

VERBALIZING/VISUALIZING: THEATRICAL MASKS AND THE GREEK EPIGRAM

Within the larger category of epigrams referring to the theatre and the even wider family of epigrams focussing on literature and its practitioners, five epigrams turn to the mask: Asclepiades 27 Gow–Page = *AP* 6.308; Callimachus 26 G–P = *AP* 6.310 and 27 G–P = *AP* 6.311; and Dioscurides 22 G–P = *AP* 7.37 and 23 G–P = *AP* 7.707. Marco Fantuzzi has recently discussed the ‘theatrical’ epigrams as a subset of ‘an entire Hellenistic vogue for epigrams on great literary figures of the past’.¹ This vogue was certainly akin to ‘contemporary projects of literary classification’,² which stemmed from an impulse to celebrate, but more importantly to master, control and eventually assert oneself over the daunting achievements of the past.

The focus of the present paper is more specific: the five epigrams catalogued above will be considered expressly in reference to the presence of the mask. I shall attempt (a) to account for this presence in literary terms, i.e. to show what the mention of the mask does for the epigram in question; and (b) to demonstrate the degree of familiarity with the conventions of post-classical theatre that the epigrammatists take for granted. Finally, focussing more specifically on Dioscurides, I shall examine possible points of intersection between the epigram as verbal and the mask as visual monument.³ This will usher in the broader historical question: why was the mask attractive to the epigrammatist?

Let us begin with the Callimachus and Asclepiades epigrams. All three of these epigrams, obviously literary, refer to dedications of masks. In all cases, though, I shall argue, the dedication seems to have gone awry and the mask is used in order to promote a whimsical programme of debunking. It is only fitting for such a widely popular feature of theatre to take centre stage in what I understand to be a triplet of intricately connected, wonderfully playful epigrams. Ironically, it is precisely the mask’s positive value as one of the commonest metonymies of theatre in the

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¹ M. Fantuzzi, ‘Epigrams and the theater’, in P. Bing and J.S. Bruss (edd.), *Brill’s Companion to the Epigram* (Leiden–Boston, 2007), 477–95, esp. 479–83. Other discussions of ‘theatrical’ epigrams, include J.M. Raines, ‘Comedy and the comic poets in the Greek epigram’, *TAPhA* 77 (1946), 83–102; T.B.L. Webster, ‘Alexandrian epigrams and the theatre’, in *Miscellanea di studi alessandrini in memoria di A. Rostagni* (Turin, 1963), 531–43; M. Fantuzzi, ‘Callimaco, l’epigramma, il teatro’, in G. Bastianini and A. Casanova (edd.), *Callimaco: cent’anni dei papiri* (Florence, 2006), 69–87; and id., ‘Dioscoride e la storia di teatro’, in R. Pretagostini and E. Dettori (edd.), *La cultura letteraria ellenistica. Persistenza, innovazione, trasmissione. Atti del convegno COFIN 2003, Università di Roma “Tor Vergata”, 19–21 Settembre 2005*. Seminari Romani di Cultura Greca, 10 (Rome, 2007), 105–23.

² P. Bing, ‘Theocritus’ epigrams on the statues of ancient poets’, *A&A* 34 (1988), 117–23, at 123.

³ For the dialectics between word and image see, most recently, the excellent essays in N.K. Rutter and B.A. Sparkes (edd.), *Word and Image in Ancient Greece*. Edinburgh Leventis Studies 1 (Edinburgh, 2000).

Hellenistic period that enables the epigrammatists to employ it as an instrument of satirical deflation.

In Callimachus 27 G–P, a mask is dedicated by a victorious actor, Agoranax of Rhodes. However, the dismal quality of the dedication (the mask looks ‘bitten’ and wrinkly like a dried fig)⁴ gives the feeling that the mighty actor, whose prowess aspires to immortality, is just as atrocious as his mask:

*Τῆς Ἀγοράνακτος με λέγε, ξένε, κωμικὸν ὄντως
ἀγκέισθαι νίκης μάρτυρα τοῦ Ῥοδίου
Πάμφιλον, οὐ μὲν ἔρωτι δεδαγμένον, ἥμισυ δ’ ὀπτῇ
ἰσχάδι καὶ λύχνοις Ἰσιδος εἰδόμενον.*

Stranger, bear witness that I am dedicated here as a truly comic witness of the victory of Agoranax the Rhodian. I am Pamphilus, but I am not bitten⁵ by love; I rather resemble a dried fig and the lamps of Isis.

In the two other cases, the grand act of dedicating masks is pursued by school-children, who have excelled in various not-too-grandiose activities, such as a hand-writing contest⁶ (Asclepiades 27 G–P):

*Νικήσας τοὺς παῖδας, ἐπεὶ καλὰ γράμματ’ ἔγραψεν,
Κόνναρος ὀγδώκοντ’ ἀστραγάλους ἔλαβεν·
κάμῃ χάριν Μούσαις τὸν κωμικὸν ᾧδε Χάρητα,
πρεσβύτην θορύβῳ θῆκέ με παιδαρίων.*

Having prevailed in a boys’ contest, because he wrote pretty letters, Connarus received eighty knucklebones as a prize; and full of gratitude he has dedicated me here to the Muses, the comic old man Chares, amidst the uproar of the boys.

