

CONTEST AND CONTRADICTION IN EARLY GREEK POETRY

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In the *Trojan Women*, Euripides presents one of the most flamboyant debate scenes in Athenian drama. As Menelaus announces his intention of taking Helen home to be killed by his fellow-Greeks, she enters and asks to be given a hearing. Her husband at first refuses: “I came not to talk, but to kill you” (905); but Hecuba intervenes, and insists that Helen be heard:

Listen to her, so that she won't die deprived of this;
and grant me the opposing speech (*enantious logous*) against her:
for you know nothing about the evils at Troy.
The whole story, duly put together (*suntetheis ho pas logos*),
will kill her with no chance of escape. (906-10)

Critics have complained that it is out of character for Hecuba thus to give her most hated enemy a chance to make her case. But it is a proper Greek (or Trojan) instinct, to wish to see a foe humiliated as well as killed, and Hecuba wants Menelaus to hear—and Helen to see him hear—all the shameful details. In addition, Hecuba is recognizing a deeply felt need (both hers and Menelaus', and the Greek audience's too) to hear and evaluate counter-arguments in a case, to explore the ethical and situational possibilities, and to pass formal judgment on the rival speeches of the two disputants. Hecuba claims to provide “the whole story, properly put together” (909)—though the phrase could equally well connote an “account, reckoning” that is to be “constructed, composed,” or even “fabricated.”¹ In any case, whatever her (or Euripides') motives, she prevails, and there follows a long, formal *agôn* (“contest, debate”) on the guilt or innocence of Helen, as both Menelaus and the audience are invited to judge the true facts of her case.

Helen speaks first. None of what happened was her fault, she claims; she was simply the victim of others. Hecuba herself is to blame, for giving birth to Paris; Priam, for not exposing him as a baby; Aphrodite, for promising Helen to Paris in the Judgment on Mount Ida, and for accompanying Paris to Sparta and overpowering her there; Paris, for ruining her; and Menelaus too, for leaving her unattended. After Paris' death, she often tried to escape from Troy—her witnesses are the Trojan guards who caught her. Finally, Deiphobus is to blame, for forcing her to marry him. All in all, she deserves sympathy, not condemnation.

Hecuba's response contradicts Helen point for point. It was nobody and nothing else but her own weakness that made Helen act as she did; neither the [186]divine beauty-contest nor Aphrodite's visit to Sparta ever happened; in fact, "Aphrodite" is no more than Helen's name for *aphrosunê* ("folly, thoughtlessness"); and so on. After she finishes, Menelaus has to judge the rival cases. He rules that Helen's adultery was "voluntary" (*hekousiôs*, 1037); that Helen's talk of "Aphrodite" was mere verbiage (*kompou*, 1038); and that Helen will be stoned to death back in Sparta. So he and Helen depart.

The scene has raised some large and unsettling questions, whose answers must determine our response, not only to Helen's guilt or innocence, but also to Menelaus' conduct and the fall of Troy itself. Which version of Helen's conduct is truer, her own or Hecuba's? Was she a reluctant pawn, controlled by a goddess and the various men in her life, or a shameless adventuress?² In particular, did the Judgment of Paris really take place? What are Menelaus' true feelings at the end of the scene, and what will he really do when he returns home? In sum, who wins the *agôn*, in Menelaus' and in our opinion? These questions are interrelated, and the answer to one implies an answer to the next. But no coherent set of answers can be found to them that can coexist with the rest of the dramatic action of the play, or with the poetic world in which it is supposed to be unfolding.

For Hecuba insists that the whole of Helen's case is built on a false premise, since there can never have been a Judgment of Paris in the first place. Goddesses do not have beauty-contests, and do not offer human cities as bribes;³ they do not even need to leave heaven to accomplish their will, let alone escort their favorites on their travels (971-86). If Hecuba is right, and her modern, "rationalist" theology is to be accepted as true, Helen's defense collapses. And many critics have concluded that Hecuba's words do indeed represent Euripides' own opinion, and are to be endorsed by the audience. But the consequences of believing her are that we must reject, not only the established tradition of *Cypria* and *Iliad*, but also *Alexandros*, a play that we saw performed only an hour or two earlier, as part of the same trilogy, including a key episode in which Hecuba was warned of Paris' future role in the destruction of Troy. Worse still, we must reject the physical locomotion of Poseidon and Athena that we have witnessed in the Prologue to *Trojan Women* itself; and we must wonder retrospectively about the earlier references to Athena's enmity towards the Trojans.⁴ We cannot remove Poseidon and Athena from the play—any more than (e.g.) we can remove Dionysus from the *Bacchae*, despite Teiresias' plausible rationalizations of him (*Ba.* 266-319). Nor indeed would we *want* to remove Poseidon or Athena, since it is they alone who guarantee the future disasters for the Greeks that we so strongly desire. That is to say, we *need* these old-fashioned Homeric divinities, with their rough-edged theodicy, both to reconcile this latest version of the story with others well known to us, and to reassure us that punishment for Greek arrogance and cruelty will indeed follow.

So we face a paradox. If we believe in the beauty-contest, Helen's self-defense turns out to be at least partially accurate, while Hecuba's version, though much more credible and attractive as a theological and moral argument, must be considered untenable in the face of the evidence. Or have the rules of evidence changed in mid-play?

[187]Perhaps we might hope for an answer, or at least a clue, to our questions in the verdict of the judge, Menelaus. But his response resolves nothing. In fact, he manages to sidle offstage without persuading anyone that he has resolved the facts of the case, or even wants to. His spoken verdict is that Helen is guilty and will die. But his action, in taking her back home with him, argues otherwise; and few critics or audiences have ever doubted that Hecuba's warnings are justified. He will be overwhelmed, if he has not already been so, by Helen's beauty—and Book 4 of the *Odyssey* may proceed, unrevised.

So who does win the *agôn*? To the most discriminating audience, i.e., ourselves, the spectators, it is Hecuba who appears to win the verbal argument. She leads us to believe that Helen's desertion of her husband was voluntary, and therefore culpable: and Menelaus, in his words, confirms this verdict. But it is Helen who wins the beauty-contest, and the *agôn* of results. She survives, and once more gets her man. Thus both parties can claim a "victory" of sorts. Hecuba has made her case, one that we, like Menelaus and the Chorus, largely endorse and are satisfied to hear; yet, at the same time, Helen and Menelaus have contrived to obtain what they—and the gods, and the tradition, hence to some degree we ourselves?—really want, and doubtless deserve.

All very "Euripidean." We were promised by Hecuba at the beginning of the debate "the single, complete account." Instead, we have been given a "double story,"⁵ with no touchstone of truth to help us choose between the contradictory versions. This scene, with its rhetorical flourishes and law-court flavor, its questioning of traditional myth and religion, and its unsettling refusal to provide an authorial guarantee as to what should be believed or disbelieved, what approved or disapproved, has impressed modern readers as an obvious and extreme case of sophistic influence; and Euripides has generally been seen in this and other similar scenes as challenging or subverting the normal forms and conventions of the Greek poetic tradition.⁶ In the present paper, however, I wish to argue that argumentation and audience-manipulation of this kind (if not quite this degree) had long been characteristic of Greek poetry. Such writers as Gorgias, Protagoras, and Euripides, though they certainly struck their contemporaries as doing something strange and (to many) shocking, were not for the most part introducing radically new techniques or attitudes, but rather exploiting, systematizing, and exaggerating possibilities that they found already well developed by their poetic predecessors.⁷ It was indeed primarily from the poets that the sophists learned how to convince, delight, or confound opponents and audiences, how to tell and retell traditional or new stories, and how to present a given argument in the appropriate light for each occasion and judge;

and this is particularly evident in the flexibility shown by both poets and sophists towards the “truth,” and their readiness to make the “weaker” or “worse” argument temporarily “stronger” or “better,” if the occasion should demand. This is not the place for me to attempt to trace the full extent of the overlap between Greek poetry and sophistry. In the present paper I shall concentrate on what is perhaps the central common element of both, their competitive and contradictory stance, a stance so characteristic of the sophists that it was given special labels (“eristic” or “agonistic” or “antilogic”),⁸ but one that is also prominent in earlier Greek poetry. A proper recognition and [188]appreciation of this stance may enable us better to explain the nature and prevalence of certain Greek poetical forms and techniques, and to respond more appropriately to the manner and tone of certain kinds of Greek myth-making and story-telling. In particular, we may be able thereby to arrive at a better understanding of the ancient Greeks’ attitude to prize-winning and the truth.

