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**Lyric Visions of Epic Combat:
The Spectacle of War in Archaic Personal Song**

Laura Swift

How to be a good warrior was a profound concern for ancient Greek society at all times, but the socio-political and military changes of the archaic period make it a pressing theme for the lyric poets.¹ While scholars have rightly moved away from the view that lyric poetry represents the birth of a new self-consciousness,² it remains the case that lyric is distinctive for its focus on personal experience, and that for the aristocratic males who formed the audiences at symposia, the nature and meaning of warfare was a major point of interest in their lives. Lyric is adept at creating a snapshot and rich in its use of imagery and metaphor, and so it is not surprising that it revels in vivid and visually oriented descriptions of warfare. As such, lyric poetry offers valuable insight into how war was presented as spectacle, and the social and cultural role that this type of portrayal fulfils. Many such descriptions take epic as a reference point, whether to add grandeur to contemporary battle experiences, or to challenge the Homeric perspective and suggest an alternative way of understanding warfare.³

This chapter will use case-studies from across the range of elegiac, iambic, and melic poetry to discuss the spectacle of war from two opposing perspectives. The first section examines how lyric uses visually impressive descriptions to represent contemporary warfare as equivalent to the deeds of the epic heroes. This is clear in the poetry of Tyrtaeus, which reconfigures epic morality for his contemporary Spartan setting. Tyrtaeus' aim is to inspire his listeners to martial courage, and as we shall see, his emphasis on the glamour of war is an important part of this strategy. We find similar techniques used by other lyric poets, who

¹ On military developments during the archaic period, see van Wees (2004: 166-74).

² Most influentially proposed by Snell (1953); for criticisms of this interpretation of the development of Greek lyric and the Greek 'discovery of the mind', cf. e.g. Budelmann (2009: 14-15).

³ The degree to which lyric poets refer to the Homeric poems as we know them, as opposed to a general repertoire of epic myth, language, and diction, is much debated, and for the purposes of this article I mostly use 'Homeric' to indicate Homeric-style epic rather than arguing for specific intertextual links. An exception is Tyrtaeus fr. 10 W, where I see an intertext with Priam's speech in *Iliad* 22, discussed below.

encourage their audiences to imagine the visual appeal of war from the safety of their drinking couches. This positive portrayal of warfare, and of courage on the battlefield, is part of the way in which sympotic poetry develops the bonds within the group of *hetairoi*, for the relaxing symposiasts can take pride in being reminded of their allure as men of action. The Homeric echoes in such language not only add grandeur, but also fulfil a political and societal function by reinforcing the valuable role played by the man who conducts himself well on the battlefield. The audience is reminded of their shared cultural values and traditions, and this enhances the unity of the drinking-group. However, lyric poetry represents a range of perspectives, and the poets critique the epic worldview as often as they admire it. The second part of the article therefore explores a contrasting phenomenon: how the language of war as spectacle is subverted to express a viewpoint which challenges the traditional epic outlook. This sometimes takes the form of an ironic spin on the glamour of war: as for example in fragments by Archilochus which satirise conventional heroic values. An alternative strategy is adopted by the composers of erotic poems, who allude to the spectacle of the battlefield in order to replace it with a different form of worth and beauty, that of love.

Beautiful battlescapes and the drama of war

A good starting point for an exploration of war as a visual drama can be found in the elegies of Tyrtaeus, poems designed to celebrate the glory of the battlefield and encourage the listener to fight with courage. In several surviving fragments, Tyrtaeus not only valorises the brave warrior, but does so in terms which stress the visual appeal of his heroism. His

descriptions of warfare achieve an almost cinematic effect,⁴ reminiscent of epic descriptions of the battlefield (fr. 11.21-38 W):⁵

ἀλλά τις εὖ διαβὰς μενέτω ποσὶν ἀμφοτέροισι
στηριχθεὶς ἐπὶ γῆς, χεῖλος ὀδοῦσι δακῶν,
μηρούς τε κνήμας τε κάτω καὶ στέρνα καὶ ὦμους
ἀσπίδος εὐρείης γαστρὶ καλυψάμενος·
δεξιτερῆι δ' ἐν χειρὶ τινασσέτω ὄβριμον ἔγχος, (25)
κινεῖτω δὲ λόφον δεινὸν ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς·
ἔρδων δ' ὄβριμα ἔργα διδασκέσθω πολεμίζειν,
μηδ' ἐκτὸς βελέων ἐστάτω ἀσπίδ' ἔχων,
ἀλλά τις ἐγγύς ἰὼν αὐτοσχεδὸν ἔγχεϊ μακρῶι
ἢ ξίφει οὐτάζων δῆϊον ἄνδρ' ἐλέτω, (30)
καὶ πόδα παρ ποδὶ θεὶς καὶ ἐπ' ἀσπίδος ἀσπίδ' ἐρείσας,
ἐν δὲ λόφον τε λόφωι καὶ κυνέην κυνέηι
καὶ στέρνον στέρνωι πεπλημένος ἀνδρὶ μαχέσθω,
ἢ ξίφεος κώπην ἢ δόρυ μακρὸν ἔχων.
ὕμεῖς δ', ὧ γυμνήτες, ὑπ' ἀσπίδος ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος (35)
πτώσσοντες μεγάλοις βάλλετε χερμαδίους
δούρασί τε ξεστοῖσιν ἀκοντίζοντες ἐς αὐτούς,
τοῖσι πανόπλοισιν πλησίον ἰστάμενοι.

⁴ On epic as a quasi-cinematic experience, see the chapters of Myers and Hesk in this volume. Cinematic metaphors have often been used in descriptions of Greek martial poetry: cf. e.g. Bonifazi (2008: 45-61); Winkler (2007); de Jong and Nünlist (2004).

⁵ The texts used are *IEG*² for Tyrtaeus and Mimnermus, *PMGF* for Ibycus, and Voigt for Sappho and Alcaeus. Translations are my own.

But let every man stand his ground with both feet set apart, rooted firmly to the earth, biting his lip with his teeth, his thighs and shins below and his chest and shoulders covered by the bulge of his broad shield. Let him brandish his fearsome spear in his right hand, and let the plume nod terrifyingly above his head. Let him teach himself to fight by his ferocious deeds, and let him not stand out of range of missiles, since he has a shield, but go close up and fight hand to hand, stabbing with his long spear or his sword, and bring down his foe. Place foot to foot and press shield against shield, thrusting crest to crest, helmet to helmet, and chest to chest, and let him fight his man, holding his sword's handle or his long spear. As for you light-armed men, crouch behind the shields and throw large rocks and hurl polished javelins at them in all directions, helping the heavy-armoured troops by standing close to them.'

