

## INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERVISUALITY IN HELIODORUS<sup>1</sup>

The opening scene of Heliodorus' novel is a very elaborate *ekphrasis* that results in a sophisticated interplay between visual and textual data. Let's start with a synthetic recapitulation of the passage.

The reader is immediately guided to identify himself with a band of Egyptian pirates who are moving in the Delta of the Nile. The pirates, as they arrive at the top of the hill that dominates the shore, first scan with their eyes the expanse of sea beneath them; then they turn their attention to the beach. And just here the *ekphrasis* begins. The passage can in all respects be qualified as ekphrastic, even if its ekphrastic nature is not denounced by any authorial voice or by the intervention of any internal narrator<sup>2</sup>. What the novelist does is simply to describe in words the images processed by the retina of the pirates<sup>3</sup>. And what the pirates see is the scene of an horrible massacre (the wording uses terms that point towards visibility, towards the process of seeing: τῇ θέᾳ, θέατρον)<sup>4</sup>. The most relevant elements (variously marked by the rhetoric of the passage) are the following:

- the tangle of the bodies, some already dead, others still writhing in agony (σπαιρόντων)

- the perception of a banquet that has degenerated into a fight, as many signs suggest:

- a) the tables set with food, some of which upset on the ground and held in their hands by dead men who have tried to use them as weapons, some covering the bodies of other dead men who have tried to hide under them;

- b) the wine bowls upturned, slipped from the hands of people who wanted to drink or to use them like stones;

- c) the drinking vessels used as missiles;

- the nature of the wounds, which have been inflicted by different blunt instruments (axes, stones, torches, clubs) but in most cases are the consequences of arrows and archery.

The description clearly aims to evoke a strange and surprising scene, in which two opposite and apparently irreconcilable situations are combined or connected, the banquet and the massacre: the last sentence is very signi-

<sup>1</sup> This article is the revised version of a paper presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Ancient Novel (ICAN V), Houston, Texas, 30 September - 4 October 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Bartsch 1989, 46; Whitmarsh 2002, 118; Webb 2009, 181.

<sup>3</sup> Morgan 1991, 86.

<sup>4</sup> Bartsch 1989, 114; Winkler 1982, 97.

ficant, because it is constructed using a sequence of antithetic couples (winning / dying, pouring of drink / spilling of blood, etc.).

#### Heliod. 1.1.1-6

ἐπὶ τὸν πλησίον αἰγιαλὸν τῇ θέᾳ κατήγοντο. καὶ ἦν τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ τοιάδε [...] ὁ δὲ αἰγιαλός, μεστὰ πάντα σωμάτων νεοσφαγῶν, τῶν μὲν ἄρδην ἀπολωλότων, τῶν δὲ ἡμιθνήτων καὶ μέρεσι τῶν σωμάτων ἔτι σπαιρόντων, ἄρτι πεπαῦσθαι τὸν πόλεμον κατηγορούντων. ἦν δὲ οὐ πολέμου καθαροῦ τὰ φαινόμενα σύμβολα, ἀλλ' ἀναμείμικτο καὶ εὐωχίας οὐκ εὐτυχοῦς ἀλλ' εἰς τοῦτο ληξιάσης ἐλεεινὰ λείψανα, τράπεζαι τῶν ἐδεσμάτων ἔτι πλήθουσai καὶ ἄλλαι πρὸς τῇ γῇ τῶν κειμένων ἐν χερσὶν ἀνθ' ὀπλῶν ἐνίοις παρὰ τὴν μάχην γεγενημένοι· ὁ γὰρ πόλεμος ἐσχεδίαστο· ἕτεραι δὲ ἄλλους ἔκρυπτον, ὡς ὦντο, ὑπελθόντας· κρατῆρες ἀνατετραμμένοι καὶ χειρῶν ἔνιοι τῶν ἐσχηκόντων ἀπορρέοντες τῶν μὲν πινόντων τῶν δὲ ἀντὶ λίθων κεχρημένων· τὸ γὰρ αἰφνίδιον τοῦ κακοῦ τὰς χρείας ἐκαινοτόμει καὶ βέλεσι κεχρηῆσθαι τοῖς ἐκπώμασιν ἐδίδασκεν. ἔκειντο δὲ ὁ μὲν πελέκει τετρωμένος, ὁ δὲ κάχληκι βεβλημένος αὐτόθεν ἀπὸ τῆς ῥαχίας πεπορισμένῳ, ἕτερος ξύλῳ κατεαγῶς, ὁ δὲ δαλῶ κατάφλεκτος, καὶ ἄλλος ἄλλως, οἱ δὲ πλεῖστοι βελῶν ἔργον καὶ τοξείας γεγενημένοι. καὶ μυρίον εἶδος ὁ δαίμων ἐπὶ μικροῦ τοῦ χωρίου διεσκεύαστο, οἶνον αἵματι μίανας, καὶ συμποσίους πόλεμον ἐπιστήσας, φόνους καὶ πότους, σπονδὰς καὶ σφαγὰς ἐπισυνάψας, καὶ τοιοῦτον θέατρον λησταῖς Αἰγυπτίοις ἐπιδείξας.

