

The Song of the Muse¹

μῆνιν ἄειδε θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος

[A atividade da Musa
"Canta, deusa, a ira de Aquiles, o Pelida,]"²A.P.David³

Pesquisador Independente

Resumo: A Musa inspira performance, mas quando ninguém restou para dizer o que viu, muito trabalho de pesquisa precisa ser feito para que se reconstrua uma performance. Este artigo diz respeito à questão da Musa a partir de uma perspectiva filológica: uma nova teoria da prosódia grega é proposta, a qual pela primeira vez conecta a dinâmica acentual da língua grega antiga, tomando por base o sistema de acentos registrado nos textos escritos, com os ritmos métricos da poesia grega. Comprovações dessa teoria são dadas na padrão de síncope e correlação entre acento e metro, padrão este bem típico na poesia de diversos povos, mas não muito observada na poesia grega antiga. Então nos dirigimos especialmente à questão cênica: o padrão binário do ritmo homérico, que consiste de dátilos com fortes e fracas partes do pé métrico em igual duração, é uma anomalia linguística mas algo fácil de se encontrar em ritmos dançado. No *Sirtós*, a dança circular tradicional grega de longa historicidade e ainda executada nos dias de hoje, nós encontramos relevantes similaridades com hexâmetro homérico, no que se refere às cesuras e diéreses. Os novos padrões acentuais revelados enfatizam a musicalidade do hexâmetro. A combinação de canção e dança circular remete-nos para a questão literária, na qual traços específicos da narrativa homérica, como frases-assinatura (frequentemente denominadas impropriamente como 'fórmulas'), o verso, e a narrativa em extensão toda como composição em anel, acabam por encontrar seu fundamento no ritmo e na atmosfera de uma dança circular que avança em passos para a direita com passos para trás em dados momentos de cada verso.

Palavras-chave: Acento Grego, épica, dança, composição em anel.

Abstract: The Muse inspires performance, but when no one is left alive who has seen the performance, a good deal of forensic work must be done before a performance can be imagined. The paper first addresses the Muse at the philological level: a new theory of Greek prosody is presented, which for the first time connects the tonal dynamics of Ancient Greek, as recorded in the written accentual system, to the metrical rhythms of Greek poetry. Demonstrations are given of a pattern of syncopation and reinforcement—typical in fact of the world's poetries, but not so far observed in Ancient Greek—between accent and metre. We then address the orchestric level: the binary Homeric rhythmic pattern, consisting of dactyls with strong and weak portions of the foot of equal duration, is anomalous in linguistically driven rhythm, but typical of dance rhythm. In the *syrtós*, a still extant traditional Greek round dance of ancient pedigree, we find compelling similarities to the rhythmic articulations—caesura and diaeresis—of the Homeric hexameter. The newly revealed accentual patterns reinforce this metre in a musical way. The combination of song and round dance leads us to the 'literary' level, where peculiarities of Homeric narrative, at the level of the signature phrase (often misleadingly called a 'formula'), the line, and the larger narrative in ring composition, come to be seen as rooted in the rhythm and ambience of a ring dance that advances to the right with a retrogression at the same moment in each line.

Keywords: Greek accent, epic, dance, ring composition

¹ Portions adapted from A. P. David, *The Dance of the Muses*, Oxford 2006

² Verso inicial de *A Ilíada*, de Homero.

³ Pesquisador com *background* in Estudos Clássicos, publicou a controversa obra *The Dance of the Muses: Choral Theory and Greek Poetics* (Oxford University Press, 2006), que propõe, entre outras coisas, a aproximação entre o metro da épica homérica (dátilo hexâmetro) e passos de dança. Website: www.danceofthemuses.org.

Who or what is the Muse? Scholars seem to prefer to let this question resonate rather than answer. We love the free space such mysteries allow, and the aura that they lend to everything we say. Other prominent examples in modern Classicism are the terms ‘tradition’ and ‘performance’. The last thing we want is for these terms to become objective and concrete. They would lose their Muse. We much prefer the free play that these concepts give us. We can talk about ‘oral tradition’ without any experience or ability in oral composition ourselves, and without applying anything we might know about real aural traditions, which is to say, recent traditions of human sound-making. Thus we can make of these ideas what we will, more or less. We can wave our hands at the idea that Greek lyric poetry was in fact danced, unlike any lyric poetry that we study in school; but then leave this idea as one of its penumbral enticements, before proceeding to study surviving examples of lyric simply as literature.

I do not wish to debunk in any sense the psychological romanticism of the Muse as ‘inspiration’. There is already a concrete aspect to this. The daughter of Mnemosyne, ‘memory’, must supply us with mnemonics. Metre and rhythm (and rhyme) are widely recognised as contributing to this mnemonic function. But much beloved poetry is remembered not because it is mnemonic, but because in its perfect combination of rhythm and expression it is simply memorable. The dactylic hexameter of Homer and epic moves to the very same rhythm as the distinctive national folk dance of modern Greece, the *syrtós*. Something can be made of this. But Homer is remembered better than his rivals because he is memorable.

Μουσική is a term whose historical semantic ground is in the dance of the Muses—it means the art of the Muses—and Hesiod describes the Μοῦσαι as divine dancers (*Theogony* 4). Hence it is a term that appears to refer to an art of physical movement, and at the same time to its Inspiring Powers. But μουσική comes to be distinguished in Greek usage from γυμναστική, the art of the naked athlete—as famously in Plato’s *Republic*. Μουσική and γυμναστική comprise the complete liberal education. So there had come to be, in time, a synchronic semantic contrast between μουσική and γυμναστική, such that the latter referred to physical education. The former then referred to the arts of speech and of the mind, to what is *not* bodily, to what would come to be called literature and even science. There is therefore something equivocal, perhaps, about ‘dance’ from the Greek perspective, in its relation to poetry and the intellect on the one hand, and the physicality of movement on the other. Χορεία, in Plato’s late usage, restores a reference, and

embodies a synthesis, that μουσική lost by having become the non-physical pole in a contrasting pair: most directly χορεία refers to dance, to a concrete patterned movement that can be exhibited by a planet as well as a chorus of dancers; but, like the original μουσική, it almost always makes this reference under the purview of a poetic text—that is to say, it refers to dance *and* song, to dance that moves under the power of poetry and a poet.

The substance of ancient Greek poetical composition is rooted in the physicality of dance. The dynamism of ancient verse is born in the interconnection between the rhythm felt in the measured vigour of dancing feet, on the one hand, and that harmony whose instrument is the human voice and whose material is the accentual melody of Greek words in the flexibility of their order.

I met Miriam Rother more than ten years ago, when I was a professor at St. John's College in Annapolis. Her son was a devoted Greek student, and I explained to him that if one applies my new theory of the Greek accent, it becomes possible to read the ancient texts as musical scores, even to experience the rhythm of their movement. Until then, however, I was still one whose teaching depended on the titillating mystery, who almost preferred that the actual music and dance remains a thing to tease a student's imagination. But this young man pointed out that his mother was a choreographer. Why not try it? Why not indeed I said. All she needed to know from me was where to stress the words, and I knew how to tell her.

