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Theognis the Author, Traditional Wisdom, and Some Side Effects of Authority

The *Theognidea* are a riddle.¹ They are the only surviving collection of Archaic elegies which boasts a direct textual tradition, but it is not clear what in them is actually by an individual called Theognis, what is Archaic, and what is later. Nor is it clear when the collection was arranged as it currently is, what stages it has been through, or how it circulated in the Classical period.² These are necessary introductory remarks if one is to speak of the poetry contained in the *Sylloge Theognidea*. Still, in this paper I would like to shift the attention away from these core problems of the ‘Theognidean question’ and put the spotlight instead on some matters of reception. The first part will be dedicated to retracing Theognis’ place in the literary culture of the 4th century BC, to which date the first mentions of Theognis’ name, as well as the first quotations ascribed to him.³ Secondly, I will examine the Imperial and Byzantine reception of two passages of the *Sylloge* (ll. 425–8 and 215–6): this trial analysis will show how pre-existing traditional *topoi* were taken up in Theognis’ text and consequently underwent further crystallization, with the lines eventually losing their attachment to an individual author’s name. The two-fold examination will allow me to contrast the 4th-century BC notion of Theognis as a well-known author of circulat-

1 I have presented early versions of this essay at Prolepsis’ Second International Conference *Auctor est aequivocum* in Bari in October 2017 and at the *Lyric Beyond Lyric* Conference at King’s College London in May 2018. I am grateful to the organizers of both events for the opportunity, as well as to the audiences for the stimulating questions. I owe a debt of gratitude to P. Agócs, P. Avlami, F. Benuzzi, F. Condello, K. Frank, M. Trapp, and the anonymous reviewer for reading this piece and providing precious suggestions. All remaining infelicities are, of course, mine. Moreover, unless otherwise stated, translations are to be considered mine.

2 Comprehensive surveys of the scholarship on the ‘Theognidean question’ can be found in Selle (2008) 4–16 and Colesanti (2011²) 1–33. Albeit dated, Carrière (1948) 19–37 is also useful for contributions up to 1936. A concise overview of the main topics of debate about Theognis and the *Theognidea* is Gerber (1997) 117–28.

3 In this paper, when using expressions such as ‘Theognis’, ‘Theognis’ poetry’ or ‘Theognis’ lines’, I am adopting the perspective of the ancient sources, and thereby referring to their notion of Theognis, or to lines known by them as Theognis’. Such expressions do not necessarily imply an acknowledgement on my part of these lines as genuinely composed by one Megarian poet named Theognis. By ‘*Theognidea*’ (or ‘*Sylloge*’, or ‘Theognidean corpus’) I refer to the collection of elegiac poetry handed down to us by the manuscript tradition under the name of Theognis.

ing written texts and as an established ethical authority with some highly gnomic late reuses of certain Theognidean lines. On the basis of these observations, I will propose that the late anonymous circulation of some *gnomai* is a side effect of the renown of Theognis' name in earlier times. Overall, with this essay, my aim is to put to the test the diachronic reception-based approach to Theognis and his poetry, giving some samples of its benefits, and secondly, to contribute to the (limited to date) conversation on the Theognidean text as a repository for traditional wisdom.

1 Theognis Between 5th and 4th Century BC

1.1 Theognis and the Athenian Elite

Theognidean echoes or references have been recognized already in some 5th-century BC comic passages,⁴ and, notoriously, in Critias' seal elegy,⁵ but the name of Theognis appears for the first time in extant Greek literature from the 4th century BC. There are 11 such mentions in total in Isocrates, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle.⁶ These authors, however, do not only mention Theognis or quote passages that they ascribe to him by name. In their works, they also cite several unattributed lines that are later found in the Mediaeval manuscripts of the Theognidean *Sylloge*.⁷ As we shall see, these instances show that Theognis

⁴ Two Theognidean lines (Thgn. 467 and 469 part.) can be found in Pherecr. fr. 162.11–12 K.–A. (on which see Kugelmeier [1996] 121–3; Ercolani [2017] 39–42). Elegy 467–96 has, however, long been thought to be Evenus' (given that Aristoteles assigns l. 472 to Evenus in *Metaph.* 1015a29–30 and *Eth. Eud.* 1223a31). See already Camerarius (1551) 130; recent supporters of the ascription to Evenus are Bowie (2012) 123–4 and Catenacci (2017), while openly contrary are Vetta (2000) 129, Condello (2009–10) 208 n. 54, Condello (2015) 205–6, and Colesanti (2011²) 102–7. For further references see Colesanti (2011²) 103 n. 143. Further Theognidean echoes have been recognized by Kugelmeier (1996) 125–6 in Ar. Av. 1362–3 (Thgn. 27–8) and by Canfora (2017) 372–3 in Ar. Ra. 1423–5 (Thgn. 1081–2 and 1091–4). For further possible echoes in Aristophanes see Kugelmeier (1996) 126–30; see also Bartol (2019) 141.

⁵ Cf. Thgn. 19–20 Κύρνε, σοφίζομένῳ μὲν ἔμοι σφρηγίς ἐπικείσθω / τοῖσδ' ἔπεισιν, Critias fr. 5.3 W.² σφραγίς δ' ἡμετέρης γλώσσης ἐπὶ τοῖσδεσι κείται. For scholarly comparisons of the two passages see the survey of Condello (2009–10).

⁶ I include in this count all mentions of Theognis found both in entirely preserved works by these authors and in fragments ascribed to them.

⁷ The ascribed quotations: Pl. *Men.* 95d–96a (Thgn. 33–36, ~434–8), *Leg.* 630a (77–78); Xen. *Symp.* 2.4 (35–36), *Περὶ Θεόγνιδος* (ap. Stob. 4.29c.53) (22–23 part., 183–90); Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1179b5–6 (~434), *Eth. Eud.* 1230a12 (177 part.), *Eth. Eud.* 1237b15–16 (125–6), *Eth. Eud.* 1243a18

was a standard poetic ‘reference point’ for these authors in relation to certain preferred themes, the predominant one being the teachability or transmissibility of virtue. This was a pressing philosophical topic from the time of the Sophists to the Hellenistic philosophers,⁸ and is often connected, in 4th-century BC discussions, to reflections on the nature of *kalokagathia*.⁹ Theognis is also mentioned twice in contexts dealing with trustworthiness, which, as a key value of the Archaic *hetaireia*, features prominently in the *Theognidea*.¹⁰

Lines 35–36 and 434 of the *Sylloge* recur multiple times (sometimes attributed to Theognis, sometimes anonymously quoted) in 4th-century BC contexts focusing on the teachability of virtue and on the moral benefits of the company of noble men.¹¹ The first occurrence calling for an analysis is in Plato’s *Meno*. The whole dialogue, as is well known, deals with the nature and the origin of virtue.¹² To ascertain whether virtue is teachable or not, Socrates leads Meno to

(14). Quotations not ascribed explicitly to Theognis: Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.20 (35–36); Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1099a27–28 (255–6), *Eth. Nic.* 1129b29–30 (147), *Eth. Nic.* 1172a13–14 (35 part.), *Eth. Eud.* 1214a5–6 (255–6). Mentions: Isoc. 2.43; Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1170a12, fr. 69 p. 297.40–41 Gigon (= fr. 92 p. 92.19–20 Rose). In addition, Pl. *Ly.* 212e quotes with no ascription ll. 1253–4, which are elsewhere (Herm. in *Phdr.* 231e) attributed to Solon (fr. 23 W.²). Finally, some lines of the *Sylloge* are ascribed to Solon and Euenus by Aristotle: *Pol.* 1256b.33–34 ascribes l. 227 to Solon (= Sol. fr. 13.71 W.²); *Ath.* 11.2–12.2 quotes (as Solon’s) Sol. fr. 6 W.², of which ll. 3–4 are very close to Thgn. 153–4 (but part of l. 153, τίκτει τοι κόπος ὕβριν, is echoed also in Arist. fr. 76.3 p. 318.10–11 Gigon (= fr. 57 p. 67.19–20 Rose) and introduced as a proverb); instead, *Metaph.* 1015a29–30 and *Eth. Eud.* 1223a31 quote Thgn. 472 as Euenus’ (the line is then anonymously quoted in *Rh.* 1370a10). These passages and all other indirect sources of the Theognidean text quoted and referred to in this article (except for Procop. *Gaz. Ep.* 164 cited below which I identified) have been collected comparing the *testimonia* sections of the *apparati critici* in the editions of Young (1971²) and West (1989²), and the dedicated appendix in Selle (2008) 394–423. The Theognidean text is quoted in the edition of West (1989²) (except where differently specified).

8 See the excursus of Müller (1975) 220–49.

9 The widest study on the word remains Bourriot (1995) (a summary about Athens is in vol. I, 619–29). See also Roscaglia (2004) 115–6 on the political implications of the expression in late 5th and 4th-century BC Athens.

10 Pl. *Leg.* 630a, Arist. *Eth. Eud.* 1237b15–16. On *pistis* in the Theognidean corpus see Donlan (1985).

11 For an in-depth analysis of the debate on the teachability of virtue see the chapter by Bertocchini in this volume (‘Can Virtue Be Taught? A Socratic Motif in Some Spurious and Dubious Platonic Dialogues’).

12 Cf. the straightforward question of young Meno to Socrates, which opens the dialogue: Pl. *Men.* 70a ἔχεις μοι εἰπεῖν, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἅρα διδασκτὸν ἢ ἀρετὴ; ἢ οὐ διδασκτὸν ἀλλ’ ἀσκητὸν; ἢ οὔτε ἀσκητὸν οὔτε μαθητὸν, ἀλλὰ φύσει παραγίγνεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἢ ἄλλω τινὶ τρόπῳ; (‘Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue can be taught, or is acquired by practice, not teach-

investigate whether ‘teachers’ of virtue actually exist. Various figures fail the exam: elite Athenians, who are unable to teach or pass virtue on to their sons (92e–94e); Thessalian aristocrats, who are undecided about virtue being teachable (95a–b); and the Sophists, who are commonly credited with teaching virtue but, as Gorgias does (95c), deny this. Finally, Socrates mentions Theognis and quotes two passages by him:

ΣΩ. οἷσθα δὲ ὅτι οὐ μόνον σοί τε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς πολιτικοῖς τοῦτο [*scil.* τὴν ἀρετὴν] δοκεῖ τοτὲ μὲν εἶναι διδασκόν, τοτὲ δ’ οὐ, ἀλλὰ καὶ θεόγνιν τὸν ποιητὴν οἷσθ’ ὅτι ταῦτα ταῦτα λέγει;

MEN. ἐν ποίοις ἔπεσιν;

ΣΩ. ἐν τοῖς ἐλεγείοις οὐ λέγει (Thgn. 33–36)

καὶ παρὰ τοῖσιν πῖνε καὶ ἔσθιε, καὶ μετὰ τοῖσιν

ἕξε, καὶ ἄνδανε τοῖς, ὧν μεγάλη δύναμις.