“Their eyes were drawn to the beach nearby. This is what they saw [...] But the beach! – a mass of newly slain bodies, some of them quite dead, others half-alive and still twitching, testimony that the fighting had only just ended. To judge by the signs this had been no proper battle. Amongst the carnage were the miserable remnants of festivities that had come to this unhappy end. There were tables still set with food, and others upset on the ground, held in dead men’s hands; in the fray they had served some as weapons, for this had been an impromptu conflict; beneath other tables men had crawled in the vain hope of hiding there. There were wine bowls upturned, and some slipping from the hands that held them; some had been drinking from them, others using them like stones, for the suddenness of the catastrophe had caused objects to be put to strange, new uses and taught men to use drinking vessels as missiles. There they lay, here a man felled by an axe, there another struck down by a stone picked up then and there from the shingly beach; here a man battered to death with a club, there another burned to death with a brand from the fire. Various were the forms of their deaths, but most were the victims of arrows and archery. In the small space the deity had contrived an infinitely varied spectacle, defiling wine with blood and unleashing war at the party, combining winning and dying, pouring of drink and spilling of blood, and staging the tragic show for the Egyptian bandits.”<sup>5</sup>

After the *ekphrasis* the arrival of Thyamis’ band sets the story in motion, with Theagenes and Charikleia being captured by the newly arrived pirates and the two main characters going on a long series of various misadventures.

<sup>5</sup> For the *Aethiopica* I adopt J. R. Morgan’s English translation, in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. by B. P. Reardon, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1989.

At the end of book 5, when the long retrospective account of Kalasiris, which began some three books before, draws to a close, the opening scene is replayed, this time not in descriptive form but through a narration. Kalasiris, who was an eyewitness, explains how things went: how it could happen, namely, that the banquet turned into massacre. The reader enjoys now, instead of a ‘freeze frame’, a narrative sequence: the explanation of Kalasiris in fact solves doubts and *aporiai* which the *ekphrasis* was not able to remove. Here is how the events took place according to Kalasiris:

- during the banquet, a violent quarrel breaks out between Peloros and Trachinos, and some pirates side with the one, some with the other;
- Trachinos tries to hit Peloros with the wine bowl, but the other prevents him and fatally wounds him;
- a furious fight begins; everything can serve as a weapon: sticks, stones, torches, and also wine bowls and tables;
- the two lovers do not remain inactive: Theagenes rages with his sword, but it is especially Charikleia who contributes to the slaughter, shooting arrows from the ship, and no arrow misses its target;
- in the end only Theagenes and Peloros remain alive, engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle: Charikleia can’t intervene, because she fears she would hit her beloved, but encourages Theagenes, who with renewed vigor aims a sword-stroke at his enemy and cuts off the arm of Peloros, who runs away.