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The pervasive Greek impulse towards competition, with its attendant psychological and social effects, has been well documented and studied.⁹ Their “contest-system,” in its purest forms (e.g., war or athletics), is a “zero-sum” game, in which one person can only win if another, or several others, lose. Thus *aretê* amounts to “success, supremacy, being better” than others. Indeed, one of the main attractions, as well as dangers, of victory is the honor, envy, and even hatred that it elicits from one’s rivals. All societies contain some measure of this impulse towards individual self-assertion and competition; but among the Greeks from the earliest times it seems to have been exceptionally strong.¹⁰

In this contest-system, the arts (*mousikê*), and poetry in particular, comprised a very popular and prestigious arena of competition, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that most Greek poetry, from the time of Homer and Hesiod to that of Euripides, was composed for performance in an explicitly or implicitly agonistic context.¹¹ In this respect, it is fundamentally different from most Roman, and most later European, poetry.¹²

Competition requires rules, and, if there is to be no absolute and unmistakable criterion of victory and defeat, such as death or a finishing-line, a judge or judges. In some traditions of artistic competition, defeat may result in the spontaneous death of one contestant;¹³ but usually verdicts, and poets’ reactions to them, are less clear-cut. Indeed, judges face especially delicate problems, unless the performers are assigned more or less identical tasks. The greater the artists’ latitude in choosing medium, subject, style, etc., the smaller becomes the likelihood that any two judges will agree as to which artist’s performance is “best.” This is one obvious reason for the striking conservatism and rigidity of the conventions governing tragic and comic performances in Athens.¹⁴ There will usually be, in fact, two contrary impulses present in every competitive poetic performance: on the one hand, towards conservatism, so that the usual criteria for evaluation can be applied; on the other, towards innovation, in the effort to impress an audience (and, in some cases, disconcert

a rival) with an ingenious new technique or surprising application of an old one.¹⁵

The catch-all Greek term for what is being tested in a poetic competition is *sophia* (together with its cognates *sophos*, *sophizomai*, *sophistês*). It may variously be translated as “wisdom/skill/artistry/cleverness/taste,” and covers three broad categories: (a) *knowledge and factual accuracy* (the *sophos*-poet knows how things were and are, tells them “truly,” gets names, pedigrees, and events right, and is therefore valuable to the community as a repository of information); (b) *moral and educational integrity* (the *sophos* presents advice or instruction, or unambiguous examples of good and bad conduct, by which the community is supposed to be collectively and individually improved); (c) *technical skill and aesthetic/emotional impact* (the *sophos*’ uncanny verbal, [189]musical and histrionic powers can excite the ear and eye as well as the mind, dazzle and delight an audience, and arouse in it irresistible feelings of wonder, sympathetic engagement, and emotional release—“tears and laughter,” “pity and fear”). Although these three categories, factual, moral, and aesthetic, might seem quite distinct, and best kept that way, ancient critics, and even the poets themselves, often blur the distinctions and slide heedlessly—or opportunistically—from one to another, as if all poets should be held accountable at every moment in all three.¹⁶

By the end of the fifth century, the poets’ claims to *sophia* (a) had been seriously—and permanently—undermined by historians, scientists, legislators, and philosophers; *sophia* (b) was under attack too, especially from the new educators, sophisticated and Socratic alike. Even *sophia* (c) was being usurped by the dazzling and enchanting displays of the sophists, and “word-power” (*rhêtorikê technê*) was being systematically taught to any who could pay for it. The sophists were, in effect, poets in prose. But Plato’s *Ion* is a useful reminder of what poetry had once meant to Greek communities, and still meant to many of the less educated members; and Aristophanes’ *Frogs* likewise draws readily from all three categories in assailing both the rival poets’ claims to poetic proficiency.

Although *sophia* (a) might seem to present the simplest and most decisive criterion for formal evaluation (*krisis*) of competing poets—and certainly it is the one that poets themselves invoke most often, as we shall see—, it is in fact rather rare for an audience or judge to be in the position of “knowing” for certain the “facts” of the case about which a poet is singing: Odysseus in Phaeacia listening to Demodocus as he sings about the Trojan war is the exception, not the rule. (By contrast, a historian or prophet can be tested empirically, even by non-experts.) Morality, too, is inherently hard to measure exactly. So in practice it is *sophia* (c) that is of most use to judges in a context of head-to-head poetic competition. An artist’s technical expertise and formal control can usually be assessed with some objectivity and precision.¹⁷ Much of the first half of the contest in the *Frogs* is taken up with more or less absurd attempts to “measure” and “weigh” the beauties and blemishes of each poet’s

diction, meter, music, and construction, in a parody of contemporary literary critical practice;¹⁸ likewise in the *Contest between Hesiod and Homer*, the preliminary stages are of a kind designed to baffle and eliminate an inelegant or slow-witted contender.¹⁹ But in both these cases the technical competence of the two contestants is of high enough quality, and evenly enough matched, to require that other, more subjective criteria be brought to bear by the respective judges: and, in both cases, the final verdict turns out to be curiously arbitrary, even unfair. Aeschylus defeats Euripides in the *Frogs*, not because he has clearly outperformed him in any of the categories of “correctness” (*orthotês*) or “skill” (*dexiotês*) suggested by Dionysus at the outset (indeed, the decision is still in the balance as late as line 1433), but because Dionysus has changed his mind as to what he wants, and is now concerned only to recreate the “good old days” of Marathon, the days when Aeschylus was in his poetic prime. That is to say, it is in the category of *sophia* (b) that Aeschylus is finally judged to have won, [190]though it was concern for *sophia* (c) that first motivated Dionysus to go looking for Euripides in the Underworld. Likewise, in the *Contest*, after clearly outmanoeuvring Hesiod throughout, in terms of *sophia* (a) and (c), and thereby winning the universal approbation of the assembled Greeks, Homer is unexpectedly defeated by the sole verdict of the king, on the basis of Hesiod’s more peaceful and productive poetic “message.” Thus in both cases the victory is far from clear-cut, and the vanquished poet may feel more resentment at the judge than shame at his own failure. We observed similar shifting between categories in the *agôn* of *Trojan Women*, between Helen’s (a) (what *did* happen) and Hecuba’s (b) (what kind of thing *ought* to happen), while an overall gain in *sophia* (c) (Euripides’ own exploitation of the paradoxical possibilities of the situation) is won quite deliberately at the expense of both (a) and (b), the self-consistency and moral coherence of the dramatic events. And there too the verdict (Menelaus’) was strikingly ambiguous and inconclusive.

Greek mythological and literary tradition is in fact richly stocked with examples of tainted verdicts, bribed or biased judges, indeterminate outcomes, and peculiar and tactful solutions to awkward confrontations. Remarkably seldom do we find unanimous decisions, fair and square defeats. A quick sampling of ten “famous contests,” five (quasi-)political, five artistic, may serve to make the point:

1. The divine beauty-contest on Ida (paradigm of no-win contests, instigated by Eris herself): Aphrodite’s bribe (Helen) wins her Paris’ verdict; but what does this verdict decide, except the fate of Paris and his city?
2. The arms of Achilles: whether it is Athena’s favoritism or a rigged jury that contrives to overturn the stronger claim of Ajax, nothing is thereby decided and nobody benefits.
3. The “decision” at Mecone: Prometheus appears to win the “contest of wits” (*erizeto boulas*, Hesiod *Th.* 534), and in return he and humankind are to be everlastingly punished.

4. The trial of (Aeschylus') Orestes: with the jury hung, Athena's pro-male bias tips the balance just enough to acquit Orestes, but not enough to offend the Erinyes beyond repair.

5. The murder-case on the shield of Achilles (paradigm of restorative competition, in effect a contest in justice: *amoibêdis de dikazon*, *Il.* 18.506): out of several alternatives, it is the "straightest" judgment (*ithuntata*, 508; clearly a relative, not absolute term here) that will be rewarded by the onlookers.²⁰

6. Theocritus' pastoral contests: as the verdict is usually indeterminate, or decided by mutual agreement, nobody is involuntarily judged inferior.

7. Apollo vs. Pan: Midas, the "official" judge, prefers Pan's song; Apollo rewards him with ass's ears (Ovid *Met.* 11.153ff.).

8. Apollo vs. Marsyas: this time Apollo does not wait for an outside verdict, but unilaterally judges himself superior, and flays his rival.

9. The Muses vs. Thamyras: here too the Muses appear to have "deprived him of song" and blinded him before any contest could take place (*Il.* 2.594-600).

[191]10. Athena vs. Arachne: Athena cannot fault Arachne's performance—and therefore sees no alternative but to wreck her rival's tapestry and turn her into a spider (Ovid *Met.* 6.5ff., esp. 129-35; and cf. 5.300-678 Muses vs. Pierides, esp. 662-68).

Even among such a disparate sample an obvious pattern can be discerned. "Winning" (i.e., appearing and being judged "better") may not prove anything; it may be more profitable, or more appropriate, to "lose." It all depends who is judging, and who your opponent is (especially when she/he is of higher social rank), and the real test may be as much of the judge as of the contestants. Such story-patterns seem to represent a means, conscious or unconscious, of reducing the demoralizing impact, and defusing the explosive threat, of failure, by suggesting the indeterminate and relative nature of the verdicts through which defeat and victory are assigned. Of course everyone yearns to win: but defeat may be more bearable if you can blame luck, the judges' favoritism, or ambiguities in the rules of competition, rather than your own lack of talent. Thus the game need not after all come out to a "zero-sum": there may be more than one winner, and more than one kind of victory.

