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The soul as a butterfly in Greek and Roman thought

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Research

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Abstract.

This thesis examines the representation of the soul, in both Greek and Roman culture, through the symbol of the butterfly. The analysis of the terminology referred to the insect is the first step I take, investigating the occurrences of the butterfly both in Greek and Latin literature, with the aim to detect the main characteristics connected to the animal. Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* and Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* play a crucial role in the identification of the kind of soul connected to this symbolic representation - the generation of the butterfly, described by both the authors, does not follow the traditional patterns, the insect not being generated by an animal similar to itself. The idea of an entity able to fly from a dead shell, as is the cocoon, ready to start a new life, might constitute what is perceived to be the origin of the symbolic association. An entity flying from the corpse at the moment of death, free from the bonds of the body and ready to start a new life after the departure of the individual are the same characteristics of the free soul defined by Bremmer. Furthermore, I detect evidences of this kind of soul both in Greek and in Latin sources, starting from Homeric epic, where the ψυχή is the closest entity to our butterfly-soul, as the name itself testifies – ψυχή, together with φάλαινα, was one of the terms the Greeks employed to refer to the insect. Evidence of free soul is detectable also in Latin literature, of which Hadrian's *animula* in his farewell *Carmen* provides just an example. Finally, the question of the location of this specific soul in the human body is addressed, with particular attention paid to the vital fluid - marrow, semen, tears - it was supposed to be contained in. Overall, I show how rooted this symbolic representation was in classical culture and how it can provide an insight into the ancient conception of the soul.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Statement of Copyright.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	4
Introduction	5
Chapter One : The many-sided face of the butterfly.....	14
The ambiguous identity of the φάλαινα.....	15
Other names for the insect.....	28
More about the ψυχή.....	39
A flight to Rome: discovering the papilio.....	43
Animula, vappo and avicula.....	51
Chapter Two : The soul behind the butterfly.....	56
Der Seelenvogel - a “flying soul” with a proper agency.....	57
The Homeric soul – different theories and hypothesis.....	61
Ψυχή in Homer: a life-force in the underworld.....	72
Post-homeric ψυχή and free soul.....	78
Life in fluids - a soul flowing away.....	84
The head: seat of soul and life.....	88
Conclusion.....	96

Statement of Copyright

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INTRODUCTION

Ψυχή, φάλανα, *animula*, *papilio* are just some of the nouns Greek and Latin sources employed to refer to the butterfly, which - judging from the ancient texts - might be considered one of the most controversial symbolic animals in Classical culture. A synoptic view of the occurrences could enlighten us about the manifold contexts where the insect makes its appearance - profoundly different from each other, they concur to the depiction of the animal as a double-faced entity. It is therefore divided between the nefarious, ill-omened image of an insect unavoidably connected to death and disease - mostly inserted in nocturnal contexts - and the idea of the light, brightly colourful insect we are used to associate with it. How to reconcile this opposed views?

The research conducted until now has not focused on the importance of the terminology, lacking a synoptic *collatio* of the evidence, able to shed new light on the employment of the symbol. Moreover, the interpretation of the different occurrences of the names - corresponding to different contexts - has never been investigated or compared. This is what I propose to do in this thesis, as a preliminary part of the work, in order to understand the true meaning of the symbol. Furthermore, a comparison between Greek and Latin sources is necessary to understand how this symbolic representation evolved throughout the years and in different cultures.

While examining the occurrences of the insect, I also seek to explain what could be the perception of the origin of this association. The answer may lie behind the symbolical employment of the butterfly, present in both Greek and Latin art and literature. As the names would suggest, the butterfly has long been associated with the idea of the soul (*ψυχή* in Greek, *anima* or *animula* in Latin), of which it represented one of the main symbols.

The evidence in favour of this association is numerous. A Latin funerary inscription from Obulco¹ provides a peculiar occurrence of the employment of the symbol - here the deceased is supposed to speak and, addressing his relatives, ask them to pour pure wine on his tomb, in order to let his “*papilio*” fly around drunk. The fluttering butterfly after the ritual is a clear reference to the soul of the dead, remaining around the tomb where the corpse is buried, but free from the bonds of the dead body.

A flying soul taking life from the corpse.

The thinking behind this symbolical representation might have been induced by the metamorphic process the butterfly is involved in through its life. As testified by Aristotle², the generation of this insect does not follow the traditional patterns, the ψυχή not being generated by an insect similar to itself. Alternatively, it starts its life by flying from a rigid cocoon, unable to feed or move in any way, and therefore not that different from a dead body. Moreover, the act of flying from this dead shell, to begin a new existence, independent from the one previously conducted, might have played a crucial role in the attribution of the symbol. This is too what we read in Pliny³, who follows Aristotle’s description, lingering over the peculiar generation of the insect.

The idea of the soul provided with a proper agency which is able to start a new life after the death of the individual is what we find in the farewell *Carmen* of Hadrian⁴ the emperor, where (not surprisingly) his *anima* - ready to fly to the underworld - is called *animula*, another name the Romans employed to refer to the

¹ C.I.L., II. 2146; VI. 26011

² Aristot., HA, 551a, 14.

³ Plin., HN, XI, 37.

⁴ Script. Hist. Aug., ed. Hohl, I, 27.

butterfly⁵. This is what I propose to investigate as a further stage of my analysis, seeking to define both the evolution of the concept of the insect and of the soul it represented. As mentioned on page 5, an essential part of my research is focused on the terminology referred to the animal, with attention paid both to Greek and the Latin sources.

Φάλαινα and *papilio*: the dark face of the butterfly.

The Greek language knew manifold terms to refer to the butterfly, each of which was employed in particular contexts - if in the generation's description (where the reference to the soul is more evident) ψυχή is the only term involved, φάλαινα appears in numerous sources, with different - sometimes peculiar - meanings.

Before analysing the sources about the nefarious effect of the insect, it is necessary to disambiguate the term - φάλαινα was, as a matter of fact, also employed to refer to another animal, profoundly different from the butterfly, that is the whale. The research conducted until now has not focused on this bizarre homonymy which might have originated from the mutual attraction to light which both animals shared - while the whale had the tendency to reach the surface of the sea in order to see the light of the sun, the unavoidable φάλαινα's attraction to light recurs often, with the image of the insect flying around the light of the lamps. The same habit which the *papilio*, *alter ego* of the φάλαινα in the Roman world, seems to have and sharing the same reputation and ill-omened consideration. As Pliny⁶ states it was considered to be one of the *mala medicamenta*, contrasting with the *iocur caprinum*, being the cause of several diseases, especially in bees, since the butterfly was known as their

⁵ See Bettini, 1999.

⁶ Plin., HN, XXVIII, 162.

main enemy. An enlightening tale of Phaedrus⁷ shows how the two insects were commonly depicted as bitter enemies. The protagonist of the novel are a butterfly and a wasp - like the bee, an insect believed to start its life from the rotten corpse of an animal (a horse for the wasp, an ox for the bee). The butterfly mourns about its miserable fate - after living in the bodies of orators, generals and other glorious men, its destiny is to become a vane entity, light and harmless (a clear reference to the soul of the dead). The wasp, on the contrary, which in the Roman culture symbolised the triumph of life over death, originates from a “donkey”, but is then able to sting. The delicate and ironic tale is an efficient compendium of the beliefs which lay behind both symbolical representations.

A connection between the symbol of the butterfly and the soul having been proved, my next step is to detect what the soul represented through this peculiar depiction and provide an overview of its main occurrences.

The free soul - a flying entity starting a new life.

Common denominator between the descriptions of the butterfly's generation and the image of the soul leaving the body at the moment of death are the flight and the idea of an entity starting a new life. Both these main characteristics can be detected in specific kinds of soul, which my aim is to identify.

My intention is to investigate the concept of the flying soul (Seelenvogel) in Classical literature, trying to understand its main characteristics and symbolic representations.

I will then focus on the Homeric souls, with the aim of underlining the main differences between them and to detect the closest entity to our butterfly soul. As the

⁷ Pha., App. Per., XXIX.

homonymy between the terms suggests, I show that it is ψυχή the soul I am searching for, as it is also confirmed by its occurrences.

Moreover, the Homeric ψυχή can be described as a proper free soul,⁸ being the only entity representing an independent continuum of life after the death of the individual it belongs to. More occurrences of this kind of soul can be found in later literature, which is what I aim to detect, going - at the same time - a step further. While evidence of the free soul in Greek literature have been mostly detected and analysed - although lacking proper comparison with each other - Latin literature is, from this point of view, still an unexplored field. Hadrian's farewell *Carmen* provides important evidence in favour of the symbolical connection⁹, which I analyse here - addressing his soul before the moment of his death, he calls it *animula*, a term the Romans employed to refer to both the soul and the butterfly, not dissimilarly from ψυχή in Greece. The choice to use the diminutive form *animula* (homonymous of butterfly) instead of *anima* would find its explanation in the text, where the soul's travel to the underworld is imagined as a flight and depicted with both the lightness and delicacy of a butterfly.

The occurrences about the ψυχή and the dead soul leaving the body after the departure also show a connection with what Onians¹⁰ defined "the stuff of life", which is the vital fluid identified with the marrow, but also with semen and tears.

The soul and the head.

Butterflies are portrayed together with phallic representations and semen¹¹. Moreover, one of the possible theories behind the etymology of the word φάλαινα

⁸ Bremmer, 1983.

⁹ About the connection between the soul and the butterfly in Hadrian's *carmen* see also Bettini, 1999.

¹⁰ Onians, 1988.

supposes the word to come from the term φαλλός, wherefrom also the representation of the Flügelphalli¹² spread in Classical Art. What might have influenced this peculiar association?

I seek to find an answer to this still unsolved question, starting from the concept of the free soul, of which the butterfly is proven to be the main symbol.

It is shown that the human substance this kind of soul has been associated with was the vital fluid, also intended as marrow, seed, tears, supposed to be connected to each other. Among all of these substances, a crucial role is played by the seed, which was also identified with the soul itself. Other recurring iconography involving the butterfly shows the insect depicted with a human skull or head, which finds also its confirmation in literature - referring to the φάλαινα, Nicander¹³ speaks about its peculiar ability to cause death, biting the head of its victim.

Finally, part of my research will be pledged to understanding the notions associated with the origin of this connection, which will play a crucial role, representing a proper connecting link. The association with the head - as we saw about the semen - is found to be the consequence of the symbolic link between the butterfly and ψυχή. As a matter of fact, the stuff of life, which we will see to be identified with the ψυχή, was supposed to be contained in the head, wherefrom the holiness and sanctity attributed to this specific part of the human body. Additional confirmation may also come from a synoptic analysis of different cultures, other than Greek and Latin ones. Frazer's studies, although outdated, are still relevant to reveal how much the idea of a soul - a "free soul" - leaving the body during unconsciousness or at death, like the Homeric ψυχή, was commonly supposed to be located in the head and to abandon the body under the guise of a flying creature.

¹¹ See Pictures 1 and 2, *Infra*, 25.

¹² Dover 1988, p. 133.

¹³ Nic., *Ther.*, 759-768.

Outline of the treatment

In order to detect and analyse this complex semantic value a preliminary investigation about the terms employed to conduct both in Greek and Latin literature is necessary.

The first chapter focuses on the terminology employed to refer to the insect. In addition to the better known couple ψυχή /φάλαινα, ancient Greeks used other nouns to express the concept of butterfly, each underlying a specific property of the animal.

Φάλαινα is the most complex to analyse, being the noun employed also to refer to the whale, apparently lacking in any mutual characteristics with the insect. I suggest that the connection might be found in the etymology of the words, possibly derived from an unavoidable attraction to light which both animals appeared to have. Furthermore, like the φάλαινα/butterfly, the whale, as a sea monster, was supposed to have a nefarious attitude towards men - as we read from Lycophron¹⁴, it was compared to dying in a foreign land, as it swallowed the bodies, without leaving any trace of them. Moreover, in biblical contexts it was associated with the idea of death and rebirth.

The analysis then focuses on the insect, the aim being to underline the main characteristics it showed. The attraction to the light, evident in the sources about the φάλαινα, is also present in the etymology of the words κανδηλοσβέστρια and πυραύστης, often mentioned by the texts while flying around the lanterns. Another feature often attributed to the butterfly, according to the sources, was the characteristic to cause diseases. I show how one of the causes of the nefarious attitude of the animal was its tendency to damage beehives, wherefrom the rooted

¹⁴ Lyc., 412-416.

opposition with the bee, considered to be another symbol of the soul, totally different from the dead soul - but the one waiting for the incarnation and birth.

The last section of the chapter is focused on the word ψυχή and on the context where it appears the most - the description of the butterfly generation. Analysing the *collatio* of the sources about the topic, I demonstrate how the idea of the symbol can be considered as a derivation from the generation process of the insect, which suggested the idea of a new entity, starting its life through the flight from a sort corpse - from which the cocoon, unable to feed or carry out any vital function, was not very much different.

Chapter two is focused on the concept of the soul expressed through the symbol, starting from the definition of Seelenvogel - an entity which tended to abandon the body during unconsciousness or after death and was imagined as a flying creature, often represented as a bird. The image of the bird itself is not incompatible with the butterfly, the animals having been associated both by the Greeks and Romans. The ability to fly, together with the colours it displayed, led the ancients to consider the insect as a small bird which never grows up.

A crucial part of my analysis is to investigate what kind of soul was actually represented through the symbol of the butterfly, seeking both to define the concept and to detect its main occurrences in Greek and Latin literature. The excursus begins with Homer's epic, where the ψυχή is a crucial part of the analysis, being - in addition to its homonymy - the soul of the dead most likely to be identified by the symbol of the butterfly. After leaving the corpse, in fact, it is the only one which is said to start a new life, different and - even more importantly - totally independent from the one previously conducted.

Other occurrences are analysed and compared, with the main aim to detect the mutual elements between Greek and Latin literature and to define the profile of the

“butterfly-soul”. I also seek to identify its place in the human body and what its real nature was conceived to be - Plato’s *Timaeus*¹⁵ and Aristotle’s *Generation of Animals*¹⁶ play a crucial role in the analysis and identification of the life fluid the ψυχή was supposed to be contained in. Moreover a connection between the ψυχή and the head, the holiest part of human body, is shown, with particular attention paid to the symbol of the butterfly, often connected to human heads and skulls both in art and literature, and therefore constituting the connecting link of my assumption.

¹⁵ Pl., Ti., 70a.

¹⁶ Arist., GA , II.

CHAPTER ONE – The many-sided face of the butterfly.

One of the most controversial insects in the classical world, the butterfly has always caused a number of difficulties for anyone who wanted to classify it, both in ancient Greece and Rome. Among the numerous sources of misunderstandings, the main issue was constituted by its peculiar generation process: it was not considered to have taken life from any natural substance (as we often find in other insects' generation descriptions¹⁷), either from an insect of its own species, or from a different one. The phenomenon in which its birth was involved was firstly described by Aristotle¹⁸ as a sort of metamorphosis, where an insect, namely a little caterpillar, at some point of its life interrupts its vital functions (such as feeding and evacuating), and develops a rigid shell which completely covers it. It turns into what is scientifically known as a *chrysalis*, an entity that indeed, does not seem to be that much different from a corpse. Several days later something magical happens: a new creature comes to life, from the almost dead body *mirabile visu*, and it literally flies away.

Moreover, both ancient Greek and Latin had several words to refer to the butterfly, with particular attention given to the terms φάλαινα and ψυχή in Greek, and *animula* and *papilio* in Latin. Different conceptions of the insect correspond to the manifold words applied to it, therefore not surprisingly we will find the φάλαινα often occurring in nocturnal contexts, unavoidably attracted to light, while the ψυχή will make its appearance when talking about the generation process. The same situation we can find for the Latin sources, where *animula*, often employed to represent the gracefulness of the insect, stands in contrast with the sombre *papilio*,

¹⁷ See Aristot., HA., 550a.

¹⁸ Aristot., HA, 550a-551b.

described using adjectives as *feralis* by Ovid¹⁹ and *ignavus atque inhonoratus* by Pliny²⁰.

In this chapter I will investigate the different terminology related to the butterfly, with particular regard to the etymology of the terms involved. Attention will be paid to both Greek and Latin sources, exploring the possible connections and differences between them.

The ambiguous identity of the φάλαινα.

Before analysing the sources referred to by the term φάλαινα, it is necessary to make a preliminary distinction in order to disambiguate *in primis* the meaning of the word. Its semantic value does not involve an univocal reference, being related to two extremely different entities, linked to each other by an apparently unexplainable homonymy: the butterfly, as is expected and more surprisingly, the whale.

The *Scholia in Aristophanem*²¹ clearly reveal what kind of animal lies behind one of the two φάλαιναι:

φάλαινα is a little animal which flies around the torches and extinguishes them.
It is also called ψώρα and ψυχή and πυραυστούμορος.

The description does not leave much to the imagination: the little animal which flies around the sources of light seems to be none other than the moth, which, we learn, also has the habit of extinguishing the flames it is attracted to. The source continues, listing other possible names employed to refer to the same insect: in addition to ψώρα and πυραυστούμορος, which will be analysed in detail further, the

¹⁹ Ov., Met., XV, 372.

²⁰ Plin., HN, XI, 21, 65.

²¹ Sch. in Ar., Comm. in Ran., sch. recent. Tzetzae, 507a, 6: Φάλλαινα μὲν ἐστὶ ζώῳφιον ταῖς λυχνιαῖς ἐπιπετόμενον καὶ σβεννύον αὐτάς, ὃ καὶ ψώρα καὶ ψυχή καὶ πυραυστούμορος λέγεται.

term ψυχή deserves particular attention. This is the evidence in support of the theory that, even though they occur in different literary contexts, both the expressions ψυχή and φάλαινα are related to the same animal, with no proper distinction being made between the diurnal butterfly and the nocturnal moth. What might seem an obvious conclusion has actually been the cause of a rooted misunderstanding over the years, if we consider that even Beavis²² wrote that “unlike Latin, Greek also has a specific term for nocturnal moth”.

Evidence in favour of the synonymy comes also from other sources. The connection existing between the two words is confirmed by the Scholia in *Lycophronem*²³, where, as for the aforementioned *Scholia in Aristophanem*²⁴, the φάλαινα is associated again with the image of the lights around which it flies:

φάλαινα is a little animal which flies around the torches,
It is also called πυραυστούμορος and ψυχή and ψώρα.

Even more explicit are the *Scholia in Nicandrum*²⁵, which play a crucial role in the given issue, definitely dispelling any doubt about the effective relation linking the words:

φάλαινα is the animal which is now called ψώρα. Moreover, it is called φάλαινα the animal which we call ψυχή.

The text above definitely proves Beavis’ statement to be unfounded. In other terms, φάλαινα and ψυχή are not just synonyms referring to the same kind of insect, but they also constitute two plausible alternatives, depending on the

²² Beavis, 1988, 121.

²³ Sch. in Lyc., sch. vet. et rec., partim Isaac et Joannis Tzetzae, 84, 1-3: Φάλαινα ζούφιόν ἐστι ταῖς λυχνίαις ἐπιπετόμενον ὃ καὶ πυραυστούμορος † καὶ ψυχή καὶ ψώρα καλεῖται.

²⁴ Supra, 15.

²⁵ Sch. in Nic., sch. et gl. In Nic. Ther., sch. vet. et rec., 760b, 1-2: ἡ φάλαινα ζῶον, ἧτις νῦν ψώρα καλεῖται. Ἄλλως: φάλαινα λέγεται ἢ παρ’ ἡμῖν λεγομένη ψυχή.

geographical area of the speaker. In particular, the former is supposed to have Rhodian origins, as the text²⁶ specifies several lines below:

Moreover, the animals which fly around the torches are called φάλαιναί by the inhabitants of Rhodes.

Apart from the φάλαινα meant by flying insect, as mentioned above, there is also another creature corresponding to the same term, which is the whale. The scientific descriptions of the animal depict it as belonging to the species of κητώδη, cetaceans, with peculiar characteristics which make it different from most of the inhabitants of the sea. In regard to respiration, it is not provided with gills: the blowhole, situated on the forehead, allows it to breathe, as we learn from Aristotle²⁷:

Some of these (the cetaceans) have a blowhole and do not have gills, such as the dolphin and the whale (the dolphin has a blowhole on his back, while the whale on its forehead).

The philosopher defines the cetaceans as ἔνυδρα, aquatic animals, but admits the difficulties he finds in collocating the species in a proper classification, as:

It is not simple to consider each of these animals to be neither totally aquatic or totally terrestrial, if we have to consider terrestrial all the animals which breathe out air, and aquatic those which, on the contrary, naturally emit water²⁸.

²⁶ Sch. in Nic., sch. et gl. In Nic. Ther., sch. vet. et rec., 760b, 6-7: ἄλλως: τὰ περι λύχνους/πετόμενα θηρία φάλαιναί καλοῦνται ὑπο Ῥοδίων.

²⁷ Aristot., HA, 489b: Τούτων (τά κητώδη) δὲ τὰ μὲν αὐλὸν ἔχει, βράγχια δ' οὐκ ἔχει, οἷον δελφίς καὶ φάλαινα (ἔχει δ' ὁ μὲν δελφίς τὸν αὐλὸν διὰ τοῦ νότου, ἡ δὲ φάλαινα ἐν φάλαινα ἐν τῷ μετώπῳ).

²⁸ Aristot., HA, 589b 2-4: Οὐ γὰρ ῥάδιον οὐτ' ἔνυδρον θεῖναι μόνον τούτων ἕκαστον οὔτε πεζόν, εἰ πεζῶ μὲν τὰ δεχόμενα τὸν ἀέρα θετέον, τὰ δὲ τὸ ὕδωρ ἔνυδρα τὴν φύσιν.

As Rossella Ricoveri points out, the Stagirite notices that the cetaceans are different from totally aquatic animals, that are provided with gills, which emit only water, like the fishes' *ghenos*... on the other hand, he considers it to be impossible that some animals could breathe and have gills at the same time...therefore the philosopher claims that the κητώδη have a double nature, both terrestrial and aquatic.²⁹ According to Aristotle, what constitutes the crucial issue in determining the *discrimen* is their peculiar process of respiration, which unavoidably forces the cetaceans to get to the surface in order to survive, by breathing air – they are terrestrial animals, since they are provided with lungs and a trachea... they therefore have to emerge from the water every once in a while in order to breathe... however, they are also aquatic animals, because they inhale water, and then emit it through the blowhole, which every cetacean is provided with. Moreover, they eat in water, where they perform every vital function³⁰. I will not linger over the scientific validity of the theory, for which I refer to Ricoveri, but what is worth considering here is this tendency to reach the surface - which Aristotle scientifically explains as the need to breathe – which might have been generally known in Ancient Greece, as confirmed by Galenus³¹:

Among the sea animals, those which have plenty of blood and are warm, such as the dolphin, the seal and the whale, all of these breathe through the air and have an extraordinary way of breathing.

²⁹ Ricoveri, 1996, p. 61: "Lo Stagirita nota infatti che i cetacei sono diversi da quegli animali completamente acquatici che immettono solo acqua, in quanto dotati di branchie, come ad esempio il *ghenos* dei pesci...d'altra parte, ritiene impossibile l'esistenza di animali che contemporaneamente respirino ed abbiano branchie...il filosofo afferma così che i κητώδη sono animali dotati di una doppia natura, una terrestre ed una acquatica".

³⁰ Ibidem: "Sono animali terrestri in quanto hanno polmoni e trachea...tant'è che devono emergere di tanto in tanto dall'acqua per inspirare...ma sono anche acquatici in quanto immettono acqua, poi emessa attraverso lo sfiatatoio, di cui tutti i cetacei sono dotati, e si nutrono in acqua, dove svolgono tutte le funzioni vitali".

³¹ Gal., Usu Part., 3, 444, 8: Πολύαιμα καὶ θερμὰ τῶν ἐνύδρων, οἷον δελφίς καὶ φώκη καὶ φάλαινα ταῦτ' ἐξ ἀέρος ἀναπνεῖ πάντα θαυμαστόν τινα τρόπον ἀναπνοῆς.

Moreover, the characteristic of emerging from the sea has offered the basis for one of the possible theories about the etymology of the term φάλαινα, which I will analyse further³².

