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Myth Management: The Nature of the Hero in Callimachus' *Hecale*
and Catullus' Poem 64

by

Oraleze D. Byars

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Liberal Arts
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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to Dr. John D. Noonan.

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Myth Management:

The Nature of the Hero in Callimachus' *Hecale* and Catullus' Poem 64

Oraleze D. Byars

ABSTRACT

Two of the best known examples of the Hellenistic epyllion are the *Hecale* by Callimachus and poem 64 by Catullus. Both poems feature Theseus, a traditional hero whose mythology dates to Homer and Hesiod. Callimachus chose an episode from the Theseus tradition which highlighted his positive side, while Catullus picked a chapter from the mythic stores which put him in the worst possible light. This paper will examine the two poet's use of mythological material - how they suppressed, included and altered the earlier traditions - to make their very antithetical cases for Theseus. In addition to Theseus, I will examine other myths to determine if their treatment of these is consistent or at odds with their handling of Theseus. The thesis of this paper is that Callimachus had a program to present the Greek heroes of old in a favorable light and Catullus's agenda was to display their flaws. This paper will suggest that the reason for their differing viewpoints can be found, at least partly, in the contemporary historical context in which they respectively wrote.

Chapter One: The Hero – Most Hoped For, or Too Much Hoped For?

The *Hecale* by Callimachus and the *Wedding of Peleus and Thetis*, or Poem 64, by Catullus are thought by modern and ancient scholars alike to be among the finest examples of a literary genre called epyllion. They are further distinguished in the minds of many for being the first epyllion written (Cameron, 1995: 447) and the last surviving example: bookends of a uniquely Hellenistic tradition which capture many of the poetic tendencies of that period. It might be expected that Catullus, who followed Callimachus by two centuries, would be strongly influenced by his predecessor and, in fact, in many ways he was (Knox, 2007:166). The principal similarities are these: both employ elaborate, obvious and complex structures; they freely alter ancient tales and include versions not previously known (at least so far as we can tell by what remains to us); both customize their material by importing local topography and traditions; and they both feature labors of the mythological Theseus.

This paper is going to consider their use of myth - in particular, how they used myth to present the hero. The primary focus will be on Theseus as he is common to both poems. His mythic tradition was long and well documented, and had already grown and evolved greatly over the course of several centuries before Callimachus and Catullus would add to it their own distinctive imprint. Mythology has always been about variant telling: by the inclusion, suppression, alteration and addition of material the tradition is refined and continued. This paper will argue that Callimachus chose an episode from the Theseus tradition with which to highlight and affirm the virtuous and positive nature of a

hero – one of the “more just and superior, the godly race of men-heroes who are called demigods” that Hesiod conceived of as populating the Age of Heroes (*Works and Days*, 156-173). Callimachus, by his treatment of Theseus, made known to the Hellenistic world that the heroes of old, those famously celebrated by the archaic poets and Classical tragedians, were glorious ancestors who continued to be worthy of poetic tribute even though the Greek world in which they had lived no longer existed. Catullus, on the other hand, took from the mythological stores an unappealing chapter in the life of Theseus which he employed to make the opposite point: he wanted to display the contemptible side of the hero and show the “evil and suffering lurking beneath the surface of the brilliantly enameled picture of the Age of Heroes” (Curran, 1969: 191). In addition to the analysis of their use of Theseus mythology, I will consider how the two poets employed other mythological material both to add meaning to their treatment of Theseus and to advance and explain their attitude toward the hero. In Callimachus, this will be a consideration of the eponymous Hecale; in Catullus, the allusions to Medea and her unhappy association with the voyage of the Argo.

o nimis optato saeculorum tempore nati
heroes, salvete deum genus! o bona matrum
progenies, salvete iterum
vos ego saepe meo, vos carmine compellabo.
(Cat. 64. 22-23)

O ye, in happiest time of ages born, hail, heroes,
sprung from gods! Hail, noble sons of mothers,
hail again! You will I oft toast with wine,
you oft with song.
(Goold, 1983)¹

¹ All translations of Catullus 64 in this thesis will be Goold's.

Though these words were written by Catullus in poem 64, it was not he but his predecessor Callimachus who actually celebrated the Age of Heroes in his epyllion *Hecale*. The Alexandrian poet from Cyrene concocted a story which at every step put the thoughts and actions of a youthful Theseus in a good light to showcase a heroic ideal. This paper will show that Callimachus selected an episode from the mythological tradition which featured Theseus in one of his well known heroic labors. He then used this as the basis for a story of his own invention – Theseus’ overnight encounter with the old woman Hecale. While he associated Theseus within the epic tradition by means of Homeric vocabulary and allusion in order to underline his heroic character, he did not focus on the epic adventure: his victory over the Marathonian bull. Instead, in the manner which will come to typify the Hellenistic epyllion, Callimachus considered the hero in the humble surroundings of a peasant’s hut and in a recognizable Attic landscape. The argument of this paper, with its initial focus on Theseus, might lead one to think that he was the main focus of the epyllion. But it was, rather, the obscure old Attic woman whom Callimachus put in the forefront of the story. Because of this innovative treatment of Hecale and her poverty, Callimachus’ epyllion was long loved, admired and imitated. Certainly Hecale enhanced the favorable qualities of the young prince by dramatic contrast. Beyond this, she became a hero in her own right. For the hospitality she famously showed weary travelers in her lifetime, she was honored in death with a cult and the deme named for her. Callimachus reaffirmed and commemorated the traditional archaic hero in his handling of Theseus while introducing to Alexandria, Hecale - his concept of a Hellenistic successor.

o nimis optato saeculorum tempore nati heroes, salvete!

“O ye, in happiest time of ages born, hail, heroes!” is the translation provided in the preceding paragraph for these lines of Catullus. But the lines can also mean: “hail heroes born in times *too much* hoped for” (Feldherr, 2007: 100; Debroun, 2007: 295) and perhaps it is this latter translation that Catullus would prefer. This paper will argue that Poem 64 is, indeed, a song about heroes who were hoped for beyond what they deserved – not for whom there was the greatest hope. Catullus quite insistently emphasized the treachery and betrayal wrought by Theseus in the aftermath of his victory over the Cretan Minotaur. He would be charged with faithlessness and deceit in the matter of Ariadne and the cause of his father’s death. The middle half of the epyllion, which Catullus depicted on an ephrastic nuptial coverlet, was spent detailing the transgressions of Theseus. The remainder of the poem encircles this section like a frame: the opening lines devoted to the sailing of the Argo to Cholchis which Catullus has as the occasion of the meeting of Peleus and Thetis; the balance on the wedding festivities at which the Fates prophesy, in a grim wedding song, the disaster named Achilles that the union will produce. Catullus used the opening Argonautica reference to connect the tragedy of Jason and Medea to both Peleus and Thetis and Theseus and Ariadne. The poet’s purpose in this is to show a broad company of flawed heroes. Then he concluded the poem with the Parcae’s wedding song which convicted Achilles of insensible slaughter, and added him to the offending group. Poem 64 undercuts the ostensibly happy occasion of a wedding with a grim narrative of a flawed Age of Heroes, a chronicle of heroic misdeeds which began with the sailing of the first ship and continued until the Trojan War (Curran, 1969: 191-192).

Chapter Two: The Hellenistic Age and the Rise of the Epyllion

The precise date of the *Hecale's* composition is not known; Hollis makes a guess of sometime in the 270s B.C. (Hollis, 1990: 13). More generally, but more important for the purposes of this paper, it was composed in the Hellenistic Age, that period of time after the death of Alexander the Great when the Greek world stretched from Italy in the West to India in the East. Hitherto, travel, if one left home at all, was driven by necessities such as food, war, and commerce, and, in any case, *nostos* (homecoming) was the expectation. Life for most Greeks in the Archaic and Classical periods was a predictable, and thereby comforting, routine determined by one's community and by the polis rather than oneself. But the colonizing conquests of Alexander carried soldiers and their families far from home and left them in distant cities surrounded by foreign cultures without the likelihood of return. This first migratory wave was followed by others as thousands of Greeks travelled east to seek their fortunes in the remains of Alexander's empire (Pollitt, 1986: 1). The Greek *vóμος* (custom), both public and private, of the Classical period was forced to give way and accommodate the influences of strange locales and peoples. The lives of these Greeks, without their familiar communal guidelines, were indeed ones of uncertainty - for some they were likely marked by tremendous anxiety. But for others, like those skilled in science and philosophy, art and literature, the Hellenistic Age, unfettered by tradition, was an exciting opportunity for freedom of thought and expression. Literature, in particular, was no longer centered on religious festivals and competitions and the Hellenistic writer's Muse was now of his

choosing (Bulloch, 1985: 543).

In Greek Egypt, stable well before the other areas of Alexander's empire (Bulloch, 1985: 541), Ptolemy I and his successors used their wealth to attract and assemble at the Museum in Alexandria the best minds in the world; they also devoted themselves to the acquisition of all the world's manuscripts for the great Library. In this way, Alexandria became the cultural capital of the Hellenistic Age. The third century scholar-poets who were gathered at the library had at their disposal all the literature of the day and from the past. As they organized, catalogued and edited (Bulloch, 1985: 542) the library's holdings, the great traditions of the past - poems in epic meter, tragedy and old comedy - were at hand for scrutiny and examination in a way never before possible. The fact that literature was now available to be read, rather than simply heard, facilitated their desire for painstaking examination. These Hellenistic scholars studied the works of the ancient standard bearers with a new purpose and to a new degree. "It is almost as if the Alexandrians undertook to analyze and define the rules of the classic genres in order to be able to violate them all the more vigorously" (Cameron, 1992: 310). Having dissected these ancient works into their various components, the next step, one imagines, came naturally - they rearranged the pieces. For instance, an adjective which Homer solely applied to bronze, Callimachus used to describe the heaven, or the simile the archaic poet put in the mouth of a goddess to describe her son, Callimachus has an old hermitess use of her own offspring. It was not just the work of Homer which Hellenistic poets ransacked for recondite jewels to weave into their own works, but of all their predecessors: Hesiod; Pindar; the fifth century comic and tragic playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes; the authors of satyr plays and New Comedy.

It was during this time of artistic experimentation that Callimachus wrote the *Hecale*. Most modern scholars put the *Hecale* in a literary category called epyllion, a term not used, at least not with this meaning, by the ancients. Though scholars such as Gutzwiller and Hollis routinely acknowledge that Walter Allen, Jr. made credible arguments against its use, they, nevertheless, agree that the Greek and Latin epyllion is sufficiently distinct to apply it to a certain type of literature, and value the convenience of being able to do so more than any contrary argument Allen was able to make. I suspect Allen knew that he was fighting a losing battle which would explain the shrillness of his statement, “the only valuable article on the subject is ‘The Latin Epyllion’, by Professor C. N. Jackson. Professor Jackson really agrees with me that the type does not exist, and he might well have taken the final step which his evidence urges, a statement that the form is spurious” (Allen, 1940: 13). It is true that many of the poems are difficult to classify because they are idiosyncratic (Vassey, 1970: 38-43), and no one poem contains or displays every feature thought to be characteristic of the type. Additionally problematic is the fact that some of the characteristic markers are not unique to the epyllion. Indeed, features such as the dactylic hexameter meter, direct speech, simile and digression also characterize the archaic epic against which the first scholar-poets of the epyllion were revolting. In spite of these difficulties, there is something about the epyllion which wants recognition as a separate literary type.

Gutzwiller, whose *Studies of the Greek Epyllion* has become something of a standard reference in the field, says “that an understanding of the Hellenistic epyllia must begin with this point, that the ancients conceived of these poems as epic, but epic written in the manner of the slender Muse of Callimachean poetics” (Gutzwiller, 1981: 5). She

has in mind here the famous rebuke Callimachus launched from the proem of his *Aetia* (Trypanis, 1958: 3-6) against the Telchines who faulted him because

I did not accomplish one continuous poem of many thousands of lines on...kings or...heroes, but like a child I roll forth a short tale, though the decades of my years are not few.

He went on to say that “poems are sweeter for being short...hereafter judge poetry by the canons of art, and not by the Persian chain” (*Aetia*, 1.17-19). Callimachus was not only referring to overall length here, but to other excesses, such as verbosity, as well. The best poets of Hellenistic epyllia chose every word with extreme care to display, in the compressed format of the epyllion, the extent of their learning as well as their familiarity with the language and style of their archaic ancestors. They especially looked to Homer as the consummate source for epic expression, simile, metrical patterns and *hapax legomena*, but drew learned allusions from every source imaginable and used vocabulary specific to certain trades, cults and cultures (Hollis, 1990: 5-10). Callimachus, in particular, favored the obscure and recherché and borrowed language from all over the Greek and non-Greek world. When the available stock of words did not suffice, he coined his own (Hollis, 1990: 13-14). The juxtaposition of epic vocabulary and neologisms is one of the many innovations of this new literary form.

