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Negotiating Hegemony in Early Greek Poetry

Laura Swift

Gramsci's ideas regard cultural production as inextricably bound up with the political and economic forces that influence a given period. In Gramscian discourse, this process of mutual exchange and interaction is a hegemonic process, and is central to understanding the relationship between culture and political power.¹ The essential concept that texts and artists cannot be understood in isolation, but must be viewed in the context of wider social and political forces, is one with which scholars of early Greek literature are nowadays well familiar, though the terminology we use ('Sitz im Leben', 'performance context') differs from that used by Gramscian theorists. Thus, despite the obvious differences between the twentieth-century state and its institutions, and the communities of the archaic Greek world, Gramsci's approach to culture can shed light on the literature of that period. In fact, Gramsci's writing places a great deal of emphasis on the role of 'common sense' and shared values in creating a cultural and social ideology which upholds the power of the ruling elite.² For Gramsci, 'common sense' is an aggregated set of beliefs, which is not systematic or coherent, but reflects the conglomeration of what most people believe.³ 'Common sense' is intrinsically fragmentary and inconsistent, even within the mind of an individual, but it holds great power as a seat of popular morality, and it forms the backdrop to the decision-making processes and life choices of people born and socialised within that system. Engaging with it is thus the starting point for any attempt at social transformation. Far from seeing ideology as something externally imposed, Gramsci's analysis perceives it as a shared and lived experience, rooted in ordinary people's core assumptions.⁴ The importance of poetry in Greek culture as an educational and moral tool means that it can be well understood through this theoretical framework. Early Greek poetry often draws on a shared set of normative tropes and assumptions, which are not the invention of any particular thinker, nor do they represent a systematic philosophy. Nevertheless, they are presented by the poets (and by later Greek writers who quote them) as embodiments of wisdom and accepted belief within the community. Thus the early Greek poets offer us, in Gramscian terms, a rich collective expression of their society's 'common sense', as well as highlighting the cultural power that such prescriptions can hold.

This chapter will argue that Gramscian approaches can offer scholars of Greek literature an insightful way to investigate the political and socio-economic affiliations of the texts they study, and that reading them through this lens can help us to better understand the cultural values they propagate, and how and why they might do so. It will examine how early Greek poetry represents the relationship and tensions between dominant and subordinate social groups, and how the morality proffered by poetry can be understood as a battleground in that struggle. It will do so with particular reference to three authors: Homer, Hesiod and Archilochus. The ideological weight attached to them in the Hellenic tradition invite such a selection: each of

them is identified by later authors as possessing particular cultural authority and a claim to represent accepted morality. For example, Homer and Hesiod are ascribed authority (whether or not this is accepted or challenged) by several ancient authors on matters ranging from religion to how to lead a good life.⁵ Similarly, ancient sources frequently liken Archilochus to Homer and Hesiod, establishing these three poets as particular exemplars of a moralising tradition.⁶ Their possession of authority is also attested by traditions that present this as contested between them, ranging from the story told in the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, whereby Homer and Hesiod compete to be recognised as the wisest poet, to Dio Chrysostom's remarks on the rival traditions of praise and blame represented by Homer and Archilochus (33.11-12), or Cratinus' comedy *Archilochoi* ('Archilochus and his followers'), which staged a competition between Archilochus and Homer and Hesiod.⁷ In these accounts, what is at stake is not merely the quality of the poetry, but also the social values represented by each poet. Thus in the *Contest*, the prize is awarded to Hesiod, despite a recognition that Homer's poetry is superior, because his poetry deals with peaceful rather than warlike activities. It is tempting to see this victory as reflecting not only on the superiority of peace to war, but also on the values of the humble and *dikē*-(or justice-)loving farmer over those of the quarrelsome aristocratic heroes. Similarly, it is likely that the contest between Archilochus and the other poets in Cratinus was not simply aesthetic but took account of the civic benefits of different types of poetry, a topic that Dio addresses in his comparison of Homer and Archilochus, where he argues that criticism fulfils a more useful social role than praise. From a Gramscian perspective, this makes their work valuable, since the texts were already in antiquity considered politically charged and linked to particular social structures and ideologies.

The starting point for my analysis of these poets will be the interplay of consent and coercion in the maintenance of hegemonic power, which represents one of Gramsci's most important contributions.⁸ In Gramsci's thought, this is vividly expressed through his redeployment of Machiavelli's image of the centaur, where the combination of beast and man in a single creature represents "the levels of force and of consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilisation".⁹ This concept is often discussed with reference to the mechanisms of the modern state: for example, the coercive elements of a modern democracy such as the police or army, which operate alongside the consensual power embedded in the electoral system. Yet the dialectic between consent and coercion is equally applicable to early Greek political thought and is an idea we find regularly in Greek poetry, which has much to say on how the power of elite groups is maintained.

