THE MUSES IN APOLLONIUS OF RHODES:
THE TERM ΥΠΟΦΗΤΟΡΕΣ

Verse 22 of the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes closes the proem with a strange invocation to the muses: Μοῦσαι δ' ὑποφήτορες εἶεν ἀοιδῆς. Over a century ago A. Gercke[1] noted how this description of the muses as ὑποφήτορες complicates our understanding of the verse. For Gercke, the verse is an expression of the poet's pride, a proclamation that the muses are subordinate to him; they are the "interpreters" of his song. Gercke surmises that this attitude was censured by Theocritus and Callimachus in different parts of their poetic work, obliging Apollonius to recant[2].

The many scholars who have responded to Gercke's argument[3] have regarded this purported controversy between poets as improbable[4], and have centred their attention on the meaning of ὑποφήτορες. Two meanings are generally advocated: "interpreters", or "inspirers".

The key argument of the defenders of the latter meaning is that Gercke's interpretation is absurd. Ardizzoni, for instance, states that "è senz'altro da escludere che il poeta abbia potuto seriamente esprimere il voto che le muse fossero al suo servizio, quali 'ministre' o 'interpreti' del suo canto"[5]. Ardizzoni backs this affirmation by assigning different meanings to the related terms ὑποφήτωρ and ὑποφήτης; for him, the former signifies "interpreter", and the latter "inspirer" or "suggester". Ardizzoni believes that Apollonius used the term ὑποφήτωρ with the meaning of ὑποφήτης, and it is this that caused "discussioni e polemiche linguistiche, dando luogo alle malevole insinuazioni dei due poeti contemporanei"[6]. In other words, for Ardizzoni the controversy did exist; however, it concerned not poetic conception, but the choice of lexis, and semantics – a not uncommon phenomenon among the Alexandrians.

[1] *Alexandrinische Studien*, "RhM" 44, 1889, 127-50 (135-6).

[2] Theocr. 22.116; Call. *in Dian.* 186; A. Rh. *Arg.* 4.1381-2. According to G. Perrotta, "SIFC" n.s. 4, 1926 = *Poesia ellenistica. Scritti minori II*, Roma 1985, pp. 207-9, the other two passages in Theocritus in which the word appears (16.29 and 17.115) are prior to Apollonius' work.

[3] Cf. M. Fusillo, *Il tempo delle Argonautiche*, Roma 1985, 365-8 and notes 16 and 18 (with a discussion of the bibliography): later, R. L. Hunter, *Medea's Flight: the fourth Book of the Argonautica*, "CQ" 37.1, 1987, 129-39 (p. 134); S. Goldhill, *The Poet's Voice*, Cambridge 1991, 292-4.

[4] With the exceptions of G. Perrotta (*cit.*) and G. Capovilla, *Callimaco e Cirene storica e mitica*, "Aegyptus" 43.3-4, 1963, 356-83 (370).

[5] *Apollonio Rodio. Le Argonautiche, libro I*, Roma 1967, 103-4.

[6] *ibid.* 104.

Unfortunately, there is no firm basis for suggesting this difference in meaning between ὑποφήτωρ and ὑποφήτης[7]. But the claim that the muses cannot be at Apollonius' service – in spite of its aura of traditionalist prejudice – has some justification. The *Argonautica* was an epic poem, for all its innovations, and subject to the rules of the genre; it is hard to see, then, how the role of the muses can be subordinate to that of the poet.

Essentially, as we will see below, many of the difficulties engendered by Apollonius' use of ὑποφήτορες stem from the unjustified meaning of subordination that is read into the word. Verse 22 can, and indeed should, be read without this idea in mind, as the problems inherent in it are of a different nature.