The partnership turned out to be a happy one. On my side, it was something like the possibility of Socrates' imagined city coming to life before his eyes. On hers, a disaffection with what seemed a sort of aimless randomness in modern dance attracted her to the guidelines and disciplines offered by my theory and the ancient visual evidence. We did not touch the question of non-verbal music, for example, although we knew the choruses involved such accompaniment, because I was able to offer nothing presentable by way of theory or practice. (In other words, I didn't know how to interpret the music, and I couldn't play it.) Our extant musically annotated manuscripts are all late in relation to the texts of the 'golden age', and probably reflect the post-Euripidean habits of the so-called 'New Music'. But Aristotle said that the effect of tragedy can be had 'in the hands'—I presume by reading—and we could go a good deal further than that.

On many occasions, however, I found myself pushed beyond where my conservative instincts allowed. I thought that the dancers used simple folk dance steps; the chorus was a

chorus of citizens, after all, not professionals like the soloists. But apart from their elaborate costumes in tragedy and comedy, it is incontrovertible that in addition to words and steps the choruses used 'schemata', or gestures, a relatively undeveloped aspect of the modern folk dances. I was dogmatic, for various reasons, about their being a shift of weight from leg to leg in the movement of a foot or 'step'. But an early fragment of *hyporchema* by the tragedian Pratinas makes it clear that the dithyramb also involved a 'tossing of the foot'. This may well indicate a marking of time without a shift of weight from foot to foot. Hence I was open to Miriam's innovations in recreating an ancient art form. This was not to be a freshly painted and colourful temple ready for use and worship, but neither was it to be an untouchable roped-off ruin.

I. A 'Classical' Indo-European Prosody

But how did I know on which syllable to stress the words? Marcus has made clear to me his interest at this conference in grounding performance in philology. There is no royal road, I'm afraid, so here goes.

The new theory of the accent originates in W. S. Allen's comparison of the Vedic *udatta-svarita* system with the classical Greek descriptions and prosodic notation. The point to note is that in Vedic the rising tone, *udatta*, occupied only one vowel mora, but the *svarita* or down-glide could occupy both moras of a following syllable.

A 'mora' is an element of vowel quantity; a short vowel has one (as in Latin *nihil*), a long one has two (*rāri*). Syllables containing long vowels are called 'heavy', but so also are closed syllables with short vowels; these are thought to contain two moras. Philologists somewhat confusingly refer to these vowels as 'long by position' when they are followed by a consonant cluster. Short vowels followed by a mute and a liquid, however, are considered 'doubtful'; this is because such syllables can be either long or short, depending on their placement in the *thesis* (an ambiguous philological term, by which I shall refer to the ictus-bearing downbeat of a foot) or the *arsis* (the weak part of the foot or upbeat). This ability stems from the fact that in poetic contexts a mute + liquid can be seen either as divisible, closing one syllable and opening the next, or together as the initial coherent plosion of the following syllable.

There are three written accents in Greek texts: ὀξύς or 'acute', βαρύς or 'grave', and περισπώμενον or 'circumflex'. I claim that *udatta* corresponds to the Greek descriptive term ὀξύς

(English 'sharp') and *svarita* to Greek βαρύς ('heavy'). Note that the latter term is conventionally defined so as to correspond to Vedic *anudatta*, 'unaccented', but its meaning in Greek is most naturally taken as positive rather than privative. The circumflex denotes a situation where the pitch rises on the first mora of a long vowel and drops on the second. Thus the Greek prosodic notation is consistent in marking the mora where the voice rises, but only in this one instance (the circumflexed vowel) does it indicate the following drop in pitch. Allen suggests that the two elements fused in these situations, with the down-glide predominating; he cites Sanskrit grammarians who describe the cases corresponding in Vedic to the Greek circumflex simply as *svarita*.⁴ Meanwhile, it is important to note that despite its name, the 'grave' sign in Greek texts does not mark the *svarita*, which is an automatic down-glide following the ὀξύς-*udatta*; rather, it marks the suppression of the pitch-rise on the final syllable (or ultima) of a non-prepausal word. In Greek sandhi, if the voice does not have 'room' to descend in pitch within the word, it is not permitted to rise: what cannot come down, must not go up.

Hence the Greek version of the *svarita* is only indicated visually in the circumflex, where the pitch-rise occurs within the first mora of a long vowel. When the pitch-rise occurs on the *second* mora of a long vowel, an acute sign is used; any subsequent down-glide on the following syllable, whether the vowel is long or short, in this situation or any other, is left unmarked. Trochaic shapes with an initial closed syllable, containing a short vowel, are marked with an acute sign (for example, ἄνδρα). It should be noted, however, that there is textual evidence that the contonation was completed within such closed syllables in trochaic environments, based on adjacent secondary accentuation induced by an enclitic in an early textual variant (ἄνδρά μοι; Homer *Odyssey* 1.1). This completion does not occur in closed syllables in non-trochaic words; in ἄνθρωπος, for example, the down-glide occurs on the penult, not within the antepenult.⁵

The new theory of the classical accent depends on the following idea: *Accentual prominence derives not just from rising pitch, but from the combination of pitch change with quantity.*

Hence a down-glide over a closed syllable or a vowel of two moras would be more prominent than the preceding rise on a single mora. If, however, the syllable following the rise

⁴ W. S. Allen, *Vox Graeca*, 3rd Edn. (Cambridge, 1987) 122

⁵ David 65

was short, the syllable containing the rise would itself register as the more dynamically prominent. There is therefore a progressive aspect to classical prosody, determined by quantity, although it remains correct to describe the accent as recessive with respect to the mora of rising pitch. Although the combination of pitch change and duration is a feature of stress, in these contexts the weakening of adjacent vowels that is also characteristic of stress does not occur.

I think it worth digressing that even some practitioners in the field seem to be unaware of the philosophical structure of descriptive argument. We are used to finding fault with ‘circular reasoning’, but this is a criticism proper to deductive arguments. Descriptive theories are inductive, and the process of reasoning in induction is *necessarily circular*. This is as true of the so-called scientific method as it is of historical linguistics. An hypothesis must be assumed to be true in order to be tested. In these days of the politicisation and capitalisation of science, there is bound to be an incentive for researchers to find what they are paid to look for, or to support orthodoxies that are dependably funded. To be sure, one method for testing an hypothesis is to look for empirical evidence of its necessary consequences. But an inductive hypothesis can never be proven, merely corroborated. Such corroboration can involve unlooked for solutions to related questions, or a comparative lack of anomalies in relation to it, or the sheer elegance of the hypothesis itself. But empirical hypotheses do not prove; they persuade, whether we speak of a theory of evolution or of Indo-European, and what they persuade is human judgement.

