LP, etc.; 360 PMG, 398 PMG, etc.; see also Bowra GLP 192 for Sappho and death.

similar lack of contextual detail in this couplet of Theognis (819-20 W):

ἔς πολυάρητον κακὸν ἤκομεν, ἔνθα μάλιστα

Κύρνε συναμφοτέρους μοῖρα λάβοι θανάτου.

We have come to an accursed ill,⁹ where best the fate of death might seize us both together, Cyrnus.

What circumstances prompted this preference for death can only be suggested.¹⁰ Whatever it was, it was for the poet a fate worse than death.

(b) Fates Worse Than Death

In the Theognidea, poverty is often and earnestly represented as a disastrous misfortune that makes life unbearable. In a series of gnomic-paraenetic verses to Cyrnus, the death-preference serves to underscore the debilitating power of πενίη (173-82 W):

ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν πενίη πάντων δάμνησι μάλιστα,

καὶ γήρως πολιοῦ Κύρνε καὶ ἠπιάλου.

175 ἦν δὴ χρὴ φεύγοντα καὶ ἔς μεγακῆτεα πόντον

ῥιπτεῖν καὶ πετρῶων Κύρνε κατ' ἠλιβάτων.

καὶ γὰρ ἀνὴρ πενίηι δεδμημένος οὐτέ τι εἰπεῖν

οὐτ' ἔρξαι δύναται, γλώσσα δέ οἱ δέδεται.

179 χρὴ γὰρ ὁμῶς ἐπὶ γῆν τε καὶ εὐρέα νῶτα θαλάσσης

δίξησθαι χαλεπῆς Κύρνε λύσιν πενίης.

τεθνάμεναι φίλε Κύρνε πενιχρῶι βέλτερον ἀνδρὶ

ἢ ζῶειν χαλεπῆι τειρόμενον πενίηι.

Poverty overpowers a good man most of all things, Cyrnus, and more than gray old age or fever. One who escapes it must hurl

⁹ I am convinced by van Groningen's argument, p. 313, that this does not mean "much-desired ill."

¹⁰ The most common hypothesis is political strife, for which see Young and van Groningen ad loc.; it can hardly be old age, unless Theognis and Cyrnus are absurdly thought coeval. There are other possibilities.

himself into a sea with deep gulfs and from towering cliffs. For a man reduced by poverty has no power to speak or act, and his tongue is tied. Truly, both on land and on the broad back of the sea as well, one must search for release from cruel poverty. Dear Cynus, a poor man is better off dead than beaten alive by cruel poverty.

In the editions of West and van Groningen these lines appear as three poems, but I prefer to treat them as one, after Young and Campbell.¹¹ I choose this approach because I appreciate the effectiveness of the balanced sequence of thought: (1) in the first and third couplet, poverty reduces a man to an unbearable condition; (2) in the fourth couplet, which expands $\chi\rho\eta\ \phi\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\gamma\omicron\nu\tau\alpha$ in 175, escape is imperative; (3) in the second and last couplet, a drastic measure is suggested. If we accept that these ten lines have a pattern of the same thought twice stated, we can see in the repetition of identical words not tautology, but rhetorical anadiplosis.¹²

The description of the dominating power of poverty begins with the pleonastic $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\omega\nu\ \mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\alpha$, "most of all things". This manner of expression is quasi-formulaic; in another passage (271-78 W), the misfortune of a father who is dishonored by ungrateful children is said to be $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\omega\nu\ \kappa\acute{\alpha}\kappa\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\nu$, "worst of all things"; in both examples, other mortal ills are mentioned only to be compared and discounted. Clearly, this technique of exaggeration intensifies the horror of the poet's present topic.

A drastic cure takes the form of the proverbial image of jumping off a cliff into the sea.¹³ However, the second image of the sea (179-80) suggests a different, positive escape in that it recalls Hesiod's words

¹¹ Young *ad loc.* sees a cohering rhyme; cf. Campbell GLPS 356.

¹² See H.W. Smyth, Greek Grammar (Cambridge, Mass. 1920, repr. 1973) 673; the surplus of intensive particles indicates a rhetorical tone.

¹³ Cf. the drunken Anacreon's "lover's leap" 376 PMG, and Campbell GLPS 323.

in the Works and Days which tell of his father who took to the sea φεβγων... κακὴν πενίην, "on the run from evil poverty" (637-38). But the chances of financial success are not high; δίζησθαι, "search out", is a verb that does not imply fulfilment, and the final couplet is an ominous reminder that death is the only sure means of escaping poverty.

This despondent conclusion emphasizes the principal topic of this passage: the helplessness of a poor man. Poverty is given but one epithet, and that twice, namely, χαλεπή. Elsewhere in the Corpus this adjective denotes a "difficulty in dealing with"; it qualifies ἄτη (588), σιάσις (78, 1082) and drunkenness(838); it describes πρῆξις ἀγαθοῦ in contrast to the ease of acting badly (1028); in an emphatic tautology, it modifies ἀμηχανία which is pictured here as the offspring of poverty (392).¹⁴ In 619-20 W, the author "rolls in ἀμηχανίῃσι" because of his insufficient resources. In the passage quoted, the middle couplet makes it clear that a man is powerless under poverty's "subjugation"; here (177) δεδημημένος reinforces δάμνησι in 173; the binding of his tongue has a counterpart in the yoke metaphor for Poverty later in the Corpus (649f.); unquestionably, the loss of δύναμις is complete.

While poverty deprives a man of the power to act in the Theognidea, wealth bestows that power.¹⁵ 718W contains an old maxim:

ὡς πλοῦτος πλείστην πᾶσιν ἔχει δύναμιν
That wealth holds the most power for all.

The politically frustrated Alcaeus offers the same thought, with this

¹⁴ Cf. 385 W, Tyrtaeus 10 W 7-10; D.H. Abel, "Genealogies of Ethical Concepts," TAPA 74 (1943) 97f. lists penia and amēchania as the first two members of the "negative family of Vice;" they are sisters who "subdue a great people" in Alcaeus 364 LP.

¹⁵ See West STUDIES 171 for examples of the power of action conferred by wealth in the Theognidea, but add 928 W.

expansion (360 LP):

χρήματ' ἄνηρ, πένιχρος δ' οὐδ' εἰς πέλετ' ἕσλος οὐδὲ τίμιος
 Money makes the man, no poor man can be noble or honored.

The adage¹⁶ appears again in a fragment of Sophocles' Aleadae (88 JP) which begins:

τὰ χρήματ' ἀνθρώποισιν εὐρίσκει φίλους,
 αὐθις δὲ τιμάς...

Money finds friends for men,¹⁷ and distinctions besides...

and concludes with an affirmation that wealth provides the power to enter such places

χάπθθεν πένης ἀνήρ
 οὐδ' ἐντυχῶν δύναιτ' ἄν ὧν ἐραῖ τυχεῖν.

where a poor man cannot obtain access so as to realize his desires.

Debilitation by poverty is the core of the traditional complaint: a poor man is deprived of the power to act. As a result, he finds it difficult to obtain τέρψις and φίλοι, and impossible to display ἀρετή and win τιμή. In short, a man who cannot make a living cannot make his life worth living.¹⁸

The preference for death is also found in traditional complaints about old age, which lament similar losses. Just as the Greek poets defined the limits of poverty by interplay with wealth, its polar

16 It recurs most notably in Pindar Isth. 2.11; Page S&A 315 cites many parallels, to which one may add Euripides Phoen. 439-40.

17 The connection between wealth and friends appears often in the Theognidea (e.g. 29-38 W, 101-04 W, 667-82 W) and is a familiar theme even in modern Blues (e.g. "Nobody loves you when you're down and out").

18 Phocylides 10 D: "Seek a living and, when you have found a living, seek aretē."

opposite, so too they effectively portrayed the misery of γῆρας by antithetical contrast with ἡβη.¹⁹ A passage included in the Theognidea (1017-22 W) describes the poet's personal panic over disappearing youth, which is called τερπνὸν ὁμῶς καὶ καλόν, "delightful alike and lovely", and then continues (1020-22 W):

ἀλλ' ὀλιγοχρόνιον γίνεται ὡσπερ ὄναρ
ἡβη τιμήεσσα· τὸ δ' οὐλόμενον καὶ ἄμορφον
αὐτίχ' ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς γῆρας ὑπερκρέματα.

But a span as brief as a dream has precious youth; and baneful, formless old age hangs presently over our heads.

These three lines are printed within quotation marks by Young in his Teubner edition,²⁰ since they repeat almost exactly fragment 5 W²¹ of Mimnermus which continues with this descriptive couplet (7-8):

ἐχθρὸν ὁμῶς καὶ ἄτιμον, ὃ τ' ἄγνωστον τιθεῖ ἄνδρα,
βλάπτει δ' ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ νόον ἀμφιχυθέν.

hateful alike and unhonored, which makes a man unrecognizable, weakens the eyes and mind buried under.

In the Theognidean Corpus, the praise of youth and the horror of old age are most often found in a sympotic framework as an exhortation to enjoy life while one can.²² The treatment of this dual theme is far more poignant in the surviving elegiacs of Mimnermus who is, in fact, famous for his ψόγος γῆρας, "censure of old age".

The misery of old age is vividly depicted in these short fragments of Mimnermus (3, 4 W):

¹⁹ E.g. Theognis 527-28 W; see especially Euripides HF 634-54 with H. Parry, AJP 86 (1965) 364-67 who cites numerous passages.

²⁰ Cf. Wilamowitz, op.cit. 285f.

²¹ West prints the whole poem as the work of Mimnermus.

²² See G. Giangrande, "Sympotic Literature and Epigram," Fondation Hardt 14, 103.

τὸ πρὶν ἔων κάλλιστος, ἐπὴν παραμείψεται ὄρη,
οὐδὲ πατὴρ παισὶν τίμιος οὔτε φίλος.

Though in former days he was fairest, when his youth's season passes, not even a father wins honor or love from his children.

Τιθωνῶι μὲν ἔδωκεν ἔχειν κακὸν ἀφθιτον { - - }
γῆρας, δὲ καὶ θανάτου βίγλιον ἀργαλέου.

[Zeus?] granted Tithonus evil, immortal old age, which is even chillier than painful death.

The myth of Tithonus probably had a special significance for Mimnermus who viewed old age as a form of living death. In an elegy (2 W) that begins with an image of the brevity of life and youth (1-2), the poet recalls the famous story of Achilles' two Fates²³ with a reference to the black κῆρες which await us all: old age and death (3-7). After another image of quickly passing youth (7-8), there is this couplet (9-10):

αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν δὴ τοῦτο τέλος παραμείψεται ὄρης,
αὐτίκα δὴ τεθνάναι βέλτιον ἢ βίος.

But when this final stage of youth passes, then death is better than life.

The poem ends pessimistically with a catalogue of the miseries that beset an old man: poverty, unfulfilled desire for children, disease (11-16). For Mimnermus, old age is a Fate Worse Than Death.

The most popular elegy of Mimnermus (1 W) bluntly explains why an old man is in a deplorable state. Old age makes one αἰσχρὸν ὁμῶς καὶ κακὸν, "ugly alike and base" (6); the consequences are clear in the pathetic ending of the poem (8-10):

οὐδ' ἀγάς προσορῶν τέρπεται ἡελίου,
ἀλλ' ἐχθρὸς μὲν παισὶν, ἀτίμαστος δὲ γυναιξίν.
οὔτως ἀργαλέον γῆρας ἔθηκε θεός.

²³ Il. 9.411f.; Bowra EGE 21 discusses this section of the poem.

He delights not in looking upon the rays of the sun, but is hateful to children and without honor in the eyes of women; so painful has god made old age.

An old man's disgrace is so acute that he cannot take pleasure in the fundamental joy of looking on the sunlight; that the Greeks valued this joy is borne out by numerous references in their literature.²⁴ Moreover, in his wasted state, an old man is denied even the comfort of day-to-day pleasure. It is this loss in particular which prompts the wish for death that opens the elegy (1-2):

τίς δὲ βίος, τί δὲ τερπνὸν ἄτερ χρυσοῦς Ἀφροδίτης;
 τεθναίην, ὅτε μοι μηκέτι ταῦτα μέλοι,

What life, what joy without golden Aphrodite? May I die when such things no longer concern me,...

The poet betrays his panic at the prospect of physical impotence which he claims will mark the end of a worthwhile life.

For the Greeks, old age generally constituted a man's removal from action. In some cases the old man is able to use his wisdom and wider experience²⁵ to provide, as Nestor does, not fighting power but the βουλαὶ γερόντων.²⁶ However this is only one slight gain in the otherwise totally enfeebling process of age²⁷ and is, in most cases, of little advantage.

²⁴ E.g. Praxilla 747 PMG has the dead Adonis say, "The most beautiful thing I leave is the light of the sun."

²⁵ Cf. Solon 18 W: "I grow old, always learning many things;" Euripides Phoen. 528-30, fr. 619 TGF²; Antiphon fr. 3 TGF².

²⁶ E.g. Il. 4.322-25; cf. Sophocles fr. 260 JP for additional examples. At the end of his long life, Bertrand Russell said that he found a small compensation for his loss of the sex-drive in the considerable amount of extra time it allowed him for thinking.

²⁷ Cf. the description of old age in Aristotle Rhet. 2.13, and in Horace Ars P. 169f. along with C.O. Brink's commentary ad loc.

At the beginning of Euripides' Heracles, Amphitryon appears as the sole defense of the absent hero's family against the tyrant Lycus. The old man says to his grandchildren (228-31):

πρὸς δ' ἔμ' ἀσθενῆ φίλον
δεδορκατ', οὐδὲν ὄντα πλὴν γλώσσης ψόφον.
ῥάμη γὰρ ἐκλέλοιπεν ἦν πρὶν εἶχομεν,
γῆραι δὲ τρομερὰ γυῖα κῆμαυρὸν σθένοσ.

You look at me, a weak friend being nothing more than the sound of a tongue. The strength we once had has left; in old age we have trembling limbs and fading power.

His address closes a fine speech (170f.) with which he employs his remaining faculty to uphold Heracles' reputation in the wake of Lycus' slander. The aged Chorus is impressed,²⁸ but the young tyrant mocks him (238-39):

σὺ μὲν λέγ' ἡμᾶς οἷς πεπύργωσαι λόγοις,
ἐγὼ δὲ δράσω σ' ἀντὶ τῶν λόγων κακῶς.

Go on, rant, pile up your tower of words! My actions, not my words, shall answer your abuse.²⁹

Amphitryon's weakened flesh cannot serve his willing spirit, and he remains a γέροντ' ἀχρεῖον, "useless old man" (42).

