**Research Proposal**

Ntouma Stavroula

**Supervisors**: Ass. Prof. dr. Stephanos Matthaios, Prof. dr. A. Papathomas, Ass. Prof. dr. N. Kanavou

**Proposed Title**: The *cosmos* of epithets. Use and function of the epithet in Hellenistic hexametric poetry.

**1. Research Objectives**

The principal purpose of the present thesis proposal is to study the use and function of the epithet in Hellenistic epic poetry, as a result of the transition from the traditional Homeric epithet to the descriptive epithet, which bears particular semantic charge. In the Hellenistic epic, the adjective seems to no longer function as a semantically neutral modifier, but instead to acquire an active meaning within the verse and the context. The selection of literary material will be based on the hexametric poems of Callimachus, his epyllion *Hecale* and the *Hymns*, the didactic epic poems of Aratus, *Phaenomena*, and Nicander, *Theriaca* and *Alexipharmaca*, Lycophron’s *Alexandra* and the *Idylls* of Theocritus.

**2. Theoretical Framework**

During antiquity, the epithet appears that it is not assumed as a distinct grammatical classification. Nevertheless, not only both rhetoricians and theoreticians of rhetoric but also grammarians had understood the importance of adjective’s category and the aims served by its use. Aristotle considers it as a characteristic element of poetry (Arist. *Rh*. 3.1406a12: ἐν μὲν γὰρ ποιήσει πρέπει “γάλα λευκὸν” εἰπεῖν) and calls it *κόσμος* (Arist. *Poet*. 1457b2). A similar role of epithet is later acknowledged by Dionysius Alicarnasseus in his commentaries for classical orators, where he often uses the phrase *ἐπίθετος κόσμος* (ex. *Isocr*. 3, *Demosth*. 1, 18, 24) for the ornamental adjectives of rhetorical speeches as part of the their style, without having special meaning. In the works *Grammatical Art* (*Τέχνη γραμματική*) of Dionysius Thrax (12,63/80 Lallot) and *Syntax* (*Σύνταξις*) of Apollonius Dyscolus (Ap. Dysc. Synt. 1. 29-32, 65, 106-8, 135 Lallot), the epithet is denominated as *ὄνομα ἐπίθετον*, a term which is transferred in Latin as *nomen adjectivum* by Roman grammarians, and it is included in *εἴδη* *ὀνόματος*. Finally, older and more modern scholars, such as Meylan-Faure (1899), Düntzer (1872), Bergson (1956, 1960) and Brunel (1964), attempted to determine the epithet by distinguishing it according to semantic criteria and its syntactic position.

A point of reference for defining and demarcating the subject of this doctoral thesis is the adjective and its use in Homeric epic poetry. The question of the significance of epithet in epic had already been dealt by Aristarchus, since the ancient philologist detected passages where the attributed epithet was not semantically consistent with the textual and pragmatological contexts. The ancient hermeneutical solution made a distinction of the Homeric epithets in terms of their use between *οὐ κόσμου χάριν ἀλλὰ πρός τι*, that is to say, those epithets which were a necessary qualification for the meaning, and epithets *οὐ τότε ἀλλὰ φύσει*, those which generally identified a name independently from their contextual needs.[[1]](#footnote-2) Based on the Alexandrian approach, Milman Parry respectively distinguished epic adjectives between the “particularized epithet, which concerns the immediate action, and the ornamental epithet, which has no relation to the ideas expressed by the words of either the sentence or the whole passage in which it occurs”.[[2]](#footnote-3) According to the scholar’s position,[[3]](#footnote-4) the latter type of adjective is the main core of the Homeric formula, which is defined “as an expression regularly used, under the same metrical conditions, to express an essential idea”.[[4]](#footnote-5) Thus, the ornamental epithets are fixed, without particular sense and are repeated in base of their metrical value, as metrical complements of the verse. Although Parry’s proposal contributed in a radical way to the Homeric research, later scholars have strongly criticized these views, re-examining the degree of semantic nuance that the Homeric adjective carries. Indicatively, both Vivante (1982) and Foley (1991) support that the epithet bears direct semantic presence and relation with its context, as for Bakker together with Fabbricotti (1991), even if they do not deny the meaning and function of the typical epithet, both consider that its basic role consist to promote the filling of the hexameter. One preliminary conclusion that we could draw from the studies in the Homeric adjective in regard to the questions of this thesis is that, even though the choice of epithet by Homer is not solely defined from the necessities of versification, the Homeric epithet is mostly presented as semantically neutral.