We know very little about the actual socio-economic conditions of poetic competition during the Archaic and early Classical periods;²¹ and we are obviously in no position to assess the feelings and motives of the more and less successful performers. But when Hesiod chooses as an example of the "good" Eris the "resentment" (*phthonos*) felt by one poet against another (*WD* 24-26), or Thucydides inveighs against "contest-pieces" (*agônismata*) designed for instant aural gratification (1.22), it is clear that they are referring to familiar phenomena. Poems were usually designed to *defeat other poems*; stories (*logoi* or *muthoi*) were shaped so as to *win a favorable verdict from a particular*

judge. The effects of this agonistic stance on the substance and style of poetic production were pervasive, as I shall try to show.²²

Of course, some kind of competitive attitude may be said to be present in virtually any act of artistic creation: rivalry with one's peers and—especially—predecessors, in the form of allusion, reworking and improvement, within the constraints of a given medium or genre, operates as a keen stimulus to refinement and innovation, and can often take the form of a kind of obligatory “parricide.”²³ But the case of the Greeks is special, I think, in the prevalence of overtly agonistic mannerisms, and in the extent to which awareness of (an) immediately present judge(s), and the challenge of a viable but contradictory alternative to the poet's present statement, may influence the choice of subject, treatment, and self-presentation. In what follows, I shall sketch some of the more interesting and striking manifestations of these mannerisms and this awareness, as they are found in the poetry of the Archaic and early Classical (i.e., pre-sophistic) period. Some of these features are familiar enough; and some may be capable of explanation in terms other than, or additional to, the agonistic stance. But cumulatively they add up to a shared set of assumptions and conventions for author, addressee, and audience alike, as to the “truth-value” of any particular poetic narrative, the origins and status of alternative versions of myth, and the nature of the actual or implied process of “judging” a particular poetic performance—assumptions and conventions quite different from those [192] that most of us are accustomed to bring with us to the reading of serious literature.

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(A) Riddles and test-poetry. The *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* begins with a series of set questions posed by Hesiod: “What is the best thing (*phertaton*) for mortals?” “What is the finest thing (*kalliston*)?” Homer responds with ready-made selections from his own and Theognis' poems (“Best never to have been born...,” Theognis 425-27; a feasting scene from *Od.* 9.6-11). Then Hesiod tries to baffle Homer with puzzles and conundrums (described as *apora* and *amphiboloi gnômai*: alternative terms might be *problêmata* and *griphoi*), some of which require Homer to supply (in meter) words that will make sense of a riddling introductory line, testing Homer's ingenuity and quickness.²⁴ Similar forms of “set” questions and riddles are found frequently elsewhere.²⁵

Riddles and verbal duels among the Greeks may test all kinds of knowledge, expertise, and ingenuity. The story of Thales' Cup, for example (Callim. *Iamb.* 1, Diog. Laert. 1.28-33), is presumably modelled on an authentic tradition, mirrored in the prose contests in wisdom and problem-solving that were conducted in medicine, theology, and natural science, often involving absurd trivia and recherché lore, and couched as *ainigmata* or *griphoi* that required as much verbal dexterity from the questioner as from the respondent.²⁶ Proto-scholarship and literary criticism often follow this competitive model too, as rival explanations and interpretations are advanced for real or pretended “problems” in the texts of the classics, especially Homer.²⁷

(B) Overtly confrontational and antithetical forms of composition are found in many literary and subliterary Greek genres. The battlefield vaunts and matched pairs of speeches in the Homeric epics;²⁸ *stichomuthia*, *kommos*, and debate-scenes in tragedy; the epirrhematic *agôn* and knockabout, invective-laden episodes of Old Comedy; the antiphonal *thrênos* over the dead, traceable from Homer to the modern day; the improvised, but semi-formalized and even ritualized insult-battles of *iambos*; the bantering groups of the *partheneion* and *epithalamion*; the (presumed) ancestors of Theocritean pastoral, with their *amoibaia* and short prize-poems: the competitive character of all these is well documented.²⁹ Most widespread and typical of all, perhaps, is that favorite lyric-form of the upper-classes, the *skolion*. After dinner, as the wine was mixed and passed round, guests were required to recite or sing elegiac, epodic, or lyric verses, sometimes of their own composition, sometimes well-known popular songs (the “Three of Stesichorus,” or the “Harmodius-song,” for example), sometimes an original pastiche of the two. The songs would first be sung in order round the tables, then “zig-zag” as singers volunteered in random order (hence the name). The collection of paraenetic elegiac verses ascribed to Theognis of Megara belongs to this tradition, and includes several different—often complementary, but sometimes contradictory—treatments of the same topic. It is likely that a high proportion of the poems of Anacreon and Alcaeus were originally composed for, or in, such a context; and certainly in subsequent centuries they were constantly sung at symposia throughout Greece.³⁰

[193]A few surviving examples of Attic *skolia* show how singers rang changes on a given pattern, or capped their rivals’ previous efforts (e.g., on the *ti kalliston* theme, or on the tyrannicides).³¹ A nice example is found in Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1218ff. Philocleon has to “take over” (1222 *dexei*) the *skolion* from the guest next to him, here imagined to be Cleon himself. Bdelycleon feeds him the first line, a traditional encomiastic opening: “No man was ever yet born for Athens...,” and Philocleon instantly caps it, in the same lyric meter, “...such a villain or thief,” and continues (1232-33) with another apt quotation to the same effect, this time adapted from Alcaeus. In a different vein (more amiable and in prose), the supreme example of eulogists successively contradicting, modifying, and improving on their predecessors’ attempts, is provided by Plato’s *Symposium*.

(C) Correction and contradiction of rivals. It has been observed that the early Greek scientists, medical theorists, historians, and philosophers tend to make a point of asserting their own originality and independence, and to refer, often scornfully, to the inadequate views of their contemporaries, of distinguished predecessors, or of popular opinion. This tendency, which is not shared by their Egyptian or Near Eastern counterparts (nor, in the case of historians, by the Romans), distinguishes their activity as one of rhetorical, as well as intellectual, opportunism: they are competing for clients or reputation or both, and their ideas gain added appeal and value if they can be advanced at the expense of those of others.³²

A similarly argumentative stance is encountered in much Archaic poetry. The mention and correction of rival points of view, the emphatic departure from common opinion, are frequent ploys, especially at the beginning of poems. These contradictions and corrections may be made in any of our three categories of *sophia*. Thus, on a point of “fact,” Hesiod at *WD* 11-12 corrects his own genealogy for Eris (*Th.* 223-25), “After all, there is not just one, there are two spirits of Strife...”; and Semonides asserts his independence from Hesiod at the beginning of his misogynistic tract, “Separate was the origin of the race of women...” (fr. 7 W, cf. Hesiod *Th.* 590). On ethical points, Solon quotes his enemies (fr. 33 W), or takes issue with Mimnermus over the proper length of human life (fr. 20 W = 26 G-P); Simonides (*PMG* 542) challenges one of the Seven Sages—and is in turn challenged and corrected by Protagoras and Socrates (Plato *Prot.* 339Aff.).³³ On points of technique and skill, Pratinas complains about recent musical fashions (*TrGF* 4 F3 = *PMG* 708, cf. Ar. *Knights* 520-41; contrast Timotheus *PMG* 796, 791.202-36); comic playwrights accuse one another of plagiarism (e.g., Eupolis fr. 52 K, Ar. *Clouds* 553-62); and Aristophanes’ Euripides and Aeschylus produce grotesque but finely-tuned caricatures of each other’s lyric styles (*Frogs* 1249-1364). The literary Telchines appear to have flourished long before Callimachus, and they seem often to have been motivated in their criticisms as much by considerations of competitive advantage as of disinterested “truth” or propriety.³⁴

(D) Priamel, Praeteritio, Recusatio. The rhetorical figure of priamel has been well studied.³⁵ But the question has rarely been raised, *why* it appealed to the Greek poets to the degree that it did. One reason, I suggest, was that it is so well designed to build and win arguments. For it may work as a [194]kind of *praeteritio* (“Some say this, others that; but I say...”), assuring us that the poet has already taken account of rival claims, and need not even discuss them further. Mention of them has neatly and tactfully conceded them some possible, limited value, should the audience wish to grant it; or, in more robustly argumentative contexts (especially invective), more detailed description of the opponent’s views or behavior (“negative foil”) may be introduced. The speaker’s own claim can then be developed out of the discarded relics of the opponents’.³⁶

