The Amorous Gaze: A Poetic and Pragmatic *Koinê* for Erotic *Melos*?

Claude Calame

In his treatise on sensation, Theophrastus gives an account of Empedocles' theory of the senses which has generated much controversy. His attempt at a critical synthesis has been all the more influential in that historians of philosophy have not hesitated, in their customary eagerness to rationalize and systematize, to gloss over its apparent inconsistencies; and this project is all the more contestable since Theophrastus himself is expounding in prose a system of propositions formulated in poetry, in the tradition of hexameter verse.¹ In any case, according to the poet and sage Empedocles sensation (*aisthêsis*) depends on two physiological principles. On the one hand, sensory perception depends on the arrangement of various 'passages' (*poroi*) which permit communication between the perceived object and the perceiving organism; in our terms, this principle would amount to one of the physical permeability of the body to what is outside it. On the other hand, perception can take place because its organs are made up of the same elements as the objects perceived; for example, in the case of vision, of fire and water surrounded by air and earth, the highest-quality perception being guaranteed by just the right mixture of the opposing elements. In addition, the emotions, joy and sorrow, obey the same physical principles of similarity, mixture and communication via pores, and these are also the principles that are foundational to thought (*phronêsis* is the term used by Theophrastus), to which is added *noûs*, intellectual capacity.

It is certainly no accident that the example chosen by Theophrastus to illustrate Empedocles' theory is that of vision and colours, which 'are brought to vision by a flood' (*aporroê*).² There is all the more reason for this choice in that throughout his poem Empedocles makes numerous appeals to his addressee to grasp his propositions through vision; and this vision of cosmo-

1 Thphr. *Sens.* 1–2, 7–24 = Emp. *VS* 31 A 86 = fr. 420 Bollack; on this particular theory of vision, see also Pl. *Men.* 76c–d. For a typical attempt at a rationalizing reading, see for example the classic study of von Fritz (1971) 594–622.

2 Cf. Sassi (2009) 281–285.

logical evidence can itself be physically dependent on touch: ‘Come, see by each palm by what path each thing comes to our notice’.³ Already implicit in Homeric poetry, this physiology was eventually reoriented—not surprisingly, in an atomist direction—by Democritus: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch—in everything we grasp, everything is but atoms and void. As far as perception by looking is concerned, the *sophos* of Abdera replaces Empedocles’ emanations with *eidôla*, ‘images’ which he envisions as detaching themselves from objects made up of atoms and coming to strike the relevant sensory organ. If, as mere aggregates of atoms, objects produce ‘primary’ qualities naturally, the perspective of the person perceiving them is inevitably involved in their perception, so that ‘secondary’ qualities are produced by convention.⁴

1 The Divine Physiology of the Amorous Gaze and Erotic Poetry

It happens that the conception of the amorous impulse animating Greek erotic poetry is founded on a particular physiology and anthropology of looking.⁵

O heart, we must pluck loves (*erotes*)
 in the opportune time of youth.
 He who, seized (*drakeis*) by the flickering rays cast by Theoxenus’ eyes
 is not submerged in desire (*pothoi*)
 Must have a black heart, forged of steel or iron by a cold flame
 Disdained by Aphrodite of the arching eyebrows,
 Whether he toils under the pressure of poverty
 Or is a slave on the hard road of female arrogance.
 But as for me, because of the goddess I melt

3 Emp. vs 31 B 3.9–13 = fr. 14.9–13 Bollack; see also vs 31 B 17.19–20 = 31.19–20 Bollack, vs 31 B 21.1–3 = 63.1–3 Bollack, etc., with the commentary by Rosenfeld-Löffler (2006) 30 and 94–97, citing the additional appeals which punctuate the sections of Empedocles’ poem now known from the Strasbourg Papyrus.

4 Democr. vs 68 B 9, 11 and 125, as well as A 77; on the material component of colours in Democritus, see Sassi (2009) 285–287.

5 Pi. fr. 123 Snell-Maehler, lines 1–12; see Hubbard (2002) and the commentary I have provided on the physiology of amorous desire in Calame (2009³) 31–38 (this self-citation prompts me immediately to tender my apologies to the reader of this article for the repeated references to my previous work—part of growing old ...). The gaze also plays an essential role in erotic iconography; examples in Skinner (2004) 85–97. As for the frequent ‘eroticization’ of the addressee of a melic praise-poem, see the recent study by Rawles (2011) 146–159.

Like the wax of holy bees bitten by the heat of the sun
 As soon as I see the youthful bodies of boys in their prime of life.
 So, for sure, in Tenedos, Persuasion and Grace
 Dwell in the son of Hagesilas.