Tyrtaeus begins by focusing on the individual warrior, whose determination is vividly captured by the detail of the biting the lip (22). This focus on the individual is reminiscent of epic's focus on the leading fighters, whose arming scenes and prowess in battle are described in detail.⁶ As he advances to battle (27-30), the description pans out to encompass the hoplite line as a whole (31-5) and finally the whole of the army, including the less glamorous but indispensable light-armoured troops (35-8). The narrative sweep makes for an exciting portrayal of the battle, but it also contains political overtones, as it reminds the listener that the individual warrior achieves heroism by being a cog in the larger machine of hoplite warfare.⁷ The warrior's own successes are still a matter to be celebrated, and the poet refers twice to combat between two individuals (δῆϊον ἄνδρ' ἔλέτω, 30; ἀνδρὶ μαχέσθω, 33). Thus Tyrtaeus draws on the glamour associated with the epic style duelling of the past, but by

⁶ On the spectacle of Homeric duels, see Myers' contribution to this volume.

⁷ The process and timing of the change from epic-style duelling to hoplite warfare is debated: for recent discussion see van Wees (2004) 172-4; Viggiano (2013). The important point here is that Tyrtaeus' focus is much more overtly on the role of massed battle tactics, in contrast with the Homeric focus on individual superlative warriors.

depicting this personal excellence as part of the larger massed battle line, he harnesses it to the fighting techniques and values of his own world. Yet the picture of these contemporary warriors owes much to epic, for Tyrtaeus uses Homeric epithets to describe the warrior's equipment and appearance, while in particular the image of the terrifying nodding plume (κινείτω δὲ λόφον δεινόν, 26) echoes a formula used in epic arming scenes.⁸

The splendour of the warrior is brought out in several other fragments of Tyrtaeus, and even his death is conceptualised as something beautiful (fr. 10.19-30 W):

τοὺς δὲ παλαιότερους, ὧν οὐκέτι γούνατ' ἐλαφρά,
μὴ καταλείποντες φεύγετε, τοὺς γεραιούς.
αἰσχρὸν γὰρ δὴ τοῦτο, μετὰ προμάχοισι πεσόντα
κεῖσθαι πρόσθε νέων ἄνδρα παλαιότερον,
ἤδη λευκὸν ἔχοντα κάρη πολίων τε γένειον,
θυμὸν ἀποπνεῖοντ' ἄλκιμον ἐν κονίηι,
αἱματόεντ' αἰδοῖα φίλαις ἐν χερσὶν ἔχοντα — (25)
αἰσχρὰ τὰ γ' ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ νεμεσητὸν ἰδεῖν,
καὶ χροὰ γυμνωθέντα· νέοισι δὲ πάντ' ἐπέοικεν,
ὄφρ' ἐρατῆς ἥβης ἀγλαὸν ἄνθος ἔχηι,
ἀνδράσι μὲν θηητὸς ἰδεῖν, ἐρατὸς δὲ γυναιξὶ
ζωὸς ἑὸν, καλὸς δ' ἐν προμάχοισι πεσών.

Do not flee, deserting your elders, whose legs are no longer nimble. For it is shameful when an old man falls and dies in the front line before the young men. With his head already white and his grey beard, he breathes out the last of his brave spirit in the

⁸ ὄβριμον ἔγχος: e.g. *Il.* 3.357, 4.529, 5.790, 7.251; ἔγγει μακρῶι: *Il.* 5.45, 660, 13.177, 15.745 (both in the same position at line end). κινείτω δὲ λόφον δεινὸν ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς evokes the Homeric δεινὸν δὲ λόφος καθύπερθευ ἔνευεν: *Il.* 3.337, 11.42, 15.81, 16.138, while the description of the massed combat in 31-3 is modelled on *Il.* 13.130-1: see Murray (1980: 127).

dust, grabbing at his bloody genitals with his hands and his naked skin exposed, a shameful and disgraceful sight to see. But for a young man in the shining bloom of his lovely youth, it is entirely decorous. In life men marvelled when they saw him, and women found him lovely, and he is still beautiful when he falls in the front line.

This passage too is strikingly visual, and invites the audience to imagine the battlefield in all its gory detail. Tyrtaeus here alludes to Priam's plea to Hector in the *Iliad*, where he too contrasts the sights of an old and a young corpse (*Il.* 22.71-6):⁹

νέωι δέ τε πάντ' ἐπέουκεν
Ἄρηι κταμένωι δεδαῖγμένωι ὄξεϊ χαλκῶι
κεῖσθαι· πάντα δὲ καλὰ θανόντι περ ὅττι φανήηι·
ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ πολιόν τε κάρη πολιόν τε γένειον
αἰδῶ τ' αἰσχύνωσι κύνες κταμένοιο γέροντος,
τοῦτο δὴ οἴκτιστον πέλεται δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσιν.

For a young man it is entirely decorous when he lies dead, fallen in battle and mangled by the sharp bronze. Dead though he is, all that is revealed of him is beautiful. But when an old man is dead, and the dogs mutilate his grey head and grey beard and genitals, it is the most pitiful thing for wretched mortals.

Tyrtaeus' adaptation of the Iliadic passage is indicative of his broader agenda, for despite the close verbal similarities, his handling of the motif differs in crucial ways. Priam's description

⁹ It is possible, of course, that both Homer and Tyrtaeus are referring to an established epic motif of the 'beautiful' and 'ugly' deaths, but given the close parallels I find an Iliadic intertext here more likely. Priam's speech is a famous moment in the *Iliad*, and we find allusions to such 'marquee scenes' earlier than we find more sustained forms of intertextuality: see Kelly (forthcoming), though I would be considerably more optimistic than him on the possibility of allusion to the *Iliad* at this date.