The diminutive scale of the epyllion meant that its story was likely to be but one episode or a narrow slice from a larger myth (Hollis, 1990: 23-26). The epyllion did not tell its story in an even and straightforward manner. The poet relied on flashback to fill the reader in on events of the past and prophecy to narrate or allude to future events which might take place well after the story at hand was concluded. Direct speech was

another very important technique which the poets of epyllion used to convey efficiently many of the important details of their story. A digression, whose relationship to the primary story was not always clear, and simile were also regular features. Simile, in particular, was used to develop the sense of the story without expanding its size. The poet, by a learned simile, was able to emphasize, explain or reinforce his words. He could also import additional meanings which might even contradict what he appeared to be saying. As will be discussed at length further on in this paper, in poem 64, Catullus inserted a troublesome doubt in the happy wedding day of Peleus and Thetis by referencing the tragic character of Euripides' Medea. Meaning in the small compass of the epyllion would be derived not only from what was said, but what the poet left unsaid: there was "the assumption that the story is already familiar to the reader" (Townend, 1983: 25) and familiar in all its transmutations (Gaisser, 1995: 581). All this meant that the epyllion was not for the passive reader; the poet expected his reader to be as educated as he and to fill in many of the blanks in the poem. In the Hellenistic epyllion, important events of a familiar tale might be dealt with quickly or alluded to briefly while the poet focused on a personal fancy (Hollis, 1990: 25). To consider briefly an example from the *Hecale*, archaic tradition would have made Theseus' killing of the Marathonian bull the focal point - the story which would be most fully developed by the poet. But Callimachus spent more time describing the varieties of olives that Hecale served Theseus for dinner than he did on the subjugation of the bull.

With regard to thematic material, the epyllion was epic in an ostentatiously anti-epic sort of way; epic altered to the tastes of a Hellenized world. Just as the subject matter of Hellenistic sculpture - the stooped and sagging body of an old man or the fleshy

fat rolls of an infant - was inconceivable in the Classical period when form was idealized, the Hellenistic epyllion often dealt not with gods and heroes, but with a more ordinary breed of people; and when it did treat gods and heroes it was with their mortal side showing (Gutzwiller, 1981: 9). There was an insistence on the commonplace and the quotidian, even as the ancient Greek myths always formed the backdrop. The example in the preceding paragraph where the meager foodstuffs of an old woman were treated with more interest than the details of an epic killing speaks to this. Gutzwiller calls this focus on the mundane a “lowering of the epic tone” (Gutzwiller, 1981: 5). *The Heracliscus*, by Theocritus, is another example of a Hellenistic adaptation, rather more comically realistic (at least as regards the behavior of the adults) than heroic, of a well-known myth. It is a look at the early home life of the baby Heracles as his parents, Amphitryon and Alcmene, and the household servants attempt to respond to a midnight crisis involving two monstrous snakes sent by Hera to kill him. By the time everyone had reached the nursery - “and lo! all the house was filled full of their bustling” (Theocritus *Id.* 24:54) - the ten month old infant had gleefully squeezed the life out of the ravenous beasts with his fat little fists. Both the example of Callimachus and that of Theocritus also demonstrate the tendency of the third century poets to pursue a less well known aspect of a familiar myth or to tell a story in a way never before told. We will see in this paper’s discussions of *The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis*, as the poem numbered 64 is popularly called, that this is also very true of Catullus. He departs on a number of occasions from any previous version of which we have evidence. (Arthur Wheeler suggests that as a *doctus* poet Catullus always had an earlier Greek source and that no seemingly novel detail was of his own invention (Wheeler, 1934: 127) - a position which, as I argue, is not well supported

by the very clever imaginings which make up much of the poet's work.)

There survives little in the way of either Greek or Latin epyllia. From Callimachus survives the *Hecale*, the "most famous, and perhaps the best" example of Hellenistic epyllia" (Gutzwiller, 1981: 46). From Theocritus we have the *Heracliscus* and the *Lion Slayer* (though his authorship of the latter is questioned) and from Moschus, who wrote about a century after Callimachus and Theocritus, the *Europa* and the *Megara*. In the Latin tradition there are, besides the sixty-fourth poem of Catullus, the *Culex* and *Ciris* in the *Appendix Virgiliana*. There are other extant examples which one or another scholar routinely includes in his own personal list. The *Aristaeus* episode in the fourth book of Virgil's *Georgics* is often mentioned as are some of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The Thirteenth Idyll, the *Hylas*, by Theocritus and some of Callimachus' hymns are others.

The inability to fix a canon highlights some of the difficulties with the epyllion as genre as Walter Allen pointed out. However, we have knowledge of other Latin epyllia which have not survived, and the knowledge of these strengthens the basis for the category. The *Io* of Licinius Calvus, the *Lydia* and *Dictynna* – also called the *Diana* - of Valerius Cato, the *Zmyrna* of Helvius Cinna, and the *Glaucus* of Cornificius. Once these are added to the list, the numbers make for a genre more difficult to dismiss. There is the viewpoint that the writers of the Latin epyllion must have thought that they were copying a legitimate literary form (Hollis, 1990: 25). Indeed, there are traces of the *Hecale* in the pseudo-Virgilian *Ciris* as well as in several episodes of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which suggests that the *Hecale* must have served as a favorite example (Hollis, 1990: 25). Lyne wrote that it was their production of a Roman adaptation of the Greek epyllion which

made the above named group a separate school. “It is in short an idiosyncrasy of the group, and the community of the group is thereby confirmed” (Lyne, 1978: 174). In a separate line of reasoning, Lyne concluded that the poets who made up this group were in fact those that Cicero dubbed the neoterics. One doesn’t have to go as far as Lyne does in defining the neoteric school only by its program of epyllia, but the composition of one of these did become a mark of caste (Wheeler, 1934: 80).

Catullus and other *poetae novi* were young modernists attracted to the refined Alexandrian style. There was nothing so new about imitating Greek forms and meters. Rome despised herself for always looking to Greece for cultural inspiration but could not help herself (Johnson, 2007: 178). What W.R. Johnson supposes so disturbed Cicero with regard to the *neoterici* (in addition to the fact that they relegated his poetry to the out-of-date heap) is his conviction that by rejecting Ennian versification and diction, they rejected what Ennius wrote as well; and that by their poetical contrivances and refinements, they disguised a want of matter, and in doing so, failed to preserve the “ethical codes and spiritual disciplines that make Romans Roman and that make Romans great” (Johnson, 2007: 178). Yet a history or a didactic epic was too big to permit the refinement and perfection they sought and, moreover, was irrelevant to their world - a world where Juvenal’s “sneer about bread and circuses would apply” (Wiseman, 1985: 4). Their poetry was an investigation of interiority caused by a Roman world in crisis (Johnson, 2007: 179).

The Roman oligarchy in the last decades of the Republic, motivated by a perverted striving for *dignitas* which knew no bounds or sense of proportion, appeared intent on the destruction of self and country. Wiseman describes a ruinous social policy

where one's *dignitas* was measured by the magnificence of one's spending and where empty coffers were refilled at the expense of the empire. The *nobiles* were always short of the money they needed to bribe voters, subsidize friends and allies, secure marriages, curry favors, flatter the populace; "hence, debt, corruption and venality in Rome, oppression and extortion in the provinces" (Syme, 1960). One's honor also depended upon the character assassination and the complete humiliation (often sexual in nature) of one's enemies (Konstan, 2007: 335). The competition for influence among the *nobiles* was fierce and constant and there was a pervasiveness of invective and meanness in Roman society. In the opening pages of *Catullus and his World*, Wiseman warns his reader to set the book aside if graphic descriptions of public impalements, crucifixions, rackings, floggings and burning by boiling pitch are likely to disturb. Rome was an incredibly and notoriously cruel place and brutality was commonplace. Though these public punishments were used to keep the huge slave population under control, the constant presence of such horrors must have impressed the subconscious of all citizens. Wiseman points out that there was no police force to protect the Roman citizen from assault nor to which one might turn for aid. A man caught cheating with another man's wife could be sexually assaulted by hired thugs to restore the *dignitas* of the aggrieved husband (Wiseman, 1985: 5-14). One has only to read the letters of Cicero to perceive the constantly shifting alliances, daily reevaluations of friendship and friendly association, and the pervasive insecurities with which everyone lived.

From about 275 to 240 B.C., Callimachus lived in the cultural center of Hellenistic Greece, a place then found not in Greece at Athens, but on the north coast of Africa, in Egypt. The big myths, exaggerated psyches and oversized heroes of the

Classical and Archaic periods were out of proportion for a world recently fragmented by migration, clashing cultures, conflicting philosophies and new religions. The poetry of Callimachus, as a consequence, had its own narrow focus. He borrowed myths and heroes from the revered works of the past but reinvented or treated them in a leptotic style. Homeric poetry had given the Greeks, as they emerged from the dark ages, their identity; the Classical Age's tragedies and comedies their moral compass. Callimachus, however, wrote not for a people but a few like-minded individuals. His poetry was designed to interest and amuse the educated and cultured audience of the royal court in Alexandria (Bulloch, 1985: 543). In addition, the Ptolemaic kings Soter (323-285 B.C.) and Philadelphos (285-246 B.C.) appeared to have demanded little in the way of poetic tribute from their poets (though Callimachus did compose poems to their queens). During the reign of Philadelphos, Egypt was prosperous and relatively stable and Alexandria was renowned for the excellence of her culture (Shipley, 2000: 200). Callimachus might have enjoyed a very good relationship with the court of Philadelphos- having possibly spent part of his childhood there as a page (Cameron, 1995: 4). Without the limitations of public performance and enjoying the goodwill of his rulers, Callimachus had an unprecedented opportunity for creative expression and was largely free to write as he pleased. The general situation was not much different for Catullus. He arrived at Rome around 62 B.C., already educated in Greek, from the Transpadane, an area more Hellenized in culture, conservative in morals and unapologetically energetic in the business of making money than his new home (Wiseman, 2007: 58-71). His family was then of equestrian rank and his father had a secure social standing in Verona. This, and the friendship of Cornelius Nepos and others of the Cisalpine region, made for his

smooth entry into the heart of Rome's most sophisticated set (Fordyce, 1961: xii-xiii). Catullus' situation was secure enough that even his humiliating poetical attacks on Julius Caesar's sexual preferences were forgiven (Konstan, 2007: 72-84). His was not to be the public voice of speeches and letters, treatises and philosophical explanations. Instead, the poetry of Catullus was largely personal: wishes, recollections, grievances and whimsies made up his content.

Chapter Three: The Myth of Theseus

Central to both the *Hecale* and to the *Wedding of Thetis and Peleus* is the myth of the Attic hero Theseus. Theseus was an early figure in Greek myth and an enduring one, undergoing 200 years of transformations until he came to represent the greatness of democratic Athens as her just and merciful monarch. In the late eighth century B.C. he was among the heroes who predated the Trojan War. His desertion of Ariadne is mentioned in the *Odyssey*, the *Cypria* and in the poetry of Hesiod. According to a scholiast of the *Iliad*, the cyclic writers refer to his rape of Helen (Agard, 1928: 84) and the *Nostoi* tells of the Amazon Antiope betraying Themiscyra for love of Theseus who, at the side of Heracles, attacked the city. The Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles* portrays him in battle against the Centaurs (*Aspis* 178). These first portraits of Theseus describe a testosterone-fueled youth who left broken hearts and bodies in his wake or, as Agard said, “he is a typical hero in the age of heroes” (Agard, 1928: 85). At that time, he was hardly a uniquely Athenian figure and much of the early literary and artistic evidence for this Theseus of ambiguous character came from non-Athenian sources. Athens’s earliest need for a mythological hero was filled by Erechtheus and Cecrops. Hesiod’s Theseus would more naturally have been Thessalian (Kearns, 1989: 117) and he had, as well, connections to Troezen through his father Aegeus which eventually formed part of his Athenian back story. (In fact, Sourvinou-Inwood argues that the later amplification of the Troezen story- which included the coming-of-age episode of Theseus’ uncovering the γινώρισμα left for him by Aegeus and of his answering Heracles, adventure for

adventure, as he journeyed overland to Athens, are part of the compromise Athens devised to appease Troezen who wanted Theseus for herself [(Sourvinou-Inwood, 1971: 99).] The dictator Pisistratus was the first to transform Theseus into an Athenian hero as he attempted to associate his own political policies with actions of Theseus. He went so far in manipulating a positive image of Theseus as to order that the uncontrollable passion of Theseus for Aigle be expunged from Hesiod's poetry. He also had a favorable passage inserted in the *Odyssey* (Tyrrell & Brown, 1991: 161-163). After the Persian wars, Pherecydes also tried to do damage control by offering mitigating circumstances for some of Theseus' worst behavior (e.g. the gods made him do it) (Mills, 1997:18).

