

49. For example, *TLG* (#D) lists total 370 attestations of nominative masculine singular: Eustathius' commentaries on Homer (81); *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (66); scholia to Homer (64); remaining 159 attestations are dispersed among 57 authors/collections.

50. The variant form *monos* is virtually universal. The forms *monos/momonon* are found mainly in hexametric contexts (incl. scholia), but usage is far less markedly Homeric. For example, *TLG* lists total 340 attestations of the nominative masculine singular *monos*: Nonnus (60); Greek Anthology (26); Herodotus (26); Gregory Nazianzenus (19); scholia to Homer (18); Eustathius (15); only 14 in Homer.

51. Comrie 1976:111; also Nagy 1990a:31–34.

52. Even in death Antinoos' rowdy "feasting" continues: he casts away his cup, kicks the table, blood, bread, and meat gush out (17–21). Confusion here is part of the wider matrix of Odyssean disguises and late recognitions. As Antinoos collapses, the suitors rush about in disarray (21ff.), and their thoughts are described in a highly unusual manner (Griffin 1986:45, on *Odyssey* 20.31ff).

53. Some elements of this speech may be comparable to Hecuba's address to Priam (see earlier), where *oios* is used.

54. Kahane 1994.

55. On *mēpios* see also "Bakker, in this volume.

56. The semantic functions of rhythm as described in this article may be more difficult to trace in later, "literate" heroic epic. But this requires separate study.

57. On the magnitude of the Homeric epics, see Ford in this volume.

ANDREW FORD

Epic as Genre

To call the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* 'epics' today can evoke two quite different sets of comparable works. The first grouping would put Homer at the head of a Western tradition of literary epic that runs from Apollonius of Rhodes through Vergil, on to the Renaissance and beyond.¹ The second, with equal justice, would view Homeric poetry as one instance of a type of traditional oral narrative to be found the world over, including cultures far outside the influence of the West.² For all their divergence, these two classes of 'epic' are not unrelated: the traditional oral art embodied in Homer was, after all, what Aristotle took as his exemplar when he laid the groundwork for the theory of Western epic in the *Poetics*. Between these two aspects of epic is yet a third way of defining the genre, in relation to the other forms of song that were named and recognized in Archaic Greece. This chapter will attempt a definition of Greek epic in such terms, asking how Homer's poems were presented to and accepted by contemporary audiences as instances of a particular kind of singing. Defining the genre in historical and culturally specific terms may offer an enriching perspective on the works, and may make clearer the connections between Homer the oral poet and Homer the father of classical epic.³

We do not know when the Greeks began to sing what we now call epics, for the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* derive from oral traditions reaching back to

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the Bronze Age (see Horrocks, this vol.; Bennet, this vol.). Because the Mycenaens did not write their songs down, we can only conjecture that they may have had songs about notable ancient kings which they distinguished from cult songs or praises of living men.⁴ It is in any case generally agreed that the Greek 'Dark Age' was crucially important for developing the themes and the special style we see in the Homeric poems.⁵ By the end of the eighth century, the Ionian version of this ancient art had triumphed over all others as *the* way to sing the exploits of heroes and gods. This style, entailing formal features such as a characteristic meter and dialect as well as larger narrative patterns, amounted to a distinct genre in the sense that it could be expected of a certain class of singers when they performed certain themes, no matter where they came from or where they sang.

This genre appears to have had at first no particular name, though Greek critics eventually named it 'epic.' When the Western critical tradition was founded in Plato and Aristotle, Homeric poetry was popularly called ἑποποιία, meaning something like 'verse composition' or 'hexameter composition.' Although Aristotle objected to naming kinds of literature according to the meter used,⁶ he recognized that trial and error had established the dactylic hexameter as the only proper vehicle for heroic narratives, and he took account of meter in defining epic.⁷ His conception of ἑποποιία as a distinct genre, however, also includes historical, 'natural,' and thematic considerations: epic was the ancestor of tragedy, each genre satisfying a human impulse to imitate the actions of serious or elevated men; the shared themes and aim of epic and comedy distinguished them from such genres as mock-epic and comedy, while they were distinct from each other in formal terms: epic was longer and greater in scope; it used a single meter throughout which was intoned without the full musical range employed in tragic odes or other songs such as the dithyramb; epic could not dispense with an element of narrative. For Aristotle, these features and the genres they marked were far from arbitrary conventions; on his view, literary genres were rooted in natural aptitudes and appetites but evolved historically as poets discovered the kinds of representations that most fully and efficiently achieved their particular aims. (Aristotle notoriously specified the aim of tragedy as a catharsis of pity and fear; some ancestral form of this is often assumed to have been the aim of epic).⁸ Aristotle's teleological outlook disposed him to view epic in relation to tragedy, and indeed to rank the later-arising form higher for its intense and economically achieved effects (ch. 25). Yet he influentially singled out the *Iliad* and *Odyseey* as paradigms of the epic art, and his acute observations on these poems⁹ came to have prescriptive force as canons, future poets would be wise to observe: the most effective epics had been predominantly naturalistic

representations of the deeds of notable figures from legend; the stories were framed within a third-person, past-tense narrative, though the speeches of characters could be given in the first person; the plot, which could begin *in medias res*, normally progressed in a linear sequence, subsuming many episodes under a single main topic; large size, scope, and a relative degree of unity were valued.