#### Heliod. 5.32.1-4

τί ἦν ἰδεῖν τὸ ἐντεῦθεν, ὃ Ναυσίκλεις; θαλάττῃ προσεΐκασας ἂν τοὺς ἄνδρας αἰφνιδίῳ σπιλάδι κατασεισθέντας, οὕτως ἀλόγιστος ὁρμὴ πρὸς ἄφραστον αὐτοὺς ἤγειρε τάραχον, ἅτε οἶνω καὶ θυμῷ κατόχους γεγεννημένους. οἱ μὲν γὰρ ὡς τοῦτον οἱ δὲ ὡς ἐκείνον ἀποκλίναντες οἱ μὲν αἰδεῖσθαι τὸν ἄρχοντα οἱ δὲ μὴ καταλύεσθαι τὸν νόμον ἐθορύβουν. καὶ τέλος ὁ μὲν Τραχῖνος ἐπανατείνεται ὡς τῷ κρατῆρι πατάζων τὸν Πέλωρον, ὁ δὲ, προπαρεσκευάστο γάρ, ἐγχειριδίῳ φθάνει διελαύνων τὸν μαζόν. καὶ ὁ μὲν ἔκειτο καιρία βεβλημένος, τοῖς λοιποῖς δὲ ἄσπονδος ἐτέτατο πόλεμος ἔπαιόν τε συμπεσόντες ἀλλήλους ἀφειδῶς, οἱ μὲν ὡς ἐπαμύνοντες τῷ ἄρχοντι οἱ δὲ ὡς τοῦ Πελώρου σὺν τῷ δικαίῳ προασπίζοντες. καὶ ἦν οἰμωγὴ μία ξύλοις λίθοις κρατῆρσι δαλοῖς τραπέζαις βαλλόντων καὶ βαλλομένων. ἐγὼ δὲ ὡς πορρωτάτῳ χωρίσας ἑμαυτὸν ἐπὶ τινος λόφου θέαν ἀκίνδυνον ἑμαυτῷ κατένεμον. οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ Θεαγένῃς ἀπόλεμος ἦν οὐδὲ ἡ Χαρίκλεια, τὰ γὰρ συγκείμενα πράττοντες ὁ μὲν ξιφῆρης θατέρῳ τὰ πρῶτα μέρει συνεμάχει παντάπασιν ἐνθουσιῶντι προσεικώς, ἡ δὲ ὡς συνερρωγότα τὸν πόλεμον εἶδεν ἀπὸ τῆς νεῶς ἐτόξευεν εὐσκοπὰ τε καὶ μόνου τοῦ Θεαγένους φειδόμενα. καὶ ἔβαλλεν οὐ καθ’ ἐν τῆς μάχης μέρος, ἀλλ’ ὄντινα πρῶτον ἴδοι τοῦτον ἀνήλiskeν, αὐτὴ μὲν οὐχ ὀρωμένη ἀλλὰ ῥαδίως πρὸς τὴν πυρκαϊάν τοὺς ἐναντίους κατοπτεύουσα, τῶν δὲ ἀγνοούντων τὸ κακὸν καὶ δαιμονίου εἶναι τὰς πληγὰς ἐνίων ὑπονοούντων.

“Well, what a spectacle ensued, Nausikles! Like a sea lashed by a sudden squall, you might have said, they were whipped into indescribable turmoil by an irrational impulse, for drink and anger had now taken full possession of them. Some sided with Trachinos, bawling that the leader must be respected; others with Peloros, clamouring that the law must be upheld. In the end Trachinos raised his bowl above his head, intending to brain Peloros with it, but Peloros was ready for him and got in first with a dagger thrust through the heart. Trachinos fell, mortally wounded. For the rest of them this meant open war, with no quarter asked or given. They fell on one another, raining blow after blow, one side claiming to be defending their captain, the other to be championing Peloros and the cause of right. There was one confused howl as sticks, stones, wine bowls, blazing torches, and tables flew through the air and found their marks. I had withdrawn to a safe distance and found myself a spot on a hill where I could watch the fighting well out of harm’s way, but neither Theagenes nor Charikleia held back from the action. Acting upon the plan we had agreed, Theagenes armed himself with a sword and to start with joined one of the two parties, fighting like a man completely berserk; and when Charikleia saw the hostilities had commenced, she began shooting arrows from the ship: every shaft found its mark, and she spared none but Theagenes. Her shots were not confined to one side or the other, but she slew whoever was the first to cross her line of vision. She herself was out of sight, but the firelight made her enemies easy targets. They, on the other hand, had no idea what this mischief was, and some even supposed that their wounds were divinely inflicted.”

Scholars do not fail to praise the ingenuity of Heliodorus, who adopts with great skill the Odyssean technique of a circular narrative structure: a beginning *in medias res* and then a retrospective account which goes back in the time, to the point where the two diegetic lines merge<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, one can go beyond the narratological level and make considerations that focus more in-depth on the literary aspects of the *Aethiopica*. The *ekphrasis* of a painting is a way to launch a story which seems to be much favoured by the Greek novelists<sup>7</sup>: one can think of Achilles Tatius’ and Longus’ novels. At the beginning of Longus’ romance, in particular, the story is presented as the verbal transcription of a *graphé*, whose meaning has been explained to the author by an exegete<sup>8</sup>. So the picture (which really exists, as the novelist explicitly claims) contains the story and is the source and the guarantee of its truth. Writing, then, is the art of putting an image into words, i.e. of transcoding it from a visual medium into a verbal medium. In the *Aethiopica* on the contrary the initial scenery exists only in the perception of the characters: it is inside of the story, and not outside of it. Then,

<sup>6</sup> Fusillo 1989, 28-32; Whitmarsh 1998, 97-98.

<sup>7</sup> Bartsch 1989, 40-42; Morales 2004, 37-38.