Old age, like poverty, deprives a man of the power to lead a good life, to stand strong for his friends and against his enemies. But worse than poverty, it is hopelessly irreversible and, in a sense, more debilitating. For instance, a sympotic quatrain in the Theognidea contradicts the earlier sentiment³⁰ that poverty is worse than old age

²⁸ The parodos included a similar lament for the Chorus' infirmity and a self-reference of being "mere words" (111).

²⁹ Translation by W. Arrowsmith.

³⁰ 173-74 W, p. 9 above.

(1129-32 W):

ἐμπόμαι· πενίης θυμοφόρου οὐ μελεδαίνω,
 οὐδ' ἀνδρῶν ἐχθρῶν οἷ με λέγουσι κακῶς.
 ἀλλ' ἤβην ἐρατὴν ὀλοφύρομαι, ἣ μ' ἐπιλείπει,
 κλαίω δ' ἀργαλέον γῆρας ἐπερχόμενον.

I will drink my fill with no care for heart-killing poverty, or for my enemies who speak badly of me. But I lament lovely youth, which is slipping from me, and I cry out at painful old age approaching.

This selection is a variation of the familiar elegiac gnome, "not for a price can you escape death or old age."³¹ The sentiment, a poor young man has an access to some pleasures of life that an old rich man cannot enjoy, is in my opinion closer to general truth than Theognis' earlier contention of the opposite. This obvious contradiction within the Corpus delights the so-called separatists who take an autobiographical approach to this work; but aside from that, it raises an important question. How sincere are these unequivocal statements of a preference for death?

The fragments of Mimnermus present such a passionate, gloomy description of the horrors of old age that his death-wish is readily accepted. The confusing testimonies concerning his life make it impossible to know whether his wish to die at sixty³² was realized, but if it was not, would he have welcomed or even sought death? It is a common belief that old people cherish life all the more; this is demonstrated by what A. M. Dale³³ calls a piece of "trenchant popular morality" with which Euripides has Admetus end his bitter condemnation of the father who refused to die in

³¹ Solon 24 W 9-10 = Theognis 727-28 W.

³² Mimnermus 6 W.

³³ Euripides: Alcestis (Oxford 1954) ad loc. My uncle once told me that old folks have trouble sleeping because their bodies instinctually demand as much of the little time that is left as possible.

his stead (Alcestis 669-72):

μάτην ἄρ' οἱ γέροντες εὖχονται θανεῖν,
 γῆρας ψεγοντες καὶ μακρὸν χρόνον βίου.
 ἦν δ' ἐγγὺς ἔλθῃ θάνατος, οὐδεὶς βούλεται
 θνήσκειν, τὸ γῆρας δ' οὐκέτ' ἔστ' αὐτοῖς βαρὺ.

Idly do old men plead for death, complaining about old age and life's long span; if death should come near, no one wants to die, and old age is no longer heavy upon them.

An old person tends to hang on even more dearly to life because his age reminds him that time is short. This is nicely demonstrated by the only poem of Anacreon's serious enough to find a place in Stobaeus' Anthology. Despite the frivolous meter, the second half is an understandable reaction to the threatening promise of old age (395 PMG 7-12):³⁴

διὰ ταῦτ' ἀνασταλύζω
 θαμὰ Τάρταρον δεδοικώς.
 Αἶδεω γάρ ἐστι δεινὸς
 μυχός, ἀργαλή δ' ἐς αὐτὸν
 κάτοδος· καὶ γὰρ ἐτοῖμον
 καταβάντι μὴ ἀναβῆναι.

Because of this [γῆρας] I weep often, afraid of Tartarus: for the pit of Hades is horrible, and difficult is the road down to it. And it is certain that he who goes down can never come up.

The human dread of death and the natural instinct for self-preservation do not minimize these poetic expressions of death-wishes and death-preferences. Rather than raising suspicion about the sincerity of these poets, the ingenuous reluctance to die forces us to take their calls for release all the more seriously. Like the modern mother's threat, "If you drown in that canoe, I'll kill you!", these conventional expressions are genuine reflections of the gravity of a situation. For

³⁴ By all means see Giangrande, op.cit. 110 on this passage for his singular interpretation.

Mimnermus, the helplessness and disgrace of old age clearly make an early death the better Fate. For others, the best is never to have been born.

(c) The Use Of Convention³⁵

When the poet of the Works and Days reaches the beginning of his description of the fifth age, the present one, a burst of passion wrenches him away from the narration; he exclaims (174-75):

μηκέτ' ἔπειτ' ὄφελλον ἐγὼ πέμπτοισι μετεῖναι
ἀνδράσιν, ἀλλ' ἢ πρόσθε θανεῖν ἢ ἔπειτα γενέσθαι.

Would that I were no longer part of the fifth generation of men, but had died before, or was born after.

Hesiod had previously described the powerful and glorious men of old, and the process of degeneration which can go no lower than this.³⁶ This life is hard; Hesiod wants no part of it.

In his Consolation to Apollonius, Plutarch³⁷ tells a folk-tale that he credits to Aristotle. Midas was said to have captured the prophetic satyr, Silenus, who was able to regain his freedom by supplying, after much persuasion, the answer to the king's query about the best and most preferable of all things for mankind.³⁸ Silenus' words are the

³⁵ I am of course indebted to Gordon Williams' approach to poetry in Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry (Oxford 1968) and to the instruction of my supervisor on the importance of context.

³⁶ Or so we might infer from his emotional wish and the subsequent prediction of Zeus' destruction of this race.

³⁷ Cons. ad Apoll. 115, Arist. fr. 44 R; questions by most modern scholars about the authorship of this work result in the name "Pseudo-Plutarch".

³⁸ Virgil's adaptation of this story in Eclogue 6 is cosmogonical and mythological; cf. Rohde Psyche n. 10 to chap. 12 for modern comments on the fable.

fullest expression of a pessimistic outlook on life; it is found often and nearly always in the same form in Greek literature.³⁹ It first appears in the Theognidea (425-28 W):

πάντων μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον,
 μηδ' εἰσιδεῖν ἀγάς ὀξέος ἡελίου,
 φόντα δ' ὅπως ὄκιστα πύλας Ἀΐδαο περῆσαι
 καὶ κεῖσθαι πολλὴν γῆν ἐπαμησάμενον.

Best of all it is for mortals not to be born and not look on the keen sun's rays, but, once born, to pass as quickly as possible through the portals of Hell, and to lie buried, having a heaped up mound of earth.

The two hexameters (425, 427) are without doubt proverbial; van Groningen notes: "c'est le cas de toute expression devenue proverbe et souvent citée de mémoire." So it is understandable that Young's Teubner edition prints them within quotation marks, but it also beyond proof, for we know of no earlier source from which it could have been taken.⁴⁰ The pentameters do have the appearance of being added on to well-known lines which, if old indeed, would likely have taken the shape of hexameters. Without evidence, we can only treat them as a quatrain of the Theognidea. However, discussion of this conventional expression in later lyric poetry will be profitable.

Sophocles makes notable use of this convention in the Oedipus at Colonus. Theseus returns with the daughters of Oedipus (1099f.) whom he has rescued from Creon's brigands, but he also brings the news that

³⁹ Van Groningen, commenting on the passage below, has a complete list (to my knowledge) of the twelve other authors in antiquity who use it. Cf. also the epitaph in A.P. 7.309: "I, Dionysius of Tarsus, sixty, lie here never having married -- I wish my father had not."

⁴⁰ Campbell GLPS 366 maintains with Young that the source is the Certainen Homeri et Hesiodi, but West's competent article in the OCD, s.v., convinces me of a later date for that work.

his hated son, Polyneices is asking for an audience with his blinded father (1161-62). After much persuasion (1179-1203), Oedipus agrees to meet him. Theseus leaves Oedipus to ponder his confrontation with his son, and in the interlude, the Chorus sings the triadic Third Stasimon which begins (1211-39):

- στρ. ὅστις τοῦ πλέονος μέρους
 χρῆζει τοῦ μετρίου παρῆς
 ζῶειν, σκαλοσύναν φυλάσ-
 σων ἐν ἑμοῖ κατάδηλος ἔσται.
 1215 ἐπεὶ πολλὰ μὲν αἰ μακρὰ
 ἀμέραι κατέθεντο δὴ
 λύπας ἐγγυτέρω, τὰ τέρ-
 ποντα δ' οὐκ ἂν ἴδοις ὅπου,
 ὅταν τις ἐς πλεόν πέσῃ
 1220 τοῦ δέοντος· ὁ δ' ἐπίκουρος Ἰσοτέλεστος,
 Ἄιδος ὅτε μοῖρ' ἀνυμέναιος
 ἄλυρος ἄχορος ἀναπέφηνε,
 θάνατος ἐς τελευτάν.
ἀντ. μὴ φῦναι τὸν ἅπαντα νι-
 1225 καὶ λόγον· τὸ δ', ἐπεὶ φανῆι,
 βῆναι κεῖσ' ὀπόθεν περ ἦ-
 κει πολὺ δεύτερον ὡς τάχιστα.
 ὡς εὔτ' ἂν τὸ νέον παρηι-
 1230 κούφας ἀφροσύνας φέρον,
 τίς πλάγχθη πολὺ μόχθος ἔ-
 ξω; τίς οὐ καμάτων ἔνι;
 φθόνος, στάσεις, ἔρις, μάχαι.
 1235 καὶ φόνοι· τό τε κατάμεμπτον ἐπιλέλογχε
 πόματον ἀκρατῆς ἀπροσόμελον
 γῆρας ἄφιλον, ἵνα πρόπαντα
 κακὰ κακῶν ξυνοικεῖ.
ἐπ. ἐν ᾧ τλάμων ὄδ', οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος,...

Whoever desires a larger measure, ill-content with a moderate life span, will be in my opinion an obvious retainer of foolishness. For the long days lay up full many things nearer to pain, but as for delights you will not know their place, when one has slipped beyond a due term. The Deliverer is accomplished for all alike, when Hades' lot, with no wedding-song, no lyre, no dance, has suddenly appeared, namely, Death at the end.

Not to be born surpasses every estimation; but when he has come to light, by far the next best is to go as quickly as possible to the place from which he has come. For when once he has let by youth's burden of light follies, what vast trouble is beyond that range? What suffering is not therein? Envy, discord, strife, battles and killings. The disparaged, final lot next falls to him, strengthless, unsociable, and friendless old age, where every evil of evils abides.

At that point is the wretch here, not I alone,...

On the lines that begin the antistrophe (1224-27), the Scholiast quotes the Theognidean passage and calls the sentiment τὸ λεγόμενον. The poet expands this thought by revealing the discouraging promises of mortality; he presents the ontogenetic figure of a man who, if he manages to survive the many dangers and pains of life, will endure the degradation of enervating old age. The strophe (1211-23) is a forlorn lament on the human condition which begins with the familiar condemnation of fools who yearn for longevity, and ends with the allusion to the two black Fates of mortals: joyless old age or gloomy deliverance, and, in either case, death at the end.

Sophocles' treatment of these familiar themes by far surpasses the work of the elegists. Note, for example, the three α-privative adjectives he uses to describe both death and old age; they convey the negative aspects, the pathetic sense of loss.⁴¹ And the lyrical quality of his

⁴¹ Cf. Iphigenia's description of her wretched state in Euripides II 220: "I am husbandless, childless, friendless, and a citizen of nowhere." This apt translation is S. Barlow's, The Imagery of Euripides (London 1958) 26.

rendition (1224-25) gives powerful life to what might otherwise have been a cold convention.

With the opening words of the epode (1239), the Chorus points to Oedipus who stands on stage. After bemoaning the sorrow of Man, then of one nameless man in particular, they present this tortured, blind old wretch as a visible example of outrageous mortal suffering. This telescopic movement from a general idea to a specific reference is a technique used elsewhere by Sophocles with equal dramatic effectiveness.⁴² When the hapless Oedipus is in focus, he is compared to a sea-beaten rock in a simile whose lyrical quality evokes the repetitive, wailing sound of funereal grief. Like other Sophoclean choral odes,⁴³ this one could stand apart from the drama. Nevertheless, it serves a dramatic function: "it prepares for the catastrophe by representing Oedipus' old age as a misery from which death will be a welcome release."⁴⁴

The traditional conceit, "Death the Releaser", is alluded to in two striking words (1220): ἐπικουρος λουσέλευστος. The translation of the latter found in the LSJ is Jebb's: "coming at the end to all alike". This rare adjective describes a familiar attribute of death; the sense appears again in a fragment of Sophocles' Philoctetes at Troy (698 JP):

ἀλλ' ἔσθ' ὁ θάνατος λοῦσθος λατρὸς νόσων

Death at the last is the healer of diseases.

The idea has an explicit expression at the end of the strophe (1223), but

⁴² T.B.L. Webster, An Introduction to Sophocles (Oxford 1936) 115 has other examples.

⁴³ G. Kirkwood, A Study of Sophoclean Drama (Ithaca 1958) 201.

⁴⁴ H.D.F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy (3rd ed. London 1961) 392; cf. Creon's line (955): "The dead feel no pain," and Jebb's note on 1211-48; Kirkwood, op. cit. 261, has an interpretation which is less convincing: he saw an ironic contrast to the bold "inner-strength" Oedipus will display in the next scene.

here, the noun which suggests "Releaser" is rich in connotations. It is used in Homer to refer to barbarian allies at Troy, in the Historians to mean mercenary troops, and in a lyric passage of the Oedipus Tyrannus (497) for an "avenger of the dead". Again, the poetic skill of Sophocles transcends cliché in treatment of a universal theme, for Death is not merely a "remedy", but something like a "foreign agent brought in for assistance commonly by all".

As so often in Greek poetry, here we see how a conventional theme can acquire a fresh vitality through its use in a context which shows its particular as well as its universal relevance, and through skillful choice of words. To illustrate the vitalizing power of poetic technique, I shall consider two other examples that treat, respectively, the two conventional themes "better never to have been born" and "death as a release". They are taken from the mythical digressions in the epinician odes of two different poets.

The myth in Bacchylides' Ode 5 is prefaced by the statement that not even the most famous and prosperous mortal is happy in all things (50-55); Heracles and Meleager verify, in their different ways, the truth of this maxim. On his errand to fetch Cerberus, Heracles meets the ghost of Meleager within the gates of Hades, and listens to his pitiful story. Then, and then alone (155), Alcmene's son weeps; he says to the dead hero (160-64):

θνατοῖσι μὴ φῦναι φέριστον
μηδ' ἀελίου προσιδεῖν
φέγγος· ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ τίς ἐστιν
πρᾶξις τάδε μυρομένοις,
κρή κείνο λέγειν ὅτι καὶ μέλλει τελεῖν.

Best for mortals not to have been born and to look on the light of the sun. Still, there is no use mourning these things; a man must talk of that which he is in fact likely to accomplish.

The first sentiment is a crudely abridged quotation of Theognis 425 W.