Literary conceptions of genre clung to the poems when they entered Rome, where Homer remained a staple of liberal education and the proper approach to a classic work (the *praelectio*) demanded an understanding of its genre. By the time the poems had come to dominate Roman literary practice, Greek critics were speaking of 'epic poetry,' and Roman schoolmasters and litterateurs of *epicium poemata* and *epicus poeta*.¹⁰ When Vergil subsumed the Greek models and critical ideas of epic in his *Aeneid*, Homer's name and the idea of epic were ensured a lasting place in the literary traditions of the Latin west. The rich and multifarious tradition of classical epic achieved its greatest prestige and most rigidly defined form in the seventeenth century, but it is worth remembering that a now canonical exemplar like *Paradise Lost* challenged that form as much as it continued it. The decline in the prestige and practice of formal epic after the eighteenth century did not entirely extinguish the genre, since Romantic long poems or modernist epic novels implicitly invoke the classical mold if only so that their departures from it may have snore force. Hence Aristotle's analysis of epic may be said to have shaped much of Western theory and literary practice from the fourth century B.C. through the present.

In the twentieth century the epic corpus expanded exponentially to accommodate traditional narratives from other cultures ranging from Bosnia, northern Russia, and Asia to the Americas and Africa. Interest in non-canonical epics can be traced to the eighteenth century, but the researches of Milman Parry and Albert Lord into how oral poems are composed and handed down gave a deeper understanding to the formal dynamics of such works. For example, Aristotle explains Greek epic's predilection for archaic and exotic words as a matter of choosing diction 'appropriate' to its dignified meter and themes (*Rhetoric* 1406b3; *Poetics* 1459b35); oral formulaic theory adds that many such forms were retained in the poetic language through centuries because they were ready to hand, metrically convenient, and inseparable from the tale as heard and performed. The study of epics as products of oral composition in performance has also made it possible to specify a further array of formal patterns which were, even if executed unthinkingly, so frequent as to have been hallmarks of the form: the paratactic style, composition by type-scenes, the use of formulaic expressions, extended similes, and ring composition.¹¹

The comparative study of epic conceives of genre not as a series of texts linked in a conscious literary tradition but as a cross-cultural type or kind: in part because Aristotle had defined the form so influentially, the definition of oral epic is not substantially altered from his (a lengthy recitation, usually sung or chanted, which treats the quasi-historical exploits of notable heroes from the culture's past); but the sample from which such a definition is drawn makes it clear that each of its terms (length, recitation, history, heroes) is relative and is only fully significant in relation to specific cultural norms. Hence defining Homeric epic may include asking how the archaic Greek version of this kind of singing was conceived by its poets and understood by its earliest audiences.

An inquiry into the early conception of epic cannot confine itself to descriptive analysis. Terms that might be adequate to sort written texts into classes are not necessarily sufficient or even relevant for an oral culture in distinguishing kinds of songs (cf. Bynum [1976]; Rosenberg [1978]). Aspects of performance, for example, are less evident in a text than its formal properties, yet in Archaic Greece the social context in which songs were performed played a major role in determining their formal requirements. Outlining the sorts of considerations that went into classifying kinds of singing in Homer's time suggests that epic and all archaic Greek poems were defined in relation to four major categories: (1) the context of the song, (2) its 'form' or the ways it marked its language, (3) its 'contents' or themes, and (4) the relations between the poet and the audience. Let us consider these categories in order, devoting most attention to the latter two which will prove the most significant.

Like any complex society, Archaic Greece organized its singing along with the rest of social life, recognizing only certain kinds of speech, rhythm, melody, and movement as appropriate on certain occasions. Thereby particular contexts generated corresponding types of song, with social and religious notions playing as large a role in their definition as formal and aesthetic criteria.¹² Most of the named kinds of songs in Homer are tied to particular ritual or communal occasions, such as the hymenaios (*Il.* 18.49f) for weddings, the *threnos* (24.721) for funerals, or the *linos* song (18.570) for harvesting (see Diehl [1940]). But epic performance was confined to no particular settings, times or places. The poems suggest that such songs were particularly at home at banquets (*Od.* 8.99; cf. 9.2-11, 13.7-10), but other evidence makes it likely that epic poetry was also performed in the marketplace or at contests held in connection with funerals and national religious festivals (Kirk [1962] 274-81). The only contextual requirement for epic performance, then, appears to have been leisure, a break from normal business sufficient to hear a long account of ancient deeds.

The context of Archaic song also determined its formal requirements, for the kinds of music and rhythms favored in particular contexts depended both on the actions to be accompanied by the song (e.g., dancing, processions, pantomimes) and also on how performing roles were to be distributed among participants. *Threnoi*, for example, not only required suitably lugubrious themes and music, but also restricted solo singing to select participants based on their age, gender, and status relative to the deceased: in *threnos* described by Homer, women kin offered a short song to which the larger group responded antiphonally (Alexiou [1974]). This pattern in which a single performer 'leads' the rest of the group was used in other types of song as well and was marked with a particular word for 'leading'.¹³ A different formal pattern folded all participants into one homogeneous choral group singing in unison: in Homer this is exemplified in the soldiers' paean, a collective prayer to Apollo: provided it expresses group solidarity, the paean is equally suitable in situations of distress (*Il.* 1.472-73) or of triumph (22.391-94). Epic performance would appear to represent the other extreme from these practices, to judge from the singers Homer represents: they perform solo, accompanying themselves on a stringed instrument,¹⁴ there is normally no dancing, and the audience is specifically designated as still, seated in rapt silence (*Od.* 1.325-26). Although the music of epic performance can only be guessed at, the vocabulary for 'singing' indicates that it was a sort of recitative, felt to lie above plain speech but below fully melodic singing.¹⁵ This mode of performance would have distinguished epic from the melodic songs the Greeks called μέλος (including most of what we call 'lyric' poetry), but not from solo recitatives in other stichic meters such as iambs and trochaics.

