STYLISTIC ANALYSIS AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PROLOGUE OF THE *CHRISTUS PATIENS*:
A CASE STUDY

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Since it is a deliberate imitation of the dramatic poetry of Euripides, the *Christus patiens* may be pardoned for being, to a considerable extent, a show-case of rhetorical figures and poetic devices of all kinds. This is especially true of the prologue — and understandably so, by virtue of the general tendency of literary works to commence somewhat stiff-legged and in grandiloquent style. However, in the prologue of the *Christus patiens* stylistic devices may be seen to play an important role in the articulation of structural elements, *i.e.* in the ordering of the discourse. For this reason, an interpretation of the prologue — or, for that matter, of the entire play — should not be attempted without due attention to the analysis of its stylistic features.

The main part of this study is just such an analysis of the prologue of the *Christus patiens*, the interpretation that is based upon it being rather tentative, due to the scarcity of literary studies and the virtual non-existence of detailed commentaries on this play.

Note that the term 'prologue' here does not refer to the *hypothesis* of the play (which contains an indication of its centonic nature and a short summary of the opening scene) but to the proper dramatic prologue — a monologue, spoken in this case by the protagonist, explaining the essence of the tragic situation, indicating the identity of the speaking character, as well as the precise moment within the course of the 'mythical' events at which the dramatic plot commences, and concluding with the indication of an external event that sets the action in motion. This monologue is spoken by the mother of Christ, the ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΣ, presumably occupying the stage all by herself. It is a lengthy monologue (like many others in this play), comprising ninety iambic trimeter verses.

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The syntactical structure of the first two sentences (vv. 1–31) recalls the opening lines of the Euripidean *Medea*: Καθ' ἄφθεια ... μηδ' ... οὐ γὰρ ἄν ... These lines refer to a 'mythical' event which the speaker identifies
as the first cause of the present unfavourable situation. Simultaneously, it serves to indicate the resentment which the θεοτόχος feels at this situation, expressing an unattainable wish that this had never occurred:

Εἰθ' ὄψελ' ἐν λειμῶνι μηδ' ἔρπευν ὄρις,
μηδ' ἐν νάπαισι τούθ' ὄφεθρεύειν δράκων
ἀγκυλομητῆς. ²

Within these lines, there are some details worth noticing. Firstly, the *protasis* consists of two parallel expressions referring to the same event: the serpent intruding in the garden (cf. Gen 3). Syntactically this parallelism resembles the first five lines of the *Medea*, though semantically it reflects the type of parallelism which characterizes most of the poetic diction of the Old Testament. Note, secondly, the attribute ἀγκυλομητῆς (v. 3). It is placed in the emphatic position at the end of the second of these phrases. Lexically and poetically, it is a perfect choice: it gives an almost visual description of the serpent, while stressing its lethal wiliness (cf. Gen 3.1).

The results of this initial event are listed as a series of explanations for the implicit *apodosis* of the conditional sentence: ‘If only ... (then all would have been well); for then ... ’ (vv. 3b–31):

{où γὰρ ἐν πλευράς φύμα,
μὴτρ γένους δύστηνος ἡπατημένη
τόλμημα τοιμάζω παντότολμον ἐν ἐξήλι,
ἐρνους ἑρωτι θυμῶν ἐκπεπληγμένη,
θεώσας πεισθείσα ἐγχειν αὐτὸθεν;
οὐδ' ἂν φαγεῖν πείσας καρποῦ τὸν πόσιν
tοῦ μηδὲ συμφέροντος αὐτίκα σφίζι,
λειμάνος ἐξωκιστὸ τοῦ πανολβίου,
lύμην κατακραθείσα καὶ λυγρὸν μόρον,
μὴτρ τέκνων τ' ἧκουσέν ἐκ δυσκοιτίας
μογοστοκοῦσ' ἀδίστα τ' ἐμπαραμένῃ,
ἰδρύ τ' ἂν ὁχεῖ τὴν γην ἀλεθριὰν
σὺν ἄνδρι καὶ τέκνοισιν ἀφὰς ὑστάτης,
ἀπερ τεκείν ὀρστὸ λύπας καὶ στόλος,
διαδοχας τε παρατέμπειν τῷ βίῳ,
διαλλαγὰς τ' ἐντεύθεν εὐρείν εξόχουσ'
οὐδ' ἂν γένος τ' ἤλωλεν ἀνθρώπων ἄταν
καὶ τὸν Δυνατὸν ἀλλαγεῖν ἐπεισε πως
ἀγαθότητι δαπέδῳ κατιέναι
καὶνὶς βροτοθῆναι τε καὶ τλῆσαι πάθος·
oυδ' ἂν ἐγώ πέφυκα μὴτρ παρθένους
καὶ νῦν ἔκλυσεν Τίον ἔλκεσθαι ἑρίτῃ
οὐράνιον, γῆνυν, ἀκραίφνῃ γοναῖς,
This lengthy exposition is neatly structured by syntactic articulation that supports its semantic continuity. The main units are introduced by οὐ γὰρ ἄν (v. 3), οὔδὲ ἄν (v. 8), οὔδὲ ἄν (v. 19), and οὔδὲ ἄν (v. 23). Semantically, these units concern the following aspects:

1. the first sin committed by Eve, mother of the human race;
2. the immediate consequences: she is banned from paradise, condemned to the woes of childbearing, and suffers hardship on this earth together with her husband and children;
3. the further consequences: the entire human race is in a state of decay that can only be rectified by the intervention of God — assuming human nature and suffering;
4. the present result: the virgin mother suffers as she hears of her son being dragged before a court of judgement, and she fears to see him being maltreated.

Concerning the first of these four units (v. 3-7) the following may be noted:

- The act itself (i.e. eating of the forbidden fruit) is not defined, but is referred to in terms expressing abhorrence of its audacious nature: τόλμημα τολμᾶν παντότολμον ἄν ἔτηλ (v. 5). This attitude towards the first sin is emphasized by the almost obtrusive alliteration produced by repetition of the stems τόλμω- and τόλμω- in four consecutive words.
- The rest of the syntactic unit is structured concentrically around this line, adding further emphasis to the central statement. The lines immediately preceding and following it contain indications of the mental state that led to such an audacious act, expressed by the participles ἤπαθημένη (v. 4) and ἐκκεκληγιμένη (v. 6) — note the parallel sound pattern — while the outer circle of this concentrical pattern is formed by an identification of the subject (v. 3b) and of her reason for desiring the forbidden fruit (v. 7).

The first phrase identifying Eve, πλευράς φύμα (v. 3), recalls Gen 2.21–2. André Tuilier calls this a 'métaphore intraduisible', excusing thereby his rendering 'la femme'. At first glance it does seem to be a vague allusion requiring a tour de force to be interpreted. However, when considered within the context of the concentrical pattern of which it forms a part, the poet's intent is revealed. Eve, being part of God's creation (πλευράς φύμα — v. 3), is beguiled (v. 4) into desiring (v. 6) not so much the fruit itself
as those divine attributes which she is persuaded that it will confer upon her (v. 7 — cf. Gen 3.4–5). This underlines once more the *hybris* involved in the first act of sin.

The second syntactic unit within this passage (vv. 8–18) describes the immediate consequences which the first sin has for Eve. It is subdivided into three aspects, *viz.* —

(a) she is banned from paradise,
(b) she is condemned to the woes of childbearing, and
(c) she suffers hardship together with her husband and children.

These subdivisions are indicated syntactically by the conjunction τε — and the recurring of ἄν — with the indicatives ἔξοχιστο (v. 10), ἠκουσεν (v. 12), and φικε (v. 14).5

The subdivisions may now be considered separately. Note, firstly, some stylistic features of v. 8:

- Like v. 7, it contains a participle of πεθῶ with an infinitive dependent on this; but the words are arranged in an inverse order, so as to create a chiastic pattern:

  πεισθεῖσα  τυχεῖν
  φαγεῖν       πείσασαι

- The semantic content of πείσασαι (v. 8) differs from that of πεισθείσα (v. 7), in as much as persuading a person to do something differs from believing something. This type of verbal repetition, involving different meanings of the same word, is a stylistic device frequently occurring in classical tragedy. Incidentally, it is also a feature of Johannine style — cf. the discussion in Nida *et al.*

- The grammatical forms of the verb πεθῶ (passive in v. 7, but active in v. 8) support the shift of emphasis which occurs on the semantic level: after being beguiled into desiring the forbidden fruit, Eve now becomes actively involved in sin, even to the point of enticing another to do the same.