The dissertation proposal aims at highlighting the contrast between the formalistic fixity of the traditional epithet and the dynamic evolution of this particular grammatical category in Hellenistic epic, as it is identified by the general confrontation of the notions tradition and innovation, which runs through the Hellenistic poetic creation. The Hellenistic epic poet, although adopting the linguistic prerequisites of the epic genre, does not apply them in their universality but alternates them in order to produce his own *langue*. One of the manifestations of this liberation from the traditional oral mechanisms is also the renewed use and function of the epithet. Therefore, in Hellenistic epic we see that the meaning of adjective is activated and does not function in the typical and expected way of the ornamental qualifier or metrical complement. On the contrary, the epithet frees itself both syntactically and semantically, for the purpose of constructing identities and describing in homeric language a non-homeric world or vice versa, a homeric world in non-homeric linguistic means. So, our objective is to clarify the ways in which the lexical and semantic differentiation of the adjective is indicated through the new syntactic environment, but also how this modification enables the poetological agency of the Hellenistic poet to be revealed.

Part of the thesis will examine the presence of any typical repetition of ‘noun-epithet’ formulas in Hellenistic hexametric poetry, if, that is to say, the adjective acquires elements of formularity. The search for the idea of formula in the Hellenistic epos is may at fist be surprising and appear to contradict the prevailing view that Hellenistic poetics proposed the general avoidance of repetition due to the pursued *variatio*. Specifically, Parry, citing Apollonius Rhodius as an example, does not acknowledge the existence of formulaic features in Hellenistic epic poets, while evaluating the absence of formula as the most critical distinction between oral epic poetry and written Hellenistic epos,[[5]](#footnote-6) an opinion that has predominated in the modern bibliography too.[[6]](#footnote-7) Despite that, beginning from Elderkin and his article in 1913 entitled “Repetition in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius”, where he identified the repetitions of words and phrases in *Argonautica*, a new approach was developed, which opposed Parry’s statements in regard with the absence of formularity in Hellenistic epic. Thus, focusing mainly on Apollonius Rhodius, there have been numerous studies, such as those of Ciani (1975), Garson (1972), Cuypers (1998), Cairns (1998) and Fantuzzi (2001), which emphasize the conscious use of formula in the only extant, surviving to us, Hellenistic epic poem. In particular, Cairns (1998) formulate the idea of ‘reoralisation’ or ‘written orality’, in order to express the creation of repetitive verbal complexes, which either are based on the echo of homeric formulas or completely renew them. At the same time, however, this particular term describes the Hellenistic poet’s awareness of Homeric epics’ oral dimension, with what it entails, and the inclusion of its characteristics into his literary work. We believe that it would be interesting to utilize the above proposition by applying it to other Alexandrian hexametric works, always having as central axis the epithet and the literary aim that its repetition has, both when it is unaltered or in systems of “noun-epithet” formulas. Thus, we could argue that this statement is a generalization of Parry’s theory which will include the Hellenistic epic poems as well. Of course, we have to underline that the traditional epic formula is not sought in its strict form, but rather the ‘epicisation’[[7]](#footnote-8) of linguistic code of Hellenistic epic. We will therefore attempt to highlight an additional method of *imitatio* and *aemulatio* of Hellenistic epic poets, who attempted to display a literary affinity with their epic predecessor by imitating the use of the traditional Homeric epithet.

**3. Structure of the dissertation**

The doctoral thesis will be divided into three parts and the material will be classified depending on the dipole of presence and absence of the epithet and, consequently, tradition and novelty regarding its use and function.

In the introduction, we will proceed to trace the approaches for the concept of the adjective in general but also of the homeric epithet in particular, as well as the diachronic theories concerning the study of its function in morphological as much as in syntactic and semantic view. Furthermore, the methodological framework shall be established and the objectives of the research shall be precisely identified.

In the first part of the thesis, we will focus on the presence of the epithet as attributive adjective and on the relation between its traditional and innovative use. In detail, we will examine the convergences and divergences of the epithet’s hellenistic use in respect of the typical ornamental epithet at lexical, morphological and semantic level. It will therefore be attempted to record, analyze and interpret the particularities of the new formations by the Hellenistic epic poets, as well as the differentiations that the traditional homeric epithets may be subjected to in their use in the Hellenistic epic.