<sup>8</sup> Longus, Pr. 1-3.

when the pirates (who are the receivers and the creators of the *graphé*) move into action, the *graphé* becomes animated and transforms itself into a story. The story produced by the liquefaction of the picture goes on, from episode to episode, to the point where it finally gives an account of the *graphé* itself. A very brilliant trick, but also a dog chasing its tail: gazing and writing dissolve into one another, as in a room of mirrors. The truth of the story depends on two sources, but each of them depends on the other.

This however is only the first level, the outer frame. But Heliodorus' writing – as we know – is based on a complex intersections of levels<sup>9</sup>. In the opening scene the intertextual game plays a very important role, as many scholars have noticed<sup>10</sup>. In a recent but already influential essay Mario Telò<sup>11</sup> carefully examines the relationship between the *ekphrasis* of Heliodorus and the scene of the *mnesterophonia* ("the slaughter of the Suitors") in book 22 of the *Odyssey*. Let's summarize, very briefly, the key points of the Homeric account:

- Odysseus hits Antinous at his throat, as he is holding the cup and is about to drink; the cup falls from Antinous' hand, a jet of blood trickles down his nose, his foot kicks the table away, bread and meat are poured on the ground;

- the suitors glance at the walls of the hall, searching in vain for shields and spears (πάντοσε παπταίνοντες ἐνδμήτους ποτὶ τοίχους);

- Eurymachus, after trying in vain to appease Odysseus, urges his companions to draw their swords, to use the tables as a shelter against the arrows and to attack all together Odysseus;

- Odysseus shoots Eurymachus, who sprawls over the table, spilling the food and the wine-cup to the floor, while his feet kick out the chair;

- the fight continues, with various episodes; Athena displays her aegis and fills the Suitors' minds with panic; they flee like a flock of birds pursued by vultures; the floor is drenched with blood;

- Phemius and Medon, after imploring and obtaining mercy, sit down beside the altar of Zeus glancing all about them (πάντοσε παπταίνοντε), still in fear:

- Odysseus too glances round the hall (πάπτηνεν), looking for any survivors; but he sees all the Suitors lying in blood and dust: they look like fish caught in a net by the fishermen and strewn in death on a beach.

Telò highlights some clear points of contact between the scene described

<sup>9</sup> Whitmarsh 2013, 45.

<sup>10</sup> Feuillâtre 1966, 105; Whitmarsh 2011, 108.

<sup>11</sup> Telò 2011.

by Heliodorus and the Odyssean text<sup>12</sup>:

- the mention of tables, wine bowls and wine-cups used as improvised weapons echoes *Od.* 22.74-75 φάσγανά τε σπάσασθε καὶ ἀντίσχεσθε τραπέζας / ἰὼν ὠκυμόρων “Draw your swords, and use the tables as shields against his death-dealing arrows” [invitation of Eurymachus to his companions];

- the image of the wine bowls that have slipped from the hands of the banqueters recalls *Od.* 22.17-18 ἐκλίνθη δ’ ἐτέρωσε, δέπας δέ οἱ ἔκπεσε χειρὸς / βλημένου “He sank to one side, the cup falling at that moment from his hand” [death of Antinous];

- the monstrous confusion of blood and wine, festivity and massacre (which is a kind of refrain in Heliodorus’ description) is mirrored in *Od.* 22.9-12 ἦ τοι ὁ καλὸν ἄλειςον ἀναιρήσεσθαι ἔμελλε, / χρύσειον ἄμφωτον, καὶ δὴ μετὰ χερσὶν ἐνώμα, / ὄφρα πίτοι οἶνοιο· φόνος δέ οἱ οὐκ ἐνὶ θυμῷ / μέμβλετο “he [Antinous] was handling a fine golden two-handled cup, about to raise it to his lips and sip the wine, his thoughts far from death”; the contiguity οἶνοιο φόνος, with the two terms of the oxymoron following one after another in the same line, marks the strange overlapping of opposite dimensions.

The presence of the Odyssean hypotext is confirmed by the narrative of Kalasiris in 5.32: Charikleia shoots arrows in every direction and kills most of the banqueters, proving herself no worse archer than Odysseus in the megaron of Ithaca<sup>13</sup>.

In Telò’s analysis great importance is given to the simile which closes the narrative of the *mnesterophonia* in *Od.* 22.381-389.<sup>14</sup> After the massacre, Odysseus gazes round the hall to see if anyone has escaped the death, but the scene that presents itself to his eyes is the tangle of the Suitors’ lifeless bodies, piled on one another, like fish dragged onto the shore by the fishermen’s nets.