The sea-φάλαινα is not confined to scientific literature: it also makes its appearance in theatrical plays and poetry, where its role is defined as fatal and noxious. Aeschylus³³ calls it λυγρά, underlining its ferocious nature, and similarly, it appears in the *Scholia in Oppianum*³⁴, where the term φάλαινα refers to the sea monster, which was about to devour Andromeda in the city of Jaffa, before Perseus' intervention³⁵:

It is said to be the sea-monster which was about to devour Andromeda, but Perseus petrified it, thanks to the Gorgo's image.

The text above does not represent the only case in which the φάλαινα is caught in the act of ferociously ingurgitating its victims: that this attitude has been frequently attributed to the animal, is also proved by Aristophane's *Vespaie*, 35, where it is defined as πανδοκεύτρια, "able to devour anything". This is actually a crucial point, which is worth lingering over: in the literary contexts in which it appears, the κῆτος has not a proper entity, being defined essentially as a monster used to devouring human beings. As Anna Angelini³⁶ says, "Praticamente mai dotato di personalità spiccata, nè di individualità precisa, il *ketos* si qualifica, già nel mito, soprattutto come divoratore di esseri umani". This attitude to swallowing tends to

³² *Infra*, 24.

³³ Aesch., frag., ed. Mette, VIII, 41, D, 464, 10.: πότερα ἀγρευομεν λυγρὰν φάλαιναν.

³⁴ Sch. in Opp., sch. et gl. In Haul., sch. vet. et rec., 406, 7-10: Λέγει δ' αὐτὴν εἶναι τὸ κῆτος, ὅπερ ἔμελλε καταπιεῖν τὴν Ἀνδρομέδαν, ἀπελίθωσε δ' αὐτὴν ὁ Περσεὺς διὰ τοῦ γοργονεῖου εἴδους.

³⁵ About the myth, see also Apollod., II, 43 f.; Ov., Met., IV, 663 ff. See also Kaizer, 2011.

³⁶ Angelini, 2008, 86: "Cariddi ingoia la zattera di Odisseo e rivomita pezzi di legno sparsi, ed egli riesce a salvarsi solo perchè si aggrappa a un albero di fico, evitando così di essere risucchiato".

have different characteristics whether it appears in either a classical, or a biblical context. In ancient Greece and Rome encountering the κῆτος means unavoidable death, as we see, for instance, in the episode of Scylla and Charybdis³⁷, where Charybdis swallows Odysseus' raft and vomits the wooden pieces, scattering it everywhere, and the hero manages to rescue himself by grabbing a fig tree and avoids being swallowed.³⁸ Even when a hero is able to triumph over the monster - as we will see - it contributes to confirmation of the mortal semantic value of the κῆτος.

Let us return to the episode of Perseus and Andromeda told in the *Scholia ad Oppianum*. The hero's rescue of the girl from a sea-monster might have taken the shape of a proper τόπος, if we consider that another celebre hero - Heracles this time - was involved in an almost identical tale. Like Andromeda, Hesione, the daughter of the Trojan king Laomedon, was to be sacrificed to a sea-monster for the good of the kingdom. Prompted by an attractive award³⁹ - in spite of love, like Perseus - Heracles decides to save the maiden, by brutally killing the monster. The development of the narration then follows different patterns, distancing the tales: Laomedon refuses to give Heracles the deserved award, provoking his desire of revenge which will lead the hero to kill the king and finally conquer Troy, awarding Hesione to Telamon. However, I will not linger further on the continuation of the myth⁴⁰, for whose detailed tale I refer to Diodorus Siculus⁴¹, Apollodorus⁴² and Strabo⁴³. What I want to focus on in my research is the role played by Heracles in the

³⁷ Hom., Od., XII, 425-444.

³⁸ Angelini, 2008, 86.

³⁹ According to the myth, Laomedon promised to award Heracles with his invincible horses.

⁴⁰ In addition to the mentioned Diodorus Siculus, Apollodorus and Strabo, other sources about the myth are Homer (Hom., Il., V, 640-651), Sophocles (Soph., Aj., 1299 ff.), Lycophron (Lyc, 337.), Ovidius (Ov., Met., XI, 211 ff.), Hyginus (Hyg., Fab., XXXI; 89), Valerius Flaccus (Val. Flacc., Arg., II, 450 ff.), Philostratus the Younger (Philostr., Imag., 12), and Quintus Smyrnaeus (Q. Smyrn., Posth., VI, 283 ff.).

⁴¹ Diod., IV, 42, 1-20.

⁴² Apollod., II, 103 ff.

⁴³ Strab., Geog., XIII, 1, 32.

episode, and - even more importantly - the one played by the κῆτος. As Davies⁴⁴ underlined “Heracles is pre-eminently the hero who conquers Death”, many of his labours being effectively connected with the Underworld. He then continues, specifying that - apart from “the most obvious and literal manifestation of the achievement”, which is Heracles’ apotheosis on Mount Oete⁴⁵ - rescuing Alceste from the hands of Thanatos⁴⁶, as well as bringing back Cerberus from the Underworld, are all representations of his tendency to fight and win against Death. Even the rustling of Geryon’s cattle⁴⁷ and the fetching of the apples of the Hesperides⁴⁸ have been interpreted with a similar meaning, “for the former represents obliquely the rescue of human souls from the grasp of a death-demon, while the latter is a barely-disguised depiction of the motif of the fruit of immortality”⁴⁹. Not to mention the wounding of Hades⁵⁰ and the despatch of Periclymenus⁵¹, both of which take place at Pylos⁵², “in which the geographical place name was already taken by antiquity to be a disguised allusion to the primitive notion of the gates or *pylae* of the Underworld”⁵³. As it emerges from these considerations, it is not surprising that, as part of his labours, Heracles finds himself involved in a

⁴⁴ Davies, 2003, p. 136-137.

⁴⁵ Cf. Apollod., II, 7, 7.

⁴⁶ Cf. About Heracles’ rescue of Alceste see Eur., Alc., and Apollod., II, 6, 2.

⁴⁷ The myth was probably a subject in Greek oral poetry. The earliest version of the tale is found in Hes., Theog., 287-294), and we know that also the lyrical poet Stesychorus wrote about the same myth in his Geryoneis (SLG S 13,4 and 14,8). The most extensive treatment of the story is found in Apollodorus (Apollod., II,5, 10).

⁴⁸ References to the myth are found in Soph., Trach. 1099 ff. and Eur., HF, 349 ff. For an extensive treatment of the myth see also Apollodorus (Apollod., II, 5, 11).

⁴⁹ Davies, 2003, p. 137.

⁵⁰ Cf. Hom., II., V, 397 ff. and Apollod., II, 7, 3.

⁵¹ Cf. Apollod., II, 7, 3; but also Nonn., Dion., 43, 247; Ov., Met., XII, 556; Hyg., Fab., 10.

⁵² In Hom., II., V, 397-399, Homer says “τλήθ δ’ Αΐδης ἐν τοῖσι πελώριος ὤκυν ὀϊστόν./εὐτέ μιν οὐτόσ ἀνήρ υἱὸς Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο/ἐν Πύλω ἐν νεκύεσσι βαλὼν ὀδύνησιν ἔδωκεν”.

⁵³ Davies, 2003, p. 137.

fight against a κῆτος, if we consider the lethal function of its ingestion. The most precise explanation of the symbolic value of the animal is found in Lycophron⁵⁴:

He will be buried in the viscera of many animals, devoured by the teeth in numerous lines of the monsters, innumerable swarm. The strangers in a stranger land will be buried, far from their relatives.

Here, as the verb buried (τυμβευθήσεται) reveals, the κῆτος is considered to be not only a certain cause of death, but one of the most unacceptable, similar to dying in a foreign country.

Contrary to the classical sources, biblical texts show the κῆτος as a sort of rite of passage, almost of initiation, to a status of rebirth. The most extensive treatment of a similar case can be found in the book of Jonas, where it is said that, during a violent storm, a sign of God's anger, whose cause was thought to be the prophet himself, Jonas is thrown to the sea. There, he spent three days and three nights in the belly of a "big fish", before safely reaching the coast. The "coast" is the Palestinian one, more specifically, the city of Jaffa – the same place where Perseus rescued Andromeda from the sea monster⁵⁵.

In the biblical context the κῆτος represents the opportunity to return to life, not just in death, but with the promise of a new existence - here the sea creature acquires new characteristics, since it becomes a way for Jonas to escape certain death. In the Jewish context there are numerous elements which prompt us to read the tale as a "death and rebirth" story - in the Midrash, Jona is the man who was born twice.⁵⁶ Considered from this point of view, the role played by the κῆτος-whale should be

⁵⁴ Lyc., 412-416: Πολλῶν γὰρ ἐν σπλάγγχοισι τυμβευθήσεται/ βρωθεῖς πολυστοίχοισι καμπέων γνάτοις/ νήριθμος ἔσμός· οἱ δ' ἐπὶ ξένης ξένοι/ παῶν ἔρημοι δεξιῶσονται τάφους.

⁵⁵ Supra, 19.

⁵⁶ Angelini, 2008, 91-92: "La creatura del mare assume qui dei nuovi connotati nel momento in cui diviene per Giona uno strumento di salvezza da morte certa. Già in ambito ebraico ci sono numerosi elementi che inducono a leggere il racconto come una storia di morte e rinascita . . . nel midrash Giona è colui che nasce due volte".

inserted into the semantic field⁵⁷ to which the symbol of the butterfly also belongs: death and rebirth, with a new existence taking on life through a kind of burial, as will be analysed further on.

Let us now briefly consider the iconographical representations of the κῆτος. It is important to know that in Classical culture - as well as in biblical art - the whale was seen as “a fairly shapeless creature”⁵⁸. The description of the sea monster in Jonah’s tale has nothing to do with the “traditional whale” we are used to imagine, as Boardman states: “This incongruous type for Jonah’s whale was adopted because it had been deep rooted in Greek and Roman art for nearly a millennium, with only slight changes in appearance and functions...”⁵⁹. He then continues by giving a specific description of the monstrous creature: “Its tail is fishy...Its body is serpentine and often scaly with a cushioned underpart...The neck may carry a ruff of spines or angular plates like gills...the ears are usually long and pointed, the forehead low”⁶⁰. This description is enough to understand that the connection between the two φάλαινα, the whale and the butterfly, has nothing to do with the physical depictions of the animals. Moreover, even though it is not impossible to find wings in some of the representations of the κῆτος, they are “exceptional, and are probably inspired by fins rather than the result of sober reflection on the part of the artist about the nature of the beast”⁶¹. The latter detail definitely confirmed that - apart from the aforementioned mutual semantic fields - there would appear to be no connection between the two animals, especially from a morphological point of view. Which one could be then the main cause of their homonymy? What, in other terms, is supposed to connect two such apparently different creatures with each other, to the

⁵⁷ About the fearsome and disquieting role of the κῆτος see also Bode, 2002, p. 7: “Die grossen Wale umgab in der Antike ein Schleier des Unheimlichen”.

⁵⁸ Boardman, 1987, p. 73.

⁵⁹ *Ivi*, p. 74.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

point that they have been given the same name? The answer may lie within the etymology of the word.

When it comes to analysing the origin of the word *φάλαινα*, there is not an univocal point of view to take into consideration, a synoptic view of the main hypotheses being necessary to deeply understand the meaning of the term. Among all the possible explanations, the one hypothesised by Pokorny⁶² and Hofmann⁶³ and supported by Immisch⁶⁴ is probably the most peculiar. According to what they claim, both *φάλλαινα* and *φάλλη*⁶⁵, would have been derived from *φαλλός*. In particular, the former might have originated thanks to the addition of the suffix *-αινα*, through the same process leading to words like *λύκαινα*, *κάπραινα*, *λέαινα*, *ῥαινα*⁶⁶. While the mutual root **bhel*, to bloat, would be the reason for its immediate connection with the sea-*φάλαινα*, Immisch supported the connection with the insect using archaeological evidence – indeed, he claims that a butterfly represented as a “Flügelphalli” is a common *τόπος* in Greek Art⁶⁷, as well as depictions of the insect together with phallic representations (See picture 1 and 2).

Another possible origin of the word *φάλαινα* is theorised by Osthoff⁶⁸, who states that the correct form for “butterfly” is *φάλαινα*, instead of *φάλλαινα*. Derived from the word *φάος*, it would be the result of a compensatory lengthening:

**φα(F)έσ-λ-αινα > *φαείλαινα > φάλαινα,*

like **φα(F)εσνός > φανός*, Attican.

⁶² Pokorny, 1969, 120.

⁶³ Hofmann, 1949, 390.

⁶⁴ Immisch, 1915.

⁶⁵ Like the word *φάλλαινα*, also *φάλλη* means both butterfly (Hes., Lex., s.v. *φάλλη*: ἡ πετομένη ψυχή) and whale (Lyc., op. cit., 84: *φάλλαι τε και δελφίνες* and 394:).

⁶⁶ Immisch, 1915, p. 197.

⁶⁷ About the “Phallus-bird” see Dover, 1988, p. 133, where it is described as one of the rare surrealist elements in Greek art.

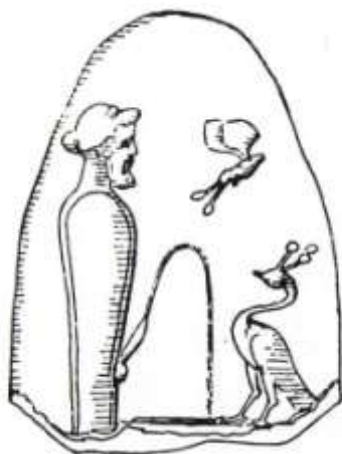
⁶⁸ Osthoff, 1901, 330.

Alternatively, it might have been generated from the dissimilation of the word

*φαναινα, obtained from the Attican φανός.



Picture 1. Black figured amphora (VI century B.C.), now residing in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.



Picture 2. Agate gemstone (second half of the II century B.C.), now residing in the Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen.

Fernandez⁶⁹ refuses this hypothesis, arguing that Osthoff's theory cannot be accepted for two reasons. First of all because it seems that the correct orthography of the word was φάλλαινα, which would exclude the supposed form φάλαινα. Secondly, because the word would not have had an Attic origin in the same way (the *Scholia ad Nicander, Ther.*, 760 claim that φάλλαινα, meaning butterfly, comes from Rhodes), which at the same time rejects the hypothesis of a primitive form *φάναίνα⁷⁰. Nevertheless he continues, stating that there is something valid in Osthoff's theory. Rejecting the form φάλαινα found in Nicander and admitting on the other hand a form φάλλαινα, the quantity of the first syllable will be long by position, although it is short by nature. Admitting this, we will then be able to detect a link between this word and other forms such as ἀμφί-φαλος. Correlations between different terms help reconstruct an original root **bhel*, meaning "to bright". We can therefore see that there is no reason why the butterfly's noun should not come from this root⁷¹.

Chantraine⁷² clearly divides the etymology of the two words, considering the φάλλαινα-whale derived from a couple φάλλαινα/*φάλλων (double of Φαλλήν), similar to δράκαινα/δράκων λέαινα/λέων. Alternatively, he proposes to follow Persson (*Beitr.*, 2, 797, n. 5), maintaining φάλλη, feminine of φαλλός, as primitive form. A different explanation would be of the origin of the word φάλλαινα, with the meaning of "butterfly". Connecting the term to the colour - almost white - that might

⁶⁹ Fernandez, 1959, 207.

⁷⁰ Ibidem: "La teoría de Osthoff no se puede mantener por dos razones: en primer lugar, porque . . . parece ser que la ortografía correcta de la palabra fué φάλλαινα, lo que excluye el supuesto φάλαινα; y en segundo lugar, porque la palabra no sea tal vez de origen ático (el Escol. A Nicandro, Ther. 760 afirma que φάλλαινα en el sentido de mariposa era término rodio), lo que asimismo descarta la hipótesis de un primitivo *φάναίνα".

⁷¹ Ibidem: "Hay en Osthoff algo que a nuestro juicio se puede aprovechar. Desechada la supuesta forma φάλαινα en Nicandro y admitido un φάλλαινα . . . la cantidad de la primera sílaba . . . siempre será larga por posición, que en el caso de que sea breve por naturaleza. Admitido esto, nada nos impedirá ver un parentesco entre esta palabra y formas tales como ἀμφί-φαλος . . . Correspondencias en los distintos idiomas permiten reconstruir una primitiva raíz ide. **bhel* . . . éste sería algo así como <<tener color brillante, brillar>>. No vemos, pues, que haya ningún inconveniente en hacer proceder el nombre de la mariposa de esta raíz".

⁷² Chantraine, 1999, 1175.

have marked the φάλλαινα, attracted to light, he hypothesizes a form *φάλυᾶ, a rapid pronunciation of the feminine of φαλιός, white, from which it might have been derivated φάλλη “avec paroxytonèse marquant la substantivation”⁷³. He strongly opposes a connection between the two φάλαινα, claiming that the homonymy has to be considered completely fortuitous. This last statement is, however, not completely correct - even between two such different animals there might have been a corresponding feature, causing the bizarre homonymy.

Let us consider again the scientific descriptions of our whale: as mentioned above⁷⁴, one of the most controversial characteristics seemed to be the tendency to reach the surface of the sea in order to breathe. A similar situation is found in the *Scholia ad Oppianum*⁷⁵, where no mention of the respiration is made:

Φάλαινα: the creature which hurls towards the light - one with the aspect of a fish, and the other, which goes towards the light during the night, commonly called κανδελοσβέστρια from the tendency to hurl towards the light. The φάλαινα has the desire to be with men, and it is also the little animal which goes towards the torches, also called κανδελοσβέστρια. It is shameless, because she desires to be with men.

In the description of the two animals, among all the differences that characterise them, there seems to be a corresponding feature - the tendency to be attracted to light. This characteristic might also be the cause of the peculiar homonymy, being at the origin of one possible etymology, with φάλαιναν derived from the expression εἰς φῶς ἄλλεσται. That the desire to reach the light is referred to in both creatures is confirmed by the expression “during the night” used for the butterfly. This detail suggests that, while the butterfly tends to go towards the light

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ Supra, 18.

⁷⁵ Sch. in Opp., sch. et gl. In Haul., sch. vet .et rec., 404, 1-7: Φάλαιναν· τὴν εἰς τὸ φῶς ἀλλομένην· φάλαινα εἶδος ἰχθύος, καὶ ἡ κατὰ νυκτὸς εἰς τὸ φῶς ἀλλομένη, ἢ κοινῶς κανδελοσβέστρια· φάλαιναν παρὰ τὸ εἰς φῶς ἄλλεσται. Φάλαινα ἔχει ἐπιθυμίαν συνουσιάζεσθαι τοῖς ἀνδράσι. ἐστὶ δὲ καὶ ζώφιον ἐν τοῖς λύχνοις ἀλλόμενον, τὸ λεγόμενον κανδηλοσβέστρια. Ἀναιδέα· διὰ τὸ ἐπιθυμεῖν τοῖς ἀνδράσι συνουσιάζεσθαι.

during the night (the torches are also involved in the description), the tendency to reach the surface - and the light of the sun - of the whale is shown during the day. Moreover, more proof that this characteristic has to be connected to both the animals comes from the structure of the text, where the butterfly and whale are always alternated and interwoven - the desire to be with men, which justifies the tendency of the whale to reach the surface, is clearly referred to the marine animal⁷⁶, but immediately followed by the reference to the κανδηλοσβέστρια. With regards to this peculiar name, which we have seen being employed as a synonym of the word φάλαινα, let us now consider specifically the butterfly, with the aim to give a complete overview of the Greek terminology referred to the animal.

Other names for the insect.

As the texts analysed above have implied, the Greeks did not restrict the terminology employed for the butterfly to the couple φάλαινα/ ψυχή. A wide variety of terms was used with reference to the insect. A few lines above we have mentioned the noun κανδηλοσβέστρια as a synonym of φάλαινα. Composed of the word κανδήλη⁷⁷, “torch”, and the verb σβέννυμι, “to extinguish”, it also makes its appearance in another form, κανδηλοσβέστης, in the *Scholia ad Nicandrum*⁷⁸. As the etymology reveals, there is a clear reference to a peculiar habit of the insect, that is being attracted to lights and eventually extinguishing them .

In addition to the aforementioned κανδηλοσβέστρια, another term recalls the attraction to the fire, which our insect is unavoidably subjected to: we are talking

⁷⁶ This belief was commonly referred to the seals, which were thought to meet men on the coasts. See Lyc., 84-85.

⁷⁷ We learn from Fernandez that the term made its first appearance in Ath., XV, 701b.

⁷⁸ Sch. in Nic., sch. et gl. In Nic. Ther., sch. vet. et rec., 763.

about the word πυράστης. Composed of πῦρ, “fire”, and αἶω, “to draw”, the animal was very common in ancient Greek proverbs, where it was cited as a paradigm of imprudent, masochistic behaviour. The first occurrence of both the name and the proverb⁷⁹ is found in Aeschylus⁸⁰:

I am afraid of the foolish destiny of the πυράστης.

Fernandez hypothesizes a connection between the two terms, starting from a possible contraposition, evident in the etymology. Πυράστης, he claims, would have been chronologically the first to appear, with the original meaning of “insect which ignites the fire”. From the opposition with this specific semantic value, it might have originated from the κανδηλοσβέστρια, “cuyo character hibrido delata su origen reciente”⁸¹. It is not simple to determine exactly the semantic evolution of the word, as Fernandez himself implies, defining it a proper enigma. Two theories have been formulated about its uncertain interpretation: one, strongly sustained by Fraenkel, that it focuses on the semantic evolution of the verb, which might have originated from the meaning of “igniting” to the value of “getting burned”. Under the heading πυράστης he writes “Lichtmotte, die sich am Feuer verbrennt”⁸², dissecting the word in two different parts to analyse singularly. We read that “Das Anfangsglied ist in der Quantität dem Nominativ πῦρ angeglichen...Das zweite Element beruht auf √αῦσ- “trocknen”, “anzünden””⁸³. Alternatively, Strömberg⁸⁴ suggests another interpretation of αἶω as “to search, to draw”, which appears to be the most credible

⁷⁹ The information is found in Fernandez, op. cit., 154.

⁸⁰ Aesch., fr. 288 Nauck: Δέδοικα μῶρον κάρτα πυράστου μόρον. The passage constitutes the oldest occurrence of both the term and the proverb related to it.

⁸¹ Fernandez, 1959, 154.

⁸² Fraenkel, 1910, 39-40.

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ Strömberg, 1944, 21.

alternative, judging from the ancient sources: “Die Benennung dürfte in einer volkstümlichen Anschauung wurzeln, dass die Motte im Licht Feuer holen will”. In all the literary contexts in which it occurs, the πυραύστης is specifically referred to as being attracted to the fire, rather than to the (bizarre) tendency to start it.

This is what we read, for instance, in Aelian⁸⁵:

The πυραύστης is an animal which relishes the brightness of the fire and flies around the high heat torches, throws itself towards them, gets burned. Aeschylus, the tragic poet, recalls it too, when he says “I am tremendously afraid of the stupid destiny of the πυραύστης.

About the proverb⁸⁶ Eustathius also wrote⁸⁷, who aimed to disambiguate the real meaning of the verb αὔω:

It is evident that among the ancients αὔσαι also meant “to touch”, or “to catch”. Similarly, κραῦσαι means “to burn oneself’s skin”. From the other meaning of the verb αὔειν it comes the word πυραύστης. It is a little winged animal, which leaps towards the fire and easily gets burned. From this insect originated the proverb about those who voluntarily die, without difficulties, “the πυραύστης destiny”.

Aristotle too pledges a passage⁸⁸ of his *Historia Animalium* to the insect, underlying another characteristic, never attributed before to the πυραύστης: the harm which the animal was supposed to cause to honeycombs:

Animals, which ruin the beehives, are engendered in the hives, among the bees – a little worm which destroys the honeycombs (some call it

⁸⁵ Ael., NA, XII, 8: ζῷόν ἐστιν ὁ πυραύστης, ὅπερ οὖν χαίρει μὲν τῇ λαμπηδόνι τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ προσπέτεται τοῖς λύχνοις ἐνακμάζουσιν, ἐμπεσὼν δὲ ὑπὸ ῥύμης εἶτα μέντοι καταπέφλεκται. Μέμνηται δὲ αὐτοῦ καὶ Αἰσχύλος ὁ τῆς τραγωδίας ποιητῆς λέγων· δέδοικα μωρὸν κάρτα πυραύστου μόρον.