In the second part, we will concentrate on the absence of the typical adjective and on the creation of novel syntactic relations within the verse. Specifically, we will discuss the role that the epithet plays being no longer as attributive in the established syntactic position but as predicative. We will investigate what the new perspectives are being offered to the Hellenistic poet via the different syntactic and perhaps metrical framework, in order to describe and express the new reality.

In the third part, another aspect of the adjective’s use, which requires consideration, is that of repeating it in similar contexts. Particularly, we will explore the reformed appearance of ‘noun-epithet’ formula and of the formulaic element by Hellenistic epic poets, as well as their poetic function.

After the completion of the three parts, the conclusions of the research shall follow. The main aim of the dissertation is to highlight a new parameter in the interaction of tradition and novelty in Hellenistic literature, with the study of the adjective at the core. The epithet as a principal entity of meaning, through which identities are produced and constructed, assists in deepening our understanding of poetics of the Hellenistic epic poetry, a genre that regenerates, being transformed by the new literary status of the Alexandrian era.

**4. Indicative Bibliography**

Bakker, Egbert J. 1997. *Poetry in Speech: Orality and Homeric Discourse*. *Myth and Poetics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

———. 1999. “Introduction Homer and Oral Poetry Research.” in: De Jong, Irene J.F. (ed.). *Homer: Critical Assessments. Vol. 1 The Creation of the Poems*. London ; New York: Routledge, 163–183.

———. 1999. “How Oral Is Oral Composition?” in: MacKay,Anne (ed.). *Signs of Orality.The Oral Tradition and Its Influence in the Greek and Roman World*. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 29–47

Bakker, Egbert J. & Ahuvia Kahane, eds. 1997. *Written Voices, Spoken Signs: Tradition, Performance, and the Epic Text*. Center for Hellenic Studies Colloquia. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Bakker, Egbert J. & Florence Fabbricotti. 1991. “Peripheral and Nuclear Semantics in Homeric Diction the Case of Dative Expressions for ‘Spear.’” *Mnemosyne* 44 (1–2): 63–84.

Bakker, Stéphanie J. 2009. *The Noun Phrase in Ancient Greek: A Functional Analysis of the Order and Articulation of NP Constituents in Herodotus*. Amsterdam Studies in Classical Philology. Leiden ; Boston: Brill.

Barnes, Michael. 2003. “Oral Tradition and Hellenistic Epic: New Directions in Apollonius of Rhodes.” *Oral Tradition* 18 (1): 55–58.

Basset, Louis. 2004. *L’imaginer et Le Dire. Scripta Minora Lyon : Maison de l’Orient et de La Méditerranée Jean Pouilloux*. Collection de La Maison de l’Orient Méditerranéen Ancien. Série Philologique, 32. Lyon: Maison de l’Orient.

Bergson, Leif. 1956. *L’épithète ornamentale dans Eschyle, Sophocle et Euripide*. Lund: H. Ohlsson.

———. 1960. *Zur Stellung Des Adjektivs in Der Älteren Griechischen Prosa: Die Motive Der Voran-Bzw. Nachstellung in Ihren Hauptzügen*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.

Bozzone, Chiara. 2010. “New Perspectives on Formularity.” in: W. Jamison, Stephanie, H. Craig Melchert, and Brent Vine (ed.). *Proceedings of the 21st Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference (October 30th and 31st, 2009, Los Angeles)*. Bremen, Hempen: Hempen Verlag, 27–44.

Brunel, Jean. 1964. *La Construction de l’adjectif Dans Les Groupes Nominaux Du Grec*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Cairns, Francis. “Orality, Writing, and Reoralisation: Some Departures and Arrivals in Homer and Apollonius Rhodius.” in: Tristram, H. L. C. (ed.). *New Methods in the Research of Epic* (*Neue Methoden der Epenforschung*). Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 63-84.

Ciani, Maria Grazia. 1975. “Ripetizione Formulare in Apollonio Rodio.” *BIFG* 2: 191–208.

Cuypers, Martijn. 1998. “In Apollonius’ Workshop with Parry’s Toolbox: The *Argonautica* and Oral Poetry.” Unpub. Paper Presented at the 1998 Hellenistic Poetry Workshop, Groningen.

Düntzer, Heinrich. 1872. *Homerische Abhandlungen*. Vol. 1. Leipzig: Hahn.

Edwards, Mark W. 1986. “Homer and Oral Tradition: The Formula, Part I.” *Oral Tradition* 1 (2): 171–230.

———. 1988. “Homer and Oral Tradition: The Formula, Part II.” *Oral Tradition* 3 (1/2): 11–60.