The second observation of Heracles more faithfully reproduces Homer,

Od. 10.202 = 568:

ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ τις πρῆξις ἐγένετο μυρομένοισιν.

And yet nothing was accomplished by lamentations.

But Bacchylides' unimaginative adaptation of conventions, word for word,⁴⁵ does not as a rule diminish his special talent for narration. His crisp, undistracting language keeps his stories moving at a skillfully planned pace. In this passage, however, Heracles' bland expression of a familiar commonplace brings the narration to an abrupt halt. The poet's attempt to have his character deliver a sympathetic reaction clearly fails.

Gerber's comments (E 356) on these lines are in fact an accurate and unacknowledged restatement of Jebb's observation: "Its pathos is enhanced by virtue of its coming from Heracles, 'the unconquered', (v.57)." It is unfortunate that Gerber omits the rest of Jebb's comment, which expresses his uneasiness about the curious application of this gnome to Meleager's story:⁴⁶

A subtler poet would scarcely have made him say it here, within the gates of Hades,... for the first part of the adage,... inevitably suggests the other which is not spoken, -- 'and next best, to die soon.'

⁴⁵ It is this Ode which contains almost exactly (31-33) Pindar's opening words of Isth. 4. It is said Pindar calls him an ape in Pyth. 2.72-73; cf. C.M. Bowra, Problems in Greek Poetry (Oxford 1953) 74f.

⁴⁶ R.C. Jebb, Bacchylides: The Poems and Fragments (Cambridge 1905, repr. Hildesheim 1967) ad loc. Jebb favors Sophocles' treatment, p. 21 above.

Other modern commentators dutifully note the "pathos" of this scene; in my opinion, it has all the pathos of a sympathy card. In any case, whatever pathos this passage can be said to have is obliterated by Heracles' next sentence, when he asks Meleager if he has any good-looking sisters (165-69).

Heracles' question makes it obvious that the poet's interest was not in evoking pathos — though he comes close with the narrative description of the only tears the hero ever shed — but that he was involved in telling the story. Meleager answers that he does have a marriageable sister, Deianeira, "Man-Destroyer" (172-75). The narration begins again with a startling jolt and, paradoxically, closes at the same time with the ironic resolution that Heracles has sought and found, in Hades, the agent of his own destruction.⁴⁷

It is admittedly unfair and in most cases unprofitable to compare Bacchylides with Pindar. I would like to stress that my goal is to demonstrate how a poet employs traditional themes. As it happens, Bacchylides' attempt in the last example is disappointing, and Pindar's in the next shows how he succeeds with his usual mastery.

Pindar's Nemean 10 contains a version of the myth of the sons of Leda, Castor and Polydeuces. The poet uses both their traditional patronymics, the Tyndaridae (i.e., the sons of Tyndareus) and the Dioscuri (i.e., the sons of Zeus). In the story of their last battle (59f.), Castor, the true Tyndarid, is stabbed by Idas who then launches an attack with his brother Lynceus on Polydeuces. The latter kills Lynceus, and

⁴⁷ A version of this same story is said by the scholiast on Il. 21.194 to have been told by Pindar; in his version, Meleager begged Heracles to marry Deianeira. Jebb discusses the effectiveness of both versions with his usual commanding insight in his Appendix, op.cit. 472.

then Zeus strikes the other with a thunderbolt which consumes both their bodies. Immediately, Polydeuces rushes to his fallen brother and finds Castor at the point of death. Helpless with grief, he prays (76-79):

Πάτερ Κρονίων, τίς δὴ λύσις
 ἔσσεται πενθέων; καὶ ἐμοὶ θάνατον σὺν
 τῷδ' ἐπίτειλον, ἄναξ.
 οἴχεται τιμὰ φίλων ταταμένωι
 φατί: παῦροι δ' ἐν πόνωι πιστοὶ βροτῶν
 καμάτου μεταλαμβάνειν.

Father, Son of Cronos, what release will there be from sorrows?
 To me as well grant death with him, lord. Honor goes from a man
 deprived of dear ones. In trouble, few mortals may be trusted
 to share one's labors.

When this passage is considered out of context, the words of Polydeuces over his dying brother appear to be conventional expressions of grief. His thoughts are familiar and simply stated: the rhetorical question implying no escape, the direct wish for death, the reflection that one's *τιμή* dies with one's *φίλοι*, the traditional complaint that in times of trouble men cannot be trusted. Yet each of these elements is enhanced in meaning and emotional impact by Pindar's use and presentation of the myth.

The poet begins the story with the end. The fourth strophe (55f.) describes the common destiny enjoyed by the Dioscuri, who live one day on Olympus with Zeus, "dear father", and the next day in a place below the earth. Polydeuces chose this destiny rather than be a god alone when Castor fell. So the audience knows even before his prayer that Polydeuces will be given a choice, and which one he will take. Thus, each phrase of his speech is richly laden with meaning.

His wish for death is boldly ironic; his question about *λύσις* will,

we know, be answered by Zeus himself. Though Polydeuces is seeking the release of death, his immortal father, in immediate reply, offers him the choice of eternal life and escape from "death as well as hateful old age" (83), or the curious quasi-life with Castor which he takes without hesitation (89). The "release from sorrows" (λύσις πενθέων) was not death for Polydeuces, but life for Castor, as the poem's final line emphasizes (90):

ἀνὰ δ' ἔλυσεν μὲν ὄφθαλμόν, ἔπειτα δὲ φωνᾶν
χαλκομίτρα Κάστορος.

He freed the eyes, and then the voice of bronze-belted Castor.

In this way did Zeus, in response to Polydeuces' complaint about the dearth of mortals who are πιστοί (78), prove the truth of the maxim that closes the first section of the poem before the telling of the myth (54):

καὶ μὲν θεῶν πιστὸν γένος.

In truth, the race of gods is trustworthy.⁴⁸

Polydeuces' explanation of his call for the release of death is very explicit (78): he lost his φίλος and hence also τιμὰ. These losses lead him to feel that life itself is deprived of value. This sentiment, so neatly crystallized by Pindar in a single sentence, can be paralleled in fifth-century tragedy, which here, as so often, reflects the traditional scheme of Greek values. In Pindar and in tragedy⁴⁹ honor and all

⁴⁸ The placement of this line at the end of the epode practically ensures that the audience will recall it during Polydeuces' speech.

⁴⁹ For the Homeric view of friendship and honor, which is generally reflected in later tragedy, see e.g. A.W.H. Adkins, "'Friendship' and 'Self-Sufficiency' in Homer and Aristotle," *CO* 13 (1963) 30f. and "'Honour' and 'Punishment' in the Homeric Poems," *BICS* 7 (1960) 23-32.

worth are frequently dependent on friends.

(d) The Value Of Life: Τιμή, Φιλία

In this final section, I shall briefly examine some striking treatments of these ideas in the plays of Sophocles and Euripides. It will be apparent that the closely linked ideas of τιμή and φιλία had for the Greeks a personal importance which was, in a very strict sense, vital.

First, Sophocles' Electra. In a recent paper, C.P. Segal⁵⁰ somewhat overstates a valid point on this play: "In no other Sophoclean play is death (literally and metaphorically) so dominant a theme." The title character, as only one example, longs for death and is visibly near death because of her grief for a dead man and for a man who is not really dead; in addition, Electra longs for, plots and ultimately accomplishes the murders of her enemies. The issues and ideas beneath this theme will appear in the following brief summary.

In the Prologue, Orestes the avenger (τιμωρός, 14) prays that he might not leave "without honor" (ἄτιμος, 71); he clearly conceives this τιμή in terms of material possessions (72). In the Parodos, Electra's thoughts repeatedly turn to the memory of Agamemnon and his death, and to her desire for vengeance; "how can it be right to neglect the dead?" she asks (237). His murderers' insults and their presence in Agamemnon's own home are, for his daughter, further justification of her present grief and obsession with revenge (254-309).

⁵⁰ "The Electra of Sophocles," TAPA 97 (1966) 485f. In this lengthy article he presents a full and interesting discussion on the relationship of the life-death interplay to the play's structure and symmetry. Crucial here, of course, is the initial plan adopted by Orestes who allows the old Tutor to report his "death" to the royal house of Argos.

Electra's problem is that she has no φίλος ἀνὴρ (188) to come to her assistance; she is literally helpless (143, 230) and virtually dying of grief (304). She prays for Orestes' return, and admits to the Chorus that the hope that he will not fail his φίλοι is her only reason to live (322-23). At this point, her sister Chrysothemis enters on the heels of a pertinent remark by the Chorus about their blood-ties (324f.). But in Electra's view, Chrysothemis is no φίλη: her refusal to respond with actions to the claims of φιλία and her cowardly acquiescence in the rule of Agamemnon's murderers make her a betrayer of φίλοι (368, 395). We can, therefore, understand Electra's reaction to the news of Orestes' "death"; it means her death, too (674, 677). All her hopes have died with him and above all, her hope of vengeance (807-12). Now she is alone and no longer will she share the house with murderers (812-18). She continues (819-22):

παρεῖσ' ἑμαυτὴν ἄφιλος ἀθανῶ βίον.
 πρὸς ταῦτά καινέτω τις, εἰ βαρύνεται,
 τῶν ἔνδον ὄντων· ὡς χάρις μὲν, ἦν κτάνηι,
 λύπη δ', ἐὰν ζῶ· τοῦ βίου δ' οὐδεὶς πόθος.

Lying down, friendless, I shall waste my life away. For that, let anyone in the house, if angry, kill me. It would be a favor if I die, agony if I live. Longing for life is no more.

When Chrysothemis appears with a lock of Orestes' hair she discovered on Agamemnon's tomb, Electra rejects this token; Orestes is dead, Hades has all their φίλοι, and they are all alone (924, 948-50). Electra implores her sister to join together and kill Aegisthus, for thereby they will win εὐκλεία and indeed undying fame (947f.); she concludes with the assertion that ζῆν αἰσχρὸν αἰσχρῶς τοῖς καλῶς πεφουκόσιν, "shameful it is for the nobly born to live shamefully" (989). When her sister refuses to help, Electra decides to seek revenge by herself. But before she acts, Orestes

appears in disguise and presents her with the urn that supposedly contains his ashes. In Electra's view, honor is gone along with her φίλος; she is nothing now (1166), and wants to die with Orestes, to be with him in the grave, for she sees that "the dead feel no pain" (1170). So ends her moving lament over the urn. Orestes, who has listened for forty-four lines, can keep silent no longer and exposes the truth. Once Electra understands the situation, she embraces life with all the fervor of her earlier rejection of it; she embraces Orestes, and soon her demanding desire for vengeance will be satisfied.

That desire has its starting-point in the ethic, "aid your friends and harm your enemies" (cf. 355-56). In this play, Electra's ability to act on these lines is frustrated by the power of her enemies and her lack of friends; she can neither harm her enemies, her mother and her lover, nor can she aid her φίλοι until Orestes returns. Until then, her shame and helplessness are gradually turning Electra into a lifeless corpse.

I turn now to Sophocles' Antigone. Creon's plea for death in the final Kommos comes from a man whose misguided belief that he alone knows what is right for Thebes and what treatment should be afforded the bodies of Polyneices and Eteocles, together with his concern for his reputation, has resulted in his loss of φίλοι. The collapse of his house has made him a "living corpse" (1167). At first, Creon realizes that his misfortune was caused by his own δυσβουλία, "ill counsel" (1269), but still, he tries to blame "some god" (1271-75). When he learns that his wife Eurydice died cursing him as a παιδοκτόνος, "infanticide", he wishes that someone might slay him (1304-11). His life is merely a living death (cf. 1325), and he cries out in pain (1328-33):

ἔτω ἔτω,
φανήτω μόνων ὁ κάλλιστ' ἐμῶν
ἐμοὶ τερμίαν ἄγων ἀμέραν
ἕπατος· ἔτω ἔτω,
ὅπως μηκέτ' ἄμαρ ἄλλ' εἰσίδω.

Come, let it appear, the fairest of my fates bringing to me a final day, best of my fates by far; come, let it pass that I never look on another day!

This prayer sums up all his desires (1336), but it is not fulfilled. As the Chorus indicates, there is no escape from destined woe (1337-38), and at the end of the play Creon is led away. Despised by, and bereft of his φίλοι, he will die a death, now or later, which will be what Antigone swore she would never endure: οὐ καλῶς θανεῖν, "to not die well" (96-97).

From the outset of the play, Antigone's concern is her duty to her dead brother Polyneices. At any cost, she will guarantee his τιμή (21f.); it will be καλόν to bury him, her φίλος, and then die herself (72). Confronted by Creon, she admits that she knew she faced death for burying her brother, but death comes to all in time, and she counts an early death a gain in her circumstances (458-70). Glory will be hers (502-04). She rejects Ismene's offer to die along with her by saying that she alone chose to die (555) in service to the dead (560).

In the Sophoclean play that bears his name, Ajax chooses death rather than life (473-80):

αἰσχρὸν γὰρ ἄνδρα τοῦ μακροῦ χρεῖζεν βίου,
κακοῖσιν ὅστις μηδὲν ἐξαλλάσσεται.
τί γὰρ παρ' ἡμᾶρ ἡμέρα τέρπειν ἔχει
προσθεῖσα κἀναθεῖσα τοῦ γε κατθανεῖν;
οὐκ ἂν πριαίμην οὐδενὸς λόγου βροτῶν
ὅστις κεναῖσιν ἐλπίσιν θεομαίνεται.
ἄλλ' ἢ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι
τὸν εὐγενῆ χρεῖ.

For it is shameful for a man to desire long life, who finds no change in troubles. What joy is there, day after day, in moving towards, then moving back from death? I rate a man as worthless, who is warmed by idle hopes. Rather, either to live well or else to die well must a well-born man choose.

These words conclude a deliberation on the possibility of living without φίλοι and τιμή. R. Lattimore rightly says, "Ajax has seen his death is necessary by sheer logic."⁵¹ Once he discovers how he has been tricked by Athena, he repeatedly prays for death. He is ἄτιμος (426, 440). He is, in any case, in danger of being killed, for he is hated by gods and men alike (457-59). Now a laughing-stock before the Greeks (454), Ajax considers facing his once valorous father, but he says, "It cannot be endured" (466). He has nowhere to go; death is his only escape. He lives in a world in which friends and enemies change places (678-83). It is no world for Ajax.⁵²

In these plays by Sophocles, we see how characters respond to the claims of φιλία and τιμή, even to the point of giving up their lives, and how the loss of friends and honor makes death preferable to life. Many plays of Euripides touch on similar concerns. I deal here with only one play, the Heracles, where, as so often in Euripides, we can observe the salutary effect of φιλία and its close links with τιμή.