The banishing from the garden (v. 10) is emphasized by contrastive technique: the reference to the garden (λειμάνον τού πανολβίου) is surrounded by an indication of the negative value of the fruit (μηδέ συμφέροντος σφίσα — an understatement!) and of the conditions prevailing outside of the garden (λύμην ... καὶ λυγρὸν μόρον). Note, also, the balancing of syntactic elements: the indicative ἔξοχιστο is surrounded by two participle phrases, *viz.* πεισασαι ... (v. 8) and καταχρίσεια ... (v. 11) — an instance of τὸ σφρογγυλον, to be sure.

The second aspect of the consequences of sin for Eve — being condemned to the woes of childbearing — is described in vv. 12–3 (cf. Gen 3.16). Note the heavy emphasis produced by the three phrases ἐκ δυσκολίας (12),
The third aspect of these consequences, viz. suffering hardship, is expounded in vv. 14–8. Lines 14 and 15 are parallel in structure: The first phrase in v. 15 supplements the first in 14, and the second in 15 (ἀρας ὑστάτης) explains the second in 14 (τήνδε γὰρ ὀλεθριαν). Incidentally, the adjective ὀλεθριαν is to be understood in its passive sense — ‘lost’ or ‘undone’ — because of the last curse; the last of three, that is. (Cf. Gen 3.14–7: The first curse affects the serpent, the second one affects the woman, and the last, addressed to the man, declares the earth to be accursed because of man’s sin.) If the parallelism in these two lines is not taken into account, one may end up like Tuilier, rendering ‘... sur cette terre de mort, avec son mari et les enfants de malédiction,’ and having to ignore the adjective ὑστάτης, which does not fit the context then.

The elaboration in vv. 16–8 serves to keep the attention focused upon the destiny of the woman — to bear children λύσας καὶ στόνοις, to produce an offspring, and thereby to obtain reconciliation. (This seems to be the poet’s interpretation of I Tim 2.15: σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας.)

The third syntactic unit of this passage (vv. 19–22) concerns the further consequences of the initial event to which vv. 1–3b referred: now all of humanity is in a state of utter ruin, from which only divine intervention can bring salvation. In these lines the scope of thought is enlarged to a cosmic scale. It concerns man and God, ruin and restoration. Note the syntactic articulation: γένος τ(ε) ... καὶ τὸν Δωνατόν ... . In a bold way it is suggested that God has also been involved in the consequences of the sin of mankind. Incidentally, the infinitive ἀλθανεῖν (v. 20 — a hapax) seems to be dependent upon Δωνατόν: ‘the One who can restore’. The other three infinitives are dependent upon βοηθήσασθαι, as is indicated by the conjunctions: καὶ έσείς ... βοηθήσασθαι τε καὶ τλῆσαι ... .

In vv. 23–31 (the fourth syntactic unit of the passage under discussion) the present result of the first sin is described: the virgin mother suffers as she hears of her son being dragged before a court of judgement, and is afraid to see him being maltreated. (It should be kept in mind that this passage was introduced by the expression of an unattainable wish. Thus every repetition of ‘then I would not ...’ is meant to stress the implication ‘but now I am ...’.)

Note, incidentally, the explicit ἔγω in v. 23. It adds emphasis to the first indication, within the text, of who the speaking character is. This information is signalled at the appropriate moment, when the context focuses attention upon the θεοτόκος. In this respect also, the poet follows the example of his classical models.

Two perspectives are delicately interwoven in vv. 23–7:
• Regarding the virgin mother, these lines form a crescendo, with v. 23 simply stating her identity, v. 24 mentioning what she hears about her son, v. 26 expressing her reaction of shock to see him being maltreated, and v. 27 describing in metaphorical terms the effect that all this has on her.

• Regarding her son, these same lines form a concentrical circular pattern by which the terms defining his origin and nature are emphasized: while vv. 23 and 27 refer to the mother only, 24 and 26 explicitly name the son as object of her concern (ὑόν in 24, and τόνδε in 26), adding emphasis by the rhyming effect of ἐκλυνον ὑόν ... and ... ἐφρίττον τόνδε καθύβρισμένον surrounding οὐφάνιον, γήγον (v. 25).