⁸⁶ About the proverb see also Zen., V, 79 and Suid., 3194, 1.

⁸⁷ Eust., II, 40: δῆλον δὲ ὅτι αὔσαι κατὰ τοὺς παλαιοὺς, καὶ τὸ θγεῖν καὶ ἄγασθαι. ὅθεν καὶ κραῦσαι τὸ τοῦ χροὸς αὔσαι. Ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ ἐτέρου αὔειν, καὶ πυραύστης. Ζωύφιον πτηνὸν ἐναλλόμενον τῷ φωτὶ καὶ ῥᾶον κατακαϊόμενον. ὅθεν καὶ παροιμία ἐπὶ τῶν ἐκοντὶ καὶ ῥαδίως θνησκόντων, τὸ πυραύστου μόρος.

⁸⁸ Aristot., HA, 605b 11: Ταῖς δὲ μελίτταις ἐγγίνεται ἐν τοῖς σμήνεσι θερία ἃ λυμáινεται τὰ κηρία, τὸ τε σκωλήκιον τὸ ἀραχνοῦν καὶ λυμáινόμενον τὰ κηρία (καλεῖται δὲ κληρος, οἱ δὲ πυραύστην καλοῦσιν· ὃς ἐντίκτει ἐν τῷ κηρίῳ, ὅμοιον ἑαυτῷ οἷον ἀράχιον, καὶ νοσεῖν ποιεῖ τὸ σμήνος), καὶ ἄλλο θηρίον οἷον ὁ ἠπίολος ὁ περὶ τὸν λύχνον πετόμενος· οὗτος ἐντίκτει τι χνοῦ ἀνάπλεων, καὶ οὐ κεντεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν μελιττῶν ἀλλὰ μόνου φεύγει καπνίζόμενος.

κλῆρος, others πυράστην – in the beehive it creates another similar creature, a kind of small spider, and damages the beehive) and another animal, such as the ἠπίολος, which flies around the lamps. This animal engenders another hairy creature and it is not stung by the bees and escapes only if annoyed by the smoke.

The reason of this unique association can be found in the text itself. What we read is not a description of the sole πυράστης: it involves different species of insects, sharing with the πυράστης a common, yet destructive, habit and therefore considered to be synonyms of the abovementioned animal.

Let us consider briefly the other terms of the comparison. The animals mentioned in the passage - which share with the πυράστης the tendency to destroy the beehives - are “talking names” as well.

What the Greeks exactly meant by the word κλῆρος has been not easy to categorise⁸⁹: as an ambivalent insect, it was to intend as both a synonym of butterfly - as we can assume from the text above - and a kind of beetle as well. An entry in Hesychius’s Lexicon⁹⁰ could help clarify the true identity of the animal. To the heading σκλῆρος he wrote:

σκλῆρος: spiders’ disease in the honeycombs

As Fernandez pointed out, the form with an additional σ would plausibly be the original, while its double κλῆρος would have been added at a later stage, as was common with the roots for the group - σκ⁹¹. Moreover, he goes a step further, claiming that the name would have originated from the adjective σκληρός (“hard”, “rigid”), whose meaning however proves to be pertinent to the homonymous insect.

⁸⁹ Cf. Fernandez, 1959, 9; Davies-Kathyrithamby, 1986, 110.

⁹⁰ Hsch, s.v. σκλῆρος: σκλῆρος: νόσημα τι ἀραχνίδων ἐν τοῖς σμήνεσι πρὸς τὸ σήπεσθαι.

⁹¹ Cf. Fernandez, 1959, 91; Schwyzer, 2005, I, 334.

Strömberg⁹² suggests a composed form, κληρο-πυραύστης, claiming that it ‘wird durch Aristoteles Hist. An. VIII 605b 11 bestätigt’ and specifying a few lines below that ‘es handelt sich bei κληῖρος und πυραύστης um Bezeichnungen für einen Käfer, der die Bienenstöcke verdirbt, vielleicht *Clerus apiarius*’. Beavis - following Strömberg’s idea that the disease cited by Hesychius might be indentified with the animal in the *Historia Animalium* - opts for considering the term as “a suitable synonym for a moth, or at least for the moth’s pupal stage, since as an adjective σκληρός means ‘hard, brittle’”⁹³.

The other term cited in Aristotle’s text, ἠπίολος, appears to be a controversial noun, open to different kinds of interpretation, for the impressive phonetic similarity with two specific terms: ἠπίαλος, “fever”, and ἠπιάλης, “nightmare”. The hypothesis of a possible connection - it goes without saying - sounds extremely fascinating and not too surreal, indeed.

Here again Hesychius plays a crucial role in the identification of the animal: in his *Lexicon*⁹⁴, under the heading ἠπίαλος, we read:

Cold shiver. The ψυχροὶ are also called like this.

Fernandez⁹⁵ hypothesizes a transmission error, which might have been the cause of the form ψυχροὶ, an incorrect copy of ψυχαῖ. There is not adequate evidence to prove the validity of the theory. It is true, however, that support for a connection between the terms comes from the traditional background of the legends, specifically analysed by Immisch⁹⁶, who claims that in Switzerland and Lusatia it is believed to

⁹² Strömberg, 1944, 21.

⁹³ Beavis, 1988, 130.

⁹⁴ Hsch, s.v. ἠπίαλος: ἠπίαλος· ῥῖγος πρὸ πυρετοῦ, ἐκαλοῦντο δὲ οὕτως καὶ οἱ ψυχροὶ.

⁹⁵ Fernandez, 1959, 197.

⁹⁶ Immisch, 1915, 193: “In der Schweiz und in der Lausitz bringt er den Schläfern den Alpdruck, desgleichen bei den Südslaven, bei den Albanern das Fieber”.

have been responsible for nightmares, while in the South Slavic countries and in Albania it is supposed to have caused fever. He also adds that for Greeks it is noteworthy that one of these animals was called ἠπίολος or ἠπίολης - the name must be connected to ἠπίαλος and ἐφιάλης⁹⁷. To support his theory, providing eminent proof, he recalls Vergil's portrait of the "Trugträumen"⁹⁸:

Right in the middle a huge opaque elm extends its branches, like old arms, which the Dreams are said to habit as their abode, pressing themselves to the leaves, one by one.

Despite Iliad's sparrows in Book II which were employed as a model referred to by other authors (such as Silius Italicus⁹⁹), Immisch rather underlines the similarities between Vergil's verses and Nicander's depictions of the φάλαινα, with the aim to establish a connection between the two images - and he is not to blame. The following is an excerpt from the Homeric¹⁰⁰ text:

Here there was a sparrows' nest, tender creatures, hidden behind the leaves on top of the branches; eight they were, nine with the mother which created them.

Vergil's *Somnia* conceal themselves behind elm's leaves, as the Homeric sparrows do with the plane tree, but the inconsistency of the depiction evokes more

⁹⁷ Ibidem: "Für die Griechen ist zu beachten, dass eins dieser Tiere ἠπίολος oder ἠπίολης heisst...Der name ist doch wohl nicht zu trennen von ἠπίαλος und ἐφιάλης".

⁹⁸ Verg., Aen., VI, 282-284: In medio ramos annosaque bracchia pandit/ulmus opaca ingens, quam sedem *Somnia* volgo/vana tenere ferunt folisque sub minimis haerent.

⁹⁹ Sil., XIII, 597.

¹⁰⁰ Hom., Il., II, 311-315: ἔνθα δ' ἔαν στρουθοῖο νεοσσοί, νήπια τέκνα,/ ὄζω ἐπ' ἀκροτάτῳ, πετάλοις ὑποπεπτηῶτες,/ ὀκτώ, ἀτὰρ μήτηρ ἑνάτη ἦν, ἧ τέκε τέκνα.

the image of the φάλαιναι employed by Nicander¹⁰¹, reared among the leaves of Perseus' tree.

Think of the monstrous creatures fostered by the gloomy Egypt, like the Moth, which the evening, at dinner time, pushes to flutter round the lights. The wings are dense and downy, even as a man appears who may chance to touch dust or ash. With this aspect, it is reared among the Perseus tree's leaves. It has got a terrible head, nodding in a grim way, and a heavy belly. If it bites a man with its sting in the top of his head, or on his neck, it easily and immediately condemns him to death.

As we read in Nicander's lines, another crucial element in moths' depictions was constituted by their wings. Far from the colourful brightness of the "traditional" butterfly's wings, they were supposed to have a peculiar consistence, being downy and soft, with an ill-omened property. The ash which they drop was considered to be a vehicle for different kind of illnesses - a belief which, as Immisch claims, still exists in German tradition: "Auch in unser Volksüberlieferung trägt die 'fliegende Elbe' Krankheiten zu"¹⁰².

The idea of a plausible connection not just with the nightmare, but also with the disease is reinforced by another term, often employed with the meaning of "butterfly", that is ψῶρα. In addition to its first meaning, another semantic value expressed from the word is indeed "scabies" or "psora". Despite the remarkable appeal of the abovementioned theories, there might be other plausible reasons for this homonymy. The term, probably derived from the adjective ψωρός, "rough", might have referred to the scales which characterise moth's wings, as both Beavis¹⁰³ and

¹⁰¹ Nic., Ther., 759-768: Φράζεο δ' Αἰγύπτιοι τὰ τε τρέφει οὐλοδὸς αἴα/ κνώδαλα, φαλλαίνη ἐναλίγκια τὴν περι λύχνουζ/ ἀκρόνυχος δειπνητὸς ἐπήλασε παιφάσσουσαν/ στεγνὰ δέ οἱ πτερὰ πάντα καὶ ἔγγνοα, τοῖα κονίης/ ἢ καὶ ἀπὸ σπληδοῖο φαίνεται ὅστις ἐπαύρη./ τῷ ἴκελος Περσεῖος ὑποτρέφεται πετάλοισι./ τοῦ καὶ σμερδαλέον νεύει κάρη αἰὲν ὑποδρά/ξ ἐσκληκός, νηδὺς δὲ βαρύνεται· αὐτὰρ ὁ κέντρον/ ἀγένηι τ' ἀκροτάτῳ κεφαλήι τ' ἐνεμάξατο φωτός./ ρεῖα δὲ κεν θανάτιο καὶ αὐτίκα μοῖραν ἐφείη.

¹⁰² Immisch, 1915, 194.

¹⁰³ Beavis, 1988, 130.

Fernandez¹⁰⁴ assert. The latter goes a step further and suggests that it is therefore possible to consider this name as derived from the similarity of appearance between the stains on the insect's wings and the ones typical of the cutaneous diseases¹⁰⁵.

Let us consider again the diseases of the beehives. In addition to the aforementioned κλῆρος and ἠπίολος, another name was also employed to express the same peculiar illness, that is σκῆν. As Hesychius¹⁰⁶ states:

Σκῆνος: body; or bees' illness, when it happens to be a σκώληξ¹⁰⁷ in the beehive.

The gloss is both clear, and would rather suggest a connection between this word and the previously analysed κλῆρος, though at a first glance the former meaning appears to be distant from the latter. Now, let us proceed in an orderly fashion, starting from the semantic value of “disease” attributed to the name: surprisingly, it will reveal itself to be not as distant as it seems from the former.

A crucial role in the identification of the term is played again by Hesychius' *Lexicon*¹⁰⁸, where we read:

Σκῆν: what some call ψυχή, others φάλαινα.

This gloss could clearly explain the employment of σκῆνος as a synonym of κλῆρος, the nouns having been associated to the idea of a pernicious insect, a bitter

¹⁰⁴ Fernandez, 1959, 39-40.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem: “Cabe, por consiguiente, considerar dicha denominación determinada por una analogía de aspecto entre las manchas de color de las alas del lepidopteron y las que ausan en la piel las afecciones cutáneas”.

¹⁰⁶ Hsch, s.v. σκῆνος: σκῆνος: σῶμα. ἢ πάθος ἐν μελίσσαις ὅταν ἐν τῷ σμήνει γένηται σκώληξ.

¹⁰⁷ Fernandez (1959, 203) calls σκώληξ the larva of the πυραύστης.

¹⁰⁸ Hsch, s.v. σκῆν: σκῆν· ὃ τινὲς μὲν ψυχὴν, τινὲς δὲ φάλαιναν.

enemy of the bees, but there is more to reveal. As we said above¹⁰⁹, the word κλῆρος assumed the meaning of “butterfly”, passing through the other value of “pupa”, immediately connected to its etymology, because of the rigid consistency of its shell. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same process involved also the terms σκῆν/σκῆνος, originally arranged to the idea of body and, then, to that of pupa.

Immisch¹¹⁰ makes the word originate from the term σκηνή, citing Boisacq’s¹¹¹ definition of a “corp en tant qu’enveloppe de l’âme”. Another *cognatus* term, σκῆνωμα, whose meaning is “tent”, “habitation”, was adopted as a model for the latin word *papilio*, which - we will see - encompassed both the meaning of “tent” and “butterfly” as well.

The idea of the σκῆνος/body might have been associated with the concept of life, since the term has quickly started to refer to a specific kind of body - a dead body, or corpse. This is what we find, for example, in Nicander’s¹¹² employment of the word:

As a matter of fact horses are the origin of wasps as bulls are of bees [they are engendered from their decayed corpses].

The reference here is to the peculiar phenomena known as *ippogonia* and *bugonia*¹¹³, when a swarm of wasps or bees takes life respectively from a dead horse or ox. I will not linger over the phenomena, about which I recall Bettini¹¹⁴ and Fernandez¹¹⁵- what is interesting to underline is the fact that Nicander refers to the carcasses of the animals, by using the word σκῆνεσι. Even more interesting for our

¹⁰⁹ Supra, 31.

¹¹⁰ Immisch, 1915, 198.

¹¹¹ Boisacq, 1938, 874.

¹¹² Nic., Ther., 741-742: ἵπποι γὰρ σφηκῶν γένεσις ταῦροι δὲ μελισσῶν/ [σκῆνεσι πυθομένοισι λυκοσπάδες ἐξεγένοντο].

¹¹³ About the bugonia see also Verg., G., IV, 528-558; Ov., Fast., 363-380.

¹¹⁴ Bettini, 2005, 215-220.

¹¹⁵ Fernandez, 1959, 199.

research, σκῆνος begins to be adopted as a contraposition of the soul, representing the body still bound to the terrestrial ties. This is what we can read, for instance, in Platon's *Axiochus*¹¹⁶:

We are , an immortal animal which operates in a mortal body. So nature gave us the body for bad purposes.

Even in medical contexts σκῆνος makes its appearance, maintaining the idea of an entity bond to the physiological limits, as we read in Hippocrates'¹¹⁷ work *On Hebdomads*:

The psyche, after abandoning the shell of the body, leaves the cold and mortal εἶδωλον together with the anger, the blood, the bile and the flesh.

Of particular interest is this description, where the expression τὸ τοῦ σώματος σκῆνος reveals how effectively the term was rather considered to be a shell, a cocoon, from which the psyche was able to escape at the moment of death.

This image perfectly suits the idea of butterfly conceived as a symbol of the soul, which I aim to investigate here. That the noun came to indicate the disease caused by the worms to the bees – and the *teredines* responsible for it as well – from the original meaning of “body”, “case” (originated by the *cognatus* word σκηνή) is also confirmation that we are moving in the right direction.

In addition to the analysed σκῆνος, the tendency to evoke the idea of the corpse even through the names attributed to the butterfly is also evident in another word, νεκύδα(λ)λος, which expresses more precisely the worm before the metamorphosis. The image of the dead body is incidental to the name itself, composed of the word

¹¹⁶ Plato, Ax., 366a: ἡμεῖς μὲν γὰρ ἔσμεν ψυχῆ, ζῶον ἀθάνατον ἐν θνητῷ καωειρμένον φρουρίῳ. Τὸ δὲ σκῆνος τουτὶ πρὸς κακοῦ περιήρμωσεν ἢ φύσις.

¹¹⁷ Hp., Hebd., 52: ἀπολείποσα δὲ ἡ ψυχὴ τὸ τοῦ σώματος σκῆνος τὸ ψυχρὸν καὶ τὸ θνητὸν εἶδωλον ἄμα καὶ χολῆ καὶ αἵματι καὶ φλέγματι καὶ σαρκὶ παρέδωκεν.

νέκυς. As Chantraine¹¹⁸ states the derivation from the word νέκυς is due to the lack of apparent life in the cocoon or in the chrysalid, while the suffix is arbitrarily inspired by κορύδαλλος. ‘We find the term in Aristotle’s *Historia Animalium*¹¹⁹, where it is identified as a stage of the metamorphosis of a larva into silkworm. We read that:

From a big larva, different from the others and provided with kind of horns, it is firstly engendered - after abandoning the larva itself - a κάμπη, then a βομβύλιος, and from it a νεκύδαλλος.

The passage follows the description of the metamorphosis which causes a worm to turn into a butterfly - a process that will be analysed in detail further - where the author cites other similar examples of metamorphosis of a larva into a different animal. In this case, the phenomenon described concerns the evolution of a κάμπη into a silkworm, whose chrysalis stage is represented through the νεκύδαλλος. What is worth noting is that, as we will see for the butterfly, the chrysalis expresses a sort of passage from a stage of life into another, where the previous being interrupts its vital functions, but - at the same time - the new creature has yet to take life and no vital signs appear through the shell where the metamorphosis is taking place. Therefore, it is not surprising to find a correlation between the name attributed to this stage and the νέκυς, corpse. The text then continues, specifying what sort of animal takes life from this larva, that is the silkworm. The additional elucidation of the place where its first usage as a source of threads to weave together appeared, led Immisch to claim that Aristotle too states that the silk weaving would have been originated

¹¹⁸ Chantraine, 1999, 742: “La dérivation de νέκυς s’explique par l’absence de vie apparente dans le cocon ou la chrysalide...Quant au suffixe, il es emprunté arbitrairement à κορύδαλλος, «alouette»”.

¹¹⁹ Aristot., HA, 551b 9-12: ἐκ δέ τινος σκόληκος μεγάλου, ὃς ἔχει οἶον κέρατα καὶ διαφέρει τῶν ἄλλων, γίνεται πρῶτον μὲν μεταβαλόντος τοῦ σκόληκος κάμπη, ἔπειτα βομβύλιος, ἐκ δὲ τούτου νεκύδαλλος.

from Kos and specifying then that the word νεκύδαλλος must have existed long before it.¹²⁰

The difference between βομβύλιος and νεκύδαλλος, two close stages of the same methamorphic process, might have been perceived to be weak, as Immisch¹²¹ states, citing another passage about the same methamorphosis - this time the author mentioned is Clemens Alexandrinus¹²²:

Leaving apart the closed silkworms, which are engendered firstly is a worm, which turns the in a hairy caterpillar. A cocoon, which some call a chrysalis, is created from this, through a third metamorphosis. A great warp of threads is made from it, very similar to the webs obtained from spiders.

Despite the terms which have probably been associated in a second stage, what I want to underline here is the association between the chrysalis, covered with the shell and unable to show any proper sign of life, and the corpse - a connection, evident in the terminology as well, which will play a crucial role in the identification of the butterfly-soul.

More about the ψυχή.

In contrast with what I have said about the φάλαινα, the contexts where the ψυχή makes its appearance are not nefarious or ill-omened: let us forget the image of the insect searching for fires in the night, or a vehicle for fatal illnesses. Or, better still, let us remember those descriptions with the aim of comparing them to an

¹²⁰ Immisch, 1915, 204: "Auch dass Aristoteles eine heurematographische Notiz anschliesst, spricht dafür, dass die Seidenspinnerei auch Kos und damit das Wort νεκύδαλλος lange Zeit schon vor ihm bestanden haben".

¹²¹ Ibidem.

¹²² Clem. Al., Paed., II, 10: Καὶ τοὺς περιέργους βόμβυκας χαίρειν ἐῶντας, ὃς σκόληξ φύεται τὸ πρῶτον, εἶτα ἐξ αὐτοῦ δασεῖα ἀναφαίνεται κάμπη μεθ' ἣν εἰς τρίτην μεταμόρφωσιν νεοχμοῦται βομβύλιον (οἱ δὲ νεκύδαλον αὐτὸ καλοῦσιν), ἐξ οὗ μακρὸς τίκτεται στήμων, καθάπερ ἐκ τῆς ἀράχνης ὁ τῆς ἀράχνης μίτος.

entirely different concept of the same animal, which is what we will see about the ψυχή.

When it comes to describing the butterfly's generation, the sole term which we encounter is ψυχή: no mention of the φύλαινα is made in the descriptions which suggest the idea of birth or re-birth. The first documented occurrence of the term appears in Aristotle's *Historia Animalium*¹²³:

The so called ψυχαὶ are engendered by the κάμψαι, which arise on the green leaves – especially on the cabbage, which someone calls cauliflower. At first, they are smaller than a grain, then they grow up and become tiny larvae and, in three days, tiny caterpillars. Then they grow up and, after changing their shape, they become immobile – they are called chrysalis and, provided with a hard shell, they move only if touched. They are enveloped by pores, similar to webs, without a mouth or any other noticeable part. After a long time, the shells get broken and from them flying creatures, called ψυχαὶ take life. While at first, when they are caterpillars, they feed themselves and lay excrement, when they become chrysalis they do not eat anything and do not evacuate anymore.

A very similar portrait of the butterfly's generation is provided by Theophrastus¹²⁴, clearly inspired by Aristotle's text:

In general, the phenomenon is not too surprising, that is both changing into something close and similar and also seeing these changes happening too. Some of them happen to the animals, others during the generation of animals. As well as among other animals, this happens to the animals called ψυχαὶ: the chrysalis is engendered by the caterpillar, and the ψυχή from the chrysalis. This phenomenon does not involve any plants.

¹²³ Aristot., HA, 551a, 14: γίνονται δ' αἱ μὲν καλούμεναι ψυχαὶ ἐκ τῶν κάμψων, αἱ δὲ γίνονται ἐπὶ τῶν φύλλων τῶν χλωρῶν, καὶ μάλιστα ἐπὶ τῆς ραφάνου, ἣν καὶ καλοῦσι τινες κράμβην, πρῶτον μὲν ἔλαττον κέγγρου, εἶτα μικροὶ σκώληκες καὶ ἀξανάμενοι, ἔπειτα ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις κάμψαι μικραὶ· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἀξηθεῖσαι ἀκίνητίζουσι, καὶ μεταβάλλουσι τὴν μορφήν, καὶ καλοῦνται χρυσαλλίδες, καὶ σκληρὸν ἔχουσι τὸ κέλυφος, ἀπτομένοι δὲ κινοῦνται. Πιπέρονται δὲ πόροις ἀραχνιώδεσιν οἱ οὔτε στόμα ἔχουσιν οὔτε ἄλλο τῶν μορίων οὐθὲν διάδηλον. Χρόνου δὲ πολλοῦ διεθόντος περιρρήγνυται τὸ κέλυφος, καὶ ἐκπέτονται ἐξ αὐτῶν πτερωτὰ ζῷα, ἃς καλοῦμεν ψυχὰς. Τὸ μὲν οὖν πρῶτον, ὅταν ᾖσι κάμψαι, τρέφονται καὶ περίττωμα ἀφιᾶσιν· ὅταν δὲ γένωνται χρυσαλλίδες, οὐδὲν οὔτε γεύονται οὔτε προίενται περίττωμα. Τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὅσα γίνεται ἐκ σκωλήκων, καὶ ὅσοι ἐκ συνδυασμοῦ γίνονται ζῶων σκώληκες, καὶ ὅσοι ἄνευ ὀχείας.

¹²⁴ Theophr., Caus. Pl., V, 7, 3: τὸ δ' ὅλον οὐκ ἄγαν ἴσως τὸ συμβαῖνον θαυμαστόν, τῷ τε εἰς τὸ σύνεγγυς καὶ εἰς τὸ ὅμοιον πῶς μεταβάλλειν, καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ ὄρᾳ καὶ ἐπὶ γὰρ τῶν ζῶων γινιμένας τοιαύτας τινὰς μεταβολὰς, τὰς μὲν κατὰ τὴν γέννησιν (οἷον ἐπ' ἄλλων καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν καλουμένων ψυχῶν· ἐκ κάμψης γὰρ χρυσαλλίς, εἶτα ἐκ ταύτης ἢ ψυχῆ· τοῦτο γὰρ ἐπὶ τῶν φυτῶν οὐδενὸς συμβαίνει.