of the beauty of the youthful corpse is introduced only as a foil for the horror of the elderly one. His rhetorical purpose is to persuade Hector not to fight, and he is arguing that Hector's death will lead to the sack of Troy and to his own death. The point of mentioning beautiful and ugly deaths is to warn Hector that he may achieve personal glory through a doomed stand against Achilles, but that he will do so at the cost of the destruction of his family and wider community, a moral imparted repeatedly throughout the strand of the poem that deals with Hector's choices.¹⁰ The function of Tyrtaeus' poem, on the other hand, is to inspire its listeners to courage in battle, and to present death as a lesser evil compared to cowardice. Thus the death of the old man is introduced as a warning of the consequences of deserting the battleline and allowing the more vulnerable to die in one's place (19-20). Whereas Priam envisages the old man's death as the murder of a feeble civilian, Tyrtaeus' old man is himself an active participant in the battle. The shame in his death is not only that it appears horrible and shameful to those who witness it, but more precisely the fact that he lays down his life while the younger men hold back (πρόσθε νέων, 22).¹¹ Tyrtaeus draws on the traditional opposition between beautiful youth and ugly old age to suggest particular disgust when the fine appearance of the young men is not matched by their moral fibre. Rather than being 'pitiful' like the Iliadic old man (οἴκτιστον, *Il.* 22.76), the sight of the elderly corpse is 'shameful and disgraceful' (αἰσχρά ... καὶ νεμεσητόν, 26), a phrase which leaves open the possibility that the disgrace is incurred by the young men who hang back before their elders rather than referring to the corpse itself. This shift is further emphasised by the reversal in the order in which the images are presented, for the glory of a youthful death is the climax of the elegiac passage. For a young man to die in battle is not only morally appropriate (πάντ' ἐπέουκεν, 27) but even beautiful, and his body is described in language which emphasises its erotic appeal (28-9). The final description of the corpse as καλός (30) leaves space for both

¹⁰ See esp. *Il.* 22.104-7.

¹¹ Cf. Tyrt. fr. 11.19-20 W, and the shameful sight of the dead warrior whose wound is on his back.

ethical and aesthetic interpretation, suggesting once more that the glamour of war is connected to its privileged status in terms of masculine values.

Thus Tyrtaeus makes extensive use of visual imagery in his descriptions of the contemporary battlefield, and encourages his audience to imagine warfare unfurling before them. This not only makes for an exciting narrative, but is also central to the poems' didactic goals, for Tyrtaeus uses the spectacle of war in order to convey moral messages about how to behave on the battlefield. This valorisation of warfare is not surprising given the martial nature of Spartan society, and Tyrtaeus' portrayal of the combat as an immediate situation led some scholars to suggest that the poems were composed for performance in a military context.¹² Yet poems whose performance context is clearly sympotic also encourage their audiences to imagine the visual appeal of war from the safety of their drinking couches. For example, Alcaeus revels in the beauty of a room filled with armour (fr. 140 V), in a poem quoted by Athenaeus as an example of how the poet prioritises martial courage (627ab):

] . . . [

μαρμαίρει δὲ μέγας δόμος

χάλκωι, παῖσα δ' Ἄρηι κεκόσμηται στέγα

λάμπραισιν κυνίαισι, κατ

τᾶν λεῦκοι κατέπερθεν ἵππιοι λόφοι (5)

νεύοισιν, κεφάλαισιν ἄν-

δρων ἀγάλματα· χάλκιοι δὲ πασ(σ)άλοις

κρύπτοισιν περικείμεναι

λάμπραι κνάμιδες, ἔρκος ἰσχύρω βέλεος, (10)

¹² The suggestion of West (1974: 10-11) that the poetry was performed on campaign takes the military context too literally, though there is evidence that later in antiquity this was believed to have been the case (*Lyc in Leocr.* 107, Philochorus 328 F 216). Bowie (1990) argues convincingly that there is no reason to object to a sympotic performance context. For discussion of Tyrtaeus' possible performance contexts, see Nagy (1990); Brunhara (2010), and for the politics of exhortatory poetry in general, see Irwin (2005).

θόρρακές τε νέω λίνω

κόιλαί τε κατ ἄσπιδες βεβλήμεναι·

πὰρ δὲ Χαλκίδικαι σπάθαι,

πὰρ δὲ ζώματα πόλλα καὶ κυπάσσιδες.

τῶν οὐκ ἔστι λάθεσθ' ἐπεὶ

(15)

δὴ πρότισθ' ὑπὰ τῶυργον ἔσταμεν τόδε.

The great hall gleams with bronze, and the whole roof is adorned for Ares with shining helmets, down from which nod white horse-hair crests, adornments for the heads of men. Shining bronze greaves hang on the pegs they hide, protection against a strong missile, and breastplates of new linen and hollow shields have been cast on the floor. Next to them are Calchian swords, and next to those are many belts and tunics. These are the things we can't forget, now that we've taken on this task.

Alcaeus here adapts a conventional trope of sympotic poetry, for it is common to find self-referential descriptions of the symposium that praise the location and the preparations taken by the host.¹³ Here, however, rather than focusing on the food, drink, or sympotic paraphernalia, Alcaeus dwells on the military equipment stored in the house, encouraging his listeners to see them as decorative objects.¹⁴ The idea that armour is intrinsically beautiful can be traced back to epic, where arming scenes dwell on the warriors' fine equipment and its lovely decoration. Alcaeus' poem stresses the visual appeal of the armour, described repeatedly with words indicating brightness and shining (μαρμαίρει, 3; λάμπραισιν, 5; λεῦκοι, 5; λάμπραι, 10). Its beauty is also foregrounded by the expressions Ἄρηι κεκόσμηται

¹³ Cf. Xenoph. fr. 1, Sem. fr. 22-3 W, and see Bowie (2009: 122). For the probable performance context as the house of a *hetairos*, see also Boedeker 2012: 70. As Page (1955: 222) notes, Hdt. 1.34.3 is also evidence that the men's hall might be decorated with hanging armour.

¹⁴ Cf. Burnett (1983: 124).

(‘adorned for Ares’, 4) and ἀγάλματα (‘adornments’, 8).¹⁵ Both phrases infuse the armour with quasi-religious significance: it is imagined as the adornment of a deity, while ἄγαλμα’ is often used of gifts to the gods.¹⁶ Yet the armour’s splendour is closely aligned with its martial function, and throughout his description, Alcaeus alludes to the context in which it will be used. The motion implied by the ‘nodding’ of the crests (νεύουσιν, 6) reminds us that they will soon be on the heads of men going into battle, while the image of the greaves hiding their pegs (8-10) hints at their function of concealing and protecting the legs of their wearer. In both cases, the allusion to the armour’s purpose is closely followed by a direct reference to it (κεφάλαισιν ἄν-/δρων ἀγάλματα, 6-7; ἔρκος ισχύρω βέλεος, 10). Similarly, the idea that the shields and breastplates have been ‘thrown’ onto the floor (βεβλήμεναι, 11) suggests a rout, with the defeated enemy jettisoning their heavy equipment as they run from the battleline, while the piles of swords, belts, and tunics suggests the stripping of spoils after the victory (13-14). Behind the immediate sight of the armour in storage lies a ghostly spectacle of the armed conflict for which it is meant.¹⁷ The final lines reinforce this message, as the poet reminds his audience of the importance of arms to their current situation (some form of civic discord, though the details and background are not specified), and so hints that the time to use them lies close at hand.¹⁸

While warfare is implicit rather than directly narrated in this fragment, Alcaeus, like Tyrtaeus, draws on its associations with beauty in order to bolster his audience’s resolution. It is perhaps partly this glorification of the military rather than the peaceable aspects of

¹⁵ Gerber (1970: 200) also argues that the glitter of the arms is suggested by the clustering of hard sounds (κ / χ used 25 times; π / φ used 19 times)

¹⁶ Though it is (deliberately) ambiguous whether Ἄρηι here should be taken as the god’s name or as a metonymy for war itself, in which case κεκόσμηται indicates how the battle is made more spectacular through the finery on display.