The attributes οὐφάνιον and γήγον are here effectively juxtaposed without any conjunction — a fine ὁσμόρος — and give the first hint at what is to become a very important theme of the play, viz. the double nature of Christ.

The metaphor of v. 27 — φέρουσα ... δεινήν φλόγα — is elaborated in vv. 28–31. The relative construction allows a transition to positive statements in the present indicative, by which the effect of the present events upon the virgin mother is vividly described: μαμάσσαι με ... δονεί χέαρ ... χαρδίαν δίεσσαν. This is supported by the concurrent transition from ἐγώ ... φέρουσα ... to the accusative με (v. 28), also made possible by the relative construction.

Vv. 30–31 refer to the prophecy of Simeon (καὶ σοῦ δὲ αὐτῆς τὴν ψυχὴν διελέυσεται ῥομφαία — Lk 2.35), probably suggesting that the virgin mother is only now beginning to understand the full meaning of those words.

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After v. 31 there occurs an abrupt change of tone. By means of a gnomic utterance, the poet momentarily eases the intense pathos produced by the metaphor of vv. 27–9. The focus of attention is removed from the virgin mother, and a point is provided from which the basic theme of the prologue can be expounded anew:

"Ἡ που μεγίστη γίνεται σωτηρία,
ὅταν γυνὴ πρός ἄνδρα μὴ διχοστατή,
τὰ πάντα συμφέρουσα τῷδ᾽ ὀσπερ θέμις,
μηδὲ πρὸς ἄλλου πάρφαισιν σίγα χλύῃ,
άλλ᾽ ἔστι συμφρονούσα γνησίῳ πόσει.
Νῦν δὲ ἔχθρα πάντα καλ νοσεὶ τὰ καίρια,
αὐτῆς προδοούσης ἄνδρα καὶ κράτους κλέας.
Φιλει γὰρ ὃβρις ἢ πάλαι τίκτειν νέαν
ἐκ δαχρών δάχρυα καταλείβεται,
ἂν οὐτε μέτρον οὕτ᾽ ἀριθμός ἔστι τις·"
Vv. 32–6 provide a contrast to the terse statement of the present situation in vv. 37–8. Although gnomic in character, those lines are very much to the point, in as far as they express the attitude which Eve should have had, but did not have. Note the stylistic structuring of the passage. The subject of γίνεται (v. 32), that is, the definition of what constitutes δίκαιον, is formulated in a parallel pattern:

δικαιοσυνή συμφέρουσα
μηδέ νεκρή

This is supported by the rhyming effect of the key words, while the semantic opposition between ideal and reality is also highlighted by end rhyme: σωτηρία–καφέω.

Ideal versus reality: the perfect state which has been brought to an end because of sin, in contrast to the far from perfect, very unfavourable reality which resulted — but the precise relation of this reality to that initial sin has not yet been defined. Perhaps it cannot be defined; at least, not in logical terms. Therefore the poet implements three parallel expressions of gnomic character (vv. 39–42): ancient ἁγρία tends to produce ἁγρία anew; from tears ever flow more tears; evil vies with evil. Within this parallel pattern, the central statement is emphasized by its position as well as by the relative phrase defining δάκρυα.

This theme of remorse without measure is expounded in the next sentence (vv. 43–50). It is not stated in general terms, as in the previous lines; the subject is specified: πότνα φύσις (v. 43). Whether this phrase refers to Eve (the mother of the human race) or to the whole of humanity, is left unanswered for the moment. The syntactic core of the sentence (στένει... ἔπει... ἤσθεν(ο)... ) provides two points of reference, from which the elaboration of thoughts commences:

• Το στένει (v. 44) are added two participles: κλάομαι and συντήρουσα (sc. δακρύω). The first of these introduces the reasons for lamenting, the second serves to indicate the perpetuation thereof. Note the effect produced by the word order in v. 46: τόν πάντα... χρόνον is extended to the total
length of the line by inserting συντήρονς διαχρώνης between the adjective and the noun.

- The content of ἔσθετο (v. 47), viz. ἡδοκημένη, is specified by πρὸς ἐχθροῦ ... καὶ ... βλάβη, the latter being defined by μητρὸς αὐτῆς ... πατρὸς (τε). Both the genitives μητρὸς and πατρὸς are further defined in vv. 48 and 49 respectively, and the loose ends are neatly tied together in the relative phrase of v. 50.