Leaving aside the masculine presumption of this symposium piece, it is precisely the gaze that is revealed here as the vector of erotic desire. It is an active gaze in so far as it concerns the young Theoxenus of Tenedos, and a passive one (*drakeis* corresponds to a form of the passive) for the adult poet who has composed this song of praise, taken up again by the guests at the banquet. The oxymoron of the 'cold flame' that forged the unfeeling heart combines fire and water, just as the earlier metaphor of the flickering effect of the gaze was enhanced by being juxtaposed to that of the submerging wave.⁶ But the force of desire conveyed by the gaze is not alone in acting upon the sense-organ and emotions of the anonymous figure who is clearly distinguished from the poetic 'I'; Aphrodite also intervenes—she, too, mobile in the intensity of her gaze. The physical and material effects of eros are animated, then, by the divine force embodied by Aphrodite. No doubt this conception, which combines a purely physical process and a divine energy, has something surprising about it. Nonetheless, we find it in Empedocles himself, since the material and physical movements of the cosmos from unity to multiplicity and vice versa are animated by the alternation of Neikos and of Philotes—Strife and Love: both are understood by Empedocles as a force of unifying aggregation and as one of balanced harmonization.⁷ The same idea is present in the interpretation given by the post-classical Derveni commentary for the process of the creation of the cosmos, as it is displayed in the classical cosmo-theogonic poem attributed to Orpheus. If the Orphic account of the creation of the world out of a primordial ejaculation is reduced to a purely physical process of emergence, agglomeration and configuration of particles, the process as a whole is nonetheless still dominated by the creative force of Zeus; and the divine cosmogonic force itself is identified, in the Orphic manner, as Aphrodite, Persuasion and Harmony.⁸

6 Greek melic poetry contains a vast range of visual metaphors centred on light, notably to express the impact of a desirable person: see Nünlist (1998) 162–177; for the metaphors of the stream and the source, cf. 189–193.

7 Emp. vs 31 B 17.7–8 and 16–20; cf. Trépanier (2004) 160–163 and 184–186. On the erotic gaze as medium of Peitho, the servant of Aphrodite, in classical iconography, see Frontisi-Ducroux (1996) 81–85.

8 *P.Derveni* col. xxi.1–12; on this cosmogonic movement, see now the extended commentary by Kouremenos, Parássoglou and Tsantsanoglou (2006) 243–252; see also Calame (2010) 29–31.

Outside of any 'lyricism', Greek melic poetry, animated by the feeling of love, provides a series of metaphorical phrases for the verbal expression of a desire which is conceived as a physical stream conveyed by looking, but which acts like a divine force. This power is incarnated in the young adolescent with wings who is such a common presence in the later Attic iconography of the symposium, especially in scenes of erotic pursuit and amorous courtship; the name of this deity is, of course, Eros.⁹ Now, marked as it is by first-person forms describing in a self-referential manner the activity of a poetic persona engaged *hic et nunc*, the different forms of melic poetry cannot be reduced to the simple textual expression of the feelings of the poet considered as an individual author. As musical forms sung and danced according to rhythms inscribed into their diction, the melic poems lead back to collective practices involving the body.¹⁰ That is to say that their performance includes the physiological dimension at the foundation of the Greek understanding and representation of erotic desire. From here it is no surprise to notice that, particularly in erotic poetry, the communicative energy of the poem is transmitted by the gaze. It is these correspondences between the role of sight in the manifestation of amorous desire through the power of eros and the role of the gaze in the performance of a song that was danced to (?) as a physical practice involving the body that we would like now to illustrate briefly, by discussing a few poems which, to tell the truth, have come down to us in a lamentably fragmentary state.

2 Hagesichora's Partheneion: The Erotic Gaze and Songs of Action

Among these poems inspired by eros are those which Alcman composed for choruses of young girls in the service of the city-state of Sparta. Bringing together adolescents from aristocratic families and from Lacedaimonia's two royal families, these choral groups—let us briefly remind ourselves—followed a course of initiation; through musical and gymnastic training, this choral cursus led adolescents from good families in Sparta to the erotic maturity of the adult woman and to the status of spouse, in the full bloom of fertile feminine

9 For the pre-classical and classical iconography of Eros, represented as a young boy with wings, see the documents collected in *LIMC* 111/2 s.v. *Eros*, 600–605, 615–618, 619–626 and 628–633 in particular.

10 On the necessity of abandoning, for the pragmatic poetry of the Greeks and for compositions which present themselves as acts of song, the modern concept of 'lyric' and returning to the indigenous category of *melos*, see my studies of (2006) and (2009).

beauty. Among the educational and initiatory tests to which these young girls submitted in a truly ‘anthropopoietic’ process of collective and cultural construction of man and woman, was the musical performance of choral songs; they were performed on the occasion of different cultic celebrations which provided a rhythm to the calendar of civic and social life in pre-classical Lacedaemonia.¹¹ A few textual traces of these initiatory choral performances have come down to us thanks to poems which the Alexandrian editors classed under the generic label of partheneia.