Coercion and consent among Hesiodic beasts and men

Perhaps the most explicit engagement with the interplay between consent and coercion is found in Hesiod's *ainos* (or fable) of the hawk and the nightingale in *Works and Days*. On the face of it, the story seems a troubling account of how the tyrannical coercion exerted by the powerful is used to suppress those weaker than them (202-12):

νῦν δ' αἶνον βασιλεῦσιν ἐρέω φρονέουσι καὶ αὐτοῖς·
 ᾧδ' ἴρηξ προσέειπεν ἀηδόνα ποικιλόδειρον
 ὕψι μάλ' ἐν νεφέεσσι φέρων ὀνύχεσσι μεμαρπώς·
 ἦ δ' ἐλεόν, γναμπτοῖσι πεπαρμένη ἀμφ' ὀνύχεσσι, (205)
 μύρετο· τὴν ὃ γ' ἐπικρατέως πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν·
 “δαμονίη, τί λέληκας; ἔχει νύ σε πολλὸν ἀρείων·
 τῆ δ' εἷς ἦ σ' ἂν ἐγὼ περ ἄγω καὶ ἀοιδὸν ἐοῦσαν·
 δεῖπνον δ', αἶ κ' ἐθέλω, ποιήσομαι ἠὲ μεθήσω.
 ἄφρων δ', ὅς κ' ἐθέλη πρὸς κρείσσονας ἀντιφερίζειν· (210)
 νίκης τε στέρεται πρὸς τ' αἰσχεσιν ἄλγεα πάσχει.”
 ᾧς ἔφατ' ὠκυπέτης ἴρηξ, τανυσίπτερος ὄρνις.

And now I will tell a fable to kings who themselves too have understanding. This is how the hawk addressed the colorful-necked nightingale, carrying her high up among the clouds, grasping her with its claws, while she wept piteously, pierced by the curved claws; he said to her forcefully, “Silly bird, why are you crying out? One far superior to you is holding you. You are going wherever I shall carry you, even if you are a singer. I shall make you my dinner if I wish, or I shall let you go. Stupid he who would wish to contend against those stronger than he is: for he is deprived of the victory and suffers pains in addition to his humiliations.” So spoke the swift-flying hawk, the long-winged bird.¹⁰

The fable opens by stressing the physical coercion applied by the hawk to control his social inferior: we are told twice in two lines that he grips her with his talons (ὀνύχεσσι, 204, 205), and the second occurrence heightens the sense of overweening force as we are told that the claws not only restrain but also pierce the flesh of the nightingale.¹¹ The hawk’s speech posits a model whereby the weak are powerless against their superiors, and he upbraids the nightingale even for crying over her fate (207). Whether she lives or dies is entirely at the hawk’s whim, and he warns her that any attempt to overthrow this order will simply lead to further physical punishment (211). The hawk frames resistance not merely as futile but as “stupid” (ἄφρων, 210), literally lacking mind or sanity, thus suggesting that the hierarchy from which he benefits is ‘common sense’, which it would be madness to rebel against. This parable is framed as a piece of advice to the kings (202), whose social status makes them the most likely analogues to the hawk. Yet this oppressive world-view is challenged by the poet’s warning to his addressee Perses that he must follow the path of *dikē* (justice) and not that of *hybris* (insolence):

ὦ Πέρση, σὺ δ' ἄκουε δίκης μὴδ' ὕβριν ὄφελλε·
 ὕβρις γάρ τε κακὴ δειλῶ βροτῶ, σὺδὲ μὲν ἐσθλὸς
 ῥηιδίως φερέμεν δύναται, βαρῦθει δέ θ' ὑπ' αὐτῆς (215)
 ἐγκύρσας ἄτησιν· ὁδὸς δ' ἐτέρηφι παρελθεῖν
 κρείσσων ἐς τὰ δίκαια· δίκη δ' ὑπὲρ ὕβριος ἴσχει
 ἐς τέλος ἐξελοῦσα· παθῶν δέ τε νήπιος ἔγνω.
 αὐτίκα γὰρ τρέχει Ὅρκος ἅμα σκολιῆσι δίκησιν·
 τῆς δὲ Δίκης ῥόθος ἐλκομένης ἦ κ' ἄνδρες ἄγωσι (220)
 δωροφάγοι, σκολιῆς δὲ δίκης κρῖνωσι θέμιστας·

As for you, Perses, give heed to *dikē* and do not foster *hybris*. For *hybris* is evil in a worthless mortal; and even a fine man cannot bear her easily, but encounters calamities and then is weighed down under her. The better road is the one towards what is just, passing her by on the other side. *dikē* wins out over *hybris* when she arrives at the end; but the fool only knows this after he has suffered. For at once Oath starts to run along beside crooked judgements, and there is a clamor when *dikē* is dragged where men, gift-eaters, carry her off and pronounce verdicts with crooked judgements.¹²

If we look at it through Gramscian lenses, the hawk reinforces the presence of coercion in the system, whereby the dominant group can enforce their decisions on the lives of those below them. However, the poet undermines the hawk's claim that power is based entirely on coercion, by offering an alternative model based on *dikē*, with the implication that *dikē* serves the interest of the subaltern as well as the dominant groups. Conversely, the coercive physical force of the hawk is identified as a form of *hybris*: a Greek term that can often have connotations of physical violence.¹³ *Hybris* is dangerous for the lowly, but is also problematic for the powerful, and the suggestion that 'even a fine man cannot bear her easily' hints that there will be consequences for the king who tries to behave like a hawk and treat his power as absolute. Hesiod therefore implies that the hawk's world-view must be replaced by a consensual *dikē*-driven model.

