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Excerpt

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## CHAPTER I

Epos *and* aoidē

“Upon you is comeliness of *epea*, in <you> are noble *phrénes*;  
and the tale, as an *aoidos* you have most expertly told it in all  
its detail.”

(Alkinoos to Odysseus, *Od.* 11.367–8)

The *Odyssey* is a poem of paradoxes. Its central hero is both poet and liar, hero and trickster, emphatically famous and notoriously anonymous, endowed with a ravenous belly, yet capable of extreme fasting. The poem itself provides a narrative context entirely worthy of such ambiguity. Hailed by many for its self-reflexive narrative sophistication, it resorts nonetheless to primitive folktales featuring witches, ogres, and magical objects. And it does so precisely in what confirms the poem as a narratological *tour de force*, the extended tale of Odysseus’ Wanderings told by the hero himself at the court of Alkinoos, king of the Phaeacians. The pull between ancient and modern seems to be reflected in the uncertain generic status of the poem as a whole: is this tale of the Homecoming Husband not some kind of elaborate folktale rather than an instance of heroic epic? Or is the poem, with marriage as its *telos*, a very early specimen of the novel, the genre of the future?

Part of the paradox is due to the fact that our idea of what constitutes “epic,” and what not, has been too confident and too rigid. Epic has been seen as a transcendental norm, best exemplified by the *Iliad* and its unambiguous setting in a heroic age. The *Odyssey* can only fall short of such a norm, due not only to its fairytale and folktale elements, but also to its domestic scenes. The poem, with its social conflict playing out on a small rural island at the periphery of the Greek world, evokes no less Hesiod’s troubled Iron Age and the agricultural world of the poem’s historical audiences in the archaic age than a long-vanished Bronze Age of heroes.

Scholars frequently attribute the difference between the two poems to a difference in time – and hence in style and taste – between two poets

(the aging of an individual poet has also been assumed), or to a more “modern” style of the younger epic. But we do not have to reach for such individual or biographical explanations. Today’s reflection on “epic” as genre allows for more inherent heterogeneity, yielding a conception in which epic appears as much more diverse and fluid than before.<sup>1</sup> Instead of a retrojected primordial literary genre, preceding other literary genres and being sharply delimited from such rivaling verbal art as “folktale” or “myth,” we may now think of an “umbrella” genre that loves to incorporate other genres, alluding to them in an intertextual play between competing performance traditions. Also incorporated can be a plethora of presumably non-sung, but still traditional speech genres, such as proverbs, praise, blame, prayer, supplication, etc.<sup>2</sup> The “umbrella” may also be a specific poem (or, better, poetic tradition), such as the *Odyssey*, alluding to other, competing traditions, such as the *Iliad*, as we will see in Chapter 8.

The widespread embedding of such minor genres within epic – if “epic” is still a meaningful term in this regard – does not compromise or dilute epic; it *is* epic, *aoidē*: the all-embracing matrix genre takes on the features of the genres it swallows and conversely transforms them: all ingested material turns into epic, metrically and thematically. A new diachronic perspective takes the place of a previous one that has long provided the backbone to the history of “early literature.” Instead of an evolutionary progression from pre-literary genres to literary (and literate) epic (and then on to sub-epic or post-epic genres), we have a *dialogue* of genres over time.<sup>3</sup>

The very name “epic” as it comes to us out of the Greek language itself is an important element in this complex. In Homer, the matrix genre of “epic,” the stage on which the heroes perform, is always referred to as ἄοιδή, an action noun designating the act of ἀείδειν, ‘sing’.<sup>4</sup> The speech of characters, on the other hand, that is, the speech genres performed within the framework of the epic performance are often called ἔπος or ἔπεα,

<sup>1</sup> The recent spate of “companions” and “handbooks” on Homer and/or epic (as on so much else), each with its own chapter on “epic as genre,” has produced useful statements to this effect. See Ford 1997; Foley 2004; and Martin 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Foley 2004: 172: “omnibus genre.” On the incorporation or representation of “speech genres” in Homer, see Minchin 2007: 23–141.

<sup>3</sup> The idea of a dialogue between genres is indebted to the work of Bakhtin (e.g., 1981: 3–4; 1986: 60–102). Yet ironically, Bakhtin sees in epic a fundamentally un-dialogic genre, seeing dialogue at work mostly in the novel and in its “precursors” (such as the Socratic dialogue).

<sup>4</sup> The verb ἐν(ν)έπειν can also be used for epic song, though its subject is then always the Muse(s) in an invocation by the poet: *Od.* 1.1; *Il.* 2.484; 11.218; 14.508; 16.112; but in contrast to ἀείδειν the verb can also be used for speech or storytelling inside the tale: *Od.* 17.549, 556, 561; 23.301.

“words,” or rather “utterances.”<sup>5</sup> But that term is also, from outside the epic tale, the term for “epic,” or more generally, all poetic utterances in dactylic hexameter.<sup>6</sup> This includes epic in our sense of “epic” (Homeric or otherwise), of course, but also oracles and poetry that *we* would not easily qualify as “epic,” such as Hesiodic wisdom poetry or Theognidean sympotic elegy. In other words, epic comes to be called by the generic term for all the speech activity to which it yields the floor. The focus on (metrical) *form* is important, for whereas epic admits a potentially unlimited number of diverse speech genres, shaping itself to their likeness and orientation, it does subject everything to one and the same meter, the dactylic rhythm of *epos*, thereby complementing a reciprocal process.<sup>7</sup>

In the *Odyssey* the reciprocity between the matrix narrative and the embedded utterance is particularly significant in that *epos*, which I will henceforth use as shorthand for Odysseus’ tales, is at various moments likened to *aoidē*, epic song. The inset tale is not merely part of epic; it competes with its “container,” shaping the narrative tension within the *Odyssey*. In this chapter, and book, I will speak of the opposition between *epos* and *aoidē* in terms of the interaction – and rivalry – between hero and poet, Odysseus and Homer.