... or, probably, a school recital of tragic extracts (Callimachus 26 G–P):

*Εὐμαθίην ἡτεῖτο διδοὺς ἐμὲ Σίμος ὁ Μίκκου
ταῖς Μούσαις· αἱ δέ, Γλαῦκος ὅκως, ἔδοσαν
ἀντ’ ὀλίγου μέγα δῶρον. ἐγὼ δ’ ἀνὰ τῇδε κεχηγὼς
κείμει τοῦ Σαμίου διπλόον, ὁ τραγικὸς
παιδαρίων Διόνυσος ἐπήκοος· οἱ δὲ λέγουσιν·
“Ἱερὸς ὁ πλόκαμος”, τοῦμόν ὄνειρα ἐμοί.*

Dedicating me to the Muses, Simus son of Miccus prayed for the ability to learn well; and they, like Glaucus, gave to him a great gift in exchange for a small one. As for me, the tragic Dionysus, I am dedicated here with a yawn twice as big as that of the Samian Dionysus,⁷ listening to boys who say: ‘this lock of hair is holy’, telling me my own dream!

⁴ The anonymous referee doubts whether this admittedly convoluted description of Agoranax’s mask indeed represents a piece of poor craftsmanship. The referee believes that Callimachus refers to a mask of dark, dusky shading, possibly depicting a Carthaginian or other exotic character. I follow a different line. Alternative interpretations, however, need to be welcome rather than excluded, as they are integral to the allure of epigram as a poetic genre.

⁵ There is an alternative reading οὐκ ἐν ἔρωτι δεδαυμένον, ‘not burnt by love’.

⁶ On such educational activities in antiquity, see R. Criboire, *Writing, Teachers and Students in Greco-Roman Egypt*, American Studies in Papyrology, 36 (Atlanta, 1996).

⁷ The reference is to a mask dedicated in the temple of Dionysus in Samos, see Plin. *HN* 8.57–8 and Fantuzzi (n.1, 2007), 482–3.

The two pieces seem to form an epigrammatic diptych; one winks at the other. In the first leg, the mask of a comic old man has been dedicated 'amidst the *θόρυβος* of children'. *θόρυβος* can be ambivalent as an indication of audience response: its meaning can range from outright 'jeering' to enthusiastic 'applause'; it can also have a neutral sense like 'hubbub'. The *agonistic* context of the epigram, however (so emphatically underscored by the introductory *νικήσας*), as well as the prevalent association of *θόρυβος* with *negative* reactions in most ancient sources, especially with reference to ecclesiastic or dicastic debates (where *θορυβῶ* often means 'shout somebody down')⁸ render the negative sense 'uproar' likelier.⁹ If so, Connarus may have chosen to dedicate the very object that would exasperate his piqued rivals even further. We may intuit a hint of a sardonic grin on our Chares.

On the contrary, in the second case, in an interesting chiasmic reversal of the situation, while the kids enjoy themselves, the mask suffers. Again, it is a strategically positioned phrase, which reveals the god's mood: *τοῦμόν ὄνειρα ἔμοι* ('telling me my own dream', that is, repeating the same things over and over again and boring me to death).¹⁰ *Κεχηγνῶς* is equally suggestive: in Comedy it can often mean 'yawn with ennui' (Ar. *Ach.* 10; *Eq.* 1032); but more often it has the sense 'looking like a gaping fool' (Ar. *Ran.* 900; *Eq.* 261; *Vesp.* 617; cf. also the pun *Κεχηγναῖοι* in *Eq.* 1263, in reference to the idiocy of the Athenians). The venerable god of theatre, wearing the embarrassingly stupid look the mask maker has imprinted on his face, is forced to endure child tragedians taking themselves seriously. A sarcastic atmosphere is clearly felt everywhere. Even the name of the dedicator *Σῖμος ὁ Μικκον* (which can be loosely translated 'Flat Nose, son of the Little One') may cause the god's spirits to droop. The masks, their contexts and their audiences are ridiculously incongruous.

The practice of dedicating masks as tokens of victory or for other purposes is amply documented¹¹ – and this provides at least part of the answer to the question why epigrams, especially dedicatory ones (*ἀναθηματικά*), would deal with these prominent theatrical objects. Still, as we have already suggested, the epigrams toy with this custom. A dedication is twofold in utility: it honours the god, but mostly it confers kudos and status on the dedicator. In the Callimachus epigrams, the dedicated objects, the masks, speak – a common convention in dedicatory epigrams and inscriptions¹² – yet not in order to advertise themselves, but, *παρὰ προσδοκίαν*, in order to draw attention either to their own base and unworthy nature (Callimachus 27 G–P) or to the bathos of a lofty gesture, on the one hand, and a lowly context and

⁸ Interruptions of ecclesiastic speeches were illegal in Athens (cf. Aeschin. 1. 35) and, although apparently quite common, are frowned upon by most ancient sources. Of course the orator could always turn *θόρυβος* to his own advantage. On ecclesiastic *θόρυβος*, see J. Tacon, 'Ecclesiastic *thorubos*: interventions, interruptions, and popular involvement in the Athenian assembly', *G&R* 48.2 (2001), 173–92. On the topic of dicastic *θόρυβος*, see V. Bers, 'Dicastic *thorubos*', *HPTH* 6 (1985), 1–15. Also relevant is A.M. Lanni, 'Spectator sport or serious politics: οἱ περιεστηκότες and the Athenian law courts', *JHS* 117 (1997), 183–9.

