

## GREEK LYRIC IMAGERY: PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION\*

W J Henderson (Rand Afrikaans University)

### 1. Introduction

Any study of the imagery in ancient Greek lyric poetry is faced with a number of problems ranging from difficult to insurmountable. These problems arise mainly from the fragmented state of both the lyric texts themselves and the ancient responses to the imagery preserved for us in the *testimonia*. However, this state of the primary material should not deter us from attempting controlled analysis of this important aspect of ancient Greek poetry (as it is of all poetry). Latacz has identified an uncertainty, an open-endedness in studies on Greek lyric. "Wir arbeiten also im Grunde mit Hypothesen" (1986:39). There is a natural reluctance to offer lyric theory. "Wie frühgriechische Lyrik konstituiert und als System strukturiert ist, wie sie im Einzelfall entsteht, wie sie 'funktioniert' hat, wodurch und wie sie wirken wollte und gewirkt hat-, diese (synchronise) Analyse hat die Lyrikforschung bisher allenfalls ansatzweise in den Blick genommen; eine Poetik der frühgriechischen Lyrik (ebenso übrigens wie des Epos) steht noch aus" (1986:42). In spite of these obstacles, interpretation is required, even if it is to be characterised by "legitimer Subjektivität" (1986:37). Although it is impossible to recreate the impact of the imagery on the contemporary (or "target") Greek audiences, a first, tentative step can be taken towards the formulation of some kind of theory of reception by analysing the way in which the ancient writers represented in the surviving *testimonia* dealt with images in the lyric (i.e. melic) poetry of ancient Greece.<sup>1</sup>

This article briefly lists the problems to be faced in such an investigation, and then looks at the limitations of the ancient critics, a study which has been greatly facilitated by the new Loeb edition of the lyric poets by David A. Campbell.

### 2. Problems

#### 2.1 The physical condition of the poetry

The fragmented nature of most of Greek lyric lies at the base of all the other problems. It has left the reader without the whole poem and therefore the context within which the imagery operated. The content, referential value and effect of an image immediately become uncertain and controversial; in many cases it is even debatable that we are in fact dealing with an image. One factor rescues the student of imagery from total defeatism: imagery is *contextual* and *synchronic* within its

---

\* The initial research for this paper was carried out at the Seminar für klassische Philologie, University of Basel, from February to June 1993. I am grateful to Prof. Joachim Latacz for his hospitality and in particular the use of the seminar library. Financial assistance by the Centre for Scientific Development in Pretoria for this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the author and must not be ascribed to the CSD.

1 I have excluded the poetry of Pindar, as well as that of the elegiac and iambic poets.

immediate context (the poem), but also *intertextual* and *diachronic* in the broader context of society. Each individual use is unique within its own context, and there is no need to formulate a “theory of Greek lyric imagery”. It is best to analyse an image synchronically, as it “works” in a complete poem. However, few such poems survive in Greek lyric before Anacreon. The diachronic approach, intertextual rather than intratextual, is the next best option. Images are embedded in a particular community’s experience, memory and mentality. Images are also shared in different times and different places of that community, and even with other communities. Information gained from one source can be applied to understand another, in much the same way as the frescoes of Crete, or the sculptural reliefs of a Greek temple are reconstructed from scattered but related bits and pieces. Further progress in this area will depend almost entirely on the discovery of new poetic texts on papyrus. There is no guarantee that such material will be forthcoming; yet the small but steady trickle of lyric fragments from the sands of the Sahara, as well as some very significant discoveries in recent times (cf. Bremer *et al.* 1987),<sup>2</sup> keep scholarly hopes and careers alive.

## 2.2 The occasion

This problem is related to the fact that an ancient lyric poem was composed for and performed during a specific occasion. At once the lack of sufficient information on the numerous public and private occasions prevents our reconstruction of the broader context in which the poetry was communicated. When this occasion was a religious ceremony, the more specific question arises: Is an item in a Greek lyric fragment a non-literal image, or is it a literal reference from or to the actual ceremony? Is it imaginative association and creation, or realistic description? Is it literary invention or constituent element of the ceremony? (cf. Rösler 1984:188-9). For example, in Alcman’s first *partheneion* (fr. 1 *PMG*), is Agido’s light (Ἀγιδῶς τὸ φῶς, 40) figurative (cf. the next phrase: ὀρῶ / ἦ’ ὥτ’ ἄλιον, “I see her like the sun”, 40-41), or does it refer to actual light on her countenance? Is the silver complexion of Hagesichora (ἀργύριον πρόσωπον, 55) a realistic description of the moonlight (or light of dawn) on her face, or a metaphor (cf. the previous lines ἃ δὲ χαιῖτα / τὰς ἐμᾶς ἀνεψιάς / Ἀγησιχόρας ἐπανθεῖ / γρυσὸς [ὠ]ς ἀκήρατος, “but the hair of my cousin Hagesichora blooms like pure gold,” 51-54)? Do the horse-similes (lines 45-51; 58-59) refer to actual racing? Solutions to this problem have been, and will continue to be, advanced by interdisciplinary research in the field of comparative anthropology, mythology and religion.