The partheneion of Alcman transmitted by the Mariette Papyrus (*PMGF* 1 = fr. 3 Calame, *P.Paris* 71), is dominated by the gaze, both from the semantic and from the enunciative point of view; and that is the case from the moment of transition in the poem from ‘narrative’ to ‘discourse’, marked by the ‘formal apparatus of enunciation’ (to take up the three concepts central to the analysis of Émile Benveniste).¹² After the initial narrative of the struggle of the Dioscuri—as sons of Tyndareus, exemplary figures for young Spartans—against the sons of Hippocoon, their probable rivals in love (and not without a gnomic allusion to the vanity of wanting to ‘marry Aphrodite’), and after a *makarismos* assuring the transition from the ‘mythic’ past to the present of mortal men and their ephemeral joy, the choreutai move to a self-referential description of action, marked by the enunciative repetition of the forms *I/you*, *here* and *now*.¹³

Divine retribution exists.
 Happy is he who, forewarned,
 passes his days without tears.
 As for myself, I sing
 40 the light of Agido;
 I see it rising like the sun;
 Agido conjures it into appearing for us.

11 In Calame (2012a), I have returned to the central role played in the political culture of pre-classical Sparta by the arts of the Muses in performance as an anthropopoietic process of ritual education of the citizen and his spouse.

12 On the implications for Greek poetry of the three concepts proposed by Benveniste in his classic studies of (1966) 237–250 and 258–266, and (1974) 79–88, see for example Calame (2005) 1–13, (2008), and (2009).

13 Alcman. *PMGF* 1.1–39 = fr. 3.1–39 Calame; as for the double mythic narrative which opens the partheneion, I prefer the hypothesis of Gengler (1995) (a local version of the struggle of the Tyndaridae against the sons of Aphareus over the abduction of the Leucippidae [?]) to that formulated by Ferrari (2008) 53–67 (insertion of the myth of Phaethon).

- But the illustrious choregos does not allow me
to address to him either praise or blame.
- 45 Indeed, she appears to me to distinguish herself
as much as if, in the middle of a herd of mares,
a vigorous charger (?) was placed,
victorious in the games, of thunderous gallop,
a horse worthy of winged dreams.
- 50 But don't you see?
On one side the Enetic courser;
on the other the locks
of my cousin Hagesichora
flower like pure gold.
- 55 Her face of silver,
why describe it to you in her light?
It's Hagesichora.
And Agido, second in beauty,
courts with her like a Colaxean horse
after an Iberian mare.
- 60 Indeed, like two doves,
they fight for us,
who bring to Orthria a robe,
rising in the ambrosial night like Sirius the star.

First off, the gaze which the poetic 'I' casts in the present (*horô*, line 40) upon Agido; comparing its brilliance to that of the rising sun, the choral group sings about this young woman in a performative manner (*egôn d'aeidô*, line 39), and the act of singing which casts the gaze without a doubt corresponds to a ritual gesture, the witnessing of the sun as it rises (*phainên*, line 43) *hic et nunc*. Immediately, the visual isotopy joins together the description of the beauty of the young girl and the act of song coinciding with the verbal praise; in a recent reading of this line, an interpreter of Alcman's poem has judiciously drawn attention to the ritual dramatization of an 'optical perception'.¹⁴ This line of imagery focused on sight continues in the comparison (by now much commented upon) of the chorus-leader herself to a mare distinguished from a herd of chargers (?) by her appearance (this is the etymological sense of

14 Peponi (2004) 296, in an article that should be read in conjunction with the brief comments offered here.

ekprepês, line 46).¹⁵ The simile not only evokes the chorus of Theocritus, struck by the light and golden beauty of Helen who, as Aurora, shines among the young chorus-members singing the poem; but it also recalls the troupe of young Spartan girls (*Lakaina parthenôn agela*) mentioned by Pindar, or again, the adolescents who (in the famous Spartan song at the end of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*) are guided by the brilliant (*euprepês*) Helen in her role as chorus-leader, and gambol like mares along the banks of the Eurotas.¹⁶