The passage that follows presents a society based on *dikē* as a perfectly harmonious way of living, which operates to the benefit of all social groups (225-37). In this society, the elite group still control power, but their wielding of it is a benevolent hegemony which enables the rest of the population to live in health and prosperity, expressed through a metaphor of natural growth: "the city blooms, and the people in it flower" (τοῖσι τέθηλε πόλις, λαοὶ δ' ἀνθέουσιν ἐν αὐτῇ, 227).¹⁴ The poet begins the description by noting that these are rulers who "give straight judgements to foreigners and to their fellow-citizens" (οἱ δὲ δίκας ξείνοισι καὶ ἐνδήμοισι διδοῦσιν / ἰθείας, 225-6). By doing this, they facilitate a good life for their subordinates, who in turn participate in the exchange of *dikē* by their labours and their fair sharing of what they produce (228-31). It later becomes apparent that this is a system overseen by Zeus, who punishes transgressions on both sides (238-69). Yet just as the model of the hawk is simplistic in its insistence on the pure power of coercion, the model of *dikē* also turns out to be unrealistic. The society of *dikē* is described in utopian terms: its inhabitants are divinely blessed beyond what is imaginable, since they are free from war and natural disaster and can guarantee the perpetual fruits of the earth to a degree that they are entirely self-sufficient (230-7). Conversely, in the real world, Hesiod is concerned to show how the mechanisms of *dike* can be corrupted, especially by the "crooked judgements" (σκολιῆσι δίκησιν, 219) of kings, who become "gift-eaters" (δωροφάγοι, 221) when they accept bribes. Despite Hesiod's injunctions to follow the path of *dikē*, he also suggests that no such thing as a perfectly consensual society exists on earth. This is apparent in the conclusion to this section, where he muses on the frailty of *dikē* in the society in which he finds himself, claiming that the man who trusts in perfect *dikē* will be harmed by his belief (270-3):

νῦν δὴ ἐγὼ μήτ' αὐτὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποισι δίκαιος
εἶην μήτ' ἐμὸς υἱός, ἐπεὶ κακὸν ἄνδρα δίκαιον
ἔμμεναι, εἰ μείζω γε δίκην ἀδικώτερος ἔξει.
ἀλλὰ τὰ γ' οὐπω ἔολπα τελεῖν Δία μητιόεντα.

As things are, I would not want to be a just man among men, since it is dangerous for a man to be just if the unjust will gain more. But I do not expect that Zeus the conseller will allow things to end like this.

Hesiod seems to conclude that the framework for conflict resolution in his own times is no more than the apparatus of state designed to uphold the hegemony of the kings and legitimise their power. It is moreover a system skewed in the kings' interest, since they control the operation of justice and benefit from bribes. Thus the *ainos* of the hawk and the nightingale turns out not to be a foil to the superior system of human justice, but a warning of how it can fail, since the legal system turns out to be a way of masking, rather than removing, the coercive force of the kings' power. Yet despite his open disgruntlement here, it would be misguided to see Hesiod as advocating any resistance against the hegemony: instead, his solution is to reassure the listener that Zeus will one day punish these abuses. Indeed, the broader goal of *Works and Days*, a poem written from the perspective of the free subaltern class, is to guide its addressee towards the propagation of the hegemony through its insistence on the value of production. Nevertheless, Hesiod explicitly recognises that both consent and coercion are at stake in the relationship between ruling and ruled, and his analysis points both to the benefits of this system when realised perfectly, and to the ways in which it can be abused or break down.

Maintaining the Homeric hegemony

If Hesiod purports to represent a mainly agrarian subaltern class, and their perspective on the benefits and limitations of the hegemonic system, the poetry of Homer represents a different end of the social scale. Though the Homeric poems present characters from a range of backgrounds, they are mainly focalised through the elite heroes who form the dominant bloc within their society. A Gramscian analysis of Homeric society would suggest to us that, like any hegemony, it relies on the support of its subaltern groups, who accept cultural values that maintain their place within the social order.¹⁵ Indeed, the relationship between the heroes and the subordinate *laos* (or people) is a central theme of Homeric poetry, and one upon which the heroes themselves regularly offer philosophical reflection. The clearest attempt to explain the relationship between the classes from the point of view of the dominant class is Sarpedon's famous speech in *Iliad* 12, where he sets out how the heroes benefit from the system, and what in turn is expected of them (12.310-21):

Γλαῦκε τί ἦ δὴ νῶϊ τετιμήμεσθα μάλιστα (310)
ἔδρη τε κρέασίν τε ἰδὲ πλείοις δεπάεσσιν
ἐν Λυκίῃ, πάντες δὲ θεοῦς ὦς εἰσορόωσι,

καὶ τέμενος νεμόμεσθα μέγα Ξάνθοιο παρ' ὄχθας
καλὸν φυταλιῆς καὶ ἀρούρης πυροφόροιο;
τῶ νῦν χρῆ Λυκίοισι μέτα πρώτοισιν ἐόντας (315)
στάμεν ἠδὲ μάχης καυστείρης ἀντιβολῆσαι,
ὄφρα τις ᾧδ' εἴπη Λυκίων πύκα θωρηκτάων·
οὐ μὰν ἀκλεέες Λυκίην κάτα κοιρανέουσιν
ἡμέτεροι βασιλῆες, ἔδουσί τε πίονα μῆλα
οἴνον τ' ἔξαιτον μελιθδέα· ἀλλ' ἄρα καὶ ἴς (320)
ἐσθλή, ἐπεὶ Λυκίοισι μέτα πρώτοισι μάχονται.