2 E.g., the British Museum papyrus of Bacchylides, published in 1897; the Cologne papyrus (7511) of Archilochus, published in 1974; the Oxyrhynchus (2617) and Lille (76 a,b,c + 73) papyri of Stesichorus, published in 1973 and 1977 respectively. Papyrus is not the only medium of preservation: Sappho’s poem 2 L-P, consisting of 16 lines, was discovered on an ostrakon, published in 1937.

### 2.3 The poetic tradition

It is useful (though not essential) to know the “pedigree” or provenance of an image; it helps the reader to fathom the “load”, the possible semantic value, of such an image if its use can be traced in the poetic tradition within which the poet creates. Images, like texts, do not exist *in vacuo*, and depend for their full meaning on other or similar images. In the case of Greek poetry, the only sufficiently early and significant texts in which to find any recorded poetic tradition are Homer and Hesiod. It is easy enough to find in Homer’s epics an equivalent for an image encountered in lyric poetry; it is not so easy to decide whether that is the actual source of the image: the epic and lyric poets drew from a common, oral source (cf. Fowler 1987:68-70, on Sappho).

It is also very difficult to distinguish everyday, “dead” images from “live” or rejuvenated use in the hands of a particular poet, and any finding in this regard is always subject to the qualification “in extant Greek”. Michael Silk (1974:27-56) has dealt fully with the problem and suggested techniques to reconstruct or establish “originality”. The intellectual intricacy of his study only proves the impossibility of the task. The influence of Homeric imagery on lyric was, of course, very definite, but individual poets also exhibit independent characteristics. To fathom and assess the role of tradition and the degree of originality in a lyric text or image, leads, in the final analysis, to a dead end.

### 2.4 The reception

The most important problem about an image is to interpret and understand its function in a poem and even in a people’s mentality. In a predominantly oral culture such as that of Greece until well into the 4th century B.C., imagery, particularly in the form of metaphor, has a very immediate and concrete impact on an audience, enforced as it is by mimetic body movement, tone of voice, facial expression and musical accompaniment. This well-known fact has been reiterated recently by Bruno Gentili: “In generale si può comunque dire che la differenza sostanziale tra i due tipi di comunicazione, orale e scritta, risiede nel fatto che in quella orale il destinatario e il mittente del messaggio si collocano, con tutte la fisicità ed emotività della loro presenza, in un determinato tempo e spazio comuni, e condividano un pari grado di realtà e concretezza” (1990:10).

Unfortunately, we have no indication of how contemporary audiences responded to the figurative language in the poetry performed before them. Instead, ancient responses to the Greek lyric texts are embodied almost exclusively in the remains of the works of scholars and writers from the 4th century B.C. to about the 12th century A.D. The core of this reception is the work of the Alexandrian scholars. Their contribution in this field was enormous, but unfortunately the ruins of their writings allow us only partial access to their thoughts and judgements. In addition, the reliability of these *testimonia* is often questioned, particularly on historical and biographical matters (cf., for example, Lefkowitz 1981). Yet they often repay close scrutiny on the context, nature, language and style of the fragmented poems. For any idea at all of the reception of early Greek lyric poetry they are really all we have.