Starting from the use of the verb παπταίνω (v. 381), which typically denotes the gaze of the predator, the gaze of the killer looking all around in search of prey, Telò connects the simile of the fish with other passages in which Odysseus is assimilated to a predatory bird: the dream of the eagle and the geese narrated by Penelope in *Od.* 19 and the simile of the vultures developed in *Od.* 22.302-309. Another interesting passage is *Od.* 19.227-231, where Odysseus, talking to Penelope, describes the gold buckle applied to the mantle that he wore years before, at the time of his departure for Troy:

<sup>12</sup> Telò 2011, 585–586.

<sup>13</sup> Telò 2011, 586 n. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Telò 2011, 587-594.

*Od.* 19.227-231

πάροιθε δὲ δαίδαλον ἦεν·  
 ἐν προτέροισι πόδεσσι κύων ἔχε ποικίλον ἐλλόν,  
 ἀσπαίροντα λάων· τὸ δὲ θαυμάζεσκον ἅπαντες,  
 ὥς οἱ χρύσειοι ἐόντες ὁ μὲν λάε νεβρὸν ἀπάγχων,  
 αὐτὰρ ὁ ἐκφυγέειν μεμαῶς ἥσπαιρε πόδεσσι.

“There was an artful device on the face:  
 a hound holding a dappled fawn under its paws,  
 looking upon it as it writhed. Everyone marvelled at how,  
 though they were golden, the hound looked upon the fawn  
 and strangled it and the fawn writhed at its feet trying to escape.”

In this *ekphrasis* visual sensitivity and narrative suggestions coexist: the hound who looks upon the fawn and doesn't allow it to escape, although it is writhing, is a foreshadowing of Odysseus who, after the massacre “gazes” (this is the meaning of λάω) at the corpses of the Suitors, shaking in agony like fish dying on the shore. Heliodorus' pirates, who from the hilltop watch the lifeless (but still twitching) bodies of the banqueters, lying here and there on the beach (in a kind of maritime ‘still life’), are built on the model – both narrative and visual – of ‘robber’ Odysseus. In Telò's opinion, this intertextual game is intended to launch the story in a visible Homeric aura, so that the novel is presented from its very beginning as a re-writing of the *Odyssey*<sup>15</sup>. And there is also – in a meta-textual perspective – the desire of the novelist to define his writing as a ‘predatory’ one: the pirates, conceived on the model of Odysseus, are themselves a model for the novelist, who is about to raid the Homeric poem, plundering it at his will<sup>16</sup>.

So far so good. But the intertextual analysis can perhaps take us a little further. We have seen that in the *Odyssey* the *ekphrasis* of the hound and the fawn is followed by the narrative of the massacre (the *drama*) and then by the simile of the fish, that is to say by the *graphé* – mediated through Odysseus' eyes – which describes the consequences of the massacre. Heliodorus reverses the sequence: the *graphé* of the slaughter, captured by the eyes of the pirates, precedes the narrative of Kalasiris. The reversal is extremely significant, because it stresses the value of the image, as it is ennobled by the literary memory. The picture of the massacre has not only the precarious

<sup>15</sup> Telò 2011, 593: “The laborious process of narrative decipherment through the pirates' deviant focalisation is coupled with a demanding exercise in intertextual decoding, which calls upon the reader's imagination and cunning to reassemble the fragments of the Homeric hypotext by discovering clues, then connecting and supplementing them”.

<sup>16</sup> Telò 2011, 583: “I contend that Heliodorus builds on the ecphrastic dimension of the fish simile occurring at the end of the slaughter of the suitors to represent his novel's relationship with the *Odyssey* in terms of predatory poetics”.

consistency of a subjective perception, but the objective strength of the Homeric tradition. Because of its evocative power it can start the story, and conversely being at the incipit it receives a special accentuation. In the end, the starting device adopted by Heliodorus turns out to be very similar to that of Longus.

One may wonder however if the *graphé* of the massacre owes its evocative power only to the literary memory and to the intertextual game and not – in some extent – also to the iconographic tradition. This is exactly the question which Aldo Tagliabue has tried to answer in a comprehensive study<sup>17</sup>. Tagliabue thinks that in his Odyssean imitation Heliodorus is inspired also by an iconographic suggestion: so we have to do not only with intertextuality but also with intervisuality. Tagliabue builds on the article of Teldò, whose conclusions he accepts to a great extent; he points out, however, that between Heliodorus' passage and its epic model do exist, apart from obvious similarities, also some differences:

- the use of the tables as offensive weapons is not found in the Homeric text, where the tables only serve as shelters (*Od.* 22.74-75);

- the same applies to the use of wine bowls and cups as missiles: an authorial comment emphasizes the innovativeness of this behavior (Heliod. 1.1.4 τὸ γὰρ αἰφνίδιον τοῦ κακοῦ τὰς χρεῖας ἐκαινοτόμει καὶ βέλεσι κερῆσθαι τοῖς ἐκπώμασιν ἐδίδασκεν).