Both Aristotle and Theophrastus are cited by another author, who mentions them as eminent sources, while speaking about the peculiar generation process in which some insects are involved - he is Cassianus Bassus¹²⁵ and, of course, the butterfly is included in this species of insects:

Aristotle and Theophrastus state that the animals are not engendered just one from another, but are also able to be engendered by themselves, even from the rotten earth. Among the animals and the plants something can be transformed into another. They claim that the caterpillar can turn into another flying animal, which is called ψυχή, the hydra into a viper, and the fig's caterpillars into Spanish flies, when the lakes are dry.

Let us now address to the term ψυχή, whose history is still object of a lively critical debate. Its late appearance in literature constitutes the main issue, together with the relation with its earlier synonym φάλαινα. Wilamowitz¹²⁶ claimed that Psyche began to be depicted as provided with wings just in the Hellenistic age. Aristotle's mention of ψυχή in the *Historia Animalium*, - according to the scholar - might have caused the spread of the winged symbol. As we have seen above, evidence of the winged representations of the soul are attested in the VI century B. C., which would confute Wilamowitz's statement about the late employment of the winged symbol.

¹²⁵ Cass. Bass., XV, 20-21: Θεόφραστος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης φασί, τὰ ζῷα οὐ μόνον ἐξ ἀλλήλων γεννᾶσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτόματα γίνεσθαι, καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς σηπομένης· αὐτῶν δὲ τῶν ζῴων καὶ τῶν φυτῶν μεταβάλλεσθαι τινα εἰς ἕτερα. Καὶ γὰρ τὴν κάμπην φασὶν εἰς ζῷον ἕτερον πτερωτόν, τὴν καλουμένην ψύχην, καὶ τὰς ἀπὸ τῆς σικῆς κάμπας εἰς κανθαρίδας, τὸν τε ὕδρον εἰς ἔχιν, ξηρανομένων τῶν λιμνῶν.

¹²⁶ Wilamowitz, 1959, 370: "Wir finden diesen Namen nur in der Zoologie seit Aristoteles, aber gibt es einen anderen? Die Schmetterlingflügel der Psyche sind freilich mir wenigstens aus der alten Kunst nicht bekannt, so dass ich sie für hellenistisch halte. Sie hat die Seele erst bekommen, als sie dem Schmetterling ihren Namen gegeben hatte".

Another solution was proposed by Nicole¹²⁷, who opted - followed by Fernandez¹²⁸ - for the ancient origin of the name, hypothesizing an origin of the term older than its first testified occurrence, in Aristotle, *HA*, V, 19, 5.

Immisch and Keller sought to find a valuable compromise. According to the latter, the names originally attributed to the butterfly were *φάλαινα* or *φάλλη*, particularly with reference to the nocturnal moth. Moreover, the root, connected with the meaning of “swollen, big”, could fit well with the depictions of the Seelenvogel, often representend with a huge uniform body and four wings¹²⁹. Keller goes on, arguing that his statement is also supported by archaeological evidence, which testify how the image of the moth has been gradually substituted with the symbol of the diurnal, lively butterfly to represent the soul - a process, he specifies, that could be considered complete in the Alexandrine age¹³⁰. The same opinion is shared by Immisch¹³¹, who makes a step further, clarifying also that Rhodes is the geographical area where, probably, the term *φάλαινα* might have been maintained with the specific meaning of moth¹³². By reading his words, it appears evident that the scholar's suppositions have been influenced by the information found in Nicander's *Theriakà*

¹²⁷ Nicole, in DS, 746: “On sait que ψυχή désigne en grec le papillon; bien que ce sens se trouve pour la première fois dans Aristote, H. An. 5, 19, 5, on ne peut douter qu'il ne soit beaucoup plus ancien. Il vient d'une comparaison avec ψυχή, l'âme; la chrysalide reste et laisse échapper un être aérien”.

¹²⁸ Fernandez, 1959, 201.

¹²⁹ Keller, 1980, 437: “Der technische und ohne Zweifel ursprüngliche Ausdruck für den Nacht - oder Abendfalter war übrigens nicht ψυχή, sondern φάλαινα oder φάλλη. Die Wurzel bezeichnet das Dicke, Geschwollene, ital. *Farfalla*, später *fanfulla*. Dies harmoniert auch mit dem uralen Seelenvogel insofern, als er meist mit eiförmigem Körper und vier Flügeln dargestellt wird”

¹³⁰ Immisch, 1915, 196: “Also das Hauptresultat wird bleiben dass mit psyche - puristisch lateinisch anima - zunächst der Abend- und Nachtschmetterling gemeint war, seit der Zeit aber, wo eine tändelnde und idyllische Richtung in Poesie uns bildender Kunst aufkam, in der alexandrinischen Epoche, seither began man beim Psycheschmetterling immer weniger an der traurigen Nachtfalter zu denken, sondern an den frischfröhlichen Tagschmetterling, der honignaschend von einer Blume zur andern huscht...”.

¹³¹ Ibidem.

¹³² Ibidem: “Hier tritt die Etymologie in ihr Recht. Neben dem Ausdruck ή (πετομένη) ψυχή...stand wie wir sahen ή φάλαινα, ursprünglich vielleicht überall, später nur noch im Rodischen auf den Nachtfalter beschränkt. Es ist zunächst ein recht rätselhaftes Wort, da es bekanntlich auch den Walfisch oder sonst ein (Meer)ungeheuer bedeuten kann...”

*Scholia*¹³³, which - as we have seen above¹³⁴ - identified in Rhodes the area where the term *φάλαινα* the meaning of moth had still continued to be employed.

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the next step to take in our research will be to analyse the Roman sources about the insect: although some common misconceptions about the butterfly seem to have survived through the centuries, the point of view of the ancient Romans is still profoundly different from the Greek texts analysed until now.

A flight to Rome: discovering the *papilio*.

Accordingly to what we have seen for the *φάλαινα*, the butterfly did not have a positive reputation in Roman culture either. The texts where the *papilio* makes its appearance - most of which complying with Greek sources - depict the animal as a pernicious creature, often involved in destruction, illness, and even in the context of death.

One of the authors who wrote most about the theme of the butterfly in his work is Pliny the Elder¹³⁵. As regards to the generation of the butterfly, his description is perfectly correspondent to Aristotle's text, which clearly constituted the main point of reference for the Roman writer.

Many insects are engendered differently, first of all, by dew. In the first spring days, it lies on the cabbage leaves and, thickened by the sun, it clumps into a millet grain. From there a little worm takes life, which in three days becomes a caterpillar, growing time after time, staying immobile in its rigid shell. It moves only if touched, grown by a cocoon, called chrysalis. After the shell has been broken, a butterfly flies away.

¹³³ Sch. in Nic., sch. et gl. In Nic. Ther., sch. vet. et rec., 760b, 6-7.

¹³⁴ Supra, 16.

¹³⁵ Plin., HN, XI, 37: Multa autem insecta et aliter nascuntur, atque in primis e rore. Insidit hic raphane folio primo vere, et spissatus sole in magnitudinem milii cogitur; inde porrigitur vermiculus parvus et triduo mox uruca, quae adiectis diebus accrescit, immobilis, duro cortice; ad tactum tantum movetur, araneo accreta, quam chrysalidem appellant. Rupto deinde cortice evolat papilio.

The description follows the metamorphosis of the butterfly already seen in the *Historia Animalium*: from a drop of dew¹³⁶, clumping thanks to the action of the sun, a *vermiculus* takes life, the first stage of the metamorphic process. It then evolves, becoming a caterpillar, which covers itself with a rigid shell, completely immobile. No mention is made here about the interruption of the vital signs, which can be assumed by the fact that the chrysalis appears absolutely unable to move spontaneously. Worth noting is that, despite the terminology referred to the butterfly there mainly consisted of a couple of terms in Latin as well, the word *papilio* seems to gather both the semantic values expressed by *φάλαινα* and *ψυχή*. Therefore, it is not surprising to find it mentioned in birth descriptions as well as in the treatments of the plagues infesting the beehives. This attitude was particularly grave from the Romans' point of view, since the bees constituted a solid basis for their economy: with their impeccable organisation, they represented both an invaluable source of earnings and a model to emulate¹³⁷. In the light of this statement, it is predictable to find harsh words against the butterfly, as those employed by Pliny¹³⁸:

Inactive and devoid of honour, the butterfly - which flutters around the enlightened torches - is pestiferous in manifold ways. As a matter of fact, it devours the wax and lays the excrements from which the warms take life. Moreover, everywhere it goes, it weaves threads, similar to webs, especially from the hair on its wings. The warms, also engendered by the wood, avidly seek the wax. What makes them destructive is their hunger, when - especially in springtime - a copious quantity of flowers is gathered in the beehives.

¹³⁶ About the fertilizing property of the dew in the ancient world, see Boedecker, 1984.

¹³⁷ About the importance of bees in Rome see Roscalla, 1998; Bettini, 2005. See also Plin., HN, XI, 4; Sen., Ep., 121, 22; Cicero, De Officiis, 157 and Varro, Rust., III, 6.

¹³⁸ Plin., HN, XI, 65: *Papilio etiam ignavus atque inhonoratus, luminibus accensis advolitans, pestifer, nec uno modo: nam et ipse ceras depascitur et reliquit excrementa, e quibus teredines gignuntur; fila etiam araneosa, quacumque incessit, alarum maxime e lanugine obtexit. Nascuntur e ligno teredines, quae ceras praecipue adpetunt. Infestat et aviditas pastus, nimia florum satietate verno maxime tempore alvo cita.*

The same nefarious *modus operandi* is described by Columella¹³⁹, who lingers on the urge to kill the infesting animals:

Moreover, moths must be defeated, animals which, staying inside the beehives, are fatal for the bees. They do not just devour the wax, but also engender from their dung the worms called beehives' moths.

As a remedy both against the inactivity¹⁴⁰ and the inactive butterflies, Columella¹⁴¹ suggests narrowing the holes in the beehives, in order to fend off the cold and prevent the infesting animals from entering inside:

Cold causes inactivity. For this reason, the holes through which the bees can enter and exit, must be very narrow, so that the cold can reach them at least as possible....moreover, in this way, poisonous tarantulas, night roaches, and the nefarious species of beetles and butterflies - as Maro says - will not destroy the beehives thanks to bigger entries. Those little worms called caterpillars must be killed, like the butterflies. These noxious animals, which infest the honeycombs, will die if you mix together ox marrow and liver¹⁴² and, after burning them, direct the smoke towards the animals.

The strong contraposition *papilio* versus *apis* was also fostered by a belief¹⁴³, deeply rooted in Roman culture, according to which the bee was considered to be a symbol for the soul as well. The ancient sources¹⁴⁴ leave no doubt about the true nature of this symbolic representation: far from being connected to the image of

¹³⁹ Columella, Rus., IX, 14: Praeterea ut tineae everrantur, papilionesque enecentur, qui plerumque intra alvos morantes apibus exitio sunt. Nam et ceras erodunt, et stercore suo vermes progenerant, quos alvorum tineas appellamus.

¹⁴⁰ The inactivity (*ignavia*), considered to be one of the biggest problems of the bees, was believed to be caused by cold. See Columella, Rus., IX, 7.

¹⁴¹ Columella, Rus., IX, 7: Nam frigus ignaviam creat; propter quod etiam foramina, quibus exitus aut introitus datur, angustissima esse debent, ut quam minimum frigoris admittant...Sic nec venenatus stellio, nec obscaenum scarabaei vel papilionis genus, lucifugaeque blattae, ut ait Maro, per laxiora spatia ianuae favos populabuntur. Vermiculi quoque, qui tineae vocantur, item papiliones enecandi sunt: quae pestes plerumque favis adhaerentes decidunt, si fimo medullam bubulam misceas, et his incensis nidorem admoveas.

¹⁴² Both ox marrow and liver are considered to be bees' cognati and so bitter enemies of the butterflies – like the medulla and the fimus, the bees were believed to take their life from oxen's belly as well, through the phenomenon called *bugonia*.

¹⁴³ About this belief see Maaskant Kleibrink, 1990, Roscalla, 1998, Bettini, 1999.

¹⁴⁴ See Virg., G., IV, 295-307; 317-52; 528-558; Ov., Fas., I, 377; Met., XV, 364; Cass. Bass., XV, 2.

death - which, as we saw and will see in detail, was a prerogative of the butterfly - the bee symbolised the pure soul, waiting for incarnation, an image of life about to begin its path. Moreover, the ritual of *bugonia* - where a swarm of bees was believed to take life from the rotten corpse of an ox - was additional proof of the triumph of life over death, whose main symbol was indeed the insect. Similarly, the wasp - which was believed to have taken life from the carcass of a horse - assumed the same symbolic value in Rome. Amusing evidence of this statement is provided by Phaedrus, who pledged one of his *Fabulae*¹⁴⁵, called *Papilio et vespa*, to the couple of insects.

A butterfly, fluttering about, saw a wasp: "Oh iniquitous destiny, until the bodies from whose remains we butterflies received the souls were still alive, I was an eloquent orator in peacetime, valorous in wartime and the most notable among my contemporaries in all sorts of ways. And now this is what I am: rotten lightness and fluttering ash. While you, that were nothing but a mule, now are able to wound whomever you want with the pricks of your sting". But the wasp answered in a prickly way (conform to its nature): "Look at what we are and not at what we were".

Apart from the mentioned harmful attitude towards the bees, the *papilio* was also characterised by an ill-omened fame, which is deductible by the texts. Here again, crucial evidence is provided by Pliny¹⁴⁶, who considered the animal a true vehicle for pestilence, if not a pestilence itself.

The moth which flutters about the flame of a torch is generally numbered among the noxious substances. It is neutralised by the goat's liver, like goat's gall neutralises venomous preparations from the field weasel.

¹⁴⁵ Pha., App. Per., XXIX: *Papilio vespam prope volantem viderat: "O sortem iniquam! Dum vivebant corpora, quorum ex reliquiis animam nos accepimus, ego eloquens in pace, fortis proeliis, arte omni princeps inter aequalis fui. En cuncta! Levitas putris et volito cinis. Tu, qui fuisti mulus clitellarius, quemcumque visum est laedis infixio aculeo."* At vespa dignam moribus vocem edidit: "Non qui fuerimus, sed qui nunc simus, vide."

¹⁴⁶ Plin., HN, XXVIII, 162: *Papilio quoque lucernarum luminibus advolans inter mala medicamenta numeratur; huic contrarium est iocur caprinum, sicut fel veneficiis ex mustella rustica factis.*

Even more explicitly he also wrote¹⁴⁷:

The papilio, great pestilence, in springtime, when the mallow flourishes, is attracted to the light of the enlightened torches, in front of the honeycombs, in the night, during the new moon phase, when the sky is clear. They leap towards that flame.

In addition to the idea of disease, which we have already seen when we wrote about ψῶρα, ἠπίολος and κλῆρος, another τόπος connects Pliny's texts to the Greek sources analysed above, namely the flight around the torches, which characterises most of the depictions of the insect. Columella¹⁴⁸ testifies that this property was employed as a method to attract the butterflies in order to kill them:

If you put a bronze vase, similar to a pot, among the honeycombs, with a light on its bottom, butterflies run there from everywhere and, fluttering about the flame, they get burned, unable to fly high away from that bottleneck, or to stay away from the fire either.

The property to originate diseases does not limit its function only towards bees. The hazard of the butterfly was generally recognised and the insect was known to be *feralis*, as Ovid¹⁴⁹ states:

And the country caterpillars which use to cover the leaves with white threads - the phenomenon has been observed by the farmers - changed into nefarious butterflies.

In Ovid's words Keller¹⁵⁰ has seen a clear reference to the idea of a nocturnal and deadly creature, which he compared to a ghost, led by the *cana fila*. Despite the

¹⁴⁷ Ivi, XXI, 81: Papilio, pestis maior, lucernis tollitur vere, cum maturescat malva, noctu interlunio caelo sereno accensis ante alvos. In ea flamma sese ingerunt.

¹⁴⁸ Columella, Rus., IX, 14: si vas aeneum simile miliario vespere ponatur inter alvos, et in fundum eius lumen aliquod demittatur, undique papiliones concurrant, dumque circa flammulam volitent adurantur, quoniam nec facile ex angusto sussum evolent, nec rursus longius ab igne possunt recedere.

¹⁴⁹ Ov., Met., XV, 372: quaeque solent canis frondes intexere filis/ agrestes tinae(res observata colonis)/ ferali mutant cum papillione figuram.

attractive image depicted by Keller, the *cana fila* would more plausibly suggest a reference to the silkworm, which we have seen¹⁵¹ to be often linked to the butterfly's metamorphosis - this would not refute, anyway, the *feralis* appearance of the animal, fostered by the gloomy colour of its appearance. As a matter of fact, the silkworm was easily considered a kind of butterfly, being itself the product of a metamorphic process. As we saw above¹⁵², the νεκύδαλλος was one of the stages of this process, in particular the one where the animal seems to interrupt any vital functions to assume - as the name suggests - the appearance of a corpse, a νέκυς. The same phenomenon described by Aristotle is reiterated in Latin literature by Pliny¹⁵³.

This worm, changing itself, engenders the so called bombylis, from which a necydallos takes life. After six months it turns into a silkworm. These insects weave a web - very similar to those woven by spiders - with which elegant feminine clothes are tailored. This weave is called bombycina. The craft of unravelling the cocoons and then weaving them again was discovered by a woman from Kos, Pamphile, Platea's daughter¹⁵⁴...The silkworms are said to be engendered in the isle of Kos, specifically by the cypress, ash and oak-wood flowers. These flowers fall on the ground because of the rain and are fertilised by the earth's vital exhalations. At first little naked butterflies are engendered, which then cover themselves with hair protecting them from the cold. Afterwards, they make their own tunics, to contrast winter's harshness, scraping off the fluff from the leaves with their feet.

The description continues with an excursus about silk production. It is remarkable how Pliny borrows the Greek terms *bombylis* and *necydallus* to refer to stages of the metamorphosis which indeed could not be alternatively expressed. The

¹⁵⁰ Keller, 1980, 439: "Ovid spricht von einem Leichenschmetterling, *feralis papilio* um dem grauen Gespint (*cana fila*), aus dessen Verwandlung er hervorgeht (met. V 372-374). Es ist klar, dass er damit einen Abend- oder Nachtfalter bezeichnen will".

¹⁵¹ Supra, 38.

¹⁵² Supra, 37.

¹⁵³ Plin., HN, XI, 26-27: Dein quod vocatur bombylis, ex ea necydallus, ex hoc in sex mensibus bombyx . Telas araneorum modo texunt ad vestem luxumque feminarum, quae bombycina appellatur. Prima eas redordiri rursusque texere invenit in Coo mulier Pamphile, Plateae filia...Bombycas et in Coo insula nasci tradunt, cupressi, terebinthi, fraxini, quercus florem imbribus decussum terrae halitu animante. Fieri autem primo papiliones parvos nudosque, mox frigorum inpatientia villis inhorrescere et adversus hiemem tunicas sibi instaurare densas, pedum asperitate radentis foliorum lanuginem.

¹⁵⁴ About the myth see also Prop., II, 3; Mart., VIII, 33 and Apul., Met., VIII, 27.

idea of a dead body, covered with a shell and unable to move, is once again maintained by reference to the chrysalis even in the etymology of the name - *necydallus* is a clear calque from the Greek νεκύδαλλος, and so derived from the word νέκυς, corpse, as we said above¹⁵⁵. Moreover, the same process leading from σκηνή, tent, to the idea of body, conceived as a shell of the soul, still continues to exist in the Latin language. Therefore, in addition to ‘butterfly’, we also find the meaning of ‘tent’ expressed by the same word *papilio*¹⁵⁶, which is exactly what we saw about σκηνή¹⁵⁷. Evidence for this statement come from military sources, such as the work *De Munitiōibus Castrorum*, attributed to Pseudo-Hyginus and probably written in the third century AD. The following is an excerpt from the twenty-eighth book¹⁵⁸:

The infantry one thousand soldier cohort is provided with ten centuriae. They camp in one hundred tents, among which the centurions have their own single tents. Therefore, the infantry five hundreds soldier cohort has got six centuriae and as for the rest, see above.

Let us return to the symbol of the insect: the image of the papilio is not strictly limited to diseases and nocturnal contexts - its lightness and the agility of its flight are equally underlined in the sources. This is, for instance, evident in Martial’s *Epigrams*¹⁵⁹:

¹⁵⁵ Supra, 37.

¹⁵⁶ See also C.Gl.L., 5, 555: papilio nomen vermis volantis, dictus a similitudine papilionis i. e. tentorii.

¹⁵⁷ Supra, 36-37.

¹⁵⁸ Ps. Hyg., Mun. Castr., XXVIII, 2: Cohors peditata miliaria habet centurias X, tendit papilionibus C, ex eis centuriones singulis. Item peditata quingenaria habet centurias VI, reliqua ut supra. Other occurrences of the word papilio - employed with the meaning of tent - in the work can be found at I, 1; I, 2; I, 5; I, 7; I, 14; I, 16; XXVII, 5; XXVII, 6.

¹⁵⁹ Mart., VIII, 33: Illa potest culicem longe sentire volantem/et minimi pinna papilionis agi;/exiguæ volitat suspensa vapore lucernae/ et leviter fuso rumpit icta mero.

It (with reference to a crown) can even feel the flight of a far mosquito, and barely bear the wing of a butterfly. It flutters pushed by the vapour of a feeble torch and even a light drop of wine can break it.

We can even find it in a delicate portrait, employed as a symbol of an innocuous and harmless animal, which Martial¹⁶⁰ opposes to the strength of the ferocious lions:

You fear my verses and are afraid that I could write against you, Ligurra, a flashing, rapid poesy, with a hint of desire that your grounded fear is believed. But your fear is vain and so is your desire. The Libyan lions attack the bulls and do not bother butterflies.

As Keller¹⁶¹ suggests, the act of fluttering about - typical of the insect - might have been one of the causes of its symbolical reference to the soul. Archaeological evidence support this theory - in a Latin inscription¹⁶² from Obulco (Porcuna, Jaén), we find written:

I recommend to my heirs to bring pure wine together with ash, so that my inebriated butterfly-soul can flutter around.

The abovementioned text is clear evidence in favour of the employment of the animal as a symbol of the soul - it is an ironic exhortation of the deceased to bring wine, in order to let his butterfly-soul fly around, inebriated by the beverage. As Fernandez states in his article¹⁶³ about the inscription, the image of the flying

¹⁶⁰ Mart., XII, 61: Versus et breve vividumque carmen/ in te ne facias times, Ligurra,/ et dignus cupis hoc metu videri./ Sed frustra metuis cupisque frustra./ In tauros Libyci ruunt leones,/ non sunt papilionibus molesti.

¹⁶¹ Keller, 1980, 437: "Man dachte sich die Seelen der Verstorbenen als kleine geflügelte schattenhafte Abbilder der betreffenden Menschen, εἶδωλα, an den Grabstätten herumschweben, schwirren und pfeifen und den Honig lecken; der als Totenopfer u. a. gespendet wurde".

¹⁶² C.I.L., II. 2146; VI. 26011: heredibus mando etiam cinere ut m[era vina ferant], volitet meus ebrius papilio.

¹⁶³ Fernandez, 2006, 118-119: "Desde el punto di vista poéticoes interesante el contenido de la linea 3, la métafora de la mariposa que revolotea, como una trasposicióñ del alma que sale del cuerpo en

butterfly itself is a representation of the soul which abandons the body at the moment of death, which finds alternative representations in other flying beings, especially birds. In this case the symbolic value is represented rather through a delicate and amusing image, more than evoked by the term. But the Latin language, as we said above, used another word to refer to the butterfly - a noun capable of evoking, even more explicitly, the symbol hidden beside the animal: it is in fact *animula*, butterfly, or, alternatively, little soul.