ἐσθλῶν μὲν γὰρ ἅπ’ ἐσθλὰ διδάξεαι· ἦν δὲ κακοῖσιν

συμμίσηγης, ἀπολεῖς καὶ τὸν ἐόντα νόον.

οἷσθ’ ὅτι ἐν τούτοις μὲν ὡς διδασκοῦ οὔσης τῆς ἀρετῆς λέγει;

MEN. φαίνεται γέ.

ΣΩ. ἐν ἄλλοις δὲ γε ὀλίγον μεταβάς, (Thgn. 435)

εἰ δ’ ἦν ποιητόν, φησί, καὶ ἔνθετον ἀνδρὶ νόημα,

λέγει πως ὅτι (Thgn. 434)

πολλοὺς ἂν μισθοὺς καὶ μεγάλους ἔφερον

οἱ δυνάμενοι τοῦτο ποιεῖν, καὶ (Thgn. 436–8)

οὐ ποτ’ ἂν ἐξ ἀγαθοῦ πατρὸς ἔγεντο κακός,

πειθόμενος μύθοισι σαόφροσιν. ἀλλὰ διδάσκων

οὐ ποτε ποιήσεις τὸν κακὸν ἄνδρ’ ἀγαθόν.

ἐννοεῖς ὅτι αὐτὸς αὐτῷ πάλιν περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν τάναντία λέγει;¹³

Pl. *Men.* 95c–96a

ing? Or if neither by practice nor by learning, whether it comes to mankind by nature or in some other way?’ transl. Lamb [1924] 265).

13 ‘SOC. And are you aware that not only you and other political folk are in two minds as to whether virtue is to be taught, but Theognis the poet also says, you remember, the very same thing? MEN. In which part of his poems? SOC. In those elegiac lines where he says (Thgn. 33–36) “eat and drink with these men; sit with them, and be pleasing unto them, who wield great power; for from the good wilt thou win thee lessons in the good; but mingle with the bad, and thou wilt lose even the sense that thou hast.” Do you observe how in these words he implies that virtue is to be taught? MEN. He does, evidently. SOC. But in some other lines he shifts his ground a little, saying (Thgn. 435) “could understanding be created and put into a man” (I think it runs thus), (Thgn. 434) “many high rewards would they obtain” (that is, the men who were able to do such a thing), and again (Thgn. 436–8) “never would a bad son have sprung from a good father, for he would have followed the precepts of wisdom: but not by teaching wilt thou ever make the bad man good.” You notice how in the second passage he contradicts himself on the same point?’ (transl. Lamb [1924] 353–5).

The text presents various issues, and has been accordingly analyzed from a variety of perspectives.¹⁴ Its most evident trait is the way Plato bends the text and rhetoric of the Theognidean lines to his own purpose.¹⁵ The Socrates of the *Meno* openly reproaches the contradiction between the two quoted sets of Theognidean couplets. The inconsistency, though, is only apparent: the speaker's advice in ll. 33–36 is addressed to someone who 'has good sense' (τὸν ἐόντα νόον, 36), while ll. 434–8 dwell on the inefficacy of every attempt to straighten out a bad nature (κακός, 436, τὸν κακὸν ἄνδρ[α], 438) when a man is naturally devoid of νόημα (l. 435).¹⁶

It has been argued that Plato's out-of-context reuse of these Theognidean words is deliberate, that his misinterpretation is consciously forced, and that his reproach of Theognis is fallacious. To convince Meno, a pupil of Gorgias, that the matter cannot be resolved through an appeal to authorities, Plato's Socrates may be using the weapons the youth is most sensitive to, and imitating the Sophists' abuse of poetic texts.¹⁷ What can be said with confidence is that Plato

14 The passage raises two main interpretative questions concerning the arrangement of Theognis' text in Plato's time. First, given Meno's question ἐν ποίοις ἔπειν; to which Socrates answers ἐν τοῖς ἐλεγείοις (95d), some have inferred that non-elegiac Theognidean poems were also in circulation, or that the Theognidean writings were then organized in different works with different titles, as *Suda* θ 136 witnesses (see Selle [2008] 63–64 with references). The second issue concerns the phrase ὀλίγον μεταβάς. According to many, it means 'just after' and implies that the Theognidean corpus known to Plato was arranged very differently from ours, as ll. 434–8 must have followed ll. 33–36 closely; for others, μεταβαίνω refers to a change of theme (exhaustive references in Selle [2008] 87–88; see also Colesanti [2011²] 301–4).

15 Plato makes l. 435 precede 434, so the order here is different than in the *Sylloge*. The same order is found in the 3rd/2nd-century BC ostrakon P. Berol. 12310 (TM 62823 = *MP*³ 01498), which preserves Thgn. 435+434+436–8 and thus stands as a testament to the later fortunes of Plato's *Meno* (Viereck [1925] 254, 257, Selle [2008] 105). In the *Sylloge*, the subject of the verb ἔφερον (434) is 'the Asclepiads'. They were a guild or family of physicians who claimed to be descendants of Asclepius, who are mentioned in l. 432. As even they, physicians *par excellence*, cannot heal human wretchedness, there is no possibility to 'heal' (to make sensible) an unsound man (ἄφρονα, 431). Plato omits any reference to the Asclepiads and supplies (in prose) οἱ δυνάμενοι τοῦτο ποιεῖν as the subject of ἔφερον. The reference is thus to 'the teachers of virtue', the very category the existence of which Plato's Socrates is problematizing.

16 See Woodbury (1951) 9–10; Woodbury (1953) 137–8; Verdenius (1957) 298; Bluck (1961) 28–30, 395; Ionescu (2007) 133–4. On the innate nature of Theognidean virtue see also Carrière (1948) 224–31.

17 Bluck (1961) 29, 391 compares the discussion of extracts from Sim. fr. 260 Poltera (= *PMG* 542) in Pl. *Prt.* 339a–347a (for which see e.g. Frede [1986]; Scodel [1986]; Most [1994]; Baltussen [2008]). Another controversial poetic quotation in Plato is Pind. fr. 169a.1–8 S.–M. in *Grg.* 484b, quoted by Callicles. This latter case is all the more interesting as it concerns Pindar, another poet whom, together with Theognis and others, Libanius says Socrates was accused of abus-

is clearly using Theognis to stress the inevitable confusion that exists about the nature of virtue.¹⁸ The quotations are a means to extend and deepen Socrates' exposition of this ambiguity, and to take it to its conclusion (possibly also while making fun of contemporary intellectual manners). Theognis, the noble Thessalians, and Meno himself are all undecided about the teachability of virtue, meaning that they do not know exactly what virtue is, and therefore cannot teach it. Not even those who are themselves *kaloi kai agathoi* (e.g. the well-known Athenian political figures), insists Plato, are teachers (διδάσκαλοι) of virtue (96b). Theognis is thus lumped together, criticized, and dismissed with other figures commonly regarded as conventional sources of wisdom in the matter of virtue: nobles, socially and politically prominent figures, and sophists.¹⁹

Lines 35–36²⁰ are quoted also by Xenophon's Socrates in the *Symposium*:

καὶ γὰρ δὴ μύρῳ μὲν ὁ ἀλειψάμενος καὶ δοῦλος καὶ ἐλεύθερος εὐθὺς ἅπας ὅμοιον ὄζει· αἱ δ' ἀπὸ τῶν ἐλευθερίων μόχθων ὄσμαι ἐπιτηδευμάτων τε πρῶτον χρηστῶν καὶ χρόνου πολλοῦ δέονται, εἰ μέλλουσιν ἡδεῖαι τε καὶ ἐλευθέριοι ἔσσεσθαι.
καὶ ὁ Λύκων εἶπεν· οὐκοῦν νέοις μὲν ἂν εἴη ταῦτα· ἡμᾶς δὲ τοὺς μηκέτι γυμναζομένους τίνας ὄζειν δεήσει;
καλοκάγαθίας νῆ Δί', ἔφη ὁ Σωκράτης.
καὶ πόθεν ἂν τις τοῦτο τὸ χρίμα λάβοι;
οὐ μὰ Δί', ἔφη, οὐ παρὰ τῶν μυροπωλῶν.
ἀλλὰ πόθεν δῆ;
ὁ μὲν Θέογνις ἔφη, (Thgn. 35–36)
ἐσθλῶν μὲν γὰρ ἀπ' ἐσθλὰ διδάξεαι· ἦν δὲ κακοῖσι

ing, drawing the accusation from Polycrates. See Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1920² II 95–100), Humbert (1930) 32–38, Dodds (1959) 270–2.

18 On sections 95a–96d see Scott (2006) 173–5.

19 According to some scholars, Theognis is treated here as representative of the whole category of poets, who were conventional repositories for supposed wisdom; Socrates would be questioning the authority of all poets on 'virtue' issues (Bluck [1961] 28–29, 391, Ionescu [2007] 133–4, Giannantoni [1990] IV 287). This would be in harmony with the common Platonic depiction of poets as 'unaware' of the topics they are handling (cf. Pl. *Ap.* 22c, *Men.* 99c–d, *Prt.* 347e, *Ion* 536c) and with the philosopher's view that neither poetry in general nor sophistic strategies of interpretation can teach anything in the matter of ethics, but only lead to contradictions (cf. Most [1994] 130–1, Baltussen [2008] 215).

20 On which see also Condello (2010) 73.

συμμίσγῃς, ἀπολεῖς καὶ τὸν ἐόντα νόον.²¹

Xen. Symp. 2.4

The ‘bodily odours which come from the efforts and undertakings of free men’ (αἱ δ’ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐλευθερίων μόχθων ὅσμαι ἐπιτηδευμάτων τε), Socrates argues, presuppose noble aspirations and take time to be achieved. The metaphor is soon clarified: Socrates is referring to *kalokagathia*, a status which can be established only associating oneself with ‘good men’ (ἐσθλοί). After the quotation of Theognis, the exchange goes on briefly on the topic of keeping company with skilled men and their teachings (2.5), and then the teachability of *kalokagathia* is questioned by the guests (2.6). By stating that the question is controversial, Socrates then dismisses the debate (2.7).

Xenophon quotes the same lines again in the *Memorabilia*, but this time without naming Theognis:

διὸ καὶ τοὺς υἱεῖς οἱ πατέρες, κἂν ᾧσι σώφρονες, ὅμως ἀπὸ τῶν πονηρῶν ἀνθρώπων εἴργουσιν, ὡς τὴν μὲν τῶν χρηστῶν ὁμιλίαν ἄσκησιν οὖσαν τῆς ἀρετῆς, τὴν δὲ τῶν πονηρῶν κατάλυσιν. μαρτυρεῖ δὲ καὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ὃ τε λέγων, (Thgn. 35–36)
ἐσθλῶν μὲν γὰρ ἀπ’ ἐσθλὰ διδάξεται²² ἦν δὲ κακοῖσι
συμμίσγῃς, ἀπολεῖς καὶ τὸν ἐόντα νόον·
καὶ ὁ λέγων, (*Eleg. adesp.* fr. 2 W.²)
αὐτὰρ ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς τοτὲ μὲν κακός, ἄλλοτε δ’ ἐσθλός.