⁹ Most scholars agree: see Fantuzzi (n.1, 2007), at 480 n. 9, with references to earlier bibliography.

¹⁰ *ὄνειρα*, apart from 'advantage', is also an epic form of *ὄναρ*, cf. Fantuzzi (n.1, 2007), at 483. I believe that the epigrammatist intended *both* senses to be present (see below).

¹¹ See e.g. J.R. Green, 'Dedications of masks', *RA* (1982), 237–48 and id., *Theatre in Ancient Greek Society* (London, 1994), 76 ff.

¹² Cf. K.J. Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands. Hellenistic Epigrams in Context* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998), 192–3; and J. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia. An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, 1993), 41–3. Gutzwiller and Svenbro discuss the 'I' of the epigrams with reference to the 'hereness' or 'thereness' of the dedicated object and the epigrammatist.

output, on the other (Callimachus 26 G–P). The dedication is not a true act of devotion or thanksgiving here: it is misplaced and ultimately jarring.

The dedication certainly backfires also as an act of social posturing or self-aggrandizement, as in the case of Agoranax: the lamented ignobility of the dedication (the mask bewails its sordid craftsmanship) boomerangs on the dedicator himself. The purpose of Agoranax's dedication is suggested by a phrase uttered by the mask itself: *κωμικὸν μάρτυρα νίκης*. This is a playful expression, whose jocularity relies on word order. The formulation can be read in two ways: one is by hypallage, the schema of the 'transferred epithet' (*κωμικὸν μάρτυρα νίκης* = *μάρτυρα κωμικῆς νίκης*). The other is by the given sequence of words: 'comic witness of victory'. There is indeed at least one attested case – in Cicero's letter to Caelius Rufus (*Ad familiares* 2.13 = 93 Shackleton Bailey)¹³ – where *κωμικὸς μάρτυς* implies a 'truthful witness'; and, of course, there is always Dicaeopolis' famously exasperated remark, that after all 'tragedy, too, knows what is right' (*Ach.* 500). The mere defensiveness of Dicaeopolis' retort, however, proves that Comedy never fully established a reputation as a 'truthful witness'. *Κωμικὸς μάρτυς* was more often than not synonymous with a sycophant.¹⁴ Agoranax's 'truly comic witness' disintegrates into a *comical* witness. The dedicated deflates the dedicator in a tongue-in-cheek act of self-deprecation.

Therefore, not only are these epigrams pseudo-dedications: they are travesties of dedications, which use the comic mask (the Asclepiades and Callimachus 27 G–P) or a mask so grotesque that it ends up being comical (the gaping Dionysus of Callimachus 26 G–P) to create irony and a sense of comedown; in essence, a *comic effect*. A sense of disarticulation and displacement, of *différance*, if you will, is ubiquitous in the epigrams. More importantly, it is the poetic 'I', a self-conscious voice from within the epigrams themselves, which ambushes the process along the way, thus underscoring the absurdity of the whole thing. Everything seems to be out of place; everything is resized, reshaped and reproduced on a less grand and less worthy scale.

The nature of the mask as a theatrical object is pivotal to this effect: dislocated itself, both spatially and temporally, from the performance, its original and only legitimate context, the mask highlights the act of displacement. There is direct parallelism between the mask and the act of dedication: they both fall through. Deviating from their principle, they relinquish their meaning. The mask has degenerated from theatrical prop to piece of shoddy art, just like the dedication is 'emaciated' from consequential action to child's play. No longer animated by the body and voice of an actor, the mask is a lifeless object hanging from the wall of a building alien to the theatre.¹⁵ That this bodiless phantom is given words is wonderfully ironic. The masks speak only to underline that speech is no longer their prerogative.

The mask, therefore, serves one first and primary purpose in these epigrams: as an object of dedication removed from the space of performance the mask derides its true self. By way of this self-negation the mask orchestrates a *charade of a dedicatory epigram*. The hilarious image of a frustrated Dionysus yawning and grimacing to the sound of schoolchildren's endless rehearsals, themselves almost a parody of the

¹³ Fantuzzi (n.1, 2007), at 480.