Amphitryon delivers the Prologue of the Heracles and describes the bleak situation: Heracles is in the Underworld, his family is threatened with death, and there is no promise of help. He concludes with the bitter and traditional complaint about the unreliability of friends in misfortune (55-59). Later, Megara twice repeats this commonplace (559, 561)

⁵¹ The Poetry of Greek Tragedy (Baltimore and Oxford 1958) 77.

⁵² Cf. B.M. Knox, "The Ajax of Sophocles," HSCP 65 (1961) 17; in this article Knox shows how the ethic "help your friends and harm your enemies" informs much of the play.

to Heracles who, arriving at the last moment, cannot believe that no one has risen to assist his family.⁵³ The hero passionately and dutifully swears to defend those dear to him and, if he must, to die (577-78):

καὶ δεῖ μ' ὑπὲρ τῶνδ', εἴπερ οἶδ' ὑπὲρ πατρός,
θνήσκειν ἀμόνοντ'.

I must die in their defense, as they might have for their father.

The Chorus calls his sense of duty proper (583), and Amphitryon adds (585-86):

πρὸς σοῦ μὲν, ὦ παῖ, τοῖς φίλοις {τ'} εἶναι φίλον
τά τ' ἐχθρὰ μισεῖν.

It is like you, my son, to be a friend to friends and to hate the enemy.

Heracles succeeds in throwing off the danger, but his destiny takes a cruel twist when Madness, under Hera's orders, induces his bloody rampage against what he thought were his enemies but were in fact the family he had just recently rescued. Afterwards, the hesitant prodding of Amphitryon brings Heracles to his senses as he stands amidst the carnage that was once his wife and children. He cries (1146-47):

οἴμοι· τί δῆτα φείδομαι ψυχῆς ἐμῆς
τῶν φιλτάτων μοι γενόμενος παίδων φονεύς;

Why then am I sparing of my life, having become the butcher of the children most dear to me?

He is the murderer of his own φίλοι, and seeks to release himself from the δόσκληια, "ill fame" which awaits him (1152).

Now Heracles sees Theseus approaching, and his immediate concern

⁵³ A.P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived* (Oxford 1971) 165 n.13 comments that every citizen of Thebes was indebted to Heracles, the conqueror of the Minyans.

is for this "friend and kinsman" (1154) who, he fears, will be polluted by his shameful actions; Heracles hides his head under his robes (cf. 1198). After ascertaining the gravity and misery of his friend's circumstances, Theseus is determined to share his grief (1202) and calls upon Heracles to "show your face to friends" (1215). He will not be dismissed, for he takes no thought of pollution and remembers that Heracles saved him from death (1221-22). Theseus' next words repeat the recurring complaint about friends who are absent in trials (1223-25):

χάριν δὲ γηράσκουσιν ἐχθαίρω φίλων,
καὶ τῶν καλῶν μὲν ὅστις ἀπολαβεῖν θέλει,
συμπλεῖν δὲ τοῖς φίλοισι δυστυχοῦσιν οὐ.

I detest the gratitude of friends that grows old, and any man who is willing to profit from good times, but not sail along with friends in misfortune.⁵⁴

Throughout the play, the essence of *φιλία* is effective action. In the stichic exchange which follows, Theseus is determined to display true *φιλία* and help Heracles through his misfortune. He dismisses the stricken hero's fear of pollution (1234), reminds him of his debt (1236, 1238), and makes the suggestion that suicide is shameful (1254). Heracles is not swayed, and delivers a long proof that his life is *ἀβίωτον* (1257); he sees no profit in continuing to live (1301).

Gradually, Heracles' argument for self-destruction is invalidated by Theseus' compassionate action (1300-39); Theseus offers him a place to go, possessions, status, all of these *τιμῆ* in the material sense. Heracles in the end sees he ought to avoid the *δειλία* (1348) of suicide and accepts Theseus' *χάρης* (1352) and decides to endure (1354f.). Heracles

⁵⁴ The common expression "sail along with friends" is found again in Euripides *El.* 1355.

had brought Theseus back from gloomy Hades, and now this unequalled favor is nonetheless repaid in kind. Heracles emotionally calls it ζεύγος γε φίλιον, "the yoke of friendship" (1403), and he advises Amphitryon to seek such a man as Theseus for a friend (1404). The hero's last words are significant (1425-26):

ὅστις δὲ πλοῦτον ἢ σθένος μᾶλλον φίλων
ἀγαθῶν πεπᾶσθαι βούλεται, κακῶς φρονεῖ.

Whoever would prefer to possess wealth or strength rather than energetic friends is thinking badly.

Thus, Euripides represents φιλία as a positive force that can make life worth living, just as the Sophoclean examples demonstrate that without it, life is worthless. In the Heracles, its force is able to overpower what was generally for the Greeks the worst of Fates Worse Than Death: humiliation.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ACCEPTANCE OF DEATH

PART I: THE FACT THAT ONE WILL DIE

The Greeks were always aware that they could not know what lay in store for them in the future, apart from the fact that they would die. The familiar maxim, "Count no man happy before he dies,"¹ conveys among others the idea that someone who lived a life of distinction might lose it all even at the moment of death. For the Greeks, the manner of death was important: the reputation that would remain after death was at stake especially at the final moment. At that time, one has the opportunity to be proven once and for all a hero or a coward.

(a) The Persistence Of Values: Εὐκλεία

The condition of his reputation was, for the Greek, a matter of life and death. Since death afforded him nothing beyond the cessation of this painful life, the report of his existence after he died was an important consideration. As a corollary, the loss of face while alive was an unbearable setback. Thus, we saw how Sophocles' Ajax chooses to die rather than live with the shameful knowledge that people blame or despise him for what he has done.

¹ This commonplace first appears in extant literature in Aeschylus *Ag.* 928, but in Sophocles *Tr.* 1 it is described as an "ancient saying" and according to Aristotle *Eth.Nic.* 1100a10 it goes back to Solon; see Herodotus 1.30-33. It occurs frequently in tragedy, the effect naturally depending on the context. It probably stems from the Greek idea that a prosperous man will readily incur the wrath of their jealous gods.

This standard of "shame"² is Adkins' (MR 154f.) first demonstration of the "persistence of traditional values" from Homer to fifth-century Athens. Both he and, more recently, Hugh Lloyd-Jones in The Justice of Zeus have emphasized the element of continuity in Greek beliefs and oppose Dodds' (GI 28-63) view of the "guilt-culture" as exaggerating the element of change. It is clearly the case that individuals in poetry from Homer to Euripides strive at any cost to secure and preserve a good reputation and avoid the mockery of enemies. Thus, Euripides' Megara (HF. 281-94) recognizes that death is a terrible thing, but argues that to die in a manner which would allow her family's enemies to mock them would be for her a greater evil than death.

In his discussion of attitudes during the time of Plato and Aristotle, Dover comments (GPM 168):

The Athenians' view of suicide was undoubtedly formed in part by their fear of humiliation, which made 'I would rather die!' and 'Life would not be worth living,' come to their lips rather readily, but it was also a high regard for the man who faces the instrument of death unflinchingly, no matter whether the hand that wields it is another's or his own.

These two attitudes have a dramatic demonstration in Euripides' Heraclidae. At the play's beginning, Iolaus has brought the family of Heracles to Athens in an attempt to avoid the cruel persecution of Eurystheus. The Argive herald now demands that Athens surrender the suppliants to his king; if not, Argos will take them by force. Iolaus is confident that the Athenians will not be influenced by threats, for in his view (200-01):

θνῆσκειν θελήσουσ'· ἡ γὰρ αἰσχύνῃ {πάρος}
τοῦ ζῆν παρ' ἐσθλοῦς ἀνδράσιν νομίζεται.

² Also discussed by Dover GPM 226-42.

They will be willing to die; for among good men, a sense of honor is given a higher priority than life.

The old man is soon proven correct. The Athenian king Demophon assures him that there are three considerations which compel him not to surrender the Heraclidae. The third and most significant is τὸ αἰσχρόν, the shame that he would feel if he betrayed the suppliants: it would be virtually such as to make him hang himself³ (242-46; cf. 256). In the play's central scene, Iolaus comments (443-50):

I do not care if I must die, except if by my death I shall delight my enemies... Now we must fall into our enemies' hands and leave life shamefully and basely.

At the end of the play, the evil Eurystheus, chained but undaunted, faces his executioners with a refusal to beg for his life since such action would mark him out as a coward (984-85). Later he says (1016-17): "I do not want to die, but leaving life would not vex me."

Both attitudes noted by Dover are even more clearly demonstrated by the actions and words of Macaria in this play. The daughter of Heracles bravely volunteers to become the required sacrificial victim (500-02). She considers the shame that she and her family will feel should she refuse, and logically concludes (533-34):

εὖρημα γάρ τοι μὴ φιλοψυχοῦσ' ἐγὼ
κάλλιστον ἤθηρα', εὐκλεῶς λιπεῖν βίον.

For if I love not my life, I have found the fairest treasure:
to leave live gloriously.

This opportunity for εὐκλεία is Macaria's overriding concern. When

³ For the colloquial use of this expression see P.T. Stevens, Euripides: Andromache (Oxford 1971) on 811; cf. Sophocles OT. 1374, and Aristophanes Ach. 125.

Iolaus suggests that all the Heraclidae draw straws, she vehemently refuses to die "by chance" (547) and repeatedly affirms that her action must be of her own choosing, that it is her own self-sacrifice which will save the lives of her family. One death is necessary. By bravely facing death, Macaria fulfills the necessity to die well. As often in Euripides,⁴ this attitude towards εὐχλεῖα indicates the persistence of Greek values from the time of Homer.

(b) The Soldier's Profession

The ability to stand fearless and face the visible approach of violent death belongs to heroic warriors, or to victims of unbearable circumstances. We have already seen examples of the latter; one more will serve to illustrate the frightful position of foreseeing one's own doom.

The Third Epinician of Bacchylides contains the story of Croesus who, during the Persians' sack of Sardis, decides that death for himself and his family is eminently preferable to a life of disgraceful slavery. Climbing a funeral pyre with his wailing wife and daughters, he says (47):

τὰ πρόσθεν {ἐχ}θρὰ φίλα· θανεῖν γλυκίστον.

What once was hateful is dear: to die is sweetest.

This juxtaposition of polar opposites vividly conveys the depth of Croesus' emotion, and his reversal of fortune. In the finest display of his talent for narration, Bacchylides effectively employs this technique of antithetical contrast; Croesus' cold and determined resolution

⁴ Other Euripidean figures who die or are willing to die either to preserve their good name or to win a good one are Alcestis, Phaedra, Evadne, Orestes and Pylades in IT, Menoecus in Phoen., and Iphigenia in IA.

is movingly underscored by the emotional outburst of his daughters, who scream in terror when the pyre is lit (49-50). With valuable insight, the poet explains (51-52):

ὁ γὰρ προφανῆς θνα-
τοῖσιν ἔχθιστος φόνων·

In truth, for mortals, the visible is the most hateful of violent deaths.

The listener can hardly doubt that Croesus shares this fear.

The approach of death takes many forms: advancing flames, water filling a ship, a sacrificial knife held high. More often for the Greeks, it takes the shape of an armed enemy advancing across a battlefield. A soldier's profession requires that he confront his own death. Each battle is an opportunity to test and prove his moral worth, for, as Heraclitus says in one of the more lucid fragments (53 VS):

Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ
βασιλεύς, καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους,
τοὺς μὲν δούλους ἐποίησε τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους.

War is the father of all, the king of all, and some he shows as gods, others as men, some he makes slaves, others free.

And Thucydides' (ii.42.2) Pericles says of the war-dead of 431: "The way in which their lives have ended is, in my view, simultaneously the first revelation and the final confirmation of a man's quality." The future of his city and his own reputation depended on the soldier's ability to suppress his concern for life and to stand his ground.⁵

The warriors of the Iliad recognized their duty in terms of glory and shame. In Book 12.310-28, Sarpedon sets forth the morality of the

⁵ See Dover GPM 161-63.

Homeric hero. He reminds Glaucus that a prince's subjects pay him honor in palpable forms, and that it is a hero's duty to stand in the front line of battle (315) and show himself worthy of honor by deeds of valor. Sarpedon goes on to point out that they will not live forever, and then says (326-28):

νῦν δ' ἔμπης γὰρ κῆρες ἐφεισᾶσιν θανάτοιο
 μυρίαί, ἃς οὐκ ἔστι φυγεῖν βροτὸν οὐδ' ὑπαλύξαι,
 ζόμεν, ἢ ἔτι εὖχος ὀρέξομεν, ἢ ἔτις ἡμῖν.

But now, seeing that the spirits of death close about us in their thousands, no man can turn aside or escape them, let us go on and win glory for ourselves, or yield it to others.

More than once in the Iliad a warrior argues introspectively about the prospect of running from the enemy. Odysseus, cut off and surrounded in Book 11.404-10, vacillates between flight (a great κακόν) and capture (βίγλιον, "even chillier"). He quickly concludes, "I know that cowards creep away from war, but that he who would win honor in battle must staunchly stand his ground."⁶ The Trojan Agenor has a similar dialogue with his θυμός (21.552f.) while his fellow citizens flee before Achilles. He imagines being caught from behind by the raging Argive who "will cut my cowardly throat"; instead, Agenor decides to stand and face him.

In Book 3, when Menelaus steps out to answer his challenge, Paris shrinks back behind the lines without any introspective deliberation at all (30-37). He is forced to reappear by Hector, who curses him for providing the Greeks with an opportunity to mock the Trojans (38-45).⁷ This concern for shame and reputation is the impetus that prods Hector

⁶ Later, in Book 14, when Agamemnon tries to argue that there is no shame in flight and that it is better to flee than be captured (80-81), he is condemned by Odysseus (83-102): heroes are born to fight for glory.

⁷ Cf. Il. 6.521-25, and 13.769f.

into the fray; he says this much to Andromache in Book 6 (441-46), and to himself, just before he dies.

The long-awaited confrontation between Hector and Achilles occurs in Book 22. Despite the frantic, emotional pleas of his parents, Hector stands and awaits the imminent onslaught of the determined Achilles. Retreat into the city would bring reproach (100) and shame (105), and an attempt to reach a settlement with the Argive would probably result in an ignominious death (123-25). Hector will fight (130): "We shall see to which one the Olympian grants glory." The sight of the furious Achilles, however, is at first too fearful to withstand, and Hector runs, until he finally realizes that there is no escape (303-05):

Now, my death is upon me. May I at least not die without a struggle, inglorious, but first perform a grand deed, that men to come might know of it.

And indeed we do.

Once Hector accepted the necessity of death, he was strong enough to stand and fight, to die well. Once he understood that his destined hour of death had come,⁸ he conquered the instinctive fear of dying and stood firmly to face the approach of Achilles, the approach of his own death.

Advice on how to withstand the terror of approaching death is a theme of the military elegists, to whom I now turn.