Neither performative contexts nor their formal requirements, then, gives us more than the most general definition of archaic Greek epic: we can only say that already for Homer it was a traditional kind of non-melic poetry, adaptable to many situations but identified with none and so without a particular name. What most obviously set epic apart from other non-melic forms in iambo-trochaic meters was the themes it treated. To turn to the contents of epics, the invocations offer important evidence.

Evidence from Homer and other early epics shows that the narrative proper was regularly announced with an invocation, a prayer that the Muse 'sing' or 'tell' a certain story; the invocation could be repeated later in the song to make a transition to new themes or inset pieces.¹⁶ Invocations had a relatively set form: an imperative, vocative ('sing, Goddess,' 'tell me, Muse'), and a brief naming of the theme which would have served as a kind of title for the song: 'the Wrath of Achilles,' is Homer's title for what was called the *Iliad* in the classical period, and 'the Man of Many Turns ...' his title for the

Odyssey.¹⁷ Other songs mentioned within the poems are identified in the same format (Ford [1992] 18–23): ‘The Baleful Return of the Achaeans’ (*Od.* 1.326–27), ‘The Quarrel of Odysseus and Peleus’ son Achilles’ (8.75), ‘The Destruction of the Achaeans / As much as they wrought and suffered and as much as the Achaeans toiled’ (8.489–90), ‘The Fashioning of the Wooden Horse’ (8.500–501), ‘The Destruction of the Argive Danaans and of Ilion’ (8.578). Invocations next regularly emphasize the great scope of the action, its pathetic quality, the nations involved, and the presence of the gods throughout. At the end of the invocation the poet specifies from what point the tale is to begin: the *Iliad* is to be sung ‘from the time when the son of Atreus and Achilles first stood apart in contention’ (1.7–8); the poet of the *Odyssey* asks the Muse ‘of these things, starting from some point, tell us now’ (1.10).

The first seven lines of the *Iliad* and the first ten of the *Odyssey* promise a kind of poem that Bowra (1925) has well described as ‘heroic epic.’¹⁸ The poet’s ‘sing’ or ‘tell’ means the song is fundamentally a narrative, as Aristotle noted (1462a16–17), although Homeric poetry is half dramatic speeches. The narrative will concern the actions of great men and women from the nation’s past who suffered and strove beside the gods; it will be a large and complex story, but only a part of a much larger story that might be told. With the recognition that the Muse is taking up the story from a certain point, the poet reminds us, as Aristotle noted too (*Poetics* ch. 8), that any particular epic is carved out of a notionally larger whole. In Lord’s words ([1960] 123), ‘a song in tradition is separate, yet inseparable from other songs.’ This larger story, even if only an abstraction, is significant because it would appear to constitute the theoretical limits of the epic repertoire, and limiting content is a major component in defining this genre.

To delimit the themes of epic for Homer means in the first instance describing the kinds of songs that the Muses inspire professional singers to sing. For among the many divinities (*Il.* 1.604; *Od.* 10.254) and mortals (*Il.* 1.473; *Od.* 14.464) who ‘sing’ in Homer, some are singled out as professional singers with the title *αοιδοί*. The word is only used of professional singers in Homer and Hesiod, those who may be listed among the society’s itinerant craftsmen along with carpenters, seers, healers, and heralds (*Od.* 17.382–85).¹⁹ The professional singers in Homer are masters of ‘singing and dancing’ (*Od.* 1.152) for any occasion: Priam summons *αοιδοί* to the palace to ‘lead’ the threnos for Hector (*Il.* 24.720–22), and Odysseus can require a song to accompany a wedding dance from Phemius, the *αοιδός* on Ithaca (*Od.* 23.133 ff.); Phemius seems to play and sing a *μολπή* while the suitors sport (1.150–55), and the Phaeacian Demodocus can accompany acrobatic dancing by troops of young men (8.261–64) or perform a burlesque hymn in the

agora (8.266 ff.). Nevertheless, to infer from this picture that the epic performer in Homer’s time was a jack-of-all-songs may be erroneous. For it seems reasonable to suppose that poets would have had to specialize to produce epics of such length and complexity, and no melic poems were ascribed to Homer in Greek tradition.

Homer seems aware of a distinction between the singers’ heroic narratives and the other kinds of song they provide when he describes Phemius’ ‘Return of the Achaeans’ (*Od.* 1.328) and Demodocus’ ‘Destruction of the Achaeans’ (8.498) with the formula, ‘singing filled with the words of god.’²⁰ The epithet is also applied to professional singers, who are the only mortals said to be ‘filled with the words of a god’²¹ referring evidently to the central role the Muses have in defining this kind of poetry. For the modern observer, what made a professional epic poet was a long apprenticeship in learning its themes and style; in Homer’s terms, it is the Muses who make some singers *αοιδοί*, and presumably make their singing superior to that of amateurs.

The search for a Homeric term that would describe in general what poets sing has focused on the phrase *κλέει ἀνδρῶν*, as when Achilles sings ‘the fames of men’ to a lyre (*Il.* 9.189). The dedication of a kind of poetry to conferring ‘fame’ on its subjects derives from chic’s very ancient connection with Indo-European praise poetry (Schmitt [1967] 61–102). Preserving and disseminating ‘fame’ was especially the concern of poets: *αοιδοί* are said to ‘confer fame’ upon their subjects by celebrating them in song (*Od.* 1.338; cf. Hesiod *Theogony* 32; *Works and Days* 1); Hesiod speaks of an *αοιδός* ‘the servant of the Muses,’ who ‘celebrates the fames of earlier men’ (*Theog.* 100; cf. *Hom. Hymn* 32.18–20). Although *κλέει ἀνδρῶν* is clearly a traditional term for oral heroic traditions, other uses of *κλέει* in Homer show that professional epic poets claimed to present these traditions with an authority unavailable even to Achilles.