Animula, vappo and avicula.

Less common than the analysed *papilio*, *animula* makes its appearance more rarely, though it plays a crucial role in the analysis of the symbol. Beavis's¹⁶⁴ statement about the actual employment of the term is incorrect: far from being "attested only in glossaries", the noun is on the contrary cited in manifold literary contexts, even since archaic times. The gloss¹⁶⁵ which Beavis refers to, defines the *animula* as a delicate animal, synonym of *papilio* – as we expected it to be. More unexpectedly, the insect is compared to the bee, to which it is considered to be similar:

The *papilio* is an animal similar to the tender bees, which is also called *animula*.

The earliest occurrence of the term is found in Plautus¹⁶⁶, who used the noun as a vocative, to refer to someone (especially women or lovers) with delicate words:

el momento de la muerte, y que encuentra un trasunto en otros seres alados, especialmente aves. La asociación del vuelo con el concepto de anima (ψυχή) aparece ya en algunos poetas griegos y latinos".

¹⁶⁴ Beavis, 1988, 127.

¹⁶⁵ C.Gl.L., V. 384.44: *Papilio animal quomodo quasi apes tenues quas dicunt animula*.

¹⁶⁶ Plaut., *Men.*, 363-364: *animule mi, mihi mira videntur/ te hic stare foris, fores quoi pateant*.

My animula, it seems amazing to me that you are at the door, so that the doors are opened for you.

A similar employment of the noun occurs in Plautus' *Casina*¹⁶⁷:

Lock you up firmly beside the window, where you can hear me kissing her, or when she will tell me: 'my animula, my Olympius, my honey, my joy...'

Whether the expression referred to a delicate butterfly or was rather a kind epithet, which might have sounded like "my little soul", is not clear. We would opt rather for the second option, though the lightness and the delicacy of the image would not exclude a plausible reference to the insect.

A context where there appears to be no ambiguity about the reference to the butterfly is one of Cicero's *Epistulae ad Atticum*¹⁶⁸:

I received your long letters, which skipped to me like little butterflies.

The choice to express the movement of the letters through the verb *restillo*, generally employed to refer to the delicate flowing of fluids, confirms the lightness of the metaphor whose protagonist are the butterflies indeed.

The sources analysed until now showed the occurrences of the term, employed in some texts with the meaning of butterfly, in others with a possible reference to the soul. Two sources are still left to analyse, perhaps the most important, where the two meanings clearly coexist, creating a meaningful as yet delicate image - crucial evidence in favour of the symbolic representation we are investigating here.

¹⁶⁷ Plaut., *Cas.*, VI, 134-136: Concludere in fenestram firmiter,/ unde auscultare possis quom ego illam ausculer:/ quom mi illa dicet 'mi animule, mi Olympio,/ mea vita, mea melilla, mea festivitas.

¹⁶⁸ Cic., *Att.*, IX, 7: Attulit uberrimas tuas litteras, quae mihi quiddam quasi animulae restillarunt.

Hadrian the Emperor distinguished himself for his immense humanistic culture, which - during the twenty years of his empire - led him to be defined “l’Olimpio innamorato della Grecia, il viaggiatore, il turista senza riposo”¹⁶⁹. His strong passion for classical literature found its own expression in a personal literary production, written in the shape of the *Carmina*. Among these, one¹⁷⁰ in particular has treasured for centuries a meaningful and peculiar conception of the soul¹⁷¹. It is a true farewell, written with extreme grace, where the poet Emperor addresses his own soul, calling it *animula*.

Light and delicate animula, guest and comrade of my body, where are you going now? In pale, frigid places, without making your usual jokes.

The last concern at the moment of death is dedicated to the soul and its continuum of life in the underworld and aimed to imagine its flight while abandoning its terrestrial shell - the body. I will not examine the role of the soul now, which I aim to investigate in detail in the next chapter. Worth noting though, is that the image of a light entity - *hospes* and *comes* out of the body - which abandons the deceased at the moment of death in order to start a new ‘life’ is here expressed with the term *animula*, not with the more common *anima*. A reference to the insect and its symbolical connection with the soul appears to be intentional and profoundly sought.

The other source left to investigate is provided by Septimius Serenus¹⁷²:

¹⁶⁹ Mazzarino, 1973, 218.

¹⁷⁰ Script. Hist. Aug., ed. Hohl, I, 27: Animula vagula blandula,/ hospes comesque corporis,/ quo nunc abibis? In loca/ pallidula rigida nudula,/ nec ut soles dabis iocos.

¹⁷¹ See Bettini, 2009.

¹⁷² Sept. Ser., I, 14-17: culicellus amasio Tulle/ rure puella vagat virido/ animula miserula properiter obiit/ perit abit avipedis animula leporis.

The maiden Ture wanders like a little mosquito in the wood for his lover - the miserable animula is dead soon, disappeared. The animula is gone away with its airy grace.

The portrait depicted by Septimius seems to leave no doubt: the comparison with the mosquito - which was another symbol for the dead soul itself ¹⁷³ - suggesting the idea of the insect, which infact finds confirmation in the word *animula*. Although there is a clear will to refer to the soul in the first instance, the bucolic context, together with the airy grace, recalls the image of the butterfly, intentionally evoked.

Another confirmation of the symbolical employment of the animal comes from Probus' Grammar¹⁷⁴, where it is possible to find the sole occurrence of the term *vappo*.

Vappo: flying animal, generally called anima.

We do not have much information about the animal, apart from the fact that flying was one of its characteristics and that Romans used to call it *anima*, 'soul'. Whether it was an insect, possibly a butterfly, or a bird is not clear, but the distinction between the two genres of animals was not as much defined in the Classical world as it may appear now.

We know, for instance, that both the Romans and the Greeks used to consider the butterfly as a kind of small bird, unable to grow. Evidence for this statement is provided by Isidorus¹⁷⁵, who says:

Butterflies are little birds, at their most when the mallow flourishes, and engender little worms from their liver.

¹⁷³ About the mosquito, or culex, as a symbol for the dead soul see Rostagni, 1961.

¹⁷⁴ Prob., Gramm. Lat., IV, 10, 30-31: vappo: animal volans, quod vulgo animas vocant.

¹⁷⁵ Isid., Etym., XII, 8: Papiliones aviculae sunt quae maxime abundant florentibus malvis, quique vermiculos [ex] stercore suo faciunt nasci.

The image depicted here is one of the most commonly referred to, the *papilio*, caught in the act of engendering the *vermiculos*, which we have seen to be repugnant towards the bees. Undoubtedly the *aviculae* described by Isidorus are butterflies and even additional evidence is provided by a gloss¹⁷⁶, which states that:

The butterfly is a bird which never grows up.

As we know, this tendency to confuse the insect with birds formerly existed in the Greek language, as is confirmed by the *Scholia ad Nicandrum*¹⁷⁷, where the butterflies are also called ὄρνεα. What might appear at a first glance a mere error of classification, could reveal a more profound reason: as we will see, the bird was often employed to represent the soul, the dead soul in particular, because of its light and flying appearance which caused the ancients to compare it to a butterfly. It is time now to unveil the symbolic value we have referred to above, with the aim of investigating more deeply the strong connection existing between both it and the other mentioned animals. This is what we propose to analyse in the following chapter.

¹⁷⁶ C.Gl.L., V. 231.3: avis qui numquam crescit

¹⁷⁷ Sch. in Nic., sch. et gl. In Nic. Ther., sch. vet. et rec., 760.

CHAPTER TWO – THE SOUL BEHIND THE BUTTERFLY.

As mentioned above in the previous chapter, one of the main purposes of my research is to investigate specifically the semantic value of the symbol I am analysing here, with the aim to interpret the ancient texts where it appeared in order to understand exactly what kind of soul lay behind the image of the butterfly.

The investigation of the ancient sources about the insect conducted up until now has shown a peculiar attitude that both the Greeks and the Romans had towards the butterfly - nefarious and ill-omened, the insect makes its appearance mostly in nocturnal contexts, often associated with the idea of disease if not death.

In this chapter my purpose will be to investigate what kind of soul specifically lies behind this particular symbol. As I will show below, my research will not be univocal - with the aim of detecting the possible connections between the insect and the concept represented through it, I will provide a diachronic overview of the occurrences of ψυχή, seeking to underline the main aspects and connecting them to the symbol.

As I have revealed above, the main feature which led to a symbolic connection between the butterfly and the soul was the flight from a dead body - the cocoon - and the ability to start a new life, typical of the insect. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same characteristics will be found in the description of the dead soul, with particular attention to the so called free soul - an entity able to leave the body provided with a proper agency.

Der Seelenvogel - a “flying soul” with a proper agency.

A peculiar concept not easy to define, with its manifold manifestations, the Seelenvogel has appeared in Greek and Roman literature since the earliest stages. As the name suggests, it consists of a theriomorphic representation of the human soul, often associated with a bird, but not infrequently depicted with the shape of other flying animals. Most of the information known comes from Weicker¹⁷⁸'s work and detailed analysis about this manifestation of the soul, whose matrix appears to be oriental. I will not linger over the Egyptian occurrences of the Seelenvogel, about which I recall Weicker. My purpose in this first section will be to investigate the characteristics of this peculiar kind of soul, as it was conceived in classical sources. Consecutively, a comparison with the butterfly soul will be a natural step to take, with the aim to detect mutual elements, useful in creating a profile of the symbol, which is the object of my analysis.

One of the main attributes of the Seelenvogel is clearly the ability to fly - inherent to its own nature, the flight represents the process of liberation from the bounds of the body, to which the soul is chained until the moment of death. A famed example is the story of Aristeas from Proconessus, mentioned by Pliny¹⁷⁹:

It is also stated that in Proconessus the soul of Aristeas was seen flying out from his mouth, under the form of a raven.

It is not rare to find the soul in its immediate representation of a bird in flight, manifesting itself at the moment of death. This is what we read, for instance, in Artemidor¹⁸⁰:

¹⁷⁸ Weicker, 1902.

¹⁷⁹ Plin., HN, VII, 174: *Aristeae etiam visam evolantem ex ore in Proconneso corvi effigie.*

¹⁸⁰ Artem., 160, 14, 20: ὅπως δ' ἂν πέτηται νοσῶν ἄνθρωπος, τεθνήξεται· φασὶ γὰρ τὰς ψυχὰς ἀπαλλαγείσας τῶν σωμάτων εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνιέναι τάχει χρωμέναις ὑπερβάλλοντι καὶ ὡς εἰπεῖν πτηνῶν ὁμοίας.

An ill man will die, as if he will be flying - as a matter of fact, they say that the souls, after separating themselves from the body, rise up to the sky at an exceptional speed, similar - as they say - to birds.

The same concept is reaffirmed by Plutarch¹⁸¹, who states:

Chronus himself hugs rocks similar to gold in a deep cave, while sleeping, and birds, flying from the top of the rock bring him ambrosia.

The description of the birds in the last passage clearly evokes the specular myth of the young Zeus fed by the sacred bees¹⁸². Here the insects, feeding the young god with honey, are the sole beings allowed to enter the sacred cave where the deity stays and renews his life cycle annually, being – as we saw above – a symbol of the regeneration of life after death. Worth noting is that, as we know, the symbol of the butterfly was not far from the image of the bee – better still, it was so close as to be its nearest opposition. The principle of the continuation of life, whether it is expressed by a pure soul waiting for incarnation or in a soul of the dead, severing its ties with the corpse is the same origin of both the symbolical representations and findings in the Seelenvogel, another term of comparison, showing that at the base of these differing concepts lies the same idea of flying living soul.

It is possible, however, that this kind of soul which abandons the body, even applies to different contexts, when the conditions for the departure are favourable or the person is asleep or not properly conscious. Evidence for this statement is provided by Homer's *Odyssey*¹⁸³:

¹⁸¹Plu., *De fac.*, XXVI, F: αὐτὸν μὲν γὰρ τὸν Κρόνον ἐν ἄνθρω βραθεὶ περιέχεσθαι πέτρας χρυσοειδοῦς καθεύδοντα... ὄρνιθας δὲ τῆς πέτρας κατὰ κορυφὴν εἰσπετομένους ἀμβροσίαν ἐπιφέρειν αὐτῷ.

¹⁸²About the myth see Virg., *G.*, 149-152; *DS*, V, 70; *Ant. Lib.*, XIX, 1, 5-7.

¹⁸³Hom., *Od.*, XIX, 535-550: ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τὸν ὄνειρον ὑπόκριται καὶ ἄκουσον. Χῆνες μοι κατὰ οἶκον ἐείκοσι πυρὸν ἔδουσιν ἐξ ὕδατος, καὶ τέ σῶν ἰαίνομαι εἰσορόωσα· ἐλθὼν δ' ἐξ ὄρεος μέγας αἰετὸς ἀγκυλοχείλης πᾶσι κατ' αὐχέν' ἔαξε καὶ ἔκτανεν· οἱ δ' ἐκέχυντο ἄθροοι ἐν μεγάροις, ὃ δ' ἐξ αἰθέρα διὰν ἀέρθη. Αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ κλαῖον καὶ ἐκώκων ἐν περ ὄνειρῳ, ἀμφὶ δ' ἐμ' ἠγγερέθοντο εὐπλοκαμίδες Ἀκαιοί, οἴκτρ' ὀλοφυρομένην ὃ μοι αἰετὸς ἔκτανε χῆνας. Ἀψ δ' ἐλθὼν κατ' ἄρ' ἔζετ' ἐπὶ προύχοντι μελάθρῳ, φωνῆ δὲ βροτέῃ κατερήτυε φώνησέν τε· 'θάρσει, Ἴκαρίου κούρη τηλεκλειτοῖο. Οὐκ ὄναρ, ἀλλ' ὕπαρ

Now listen to me and help me explain this dream. There are twenty geese eating grains in my house, emerging from the water, and I enjoy seeing them. A huge eagle, swooping in on them, with its hooked beak, breaks their necks and kills them all. They are laid down, gathered into a heap, in the house. Then the eagle rises to the bright sky. I am crying, weeping, with the Achives beautiful curls coming closer since I am complaining that the eagle killed my geese. Suddenly, coming back, it roosts on the rim of the roof and entertains me with human words and says: “Come on, daughter of the glorious Icarius, this is not a dream, but a real vision, which will be truth. The geese are your suitors and I was the first eagle to you, but now I am back and I am your lawful husband and I will give an ignoble death to all the suitors”.

Here the eagle, as Weicker¹⁸⁴ states, would be the representation of Odysseus’ soul, which appears to his wife in dreams. Indeed, the Seelenvogel seems to have something in common with the dreams, both being represented as theriomorphic manifestations always foreseeing true events, as Weicker claims “Solche Vögel wissen erklärlicherweise mehr als die Menschen, verkünden ihnen wie alle Tiere im Traume untrüglich die Wahrheit und enthüllen ihnen die Zukunft oder wichtige Geheimnisse...”. The connection with the oniric world is not new. It was, as we have seen above, a typical characteristic attributed to the butterfly as well, which – as far as the legends tell – would have had the propriety to cause nightmares and manipulate the oniric visions of men.

A similar departure of the soul is testified by Pliny¹⁸⁵, with reference to the episode of Herotimus of Clazomene, whose soul abandoned his body in order to wander around the world:

Among the examples we find that the soul of Herotimus of Clazomene, after abandoning the body, was used to wander and so report from far away things

ἔσθλὸν, ὃ τοι τετελεσμένον ἔσται. Χῆνες μὲν μνηστῆρες, ἐγὼ δὲ τοι αἰετὸς ὄρνις ἦα πάρος, νῦν αὖτε τεὸς πόσις εἰλήλουθα, ὃς πᾶσι μνηστῆρσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσω’.

¹⁸⁴ Weicker, 1902, 25.

¹⁸⁵ Plinius, HN, VII, 173-174: Reperimus inter exempla Hermotimi Clazomenii animam relicto corpore errare solitam vagamque e longinquo multa adnuntiare, quae nisi a prasente nosci non possent, corpore interim semianimi, donec cremato eo inimici, qui Cantharidae vocabantur, remeanti animae veluti vaginam ademerint.

which could not be known by anyone but people who were there, while the body in the meantime was fighting between life and death, until his enemies, called Cantharides, after cremating it, removed in some way the case of his returning soul.

The role of the body is here clearly expressed: it is nothing but a case, a shell to the soul, which enables it to return to its natural abode, allowing the person live again. This is not a different view from what we saw to be at the origin of the employment of the symbol of the butterfly: in both cases the soul is seen as a flying entity provided with free agency, able to escape from the bounds of the body (whether it is alive or a corpse indeed).

Mutatis mutandis, Frazer¹⁸⁶ discovered that the same belief was spread among other races, settled far away from Greek and Roman geographical areas of activity. According to the anthropologist, “ the soul is often conceived as a bird ready to take flight...in Sintag, a district of Borneo, when a person, either a man, woman, or child, has fallen off a horse or out of a tree, and is brought home, his wife or other kinswoman goes as quickly as possible to the spot where the accident happened, and throws coloured yellow rice around, while uttering the words, ‘Cluck! Cluck! Soul! So-and-so is in his house again. Cluck! Cluck! Soul!’ . Then she gathers up the rice in a basket, carries it to the injured individual, and drops the grains from her hand onto his head, repeating, ‘Cluck! Cluck! Soul!’ . The intention here is clearly to lure back the lingering bird-soul and replace it in the head of its owner”. Frazer also recalls other similar examples, where the reference to the bird soul belief is evident – the choice to report this one in particular lies in the peculiar connection between the soul and the head, which is underlined here. As we will see below, in reference to the butterfly soul, it was a wide held belief to think that the quintessence of life resided in the head. And the head indeed was that part of the Seelenvogel often emphasized

¹⁸⁶ Frazer, 1980, 27.

in a variety of its representations. In addition to ravens, eagles and other kinds of birds, one of the most evocative iconographies of the Seelenvogel was the Siren, a mythological creature with the body of a bird and a human head, which was deeply analysed by Weicker.

Let us focus now our attention on a particular literary context, the Homeric epic, when - we will see that the occurrences of the so called free soul are particularly relevant and noteworthy.

The Homeric soul – different theories and hypothesis.

When it comes to defining the concept of the soul in Homer, it is necessary in the first instance to make a preamble. We cannot speak of a unique entity – which depend on the circumstances where men act, and on the different parts of the individuals involved in their actions, multiple manifestations of the soul tend to emerge, whose classification is still a debated question. What I aim to do here is to give a general overview of the Homeric souls, trying to find hidden traces of the soul I have planned to investigate. The analysis will focus on the sources, examining them from a specific point of view - the moment of the death, which I have shown to constitute the *conditio sine qua non* for our butterfly soul to manifest itself.

Among the numerous attempts to classify the Homeric souls, a common denominator can be detected and identified - as Claus¹⁸⁷ stated, they are all “culturally idiosyncratic expressions that cannot be understood apart from their historical setting”. In other words, we cannot exclude the contexts where they appear in the analysis that we propose to make, even when, as we will see, a comparison with other cultures will naturally offer other causes for reflection. Bremmer¹⁸⁸ -

¹⁸⁷ Claus, 1981, 13.

¹⁸⁸ Bremmer, 1983.

elaborating Arbman's¹⁸⁹ and Hultkrantz's¹⁹⁰ previous studies - sought to trace a preliminary classification of the Homeric souls, dividing them into body souls and free soul¹⁹¹. The life soul and the ego soul belong to the first group, the former being identified with breath, and the latter being the object of controversial studies. According to Bremmer, while Arbman and his contemporaries have neglected to analyse these soul's manifestations, Hultkrantz explanations were not thorough, lacking a reference to the psychological depth of Archaic Greece souls. I will not spend time on theories formulated about the ego soul - what I want to focus on here is their role and general function in Homeric epic, with the aim to compare them to the other category of soul, denominated by Bremmer free soul, which, as we will see further in detail, seems to correspond the most to the butterfly soul taking shape in my analysis. What I want to show for now is that, unlike the free soul, the body soul is active during consciousness and represents the inner self of the individual. Its bond with the body cannot be severed, as it is divided into several parts corresponding to body parts and organs acting in different situations. Hultkrantz's description of the body soul fits well - in part - with the idea of the Homeric souls, ψυχή excluded. According to the scholar this soul would be "the centre of thinking, willing and feeling - the 'mind' in a wide sense. However, at the same time, as in this way the ego-soul shows its close kinship with our concept of the ego, it manifests certain peculiar features which make it clear that it is not an expression for the individual's own personality, but a being within the individual which endows him with thought and will etc."¹⁹². Although there are obvious similarities with the Archaic Greek concept of the soul, we should be reminded that Hultkrantz's studies refer to North

¹⁸⁹ Arbman, 1926.

¹⁹⁰ Hultkrantz, 1953.

¹⁹¹ This classification was made by Arbman.

¹⁹² Hultkrantz, 1953, 208.

American Indian tribes and therefore lack the exact psychological references encountered in the Homeric epic, which is the flaw to which Bremmer laid the most blame. According to the latter, Hultkrantz's "definition does not suggest the richness and variety of the Greek material"¹⁹³, being substantially an abstraction, without a true reference to reality.

Another worth remarking point is that, although the consciousness of "self" in Homeric poetry has been commonly recognised, at this early stage, individuals expressed their psychic activities exclusively through these entities, where agent and function cannot be clearly distinguished. Not surprisingly, we will find these souls alternatively representing an action (such as thinking, feeling, deliberating) and the entities apt to these activities as well. Moreover, a proper distinction among all the human activities they are connected with is not always possible: "in the rich range of language expressing psychological activity, we may be able to establish intellectual, emotional, volitional, and, where appropriate, moral categories. Sometimes these distinctions are clear and validly applied. But frequently in this early Greek poetry, they are not. Instead, types of activities are often fused and functions blurred. Several elements may be present in verbs expressing such activity. A verb for thinking may also include aspects of feeling, willing, or reacting. As a consequence, in a passage where such a word occurs, the range of meaning of a psychic term may be very rich"¹⁹⁴. A clear definition of these peculiar entities is the one provided by Claus¹⁹⁵, κραδίη who defined all the types of Homeric souls, with the - important - exception of ψυχή and , as "a concrete, contextually determined thought (or thoughts), usually, but not always, immediate and temporary in nature; a force or energy on which the

¹⁹³ Bremmer, 1983, 61.

¹⁹⁴ Ivi, 15.

¹⁹⁵ Claus, 1981, 15.

‘life’ of a man depends” as well, and, at the same time, a personification of the previous two definitions.

Among the Homeric souls, the *vóoc* is the only one which is never mentioned in descriptions of death. This psychical entity has been categorised as the most intellectual Homeric soul, being “the mind or an act of mind, a thought or a purpose”, as Bremmer¹⁹⁶ states. It constitutes something difficult to define properly, as we know its location is often to be found in the chest¹⁹⁷, but its consistency is far from being material. No connection can be made with any organ of the body, and - differently from what we will see regarding the other Homeric souls - the *vóoc* cannot be taken away or blown out. It appears to be a human prerogative, never involved in a context of death. Different from the *vóoc*, but not classifiable as a physical organ as well, is the *μέvoç*, which Bremmer defines “a momentary impulse of one, several, or even all mental and physical organs largely directed toward a specific activity”¹⁹⁸. While the person is still alive, the *μέvoç* manifests itself particularly during fighting - it is an impulse, focussed on a specific action, which cannot be entirely controlled by men. In the majority of the cases, it is a goddess who manipulates this strength, instilling it to the warriors by breathing¹⁹⁹. This vague entity, whose consistency was supposed to be gaseous - though a lively debate about it is still ongoing²⁰⁰ - appears to be lacking a proper free agency, as it is never mentioned to abandon the body *sua sponte* at the moment of death. What we read about the *μέvoç* in the description of departures, is that it is loosened. As Bremmer

¹⁹⁶ Bremmer, 1983, 57.

¹⁹⁷ See Hom., II., IV, 309; XIX, 202. Other places where the *μέvoç* was also supposed to be located were the *θυμός* itself (XVI, 529) and the *φρένες* (I, 89). About the *φρένες*, formerly considered to be set in the diaphragm, but recently relocated in the lungs, see also Bremmer, 1983, 2 and Onians, 1988, 13-30.