The details mentioned above may be considered to be external or objective aspects of the theme of remorse. The internal, subjective (perhaps ‘psychological’) aspect thereof is expressed by the participles ἡμιμομένη (43) and ἡδοκημένη (47). (Incidentally, their rhyming sound pattern supports the syntactic balance of the sentence, the first being associated with στένει and the second with ἐσθετο.) The dishonour and injury to which these terms refer, are manifestations of the humiliation which human nature suffered because of the first sin. The adjective πόνας (v. 43) serves to emphasize by way of contrast the participle ἡμιμομένη; note the effective positioning of these two words in v. 43, directly before and after φῶς.

But who is this πόνας φῶς ἡμιμομένης? Is it the mother of the human race, the one whose origin was indicated by the metaphor πλαξωρήν φόμα (v. 3)? — her venerable nature was indeed humiliated by that first βλάβη. Or does the phrase refer to the whole of humanity, her descendants and heirs to her miserable condition? Or did the poet intend both, perhaps, and deliberately left the ambiguity unresolved?

An answer may be found in αὐτῆς (v. 48). If it is to be understood as the personal pronoun defining μητρὸς, then the descendants of that mother are intended. If, however, it is to be understood as defining βλάβη, then the mother herself is intended, being defined by the appositional μητρὸς ... πρωτοκήμωνος. In prose, word order and the presence of the definite article would have decided the matter; but this is poetry, and the ambiguity remains.

It was stated above that v. 50 neatly ties together the loose ends of this sentence. What was meant, is this:

- The relative διω jointly refers to μητρὸς and πατρὸς, the progenitors of the human race (their ἔκγονοι).
- The phrase πάντες ... οἱ κατὰ χρόνον(α) suggests (without stating explicitly) that the whole of humanity is included in the destiny of the first sinners.
- The verb ἐκμέν (first person plural) includes the Virgin also, thus suggesting once again that the results of the first sin continues into the present. One may even see in this a direct reminder to the reader — or the audience? — of also being included among the ἔκγονοι of Adam and Eve.
• Syntactically, this line reveals a perfect symmetry. Thus style, syntax, and content all add to the poetic aptness of this concluding phrase.

The following lines (51–5) open another perspective upon the reactions of Eve — or of mankind? — to the consequences of sin:

Boδ μεν δρκους, ἀνακαλεὶ δεξιάς,
πίστιν μεγίστην, καὶ Θεόν μαρτύρεται:
ἐγνω γὰρ ἡ τάλαινα συμφορόν ὑπο,
οἶνον πατρίβαν μὴ λιπεῖν ἐσθλὸν χθόνα:
στυγεὶ δὲ χόσιμον, οὐδ’ ὄριος’ εὐφραῖνεται.

Vv. 51–2 recall the reaction of Eve, when confronted with what she had done: She blamed it all upon the serpent (cf. Gen 3.4 and 3.13). V. 55 depicts another typically human reaction: detesting that which reminds one of one’s sin. In this case it is the natural environment (χόσιμον), so totally different from paradise.

Note the stylistic pattern of these lines: a series of short, co-ordinately arranged phrases is interrupted by a two-line explanation. This in itself is an example of the varietas which some critics were unable to detect in the poetic fibre of the play; but it may become even clearer when the style of these lines is compared to the periodic style of the previous sentence (vv. 43–50).

From v. 56 onward, the attention is once more focused on the virgin mother and on her present situation. This is indicated by the use of a first person singular form of the verb — ἐκβεβήχη(α) — in v. 56, and the pronoun μ(ε) in v. 57:

Εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ νῦν ἐκβεβήχη’ ἀληθόνος,
ὡς’ ἤμερος μ’ ὑπῆλθε γῇ τε καὶ τόλμω
λέξαι μολούσαν δεύρο φύσεως βλάβας.