21 ‘ “In fact, as far as perfume is concerned, as soon as a man puts it on, the scent is the same whether he’s a slave or free; but the scents that come from the exertions of free men demand primarily noble pursuits and plenty of time if they are to have the sweet smell of freedom.” “That may do for youngsters,” observed Lycon, “but what about those of us who no longer exercise in the gymnasium? What should we smell like?” “Gentlemanliness, surely!” replied Socrates. “And where might a person get this particular scent?” “Certainly not from the perfume market,” said Socrates. “But where, then?” “Theognis has said: (Thgn. 35–36) good men will teach you good; society with bad will but corrupt the good mind that you had” ’ (transl. Todd in Marchant/Todd [2013] 573–5).

22 The variant reading διδάξεται is found in Plato’s *Meno* and in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* and *Symposium*, while μαθήσεται is to be read in the manuscript tradition of the *Sylloge*. For the variant reading see Carrière (1948) 77 n. 2, van Groningen (1966) 24, Peretti (1953) 50, Verdenius (1957) 298, Bluck (1961) 396, Colesanti (2011²) 314 n. 233, Bluck (1961) 393, Mitscherling (1982) and Bandini/Dorion (2000) 91–92 n. 99 argued that Xenophon drew the quote from Plato’s *Meno*. Von Geysso (1892) 14–19 rather claimed that both Plato and Xenophon drew it from another Socratic, Antisthenes (see Giannantoni [1990] IV 287–9; see also Huss [1999] 130–1).

κάγῳ δὲ μαρτυρῶ τούτοις.²³

Xen. Mem. 1.2.20

Xenophon (from 1.2.12 onwards) is considering the moral corruption of Alcibiades and Critias. Once they left Socrates, these two men started leading a debased life, but not, argues Xenophon, because they had been corrupted by Socrates (who showed himself to be an exemplary *kalos kai agathos* to those who associated with him, 1.2.18).²⁴ Their debasement was rather a consequence of the fact that, by leaving his company, Alcibiades and Critias interrupted their training in virtue.²⁵ Xenophon is therefore relieving Socrates of responsibility (cf. 1.2.28), but he is also making his own point about the achievement of virtue: association with good people is *askesis* (practice) of *arete*, and *arete*, like any discipline which needs training, can be forgotten if not practiced enough, or can deteriorate through association with the bad. The two elegiac quotations aim at iterating and vindicating Xenophon's stance – and Xenophon is using the poetic lines in exactly the sort of 'appeal to authority' that Plato critiques: a confirmation that Theognis was, indeed, a common authority on virtue.

Theognis is mentioned also by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, again in a context that focuses on the role of practice in establishing and maintaining virtue: γίνοιτο δ' ἂν καὶ ἄσκησις τις τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐκ τοῦ συζῆν τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς, καθάπερ καὶ Θεόγνις φησιν, 1170a11–13.²⁶ This is the first of three such Theognidean appearances in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in contexts that touch on moral excellence. We find l. 35 of the *Sylloge* again partially quoted and unattributed at the end of book 9, where Aristotle deals with friendship and associations. Once again, we find the usual pronouncements: social relations impact on a person's mental formation, with bad people corrupting one another, and good people making each other better.

²³ 'That is why fathers try to keep their sons, even if they are well behaved, out of bad company: for the society of honest men is a training in virtue, but the society of the bad is virtue's undoing. As one of the poets says: (Thgn. 35–36) from the good shall you learn good things; but if you mingle with the bad you shall lose even what wisdom you have. And another says: (*Eleg. adesp.* fr. 2 W.²) ah, but a good man is at one time base, at another noble. My testimony agrees with theirs' (transl. adapted from Marchant in Marchant/Todd [2013] 27–29).

²⁴ On the insistent characterization of Socrates as *kalos kai agathos* in the *Memorabilia* see Roscaglia (2004) 119.

²⁵ A second reason was that, from the outset, they were not interested in Socrates' moral example but rather in the political potentialities of his rhetorical skills (Xen. Mem. 1.2.16). For considerations on the weaknesses of Socrates' defense by Xenophon see Canfora (2011) 72–73.

²⁶ 'Some training in virtue may derive also from the society of the good, as also Theognis says'.

διόπερ οἱ μὲν συμπίνουσιν, οἱ δὲ συγκυβεύουσιν, ἄλλοι δὲ συγγυμνάζονται καὶ συγκυνηγοῦσιν ἢ συμφιλοσοφοῦσιν [...] ἢ δὲ τῶν ἐπεικῶν ἐπεικῆς, συναυξανόμενη ταῖς ὁμιλίαις. δοκοῦσι δὲ καὶ βελτίους γίνεσθαι ἐνεργοῦντες καὶ διορθοῦντες ἀλλήλους· ἀπομάττονται γὰρ παρ' ἀλλήλων οἷς ἀρέσκονται, ὅθεν (Thgn. 35 part.)

ἐσθλῶν μὲν γὰρ ἅπ' ἐσθλά.

περὶ μὲν οὖν φιλίας ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον εἰρήσθω· {ἐπόμενον δ' ἂν εἴη διελεῖν περὶ ἡδονῆς.}²⁷

Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1172a3–5, 10–15

Finally, another Theognidean line, quoted already in the *Meno*, appears further on in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle argues that theoretical discourse is ineffective in transmitting virtue, as it cannot lead the many to *kalokagathia*. ‘Theoretical ethics’ can guide to *arete* only those young people who are naturally prone to love what is ‘noble’ (those who have an ἦθος φιλόκαλον):

οὐδὲ δὴ περὶ ἀρετῆς ἱκανὸν τὸ εἰδέναι, ἀλλ' ἔχειν καὶ χρῆσθαι πειρατέον, ἢ εἴ πως ἄλλως ἀγαθοὶ γινόμεθα. εἰ μὲν οὖν ᾗσαν οἱ λόγοι αὐτάρκεις πρὸς τὸ ποιῆσαι ἐπεικεῖς, (Thgn. 434) ‘πολλοὺς ἂν μισθοὺς καὶ μεγάλους’ δικαίως ‘ἔφερον’ κατὰ τὸν Θεόγνιν, καὶ ἔδει ἂν τούτους πορίσασθαι· νῦν δὲ φαίνονται προτρέψασθαι μὲν καὶ παρορμῆσαι τῶν νέων τοὺς ἐλευθερίου ἰσχύειν, ἦθος τ' εὐγενὲς καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλόκαλον ποιῆσαι ἂν κατοκώχμιον ἐκ τῆς ἀρετῆς, τοὺς δὲ πολλοὺς ἀδυνατεῖν πρὸς καλοκαγαθίαν προτρέψασθαι.²⁸

Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1179b2–10

To validate this pronouncement, Aristotle resorts to Theognis’ l. 434, adjusting it to his own rhetorical need, and making almost ‘proverbialized’ use of it. Yet, despite the adjustment, there is an evident thematic consistency between the original Theognidean context and the Aristotelian one. Aristotle is maintaining

27 ‘Hence some friends drink or dice together, others practise athletic sports and hunt, or study philosophy, in each other’s company [...] But the friendship of the good is good and grows with their intercourse. And they seem actually to become better by putting their friendship into practice, and because they correct each other’s faults, for each takes the impress from the other of those traits in him that give him pleasure – whence the saying: (Thgn. 35 part.) noble deeds from noble men. So much for our treatment of Friendship. Our next business will be to discuss Pleasure’ (transl. Rackham [1934²] 575).

28 ‘If so, to know what virtue is, is not enough; we must endeavour to possess and to practise it, or in some other manner actually ourselves to become good. Now if discourses on ethics were sufficient in themselves to make men virtuous, (Thgn. 434) “large fees and many”, quite rightly, “would they win”, as Theognis says, and to provide such discourses would be all that is wanted. But as it is, we see that although theories have power to stimulate and encourage generous youths, and, given an inborn nobility of character and a genuine love of what is noble, can make them susceptible to the influence of virtue, yet they are powerless to stimulate the mass of mankind to moral nobility’ (transl. adapted from Rackham [1934²] 629).

exactly that ‘you will never make the bad man noble through teaching’, as is stated in ll. 437–8 of the *Sylloge*, in the near context of 434.

The persistent presence of Theognis’ name and verses in 4th-century BC discourses on virtue should be evident by now. Excerpts from his elegies are quoted in contexts which explicitly refer to the ideal of *kalokagathia*, and which are concerned with the way *kalokagathia* and *arete* are transmitted, acquired and developed. In the case of Plato, Theognis is presented as a commonly-acknowledged authoritative source, which provides – according to Plato’s Socrates – a skewed and contradictory (though widely accepted) perspective on virtue. In Xenophon and Aristotle, ll. 35–36 and 434 are used as a rhetorical tool to establish these authors’ views on the matter of *kalokagathia*. These lines seem to be a favourite commonplace to which 4th-century writers resort in these contexts filled with the entangled ideas of virtue, moral excellence and nobility.²⁹

The involvement of the Socratics with Theognis requires us to interrogate the ideological connotations of their reuse of Theognis’ verses. Canfora (1995) 122–3 argues that the ideal of ‘aristocratic prevalence’, pervasive in the *Theognidea*, must have struck a chord in the Socratic milieu of traditional Athenian aristocracy.³⁰ The association of Theognis with the theme of ‘good birth’ is indeed frequent, and not confined to the passages analysed above. We know of a treatise *On Theognis* (Περὶ Θεόγνιδος) said to be by Xenophon (Stob. 4.29c.53), and the Theognidean collection (σύγγραμμα) known to the writer of this treatise ‘began with the theme of good birth’ (ἄρχεται γὰρ πρῶτον ἀπὸ τοῦ εὖ γενέσθαι). Another *On Theognis* is mentioned by Diogenes Laertius (Diog. Laert. 6.16 = Antisth. V A 41.15 Giannantoni) as the work of Antisthenes, a Socratic who equated virtuous men with the well-born (τοὺς αὐτοὺς εὐγενεῖς τοὺς καὶ

²⁹ Socrates possibly played a role in establishing the ‘canonicity’ of Theognis for the theme of ‘learning virtue’ by referring to the poet in his teachings. In Libanius’ *Apology of Socrates* (Decl. 1.62, 72, 88–91) we read that Socrates was accused of attacking (ἐπιλαμβάνεται, Decl. 1.62) Homer, Hesiod, Theognis, and Pindar, which he did (as the speaking persona says in Socrates’ defense) for the moral benefit of the young and of his audience. Such information possibly came to Libanius through an early source, the *Accusation of Socrates* by the 4th-century BC sophist Polycrates (Humbert [1930] 11–14; Russell [1996] 17 is more cautious; contrary Livingstone [2001] 32–35; for Polycrates’ extant fragments see Radermacher [1951] 128–32).