¹⁴ Cf. Polybius 12.13.3: *ὁ δ' ἵνα πιστὸς φανῇ κατὰ τὴν αἰσχρολογίαν καὶ τὴν ὅλην ἀναισχυντίαν, καὶ προσκατέψευσται τὰνδρός, κωμικόν τινα μάρτυρα προσεπισπασάμενος ἀνώνυμον.*

¹⁵ On the theory of the mask as a theatrical sign, see e.g. D. Wiles, *The Masks of Menander. Sign and Meaning in Greek and Roman Performance* (Cambridge, 1991).

sacred text, encapsulates this spirit. Is it accidental that the *Bacchae* verse evoked here (ἱερὸς ὁ πλόκαμος, 494) is from a passage in which the god commands the profane to keep their hands off him? The children use their mouths to do what Pentheus failed to do with his hands: they soil the god! That is quite a benefit (ὄνειαρ) for Dionysus (see above, n. 10): what was meant to glorify him (the recitation of the holy verses, as well as the dedication of his mask – let us not forget that Dionysus in particular was worshipped in the form of a mask¹⁶) ends up berating and insulting him.

The mouth of Dionysus is open, as it is on a real mask, a genuine actor's piece. However, rather than a channel of speech, the orifice has become a token of (self-) ridicule, in a manner parallel to the way that the epigram, rather than glorifying the ἀνάθεσις, ends up mocking the ἀναθέτης (either on purpose or by accident!). The mask as an object of dedication appears indeed as an ἀτοπov. The same ἀτοπία, however, marks the fate of a literary dedicatory epigram. Using the mask, the epigrams conduct an ironic introspection, humorously asking questions about themselves, *about their own dislocation from inscription to text*. What does a mask do on a wall? And what does a dedicatory epigram do on a page?

The three epigrams in question are thus, eventually, in the broad sense *comic*.¹⁷ Significantly, much of their humour rests on activating the particular comic baggage carried by the masks. The epigrams are *not*, of course, ἐκφράσεις of masks: no mask is described explicitly in any of these epigrams.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the physical object is clearly visualized (the visualization being abetted by details such as names or clues of appearance), and this visual image with its particular semiotic associations is paramount for the poem to be understood.¹⁹ Let us look at the simpler example first, Asclepiades 27 G–P.

There are many reasons why the mask dedicated here would be a 'Chares'. It may just be that the epigrammatist could not resist a pun on χάριν ... Χάρητα. It can indeed be because it has something to do with Connarus' victory; or some reference may be made to a particular play (although Chares, albeit a very common Greek name, was not particularly frequent for a comic old man).²⁰ It may also be, however, because, as the theory goes, particular mask types, and thus particular stock roles, were commonly associated with particular names.²¹

¹⁶ F. Frontisi-Ducroux, *Le dieu-masque. Une figure du Dionysus d'Athènes* (Paris, 1991).

¹⁷ For the 'comic mode' in Hellenistic literature, which cannot and should not be confused with "Comedy", see A.K. Petrides, 'Μίμος, μιμιάμβος, Μάχων, παρωδοί, συλλογράφοι: ελληνιστικές μεταμορφώσεις του κωμικού τρόπου' ['Mime, mimiamb, Machon, the parodists, the sillographers: Hellenistic transformations of the comic mode'], in K. Spanoudakis and F. Manakidou (edd.), *Αλεξανδρινή Μούσα. Συνέχεια και νεωτερισμός στην ελληνιστική ποίηση, Σήματα: Σύγχρονες Προσεγγίσεις στην Αρχαία Ελληνική Γραμματεία* 2 (Athens, 2008), 441–99.

¹⁸ On epigram and *ekphrasis*, see most recently the article by I. Männlein-Robert, 'Epigrams on art: voice and voicelessness in Hellenistic epigram', in P. Bing and J.S. Bruss (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Hellenistic Epigram* (Leiden–Boston, 2007), 251–74.

¹⁹ There is, of course, always the possibility that the epigrammatists make generic references to masks only. I find this rather reductive, though. The dissemination of the New Comedy mask system was very wide. People knew what the masks looked like and were quite capable of making associations between masks, characters and plots.

²⁰ In fact, other than Plaut. *Trin.* 922, the name occurs nowhere else in a known comedy. This, of course, may only be an accident of tradition – and the epigram itself may be evidence in that respect.

²¹ See, among many, W.T. MacCary, 'Menander's characters: their names, roles and masks', *TAPhA* 101 (1970), 277–90; P.G.McC. Brown, 'Masks, names and characters in New Comedy', *Hermes* 115 (1987), 181–202.

The presence of an 'old man' mask among clamouring children is funny enough. It may even serve as an amusing reminder of their teacher. But if the *θόρυβος*, 'uproar', is motivated by the other children's negative take on Connarus' victory, on top of funny, Connarus may have meant to be *jeering*. For this teasing agenda to be furthered, a generic reference to the *senex iratus* type would probably suffice. It is the 'actant' of comic old men to clash with youngsters; no specific mask *need* be surmised. But the strong *deixis* of the epigram makes the mask almost *tangible*; it urges a theatre-savvy reader to *visualize* the mask and at least play with possible identifications.