Note that the conjunction γὰρ in v. 56 is not to be interpreted in the strict sense of indicating the cause of the foregoing, since the sentence as a whole has the conventional function of explaining the presence of the speaking character on stage. Once this has been done, the virgin can proceed with an exposition of her own involvement in the events of the play (vv. 59 ff.):

Οὐκο πω γὰρ ἡ τάλαινα παῦται γώνι,
τίκτουσα μὴ τίκτουσα, φεύγουσα’ αὖ τόκους.
Δύστην’, ἐμαυτὴν γὰρ λέγω, λέγουσα σὲ
tίκτουσαν οὐ τίκτουσαν, ὡς ὑπὲρ λόγον.
Τόκον γὰρ ἐγνων ἄτοκον, τι γὰρ φράσω;
πόνους φυγοῦσα καὶ φθοράν νῦν καὶ πάλαι.
Οὐξ οἴδα τέρψιν οὐδ’ ἐπίσωγον φάτιν
τινὸς πρὸς ἀνδρὸς μᾶλλον ἢ χάλκου βαφάς.

107
Though consisting of a number of independent syntactic units, vv. 59–70 are semantically linked up and structured around a central theme. From a stylistic point of view, it may be noted that this passage is an example of the ἑξίζε ἐφομένη, the loose rhetorical style, where phrases are strung together without much use of subordination and often with the omission of connectives. In the process of interpreting these lines, however, close attention should be paid to the semantic structuring of the passage as a whole.

The central theme of these lines is the miraculous birth of Christ and the virginity of the mother Mary; but this is set within the frame of her present suffering, the nature of which it serves to explain. Consider, firstly, the frame:

- In vv. 59–60 she states that ‘the poor woman’ has not yet ceased from wailing; the one, that is, who gave birth and yet did not give birth, or rather, who gave birth while escaping the pangs of childbirth. This paradox (which indeed such an occurrence was at any stage prior to the 20th century) is to be explained in the following lines, by yet another paradox.
- The rhetorical question and exclamation of v. 68 refer to the second paradox: that the virgin had a child, is reason for astonishment. But how is she to bear seeing him being insulted? This second rhetorical question (v. 69) focuses attention on her present suffering, which is psychological, not physical. The contrast is confirmed in v. 70, in an exclamation consisting of two phrases, the first recalling v. 68, the second, v. 69.

The main theme of vv. 59–70, as stated above, concerns the birth of Christ and the virginity of Mary. The first of these two aspects has been referred to in v. 60; the paradoxical nature thereof is explained in vv. 61–3. This ‘explanation’, however, is nothing more than a series of re-formulations of the same thought, interrupted by phrases which indicate the impossibility of explaining this miracle in terms of logic. Thus the ὀσύμορον of v. 60 is echoed in v. 62, followed by the phrase ὡς ὑπὲρ λόγον. The next line contains another ὀσύμορον (τόξον ... ἔτοξον), followed by a rhetorical question (πτ γὰρ φράσω;) which creates the expectation of yet another re-formulation. This is provided in v. 64, but the phrase πᾶνος φυγοῦσα comes very close to repeating the last phrase of v. 60 (φεύγουσα 'αὐ τόξους). The only way out of this circle is by adding a second object to φυγοῦσα, viz. φθοράν (‘loss of virginity’). Vv. 65–7 serve to explain this aspect of the theme, culminating in the explicit statement οὗ γὰρ κορείς ἄμμα διέφθειρέ
This statement leads quite naturally to the rhetorical question of v. 68.

Note, incidentally, the chiastic structure of v. 64:

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\begin{align*}
\text{πόνους} & \quad \text{xai ψηφαράν} \\
\text{ψύν} & \quad \text{xai πάλακ} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(A - B)  (B - A)

Recognition of this stylistic feature leads us to read πάλακ with πόνους φυγούσα only, and ψύν with (ψυγόουσα) ψηφαράν only. Otherwise this line would yield the meaning 'having escaped the pangs of birth now and of old' — which would nullify the antithesis of v. 70: 'Having escaped the pangs of birth then, how I suffer in my heart now!'

The semantic pattern of vv. 59-70 is further reinforced by the recurrence of the same thought in the phrases ψυγόουσα' αὖ τόξους (v. 60) and πόνους φυγούσα (vv. 64 and 70). In v. 60 the term τόξος is most appropriate, by reason of its contribution to the sound pattern of that line as well as its specific reference to childbirth. The term πόνος, on the other hand, fits better into the sound pattern of both vv. 64 and 70, where it occurs in contexts which prevent it from being misunderstood. Moreover, it serves to suggest a contrast between Mary and Eve: the latter suffered physical πόνος (cf. v. 45), while Mary, albeit πόνους φυγούσα, suffers mentally because of the ὃδε that her son endures.