Prior to the last quarter of the sixth century, some of the most popular and frequent representations of Theseus were his defeat of the Minotaur, abduction of Helen and Ariadne, and battle with the Centaurs (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1971: 98). During that time, according to Agard, Heracles, as the traditional athlete of the Greek people, appeared on the black figure vases eighty percent of the time. However, from 515 B.C. to the end of the Persian wars, the representations of Theseus almost equaled in number those of Heracles and not only did the frequency of his image increase, but his likenesses, limited in the past to a few stock illustrations, was supplemented by three entirely new episodes: his battles against the Amazons, his travels from Troezen to Athens, and his trip to the bottom of the sea (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1971: 98). It was during this period that Theseus finally managed to shed the prevailing image of a youth who deserted Ariadne, raped Helen and carried off Persephone from the underworld and to become a national hero of Athens. The distinction between Theseus and Heracles grew sharper: the former, a youth of beauty and grace, a wily competitor who can defeat his mortal enemy by guile

or force; the latter, a mature monster- killing brute in the employ of a tyrant (Agard, 1928: 86-87). Bacchylides, who wrote at least two poems in the early years of the Delian league about a princely Theseus, was likely the main literary source for “an authentic hero designed to bring fame to Athens (Davie, 1982: 25). Finally the image became that of Theseus as synoecist, the unifier of the twelve Attic kingdoms under one capital. This was the final key to his ascendancy in Attic myth (Diamant, 1982:38). Kearns says that the “timeless, static, un-epic, un-episodic” Erechtheus or Cecrops could never have “sufficed as the mythological expressions of Athenian self-awareness” (Kearns, 1989: 118). There had to be a struggle, the possibility of failure, a real enemy of the kind that Theseus faced in the Pallantidai, a rivalry for the Athenian throne which originated a generation earlier between Aegeus and his brother Pallas, to satisfy the “desire for a heroic figure who would express in himself the developed forms and ideals of Athenian political life” (Kearns, 1989: 118). When, as recounted by Plutarch, Cimon brought the bones of Theseus back from the Persian occupied island of Scyros and buried them in the middle of the city, his cult was established formally. His tomb was “a sanctuary and refuge for slaves, and all those of mean condition that fly from the persecution of men in power, in memory that Theseus while he lived was an assister and protector of the distressed, and never refused the petitions of the afflicted that fled to him” (*Theseus* 14). The hero cult of Theseus which developed in Athens after the Persian wars honored a very different sort of hero than the early archaic battlefield warrior. The expanded fifth century meaning of the word ἥρωας had little resemblance to the Homeric hero which was simply a sign of respect given to those of the highest class, and signaled little more than nobleman (Kearns, 1989: 2). It was expected that heroes of cult would continue to do in

death what they had done in life: “help their friends and harm their enemies” (Knox & Fagles, 1984: 257). The fully formed Athenian hero, the mature Theseus, was celebrated in sculpture on the Parthenon, Hephaestaeum, and temples at Bassae, Sunium and Olympia. He was probably best met, however, in the tragedies of Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles. Except in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* (an instance in which many would be willing to forgive his momentary rashness), he is represented in those plays as noble, measured and generous. In Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*, Theseus puts an end to the horrible and unrelenting demands by the chorus that Oedipus revisit his tragedy from the beginning and immediately offers his aid, admitting that the situation of no man is secure (565-569):

Never, then, would I turn aside from a stranger, such as
you are now, or refuse to help in his deliverance.
For I know well that I am a man, and that my portion
of tomorrow is no greater than yours.

He also tries to restore to Oedipus some of his dignity by reminding him (561-5)

that I myself also was reared in exile, just as you, and
that in foreign lands I wrestled with perils to my life,
like no other man.

Yet he is insistent as to his limitations and respects the gods’ greater powers; he will do whatever he can to help the suppliant but, “I am only a man, well I know, and I have no more power over tomorrow, Oedipus, than you” (639). In the *Suppliants*, Euripides provides a statesman who gives thanks for order, reason and counsel (201-204):

He has my praise, whichever god brought us to live by rule
from chaos and from brutishness, first by implanting reason,
and next by giving us a tongue to declare our thoughts, so as
to know the meaning of what is said.

who champions the middle class (239-245),

For there are three ranks of citizens; the rich, a useless set,
that ever crave for more; the poor and destitute, fearful folk,
that cherish envy more than is right, and shoot out grievous
stings against the men who have anything, beguiled as they are
by the eloquence of vicious leaders; while the class that is
midmost of the three preserves cities, observing such order
as the state ordains.

and who gives democracy (349-354)

But I require the whole city's sanction also, which my wish
will ensure; still, by communicating the proposal to them I
would find the people better disposed. For I made them
supreme, when I set this city free, by giving all an equal vote.

Of the *Suppliants* Shaw says “the distinction between the courage of the youth and the counsel of the old is central to the play... Whereas courage is expressed in action, counsel is expressed in speech” (Shaw, 1982: 5). Shaw is describing here the essential difference between Adrastus and Theseus in the play. I think it is also very like the difference between the action-oriented Theseus of the early mythology and that of the later when thought supplanted deed as his response to a problem.

Chapter Four: The Theseus of Callimachus

The Callimachean Theseus who found sanctuary in the rustic cottage of Hecale was conceptually a Theseus taken from the later myths, his image already polished to the brilliant shine befitting Athens's mortal representative. As I will show, the Alexandrian poet wanted no part of the mythological tradition which put Theseus in an unfavorable light. He selected stories from previous accounts or, where the earlier tradition was lacking, fabricated material which would comport with his purpose of presenting this heroic age figure in terms that were exclusively excellent. Yet the poet did not present Theseus in the rarified landscape of the battlefield as did the cyclic poets or as the justice-giving ruler of Athens as did Sophocles and Euripides. He put Theseus in the Attic countryside, a realistic backdrop that the Hellenistic epyllion favored. This was one of the singular hallmarks of epyllia: the view of gods and heroes in a menial setting.

Callimachus likely got many of the particulars of his Theseus myth from Philochorus of Athens, the same Attidographer cited by Plutarch for his life of *Theseus* (Trypanis, 1958:176). A patriotic *Theseid*, which perhaps appeared around 510 B.C., in addition to the plays of Sophocles and Euripides, likely offered inspiration as well. Satyr plays and comedies would have been good sources for other material, particularly for Scyron and Cercyon, two despicable highwaymen Theseus encounters, and for the rustic and homelier touches (Hollis, 1990: 5-9). Though little remains of the *Hecale*, the following chronicle of Theseus has been pieced together. The epyllion famously opens not with Theseus, but Hecale: "once on a hill of Erechtheus there lived an Attic woman" (Hollis, fr. 1) "and all wayfarers honored her for her hospitality; for she kept her house

open” (Hollis, fr. 2). It then switches, as we know from the Milan Diegesis, a first or second century A. D. papyrus which gave scholars a prose summary of the poem, to a scene at the palace of Aegeus in Athens upon the unexpected arrival of Theseus. His stepmother Medea identifies Theseus before Aegeus does and tries to poison him (Hollis, fr. 4) - an inhospitable reception which balances the later hospitality of Hecale (Zetzel, 1992: 169). Just as he is about to take the fatal drink his father recognizes him by the *γνωρίσματα*, tokens of recognition, left for that purpose in Troezen, and shouts a warning (Hollis, fr. 7). Then follows a flashback (one of the literary devices that the poets of epyllia regularly used to expand upon their narrowly focused stories) to Troezen and a review of a speech given by Aegeus to the daughter of Aethra, who was then pregnant by him with Theseus. He commanded her to take the child when he was of age to a hollow stone underneath which, were he strong enough to lift it, he would find the *γνωρίσματα*, a sword and soldier’s boots (Hollis, fr. 9-10). Aegeus keeps Theseus close after this, fearing to lose his son only just recently recovered (*Diegesis Hecalae*). Theseus, however, wants to establish his own reputation and begs his father’s consent (Hollis, fr. 17) to rid the Tetrapolis of Marathon of the bull which has caused them so much grief (*Diegesis*). Denied permission, he sets out secretly at night and in this way arrives at Hecale’s poor hut (*Diegesis*). In the fashion of Homer, Hecale postpones inquiry as to Theseus’ identity until after she has observed certain courtesies: getting him dry, clean and fed (Hollis, fr. 27). Then, as the scene moves from narrative to a dialogue (another of the poetic techniques used by writers of epyllia to backfill their small-scale story), Theseus identifies himself and says that he is on his way, with Athena as his guide, to fight the Marathonian bull (Hollis, fr. 40). Regrettably, this is all that remains of

Theseus' speech. The remainder of the extant conversation, which is spoken by Hecale, will be taken up in the next section of this paper. Returning to the narrative which followed the conversation, Theseus sleeps that night in a bed near the fire (Hollis, fr. 63), and Hecale watches him as he rises early in the morning (Hollis, fr. 64). This might logically be when she makes a vow to sacrifice to Zeus in return for his safe passage, a fact we have from Plutarch (*Theseus* 14). The next fragments deal with the capture of the bull and the return of Theseus to Athens. "having bent to the earth the terrible horn of the beast" (Hollis, fr. 67) "he was dragging (the bull) and it was following, a sluggish wayfarer" (Hollis, fr. 68). Theseus called out to the amazed onlookers and said "let the swiftest go to the city to bear this message to my father Aegeus – for he shall relieve him from many cares" (Hollis, fr. 69). Then he came unawares upon Hecale's funeral. "But upon finding her dead unexpectedly, and after lamenting how he was cheated of what he had expected, he undertook to repay her for her hospitality after death. He founded the deme which he named after her, and established the sacred precinct of Zeus Hecaleos" (*Diegesis*). "Philochorus certainly associated the institution of the cult [of Hecale] with Theseus and probably he mentioned the hospitality. Wherever the deme of Hecale was situated, the connection with the expedition to Marathon seems inevitable" (Hutchinson, 1988: 56).

Throughout the epyllion, Theseus is the ideal representation of a youthful hero - bold in action, determined in mind, thoughtful in heart. From the first chronological task set before him, the lifting of the rock placed years earlier by his father as a rite of passage, to the last, when he established honors for Hecale, his intelligence, character and actions were in accord for the future king whom Thucydides described as a man "of

equal intelligence and power” (Thuc. 2.15.2). Plutarch says that after he recovered the γνωρίσματα, Theseus eschewed the safer sea route to Athens pressed on him by Pittheus, the king of Troezen, and chose instead the perilous overland journey for the purpose of having Herculean style adventures (Plutarch, *Theseus* 14). After he reached Athens he was motivated by a hero’s desire for honor and fame to disobey the command of his father to remain secure at home, and sought instead the Marathonian bull. His first thought following his victory over the bull, however, was the peace of mind of his father and so he ordered messengers to run to the old king with assurances of his safety. His relationship with his father - both as he defied him and as he honored him - show a hero’s spirit: boldly determined on the battlefield, yet remembering his familial responsibilities. “The humane and dutiful feeling is strikingly combined in this scene with formidable heroism... Yet his heroism is not a matter of physical prowess alone: his message to his father exhibits noble brevity and a proud restraint (Hutchinson, 1988: 62). This brings to mind the Theseus of *Catullus 64* (Hollis, 1990: 221) when, in similar situation, after his successful Cretan adventure, he failed to remember his promise to his father to signal his safe return and caused the grief-stricken man to jump to his death. One has to wonder if Catullus had the earlier model in mind. Lastly, Theseus returned to the hill of Erichtheus to honor Hecale, faithful also to his duty to her who had given him shelter.