There is one particular *πάππος* mask, which fits the 'angry old man' category better than any other: it is the 'second grandfather' (*πάππος ἕτερος*), 'who had a rather intense look on his face and was vexatious', cf. Pollux, *Onomasticon* 4.144: *ὁ δ' ἕτερος πάππος ισχνότερος καὶ ἐντονώτερος τὸ βλέμμα καὶ λυπηρός*²². This mask of an irascible oldster must have often played against²³ the *πρώτος πάππος*, who was *ἡμερώτατος τὰς ὀφρῦς*.²⁴ Its physiognomy implies that it was particularly fitting for a self-important, censorious character lashing at the shenanigans of some *παιδάρια*. Connarus may well be pulling his classmates' leg by placing in front of them the most obnoxious of comic old men.

A more complex example of activating generic foreknowledge comes from the Agoranax epigram. The joke here, we have suggested, lies in the awful craftsmanship of the mask, which ends up discrediting Agoranax's victory (and thespian ability). But why is the name Pamphilus thrown in? Are we meant to read anything into it? And what is the relation between the name and the visual cues provided? In a nutshell, *could* we read the epigram differently *if* we are familiar with the New Comedy mask system?

That the mask is *not* 'bitten by love' (*οὐ μὲν ἔρωτι δεδαγμένον*) may imply that its miserable look is the result of the mask maker's poor craftsmanship rather than Love's tribulations. What is the link, however, between a dried fig and the lamps of Isis? The phrasing here is cryptic, but sense may be made of it when considered against Pollux's catalogue of masks. The details seem to turn persistently on *colour*, which together with the name Pamphilus should help qualified readers specify the mask. A dried fig, exposed as it is to the sun, has a reddish, sunburnt and wrinkled look.²⁵ A lamp of Isis, made apparently of terracotta, is very similar in colour; being a crude and substandard object, it would imply that the mask, or at least this inferior rendition of it, has a rather battered quality. Which mask can this be? If we are looking for a young-man type, which combines red-brown colour as a product of exposure to the sun and wrinkles, the description may allude to any one of three masks: (a) the *πάγχρηστος*, who is *ὑπέρυθρος*, because he is *γυμναστικός*, and thus has a face eaten by the sun, plus *ρύτιδας ὀλίγας* [...] *ἐπὶ τοῦ μετώπου* (an effect

²² On the mask of the 'second grandfather', see T.B.L. Webster, *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy*, 3rd edition revised and enlarged by J.R. Green and A. Seeberg (*BICS Supplement* 50, London, 1995), vol. 1, p. 9.

²³ For an example of such synergy between two youth masks this time, see A.K. Petrides, 'Masks in dialogue: the First and Second Episeistos masks in New Comedy', in R. Grisolia and G.M. Rispoli (edd.), *Il personaggio e la maschera. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Quaderni del Centro Studi Magna Grecia* 3 (Naples, 2005), 143–54.

²⁴ Poll. *Onom.* 4. 143.

²⁵ But, *pace* Gutzwiller (n. 4), 193, this need not lead us to believe that the epigrammatist meant an 'old man' mask here. This way the joke would evaporate completely – apart from the fact that Pamphilus is not an old man's name in New Comedy.

enhanced also by his raised eyebrows), which can give the mask, depending on the mask maker, either an air of *gravitas* or, on the contrary, of distress; (b) the μέλας, who is πεπαιδευμένω ἢ φιλογυμναστῇ εἰκώς, and has a slightly despondent look (he is καθεϊμένος τὰς ὀφρύς); and (c) the οὔλος, who is again ὑπέρυθρος and has one wrinkle on the forehead (Pollux, *Onomasticon* 4.146–7).

I have made the case elsewhere²⁶ that characters bearing the name Πάμφιλος, such as in Terence's *Andria*, would make perfect sense with the πάγχρηστος mask (although the association need not have been written in stone). There is no space for us to reproduce the argument here – nor do we need to. To grasp the epigrammatist's subtle play with the mask, in one of the many possible semantic layers one can peel off this poem, we only need to entertain the possibility that the *imperfect* mask Agoranax dedicates is a πάγχρηστος, 'the perfect youth'. This is a mask of outstanding physical beauty,²⁷ which in the language of physiognomics connotes also the possibility of inner perfection and accomplishment (the latter is incompatible with being 'burned by love' and is the starting point of solid comedy in the plays). Such a specimen was doubly defiled: by a skill-less craftsman, who could not make it, and by a clueless actor, who could not play it (and yet he won)!

A completely different exploitation of the mask is encountered in the two pieces by Dioscurides.²⁸ I argued that in Asclepiades and Callimachus awareness of the mask and its theatrical baggage adds semantic density to the epigram and transforms it from dedicatory to satirical. The Dioscurides epigrams are pseudo-epitaphs in praise of Sophocles and Sositheus respectively, delivered by two satyrs, characters of Sophoclean and Sosithean satyr plays. The atmosphere is completely different compared to the three epigrams we examined above. The epigrams recapitulate the men's contribution to the history of theatre (they embody a form of theatre history themselves). The veneration directed at the two key figures rings sincere.