The *mnesterophonia* has indeed its iconographic history, not particularly rich but anyway interesting (the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* lists about fifteen artistic artifacts, the oldest of which date back to the 5th century BC)<sup>18</sup>. The core of the presentations always focuses on the fight between Odysseus and the Suitors: against the backdrop of a banquet the hero shoots arrows and the Suitors attempt to avoid being hit. The sympotic context is always there, so that the massacre is to be seen as a banquet that ended badly: sympotic equipment, like tables, couches, wine bowls, cups, is clearly visible, but its misuse is also visible. Art historians think that this figurative regularity can be traced back to a prototype, that is to say to a monumental painting of classical age, which served as a model for centuries<sup>19</sup>. It could be the one that Pausanias says he has seen in Corinth:

<sup>17</sup> Tagliabue 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Touchefeu-Meynier 1992, 631-634. On the problem of dating these artifacts see also Poggio 2007, 66: "Gli esempi pervenuti di mnesterofonia non sono molti, e comunque non anteriori al V secolo a.C.".

<sup>19</sup> Pasquier 1996, 423.



Paus. 2.3.3

ἔτι γε δὴ καὶ Ἀπόλλωνος ἄγαλμα πρὸς τῇ Πειρήνῃ καὶ περίβολός ἐστιν, ἐν δὲ αὐτῷ γραφὴ τὸ Ὀδυσσέως ἐς τοὺς μνηστῆρας ἔχουσα τόλμημα.

"Near the Peirene there are an image and a sacred enclosure of Apollo; in the latter is a painting of the exploit of Odysseus against the Suitors."

A trace of this iconography survives in late antiquity; Tagliabue mentions three sarcophagi dating from the early 3rd century AD<sup>20</sup>, two of which are of Attic provenance: in all three the use of the tables as weapons is very clear. It is not inconceivable that Heliodorus may have seen them. Moreover, we can get a better idea of what was the standard iconography of the *mnesterophonía* in classical times through an Attic *skyphos* and two wine bowls produced in Magna-Graecia.

The *skyphos* (see the two photos in *LIMC* VI.2, p. 371) is decorated by the Penelope Painter and dates back to about 440 BC<sup>21</sup>. Odysseus, followed by two maids, is ready to shoot an arrow to the right, toward the B side of the vase; here there are three Suitors, who are clearly taking part in the symposium. Two are on the couch: the one of them, pierced in his back, is trying to tear the arrow from his body; the other stretches his mantle as a shelter; a third Suitor is on the ground and hides behind a table.

The first of the two wine bowls, of Apulian production, is decorated by the Hearst Painter and can be dated to 420/410 BC (see the two photos in *LIMC* VI.2, p. 371)<sup>22</sup>; only a fragment survives, which shows the upper portion of seven figures, engaged in a furious battle. The figure of Odysseus is not preserved (it presumably occupied the left edge of the scene); at the center Telemachus attacks a Suitor, taking him by the hair, and is in turn attacked, from behind, by another Suitor who holds a *kottabos*. To the right, a young man with no beard, pierced by an arrow, holds a table and is ready to strike; on the right edge a bearded man tries to protect himself with a carpet, while an arrow flies over his head. To the left another bearded man tries to hide behind a table, but has already been hit by an arrow.

The second is a Campanian wine bowl (from Capua), decorated by the Ixion Painter and dated to about 330 BC (see *Louvre, Guide des Collections* (1989) 175, n° 171)<sup>23</sup>. Among all the representations of the *mnesterophonía* which have survived, this is the most spectacular and dramatic. In the right section of the scene there are the three attackers: Odysseus holds his bow and is helped in his efforts by Telemachus (at his left, protected by the

<sup>20</sup> Numbers 22–24 in Touchefeu-Meynier 1992, 633–634.

<sup>21</sup> Number 9 in Touchefeu-Meynier 1992, 632.

<sup>22</sup> Number 11 in Touchefeu-Meynier 1992, 632.

<sup>23</sup> Number 13 in Touchefeu-Meynier 1992, 632.

shield) and Eumaeus (who is in the upper register, upon Odysseus' head). The Suitors, who occupy at least four-fifths of the scene, are a tangled mass of bodies, painted in different postures; the sympotic context is clearly suggested by the couch, on which some dead bodies lie, while others try to strike back standing on the couch. Others are on the ground, standing or kneeling. Two Suitors use the tables as shields; many hold pots or cups, ready to use them as missiles.