3. *Limitations of the testimonia*

## 3.1 Metrical, linguistic and stylistic comment

In many cases, the ancient critics quote from Greek lyric for reasons other than to elucidate a simile or metaphor. That an image is even involved is pure chance. Hephaestion, the 2nd century metrist, regularly comments on metrical matters. When Sappho compares a bridegroom to Ares (fr. 111.5 L-P), Hephaestion comments only on the refrain that comes after a line instead of after a strophe and is called a μεσὺμνιον (*Poem.* 7.1, p.70 Consbruch). The comparison with Ares is, of course, intended to flatter the bridegroom and to emphasise his strength and virility in love's "battles" (cf. Perrotta & Gentili 1973:177, noting the ithyphallic reference in line 6). Sappho's image of love "streaming" (κέχυνται) over the bride's face (fr. 112.4 L-P) elicited from Hephaestion only the observation that Sappho uses the 3½-foot choriambic with iambic closure (*Ench.* 15.26, pp.55-56 Consbruch; Campbell 1991:273). Hephaestion comments on the metre in two more Sappho fragments: fr. 115, where the bridegroom is compared to a sapling (*Ench.* 7.6, p. 23 Consbruch), and fr. 132, where she compares her daughter Cleis to golden flowers (*Ench.* 15.18, pp.53-54 Consbruch). Hephaestion also cites, only for their metrical interest, Anacreon fr. 428 *PMG*, where love is viewed as madness, and fr. 413, where Anacreon uses an effective simile of a blacksmith (*Ench.* 5.2; 12.4, p.39 Consbruch).

The 6th century grammarian, Priscian, does the same. He cites fr. 33 S-M from Bacchylides, where there seems to be a reference to the test for true gold by means of a touchstone (cf. fr. 14), only to illustrate an iambic line ending with a tribrach (*De metr. Ter.*, iii.428 Keil, *Gramm. Lat.*). Also, of Bacchylides' image "the cream of sacred Athens' men" (Ἀθ[ανάων...ων]δρον ἱερῶν ἄωτο[ν], fr. 23) we are told only that it comes from a dithyrambic song (*P. Oxy.* 2368 col. I).

Grammarians like Apollonius Dyscolus (a 2nd century Alexandrian) and Choeroboscus (4th or 5th century) naturally focus on linguistic points. Sappho's bold "you roast us" (ῥοπτὰς ἄμμε, fr. 38 L-P) drew from Apollonius Dyscolus the explanation that ἄμμε meant "us" (*Pron.* 127A, i.100 Schneider). When Alcaeus (fr. 330 L-P) describes war as a "mingling" (μείξαντες), Choeroboscus (on Theodosius, *Canons* 1.214 Hilgard) comments only on the retention of upsilon (in other words, the orthography) in Aeolic. Comment preserved on a papyrus fragment (*P. Oxy.* 2306 = fr. 305(a) col.i.7-10) glosses the "mixing" metaphor rather lamely as signifying that there will never be a shortage of war.

The ancient etymologies also focus on linguistic points. Anacreon's use (fr. 349 *PMG*) of the verb "pluck" (τίλλειν) as a gesture of mockery is cited by the *Etymologicum Genuinum* (= *Etymologicum Magnum* 713.7) where σίλλοι is glossed as "gibes" and equated with τίλλοι; and τίλλειν as σκώπτειν, "mock". Does this refer to mockery by plucking the beard? As expected from an etymologist, the meaning and synonym(s) are given, but not the connotation. In fr. 432 *PMG* Anacreon compares the ageing poet/lover to wrinkled, over-ripe fruit (κυσζή τις ἤδη καὶ πέπειρα). The *Etymologicum Genuinum* (= *Etymologicum Magnum* 523.4) explains κυσζή, but not the metaphorical use of πέπειρα, "over-ripe" (fruit). When Anacreon

says (fr. 398 *PMG*) that Eros's dice are madness and uproar (μανίαι τε καὶ κυδοιμοί), scholiast A on Homer *Il.* 23.88, commenting on Homer's "in anger over the dice" (ἀμφ' ἀστραγάλοισι χολωθεῖς), claims that most of the "individual" texts have ἀμφ' ἀστραγάλησιν (i.e. the feminine form), "which is more Ionic", as here in Anacreon; he is concerned only with the grammatical form and gender of ἀστράγαλος. All Athenaeus can come up with when Anacreon uses the image of putting one's hand in a frying-pan (fr. 436 *PMG*), is to explain the Ionic ἤγαγον for τάγηνον (6.229b), instead of the application of the expression. Ibycus' simile of love blazing like brilliant flashes through the long night (fr. 314 *PMG*) induced Theon of Smyrna, a scholar of the 2nd century, to state that the poets, according to Adrastus, use the word σειρίος of all the stars in common (*Math.* p.146 Hiller). Fortunately, there are only a few instances of an image being glossed by only metrical or linguistic comment.