Glaucus, why are we two especially honoured in Lycia
with the best seats and cuts of meat, and ever-full wine-cups,
and all men look upon us as if we were gods and we
enjoy a huge estate, cut out beside Xanthus' banks,
fine land, of orchards and wheat-bearing ploughland?
That is why we must now take our stand in the first rank
of the Lycians, and confront the scorching heat of battle,
so that among the close-armoured Lycians men may say,
“Certainly those who rule us in Lycia are not without glory,
these kings of ours, who eat fattened sheep and drink
choice honey-sweet wine. There is also noble valour in them,
it seems, because they fight in the first ranks of the Lycians.”¹⁶

Sarpedon acknowledges the economic dominance of the hero-class, and represents it as arising through the consent of the subaltern class who produce the material wealth on which the heroes depend.¹⁷ In his account, this consent is dependent on the heroes' ongoing willingness to fight on behalf of their community. Nevertheless, Sarpedon takes it for granted that if the heroes continue to fulfil their end of the bargain, their social position will be upheld, and that both heroes and *laos* benefit equally from the status quo. The same ethos is represented on the shield of Achilles, where one of the images depicts the peace-time functioning of a king's estate, where the labourers work in an orderly fashion to gather in the wheat harvest (*Il.* 18.550-60). Here too, the relationship is depicted as mutually beneficial: the king watches his subordinates' efforts and “rejoices in in his heart” at seeing them (γηθόσυνος κῆρ, 18.557), while in return his heralds prepare a feast of an ox (558-9) from which the workers will benefit.¹⁸ This passage too acknowledges the dominant class' economic dependence, yet suggests that, at least in the idealised world represented by the images on the shield, everyone stands to gain from the system. Sarpedon's speech also draws attention to the fragility of this ideology, which relies on the consent of the *laos*, and so acts as a form of economic pressure on the heroes. Other passages in the *Iliad* also show the anxiety heroes experience at the prospect of the *laos* withdrawing consent to their rule, from Hector's shame before the Trojan people if he should fail to live up to his warrior ideals (*Il.* 6.441-3) to Agamemnon's assumption that if Menelaus dies, he will no longer be able to control the army (*Il.* 4.169-72). Yet the *Iliad* also depicts the coercion that the heroes themselves use to underpin the hegemony, as becomes apparent in the events of Book 2, where the *laos* does in fact withdraw consent to Agamemnon's military action and his leadership over them.¹⁹

The context of the *laos*' resistance is Agamemnon's ill-advised attempt to test their resolve by suggesting that the war at Troy is doomed to failure. While Agamemnon hopes to reaffirm the *laos*' ongoing commitment to the hegemony thus far established within the Achaean army, this backfires when they in fact prefer to return home, and dissent from their allocated role as subject to his military authority. In this moment of crisis, when consent can no longer be relied upon, the dominant group instead resorts to coercion, exemplified by Odysseus' intervention to re-establish the power balance.²⁰ The poet describes how Odysseus distinguishes between members of the dominant and subordinated classes, as when a member of the former appears to be dissenting, he attempts to persuade them to re-establish their own authoritative place within the hierarchy (δαιμόνι' οὐ σε ἔοικε κακὸν ὧς δειδίσεσθαι, / ἀλλ' αὐτὸς τε κάθησο καὶ ἄλλους ἴδρυσε λαούς, 'You are possessed! It is not right to threaten you as if you were a coward; go, sit down again and make all your people sit as well.', 2.190-1). Conversely, his behaviour with members of the *laos* is much harsher (2.198-204):

ὄν δ' αὖ δῆμου τ' ἄνδρα ἴδοι βοόωντά τ' ἐφεύροι,
τὸν σκῆπτρῳ ἐλάσασκεν ὁμοκλήσασκέ τε μῦθῳ·
δαιμόνι' ἀτρέμας ἦσο καὶ ἄλλων μῦθον ἄκουε,
οἱ σέο φέρτεροί εἰσι, σὺ δ' ἀπτόλεμος καὶ ἄναλκις
οὔτέ ποτ' ἐν πολέμῳ ἐναρίθμιος οὔτ' ἐνὶ βουλή·
οὐ μὲν πως πάντες βασιλεύσομεν ἐνθάδ' Ἀχαιοί·
οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη· εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω,

But whenever he saw a man of the common people yelling out,
he would belabour them with the staff and shout at him:
"‘You are possessed! Sit down quietly and listen to the words of others
who are better fighters than you; you are feeble and unwarlike,
not someone to be reckoned with either in war or in counsel.
There is no way that we Achaeans can all be kings here.
Many rulers are an evil thing; let there be a single commander.’"²¹

Odysseus' attempt to coerce the *laos* into supporting the hegemony partly relies on literal violence, as he beats members of the dissident group (ἐλάσασκεν, 199). The staff he uses to do this is Agamemnon's sceptre of kingship, which Odysseus has taken in order to re-establish royal authority (186). The sceptre represents the authority granted Agamemnon by political and civil society, as the poet stresses at the start of this scene, where he tells us that the staff's origins can be traced directly back to Zeus, the ultimate political arbiter, and lists the generations of kings who have held it before him (102-8). Yet when the consensus that upholds the staff's normal function in designating authority breaks down, it is used as a weapon of physical chastisement. Equally important, however, is the coercive element in Odysseus' abusive words, whose aim is to delegitimise and exclude the offending parties, in a form of what Pierre Bourdieu termed 'symbolic violence'.²² Odysseus defines those of the *laos* who are actively protesting as "feeble and unwarlike" (ἀπτόλεμος καὶ ἄναλκις, 201), and as such he reinforces their low status and denies them a voice by removing their stake in society. Although the assemblies of the *Iliad* regularly depict the role of the *laos* in

ratifying the decisions of their leaders, Odysseus' actions show that this authority is only granted when they adhere to their place within the power structure. Despite the importance of consent to upholding the social structures, we see here how underpinning it is the threat of coercion, since the hero-class has control of violence, which is embedded in their roles both as the greatest warriors but also as the "speakers of words" (*Il.* 9.443). Yet the *laos* themselves must consent as a group to this coercive control, since if all of them rose up against the kings they would easily overpower them and prevent their violence. Odysseus' actions re-establish the hegemony within the army, and regain the consent of the *laos* who return to their seats with an approving roar (207-10).