Tagliabue notes that all these representations refer to the fight between Odysseus and the Suitors (that is to say to the section of *Od.* 22 which narrates the *drama*), not to the final outcome (the 'still life' contained in the simile of the fish, which is a sort of *graphé*). Nevertheless, the points of contact with the beginning scene of the *Aethiopica* are obvious. Particularly interesting are two elements which occur both in the iconography (but not in the *skyphos*) and in the novel, whereas they are missing in the Homeric account. The first is the use of the tables as offensive weapons: in the Homeric text the tables serve as shelters (or at least this is what Eurymachus says to his companions), not as blunt instruments. The second is the use of pots and cups as missiles: in the *Odyssey* this doesn't happen, because the Suitors have swords and later they are supplied with weapons by the goatherd Melanthius<sup>24</sup>. Tagliabue concludes that the massacre described by Heliodorus has its model not only in the text of the *mnesterophonia* but also in its iconographic tradition.

I think that we may agree with this conclusion, particularly since – if we believe Pausanias – there was also an iconography which was inspired by the final moment of the *mnesterophonia*. Describing the monuments of Plataea, Pausanias speaks about some paintings exposed in the temple of Athena Areia: one of them, by Polygnotus, represents Odysseus after the massacre of the Suitors.

Paus. 9.4.2

Γραφαὶ δὲ εἰσιν ἐν τῷ ναῷ Πολυγνώτου μὲν Ὀδυσσεὺς τοὺς μνηστῆρας ἤδη κατεργασμένος [...]

"In the temple are paintings: one of them, by Polygnotus, represents Odysseus after he has killed the Suitors."

This passage is interesting because we are told that Polygnotus' painting focused on the outcome of the slaughter: so we can think that its content was a 'still life' in some way comparable with the simile of the fish in the *Odyssey* and with the *ekphrasis* of the *Aethiopica*. Heliodorus therefore may have

<sup>24</sup> Pasquier 1996, 424 n. 16: "La pittura invece insiste più del poema sui vasi rovesciati e rinforza l'immagine del banchetto tragico mettendo nelle mani dei Pretendenti alcuni pezzi di questo vasellame invece delle armi".

drawn inspiration also from this other iconographic line.

Let us summarize what has been said so far. The *graphé* of the massacre in the *Aethiopica* turns out to be a very complicated overlapping of perspectives, suggestions, memories. It is, first of all, what the pirates see, that is to say an image inside the *fabula*, a subjective perception of internal characters. But it is also the re-texturing of the Odyssean *mnestrophonia*, both in terms of intertextuality and intervisuality: the Homeric intertext, evoked by unequivocal markers, gives value and truth to the story from its very beginning; and the visual memory of the iconographic tradition, explicitly alluded to by details which are not Homeric, enriches the scene with an additional density of signification. Behind the pirates' eyes there is the look of Homer: what Homer sees and what the Greeks have seen in Homer.

We can go however another step further. The motive of the symposium degenerated into bloody battle, which has its prototype in the *Odyssey*, is a popular theme also before Heliodorus, both in literature and in figurative art. Thus we cannot rule out the possibility that in the *Aethiopica* a second-level memory is also active. An example is the passage of Plutarch's *De genio Socratis* in which the killing of the tyrants is narrated. When the conspirators, disguised as revelers, enter the room where the two main representatives of the Theban philo-Spartan oligarchy (namely Archias and Philip) are at a banquet, the battle rages on: Archias, overcome by wine, is unable to stand up and is instantly killed; Philip, still lying on a couch, tries to use cups as missiles, but is pushed down to the ground and executed. The rhythm of the narrative is very fast-paced, but it illustrates well the sudden reversal of the situation and the desperate resistance of the banqueters surprised by the conspirators and forced to fight.

Plut. *De genio Socr.* 31 (597ab)

τὸν δὲ Φίλιππον ἔτρωσε μὲν Χάρων παρὰ τὸν τράχηλον, ἀμυνόμενον δὲ τοῖς παρακειμένοις ἐκπώμασιν ὁ Λυσίθεος ἀπὸ τῆς κλίνης χαμαὶ καταβαλὼν ἀνείλε.

"Charon wounded Philip in the neck, and while he tried to defend himself with the cups that were about him, Lysitheus threw him off his seat, and ran him through."

The most interesting text however is a passage of Philostratus' *Images*. Describing the painting entitled *Cassandra*, the author outlines a scene which is very similar to that of the *Aethiopica*<sup>25</sup>: a banquet turned into slaughter, blood mixed with wine, diners who fall lifeless above the tables and spill the wine bowls with their gasps of agony (noteworthy is the use of the verb *σπαίρω*). The scene is based on epic rather than on tragedy: it is the pictorial representation of the fatal banquet narrated by Agamemnon's soul

<sup>25</sup> Winkler 1982, 101 n. 13.

in the *nekyia* of the *Odyssey* (with some reference also to the *mnesterophonía* of *Od.* 22). After the first lines of his description the rhetorician addresses the young boy who is his main interlocutor and points out that the scene can be watched as a *drama*, and in this case it provides the synthesis of a complicated story; but it can be looked upon as a *graphé*, and then it has much more to say and to offer.