From the rhetoricians one expects stylistic comment which offers a positive contribution to an understanding of an image. This is the case with Demetrius of Phaleron (4th century B.C.), Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1st century B.C.), Ammonius (1st/2nd century grammarian), Apollonius Dyscolus and Syrianus (5th century), though the content and significance of the image are ignored. Demetrius of Phaleron distinguishes phrases that help the sense and phrases that ornament it and give it beauty (*Eloc.* 106, p.26 Radermacher). As an example of the former, he cites Sappho (?), fr. 105(c): "like the hyacinth which shepherds tread underfoot in the mountains". As an example of the latter, the so-called *epiphoneme*, "the most impressive feature in prose", he uses the expansion of the same simile: "and on the ground the purple flower" (transl. Campbell 1990:133). This seems valid enough, but we would have preferred to know the application of the simile. Demetrius points out (*Eloc.* 148) how Sappho, in fr. 111.6 L-P, modulates the exaggeration (and hubris) in the comparison by means of the additional phrase ἀνδρος μεγάλω πόλυ μέσδων, "much larger than a large man" (cf. Perrotta & Gentili 1973:175; Campbell 1982:284; 1990:137).

Dionysius comments competently (*Comp.* 23) on the polished style, euphony and smooth composition (γλαφυρὰ σύνθεσις) of Sappho's hymn to Aphrodite (fr. 1 L-P), but, as one would expect from the context, says nothing of the imagery involved when Sappho speaks of "wile-weaving Aphrodite" (Ἀφρόδιτα/...δολόπλοκε, 1-2).

Ammonius quotes Sappho's "lately had golden-sandalled Dawn" (ἀρτίως μὲν ἄ χρυσοπέδιλος Αὔως, fr. 123 L-P), but limits his comment to the criticism that Sappho used ἀρτίως instead of ἄρτι (*Diff.* 75, p.19 Nickau; Campbell 1990:145).

Apollonius Dyscolus (*Adv.* 596, i.183 Schneider) quotes Bacchylides' "tower-horned" (πυργοκέρατα, fr. 39 S-M) as an example of a metaplasm (a form derived from a non-existent nominative singular).

Sappho's comparison of the bride to the sweet-apple reddening on the topmost bough and therefore unattainable by ordinary men (fr. 105a L-P) elicited from Syrianus the observation (*in Hermog. Id.* 1.1; Campbell 1990:131) that here, as in fr. 2.5-8, such kinds of style appeal to all the senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch).

Though there is no explanation, the statement is quite sophisticated: it recognises synaesthesia and introduces a comparable example.<sup>3</sup>

Comment by scholiasts varies in nature and quality. Alcman calls Greece “the nurse of men” (βωτιανείρα, fr. 77 *PMG*); the scholiast on Homer, *Il.* 3.39 explains the content of Δύσπαρις and Αινόπαρις, but not βωτιανείρα. The expression, which occurs in Homer (*Il.* 1.155), Hesiod (fr. 165.16 M-W) and the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite (5.265), is common enough, but deserved more comment. Calame (1983:490) has pointed out that the adjective is used of particularly fertile lands. In fr. 90 *PMG* Alcman speaks of “the Rhipae, mountain blossoming with forest, breast of black night” (Ρίπας, ὄρος ἀνθέων ὕλα, / νυκτὸς μελαίνας στέρνον). The scholiast on Soph., *OC* 1248, explaining Sophocles’ “from night-wrapped Rhipae” (ἐννυχιᾶν ἀπὸ Ρίπᾶν), states: “He is speaking of the mountains called Rhipae: some in fact call them ‘the Rhipaeian mountains’. He speaks of them as ‘night-wrapped’ because they are situated in the west. Alcman mentions them in these words ...” (transl. Campbell 1988:457). Apart from stating the obvious, the scholiast errs in placing the mountains in question in the west instead of the north (cf. Calame 1983:586; Campbell 1988:457 n.1). Moreover, the scholiast only mentions Alcman, but the reference is pointless as Alcman does not describe the mountains as “night-wrapped”. The connection is made purely on the basis of the same name of the mountain and the reference to night. Alcman’s imagery is not explained, a lapse understandable in this case, as the scholiast is elucidating the Sophoclean phrase. Calame (1983:586) notes the originality of this fragment in spite of the Homeric echoes, and acutely explains the double metaphor in the description of both the mountain and night in terms of the human breast. Finally in this group, the reference of “Siren” in Simonides, fr. 607 *PMG*, is supplied by the *P.Berol.* 13875 (a commentary on Pindar fr. 339 S-M, ed. Zuntz, *CR* 49 [1935] 4-7): “this is in answer to Simonides, since in one song he called Pisistratus ‘Siren’” (transl. Campbell 1991:479).