This spurious problem of subordination is also found in the studies that propose translating ὑποφήτορες as "interpreters". We have seen this in Gercke; it is also clear in L. Paduano Faedo's article[8], which deserves examination, albeit brief. This article contains a clear exposition of the reasons for translating ὑποφήτορες as "interpreters", although sadly this explanation is mixed up with constant attempts to stress the muses' subordination (the author even translates the term indiscriminately as "interpreti" or "ministre"). Mrs. Faedo propounds a strange combination of a tripartite hierarchical structure (involving the muses, the author, and the audience) on the one hand, and active and passive functions of the word ὑποφήτωρ on the other – a combination that I find hard to understand: "Nella concezione triadica che emerge dalla poesia alessandrina, ὑποφήτωρ-ὑποφήτης può sí avere un valore attivo, ma solo sul punto piú basso della gerarchia, mantenendo nel contempo il rapporto di dipendenza da quelle piú alte; tale valore attivo non può, cioè essere preso in assoluto. Se, dunque, la musa è ὑποφήτωρ nel senso attivo, lo sarà nei confronti del pubblico inteso come elemento ricettivo, non del poeta che è l'apice iniziale della gerarchia (evidentissima nella costruzione del nesso sintattico: ἐγὼ μυθησαίμην). Se il termine esprimesse una funzione attiva della musa nei riguardi del poeta verrebbe a mancare il vertice della gerarchia rispetto a cui la musa soggiace nella condizione definita da ὑπό"[9]. Apparently, Mrs. Faedo means that the muses interpret Apollonius – a passive function – and transmit this interpretation to the audience – an active function. But who is more in debt to whom? The poet who needs the muses if his work is to be understood, or the muses who act to the profit of the audience as interpreters of his work? Arguments of this kind can lead

[7] Cf. P. Chantraine, *La formation des noms en grec ancien*, Paris 1933, 310-29; É. Benveniste, *Noms d'agent et noms d'action en Indoeuropéen*, Paris 1948, 44-56.

[8] *L'inversione del rapporto poeta-musa nella cultura ellenistica*, "ASNSP" 39, 1970, 377-86.

[9] *ibid.* 381.

to contradictory or unsatisfactory conclusions.

At one point, Mrs. Faedo offers this paraphrase of Apollonius' verse: "il significato globale della frase, sviscerato nei suoi sottintesi immediati, sarebbe questo: mi siano ministre le muse; cioè la poesia tradizionale mi serva da tramite per esprimere la mia realtà"[10]. I do not see exactly how this suggests that the muses are subordinate to the poet. Apparently, the muses do not interpret the poem *passively*; on the contrary, Mrs. Faedo equates them with traditional poetry. But does this mean that traditional poetry is the *interpreter* of the song, and thus its servant? If, like L. Faedo, we accept that ὑποφήτορες means "interpreters", then this is what we must conclude from her paraphrase, but it is an absurd conclusion.

I do not wish to dwell on these criticisms. As I said above, I agree with part of what has been written by both "Gerckians" and "traditionalists" (if we can indeed use these denominations). But we should discard the idea that the muses are subordinate to the poet, an idea that is unacceptable if we translate ὑποφήτορες as "interpreters", and also the somewhat contrived translation "inspirers", for which there is little evidence.

Giangrande supplies a different approach to the problem: "Incredible though it is, nobody appears to have seen that ὑποφήτης, ὑποφήτωρ, and ὑποφᾶτις, when governing the genitive of an *abstract*, invariably mean 'Verkünder', '*narrator*', 'purveyor' (e.g. ὑποφήτορες ἀνιῶν, ὑποφήτορες μύθων, ὑποφᾶτις διαβολιᾶν, ὑποφᾶτις εἰράνας...)"[11]. In my view, this explanation is sensible, although certain aspects of it require some comment.

First, the translation "narrator", without any further specification, is hardly applicable in the first and fourth examples that Giangrande provides: in the first (from Manethon 2.295), the most obvious translation is "purveyor" ("*subornatores*" is the Latin translation in the Didot collection), and in the fourth (from *AP* 6.46 by Antipater of Sidon) a better translation would be "Verkünder". The second example, however, (also from Manethon 3.326) is well translated as "narrator" and the third (from Pindar *P*. 2.76), though usually rendered as "purveyor", could also be translated as "narrator" if we take slander (διαβολιᾶν) as being something that is transmitted, and thus encased in some kind of narration.