The consent of the *laos* to their own position within the hierarchy is shown a little later in their response to the chastisement of Thersites, who voices further objections to Agamemnon's leadership. Odysseus uses the same tactics as before: he beats Thersites and abuses him verbally (246-66). Here the poet highlights the response of the rest of the *laos*, who, far from being cowed into submission, welcome Odysseus' behaviour and conduct their own symbolic violence against Thersites by excluding him from the social group (270-5):

οἱ δὲ καὶ ἀχνύμενοί περ ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἠδὺ γέλασσαν·
 ὃδε δὲ τις εἵπεσκεν ἰδὼν ἐς πλησίον ἄλλον·
 ὦ πόποι ἦ δὴ μυρὶ Ὀδυσσεὺς ἐσθλὰ ἔοργε
 βουλὰς τ' ἐξάρχων ἀγαθὰς πόλεμόν τε κορύσσαν·
 νῦν δὲ τόδε μέγ' ἄριστον ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἔρεξεν,
 ὃς τὸν λωβητῆρα ἐπεσβόλον ἔσχ' ἀγοράων.

But the rest, vexed though they were, laughed happily to see it,
 and this is what they would say, each man looking at his neighbour:
 "Well, we know that Odysseus has done countless fine things,
 both leading us with good counsel and deploying us in battle,
 but this is by far the best thing he has done among the Argives,
 stopping this blustering and intemperate man speaking in the assembly."²³

The *laos* are described as distressed (ἀχνύμενοί, 270), presumably because of their own recent experiences and chastisement, but the humiliation of Thersites offers them an opportunity to reintegrate into the power structures by uniting against him and so reclaiming their own authority as moral arbiters. Their remarks validate Odysseus' actions, and re-establish the status quo, by accepting the authority of the hero-class to provide political and military leadership. When viewed through a Gramscian lens, therefore, this interlude in the *Iliad* shows the interconnectedness of consent and coercion for maintaining power. By providing coercive leadership, Odysseus regains the consent of the subaltern class, whose complicity is crucial for the continued operation of Achaean society at Troy. Odysseus' behaviour strips away, at least temporarily, the pretence elsewhere in the poem, that the relationship between hero and *laos* is entirely benign and mutually beneficial, revealing the coercive elements that the dominant class are willing to use when consensual leadership breaks down.

Navigating hegemony in Archilochean abuse poetry

The role of shame and abuse as forms of coercion brings us to the poetry of Archilochus, known above all in antiquity as a ferocious blame poet who could drive his victims to suicide with his poisonous verses. Archilochus' poetic persona roots itself strongly in the struggle between dominant and dominated groups, and is fertile terrain for Gramscian analysis. In historical terms, Archilochus, like other early Greek lyric poets, is likely to have been a member of the aristocratic elite. Yet within his poetry, he adopts a persona which is systematically marginalised, and which expresses discontent with the status quo of the socio-economic system. This is most clearly expressed by the Athenian oligarch Critias, who attacks Archilochus for perpetuating what he perceives as a shameful image of himself (88 B 44 D-K = Archil fr. 295 W). Critias tells us that Archilochus claimed to be the son of a slave woman, and that he had to leave his home island Paros because of poverty, as well as criticising the moral values espoused by his poetry, where the poetic persona engages in disreputable activities such as seducing freeborn women and jettisoning his shield in battle. Critias' attack on Archilochus is no doubt ideologically charged, and may be a deliberate misreading of the poetry to suit his political agenda rather than a naïve assumption that everything in it must be biographically true.²⁴ Nevertheless, the surviving fragments corroborate the idea that Archilochus identified himself with the dominated rather than the elite class. Thus for example, he describes life on Paros as suitable only for poor farming and seafaring, rejecting it with the line ἔα Πάρον καὶ σῦκα κείνα καὶ θαλάσσιον βίον ('away with Paros and those figs and that life at sea, fr. 116 W). Figs were a cheap food associated with the poor, and can grow in difficult conditions with poor and rocky soil: the implication is that farming on Paros is a harsh lifestyle, while seafaring is considered even more dangerous and undesirable.²⁵ Similarly, the new colony on Thasos is called 'the misery of all Greece' (Πανελλήνων οἰζύς, fr. 102 W), while the island itself is presented as harsh and difficult to settle (fr. 21-2 W). The third-century BCE Mnesiepes inscription (*SEG* 15.517), which preserves the legend of Archilochus' life, depicts him as systematically unappreciated or excluded by his community. For example, when he is given the gift of poetry by the Muses as a young man, his father is only interested in trying to get back the cow that the Muses took in exchange for this blessing, while when he invents ribald iambic poetry, it is rejected by the citizens of Paros as inappropriate.²⁶