Elderkin, G. W. 1913. “Repetition in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius.” *The American Journal of Philology* 34 (2): 198–201.

Fantuzzi, Marco. 2001. “‘ Homeric’ Formularity in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes.” in: D. Papanghelis, Theodore & Αntonios, Rengakos (eds.). *A Companion to Apollonius Rhodius*. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 171–191.

Finkelberg, Margalit. 1989. “Formulaic and Nonformulaic Elements in Homer.” *Classical Philology* 84 (3): 179–197.

———. 2005. “Oral Theory and the Limits of Formulaic Diction.” *Oral Tradition* 19 (2): 236–252.

Foley, John Miles. 1991. *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Garson, R. W. 1972. “Homeric Echoes in Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica*.” *Classical Philology* 67 (1): 1–9.

Giangrande, Giuseppe. 1973. “The Utilization of Homeric Variants by Apollonius Rhodius: A Methodological Canon of Research.” *Quaderni Urbinati Di Cultura Classica* 15: 73-81.

Knight, Virginia H. 1995. *The Renewal of Epic: Responses to Homer in the Argonautica of Apollonius*. Leiden ; Boston: Brill.

Lallot, Jean. 1992. “L’adjectif dans la tradition grammaticale grecque.” *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 14 (1): 25–35.

Machacek, Gregory. 1994. “The Occasional Contextual Appropriateness of Formulaic Diction in the Homeric Poems.” *The American Journal of Philology* 115 (3): 321–335.

Meylan-Faure, Henri. 1899. *Les Épithètes Dans Homère Dissertation Présentée à La Faculté Des Lettres de l’Université de Lausanne Par H. Meylan-Faure Pour Obtenir Les Grades de Licencié et Docteur Ès-Lettres*. Lausanne: Imprimerie Georges Bridel & Cie.

Montanari, Franco, Antonios Rengakos & Christos Tsagalis. 2011. *Homeric Contexts: Neoanalysis and the Interpretation of Oral Poetry*. Trends in Classics - Supplementary Volumes. Berlin ; Boston: De Gruyter.

Morris, Ian, and Barry B. Powell. 2009. *A New Companion to Homer. Εγχειρίδιο Ομηρικών Σπουδών*. Αθήνα: Παπαδήμας.

Moskalew, Walter. 1982. *Formular Language and Poetic Design in the Aeneid*. Vol. 73. Leiden ; Boston: Brill.

Parry, Milman. 1971. *The Making of Homeric Verse, Edited by Adam Parry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Rind, Miles & Lauren Tillinghast. 2008. “What Is an Attributive Adjective?” *Philosophy* 83 (1): 77–88.

Vian, Francis. 1973. “Notes critiques au chant II des « Argonautiques» d’Apollonios de Rhodes.” *Revue des Études Anciennes* 75 (1): 82–102.

Visser, Edzard. 1999. “Formulae or Single Words? Towards a New Theory on Homeric Verse-Making.” in: De Jong, Irene J.F. (ed.). *Homer: Critical Assessments. Vol. 1. The Creation of the Poems*. London ; New York: Routledge. 364–81.

Vivante, Paolo. 1982. *The Epithets in Homer: A Study in Poetic Values*. Ann Arbor: Yale University Press New Haven.

1. Parry (1971) 120-121. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Parry (1971) 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Parry (1971) 149: “In the matter of the generic meaning of the epithet as in that of its ornamental meaning, we can conclude that the poet was guided in his choice by considerations of versification and in no way by the sense”, 165: “The technique of epithets, as we have studied it, is solely designed to help the poet to fit a noun into a line of six feet; once the noun has been fitted in and the line is complete, the epithet has no further function”, 166: “The traditional epithet would not be possible if the bards had not wanted them in a great variety of metrical values. The ornamental meaning is not possible in an epithet which is not traditional. And the generic meaning is not possible in an epithet which is not ornamental”. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Parry (1971) 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Parry (1971) 429: “Apollonius swings us from imitation to originality. […] He affects ornament, along with epic forms and words, only enough to produce a pleasantly archaic impression […]. There are no formulaic lines, few formulaic phrases, and the formulaic quality of position is noticeably absent. His work has every mark of originality and can in no way be criticized as a mere imitation of Homer”. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Ex. s. R. Hunter, *Apollonius of Rhodes: Argonautica Book IV*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015, 29 in his commentary on the third book of *Argonautica*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. M. Fantuzzi, R. Hunter. *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry*.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004, 271, 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)