It is plainly evident that Callimachus took his conception for Theseus from the later legendary traditions, well after the time when his mythological narrative was narrowly focused on his amorous and battlefield adventures. The educated reader of Callimachus’ version of the myth would have noted that he avoided any mention of scandal or indiscretion; there are no troublesome hints (which the writers of epyllia

used to fill out their story without adding length) to Theseus' early reputation or character defects: no learned similes to the Ariadne stories, no fleeting allusions to the rapes of Helen or Persephone. That he is still very much a youth is especially highlighted by the contrast to the aged Hecale (whom he addresses as *maia*, or mother, the same word Odysseus uses with Eurycleia (*Od.*19.482, 20.129), but clearly a youth en route to kingship. There are many examples of the favorable treatment Callimachus gives Theseus. One, as he sets forth against the bull of Marathon he operates under the protection of Athena, who, of course, also got Odysseus home safely from Troy (Hollis, fr. 17, 40). Agard notes that in the fifth century, Athena, who had previously "sponsored Heracles, now often appears in the company of Theseus" (Agard, 1928: 87). Second, both Pfeiffer and Trypanis speculated that a kingly man from Aphidnae, whom Hecale recollects as meeting years earlier (Hollis, fr. 42), might have been his father Aegeus (Hollis, 1990: 180). This is another event with Homeric precedent (i.e. Helen and Telemachus in Book Four of the *Odyssey* [4.138]): an older person meets a young prince and, having also met the young prince's father at the same age, notices the likeness between the two. Hecale says "horses [brought] him from Aphidnae, looking like...Zeus' sons..." and she remembers his "beautiful...mantle held by golden brooches, a work of spiders" (Hollis, fr. 42). Even if the kingly man on horseback is not Theseus' father, Pfeiffer could still be correct, as Hollis thinks is likely, that Hecale is comparing Theseus to this man and, thus, associates Theseus with a son of Zeus. One can imagine Theseus in this passage as Bacchylides earlier did, wearing a "tunic and a thick Thessalian mantle...a youth he is in his earliest manhood...So vigorous, so valiant, so bold..." (Bacchylides, *Ode 18*). A Hesiodic demigod, one might also think

to add, as it was certainly the sight of a demigod that caused the townspeople to cast down their eyes in fear and respect when Theseus came along leading the bull: “...when they saw it they all trembled and shrank from looking face to face on the great hero and the monstrous beast” (Hollis, fr. 69). Hollis wrote, “in spite of his youth, victory has made Theseus a full-fledged hero, an “ἄνδρα μέγαν” (a great man) (Hollis, 1990: 220). As a further tribute to the Athenian hero, Callimachus had the people shower him with leaves, a *phyllobolia* that the south and north winds combined, “even in the month of falling leaves”, could not match (Hollis, fr. 69). This was the customary way to congratulate athletic victors (Trypanis, 1958: 192) and recalls Theseus’ prowess as an athlete, one of those favorable mythic characteristics which were increasingly featured in the art work after 515 B.C. It might be remembered that as an athlete, he was particularly known as a wrestler - Pausanias would later credit him with the invention of the wrestling style which required thought over brute strength (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.39.3). Indeed, as will be taken up later on in this paper, we know that Hecale told Theseus that her son had been killed by Cercyon, the brigand who was famous for challenging passers-by to a wrestling match which they always lost and so lost their lives.

Callimachus additionally underscores the positive side of Theseus by closely associating him within the Homeric tradition of hospitality. Indeed, his role in the hospitality scene repeats that of Odysseus, one of Homer’s greatest heroes. I will only take up this very important theme briefly here, reserving the greater part of the discussion for the later section on Hecale. Yet it is worth noting that in the same way as the hero of the *Odyssey*, en route to his most formidable challenge, arrived disguised at Eumaeus’

poor quarters, Theseus came incognito to Hecale's hut— his status as the future king and unifier of Athens yet concealed by his youth. It isn't known when Hecale discovered his identity. That he would become Athens' greatest king, a fact known to the reader all along, she would never know. Hollis notes that both itinerants, the king of Ithaca and the future ruler of Athens, are more distinguished than their hosts; Eumaeus and Hecale are currently of reduced of circumstance, though each had enjoyed a certain prosperity in former days (Hollis, 1990: 341-343). In *Odysseus*, Callimachus has the perfect model for the wise leader which Theseus will become when king - the lord of Ithaca was most famous for his guile and cunning, solving problems not solely by force but also by his mental acuity.

I offer a final argument to support my thesis that the dignity bestowed on the Athenian prince by Callimachus was extraordinary and significant. It pertains to the literary style and purpose of Callimachus for which he was famous and which was almost axiomatic: he was an avowed contrarian, a lover of the unexpected dislocation, an aficionado of the poetic prank. It was not Callimachus' poetic style to present the character of Theseus as he did: flawless; in fact, perfectly flawless. He doesn't indulge himself even the slightest intimation of shortcoming, though legend offered rich material. This determinedly serious handling of Theseus is decidedly opposite to the standard practice of Hellenistic poetry, in general, and of Callimachus, in particular. That Callimachus delighted in the unexpected and unsettling reversal is abundantly shown in his poetry. To an inquiring friend en route to see the statue of Zeus at Olympia, "widely regarded as the greatest achievement of sculpture and the most sublime representation of a deity" (Hutchinson, 1988: 26), Callimachus perversely provided its measurements and

other dry details before further lowering the focus to the crassest element: “as for the cost (I know you are greedy to learn this too from me)” (*Iambus* 6). In the middle of an elaborate explanation of a pre-nuptial rite, and just on the verge of giving the aition, Callimachus breaks off mid-sentence in a story about Acontius’ love for Cydippe to say that it would be impious to recount a myth of Hera’s sleeping with Zeus out of wedlock (*Aetia*, 3: fr. 75). The heroics of Heracles’ fight with the Nemean lion are parodied in the parallel battle waged by his peasant host Molorchus against the household mice (*Aetia*, 3: fr. 55-59). Considering examples from the *Hecale*, Aegeus is shown as feeble and dim-witted, almost allowing Medea to poison Theseus when he first arrived at the palace (Hollis, fr. 7) (Hollis, 1990: 144). The victim of the epic conquest, the Marathonian bull, is described with comic understatement as a “sluggish wayfarer” as he is dragged by Theseus back to Athens (Hollis, fr. 69). Athena bans crows forever from the Acropolis after they foolishly brought her the bad news that the daughters of Cecrops had uncovered her hidden association with Hephaestus (Hollis, fr. 72) and Apollo turns the formerly white raven black for a similar delivery of unwanted news (Hollis, fr. 74). Even Hecale is gently teased for her elderly ways. Of her loquacity the poet says “the lips of an old woman are never still” (Hollis, fr. 58). I consider it very important that Callimachus goes completely against the grain never to toy with Theseus. He alone is handled with care and treated only with dignity. Callimachus meant to present a heroic age hero in the best terms. For him, even though the epic as a means of poetic expression was exhausted, the great epic heroes of the past were superior men, and continued to have pride of place in the far-flung Greek world. This explains the exceedingly and purely favorable portrait of Theseus, a portrait without reversals, allusions or other poetic

devices to alter the serious mood he had created. The poet believed in the inherent goodness of the hero Theseus.

Even so, his exploit was not the main focus of the epyllion. The epic adventure was just the “peg” on which hung the principal story of Hecale (Bulloch, 1985: 564) - the framework, maybe even the pretext, for the poet to showcase an old peasant woman. This was the defining shift of the epyllion: the rejection of a long, elaborate hexameter song with an emphasis on archaic era “kings and heroes” (*Aetia*, Book 1. 4-5) in favor of a poem which featured in the central role a “low” character (Zanker, 1977: 77).

Chapter Five: Hecale

Although Theseus was an important part of the *Hecale*, Callimachus put in the forefront of the epyllion an old woman on the last day of her life. A major part of the poem appears to have been an account of her hospitality and the conversation she had with Theseus. This is the preoccupation with the routine and everyday which typified the Hellenistic epyllion. Even the heroic bull killing takes place as part of the simple rural existence of Hecale rather than in the grand context of the royal Athenian palace of Aegeus.

A quickly developing storm brings Theseus to the hut of Hecale (Hollis, fr. 18). This circumstance is itself a perfect example of a primary characteristic of the Hellenistic epyllion, the diminution of epic tone or sensibility: the pivotal meeting is not brought about by a vengeful or propitious god, but a very ordinary case of bad weather (Hollis, 1990: 6). Hecale sets about at once to making her young guest comfortable, having him sit on a humble couch (Hollis, fr. 29). She takes down wood she had put away to dry long before and cuts it so that she can set water to boil for cabbage and wild vegetables (Hollis, fr. 31-33). She also prepares water to wash his feet (Hollis, fr. 60). She adds three varieties of olives to the meal and loaves of bread in abundance, the type which are saved for herdsmen (Hollis, fr. 35). Callimachus is lavish with detail in this narrative section, lingering at length on the homely particulars and using the language specific to the daily routine and accouterments of impoverished rusticity. In this way he drives to the forefront Hecale's poverty and emphasizes the unassuming material he treats. Often he calls the utensils, food and furnishings by their local names, underlining, "by using down-to-earth Attic terms for everyday objects",

that “Hecale and Theseus were Attic heroes” (Cameron, 1995: 443). Trypanis notes how successful this treatment of lowly hospitality was in antiquity; among those influenced, Ovid is especially recognized as mining and imitating the *Hecale* for several stories in his *Metamorphosis* (Trypanis, 1958: 177). These details, which concentrate attention on the scanty furnishings, type of wood used for the fire and various colors of the olives, also show sentimentality for the ordinary, both on the part of Callimachus and his sophisticated urban audience, which came from its remoteness to their normal experience (Bullock, 1985: 543-563). Next Hecale and Theseus begin their conversation, probably a lengthy dialogue which would have provided the reader the background stories of their lives. Unfortunately, little of this remains today. She first questions Theseus about his background and the reason for his journey, and then replies in turn to his inquiries about her (Hollis, fr. 42). She mentions oxen she used to own and describes the man, presumably her husband, who came on horseback from Aphidnae looking like a son of Zeus (Hollis, fr. 42). She emphasizes that she did not come from a poor family and raised her two sons “on dainties, drenched in warm baths and in this way they ran up like aspens in a ravine” (Hollis, fr. 48.7). Then, in an address to one of her sons whom the outlaw Cercyon had earlier killed, she asks “was I refusing to hear death calling me a long time ago, that I might soon tear my garments over you too” (Hollis, fr. 49). She vigorously curses the bandit, but Hollis notes the charm of the disclaimer she added to her threat “and, if it be not a sin, (may I) eat him raw” (Hollis, fr. 48.7). Hollis thinks it likely that Theseus would here have told her that he killed Cercyon (Hollis, 1990: 209); thus, though she will die without knowing that Theseus prevailed over the bull, she at least has the satisfaction of knowing that the

despised Cercyon is already dead. Plutarch reported that it was to seek opportunities for heroic behavior of exactly this type that Theseus preferred the dangerous overland journey to the more secure sea voyage from Troezen to Athens (*Theseus* 14). At the end of their conversation, Hecale tells Theseus that she will sleep on a couch in a corner of the hut, probably giving Theseus the bed nearest the fire in the same way Eumaeus did for Odysseus. From her corner bed, she sees Theseus arise on the following morning to continue his journey to Marathon. When he returns a day later, Hecale is already dead (Hollis, fr. 79-80):

...whose tomb is this you are building?...Go, gentle woman,
the way which heart-gnawing worries do not traverse...Often,
good mother...will we remember your hospitable hut, for it was
a common shelter for all.

The woman who had long given welcome to travelers is here set on her own journey. The praise Theseus offers her is humble, crafted thus by Callimachus to explain the value of Hecale's heroics in language as simple as was her life (Hutchinson, 1988: 59).

Callimachus probably made up this story of Hecale, there "lying before Callimachus no tradition on the life" of this old peasant woman (Hutchinson, 1988: 57). The epyllion would have provided an aition for the deme and festivities established in her name - historical honors for one who was otherwise almost unknown. Beyond this, it painted a picture of an Attic woman's poverty and loss which were bitterly received at the end of a life that had begun with more promise. There are moments of humor, especially those provided by the reminiscences of the 500 year old crow in a poetic digression, but the general tone would have been rather serious and lacking in the "genial wit and childlike charm" that Gutzwiller says is a hallmark of the epyllion

(Gutzwiller, 1981: 4).