¹⁹⁸ Bremmer, 1983, 58.

¹⁹⁹ Hom., II., X, 482.

²⁰⁰ See Bremmer, 1983, 59.

underlines, the processes of the interruption of men's lives involving the μένος²⁰¹ are comparable to "the collapsing of horses when they are unharnessed after a tiring ride"²⁰². As far as the μένος is concerned, it is impossible to detect in it the soul I am investigating here - no traces of this kind of Homeric soul seem to remain and survive in the afterlife, as well as the agency of the person it belongs to appears not to be connected with this entity at all.

A different situation is the one concerning the θυμός. During human existence, like the μένος, the θυμός is also an urge people feel to take action. Its activity is particularly connected to the emotional world: "friendship and feelings of revenge, joy and grief, anger and fear - all spring from θυμός"²⁰³. Nevertheless, its presence in the human body is perceivable also in other circumstances. When it comes to making an important decision and showing bravery and prompt reaction the θυμός is also involved, as we can see in Il., XI, 401-407²⁰⁴:

Odysseus, strong with his spear, was left alone and none of the Argives abided by him, because that fear hold them all. Therefore, afflicted, he spoke to his magnanimous heart: «Woe is me, what do I have to do? It will be a great evil, if I escape the crowd, upset. And it will be even a worse thing if I am taken all alone. The son of Cronos terrified the rest of the Danaans. But why does my dear θυμός say these things to me?

Here the act of deliberating, which requires the intervention of the θυμός, shows that intellectual activities were also controlled by this kind of soul. As Sullivan asserts "These include pondering, thinking, knowing, deliberation, planning and perceiving. People too, will often put a thing into θυμός for consideration. Odysseus 'ponders evils in his θυμός' for the suitors (Od. 20.5). Zeus 'thinks about'

²⁰¹ See Hom., Il., V, 296; VIII, 123; VIII, 315.

²⁰² Bremmer, 1983, 76.

²⁰³ Ivi, 54.

²⁰⁴ Hom., Il., XI, 401-407: Οἴωθι δ' Ὀδυσσεὺς δουρικλυτὸς, οὐδέ τις αὐτῷ Ἀργείων παρέμεινεν, ἐπεὶ φόβος ἔλλαβε πάντας· ὀχθήσας δ' ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς ὃν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν· <<ὦ μοι ἐγώ, τί πάθω; Μέγα μὲν κακὸν αἶ κε φέβωμαι πληθὺν ταρβήσας· τὸ δὲ ῥίγιον αἶ κεν ἀλώω μοῦνος· τοὺς δ' ἄλλους Δαναοὺς ἐφόβησε Κρονίων. Ἀλλὰ τί ἦ μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός;

events in his θυμός as he watches the battle of Troy (Il. 16.646). Athena says that ‘she knew in her θυμός’ that Odysseus would return home (Od. 13.339). Hermes ‘deliberates in θυμός’ how to take Priam safely from Achilles’ camp (Il. 24.680) . . . Θυμός in particular is involved in decisions that heroes might make . . . The volitional activities θυμός is associated with include ordering, urging on, allowing, daring, desiring, and being eager for some action²⁰⁵. Of course, as we would have expected, the θυμός can be affected by external agents²⁰⁶ too, but it still remains an active agent, distinct from the person²⁰⁷, which affects behaviour to a large extent, so that there may be the need to control its strength. This characteristic to interact with the person it belongs to, showing a proper agency, finds its equivalent traits in death descriptions too. Although the loss of θυμός is used as a metaphor for death both for human beings and animals - which are provided with θυμός as well - there are also other ways in which this Homeric soul is supposed to leave the body.

As it is influenced by external interventions, it is possible to find death descriptions, where the θυμός is literally taken away from the living body it resides in²⁰⁸.

Nevertheless and differently from the souls analysed so far, the θυμός shows an own agency not only while the person is still alive, but also at death. Therefore, it can be caught in the act of spontaneously abandoning the body²⁰⁹.

Although its absence from the body is responsible for the death of the person, the θυμός does not appear to be connected with the world of the dead. We know what happens to it *until* the moment of death, but there are no evidence about its afterlife existence. It is never said to continue its *iter* in the afterlife and, even when

²⁰⁵ Sullivan, 1995, 56.

²⁰⁶ See Hom., Il., IX, 636; XIV, 315; XVIII, 178; Od., I, 320; IX, 295.

²⁰⁷ There are several occurrences of heroes speaking to their θυμός. See Hom., Il., XI, 403; XVIII, 5-15; Od., V, 355; 406.

²⁰⁸ See Hom., Il., XXII, 68; Od., IV, 153; XI, 200.

²⁰⁹ See Hom., Il., XII, 386; Od., X, 163.

it is described in the houses of Hades, the episode “seems to be a rhetorical wish and not a reflection of normal belief”²¹⁰.

Like ψυχή, it is involved in swooning by which they are somehow affected too, but the perspective of its action on the two entities is completely different. Comparing two episodes can help us identify the distinction²¹¹:

When she breathed and her θυμός awoke into her chest, she spoke to the women of Troy, while mourning.

While for the ψυχή, we read²¹²:

Then the dark night covered her eyes, she fell backward and exhaled forth her ψυχή.

The episodes are clear examples of the different attitudes of the two souls: at the moment of the trauma, when Andromache temporarily loses consciousness, it is her psyche that becomes active, affecting her eyes²¹³ and leaving the body and therefore causing a temporary death. On the other hand, as the woman recovers, the image of life returning to the body is expressed through the θυμός, reverting to the φρένες. Therefore, the θυμός is not connected to the dead world, but rather linked to the concept of life, in contrast with the ψυχή, which “when an individual is normally active . . . is hardly thought of”²¹⁴. Therefore the connection with the butterfly soul cannot be established, lacking the main characteristic of the flight from the body in order to start a new independent life after death.

²¹⁰ Bremmer, 1983, 75.

²¹¹ Hom., II., XXII, 475-476: ἢ δ’ ἐπεὶ οὖν ἔμπνυτο καὶ ἐς φρένα θυμὸς ἀγέρθη ἀμβλήδην γοῶσα μετὰ Τρωῆσιν ἔειπεν.

²¹² Hom., II., XXII, 466-467: τὴν δὲ κατ’ ὀφθαλμῶν ἐρεβεννὴ νύξ ἐκάλυπεν ἤριπε δ’ ἐξοπίσω, ἀπὼ δὲ ψυχὴν ἐκάπυσσε.

²¹³ The connection between ψυχή and eyes will be analysed below. See *Infra*, 69.

²¹⁴ Bremmer, 1983, 75.

The souls analysed until now have been categorised by Bremmer as the proper ego souls, from which he excluded the ψυχή, considered an example of free soul, but also the αἰών. With regard to the organs, other locations of human feelings and thoughts, he tended to consider them “rudimentary ego potencies”²¹⁵, being all the entities involved in the conscious emotional/intellectual men’s activity. Let us investigate now the remaining entities connected to the Homeric souls, starting from the αἰών and briefly giving a general overview of the additional organs, involved in the human psychological activity. The last to be analysed will be the ψυχή, whose investigation will prove crucial for our research.

As Onians claims, the true meaning of αἰών in Homeric literature has been debated for long time - the etymology²¹⁶ would rather suggest a connection with the idea of a lifetime, but its actual employment in the sources reveals another use, namely, as one of the manifestations of the Homeric souls.

The concept of αἰών appears to be deeply connected to the moment of death – I will analyse later what makes it closer to the ψυχή. It can leave the corpse at the moment of departure²¹⁷:

Son of Priam, do not let me lie here as a prey for the Danaans, help me. Thereafter, let the αἰών abandon me in your city, because I should not return home to my native land to make my dear wife and infant son glad.

Or can be removed from individuals, causing their death²¹⁸:

My son, enter within the walls, so that you may save the Trojan men and women, and so that you give not great glory to the son of Peleus, and you do not lose your dear αἰών

²¹⁵ Ivi, 61.

²¹⁶ Onians, 1988, 200.

²¹⁷ Hom., Il., V, 684-688.: Πριαμίδη, μὴ δὴ με ἔλωρ Δαναοῖσιν ἐάσης κεῖσθαι, ἀλλ’ ἐπάμμονον· ἐπειτὰ με καὶ λίποι αἰὼν ἐν πόλει ὑμετέρῃ, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἄρ’ ἔμελλον ἔγωγε νοστήσας οἶκον δὲ φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν εὐφρανέειν ἄλοχόν τε φίλην καὶ νήπιον υἱόν. See also Hom., Od., VII, 224.

²¹⁸ Hom., Il., XXII; 56-58: Ἀλλ’ εἰσέρχαιο τεῖχος ἐμὸν τέκος, ὄφρα σωθῆς Τρῶας καὶ Τρῶας, μὴ δὲ μέγα κῦδος ὀρέξῃς Πηλεΐδῃ, αὐτὸς δὲ φίλης αἰῶνος ἀμερθῆς.

The departure of the αἰὼν together with the loss of the ψυχή²¹⁹ can also be found:

But when his and his αἰὼν have left him, then send Death and sweet Sleep to bear him away. Then let they come to the land of the wide Lycia, where his brothers and his companions will honour him with a tomb and a stele. This is the honour of the dead.

Of particular interest are the theories formulated about the possible location of this Homeric soul, which offers causes for further reflection. In one of the death descriptions where αἰὼν is involved, it appears to be connected with tears²²⁰.

She found him sitting on the shore, and his eyes were never dry of tears, his sweet life was passing and he thought mournfully of his return, because he did not like the nymph anymore. He spent the nights perforce in the hollow cave against his will, beside her willing. By day, sitting on the rocks and sands, racking his θυμός with tears, moans and griefs, he looked at the sea, without rest, shedding tears. Staying close to him, the brightful goddess so spoke: «Unfortunate man, do not cry longer here, nor let your αἰὼν consume. By now she will be ready to let you go.

As Onians²²¹ claims “Its natural interpretation in fact is that the liquid flowing down was αἰὼν and that it is the same liquid which is said to be ‘wasted’ when husband or wife weeps”. According to the scholar the idea of “life fluid” would have been associated later to the general concept of life, a process that, as we will see, will involve also the ψυχή. As a matter of fact, the connection with fluids represents one of the characteristics of the butterfly soul we aim to analyse. Therefore, it is not surprising to find the loss of αἰὼν, which was thought to abandon the corpse at the moment of death, in the same way as the ψυχή, expressed through the flowing of

²¹⁹ Hom., Il., XVI, 453-457: Αὐτὰρ ἐπὶν δὴ τὸν γε λίπη ψυχή τε καὶ αἰὼν, πέμπειν μιν θάνατόν τε φέρειν καὶ νήδυμον ὕπνον εἰς ὃ κε δὴ Λυκίης εὐρείης δῆμον ἴκωνται, ἐνθά ἐ ταρχύσουσι κασίγνητοὶ τε ἔται τε τύμβῳ τε στήλῃ τε· τὸ γὰρ γέρας ἔστι θανόντων.

²²⁰ Hom., Od., V, 151-161: Τὸν δ' ἄρ' ἐπ' ἀκτῆς εὔρε καθήμενον· οὐδέ ποτ' ὅσσε δακρυόφιν τέρσοντο, κατεῖβετο δὲ γλυκὺς αἰὼν νόστον ὀδυρομένῳ, ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι ἦνδανε νύμφη. Ἄλλ' ἦ τοι νύκτας μὲν ἰαύεσκεν καὶ ἀνάγκη ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι παρ' οὐκ ἐθέλων ἐθελούσῃ· ἦματα δ' ἄμ πέτρησι καὶ ἠιόνεσσι καθίζων δάκρυσι καὶ στοναχῆσι καὶ ἄλγεσι θυμὸν ἐρέχθων πόντον ἐπ' ἀτρύγετον δερκέσκετο δάκρυα λείβων. Ἀγχοῦ δ' ἰσταμένη προσεφώνεε διὰ θεάων· κάμμορε, μὴ μοι ἔτ' ἐνθάδ' ὀδύρεο, μηδέ τοι αἰὼν φθινέτω· ἦδη γὰρ σε μάλα πρόφρας' ἀποπέμψω.

²²¹ Onians, 1988.

tears. External evidence, among which Hippocrates²²², would rather suggest a connection with another “life-fluid”, that is the marrow, or cerebro-spinal fluid.

The identification with the marrow, although frequently considered “later and derivative”, is unmistakable for Onians, who adds: “That the meaning ‘marrow’ or ‘fluid’ could arise out of a supposed primitive meaning of ‘period of existence’ is difficult to believe”, claiming that, as it happened for the concept of “life”, later connected to the fluid αἰών, a similar tardive and popular process would have led to consider the entity as a synonym of “temporal life”, due to its similarity with words like αἰεί, αἰεῖ, aevum. On the contrary, the linguistic evidence should be found elsewhere, more precisely, in words αἰών sharing both the same root and the meaning of fluid, flowing and such as αἰονάω, with its composites ἐπαιονάω and καταιονάω.

The souls so far analysed represent different examples of life-force which, though connected to the body, cannot be expressed through specific organs.

To the latter category belong the φρένες, seat of feelings, but also provided with intellectual activity. As we saw above, they were also considered to be the physical location of the νόος, yet the specific action of them appear slightly different - while the νόος was the Homeric soul apt to discern and notice present and future events, the φρένες were the assigned organ to reflect and reason about the same²²³. According to Claus, the two entities would share the same typology of activity, being both conceived as the place where thoughts take shape and the thoughts themselves. Only a purely anatomical difference can be detected between them: while the νόος would represent the “imaginary organ of mental attention and intention”, the φρένες

²²² Hp., Epid., VII, 122.

²²³ About the interaction νόος-φρένες, see Bremmer, 1983, 61 and Atkins, 1970, 20.

would be directly represented by either the diaphragm or the lungs²²⁴. The question about their exact location is still under debate, though Onians provided a satisfactory explanation about what might be the most plausible seat for this organ. As the scholar argued, the later concept of the φρένες would have located them in the diaphragm, an assumption that can be easily confirmed by Plato's *Timaeus*²²⁵. Nevertheless, "a large proportion of the commonest words has changed their meaning in the interval between Homer and the Attic age and "we may then with an open mind examine the Homeric instances and, for further guidance, turn not to science, relatively late and original in its terminology, but to the earliest literature where, if anywhere, the tradition of language and thought might be expected to survive". Therefore, starting from the assumption that, as we saw above, the φρένες were the location of the θυμός, vaporous entity, and that the black colour was a frequent epithet for φρένες in Homeric poetry²²⁶, Onians suggests that "the 'blackish' organs containing something vaporous might be nothing more than the lungs containing the breath"²²⁷. The possible identification of breath with the θυμός plays a crucial role in the process of categorisation of the Homeric souls, separating this physiological function from the ψυχή, which, as we will see below, was rather connected to the human fluids.

Three organs remain to be analysed: καρδίη, ἥτορ and κῆρ which are firmly connected to each other and therefore treated together. Although all these three entities appear to be related to the idea of "heart" and "emotions", it is possible to make some distinctions among them. As for their relation with the body, καρδίη and κῆρ are more often active within the individuals than the ἥτορ. Generally the κῆρ

²²⁴ Claus, 1981, 16. See also Snell, 1953, 13.

²²⁵ Pl., Ti., 70a.

²²⁶ See Hom., Il. I, 103; XVII, 83, 499, 573; Od., IV, 661.

²²⁷ Onians, 1988, 24.

appears to be involved in thoughts²²⁸, a characteristic that both ἦτορ and κραδίη lack. The latter in particular is described as the seat of strong emotions (anger, pain, even insensibility) and depicted as an entity to tame with the rational support of φρένες and θυμός²²⁹. Of particular interest for our research is the ἦτορ, which is the only entity – among these – supposed to be lost at the moment of death²³⁰. It can also be lost while individuals are still alive, due to strong and sudden emotions²³¹:

I heard the voice of the honoured mother of my husband and in my chest my ἦτορ leapt to my mouth and beneath my knees are rigid: something evil is coming for the children of Priam.

The description is resembling to the other above mentioned episode in the *Iliad*²³², where Andromache again risks death after discovering the nefarious destiny of her husband. In this case what the woman is about to lose is another entity, the soul by definition – the ψυχή. The modality of the loss and the main characteristics of the ψυχή in the underworld suggest that this is the direction where my research is to be focused and the soul I should investigate, to find the connections with the symbol I am researching here.

Ψυχή in Homer: a life-force in the underworld.

In the series of the Homeric souls, the ψυχή warrants particular analysis - as the name itself suggests, this kind of soul shows particular connections with the butterfly soul, and is therefore worth analysing carefully.

What we know about the ψυχή in Homer is that it was a unique entity, profoundly different from the other typologies of soul innate in the individual. Its

²²⁸ See Hom., Od., VII, 82; XVIII, 344.

²²⁹ See Hom., Il., XX, 5-23.

²³⁰ See Hom., Il., XXI, 114; Od., XXII, 68.

²³¹ Hom., Il., XXII; 451-453: Αἰδοίης ἐκυρῆς ὅπως ἐκλυον, ἐν δ' ἔμοι αὐτῆι στήθεσι πάλλεται ἦτορ ἀνά στόμα, νέρθε δὲ γοῦνα πῆγνυται· ἐγγυς δὴ τι κακὸν Πριάμοιο τέκεσσιν.

²³² *Supra*, 67.

influence on the human body is more than a physiological or psychological circumscribed effect - its presence is needed to survive. As Darcus Sullivan pointed out, the ψυχή is “mentioned only when death approaches or in death-like conditions”²³³. Every time it seems to abandon the body, the consequences for the individuals are grievous and inevitable. Unlike the other entities analysed above, it has no proper physiological or psychological connection with the individuals, still representing a part of them - the portion which is able to survive even after death. The only soul provided with this attribute, the ψυχή, represents a continuum of human life, free from the bonds of the body. At the moment of death this entity, always hidden and unexpressed while the owners are still alive, properly takes on life, showing a personal agency, separate from terrestrial existence. The conditions of this new life after death are of course profoundly different from human life, beginning with the appearance. The ψυχαί in the Homeric underworld, though evoking the physical aspect of the bodies they belonged to, show different characteristics, among which is their unsubstantial nature.

The souls of the dead crowding Hades are also called σκιαί, shadows of what was once their terrestrial aspect. Although they may still be recognised by mortals, being εἶδωλα of themselves, the interaction with them is, as we saw, compromised by their unsubstantial nature. Another well known example comes from the episode of the encounter between Patroclus' ψυχή and Achilles²³⁴.

²³³ Sullivan, 1995, 82.

²³⁴ Hom., II., XXIII, 65-101: ἦλθε δ' ἐπὶ ψυχῇ Πατροκλήος δειλοῖο πάντ' αὐτῷ μέγεθός τε καὶ ὄμματα κάλ' εἴκυῖα καὶ φωνήν, καὶ τοῖα περὶ χροῖ εἴματα ἔστο· στή δ' ἄρ' ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς καὶ μιν πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν· «εὐδεις, αὐτὰρ ἐμεῖο λελασμένος ἔπλευ Ἀχιλλεῦ. Οὐ μὲν μευ ζώνοντος ἀκήδεις, ἀλλὰ θανόντος; Θάπτέ με ὅτι τάχιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περήσω. Τῆλέ με εἵργουσι ψυχαὶ εἶδωλα καμόντων, οὐδέ με πω μίσγεσθαι ὑπὲρ ποταμοῖο ἐῶσιν, ἀλλ' αὐτως ἀλάλημαι ἀν' εὐρυπυλῆς Αἴδος δῶ. Καὶ μοι δὸς τὴν χεῖρ'· ὀλοφύρομαι, οὐ γὰρ ἔτ' αὔτις νίσομαι ἐξ Αἴδαο, ἐπὴν με πυρὸς λελάχητε. Οὐ μὲν γὰρ ζωοί γε φίλων ἀπάνευθεν ἐταίρων βουλὰς ἐζόμενοι βουλευόμεν, ἀλλ' ἐμὲ μὲν κῆρ ἀμφέχανε στυρεγῆ, ἢ περ λάχε γιγνόμενόν περ· καὶ δὲ σοὶ αὐτῷ μοῖρα, θεοῖς ἐπιείκελ' Ἀχιλλεῦ, ἀλλ' ὁμοῦ ὡς ἐτράφημεν ἐν ὑμετέροισι δόμοισιν, εὐτέ με τυτθὸν ἐόντα Μενoitίος ἐξ Ὀπόμεντος ἤγαγεν ὑμέτερόνδ' ἀνδροκτασίης ὑπο λυγρῆς, ἤματι τῷ ὅτε παῖδα κατέκτανον Ἀμφιδάμαντος νήπιος οὐκ ἐθέλων ἀμφ' ἀστραγάλοισι χολωθεῖς· ἔνθά με δεξάμενος ἐν δώμασιν ἱππότα Πηλεὺς ἔτραφέ τ' ἐνδυκέως καὶ σὸν

Then came the ψυχή of the hapless Patroclus, similar to himself in all things, in stature, beautiful eyes and voice, and he was wearing the same clothes on his body. He stood above Achilles' head and so spoke to him: «You sleep and you have forgotten about me, Achilles. You did not neglect me while I was alive, but you do now that I am dead. Bury me as soon as you can, I'll pass within the doors of Hades. The ψυχαί, ghosts of the dead, keep me distant, they do not let me join them beyond the river. I wander vainly around the house of the Hades with the wide doors. Give me your hand, I beg you in tears, I will never come back from Hades once you have given to me my pyre. We will no more sit apart from the other comrades, alive, making decision together - the hateful Fate swallowed me, the one that I had at my birth. And you, Achilles, like to the gods, you will die beneath the walls of the rich Trojans. I will tell you something more and I will beg you, if you listen to me – do not bury my bones far from yours, Achilles, but let them lie together, as we grew up in your houses, when Menoetius from Opoeis brought me as a child to you because of a sad murder, the day when I killed the son of Amphidamus, unwise, unwilling, angry for the dice. Then, the knight Peleus, after receiving me into his house, raised me with care and named me your squire. So let only one golden urn with two handles cover our bones, the one that your august mother gave you». Achilles swift of foot so answered to him: «Why did you, dear head, come here and give me orders about these things, one by one? I will fulfil them all for sure and will obey as you order. But, come closer: let us hug for a moment and enjoy the bitter weeping». After saying this, he reached forth with his hands, but he did not clasp him. The ψυχή like smoke went beneath the earth, squeaking.

Here the εἶδωλον of the warrior is able to take part in the conversation with the hero, but the modality is different. First of all, his ψυχή “flies” upon the warrior's head, like an ὄναρ; secondly, after speaking with his proper voice, Patroclus fades away, losing all his human attributes - he disappears “like smoke” and suddenly loses his ability to speak; he emits sounds instead of words, as we can assume from the verb τρίζω, used in Homer to refer to the call of the bat. Of particular interest this association between the image of the flight and the verb τρίζειν which both evoke the idea of a evanescent flying creature. As underlined by Claus, the Homeric ψυχή is not “a sheer abstraction”, but an objective entity whose main characteristics are not far from the image of our butterfly. We have mentioned its impalpable lightness -

θεράποντ' ὀνόμηνεν ὧς δὲ καὶ ὄστέα νῶϊν ὀμή σορὸς ἀμφικαλύπτοι χρύσεος ἀμφιφορεύς, τὸν τοι πόρε πότνια μήτηρ». Τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς: «τίπτέ μοι ἠθεῖη κεφαλὴ δεῦρ' εἰλήλουθας καὶ μοι ταῦτα ἕκαστ' ἐπιτέλλαι; Αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ τοι πάντα μάλ' ἐκτελέω καὶ πείσομαι ὧς σὺ κελεύεις. Ἀλλὰ μοι ἄσπον στήθι μίνυθ' ἀπερ ἀμφιβρόντες ἀλλήλους ὄλοοιο τεταρπόμεσθα γόοιο». Ὡς ἄρα φωνήσας ὠρέξατο χερσὶ φίλησιν οὐδ' ἔλαβε· ψυχή δὲ κατὰ χθονὸς ἤυτε καπνὸς ὤκετο τετριγυῖα.

the impalpable, almost vaporous, consistency is often associated with the tendency to abandon the corpse flying away²³⁵

Thrice I sprang towards her, my heart obliged me to clasp her and thrice she flew away from my hands, like a shadow or a dream.