⁸ Zeus had weighed the scales and Hector's *kēr* was heavier (209-13). See B.C. Dietrich, Death, Fate and the Gods (London 1965) 289-96 for the spinning and balancing of fate. With this, cf. M.P. Nilsson, A History of Greek Religion, trans. by F.J. Fielden (Oxford, 2nd ed. 1949) 169: "The Homeric man is seized with terror when confronted with the empty nothingness of the kingdom of the dead. Therefore the idea of death as the certain lot of all the living... grips him with violence."

(c) The Fear Of Death

The indomitable Spartan warriors were famous even in their own time for their complete lack of anxiety over personal safety.⁹ The finest example of their steadfast courage is the well-known stand at Thermopylae. Though the pragmatic Spartans might not have appreciated the aesthetic function of poetry, it is said that they memorized and marched to the elegiacs of Tyrtaeus.¹⁰ His martial protreptics were composed around two exhortations: μή φειδόμενοι τᾶς ζωᾶς,¹¹ "be not sparing of your lives", and παρ' ἀλλήλοισι μένοντες,¹² "standing fast next to each other". The poet's familiar encouragement to "stand steady, firmly planted, and bite your lip" is an elegiac couplet found twice in the extant fragments, in 11 W 21-22, and at the end of the elegy (10 W) quoted by the fourth-century orator Lycurgus who introduces it to his Athenian audience with these words (in Leocr. 107):

It is advantageous to listen to these elegiac verses, so that you might understand the kind of deeds that made men esteemed among them.

This poem, without the final couplet, can be neatly divided into

⁹ See the anecdote in Polyaeus 1.17 about Spartan "dog tags".

¹⁰ Athenaeus 14.630e; Bowra (EGE 42) assumed that they were accompanied by the flute, but this connection of flutes with elegy is impossible: see D.A. Campbell, "Flutes and Elegiac Couplets," JHS 84 (1964) 63-68.

¹¹ 856 PMG 5, an anapaestic Embateria (Battle-Song) attributed to Tyrtaeus.

¹² 10 W 15, and 11 W 11 where it is followed by the promise that "fewer will die" (13). B. Snell, Poetry and Society (Bloomington 1961) 37 remarks that these poems coincide with the full development of the hoplite phalanx, a highly successful battle stance provided that no one ran off and left the flank of his partner exposed.

two sections of equal length; in fact, many modern scholars treat it as two separate poems. The change from first person to second at the center of the piece has prompted Prato, in his recent edition (1968) of Tyrtaeus, to follow Wilamowitz¹³ reason for separation (81, 86): "dopo il v. 14 ogni nesso si interrompe," and "vv. 13-14 che segnano... il momento culminante dell' allocuzione." But most modern scholars, since the detailed arguments of two other Italians,¹⁴ see a complete poem which is one of the few genuine works of Tyrtaeus.

Elegy 10 W has a startling beginning: "To die is indeed beautiful..." This is explained by the following words. The first couplet runs (1-2):

τεθνάμεναι γὰρ καλὸν ἐνὶ προμάχοισι πεσόντα
ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν περὶ ἧ' πατρίδι μαρνάμενον·

To die is indeed beautiful in the frontline, a good man who fell fighting for his country.

Again at the end of the poem, Tyrtaeus draws a visual image of a young corpse bravely fallen and calls it καλός (30). Horace will later adapt this sentiment (Odes iii.2.13):

DULCE ET DECORVM EST PRO PATRIA MORI

In both cases, Tyrtaeus contrasts the comeliness of a hero's death with the ignominy of defeat and exile (7-10), and the shame of flight (21). The thought that such shame would be unbearable leads to his exhortation (13-14): "let us fight" and θνήσκωμεν ψυχῶν μηκέτι φειδόμενοι, "let us die, no longer sparing our lives." Immediately after this, he addresses

13 U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Die Textgeschichte der Griechischen Lyriker (Berlin 1900) 111.

14 A. Barigazzi, "Contributo al Vero Tirteo," PP 6 (1951) 102-15, and F. Rossi, "Studi su Tirteo," AIV 112 (1953-54) 369-437.

the men of fighting age (15-18):

ὦ νέοι, ἀλλὰ μάχεσθε παρ' ἀλλήλοισι μένοντες,
μηδὲ φυγῆς αἰσχρῆς ἄρχετε μηδὲ φόβου,
ἀλλὰ μέγαν ποιεῖτε καὶ ἄλκιμον ἐν φρεσὶ θυμόν,
μηδὲ φιλοψυχεῖτ' ἀνδράσι μαρνάμενοι.

Young men, rather fight standing fast next to each other, do not begin a shameful flight nor fear, but make great and stout the heart in your chests, and be not too fond of life when battling men.

This is the earliest appearance of the word φιλοψυχεῖν, "to be too fond of life", and so "to be cowardly". This admonition is, as Prato notes (92), a "concetto frequente in Tirteo." It finds, as Campbell observes (GLPS 172), a more vivid expression in a couplet from another elegy where it follows an exhortation to put aside fear (11 W 5-6):

ἐχθρὴν μὲν ψυχὴν θέμενος, θανάτου δὲ μελαίνας
κῆρας {ὁμῶς} ἀγαῖς ἡελίοιο φίλας.

holding life in abhorrence and the black fates of death as dear as the rays of the sun.

Clearly, a soldier who holds this view will conquer his innate fear of, and his instinct to flee from the threat of death. In this way could he (12 W 11-12)

-- τετλαίη μὲν ὄρων φόνον αἱματόεντα,
καὶ δηίων ὀρέγοιτ' ἐγγύθεν ἰστάμενος.

endure the sight of bloody slaughter, and still strike at the enemy and stand close.

These words come from an elegy which Fränkel¹⁵ maintains exhibits a style and contains sentiments that suggest a date too late for Tyrtaeus. For

¹⁵ EGPP 337-39; cf. C. Del Grande, "Tirteo, Elegia 9 Diehl," Filologia Minore (Milan 1956) who argues that the poem is by Tyrtaeus.

instead of the usual vivid pictures of the disgrace of flight and the blunt prohibitions against displays of cowardice, this poem offers a positive reason to stay in the fight with the sentiment that, if a man dies bravely, then (31-32)

οὐδέ ποτε κλέος ἐσθλὸν ἀπόλλυται οὐδ' ὄνομ' αὐτοῦ,
 ἀλλ' ὑπὸ γῆς περ ἔων γίνεται δάνατος
 never will his good fame die, nor his name, and though he is
 under the earth, he is immortal.

Not before this, and not until much later,¹⁶ is there a direct reference to the idea of immortality from a heroic death, an idea that receives such decorous treatment in Simonides' tribute to the Spartans who stood fast, unafraid, against the approach of certain death (531 PMG):

τῶν ἐν Θερμοπύλαις θανόντων
 εὐκλεῆς μὲν ἡ τύχη, καλὸς δ' ὁ πότμος,
 βωμὸς δ' ὁ τάφος, πρὸ γόων δὲ μνᾶσις, ὁ δ' οἶκτος ἔπαινος.
 ἔνταφιον δὲ τοιοῦτον οὐτ' εὐρῶς
 οὐθ' ὁ πανδαμάτωρ ἀμαυρώσει χρόνος.
 ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν ὅδε σηκὸς οἰκέταν εὐδοξίαν
 Ἑλλάδος εἴλετο: μαρτυρεῖ δὲ καὶ Λεωνίδας,
 Σπάρτας Βισιλεύς, ἀρετᾶς μέγαν λελοιπᾶς
 κόσμον ἀέναόν τε κλέος.

Those who died at Thermopylae: glorious is their opportunity, fair their end; an altar is their tomb and commemoration instead of lamentations, for pity, praise; such an offering to the dead neither Decay nor all-subduing Time will obscure. This precinct of good men has won as its inhabitant the glory of Greece. Leonidas in turn bears witness, the Spartan king who has left a great ornament of excellence and ever-lasting fame.

A Spartan soldier who was inspired by Tyrtaeus would reckon his own life as far less important than the preservation of his city and reputation.

¹⁶ See Lattimore TGLE 46 n.188, and also 238f. However, kleos apthiton is found in Homer (Il. 9.413) and on early stone inscriptions: see #33 and #44 in P. Friedländer and H.B. Hoffleit, Epigrammata (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1948).

In this way, his fear of death would be minimized and his capacity for endurance strengthened.

Advice on how to face death is given a different but no less effective emphasis in the only surviving elegy by Callinus (1 W 8-13):

θάνατος δὲ τότε ἔσσεται, ὁππότε κεν δῆ
 μοῖραι ἐπικλώσωσ'. ἀλλὰ τις ἰθὺς ἕτω
 ἔγχος ἀνασχόμενος καὶ ὅπ' ἀσπίδος ἄλκιμον ἦτορ
 ἔλασας, τὸ πρῶτον μειγνυμένου πολέμου.
 οὐ γάρ κως θάνατόν γε φυγεῖν εἰμαρμένον ἐστὶν
 ἄνδρ', οὐδ' εἰ προγόνων ἦι γένος ἀθανάτων.

But death will come at precisely the moment that the Fates spin it. So let each man go straight out holding fast a spear and covering a stout heart behind his shield, at the onset of clashing battle. For it is decreed by fate that no man escape death, not even if he is a child of immortal ancestors.

On the whole elegy, Fränkel says (EGPP 153):

In order to combat the natural fear of death a series of arguments are [sic] woven into the poem; these are not very consistent but all are at one in the conclusion to be drawn from them.

Apart from these lines, and the couplet that follows, Callinus appeals to the men's sense of glory and shame, and consequently to their worries about their reputations. At the outset he only briefly calls for patriotism (6-7). His most striking argument is in the lines quoted above.

Callinus attempts to engender an attitude towards the approach of death which, if achieved, will assuage a soldier's fear. He uses a traditional belief¹⁷ that the time of each man's death has already been determined by inescapable fate. To hold this view is to come to direct

¹⁷ cf. Il. 6.487-89 and 7.52-53 for the idea that the time of one's death is part of one's moira; on the other hand, how one dies is the individual's own responsibility.

terms with the cold, hard fact that at a certain time, at any minute, death is possible and unavoidable.

But as Adkins observes (MR 119), "a fatalistic attitude to the whole of life does not result from this." Adkins goes on to rephrase the point of Callinus' exhortation:

There may be a bullet with your name on it, but until you meet it your actions are in your hands, and it is shameful to succumb.

Callinus could not and would not hope to create a reckless band of fighting automata who act without personal concern. Rather, he wants to inspire an army of heroes whose will to fight is fired by the courageous acceptance of the necessity to die.

The couplet that follows the selection of Callinus' elegy quoted above is an expansion of the concept of inescapable destiny: a man may return from war only to die at home (14-15). Gerber (E 46) thinks immediately of Agamemnon. Campbell (GLPS 165) cites many parallels and, though Callinus does not refer explicitly to a deserter, he compares Simonides (524 PMG):

ὁ δ' αὖ θάνατος κίχῃ καὶ τὸν φυγόμενον.

Death in turn finds even the deserter.

as well as Horace (Odes iii.2.14):

MORS ET FVGACEM PERSEQVITVR VIRVM.

To these I add Martial's clever epigram (ii.80):

HOSTEM CVM FVGERET, SE FANNIVS IPSE PEREMIT.

HIC, ROGO, NON FVROR EST, NE MORIARE, MORI?

Tyrtaeus' injunction against flight is delivered with images of the attending unbearable shame. Callinus further adds that flight, if not in accord with destiny, is impossible. Thus, a soldier who runs is not only a coward, but also a fool who runs the risk of a coward's death. There is also the famous story of the Spartan who comes home from war, minus his shield, only to be killed by his mother for failing to obey her command to return with his shield, or on it.¹⁸ Sextus Empiricus (Pyrrh. Hypot. 3.216) tells this tale, and then quotes the first three lines of this poem of Archilochus (5 W):

ἀσπίδι μὲν Σαῖων τις ἀγάλλεται, ἦν παρὰ θάμνῳι,
 ἔντος ἀμάμητον, κάλλιπον οὐκ ἐθέλων.
 αὐτὸν δ' ἐξεσάωσα. τί μοι μέλει ἀσπίς ἐκεῖνη;
 ἔρρέτω· ἐξαῦτις κτήσομαι οὐ κακίῳ.

Some Thracian exults over the shield I left behind beside a bush, a serviceable piece of armor, but I had no choice; myself I saved. Why worry myself about that particular shield? Let it rot. Again will I own one, no worse.

Discussion of this poem is hampered by the crucial lack of definite evidence about Archilochus, and the problem is that almost any conclusion is incontestable. For example, Bowra (EGE 10) saw a marked contrast with Homeric battles over armor and honor, and claimed that Archilochus, "with years of military experience...", was more realistic. There are only two fragments of Archilochus that can even tentatively be dated,¹⁹ and neither one sheds any light on the age of the author who composed this piece; and yet, who can prove Bowra wrong?

¹⁸ As part of the normal equipment of the age, a heavy shield would impede someone intent on speed at any cost, and would also be useful for carting its dead owner home.

¹⁹ 19 W, "Gyges" and 122 W, an eclipse; see F. Jacoby, "The Date of Archilochus," CQ 35 (1941) 97-109.

This poem is the first of what A. Bonnard²⁰ calls the "cascade de boucliers lachés." The ancient critics disdainfully condemned Archilochus as a cowardly δειψασις. Modern scholars normally see in this poem a deliberate rejection of Homeric ideals. A. Lesky,²¹ writing in 1958, discerned an attack on the ancient code of chivalry. Likewise, Fränkel (EGPP 137) sees Archilochus as an iconoclast who boldly ridiculed romantic ideologies, "false glitter". The piece is read seriously by Gerber (E 15) who defends Archilochus: "He might be accused of carelessness, not cowardice." In 1974, G. Kirkwood²² described the poet's words as a "fresh view" that is not anti-Homeric, but un-Homeric. He further adds:²³

The element of narrative is incidental; the events are valuable not intrinsically but for what they tell us about the poet himself, his attitude, tastes and emotions.

In summary, the poet who composed these lines is the agent provocateur of a social revolution, or a picaresque rogue flippantly mocking traditional values, or else an honest pragmatist. So the characterizations run. But in fact, the most that can be said is that he was probably a soldier, and ipso facto, a poet.

Lloyd-Jones (JZ 38) poses a question for those who say that Archilochus is rebelling against the Homeric code of honor:

²⁰ A. Bonnard and F. Lasserre, Archiloque: Fragments (Paris 1958) 5; like everyone else, Bonnard refers to the other poets who claimed to have thrown away their shields: Alcaeus (428 LP), Anacreon (381b PMG) and Horace (ii.7.9-10); he then suggests, "Il n'est pas raisonnable de penser que... soit autre chose que littérature."