The figure of Hecale would surely have set that of Theseus into sharp relief; she was an old and sentimentalized peasant woman while he was a spirited hero at the beginning of a promising career. Because Theseus and Hecale share what will be the last day of her life, the bond of affection shared by this disparate pair goes far beyond the Homeric models of Odysseus with Eumaeus and Eurycleia. The bond of Hecale and Theseus is based in a poignant pathos heightened by several factors. First, Hecale must have been supremely gratified to learn that her guest had killed her son's murderer. A substantial portion of the fragmentary remains of her conversation with Theseus is made up of her recollections of her sons and her unabated grief and anger at their deaths. Then, again, she was likely deeply affected by seeing in Theseus the likeness of her dead husband, both thankful for and saddened by the unexpected reminder. Finally, Hecale and Theseus must have planned and anticipated a reunion for the time after Theseus fought the bull. She died awaiting his return - Plutarch says that it was her intention to pay Zeus tribute for the hero's safe return (*Theseus* 14). Further, the *Diegesis* states that her death "belied" the hope of Theseus to see her once again. This loss could even have been the first unwelcome outcome experienced by Theseus in his young life. The ultimate disparity in their incongruous association was her death and his future.

Though the poet was sensible to the good effect the pairing made, Hecale was not meant only to heighten the future promise of the youth by comparison with her loss and her diminished position. Callimachus was after something far more from Hecale than a supporting partner in an odd relationship. Indeed, it was her name he gave to the poem,

she whom he put in the foreground of the epyllion. He took a traditional myth and reworked the grand theme to produce a homelier story appealing to and reflective of the interests of a new age (Pollit, 1986). Broadly speaking, scholars explain the reworking – the prominent status Hecale gave Hecale in his epyllion - in one of two ways: either as a “diminution” of archaic epic sensibility (Gutzwiller, 1981) or as a creation of a new type of hero (Zanker, 1977). Both explanations are dependent on her famous hospitality, the φιλοξενία with which the epyllion opens. It has long been recognized that the hospitality of Hecale closely parallels the Homeric hospitality scene, especially upon the humble treatment given Odysseus by Eumaeus. Callimachus copied the epic hospitality scene so that Hecale might stand within that noble tradition as an Alexandrian successor to the Homeric legends of Athena-Mentes in Ithaca, Telemachus in Sparta and Pylos, Odysseus and Circe, Odysseus and the Phaeacians, and Odysseus and Eumaeus. Hospitality is an “archetypally epic virtue” (Cameron, 1995: 444). Hutchinson says that hospitality combined with poverty is a mark of morality in the *Odyssey*, and that the poverty of Eumaeus as he entertains Odysseus “heightens his goodness” (Hutchinson, 1988: 12). Zanker makes it clear, however, that there is an important distinction between Hecale and Eumaeus. In the first place, Eumaeus (and Eurycleia) are not the central characters in the *Odyssey*; they are sympathetic but minor characters. More to the point, they are not truly “low” characters because, as faithful servants, they are part of Odysseus’ royal family (Zanker, 1977: 74). The elevation of Hecale to title character is part of Callimachus’ unique program for the new epic form.

Scholars such as Hollis, Hutchinson and Gutzwiller see a lowering of the epic tone in the hospitality episode of the *Hecale*. They point to the many ways Callimachus

shifts the “balance from the heroic to the unheroic while still producing a recognizably epic poem” (Cameron, 1995: 445). Much of the language used to describe the hut and its contents comes from Old Comedy and by mixing in words common in Old Comedy, the Alexandrian poet deliberately lowers the nobility and epic seriousness inherent in the Homeric concept of the host-guest relationship. Hollis notes many specific examples (Hollis, 1990: 5-15). The word for couch, for instance, ἀσκάντης, upon which Hecale made Theseus sit, almost certainly comes from Aristophanes’ Clouds (Nub. 633) (though it might be noted that Callimachus used the standard Homeric verb, ἔζομαι, ‘to make someone to sit’). σιπύη (bread bin) and μετὰκερας (warm water) are two other nouns which describe the epic-based hospitality offered by Hecale but whose source is Old Comedy. Ancillary to an inclusion of non-epic vocabulary to describe an essentially epic virtue is the poverty of expression in the Alexandrian epyllion (Hollis, fr. 29-36.4-5, 38, 39, 48.5, 60):

...she made him sit on the humble couch...and she took down
wood stored away a long time ago...dry wood...to cut...she
swiftly took off the hollow, boiling pot...she emptied the tub,
and then she drew another mixed draught...olives which grew
ripe on the tree, and wild olives, and the light-coloured ones,
which in autumn she had to put to swim in brine...and from
the bread-box she took and served loaves in abundance,
such as women put away for herdsmen.

This language of the Hellenistic poet finds its roots in realistic Attic rusticity. It is very lacking in the lofty, epic richness of the Homeric model it recalls (Od.14. 48-79):

So saying, the noble swineherd led him to the hut, and brought
him in, and made him sit, strewing thick brushwood beneath,
and on it spreading the skin of a shaggy wild goat, large and hairy,

his own sleeping pad...he went to the sties, where the tribes of swine were penned. Choosing two from there, he brought them in and killed them both, and singed, and cut them up, and spitted them. Then, when he had roasted all, he brought and set it before Odysseus, hot upon the spits, and sprinkled over it white barley meal. Then in a bowl of ivy wood he mixed honey-sweet wine...

To consider other means by which it is argued that Callimachus lowered the epic tone, consider these following examples of language and allusion. Callimachus describes Hecale as wearing a “wide hat, stretching out beyond the head, a shepherd’s felt headgear”. The first word which Callimachus uses for ‘hat’ is *καλύπτρη*, the very word used by Homer for the veil worn by Hecuba, Circe and Calypso. Then he elaborates (downgrades, actually) offering *πίλημα*, a plain, pressed wool hat popular in Thessaly (Gutzwiller, 1981: 54) and “technically the precise word from the life of a peasant farmer” (Zanker, 1987: 209). While displaying his pedantry, Callimachus smoothly transforms epic splendor - the veil of queens and goddesses - to the ordinary - the working class headgear of peasants. The simile uttered by Thetis in the *Iliad* about her son Achilles that “he shot up like a sapling”, was echoed by Hecale who says of her sons, also destined to die young, that “these two of mine shot up like aspens” (Hollis, fr. 48.7). By this reference, Callimachus puts Hecale squarely in the middle of the Homeric tradition; by the very same reference, however, the reader is reminded how great her distance is from it. Hecale’s prosperity is a local affair – the fate of her sons can’t compare with the deaths of the Trojan heroes, her wealth with that of the Achaean kings, her grandness with that of a goddess (Hutchinson, 1988: 58-9). Nor can her entertainment of Theseus measure up to the entertainment Eumaeus provided Odysseus: sweet wine in ivy-wood bowls, fat beasts singed on a spit over a hot fire, a thick hairy

goat skin to keep out the night's cold. The echoes to Homer serve simultaneously to elevate Hecale even as they underline the meagerness of her condition. Though epic associations abound, Callimachus lightened the tone with a variety of vocabulary not found in epic. He made use of allusions that connected his characters to the heroic tradition at the same time they segregated them from it. Rather than lofty grandeur there is poor simplicity. Hecale's achievements and tragedies are personal, not national. Callimachus transformed the richness of the hospitality scene at Eumaeus' hut by replacing a the skin of a shaggy wild goat, large and thickly fleeced with a tattered rag, and platters of roasted meats heaped high with bread and olives. Callimachus wrote an epic hospitality scene rich in Homeric associations but with the plain face of Hecale at its heart.

There are scholars, however, who argue that the treatment of Hecale goes beyond an innovative use of realistic and mean material. Bullock says that Callimachus' concentration on the more ordinary details of his heroic material "was not a *diminution* of the grand themes of tradition, but rather an essential reworking of convention, and the establishing of a new realism" (Bullock, 1985: 564). Callimachus' dislike of archaic epic was widely known (Zanker, 1977: 68). He wrote in one of his epigrams "ἔχθαίρω τὸ ποίημα τὸ κυκλικόν", "I hate cyclic poetry" (Epigram 28). The *Hecale* was to be his radical expression of how epic should appear in the third century B.C. and this meant a full break with the earlier tradition, not a reworking of it. Hecale was a new hero, not a version of the old (Zanker, 1977: 68). The realistic detailing of her impoverished life and home, along with allusive comparisons to Homer, does not diminish the nature of a heroic age hero, but, rather, illustrates the quality of a new generation of hero. She

becomes a hero when Theseus institutes her cult and names a deme after her (Cameron, 1995: 445) and her heroic nature is treated with seriousness and respect though the language is appropriate to rusticity. According to this line of reasoning, the use of vocabulary from Old Comedy does not so much lower the epic tone as it gives the poem Attic flavor (Hollis, 1990: 196). Zanker points out that had Callimachus represented her with the elevated language and grand expression of epic, the result would have been burlesque (Zanker, 1977: 77) - a parody, in the manner of the story of Heracles' mouse-hunting host Molochus, of her heroic quality. That Callimachus meant Hecale to be a true hero explains why he named the epyllion after her, why he put her at the forefront of the poem, why he lavished attention upon her and why he gave her honors (Zanker, 1977: 71). Her heroism was not of the pure, undiluted kind that characterized Theseus. Her lips, like those of an old woman, were never still and her wildly spoken curse against Cercyon included an escape clause. Yet this gentle teasing simply made her more realistic and sympathetic hero according to Zanker, and did not undermine her dignity (Zanker, 1977: 72). The epyllion was a rejection of the "basic Classical axiom that epic, like tragedy, deals with great deeds of great men... in Aristotelian terminology *spoudaia* by *spoudaioi*" (Cameron, 1995: 443). "The *Hecale* is the first time in extant Greek literature that a $\phi\alpha\upsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ is elevated to a main role in an epic poem" (Zanker, 1977: 77).

I think that the Alexandrian poet had both outcomes in mind when he wrote the *Hecale*. Certainly the use of impoverished realism in language and context and the admixture of vocabulary from Old Comedy lowers the epic tone of Theseus' adventure. Callimachus and the other intellectuals at the Alexandrian court were weary of high-flown epic seriousness. The ideals of the archaic world were out-of-date in 250 B.C.

when social realism was stylish and people were charmed by the weird and novel (Pollitt, 1986: 143): hence, the popularity of a sympathetic but sweetly humorous picture of the impoverished Hecale. The *Hecale* certainly found ways to undercut “conventional heroic interpretations” (Gutzwiller, 1981: 5). When Hecale echoes the aspen simile of Thetis, the distance between herself and the goddess, and between her own sons killed by highway thugs and the Greeks who fought at Troy, is underlined rather than bridged. Yet, the Cyrenean poet clearly connects her hospitality to the Homeric tradition and wants this connection to bestow upon Hecale hero status (Cameron, 1995: 444). For him, she is a hero fitting for a new era. Her heroism is different from the epic heroism of Theseus (which he plainly admired and considered as still meaningful in the Hellenistic Age); hers is a modernized heroism based in realism. It does not replace epic heroism, but stands alongside it. This is the correct interpretation of the epyllion’s odd pairing.

Chapter Six: The Theseus of Catullus

At the time following the Persian wars when the Theseus myth was increasingly refined to represent the glory of Athens appropriately, there was a series of efforts to repair Theseus' reputation, particularly with regard to his treatment of Ariadne: "that Dionysus took her from him, that like Aeneas in later time he received divine orders to abandon his sweetheart, that he left her on the island intending to return but was prevented by the wind, that he returned to Naxos after her death and instituted a festival in her honor" (Wheeler, 1934: 129). Catullus ignored these patriotic and sanitized enhancements of the myth in his epyllion, Poem 64. He chose a labor of Theseus to feature in the poem, a choice of subject which acknowledged both his debt and his allegiance to his Alexandrian predecessor, but chose to present him in the harsh light of faithlessness and misery. Such a representation of Theseus, "the bringer of tragedy" was one way by which Catullus would show that "the Age of Heroes was not uniformly praiseworthy" (Bramble, 1970: 23).

It might be helpful if at this point I explained that although the Theseus episode is exceedingly important in the poem, presented at length and fleshed out with multiple flashbacks, direct speech and abundant narrative detail - especially compared to the allusiveness which characterizes much of the poem- it is actually a digression from the main story from which the poem takes its modern name, *The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis*. The digression has long been distinguished, not unduly: at 215 lines of poetry it constitutes more than half the length of the entire poem. In addition to its size, it is remarkable because it appears, quite incongruously as it deals with infidelity, betrayal

and desertion, on the coverlet of the nuptial bed as an ecphrasis. Wheeler has noted that Catullus tells the digression segment with more “zest” (Wheeler, 1934: 128) than he does the main story and this fact, combined with the physical prominence and original handling, has guaranteed the digression enormous and sustained interest through the years.