The *Odyssey* offers valuable evidence for the way poets regarded their repertoire when Homer describes a poet beginning a heroic theme:

the Muse then stirred up the singer to sing the fames of men from that *οἴμη* whose fame at that time reached broad heaven, the Quarrel of Odysseus and Achilles, son of Peleus, how they once contended with each other at the rich feast of the gods
Od. 8.73–76

An individual story a bard might perform, such as ‘the Quarrel of Odysseus and Achilles,’ is here given the quasi-technical name *οἴμη*, possibly understood metaphorically as a ‘path’ of song.²² A professional poet like

Phemius knows many such stories: 'the Muse has made οἶμοι of every kind grow in my heart' (*Od.* 22.347–48; cf. 8.479–81). The aggregate of οἶμοι are the κλέα ἀνδρῶν (8.73). The κλέα ἀνδρῶν, however, include any account of earlier men of note, not just those purveyed by poets. Κλέος basically means 'what is heard,' and κλέα include whatever is handed down from mouth to ear. Indeed, simply as 'what is heard,' κλέος may be casual talk, second-hand report, or mere rumor (e.g., *Od.* 3.83; 4.317; 16.461; 23.137).²³ Phoenix tells, without 'singing' and without invoking the Muses, an old story about Meleager which he ascribes to the 'fames of men': 'so we hear tell of the fames of men of long ago, the heroes' (*Il.* 9.524–5). Genealogies may circulate in the same way, and are identified with κλέα when Aeneas compares his lineage with Achilles':

We know each other's lineage, we know each other's parents
from hearing the sayings that have been heard before among
mortal men;
but as for actually seeing them, you have never seen my parents,
nor I yours.

Il. 20.202–204

Oral genealogical traditions arise as each generation 'hears' from the one before, and not particularly from singers, the names of ancestors. But Aeneas significantly contrasts such knowledge (202) as mortals may have of their past with the first-hand knowledge an eye-witness might have (204). This opposition is significant because Homer uses it at a key point to distinguish his own inspired poetry from humanly transmitted κλέα ἀνδρῶν as a source of knowledge about the past.

In his extended invocation to the catalogue of ships Homer distinguishes the account his Muses inspire from the general run of oral tradition: 'For you [Muses] are goddesses, and are present, and know all / but we hear only and do not know anything' (*Iliad* 2.485–6). The Muses 'know' these things in the root sense of that word, they 'have seen' them and so bring the authority of eye-witnesses to the events of which the poet wishes to speak. The poet and his generation do not 'know' the past in this way; for them, as for Aeneas, knowledge of the past without the Muses is mere report. These same distinctions are deployed in the *Odyssey* when the hero praises a heroic singer: 'very rightly you sing the destruction of the Achaeans ... as if you had been there in person or had heard about them from someone who was' (*Od.* 8.489–91). The implication is that the blind bard has an eyewitness' knowledge from the Muses.

Among the functions of the Muses, then, is to underwrite the claim by professional poets that their songs about the past are superior to the many other accounts available in the society. The Muses' favor and assistance make the difference between 'mere' κλέος and θεοτικὸς αἰοιδή. Although the poet and the gentleman hero may share an interest in the fames of men, the poet's status depends on confining 'true' epic to what the Muses give. Accordingly, the range of epic is the range of songs that Muses inspire αἰοιδοί to sing. Bowra's notion of 'heroic epic' well expresses the ethos of these poems, but a comparison with the Hesiodic corpus suggests that the range of 'heroic' song should be interpreted broadly.

Although the preeminence of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* may incline us to identify θεοτικὸς αἰοιδή with heroic poetry, the range of themes the Muses inspire is in fact wider. After all, Hesiod also invokes the Muses, and much of the poetry that went under his name shares the diction, meter, dialect, and legends to be found in Homer. A consideration of Hesiodic poetry shows that the repertoire of the Muses' singer extended beyond the doings of 'heroes,' and that it is better defined, in Homer's terms, as 'the deeds of gods and men that singers celebrate' (*Od.* 1.338) or, in Hesiod's terms, as 'the fames of men of former times/and the blessed gods who hold Olympus' (*Theog.* 100–101).

It used to be common to distinguish between an Ionian (Homeric) 'school' of heroic epic and a Boeotian (Hesiodic) school of didactic or catalogue poetry. But the opposition of epic to didactic is wholly inapplicable to the Archaic period,²⁴ and such a gross dichotomy obscures important conceptual affinities that Homer's poetry had with at least some of Hesiod's (Thalman [1984] xi–xiii, 75–77). The epic singer, after all, must be knowledgeable (*Od.* 1.337–39), and later Greece put Homer on an equal footing with Hesiod as a teacher.²⁵ Moreover, the *Theogony* at least (I postpone discussion of *Works and Days*) is closer to Homer's poems than a strict epic/didactic dichotomy allows. In its proem Hesiod appears very much like a Homeric singer: he learned the art of singing, from the Muses (*Theog.* 22; cf. *Od.* 8.481; 488) who breathed into him a 'voice filled with the words of a god' (*Theog.* 31–32). He initiates his theme in much the same fashion as Homer, invoking the Muses to 'celebrate the holy race of the gods' and bidding them to 'tell me these things... from the beginning' (*Theog.* 104–115). Hesiod's theme is undoubtedly sacred history, but it is also a narrative of noteworthy deeds, and deeds that are far from unconnected to heroic history.