This oppressed persona is also apparent in Archilochus' use of animal imagery and fables to describe himself, where he repeatedly chooses to identify with an animal which is weaker than or socially inferior to the others in the story. Thus in fr. 23 W, the speaker identifies himself with an ant; in the Fox and Eagle Epode (fr. 172-81 W) he is the fox, who is helpless in the face of the eagle's violence; and in the Fox and Monkey Epode (fr. 185-7 W) the Archilochean fox appears to be the social inferior of the monkey, who in the Aesopic fable is elected to kingship. Nevertheless, all these animals turn out to be more powerful than they appear, and are able to turn the tables on their social superiors: the ant possesses a painful bite, whose power is reflected in the poet's ability to harm his enemies (fr. 23.15),²⁷ the fox of the Fox and Eagle Epode

is supported by Zeus, who ensures its wrongs are avenged,²⁸ while that of the Fox and Monkey Epode outwits the monkey by entrapping him in a humiliating position.²⁹ In this light, we could interpret Archilochus' poetry as representing a counter-hegemonic view, most obviously exemplified by fr. 5 W, where the poet describes abandoning his shield on the battlefield, claiming not to care about the symbolic importance of such an act (τί μοι μέλει ἄσπις ἐκείνη; / ἐρρέτω·, “‘What’s that shield to me? To hell with it!’”, fr. 5.3-4 W). We know that this poem was considered shocking in antiquity: it forms a central plank of Critias' case against Archilochus, while Plutarch claims that it led to Archilochus' expulsion from Sparta (*Instit. Lac.* 34.239b). The ethical stance embodied in this poem, it could be said, represents a challenge to established values, since the success of the citizen army relies on the commitment of the individual hoplite to the battle line, and more abstractly to the ‘common sense’ code it symbolises of putting the group above individual safety.

However, for a full account of how Archilochus engages with hegemonic values, we need also to look at who he abuses, and what they are attacked for. On analysis, Archilochus' poetic persona usually aims to capture the moral centre ground to justify his attacks and win the audience's sympathy. In so doing, he aligns himself with an accepted set of ‘common sense’ values, and presents his enemy as having breached these, an act which justifies the attack on their honour and renders them open to the mockery of the community.³⁰ This is particularly clear in Archilochus' most famous poem in antiquity, the Fox and Eagle Epode, where he attacks his enemy Lycambes. In what survives of this poem, we can see how Archilochus balances his persona as an outsider with an attempt to monopolise values from inside the hegemony. Thus in the poem's first section, he mobilises the audience against Lycambes, who is depicted as mocked and excluded (νῦν δὲ δὴ πολλὸς / ἄστοῖσι φαίνεται γέλως, “‘Now you're a big laughing-stock for the citizens’”, fr. 172.3-4 W). In a slightly later passage, Archilochus explains what is at stake, presenting the quarrel between them as a moral breach rather than a personal rift: Lycambes has broken an oath based on shared dining and hospitality (ὄρκον δ' ἐνοσφίσθης μέγαν / ἄλας τε καὶ τράπεζαν, ‘You turned your back on the great oath and on salt and table’, fr. 173 W). Thus Lycambes has disrupted the unity of the sympotic *hetaireia*, an institution which exists to promote the interests of a socially dominant group. He is presented as an enemy of the elite class, as well as an aggressor against ‘common sense’ morality such as the importance of oaths, which are ultimately overseen by the guardianship of Zeus. Archilochus' audience are expected to unite around the poet, sharing the assumption that the *hetaireia* and the elite bonding it fosters are crucial to the values of their society.³¹

As the poem continues, Archilochus uses the fable to further explore the political and social relationship between himself (represented by the fox) and Lycambes (who is identified with the eagle). The eagle is powerful and a favourite of Zeus,³² and can dominate the fox, whose children it takes away and devours, despite having made an oath of friendship (ζυνεωνίην / ἔμειξαν, “‘they joined together in friendship’”, fr. 174). In making the eagle an oath-breaker, Archilochus goes further than the Aesopic version of the fable,

where the animals simply become friends, and reflects the version of the fable found in the Near Eastern tradition, where the animals make a formal pact and seal it with an oath.³³ In response to the breaking of the oath, the fox prays to Zeus for justice, in a passage that reflects Hesiod's *ainos* of the hawk and the nightingale (fr. 177 W):

ὦ Ζεῦ, πάτερ Ζεῦ, σὸν μὲν οὐρανοῦ κράτος,
σὺ δ' ἔργ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπων ὄραις
λεωργὰ καὶ θεμιστά, σοὶ δὲ θηρίων
ὔβρις τε καὶ δίκη μέλει.

O Zeus, father Zeus, yours is the power in heaven, you see both the wicked and the lawful deeds of men, and the violence and justice of beasts is your concern.

In contrast to Hesiod's image of an animal world dominated by coercion, Archilochus presents one overseen by a further authority, since Zeus' arbitration of morality extends over beasts as well as men. Moreover, whereas in Hesiod the discussion of *dikē* prompted by the *ainos* ends with the poet merely anticipating that Zeus will one day intervene to rectify the injustice perpetuated by the elite, Archilochus' fable ends by depicting the eagle's downfall, as its attempt to steal meat from a sacrifice causes the destruction of its own young. In other words, the dominant eagle transgresses against the core values shared by both the subordinated fox and the audience just as, by implication, Lycambes has also done. Though Lycambes, like the eagle, appears to have the social and economic power, Archilochus is able to mobilise 'common sense' values against him, and so turn the tables by transforming Lycambes into the ostracised party. However much it appears to identify with the 'little man', Archilochus' poetry cannot straightforwardly be identified as a challenge to the hegemony. Rather, it is an attempt by the poet to have his cake and eat it, simultaneously presenting himself as the underdog, yet utilising hegemonic values for his own purposes. He invites the audience to unite around a set of shared aspirations, directing anger or discontent felt by the dominated away from the in-group or the system itself, and on to those who transgress against it. In doing so, the counter-cultural elements of his poetry can be seen just as readily as a form of safety valve, a means of thinking through troubling realities in a safe space, rather than any serious protest against established culture.