As the digression opens, Catullus’ immediate focus is on the anguish of the deserted Ariadne as she watches Theseus sailing away, “leaving unfulfilled his empty pledges” (59). He describes Ariadne in emotionally wrenching language as she mourns her loss, her clothes falling unnoticed from her body to the sea (70). Catullus then flashes back from her current pain to tell the background circumstances of her present situation, beginning with Theseus’ resolve to rescue Athens from further payment of human tribute to King Minos to the maiden’s sad but determined departure from her family with Theseus – the basic Cretan adventure. When Catullus returns to the digression’s “present” time, he gives Ariadne, as she watches Theseus’ ship sail off, 69 lines in which she mourns her fate, curses the faithless Theseus and begs vengeance for her betrayal. As the king of the gods himself nods assent to her prayers, a nod described in Homer’s *Iliad* (1.528-530), the waters upon which Theseus sails turn stormy and the promise Theseus earlier made to his father –to set a white sail if he should return safe from Crete – slips forgotten from his mind. Then Catullus flashes back to a time before Theseus sailed to Crete, a time when he had just been recently restored to his aging father. Here Aegeus makes a long speech in which he despairs the possibility of again losing Theseus and makes his son promise to signal his survival as soon as he comes into sight of Athens’ hill. Hollis has noted that were the Marathonian bull substituted for the Minotaur here,

we would have the speech which Aegeus must have uttered to Theseus in the *Hecale* but which is not among the surviving fragments (Hollis, 1969: 32). When Catullus returns to the digression-present, the reader “sees” Aegeus as he sees (Gaisser, 1995: 597) his son’s ship still flying the dyed sails, the promise forgotten. Imagining the worst, he hurls himself from the precipice, so that when Theseus enters the house and finds it darkened in mourning he “himself received such grief as by forgetfulness of heart he had caused to the daughter of Minos” (247-8). Catullus then returns over the sea, which Theseus has just sailed, to Ariadne, where she still stands stricken on the beach, “gazing out tearfully at the receding ship” (249-250).

The case Catullus makes for Theseus is almost, but not entirely negative. Catullus grants him without mitigating comment his initial heroic *virtus* – his willingness to die for Athens so that others might not and his eagerness to “win either death or the prize of praise” (102). He also gives him a handsome and heroic countenance: *sanctus puer* (95), *flavus hospes* (98), *ferox* (247); a charming voice: *blanda vox* (140); and a winning demeanor: *dulci forma* (175). However, as Wheeler points out, these are “essential to a love story” (Wheeler, 1934: 129) and serve to make Ariadne, as well as Aegeus, more pitiable and tragic characters. I would also call attention to the fact that at least one of these seemingly favorable characteristics hints, by its multiple meanings, at the deception to come and suggests the flaw in the hero Theseus. The adjective *blanda* while having the innocuous meanings of attractive and charming also has darker overtones and the more sinister connotations like coaxing, seductive and insidious (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*). The remainder of the digression is an extensive and clear cut indictment of Theseus.

In her shoreside lament, Ariadne charges Theseus as *perfidus* (faithless) (132 - 133), *neglecto numine divum immemor* (mindless of the gods' will) (134), *periuria* (given to perjury) (135) and *crudelis* (given to cruelty) (136, 175), *nulla clementia* (merciless) (137), *immite pectus* (hard-hearted) (138) and *pectus imum* (mean hearted) (138). She even questions his humanity, wondering if his mother could have been a lioness (154) (Curran, 1969: 179). The fault-finding characterization of Theseus is not limited to the speech of Ariadne - though there are scholars who argue that Ariadne's and the poet's is, in fact, a shared voice (Daniels, 1973: 408). Konstans, who makes a distinction between the speeches of the poet and Ariadne (Konstans, 1977: 45), points out the following censures made in his own voice: Catullus writes of Theseus' *irrita promissa* (useless pledges) (59), *immiti corde* (ruthless heart) (94), *oblito pectore* (forgetful heart) (208), and *mente immemori* (forgetful mind) (248). Lafaye suggested that Catullus was the first to link the death of Aegeus directly with the forgetfulness of his son (Konstans, 1977: 45, citing Lafaye, 1894: 175). (Gaisser takes Lafaye's logic a step further saying that Catullus was the first to make Ariadne the cause of Aegeus' death (Gaisser, 1995: 604).) Beyond the direct criticism of Theseus, Catullus appears to credit his victorious conquest of the Minotaur at least partially to the prayer made by Ariadne. The first word following her prayer ("not unsweet were the gifts, though vainly promised to the gods, which she pledged with silent lip") is *nam* (the epexegetical *for*) which explains the result of Ariadne's sweet offering to the gods (105-111):

For as an oak or a cone-bearing pine with sweating bark, when a vehement storm twists the grain with its blast, and tears it smashing over far and wide all it meets: so did Theseus overcome and lay low the bulk of the monster vainly tossing his horns to the empty winds.

The prayer “blurs the focus on Theseus’ *virtus*...Ariadne’s love and the gods’ consent are among the causes of Theseus’ victory” (Konstan, 1977: 41).

Just as it is plain that Callimachus preferred the complimentary image of Theseus which was advanced in the aftermath of the Persian wars, it is equally obvious that Catullus’ portrait of Theseus disregarded the fifth century model in favor of the earlier archaic mythology: the unrefined Theseus whose good reputation was rooted in but limited to his battlefield exploits. Even that measure of success, however, could elicit “a feeling of horror and not an appreciation of heroism” (Daniels, 1973: 100). The horror of the battlefield was clearly expressed in the epithalamium for Peleus and Thetis which spent twenty-eight lines singing of slain sons, rivers of blood, headless maidens and grief-stricken mothers (343- 371). The Catullan code of heroism definitely did not include excessive zeal in combat.

Catullus is emphatic in his indictment of Theseus. He is charged again and again as forgetful, cruel, and faithless. These are the defects of a man who lacked the *virtutes heroum* (the virtues of heroes) which Catullus had promised, ironically it seems, that the nuptial cover would display (50-51):

This coverlet, broidered with shapes of ancient men,
with wondrous art sets forth the worthy deeds of
heroes.

Konstans, arguing that the poem “lays bare the negative aspect of heroism”, suggests that *indicat* here means not sets forth or show but, rather, expose or unmask and thus insinuates the inglorious behavior of Theseus which would be described within (Konstans, 1977: 26, 40). Theseus, as *perfidus* and *immemor* in his relationship to the

gods, his love, and his home, is an “unheroic hero” (Daniels, 1973: 97).

The epyllion is, moreover, explicit in charging Theseus with the ruin of three homes (though he might be credited for creating one if we consider the more distant ephrastic scene of Bacchus coming to marry Ariadne). The first was the *domus* of Ariadne and her family. Catullus describes Ariadne as “still nursing in the soft embrace of her mother” (88-89) when “she was taken from her father” (132). Ariadne says that it was her own *germanus* (brother) (150) whom she helped Theseus slay and that he was stained with *fraterna caede* (the blood of her brother) (181). She laments that, abandoned, she has no home to which to go and sees her life’s end on a deserted and remote island (184) where everything looks like death (187). In consequence, she prays to the Eumenides to bring ruin upon Theseus and his own family, a prayer which is fulfilled by the nod of Zeus. The second *domus* Theseus destroys, then, is that of his father (246-248):

sic funesta domus ingressus tecta paterna
morte ferox Theseus, qualem Minoidi luctum
obtulerat memte immemori, talem ipse recipit.

Thus bold Theseus, as he entered the chambers of his home, darkened with mourning for his father’s death, himself received such grief as by forgetfulness of heart he had caused to the daughter of Minos.

Funesta, as well as meaning ‘in mourning’, can mean deadly and fatal- Theseus has made his own home uninhabitable by forgetting the promise he made to his father. For this transgression, he received the harshest punishment Catullus could administer: not only the loss of his paternal home, but the blame for it besides. Then, of course, there is the

domus promised to Ariadne that never came to be. In his own voice Catullus called Theseus the *coniunx* (husband) (123) of Ariadne. In her lament, she said Theseus had pledged her *conubia laeta* and *optatos hymenaeos* (joyful wedlock and desired espousal) (141). Ariadne even confessed that she would have become a part of Theseus' *domus* as slave so desperate was she. This has as its model Apollonius' *Argonautica*, where Medea offered to follow Jason even were it only as a sister or daughter (Wheeler, 1934:144). Scholars have noted that Catullus borrowed many elements appropriate to an epithalamium, both in his description of Ariadne (her chaste couch, her place at her mother's breast, the many colorful flowers to which Catullus compares her) (86-95) and in the tearful separation from her family as she leaves to join his (117-121). Indeed, these elements may all be found in Catullus' epithalamium, poem 61. I admit that the promises, so full of meaning for Ariadne, would not have made for a legally binding betrothal, *sponsalia*, under Roman law (Manson, 1910). But when the father of the gods himself agreed that Theseus should be punished for his lack of *fides* to Ariadne, Catullus "gives to personal love all the moral power of the family bond" (Konstan, 1977: 79). By the death of Aegeus, Catullus clearly shows that he rejects the premise of a heroic code which permits cruelty in the pursuit of personal glory (Harmon, 1973: 330). The last *domus* Catullus does not emphasize because he is reluctant to destroy the negative image he has crafted of Theseus. Yet Wheeler believed that the poet wanted to let a ray of hope shine through for Ariadne, even a hope tinged with danger (Wiseman, 1985: 181), so that woven into the coverlet is the god Bacchus, in the company of his frenzied followers, burning with love for her. Wheeler says that this is an example of "Alexandrian art at its best" (Wheeler, 1934: 130).

Besides the theme of *domus*, there have been many other theories given for the inclusion of the digression, with its themes of betrayal and oath-violation, in what appears on the surface to be a happy wedding tale. Wheeler provides an overview of the theories beginning with Ellis, who saw no link between the two; the English philosopher Hodgson, who thought that the “glory of marriage” was the common ground; Lafaye, who attributed the connection to an Alexandrian fondness for contrast; and Drachman and Pascal, both of whom believed that two separate Greek poems had been combined. As for his own position, which I find as unappealing as the ones just mentioned, Wheeler wanted the coverlet itself to be the reason, crediting Catullus as combining “two well-known forms of poetic technique. Both are as old as Homer, but Catullus is the first poet to combine them in this way” (Wheeler, 1934: 131-148). He is speaking, of course, of combining the digression and the ecphrasis. While I agree that a digression presented as an ecphrasis is unique and imaginative, I cannot agree with Wheeler that it was Catullus’ main reason. Fordyce expressed the viewpoint of many in saying “that a connexion between the two stories is to be found in the contrast between happy marriage and unhappy love (Fordyce, 1961: 274). My own stance is allied with the more recent positions of Curran, Bramble, Gaisser, and Konstan, who tend to associate the digression strongly with the frame story and to see them as an integrated, or at least interconnected, whole designed so that the reader might “observe the light they cast on each other” (Curran, 1969: 174). In fact, the ecphrastic digression enfolds the wedding couch and joins the wedding story to the Theseus-Ariadne story physically as well as thematically (Curran, 1969: 181). The Theseus-Ariadne inset was meant to show defects in the hero. Elements of the wedding story did the same, as the next section of this paper will make

clear. With the very first lines of the epyllion the poet suggested that something is wrong; by the time he painted the wedded couple's offspring as a cold blooded killing machine he will have left little doubt as to his intentions: the frame story and digression are meant to go hand-in-hand to show the inglorious side of the heroic age hero.

Chapter Seven: The Voyage of Argo

Poem 64 famously opens with an allusion to the voyage of the Argo en route to the eastern end of the world to take the Golden Fleece from Aeëtes (1-11)

Pine-trees of old, born on the top of Pelion, are said to have swum through the clear waters of Neptune to the waves of Phasis and the realms of Aeetes, when the chosen youths, the flower of Argive strength, desiring to bear away from the Colchians the golden fleece, dared to course over the salt seas with swift ship, sweeping the blue expanse with fir-wood blades, for whom the goddess who holds the fortresses of city-tips made with her own hands the car flitting with light breeze, and bound the piny structure of the bowed keel. That ship first hanelled with voyage Amphitrite untried before.