At the beginning of the next strophe it is again to the gaze that the poetic 'I' invites the generic *you*: 'But don't you see?' (*ê oukh horêis*; line 50), in a performative echo of the 'I see' (*horô*, line 40) in the preceding strophe. While this enunciative *you* has been seen as referring to the public assistant at the performance by the chorus of Alcman's song,¹⁷ it seems preferable to link it to the choristers in an act of negative self-description that develops in the following strophe. In an equally self-referential way, the gaze is called to direct itself to Hagesichora: the chorus-leader advertises through her own name her role as leader of the choral group. From the semantic point of view, the beauty of the young girl is once again verbally perceived in the light of its brilliance: locks of hair like pure gold and a face of silver; these comparisons finally exempt the choir from having to go on with its 'luminous' (*diaphadan*, line 56) evocation, so brilliant is the light of the chorus-leader. As for the enunciative dimension, this description of the beauty of the chorus-leader is punctuated, through the interposition of demonstratives, by a sequence of gestures of verbal deixis; they refer the perception of Hagesichora's beauty, *hic et nunc*, back to the power of words.¹⁸ This semantic-enunciative dynamic, centered on vision, continues in the following line about Agido: first, in the use of a visual term, *to (w)eidos* (line 58), to describe her beauty; and then in the comparison of the two young women to two doves rising in the sky like the star Sirius, known for its brilliance.¹⁹ The visual effect produced by the light

15 On the visual role and the erotic dimension of this simile, see Calame (1977) II 67–70.

16 Theoc. 19.21–31; I take up the question of the subtle enunciative structure of the poetic and aetiological song of praise to Helen 'of the rose skin' disguised as a ritual epithalamium in Calame (2012b). For *agela* in which adolescent girls and boys seem to have held symbolic ties of kinship (at the level of cousins) see Pi. fr. 112 Snell-Maehler, with the comments by Calame (1977) I 372–385; cf. Ar. *Lys.* 1305–1315.

17 This is the suggestion put forward by Peponi (2004) 300, 309 and 313.

18 The deictic role of these demonstratives has been well described by Peponi (2004) 301–304.

19 See my commentary on these lines: Calame (1977) II 72–79.

which emanates from these two beautiful bodies is redoubled by the movement of the (ritual?) race in which the two young women are engaged.

Between the visually evocative power of the similes and metaphors and the gestures of verbal deixis which refer back to the visual reality of the performance, Alcman's partheneion oscillates ceaselessly between *demonstratio ad oculos* and *Deixis am Phantasma*, to take up two more concepts dear to another linguist by whom I have willingly allowed myself to be influenced.²⁰

Consisting of the enumeration of various items of finery that the *I/we* claims not to possess—at the same time naming through their anthroponym the choristers who can assume this stance of denial—the next strophe appeals again to perception through vision: an abundance of purple, a finely worked gold bracelet, a mitre from Lydia used as pride (*agalma*, 69) for young girls, the locks of Nanno's hair, the divine beauty (*sieidês*, 71) of Areta, etc., all culminating in the love-charm (*erata*) of (W)ianthemis, whose name evokes the violet. Each of these items of finery, just like the young girls who might wear them, excites amorous desire.²¹ But in fact—the choreutai conclude—it is Hagesichora who 'besets me' (*me teirei*, 77), from a verb which expresses the physical despondency that being in love provokes.²² And verbally induced vision of the objects arousing erotic desire has its effect at the enunciative level when the poetic 'I' expresses the wish of retaining the amorous gaze of one of the young girls: 'May Astaphis be mine, may Philylla look (at me)' (*potiglepoi*, 75). 'And if a beautiful and tender young girl was mine' sings Hipponax, in the same way, in an isolated tetrameter iambic; 'I would want to see (*idên*) her charming (*eraton*) walk and the striking sparkle of her gaze (*prosôpou*)' sings 'Sappho' of a young girl who has by now left her group, having probably arrived at adulthood as a mature woman.²³ It is the erotic power of the gaze which excites, from the point of view of poetic expression and from the point of view of the action in the song, the ritual song of young girls of whom Alcman is probably the *chorodidaskalos*.²⁴

20 I argue for the pertinence of these concepts for Greek poetry in Calame (2004) 420–423 and (2005) 1–4; cf. Bühler (1934) 102–148.

21 On the erotic character of most of the items of finery and of some of the speaking names of the young girls (cited above) see my commentary: Calame (1983) 335–340, with the references to the second volume of my 1977 work.

22 See notably Hes. fr. 298 Merkelbach-West.

23 Hippon. fr. 120 Degani = 119 West; Sapph. fr. 16.17–18 Voigt: according to the etymology of the word, grounded in sight, *prosopon* here refers back to looking (cf. Hutchinson [2001] 166); see also the other parallels which I list in Calame (1977) 11 88–90, to explain the erotic connotations of these two expressions.

24 This particular realisation of the 'author-function' in the context of choral poems destined

But what provides, as it were, the key to the 'optical dramatization' energizing the entire poem is the voice of the chorus-leader, which is compared in the final section to the song of the swan. In fact, after a strophe dedicated to the ritual celebrated for the goddess of the dawn (without a doubt Helen) and marked again by verbs of erotic desire (*erô*, line 88; *eratas*, line 91), the poem of praise focuses once more, probably at the end of the partheneion, on Hagesichora, addressing not only the strong feeling of desire caused by her hair, but also the brilliance of her voice, even sweeter than those of the Sirens. As in numerous other melic songs, the coincidence between the erotic desire that is sung about and the erotic pleasure which pre-classical Greek poetics attributes generally to song in musical performance, is remarkable.²⁵ From the point of view of pragmatics, the aesthetic effect of pre-classical Greek poetry was almost deliberately described in erotic terms because of the erotic predisposition that listeners brought to performances.