³⁰ Vetta (2000) 140–1 also hypothesized about the crucial role of Athenian aristocratic families (especially the affiliated Dropids and Alcmeonids) in the ‘progressive compilation’ of the *Sylloge* (see also Ferreri [2011] 273–5 and Ferreri [2013] 62–63). On the interest of the Socratics for Theognis see Colesanti (2011²) 320, 336 and Ferreri (2013) 95–96.

ἐναπέτους, Antisth. V A 134.2–3 Giannantoni).³¹ Theognis was mentioned also in an Aristotelian fragment (fr. 69 Gigon = 92 Rose, in Stob. 4.29a.25) from the treatise *On good birth* (Περὶ εὐγενείας). Was Theognis in this period held up as an advocate for selective ‘aristocratic breeding’, and for the need to close access to the ‘best’ social circles in the city?

We ought to bring out in evidence an important common theme in all the passages examined above. Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle discuss *arete* and *kalokagathia* only in reference to social elites, and some of the passages analyzed also show terms typical of the rhetoric of the ‘elite–masses’ opposition.³² The *kaloi kai agathoi* of whom Plato’s Socrates talks are the Athenian and Thesalian ruling classes (οἱ πολιτικοί, 95c), whose socio–political prominence thus seems to serve as one mark of ‘virtue’, at least as conventionally intended.³³ Xenophon, too (*Symp.* 2.4), dwells on a concept of *kalokagathia* which is clearly not devoid of socio–political connotations. A contrast between ‘the public’ or ‘the masses’, on the one hand, and ‘the private’ or the ‘few’ on the other, thus takes shape in the passage. While perfumes fudge the distinction between free and slave, *kalokagathia* pertains only to nobles. *Kalokagathia* cannot be acquired or exercised in places of popular sociability, like the ‘perfume market’, but only in elite contexts, familiar from the poetry of the Archaic aristocratic tradition. The symposium is likely to be one of these contexts, given the fictional setting of Xenophon’s work itself.³⁴ Finally, Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1179b) mentions the few (those ‘naturally prone to virtue’) as opposed to ‘the many’ (τοὺς

31 The relation between these two works *On Theognis* has long been discussed, together with the possibility that other 4th–century BC authors who cite Theognidean lines drew the lines from Antisthenes. For a survey of the question and references see Selle (2008) 57–62.

32 The term ‘elite’ is used to refer to ‘those members of society who are (1) much more highly educated than the norm (the educated elite), (2) much wealthier than the norm (the upper class or the wealth elite), or (3) recognized by other members of society as deserving privileges based on their birth right and/or by their performance (or avoidance) of certain occupations (the nobles, aristocrats, or status elite)’ (Ober [1989] 11).

33 However, Plato is here aiming at this conventional conception: for him true virtue is a moral quality, and not *kalokagathia* as political success. See Bluck (1961) 30, Bourriot (1995) I 248–51, and Roscalla (2004) 117–8 who sees in the *Meno*’s Socrates a new, ‘moral’ *kalos ka-gathos* figure opposed to the contemporary ‘historical’ Athenian *kaloi kai agathoi*.

34 As Thgn. 33–34 refer to a sympotic situation, we might also argue that Xenophon chose to quote the distich Thgn. 35–36 knowing that its context of reference was consonant with the setting of his *Symposium*. This hypothesis would then invite several questions about the actual boundaries of the poem the couplet was known to be part of (the division of Thgn. 19–38 is a vexed question, see references in Selle [2008] 315 n. 338, Colesanti [2011²] 242 n. 65–66) and about its (oral and written) circulation in Xenophon’s time.

δὲ πολλούς, 1179b10) who have no hope of attaining *kalokagathia*, and lingers on the ‘noble’ character (ἡθὺς τ’ εὐγενές, 1179b8) of those who can more easily reach it.³⁵

All things considered, Theognis’ lines were particularly renowned in the political groups Socrates moved in, as the critique has already established.³⁶ But the examined reuses allow us to clarify the political reasons of such an interest, and the terms of these literary appropriations.

Firstly, we need to stress that, in 4th-century BC Athens, Theognis was re-used by elitist authors: members of a political and intellectual elite that defined itself in opposition to the ‘masses’, these authors addressed not the wider public, but an elite of ‘like-minded aristocrats’.³⁷ Among these, Xenophon and Aristotle make Theognis speak for them as 4th-century BC Athenians, while Plato dismisses him as a spokesperson for (at that time) widespread misconceptions about the teachability of virtue. Therefore, in all cases, this repurposing of Theognis’ lines set the Archaic ideology originally expressed in them against the contemporary political context – that of 4th-century BC democratic Athens – and show how Theognis’ was a poetical voice to whom well-born Athenians could relate. These reuses, indeed, demonstrate how the Theognidean, Archaic political terminology of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘noble’ and ‘base’ was transferred into the contemporary socio-political clash: that of the traditional Athenian elite striving for a recognition of its own superior political status within the horizons of the democratic *polis*, where the only legal distinction was that of citizens and non-citizens.³⁸ All in all, Theognis was (already) an authoritative voice through

35 In two other non virtue-related 4th-century BC passages, references to Theognis appear in contexts where the mob is reproached or negatively represented. Isocrates (2.42–44) is sceptical about ‘the many’ engaging with writings useful for their moral development, such as those of Hesiod, Theognis and Phocylides. In the *Laws* (627a), some paragraphs before quoting Thgn. 77–78 (630a), Plato talks of civic conflict in Archaic terms as a clash between ‘the better’ and ‘the mass’ or ‘the worse’ (οἱ ἀμείνονες νικῶσι τὸ πλῆθος καὶ τοὺς χείρους).

36 On the Socratic circles see also Meiksins Wood/Wood (1978) 85–87.

37 Pownall (2007) 246 thus defines the readership of 4th-century BC prose works (such as Xenophon’s and Isocrates’) that were aimed at giving pragmatic definitions of aristocratic virtue. See also Ober (1989) 13: ‘(the educated elite of Athens) included the writers of virtually all surviving Athenian texts’. The written circulation of texts in the late 5th and in the 4th century BC was also restricted, probably to the part of population who had the means to acquire books (see e.g. Harris [1989] 84–87).

38 For considerations about the mass–elite clash in Greek city–state politics, see Ober (1989) (especially 11–17, and 249–61 on elite status). See also Johnstone (2010) 141–6 on class tensions in 4th-century BC Athens (especially as a context for Xenophon’s writings), and Canfora (2017) 350–9 (mainly building on Ar. *Ra.* 718–37).

which Athenians could establish their elitist ideals and validate them rhetorically.

To complete this picture of Theognis in the 4th century BC, I will focus on Aristotle again. The analysis will bring us to consider Aristotle's engagement with a circulating written text of Theognis.

1.2 Aristotle

The scope of mentions and quotations of Theognis is broader in Aristotle than in other 4th-century BC authors. We count eight quotations (both ascribed and anonymous) in the Aristotelian *Ethics*, as well as two more mentions (with no text quoted), one in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and one in a fragment. With no exception, the references to Theognis are meant as gnostic validations of Aristotle's statements on ethics. Still, to him Theognis is not simply a source of *gnomai*. Two examples will illustrate this.

Passage 1179b2–10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is an example of how a line from the *Theognidea* can be 'conventionalized' in the process of citation. The quoted phrase (Thgn. 434) is wedged into Aristotle's prose and the original subject of the main verb is altered. These are signs that the sentence had probably become a commonplace with which to express incisively a specific concept – the unfeasibility of some action. The flow of thought is seamless: no interruption precedes the quotation and the period goes on after it. What is more, the pentameter is broken into two segments by the insertion of the adverb *δικαίως*. Aristotle is here expressing his own point with Theognis' words, and thus is at the same time validating his own stance, which of course coincides with the utterance of an acknowledged poetical authority. Aristotle, like Plato, neglects to mention the Asclepiads who are cited in l. 432 of the *Sylloge* and are the 'original' subject of *ἔφepov*. In Theognis, the sense is: 'if the Asclepiads could heal human wretchedness, they would obtain many high rewards'. Aristotle chooses the term *λόγοι* as subject of the verb *ἔφepov*: the line thus undergoes a metaphorical shift. The word *μισθός* ('reward') refers to the (imaginary) achievements that discourse would accomplish if it could 'convert' people to virtue. Independently from the source from which Aristotle draws the line, we see that he is using it as a commonplace: 'if they could do x, they would do a roaring trade' is a way to express the unfeasibility of x. Aristotle's casual use of it shows the conventionality of this expression. He utilizes the line as he sees fit; nevertheless, the context remains strictly related to that of the Theognidean elegy this line belongs to, as already noticed above. Though Aristotle appropriates the expression nonchalantly by changing the referent, he is still well aware of its

original context. The broader Theognidean frame of the elegy 429–38, especially its second section, is verbally echoed (and thus presupposed) in the Aristotelian context. Beside the general claim that without a good natural disposition virtue cannot be put into practice, the reference is made to the inefficacy of discourse (cf. Thgn. 436–7 οὔποτ(ε) ... / πειθόμενος μῦθοισι σαόφρονι) and teaching (cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1179b21 and 23 διδαχή, Thgn. 437–8 ἀλλὰ διδάσκων / οὔποτε ποιήσει τὸν κακὸν ἄνδρ' ἀγαθόν). This is crucial evidence for the fact that l. 434 was circulating together with the following lines, and that therefore 429–38 likely existed as an elegy in Aristotle's time.³⁹

Another case of Theognidean echoes punctuating Aristotle's prose text is to be found in the *Eudemian Ethics*:

αὕτη μὲν οὖν ἡ πρώτη φιλία, ἣν πάντες ὁμολογοῦσιν· αἱ δ' ἄλλαι δι' αὐτὴν καὶ δοκοῦσι καὶ ἀμφισβητοῦνται. βέβαιον γάρ τι δοκεῖ ἡ φιλία· μόνη δ' αὕτη βέβαιος. τὸ γὰρ κεκριμένον βέβαιον, τὰ δὲ μὴ ταχὺ γινόμενα μηδὲ ῥαδίως {οὐ} ποιεῖ τὴν κρίσιν ὀρθήν. οὐκ ἔστι δ' ἄνευ πίστεως φιλία βέβαιος· ἡ δὲ πίστις οὐκ ἄνευ χρόνου. δεῖ γὰρ πείραν λαβεῖν, ὥσπερ λέγει καὶ Θέογνις· (Thgn. 125–126)
οὐ γὰρ ἂν εἰδείης ἀνδρὸς νόον οὐδὲ γυναικός,
πρὶν πειραθείης ὥσπερ ὑποζυγίου.⁴⁰

Arist. *Eth. Eud.* 1237b8–16

In West's edition of the *Sylloge*, the lines Aristotle quotes here (125–6) belong to the elegy 119–28, where the necessity of testing friends' good intentions is the central theme. In the Aristotelian passage, we can identify some Theognidean traces from outside the verbatim quotation. Aristotle says that, in matter of friendship, judging correctly is 'not easy' (μηδὲ ῥαδίως, 1237b11), and understanding if a friend is reliable takes time. These ideas are present in ll. 119–24 of the *Sylloge*: χρυσοῦ κιβδήλοιο καὶ ἀργύρου ἀνσχετὸς ἄτη, / Κύρνε, καὶ ἐξευρεῖν ῥάδιον ἀνδρὶ σοφῷ· / εἰ δὲ φίλου νόος ἀνδρὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι λεληθῇ / ψυδρὸς ἐών, δόλιον δ' ἐν φρεσὶν ἦτορ ἔχῃ, / τοῦτο θεὸς κιβδηλότατον ποίησε

³⁹ As for the first three couplets of the elegy, they are syntactically linked: 434 is the apodosis of the protasis at ll. 432–3; 432, being a pentameter, must necessarily follow a hexameter; ll. 429–31 are a syntactical continuum as well.