Perhaps too we may seek the origins of *recusatio* in agonistic and sympotic settings: “Others may wish to sing (may already have sung) of war, or other grim and pompous matters; but I am preoccupied with wine and festivities” (cf. Stesichorus *PMG* 210, Xenophanes fr. 2 W, Aristophanes *Ach.* 1190ff.), or “with love” (Sappho fr. 16 L-P, Mimnermus fr. 2 W). Here the rules, as it were, are changed in mid-contest, and the rivals’ poetry thereby rendered irrelevant or tasteless, by the sudden application of *sophia* (b).³⁷

(E) Parentage, Etymology, and “Doubling.” A common and flexible form of contradiction or innovation is the rejection of one supposed origin or “true nature” of a familiar personality or entity, in favor of another. Since parents were generally thought to be responsible for their offspring’s natural disposition (and name, too), a poet could always come up with a striking new

characterization or aetiology by inventing new parents, or choosing the appropriate ones from among preexisting alternatives. Some revised genealogies are meant to be taken more seriously than others (“You weren’t my father after all: a true father would never treat me like this,” or “Your mother was the sea, or a rock, or a lioness;” thus Hecuba at *Tro.* 766-71, “Zeus can’t be your father...”);³⁸ but a new pedigree may have large implications for our view of the person under discussion: in effect, *sophia* (a) and (b), facts and ethics, here collapse into one another, and the need for a “superior” moral may lead to a sacrifice of traditional (= “true”) facts. Hesiod exploits this principle to the full in the *Theogony*, e.g., in the number and names of the Muses, and in the account of the birth and parentage of both Eros and Aphrodite—neither of them in agreement with Homeric and other “standard” accounts.³⁹

A poet’s concern in thus choosing (or inventing) parents for a divinity or hero is not to establish orthodoxy or consistency of belief, a Creed, leading to permanently valid and irreversible “truth,” but to develop plausible and satisfying aetiological relationships between narrative and cult, between hallowed figures of traditional myth and contemporary rulers or victors, or between different cultural and moral forces in the world, and thereby to establish the proper feelings of *charis* (“mutual favor and gratitude”) between poet, divinity, and celebrants/audience. This in itself will be sufficient validation of the “facts” of any particular narrative included by the poet as part of the present celebration. Therefore, although a few poems may be designed to be infinitely repeatable and as non-local and non-occasional as possible (panHellenic, even literary?)—i.e. they may aspire to say the “last word” on their subject, and to render all previous and future attempts futile⁴⁰—, the more usual impulse is to leave loopholes for possible exceptions, pegs on which to hang possible [195]additions, open ends to accommodate codas or modifications desired by particular audiences in the light of other existing songs or cult traditions.

Doublets, or disputed parentage, can be a fruitful source of poetic refutation and one-upmanship. Is Theseus to be son of Poseidon, or of Aegeus? Odysseus of Laertes or Sisyphus? (Heracles has always to be both, Zeus’ and Amphitryon’s.) In a more allegorical mode, Hesiod’s creation of an homonymous elder sister for Eris (*WD* 11ff.) allows him to “refute” his more straightforward *Theogony* account, and to develop out of it a richly emblematic model of the ethical complexities of the *Works and Days*. This pattern of introducing a familiar moral concept which we all think we know perfectly well, and then revealing an unexpected “other side,” or long-lost sibling, for it, allows the poet/speaker to claim double credit: first, for the self-evident, gnomic “truth” of the familiar version, and then for the unexpected refinements or contradictions adduced by the doublet.⁴¹

As with birth, so with names. The discovery of the “true” (*etimos*) or “right” (*orthos*) name, or meaning of a name, supposedly concealed or unnoticed by others until now, can lay bare a person’s real nature, and

demonstrate the unique insight of the present speaker. Long before *orthoepia* (“verbal correctness”) was recognized as a formal branch of sophistic teaching by Protagoras and Prodicus—and duly mimicked by Euripides’ Hecuba (*Tro.* 987-90), Teiresias (*Ba.* 272-97), etc.—, Hesiod offers *ad hoc* etymologies/aetiologies that attest to his own verbal skill as well as to the appropriateness of his pedigrees and hence to the “truth” of his narrative (e.g., *Th.* 63-79, 195-200, 207-10, *WD* 2-3); likewise “Helen” at Aeschylus *Ag.* 681ff. Thus *sophia* (c) encroaches into the realm of *sophia* (a). Occasionally, thanks to one poet’s authority, such an etymology may become virtually canonical (as with the nine Muses); more often, it is merely heuristic or playful.

It may be noted that this category (E) involves an integral element of hymnic and encomiastic style, which requires the honorific listing of name and epithets, parentage, and place of origin of the laudandus. Whereas in many cultures (and in Greek mystery and magical texts) such names and titles must remain fixed to be effective, and must therefore aim to be as all-inclusive and traditional as possible, even to the point of being repeated verbatim over several centuries, the Greeks in their praise-poems display instead a preference for selection and variation. Obviously, in some cases the parentage of a victor or god is too firmly established to allow significant alteration; and often too the conditions and aetiology of a particular cult or geographical region may dictate choice of one variant over another. But these may also present a challenge and stimulus to the poet. The poet has to impress the laudandus and the wider audience (both, in different senses, the “judges” of his performance) by fitting his song to the *kairos* of the occasion, implicitly matching and outdoing contemporaries and predecessors alike, who will have faced a similar task on a similar occasion many times before, and may even be facing it now. We find frequent occurrence in hymns of such formulae as “If it pleases you to be called x...,” “How should I hymn you...?,” “How can I find new ways...?,” all subject to the ultimate concern, that of making sure that the recipient of the song will “respond with pleasure and gratitude (*charis*) to this song.” It is clear that what [196] would in later literary theory be called *to prepon* or *to pithanon* (what is “appropriate” or “persuasive”) is more at issue than what is historically or absolutely “true.” Cadmus’ pragmatic observations at Euripides *Ba.* 333-35 are no more than a cynical acknowledgement of this pervasive practice:

Even if this person isn’t god, as you say,
You might as well let him go on being called god.
Lie, to splendid effect (*katapseudou kalôs*); say he is Semele’s son,
So people will think she bore a divine baby....

A more typical and tactful way of exploiting the *kairos* and making a “weaker” argument temporarily stronger is through a priamel:

Some say you were born in Dracenum, ... some at Thebes....
They are all wrong, all lying (*pseudomenoi*):
[You were born] far from men, ... in Nysa.

(*Hom. Hymn* 1.1-8)

Here there is presumably no question of permanently discrediting the tradition of Dionysus' birth at Thebes from Semele: rather, a momentary suspension of this version is proposed, one that is reinforced by the "new" etymology: "son of Zeus [*Dios*] at *Nysa*."

A religious sage or proto-philosopher, a Xenophanes or Parmenides, may need to develop a coherent system of terms and beliefs, in which what is true today is true and repeatable tomorrow, and what is true in one area of his teaching will not be contradicted in another. But a praise-poet, or even a "wisdom-poet" such as Hesiod or Solon, need not concern himself about inconsistencies or contradictions; rather, he may exploit them to his advantage (though he is of course at liberty to assail them in others).⁴² Complaints, even boasts, are made about the "lies of poets," both from moralistic philosophers and from poets themselves: but whereas Plato (and perhaps Xenophanes too) has a serious alternative to propose, in the form of a more reliable, self-consistent, and truth-directed mode of discourse, Hesiod, Solon, Pindar, and the other poets are playing the same game themselves.⁴³ The "best" poet is the one who demonstrates his cleverness, pleases his patrons, exercises his skill, most "knowingly" (*epistamenôs*).⁴⁴ In a context in which it is understood (though rarely asserted, before Protagoras and Gorgias) that absolute standards of truth or even of moral consistency are neither attainable nor even professionally desirable (in as much as any authorized, "final" version may put future poets out of a job), he has to tell "his" story (i.e., "the" story, freshly redefined) in a way that will raise eyebrows and score points, but need only temporarily and provisionally ring "true."

(F) Contradictory versions of myth. So we return to our initial point of departure. At every stage of their history, as far as we can tell, the Greeks were well aware that different—and incompatible—stories could be told about almost any of their gods and heroes. By "could be told," I mean that they either had already been told and were known, or that the proliferation of alternative, interchangeable story-types was so common that a narrator could readily modify or invert any received version for his own particular purposes. Our oldest examples of Greek story-telling, those of Homer and Hesiod, demonstrate conclusively not only that their own central narratives have been [197]radically reshaped out of preexisting stories and themes, but that other inserted stories may also be presented in quite unusual and lopsided versions (e.g., Niobe in *Il.* 24.602-17; Zeus' Jar of Goods/Evils in *WD* 94ff.; or the Meleager episode in Book 9 of the *Iliad*). We are never entitled to assume that "Homer's version," just because it is earlier, is any more "original" and intrinsically authoritative than a version attested for the first time a century or more later (e.g., in Stesichorus, or Pindar, or even Euripides); though its occurrence in Homeric epic will thenceforth tend to lend this version a peculiar authority, if only as a reference-point for other versions. In any case, whether or not the poets of the Homeric and Hesiodic traditions are consciously aiming to produce panHellenic and permanent "classics" that may supercede all preexisting "local" versions,

they show themselves well aware of the need to accommodate alternatives, and to allow themselves or others to modify or unsay what they may already have said.