### 3.2 Biographical comment

Almost totally useless is biographical comment, and the ancient author most guilty of this sin against Criticism is Athenaeus (3rd century A.D.), though, of course, it must be granted that his main purpose was not to elucidate images in the texts he quotes in the course of his *Deipnosophistai*. It has also been noted that such biographical speculation was typical of ancient interpretations of poetry (Lefkowitz 1981: *passim*; Most 1987:3).

#### Alcman, fr. 59a *PMG*

Athenaeus (13.600f) cites Chamaeleon for Archytas’s view of Alcman as an innovator in erotic and licentious songs, and as proof quotes the lines: “Ἐρῶς με δηῦτε... / γλυκὺς κατεῖβων καρδίαν ἰαίνει (“Eros again ... / pours sweetly down (me) and warms my heart”; Campbell 1988:435). Quoting one’s sources, as Athenaeus does

<sup>3</sup> On synaesthetic or intersensual imagery, cf. Stanford 1936:47-62 and, for examples, Smyth 1963:343, 448.

here, is a positive aspect, but one notices immediately the biographical method of interpretation, where the theme and even genre are equated with the poet's personal life. One may lessen the blame on Athenaeus by tracing this type of moralistic interpretation back to Archytas (Degani & Burzacchini 1977:291-2; Calame 1983:559), but Athenaeus fully approves of and elsewhere resorts to such an approach. More importantly: there is no attempt here to explain the two metaphors. The verb κατεῖβω is generally used of tears and not, as here, of love.<sup>4</sup> The metaphorical use of λαίνει occurs frequently, before Alcman mostly in epic,<sup>5</sup> but the *iunctura* of καρδίαν λαίνει seems original (Calame 1983:560). Certainly, Alcman's use of the two metaphors together seems new. Love is compared to sweet wine being poured down into the poet's mouth and warming his heart. The point is clear: love is a sweet, warm, soothing, pleasant experience.

Alcaeus, fr. 335 L-P

Alcaeus speaks of facing troubles in terms of "cutting a way forward" (προκόφομεν), and of wine as the "best of remedies" (φαρμάκων...ἄριστον). Athenaeus' contribution is to state that Alcaeus habitually drinks in times of misfortune (10.430b-c). The biographical interpretation is evident again. There is no comment on προκόφομεν or φαρμάκων. The verb προκόπτω is only used metaphorically, and this is the earliest recorded use. The use of φάρμακον as a metaphor for wine also seems new. Archilochus (fr. 13.5-7 West) used it of endurance (τλημοσύνη). The idea of wine as a healer of ills occurs in the *Cypria* 10 (ed. Kinkel) and Degani & Burzacchini (1977:229) believe that Alcaeus has developed the motif by singling out the efficacy of wine to promote escape from reality and also compensation for the frustrations of life. Other poets followed Alcaeus: e.g. Theognis 883; Euripides *Bacch.* 283; Simonides fr. 512 *PMG*; Horace *Carm.* 1.7.31.

Alcaeus, fr. 367 L-P

When Alcaeus says "I heard flowery Spring arriving" (ἦρος ἀνθεμόεντος ἐπάϊον ἐρχομένοιο), Athenaeus again comments on the poet's drinking-habits (10.430b; Campbell 1990:397). This is biographical interpretation rather than elucidation of the way in which the approach of Spring is represented. In fact, the image has some complexity and density of sense. The act of *hearing*, the dominant meaning of ἐπάϊω, seems at first purely literal (birds singing, for example), but the presence of ἀνθεμόεντος next to ἦρος conjures up a *visual* response. The arrival of Spring is therefore represented synaesthetically, with both auditive and visual signs.

4 Hesiod also used εἶβω of Eros (*Theog.* 910ff.); cf. Perrotta & Gentili 1973:296, who also point out that, far from illustrating Alcman's licentiousness, the lines are full of "una dolce e serena letizia" and that the second line is "luminosa e leggera". Cf. Degani & Burzacchini 1977:292, who stress the originality of Alcman's view, here and in fr. 3.61-62, of love as soft, sweet and warmly comforting.