3 The Partheneion of Astymelousa: Diction in Erotic Poetry

My claim is that the poetic perception of erotic feeling through the gaze refers back to an asymmetric relation between a beautiful person who, in his or her full bloom, arouses desire, and an older person who feels its impact (or a younger person who aspires to feel it). Through the intermediary of poetic performance, the relation is generally established between two people of the same sex: not a 'homosexual' relationship, but a 'homophilic' one, to the extent that the relationship is transitory. This poetic experience of asymmetric eros, which has an educational as well as an initiatory quality, is realized in the musical performance itself. The performance of pre-classical erotic poetry confers upon the perpetual amorous gap between adolescent and adult of the same sex a transitory, collective and ritual character which evokes the tribal initiation ritual.²⁶ A later development of this will be the philosophical relationship between *eromenos* and *erastês*.

for a sung performance is attested for Alcman in test. 9 Campbell = 5 Calame. This does not necessarily mean that the voice of the poet is implicated in the indefinite and anonymous *tis* in line 47, as Peponi (2004) 313–316 hypothesizes; but in the polyphony of the choral poem in its entirety (cf. Calame [2008]) the voice of the chorus-master can sustain all the gnomic affirmations which, generally speaking, punctuate the melic poem.

25 See Calame (2009³) 77–96.

26 For numerous attestations of an asymmetric relationship constructing a characteristically Greek kind of homophilia with an initiatory function, see Calame (2009³) 119–145.

The frequent focalization of melic poetry on homophilic erotic desire receives striking confirmation from a papyrus fragment of an other partheneion by Alcman that came to light some sixty years ago (*PMGF* 3 = fr. 26 Calame, *P.Oxy.* 2387). Composed, like the Mariette partheneion, in a mixture of trochaic and dactylic meters, the lines which we can read from this fragmentary poem are in a familiar fashion full of erotic desire (again conveyed by sight), both in the semantic description and in the enunciative course of the poem. In a prelude which is unfortunately fragmentary, a strophe containing an invocation to the Muse describes the preparations for a choral performance before ending in a performative verb-form; in a moment of self-reflexive choral anticipation, this verb-form (*tinaxô*, 9) refers to the musical action in which the poetic 'I' is engaged in shaking her blond tresses. Then, after a possible mythical narrative, attention is focalized on the figure of the young Astymelousa, whose name means 'love for the town' and is glossed as 'object of solicitude for the community of citizens' (*melêma damôî*, 74) by the young girls who sing the poem while dancing; Astymelousa is probably the chorus-leader. Now, described in the enunciative present but in the third person (just like Hagesichora in the 'first' partheneion), the young woman is in turn the (probable) subject of a verb of seeing: 'By the desire which loosens the limbs, she casts a glance which dissolves more quickly than sleep or death'.²⁷

It is well known that from epic and iconography to tragedy there are numerous similes and metaphors comparing the 'out of body' state induced by the power of amorous desire which puts us in to sleep, if not to death itself. 'It seems to me that I am almost dead', declares 'Sappho' in the famous poem where she describes the blockage of sensation provoked by the sight of the young girl she loves with her future spouse: passing from the vision of the young girl (*s' idô*, 7), through the hearing of her soft voice and again to the sight of her desire-provoking smile, amorous perception blocks successively speech, hearing and sight (literally: 'I don't see anything through my eyes anymore', line 11) to leave the body prey to a fiery current, to trembling, to sweating and finally to the pallor of death.²⁸ Whatever is to be said about this somatic 'symptomatology' of

27 Alcman. *PMGF* 3.1–10 and 61–64 = fr. 26.3–10 and 61–64 Calame; for poetic parallels to these various expressions of erotic desire, see Calame (1983) 396–401 and 403–406.

28 Sapph. fr. 31 Voigt, with the references in the excellent commentary on the poem by Burnett (1983) 231–243; for choral features in the enunciation of the poems of Sappho see the good study by Lardinois (1996); on eros between sleep and death, including in iconography, cf. Calame (2009³) 56–57 (with the small number of bibliographical suggestions in note 50) and 201–206.

amorous desire, of which we already find isolated traces in Homeric poetry and which are taken up in Hippocratic physiology, the role played by sight is central, along with that played by hearing; it refers back directly to the seductive sweetness of the poetic word.