Modern critics and anthropologists are not agreed as to the degree to which oral story-tellers are aware of their own innovations and self-contradictions in taking over stories from others or retelling them repeatedly themselves, and poetic narrative traditions vary as to how strongly they lay their claims to accuracy and self-consistency.⁴⁵ On the available evidence, early Greek poets appear not to have been unduly worried about such matters, and to have been relatively frank about the techniques and strategies available to them in their (re)fashioning of their given material.⁴⁶

The “adding-on” style of dactylic hexameter composition, characteristic of oral epic, is especially well suited to sudden reroutings and inversions of a narrative or description.⁴⁷ On the small scale, infinitely recurring, the technique lends a provisional, potentially incomplete air even to an end-stopped, or potentially end-stopped, verse: we wait to hear whether a modifying adjective or adverb is to be tacked on, and another hexameter constructed to round it out. But on the larger narrative scale, this modifier (if and when it comes), while usually it will expand or complement an item from the preceding verse, may from time to time radically alter, transform, or even negate it.

In the priamel to the *Hymn to Dionysus*, for example (quoted above), the poet’s departure from tradition is marked by a new verse beginning *pseudomenoi* (“They are all lying/mistaken...”). A more striking technique is found in two passages of catalog poetry, one from Odysseus’ visit to the Underworld (*Od.* 11.601-608), the other from the Hesiodic *Catalog of Women* (fr. 23a.13-26 M-W). In both cases, the narrative appears to be complete and intelligible (“I saw Heracles there...,” “They sacrificed Iphigenia”), until the “adding-on” of *eidôlon* (“a wraith only”) introduces the “correction,” that the first version we heard was, not merely incomplete, but essentially untrue. Yet we did hear it, and in each case we accepted it without question—however briefly—as the narrator’s own (and only) view.⁴⁸ If the “adding-on” style allows an author to proceed habitually one verse at a time, still uncommitted fully to his last utterance as long as he is in a position to modify it with his next, the *eidôlon*-technique allows him to go further still in exploiting alternative patterns of expectation in his audience, much as Hecuba’s version of events supercedes, without obliterating, Helen’s in the *agôn* of *Trojan Women*.

[198]Similarly open-ended and uncommitted presentations of contradictory versions of a story are found at Hesiod *WD* 167-73, where our manuscripts all give us a straightforward description of the dead race of Heroes dwelling in the Isles of the Blessed, but several papyri contain a modification of the account that includes Kronos as their king, and the tidy explanation that Zeus released him and gave him this honor; and at *Th.* 526-34 / 613-16 two endings to the Prometheus story coexist, one leaving him suffering eternal torment from Zeus’ eagle, the other bringing Heracles to the rescue. Perhaps Hesiod in both cases preferred to retain the double version because of the all-

inclusive character of both these poems (they give the impression at times of trying, not merely to outdo any particular previous attempt on this material, but to preempt all future attempts too); or perhaps we possess a written version that combines two possible, but mutually exclusive, oral versions, with the choice left open to the performer on each occasion. But, in this latter case, the “redactor” of our extant, written text must have decided that both versions were better retained: and his reason may have been that more was gained than lost by the double-meaning, or unsaying of the story.⁴⁹

The most famous *eidôlon* story, of course, is Stesichorus’ *Palinode* for Helen:

That (This?) story is not true;
You never set foot in the benched ships,
And you never came to the towers of Troy....

(PMG 192, cf. 193)

Stesichorus is generally credited with inventing the story of the phantom Helen (a version followed by Herodotus, and by Euripides in his *Helen*); but it may be much older.⁵⁰ In any case, both the manner in which the “rejected” version is presented, and the motive for Stesichorus’ *kainopoiêsis* (“innovation,” PMG 193.17) are notable. The triple negatives in anaphora (*ouk ... oude ... oude...*) and the explicit mention of a “spurious account” (*ouk etumos logos*) ensure that in this case we keep the familiar version (i.e., that of our *Iliad*) prominently in view from the outset, and will trace every step of Stesichorus’ narrative against a backdrop of that “classic” treatment. We do not possess enough of the *Palinode* to tell how the narrative was handled; but certainly Euripides’ *Helen* would be impossible and pointless without the *Iliad*, so constantly does it play off the expectations (ours, and also Menelaus’) of what is commonly agreed to have happened and to be “true.” No other Greek poem ever quite attained the canonical status of the *Iliad* (a status it attained not because it was demonstrably “true,” but because it was unsurpassed—in terms of *sophia* [b] and [c]): but, even if there had not been such a definitively fine epic actually in existence, it might have been necessary to “invent” one (i.e., to posit one heroic text as “the” semi-official version of “the” key epic event), for precisely these purposes. The charm of hearing the “weaker” or “worse” account made to appear “stronger” or “better” depends on there being universal agreement in the first place that one account *is* (or should be) really “better.” A palinode (or a Gorgianic *Defense of Helen*) is only exciting or amusing if we are firmly committed to the legitimacy of the case which it is rebutting.

[199] We are told that Stesichorus wrote his *Palinode* in order to win back Helen’s good opinion: she had blinded him for maligning her in an earlier poem. These biographical details are doubtless apocryphal; but they do strongly suggest that Stesichorus represented himself as being concerned, not to establish an absolute “truth” (Did Helen go or not?), but to establish a more congenial relationship with his addressee/audience (What would Helen like me to say about her? What would this audience like to hear said of her?). Indeed,

his alleged blinding recalls that of Teiresias—a punishment, not for spreading falsehoods, but for seeing, or speaking, the naked truth.

Of all Archaic poets, the three who have gained the strongest reputations for devotion to the truth are Hesiod, Xenophanes, and Pindar. I have suggested above that several of Hesiod’s “corrections” of the tradition, like his etymologies and pedigrees, may be more playful and heuristic than dogmatic. Perhaps Xenophanes is the exception that proves the general rule: a religious, even philosophical, poet of serious and consistent principles, who genuinely disapproves of what the pseudo-*sophoi* are up to (though we should note that Heraclitus dismisses him in the same breath as Homer, Hesiod, and Pythagoras, 22 B40 DK). But we have too little of his work to judge adequately.

As for Pindar, who is credited by many with the strongest of moral purposes, on the basis of his criticisms of other poets’ lies and his refusal to tell disgraceful or immoral stories that reflect badly on gods or heroes, we find on closer inspection that he is quite candid about his overriding concern, which is for his audience’s favor. When he breaks off to reject a well-known version of a myth, it is because this version will get him into trouble:

Jettison this story, please, my tongue!
 Insulting the gods makes unpopular poetry (*echthra sophia*),
 And bold boasts uttered on the wrong occasion sound mad.
 So don’t babble tales like these: keep all war and fighting
 Well away from the gods! (*Ol.* 9.35-41)
 It is reasonable (*eikos*) for a man to speak well of the gods:
 He receives less blame that way (*meiôn aitia*). (*Ol.* 1.35-36)
 But for me [sc. in contrast to the “jealous neighbors” of line 47],
 There is no way that I will say that one of the blessed gods
 Is a glutton. I steer clear.
 Trouble (*akerdeia*, lit. “no profit”) usually comes to bad-mouths.
 (*Ol.* 1.52-53)

In each case, the distinction is not explicitly between true and false, but between what the gods do and do not like to hear.

Pindar’s attitude, and perhaps the prevailing Greek attitude towards a poet’s or eulogist’s obligations, is summed up in *Py.* 1.76ff.:

From singing of Salamis I will win the gratitude of the
 Athenians as my reward;
 At Sparta, I will win it [from the battle of Plataea];
 And by the banks of Himera, by fulfilling a song of praise
 For the children of Deinomenes....

[200]That is to say, each city likes to hear that its own contribution to the Persian War was the most significant; so Pindar will adapt his version of the events accordingly, as *kairos* requires.⁵¹

When Pindar chooses to lard his account in *Ol.* 1 of the cannibal-feast-that-never-occurred with words suggestive of “boiling” and “digestion,” and with a mystifying reference to Pelops’ ivory shoulder;⁵² or when Aeschylus’

Elders in *Ag.* break off their account of the sacrifice of Iphigenia at the precise moment where, in the alternative version, Artemis is due to substitute the doe (*Ag.* 248, “What happened next, I did not see; and I do not say....”), we are faced with a technique closely related to that of Euripides in the passage from the *Trojan Women* with which I began; i.e., we are told a convincing story and at the same time reminded that it cannot or may not be true.⁵³ Without asking their audiences to dwell on this paradox and analyze its implications, as Euripides or Gorgias later would, Pindar and Aeschylus can count on a level of sophistication and of open-mindedness that modern readers have failed to match. A praise-poet is licensed and expected to tell tall stories, and thereby to *untell* well-founded traditions: and a tragedian, in presenting a tragic trilogy that is at the same time part of a tragi-comic tetralogy, must design his *Oresteia* to be both a complete whole and a preparation for the concluding—yet free-standing?—satyr-play.