5 Hom. *Il.* 19.174; 23.600; 24.119; *Od.* 4.549; 15.379; 22.59; 23.47; Hom. *Hymn* 2 (to Demeter) 65, 435; Archil. fr. 25.2 West; Pind. *Ol.* 7.43; *Isth.* 1.11; 2.90.

### 3.3 Moral comment

Equally unhelpful is the type of value judgement that uses moral principles as a criterion.

Ibycus, fr. 286.8-13 *PMG*

Ibycus' potent analogy between love and the wind from Thrace raised from Athenaeus only the observation that Ibycus shouts and screams (13.601b). What did he mean? The sound of the Greek is not particularly harsh or "loud" or hysterical. Athenaeus must then have had the content, the actual ideas, in mind. Yet the first part of the poem, in theme and tone, is calm and peaceful (1-7). The second part (8-13), on the violent behaviour and effect of the North wind, especially as an analogue for the way in which love is experienced by the poet, must have been the aspect that elicited (or contributed to) Athenaeus' opinion. He considered the poet's description of the experience of love as too bold or too violent. Also, Athenaeus probably equated the "I" of the poem with Ibycus (biographical interpretation), and felt that the poet was being too personal or confessional about his experience of love (cf. Davies 1986:404-5; Bernardini 1990:69-80, the latter in particular for the possible personal expression of pain).<sup>6</sup> His criticism is based on a particular preconceived idea of what constitutes acceptable love-poetry, and occurs during a discussion of erotic songs. Athenaeus' attack on the poet therefore seems to have arisen from a particular moral standpoint, which expected more constraint in such matters. The same moral reserve is exhibited by Cicero (*Tusc.* 4.33.71) and the *Suda* entry on Ibycus (cf. Degani & Burzacchini 1977:303-304).

For a modern reader the wind-image itself is extremely effective and innovative, and many have commented on it and its relation to the garden-imagery of the first part of the poem (cf., for example, Fränkel 1955:46; Trumpf 1960:14-22; West 1966:153-154; Gentili 1967:178-180; Giangrande 1971:106-108). The picture of Boreas is built up swiftly and vividly: it is accompanied by lightning (στεροπᾶς φλέγων, 8); it rushes (αἶσ-/ σων, 9-10) and is frenzied and searing (ἀζαλέαις μανί-/ αισιν, 10-11), dark, fearless, (ἔρεμνός ἀθαμβήης, 11-asyndetic), and forcefully dominating (ἐγκρατέως πεδόθεν φυλάσσει, 12). Early in the description the connection with love is firmly made (παρὰ Κύπριδος, 10), and the items of the image apply equally to the wind (literally) and to love (figuratively). By the analogy love is thus viewed as an elemental force of nature, with all the attributes and associations of the North wind. It is a new way of visualising love (cf. Perrotta & Gentili 1973:297),

---

6 This aspect raises questions of the form and performance of Ibycus' poetry even for a modern reader; cf. Perrotta & Gentili 1973:297-298; Cingano 1990:189-224.

even if it employs some common terms,<sup>7</sup> but, above all, it is effective imagery, integrated organically into the thought and feeling of the poem.

Anacreon, fr. 357 *PMG*

When Anacreon addresses Eros as δαμάλης, Dio Chrysostom comments only that kings should not call on gods as Anacreon does (*Orat.* 2.62). Yet the use here is unique in extant Greek, whether δαμάλης is interpreted as “subduer” or “young steer”.<sup>8</sup> The former reading typifies Eros’ action as domineering, taming, even violent; the latter as lascivious, high-spirited, even playful. The poem, addressed to Dionysus (ὦναξ, 1; ὦ Δεόνυσε, 11) and requesting his help to influence Cleobulus, portrays gentleness and playfulness rather than aggression and violence (συμπαιζουσιν, 4; εὐμενής, 6; ἀγαθὸς γένεο / σύμβουλος, 9-10). This context would support the sense of “young steer”.

On the other hand, Dionysus (and not Eros) is associated with the bull and orgiastic violence (cf. Roscher 1965:I.1.1055-9 [Voigt]; 1149-51 [Thraemer]). In this case the non-violent setting would be ironic. Also, Eros’ subduing power is attested elsewhere in Anacreon himself (e.g. fr. 346.4-6; 413 *PMG*). Although there is no decisive indication either way, the most “natural” interpretation is “subduer”, “tamer”.