Modern astrophysics based solely on the role of gravitational forces in the cosmos has been forced to adopt non-empirical things, like dark matter, dark energy and black holes, to save its equations. Not a day goes by without astronomers exclaiming their surprise about celestial phenomena on all scales, from comets to galactic clusters, but even a preponderance of anomalies and ad hoc solutions has not been enough to shift people’s settled judgements. The oral theory of Homeric composition requires ‘dark ages’ that must have been an extraordinarily fecund time of oral artistry, without any shred of empirical evidence about its habitation, let alone a society that might have supported a tradition of aesthetic performance. There is no ancient testimony to such a tradition; and today’s sophisticated exponents adopt a ‘softened’ principle of economy, in light of the Homeric evidence, without being bothered that minus Milman Parry’s hard claim of economy in formulas—one formula one idea—the theory no longer offers a means of facile composition-in-performance that could distinguish it from composition-in-writing and its

sphere of authorial choice. And yet the oral theory of Homeric composition is usually taught as fact in schools.

In light of these considerations, it is welcome evidence for Allen's comparison of Vedic and Greek accentuation that the theory applies most simply to Latin as well as Greek, in a way that he had not foreseen. (It is possible that it also applies to classical Sanskrit, which some have claimed to have an accentual system identical to that of Latin; in which case we have discovered a most curious and as yet unexplained phenomenon of 'classical-era' Indo-European.) I shall therefore begin with the case of Latin before proceeding to the complexities of Greek. The traditional rules for Latin are these:

1. Disyllabic words have the accent or stress on the penult.
2. Polysyllabic words have the accent on the penult, when the penult is long; on the antepenult, when the penult is short or common.

Hence the stress positions are those underlined:

Cicerō, facilis, corda, rari, nihil, canō

For classical Latin, the new rule is simply this: *The contonation must begin* (that is, the pitch-rise must occur), *where possible, on the second mora before the ultima*. The rule for Latin is indifferent as to the quantity of the ultima.

Tonal prominence in Latin then becomes an automatic consequence of the possible conjunctions of pitch change and quantity.

Consider the following examples. I use a grave sign for a prominent long syllable bearing a down-glide, and an acute for a prominent syllable bearing the sharp rise in pitch. Note that there is a mora of rising pitch in each word, but it is tonally prominent only when followed by a short syllable. The traditional stress locations are underlined:

Cicerō, facilis, còrda, ràri, níhil, canò

Classical grammarians describe one species of Latin accent as 'flex' (for example Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 1.5). It is sometimes suggested that such a tonal description is a result of 'Greek envy', and that the classical Latin stress accent was not actually tonal. The new theory suggests that on long penults, the Latin dynamic prosody was tonal in a way that directly reminded native descriptivists of the Greek circumflex. Hence the Latin grammarians may not

have been so envious after all, if the new law is correct. The reader will observe that in all cases save the last one, the new theory predicts tonal prominence for the same syllable described according to the traditional rule as ‘stressed’. In the iambic shape (*canō*), however, the new theory generates an ultima stress, which would be a unique case of such stress (outside of monosyllables) in classical Latin.⁶ This prominence occurs because the down-glide fills both moras of the long ultima. The first line of Virgil’s *Aeneid* strongly suggests that *cano* was pronounced with an ultima stress in a poetic context. To stress the penult here would be to stress the second short of the second dactyl—unnaturally, from any possible poetic or musical motive—rather than the thesis of the third dactyl, at the first caesura of the whole poem. It is also counterintuitive that an onomatopoeic expulsion at this rhythmic moment (*canō*) would be suppressed. Rather than the schoolboys’ *árma virúmque cánō*, we offer *àrma virùmque canò*.

The classical Greek rule allows for more complications and permutations. The descriptive recessive rule from which everything seems to stem, however, can be stated simply thus: *Where possible, pitch-rise occurs on the antepenult; but no more than one mora may follow the end of the contonation.*

Through Allen’s comparison with Vedic it has become possible to revive a binary distinction, oxytone/barytone, which persists in Greek grammars but appears to have little descriptive utility. ‘Barytone’ in particular has come to mean merely a word with no accent mark on the ultima.⁷ I would suggest that the distinction corresponds to one between prominent rising pitch (‘sharp’) and prominent down-glide (‘heavy’). (Note again that ‘prominent’ means ‘dominant’, not ‘sole’ in these phrases. A prominent ‘sharp’ is generally followed by a non-prominent down-glide on a short syllable or syllables, while a prominent ‘heavy’ follows an anticipatory rise marked in texts by an acute accent, or is fused with it in a vowel marked with a circumflex.) Dionysius of Halicarnassus reports that Greek words were characterized by being spoken either on the ‘sharp pitch’, the ‘heavy pitch’, or on both (Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 40.17). Under the new parlance we speak of words that are

⁶ see David 77, 78

⁷ H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Harvard, 1920) 38

Oxytone	—on the antepenult —penult —ultima	δέκατος πόλις ὄξυς
Barytone	—on the penult —ultima	ἄνθρωπος, δῶρον λέγω, ζῆν
Both		πόλις, πόλις τε

Any word whose ultimate quantity could be affected by an enclitic or a pause could switch from oxytone to barytone. These would be the words that could be pronounced ‘on both’.⁸

A principal corroboration for the proposed law comes from samples of stichic verse, where one would expect metrical ictus to be reinforced and counterpointed by prosody in a recognisable way. Greek verse is notorious for showing no sort of patterned relationship between its prosody and its poetry, a situation otherwise highly anomalous. (Japanese has been offered as an example of a language with a pitch accent independent of its quantitative rhythm.⁹) Consider the opening line of Sophocles’ *Antigone*:

ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμήνης κάρᾱ,

The underlined syllables represent the ictus-bearing segments of the iambs. Note that there is no correspondence whatsoever between the positions of the written accent marks and this ictus, unless we accept the implausible notion that Sophocles was aiming for a complete counterpoint or rhythmic dissonance in his opening line. Now consider how the underlined ictus relates to the positions claimed for tonal prominence according to the new theory:

ὦ κοινον αὐταδέλφον Ἰσμηνης καρᾶ,

Here we see initial de-emphasis or counterpoint culminating in full agreement between accent and ictus, both at caesura (after αὐτάδελφον) and at line-end (κάρᾱ): a recognisably musical pattern.¹⁰

As I continue to stress, the written accent efficiently marks the place in a syllable where the voice rose in pitch, but not necessarily the syllable that was most tonally prominent in the classical era:

2 ἄρ' οἴσθ' ὅτι Ζεὺς τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδῖπου κακῶν
3 ὅποῖον οὐχὶ νῶν ἐτι ζῶσαιν τελεῖ;
4 οἷδ' ἐν γὰρ οὐτ' ἀλγεινὸν οὐτ' ἄπης ἄτερ
5 οὐτ' αἰσχροὺν οὐτ' ἄτιμόν ἐσθ', ὅποῖον οὐ

⁸ Dionysius includes the circumflex also in this category. (For a discussion, see David 61-2.)

⁹ A.M. Devine and L.D. Stephens, *The Prosody of Greek Speech* (Oxford, 1994) 213

¹⁰ For a number of other examples from epic and tragedy, see David 115-37, 222-7, 236-7, 249-253, 258-260, 263-9.