The poet goes on in the next lines to say that only on a certain day of that journey, and on no other, did mortals see the bare breasted sea-nymphs rising from the waves to marvel at the first ship to plough the sea and did Peleus catch sight of Thetis and fall in love with her and she did not disdain his love (12- 9). It has long been recognized (Konstan, 1977: 3) that it is only in this version by Catullus that the mythic meeting of Peleus and Thetis occurs as the Argo sails to Colchis. Of course it is a feature of the epyllion to tell a story in a manner not previously known or, in any case, less well known, and that it is highly characteristic of Hellenistic erudition to reformulate earlier poetic efforts. In this way the poet not only displays his learning but can either, depending upon how he manipulates the earlier material, affiliate with or distance himself from his predecessors. It is also true that Hellenistic erudition did not end with the poet but

included and needed a *doctus* reader as well. Gaisser calls the person who is “trained to look for allusive clues in the text and is both knowledgeable enough to recognize them and subtle enough to construe their meaning” a neoteric reader, and claims that the poet intended his poetry for a reader willing to apply such skills to the poem (Gaisser, 1995: 581). That Catullus had a number of models, both Latin and Greek, for the opening lines of the poem has long been admitted and explored. Euripides’ *Medea*, Apollonius *Argonautica* and Ennius’ *Medea Exul* are all recognizable in Catullus’ poem (Thomas, 1982: 145). Thomas argues that the main purpose of Catullus in selecting the voyage of the Argo to open the poem is that it is so dense with poetical antecedents that the *doctus* poet could not resist referencing them before presenting his own “superior version” (Thomas, 1982: 163-164). Certainly this argument has merit; Catullus must have indeed relished the vast poetical possibilities inherent in the Argo legend as told by Euripides, Apollonius and Ennius. Yet I agree with other scholars who contend that Catullus’ arrangement was not designed foremost as a polemical exercise or even as an erudite reformation of a familiar myth. The main reason was thematic: he wanted to insert Medea with all her unhappy associations into the story (Curran, 1969: 185). By rearranging the normal order of the Argo myth in a way that no earlier poet had ever done, Catullus deliberately put the wedding of Peleus and Thetis within the context of the voyage of the Argonauts - and thus with the unpleasant Jason and Medea myth - in order to adumbrate the hideous wrongdoings which would result from the offspring of the union (Konstan, 1977: 3). In fact, the signposts to the Medea myth of Ennius and Euripides are so prevalent and pronounced in the first 18 lines that the neoteric reader not possessed of the modern name given to the poem would not know until line 19 that he

was not reading a story of Jason and Medea but, rather, of Peleus and Thetis (Gaisser, 1995: 581). At lines 19-21, with the emphatic threefold polyptoton, the reader discovers that he has been misled and that the true subject will be the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (Gaisser, 1995: 581):

tum Thetidis Peleus incensus fertur amore,
tum Thetis humanos non despexit hymenaeos,
tum Thetidi pater ipse iugandum Pelea sensit.

Then is Peleus said to have caught fire
with love of Thetis, then did Thetis not disdain
mortal espousals, then did the Father himself
know in his heart that Peleus must be joined to
Thetis.

At this point, Catullus' reader would recognize the chronological alteration which made the wedding a result of the Argo's sailing, know that the reversal was intentional and meaningful, and understand that poet had signaled that he could expect a non-traditional telling of the wedding story. Now the reader would realize that Medea is meant to haunt the festivities and to insinuate that the wedding itself might not be without defect (Bramble, 1970: 21). The flaw, Catullus would make clear, is their celebrated offspring, Achilles, and the disproportionate carnage he was going to wreak at Troy as he cut down her sons with the same thoroughness and mechanical precision as a farmer crops yellow ears of corn (353-355) - his thirst for blood not slaked until his burial mound was graced by "the snowy limbs of the slaughtered maiden" (364-365). Curran cuts short the objection that a disapproving reaction to the "Achilles' passage represents an anachronistic imposition of alien values and sensibilities upon the heroic point of view". This is exactly the view expressed by Skinner who called Achilles a "conventional hero" and excused his "disquieting brutalities" as acceptable under a more "primitive heroic

code” (Skinner, 1976: 53). Curran had already taken the position, anticipating this sort of mitigation, that in the aftermath of Euripides and the Alexandrians, no poet, least of all the urbane Catullus, could accept uncritically the brutal savagery of Achilles (Curran, 1969: 191). The juxtaposition of two maidens, one the future mother of Achilles, the other his victim, in the epyllion’s epithalamium is designed to shock and discomfort. The following are the final stanzas of the song of the Parcae. They represent the dark and the light of the Age of Heroes, the happy ideal and tragic reality (366-381):

...the high tomb shall be wetted
With Polyxena’s blood, who like a victim falling under
The two-edged steel, shall bend her knee and bow her
headless trunk. Run, drawing the woof-threads, ye
spindles, run.

Come then, unite the loves which your souls
Desire: let the husband receive in happy bonds the
Goddess, let the bride be given up – nay now! – to her
eager spouse. Run, drawing the woof-threads, ye
spindles, run.

When her nurse visits her again with the morning
Light, she will not be able to circle her neck with
Yesterday’s riband; nor shall her anxious mother,
Saddened by lone-lying of an unkindly bride, give up
The hope of dear descendants. Run, drawing the
woof-threads, ye spindles, run.

The Medea myth, which Catullus used to highlight the dark element of the age of heroes, is not easily covered in brief fashion. In addition to the fact that it is quite old, much of the archaic Argonautic poetry has been lost (Bremmer, 1997: 86), and elements of the story occur in a geographical area so wide that it has been argued that there were two separate Medeas or that a later character supplanted earlier versions (Griffiths, 2006: 30-32). Early literary accounts of the Medea myth were the late seventh century poetry

of Mimnermus (fr. 11a), the sixth century conclusion of the *Theogony* by the pseudo-Hesiod (956-1002), and the seventh or sixth century anonymous *Carmen Naupacticum* (Bernabé Pajares, & Olmos Romera, 1996: Fr7 Davies). In addition to these direct mentions of Medea, there are references in later works (especially in Pausanias' *Description of Greece* which cites works by Hellanikos, Kinaithon and a poem, *Korinthiaka*, by Eumelos) that indicate a substantial written tradition dating from the archaic period which no longer exists (Griffiths, 2006: 16). The extant versions have in common several details. One is the importance they give to the role of Aphrodite in the affairs of Jason and Medea; Medea does not act so much as she is acted upon. Her divine ancestry, skill with drugs and magic, and her foreignness are also repeated themes (Graf, 1997: 31-33). In the late sixth century the lyric poet Pindar made a notable shift in the tradition by inserting doubt and ambiguity into the previously straightforward equation which minimized Medea's personal responsibility. In his fourth Pythian ode (211 - 250), the only complete pre-Hellenistic version of the Colchian story which remains, Aphrodite's agency in Medea's abduction is less certain - Medea may be a consenting partner to her own seizure (Graf, 1997: 29). The tragedy which Euripides wrote in 431 B.C. greatly develops this tension between Medea-as-partner and Medea-as-pawn, and it is the former, wanting to make complete Jason's debt to her, who loudly claims responsibility. As Medea and Jason argue about the degree of his obligation to her, she maintains that *she* saved his life (476), *she* killed the snake that guarded the fleece (482), *she* left her family of her own accord (482), and *she* killed Pelias and destroyed his house (486-487). Jason's admits some assistance, but attributes to Aphrodite and Eros Medea's complicity and the success of the voyage (526-531). It is

also in the fifth century that fratricide, the murder of Apsyrtus, is added to the myth. Euripides (Med. 160), Sophocles (fr. 343 Radt) and the mythographer Pherecydes (Jacoby, 1923: fr. 32.3) each mention this crime. Yet, it is especially Euripides who “gives Medea her canonical identity: the woman who kills her children in vengeance when her husband deserts her...it was his heroine who became the point of reference for later versions” (Boedeker, 1997: 127). The Medea myth, like the Theseus myth, is episodic. It is possible to point to a Colchian chapter, a Corinthian chapter or an Athenian chapter in Medea’s story just as Theseus’ legend may be accessed by his labors or his transgressions or by other systems. However, Euripides arranged the earlier material to create a character that linked a compelling personal tragedy to a reply so unnatural and repulsive that no subsequent treatment of Medea could escape its influence. She would forever be guilty of fratricide, murder and infanticide, an enduring heroine both pitiable and evil.

By the innovation of having Peleus and Thetis meet as a result of the sailing of the Argo, Medea became the poet’s invited guest at the wedding and brought, as Catullus intended, the abundant associations of faithlessness, betrayal, desertion, murder and misery that were well-known from Euripides and repeated in Apollonius and Ennius. The purpose of the Medea allusion, to insinuate a less-than-glorious outcome of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, is reinforced by its connection to the Theseus/Ariadne story - itself, as this paper has shown, a troubling narrative in a wedding poem. The outlines of both stories are analogous (Konstan, 1977: 68): each begins with a sea voyage and a perilous mission (the one to Cholchis for the golden fleece, the other to Crete to kill the Minotaur); in each, a local maid falls in love with the hero and assists him in his quest

– even to the point of killing a brother (Apsyrtus, the Minotaur); the girl leaves her family to go with the hero; the hero abandons the girl (in Corinth, on Naxos); the deserted maid reproaches the hero; the hero suffers the loss of his own family (Jason, his children and bride; Theseus, his father).

In addition to the broadly stroked similarities between the Theseus/Ariadne and Jason/Medea mythologies outlined above, Catullus directly models Ariadne's expression of suffering on the earlier Greek and Latin speeches of Medea. The *Medea* of Euripides, for one example, opens with a maid saying (1-8):

Would that the Argo had never winged its way
to the land of Colchis through the dark-blue
Symplegades! Would that the pine trees had never
been felled in the glens of Mount Pelion and
furnished oars for the hands [5] of the heroes
who at Pelias' command set forth in quest
of the Golden Fleece! For then my lady Medea
would not have sailed to the towers of Iolcus,
her heart smitten with love for Jason.

(Kovaks, 2001)

In Catullus' epyllion, Ariadne expresses this same wish in her lament (171-172):

Iuppiter omnipotens, utinam ne tempore primo
Cnosia Cecropiae tetigissent litora puppes,
indomito nec dira ferens stipendia tauro
perfidus in Creta religasset navita funem

Almighty Jupiter, I would the Attic ships had never touched
Cnosian shores, nor ever the faithless voyager,
bearing the dreadful tribute to the savage bull,
has fashioned his cable in Crete...

By modeling Ariadne's lament on that of Euripides (and on the nearly identical Latin

model of Ennius - *Medea Exul* 253- 261- who had also followed the Greek original)
Catullus connects the betrayal and treachery of Theseus to Jason and the Argonauts and correlates their failings. That Medea's tragedy found a voice in Ariadne may be seen in another example from Poem 64 (177-181):

nam quo me referam? qua spe perdita nitar?
Idaeosne petam montes? at furgite lato
discernens ponti truculentum diuidit aequor.
an patris auxilium sperem: quemne ipsa reliqui
respersum iuuenem fraternal caede secuta?

For whither shall I return, lost, ah, lost: on what hope
do I lean? Shall I seek the mountains of Crete?
But barring them with broad flood the stormy
waters of the sea lie in between. Shall I hope for the
aid of my father, the father I deserted of my own
will, to follow a lover stained with my brother's
blood?

Catullus' model is clearly Ennius (*Medea Exul* 284-5) (Zetzel, 1983: 259):

Quo nunc me uortuam, quod iter incipiam ingredi?
Domum paternamne anne ad Peliae filias?

Whither shall I turn now? What road set out
To tread? Towards my father's home, or what?
To Pelias' daughters?

(Jocelyn, 1967)

Zetzel argues that Catullus' use of the Medea allusion in both the opening lines of the epyllion and in the ecphrasis undermines Thomas' thesis that the Argo myth, traditionally unconnected with the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, was employed for the multiplicity of versions which offered the *doctus* poet an irresistible opportunity to display his erudition.

Zetzel suggests that, without even considering the content of the poem, “the use of the same model in both parts of the poem would assist in binding the narrative and the ephrasis together” (Zetzel, 1983: 259). Catullus intended to show a pattern of weakness, to expose an intrinsic flaw in the Age of Heroes. The character defects of Theseus were not limited to him, but attributes of the generation.