Philostr. *Im.* 2.10.1 (= *Cassandra*)

Οἱ κείμενοι κατ' ἄλλος ἄλλο τοῦ ἀνδρῶνος καὶ τὸ ἀναμίξ τῷ οἴνῳ αἷμα καὶ οἱ ἐκπνέοντες ἐπὶ τραπεζῶν κρατῆρ τε οὐτοσί λελακτισμένος ὑπὸ ἀνδρός, ὃς πρὸς αὐτῷ σπαίρει, κόρη τε χρησμοδὸς τὴν στολὴν εἰς πέλεκυν ἐμπεσοῦμενον ἑαυτῇ βλέπουσα—τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονα ἦκοντα ἐκ Τροίας ἢ Κλυταιμνήστρα δέχεται τούτῳ τῷ τρόπῳ οὕτω μεθύοντα, ὥς καὶ τὸν Αἰγισθον θαρσῆσαι τὸ ἔργον. ἢ Κλυταιμνήστρα δὲ πέπλου τέχῃ τινὸς ἀπείρου τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονα περισχοῦσα πέλεκυν ἐς αὐτὸν ἤκεν ἀμφήκη τοῦτον, ὃς καὶ τὰ δένδρα αἰρεῖ τὰ μεγάλα, τὴν τε τοῦ Πριάμου κόρην καλλίστην νομισθεῖσαν τῷ Ἀγαμέμνονι χρησμούς τε ἀπιστομένους ἄδουσιν ἀποκτείνει θερμῷ τῷ πελέκει. καὶ εἰ μὲν ὥς δρᾶμα ἐξετάζομεν, ὃ παῖ, ταῦτα, τετραγώδῃται μεγάλα ἐν σμικρῷ, εἰ δ' ὥς γραφήν, πλείω ἐν αὐτοῖς ὄψει.

“The men who lie here and there in the men’s great hall, the blood commingled with the wine, the men who sprawling on the tables breathe out their life, and yonder mixing-bowl that has been kicked aside by the man who lies gasping beside it, a maiden in the garb of a prophetess who gazes at the axe which is about to descend upon her – thus Clytemnestra welcomes Agamemnon on his return from Troy. And while others are slaying Agamemnon’s followers, who are so drunken as to embolden even Aegisthus for the deed, Clytemnestra, enveloping Agamemnon in a device of a mantle from which there is no escape, brings down upon him this two-edged axe by which even great trees are laid low, and the daughter of Priam, esteemed by Agamemnon as of surpassing beauty, who chanted prophecies that were not believed, she slays with the still warm axe. If we examine this scene as a drama, my boy, a great tragedy has been enacted in a brief space of time, but if as a painting, you will see more in it than a drama.”<sup>26</sup>

What does this mean? In what sense does a ‘painting’ tell more than a ‘drama’? Different answers are possible<sup>27</sup>. But the most likely explanation is that a *graphé* involves the viewer more deeply, it forces him to consider the scene both at a mental and at a sensory level, to evoke parallel situations, which he has to draw from his personal knowledge and from his own experience. The viewer of a *graphé* is absorbed into the dimension of the image, whose internal dynamics cannot be completely separated from the external dynamics of the observer. The *graphé* contained in the opening

<sup>26</sup> English translation of A. Fairbanks, *Elder Philostratus, Younger Philostratus, Callistratus*, The Loeb Classical Library 1931.

<sup>27</sup> Elsner 2007, 331.

passage of the *Aethiopica* also ‘tells more’: it involves the primary users, the pirates, putting them into action (and then launching the story), and it involves the secondary users, the readers, guiding them to the enjoyment of the novel.

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## ABSTRACT:

This article focuses on the opening scene of Heliodorus' novel, a very elaborate *ekphrasis* that results in a famously sophisticated interplay between visual and textual data. My aim is to trace their interrelation back to the *Odyssey*'s *Mnesterophonia*, the obvious model of the scene. I also try to show that Heliodorus, while conjuring up the *Odyssey*, integrates into his narrative the later tradition relevant to the *Mnesterophonia*, which had of course a rich reception, both literary and iconographic. All in all, Heliodorus emerges as a master of intertextuality as well as of intervisuality.

## KEYWORDS:

Greek Novel, Heliodorus, Intertextuality, Intervisuality.