A bridge between the Hesiodic *Theogony* and Homeric epic is provided by his *Ehoiai* or *Catalogue of Women* which is blended into the end of our *Theogony*. After the ascendancy of the Olympians is secured, the *Theogony*

changes its theme with a transitional invocation at 963–68: ‘sing the tribe of goddesses ... who lay with mortal men and produced godlike children.’ Another invocation at 1019–22 switches to the converse of this theme, asking for the ‘race of [mortal] women’ who consorted with gods and the heroic descendants of these unions. With this latter invocation a transition is effected to the *Catalogue of Women*.²⁶ What we may call Homer’s ‘heroic’ tales follow logically and chronologically on this *Theogony*–*Catalogue* continuum: one divine–mortal union that was recounted in the *Catalogue* (at some length and with a dramatic speech) was that of Thetis and Peleus (Fr. 210–211 M–W), but the union of Achilles’ parents is equally an epic theme, as in the cyclic *Cypria*. From this perspective, epics appear not as secular stories about heroic mortals as opposed to gods, but as later stories in a single continuous history. The same comprehensive vision informed the epic cycle, which not only filled in the prologue and aftermath of the Trojan war but reached back to describe the Titanomachy and perhaps too the birth of the gods.²⁷

Firm distinctions begin to become perilous here, for one may usefully describe the catalogue poem as a separate genre, a type of poetry that may be paralleled in Greece and elsewhere.²⁸ Even on such a view, however, catalogue poetry will often function as sub-genre or narrative mode within epic: the catalogue style, for example, is also at home in telling tales of Troy (e.g. *Il.* 2.484 ff., 1.2.89–104), and Homer no less than Hesiod may need to list a number of rivers (*Il.* 12.17–23; cf. *Theog.* 337–45) or Nereids (*Il.* 18.37–49; cf. *Theog.* 240–64). Even the characters within heroic narratives may have reason to list their ancestors at some length (e.g. *Il.* 6.150–211, 20.200–258). In a notable passage from Odysseus’ account of his visit to the underworld (*Od.* 11.225–332), the hero catalogues for his audience the noble women he saw there, thus taking up the themes and much of the manner of a poem like the *Catalogue of Women*.

Whether one wishes to view catalogue poetry as a distinct genre or as a mode of heroic narrative, Hesiod’s *Theogony* and *Catalogue of Women* suggest that theogonies were not set apart as distinctively didactic poems but were, like Homeric epic, narrative and sometimes dramatic accounts of earliest history. In the repertoire of the Muses, the κλέα ἀνδρῶν were connected to theogonies, and the whole embraced a discrete mythic epoch beginning with the birth of the gods and ending when the Trojan war resulted in a breach of the close intercourse between gods and mortals (Hesiod Fr. 1.6 ff. and Fr. dub. 264; cf. *Od.* 7.201–203). Although some nobles at epic performances may have claimed descent from the great dynasties mentioned, their world was irretrievably cut off from that age, most obviously because the gods no longer mixed as freely with mortals on earth.²⁹

Archaic epic, then, was significantly defined by the themes it could treat. The Homeric and Hesiodic conception of Muse-inspired poetry was based on this mythic age and not on a division between poetry about mortals versus poetry about gods (which is essentially, and perhaps originally, a Platonic way of dividing poetry).³⁰ The restriction of epic to themes from this imaginary time held force for a very long time in Greece; as far as we can see, it was not breached until the fifth century when Choerilus of Samos, with much fanfare in his poem about innovation, gave epic treatment to Greece’s wars with Persia.

Other poems attributed to Hesiod appear to have been Muse-inspired narratives of ancient times, such as the *Marriage of Ceyx*, *Descent of Pirithous*, and *Aegimus*. Yet to call all of Hesiod ‘epic’ may be reductive: if we consider the fourth respect in which archaic poetry defined itself, the poet’s relation to the audience, we will realize that Greek epic also involved a quite distinctive rhetorical stance of the poet toward his audience.

Hesiod’s *Works and Days* begins with an invocation and so might be immediately taken as a form of Muse-inspired epic. But this invocation is in fact the reverse of those in Homer and the *Theogony*, and it establishes a relationship between poet and addressee that differs vastly from that of epic’s to its audience. Hesiod bids the Muses to perform, but not to perform the *Works and Days*. They are asked to tell of Zeus and celebrate his justice (1 ff.): at the end of the poem, the poet turns to a certain Perses and proclaims that ‘I would tell [you] true things’ (10). The actual poem will thus be Hesiod’s speech to his brother, not the speech of the Muses.³¹ This is not to say that the poet wished to sever his own song form from the true and authoritative song of the goddesses, but it does mean that *Works and Days* will not be a narrative, a fact reinforced by its many subsequent addresses to Perses. Hesiod will relate parts of divine and heroic history (such as the stories of Pandora and Prometheus), but always as a particular speaker advising a particular auditor, in order to draw lessons about what Perses should do in this morally ordered cosmos.³² By contrast, Homer’s epics and Hesiod’s extended narratives present stories of the past in the first instance as coming from the lips of the Muses, and never explicitly indicate how to apply these tales to their auditors’ lives.³³ Whereas the *Works and Days* establishes a highly individualized persona for both poet and addressee (as, presumably, the *Precepts of Cheiron* did also), the epic narrator’s relation to his audience is far less specific: its projected audience is a nameless collectivity, a weaker and more ignorant generation of mortals living long after the heroes (e.g., *Il.* 5.302–304; 12.380–83).