In sum then, the semantic structure of this passage consists of a central theme, the two aspects of which are jointly stated in v. 64, and expounded in vv. 61-3 and vv. 65-7, respectively. This theme is set in the frame of the present suffering of the virgin mother — mentioned only in v. 59, but forcefully emphasized in vv. 68-70.

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After v. 70, the poet introduces a diversion comparable to that which occurs after v. 31 — comparable in function, that is, but of a different type. After v. 31, the intense pathos is abated by means of a gnomic utterance which removes the focus of attention from the virgin mother; whereas here, at v. 71, the same effect is produced, but this time by contrasting her present agony to her joy at the annunciation:

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\begin{align*}
\text{'Ανθράλαξα πῶς πᾶλαι χαράς ὑπο,} \\
\text{δὲ τῇ κοιλαν εὐαγγελον ἀγγελων τόκον,} \\
\text{φράξων ἅλυξιν δυσμενῶν βροτῶν γένει} \\
\text{xai γηθόσυνον χάρμα μοι φέρων μέγας;} \\
\text{Λάγους δὲ τοῦτο εὐπλαγγκτὸς ὦχ ἐφανόμην,} \\
\text{πεισθεῖσα τῷ φέροντι θέσκελον φάτιν,} \\
\text{οὐχὶ σφάγιον μηνύουσαν μὲ ἐκτεκεῖν,} \\
\text{ἄλλι' ὡς ἀνακτα γῆς τε καὶ πάντος πόλου.} \\
\text{Ομοιο ό θεὸν καὶ γυναικεῖο νόμω}
\end{align*}
\]

109
From a stylistic point of view, the contrast between the joy and suffering of the θεοτόκος is enhanced by the figures of both asyndeton and chiasmus:

πός ὄδυνῶμαι κέφαρ;  
ἀνηλάλαξα πῶς ...

The stylistic structure of vv. 71–4 is also worth noticing: the neat chiasmus occurring in vv. 73–4 (φράζων ἀλυζιν — χάρμα ... φέρων) supports the larger chiastic pattern of the sentence, with its play upon content and reaction:

χαρᾶς ὑπὸ τόκον  
ἀλυζιν χάρμα

Note, however, that the phrase δυσμενῶν βροτῶν defines γένει, not ἀλυζιν. If that were the case, the unmarked lexical meaning of both ἀλυζις and δυσμενής would produce the sense '(announcing) escape from enemies'; whereas in these lines, the context requires the sense '(announcing) salvation (to the race) of wretched mortals'.

In vv. 75–8, reference is made to Mary’s first reaction to the annunciation, namely that of disbelief (cf. Lk 1.34). The formulation in these lines almost sounds like a reproach of the archangel, for not revealing that her son was to be a sacrifice; but the intention is rather to emphasize that upon accepting the angel’s message, she had reason for great joy. So, though finding the announcement hard to believe, she gave expression to her joy (cf. Lk 1.46 ff.) and conducted herself in a way which is considered proper for faithful servants of the Lord (vv. 79–86; cf. Lk 1.38, 48). This is expounded at length, in a passage rather loosely structured, in which the figure of asyndeton is conspicuous. The poetic purpose of these lines is to provide a background against which v. 87 is effectively contrasted.

The emotive content of the entire prologue is concentrated in v. 87. In this line, rhetorical style and the choice of words collaborate to produce the intended effect:

- The rhetorical question (or rather exclamation) introduced by (χαί) πῶς recalls the occurrence of the same figure in vv. 70 and 71. Thus it is contrasted to the sense of joy evoked by vv. 71 ff. while reflecting the grief of v. 70.
The adverb νῦν is balanced against πάλιν (v. 71), so as to support the contrast between this line and the foregoing.

The metaphor στροβίζει ... σπλάγχνα ... δριμό βέλος recalls that of vv. 28–9 (... δομή κραυ καὶ καρδιάν δίειςίν ὡς ἐκπυρον μέγα), which marked the first moment when attention was sharply focused upon the agony of Mary.