In addition, the ψυχαί in the underworld are frequently described as numerous entities, gathered together in huge numbers²³⁶:

The ψυχαί of the dead gathered out of Erebus, young women and youths and old men who very much suffered, tender maidens with heart new to sorrow. Many, wounded by bronze-tipped spears, men killed at war, with their blood-stained weapons. Numerous, they were going around the pit from every side, with terrible screams - a green fear caught me.

This characteristic in particular, together with the wings' noise, are responsible for Keller's association between the symbol of the butterfly and the soul of the dead²³⁷.

There is still something left to say about the behaviour of the ψυχαί in the underworld - speaking or simply making animal calls, able or not to be understood by mortals, their abilities seem to change case by case. Digging at a deeper level, we can make a distinction between the different behaviour of the ψυχαί, depending on the funerary rituals administered to the corpses. We can thus divide the Homeric dead souls into three main categories: ψυχαί with unburied corpse, ψυχαί with buried corpses drinking blood, ψυχαί with buried corpses not drinking blood. Patroclus' εἶδωλον, which exhorted Achilles to honour him with a proper burial, clearly belongs to the first group and is therefore able to speak properly and display human features. Although he cannot know about anything that happened after his death, he still

²³⁵ Hom., Od., XI, 206-208: Τρις μὲν ἐφωρμήθην, ἔλειν τέ με θυμὸς ἀνώγει, τρις δέ μοι ἐκ χειρῶν σκιῇ εἶκελον ἦ καὶ ὄνειρῳ ἔπτατ'.

²³⁶ Hom., Od., XI, 36-43: Αἱ δ' ἀγέροντο ψυχαὶ ὑπέξ Ἐρέβου νεκρῶν κατατεθνηῶτων. Νύμφαι τ' ἠἰθεοὶ τε πολύτλητοὶ τε γέροντες παρθενικαὶ τ' ἀταλαὶ νεοπενθέα θυμὸν ἔχουσαι, πολλοὶ δ' οὐτάμενοι χαλκήρεσιν ἐξχείησιν, ἄνδρες ἀρηίφατοι βεβροτωμένα τεύχε' ἔχοντες· οἱ πολλοὶ περὶ βόθρον ἐφοίτων ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος θεσπεσίη ἰαχῆ· ἐμὲ δὲ χλωρὸν δέος ἦρει.

²³⁷ See Keller, 1980.

retains the ability to communicate and interact with his companion and – which is even more important – to feel emotions. Other similar cases can be found in the *Odyssey*. The suitors are provided with particular abilities before their burial. So Elpenor’s ψυχή is able to recognise and speak to Odysseus and at the same time feels sorrow²³⁸. Although he is not kept away from the Hades, he is recognised as unburied by certain souls, the ones who have drunk blood in particular. This is another category of souls identified by Sullivan²³⁹, which differs from the other ψυχαί not drinking blood for some additional characteristics they display.

Let us focus on the ψυχαί waiting to drink blood - although in some cases they may show particular abilities, such as the capacity to recognise people, normally we find them lacking the emotional depth which on the other hand characterises the souls after drinking blood. One instance could clarify the change – when Odysseus meets his mother Anticleia before she drinks blood, we find “a helpless ψυχή with no powers”²⁴⁰, who turns into a more complex entity after her drink. She’s the one who recognises her son and tells him about the events occurring on earth.

As the sources abovementioned testify, it is impossible to deny a connection between ψυχή and blood. In some ways this human fluid seems to nourish the ψυχή, providing it with the typical characteristics belonging to the other Homeric souls, such as the strong feelings appropriate to θυμός or the mental activity associated with νόος and φρένες. This constitutes a crucial point for my investigation, the fluids being linked to the concept of the soul, as I will show below. Although the blood here would rather represent a connection between the ψυχή and what we have defined as “body souls”, allowing the dead to behave in a “more human” way, it must be said that this existing connection between human fluid and the ψυχή might

²³⁸ See also Aguirre, 2009.

²³⁹ Sullivan, 1995, 86.

²⁴⁰ Ivi, 89.

contribute to validate one of the possible thesis about its true substance. The descriptions of the ψυχαί's departures from human bodies are often connected with breath. This is what we saw, for instance, in the abovementioned episode of Andromache.

The recovering process of the ψυχή seems to be possible through the act of breathing. Despite the etymological connection²⁴¹, which would work as a link between the dead soul and the breath, it seems to be rather involved in death-like circumstances, where either the absence of breathing, or its alteration, are symptoms of a syncope. As Claus pointed out, here “breathlessness is not the significant point of attention. This interpretation is borne out by the observation that in eight passages not using ψυχή, syncope is initiated by a manifest physical exhaustion of the kind experienced by Odysseus after swimming to Phaeacia. In the passages with ψυχή, however, no equally violent physical cause for breathlessness exists...If anatomical precision is sought, what is more likely in this context is, rather, general bodily weakness caused by loss of blood”²⁴². Therefore, its appearance in death-like contexts where the ceasing of breathing is involved would be due to the life-force it represents - an objective entity which, at moment of death, is ready to leave the body and, as we saw, start a new existence, but not because of representing the breath itself.

External evidence can be provided by Bremmer's and Hultkrantz's studies on the breath and free souls, which are in fact, thought to be connected, although still belonging to different semantic fields.

The concept of free soul, as the name suggests, refers to an entity free from the body's bonds. As underlined by Arbman, this kind of soul reflects the personality of

²⁴¹ Chantraine, 1999, s.v. ψυχή.

²⁴² Claus, 1981, 96.

the individual, manifesting itself only during unconsciousness and constituting an extension of the individual, projected in the afterlife. It is opposed to the body soul, which is active during consciousness and strictly dependent on the body's activity. For this reason, Bremmer tended to identify the free soul with the Homeric ψυχή and the body soul with the other souls and the individual's vital organs. The breath soul, connected to the physical act of breathing was categorised as part of the body soul, yet with the tendency to represent the «airy, ethereal shape of the deceased», which will lead it to be assimilated to the free soul, but only in later literature. My analysis will therefore focus on the first kind of soul, defined as a free soul, which would find its representation in the symbol of the butterfly - a living creature with a proper agency, able to start a new life, free from the bonds of the corpse-cocoon.

Post-homeric ψυχή and free soul.

After analysing the main occurrences and characteristics of the Homeric ψυχή, which I have shown to be the specific kind of soul connected to the symbol of the butterfly, let us consider now the evolution of the same in the post Homeric literary production, focusing our attention particularly on the concept of free soul and its later employment.

A noteworthy fact, on which the scholars²⁴³ seem to agree, is that the role of ψυχή changes in favour of a more psychological use of the term, which might have derived from the Homeric identification as a “life force”. Although the Homeric soul words have been readapted to new literary contexts and changed in their meanings, it is still possible to find connections and references to the dead free soul I am analysing here.

²⁴³ See Claus, 1981, 96; Sullivan, 1995, 90.

Analysing the occurrences of ψυχή in both lyric and elegiac poets, the main difference that comes to our attention is a wider use of ψυχή in life contexts, not just in death-like situations as we saw in Homer. In other terms, the ability to constitute a continuum of life after death, representing the only living part of the dead man, has led it to assume also many of the vital functions traditionally attributed to other Homeric souls, which slowly tended to disappear. Despite this phenomenon - which Sullivan thought to be “long associated with ψυχή in the spoken language of early Greece” - references to the original Homeric meaning are still retained. Life, in the first instance, is the semantic value which occurs most, with different specific meanings, depending on the various contexts where it makes its appearance. Therefore, in Tyrtaeus ψυχή becomes the foe, something not to care about and to be ready to lose in battle²⁴⁴:

The wandering man does not respect or care about himself or his descendent.
So, let us fight for our homeland, with brave, and let us die for our children,
without sparing our lives.

Or again²⁴⁵:

Go! You are the invincible descents of Heracles: be brave! Zeus does not bend his neck. Do not fear the crowd, do not be scared! Go forward against your enemy with your shield. Hate your own lives and love the black Cheres instead, as the rays of the sun.

With Theognis²⁴⁶ the ψυχή obtains again the value of the shade of the dead, retained in the Underworld, but there is something more:

²⁴⁴ Tyrtr., X, 14: †εἶθ' οὕτως ἀνδρός τοι ἀλωμένου οὐδεμί' ὄρη γίνεται οὐτ' αἰδῶς οὐτ' ὀπίσω γένεος. Θυμῶι γῆς πέρι τῆσδε μαχώμεθα καὶ περὶ παίδων θνήσκωμεν ψυχῶν μηκέτι φειδόμενοι.

²⁴⁵ Tyrtr., XI, 1-6: Ἄλλ' Ἡρακλῆος γὰρ ἀνικῆτου γένος ἐστέ, θαρσεῖτ'· οὐπω Ζεὺς ἀνχένα λοξὸν ἔχει· μηδ' ἀνδρῶν πληθὺν δειμαίνετε, μηδὲ φοβεῖσθε, ἰθὺς δ' ἐς προμάχους ἀσπίδ' ἀνὴρ ἔχέτω, ἐχθρὴν μὲν ψυχὴν θέμενος, θανάτου δὲ μελαίνας κῆρας <ὁμῶς> ἀυγαῖς ἠελίοιο φίλας.

²⁴⁶ Thgn., 710: Πλήθει δ' ἀνθρώπων ἀρετὴ μία γίνεται ἦδε, πλουτεῖν τῶν δ' ἄλλων οὐδὲν ἄρ' ἦν ὄφελος, οὐδ' εἰ σωφροσύνη μὲν ἔχοις Ῥαδαμάνθου αὐτοῦ, πλείονα δ' εἰδείης Σισύφου Αἰολίδεω, ὅστε καὶ ἐξ Αἴδεω πολυιδρίησιν ἀνῆλθεν πείσας, Περσεφόνην αἰμυλίωσι λόγοις, ἦτε βροτοῖς παρέχει λήθην βλάπτουσα νόοιο· ἄλλος δ' οὐπω τις τοῦτο γ' ἐπεφράσατο, ὄντινα δὴ θανάτοιο μέλαν νέφος ἀμφικαλύψει, ἔλθῃ δ' ἐς σκιερὸν χῶρον ἀποφθιμένων, κυανέας τε πύλας παραμείψεται, αἵτε θανόντων ψυχὰς εἵργουσιν καίπερ ἀναινομένας.

Only one virtue exists for the crowd: getting richer. The rest is useless. Not the wisdom of Radamant himself or being wiser than Sisyphus (he was able to come back from the Hades, after convincing with his astute words Persephone, who imposes the oblivion to men and empties their minds. None had even tries of those the black deadly cloud enveloped, the ones who came into the sinister land of the deceased, beyond the dark doors which imprison the recalcitrant souls of the dead).

The souls are here described as recalcitrant, because they are forced to stay in Hades against their will, which is here emphasised, as their free agency.

As we said in the preamble we often find attributes of the ψυχή qualities which originally belonged to other Homeric souls. Very often in lyric poetry the ψυχή absorbs some of the functions typical of the θυμός - as we saw above for Tyrtaeus, the brave and the indomitable war instinct, but also anger as well as sexual desire expressed by Hipponax. Even Pindar, who tends to maintain the original meaning of ψυχή as the only human part able to survive after death (yet with additional moral qualities absent in Homer²⁴⁷), still refers to the ψυχή as if it rather was the θυμός²⁴⁸. As Sullivan claims “Psyche is beginning to be referred to like θυμός. Its role in the living person is becoming apparent. When Homer speaks of someone ‘giving ψυχή’ he refers to the moment of death. The living person now exerts control over psyche which abides within a seat of emotions”²⁴⁹. If it is possible that ψυχή tends to gather some of the characteristics of other Homeric souls, the opposite can also happen, that is to find some occurrences of free soul, “hidden” behind other Homeric soul names, other than ψυχή. This is what we find for example in Aristophanes’ Acharnians²⁵⁰, 395 ff.:

Dicaeopolis. Now it is time for me to show my strong spirit. I have to go to Euripides.
Slave. Who’s there?
D. Is Euripides at home?

²⁴⁷ See Pind., Ol., II and Pindar’s references to the theory of the transmigration of the soul.

²⁴⁸ See Pind., Ol., II, 89; Nem., III, 26, frs. 123.1, 127.4.

²⁴⁹ Sullivan, 1995, 92.

²⁵⁰ Ar., Ach., 395: Δ. ὦρα ‘ στίν ἦδε καρτερὰν ψυχὴν λαβεῖν, καὶ μοι βαδιστέ’ ἐστὶν ὡς Εὐριπίδην. Κ. Τίς οὗτος, Δ. ἔνδον ἔστ’ Εὐριπίδης; Κ. Οὐκ ἔνδον εἶτ’ οὐκ ἔνδον; Δ. ὀρθῶς ᾧ γέρον. ὁ νοῦς μὲν ἔξω ζυλλέγων ἐπόλλια οὐκ ἔνδον, αὐτὸς δ’ ἔνδον ἀναβάδην ποιεῖ.

- S. He is and he is not.
 D. How? He is and he is not?
 S. Certainly, old man. His νοῦς is outside, collecting verses, while he's inside writing tragedies.

Here Euripides' soul is told to be able to leave the man's body when still alive (and writing tragedies), in order to go abroad collecting songs - noteworthy is that, and surprisingly, it is not the ψυχή to be mentioned here, but the νοῦς. If this employment of νοῦς as an independent entity detached from the body denotes a profound distance from Homer's concept of the soul²⁵¹, it is still an important indication, attesting that the idea of free soul was still deeply rooted in Greek culture at that time. A similar image of free souls depicted in poetic ecstasies is found at *Peace*, 827 ff.²⁵², where this time the soul of the poets collecting songs is called ψυχή:

- Servant. Did you see any other man besides you spinning around in the air?
 Trygaeus. No, only the souls of two or three dithyrambic poets.
 S. What were they doing?
 T. They were catching lyrics exordia that fluctuate in the ether.

Let us analyse briefly the terminology of the text. The verb ποτώμεναι, here employed to describe the flight of the free souls appears only next to ψυχαί, as to reaffirm the image of the symbol naturally evoked by the word.

One of the main characteristics we found attributed to the Homeric ψυχή was its actual connection to the fluids of the human body, with particular reference to blood and marrow. This is a crucial point, which will be analysed further in detail, as a symbol of vital essence which flows away from the human body. In tragic poetry we find some occurrences of the soul connected and cited with blood and marrow.

²⁵¹ Claus (1981, 87) hypothesizes that the use of νοῦς instead of ψυχή might be due to the poetic ecstasy.

²⁵² Ar., *Paç*, 827 ff.; O. ἄλλον τιν' εἶδες ἄνδρα κατὰ τὸν ἀέρα πλανώμενον πλὴν σαυτὸν; T. Οὐκ, εἰ μή γέ που ψυχὰς δύο ἢ τρεῖς διθυραμβοδιδασκάλων. O. Τί δ' ἔδρων; T. Ξυνελέγοντ' ἀναβολὰς ποτώμεναι τὰς ἐνδιαεριαιερηνηχέτους τινὰς.

The first one appears in Sophocles' *Electra*²⁵³, where Clytemnestra shows her feelings of anger toward Electra, offended because her daughter dared to drink the blood of her ψυχή:

Now, however, since today I got rid of the fear of him and this girl – greater plague who lived in my home, while consuming undiluted the pure blood of my ψυχή. Now I will stay in peace without her threats.

As we saw in Homer, the ψυχή was normally supposed to drink the blood in order to have more “human attributes”, such as the ability to speak, to recognise people and to be understood by them. Therefore the act of drinking ψυχή’s blood, other than unnatural, appears to be mean and cruel at the same time, with the specific purpose of depriving the soul of the main attributes it might have. Even more specifically in connection with human fluids is the occurrence we find at Euripides’ *Hyppolitus*, 255: the nurse of the young boy, in order to express the strong emotions that pervade humans, uses the periphrasis “μὴ πρὸς ἄκρον μυελὸν ψυχῆς“, which literally means “not until the marrow of the ψυχή”. An expression that confirms the intimate nature of the marrow – which I will analyse further below – and at the same time concurs to establish a connection between the two elements which will play a crucial role in our analysis.

Before treating this topic in detail, let us briefly consider the Latin occurrences of free soul and butterfly soul and the conception of anima in Roman culture. That the soul was conceived as a fluid, flowing away at the moment of death, might be quite evident in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, X²⁵⁴:

²⁵³ S., El., 783-787: Νῦν δ’ ἡμέρα γὰρ τῆδ’ ἀπὴλλαγμαὶ φόβου πρὸς τῆσδ’ ἐκείνου θ’. ἦδε γὰρ μείζων βλάβη ξύνοικος ἦν μοι, τοῦμόν ἐκπίνουσ’ ἀεὶ ψυχῆς ἄκρατον αἶμα. Νῦν δ’ ἔκηλά που τῶν τῆσδ’ ἀπειλῶν οὔνεχ’ ἡμερεύσομεν.

²⁵⁴ Ov., Met., X, 185: Expalluit aequae quam puer ipse deus conlapsosque excipit artus, et modo te refovet, modo tristia vulnera siccant, nunc animam admotis fugientem sustinet herbis. Nil prosunt artes; Erat inmedicabile vulnus.

The god became as pallid as the boy and held the limbs falling down. And he tries to warm him and then to dry the wound and then tries to retain his escaping soul, putting herbs. But his arts are vain - the wound is incurable.

The scene depicted here is particularly touching: the god, powerful and immortal, seems unable to handle the death of his beloved Hyacinthus, and makes a tentative attempt to keep him alive, by covering his wounds and preventing his soul from abandoning the body. Although it has not been attested anywhere as an example of free soul, this occurrence cannot be neglected, deserving a mention as important evidence of soul conceived as a fluid in Latin literature.

Moreover, as we saw, an important occurrence of free soul - butterfly soul, in particular - is constituted by Hadrian's farewell *Carmen*, where his *animula* is conceived as a free entity, which survives to the death and is destined to reach Hades' reigns. We have spoken above about the word *animula* and its connection with the butterfly - what is left to analyse now is the Romans' terminology and concept of the soul. Again Ovid provides some further important evidence – where the soul is here represented as a bird²⁵⁵:

And, since we are not only bodies, but bird souls as well, we may enter into the animals' abodes and hide ourselves in the breasts of cattle.

As we know, there were at least two words used in Latin to refer to the soul: *anima* and *animus*, two cognate terms, both with evident reference to the air, as it appears from their etymology. Detecting the difference between them is not a simple job – as underlined by Onians²⁵⁶, a preliminary distinction should be made between consciousness and unconsciousness: everything belonging to the first group is not a matter of *anima*. *Animus*, on the contrary, is the entity involved with feelings proper to life and the state of consciousness. Once this point is clarified, what remains is to

²⁵⁵ Ov., Met., XV, 456-458: Quoniam non corpora solum, verum etiam volucres animae sumus inque ferinas possumus ire domos pecudumque in pectora condi.

²⁵⁶ Onians, 1988.

define the true meaning of *anima*, which appears to be an “apparent confusion”, the word gathering both the semantic values of breath and life-force. The problem consists of finding a consistency in this assumption, reconciling two entities profoundly different from each other. While the breath would imply that the chest should be the natural seat for the *anima*, we know that the life force for Romans was set somewhere else. Known as *genius*, this life force was supposed to occupy the head of the individuals, a detail which we will encounter further. *Anima*, *animus* and *genius* constituted the trilogy of the Roman souls, but which specific properties belonged to each of them? The *animus* could be considered the Roman version of the Greek θυμός: vital and active during life, it was set between *cor* and *praecordia* and made of breath. There is no evidence of a continuum of life in the underworld for the *animus*, representing what we have defined as breath soul.

Differently from the *animus*, the *genius* (also called *anima*) was considered to continue its existence even after death, in the same way as the ψυχή. Moreover, as we saw, the attribute of life force, independent from the bonds of the body seem to suit it perfectly. What then would be the explanation lying behind the image of the head as its seat? The next sections will seek to find an answer for this unsolved question.

Life in fluids - a soul flowing away.

In section two we have spoken about the different Homeric souls. Among the manifold entities existing, one in particular, the αἰών, was considered to be the most similar to the ψυχή, for its tendency to leave the body after death, without being properly involved in awakening or consciousness. Both the souls also appear to be connected in another way, being associated, as we disclosed above, with human body fluids. This is what I aim to investigate in this section, seeking to find differences and

associated elements between the two entities and to understand what belief lied behind this unexpected connection.

All the main human fluids, such as sweat, the synovial fluid, seed or the cerebro-spinal fluid were assimilated and supposed to be made of the same substance, which would be no other than the αἰών. Plenty of evidence concur to prove this assumption. First of all, sexual encounters were described as liquefying phenomena, associated with wetness; as Onians²⁵⁷ claims “Sexual love is repeatedly described as a process of ‘liquefying, melting’ (τέκεσθαι) and is characterised as ὑγρός, ‘liquid, wet’”- but this is not enough. This substance, which could be defined as a vital fluid, was also strictly connected with other organs, apparently difficult to link with this sort of liquid, that is the eyes. The explanation hiding behind this belief, other than being fascinating and noteworthy, will also clarify some aspects of the butterfly soul.

A recurring expression used to refer to weeping was “wasting the αἰών”, which was supposed to flow down, in a liquid state, from the eyes²⁵⁸.

It is not rare in Greek literature to find sexual activity and desire connected with eyes’ wetness²⁵⁹:

Eros, Eros, distilling fluid desire down upon the eyes and a sweet pleasure in the souls of those against whom you you make war, never show yourself to me as an enemy and do not come immoderate.

Moreover, as we saw, another vital fluid, the marrow, was thought to be connected to the αἰών as well²⁶⁰.

²⁵⁷ Onians, 1988, 202.

²⁵⁸ See also Rohde, 1925, 17; 47. Speaking about the funerary rituals for Patroklos, he underlines how eyes and mouth had to be closed: “Was there originally some idea of the “soul” being released by these means? – Seat of the soul in the κόρη of the eye: ψυχαι δ’ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσι τῶν τελευτῶντων, Babr., 95, 35.

²⁵⁹ Euripides, Hippolytus, 525 ff.: Ἔρωσ Ἔρωσ, ὁ κατ’ ὀμμάτων στάζων πόθον, εἰσάγων γλυκεῖαν ψυχῆ χάριν οὐς ἐπιστρατεύσει, μή μοί ποτε σὺν κακῷ φανείης μηδ’ ἄρρητος ἐλθοῖς.

So far we have analysed the connection between the life liquid pervading human body and the αἰών, the Homeric soul which, like the ψυχή, abandons the corpse at the moment of death and sleeps while the individual is conscious. The strict similarity between these two souls has played a crucial role in the attribution of the same characteristics, such as the involvement with the life liquid. Therefore it is not surprising to find the ψυχή connected to the same substance, either under the guise of the marrow or through the image of the seed. The association between the former and the soul can be proved by another symbolic representation of the dead soul, the snake, thanks to its shape connected to the marrow²⁶¹.

As for the association between the ψυχή and seed, the sources tend not just to connect these two elements, but also to identify the soul with the semen itself. This is what we find in Plato's *Timaeus*²⁶²:

Mixing them one with another in due proportion from them God shaped the marrow, conceived as a universal seed for all the mortal kinds. Then he engendered in it the manifold kinds of Soul and bound them. He then divided the marrow in His original division, into shapes coinciding for number and nature to the ones belonging to the different kinds of soul. He shaped then that part of the marrow destined to receive within itself - as into a field - the divine seed in a perfect sphere and named it brain, because he wanted to call head the vessel around it, when every creature should be completed.

The connection between seed and marrow is explained further below, where Plato says that this substance, also called seed, flows from the head through the neck and then through the spine and is moved by the love for generating and the desire for emission.

²⁶⁰ Supra, 70.

²⁶¹ See Ael., NA, I, 51; Ov., Met., XV, 389; Plin., NH, X, 66, 188.