²¹ A History of Greek Literature, trans. by J. Willis and C. de Heer (New York 1966) 111.

²² Early Greek Monody (Ithaca 1974) 32-33.

²³ ibid. 34.

Do they imagine that the Homeric Odysseus, faced with the choice between abandoning his shield and being killed or captured, would have kept his shield?

He proceeds to demonstrate that certain moral values remain constant despite the rapid changes of the archaic age, but that the element of continuity is overlooked by those intent on tracing a development. How can we assume that what in Archilochus is new to us was necessarily new to his contemporaries? We should also ask another question: can we assume with confidence that the first person narrator of these lines is actually Archilochus?²⁴

K. J. Dover²⁵ has questioned the validity of assuming that, unless proven otherwise, any fragment or poem of an early Greek poet which uses the first person singular is in fact autobiographical. He asks:

Are we sure -- to take a crucial example -- that Archilochus himself threw away his shield...? I put this question because consideration of preliterate song has left me no longer sure.

Nor am I. Dover's suggestions are attractive.

His thesis is that Archilochus composed neither iambs nor elegiacs, neither philosophic nor didactic poetry, but that he composed songs. Dover examines songs from modern preliterate cultures and observes four aspects: short songs express feelings; the feelings are not necessarily those of the composer; the situations are not necessarily actual; they are composed in relatively small communities. According to this view, a biographical sketch of Archilochus is impossible and, at any rate, useless.

²⁴ West (STUDIES 2) clearly maintains that in elegy the poet speaks in propria persona.

²⁵ "The Poetry of Archilochus," Fondation Hardt 10, 209. Dover's insight and intelligence successfully fulfil the intention of the preceding, wearisome paper by D. Page, who goes nowhere but to a lexicon in his fraudulent examination of "Archilochus and the Oral Tradition."

The poet's fragments still show us what standpoints, emotions and topics he preferred to use; these, conclude Dover, "are the elements which compose his personality as an artist."²⁶

My own interpretation of Archilochus 5 W concerns both the poet and his poetry. I sense a change in the feelings of the narrator between the two couplets; the first seems to express genuine regret over an event that has happened, but the second conveys an enheartening determination to do now what can be done. Furthermore, a poet who displays a clever inventiveness in handling different meters and composing rhythms²⁷ might naturally recognize the literary effectiveness of the notion of ethical inversion.²⁸ I suggest that Archilochus is not turning moral values upside-down, but by his unexpected use of a familiar theme, that he is producing a delightfully entertaining result.

The reflection in this story is after all grounded in the traditional Greek attitude to accept what fate has accomplished but simultaneously to strive within mortal limits to do what one can. Whoever it was that threw away his shield exemplifies again the Greek attitude toward destiny and death; he was not so resignedly fatalistic that he would not exert himself and attempt in every way to avoid disaster until events proved that escape was impossible.

Hesiod tells an old story which he is sure that the nobles will understand (Op. 202-12): a hawk seizes a nightingale and as he carries

²⁶ ibid. 212.

²⁷ His skill is recognized and praised by Campbell (GLPS 139).

²⁸ L. Edmunds, "Thucydides' Ethics as Reflected in the Description of Stasis (3.82-83)," HSCP 79 (1975) 88f. argues that the notion of ethical inversion is traditional in Greek ethical thought and that this mental habit is reflected in Archilochus' poem.

her away, his prey cries pitifully; the hawk says (207-11):

Δαιμονίη, τί λέληκας; ἔχει νύ σε πολλὸν ἀρείων
 τῆι δ' εἶς, ἣν σ' ἂν ἐγὼ περ ἄγω καὶ ἀοιδὸν ἐοῦσαν·
 δεῖπνον δ', αἶ κ' ἐθέλω, ποιήσομαι, τῆ μεθήσω.
 ἄφρων δ', ὅς κ' ἐθέληι πρὸς κρείσσονας ἀντιφερίζειν·
 νίκης τε στέρεται πρὸς τ' ἀΐσχεσιν ἄλγεα πάσχει.

My good lady, why do you screech? One much stronger has you now, and you go to wherever I take you, for all your singing. I will make you, if I wish, my dinner, or I will let you go. A fool is he who wishes to withstand the stronger. He loses and suffers pains besides his humiliation.

Ideally, a Greek would not foolishly leave himself prey to danger, but if caught, he would face his fate bravely, without tears.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF DEATH

PART II: THE FACT THAT ONE HAS DIED

We have seen how a Greek could endure the approach of death without fear by realizing that his own death is an inevitable and unavoidable fact. This courageous stance at his terrifying final moment allowed him to fulfil a need that was crucial for a Greek: the need to die well. Death's victim must accept what has to be; likewise, his survivors must accept what had to be. Again, by realizing that death is an inevitable and unavoidable fact, mourners of the deceased could endure their loss after death's departure. In the biblical words of Shakespeare (Lear 5.2), "Men must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither."

(a) Grief And Consolation

A short fragment of Solon is a death-wish of a different sort (21 W):

μηδέ μοι ἄκλαυτος θάνατος μόλοι, ἀλλὰ φίλοισι
καλλείποιμι θανῶν ἄλγεα καὶ στοναχάς.

May death not come to me unwept; instead, when I am dead, may I leave behind mourning and lamentations for my friends.

Plutarch (Publ. 24.5) quotes this couplet to illustrate Solon's opinion that the loud and numerous lamentations which surrounded the funeral of Publicola proved him to be εὐδαίμων. Solon would like the same recognition for his own corpse.

Dover (GPM 167) correctly observes that the Greeks "were inclined to express grief noisily and extravagantly." The death of φίλοι would produce such a volume of lamentation that the Chorus in the Alcestis (86) could expect to hear it even though it listened outside the house of Admetus. The expression of grief over the loss of someone dear is a spontaneous reaction, and is a necessary part of the process of facing such a loss.¹

However, another fragmentary elegiac couplet is said by Plutarch to contain Archilochus' reaction to the death of his sister's husband (11 W):

οὐτέ τι γὰρ κλαίων λήσομαι, οὔτε κάκιον
θῆσω τερπωλᾶς καὶ θαλίας ἐφέπων.

I shall, in fact, heal nothing by crying, nor make it worse by pursuing enjoyment and feasting.

The Greeks clearly realized that the refusal to accept the fact of death is to deny that life must go on. Their poetry is replete with exhortations to endure the loss of φίλοι. Archilochus' sentiment is frequently echoed by other poets. Some lines by Stesichorus (244 PMG):

ἀτελέστατα γὰρ καὶ ἀμάχανα τοὺς θανόντας
κλαίειν

It is supremely pointless and assuredly useless to weep for the dead.

are impersonal, but nonetheless emphatic. He comes closer in attitude to Archilochus elsewhere (232 PMG):²

¹ It is to the detriment of the modern Western world that sociological taboo and custom prohibit this type of release.

² Bowra GLP 128: "Against the final darkness of death Stesichorus sets the sunlit present."

τμάλατ τοι μάλιστα
 παιγμοσύνας {τε} φιλεῖ μολπὰς τ' Ἀπόλλων,
 κήδεα δὲ στοναχὰς τ' Ἀΐδας ἔλαχε

Apollo loves games and songs best, and mournful lamentations
 belong to Hades.

These lines seem to suggest that the dead should weep for the dead, but that for the living, life must go on. Perhaps even Sappho was expressing a similar idea in the words which, we are told, she addressed to her daughter (150 LP):

οὐ γὰρ θέμις ἐν μοισσοπόλων τοίκιαι
 θρῆνον ἔμμεν'· οὐ κ' ἄμμι τάδε πρέποι

It is not right that there be lamentations in the [house?] of
 the Muses' servants; it would not become us.

I hesitate to conclude that her sentiment is the same as those above; much of her poetry, though in no way θρῆνοι, exhibits grief. A more explicit example is the fragment of Sophocles (557 JP) which begins with the commonplace that tears cannot raise the dead; if they could, they would be more valuable than gold.³

In fact, nothing can bring the dead back to life;⁴ as Ibycus succinctly puts it (313 PMG):

οὐκ ἔστιν ἀποφθιμένοις ζωᾶς ἔτι φάρμακον εὐρεῖν

For the dead it is impossible to find a drug to win back life.

So grief has no effect on the circumstances, but only on the one who grieves. The poetic conceit that a mourner's tears are useless, clinically

³ This valadiction prohibiting mourning occurs elsewhere in Sophocles: Aj. 377f., El. 137f., fr. 761 TGF²; for further references see Johann 56 n.221, Kassel 70, and for examples from grave inscriptions, Lattimore TGLE 217f.

⁴ Except, of course, in myth: e.g. M.W. Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Heracles' rescue of Theseus and of, as we shall see, *Alcestis*.

labeled nihil proficitur maerendo,⁵ is a central component of the later literary consolatio mortis. The locus classicus is to be found in Iliad 24.⁶

Priam comes as a suppliant to recover the body of Hector. He confronts Achilles and kisses his hands (476-80). Their reconciliation is achieved by mutual consolation. Priam's opening address may be paraphrased as follows: "Remember your father, Achilles, who is old like me and also surrounded by enemies. But at least he lives in hopes that his son will return; I have lost my sons, including Hector for whose body I have now come. Pity me, remembering your father; I am still more to be pitied, for I have endured what no other has done, to put my lips to the hands of the man who killed my sons" (486-506). Priam's argument that he and Peleus have both suffered prompts Achilles to grieve: while Priam weeps for Hector, Achilles weeps for Peleus and Patroclus. His weeping, shared with Priam, serves to console him (512f.), and now it is his turn to offer consolation to the Trojan king. He begins by urging him to set aside his grief (522-26):

ἄλγεα δ' ἔμπης

ἐν θυμῷ κατακεῖσθαι ἑάσομεν ἀχνύμενοί περ·
οὐ γάρ τις πρῆξις πέλεται κρουερόιο γόοιο·
ὡς γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι,
ζῶειν ἀχνυμένοις·

But let us allow our sorrows to lie still in our hearts despite our affliction. Nothing, in fact, is accomplished by grim lamentation. For thus have gods spun their fate for unhappy mortals, to live in affliction.

He introduces Peleus as a paradigm of the mixed fortunes of men: to his

⁵ Johann 56; the words are Cicero's (Tusc. 3.64).

⁶ Cf. the treatment of the consolatio theme in the Iliad by M.N. Nagler, Spontaneity and Tradition (Berkeley 1974) 174-98.

aged father the gods have given both good and ill, as they have now given to Priam. He concludes (549-51):

ἄνοχεο, μηδ' ἀλίσστον δόδυρεο σὸν κατὰ θυμόν·
οὐ γάρ τι πρήξεις ἀκαχήμενος υἱὸς ἔηος,
οὐδέ μιν ἀνοστήσεις

Endure. Do not mourn endlessly in your heart. For you will accomplish nothing by mourning your son, you will not raise him.

This consolatio almost works. But first Hector's body must be surrendered (553-55). That done, Achilles urges Priam to eat with him (601, 618f.). He reminds the old man of the tale of Niobe: she lost her twelve children, killed by Apollo's bow, but she remembered to eat (602f., 613). In short, life must go on. Priam is consoled and, after a meal, longs to sleep (635-42).

In this scene, two major consolatory themes are evident: (1) the universality of human misfortune and loss of dear ones; (2) the need for the living to accept the mortality of man and to continue to participate in the cycle of life. The grief of these mourners is painfully acute, but once they are soothed by examples of other mortal suffering and are shaken back into the reality that cannot be undone, they can, as they must, endure it.

The consolatory encouragement "Endure" appears elsewhere in Homer, often with the thought that this is all a mortal man can do. For instance, it is after the famous "Urn Speech", in which the immortals who are "free from care" (ἀκηδέες) are compared with beleaguered mortals, that Achilles says ἄνοχεο to Priam. More frequently, such encouragement is given with the verb τλάω and its cognates.⁷ Nausicaa, upon meeting Odysseus, recog-

⁷ Twice in the Iliad both this verb and anascheo are used, 1.586 and 5.382.

nizes that Zeus allots prosperity with no thought for the moral quality of the recipient, and that Odysseus has received hardship; but she advises him, οὐδὲ χρὴ τετλάμεν ἔμπης, "it must be endured nonetheless" (Od. 6.190, cf. 3.209). Odysseus himself later comments on the frailty of man and his prosperity: when suffering comes, all one can do is endure.⁸

The Muses in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo are imagined singing about the gifts that the gods enjoy and about the τλημοσύναι (191) of helpless mortals who can find no θανάτοιο ἄκος, "remedy against death" (193). In Iliad 24, Apollo blames Achilles for his excessive grief over the death of Patroclus; others, he says, have lost someone dear, but have ceased lamentation (49):

τλητὸν γὰρ Μοῖραι θυμὸν θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν

For the Fates have given mortals an enduring heart.

These lines might have been in Archilochus' mind when he composed this elegy (13 W):

κῆδεα μὲν στονόεντα Περικλῆες οὐδέ τις ἀστῶν
μεμφόμενος θαλίῃς τέρψεται οὐδὲ πόλις·

- 3 τοίους γὰρ κατὰ κύμα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης
ἔκλυσεν, οἶδαλέους δ' ἀμφ' οὐδύνης ἔχομεν
5 πνεύμονας. ἀλλὰ θεοὶ γὰρ ἀνηκέστοισι κακοῖσιν
ὦ φίλ' ἐπὶ κρατερὴν τλημοσύνην ἔθεσαν
7 φάρμακον. ἄλλοτε ἄλλος ἔχει τόδε· νῦν μὲν ἐς ἡμέας
ἐτράπεθ', αἱματόεν δ' ἔλκος ἀναστένομεν,
9 ἐξαῦτις δ' ἐτέρους ἐπαμείψεται. ἀλλὰ τάχιστα
τλήτε, γυναικεῖον πένθος ἀπώσαμενοι.

⁸ Od. 18.130f.; cf. Lloyd-Jones JZ 30, 38 on the themes of endurance in the Odyssey and in archaic poetry.

Complaining of mournful sorrows, Pericles, no citizen will take joy in the feasting, nor his city. Such men did the swells of the hard-roaring sea wash under; the pains of grief we feel within our lungs. And yet, for incurable troubles the gods, my friend, have prescribed staunch endurance, a remedy. Now one, now another feels it. Though at present it has turned to us, and we moan a bloody wound, later it will pass to others. So quickly, all of you, endure. Put aside womanly mourning.

The structure of this fragment caused an uneasiness in Fränkel (EGPP 143f.) which prompted him to add other elegiac fragments of Archilochus to it.⁹ I am inclined, like Campbell (GLPS 145) and West (app. crit.), to take these lines as a complete poem, and shall treat them as such.