Did Pelops’ shoulder *really* get eaten? When exactly *did* Poseidon fall in love with him? Who knows? Who cares? Not Pindar, nor Hieron. But in case Demeter or Poseidon should be thought to care, then let the story be expressly unsaid, so that Pindar may thereby assert his moral superiority over his predecessors. Likewise Aeschylus is able in the *Oresteia* to exploit, without ever fully resolving, his audience’s preexistent uncertainties and doubled expectations (Was Iphigenia *really* killed at Aulis? Did Helen *really* go to Troy?). For, after watching the first three plays, and assessing the intentions, beliefs, and reactions of their main characters, our answer to both questions must be, Yes. But if we note the points of bifurcation, the pointedly ambiguous moments in the narrative where an alternative version might sprout, and reserve judgment on them until the whole dramatic performance is over, we may find a double source of pleasure, as two different—perhaps incompatible—stories are seen to have unfolded before us.⁵⁴

In much the same way, in the *Trojan Women*, though Helen’s Worse Argument may win the day, Hecuba’s Better Argument is not permanently overthrown. The two contest-pieces coexist, each eliciting from us, as from Menelaus, some measure of assent and admiration, and combining to produce a paradoxical pleasure peculiar to the process of “spur-of-the-moment listening (reading/watching),” a process ever subject to revision, addition, retraction. There is no poetic “last word,” no Thucydidean “possession for ever.” The play’s the thing.⁵⁵



NOTES

1. For *suntetheis logos*, cf. Eur. *Ba.* 297, Plato *Phaedrus* 260b, *Apol.* 27a; also [Aesch.] *Prom.* 686.

2. The same question is posed more delicately in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (perhaps too in the *Cypria*): but there Helen is allowed a charming presence and manner that sidestep and disarm all criticism (even her own, *Il.* 3.395-412, 426-36, 6.344-58; *Od.* 4.250-64), without quite answering it. Cf. Vergil's rather "Euripidean" commentary, *Aeneid* 2.567-633.

3. The choice of reading in 975 is not crucial to my argument. I think that either Hartung's οὐ (adopted by J. Diggle in the *OCT Euripides* vol. 2 [1981] and by S. E. Barlow in her commentary on the play [Warminster 1987]) or Reiske's ἤ (punctuated as an incredulous question) must be correct, in view of the order of clauses and the usual associations of χλιδῆ: so, no Judgment at all. But even with the manuscripts' αἶ (accepted by W. Biehl in his Teubner edition [Leipzig 1970], T. C. W. Stinton, *Euripides and the Judgement of Paris* [*JHS Suppl.* 11, 1965] 38 n. 1, and K. H. Lee in his Macmillan edition [London 1977]), the divine bribes are denied.

4. Poseidon begins the play: "I have come..." and goes on to remind us that he himself "with straight measuring-tools built the stone towers of Troy" (5-6). Hera's and Athena's bitter feelings towards Troy can hardly be explained except as the consequence of the Judgment (cf. 23-24, 59, 65). For *Alexandros*, see R. A. Coles, *A New Oxyrhynchus Papyrus: The Hypothesis of Euripides' Alexandros* (*BICS Suppl.* 32, 1974).

5. *Dissoi Logoi* ("Two-fold Arguments") is the title of an extant sophistic collection of paired, contradictory speeches (90 B1-9 DK), probably much indebted to the *Antilogiai* and *Kataballontes Logoi* of Protagoras (80 B5, B1 DK) and to the theories and practice of Gorgias.

6. Such a view of Euripides can be traced back to Aristophanes (*Clouds*, *Frogs*); see further, e.g., J. Duchemin, *L' AGON dans la tragédie grecque* (2nd ed. Paris 1968) passim, A. N. Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Madison 1987) 3-19, 70-94. For sensible remarks on the different ways in which Euripides handles such scenes, see C. Collard, "Formal debates in Euripides' drama," *G&R* 22 (1975) 58-71.

7. "I assure you that the sophistic art is an old one; but those who practiced it in the old days were frightened of the trouble it might bring them, so they covered it up and adopted disguises. Some used poetry, like Homer and Hesiod and Simonides...": so Protagoras, tongue only partly in cheek, at Plato *Prot.* 316d. See further Rosenmeyer, *AJP* 76 (1955) 225-60, and W. J. Verdenius, "Gorgias' doctrine of deception," in G. B. Kerferd, ed., *The Sophists and their Legacy* (*Hermes Einzelschr.* 44, 1981) 116-28, with further references. If at times in this paper I appear to minimize the originality or distinctiveness of the sophists, and of Euripidean "shock-tactics," this is only because I think that the continuities have been consistently undervalued by "progressivist" critics committed to an oversimplified model of a developing Greek "consciousness" and an accompanying rise and fall (decadence) in literary practice and taste. See *infra* n. 49.

8. See especially Plato *Hippias Min.* 363-64, 368, *Ion*, *Euthydemus*; Isocrates *Paneg.* 45-46; Aristotle *Topics*, Diog. Laert. 9.51-52 (*Protagoras*); further G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge 1981) ch. 6, and—with several pinches of salt—G. Ryle, *Plato's Progress* (Cambridge 1966) 102-31.

9. E. g., A. W. Gouldner, *Enter Plato: Part I, The Hellenic World* (New York 1965), D. Sansone, *Greek Athletics and the Genesis of Sport* (Berkeley 1988), G. E. R. Lloyd,

Magic, Reason, and Experience (Cambridge 1979) 59-66, 86-98, N. Loreaux, *The Invention of Athens* (Paris 1981; Engl. tr. Cambridge, Mass. 1986) 202-20, 329-35; for [202]modern Greece too, J. K. Campbell, *Honour, Family, and Patronage* (Oxford 1964), esp. 9, 264-68, 320; and for similarities in Norse culture and poetics, C. J. Clover, "The Germanic context of the Unferth Episode," *Speculum* 55 (1980) 444-68, esp. 447, 451-53, 459.

10. Why? The reasons must include: geography, requiring fragmentation rather than coordination of labor; the systems of inheritance, marriage, and land-tenure; the heavy emphasis on war and conquest; and (most important with regard to poetic innovation) the lack of a stable central monarchy and attendant priestly-scribal caste, who would in other societies (Egypt, Babylon, India) control all "publication," secular and religious, and would be more inclined to maintain single, "authorized" traditions about their gods and heroes wherever possible. See V. Ehrenberg, *Ost und West* (Prague 1935), Lloyd (supra n. 9) 226-67.

11. Best known are the competitions at the City Dionysia, Lenaea, and Panathenaea at Athens, and at the Olympic and Pythian Games, mostly dating from the sixth century; but n.b., from an earlier period, Homer *Il.* 2.594-600 (and *Od.* 8.258-60, 370f., 380, for dancing); Hesiod *WD* 651-57, also fr. 278 M-W (prophecy); Alcman's *Partheneion* (*PMG* 1). The casual way in which the Underworld contest for the Chair of Tragedy is set up in the *Frogs*, on the analogy of the other crafts, confirms that there is nothing intrinsically funny about such a move (cf. Pherecrates' *Krapataloi*, Phrynichus' *Muses*, etc.).

12. Roman drama was normally staged by a producer as a money-making venture: there were no prizes. For most other kinds of poetry, recitation and/or publication was usually supported by a patron. (The rhetorical *controversiae* were ostensibly agonistic; but the rules of that game forbade much tinkering with the "facts" of the case, and the range of innovation was correspondingly smaller.) For an account of the (mostly Greek or Greek-inspired) poetical competitions of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, see Alex Hardie, *Statius and the Silvae: Poets, Patrons and Epideixis in the Graeco-Roman World* (Liverpool 1983) 15-30, 37-49. Closer parallels to archaic Greek practice may be presented by earlier Indo-European, and certainly by later Celtic and Scandinavian cultures; cf. Clover (supra n. 9), Lindow (infra n. 26).

13. Thus Calchas dies of chagrin at Mopsus' mantic success (ps.-Hesiod *Melampodia* fr. 278 M-W); and Homer himself is said to have died after (and implicitly, as a result of) failing to solve a children's riddle (*Contest* 323-35, cf. Heraclitus B56 DK); conversely (and more typically) the Sphinx dies when her riddle is solved; cf. too Hesiod's failure to understand a fatal oracle (Thuc. 3.96.1).

14. Number of speaking actors; size of chorus; structure and metrical forms; messenger speeches; comic *agôn* and parabasis; etc.