6 τῶν σῶν τε κάμῶν οὐκ ὄπωπ' ἐγὼ κακῶν.
 7 καὶ νῦν τί τοῦτ' αἶ φρασι πανδήμῳ πόλει
 8 κήρυγμα θεῖναι τὸν στρατηγὸν ἀρίως;
 9 ἔχεις τι κείσῃκουσας; ἢ σε λανθάνει
 10 πρὸς τοὺς φίλους στείχοντα τῶν ἐχθρῶν κακά;

In these 10 lines, there are a total of 60 underlined iambic theses (the long syllables bearing the ictus). Of these, only 19, 32% or less than a third, bear a written accent. (14 of the 19 are circumflexes.) It is small wonder that it is difficult to recite these lines in modern Greek in such a way as to render any sense of rhythm. The sense of music depends on variations in the way that melody and meaning relate to a progressive ictus. This tensile relationship produces certain phenomena characteristic of poetic and musical discourse, such as *enjambement* and syncopation. But variation depends upon a theme, and when prosody seems to ignore altogether the underlying metrical rhythm, the result is merely chaos. Even the final syllabic cadence of these iambic lines is marked with an accent only 4 times out of 10.

Metrical analysis, on the other hand, is generally too rigid to yield a sense of the music in Greek poetry. The tradition of reciting poetry according to metrical ictus is properly called 'scanning' rather than 'reciting'. To stretch a point, focussing on metre is like ignoring the melody and harmony in the analysis of a Mozart sonata, and looking exclusively at time signatures and bar lines. (On the other hand, many teachers avoid the arcane details of traditional metrical analysis, and focus solely on the words; this could be compared to studying Mozart opera via the libretto.) Because of a conviction that there was no connection between the Greek pitch accent and verse rhythm,¹¹ metrical analysis has proceeded in terms of the location of word divisions. 'Caesura' is a word break that cuts a foot; 'diaeresis' a word division between feet. It is understood that certain such divisions characterise different metres. In the case of the iambic trimeter, for example, we are told that a 'chief' caesura occurs more often after the second anceps (a position which can be filled by either a long or short syllable; the 5th syllable in the line) than after the second breve (always short, the 7th syllable in the line).¹²

The opening lines of *Antigone*, however, show four of the former and six of the latter:

¹¹ see e.g. A.M. Dale, *The Lyric Metres of Greek Drama* (Cambridge, 1968), 5

¹² J.W. Halporn, M. Ostwald and T.G. Rosenmeyer, *The Meters of Greek and Latin Poetry*, Revised Edition (Oklahoma, 1963) 13

1 ὦ κοινὸν ἀντάδελφον | Ἴσμηνης κάρα,
 2 ἄρ' οἴσθ' ὅτι Ζεὺς | τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδίπου κακῶν
 3 ὅποιον οὐχί | νῶν ἔτι ζῶσαιν τελει;
 4 οὐδὲν γὰρ οὐτ' ἀλγεινὸν | οὐτ' ἄτης ἄτερ
 5 οὐτ' αἰσχροὺς οὐτ' ἄτιμόν | ἐσθ', ὅποιον οὐ
 6 τῶν σῶν τε κάμων | οὐκ ὄπωπ' ἐγὼ κακῶν.
 7 καὶ νῦν τί τοῦτ' αὖ | φασι | πανδήμῳ πόλει
 8 κήρυγμα θεῖναι | τὸν στρατηγὸν ἄρτίως;
 9 ἔχεις τι κείσηκουσας; | ἦ σε λανθάνει
 10 πρὸς τοὺς φίλους στείχοντα | τῶν ἐχθρῶν κακά;

Line 7 shows both caesuras, but the left-leaning enclitic φασι (and the sense) argue for choosing the second. Note also that in 5 there may be no 'chief' caesura at all, as the left-leaning enclitic ἐσθ' attaches to ἄτιμόν.

The fact remains, however, that the ends (and the beginnings) of words are not of necessity prosodically prominent in Greek. Greek words, including word + enclitic combinations, are indeed prosodic units, in the sense that the contonation cannot cross word-boundaries (unlike in the case of Vedic), and a recessive rule is defined in relation to the ultima. But there is no indication that word divisions of themselves marked any sort of prosodic emphasis. As I have said, Greek would be anomalous amongst the world's languages, and unique in Indo-European, if the native prosody internal to its words bore no reinforcing relation to its poetic rhythms. Here are the same ten lines analysed according to the new law (grave for circumflex/barytone, acute for oxytone):

1 ὦ κοινον ἀνταδέλφον | Ἰσμηνης καρὰ,
 2 ἄρ' οἴσθ' ὅτι Ζεὺς | τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδίπου κακῶν
 3 ὅποιον οὐχί | νῶν ἐτι ζωσαιν τελει;
 4 οὐδεν γαρ οὐτ' ἀλγεινον | οὐτ' ἀτης ἀτερ
 5 οὐτ' αἰσχρον οὐτ' ἀτιμον | ἐσθ', ὅποιον οὐ
 6 τῶν σῶν τε κάμων | οὐκ ὄπωπ' ἐγω κακῶν.
 7 και νυν τί τοῦτ' αὖ | φασι | πανδημῶ πολει
 8 κηρυγμα θεῖναι | τον στρατηγον ἀρτίως;
 9 ἐχεις τι κείσηκούσας; | ἦ σε λανθανει
 10 προς τους φιλοὺς στειχόντα | τῶν ἐχθρῶν κακά;

Immediately we find that under the proposed law, 40 of the 60 iambic theses (67%, two thirds) are tonally prominent. Most of these prominences are barytonic, but several are oxytones, under the new parlance. We would count 41 if we could be confident that elision allowed for the completion of a contonation across a word boundary, at οὐτ' αἰσχροὺς (line 5), on analogy with an

enclitic later in the same line (ἄμῳν ἐσθ'). This statistic suggests neither rote reinforcement, nor chaos, but musical variation. The final syllable, which could be expected to be the most invariant cadence point of agreement between accent and ictus, is now shown to be tonally prominent 9 times out of 10, rather than 4.

A closer look reveals how metrical analysis can obscure rather than clarify the musical reality. We are told that caesura most often occurs after second anceps. This sounds like a regularity. But the X that marks anceps in the visual mathematics of a metrical schema is not a sign of invariance; rather, anceps, true to its name ('two-headed'), is precisely an indication of variability, crucial in this case to the harmonic realisation. In a predominance of cases, when anceps is long before a word division, it is also tonally prominent, because a long ultima is generally stressed and usually bears the down-glide of the contonation. Such a caesura turns out in fact to be a side-effect of what is sometimes called a 'masculine', or ascending cadence at midline, which results in an aesthetic asymmetry between the two parts of the line. (Some Indo-European lines, like the French alexandrine, prefer a perfectly symmetric division.) Conversely, if the anceps is realised as short, the preceding long is usually stressed due to the recessive rule; hence the word division is the result of a trochaic or 'feminine' (descending) accentual cadence. Caesura after the second breve represents the third musical option, for a midline break that does not divide the line into equal halves: a descending cadence on the third iamb, as in line 1 above. This dependence of the phenomenon 'caesura' upon accentual determinants is easily seen in the Greek hexameter. There is almost always a caesura in the third foot, either after the long thesis of the dactyl, or after the first of the two shorts in the arsis (-|UU or -U|U). Again, the two caesuras can be understood as the result of an aesthetic impulse towards an asymmetric midline cadence in the stichic line. The two possible positions for a heavy (barytonic) stress in a Greek word are on the ultima or on the penult, when the latter is followed by a short syllable. Hence if one wishes to compose a masculine or a feminine accentual cadence upon the third longum of a hexameter—that is, to place a stressed long syllable there—the two kinds of caesura necessarily result. Caesura is a late concept first met with in Aristides Quintilianus (3rd Century CE). The prosody of Greek in a metrical environment, the melody, is its true cause.