There is, then, no single interpretation of the different examples. And so the problem has shifted: even without Giangrande's distinction between cases in which the word governs an abstract and those in which it governs a person, there were different interpretations of its meaning; and now, with his

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[10] *ibid.* 379.
[11] *On the use of the vocative in Alexandrian Epic*, "CQ" 62, 1968, 52-9 (p. 55 n. 9).

distinction, we come upon further variations when the governed term is an abstract. I will try now to show that in Giangrande's examples there is an underlying consistency, and in this way clarify the problem.

The most difficult example is the first one (Manethon 2.295), as the connection between the act of causing (almost supplying: cf. "purveyor") and the act of narrating is unclear. The passage centres on the character of men born under the sign of Aries in conjunction with Hermes: violent, malicious men, πρὸς δὲ κακοφροσύνῃσιν ἀεὶ μερόπεσσι συνόντας, / ὡς δὴ καί τ' ἄλλοις ὑποφήτορας ἔμμεν ἀνιῶν (vv. 294-5). Obviously, these men do not *recount* turmoil, but *cause* turmoil (perhaps indeed through their words: note the correlation between κακοφροσύνῃσιν in v. 294 and ὑπο-φήτορας in v. 295, as if it were the κακοφροσύναι that produce the ἀνίαι, and as if the ὑποφήτορες were their messengers, and only in this way the cause of the ἀνίαι. In any case, Manethon clearly pushes the semantic possibilities of ὑποφήτωρ to their limits. The normal construction is the one we find in the second example, in which ὑποφήτορες μύθων seems to mean "narrator or elucidator of myths", rather than "cause of myths", and also – obviously enough – presupposes previous knowledge (cf. 3.325 ἐν σοφίῃ) of myths. Essentially, the problem encountered in the construction ὑποφήτορες ἀνιῶν is that the ἀνίαι are not the immediate product of the activity of the ὑποφήτωρ, but the effect of this product on others. I think that Manethon, using constructions such as the Pindaric διαβολιᾶν ὑπο-φάτιες, has replaced the product with its effect; thus we find ἄλλοις ὑποφήτορες ἔμμεν ἀνιῶν instead of the grammatically possible and more normal ἄλλοις ὑποφήτορες ἔμμεν λόγων ἀνιηρῶν.

We should remember, nonetheless, that the passage from Manethon is exceptional, and that other constructions are usually found in its place. In general, ὑποφήτωρ is the one who speaks (cf. –φήτωρ) derivatively or on the basis of something else (ὑπο-). It is thus an interpreter, or an indicator, only perceived as such in that it makes known something which otherwise would have no meaning. It is thanks, then, to the ὑποφήτωρ that the μύθοι, the διαβολιαί, or the ἀνίαι (the λόγοι ἀνιηροί) are produced. Moreover, seen in this way, the same meaning can be applied to the constructions using the genitive of a non-abstract noun: for instance, in the Theocritean expressions that describe poets as μουσάων ὑποφῆται (16.29 and 17.115) we should understand that the presence of the muses only becomes known thanks to the poets, which is tantamount to saying that the muses become manifest in the work of the poets, or that it is via the work of the poets that the muses – i.e. their voice and words – become known. In the case of Ἐνυαλίοιο καὶ Εἰράνας ὑποφᾶτιν... σάλπιγγα we should also understand that the σάλπιγξ indicates that Enyalios and Eirene are present – that

men perceive them via the σάλπιγξ[12].

Before looking at Apollonius' passage in the light of these considerations, we should mention two alternative translations. The first is the use of "whisperer" or "he who speaks quietly or in a low voice" to express ὑποφήτωρ. We find this in the Pindaric διαβολιᾶν ὑποφάτιες (Pi. *P.* 2.76) mentioned above[13], and in that instance this translation is not impossible; indeed, it is advisable to utter slander about powerful figures in a low voice. But it is a secondary, added meaning, and one that cannot be justified in cases in which the ὑποφήτωρ is obviously not as quiet as this, as is the case, for instance, of a σάλπιγξ.