⁴⁰ 'This then is the primary friendship, which all people recognize. It is on account of it that the other sorts are considered to be friendship, and also that their claim is disputed – for friendship seems to be something stable, and only this friendship is stable; for a formed judgement is stable, and not doing things quickly or easily makes the judgement right. And there is no stable friendship without confidence, and confidence only comes with time; for it is necessary to make trial, as Theognis says (Thgn. 125–6): because you cannot know a man's or a woman's mind, until you put it to the test like a beast of burden' (transl. adapted from Rackham [1952²] 381).

βροτοῖσιν, / καὶ γινῶναι πάντων τοῦτ' ἀνιηρότατον.⁴¹ The difficulty of uncovering a friend's insincerity is stated also in the couplet which precedes this elegy in the *Sylloge*: κιβδήλου δ' ἀνδρὸς γινῶναι χαλεπώτερον οὐδέν, / Κύρν', οὐδ' εὐλαβίης ἐστὶ περὶ πλέονος, Thgn. 117–8.⁴² In this case as well, the echoes in Aristotle's text suggests that Thgn. 117–28 (in the current editions identified as two poems, 117–8 and 119–28) might have been circulating together during his time, in a not much different sequence than the one transmitted in the Mediaeval manuscripts.

Overall, we must also notice that Theognis' name is referred to by Aristotle as that of a renowned authority, with no further detail. It is a name Aristotle can cite to validate his statements. He quotes Theognis, as he does other authors, for a rhetorical purpose. Theognis appears as bearer of well-acknowledged ethics on which Aristotle can base himself, or with which he can back up his own arguments. Yet Theognis was more than a source of validating maxims for Aristotle. He does not know only the lines he quotes but shows awareness also of the context they come from. The quoted lines might have been circulating orally as sayings; but Aristotle also knew that they came from a broader context, from longer elegies – which suggests that he might have accessed them as such in an extantized version.⁴³

We have thus explored the presence of Theognis in the texts of Plato and Xenophon, products of the 5th century BC and its tensions, and in Aristotle. We have recognized the role of Theognis as an 'authoritative voice' in the 4th–century BC cultural landscape, and also ascertained the ideological load of several reuses of his poems. There is a sense, in the period, that Theognis is the poet to resort to for quotable lines on friendship and virtue, a sort of 'teacher of wisdom'⁴⁴ in these matters. The sample examination of some Aristotelian reuses of Theognis' poetry allows us to add further elements to the picture. The 'undeclared' Theognidean presence, these scattered echoes traceable in the prose nearby the quotations, disclose a deep familiarity on the part of Aristotle with

41 'The ruin that results from counterfeit gold and silver is endurable, Cynus, and it is easy for an expert to find out. But if a friend's intent is false and lies undetected in his breast and if he has a treacherous heart, this is the most counterfeit thing that the god has made for mortals and to recognize it costs the greatest pain of all' (transl. Gerber [1999] 191).

42 'Nothing, Cynus, is more difficult to recognize than a counterfeit man and nothing is of more importance than being on one's guard against him' (transl. Gerber [1999] 191).

43 For the written circulation of a Theognidean text in the 4th century BC see e.g. West (1974) 55–57; Colesanti (2011²) 329–34 argues for the circulation of a sympotic *hypomnema* in Athens in the 5th and 4th century BC.

44 'Maestro di saggezza', Colesanti (2011²) 333.

Theognis' text. This familiarity goes beyond the verbatim quotations of isolated *gnomai*: Aristotle knew the elegiac frame he was drawing the lines from. The examined Aristotelian cases are not dissimilar to that of Xen. *Symp.* 2.4, where, in the reuse of Thgn. 35–36, we might sense awareness of the broader sympotic context the distich comes from. Even though we cannot exclude that the authors knew the broader elegiac contexts mnemonically, I think that these cases likely imply engagement with the Theognidean text in written form. Both passages confirm a further detail of these authors' notion of Theognis in the 4th century BC: teacher of wisdom and authority in matter of some ethical themes, whose texts are ideologically loaded; but also recognized author of some circulating written texts.

With this picture in mind, we shall now turn to the later afterlife of Theognis. Examining the fortunes of two other passages will allow us some glimpses of the destiny of Theognidean poetry in Imperial and Byzantine times. This will, eventually, lead us to elaborate some core ideas about the trajectory of the history of Theognis' text from the 5th century BC onwards.

2 Two Cases of Later Reception

Let us first examine ll. 425–8 of the *Sylloge*:

πάντων μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον,
μηδ' ἐσιδεῖν αὐγὰς ὀξέος ἡελίου,
φύντα δ' ὅπως ὥκιστα πύλας Αἰδαο περῆσαι
καὶ κεῖσθαι πολλὴν γῆν ἐπαμεισάμενον.⁴⁵

Thgn. 425–8

The hexameters are almost identical to two lines of a 3rd-century BC papyrus which preserves some remains of what has been recognized as the *Mouseion* of the 4th-century BC sophist Alcidas:⁴⁶

⁴⁵ 'It is best of all for mortals not to be born and not to look upon the rays of the piercing sun, but once born it is best to pass the gates of Hades as quickly as possible and to lie under a large heap of earth' (transl. Gerber [1999] 235).

⁴⁶ On the attribution to Alcidas see Bassino (2012) 40 n. 13, with references.

τὸν
 δ' Ὀμηρον... ἀ]ποκρί-
 νασθαι... τὰδε τὰ ἐ]πη· ἀρ-
 χὴν μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐ]πιχθονίοισι-
 ν ἄριστον, φύντα δ' ὅ]πως ὥκισ-
 τα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσ]αι.⁴⁷

P. Petr. 1.25.10–15 (TM 59083 = *MP*³ 77, 3rd BC)
 (ed. Bassino)⁴⁸

Alcidamas' *Mouseion* was probably the main source of the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*, handed down to us in a 2nd-century BC version in a manuscript (*Laur. Plut.* 56.01).⁴⁹ The lines found in the papyrus are also in the version of the *Certamen* preserved in the manuscript: Ὀμηρος· / ἀρχὴν μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον, / φύντα δ' ὅμως ὥκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι (*Cert. Hom. et Hes.* 77–79, ed. Bassino).

The motif of ἄριστον μὴ φῦναι ('best not to be born') is only one instance of the wider Greek pessimistic conception of human life, which is detectable, in different forms, from Homer onwards.⁵⁰ This particular *topos* is found widely in literary texts from the 5th and 4th century BC.⁵¹ Passages from Bacchylides and

47 'Homer answered with these words: "not to be born at all is the best thing for mortals; and if one is born, to pass through Hades' gates as quickly as possible" '.

48 For P. Petrie 1.25 see Bassino (2019) 60–67. The first edition is in Mahaffy (1891) 70.

49 For the manuscript tradition of the *Certamen* see Bassino (2019) 48–60. For the other fragmentary sources on papyri see Bassino (2012) 38 and Bassino (2019) 67–82.

50 See Easterling (2013) 193–4. See for example Hom. *Il.* 17.446–7 οὐ μὲν γάρ τί πού ἐστιν οἰζυρώτερον ἀνδρὸς / πάντων ὅσσα τε γαῖαν ἐπι πνέει τε καὶ ἔρπει, or the conception of men as φύλλα (e.g. Hom. *Il.* 6.146–8, Mimn. fr. 2.1–2 W.³), or again the idea that human life is ephemeral (Pind. *Pyth.* 8.95–96 ἐπάμεροι· τί δέ τις; τί δ' οὐ τις; σκιᾶς ὄναρ / ἄνθρωπος) and the notion that dying young is a blessing (Hdt. 1.31.4 τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ τυχεῖν ἄριστον). In particular, the motif of the men 'just as the leaves' offers a good comparison to our case when it comes to the consideration of its interaction with the Homeric text, its possible antecedent. On this matter, consider the scepticism of Kelly, who recognizes that in the Archaic context themes must have existed independently of their few surviving attestations, and concludes that scholars are 'right to be sceptical that Mimnermus is doing anything more than using a typical theme' (Kelly [2015] 23).

51 The echoes of the motif in the *Ecclesiastes* exemplifies also its trans-cultural appeal: Eccl 4:2–3 *LXX* καὶ ἐπὶνεσα ἐγὼ σὺν τοὺς τεθνηκότας τοὺς ἥδη ἀποθανόντας ὑπὲρ τοὺς ζῶντας, ὅσοι αὐτοὶ ζῶσιν ἕως τοῦ νῦν· καὶ ἀγαθὸς ὑπὲρ τοὺς δύο τούτους ὅστις οὐπᾶ ἐγένετο, ὃς οὐκ εἶδεν σὺν τὸ ποίημα τὸ πονηρὸν τὸ πεποιημένον ὑπὸ τὸν ἥλιον. See Ranston (1925) 30–31.

Sophocles, as well as one Euripidean and one Aristotelian fragment, exemplify its pervasiveness and standardized form:⁵²

[...] θνατοῖσι μὴ φῦναι φέριστον
μηδ' ἀελίου προσιδεῖν
φέγγος.⁵³

Bacchyl. 5.160–2

μὴ φῦναι τὸν ἅπαντα νι–
κᾷ λόγον· τὸ δ', ἐπεὶ φανῇ,
βῆναι κείθεν ὅθεν περ ἦ–
κει πολὺ δεύτερον ὥς τάχιστα.⁵⁴

Soph. OC 1224–7

ἐγὼ τὸ μὲν δὴ πανταχοῦ θρυλούμενον
κράτιστον εἶναι φημὶ 'μὴ φῦναι' βροτῶ.⁵⁵

Eur. *Beller.* fr. 285.1–2 K.