These differences in the way the poet orients himself to his audience suggest that the *Works and Days* is less close to the *Theogony* than to other

hortatory, non-narrative Hesiodic poems such as the *Precepts of Cheiron*, *Bird Divination*, and *Astronomy*. Slicing up genres is particularly perilous here, but much as these poems may share with epic in diction, meter, dialect, legends, and morals, the personas of poet and addressee are quite different, and their themes could hardly be summed up as ἔργ' ὀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, τὰ τε κλείουσιν ἀοιδοί. When Greeks wished to draw a clear distinction between Homer and Hesiod, the latter's poetry is exemplified with *Works and Days* as forming a clear contrast to Homer: Aristophanes' list of useful ancient poets includes Hesiod who taught 'working the land, seasons and harvests and farming' and Homer, the teacher of 'battle formations, courage, and armor'.³⁴ Whatever name or status one may wish to give these Hesiodic works, they clearly derive from a different tradition than epic, one that may be called 'wisdom poetry' (M. L. West [1978] 3–25). To be sure, the hortatory mode of wisdom poetry may appear in epic too: Phoenix is giving instruction through heroic legend when he recounts the Meleager story to Achilles (9.524–605). Once incorporated into the *Iliad's* hexameters, the Meleager tale may look like an 'epic within an epic'; but the whole is preceded and followed by direct, second-person instructions to Achilles on how to apply the story to his situation (9.513–23, 600–605). In a somewhat subtle variant, Nestor tells Patroclus one of his own youthful exploits (*Il.* 11.670–761): this Pyliaean cattle raid is recounted with typically heroic form and structure (see Hainsworth [1991] 22); but it is presented as the personal reminiscence of an elder warrior to a youth, and it is framed with pointed remarks contrasting Achilles' present behavior (11.663–668, 761–63).³⁵

Archaic Greek epic must thus be defined in formal, thematic, and rhetorical terms. It was a long, solo song performed in a rhythmic recitative; it narrated on the authority of the Muses the deeds of gods and early heroes. The themes epic treated, the 'paths' it could take, were extensive but firmly circumscribed by a mythic conception of a long-lost golden age. The stories were presented dramatically and without explicit cues for how to apply them to their auditors' lives. This discreet attitude toward its audience and its lack of a fictional addressee distinguished epic from exhortative recitatives such as the *Works and Days*; it also would have distinguished epic from such melic poetry as offered extended mythic narrative but explicitly applied the stories to the present ceremony and community.³⁶ The combination of this limited range of themes, the poet's discreet way of rendering them, and the solo recitative was sufficient to distinguish epic formally and thematically from all contemporary lyric songs and from all non-narrative recitations.

Having achieved this much of a definition of epic in Archaic terms, it remains to add that manipulating these shared conventions offered the poet

possibilities for subtly expressive effects. A simple but resonant example is Odysseus' deliberate misapplication of the rules governing wedding songs. After the slaughter of the suitors, Odysseus commands Phemius to produce a wedding song so that passersby might infer that Penelope has at last decided to marry (*Od.* 23.133 ff.). By applying a specific kind of song to the wrong context the hero strategically miscommunicates what has gone on in the palace. A wedding song is hardly what one expects to follow a blood bath, and yet such a song is ironically appropriate when the hero is about to be reunited with his wife.

In a more subtle example Homer discreetly evokes the Archaic genre of maiden's songs (later called *parthenia*) to provide a background to the scene of Odysseus' first meeting with Nausicaa. When the hero first spies the princess, she is amusing herself by playing a ball game with her maids and leading them in an antiphonal song and dance (*Od.* 6.101). The narrator does not tell us the song's theme but gives the performance a specific coloration when he compares it to the virgin goddess Artemis sporting with her nymphs in the wild (6.102–109). Such a conceit was typical in maiden's songs, which could be performed antiphonally and for which Artemis and her chorus provided a divine archetype.³⁷ The tableau moves Odysseus to make the same comparison and to venture how well Nausicaa must dance in choruses; he adds that his only comparable experience was on Delos, which was famed for its women's choirs (6.151–63). Once again these subtle intimations of non-epic song are particularly appropriate to the scene, for the parthenion ceremony functioned as a kind of 'coming out' ball in which well-born women might attract the amorous glance of a spectator (cf. *Il.* 16.179–83), and the possibility of taking this princess to wife will soon present itself in the story.

The *Iliad* exhibits a particular versatility in exploiting another non-epic genre, the *threnos*. In drawing to a close, the poem modulates from epic narrative to first-person women's lament with a protracted presentation of the threnodies for Hector (24.723–776). It exploits this genre both for its themes of pathos (a tone also borrowed for the speeches of Andromache and Hecuba in *Iliad* 6) and for its antiphonal structure which allows Helen herself, as the final threnodist, to reflect on the war being fought for her sake. But the conventions of the *threnos* are significantly evoked throughout in the *Iliad*, especially in connection with the death of Patroclus. At Patroclus' lavish funeral in book 23, his comrade-in-arms Achilles 'leads' laments while the Myrmidons in full panoply respond (23.1–17). The verb suggests that Patroclus is being given a formal *threnos*, at least insofar as the battlefield allows. Earlier uses of the word place this male *threnos* for Patroclus in a series of more or less spontaneous laments which anticipate, albeit