The mask predominates in the epigrammatic account of Sophocles' achievement, especially in satyr drama (Dioscurides 22 G–P = *AP* 7.37), but also to 'serious' tragedy, to which the highlighted mask points. To visualize the mask here is no longer an exercise of theatrical *doctrina*. It is a *sine qua non*:

Τύμβος ὄδ' ἔστ', ὦνθρῳπε, Σοφοκλέος, ὃν παρὰ Μουσῶν
 ἱρὴν παρθεσίην ἱερὸς ὦν ἔλαχον·
 ὃς με τὸν ἐκ Φλιούντος, ἔτι τρίβολον πατέοντα
 πρίνινον ἐς χρύσειον σχῆμα μεθρημόσατο
 καὶ λεπτήν ἐνέδυσεν ἀλουργίδα· τοῦ δὲ θανόντος
 εὔθετον ὀρχηστὴν τῇδ' ἀνέπαυσα πόδα. –
 Ὅλβιος, ὡς ἀγαθὴν ἔλαχες στάσιν· ἡ δ' ἐνὶ χερσὶ
 κούρμιος ἐκ ποίης ἦδε διδασκαλίας; –
 Εἴτε σοι Ἀντιγόνην εἰπεῖν φίλον, οὐκ ἂν ἀμάρτοισ,
 εἴτε καὶ Ἥλέκτραν· ἀμφότεραι γὰρ ἄκρον.

²⁶ A.K. Petrides, 'Faces of allusion: intertextuality and the mask of New Comedy' (Diss. University of Cambridge, 2005), 202–41.

²⁷ Specimens of this mask are collected in L. Bernabò Brea, *Menandro e il teatro greco nelle terracotte liparesi* (Genoa, 1981), figs 244, 247, 252, 253.

²⁸ These epigrams, too, are separated in the *Greek Anthology*, but scholars have long recognized a 'sequential connection' between them. See M. Gabathuler, *Hellenistische Epigramme auf Dichter* (St. Gallen, 1937), 82–90; and P. Bing, *The Well-Read Muse. Present and Past in Callimachus and the Hellenistic Poets*, *Hypomnemata* 90 (Göttingen, 1988), 40. See also – a notable, if brief, study of the two epigrams – D.F. Sutton, 'Two epigrams of Dioscurides', *RSC* 21 (1973), 173–6.

This here, man, is the tomb of Sophocles, which the Muses have given me, his sacred servant, the sacred duty to guard. It was he who took me from Phlius, while I was still treading on prickly oak-tree leaves, and reworked me into a shape of gold and dressed me in delicate purple. Upon his death, I have rested my well-arranged dancing foot on this spot. – Blessed are you, for you have received a brilliant post! And the mask of the shaven maiden in your hands, from which play is she? – Whether you prefer to call her Antigone or even Electra, you would not be far off the mark: because both are unmatched.

The mask is held in the hands of the satyr who presents the tomb of Sophocles. It forms the centrepiece of the whole imaginary complex. The mask is the *κούριμος*, a female tragic mask (the mask maker is explicit here as to the mask type; he cannot jeopardize its identification), applicable to either of Sophocles' top (*ἄκρον*) female characters, Antigone or Electra, see Poll. *Onom.* 4.140: ἡ δὲ κούριμος παρθένος ἀντὶ ὄγκου ἔχει τριχῶν κατεφηγμένων διάκρισιν, καὶ βραχεία ἐν κύκλῳ περικέκασται, ὑπωχρος δὲ τὴν χροιάν. The absence of *ὄγκος*, a rule among masks of young women, renders the *κούριμος* a moderate and poised mask. The hair is shaven all around, an indication of reserved and temperate mourning. It is also brushed down and parted, a composed and unpretentious hairstyle, evidence of that prized female modesty, but also of composure in the face of hardship (as suggested by the mask's complexion – again the preposition *ὑπό* moderates the expression).

There is also a 'philosophical' reason why this mask could be worn by *either* Antigone or Electra – beyond the practical one, that the repertory was limited and recycling was inevitable. The mask referred to by the epigram is actually not a Classical but a Hellenistic piece: the staging of both new and *παλαιαὶ τραγωδίαι* in post-classical times was achieved with a new repertoire of masks constructed with principles divergent from the masks of Classical tragedy.²⁹ The mask maker's art in the Hellenistic period is imbued with the staples of Peripatetic philosophy and more specifically the Aristotelian science of physiognomics, as developed from the fourth century onwards.³⁰ Facial traits and expressions are now symbolically over-determined: *τὸ φαίνεσθαι* is conceptualized as 'sympathetic' with *τὸ εἶναι*.³¹ The qualities of the *κούριμος* mask are clearly intended to incarnate the ideal of female *μέτρον*. Given Aristotle's high regard for Sophocles, whose work he considered the

²⁹ On the Classical mask of tragedy, see S. Halliwell, 'The function and aesthetics of the Greek tragic mask', in N.W. Slater and B. Zimmermann (edd.), *Intertextualität in der griechisch-römischen Komödie*. Drama 2 (Stuttgart, 1993), 195–211; C. Calame, 'Tragedy and the mask: to stage the self and confront the differentiated', in id., *The Craft of Poetic Speech in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1995), 97–115; C.W. Marshall, 'Some fifth-century masking conventions', *G&R* 46 (1999), 188–202. See also: M. Johnson, 'The mask in ancient Greek tragedy. A re-examination based on the principles and practices of the Noh theatre of Japan' (Diss. University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1984). On the shift from the 'neutral' classical to the 'expressive' Hellenistic mask, see Petrides (n. 26), at 1–14.