¹⁷ Burnett (1983: 124-5) reads the poem as a movement from beauty to ordinary practicality, but I am unconvinced by her translation of lines 10-13 on which this analysis is based.

¹⁸ I agree with Walker (2000: 216-17) that it is tempting to take the poem as nearly complete, and to see the task as unspecified. Since the audience must have known the political context which prompted the poem, it is poetically more effective if it is not spelled out in full but merely alluded to at the end. For the shift in tone at the end of the poem, see also Maurach (1968).

sympotic companionship that caused Athenaeus to describe these lines as showing that Alcaeus was ‘more warlike than he should be’ (μᾶλλον τοῦ δέοντος πολεμικὸς γενόμενος, 627ab). Yet Athenaeus’ criticism also reflects the fact that the conflict is one of political *stasis* rather than war with an external enemy. The splendour of the armour serves a rhetorical function, for it encourages the listener to see this conflict as a noble one and downplays the negative consequences of internal discord. Similarly, Alcaeus makes rich use of epic language to describe the arms. Lines 4-5 are evocative of epic formulae describing an arming scene; in particular ‘κατέπερθεν ἵππιοι λόφοι / νεύουσιν’ (‘horse-hair crests nod from above 5-6) recalls the Homeric ‘δεινὸν δὲ λόφος καθύπερθεν ἔνευεν’ (‘the crest nodded terribly from above’), while the greaves’ role as ‘ἔρκος ἰσχύρω βέλεος’ (‘protection against a strong missile’) is modelled on the epic ‘ἔρκος βελέων’ (‘a protection against missiles’).¹⁹ The use of bronze rather than iron also presents the armour as heroised, rather than being a realistic description of contemporary equipment.²⁰ This epicising language has an agenda, for it presents the conflict as on a par with the great deeds of the heroes of old, rather than embroiled in murky contemporary politics. Since civic discord is usually presented as hateful in Greek thought, Alcaeus may be trying to put a positive spin on a distasteful form of conflict, and so encourage his fellow symposiasts, who were presumably members of his own political grouping.

A rhetorical purpose is equally apparent in Mimnermus’ description of a brave warrior (fr. 14 W):

οὐ μὲν δὴ κείνου γε μένος καὶ ἀγήνορα θυμὸν

τοῖον ἐμέω προτέρων πεύθομαι, οἳ μιν ἴδον

¹⁹ Δεινὸν δὲ λόφος καθύπερθεν ἔνευεν: *Il.* 3.337, 11.42, 15.81, 16.138; *Od.* 22.124. ἔρκος βελέων or ἔρκος ἀκόντων: *Il.* 5.316, 15.646.

²⁰ Page (1955: 211-22) discusses the old-fashioned nature of the weapons, though his analysis is hampered by his assumption that the description is accurate rather than poetic (so also Snodgrass 1983: 183). For the epic language, see also Rösler (1980: 153-4).

Λυδῶν ἵππομάχων πυκινὰς κλονέοντα φάλαγγας
Ἕρμιον ἄμ πεδίον, φῶτα φερεμμελίην·
τοῦ μὲν ἄρ' οὐ ποτε πάμπαν ἐμέμψατο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη (5)
δριμὺ μένος κραδίης, εὖθ' ὃ γ' ἀνὰ προμάχους
σεύαιθ' αἱματόεν<τος ἐν> ὑσμίνῃ πολέμοιο,
πικρὰ βιαζόμενος δυσμενέων βέλεα·
οὐ γάρ τις κείνου δηίων ἔτ' ἀμεινότερος φῶς
ἔσκεν ἐποίχεσθαι φυλόπιδος κρατερῆς (10)
ἔργον, ὅτ' ἀγῆισιν φέρετ' ὠκέος ἠελίοιο.

The might and warlike spirit of that man were not like (yours), as I learn from older men who saw him routing the phalanxes of the Lydian cavalry on the plain of Hermos with his ash-spear. Never did Pallas Athena find fault with his heart's fierce might, when he rushed through the foremost fighters in the combat of bloody war, defying the sharp missiles of the enemy. No man of the enemy remained his better, when he traversed the harsh task of war, as long as he moved in the rays of the swift sun.

The portrayal of the outstanding individual singlehandedly routing the enemy evokes the Homeric *aristeia*, while his description as the best of all (οὐ γάρ τις κείνου δηίων ἔτ' ἀμεινότερος φῶς, 9) reminds us of Achilles, the best of the Achaeans. As well as an Achilles, this warrior is also a second Diomedes, directly supported by Athena in his triumph over the massed ranks of an Asiatic foe. Indeed, as Grethlein notes, this warrior surpasses the Homeric Diomedes, for he gives no grounds for Athena to rebuke him (vs *Il.* 5.800-24) and is not wounded by an enemy missile (vs. *Il.* 98-100).²¹ The description is vivid and exciting: we are

²¹ Grethlein (2007: 107-8).

encouraged to imagine the older men's story as a visual narrative, with the details of location, military equipment, and the hero's dynamic movement through the battleline. Yet the underlying message is accusatory, for the purpose of the narrative is not to praise the former warrior but to criticise contemporary fighters.²² Each achievement of this warrior is introduced with a negative clause (οὐ μὲν δῆ, 1 ... οὐ ποτε πάμπαν, 5 ... οὐ γάρ, 9), reinforcing the idea that the warrior's greatness is mentioned to contrast with the failings of the men of today.