οὐκοῦν, τὸ πολλοῖς τῶν σοφῶν εἰρημένον,
τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι μὲν κράτιστόν ἐστ' αἰί,
ἐπὶ γένηται δ', ὥς τάχιστ' ἔχειν τέλος.⁵⁶

Alexis fr. 145.14–16 K.–A.

⁵² The verb with negative particle, μὴ φῦναι, is to be found in all passages except for Aristotle's and Alexis' fragments, where φύω is replaced by γίγνομαι. A superlative adjective is used in most passages to indicate that death is preferable to any other condition (φέριστον in Alcidas and Bacchylides, ἄριστον in Theognis, ἄριστον and κρεῖττον in Aristotle, κράτιστον in Euripides and Alexis). In Sophocles, the concept is instead conveyed with a periphrasis (τὸν ἅπαντα νι–/κᾷ λόγον, 1224–5). Superlative adverbial expressions (ὥκιστα or ὥς τάχιστα), underlining the necessity of dying as soon as possible, are found in Theognis, Sophocles, Aristotle and Alexis. One commonality shared only by Theognis (426) and Bacchylides is worth noticing: namely the reference to 'not seeing the sunlight anymore'. Such intertextuality, though unique, does not necessarily point to the interdependence of the two texts: the metaphor of life as 'seeing the sunlight' was indeed well established (see below).

⁵³ 'Best for mortals never to be born, never to set eyes on the sun's light' (transl. Campbell [1992] 151).

⁵⁴ 'Not to be born comes first by every reckoning; and once one has appeared, to go back to where one came from as soon as possible is the next best thing' (transl. Lloyd–Jones [1994] 547).

⁵⁵ 'I myself affirm what is of course a common word everywhere, that it is best for a man not to be born' (transl. Collard/Cropp [2008] 297).

⁵⁶ 'Surely, as it is said by many wise men, not to be born is always the best thing, and when one is born, to reach the end of life as quickly as possible'.

p. 294.43–5.3 Gigon (= p. 48.18–23 Rose) ‘πρὸς δὲ δὴ τούτοις <τὸ> διὰ στόματος ὃν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ὀρᾷ ὡς ἐκ πολλῶν ἐτῶν περιφέρεται θρυλούμενον.’ ‘τί τοῦτ’;’ ἔφη. κάκεινος ὑπολαβὼν ‘ὡς ἄρα μὴ γενέσθαι μέν,’ ἔφη, ‘ἄριστον πάντων, τὸ δὲ τεθνάναι τοῦ ζῆν ἔστι κρεῖττον, καὶ πολλοῖς οὕτω παρὰ τοῦ δαιμονίου μεμαρτύρηται.’ p. 295.15–20 Gigon (= p. 49.5–9 Rose) ‘ἀνθρώποις δὲ ἀάμπαν οὐκ ἔστι γενέσθαι τὸ πάντων ἄριστον οὐδὲ μετασχεῖν τῆς τοῦ βελτίονος φύσεως (ἄριστον γὰρ πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι)· τὸ μέντοι μετὰ τοῦτο καὶ τὸ πρῶτον τῶν ἀνθρώποις ἀνυστῶν, δεῦτερον δέ, τὸ γενομένους ἀποθανεῖν ὡς τάχιστα.’⁵⁷

Arist. fr. 65 Gigon (= fr. 44 Rose)

Lines 425–8 of the *Sylloge* thus elaborate on a pessimistic notion deeply rooted in the Greek mindset, and more specifically on an apparently widely circulating saying, as it is explicitly said in Euripides’, Aristotle’s, and Alexis’ fragments. As LeVen (2013) 32 warns, ‘studying the relationship between texts relying on the same *gnomē* [...] would not tell us much about the mutual relationship of the two “texts” but does help us map individual passages’ connections to a textual collective’, which is the ‘endless, and endlessly fluid, repertoire of intertextual connections with oral narratives’.⁵⁸ Indeed, we do not know if the motif of ἄριστον μὴ φῦναι was already established as a saying in hexameters when Alcidas utilized it, if he borrowed it from some previous tradition of the *Certamen*, or if the two lines were the sophist’s creation.⁵⁹ In any case, we must consider the possibility that the *Sylloge*’s lines might not only be taking up a wide-spread motif, but also a pre-existing hexameter form in which the *topos* had already crystallized. Scholars have even spoken of the hexameters as a proverb;⁶⁰ they maintained that the composer of ll. 425–8 fitted such proverb

57 ‘ “And in addition, you see that the saying that is on the lips of all men circulates since many years as a common word.” “What is this?” said he. And the other said in answer: “That not to be born is the best of all things, and that to be dead is better than to live, and that this is so has been proved to many by the deity.” [...] “But for men it is utterly impossible that they should obtain the best thing of all, or even have any share in its nature (for the best thing for all men and women is not to be born); however, the next best thing to this, and the first of those to which man can attain, but nevertheless only the second best, is, after being born, to die as quickly as possible” ’ (transl. adapted from Babbitt [1928] 179). The second portion of the fragment here reported comes from Silenus’ discourse to Midas.

58 LeVen is here reflecting on the same tropes and witticism recurring in different *chreiai*.

59 Easterling (2013) regards the Aristotelian passage as the key witness and therefore treats the ἄριστον μὴ φῦναι motif as ‘Silenus’ wisdom’. However, Aristotle’s fragment is the only source for Silenus’ discourse to Midas (on which Davies [2015] 457–8). A reference to Midas’ capture of Silenus is already found in Hdt. 8.138.2–3, but nothing is said there about Silenus’ words. See also van Groningen (1966) 170.

60 Peretti (1953) 66 with n. 1, van Groningen (1966) 170, Condello (2010) 76, and Colesanti (2011²) 56–58.

into an elegiac version, and that the pentameters are redundant, adding nothing to the concepts in the hexameters. Nonetheless, I believe that something can be said in defense of their poetic quality. The pentameters do indeed draw from very common motifs. As for 426, both the metaphor of life as the faculty of ‘seeing the sunlight’ and the attribute ὀξύς used for the sun and sunlight, are found already in epic.⁶¹ In 428, we find another well-established image, that of ‘lying under a tall heap of earth’.⁶² So, the hexameters take over a pre-existing saying and the pentameters comment on it. Still, they do this by elaborating on mixed literary motifs: the result is a poignant chain of shared images linked to the broader sphere of life and death – a sequence which results in sounding proverbial on its own. Its later fortune confirms that it was perceived as such.

The many indirect attestations show that both the hexameters and the elegiac version had a successful afterlife.⁶³ As for the elegiacs, ll. 425–7 are quoted and ascribed to Theognis by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 3.3.15.1), while the entire elegy is quoted anonymously in Sextus Empiricus (*Pyr.* 3.231). It is then found in Stobaeus (4.52b.30), who separately reports Alcidas’ hexameter version as well (4.52b.22), confirming that the two were still circulating in parallel.⁶⁴ Finally, 425–7 are transmitted unattributed in *Suda* α 4099 and, with ascription to Theognis, by the paroemiographer Macarius (2.45). Out of five such occurrences in later ancient authors, three cases report the elegiac lines in a lemma without any contextualization: Stobaeus, the *Suda*, and Macarius. Such treatment is intrinsic to the nature of these works, which are arranged as series

⁶¹ E.g. Hom. *Il.* 14.345 ὀξύτατον πέλεται φάος εισοράασθαι, 17.371–2. αὐγὴ / ἡελίου ὀξεῖα, Hom. *Od.* 10.498 ζῶειν καὶ ὄραν φάος ἡελίοιο, Hes. *Op.* 414 μένος ὀξέος ἡελίοιο (see also *h.Ap.* 374) and 155 λαμπρὸν δ’ ἔλιπον φάος ἡελίοιο. See also Thgn. 569 λείψω δ’ ἐρατὸν φάος ἡελίοιο. See Peretti (1953) 66 n. 1, van Groningen (1966) 169, West (1997) 235.

⁶² Cf. Hom. *Il.* 6.464 ἀλλὰ με τεθνηῶτα χυτὴ κατὰ γαῖα καλύπτοι, Eur. *Supp.* 53 οὔτε τάφων χώματα γαίης ἐσοῶ; Eur. *Rh.* 414–5 οἱ μὲν ἐν χωστοῖς τάφοις / κεῖνται πεσόντες.

⁶³ The hexameters (ll. 425+427 of the *Sylloge*) are quoted as Alcidas’ in Stob. 4.52b.22, with no ascription in Epicurus *Ep.* 3.126 (p. 46.14–15 von der Mühl), in Diogenian. 3.4 (=Apostol. 3.85), and in Procop. *Gaz. Ep.* 164.16–17 (p. 79 Garzya–Loenertz). Line 425 is also quoted anonymously in *schol.* Soph. *OC* 1224 Xenis. The variant reading ἀρχήν (425) is to be found in all these instances except Procopius, where we read ἀρχήθεν (πάντων is found only in the manuscript tradition of the *Theognidea* and in Clement’s quotation of Theognis).

⁶⁴ Peretti (1953) 62 noticed that four passages that are quoted in Clem. Al. *Strom.* 3.3.14–16 (vol. II pp. 201.23–3.11 Stählin) are to be found also in Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* 3.229–31 (namely, Eur. fr. 638 and 449 K., Thgn. 425–7, Hdt. 1.31), and that three of these are quoted or referred to in Stob. 4.52b (Thgn. 425–8 in Stob. 4.52b.30, Eur. fr. 449 K. in Stob. 4.52b.42, Hdt. 1.31 in Stob. 4.52b.43). Peretti concluded that Clement, Sextus, and Stobaeus drew these passages from the same source, a gnomology περὶ ζωῆς καὶ θανάτου.

of entries: they are, respectively, an anthology of extracts from Greek writers, an encyclopaedia and a paroemiographical collection.⁶⁵ By contrast, in the works of Clement and Sextus, the quotations are inserted in a broader argumentative context and help to build the author's case. Neither author, however, engages with the lines, and instead both quote them without introduction or further comment, simply as an authoritative rhetorical aid to their arguments:

ναὶ μὴν καὶ Θεόγνης τὴν γένεσιν δείκνυσι κακὴν ὧδέ πως λέγων· (Thgn. 425–7)
 πάντων μὲν μὴ φύναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον
 μὴδ' ἐσορᾶν αὐγὰς ὀξέος ἡελίου
 φύντα δ' ὅπως ὥκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι.
 ἀκόλουθα δ' αὐτοῖς καὶ ὁ τῆς τραγωδίας ποιητῆς Εὐριπίδης γράφει· (Eur. fr. 449.3–6 K.)
 ἔδει γὰρ ἡμᾶς σύλλογον ποιουμένους
 τὸν φύντα θρηνεῖν εἰς ὅσ' ἔρχεται κακά·
 τὸν δ' αὖ θανόντα καὶ πόνων πεπαυμένον
 χαίροντας εὐφημοῦντας ἐκπέμπειν δόμων.⁶⁶

Clem. *Strom.* 3.3.15.1–2 (II 202.8–16 Stählin)

ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ βέλτιον εἶναι τὸ ἀποθανεῖν τοῦ ζῆν ἡμᾶς ὑπολαμβάνουσιν. ὁ γοῦν Εὐριπίδης
 φησὶν (Eur. fr. 449.3–6 K.)
 ἐχρῆν γὰρ ἡμᾶς σύλλογον ποιουμένους
 τὸν φύντα θρηνεῖν, εἰς ὅσ' ἔρχεται κακά,
 τὸν δ' αὖ θανόντα καὶ κακῶν πεπαυμένον
 χαίροντας εὐφημοῦντας ἐκπέμπειν δόμων.
 ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς αὐτῆς ὑπολήψεως καὶ ταῦτα εἴρηται· (Thgn. 425–8)
 ἀρχὴν μὲν μὴ φύναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον,
 μὴδ' ἐσιδεῖν αὐγὰς ὀξέος ἡελίου,
 φύντα δ' ὅπως ὥκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι
 καὶ κεῖσθαι πολλὴν γαίαν ἐφессάμενον

⁶⁵ In the *Suda* and Macarius we find the same exegetical note (ἐπὶ τῶν δυστυχῶς βεβιωκότων), which suggests that either the *Suda* was Macarius' source for this lemma, or both drew it from the same source.