It will no longer be surprising that the final catalectic foot of the hexameter (-x) shows a written accent only on a minority of occasions. The new law resolves this otherwise inexplicable

anomaly. For its part, metrical analysis declares that the final syllable of the hexameter is anceps. Since there is always word division between lines, what this means, musically, is that the Greek hexameter is able to resolve with either an ascending or a descending cadence. If the final syllable is long, it is always tonally prominent. (This only happens in the Latin version when there is a monosyllable at line end.) If it is short, the stress usually falls on the antecedent long thesis, producing the descending cadence at line end.

The new law in the Greek case, unlike that of Latin, was not corroborated by any received rules for stress. The new law in fact corroborated *Allen's* rules for stress. Allen came up with these rules through the study of syllabic placements in the second half of lines of stichic verse. This excursus was part of his *Accent and Rhythm* (Cambridge, 1973), but disconnected from the comparison with Vedic *udatta* and *svarita*. It shows for the first time that Allen's analysis was in fact consistent with the received graphic marks for Greek. M. L. West describes Allen's stress theory as 'convicted long ago of being based on circular reasoning' and claims it is 'generally ignored by specialists.'¹³ He fails to mention that he is referring only to his own review of *Accent and Rhythm*.¹⁴ Allen's book has recently been reprinted (2009) to the acclaim of professional linguists. There are unfortunately occasions when classical philologists seem to live in a kind of echo chamber, unaware of opinions and methods grounded in other relevant disciplines. Clearly West does not appear to understand the circular nature of descriptive argument. Deductions are rare in some approaches to reality. A. M. Devine and L. D. Stephens, by contrast, described Allen's study as 'the first work in the field of Greek metre that can truly be said to understand the requirements of scientific method and theory construction.'¹⁵ This is the view to which an informed consensus subscribes. Here are the rules, as Allen set them out in his later handbook:

1. Prominence applies to an element constituted by either (a) one heavy syllable or (b) two light syllables.
2. Words (or word-like sequences) longer than an element have internal contrasts of prominence/non-prominence.
3. If the final syllable of a word is heavy it is prominent.

¹³ M. L. West, 'Review of A. P. David, *The Dance of the Muses. Choral Theory and Ancient Greek Poetics*', *JHS* 128 (2008) 182-3, at 182

¹⁴ West, *Gnomon* 48 (1976) 5-8

¹⁵ Devine and Stephens, *Language and Metre* (Scholars Press, 1984) 26

4. If the final syllable is light, the next preceding element is prominent.
5. A preceding element separated from the prominent element is also (secondarily) prominent.¹⁶

The new law has nothing to say about a possible unattested secondary prominence (rule 5), except to say that dual prominence is met with routinely in enclitic combinations. In all other respects, Allen's stress rules predict the *same prominent syllables as the new theory does*. In effect, the new theory amounts to a dovetailing and a vindication of ancient and modern approaches. Allen's rules were induced in a study of the ends of lines of verse. That they are confirmed by an application to the rest of the line in Greek poetry, is a closing of the circle. The new law of Greek prosody corroborates and is corroborated by 1) the received system of accent signs, 2) Allen's comparison of Greek and Vedic, and 3) his theory of Greek stress, all of them previously disconnected. This manner of evidential closing of the circle is a hallmark of sound inductive reasoning.

II. The Muses' Dance

The story does not end here, however, in the case of Homer. There is the phenomenon of the 'bucolic diaeresis'. There is nothing complicated about a diaeresis. It occurs between every line of verse: new line, new foot, the first syllable of a new word. But the bucolic diaeresis presents a typological difficulty. It occurs between the fourth and fifth feet of an hexameter line. This puzzle has heretofore been overlooked in its musical dimension. Why this extra division? Linguistic theories of metre can account for a break near mid-line as a kind of spontaneity, based on instincts for symmetry and the like. Hence some kind of mid-line division in the hexameter, whether caesura or diaeresis, is already predictable typologically, and there is a regular caesura in the third foot. But diaeresis marks the beginning of a line, and hence constitutes an inceptive cue. How can one account for the regularisation of a new beginning, a kind of 'kick start'—the bucolic diaeresis—immediately before the *end* of the hexameter line? (The standard introductions and accounts do not seem to feel even the pressure of a problem here: accounts of the diaeresis as a so-called 'rhythmic clausula' do not even pretend to address the question of why such a strange effect might have been a poetic desideratum.) In the modern folk dance (the *συρτός* of

¹⁶ Allen 135-6

ancient name), it so happens that the locations of these classical divisions of the line, caesura and diaeresis, frame a distinctive retrogression and then a resumption in the circling step. They mark the ‘tropic’ points of a dance that revolves with involutions.

The most obvious evidence that Homeric poetry originated in dance is in its metre—to begin with, the specific way in which the ancients described the elements of metre. The components of a hexameter line, or a lyric period, are, literally, ‘feet’, or steps whose rhythm can be actualised by the movement of human legs. The distinctive isochrony of the dactyl itself—the time equality of the strong and weak elements of the foot, as against the typically contrastive pulses of speech rhythms—as well as the isometry of hexameter lines, together recall the isometry and isochrony of dance patterns. Antoine Meillet understood the isochronic dactyl to be a Greek innovation in the context of Indo-European metre. As Pierre Chantraine has observed, ‘il apparaît que le rythme naturel de la langue grecque s’adaptait mal à la métrique rigide de l’hexamètre dactylique.’ He gives numerous examples of forms of phonological and even morphological adaptations to metrical constraints in Homer. Language did not generate this metre, but distinctive language was generated by it.

There is also direct evidence from Homer: the bards in the *Odyssey*, including Phemius and Demodocus, are at times depicted as singing their tales while others danced (1.150-5, 8.256 ff.; see also 4.17-19). The mere fact of this possibility in performance must distinguish Homeric epic formally from other claimants to the ‘epic’ title in stichic narrative, and hence delimit its field of comparison. In the case of Demodocus, the performance depicted is no impromptu affair, but a carefully prepared event, supervised by nine officious judges, who smooth out a suitable circle. Demodocus is placed at the centre of this dancing space, then surrounded by boys who take their stand in a circle. The boys are said to be skilled (δαίμονες) at the dance. Hence they are not casual improvisers, responding to the singer’s rhythm; rather, the dance comes first in this depiction, before the song begins, and appears to continue through the song. *The dance comes first.*

That the dance supplied a rhythm—a backbeat—to the singer is an obvious inference. But we find the influence of the form and the rhythm of the round dance to be pervasive in Homer, at the level of the syllable; at the level of the word and phrase; at the level of the line; at the level of the narrative, in ‘ring composition’; and in some of the deepest structures in Homer’s narrative

form. In this concept of the 'beat', as it has been understood in Western music from classical to jazz and rap, we find a concrete aspect to the reality of the inspiring Muse. The beat: either you have it, or you don't.