Mimnermus draws on the common archaic trope that mortals are in a state of decline from a superior past; however, he does not look back to the vanished mythological world of the heroes but to the previous generation, and the mighty deeds of the warrior do not require the aid of the Muses, but can be attested by the eye-witness accounts of older men (2).²³ Since we lack the poem's wider context, we should be cautious of assuming that it was accusatory overall: if, for example, the lines were spoken by a character in the heat of battle, and were followed by a description of his companions' courageous rallying, our interpretation of the tone would be quite different.²⁴ Nevertheless, the fragment once again reminds us that the lyric poets' use of the spectacle of war must be read through the filter of their rhetorical goals. While lyric poetry draws on the epic grandeur of war, such martial narratives are not told for their own sake, but embedded into a broader social and poetic context.

Anti-epicising spectacles of war

The poems discussed above are cases where poets use epic associations positively, in order to suggest a kinship between epic and contemporary warfare. Yet poets can also choose to

²² See Allen (1993: 117). For memories of the past as a key feature of sympotic poetry, see Rösler (1990).

²³ As Jacoby (1918: 287-9) notes, this too is an intertext with Diomedes, whom Agamemnon criticises for lacking the courage of his father (*Il.* 4.370-400). For further discussion of the criticism of Mimnermus' contemporaries, see Klinger (1930: 80-1); Massa Positano (1946: 361-2); West (1974: 74); Podlecki (1984: 60).

²⁴ Cf. Bowie (1986: 29).

emphasise difference rather than similarity, and the second part of this chapter will therefore explore cases where the language of war as spectacle is used to challenge the epic outlook. Perhaps the most famous example is Archilochus' 'Shield Poem', a (probably complete) elegy which draws heavily on epic martial language in order to express a distinctly non-heroic viewpoint (fr. 5 W):

ἀσπίδι μὲν Σαίων τις ἀγάλλεται, ἦν παρὰ θάμνῳι,
ἔντος ἀμώμητον, κάλλιπον οὐκ ἐθέλων·
αὐτὸν δ' ἐξεσάωσα. τί μοι μέλει ἀσπίς ἐκείνη;
ἔρρέτω· ἐξαῦτις κτήσομαι οὐ κακίω.

Some Saian glories in my shield, that blameless armour which I left by a bush, against my will. But I saved my own skin. What's that shield to me? To hell with it! I'll get another one no worse.

The poem has been read since antiquity as a travesty of martial values: thus Plutarch claims that it led to Archilochus being banned from Sparta (*Instit. Lac.* 34), while Critias attacks Archilochus for making his shameful behaviour public (fr. 44 DK).²⁵ In fact, the parody of epic battle scenes is more sophisticated than is usually recognised, and Archilochus alludes to Homeric battle narrative in order to poke fun at his own narrator, as well as to critique the traditional ethos of heroism.

The poem opens in the aftermath of a military encounter, as Archilochus offers a snapshot of the barbarian warrior exulting (ἀγάλλεται, 1) in the capture of the narrator's

²⁵ Older scholarship also often assumed that the poem reflected a real incident in Archilochus' life, cf. e.g. de Falco (1946: 348); Kirkwood (1974: 33); Rankin (1977: 42). Now scholars are rightly more cautious of attempts to read biographical reality into the poems, especially given that the jettisoning of a shield is a common trope in lyric poetry: cf. Alc. fr. 401b V; Anacr. fr. 381 *PMG*, and see Schwertfeger (1982); Corrêa (1998: 123-6).

shield. The choice of ‘ἀγάλλεται’ evokes the epic trope of the warrior rejoicing in the spoils stripped from his enemy; more specifically, it may recall the image of the Homeric Hector glorying in the arms of Achilles.²⁶ ‘ἀγάλλομαι’ tends to be used negatively in the *Iliad*, and this resonance encourages us to perceive the barbarian warrior as arrogant, and to focalise the situation through the narrator’s eyes.²⁷ The epic resonance elevates the status of the enemy warrior and adds grandeur to the situation. Yet Archilochus also parodies the gulf between the world of epic and his own, for in the place of a famous hero we find an anonymous barbarian described dismissively as ‘some Saian’ (Σαῖων τις), with the ‘τις’ suggesting a derogatory attitude.²⁸ The epic language also highlights the most significant difference between the Archilochean context and the battle-scenes it evokes, for rather than triumphantly stripping the armour from a defeated enemy, the Saian has found an abandoned shield left by the fleeing narrator.²⁹

The shield is described as ‘ἔντος ἀμώμητον’ (‘blameless armour’, 2), a formula modelled on Homeric precedent but not identical with anything in extant epic.³⁰ The *Iliad* regularly uses the plural form ‘ἔντεα’ of epic armour, but ‘ἔντος’ in the singular is rare, and the use of the singular draws our attention to this individual item, whose significance has already been suggested by the placing of ‘ἄσπίδι’ as the first line of the poem.³¹ Calling the shield ‘ἔντος’ implies it is a piece of such importance that it can stand for the whole set of equipment

²⁶ *Il.* 17.473, 18.132.

²⁷ On ‘ἀγάλλομαι’ see Di Benedetto (1991: 17-18), and see also Page (1964: 132); Seidensticker (1978: 8-9).

²⁸ Cf. Corrêa (1998: 127).

²⁹ Scholars who seek to lessen Archilochus’ culpability interpret ‘παρὰ θάμνῳ’ as indicating that the poet did not throw his shield away but that it was resting against a bush and then lost during a surprise attack: cf. Gerber (1970: 15); Loscalzo (1997: 16-17); Anderson (2008: 259). However, this does not follow, for ‘κάλλιπον’ need not suggest deliberate placing, and much of the poem’s *frisson* relies on the fact that the narrator’s behaviour is controversial. On the significance of ‘οὐκ ἐθέλων’, and its relevance to this issue, see Mazzocchini (2006: 439-41).

³⁰ See Page in Scherer (1964: 110); Seidensticker (1978: 8).

³¹ A parallel is [Hes.] fr. 343.18 MW, where the singular ‘ἔντος’ is used of Athena’s *aegis*, an item which is also of importance individually rather than as part of a set of arms. Archilochus himself also uses the singular at fr. 139.5 W, though the context is unclear.