imperfectly, the final ceremony of 23. When Patroclus' body was being prepared, Achilles embraced the corpse and 'led' lamentations for the Achaeans who groaned in response (18.314–17, 354–55). This spontaneous lament resembles a *threnos*, though it is not formally constituted as one; and Achilles promises Patroclus another lament, that women will mourn him (18.338–42). This comes true in an unforeseen way: Briseis catches a glimpse of the body and 'leads' a lament to which her companions respond with groans (19.282–302). The multiplication of these scenes (also 19.314–39) dramatically emphasizes the loss Achilles feels rather than reflecting any precise set of funeral practices (M. W. Edwards [1986]). Two further quasi-anthologies which begin the series suggest that the poet keeps returning to the form as a way of exploring how raw suffering may be transmuted into artistic structure. When news of Patroclus' death is first announced, Achilles falls to the ground in an orgy of grief, groaning, and self-defilement. These sounds arouse the captive women in his tent who come running and collapse around him beating their breasts (18.22–31). The actions are perfectly comprehensible in themselves even as the tableau suggests an antiphonal lament; it is as if the poet is deliberately superposing on the elemental and impassioned expression of grief its most proper and ceremonious form (its genre). That form is soon repeated when Thetis hears the cries and comes with her Nereids to comfort the hero. Taking Achilles' head in her arms, in another conventional gesture of mourning (18.72; cf. 24.712, 724), she 'leads the groaning' for the nymphs who beat their breasts in response (18.50–51). Her ensuing complaint (18.52–64) thus becomes at once highly pathetic and a generic anomaly: a god's lament in prospect for the son she knows will die. The *threnos*, then, serves the poet of the *Iliad* as a source of pathetic themes, as an evocative pattern for structuring action, and as a way to intimate the great pathos of an event that lies beyond the limits of the story he has to tell.

Generic conventions offer no less suggestive material when the genre being represented is epic itself. The *Iliad* does not show us epic singers performing; Priam has professional singers summoned to Hector's funeral, though their singing is not subsequently described (24.721–22). Their presence, however, suggests that epic's noble pedigree reaches back even to praises offered heroes at funerals, an idea that may contain a grain of truth.³⁸ The *Odyssey* offers more extensive representations of epic singing which dramatize Homer's definition of epic, affirming the distinction drawn above between epic and non-inspired accounts of the past.

The *Odyssey* twice suggestively juxtaposes epic song to nonpoetic accounts of heroic deeds: in book 1, Phemius sings about the return of the heroes while Telemachus privately discusses the same topic with a well-traveled guest (in reality, a disguised Athena); on Phaeacia, Odysseus praises

Demodocus as a nonpareil epic performer, their goes on to recount his own adventures in a kind of 'prose' sequel to the poet's Trojan tales. In both cases the unique access that the Muses give to the past for Homer's generation is ironically reaffirmed: if epic poetry was once an entertainment worthy of heroes, it will be all the more valuable in a post-heroic age when gods do not so readily appear on earth bearing news, and heroes no longer give their own accounts of their actions. The contrast between song in a heroic context and song in Homer's own day is further underlined by the response of the audience. Penelope's tears at Phemius' song are set against the pleasure taken in the same song by the suitors, and Odysseus' repeated sobbing at songs of Troy provokes the curiosity of the pacific and music-loving Phaeacians (1.325 ff., 8.83 ff.). For non-heroic mortals, pleasure is the normal response to epic: when a man hears songs about earlier men, 'straight away he forgets his sad thoughts and does not think about his cares' (Hesiod, *Theog.* 102–103); even an embittered Achilles finds pleasure (*Il.* 9.189) in the κλέα ἀνδρῶν because the men in question are of former times. Because Penelope and Odysseus are not of the generation of later mortals, but are personally involved in the actions described in song their response differs heroically from the norm.³⁹

A final outstanding example of Homer manipulating the conventions of his own genre is Odysseus' *apologos* in *Odyssey* 9–12. In a tour de force the poet assumes a persona which liberates him from three fundamental conventions of epic narrative: he narrates the story in the first person; as a vagabond sailor, he incorporates fantastic and supernatural tales otherwise out of place in Homeric poetry; finally, he boldly flashes back to tell at length events that preceded the beginning of the poem. But we are not quite allowed to forget the epic narrator who has modulated his own voice into that of his character. Odysseus too casts a singer's spell over his audience (*Od.* 11.333–34 = 13.1–2; cf. 1.337–40), and King Alcinous explicitly compares him to a singer (11.363–69). If the *apologos* reveals to the Phaeacians that the apparent vagabond is really a hero, it also reminds Homer's audience that behind this hero stands a poet no less skilled in disguising himself.

Our ability to appreciate the ways in which Homer relies on and exploits his contemporaries' notions of genre rests on a very limited sample of Archaic songs. Although there is much we cannot know, nonetheless we may claim that a notion of epic genre helped the poet to guide the expectations of his audience and helped the audience place new songs in relation to ones it had heard. If at times the conventions of epic were pressed to their limits, the result would still be an epic, a tale of the vast but not infinite past delivered by the Muses to the skillfully recreative singer.