³⁰ On physiognomics, see mainly E.C. Evans, *Physiognomics in the Ancient World*, *TPhS* 59, 5.5 (Philadelphia, 1969); T. Barton, *Power and Knowledge. Astrology, Physiognomics and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor, 1994); M.G. Gleason, *Making Men. Sophists and Self-presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, 1995); S. Vogt, *Aristoteles Physiognomica*. Aristoteles, Werke in deutscher Übersetzung 18, vi (Berlin, 1999); M.M. Sassi, *The Science of Man in Ancient Greece* (Chicago and London, 2001); M. Popovic, *Reading the Human Body. Physiognomics and Astrology in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Hellenistic-Early Roman period Judaism* (Leiden–Boston, 2007); and S. Swain (ed.), *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul. Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam* (Oxford, 2007), especially the chapters by Boys-Stones, Swain and Elsner.

³¹ On physiognomics and the mask, especially from the fourth century onwards, see Wiles (n. 15), at 68–99.

τέλος of tragedy, this μετριότης of the mask encapsulates the spirit of Sophocles himself. The mask epitomizes the moral qualities of the man's achievement; it is a metonymy of his theatrical art.

By the late fourth century, the significance of the mask in theatrical performance is boosted. The upgrading of the mask is reflected in a significant shift in theatre-related dedications.³² The fifth century was the era of the figurine, as most dedications concerned whole figures or complexes of figures. From the fourth century onwards the balance is tilting decisively in favour of dedicating masks. By the dawn of the Hellenistic era, the mask has been established as the prime means whereby theatre was conceptualized in artistic representations. In this case, the figurative arts and the art of the epigram synergize, giving an insight into the phenomenology of theatre in the era of Hellenism. Foreshadowing the mask in order to grasp the essence of Sophocles' work may be anachronistic in reference to the performance conditions of the fifth century; it certainly reflects, none the less, the conditions of the epigrammatist's own time.

If the mask takes centre stage in Dioscurides 22 G–P, in the Sositheus epigram (Dioscurides 23 G–P = *AP* 7.707) the mask appears sidelined, at least verbally. No mention of any mask is made explicitly in this epigram:

Κῆγ' ὦ Σωσιθέου κομέω νέκυν, ὅσσον ἐν ἄστει
 ἄλλος ἀπ' αὐθαίμων ἡμετέρων Σοφοκλῆν,
 Σκίρτος ὁ πυρρογένειος. ἔκισσοφόρησε γὰρ ὦν' ἦρ
 ἄξια Φλιασίων, ναὶ μὰ χορούς, Σατύρων
 κῆμ' ἐν τὸν ἐν καινοῖς τεθραμμένον ἦθεσιν ἤδη
 ἤγαγεν εἰς μνήμην πατρίδ' ἀναρχαῖσας,
 καὶ πάλιν εἰσώρμησα τὸν ἄρσενά Δωρίδι Μούσῃ
 ῥυθμόν, πρὸς τ' αὐδὴν ἐλκόμενος μέγαλην
 ξεύαδέ μοι θύρσων τύπος οὐχ ἐρὶτ' καινοτομηθεῖς
 τῇ φιλοκινδύνῳ φροντίδι Σωσιθέου.

I, too, Scirtus the red-beard, tend to the dead body of Sositheus, as much as in the city another one of my brothers tends to Sophocles. Because, by the dance I swear, this man was decked with the leaves of ivy in a manner worthy of the Phliasian Satyrs and led me, who had been brought up in novel fashions, back to the tradition of my forefathers by restoring ancient practice. Once again forcing the masculine rhythm into the Dorian Muse and drawn to the heightened voice [...] wrought anew by the risk-loving care of Sositheus.

The satyr celebrates Sositheus' ἀναρχαῖσμός of satyr play.³³ More emphasis is ostensibly given on the reorganization of satyric dance than on the mask or any other aspect of ὄψις. But this is exactly where the reader's theatrical education is supposed to be ushered in. The reader is not supposed to simply read the epigram, but to *visualize it*. Word and image are here interwoven; the word is indeed a shortcut to the image. Verbal and material monuments are one. The reader is expected to *envisage* the mask as worn by the *persona loquens*.

³² For the evidence, see Petrides (n. 26), 14–20.

³³ On the satyr dramas of Sositheus, see inter alia G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, 'The *Daphnis* or *Lityerses* of Sositheus', *AC* 63 (1994), 237–50; id., 'Echoes of earlier drama in Sositheus' *Daphnis* and Lycophron's *Menedemus*', *AC* 66 (1997), 121–43; A.-T. Cozzoli, 'Sositeo e il nuovo drama satiresco', in A. Martina (ed.), *Teatro greco postclassico e teatro latino. Teorie e prassi drammatica* (Rome, 2003), 265–91. A comprehensive commentary on Sositheus' fragments is now available in P. Cipolla, *Poeti minori del dramma satiresco. Testo critico, traduzione e commento* (Amsterdam, 2003), 381–420.