(ἔντεα). The shield is therefore analogous to the significant pieces of armour used to identify the great epic heroes (e.g. Achilles' shield and great ash spear, Ajax's boar-tooth helmet). 'ἀμώμητον' ('blameless') is significant too, for although it is found in epic along with the alternative form 'ἀμύμων', both words usually describe the excellence of people rather than objects.³² Using it of the shield therefore serves to personify it and increase its significance as the central symbol of the poem; moreover, 'ἀμώμητον' evokes ideas of blame and shame, and so raises the question of whether the narrator is attempting to cast himself as equally blameless.³³ The ambiguity of the shield comes to the fore again in the last words of the poem, where the narrator consoles himself with the thought that he can get another shield 'no worse' (οὐ κακίω, 4). In the context of a shield, we might well expect 'κακός' to refer to the visual beauty of the object, and the word reminds us of descriptions of fine and elaborate Homeric armour, yet 'κακός' in epic commonly means 'cowardly', and is used of men who fail to perform on the battlefield.³⁴ The poem's final words, therefore, summarise the poem's central concern as to what the shield symbolises: is it simply an object, or is it a reflection of the moral worth of its owner, and in which of these two senses should we understand 'κακίω'?

The non-spectacular nature of contemporary warfare is depicted equally vividly in fr. 114 W, where Archilochus pokes fun at the epic image of the glorious warrior:

οὐ φιλέω μέγαν στρατηγὸν οὐδὲ διαπεπλιγμένον
οὐδὲ βοστρύχοις γαῦρον οὐδ' ὑπεξυρημένον,
ἀλλὰ μοι μικρὸς τις εἶη καὶ περὶ κνήμας ἰδεῖν

³² Exceptions are *Il.* 9.128, 15.463

³³ Cf. Burnett (1983: 42).

³⁴ E.g. *Il.* 2.365, 9.319, 13.279, 18.128. Early Greek elegists regularly note the shifting nature of 'κακός' and 'κακότης' and we find frequent debates within the poetry as to how the terms should be understood: e.g. Tyr. fr. 10.10 W; Thgn. 524, 623, 1061, 1175, and the new Archilochus fragment (P. Oxy 4708). For Archilochus' equally slippery use of 'κακός' in that poem, see Swift (2012: 146).

ροικός, ἀσφαλῆως βεβηκῶς ποσσί, καρδίας πλέως.

I have no fondness for a general who is tall and takes long strides, proud of his curls and partly shaven. No, as far as I'm concerned let him be short and bandy-legged to look at round the shins, but standing firm on his feet, full of heart.

The poem is used by Dio Chrysostom (33.17) to illustrate the importance of separating appearance from true worth.³⁵ In epic convention the ideal is for the two to be equivalent: hence Achilles is the handsomest of the Achaeans as well as the best warrior (*Il.* 2.674), whereas Thersites is as bad in character as he is ugly in appearance (*Il.* 2.213-19).

Nevertheless the Homeric poems are perfectly aware of the potential gap between appearance and reality, and there are several examples of characters who either look handsome but are less than exemplary warriors (most notably Paris, but note also the beautiful but feeble Nireus at *Il.* 2.673-5) or whose humble looks belie their real ability (for example Athene's comments on Tydeus at *Il.* 5.801, or Antenor's on Odysseus at *Il.* 3.216-24).³⁶ Where Archilochus differs from these models is in the derogatory way he describes the tall general: rather than being impressive on the outside (even if weak within), his good looks are presented as a mockery of dandified fashion.³⁷ Archilochus thus overturns the conventional focus on the visual impact of a mighty warrior and instead presents his general as something inherently ludicrous.

³⁵ For discussion of the lines' relationship to traditional martial values, see Gerber (1970: 27); Russo (1974); Kirkwood (1974: 33); Toohey (1988); Müller (1994: 180-2).

³⁶ Cf. also Tyrt. fr. 12.1-9 W, where the poet contrasts military worth with external appearance and other forms of *aretê*.

³⁷ Cf. Archil. fr. 117 W, where he mocks his friend Glaucus for his fancy hairstyle.

The separation between appearance and reality is not fully developed until the final surviving words, where we are told the small general is ‘καρδίας πλέως’ (‘full of heart’).³⁸ The two generals are described in terms which begin by reflecting each other but then diverge: the description of each one begins with a comment on his height (μέγαν, ‘tall’, 1; μικρός, ‘small’, 3) followed by one on his legs and gait (διαπεπλιγμένον, ‘takes long strides’, 1; περὶ κνήμας ἰδεῖν ροικός, ‘bandy-legged to look at around the shins’, 3-4). After this, however, the two descriptions start to vary: the tall general continues to be described in terms of his appearance (2), but the focus shifts from things that may be useful on the battlefield (size and movement) to ones which are purely decorative (his hairstyle). Conversely, the description of the little general moves from external to inner qualities: ‘ἀσφαλέως βεβηκῶς ποσσὶ’ (‘standing firm on his feet’, 4) is at first glance a physical description but is also loaded with normative connotations, since it alludes to the soldier’s ability to stand his ground in battle, and the progression is complete with ‘καρδίας πλέως’ (‘full of heart’), which is entirely about his moral worth.³⁹ The contrasting paths of the two descriptions show us the real difference between the two generals: the tall general is superficial; in place of the small general’s courage, he can only offer his fancy curls.

It would be misleading to argue that Archilochus only draws on the Homeric spectacle of war in order to undermine it, for fragments survive in which he uses epic-style cinematics to celebrate military success. For example, two fragments survive that present an epicising account of a contemporary battle, complete with the detail that Athena herself supported the poet’s side (fr. 94, 98 W). It is no coincidence that these poems were preserved on the Sosthenes Inscription, whose aim is to celebrate Archilochus’ deeds of religious and patriotic significance, and they would have been selected because they were

³⁸ Like fr. 5, this poem may be complete, since it makes excellent sense as a self-contained unit which builds up to a climax: cf. Russo (1974: 143).

³⁹ Standing firm in battle is a critical element of the hoplite ethos, since the success of the army depended on the line remaining unbroken, as attested for example in the Athenian Ephebic Oath, Lyc. *Leocr.* 76-7: cf. Lavelle (2008: 151).

believed to show the poet's love for his country. The poems themselves were plausibly composed for performance on civic occasions, for example to celebrate a military success. Conversely, it is significant that the fragments discussed above were probably sympotic, and so performed in a private context where banter and mockery would have been more appropriate. Nevertheless, cynicism is a regular feature of Archilochus' poetry, and conventional descriptions of epic battles provide him with an opportunity to play up the gulf between the grandeur of the heroic world and the sordid reality of his own. Yet lyric challenges to the epic view of warfare can take a more positive form, and it is common for the composers of erotic poems to allude to the spectacle of the battlefield in order to replace it with a different form of worth and beauty: that of love. The most explicit example is Sappho fr. 16 V, where she explicitly rejects the splendour of war:

οἱ μὲν ἰππήων στρότον οἱ δὲ πέσδων
οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖσ' ἐπ[ι] γᾶν μέλαι[ν]αν
ἔ]μμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὄτ-
τω τις ἔραται·