The elegy begins with an address to Pericles¹⁰ which describes the extent of a collective sorrow over a recent tragedy, and ends with a second person plural imperative to "endure" and cease lamenting. In order to help stop their tears, the poet skillfully employs variations on the Greek view of mortality. The traditional thought that helpless mortals can do nothing but endure the inescapable gifts of the gods is neatly inverted by Archilochus with the final word of the sentence: the gods give mortals, for incurable troubles, endurance, a cure.¹¹ This paradox presents the divine "gift" of endurance in a new, positive light; it is at

⁹ For other combinations equally beyond disproof but perhaps beyond belief, see F.R. Adrados, "La elegia a Pericles de Archiloco," AFC 6 (1953-54) 225-38 for the sequence (W) 16, 8, 9, 12, 13, 11; also, the edition of Lasserre-Bonnard for (W) 13, 8, 9, 12, 11; oddly, all three assortments contain both the fragment bemoaning the absence of bodies for funeral rites (9 W) and the fragment (12 W) which I take as a reference to bodies washed up on shore.

¹⁰ See Kassel 6 who cites appearances in Homer of the formulaic line, "touch and call by name" which precedes many consolatory speeches.

¹¹ In an awkward attempt to demonstrate that Archilochus uses words and phrases not dissimilar to Homeric expressions, D.L. Page, "Archilochus and the Oral Tradition," Fondation Hardt 10, 127 says that pharmakon "is not to be regarded as metaphorical here." Does he think Archilochus is referring to Olympian apothecaries? I have examined every appearance of this word in Homer and nowhere does it mean anything but a concrete drug, poisonous or palliative, medicinal or magic.

this point that the poem leaves lamentation, and begins consolation. Archilochus has indicated that the disaster is in the past and cannot be undone, and deftly moves to the present in line 7 with the consoling reminder that all mortals are subject to sorrow,¹² and then to the future in line 9 with the prediction that others will feel it. This looking away from the past towards the future is the "remedy" for the grieving survivors of the dead.

Archilochus' reminder, "it happened before, it will happen again," is an attempt to force the mourners to come to terms with the unavoidable, incurable fact of their friends' death and by accepting it, to find a release from the anxiety of helpless frustration. At the same time, it is also an encouragement: "if it goes badly now, it may go well again at any moment." Once these vitalizing attitudes are accepted, men will hear the final words of the elegy not only as a mere rejoinder that this is all that can be done, but also as a positive encouragement, a logical development of the preceding reflections, a cure for incurable mortal difficulties.

(b) The Consolation Of Mortality¹³

The Greek consciousness of the presence of the immortals produced, by contrast, the concept of their own feeble mortality.¹⁴ A much quoted fragment of Pindar describes the gods (143 S):

¹² Arguments about the textual variants of the demonstrative pronoun in this line (7) are unnecessary: take either tade or tode. The point is the universality of the human condition.

¹³ For this section my debt to Johann's book, especially the outline of related themes on the argument de communi hominum condicione on 64-67, will be obvious to the reader.

¹⁴ B.C. Dietrich, Death, Fate and the Gods (London 1965) 6: "The Greeks looked upon nature, the world and indeed the gods from the point of view of man."

κεῖνοι γάρ τ' ἄνοσοι καὶ ἀγήραοι
 πόνων τ' ἀπειροί, βαρυβόαν
 πορθμὸν πεφευγότες Ἀχέροντος

They are without diseases, without old age, of hardships always inexperienced, freed from the deep-sounding gate of Acheron.

The picture of mortals, on the other hand, is fundamentally and persistently outlined by the Greek notion of their universal subjection to unpredictable, inescapable and inconstant fate, to these capricious "gifts of the gods". Still, from each of these characteristics of human destiny, some form of consolation could be derived.

The ephēmeros nature¹⁵ of man is often viewed in terms of his inability to predict personal destiny. Man's existence is called ephēmeros in a melancholy essay by Semonides of Amorgos (1 W). The poet compares the power of Zeus with the dull and bestial mind of man (1-5), and then mocks the vanity of mortal dreams for future success (6-10) by categorically drawing many images of horrible, but more realistic possibilities for what lay in store (11-22). This is more than a simple pessimistic lament, as the poet's advice at the end of the piece shows. Semonides suggests that since we cannot know the future, we ought to take what joy we can from the present (22-4):

εἰ δ' ἐμοὶ πιθοῖατο,
 οὐκ ἂν κακῶν ἐρῶμεν, οὐδ' ἐπ' ἄλγεσιν
 κακοῖς ἔχοντες θυμὸν αἰκίζοίμεθα.

If you want my advice, we would not chase after troubles and, when we have painful troubles, not torture ourselves.

¹⁵ See the lucid discussion by H. Fränkel, "Man's Ephēmeros Nature according to Pindar and Others," TAPA 77 (1946) 131-45; he sees the Semonides fragment treated below as a demonstration of "ignorance of reality at large" and lack of mortal "insight".

It is a helpful suggestion.¹⁶

The obscurity of future events has an impact on the poets' attitudes towards their present circumstances. After the eclipse of 648 B.C.,¹⁷ Archilochus records his firm belief that anything can happen (122 W). Simonides repeats this point of view in a gnomic reminder (527 PMG): "There is no trouble unexpected for mortals."¹⁸ And a fragment of Sophocles shows a clever use of this idea in a consolation (761 TGF²):

σὺ δ' ἄνδρα θνητὸν εἰ κατέφθιτο στένεις,
εἰδῶς τὸ μέλλον οὐδὲν εἰ κέρδος φέρει;

Do you lament a mortal man if he dies, knowing not if the future carries gain?

When the sentiment that a mortal man cannot avoid his destined fate appears in poems of a consolatory nature, it serves to deny thoughts that what is now happening could have been avoided. Thus, resignation in the face of painful reality is facilitated by the suppression of anxious regret. A poem in the Theognidea begins with an adroit use of paranomasia and oxymoron on the theme of the exhortation to endure (1029 W):

τόλμα θυμὲ κακοῖσιν ὅμως ἄτλητα πεπονθῶς

Endure, my heart, in troubles, even though suffering the unendurable.

A few lines on is the familiar encouragement that this is all one can do

¹⁶ See R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book I (Oxford 1970) on i.11.8 (carpe diem) for the poet's familiar "distrust of the morrow"; Semonides, in my opinion, is expressing not only this idea but also the uselessness of wallowing in present misfortune -- I sense that he is trying to distinguish at what times a view to the future is not disadvantageous.

¹⁷ In April; see F. Jacoby, "The Date of Archilochus," CQ 35 (1941) 101.

¹⁸ In Bowra's view (GLP 324), Simonides knew that death and disaster might come at any moment and believed that men must be ready for them. Swami Shivanandā once told me, "Expect the best, but be prepared for the worst."

(1033-34 W):

θεῶν δ' εἰμαρμένα δῶρα
 οὐκ ἄν ῥηϊδίως θνητὸς ἀνὴρ προφύγοι
 Mortal man could not easily escape the allotted gifts of the gods.

The litotes "not easily" recalls the common references by Homer and Hesiod to the gods, who achieve all things ῥηϊδίως. The whole thought that methods of escape are not available for men frequently appears in the Theognidea in relation to such inherited mortal woes as old age, death, the "gifts of the gods". The theme of inescapable destiny has another variation in this couplet (817-18 W):

Κύρην· ἔμπης δ' ὅτι μοῖρα παθεῖν οὐκ ἔσθ' ὑπαλύξαι.
 [ὅττι δὲ μοῖρα παθεῖν, οὐτι δέδοικα παθεῖν.]

Cyrnus, it is impossible to avoid what we are destined to suffer.
 What I am destined to suffer I am not afraid to suffer.

Fearful anxiety about the future is as pointless as blind hopes for it. Likewise, the fear of dying is foolish, as a fragment of Sophocles explains (951 JP):

ὅστις δὲ θνητῶν θάνατον ὀρρωδεῖ λίαν,
 μῶρος πέφυκε· τῆι τύχηι μέλει τάδε.
 ὅταν δ' ὁ καιρὸς τοῦ θανεῖν ἐλθῶν τύχηι,
 οὐδ' ἄν πρὸς ἀλάς Ζηνὸς ἐκφύγοι μολῶν.

Whoever of mortals is overly afraid of death is a fool. That is in the hands of chance. When the exact time to die happens to come, one cannot escape should he go to the halls of Zeus.

By realizing that death and destiny are beyond mortals' "insubstantial power"¹⁹ to influence, a man might focus his energy on his immediate circumstances and on what he is able to accomplish. This reasoning is

¹⁹ Simonides 520 PMG 1-2. This is Callinus' argument; see above p. 48.

a common element of the sympotic exhortation to enjoy life while it is still possible, to "eat, drink and be merry."²⁰ It is also used effectively in the advice of a consolator that the survivors accept their loss as an unalterable fact, put aside useless mourning and make the best of life before death falls in turn to them.

In his efforts to soothe the bereaved Apollonius, Plutarch (ii.1.20) quotes Simonides (520 PMG 4-6):

ὁ δ' ἄφυκτος ὁμῶς ἐπικρέμαται θάνατος·
 κείνου γὰρ ἴσον λάχον μέρος οὔ τ' ἀγαθοὶ
 ἴσους τε κακός.

Inevitable death hangs over all alike. Its equal portion both the good and bad obtain.

This thought²¹ produces two related themes. The first is the consolatio per exemplum, i.e. the attempt to offer consolation by recalling some mythological character who for all his talents could not avoid death in the end. Achilles, for instance, upon notification of his approaching death, only shrugs: not even Heracles escaped his doom.²² The second is the comforting reminder that "you are not the only one who has suffered such pain."²³ The latter theme is especially frequent in Euripides.²⁴ A fine illustration can be found in a fragment from his Kresphontes

²⁰ Nisbet-Hubbard, op.cit. on i.4.18 has many Greek examples.

²¹ Lattimore TGLE 251 calls this theme of inescapable death the consolation par excellence, "representing as it does the ultimate if meager solace."

²² Il. 18.117; Alcaeus uses the story of Sisyphus in a sympotic illustration of death's inevitability (38 LP); cf. also Lucretius 3.1027-28.

²³ Non hoc tibi soli, Kassel 80; his references are expanded by Johann 64 n. 262; to these, add the Euripidean examples in the next footnote.

²⁴ Fr. (TGF²) 10, 332, 418 and 757; note especially Hec. 321-26, a callous use of this consolation by Odysseus.

(454 TGF²):

τεθνᾶσι παῖδες οὐκ ἐμοὶ μόνῃ βροτῶν
 οὐδ' ἀνδρὸς ἐστερήμεθ', ἀλλὰ μυρίαί
 τὸν αὐτὸν ἐξήντησαν ὡς ἐγὼ βίον.

Children die not only for me of mortals, nor am I the only one
 robbed of my husband; countless many have drained the same life
 as I have.

Sophocles employs a cruel application of this theme in his Electra. The Chorus' attempt to console Electra with this thought (153) has no effect; shortly afterwards, Electra explains to the Chorus the extent of abuse she suffers from Clytemnestra, who taunts her with such insults as (289-90):

ὦ δόσθεον μίσσημα, σοὶ μόνῃ πατὴρ
 τέθνηκεν; ἄλλος δ' οὔτις ἐν πένθει βροτῶν;

You god-hated, vile creature, are you the only one whose father
 has died? Is there no other mortal who suffers?

But Electra is a typical Sophoclean heroine: neither the consolations offered by friends nor the rebukes of her enemies will make her yield. She remains unimpressed by assertions that her fortunes are shared by others; in her own view, her suffering is unique and thereby justifies her pursuit of vengeance.

However, the recognition that man cannot escape his destiny and must die sooner or later does offer consolation to the living who are thus able to accept and endure their sorrow. The dead person could not have escaped his doom. In addition, when the mourner recognizes that he too must die some day, he may come to accept the present, fleeting opportunity to enjoy what moments of life remain. Without question, death approaches; it comes at any moment, without warning. So there is consolation as well

in mortals' lack of foresight of what the next moments will bring.²⁵

The uncertainty embodied in the Greek view of changing fortune is eloquently expressed by Simonides (521 PMG):

ἄνθρωπος ἔδῃ μὴ ποτε φάσις ὅ τι γίνεται {αἴριον},
 μηδ' ἄνδρα ἰδὼν ὄλβιον ὅσον χρόνον ἔσσειται.
 ἄκεῖα γὰρ οὐδὲ τανυπτερόγου μυίας
 οὕτως ἂ μετάστασις.

Being mortal, never say what is destined to happen [tomorrow], nor, when you have seen a man happy, how long he will be so; for not even the long-winged fly's change of position is so swift.

The rapidity of fortune's reversals, combined with the general wish to avoid the φθόνος of the gods, made a prosperous man look with caution to the future. Simonides' warning here, and in 527 PMG, conveys this familiar thought, a common theme throughout Greek poetry. This sentiment made the Greeks hesitant to use the encouragement of possible good luck. We saw that Semonides of Amorgos (1 W) condemned hope in the future as vain and dangerous; this view is also professed by Solon (34 W 1 and 13 W 36). In the Troades of Euripides, after Andromache asserts that the dead Polyxena has fared better than herself, Hecuba raises the counterpoint (633): "Death is nothing, while in life there are hopes." But the widow of Hector responds that death is preferable to a miserable life which is accompanied by the bitter memory of former happiness (636-42), and she shows how the pain of her present misfortune is the result of her good name (643-60). Andromache is looking entirely at the past: the memory of Hector still rules her (661-78); she has no hope, no future (681-83). So Hecuba apologizes for her tongue's loss of control, but

²⁵ Johann 65 n. 265 has many Greek examples of the consolatio theme de vitae varietate.

nonetheless tries to turn Andromache's thoughts to the future by saying she must forget Hector: tears will not save him (697-98).

In Aeschylus' Prometheus, the Chorus asks the chained Titan what assistance he gave to mortal men. Before he mentions, in an offhand way, the gift of fire, Prometheus says that he made them incapable of "fore-seeing their doom"; he is asked how he did this, with what φάρμακον, and he replies (250):

τυφλὰς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐλπίδας κατώκισα

I placed in them blind hopes.

The Chorus is impressed by this "great gift".²⁶

Obviously, the Greeks thought of ἐλπίς as both good and bad; this is apparent in the Chorus' famous words in Sophocles' Antigone (615-17). A lesser known example is found in the Heracles of Euripides. Against Megara's pessimistic condemnation of hope, the old Amphytrion reacts with his faith in the possibility that a better wind might still blow (95-96) and in the belief that everything changes (104); he feels that the brave always hope, the coward despairs (195-06). Nonetheless, even he gives up hope on the very edge of disaster (503-06).

In addition, destiny was conceived as an oscillation between good and bad fortune.²⁷ The fragment of Archilochus (130 W) which gives an image for the human results of the capricious "gifts of the gods" powerfully describes men who are brought low as well as men who are raised up in circumstances; both happen frequently (πολλάκις... πολλάκις, 1 and 3).