Conclusion

This brief overview of three very different archaic poets demonstrates that Gramscian ideas provide us with an enriching lens through which to view how social conflict is represented in early Greek texts, and how the poetry negotiates a set of socially agreed values. An analysis of these poets which presents them as simply 'promoting' or 'challenging' agreed values is insufficiently nuanced. Rather, all the poets engage with how the social norms uphold an expected set of behaviours, and also with how these benefit or marginalise different groupings. Thus, while Hesiod's account of *hybris* versus *dikē* might initially seem like a straightforward dichotomy between a society based exclusively on coercion, and one based on reciprocity

and consent, this opposition is shown to be unrealistic. In fact, the society of Hesiod's own day is complex and in many ways unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the existence of *dikē* highlights the importance of consent within the system, even if this can be in practice abused or ignored. Likewise, in Homeric society the consent of the *laos* is required for the system to function, but if this consent is withdrawn (even as a result of the failings of the dominant class), the system is ultimately maintained by literal and symbolic coercion by the elite, and this violence appears to be the mechanism by which consent is restored. Within the framework of the poem, the presence of coercive strategies can be seen as a social good, as it ultimately restores order and safeguards the functioning of the community. Finally, Archilochus explores the mechanisms of hegemony from a purportedly subaltern perspective, adopting a persona who moves in elite circles but is marginalised compared to his more powerful companions. In fact, however, this persona is expert in coopting the values of the hegemony for his own purposes, in order to enact symbolic violence against those who have wronged him. The poetry thus presents a clear example of how hegemonic values are presented as mainstream 'common sense', and how they are upheld and policed by those outside the dominant group as well as those within it.

Gramsci's approach foregrounds the fundamental role of culture in upholding and perpetuating hegemonic values. The ongoing authority granted to poets in Greek culture, and to these three poets in particular, shows an awareness of the role played by intellectuals and cultural agents in shaping as well as reflecting the values of their society. Indeed, in the poetry of Hesiod and Archilochus, the speakers' identities as poets is presented as integral to the ethical case they make: hence the oppressed nightingale in Hesiod's fable is a singer (WD 208), while it is implicit to Archilochus' Fox and Eagle Epode that the poem itself functions as the punishment that will avenge the poet for Lycambes' transgressions.

Early Greek poets, then, perceive themselves as active agents in communicating and influencing social norms, just as they also show themselves to be sensitive to the delicacies of the power-balance on which their society is based. It would be naïve to see in early Greek poetry, however apparently counter-cultural a persona it adopts, a serious challenge to the 'common sense' values of the community. Nevertheless, a Gramscian analysis shows us how capable the poets are of exploring the hegemonic framework in which they operate in a satisfying and intellectually challenging way.

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1

Q13 §7; Q15 §10; Q6 §81; Q13 §11; Q5 §127; Q14 §49; Q14 §76; Q6 §12; Q8 §179; Q1 §47; Q8 §2; Q6 §137; Q8 §190; Q26 §6; Q6 §88; Q8 §185; Q8 §141; Q6 §136; Q14 §13; Q17 §51; Q7 §90; Q8 §130; Q15 §3; Q15 §18; Q6 §10; Q3 §46; Q3 §34 (= SPN: 242-76). Said 1984: 169 argues for a Gramscian-influenced understanding of literature that emanates from a specific national cultural context.

2

Q11 §12 (= SPN: 323-33) and Q11 §13 (= SPN: 419-425).

3

On Gramscian ‘common sense’, see Crehan 2011 and 2016: 43-58

4

Q11 §63 and Q7 §19 (= SPN:3757); see further Williams 1980: 37, Jones 2006: 4-5.

5

Religion: Hdt. 2.53.2-3. On Homer as teacher, see Xenoph. B 10 DK, Pl. *Rep.* 606-7 (the theme of Homer as educator also pervades Plato’s *Ion* and *Hippias Major*), Xen. *Symp.* 3.5, Isoc. *Pan.* 159. On Hesiod as teacher see Heraclitus B 57 DK, Ar. *Frogs* 1030-6, Pl. *Protag.* 316d, [Arist.] *Xen.* 975a10, Plut. *Thes.* 3.2. See Koning 2010; Graziosi 2016: 35-6.

6

E.g. Heraclitus 42 D-K *apud* Diog. Laert. 9.1; [Long.] *de Subl.* 13.3; Philostr. *VS* 6.620, *Imag.* 1.3; Cic. *Tusc.* 1.3.

7

On the tradition of the *Certamen*, see West 1967; Richardson 1981; Heldmann 1982; Graziosi 2001. On Archilochus and Homer/Hesiod, see Swift 2019: 18-20, 22-4, 40-3. For Cratinus’ use of these poets, see Bakola 2009: 73-4.

8

My reading of hegemony for the purposes of this chapter is one developed in the field of cultural studies, see for example Thomas 2009, Jones 2016. The concept of hegemony need not be limited to the cultural sphere, and hegemony in Gramsci’s thinking includes other aspects, such as the economic and political: see Hoare and Sperber 2016: 117-38. For an overview of ideas about hegemony which may have influenced Gramsci’s development of the concept, see Boothman 2011.

9

SPN: 170. For discussion of the centaur image, see Anderson 2017: 54-5 and 100-1; Cox 1983: 164; Fontana 2008. On the relative power of consent and coercion, see Anderson 2017: esp. 85-105; Thomas 2009: 161-2.