The remaining lines of the poem grant us a glimpse of the desirable Astymelousa elegantly traversing public space, wearing a crown, apparently in silence; in this walk, which is without a doubt ritual in nature, the young girl appears 'like a star which crosses the sky twinkling or like a golden bough or again like a soft feather' (lines 65–70). Just as in the partheneion of the Mariette papyrus, what is being poeticized here is both the splendor of the beauty of the young girl (in the simile with the star and the reference to gold) and her movement; this is compared to the light flight of a feather, with a probable allusion to choral dance. Added to this is the perfumed oil from Cyprus which, evoking the seductiveness and charm (*kharis*, 71) of Aphrodite, perfumes the young girl's hair. The anthropological comparison shows that this sensory perception of the body of the young girl in her grace and fragrance contributes to the social construction not only of the gender, but also of the age-class.²⁹

If, as in the other partheneion, visual impressions lay the foundation for the laudatory description of the young girl assuming the role of the chorus-leader, sight also underwrites the act of singing. Indeed, at the end of the strophe dedicated to the erotic praise of Astymelousa, looking re-establishes the enunciative dimension of the poem. In these very lacunose lines, the poetic 'I' expresses the wish to see (the chorus-leader), to get close to her and to take hold of her delicate hand; the gesture is certainly erotic, but it could also be involved in a choral dance. This is shown by contemporary iconography, which often represents groups of young girls dancing in a circle, holding each other by the wrist.³⁰ Accompanying the song of action identified in the following line by the temporal deictic *nun de* (line 82; a reference to the *hic et nunc* of the melic poem), looking is now associated not with hearing, but with touch, which emerges as in some way complimentary to the seeing, hearing and touching that are longed for in this poem of praise for the beautiful Astymelousa, leader of the chorus.

29 Gélard (2010) 175–186, gives a good example of a ritual and 'gendered' appeal to the sense of smell in a traditional society. For parallels in the similes of Alcman see again my commentary: Calame (1983) 407–412.

30 Cf. Calame (1983) 417–418.

4 Erotic Gazes from Sappho to Pindar

But let us return to looking and its double semantic and enunciative role. As we have already seen in our discussion of poems by Pindar and Sappho, poetic and metaphorical descriptions of erotic physiology are not to be found only in the partheneia composed by Alcman and sung by young girls from Sparta. Echoing the word *potiglepoi* ('may she cast her gaze', 75) in the first poem we discussed by Alcman, the form *potiderketai* ('she casts her gaze towards', 61), which marks the praise of the chorus-leader in the second partheneion, is inserted into an explicitly amorous expressive context. Without a doubt, it is the poetic 'I' himself who is struck by the desire which is conveyed by the gaze of the young woman with the charming gait and the elegantly perfumed locks. In any case, as well as being compared to sleep and death for the effect of sweet annihilation that it provokes, this erotic gaze is also described as *takeros*, 'melting' (61). Now, this melting effect is attributed to Eros himself not only in an expression drawn by a scholiast from a poem by Anacreon, but above all in the first lines of a famous poem of Ibycus:³¹

Eros again casts me a humid (*takeros*) look
 From beneath his somber eyelashes;
 Through his charms of a thousand detours
 He throws me into the nets of Aphrodite.
 Ah yes, I tremble when I see him come near me
 Just as the courser (?) destined for victory, when age comes on,
 Turns against his will, under the yoke of his harness, towards the race-
 course.

The dissolving effect of Eros' glance evokes the sparkling gaze of the young and beautiful aristocrat from Tenedos poeticized by Pindar, which provoked a wave of desire and an effect of melting (*takomai*, line 11) like that produced on beeswax by the biting heat of the sun.³² In the same way, the eyes of the handsome Echekratidas of Thessaly fill the poetic 'I' with desire in these elegiac lines by Simonides published in 1992:³³

31 Anacr. *PMG* 459, then Ibyc. *PMGF* 287, whose first lines are cited by Pl. *Prm.* 137a.

32 For Pi. fr. 123 Snell-Maehler, cf. above, note 5.

33 Simon. fr. 22.9–14 West² (the first two lines of the Greek text are incomplete); see the comments of Bowie (2009) 132–135, with the parallels collected by Mace (2001).

And, on perceiving with my eyes Echekratidas
 of the shining locks, I would take his hand
 So that the young flower of his body full of charm [touched me]
 and so that he with his gaze poured on me a libation of dissolving
 lust.
 And I, stretched out with the young lad among the flowers,
 would enjoy a moment of delicate happiness ...