πά]γχυ δ' εὖμαρες σύνετον πόησαι (5)
π]άντι τ[ο]ῦτ', ἃ γὰρ πόλυ περσκέθρισσα
κάλλος [ἀνθ]ρώπων Ἑλένα [τὸ]ν ἄνδρα
τὸν [ἀρ]ιστον

καλλ[ίποι]σ' ἔβα 'ς Τροΐαν πλέρι[σα
καὺδ[ὲ] πα]ῖδος οὐδὲ φίλων το[κ]ήων (10)
πά[μπαν] ἐμνάσθη, ἀλλὰ παράγαγ' αὐταν

]σαν

]αμπτον γὰρ [
]. . . κούφωστ[]ση.[.]ν
. .]με νῦν Ἀνακτορί[ας ὀ]γέμναι- (15)
σ' οὐ παρεοίσας·

τᾶ]ς (κ)ε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα
κάμαρυγμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω
ἦ τὰ Λύδων ἄρματα κᾶν ὄπλοισι
πεσομ]άχεντας. (20)

Some say a host of cavalry is the most beautiful thing on the black earth, others infantry, and others ships, but I say it is whatever one loves. It is easy enough to make this intelligible to all, for Helen, who far surpassed all other mortals in beauty, left her fine husband and sailed to Troy, and paid no thought to her child or her dear parents, but (love) led her astray. ... lightly ... it reminds me of Anactoria, who is not here ... I would rather see her lovely walk and the bright sparkle of her face than all the chariots and armed men of Lydia.

The poem takes the glamour of war as its starting point, suggesting that most people would regard a military spectacle as the most beautiful thing (κάλλιστον, 3).⁴⁰ The Homeric echoes in the opening lines prime us to think of set-piece epic descriptions such as the sight of the

⁴⁰ On the importance of the visual in the poem, see Worman (1997: 168). For the beauty of armies cf. *Il.* 4.431-2, 13.140-1, 20.156-7, and see Hutchinson (2001: 161).

assembled troops.⁴¹ While at this point ‘κάλλιστον’ could be taken to refer to the best thing, rather than the most beautiful, as the poem goes on Sappho makes it clear that it is visual appeal that she has in mind, for ‘κάλλιστον’ is picked up by the physical beauty of Helen (πόλυ περσκέθοισα κάλλος, 6-7), while at the end it is Anactoria’s beauty which is compared to the experience of watching an army (17-20).⁴² Thus, through the slipperiness of ‘κάλλιστον’, Sappho moves from a definition based on moral and military values to one based on personal and erotic ones. This shift is encoded by the surprising nature of the priamel at the end of the first stanza, for whereas we expect the narrator to finish by putting forward her own candidate for what should be considered ‘κάλλιστον’, she instead concludes that it is a subjective matter (κῆν’ ὄτ-τω τις ἔραται, 3-4).⁴³ The relativity of erotic love as a measure of worth is then reinforced by the myth of Helen, for while her own surpassing beauty is presented as beyond doubt, the point of mentioning her is not that she is the most beautiful of all, but that love led her to abandon a man who is presented as objectively worthy (αρ]ιστον, 8).⁴⁴

The correlation between erotic and martial forms of spectacle runs throughout the poem, for despite Sappho’s apparent separation of the two, the audience can perceive the figure of Helen as a bridge between them. Helen’s prioritisation of erotic desire leads to a military expedition, and the mention of the army on display (1-3) and the Asian force (19-20) evokes the armies meeting at Troy. Similarly, the ‘bright sparkle’ of Anactoria’s face (κάμαρυγμα λάμπρον, 18) recalls epic descriptions of shining weaponry and armour. Sexual

⁴¹ Cf. Rissman (1983: 34-8), who notes not only the Homeric resonance of ‘ἐπ[ι] γὰν μέλαι[ν]αν’ (*Il.* 2.699, 17.416, 20.494; *Od.* 11.365, 587), but also the opening’s similarity to the Homeric phrases ‘πεζοί θ’ ἱππῆες τε’ (*Il.* 2.180, 8.59; *Od.* 24.70) / ‘ἱππῆες πεζοί τε’ (*Il.* 11.528). See also DuBois (1995: 101).

⁴² On ‘κάλλιστον’, see Koniaris (1967: 259-61); Liebermann (1980).

⁴³ On this inherent subjectivity, cf. Burnett (1983: 283-90); Foley (1998: 60-2); Blondell (2010: 379-80). Bundy (1962: 5) describes this as a straightforward example of a priamel, but overlooks much of the nuance of the passage: for a critique of his approach, see Pfeiffer (2000: 2).

⁴⁴ Most (1981: 11-13). Whether or not Page’s ‘[πανάρ]ιστον’ is the correct supplement, ‘αρ]ιστον’ seems inevitable: other suggestions include ‘μέγ’ ἄρ]ιστον’ (Gallavotti) and ‘περ ἄρ]ιστον’ (Marzullo): for a discussion of the issues see Degani and Burzacchini (1977: 135); Hutchinson (2001: 163).

beauty can operate as a kind of weapon, just as Helen's beauty damages her loved ones, an idea that connects to the common trope of erotic lyric that presents love as a violent force.⁴⁵

The replacement of a military with an erotic spectacle also lies at the heart of Ibycus' poem in praise of Polycrates (fr. S151 *PMGF*). After giving an initial outline of the Trojan War, the poet reverses tack, stating that he does not wish to sing of heroic deeds (10-19). Yet despite this rejection of a martial theme, Ibycus goes on to conjure up the image of an epic-style battlefield in a passage that alludes to the Homeric Catalogue of Ships, when the Achaean army is presented in all its splendour (23-6):

καὶ τὰ μὲ[ν ἄν] Μοῖσαι σεσοφι[σ]μέναι
εὖ Ἑλικωνίδ[ε]ς ἐμβαίεν ἥλ[ο]γ[ω]ι ·
θνατ[ὸ]ς δ' οὐ κ[ε]ν ἄν[θρω]πος (25)
διερὸ[ς] τὰ ἕκαστα εἶποι,

The skilled Muses of Helicon could easily tell the story of these things, but no mortal man could tell each detail.

The appeal to the Muses recalls the Iliadic narrator's plea for their help, and his claim that he can only manage to describe the Achaean army with divine intervention (*Il.* 2.484-93).⁴⁶ The lines therefore evoke the epic spectacle of war and the glorious sight of an army in its finery. The narrator begins by following Homeric precedent, referring to the ships that came to Troy and the men who came in them (27-31). Yet after listing only the two greatest heroes,

⁴⁵ A common theme in Sappho: cf. fr. 31, 47, 130 V.