We must therefore find comparates for Homer's text not solely on the basis of its composition out of words, or even in stichic metre; rather we must look for texts made up of a combination of word, rhythm, and harmony, and what is more, and crucially, a combination that is known to have been generated by accompanying a specific dance. The compositions of modern classical music, arising as they do out of dance, therefore present themselves as legitimate comparanda. A great deal of ink has been spilt on the question of textuality in the context of a supposed Homeric orality; but there has been scant consideration of the musical text, or 'score,' as a paradigm with which to discuss the many Homeric questions.

It is impossible here not to be straightforward and blunt. Children know that one cannot compare apples and oranges. There must be a correspondence between essential elements of the things compared before a connection with generative or historical implications can be inferred. Apples and oranges are both fruit but they are not both citrus fruit. Homeric poetry and south Slavic oral poetry are both poetry. But there is an integral element in the origin, form and composition of Homeric poetry that is not present in south Slavic oral poetry, nor indeed in any of the proposed comparates in so-called 'oral literature' or elsewhere.

Let us be clear, however, that a claim about the right comparison does not entail a claim about the *similarity of the comparates*. Lemons and oranges are both citrus, and so to be distinguished from all the varieties of apples, as oral poetry from oratorio. But in comparing lemons and oranges one may well find that one kind is tart and the other sweet; and hence not something merely different from, but *opposed* to the other. In comparing Homeric poetry to species of modern classical music, one must still and always distinguish genotype and phenotype. A surprising number of people confuse whales for fish, presumably because they have comparable phenotypes; and the medium of metrical narratives with repetitions has also led many to relate Homeric and south Slavic epic. But if one is seeking an account of nature and origin, comparative reconstruction of species demands that the proper comparates of the mammalian whale are the lowly mouse and the land-lubbing elephant.

To establish that Homer's poetry is a kind of dance music would of course be an

important result in itself, but it is apparent that dance and dance music need have no verbal component at all (just as there is no intrinsic necessity for there to be sea-going mammals). Our genetic claim serves here to open a door to the question of the pressure of such a medium of origin upon the forms and structures of language that partake of it in Homeric epic, under such widely non-musical rubrics as narrative, phrasing and morphology.

Milman Parry's comparison led to an interpretation of repeated phrases and lines in Homer as oral 'formulas,' metrical 'building blocks' with which a bard filled and improvised his lines. Zeal for the comparative reconstructive method, rather than facts, led to the positing of 'cognate formulae,' and to a number of versions of 'comparative metrics'. The question of what in fact constitutes an isolable unit in such reconstructive studies, whether metrical or formulaic, remains highly dubious. Where there is no definable 'metreme,' and where the dimensions and the function of a 'formula' remain the province of dispute and arbitrary assertion, claims for cognate metres and cognate formulae, and in general the application of comparative reconstruction to these phenomena, are philosophically and methodologically groundless.

I know of no record that the opening chorus of J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* has ever been danced to. It is highly unlikely that it was intended to be danced. And yet the chorus is manifestly a *siciliano*. Not every composition in 12/8 is a *siciliano*. But there is a characteristic movement to this dance that is configured spatially and in human gesture and posture beyond the instruction given by the mere time signature, and the speech and the music of the opening chorus of the *Passion* sensibly *dance* with the dance. Similarly, the texts of Homeric arioso are musical texts, and we find that they also 'dance' to a peculiar dance, most obviously in their rhythmic articulation, but also in their diction and their narrative shape. In this sense, Virgil shares only a time signature with Homer. It is *possible* to dance to either of them, in particular as Virgil observes caesura and diaeresis, but in Homer's case, recurrent phrases matching the lengths of the dance's articulations, together with his narrative rings, have been found to connect his music to the form, fine structure, and 'groove' of a particular round dance native to Greece—just as the motion and phrasing of Bach's chorus bespeak a sublimated and yet altogether actual *siciliano*. I know of no record of a text of Homer having been danced before February 2001, under Miriam Rother's tutelage, and there is no reason to suspect that Homer himself, any more than Bach, intended his music to be danced; but there is overwhelming evidence all the same that Homer's

poetry was, unlike Virgil's, and unequivocally, *dance music*.

The name itself, *syrtós*, carries the stamp of antiquity; a Boeotian inscription from the 1st century A.D. refers to the dance of the *συρτοί*. While this is a late date in relation to Homeric or Classical times, the dance has apparently survived for nearly two millennia since then, and what is more, it is referred to, even in the first century inscription, as the *πάτριος ὄρχησις*: the dance of the forefathers. (Taken as descriptive rather than limiting, the adjective *πάτριος* yields an even more intriguing sense: the dance of the ancestry, that is, the catalogue dance.) This dactylic round dance of the twenty-first century clearly has a prodigious history. It has been neglected by philology as a clue to epic form.

I ask you to observe that the articulations of this still extant folk dance, the moments that mark when it changes directions and retrogrades like a planet in the heavens, correspond to the articulations, the characteristic breaks in the rhythm, of Homer's verses. Caesura and diaeresis frame a distinctive retrogression in the circling step. A resumption of movement after the retrogression in the dance corresponds to a 'second beginning' in the words of the verse. Hence dance is very likely the source of this inceptive cue and the peculiar diaeresis.

We perform the beginning of the Catalogue of Ships, from *Iliad* II, going only so far as the first ship, which belonged to the Boeotians. Then two acrobats take over the central space in the circle, tumbling in rhythm; their set poses are taken from ancient depictions; I reenter the ring with the lines from the *Odyssey* that describe just such an acrobatic display in the wake of an epic performance.

I should point out that in dancing to the 'speech of the Muse' (*λέξις Μούσης*)—interpreting that phrase to refer to epic poetry—and then dancing gymnastically, we are following a specific prescription from Plato's *Laws* (795d-e) for gymnastic education. But we make no claims here for an authentic reconstruction. This was performed indoors on a resonant wood floor, rather than on the earth; this called for unnatural dynamics. Our students were almost completely unfamiliar with the idiom of Greek folk dance, and Miriam and I are ourselves tourists in this sphere. What I do feel is demonstrated is the connection between phrases in the verse and turns in the dance. Ἦτε Χορευταί¹⁷

The centre of a ring dance is a potent, magical place; it is a place of conjuration. Ritual

¹⁷ http://danceofthemuses.org/Dance_of_the_Muses/Homer_Dance_Video.html

circle dances, as they are depicted on Minoan and Mycenæan artifacts, were occasions for the god's epiphany, descending into the very midst of the dancers.¹⁸ The possessed motion, the hypnotic rhythm, the mask-like faces serve to turn the circle into a kind of lens at whose focus sits the bard. Under such conditions, his invocation to the Muse is no literary conceit; it is an invitation to the palpable, living presence of the goddess of poesy. In one scholar's words, 'the experience of the dance merges with the experience of the deity.'¹⁹

Danced verse intends to conjure a presence. This is the peculiar aim and native power of the art form χορεία, as the poet's vehicle for bringing to life in the present the stories of his community's past. The dramatic actor, and his evocation through impersonation, represents the choral poet's ultimate innovation in the art of conjuring a presence. In the same stroke, however, this innovation transformed the original power of the chorus of dancers—it turned them at some level into actors as well—and so involved a move from what may be called a poetics of evocation towards a poetics of imitation.