In this way v. 87 completes the main pattern of the prologue, viz. successive expositions of different themes, each of which culminates in a sharp focus on the present agony of the virgin mother. This pattern suggests that her involvement in the Passion is to provide the principal perspective from which the further events of the play will be regarded.

Vv. 88–90, though spoken by the same character as the previous lines, do not form part of the rhetorical structure of the prologue. Their function is to provide a transition from the contemplative to the dramatic; that is, from a discussion of events to a representation thereof:

In these lines the time of day — just before dawn — is indicated, and the entry of a second character is announced, marking the point where the dialogue commences. (The chorus in this play has a function much more closely resembling that of a third actor, than that of the χορός of the classical theatre. Although in classical tragedy the chorus — or an individual acting as their mouthpiece — frequently entered into the dialogue in the same manner as the other actors, here the function of the chorus is strictly limited to that type of participation in the action. Accordingly, they are presented as a corporative personality, whose speech is not distinguished from that of the individual characters by any metrical or dialectal means.)

The main theme of the prologue may be summarized as follows: The protagonist has been involved in the catastrophic results of that fateful event which occurred in the garden of Eden, for she now faces the agony of witnessing the injustice being done to her son. This theme is expounded in vv. 1–31, and is taken up again in vv. 32–70. Both these sections begin with a reference to the distant past, proceed to an exposition of the (seemingly) irremediable consequences of the first sin, and end with an emphatic statement of the present agony of the θεοτόκος. At v. 71 the focus of attention is shifted to the past again, but this time to a more recent event, viz. the annunciation. The joy which the virgin mother felt at that occasion stands in sharp contrast to her present agony.
Thus the discourse structure of the prologue serves to highlight the predicament of the protagonist, by referring to the ‘mythical’ background of her present situation. From a dramaturgical point of view, this may be said to elicit pity for the protagonist, as the reader — or audience — identifies with the ἄνταξιος. It also serves to create dramatic tension, since the reader is led to realize that a sacrifice is needed in order to remedy the present situation.

It has been shown that diverse stylistic means have been employed for the articulation of the discourse structure of the prologue. Due recognition of the stylistic features of the prologue and of their function is an essential aid to its interpretation. Even in the interpretation of short sections of the text, it is important to take notice of the author’s use of rhetorical figures and stylistic devices of different kinds. This has been shown particularly with regard to the interpretation of vv. 3–7, 14–5, 23–7, and v. 64.

NOTES


3. Tuilier’s text reads τόλμημα τολμᾶν ... ἀνέλη. To this must be objected that ἀνταξίαν hardly makes sense when the object is one’s own τόλμημα. (Cf. Liddell & Scott, Greek–English Lexicon, new [ninth] edition, Oxford 1940.) With τάξις (‘dare’ / ‘venture to do’) however, the phrase τόλμημα τολμᾶν makes perfect sense. The repetition of the particle ἔιν is attested also in v. 14, but is even more functional here, due to the insertion of a whole line of verse between οὗ γὰρ ἐν πλευράς φύμα (v. 3) and the verb ἐπελή (v. 5).


5. It seems to me v. 14 should read ἰδρῶ τ(α) ἔν ὕψει ... — implementing the Epic form — rather than ἰδρῶ(ς) ἔν ὕψει.


7. A. Tuilier, op. cit. 129.


9. It seems that the phrase πῶς δύναμιν κέαρ (v. 70) is to be taken as an exclamation, not as a question; otherwise it would indicate the suffering of the virgin as being paradoxical, which obviously it is not in the present context. Furthermore, the repetition of πῶς in four consecutive lines (68, 69, 70, and 71) should in itself be an indication that a difference in usage is to be expected. Thus, after the two
questions καὶ καίδα πῶς ἐπικοινών; — suggesting a paradox — and ... πῶς ὁδιον ἐξέπειν; — suggesting that she finds the mere thought of her son being insulted unbearable — the phrase in v. 70 serves to emphasize her mental agony.

10. Even in a play meant to be read rather than performed, there exists a marked difference between these two aspects: for is a play which is meant to be read, the printed form is a code calling upon the reader to imagine himself 'watching a performance'. In other words, the printed code instructs the reader to pretend that the text he is reading, is a play in actual performance. The difference between a play being performed and a play being read, then, is only that the code of pretence which applies to the former situation, is in the latter case supplemented by an additional layer of pretence.
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