²⁶ In the next line, 251. Theognis (1135 W) calls it the greatest gift.

²⁷ Cf. Sophocles Tr. 129-31 and J.C. Kamerbeek, Commentary: Trachiniae (Leiden 1970) ad loc. concerning the cyclic workings of fate, the "veritable Wheel of Fortune".

His vivid reaction to the eclipse (122 W) is quoted by Stobaeus under *περὶ ἐλπίδος*, "concerning hope": Archilochus' point is that men can, in blunt fact, have none. For as Pindar says of the future (Pythian 8.76):²⁸

τὰ δ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀνδράσι κεῖται.

Those affairs are out of mortal reach.

Anything can happen. Nonetheless, this does not exclude the possibility that it might be something good. When Archilochus ends his personal consolation to his *θυμός* (128 W) with the words (7):

γίνωσκε δ' ὅτιος ρυθμὸς ἀνθρώπους ἔχει.

Know well what kind of rhythm holds mankind.

is he merely rewording the Delphic maxims "Know thyself" and "Nothing to excess", or is he using an encouragement like the one that ends the Periclean consolation (13 W 9) that these troubles, which are now impossible to escape, will eventually pass? This is no definite advocacy of hope for the future: that hope is impossible, dangerous, and it leads to disappointment. But it is encouraging to remember, like the fact that sorrow and pain befall every mortal, that the fate of every mortal is in constant oscillation; whereas the present circumstances may deteriorate, they may also improve. In the meantime, a man could only hang on to life. This is undoubtedly the message in the following consolatory couplet from the *Theognidea* (355-56 W):

τόλμα Κύρνε κακοῖσιν, ἐπεὶ κάσθλοῖσιν ἔχαιρες,
εὐτέ σε καὶ τούτων μοῖρ' ἐπέβαλλεν ἔχειν.

²⁸ Again, at Nem. 6.1-7 Pindar suggests that man's ignorance of what the future holds is the most significant distinction between the race of men and the race of gods.

Endure, Cyrnus, in bad times, as in good you found delight, when fate decreed that you share in them.

In any case, human life is not static: πάντα βεῖ says the philosopher.²⁹

Up or down, the present circumstances must be endured.

The Simonides fragment quoted above (521 PMG; p. 68) is said to come from one of his famous θρήνοι. In a discussion on lyric threnody, H.W. Smyth³⁰ observes:

For the wild expression of passionate lament that was natural to a more primitive state of society, there was substituted in the lyric age an ennobling and purifying song that released the mourner from too close an engagement with his grief.

Does Simonides' memorable description of the speed of man's μετάστασις³¹ contain some consolation for mourners? The warning about the folly of looking to the future, just as it is used in sympotic exhortations, brings one effectively to consider the present circumstances. The past is dead, the future is precariously indefinite; both were and will be in the hands of fate. The message is to live while the living can be done, to live how we can — in the now.³²

Poems of consolation were written long before the development of the

²⁹ G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers (Cambridge 1971) 186-87; Plato attributes these words to Heraclitus, the "Obscure"; for both flux and obscurity, see the "River Fragment" and the discussion by M. Marcovich, Heraclitus (Merida, Venezuela 1967) 194-214.

³⁰ Greek Melic Poets (London 1906, repr. 1963) cxxvi; Smyth includes elegy in his discussion of related threnetic species.

³¹ Kassel 65-66 gives other examples of Greek expressions for this "changing of position"; Johann sees this theme as a topos of the consolatio which he calls de praemeditatione futurorum malorum (63).

³² It is also the message from Fritz Perls and Gestalt Therapy, and it is the main idea of Aldous Huxley's novel, Island.

of the late literary form, the consolatio mortis. The obvious proof of this is that the form demanded by convention the inclusion of numerous citations of consolatory themes from earlier authors. Since, in truth, only so many things can be said in consolation, the poets concentrated on saying them differently and well. Whereas the words of consolatory themes were the usual subject of variation, Euripides, in one play, varies their use in a skillful display of dramatic technique. I turn now to his Alcestis.

(c) Inversion In The Alcestis

Euripides' play dramatizes a story about the acceptance of death: one's own and someone else's. Every character in the play is compelled to confront the actuality of Death who indeed appears in the prologue. The manner in which these people face death is presented in terms of the moral values which have been discussed throughout this thesis. Their reactions to the approach and departure of death are human and traditional, but the whole play has a consistently ironic tone: the characters act within the framework of a mythological folk-tale which begins and ends with an escape from death.

The Prologue, delivered by Apollo and Thanatos, outlines the plot which is an inversion of all natural law. Apollo speaks first. He has endured (1) to act the servant for a mortal, his punishment for a crime against Zeus. Admetus, his master pro tempore, received him hospitably, and in return for this kindness Apollo arranged -- even though his own troubles began when he reacted against Zeus' murder of Asclepius, his son, for raising the dead -- for Admetus to escape the time of his death if

he could find someone willing to die in his place (13-15). Only his wife, Alcestis, was willing; and today is the day (20-21). Death appears in person to collect her.

When Thanatos sees Apollo, he condemns his chicanery towards the Fates, his cheap "wrestler's trick" (34); he is uneasy and afraid that the god will deprive him of his τιμή (30) throughout their ensuing conversation (31, 43, 53). Thanatos is not his usual indomitable self, and Apollo predicts the play's ending: Death will be overpowered and robbed of his victim by a man who is unquestionably Heracles (64-71). Apollo leaves; Thanatos, unmoved, enters the house to fetch Alcestis.

At this point, the drama of Alcestis' death unfolds. Her name is immediately on the lips of the Chorus, and it is accompanied by the description which will be used repeatedly and significantly: ἀρίστη γυνή, "the best wife" (83-84).³³ The last half of the Parodos (112-31) contains the theme of inescapable and incurable death; here it has an unusual application,³⁴ because this particular death had a visible approach and is a clear matter of choice. Alcestis' decision has won for her εὐκλεία (150), whereas the result of Admetus' decision is described by the maid-servant, in these words (196-97):

καὶ καθανὼν τᾶν ὄλετ', ἐκφυγὼν δ' ἔχει
τοσοῦτον ἄλγος, οὐ ποτ' -- οὐ λελήσεται.

Had he died, he would merely have died: but he escaped and has such grief, which he will remember all too well.

Admetus chose not to endure his death.

³³ A.M. Dale, *Euripides: Alcestis* (Oxford 1954) *ad loc.* notes that this attribute is "at the centre of the story."

³⁴ At different moments, e.g. at the reference to Phoebus' son (124f.), the audience might be reminded of the predicted escape at the end; cf. also the Chorus' prayer for a deliverer from death (244).

Admetus' inability to look past the present circumstances led him to accept all too readily Apollo's gift and then his wife's offer, without considering what he will learn only as she is dying.³⁵ Even the Chorus recognizes that the sorrow over the loss of a good wife would make a man want to kill himself (228-30). Alcestis knows that her choice represents a release from a painful life deprived of φίλοι (287-88) and an opportunity to win εὐκλεία (323-25). Admetus will have neither; though he managed to escape inescapable death, the life he has won, as the Chorus sees (242-43), will not be worth living. Just before Alcestis dies, Admetus swears not only to fulfil her last request that he not remarry (304-05, 328f.), but also to mourn for the rest of his life for a wife so generous (340-42). The description of the future life he says he will make for himself is aptly evaluated by A.M. Dale:³⁶

Admetus is in all good faith proposing to lead a life which will make nonsense of her gift to him.

His whole speech on this idea (especially 342f.) is a vivid expansion of the painful truth which he gradually perceives: not only his continued existence, but also its very quality is determined by Alcestis' willingness to die for him. Her death is a matter of both life and death for him. Thus there is a grim irony in Alcestis' affirmation that she gave her life in exchange for his (282-84). Moreover we can understand, even though we cannot condone, Admetus' pleas that she not leave him, that she "endure" (277), and his desire to die with her (382). But he has accepted the bargain Apollo arranged for him, and now Alcestis must die alone.

³⁵ 273-74, Admetus: "This is worse than death." Also, cf. 278-79.

³⁶ op. cit., 82.

The Chorus praises her bravery: οὐ... μόνα... ἔτλας, "you alone dared" (460-62) to give up your life. Admetus' father uses the same word (τλάσσει, 624) to indicate the daring of her act when he comes to console his son with the commonplace that such sorrow must nevertheless be borne (617).³⁷ In earlier scenes Admetus' parents were repeatedly criticized for their failure to die for their son (16, 290-92, 338-39, 466-70). Now Pheres is condemned to his face as a coward by his son (οὐδ' ἐτόλμησας θανεῖν, 644), but he returns the charge with the reminder that it was Admetus himself who originally would not dare to face death (694-96, 701-02, 716). Pheres' initial attempt to console Admetus is clearly insincere and it merely provokes his son, who disowns his parents and argues that the prayers of the old for death are idle: when death comes they do not wish to die (669-72).³⁸ In response to Admetus' outburst, Pheres employs the notion that all men must die, not with its regular application as a consolatory theme, but as a defense for his refusal to die for his son: since life is short and all men rejoice in life, he, like Admetus, will not surrender it; they are not unique, for all men love life (703-04).³⁹

In an earlier scene after the death of Alcestis, Admetus' pride in his reputation as a host prompts him to mislead Heracles and force him to accept hospitality.⁴⁰ During the burial, Heracles directs a rich

³⁷ According to Johann 37, in the Chapter "Über den Zeitpunkt der therapeutischen Behandlung," it would seem that Pheres' timing was "off": the Chorus tactfully waits until after the corpse has been carried to the grave before they advise Admetus to "bear it".

³⁸ These lines are quoted above p. 18.

³⁹ When the notion is applied in this manner, Alcestis would seem a fool to sacrifice her life for another.

⁴⁰ Again Admetus demonstrates his concern for only the present situation and not for the possible ramifications in the future.

assortment of consolatory themes to the attendant who is mourning excessively over the death of one who Heracles has been led to believe is a minor member of the household. If the sentiments in the hero's speech were applied to Admetus, the irony would be obvious (782-91):

βροτοῖς ἅπασι κατθανεῖν ὀφείλεται,
 κοῦκ ἔστι θνητῶν ὅστις ἐξεπίσταται
 τὴν αἰρίον μέλλουσιν εἰ βιώσεται.
 785 τὸ τῆς τύχης γὰρ ἀφανὲς οἷ προβήσεται,
 κἄστ' οὐ διδακτὸν οὐδ' ἀλίσκεται τέχνῃ.
 ταῦτ' οὖν ἀκούσας καὶ μαθὼν ἐμοῦ πάρα,
 εὐφραίνε σαυτὸν, πῖνε, τὸν καθ' ἡμέραν
 βίον λογίζου σόν, τὰ δ' ἄλλα τῆς τύχης.
 790 τίμα δὲ καὶ τὴν πλεῖστον ἡδίστην θεῶν
 Κύπριν βροτοῖσιν· εὐμενῆς γὰρ ἡ θεός.

To die is a debt that comes due for all mortals, and there is no man who knows if he will live another tomorrow. For uncertain is the movement of chance; it cannot be learned or defined by craft. So hear this and learn from me, enjoy yourself, drink, your life this day call your own, leave the rest to chance. And show respect for Cypris, by far the sweetest of gods for mortals; this god is truly gracious.

A portion of the future was made clear to Admetus when he was told the day of his death. But he did not see the sorrow of losing his wife, nor the unavoidable fact that he must die anyway; he saw only the chance to forestall the payment of his mortal debt. So now, he can no longer call any day of his life his own. His life, as well as his anguish, is the gift of Alcestis whose memory would make Heracles' final words unbearable if Admetus were to hear them.

Admetus returns from the funeral weeping copiously, and the Chorus tries various traditional techniques of consolation (861-1005) without success; each of these consolatory themes has an ironic connotation in view of the play's action:

(1) "Tears will not bring her back to life" (875, 985-86); but the tears of the servant brought out the truth to Heracles, who has rushed away in what we know will be a successful attempt to bully Thanatos into surrendering Alcestis; his mission might have been accomplished already if Admetus had not concealed his own tears.

(2) "Nothing can be done, there is no remedy" (962-71); but soon we learn how, in the fairy-tale world of this play, Heracles can act as a true φίλος and provide a remedy.

(3) "Endure" (891, 985); but Admetus has not endured in the distant and immediate past, and he cannot now; however, Heracles' endurance (cf. 837) makes it unnecessary for Admetus to endure much longer.

(4) "You are not the only mortal to suffer such sorrow" (892-93, 931-33); but Admetus' gift from Apollo gave him a singular opportunity, namely, to ask his wife to die for him; he unthinkingly accepted that gift and now regrets it.

(5) "The glory of the dead will live on" (995-1005); but this is savagely inappropriate since Alcestis' gain contrasts with Admetus' realization of his own loss of reputation. His last words before this ode contain what he imagines an enemy will mockingly say about his cowardice and shame (955-59), and then his concluding, rhetorical question (960-1):

τί μοι ζῆν ὄντα κέρδιον, φίλοι,
κακῶς κλύοντι καὶ κακῶς πεπραγότε;

What gain do I have then in living, friends, with my bad reputation and my bad fortune?

Admetus has now seen that Alcestis' fortune is happier than his own: in death she is free from pain and secure in her good name, but he, who was slated to die, will live out a painful existence (935-40).

The folk-tale ending of the play is a veritable Conquest of Death. Heracles enters, obviously successful in his bout with Thanatos, and leads in a veiled woman, his surprise for his host. Alcestis is restored to Admetus, and Apollo's prediction in the Prologue is fulfilled. The Chorus' earlier wish that Alcestis be delivered from death is answered. Within the framework of a fairy-tale world, Euripides has allowed his characters to see the approach of death and has revealed their reactions to the audience. The play's action is informed by many of the ideas and the ideals which I have traced in this thesis, but frequently they are inverted or given an unusual application. Euripides' treatment has a tart and ironic tone because of his novel manipulation of poetic themes related to "the release of death" and "the acceptance of death". Once more we can see how a Greek poet uses his skill to endow traditional commonplaces and beliefs about death with a new vitality.

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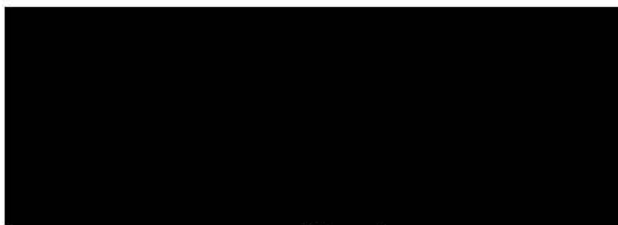
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AND CLASSICAL GREEK POETRY

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September 20, 1976