The second translation concerns *Arg.* 1.22. C. García Gual translates the verse into Spanish as "¡Ojalá que las Musas sean apuntadoras de mi canto!" ("Would that the Muses be *prompters* of my song!")[14], an idea taken from the theatre. I suspect that the concept of "speaking quietly", which might be seen in the same Greek word as well as into passages such as the one from Pindar quoted above, may have influenced García Gual's choice: the image of the muses whispering to Apollonius, reminding him of what he has to write, is an attractive one, less questionable than most of the other interpretations. But if ὑποφήτορες is understood in this way, then the muses are merely there as an aid to memory (an actor does not need to have his text explained to him; he is expected to have understood it). This interpretation is hardly compatible with the rest of the uses of ὑποφήτωρ, in which the muses' function is to transmit a message which explains, elucidates or reveals something which otherwise would be unknown or unintelligible. In other words, a ὑποφήτωρ is not a μνήμων. Nor is it a simple messenger, a κῆρυξ or a ἄγγελος: a messenger transmits information to a person who was not present at the time the message was set forth, but who *assumes* that the information is accurate and consistent with the original statement. A messenger, then, is a neutral bearer of information; in contrast, a ὑποφήτωρ elucidates the message, and the hearer knows that the message is not the same as the source.

In Apollonius' verse there is no dative to indicate the recipient of the muses' action, but I think that it is clearly Apollonius himself. This would need no explanation except for the fact that it has been suggested that the be-

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[12] And in all the other cases as well, starting with the Homeric *hápax* regarding the Σελλοὶ (...) ὑποφῆται of Zeus (*Il.* 16.234-5).

[13] See, for example J. Pòrtulas *Lectura de Píndar*, Barcelona 1977, p. 243: "the whispering of the slanderers".

[14] *Apolonio de Rodas. El viaje de los Argonautas*, Madrid 1975, p. 50.

neficiary of the muses' interpretation is the audience. If we accept the latter argument, then the muses are ὑποφήτορες 'Απολλονίου ἀοιδῆς ἑτέροις: ἀοιδῆς refers to the poem the *Argonautica*, and Apollonius is saying that no one would be able to understand the poem without the help of the muses. As he hopes to be understood, he asks the muses to make his poem intelligible to the audience, and as ὑποφήτορες cannot mean "bearers of intelligence" or something of that sort, but rather "interpreters, or *elucidators*", Apollonius would be saying that his poem cannot be understood as it stands but has to undergo a change – a ὑποφητεία – which will make it intelligible. But how can a poet say that his work, as it stands, is deficient? And what would be the result of the muses' intervention as ὑποφήτορες? Clearly, the result would be a different poem – a better poem, thanks to the muses. If this is the case, why not write a poem that does not require the participation of the muses? Or is Apollonius declaring his incompetence as a poet?[15]

The difficulties that this causes are insurmountable. But things become simpler if we understand the genitive – either of an abstract noun or of a personal noun – governed by ὑποφήτωρ / -της as the object of the ὑποφήτωρ / -της's action, and, at the same time, its result. So ὑποφήτορες ἀοιδῆς means that the muses elucidate the poem to Apollonius; that is to say, they explain to him the result of an elucidation.

In poetic terms, then, the muses are a literary *function*. This function involves assuming a position vis-à-vis the rest of the texts; the poem is understood to be a text that is "derived" in some way, and, more importantly, from the perspective of this text, the other texts are understood to be the object of interpretation. The poem is thus an interpretation, and its author is the interpreter of the song. Nonetheless, Apollonius is not advocating a "second-degree" poetics, as could be inferred from a conventional, and in my view inadequate, vision of Hellenistic poetry, according to which poetic productions are only variations on the works of the past. Apollonius sets himself the task of narrating a story (cf. v. 20 μυθησαίμην) and states that the material on which he will be working is not only utterly disorganized, but at odds with his own poetic desires. The ὑποφητεία becomes in this way a precondition for the creation of his own poem, and is at the same time the condition of the poem itself.