Whatever the scenario that lies behind this hypothetical scene described in lines that are, once again, very fragmentary, what is central to the poetic expression of erotic desire is the liquid quality of the gaze which melts what it looks upon. And here it is very precisely the complexion of the young man which produces charm, a charm created by desire transmitted by a look; just as in the choral song that Alcman dedicates to the erotic praise of Astymelousa, in the following lines there is a description of the sensory effect (visual or olfactory) created by the young man's flowing locks and the tactile impression produced by taking his hand. From a homophilic feminine relationship we have thus passed, with the same poetic vocabulary and the same physiology of erotic feeling dependent upon the gaze, to the relationship between an aging poet and a young and beautiful adolescent. The allusion to a flowery couch evokes, moreover, the numerous poetic scenes of lovers' trysts on soft grass covered with flowers dear to Aphrodite; there is a possible reference to similar prairies in the great beyond, if it is true that the poem is about an adolescent who has died prematurely and has already passed on to the Isles of the Blessed.³⁴

Now, the expression *lusimelês pothos* (or *eros*: 'which loosens limbs') which precedes in the poem the mention of the gaze dissolving one more effectively than sleep and death, goes well beyond the admittedly blurry boundaries of melic poetry. For sure, Sappho sings 'Eros again shakes me, the one that breaks limbs, the irresistible animal, the sweet-bitter'; in a hymn she also describes, in relation to dazzling beauty and a gaze sweet as honey, the *eros* which is poured out onto the desirable face of a young married woman, honored by Aphrodite. But the cosmogonic *Eros* of Hesiod is also characterized as *lusimelês*, the one that 'tames in their breasts the reason and will of all gods and men'; the formula slides easily into the epic diction and dactylic hexameter of the *Theogony*. And in an asynartete by Archilochus, the poetic subject

34 For similarities between the gardens of love and the prairies of the world beyond see my study: Calame (2007). On the gesture of taking a beloved's hand see above, n. 30.

addresses himself to a companion who has been, so to speak, tamed by 'the passionate desire which loosens the limbs' (*ho lusimelês pothos*).³⁵

5 An Erotic Poetics between the Semantics and Pragmatics

In its formulaic quality, the poetic language of amorous desire has apparently little concern for the boundaries drawn by sexual identities. Both from the lexical and the syntactical points of view, the poetic expressions that we meet offer possibilities for variation and for adaptation to the meter, genre, and enunciative context of each particular poem; they belong to a traditional language of some plasticity for the poetic and pragmatic expression of desire animated by Eros and Aphrodite.

If the young girls singing Alcman's second partheneion can pronounce themselves struck by the dissolving gaze emanating (without a doubt) from the chorus-leader, in the banquet-poem by Pindar it is the masculine poetic 'I' which melts like wax in the sun under the Aphrodite-inspired gaze of the young man. On the one hand, then, we have a homophilic and asymmetric female relationship, and on the other hand a male relationship of the same sort; in the first case, the perspective is that of the adolescent choreutai, and in the second case, that of the male singer. But the Eros of Hesiod also favors the perfectly symmetrical and reciprocal union of the gods with goddesses for theogonic procreation, in the most ordinary type of heterosexual relationship. In the great scene of seduction which marks the middle of the *Iliad* it is only when Zeus perceives (*iden*, repeated several times) Hera decked up in all the finery given her by Aphrodite that Eros fills the king of the gods with desire. Both the use of the term *philôtês* and that of the dual in the description of the love-scene which follows indicate the reciprocity of feeling in this relationship of love between two adults.³⁶

It is Eros, then, who, notably through the medium of vision, establishes the amorous relations that Greek poetry so often describes, traversing not only sexual identities, but also age classes and enunciative relations. No doubt because

35 Sapph. fr. 130.1–2 and 112 Voigt; Hes. *Th.* 120–121 (cf. also 910–911, with reference to the beautiful gaze of the three Graces); Archil. fr. 196 West²; see also *Carm. pop. PMG* 873.3–4, in an address to *paides*: 'with courage, Eros who breaks limbs flourishes in the cities of the Chalcidians'; on acts of violence by Eros cf. Pironti (2007) 94–100.

36 *Il.* 14.292–296, with the commentary which I have provided in Calame (2009³) 67–72 and 209–216.

of its strongly pragmatic dimension, erotic melic poetry is, from this point of view, essentially focused on asymmetric erotic relationships, expressing an erotic desire that coincides with the act of singing itself: a poetic 'I', masculine and adult, is drawn to the stunning beauty of a tender adolescent boy (Pindar and Simonides) or of a fresh young girl (Anacreon); but this 'I' can also be feminine and receptive to adolescent girls in their bloom (Sappho). In other cases, in an inversion of the usual poetic relationship, it is the young girls in a choral group who express, in a poetic 'we' that is collective though articulated only through the mediation of an adult poet, the erotic emotion produced by a young woman (Alcman); this young woman, usually the chorus-leader, is in charge of the girls' choral development and thus also of their musical and amorous education, which has a significance that comparative cultural anthropology reveals to be initiatory.