⁶⁶ 'And surely, Theognis too shows that birth is evil, when he says as follows (Thgn. 425–7): "it is best of all for mortals not to be born and not to look towards the rays of the piercing sun, but once born it is best to pass the gates of Hades as quickly as possible." The tragic poet Euripides too writes words which are in accordance with these: (Eur. fr. 449.3–6 K.) "we ought to get together and lament the new-born for the many evils he comes to; while the man who died and has been given rest from hardships, we ought to escort him from his house rejoicing and shouting in triumph" '.

καὶ τὰ περὶ Κλέοβιν δὲ καὶ Βίτωνα ἴσμεν, ἃ φησιν ὁ Ἡρόδοτος ἐν τῷ περὶ τῆς Ἀργείας
 ἱερείας λόγῳ (cf. Hdt. 1.31).⁶⁷

Sext. Emp. Pyr. 3.230–1

Thus, the elegiac, Theognidean version, despite appropriating an established motif, had its own success, and contributed to the further canonization of this pessimistic imagery in later ancient sources. To deepen our understanding of this process of transmission and reception, let us consider the similar fate of another passage in the *Theognidea*.

Lines 213–8 of the *Sylloge* include the famous exhortation to be ‘socially flexible’, by imitating the octopus:⁶⁸

θυμέ, φίλους κατὰ πάντας ἐπίστρεφε ποικίλον ἦθος,
 ὀργὴν συμμίσγων ἦντιν’ ἕκαστος ἔχει.
 πουλύπου ὀργὴν ἴσχε πολυπλόκου, ὅς ποτὶ πέτρῃ,
 τῇ προσομιλήσῃ, τοῖος ἰδεῖν ἐφάνη.
 νῦν μὲν τῇδ’ ἐφέπου, τοτὲ δ’ ἄλλοιός χροά γίνου.
 κρέσσων τοι σοφίη γίνεται ἀτροπίας.⁶⁹

Thgn. 213–8 (213–4 + 215–8 W.²)⁷⁰

The Theognidean variant of this motif may be the most popular one, but this same *topos* can be found in other Archaic and Classical passages, often in simi-

67 ‘And some even suppose that dying is better for us than living. Thus Euripides says (Eur. fr. 449.3–6 K.) “we ought to get together and lament the new-born for the many evils he comes to; while the man who died and has been given rest from evils, we ought to escort him from his house rejoicing and shouting in triumph”. These lines, too, spring from the same sentiment (Thgn. 425–8): “not to be born at all is the best thing for mortals and not to look towards the rays of the piercing sun, but once born it is best to pass the gates of Hades as quickly as possible and to lie under a large heap of earth.” We know, too, the facts about Cleobis and Biton which Herodotus relates in his history of the Argive priestess (cf. Hdt. 1.31)’ (transl. adapted from Bury [1933] 479–81.

68 On the octopus’ *metis*, see Detienne/Vernant (1974) 45–52. For the octopus as a metaphor of the versatility of the poet, especially in the relationship with his clients: Gentili (2006⁴) 186–236, LeVen (2013) 34 and LeVen (2014) 137–44.

69 ‘My heart, keep turning a versatile disposition in accordance with all your friends, mingling with it the mood which each one has. Adopt the mood of the cunning octopus which seems to resemble the rock to which it clings. Now follow along in this direction, now take on a different complexion. Cleverness is in truth superior to inflexibility’ (transl. Gerber [1999] 205).

70 Thgn. 1071–2 Κύρνε, φίλους πρὸς πάντας ἐπίστρεφε ποικίλον ἦθος, / συμμίσγων ὀργὴν οἷος ἕκαστος ἔφω are a doublet of 213–4, and 1073–4 νῦν μὲν τῷδ’ ἐφέπου, τοτὲ δ’ ἄλλοιός πέλεν ὀργὴν. / κρεῖσσόν τοι σοφίη καὶ μεγάλης ἀρετῆς are a doublet of 217–8. Discussions can be found in Peretti (1953) 93–104, Adrados (1958), van Groningen (1966) 396–7, and Colesanti (2011²) 138–42.

larly hortatory contexts. There are striking commonalities between these lines of the *Sylloge*, an epic fragment, and a Pindaric fragment:⁷¹

πουλύποδός μοι, τέκνον, ἔχων νόον, Ἀμφίλοχ' ἦρως,
τοῖσιν ἐφαρμόζειν, τῶν κεν κατὰ δῆμον ἵκηαι,
ἄλλοτε δ' ἄλλοῖος τελέθειν καὶ χροῖῃ ἔπεσθαι.⁷²

Thebaïs fr. *8 W. (= *Thebaïs* fr. 4 Bernabé =
Nosti fr. 14 Allen = 'Hom.' fr. 3 Davies)⁷³

ὦ τέκνον, ποντίου θηρὸς πετράϊου
χρωτὶ μάλιστα νόον
προσφέρων πάσαις πολίεσσιν ὁμίλει·
τῷ παρόντι δ' ἐπαινῆσαις ἐκὼν
ἄλλοτ' ἄλλοῖα φρόνει.⁷⁴

Pind. fr. 43 S.–M.

The motif returns also in a Sophoclean fragment (Soph. fr. 307 R.²) and in two fragments of Old Comedy (Eup. fr. 117 and Alc. com. fr. 1 K.–A.).⁷⁵ As with the

71 Words of command and apostrophes (θυμέ Thgn. 213, τέκνον *Thebaïs* fr. *8.1 and Pind. fr. 43.1) are present in all passages. In *Thebaïs* fr. *8.1 it is recommended to have the mind of the octopus (πουλύποδός ... νόον), while Pindar's advice is to let one's mind be like the octopus' skin (see Pind. fr. 43.1–3), and in Thgn. 215 the reference is to the octopus' ὄργη (but the variant reading νόον is in all the quotations of the line in Plutarch, in *De amic. mult.* 96f, *Aet. phys.* 916c, *De soll. an.* 978e). Pind. fr. 43.1 and Thgn. 215 allude to the rocky lair of the octopus (cf. also Soph. fr. 307.1 R.²). In both *Thebaïs* fr. *8.2 τῶν κεν κατὰ δῆμον ἵκηαι and in Pind. fr. 43.3 πάσαις πολίεσσιν the idea of travelling or moving is expressed (see also Bernabé's reading χῶρῳ for West's χροῖῃ at *Thebaïs* fr. *8.3). A call to flexibility of mind is expressed with ἄλλοτε δ' ἄλλοῖος in *Thebaïs* fr. *8.3, τοτὲ δ' ἄλλοῖος in Thgn. 216 and ἄλλοτ' ἄλλοῖα in Pind. fr. 43.5. Finally, the word χρώς is found in Thgn. 217 and in Pind. fr. 43.2 (see West 2003b 152–3 about χροῖῃ at *Thebaïs* fr. *8.3).

72 'Pray hold to the octopus' outlook, Amphilochous my son, and adapt it to whatever people you come among; be changeable, and go along with the color' (transl. West [2003a] 51).

73 Different scholars have attributed this fragment to different epic poems, see Debiasi (2013). Interestingly, ll. 1–2 are transmitted by Antigonos of Carystus, who thus introduces the quotation: ὅθεν δῆλον καὶ ὁ ποιητὴς τὸ θρυλούμενον ἔγραψε, Antig. 25a (p. 46 Giannini). We already encountered the expression τὸ θρυλούμενον twice, referred to the 'best not to be born' *topos*, cf. Eur. fr. 285.1 K. and Arist. fr. 65 p. 294.46 Gigon (= fr. 44 p. 48.20 Rose), meaning that this is a traditional, well-known motif.

74 'O son, make your mind most like the skin of the rocky sea creature in all the cities you visit; readily praise the person who is present, but think differently at other times' (transl. Race [2012] 245).

75 Its fortune would continue in later writings: cf. e.g. *Sib. Or.* 2.120–1 (= ps.–Phoc. 48–49), Greg. Naz. *Carm.* 1.2.2.460, 9.44, 29.54 (PG 37 614.10, 670.13, 888.6 respectively), Cyr. *Contra Jul.* 3.46.7–8 (I.1 237 Riedweg) (=Jul. Gal. 177 Neumann).

topos ‘better not to be born’, the imagery of the octopus’ colour-changing skin as a metaphor for the human mind was well-established at the latest by the early Classical period. To the question of the relations between these passages (complicated by the doublets at Thgn. 1071–4) there is, again, no straightforward answer. One may wish to recognize conscious textual allusions, but what the texts share is primarily what I would call a ‘common imagery’: the articulation of a *topos* in its details, rather than the actual wording.⁷⁶

Theognis’ ll. 215–6 and these five other passages are all quoted by Athenaeus. The two comic fragments, the fragment from the *Thebaid*, and Theognis’ ll. 215–6 are to be found in book 7 of the *Deipnosophists* (7.316b–c, 317a–b), in a section focused on descriptions of the octopus. In book 12, instead, Athenaeus quotes in a row Pindar, Sophocles, and part of Theognis’ l. 215 (12.513c–d). Lines 215–6 are also quoted earlier, in Plutarch, on a number of occasions. In one case (*De amic. mult.* 96f) they are presented as laughable because, says Plutarch, nobody can follow Theognis’ advice and tirelessly adjust to many people, thus acquiring many friends. Plutarch quotes the lines twice more, in discussions of natural philosophy, in both cases together with Pindar’s fragment 43 (*Aet. phys.* 916c, *De soll. an.* 978e). Part of l. 215 ends up, although rearranged and unattributed, in an entry of Diogenianus’ collection of proverbs (1.23 cod. Mazarinco = Apostol. 2.39), where it is to be found together with l. 3 of *Thebaïs* fr. *8.⁷⁷ A parody of ll. 215–6 is also to be found in Philostratus. He does not mention Theognis but these elegiacs (which mock his namesake, the sophist Philostratus of Egypt) follow exactly the syntax of ll. 215–6:

ὄθεν καὶ παρῳδούν τινες ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τόδε τὸ ἐλεγείον·
 παυσόφου ὀργὴν ἴσχε Φιλοστράτου, ὃς Κλεοπάτρα
 νῦν προσομιλήσας τοῖος ἰδεῖν πέφαται.⁷⁸

Philostr. *V S* 486 (II 6.23–26 Kayser)

⁷⁶ Adrados (1958) 4–5 proposed that Pind. fr. 43 S.–M. was the model for the elegiac lines, and that Pindar’s antecedent was the *Thebaid* – which the scholar does not exclude may have been known also to Theognis.