Anacreon, fr. 414 *PMG*

When Anacreon refers to the shorn locks of a slave-boy as “the blameless flower” (ἄμωμον ἄνθος), Stobaeus (500 A.D.) cites the fragment and quotes Favorinus (2nd century A.D.) as saying that Anacreon seems ridiculous and petty in blaming the boy for cutting off his hair, adding intriguingly: “Anacreon, wait a moment and you will see everything cut off” (4.21.24 = iv.491 Hense; transl. Campbell 1988:93)—whatever that may mean. The focus of the comment is on the adjective; there is no comment on the image itself. Although ἄνθος is used metaphorically of many things (life, complexion, youth, song, pride, honour, love, mind, being, soul), this seems to be its only use of hair in surviving Greek. Moreover, the *iuncturae* of ἀπαλῆς κόμης and ἄμωμον ἄνθος seem unique in extant Greek literature.

7 Ἐρηϊκίος Βορέας occurs in Hes. *Op.* 553, Tyrt. fr. 12.4 West, Simon. fr. 6.2 West; ἀζαλέος in Hes. *Scut.* 153 (of Sirius); ἐρεμνός in Hom. *Il.* 12.375 and 20.51 (of a storm); ἀθαμβής is rare; ἐγκρατέως is found here for the first time; πεδόθεν appears in Hom. *Od.* 13.295 and Hes. *Theog.* 680; and φυλάσσει (if correct), in the metaphorical sense of “guard” or “hold fast” (i.e. as a prisoner) is unparalleled—which is why other suggestions have been put forward, suitably paralleled and semantically easier, but far less effective as poetic imagery (e.g. Naeke’s τινάσσει; Hermann’s φλάσσει, Mueller’s σαλάσσει; West’s λαφύσσει). The manuscript reading φυλάσσει is defended convincingly on metrical and semantic grounds by Perrotta & Gentili (1973:301-302); cf. also Degani & Burzacchini 1977:308-9. For the analogy of wind and love, cf. Sappho, fr. 47 L-P; for love as madness, cf. Sappho, fr. 1.18; Alcaeus, fr. 283.5 L-P; Anacreon, fr. 398 *PMG*.

8 Hesychius gives either meaning: δαμάλην τὸν Ἐρωτα. ἦτοι τὸν δαμάζοντα ἢ ἀγέρωζον. Campbell (1982:319) understands “subduer” (“young steer” being a later meaning), while Perrotta & Gentili (1973:252) reject this in favour of “young steer”.

Simonides, fr. 509 *PMG*

Simonides calls Heracles “Alcmene’s iron son” (σιδάρεον...τέκος), which elicited from Lucian (c.115-c.200) comment on the hubris involved in comparing the boy victor Glaucus with figures like Polydeuces and Heracles (*Pro imaginibus* 19; Campbell 1991:372-379). Although his criticism is based on a moral or ethical premise, he redeems himself by explaining further that this act of impiety brought no divine punishment on Glaucus or the poet, who both went on to enjoy “reputation and honour among the Greeks.” The adjective σιδήρεος (σιδήρειος) appears frequently in epic with soul (θυμός) or heart (κράδιη, ἦτορ) in the metaphorical sense of hard or stubborn.<sup>9</sup> Only Simonides uses it of Heracles, and then to suggest not only hardness and stubbornness, but also strength, firmness and steadfastness. After Simonides, poets apply the term to mortal men.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

Interpreting poetic imagery is always a complex process: it is in the very nature of imagery to generate thoughts and responses that defy complete rational formulation in analytical prose. When the context of that imagery is lost or deficient, or removed by up to twenty-seven centuries, as in the case of ancient Greek lyric, the critic and reader face a formidable task. Awareness of the problems involved in such an investigation helps to limit dogmatic conclusions, but at the same time must admit controlled speculation and personal reponse on the part of the interpreter. Otherwise there will be almost nothing to say of the imagery encountered in the surviving lyric poetry of ancient Greece.

Fortunately the situation is not altogether impossible. A great deal of information, albeit like debris from a big bang somewhere in the past, has reached us. This includes both the poetic texts and the body of criticism on them. This material still rewards close study, as the above discussion hopes to demonstrate.