But taking our cue from the pragmatism of a form of poetry which is also ritual act we must now turn back from the semantics of the physiology of the erotic gaze to the poetic enunciation of desire embodied in Eros. The opening phrase 'Eros again strikes me' attested in the verses just cited by Ibycus and Sappho also marks the beginning of a poem (the rest of which is lost) by Alcman himself:³⁷

Eros again, by the will of Cypris,
Warms up my heart, which he gently invades.

This same formulaic phrase also animates in an enunciative way the fragmentary beginning of a poem by Anacreon:

Eros again, like a blacksmith, has struck me
With his powerful hammer; he has plunged me into an icy torrent.

If we are ignorant of both the genre and the enunciative context of these two beginnings of poems (though we can assume that the first is a partheneion and the second a song for a symposium), the phrase *Eros (me) daute* implies both the presence of the first person and the verbal gesture of deixis indicated by

37 Alcman. *PMGF* 59(a) = fr. 148 Calame, then Anacr. *PMG* 413 (cf. also *PMG* 358 for an erotic relationship between a masculine poetic 'I' and a young girl from Lesbos). See above Sapph. fr. 130.1–2 Voigt and Ibyc. *PMGF* 287.1–2. For the probable context of Alcman's poem, see Calame (1983) 558–564, and for the combined formulaic and pragmatic quality of the phrase *Eros (me) daute*, see my study, Calame (1997).

the word *de*. Inserted into a formula,³⁸ *daute* means the 'reenactment', at the beginning of a poem, *hic et nunc*, by the *persona cantans* of an erotic experience that is expressed in the poem itself, whether its performance was 'monodic' or choral. Along with the meter of the poem, these formulae contribute to the ritualization of the poem as it is danced and sung, and of the movements or practices of the body that correspond to it. Using language made rhythmical and metaphoric, they activate the gaze, the vehicle of erotic desire, with physiological and anthropopoietic effects.

We are facing a poetic language of eros which crosses the various poetic forms, differences of genre and asymmetries of age, all the while conforming to a metrical, dialectal and sometimes lexical point of view to specific localities: is this not a paradigm of the dialectic between the 'pan-Hellenic' and 'epichoric' identified by scholars? For ourselves, we would prefer to this idea, as far as the arts of the Muses are concerned, the concept of a 'Greek network of musical poetry' or of a 'song and performance culture network'; a notion to be developed in some other study.

To return finally to the physiology of the erotic gaze in a poetic aesthetic, we can conclude our discussion with two brief references to Plato. First, it may be helpful to recall the etymologizing speculations offered in the *Cratylus* concerning the vocabulary of erotic desire. On the one hand, besides *pothos*, nostalgic desire, which alludes to something absent (located 'somewhere', *pou*), *himeros* (according to Plato) signifies imperious desire, since it flows impetuously (*hiemenos rhei*) to sweep away the soul in its flow; on the other hand, *eros* too is conceived of materialistically as a current (*rhoê*) since from outside it flows into (*esrhei*) the soul and it 'runs into the inside through the eyes'.³⁹ But it is also Socrates who, in his speech in front of Phaedrus inspired by the poet Stesichorus, seizes on the amorous relationship between an adult *erastês* and a young *eromenos* to signpost the way towards beauty in itself.⁴⁰

38 No doubt it is this formulaic character that explains the probable taking up of some of Alcman's poems by men's symposia, according to the hypothesis advanced by Carey (2011) 447–451; for example, the two verses of Alcman mentioned in n. 36 (no doubt extracts from a partheneion) were interpreted by the ancient scholar who cited them in terms of a heterosexual relationship between the poet and the chorus-leader, now transformed into a poetess (!); cf. Rawles (2011) 140–143.

39 Pl. *Cra.* 420a–b.

40 Pl. *Phdr.* 244a–b and 251a–d.

On the other hand, he who is a recent initiate, he who has eyes full of visions of the beyond, this man, when he comes to see the face (*prosôpon idêi*) which is divine, which is a felicitous imitation of beauty (*kallos*) or form of a body, he begins by trembling (...); then he is covered in sweat, feeling a heat he is not used to. And indeed, when he has taken in the onrush (*aporroê*) of beauty, then he finds that his body is hot and that his hair is standing on end; and this heat melts (*etake*) the hard material which, for a long time, had been blocking up the holes where the wings come out, stopping them from sprouting (...). Each time then that, lifting up his eyes towards the beauty of the young boy and taking into his body the particles which detach themselves to come towards it—whence the expression ‘a wave of desire’ (*himeros*)—the soul is enlivened and warmed up, it is healed of suffering and is completely joyful.

Such is the liberating effect of the erotic current that, transmitted by the gaze, courses from the beautiful young body to the man who perceives it, bringing him joy and freedom; this is why, as Socrates will comment ironically quoting a line from Homer, Eros ‘gives you wings’. And this is how the foundations are laid for a truly anthropopoietic aesthetics.

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