Consequently, not only is the mask here, ultimately, central; it is also, unlike the ‘dedicatory’ epigrams and also unlike the Sophocles epigram, a *living mask*. The ‘actor’ is not to be conceived as frozen in time; rather, time has been perpetuated, eternalized, just as Sositheus’ glory is rendered everlasting, by the monument. The mask remains constantly in the moment. It is never taken off, it never dies. It is now an incorruptible memorial of Sositheus’ achievement, just as it was, just as it should be. By not consecrating the mask in the narrow sense as a self-standing object, but by *reincorporating* it into the semiotic continuum that is the actor, and hence the character, the epigram *reanimates* the mask; it breathes into it the life the latter relinquishes as soon as it is removed from the theatre.

Just like the living mask in performance, the mask that speaks through its seemingly unchanging visage, the epigram breaks down the boundaries between the visual and the verbal. In Hellenistic performance, through a densely allusive technique, the physiognomy of the mask becomes *textualized*. The image becomes word. In the Sositheus epigram, through *ἐνάργεια* and *φαντασία*, the word becomes image. Dioscurides remotivates the epitaphic epigram in its non-inscriptional literary version. The epitaphic epigram, initially an accessory of a visual monument, becomes a visual monument in itself.

Allusive and condensed, little capsules of meaning, both the mask and the epigram appear akin. To drive the point home, Callimachus 58 G–P = AP 9.566³⁴ juxtaposes the poetics of epigram and theatre explicitly:

Μικρή τις, Διόνυσε, καλὰ πρήσσοντι ποιητῇ
 ῥήσις· ὁ μὲν Νικῶ φησὶ τὸ μακρότατον·
 ὧ δὲ σὺ μὴ πνεύσης ἐνδέξιος, ἦν τις ἔρηται
 Πῶς ἔβαλες; φησί· Σκληρὰ τὰ γιννόμενα.
 τῷ μερμηρίζαντι τὰ μῆνδिका τοῦτο γένοιτο
 τοῦπος· ἐμοὶ δ’, ὦναξ, ἡ βραχυσυλλαβίη.

Dionysus, a successful poet opts for short speeches. The longest speech he would deliver is ‘I win’. However, do not breathe your benevolent spirit upon the one who, when asked ‘How was your luck?’ would say ‘It is hard what happens to me’. Let these words belong to the one who made unjust thoughts in his mind. As for me, my Lord, let me have the gift of the few syllables.

What Callimachus is doing here, curiously enough, is to *transpose* to the theatre an article of faith that pertains to the epigram: *βραχυσυλλαβίη*. The victorious poet distinguishes himself from the defeated one through his ability to summarize his triumph in a single disyllable, *νικῶ*. ‘*Ῥήσις*’, then, is here the speech announcing victory. The term, however, is technical: *μικρὴ ῥήσις* cannot but refer also to the way the victorious poet handled messenger and other speeches in the play – the ‘epic’ parts of the theatrical equation, that is, the parts that above all attracted Callimachus and that Lycophron in his *Alexandra* apparently attempted to renovate, as well. The ability of the victorious poet to condense his speech of triumph is analogous to his knack for negotiating the theatrical medium curtly and succinctly. *Βραχυσυλλαβίη* describes the epigram’s allusive concentration of language. Allusion ‘impregnates’ the language of the epigram in much the same way that the Hellenistic mask, mainly through physiognomics, ‘gestates’ and ushers into the performance discourses that would otherwise be left in the dark.³⁵

³⁴ For the specific epigram, see Fantuzzi (n. 1, 2007), 486–7.

³⁵ Petrides (n. 26) offers a full discussion of this ‘intertextual’, allusive nature of the New Comedy mask.

Callimachus talks about *ρήσεις*, of course, not masks; but the mask, especially in New Comedy, is all about *βραχυσυλλαβίη*, too. It is a tantalizing shortcut to *ἦθος* (predisposition towards action) and to a whole web of allusions: to other characters (wearing other masks), to a system of values, to paradigms and archetypes lurking in the background. Callimachus conjoins the epigram and the theatre under the banner of a single poetic programme. A successful epigrammatist *and* playwright is one who knows how to economize language by saying *πολλὰ ὀλίγοις*. In Hellenistic performance the sign which achieves this economical densification of language is the *ὄψις*, but above all the mask.

So why *was* the mask attractive to the epigrammatist? It was attractive, because, historically speaking, by the third century the mask had become the chief way to realize performance on stage and to conceptualize it in the figurative arts. The mask was everywhere. The mask also shared in some way the epigram's taste for layering the written word with various tiers of meaning through the implication of the visual (and, in the mask's case, of other means). The mask did with images much of what the epigram, and Hellenistic poetry overall, did with words.

The Open University of Cyprus

ANTONIS K. PETRIDES
apetrides@ouc.ac.cy