15. So, e.g., the use of a third speaking actor for Cassandra and Pylades in the *Oresteia*, or the final entrance in *Medea* of a human heroine in a space usually reserved for divine apparitions. As modern parallels to these contrary impulses we might consider the "compulsory" and "individual" (or "freestyle") programs of competitive skating or gymnastics, or the Harlem "stride" piano contests of the 1930s, with their fixed [= "compulsory"] harmonic structure and tempo requiring "correct" execution by the left hand, while progressively more daring [= "free"] melodic and rhythmic innovations would be attempted by the right.

16. All discussion of Greek views of poetry and/or fiction starts from Homer *Il.* 2.484-93, *Od.* 8.487-98, Hesiod *Th.* 1-115, and Plato *Ion*. Of the enormous modern literature on the subject, especially relevant here are F. Solmsen, "The gift of speech in

Homer and Hesiod,” *TAPA* 85 (1954) 1-15, H. Maehler, *Die Auffassung des Dichterberufs im frühen Griechentum (Hypomnemata 3, Göttingen 1963)*, M. Detienne, *Les maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque* (2nd ed., Paris 1973), George B. Walsh, *The Varieties of Enchantment* (Chapel Hill 1984), Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics [203]* (London 1986) 1-27, Louise H. Pratt, *Lying and Poetry from Homer to Pindar* (diss. U. Michigan 1987).

17. This is not to deny that the “rules” may be differently interpreted by different artists and judges. Writing in the fourth century, Aristotle displays a sophisticated awareness of the range of criteria involved: “By ‘episodic’ plot I mean one in which the scenes do not follow one another according to any probable or necessary pattern. Such plots are composed by bad poets because of incompetence, but by good poets because of the actors: for, in composing contest-pieces (*agônismata*) and stretching a story-line beyond its natural limits, they are often compelled to distort the proper sequence of events” (*Poetics* 9.1451b35ff.). Aristotle is thus distinguishing between the virtuoso technical effects of *sophia* (c), beloved of actors and inferior audiences, and the “proper sequence” of plot-events—which should also, as a product of artistic technique, belong to *sophia* (c), but has been elevated by Aristotle in the *Poetics* to a status equivalent to *sophia* (a); i.e., the “natural limits” (*dunamis*) and “proper sequence” (*to ephexês*) of a literary *muthos* for Aristotle amount to the “true” version of that story.

18. See M. Pohlenz, “Die Anfänge der griechische Poetik,” *NGG* (1920) 142-78 (repr. in *Kl. Schr.* [Hildesheim 1965]), J. D. Denniston, “Technical terms in Aristophanes,” *CQ* 21 (1927) 113-21. The conception of poetry as a craft, analogous to weaving or carpentry and described in the same terms, appears to go back to Indo-European times: R. Schmitt, ed., *Indogermanische Dichtersprache (Wege der Forschung 165, Darmstadt 1968)*.

19. See infra p. 192, and the “compulsory” programs mentioned supra n. 15. I am assuming that the *Contest* contains at least a fourth century kernel, and includes older material still; i.e., that it reflects or recalls, however clumsily, actual Archaic procedures; see N. J. Richardson, “The Contest of Homer and Hesiod and Alcidas’ *Mouseion*,” *CQ* 31 (1981) 1-10.

20. For a more detailed representation of socially harmonious competition, we need only turn to the Games of Book 23 of the *Iliad*—though even there almost every event produces an awkward moment or two.

21. See, e.g., W. Schadewaldt, *Legende von Homer dem fährenden Sanger* (Leipzig 1942) and *Von Homers Welt und Werk* (Stuttgart 1944) 54-86, A. Gzella, “The Competition between Choral Poets,” *Eos* 58 (1969-70) 19-32, J. Svenbro, *La parole et le marbre* (Lund 1976), Hardie (supra n. 12), B. Gentili, *Poesia e pubblico nella Grecia antica* (Rome 1984).

22. The same of course is true of much prose: apart from the sophists and other authors of epideictic, judicial or political oratory, medical and historical writers also tend to be highly competitive; see infra n. 32.

23. See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York 1973) and *Agon* (New York 1981) with debts to Freud and Frantz Fanon; also now W. Fitzgerald, *Agonistic Poetry* (Berkeley 1987).

24. Cf. the “kennings” of Hesiod and Theognis, and “Cleobulina” frs. 1-3 W; further K. Ohlert, *Rätsel und Rätselspiele der alten Griechen* (2nd ed., Berlin 1912), W. Schultz, art. “Rätsel,” *RE* (1914) 62-125.

25. The type, *ti phertaton? ti kalliston? ti terpnotaton?*, etc., is standard, to judge from *PMG* 651 (Simonides) and 890 (anonymous), together with Tyrtaeus fr. 12 W, Sappho fr. 16 L-P, Xenophanes fr. 2 W, Theognis 1063-68 (cf. 255-56), and Simonides

PMG 542; cf. too Pindar *Ol.* 1.1ff. It recurs in modified form, e.g., at Eur. *Ba.* 877-81, 1150-52 (on *to sophon* and *to kalon* respectively), and is found too in the Pythagorean *akousmata* ("Sayings"): *ti sophon? ti malista? ti esti? ti prakteon?*, etc.

26. See further Lloyd (supra n. 9) 59-61; cf. too J. Lindow, "Riddles, Kennings, and the complexity of Skaldic poetry," *Scandinavian Studies* 47 (1975) 311-27, and, for [204]modern sociological material, Stanley Brandes, *Metaphors of Masculinity* (Philadelphia 1980) 128-36.

27. Plato's Ion, like certain sophists, specializes in answering obscure questions about his favorite poet; allegorists discover new and morally sounder meanings in old texts; and by the time of Aristotle Homeric *problēmata* and *zētēmata* are a genre of their own. See further N. J. Richardson, "Homeric Professors in the Age of the Sophists," *PCPS* 21 (1975) 65-81.

28. See especially B. C. Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad* (*Hermes Einzelschr.* 21, 1968), D. Lohmann, *Die Komposition der Reden in der Ilias* (Berlin 1970).

29. W. Jens, ed., *Die Bauformen der griechischen Tragödie (Poetica Beiheft 6*, Munich 1971), and Duchemin (supra n. 6); T. Gelzer, *Der epirrhematische Agon bei Aristophanes* (*Zetemata* 23, 1960); M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge 1974); M. L. West, *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus* (Berlin 1974); C. Calame, *Les chœurs des jeunes filles en Grèce archaïque* (Rome 1977); J. Duchemin, "Les origines populaires et paysannes de l'agon tragique," *Dioniso* 43 (1969) 247-75, D. M. Halperin, *Before Pastoral* (New Haven 1983).

30. R. Reitzenstein, *Epigramm und Skolion* (Giessen 1893), W. Rösler, *Dichter und Gruppe* (Munich 1980), E. L. Bowie, "Early Greek elegy, symposium, and public festival," *JHS* 106 (1986) 13-35, T. Figueira and G. Nagy, eds., *Theognis of Megara* (Baltimore 1985).

31. See esp. PMG 893-896, and 651, 890, with Page's further references *ad loc.*

32. Lloyd (supra n. 9) 86-98; but it is notable that Greek doctors, unlike poets, did not bandy their own names about in their works. Of historians, most notable for their dismissive attitude to predecessors are perhaps Hecataeus and Ctesias; but Herodotus and Thucydides get their jabs in too.

33. Similarly, e.g., Pindar *Nem.* 7.20-26 (against Homer); the Elders at Aesch. *Ag.* 750-62; women against male tradition at Eur. *Med.* 410-30. We may note too the ethical implications of the factual contradiction ("It was *not* Ajax who rescued Achilles' corpse...," at [Homer] *Little Iliad* fr. II Allen. For Norse and Germanic parallels, see Clover (supra n. 9) 453-59.

34. Callimachus *Aetia* fr. 1. Corinna's alleged criticisms of Pindar perhaps belong in this category too (Plutarch *de glor. Ath.* 4.347F). It could be objected that my lumping together in this section of actual, contemporary rivals and illustrious, deceased predecessors may obscure some important distinctions. But I think the same impetus is involved in contradicting either, and the mention by name of even quite remote and absent authorities confers on them and their words a presence that is more than metaphorical. It is also important to bear in mind that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as we have them, are probably atypical of early epic poetry in their conspicuous lack of the occasional and self-promotional references that would normally accompany any particular performance. Such references came to be suppressed as these two poems acquired their exceptional, quasi-canonical status; see M. Griffith, "Personality in Hesiod," *CA* 2 (1983) 37-65, esp. 46-47.