⁷⁷ Diogenianus probably drew it from Plutarch: his reading πολύποδος πολυχρόου νόον is in Plut. *De amic. mult.* 96f (cod. D), *Aet. phys.* 916c, *De soll. an.* 978e.

⁷⁸ ‘I am aware that Philostratus the Egyptian also, though he studied philosophy with Queen Cleopatra, was called a sophist. This was because he adopted the panegyric and highly-coloured type of eloquence; which came of associating with a woman who regarded even the love of letters as a sensuous pleasure. Hence the following elegiac couplet was composed as a parody aimed at him: acquire the temperament of that very wise man, Philostratus, who, fresh from his intimacy with Cleopatra, has taken on colours like hers’ (transl. Wright [1921] 17).

Finally, a non-literal reference to l. 215 with a mention of Theognis is to be found in Julian's *Misopogon*, where the emperor mockingly reports the accusations of the Antiochenes against him. He is described as inflexible (thus contravening the teaching of Theognis) and unable to adapt to the Antiochenes' mindset (a defect described by means of another *topos*: the proverbial 'roughness of Mykonos'):

οὐκ οἶσθα ἀνθρώποις ὁμιλεῖν, οὐδὲ ἐπαινέτης εἶ τοῦ Θεόγνιδος, οὐδὲ μιμῆ τὸν ἀφομοιούμενον ταῖς πέτραις πολὺπουν, ἀλλὰ ἡ λεγομένη Μύκονος ἀγροικία τε καὶ ἄμαθια καὶ ἀβελτερία πρὸς πάντας ἐπιτηδεύεται παρὰ σοῦ.⁷⁹

Jul. Mis. 349d (pp. 189.20–90.2 Nesselrath)

Philostratus' parody and Julian's hint at Theognis' line, although they contrast sharply in their treatment of the text (Philostratus does not mention Theognis, Julian does), are both witnesses to the renown of these lines. Philostratus' parody, to be effective, needs to be based on a well-known passage (see the indefinite τινες). Julian instead only mentions Theognis and subsumes the core idea of l. 215 in his own prose: there is no need to quote the actual line fully. Just below, he uses another proverbial image with the same illustrative purpose for which he resorts to Theognis. Line 215 and the saying on the roughness of Mykonos are both well known and analogously rhetorically functional. So, all in all, in some cases ll. 215–6 are quoted without ascription, and even end up in a repertory of proverbs; in other cases, the ascription is maintained and stands as a testament to the enduring popularity of those lines as authored by Theognis.

In sum, both the examined sets of lines develop well-established imageries, and their postclassical fortune is livelier than that of the other poetical instances of the same motifs. Having thus gained perspective on the fortunes of their ancient reception, we can now move to some conclusions.

3 Conclusions

This essay has started with an investigation of the Theognidean presence in 4th–century BC prose writings, where we can trace a well-defined author named

⁷⁹ ‘“You do not know,” you answer, “how to mix with people, and you cannot approve of the maxim of Theognis, for you do not imitate the polypus which takes on the colours of the rocks. Nay rather you behave to all men with the proverbial Myconian boorishness and ignorance and stupidity” ’ (transl. Wright [1913] 453–5).

Theognis. Not only is he unanimously recognized as the composer of specific lines (35–36 and 434), but an ‘authority status’ on specific themes also seems unanimously accorded to him, even though different authors referred to him with different aims.⁸⁰ Besides, we have seen that the Archaic ideals expressed in the *Theognidea* and their characteristic terminology were transferred from the Archaic civic confrontation to the mass–elite opposition in democratic Athens. Plato’s critique further suggests that Theognis was a canonical authority in matter of virtue, co-opted as spokesperson for the conventional notion of *kalo-kagathia* popular among the Athenian elite.

We then considered the later reception of ll. 425–8 and 215–6. In the light of this examination, we can make two sets of observations. Firstly, in both cases, stereotypical imageries occur, which have several famous 5th–century BC parallels. In these two examined cases, the Theognidean lines are either the first or one of the first extant attestations of images and motifs which will go on to be successful in other Classical literary texts. We lack evidence to clear up the relations among the ancient passages, given the pervasiveness of both imageries. However, it is likely that the two Theognidean *loci* drew on already established *topoi* and contributed to popularizing them in their own elegiac version. Theognis’ variations on such *topoi* (consider the case of the octopus trope) had a longer afterlife than others, for their gnomicity and intrinsic ‘quotability’, namely, the self-standing nature of many of the Theognidean couplets,⁸¹ which makes them ‘reusable’ in any context. The study of other elaborations of the same *topoi* and that of the transmission of Theognis’ versions allow us to recognize Theognis’ poetry as both a recipient of ‘traditional wisdom’ (if we agree to apply this label to the complexes of imagery examined), and a means of perpetuating it.

Secondly, in these later uses, we observed a progressive anonymization of Theognis’ lines. In Clement and Sextus, ll. 425–7 (or 425–8) are a given, a quote to be used with an argumentative purpose, alongside similar quotations, and they need not to be commented on. For the purposes of these texts, the authorship of the lines is unimportant: their validating strength is what counts. The case of the octopus lines also exemplifies a second, parallel aspect of the late destiny of the Theognidean text, i.e. its popularity. Julian’s allusion to Theognis’

⁸⁰ Condello (2010) 62 makes wary remarks about the tenuous distinction between *auctoritas* and authorship when talking about *gnomai* and ‘common wisdom’ (*‘sapienza comune’*). Yet, I think that the 4th–century BC occurrences of Theognis’ name show that those quoting authors shared a notion of Theognis as *auctoritas qua auctor* of some precise lines.

⁸¹ See Hunter (2014) 77–78 on the ‘quotability’ of Hesiod’s *Works and Days*.

lines and Philostratus' parody reveal the renown of that text: it could be referred to both as Theognis' and without ascription, being in either case rhetorically effective. This, to use an imagery which is familiar to us by now, reflects Theognis' own octopus-like flexibility, the flexibility of his ever-applicable, universal, timeless lines, which are authoritative when mentioned, but still rhetorically effective when left anonymous. This is also due to intrinsic features: the seriality and 'fragmentability', the gnomic, universal character of many of the Theognidean statements, their availability 'to the later crystallisation in proverbial saying', and thus ever 'reenactable', in any context, as Condello wrote.⁸²

It could be pointed out that, as ll. 425–8 and 215–6 are not ascribed to Theognis any earlier than the 1st or 2nd century AD, they might have been included among the *Theognidea* quite late. This does not invalidate the 'parabola of authority' of Theognis' name I have just considered. On the contrary, ll. 425–8 and 215–6 might have been included in the *Theognidea* precisely because they were as gnomic and proverbial sounding as those known as Theognis', who was by now an established wisdom authority.

To make some comprehensive considerations: Theognis achieved renown in the 4th century BC; at that time, he was already a 'validating' authority and his lines were already used gnomically. Nonetheless, such a status was one aspect of a much more rounded notion of Theognis, which entailed authorship, authority status, as well as an ideological position. This early establishment as an authority influenced the way his poetry was later used. With time, some Theognidean lines (such as the two case studies here examined), being gnomic and reenactable, became commonplaces, acquiring what we could call a proverbial veneer. They circulated autonomously, and were probably being taken up in anthologies;⁸³ finally, in some cases they ended up losing the ascription to Theognis.⁸⁴ But the necessary condition for their anonymization was their wide circulation – and other sources attest that they were, at least partly, or up to a certain time, circulating as Theognis'. In other words, their anonymization is a side effect, or better still the end result, of the authority once accorded to Theognis, of his profile of teacher of ethical wisdom which underlies his 4th-century BC reuses. This leads us to the core argument of this paper. We saw that the

⁸² Condello (2010) 62; see also 63–66, 68–69.

⁸³ With the anthological transmission going side by side with a continuous direct transmission (see Condello [2010] 72–73).

⁸⁴ See above the cases of Sextus and Philostratus. Condello (2010) 61–62, 84–85 stresses how this process implies a popularization of the Theognidean lines, which from point of reference of the Athenian 5th and 4th-century BC elite became an inter-class domain.

motifs of ‘better not to be born’ and the ‘adaptability of the octopus’ are well attested in Greek literary texts, and it is therefore safe to assume that they were rooted in the Greek imaginary prior to Theognis’ own elaboration on them. Hence, already circulating *topoi* were taken up in Theognis’ lines and fitted to the elegiac meter. The metrical arrangement, the renowned authority and gnomic versatility of Theognis’ lines had these motifs further established in ‘Theognidean versions’. Over the centuries, authors resorted to them more often than to other literary instances of the same imageries, and the lines eventually ended up, with no ascription, in Imperial and Byzantine compilations (425–7 in *Suda* α 4099; 215–6 in Diogenian. 1.23 cod. Mazarinco = Apostol. 2.39). Seen from this perspective, Theognis’ fame and recognized *auctoritas*, therefore, develop almost as a middle episode in a longer story, which begins with the anonymous wisdom repertory these lines drew from and ends with the anonymous wisdom repertory they eventually became part of.

One last question concerns the significance of acknowledging the arc of the Theognidean reception through time. This essay has offered a sample analysis of some chosen *Theognidea* and of the ways they are quoted in different times, proposing a shift in our perspective on and our approach to the corpus. The survey aimed to show, through selected examples, how much can be discovered by studying how Theognis’ lines were appropriated and adjusted over time, by considering what happened, in the reuses, to the ideology the *Theognidea* first voiced, what later authors thought of the poet, and how Theognis became the ‘grumpy aristocrat’ of our collective imagination – or if perhaps this notion developed earlier and actually played a role in the arrangement of the *Sylloge* itself. Although there might be much we do not know about the Theognidean corpus, there is also a lot that we can say about the journey in time of Theognis’ poetry: it is embedded in later authors’ texts, and we should keep an eye out for this, shifting the focus onto the indirect tradition and onto the dynamics of reception and quotation.