²⁶² Pl., Ti., 73c: Μειγνύς δὲ ἀλλήλοις σύμμετρα, πανσπερμίαν παντὶ θνητῷ γένει μηχανώμενος, τὸν μυελὸν ἐκ αὐτῶν ἀπηργάσατο, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα δὴ φυτεύων ἐν αὐτῷ κατέδει τὰ τῶν ψυχῶν γένη, σχημάτων τε ὅσα ἔμελλεν αὐτῷ σχήσειν οἷά τε καθ' ἕκαστα εἶδη, τὸν μυελὸν αὐτὸν τοσαῦτα καὶ τοιαῦτα διηρεῖτο σχήματα εὐθύς ἐν τῇ διανομῇ τῇ κατ' ἀρχάς. Καὶ τὴν μὲν τὸ θεῖον σπέρμα οἷον ἄρουραν μέλλουσαν ἔξειν ἐν αὐτῇ περιφερῇ πανταχῇ πλάσας ἐπωνόμασεν τοῦ μυελοῦ ταύτην τὴν μοῖραν ἐγκέφαλον, ὡς ἀποτελεσθέντος ἐκάστου ζώου τὸ περὶ τοῦτ' ἀγγεῖον κεφαλὴν γενησόμενον.

Another author who treated extensively the connection between soul and seed is Aristotle. In *Generation of Animals*' Book II²⁶³ he deals with the crucial issue of the existence of seed in the soul:

The next question to ask and answer is this. If for those animals that emit seed into the female, what enters is not part of the final embryo, where is directed then, since – as we saw – its action depends on the power contained in it? It is not only necessary to establish if what is taking shape in the female received anything material from what entered her, or not. But also, regarding the soul, from which it comes the word “animal” - and this is connected with the sensitive part of the soul - is it originally in the semen and in the embryo before being fertilised or not? And if it is, where does it come from? Because nobody would say that he unfertilised embryo is soulless or in every sense lacking life (since both the semen and the embryo of an animal have every bit as much life as a plant).

As underlined by Preus²⁶⁴, the property of semen to effect natural production should be itself evidence in favour of its soul's possession. Nevertheless, the ambiguity caused by the word δύναμις might generate some problems. Therefore we read that “on the one hand, the word δύναμις has the effect of taking away something; not actually, but potentially, semen has and is soul”. But a few lines further he adds that “semen must, however, have actually the power of generation, and if it has that power, then it “has and is” the soul”.

In the light of these statements, we can now understand the reason for the painting analysed in Chapter One²⁶⁵, showing a butterfly and the seed or phallus. Moreover, one of the possible hypothesises for the etymology of the φύλαινα,

²⁶³ Arist., GA, II, Τούτου δ' ἐχόμενον ἐστὶν ἀπορῆσαι καὶ εἰπεῖν, εἰ τῶν προἰεμένων εἰς τὸ θῆλυ γονὴν μὴθὲν μόριον ἐστὶ τὸ εἰσελθὸν τοῦ γιγνομένου κυήματος, ποῦ τρέπεται τὸ σωματῶδες αὐτοῦ, εἴπερ ἐργάζεται τῇ δυνάμει τῇ ἐνούσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ. Διορίσαι δὲ δεῖ πότερον μεταλαμβάνει τὸ συνιστάμενον ἐν τῷ θήλει ἀπὸ τοῦ εἰσελθόντος τι ἢ οὐθέν, καὶ περὶ ψυχῆς καθ' ἣν λέγεται ζῶον (ζῶον δ' ἐστὶ κατὰ τὸ μόριον τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ αἰσθητικόν) πότερον ἐνυπάρχει τῷ σπέρματι καὶ τῷ κυήματι ἢ οὐ, καὶ πόθεν. Τὴν μὲν οὖν θρεπτικὴν ψυχὴν τὰ σπέρματα καὶ τὰ κυήματα τὰ μήπω χωριστὰ δῆλον ὅτι δυνάμει μὲν ἔχοντα θετέον, ἐνεργεία δ' οὐκ ἔχοντα πρὶν ἢ καθάπερ τὰ χωριζόμενα τῶν κυημάτων ἔλκει τὴν τροφήν καὶ ποιεῖ τὸ τῆς τοιαύτης ψυχῆς ἔργον· πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ἀπαντ' ἔοικε ζῆν τὰ τοιαῦτα φυτοῦ βίον.

²⁶⁴ Preus, 1970.

²⁶⁵ Supra, 25.

plausibly connected to the male genital organ, would find confirmation in this latter association, the butterfly being connected with the seed as symbol of the ψυχή.

More evidence of the connection between ψυχή and seed can also be found in Homer. At the moment of the death of Hector, the image of his soul is not depicted as abandoning the body, as we would expect, but the face. The reason for this image is connected with the belief that the vital fluid analysed above, identified either with the αἰὼν or with ψυχή, was thought to be contained in the head, conceived as the source of what was defined as the “stuff of life”. Therefore, will find the head itself also connected to the butterfly, the symbol we are investigating here. This is what we aim to discover in the next section.

The head: seat of soul and life.

As we saw above, the head was considered to be the seat of the vital fluid, identified with marrow and seed, responsible for life and procreation. We are not surprised, therefore, to find this body part venerated as sacred and holy by Greeks and mentioned in oaths and curses²⁶⁶:

Zeus, glorious, great, and all of you immortal gods, whoever strayed against the oaths, may their brain flow down like this wine, theirs and their children's, and their wife may be slaves of others.

In Pindar's *Olimpic VI*, 57-61²⁶⁷ we read:

And when he had reached the delicious of golden-crowned Youth, he went into the middle of the Alpheus and called his grandfather Poseidon who widely rules and the Archer who watches Delos, built by Gods, praying to have on his head the honour of caring for the people.

²⁶⁶ Hom., II., III; 298 ff.: Ζεῦ κύδιστε μέγιστε καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι ὀπότεροι πρότεροι ὑπὲρ ὄρκια πημῖναιαν ὧδέ σφ' ἐγκέφαλος χαμάδις ῥέει ὡς ὄδε οἶνος αὐτῶν καὶ τεκέων, ἄλοχοι δ' ἄλλοισι δαμεῖεν. See also Hom., II., XVIII, 82; Od., XXII, 463.

²⁶⁷ Pind, Ol., VI, 57-61: Τερπνᾶς δ' ἐπεὶ χρυσοστεφάνοιο λάβεν καρπὸν Ἴμβας Ἀλφεῶ μέσσω καταβάς ἐκάλεσσε Ποσειδᾶν· εὐρυβίαν, ὃν πρόγονον, καὶ τοξοφόρον Δάλου θεοδμάτας σκοπὸν, αἰτέων λαστρόφρον τιμάν τιν' ἔᾱ καφαλά, νυκτὸς ὑπαίθριος.

Again, the head is depicted as a sacred organ in *Olimpic VII*²⁶⁸, where we find:

And he (Helios) ordered gold headed Lachesis to raise her hands right away, and spoke, properly and earnestly, the great oath of the Gods, and consent with the son of Cronus that that island, once it had risen into the bright air, should be then his prize of honour on his head.

Another occurrence of head as sacred and venerable can be found in Euripides'

*Andromache*²⁶⁹:

It was not as a bride that Paris brought Helen to lofty Troy into his chamber to lie with but rather as a mad ruin. For her sake, the sharp warcraft of Greece in its thousand ships captured you, o Troy, sacked you with fire and sword, and killed Hector, husband to luckless me. The son of the sea-goddess Thetis dragged him, as he rode his chariot, about the walls of Troy. I myself was led off from my chamber to the sea-shore, putting hateful slavery as a covering about my head.

Here the head represents the holiest part of the individual, violated by the enemies and reduced to slavery.

The holiness attributed to the head, together with the cerebro-spinal fluid contained in it, might be the cause of the spread of the taboo against the consumption of animals' head and its contents after sacrifices, a belief spread also among the Egyptian people, as testified by Herodotus²⁷⁰:

They (the Egyptians) flay the body of the animal, while they send curses towards its head and take it away. If there is a market or Greek merchants resident there, they bring it to the market and sell it; otherwise they throw it into the river. The curse they use to send towards the heads of the victims consists in wishing that, if any catastrophe is going to happen on them or on the whole Egypt, it might happen to the head instead. As for the heads of the sacrificed

²⁶⁸ Pind., Ol., VII, 65-68: Ἐκέλευσεν δ' αὐτίκα χρυσάμπυκα μὲν Λάχεσιν χειρὰς ἀντεῖναι, θεῶν δ' ὄρκον μέγαν μὴ παρφάμεν, ἀλλὰ Κρόνου σὺν παιδὶ νεῦσαι, φαεννὸν ἐς αἰθέρα νιν πεμφθεῖσαν ἐᾷ κεφαλᾷ ἐξοπίσω γέρας ἔσσεσθαι.

²⁶⁹ E., Andr., 103-110: Ἰλίῳ αἰπεινᾷ Πάρις οὐ γάμον ἀλλὰ τιν' ἄταν ἀγάγετ' εὐναίαν εἰς θαλάμους Ἑλέναν. ἄς ἔνεκ', ὃ Τροία, δορι καὶ πυρὶ δηιάλωτον εἶλέ σ' ὁ χιλιόναυς Ἑλλάδος ὄξυς Ἄρης καὶ τὸν ἐμὸν μελέας πόσιν Ἔκτορα, τὸν περὶ τείχη εἵλκυσε διφρευῶν παῖς ἀλίας Θετίδος· αὐτὰ δ' ἐκ θαλάμων ἀγόμαν ἐπὶ θίνα θαλάσσης, δουλοσύναν στυγεράν ἀμφιβλοῦσα κάρη.

²⁷⁰ Hdt., II, 39: Σῶμα μὲν δὴ τοῦ κτήνεος δείρουσι, κεφαλῇ δὲ κείνη πολλὰ καταρησάμενοι φέρουσι, τοῖσι μὲν ἂν ἡ ἀγορὴ καὶ Ἕλληνές σφι ἔωσι ἐπιδήμιοι ἔμποροι, οἱ δὲ φέροντες ἐς τὴν ἀγορὴν ἀπ' ὧν ἔδοντο, τοῖσι δὲ ἂν μὴ παρέωσι Ἕλληνες, οἱ δ' ἐκβάλλουσι ἐς τὸν ποταμόν. Καταρῶνται δὲ τάδε λέγοντες τῆσι κεφαλῇσι, εἴ τι μέλλει ἢ σφίσι τοῖσι θύουσι ἢ Αἰγύπτῳ τῇ συναπάσῃ κακὸν γενέσθαι, ἐς κεφαλὴν ταύτην τραπέσθαι. Κατὰ μὲν νυν τὰς κεφαλὰς τῶν θυομένων κτηνῶν καὶ τὴν ἐπίσπεισιν τοῦ οἴνου πάντες Αἰγύπτιοι νόμοισι τοῖσι αὐτοῖσι χρέωνται ὁμοίως ἐς πάντα τὰ ἱρά, καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου τοῦ νόμου οὐδὲ ἄλλου οὐδενὸς ἐμπύχου κεφαλῆς γεύσεται Αἰγυπτίων οὐδεῖς.

animals and wine libations, all the Egyptians respect the same rules for which Egyptian people would never taste the head of any animal.

The same belief is discussed by Aelian²⁷¹, who says:

Those crocodiles raised in the lakes made by the Ombites are their friends and they obey every time they are called by them. The Ombites bring them the heads of the sacrificed animals – they never eat these parts and use to throw them to the crocodiles, which jump around them.

The same taboo was strictly respected by the Pythagoreans, who went further, numbering among the forbidden foods the fava bean as well, considered to be a sacred legume, as able to turn into a human head or genitals or blood. Moreover, fava beans were also thought to have the power to connect with the underworld, having the ability to regenerate and being considered as the first being born from the original rot, together with the first man²⁷².

What is more important for our research, “head” was also a frequent epithet, referred to people, dead people, in particular²⁷³. With the only exception of *Iliad* VIII, 281²⁷⁴, the other occurrences of the epithet are all addressed to deceased people or souls of Hades.

Therefore in *Iliad*, XXIII²⁷⁵ we find Achilles addressing Patroclus’ soul as “my dear head”:

Achilles, swift of foot, so answered him: “Why did you, my dear head, come here, and gave me charge about these things, one by one? I will fulfil them all and I will obey, as you order.

²⁷¹ Ael., NA, X, 21: Τοῖς δὲ Ὀμβίταις καὶ συνήθεις εἰσί, καὶ μέντοι καὶ ὑπακούουσι καλούντων αὐτῶν οἱ τρεφόμενοι ἐν ταῖς λίμναις ταῖς ὑπ’αὐτῶν πεποιημέναις. Κομίζουσι δὲ ἄρα αὐτοῖς κεφαλὰς τῶν ζώων τῶν θυομένων. Αὐτοὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἂν γεύσαιντο τοῦδε τοῦ μέρους’ καὶ ἐμβάλλουσιν αὐτάς, οἳ δὲ περὶ ταύταις πηδῶσιν.

²⁷² See Detienne, 1975, 60-61.

²⁷³ See also Warden, 1971, 97.

²⁷⁴ Hom., II., VIII, 281: Τεῦκρε, φίλη κεφαλή, Τελαμώνιε, κοίρανε λαῶν. Teucer, my dear, son of Telamon, captain of hosts.

²⁷⁵ Hom., II., XXIII, 93-96: Τὸν δ’ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς· <<τίπτε μοι, ἠθείη κεφαλή, δεῦρ’ εἰλήλουθας, καὶ μοι ταῦτα ἕκαστ’ ἐπιτέλλεαι; Αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ τοι πάντα μάλ’ ἐκτελέω καὶ πείσομαι ὡς σὺ κελεύεις.

We find the same expression in the *Odyssey*²⁷⁶, employed by Penelope, who stops Phemius while evoking the great achievements of her husband, believed dead:

Phemius, you know many other chants, able to fascinate men, achievements of men, heroes, gods, glorified by poets. Sing one of them to these people, so that sitting here they could silently drink their wine. But, please, stop this excruciating song, which always breaks my heart in my breast. For a tormenting sorrow has come on me above all. So dear a head I regret, always thinking of that man, whose fame is wide through Ellas and Mid-Argos.

We find more crucial evidence in *Odyssey*, X, 521²⁷⁷, where the ψυχαί are referred to with the periphrasis “bloodless heads of the dead”:

And beseech the bloodless heads of the dead and promise that you will slit the throat of a beautiful cow in your house Ithaca and will fill the pyre with presents.

The identification of the head with the soul in the underworld might also be connected to κυνέη of Hades²⁷⁸, one of his typical attributes, which gives him the gift of the invisibility, enclosing his head and, therefore, his ψυχή:

And Athena wore the helmet of Hades, so that the powerful Ares could not see her.

The link between ψυχή and the head is not attested only in literature: art provides important evidence as well. In a gem of the first century, now contained in the Demidoff collection, a moth is depicted lying on a skull (Picture 3). As I have

²⁷⁶ Hom., *Od.*, I, 337-344: Φήμιε, πολλὰ γὰρ ἄλλα βροτῶν θελκτήρια οἶδας. ἔργ’ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, τὰ τε κλείουσιν ἀοιδοί· τῶν ἔν γέ σφιν ἄειδε παρήμενος, οἱ δὲ σιωπῇ οἶνον πινόντων· ταύτης δ’ ἀποπαύε’ ἀοιδῆς λυγρῆς, ἣ τέ μοι αἰεὶ ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλον κῆρ τείρει, ἐπεὶ με μάλιστα καθίκετο πένθος ἄλασθον. Τοίην γὰρ κεφαλὴν ποθέω μεμνημένη αἰεὶ ἀνδρός, τοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ καθ’ Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος.

²⁷⁷ Hom., *Od.*, X, 521: Πολλὰ δὲ γουνοῦσθαι νεκῶν ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα, ἐλθὼν εἰς Ἰθάκην στειῖραν βοῦν, ἣ τις ἀρίστη, ῥέξειν ἐν μεγάροισι πυρὴν τ’ ἐμπλησέμεν ἐσθλῶν, Τειρεσίη δ’ ἀπάνευθεν οἶν ἱερευσέμεν οἶω παμμέλαν’, ὃς μῆλοισι μεταπρέπει ὑμετέροισιν. The expression is found also in *Od.*, X, 536; XI, 29; 49.

²⁷⁸ Hom., *Il.*, V, 844-845: Αὐτὰρ Ἀθήνη δὺν’ Ἄϊδος κυνέην, μὴ μιν ἴδοι ὄβριμος Ἄρης.

shown in the first chapter²⁷⁹, the peculiar connection between the butterfly and the head was not unknown among the Greeks: we saw how the nefarious action of the φάλαινα - depicted with a σμερδαλέον κάρη - found its breeding ground in the head of individuals (Nic., *Ther.*, 766-768: If it bites a man with its sting on the top of his head, or on his neck, it easily and immediately condemns him to death). Moreover, one of the typical depictions of Hermes, the psychopompus god²⁸⁰, was a pillar provided with a huge head and marked genital organs, which we saw to be both symbols of the soul. As a matter of fact, Hermes himself was indeed often associated with the anthropomorphic representation of Psyche (Pictures 4 and 5), depicted with butterfly's wings²⁸¹.



Picture 3. Gem (I B.C.), now contained in the Demidoff collection. See Furtwängler, *Ant. Gemmen*. 29. 48.

²⁷⁹ *Supra*, 34.

²⁸⁰ See Roscher, 1878.

²⁸¹ See Icard-Gianolio, 1994.



Picture 4. "Sarcophago di Prometeo", residing at the Museo del Campidoglio. On the right Hermes leads the anthropomorphic winged representation of Psyche.



Picture 5. 240 B.C. Marble sarcophagus, now residing at Louvre Museum. On the left Psyche is held by Hermes. Between the god's legs Psyche and Eros embracing each other.

The investigation conducted in this chapter had a double aim - on the one hand our purpose was to detect the main characteristics of the soul we had identified with the symbol of the butterfly, seeking to understand how and why the symbol representation fits its concept. On the other hand, our intent was to give a diachronic overview of the soul, underlying the characteristics of the same both in Greek and Roman culture. We have discovered that an idea of free soul, or soul able to sever the bonds with the body, originated in Egypt, then spread to the Greek and Roman areas of influence. The main characteristic of this soul was the flight from the body – wherefrom the connection with flying animals, such as birds – and the tendency to abandon the body not necessarily after death, but also when the individuals were unconscious but still alive. My second step was then to analyse the Homeric souls, seeking to identify which one in particular could show mutual elements with our symbol, and why. In addition to the name, which constituted evidence as well, we found the Homeric ψυχή - the only Homeric soul able to leave the corpse after death, starting a new existence in the underworld - the most similar to the butterfly soul. The evolution of the concept throughout the centuries in Greek literature confirmed our assumption, the occurrences of ψυχή as free soul being attested also in Aristophanes. One of the main issues to treat was then the location of this particular entity in the human body, with the aim to find an explanation for some questions I had left unsolved in chapter one. First of all, the connection between the butterfly and the male genital organ - attested both with artistic and linguistic evidences - which found here its explanation. As the ψυχή is an entity believed to be contained in human fluids, such as marrow or seed, it is easy to understand why the butterfly, its symbol, had been associated with phallic representations or with the term φαλλός,

and even its name (φάλαίνα). The same concept of soul we saw to be shared also by the Romans: occurrences of free soul or butterfly soul are found in Latin literature as well and constitute important evidence of the longevity of this symbolic representation. Moreover, the main location of this vital fluid, the head, was also often connected to the butterfly, both in art and in literature - the last piece of evidence which helps us testify how rooted was this belief in classical culture.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the symbolic value of the butterfly, demonstrating that this insect was considered to be the representation of the dead soul in Classical culture. For this purpose, I started from the terminology related to the animal, analysing both Greek and Latin sources, with the aim to trace a profile of the insect to compare with the other term of the comparison.

I then continued by analysing the type of soul which could match the characteristics of the symbol. I began our analysis with the Homeric epic, giving a general overview of the different kinds of soul - the ψυχή, connected to the insect by the terminology as well, was shown to have manifold mutual features with the symbolical representation I investigated here. In particular, the flight from the corpse in order to start an independent new life after death was shown to be the connecting link of the comparison - like the butterfly leaves the cocoon, a rigid shell, with no vital functions, the ψυχή flies away from the corpse to Hades' land.

Examination of Roman material provided an example of the free soul - in Hadrian²⁸²'s farewell *carmen* his soul is imagined to leave the body and fly to the underworld, like an *animula* (both little soul and butterfly).

My research proceeded then, by examining the main features of the free soul, and comparing ancient occurrences to modern interpretations. Furthermore, I looked into the characterisation of this kind of soul, tracing an excursus of its representation in classical literature and providing a profile of the butterfly soul. Connections and mutual characteristics responsible for the symbolic association were finally detected, both providing new answers to thorny questions, and encouraging new perspectives of research for a prolific and much debated topic.

²⁸² Script. Hist. Aug., ed. Hohl, I, 27.

The connection between butterfly and the soul.

Prompted by the peculiar homonymy between the butterfly and the soul, present both in ancient Greek and Latin, I started my research by analysing the terminology connected to the insect. I have shown that both languages expressed the idea of butterfly mainly through two pairs of terms - φάλαινα and ψυχή in Greek, *animula* and *papilio* in Latin - each of which, provided with a specific semantic value, tended to appear in particular contexts, different from one another.

The analysis began with the Greek terms. After pointing out the *discrimen* between two different typologies of φάλαινα - the whale and the proper butterfly, both homonymous nouns - I focused my investigation on the insect, showing how nefarious and ill-omened it appeared, judging from the sources. I have demonstrated that, while the φάλαινα tended to make its appearance in nocturnal and gloomy contexts, the first attested occurrence of ψυχή is in Aristotle's *Historia Animalium*²⁸³, where the author speaks about the creation of the butterfly. The same situation was found in Latin occurrences, where the *papilio*, depicted as *nefastus atque inhonoratus*, was opposed to the *animula*, employed in more delicate contexts.

I have demonstrated how the idea of the generation of the butterfly, as an animal able to start a new life from a dead being²⁸⁴, was the origin of the association with the concept of the soul, specifically the dead soul.

The free soul of the dead: a flying entity, able to survive after death.

²⁸³ Aristot., HA, 551a, 14.

²⁸⁴ The cocoon, unable to move or show any vital signs, was indeed not different from a proper corpse.

In the second chapter I provided a general overview of the so called Seelenvogel - a soul, still represented by a flying creature, which leaves the body during unconsciousness or at the moment of death to start a new life.

A further step was to provide an overview of the Homeric souls, demonstrating that the ψυχή - the soul of the dead which tends to leave the body during swooning or after death - was the one to associate with the symbol of the butterfly.

I have then shown that the characteristics of this specific kind of soul perfectly match with the concept of free soul (Bremmer²⁸⁵), which identifies an entity able to start a new life after death, totally free from the bonds of the body. The numerous evidence of the free soul we detected testified how rooted this concept of soul was in Greek culture.

My next step was to involve Latin literature as well - in one of his *Carmina*, Hadrian conceived his *animula* as a delicate flying entity, indeed resembling a butterfly, caught during its last flight.

The soul - a vital fluid inside the head.

Finally, I sought to detect where in the human body this kind of soul had been exactly located. I started from the assumption that the Homeric ψυχή was thought to be contained in the vital fluid (Onians²⁸⁶) represented by marrow and seed and also found confirmation of the link between the ψυχή and the semen in Plato²⁸⁷ and Aristotle²⁸⁸. It was then displayed once again the connection between the ψυχή and the butterfly, often depicted together with phallic representations and semen, or associated with them through the etymology of the name (φάλαινα).

²⁸⁵ Bremmer, 1983.

²⁸⁶ Onians, 1988.

²⁸⁷ Pl., Ti., 70a.

²⁸⁸ Arist., GA, II.

Furthermore, as the seat of this vital fluid was supposed to be the head - the holiest part of human body, as vessel of the soul indeed - I showed another confirmation of the symbolical representation of the butterfly. As a matter of fact, the insect often appeared to have a connection with human heads or skulls, both in classical art and literature, also being said to have the power to kill men by biting them on their head (Nicander²⁸⁹). No wonder, then, that the huge head - one of the main features of the *φάλαινα*, according to Nicander - was, together with prominently displayed genital organs, one of the two characteristics with which Hermes - the psychopompos god - was often represented?

²⁸⁹ Nic., Ther., 759-768.

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