Before I conclude this section, I want to take up briefly the subject of Peleus who, of course, was aboard the Argo and was thus, as I argue, a member of the Age of Heroes. His position in the epyllion is largely abstract and undetailed, his particular significance being the necessary partner in the wedding. He is a member of the Argonautic crew when he catches “fire with love of Thetis” (19), who, in turn, does not “disdain” the marriage (20), and he is granted her by Jupiter, Tethys and Oceanus (26-30). He is called a *Thessaliae columen* (mainstay of Thessaly) (26). The wedding takes place in his own splendid palace (a departure from all previous literary accounts, as is typical of the epyllion, which place the wedding on Mount Pelion) (43-44) where the Fates sing that “no love ever joined lovers in such a bond as links” Peleus and Thetis (336-337) before calling for the union “which your souls desire” (372). Catullus ignores the favorable Pindaric tradition of Peleus which gave him Thetis as reward for his virtuous resistance to the adulterous entreaties of Hippolyte, the wife of Akastos (*Nem.* 4.57ff, 5.25ff) (Konstan, 1977: 4). Although Catullus did not attribute the winning of Thetis to any action on the part of Peleus, neither did the poet allude to the other traditions which had Peleus, as a mortal, be a punishment that Jupiter inflicted on Thetis (Wheeler, 1934: 123). It might even be argued that Jupiter’s acknowledgement that “he gave up his own love” (27) was intended to highlight Peleus favorably (Wheeler, 1934: 123). Yet the glaring

absence of Apollo and Athena from the wedding ceremony undermines any gains which accrued to the character of Peleus because of Zeus' favor (298-301):

Then came the Father of the gods with his divine wife and his sons,
Leaving thee, Phoebus, alone in heaven, and with thee
Thine own sister who dwells in the heights of Idrus; for
as thou didst, so did thy sister scorn Peleus, nor
Deigned to be present at the nuptial torches of Thetis.

In Homer (*Il.* 24.63) and Pindar (*Nem.* 5.21 ff.), Apollo was present at the ceremony.

Catullus' learned readers would recognize that this departure by the poet from the earlier versions of the myth was deliberately intended to cause doubt and worry. The guest list contained other disturbing elements, also innovations of the poet. One is Prometheus, a guest who only in this version attends the wedding. He comes - *extenuata gerens veteris vestigia poenae* (still bearing the scars of his ancient punishment) (295) - a "discordant note in a celebration of harmony" (Curran, 1969: 186). The role of Peleus in the epyllion is largely understated. However, it can be noted that there were opportunities from the earlier tradition for a more favorable treatment of the Argonaut which the poet chose to ignore. This leaves the poem with no positive portrayals from the age of heroes, exactly what Catullus intended.

Chapter Eight: Optimism in Alexandria, Despair in Rome

“It is often remarked that heroics are out of place in the epyllion” (Nisetich, 2001: xxxiii). This view became one of the defining features of the epyllion and surely had its origins in the rebuke Callimachus made to the Telchines in the proem of the *Aetia* to eschew writing poetry about “kings and heroes”. Gutzwiller’s definition of the epyllion makes the diminution of the hero central (Gutzwiller, 1981:2):

Most basic to the transformation of epic in the Hellenistic epyllion is the subversion of the archaic ideal. Although each epyllion narrative is based on an episode in the life of a hero or heroine, the story is told in such a way as to undercut or even mock the conventional heroic interpretation of this episode.

Nisetich, arguing the opposing view, says that it cannot be true that heroics are ill-suited to the epyllion, at least with regards to that of Callimachus. He cites as evidence to the contrary the exemplary treatment of Theseus in the *Hecale*, which this paper has enumerated (Nisetich, 2001: xxxiv). Through flashback and allusion, the epyllion traced the passage of Theseus, beginning in Troezen with his recovery of his birthright to his arrival in Athens and subsequent victorious mission to Marathon, with deference. The depiction included the successful but potentially deadly encounters with Scyron, Cercyon and Medea in addition to his key victory over the bull. There was also the sympathetic description of a young prince, just on the heels of his most glorious triumph, preoccupied first with his father’s well-being and then mindful of his obligation to honor the Attic woman who gave him shelter. The heart of the miniature epic was the account of this overnight visit with Hecale. The epyllion may have been given its structural unity by

material which was suitable for epic - the journey of Theseus to kill the bull of Marathon – but the focus was on the commonplace: an evening journey interrupted by a storm, a simple meal, a conversation (Bulloch, 1985: 563-4). In this way the Alexandrian poet revised the high tone of the archaic epic to appeal to the third century appetite for all things outside their realm of experience: “the ordinary had appeal precisely because of its remoteness from the normal experience of most Hellenistic readers” (Bulloch, 1985: 543). Callimachus “clearly and correctly understood that the decline of poetry in the fourth century was due in great measure to the constant repetition and consequent exhaustion of the old mythological material” (Trypanis, 1947: 3). Although the *Hecale* featured a well-documented hero, it found originality in the lowliness of its backdrop and its emphasis on the everyday concerns of food and shelter. Theseus is shown at the “outset of his heroic career” (Hollis, 1990: 6) and the main focus is on the companionship he shared with an old peasant woman on the eve of her death. His conquest of the bull was only briefly treated.

Moreover, Callimachus added a new dimension to the mythological representation of Theseus. His unique characterization was a blend of the early archaic era youth, whose reputation as a skilled warrior was tarnished by his rude social behavior, and the Classical period’s just and wise Athenian king. The hero was shown just at the moment of adolescent discovery and emergent character, yet already possessed of the Sophoclean maturity seen in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Hecale must have recognized the heroic promise in the youth – Plutarch says that she intended to make a sacrifice to Zeus on his behalf (*Theseus*14). Part of the engaging pathos of the epyllion was that she did not live to see him become an “ἄνδρα μέγαν”, best seen when the concerns of the

“great man” - whose visage, as he led the beast he had just tamed, inspired equal measures of awe and terror in the townspeople of Marathon - were not on his own feat, but on his father and new friend.

Still it needs to be answered why Callimachus, whose famous response to his detractors was to ridicule contemporary efforts to continue the production of epic poetry about “kings and heroes”, would compose a new type of poetry, an innovation intended and destined to attract notice, based on Theseus - one of the most frequently occurring subjects of the visual and written arts of ancient Greece. He could just as well have picked a less well-known hero to anchor his little epic. I argue that it must be considered noteworthy that he chose to distinguish his epyllion – a poem designed to be a showpiece for his new poetic principles, his answer to his critics and manifesto for the future (Crump, 1931: 33) - with a plot based on Theseus. His long and regular appearance in poetry and art would seem to make him especially distasteful or unsuitable to a poet with a stated agenda of modernism. Part of his very public reply to the Telchines was “the path of a poet should be one little used” (*Aetia*, 1). But Callimachus had an important and personal reason to take up the story of Theseus once again, and to make him look so good. The reason has to do with the poet’s admiration for the past glory of Athens.

Cameron argues against the claim “that Hellenistic poets, living in an age of monarchies, were inspired by nostalgia for the mythical past of the Classical city-state” (Cameron, 1995: 42). While that may be true, I believe that more than most Callimachus must have been affected by the library’s “almost sacred claim to be the guardian and controller of Greek culture for all the Greeks” (Shipley, 2000: 242). His lot was to work daily within its walls and he would have been thoroughly steeped in Greek historiography

and myth as he compiled the *Pinakes*, a catalogue of the library's stacks. As part of the dislocated Greek community, Callimachus would have been naturally drawn to link an unaffiliated present to the deeply rooted mythological past which was his steady diet. Attica, with its tradition that its people were autochthonous - sprung from the earth itself - had the deep binding roots Alexandria lacked. The Athenian belief that they were autochthonous gave them a national self-consciousness which was central to their culture in the fifth and fourth centuries. They were unified in this, set apart from other Greeks, to whom they felt superior (Kearns, 1989: 110). This feeling of superiority and separateness might have struck a chord with Callimachus as well. Thus, he featured Theseus - not a Pan-Hellenic hero, but Athens' singular hero. As the unifier and just ruler, he was the human representation of Athens; the city incarnate. By idealizing the hero Theseus, Callimachus glorified Athens. His treatment of Theseus was a celebration of the greatest city of the Ancient Greece. This is the reason Callimachus picked Theseus to secure the poem. There was no other hero whose tradition was so connected to the literary and cultural heart of his artistic ancestry. It was for this reason that Callimachus did not "be grudge space to the hero and his story, though famous" (Hutchinson, 1988: 61). "The patriotic feeling so common in classical poetry" (Trypanis, 1947: 4) was revived in the *Hecale*. This is not nostalgia for the past but admiration and a commemorative tribute.

Callimachus was no preterist, however. As well as celebrating the archaic hero Theseus, he unveiled Hecale. She, with her simple hospitality, is his concept of a hero for the Hellenistic world. Far from avoiding or denigrating the hero, Callimachus wrote a poem which expanded the category and brought together the old and the new versions.

The epyllion expressed appreciation for the noble Hellenic heroes of the past while giving the future a Hellenistic prototype.

Even as the epyllion of Callimachus is optimistic and forward looking with respect to the hero - establishing a model for the next generation of poets - that of Catullus shows his full dissatisfaction with heroes past and disaffection with the present human condition. The final lines of the epyllion which has heretofore exposed the shortcomings in the heroes of the past are a litany of the crimes and ills of present day Rome. “The heavenly ones were wont to visit pious homes of heroes, and show themselves to mortal company” (384-386) only before

...the earth was dyed
with hideous crime, and all men banished justice from
their greedy souls and brothers sprinkled their hands
with brothers' blood, the son left off to mourn his
parents' death, the father wished for the death of his
young son, that he might without hindrance enjoy the
flower of a young bride, the unnatural mother impiously
coupling with her unconscious son did not fear
to pollute her family gods. (397-404)

Catullus despised the current condition and called the contemporary Roman behavior criminal. He found no escape in the past, however, because “as the poem as a whole declares, it was never any better” (Curran, 1969: 192).

It was long thought by some (Putnam, 1961:189) that Catullus meant the wedding of Peleus and Thetis to be the last occasion where the gods mingled with mortals, and that the basic antithesis of the poem was between the Age of Heroes and the contemporary world. More recent scholarship proves this argument wrong for two reasons. First, as this paper has shown, the treatment of ancient heroes in the poem was

far from favorable. The portrait of Theseus, the allusions to Jason and Medea, and the excesses of Achilles express the flaws inherent in the hero. Even the presence of the Argo, aside from the allusions to Medea, is ambiguous and worrisome. This, the “ship first hauled with voyage Amphitrite untried before” (11) did not represent an advancement of civilization, but, rather, a transgression of the natural limits (Konstans, 1977: 23-26). Men were meant to stay ashore. “Daring, too daring, the man who first broke into the treacherous seas with a boat so fragile” says a chorus in Seneca’s *Medea* (300-301). Much earlier than Seneca, Hesiod had opined that the just man does not travel the seas (*WD*, 230-236):

Neither famine nor disaster ever haunts men who do true justice;
but light-heartedly they tend the fields which are all their care.
The earth bears them victual in plenty, and on the mountains
the oak bears acorns upon the top and bees in the midst. Their
woolly sheep are laden with fleeces; their women bear children
like their parents. They flourish continually with good things,
and do not travel on ships, for the grain-giving earth bears them fruit.

The reason for sea travel is gain. Profit, and the desire for it, leads to inequality and inequality leads to war. The *Wedding of Peleus and Thetis* opens with a story of gain: the Argo seeking the Golden Fleece; it ends with the hideous savagery committed by Achilles in the Trojan War. There is also the matter of Thetis and the Nereids rising up above the foamy waves to gaze in wonderment at the first ship (15-18). “The reader is expected to recall that when Homer presented this scene in *Iliad* 18.35 ff., the Nereids are mourning the Patroclus who died because of Achilles” (Curran, 1969: 187). Second, not even in this epyllion do gods and mortals mingle. Apollo and Athena refused to attend the wedding, and only after the mortal guests depart, giving “place to the holy gods”

(267-268), do other immortals begin arriving (Curran, 1969: 185). The wedding is the mythological present, a time when the gods refused to visit the homes “dyed with hideous crime” (397). The past, represented by Theseus and the Argonauts, was also deeply flawed. The future is embodied by Achilles. The poem turns out to be a bleak assessment of the human condition beginning long ago with the sailing of the first ship and concluding in the poet’s lifetime. Unlike his Alexandrian predecessor, Catullus does not hold out hope or offer a positive standard bearer for the future. The future he promised was a litany of horror at the hand of Achilles, prophesied in the song of the Parcae. Catullus and his poetry stand near the beginning of the end of the Roman Republic. The Roman world is disintegrating and his epyllion is a reflection of his pessimism.

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