The *Argonautica*, then, is a poem in which legend is explained in an organized way thanks to a process of elucidation. At the same time, since from the perspective of the poem the other texts are chaotic, they have no functional value. Apollonius suggests this when he confronts them and polemicizes

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[15] In fact, as we will see, readers may feel the need to *interpret* Apollonius' work; but Apollonius is not exempt from this need either.

against them[16], when he expresses doubts about the reliability of certain versions[17], and above all when he apologizes (ironically) for the improbability of some of the episodes that he narrates[18]. Indeed, on occasion his references to other literature are a way of drawing attention to the distances between him and it[19]. In turn, the poem is organized as a compact text, supported by narrative structures endowed with plausibility (characters' motivations, control of narrative time, etc.) and by structuring mechanisms such as the αἴτια[20], which become systems of narrative legitimization, vis-à-vis the *incredibilia* (which are thematic and by their very nature ultimately narrative as well, and thus impede the creation of a convincing story): the *incredibilia* are a reflection of the resistance of the material confronting the poet[21].

As we have seen, it cannot be claimed that the relationship between the poet and the muse is inverted. An inversion of this kind would only be possible if the poet were instructing the muses, and this is not the case[22]. We might also be able to speak of inversion if the poet, without instructing the muses in any way, entrusted them with the task of transmitting his words to his audience. This hypothesis is less absurd, but also harder to justify on the evidence available. This inversion would occur in a different place inside the chain of communication, in accordance with Faedo's thesis. But this would mean either that Apollonius is so proud of his work that he claims that nobody will understand it without the muses' explanation, or that he is saying

[16] Cf. *Arg.* 1.18.

[17] Cf. *Arg.* 4.1381.

[18] Cf. *Arg.* 4.984-5.

[19] Cf. *Arg.* 1.1220.

[20] On the αἴτια, see M. Valverde, *El aition en las Argonáuticas de Apolonio de Rodas*, Murcia 1989.

[21] On these questions, see M. M. Bakhtin – P. M. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, Harvard 1985[2] (1st. Russian edition, Moscow 1928), p. 123: "When the poet selects words, their combination, and their compositional arrangement, he selects, combines, and arranges the evaluations lodged in them as well. And the resistance of the material we feel in every poetic work is in fact the resistance of the social evaluations it contains. These existed before the poet took them, reevaluated them, renewed them, and gave them new nuances".

[22] L. Paduano Faedo (*cit.*) claims that Berthouville Bernay's skyphos A depicts Aratus reading a lesson to the Muse (C. Picard, *Un cénacle littéraire hellénistique sur deux vases d'argent du trésor de Berthouville Bernay*, "Mont. Piot" 43, 1950, 553 ff. makes the same observation). For Mrs. Faedo, the scene is an inversion of Monnus' mosaic at Treveri and the illustration of the Matritensis A 16, with the figures transposed. But there are similarities as well; in each case the poet holds the *radius* and the Muse has her arm over the globe, as if she had control over it, and the poet responsibility for depicting it. On the iconography referring to Aratus and the Muse, see J. Fink, *Die Inspiration des Dichters im Bild. Kritische Bemerkungen zu «Arat und Muse»*, "Gymnasium" 66, 1959, 491-4.

that he is incapable of making himself understood. Neither possibility is acceptable, unless the poem is presented as an 'oracular' work. However, there is nothing to stop the muses instructing the audience, provided, of course, that they also instruct Apollonius: the poem is the ὑποφητεία which the muses perform for Apollonius and the audience. In contrast, if the muses' interpretation is only between the poem and the readers, why should we reject the possibility that Apollonius may also need their interpretation of the existing literature? If this were the case, why would Apollonius, as a literary author, advocate what would be in fact an endless semeiosis applied to art? Neither he nor the "Gerckians" would accept the consequences. The artistic work, as Apollonius presents it, conceives itself as closed and finite, a work which aims at invalidating an endless interpretation; only a new work, converting everything alien to it into chaos, can resume the process of interpretation. Apollonius does not mean, then, an interpretation at the level of reading, but an artistic interpretation.