35. W. H. Race, *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius (Mnemosyne Suppl.* 74, 1982).

36. E.g., Timocreon *PMG* 727, on which see R. Scodel, “Timocreon’s Encomium of Aristides,” *CA* 2 (1983) 102-107.

37. We may think too of Socrates’ (highly disruptive) complaints about particularly brilliant epideictic speeches to which it is his turn to respond (e.g., *Prot.* 334c-d, *Symp.* 198a-199b). A perfect non-Greek example of such switching of “genres” is furnished by the Icelandic *Saga of Gunnlaug Wormtongue*. Two rivals are presenting praise-poems to the king: “Then Gunnlaug recited the long lay which he had composed about king Olaf; and when the lay came to an end, ‘Hrafn,’ inquired the king, ‘how well made is this [205]poem?’ ‘Well sire, it is a poem full of big words, but far from elegant, and stiff and hard like Gunnlaug’s own temper.’ ‘Now you shall recite your poem, Hrafn,’ ordered the king. And so he did; and when it came to an end, ‘Gunnlaug,’ inquired the king, ‘how well made is this poem?’ ‘Well sire, it is a pretty poem, just like Hrafn himself to look at; but there’s not much in it once you peer closer. And why should you compose only a short lay [*flokkr*] about the king, Hrafn? Didn’t he impress you as worth a long one [*drápa*, i.e., one containing a regular refrain]?” (quoted [with parentheses added] from *Erik the Red and Other Icelandic Sagas*, tr. Gwyn Jones [Oxford 1961] 195-96; I thank Carol Clover for this reference).

38. See M. Griffith, “Euripides *Alkestis* 636-641,” *HSCP* 82 (1978) 83-86.

39. *Th.* 60-79, 116-22, 188-206 (though 16-17 imply that Dione is Aphrodite’s mother, as in Homer); cf. Plato *Symp.* 180dff. For the organizational and narratological functions of genealogy in Hesiod, see especially P. Philippson, *Genealogie als mythische Form* (*Symb. Oslo. Suppl.* 7, 1936), and M. L. West, ed., *Hesiod Theogony* (Oxford 1966) 34ff. It is noteworthy how freely such personifications as Right, Curse, Prayers, etc. may be treated in this regard.

40. This is argued, e.g., by G. Nagy [article forthcoming], with reference to C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of the Masks* (tr. S. Modelski, Seattle 1982); but it will be clear from what follows that I think few poems apart from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* laid much claim to panHellenic status at the time of their composition. See supra n. 34.

41. E.g., Phaedra on double *aidōs* (Eur. *Hipp.* 383-88), Aphrodite Pandemos/Ourania (Plato *Symp.* 180dff.); and see M. Gagarin’s essay in this volume.

42. Thus it may be inappropriate to assess Hesiod’s “inconsistencies” as being the (inevitable, and mildly undesirable) product of preliterate or prephilosophical mentality; they are more of a help than a hindrance to his poetry. Doubtless there were opportunities to revise the “earlier” account in *Th.* of the birth of Eris, in light of the more “considered” afterthoughts of *WD*—but it would have been distracting and “incorrect” in context to do so. Likewise Pindar probably did not “change his mind” about Neoptolemus between *Paeon* 6 and *Nem.* 7.30ff, nor about the afterlife between *Ol.* 2.57ff. and frs. 129, 131; see H. Lloyd-Jones, “Pindar and the After-life,” *Pindare* (Fond. Hardt, *Entretiens* 31, Geneva 1984) 245-83.

43. Indeed, Pindar invites us to view Homer’s “deceptive” exaltation of Odysseus with as much aesthetic admiration as moral disapproval (*Nem.* 7.20-25). Even if Ajax was “really” the greater hero, even if the *Odyssey* is more than Odysseus deserved, Homer’s very success (and Odysseus’) in fooling so many people for so long must be due to the extraordinary power of *sophia* (c); cf. *Od.* 11.548-51, 565-67; also Pratt (supra n. 16) 5-48, 79-86, who argues that poetic “lying” is frequently justified, but only when it is for ethically good ends.

44. Hesiod *WD* 107; cf. *Th.* 87, Solon fr. 13.51-52 W, etc. The Greek contest-system, and the “shame-culture” of which it was an essential part, tended to rank individuals as “stronger” and “weaker,” “successful” and “unsuccessful,” rather than as intrinsically

“good” and “bad”; and even Hesiod’s Muses imply that there may be stories other than true ones that they can help a poet to tell, for whatever purposes (*Th.* 27).

45. See R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry* (Cambridge 1977); J. Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge 1968); A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass. 1960).

46. We should remember too that earlier Indo-European metaphors for poetic activity (weaving, moulding, carpentry, etc.) tend to imply *rearrangement* or *transformation* of raw, malleable materials, rather than mere repetition, preservation, or imitation. See R. Schmitt (*supra* n. 18).

[206]47. On this feature of oral formulaic style, see M. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse* (Oxford 1972) 251-65, G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary, Vol. 1: Books 1-4* (Cambridge 1985) 30-37.

48. It makes little difference whether the Heracles passage is an interpolation, as some have suspected, i.e., whether one poet has contradicted himself or another. In either case, the effect of the existing text on the reader/listener is the same.

49. For a similar account of discrepant elements combined in the Homeric epics for special artistic and ethical purposes, see M. N. Nagler’s article in the present volume; and for the functions and choices of a “Redactor,” who may prefer to retain incompatible (though not originally “rival”) accounts side-by-side, rather than harmonize or trim them, see R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Berkeley 1981) esp. 3-22, 131-54. The sophists’ (and Euripides’) most arresting move beyond the poets came perhaps in their granting equal time and equal weight within the same work and on the same terms, i.e., on the same literary “occasion,” to both contradictory accounts.

50. Hdt. 2.112-20; cf. (?) Hesiod fr. 358 M-W (from Tzetzes). For a full discussion of the evidence, including other comparable *eidôlon*-stories, see R. Kannicht, ed., *Euripides Helena* (Heidelberg 1969) I.21-41, who argues strongly for Stesichorus’ originality. But Helen seems always to have attracted double stories: see E. Downing’s article in the present volume.

51. Obviously I am lumping together here a number of different kinds of “alternative versions.” The next task should be to distinguish more precisely and more subtly between different kinds of contradiction, rejection, and revision; between the different generic expectations of authorial truthfulness and morality encountered in “high” vs “low” or erotic verse; between stories told so as to sound self-contained and wholly convincing on their own, with no room left for counter-versions, and stories told in such a way that a counter-version is inescapably, or optionally, present in the back or front of the listener’s mind. Almost any myth, however positive its narrated conclusion, can be pursued to a further, negative outcome—When can a poet refer to (e.g.) Peleus or Cadmus and exclude such associations and ramifications? What are the effects of allowing them to creep in? At what point do they begin to undermine the main story-line to which they are an appendage or variant? See T. C. W. Stinton, “The Scope and Limits of Allusion in Greek Tragedy,” in Martin Cropp et al., eds., *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy: Essays presented to D. J. Conacher* (Calgary 1986) 67-102, and Deborah H. Roberts, “Sophoclean Endings: Another Story” [forthcoming]; also C. P. Segal, *Pindar’s Mythmaking. The Fourth Pythian Ode* (Princeton 1986), esp. 26-28, 30-31, 127-30.

52. *Ol.* 1.24-53. See Stinton (*supra* n. 51) 99 n. 119, and A. Köhnken, “Time and Event in Pindar *O.* 1.25-53,” *CA* 2 (1983) 66-76. Again, in *Py.* 2.21ff. Pindar completes the story of Ixion’s rape of Hera before adding that it was only a cloud that he raped (n.b. *pseudos gluku methepôn, eidos gar...prepen*, 37-40).

53. For in *Agamemnon*, in addition to the interruption of the narrative of the sacrifice, we also hear of a “phantom (*phasma*) ruling in Menelaus’ palace..., a vision (*opsis*) that slips through his hands and is gone” after Helen’s departure for Troy (414-28); and we are given a lengthy reminder that Menelaus on his journey home from Troy has been diverted (617-80)—an unmistakable preparation for the Proteus-adventure in Egypt, where, in Herodotus’ and Euripides’ versions, and probably in Stesichorus’ too, he is reunited with the real Helen. Of course we know almost nothing about *Proteus*, the satyr-play that completed the *Oresteia*: but we do know from its title (together with Homer *Od.* 4.332-586, with scholia) that it was an Egyptian sequel, and it even included a character named Eidô (fr. 212 R). Was she simply a metrical convenience (for Eidothea), or did she possess some *eidôlon* qualities too? In any case, I think it likely that a satyric *Proteus*, with (presumably) a “romance” or “comic” plot and mood, may [207] have been able to clear up the notorious problem of Artemis’ apparent cruelty in the parodos of *Agamemnon*. If she actually rescues Iphigenia at the last moment (*Ag.* 248), the goddess (and by implication, Zeus too) is exonerated—at least in retrospect. But then of course the chain of motivations in *Agamemnon* would be (again, only in retrospect) disconcertingly broken. Clytaemestra has no need for vengeance....

54. See E. Downing, pp. 1-8 in this volume; cf. R. Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte* (Paris 1973), J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca 1976) 261-65.

55. Parts of this essay were delivered as lectures at Austin (1984), Berkeley (1986) and Harvard (1989). I am grateful to several readers of it in its various drafts for helpful comments, especially to Eric Downing, Mark W. Edwards, James Porter, an anonymous referee, and my fellow-editor.