NOTES

1. Valuable overviews of the classical epic tradition are Newman (1986); Hainsworth (1991).
2. For an introduction to the vast and ongoing research on oral poetics, see A. B. Lord, 'Oral Poetry' in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, 1993), 863–66.
3. A. Fowler (1982) argues powerfully for the continuing usefulness of genre criticism in these terms.
4. Cf. Webster (1953) 91–135.
5. Kirk (1976) 19–39; M. L. West (1988).
6. Because the poet's essential task is not versification but imitation: *Poetis* 1447a28–47b23; cf. 1451a37–b5, 1451b27–29.
7. *Poetis* 1459b31–60a1. Cf. Aristotle's brief formulas for epic: 'the mimetic art in hexameters' (1449b21) or 'the art of narrative imitation in recited meter' (1459a17).
8. On Aristotle's notion of genre, see Rosenmeyer (1985).
9. Surveyed in Hogan (1973).
10. Cicero, *de Opt. Gen.* 1, 2; Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.51, 62 (where the broad range of 'epic' poets is noteworthy). The Greek phrase is first attested in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Composition* 22 (where it is a very probable emendation); on ἔπος as a name for the genre (e.g., Horace, *Satires* 1.10.43), see Koster (1970) 86–91.
11. For a full description, see M. W. Edwards (1987) 29–123.
12. R. P. Martin (1989) 43–44 argues that 'social genres' are primary and that literary genres vary according to a society's ideas of performance.
13. E.g., *Il.* 24.723 (Hector's mother 'leads off' the laments for her son); *Od.* 4.15–19 (a musician and tumblers lead a wedding song); Archilochus leads the Dithyramb and the 'Lesbian Paean' (120, 121, M. L. West, ed., *Lambi et Elegi Graeci*, Second edition [Oxford 1992]). Further varieties in *Lexicon des Frägrichischen Epos*, ed. B. Snell et al. (Göttingen, 1979–) s.v. ἔπος, B I 2e and B II 2 (Hereafter, *LfggE*).
14. On musical instruments in Homer, see Barker (1984) 4–17, 25. By the Classical period, epic performers had dispensed with the lyre altogether; how early this occurred is unclear: see M. L. West (1966) on Hesiod *Theog.* 30. G. Nagy (1990b) 21–24 cautions that the portrayal of poets in Homer may not directly reflect contemporary practice in every respect.
15. For a musical reconstruction of epic recitative, see M. L. West (1981), who also discusses the terms for singing.
16. In addition to *Il.* 1.1–7 and *Od.* 1.1–10, cf. Hesiod *Theog.* 104–115; *Thebais* fr. 1, ed. M. Davies (1988); Antimachus; *Thebais* fr. 1 Wyss. Transitional invocations: *Il.* 2.484 ff., 2.761–62, 11.218–20, 14.508–510, 16.112–13; Hesiod *Theog.* 965–68, 1021–2. See especially Fränkel (1975) 6–25.
17. Cf. Lord (1960) 99: 'When one asks a singer what songs he knows, he will begin by saying that he knows the song, for example, about Marko Kraljevic when he fought with Musa, or he will identify it by its first lines.'
18. Cf. Hainsworth (1993) 32–53.
19. *LfggE* s.v. ἀοιδός and ἀοιδή.
20. Cf. *Il.* 2.600, *Od.* 12.158; *Hom. Hymn Hermes* 442.
21. *Od.* 17.385; cf. Hesiod fr. 310.2 R. Merkelbach and M. L. West, *Fragmenta Hesiodica* (Oxford, 1967), hereafter M-W.

22. On the meaning and etymology of *οἰμῆ*, see Ford (1992) 42 n. 78 and the literature there cited; a different view in Nagy (1990b) 28.
23. Cf. Redfield (1975) 32–34.
24. The most influential formulation was the fourth-century grammarian Diomedes: E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. W. R. Trask (Princeton, 1973) 440. Cf. W. Kroll, 'Lehrgedichte,' *Pauy-Wisowa Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* 12.2 (1925) 1843.
25. For Homer as teacher: Xenophanes B 10 DK (H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed. [Berlin, 1952]); Heraclitus B 56. Xenophanes paired Homer with Hesiod in denouncing their portrayal of gods: B 11, A 1.18 DK; Herodotus joined them as the source of Greek ideas about the gods (2.53).
26. Hesiod fr. 1 M-W. On these transitions, see M. L. West (1985) 49, 126–27.
27. Bernabé (1988) 8; against any recoverable cyclic *Theogony*, see Davies (1989) 13.
28. M. L. West (1985) 3–11.
29. M. L. West (1985) 9–11, 29–30, remarks that early Greek catalogue poems are relatively unusual among other genealogical traditions in concentrating on the heroic age and not continuing lineages up to the 'present' time.
30. The differentiation of 'hymns' for gods from 'encomia' for mortals is found first in Plato (*Republic* 607a, etc.); see Cassola (1975) x–xii.
31. The gnomological *Theognidea* also opens by addressing the Muses and other deities before the poet resumes the first person to direct advice to a certain Cynos (esp. 27 ff.).
32. Because the story of the *Theogony* involves the founding of the moral order of the world, it too sometimes briefly comments on the present effects of past actions, as when Oath is characterized as 'the one who most vexes perjurers on earth' (231–32). But even in lengthier excursuses on why the world works as it does now (e.g. the moralizing that follows the Prometheus–Pandora story, 590–616), the *Theogony* avoids appealing to a 'you' and quickly resumes its narrative thrust (cf. 612).
33. De Jong (1987a) shows the many ways in which the epic narrator may to move away from the impersonal voice of the Muse and closer to his audience, but always to a degree of involvement that falls far short of direct exhortation.
34. *Frags* 1033–36; Hesiod wins the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* (233.207–210 Allen) on the grounds that he calls the people to 'farming and peace' whereas Homer urges them on to 'war and slaughter' (see Rosen, this vol.).
35. The dramatic situation of this moral instruction suggests, again, the *Precepts of Chetron*, and even more strongly Hippias of Elis' 'Trojan Oration', which he performed (at schools) as a prose sermon from Nestor to the young Neoptolemos (Plato, *Hipp. Maj.* 286B).
36. On the generic relations between epic and lyric narratives in the Archaic period, see Burkert (1987).
37. See Calame (1977) II, 90–91; Ford (1992) 118–19.
38. Reiner (1938) 62–67, 116–20; Bowra (1952) 8–10.
39. A related ironic reversal of a fundamental epic norm is Telemachus' defending Phemius' heroic theme on the grounds that men love best the 'newest' song (*Od.* 1.350–52). Only in a heroic age can epic be 'new.'

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HOMER

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