Catalogue poetry is surely, from a literary point of view, the most boring portion of the Greeks' poetic legacy. But consider what the effect of this poetry must have been like in performance. What begins as a self-subsistent, retrogressive and rhythmic movement in the round, takes on a semantic force, as the song strikes up, and the rhythm and harmony of the ancestral names interweave with and, as it were, re-harmonise the rhythm and direction of the steps. And conversely, just as the dance becomes meaningful, so also does the word in dance take on the power of circle magic, so that it not only points, but *summons*. As one danced to the florid chant of names in their rhythmic ideality, one felt the very presence of one's ancestors gracing the communal circle: the storied warriors and their well-balanced ships on the expedition to Troy, or the noble women of the past in the matriarchal line.

There is no intrinsic or necessary connection between catalogues and dance. The function and functionality of a catalogue or list is mnemonic. The archetype of a catalogue is the series of *counting numbers*, a list of proper names in fixed and unchanging order. That is, one remembers that one element follows another in a catalogue or list (whether a shopping list or a genealogy) in the way that one remembers that six follows five; and the way that one remembers

¹⁸ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985; see, e.g. 40

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 103

the latter is lost in the very first functioning of the active memory. Dance adds to the speaking of a catalogue, which is a list of substantives, the phenomenological summoning of each substantive. The power of dance therefore turns memory into epiphany.

I feel there are good reasons to think that Homer composed the epics for a standing rhapsode equipped with his prop-staff and his voice, not a seated singer with a guitar. Many scholars believe, however, that the catalogue of ships is an independent poem that has been incorporated by Homer. In all of Homer, this passage is therefore the most likely actually to have been danced.

I used a book for several reasons: I recite better when I work from a score, for one. But I also wish to illustrate that a text of Homer *is* a score, one that has to be prepared in order to be performed. It has become painfully obvious to me that there is a sheer phonic prowess, in lung capacity and the articulations of the vocal apparatus, as well as rehearsal required for the performance of Homer, in dividing the breaths and punctuating the phrases, to register and to render all the effects that his poetry contains. The situation is similar to that of a Mozart text in relation to a modern singer or instrumentalist. What is more, an Homeric storyteller must not only prepare the *content* of his lines, but also the *way* in which he shall render them: at times he is a lyric poet in his own voice, but at other times he must *be* Zeus, or Achilles, or Helen, or Penelope. He must therefore be both an excellent singer and a multidimensional actor. Our only evidence from the ancient world suggests that the rhapsodes were just such skilled performers in relation to their Mozart. They were exceptionally good at selecting and performing from a text. I say this because many scholars believe that Homer's text was *composed* in the midst of performance, in some unrecorded period of history. The notion of composition *in* performance—a notion of an extemporaneous combination of stock elements, with an improvised style and delivery—seems fantastic and counter-intuitive if it is to be applied to Homer's extraordinary music and the fully realised histrionics of his script. No, folks: Homer's composition must be *prepared* to be performed, like so many compositions in poetry and music. Perhaps such scholars should stop *talking* about performance, and try it.

III. Homeric Poetics

What can we now offer as a coherent picture of how Homeric poetry came about? What can we tell in place of the fantasy of generations of extemporising bards, and the crudity of metrical building blocks?

Catalogues are the source of this poetry, but catalogues themselves are not poetry, they are lists. They mark time, while time itself can be understood and concretised as a counting number; and this primitive connection between numbering, remembering and time is centrally and vividly thematic throughout the obviously non-primitive *Odyssey*. Think of seals, geese, and pear trees, of transported treasures and the tally of the cows of the sun's days and the tale of the daily pig.

The earliest recorded hexameters do not preserve catalogues. Nor does it seem necessary that a list be metrical. So our story tells that catalogues became poetry when they met with a particular dactylic dance form and dance rhythm, and became chanted in a circle so as to bring their elements to ritual epiphany. The listed names both extended and delimited themselves according to the tropic points of the dance, to become noun-and-epithet phrases that summoned their referents to the performance space. The catalogic marking of past time was allowed in this way to impregnate the present, so as to create a *presence*.

The expansion of the catalogue elements by means of loops 'picked up' by relative clauses was a simple and likely an automatic response of the cataloguer becoming a tale-teller, as he worked more and more with the summoning power of noun-and-epithet phrases and the chosen aesthetics of ring composition, rather than with list elements adapted to a metre that of necessity *had* to 'loop' themselves off. Oralists theorists also note this expandability by means of relative clauses as a contributor to the technique of extemporising. What they have missed is the function and *gestalt* of the frame for these expansions. The motive of extemporising is deceptively similar but in its root notion anathema to that of an 'intemporising' cataloguer: here instead we find a notion of preserving a memory in an absolutely distinct and definite order (like that of a genealogy), while expanding *within* it in ways that *must not disrupt* that order. Our story therefore gives us a cataloguer becoming a poet by expanding on some or each of the terms in a list, evoking its life-giving elements, and often making it circle back on itself chiastically with a repetition of themes, perhaps as a way of rejoining the list mnemonically, before proceeding to, or perhaps even remembering, the next term. (Consider what it is like to be interrupted while

counting money.) He thereby both remembers and preserves the relative temporal order of the catalogue: he is able to digress as expansively as he desires, but returns via the path of his introduced themes in reverse order. Thus both the mechanism and the art of ring composition spring from one source. By means of it this sort of tale-teller always does his imaginative and expansive poetic work, but also always keeps his place, within the larger frame of the catalogue. Chiastic order is a specifically epic form of ring composition that points in sympathy to the origin of all 'epic movement' in a peculiar, dactylic dance, characterised by a pivotal retrogression. In such epic movement there is a way forward and a way back (abccba) that delimits a retrogression within an onward cycle. Hence there is a meeting of motives here—need transforms into desire: a cataloguer's need to re-find his place matches the aesthetic sense of a peculiar movement.

For all their richness and power, the *form* of the major Hesiodic poems needs almost no further account. The catalogue frame of these compositions is transparent: one need only supply a poet worthy of being remembered by name to supply also that 'intemporised' richness and that power. The developed complexity and beauty of such catalogic narrative, turning into poetry, made it something worth sitting down and listening to, something that one could be instructed by, even if one was young enough that the rhythmic phrasing also made one want to get up and dance. And conversely, the seated attention that such narrative commanded would have encouraged a didactic element in the ancient singer-songwriter, no longer only a dancers' bard.