10

Eng. tr. Most 2018.

11

The tradition of associating the hawk with the power of the kings goes back to antiquity: see Σ WD 202a, 207-12 Pertusi, and for modern analysis see West 1978; Verdenius 1985 *ad loc.*; Mordine 2006. On the power implied by the repetition of ὀνόχεσσι, see Canevaro 2015: 56. The main alternative reading (less widely accepted) is to identify the hawk as Zeus, who has the kings in his power: e.g. Jensen 1966: 20.

12

Eng. tr. Most 2018, adapted.

13

For *hybris* as an act of verbal or physical coercion or dishonour, see Arist. *Rhet.* 1378b23-30, and for the physical violence associated with the term see Pollux, *Lexicon* 8.76-7. For modern discussion of the term's meaning see Fisher 1992: 151-246; Cairns 1996; on legal aspects see Gagarin 1979 and van Wees 2011.

¹⁴ Cf. SPN 182, on the unstable equilibria between the interests of the dominant and subordinate groups, and how a dominant group may stop short of unbridled economic self-interest in order to maintain them.

15

Thus, a Gramscian analysis, which takes into account the subaltern class' active role in maintaining the hegemony, may counter Hammer's objection to existing Marxist readings of Homer that they "are curiously undialectical in presenting a view of society [...] as governed by elite manipulation of an exploited people" (2002: 150). For readings of the type he criticises, see Tandy 1997 and Thalmann 1998. For an analysis of the role of the subaltern class in Gramsci's thought, see Green 2011.

16

Eng Tr. by Verity 2011.

17

The reciprocity between ruler and ruled in Homeric society has long been recognised: see e.g. Raaflaub 1997; Donlan 1998; Hammer 2002: 150-5. See SPN 182 on the need for the dominant class to curb their own economic interests to maintain equilibrium. The identity of the hero-class and the derivation of its authority has been discussed in various terms, for example divine kingship (e.g. Bonner and Smith 1930, Köstler 1968, Mondi 1980), the possession of social goods (e.g. Muellner 1996: 34, Nagler 1988: 81-90), or the ability to command deference (see Van Wees 1992: 61-125). Inclusion within the hero-class ultimately depends on achieving and maintaining an appropriate level of *timē*, which can be inherent according to position or ability, but also granted by the wider group: for a detailed discussion see Scodel 2008: 1-30.

18

I take it to be more likely that the barley prepared by the women (18.559-60) is to be sprinkled over the roast meat to make a communal dish (cf. *Od.* 14.77, 429) rather than that the labourers are to eat barley and the king meat: for a fuller explanation see Edwards 1991: 224, and for a counterview see Kirk 1976: 12. The latter tradition would be a starker reinforcement of the social hierarchy, though in both cases the king controls access to the meat.

19

Contra Donlan 1997, who sees the *basileis* as ultimately lacking coercive power.

20

A Gramscian position thus encourages us to take a less positive view of Odysseus' intervention than that of Haubold 2000: 59, who regards it as showing "how to mobilise communal interest". On the importance of force in Odysseus' actions, see Hammer 2002: 88, Barker 2009: 55.

21

Eng. tr. Verity 2011.

22

For Bourdieu's collected writings on language and its use to control, see Bourdieu 1991.

23

Eng tr. Verity 2011.

24

See Rotstein 2010: 301-17, Swift 2019: 416.

25

See Treu 1958: 215; Pouilloux 1964: 10; Swift 2019: 301. On figs as poor man's food see Wilkins and Hill 2006: 53-4, and Archil. Fr. 250, where 'fig-eating' is used to refer to the lifestyle of a miser. On the wretchedness of a sailor's life, cf. Hes. *WD* 618-94; Eur. Fr. 670 *TrGF*; Antiph. Fr. 100 K-A.

26

See Swift 2019: 8.

27

On the ant's bite, see Headlam-Knox on Her. 1.15, and for the associated moral 'even unimportant creatures can cause harm' cf. Aesop. 225 Perry, *Σ Ar. Birds* 82 (p. 19 Holwerda) = *Suda* σ 256. See further Brown 2018: 39-40.

28

This is made clear in the fable narrative at Aesop 1 Perry, to which Archilochus seems to adhere closely, and foreshadowed in the surviving Archilochean passage where the fox prays to Zeus for assistance (Fr. 177 W). The vindication of the fox is necessary for the poem to function as an attack on the treacherous Lycambes: on the analogue see Carey 1986; Brown 1997: 65-6; Irwin 1998.

29

The idea of the monkey king became a proverbial way of referring to false pretensions which are easily exposed: see Diogen. 6.98, 7.94; Apostol. 14.32; *Suda* π 1581.

30

For discussion see Carey 2018.

31

I take it as likely (along with most scholars) that early iambus was mostly performed in a sympotic setting, in which case the audience themselves would have also been members of the elite class. However, some iambic pieces could suggest a performance before wider group (e.g. Solon's political elegies: Fr. 36-7 W, or Archilochus' celebration of battle victories: Fr. 89, 94 W), and there is no good reason to insist on a single performance context for a genre as multi-faceted as iambus. For scholarly discussion, see West 1974: 26-7, Rösler 1980; Pellizer 1990; Vetta 1992; Kantzios 2005: 12-20. Stehle 1997: 215, and for a more detailed account of my position see Swift 2019: 13-14.

32

See Corrêa 2010: 65-7.

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On the parallels between the Near Eastern and Greek myth, see Baldi 1961 and West 1997: 502-5.