⁴⁶ I therefore agree with Woodbury (1985: 198) and Blondell (2010: 366-7) that interpreting this passage as a *recusatio* of the poet's ability to compose heroic poetry is too simplistic: for discussion of this issue see Bowra (1961: 252-6); Sisti (1967).

Achilles and Ajax (32-4), Ibycus deviates from the epic model in a passage which explains his reluctance to take on heroic themes, and confirms his agenda as an erotic poet (36-48):

..... κάλλι]στρος ἀπ' Ἄργεος
..... Κυάνι]ππ[ο]ς ἐς Ἴλιον
.....]
.....] . [.] ...
.....] α χρυσεόστροφ[ος (40)
Ἵλλις ἐγήνατο, τῶι δ' [ἄ]ρα Τρωίλον
ὥσει χρυσὸν ὀρει-
χάλκωι τρις ἄπεφθο[ν] ἤδη

Τρῶες Δ[α]ναοί τ' ἐρό[ε]σσαν
μορφὰν μάλ' εἴσκοιν ὅμοιον. (45)
τοῖς μὲν πέδα κάλλεος αἰὲν
καὶ σύ, Πολύκρατες, κλέος ἄφθιτον ἐξεῖς
ὥς κατ' αἰδᾶν καὶ ἐμὸν κλέος.

Cyanippus the most handsome ... from Argos to Troy ... (and Zeuxippus, whom)
golden-girdled Hyllis bore, and the Trojans and Greeks likened Troilus to him as
thrice-refined gold to orichalc, and judged him very similar in his lovely form.
Among these men, Polycrates, you will have undying glory for beauty forever, as far
as song and my fame can provide.

Whereas Achilles and Ajax were described in terms that emphasised their martial ability (respectively *πρ[οφ]ερέστατος α[ί]χμᾶι*, ‘foremost with the spear’, 32, and *ἄλκι[μος]*, ‘strong’, 34),⁴⁷ Cyanippus is described with the more open-ended *‘κάλλιστος’*.⁴⁸ As the narrative moves on it becomes clear that Ibycus is interested in physical beauty rather than warrior might, for the next two men mentioned, Zeuxippus and Troilus, are exceptional for their beauty, expressed by the comparison to shining precious metals.⁴⁹ Whereas the Trojan War is described as a conflict over the beauty of Helen (*Ἑλένας περι εἶδει*, 5), the Greeks and Trojans are united in their appreciation of the beautiful young men. The final lines confirm a connection between beauty and glory, for Polycrates, Zeuxippus, and Troilus will all gain eternal fame because of their looks 47).⁵⁰ *‘κλέος ἄφθιτον’* is a phrase loaded with Homeric symbolism, but here it is visual splendour rather than military triumph that will confer undying glory.⁵¹

Conclusion

The Homeric concept of war as visually impressive pervades Greek poetry of all forms, and forms a constant backdrop to lyric descriptions of war. Epic resonances are found in lyric of all categories, yet the lyric poets have great flexibility in how they rework epic conceptions to suit their contemporary listeners. Most surviving lyric was composed for a male elite audience, for whom warfare would be a regular reality and a central part of their identity.

⁴⁷ As Blondell (2010: 368) notes, Ibycus deliberately avoids the Homeric conflation of physical and martial worth, whereby Achilles is both the best fighter and handsomest man of the Achaeans (cf. *Il.* 2.673-74), and instead creates a distinction between war and beauty.

⁴⁸ Assuming this is indeed the correct supplement. In its favour is the fact that it would be an echo of the Homeric *‘ὄς κάλλιστος ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθε’* (*Il.* 2.674, of Nireus).

⁴⁹ There is much discussion as to whether Troilus is handsomer than Cyanippus or whether the gold/orichalc comparison is meant to suggest equal examples of beauty: see Robertson (1970); Woodbury (1985: 201-3); Hutchinson (2001: 252); Wilkinson (2013: 82-3).

⁵⁰ I follow scholars such as Page (1951: 160); Fraenkel (1975: 289); Woodbury (1985: 203-5); Wilkinson (2013: 83-4) in printing 46-7 as a single sentence, rather than following the scribe’s punctuation of the manuscript. For arguments in favour of removing the stop at the end of 46, see Barron (1969: 135); Péron (1982: 39-40); West (1970: 206).

⁵¹ *‘κλέος ἄφθιτον’*: cf. *Il.* 9.189; *Od.* 8.73. For discussion of the phrase see Nagy (1974: 231-55); Goldhill (1994: 69).

Alluding to epic models is a strategy for flattering the listener, for it implies that his own experiences of battle, however unglamorous, can be best understood by analogy with the heroes of old, and that he too is involved in an activity which will preserve a good reputation. From the poets' perspective, presenting the subjects of the poems as similar to the great conflicts of epic is a way of elevating their own status and the power of their poetry, as it suggests their ability to commemorate important deeds for future generations.

Individual poems differ in how critical or otherwise their approach is to epic: thus the epic battlefield can be an aspirational ideal, an unattainable fantasy, or something to be rejected outright. Yet even in poems which seem to adopt epic portrayals of war enthusiastically, we should not overlook the way in which lyric poets adapt epic convention for their own rhetorical ends. For example, Tyrtaeus refashions the epic warrior in the model of a contemporary Spartan, stressing the role of the community in achieving victory, while Mimnermus brings the heroic past into recent history in order to add weight to his criticism of his contemporaries. Similarly, Alcaeus' epicising description of his contemporary weapons is a tactic for presenting a partisan view of the conflict in question, since it puts a positive spin on his own faction, and presents the conflict as a laudable one which will incur praise.

Whereas Tyrtaeus and Alcaeus present the epic world as a model for contemporary conflict, the gulf between the grandeur of epic and the banality of the modern world is a regular concern of Archilochus' poetry, and his presentation of the handsome but useless general suggests the ludicrousness of a contemporary fighter styling himself as an Achilles. Erotic poetry goes still further and challenges the epic perspective by presenting erotic appeal in terms which draw on the traditional association between war and beauty. Thus Ibycus envisages a battlefield where warriors are judged by their beauty rather than their prowess, and Sappho challenges the masculine assumption that splendour on the battlefield is the highest goal. Yet all of these poems rely on the audience's familiarity with epic battlescapes,

and presuppose a lively interest among communities across the Greek world in the concept of war as spectacle.