Our investigation shows, firstly, that what ancient critics say about an image is determined by their immediate interest in citing the image in the first place. Usually this is not primarily to elucidate the reference, context and effect of the image (which is what *we* would like), but something else altogether. This is unfortunate, of course, but we should at least be grateful that they quoted the fragments for *some* reason, since in most cases these quotes would otherwise have been lost.

Secondly, some critics, like Athenaeus, Dio Chrysostom and Stobaeus strike us as rather limited, but then again their primary aims were not to offer literary interpretation. Others, such as Demetrius of Phaleron, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Ammonius, Apollonius Dyscolus, Syrianus and the nameless scholiasts provide us with vital clues to the meaning of certain images.

Thirdly, it is worth noting that the worst or least helpful comments in the study of imagery, namely those with a biographical and moral purpose, are relatively limited among ancient critics. Their often wayward opinions are often easily corrected

9 Hom. *Il.* 22.357; 24.205, 521; *Od.* 4.293; 5.191; 23.172.

10 Aristoph. *Ach.* 491; Theocr. 22.47; Aeschines 3.166.

with information from elsewhere. When one takes all the *testimonia* on imagery into consideration, it is at once clear that the majority of the ancient comments on the imagery of Greek lyric poetry are in fact of great value to the modern reader. This more positive contribution deserves a separate study (cf. Henderson 1998).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bernardini, P A 1990. La bellezza dell'amato: Ibico fr. 288 e 289 P. *AION* 12:69-80.
- Bremer, J M, Van Erp Taalman Kip, A Maria & Slings, S R 1987. *Some recently found Greek poems. Text and commentary*. Leiden: Brill.
- Calame, C 1983. *Alcman. Introduction, texte critique, témoignages, traduction et commentaire*. Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo.
- Campbell, D A 1982. *Greek lyric poetry. A selection of early Greek lyric, elegiac and iambic poetry*. Revised edition, reprinted 1990. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press.
- Campbell, D A 1988. *Greek Lyric, Vol. II: Anacreon, Anacreontea, choral lyric from Olympus to Alcman*. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Campbell, D A 1990. *Greek Lyric, Vol. I: Sappho and Alcaeus*. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press [1982].
- Campbell, D A 1991. *Greek Lyric, Vol. III: Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides, and others*. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Cingano, E 1990. L'opera di Ibico e Stesicoro nella classificazione degli antichi e dei moderni. *AION* 12:189-224.
- Davies, M 1986. Symbolism and imagery in the poetry of Ibycus. *Hermes* 114:404-5.
- Degani, E & Burzacchini, G 1977. *Lirici greci*. Reprinted 1984. Firenze: La nuova Italia.
- Fowler, R L 1987. *The nature of early Greek lyric. Three preliminary studies*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Fränkel, H 1955. *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens*. Reprinted 1960. Munich: C H Beck.
- Gentili, B 1967. Metodi di lettura (su alcune congetture ai poeti lirici). *QUCC* 4:178-80.
- Gentili, B 1990. L'"io" nella poesia lirica greca. *AION* 12:9-24.
- Giangrande, G 1971. Interpretationen griechischer Meliker. *RhM* 114:106-8.
- Henderson, W J 1998. Received response: ancient testimony on Greek lyric imagery. *AClass* 41:5-27.
- Latacz, J 1986. Zu den "pragmatischen" Tendenzen der gegenwärtigen gräzistischen Lyrik-Interpretation. *WJA* 12:35-55.
- Lefkowitz, M 1981. *The lives of the Greek poets*. London: Duckworth.
- Most, G W 1987. Alcman's "cosmogonic" fragment (fr. 5 Page, 81 Calame). *CQ* 37:1-19.

- Perrotta, G & Gentili, B 1973. *Polinnia. Poesia greca arcaica*. 7th edition. Messina & Firenze: Casa Editrice G. D'Anna.
- Roscher, W H 1965. *Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms [Leipzig: Teubner 1884-1886].
- Rösler, W 1984. Die frühe griechische Lyrik und ihre Interpretation. Versuch einer Situationsbeschreibung. *Poetica* 16:188-89.
- Silk, M S 1974. *Interaction in poetic imagery*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Smyth, H W 1963. *Greek melic poets*. New York: Biblio & Tannen [1899].
- Stanford, W B 1936. *Greek metaphor*. Oxford: B H Blackwell.
- Trumpf, J 1960. Kydonische Äpfel. *Hermes* 88:14-22.
- West, M L 1966. Conjectures on 46 Greek poets. *Philologus* 110:153-4.