A variation on the theory of inversion is the theory of reduction: the hypothesis that the function of the muses is less important in Apollonius' work than it is traditionally[23]. But if this hypothesis is based on an evaluation of the importance of the muses' role vis-à-vis literary creation, it is false. There is no reason to suppose that a ὑποφήτευε Μοῦσα is less important than an ἔννεπε Μοῦσα: in the former case, the muse is capable of understanding and making understood what cannot be grasped on its own; in the latter, the muse can transmit knowledge of the facts, a knowledge which derives from compresence. In both cases, the mission of the muse is essential, and the result of her mission the same.

The theory of reduction could also be advocated if we suppose that the area in which the muses intervene as ὑποφήτορες is limited to the form of the poem. P. Händel presents this idea as follows: "Nach Liddell-Scott heißt das Wort (mit -τωρ- oder -της-Suffix) 'Ausdeuter, Erklärer'. So merkwürdig es scheinen mag, auch für unsere Stelle ist daran nicht zu rütteln. Die Musen geben dem Dichter nicht sein Lied ein, sie verhelfen nur zum klaren Ausdruck"[24]. The questions raised by this explanation are deeper than Händel probably intended. Supposing that ὑποφήτορες signifies "translators" (a supposition that we can accept) and assuming that a translation alters not the content but the form, Händel seems to believe that the muses only help Apollonius with formal aspects of the poem ("sie verhelfen nur zum klaren

23 Cf. R. L. Hunter (cit.).

24 Cf. Beobachtungen zur epischen Technik des Apollonios Rhodios, München 1954, p. 10. I am aware of the possibility that this argument may have been suggested by an etymological operation inside the German language (Ausdeuter, Erklärer – klaren Ausdruck); if this is so, obviously, the argument would be invalidated.

Ausdruck"). But if the muses are "translators" and not merely "correctors" (the latter being an interpretation for which there is no justification and which would reduce their role to caricature), we should note that, at least according to current thought, they also transmit a content[25], and that their necessarily clear expression is the expression of a content[26]. Let us suppose, though, that Apollonius sees things differently. Aware of his ability – in ideal terms – to compose an imperfect, incomprehensible work[27], he considers it necessary to provide it with clear expression. The "translator" muses will have to *translate* the first idea – in fact, they will have to interpret it. In other words, the first stage – which is ideal because it depends on the image that the final poem, an aesthetic work, makes of it – is easily assimilated (indeed it *must* be assimilated) in the resistant material that I mentioned earlier. It hardly matters whether we situate the material's resistance outside – and before – the poet, or inside the poet in the critical moment of creation, because, as we have said, this resistance is postulated by the literary text, which is built as an aesthetic object opposed to the extra-textual world: opposed to the other texts, but also opposed to all non-aesthetic reality[28].

In his request for interpretation, Apollonius is not far away from Theocri-

[25] Cf. B. A. Uspenski's definition of signification as "an invariant in the reversible operations of translation" (*On Semantism in Art*, in: *Simposium po strukturnomu izučeniju znakovyh sistem*, Moscow 1962, p. 125).

[26] Cf. I. Lotman *La structure du texte artistique*, Paris 1973 (1st. Russian edition, Moscow 1970), pp. 91-2: "L'expression, par opposition à l'inexpression, oblige à examiner le texte comme la réalisation d'un système, son incarnation matérielle"; p. 40: "Le dualisme de la forme et du contenu doit être remplacé par le concept de l'idée qui se réalise dans une structure adéquate et qui n'existe pas en dehors de cette structure".

[27] It is surprising that the supporters of the controversy hypothesis have not considered the possibility that Apollonius may have been referring to a reinterpretation of the supposed first version of his poem; after all, a hypothesis of this kind is no less demonstrable than one involving a justification or a retraction in other verses in the same poem. I am not defending this reading, but if it were demonstrated it would not invalidate the essential thesis of the present study.