Note that we also find the relative clause as an entry into mythic digression throughout the extravagantly idiosyncratic poetic forms of Pindar, which were known to be circle-danced; Pindar's 'intemporising' rings reach new levels of sequential determination, in that the myths are often told in *reverse chronology*. Hence 'epic techniques,' that can be confusing to a modern or otherwise foreign sensibility, came to be aesthetically choice worthy in later generations and later poetic media. There is no reason to connect them to extemporising composers. Rather, they should be seen as techniques growing out of an aesthetic project that is common to both epic and lyric in Greek: the *choral unfolding of linear myth*.

Perhaps the most significant development of the stage of craft anterior to Homer was the sort of digressive insertion that centered on a speech. It is a transforming histrionic moment in performance when Homer takes on the voice and the staff of the old priest at the beginning of the *Iliad*. A speech in any sort of narrative is a suspension of things, on several levels. In imitating the

mind and the organism of a protagonist come to speech, one enters fully into the notion of organism as such. The chanting cataloguer becomes of necessity an artist of the human experience when he speaks another's speech in the course of recounting an episode. In Homer of course the speeches have a Shakespearean realisation and potency. But even the first attempt of the catalogue-teller to reproduce a divine or human speech in epic metre had to have been, in the nature of things, a fully-formed entrance into the world of art and the representation of thought, like the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus. One need only present a Trojan deliberating, whether to stay by the oak, or to go out into the plain to confront a raging Achilles, to immerse an audience fully in the notions of 'choice' and 'dilemma' that characterise human experience.

One had always to remember the frame, however. A speech in a novel is in some way integral to the plot, which exists as a larger, authorial, and climactic structure. A speech inside catalogue poetry, on the other hand, is like a passing window into life and form that yields merely to what *must* happen and *has* to be told next.

About the similes, a modern bard in English notes the following:

In performance, I found myself isolating the similes somewhat and marking them—pausing a little before and after, changing the voice, dropping any percussion I may have been using—in order to bring out their quality as poetic events distinct from the poetry of the narrative and speeches. I found that the narrative resumed with a kind of quiet power after a simile had been given full attention in this way, and that the audience's engagement with the performance was deepened.²⁰

One of the virtues of Stanley Lombardo's translations of Homer is that he offsets the similes in italics. One gets the impression from scanning his pages that there are regular recurrences of these 'italicised moments'—sheer poetry in performance—as though these were the moments that both singer and audience were waiting for—as though everything else in Homer were merely filler.

We must put aside this story, however, when we come to the moments of narrative lyric that Homer sometimes discovers. These include the Trojan soldiers numbered like the stars on a clear night, camped out on the plain at the end of *Iliad* VIII; or the moment at the end of *Odyssey*

²⁰Stanley Lombardo, Translator's Preface, in Homer, *Iliad* (Hackett: 1997) x-xi

5 when Odysseus crawls into his leaf bed on Phaeacia, saved like a farmer's brand out in the far fields to light a fire the next day. Such poetry is not to my mind foreseeable from an origin in a narrative catalogue. If his speeches and similes are things of wonder, then Homer's moments of narrative lyric are simply miracles. And miraculous achievements in the world's poetry can never be accounted for, although it is surely worthwhile to recognise them for what they are.

In the relationship of continental classical composers to folk dance and folk dance rhythm, in the relation of Shakespeare to morality plays, in the relation of twentieth century art to primitivism, there is a manifestly ubiquitous phenomenon that seems so obviously to apply as well in the relation of Homer to epic and to the bards. The ancient case of Tamil *cankam* composition also contributes to the paradigm. What we infer from the comparison is this: that there is no contradiction whatsoever in saying that great and famous artists can be linked concretely and profoundly to the forms produced by an anonymous folk tradition; and at the same time, that the works of such artists must be separated in their analysis from the dictates of such a tradition, in that they indicate sources of energy and form that can in no useful or plausible way be linked to those of the tradition. A. K. Ramanujan comments on the Tamil material that [t]he poems are not the result of rapid composition like oral epics, but of subtle care and reworking ... Yet the authors were close to the stock-in-trade of bards and minstrels who were often their subjects and who were very much alive all around them. The poems are witnesses to a transition.²¹

Shakespeare knew his players, but in tragedy, comedy, and historical-pastoral, he transformed the territory and continues to do so. He cannot be plausibly subsumed as an exemplar of some broader historical construct, such as 'Elizabethan drama'. In a similar way, a treatment of 'Greek epic' can only reductively, piecemeal, and somewhat esoterically draw on the works of Homer. And a course on Greek epic must of course begin its investigation of form not with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* but with the form of a dance and with the form of the catalogue. And more precious far than metrical form, is feeling the beat of the Muse.

Some derive the hexameter as a combination of hypothetical lyric forms, entirely inverting the attested history of the genres, and further mystifying the need to adapt words and paradigms to fit the metre. (Actual lyric forms are distinctive in *not* showing metrical lengthening.) Oral theory

²¹A. K. Ramanujan, *Poems of Love and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 273.

does explain repetition in the Homeric text, but as a functional necessity, born, it is assumed, of the exigencies of a non-literary genesis. In its origins oral theory presumes to apologise for certain 'tics' it sees as characteristic of oral transmission among the illiterate. No aesthetic motives whatsoever are acknowledged. One wonders why people who are not drawn to the song-like recurrences in the tone painting of Homer's art, as are many of his students today, even through translations, would bother to write and lecture on him in the first place. There are plenty of other whales in the sea. No ancient descriptions or testimony can be cited—none!—and typology is sought in modern oral traditions without any apparent connection to dance. As we have lived on with this theory, it has had to absorb a critical mass of anomalies. But abandoning Parry's strict principles of economy and extension makes the theory not merely implausible as a basis for composition-in-performance, but incoherent.

The choral paradigm for Homer, by contrast, is based on the most authoritative of pre-Hellenistic sources and the most enduring of still extant folk traditions. This paradigm explains what competing descriptive hypotheses take as merely given. The non-linguistic dactyl, the hexameter itself, its word breaks, the creation of a metrical, modified morphology—none of these things are addressed by oral theory. 'Choral theory', on the other hand, accounts for the origin of the metre itself and the feet, as well as practical and aesthetic motives for metrical phrasing and for recurrence, including ring composition. Most importantly, choral theory accounts for the caesurae and diaereses that appear to constitute the internal structure of the hexameter line.

We know little or nothing of Homer's population, its location, its antiquity, its wealth, its social structure, its vernacular. Of course we know even less of him—high caste or low, whether he worked for a king, whether he was itinerant among several populations, whether he was female, whether he was married, whether he *liked* his audience. As we have seen, the notion that Homer's text is a window to tradition depends upon Parry's hypothesis. But Parry made the wrong comparison. The 'odd' features of Homeric narrative, the repetitions, rings, and signature phrases and lines, which led to a search for extrinsic pressures, are all of them natural to dance music. Hence it could be expected that a narrative conceived under the influence of an endlessly repeating dance rhythm would show verbal and narratological versions of these forms. But beyond any oddness of presentation, what Homer left us was challenging stories and sublime poetry. He was, in equal parts, a scandalous moralist and an extraordinary composer. We do not

know where he came from, but the emerging Hellenic culture that claimed him never recovered, from Homer's gods or Homer's truth.

The song of the Muse is still sung. And the beat goes on.

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