[28] Cf. M. M. Bakhtin, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, Paris 1978 (1st. Russian edition, Moscow 1975, but the passage was written earlier, in 1924), p. 49: "À côté de la réalité de la connaissance et de l'acte, qui préexistent pour l'artiste du verbe, préexiste aussi la littérature: il est contraint de lutter *avec* ou *pour* les anciennes formes littéraires, de s'en servir, de les combiner, d'avoir raison de leur résistance ou de trouver en elles un soutien. Mais au fond de ce mouvement, de ce conflit à l'intérieur d'un contexte purement littéraire, a lieu une lutte plus importante, déterminante, initiale, avec la réalité de la connaissance et de l'acte: *tout artiste dans son oeuvre, si elle est signifiante et sérieuse, apparaît comme le premier artiste; il doit spontanément occuper une position esthétique, par rapport à la réalité non esthétique de la connaissance et de l'acte*, ne serait-ce que dans les limites de son expérience personelle, éthique et biographique".

tus when the latter declares that the poets are the "interpreters of the muses": to compose a literary work is to interpret. In Theocritus, the interpreters are the poets; Apollonius asks the muse to interpret. The muse, then, is his own aesthetic conception[29].

The scholarly, elegant and precise writing of the Hellenistic poets bears witness to the process of putting the material in order and giving it shape. In Philetas of Cos' definition of the ideal poet as ἐπέων εἰδὼς κόσμον καὶ πολλὰ μογήσας / μύθων παντοίων οἶμον ἐπιστάμενος (fr. 10 K.), ἐπέων κόσμος means "simul ornata elocutio et versuum structura, quibus v. 4 opponitur «variarum fabularum cursus»"[30]. The activity of interpretation is the second term[31], as Kuchenmüller also infers: "Hoc loco (...) μῦθος erit fabula, cuius cursum (οἶμον) laboriose poeta eruit ex tenebris". Indeed, the ἐπιστήμη required is not the act of remembering myths, but knowledge of their course; a knowledge which cannot be acquired without effort, and which is proven in the ability to utter an ἐπέων κόσμον.

If an archaic poet found his words "nel gioco selettivo e combinatorio tra testo e testo"[32], what a modern poet finds does not make sense; he has to work to understand it. In fact, he finds nothing, because the texts and the world are here and the only thing he has to find is a literary space. Composing and interpreting are simultaneous operations, but they are theoretically distinct: the awareness of being ἐπέων εἰδὼς κόσμον and at the same time πολλὰ μογήσας / μύθων παντοίων οἶμον ἐπιστάμενος traces vividly the distance between an ἐγὼ μυθησαίμην and the Μοῦσαι ὑποφήτορες, which is the distance between the desire to be able to narrate (μυθησαίμην) and the need to understand, the gap between the word considered one's own (ἐγώ) and the word of others – a gap which, albeit at the expense of exposing it, only a literary work can bridge.

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[29] Cf. E. Livrea, *Apollonii Rhodii Argonauticon liber quartus*, Firenze 1973, p. 286 (*ad v.* 984), in which he argues that Apollonius' Muse is not identified with the literary tradition; he states that Apollonius, on the contrary, "vuole opporre al mito tradizionale la sua concezione poetica (Μοῦσαι) improntata a dotto scetticismo".

[30] Cf. G. Kuchenmüller, *Philetae Coi Reliquiae*, Berlin 1928, p. 63.

[31] Even though it must be expressed by the first term, and in the literary work *exclusively* by the first term: recall the sequence in Manethon 3.325-6 ἐν σοφίῃ... μύθων ὑποφήτορες. In general it could be said that when the term governed by ὑποφήτωρ belongs to the semantic field of verbality (μύθων, ἀοιδῆς...), it is at the same time the object interpreted and the interpretation itself.

[32] Cf. B. Gentili, *Poesia e pubblico nella Grecia antica*, Roma-Bari 1984, p. 73.