### *Epos and aoidē*

If epic is the shell that holds *epos*, then the *Odyssey* is the most “epic” poem imaginable. It turns itself inside out in the way in which it presents its hero in the proem (*Od.* 1.1–10):

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ  
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε·  
πολλῶν δ’ ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,  
πολλὰ δ’ ὃ γ’ ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὄν κατὰ θυμόν,  
ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.

<sup>5</sup> The other major term for “spoken utterance” in Homer is *mūthos*. For the use of *mūthos* and *ēpos* in Homer, see Martin 1989: 1–42. Martin redefines *mūthos* in Homer as “a speech act indicating authority, performed at length, usually in public, with a focus on full attention to every detail” (p. 12), whereas *ēpos* is glossed as “an utterance, ideally short, accompanying a physical act, and focusing on message, as perceived by the addressee, rather than on performance as enacted by the speaker.” By these criteria much of what in the present study is called *epos* would be *mūthos*. But I will use *epos* as the unmarked term for “speech within epic” on account of this word being able to designate “epic” as a whole (see below). Note that *epos* can also apply (e.g., *Od.* 17.519) to song of the *aoides*.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps first in Pindar (*Nem.* 2.2 ῥαπτῶν ἐπέων . . . ἀοιδοί); cf. Hdt. 2.116.3; 4.29. On *epos*, see also Koller 1972.

<sup>7</sup> For ideas on epic meter, the dactylic hexameter, being derived diachronically from the (Aeolic) meters of sung poetry (even though epic is attested earlier than our extant specimens of song in Aeolic meters), see Nagy 1990: 11, 48–51, 439–64.

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Epos *and* aoidē

ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὧς ἐτάρους ἐρρύσατο, ἰέμενός περ·  
 αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ἔλοντο,  
 νήπιοι, οἱ κατὰ βοῦς Ὑπερίονος Ἥελίοιο  
 ἦσθιον· αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν ἀφείλετο νόστιμον ἦμαρ.  
 τῶν ἀμόθεν γε, θεά, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπέ καὶ ἡμῖν.

Sing to me of the man, Muse, the one of many turns, who wandered  
 far and wide, blown off course after he had sacked the sacred citadel  
 of Troy;

of many men he saw the cities and learned their mind and ways;  
 and many woes on the high seas he suffered in his spirit,  
 striving for his life and the safe return of his Companions.

But still he could not save his Companions, much as he tried:

through their own culpable recklessness they perished,

fools, who ate the cattle of Helios Hyperion.

But he took away the day of their safe return.

Of these events, from some point, goddess, daughter of Zeus, speak to  
 us too.

The proem's fame may obscure the remarkable fact that the hero is *not* introduced as, say, “the man who, disguised as beggar, completed his *nostos* after wandering for many years, and who punished the Suitors of his wife, who thus died because of their own criminal recklessness.” The “woes” that the hero “suffered in his spirit” (πάθην ἄλγεα ὄν κατὰ θυμόν, *Od.* 1.4) are his tribulations “on the high seas” (ἐν πόντῳ), not the insults at the hand of the Suitors in his own house, though the poem emphasizes that suffering too.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the poem in its programmatic self-presentation draws on Odysseus' own tale of his Wanderings rather than on the poet's tale of the hero's Homecoming, favoring inset tale over matrix story, and *epos* over *aoidē*.

The proem showcases just one out of the many adventures of the hero, the Cattle of the Sun episode, a choice that has puzzled some readers, who also feel that the condemnation of the Companions here – a verdict involving the term ἀτασθαλίη, to be understood as “criminal recklessness” – is too strong and not borne out by the narrative: many more companions will be killed in the adventure of the Laestrygonians than in the Cattle of the Sun episode, and, some readers have felt, the behavior of the Companions in that last episode does not deserve to be condemned in such a harsh way.<sup>9</sup> There will be opportunities later, in Chapters 6 and 7, for addressing these concerns in detail (the poem's strong verdict will be upheld); here

<sup>8</sup> For example, *Od.* 18.346–8; 20.18, 284–6. This does not mean, of course, that the matrix narrative does not recount tribulations on the high seas (as in the shipwreck of Odysseus' raft in Book Five).

<sup>9</sup> For example, Fenik 1974: 208–30; S. West 1988: 71–2. See also Nagler 1990 and Cook 1995: 15–18.

we may note that the very prominent role the Cattle of the Sun episode is allowed to play in the proem is related to the interplay between *epos* and *aoidē*, hero and poet. If the poet's story is one of criminal feasting on cattle that belongs to someone else, so is the hero's. Both stories revolve around instances of ἀτασθαλίη, of humans who in and through the act of eating meat meet with self-inflicted doom.

The *Odyssey* subverts the hierarchizing narratological distinction between primary and secondary (or internal, embedded) narrator, narrator *of* the tale, and narrator *in* the tale,<sup>10</sup> placing Odysseus as storyteller on the same level as Homer. This is reflected in the poem's various starts and restarts, which enter into an "intratextual" dialogue with each other. The beginning of the hero's story is preceded by a reactivation of the important themes of the poem's proem. Odysseus' narrative is requested by his host Alkinoos in language that brings back the themes of wandering (πλάγχθη, 'was blown off course') and travel (πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα, 'and of many men saw the cities'), inviting the hero to elaborate on the proem's neutral καὶ νόον ἔγνων, 'and he learned their mind and ways' (*Od.* 8.572–6):<sup>11</sup>

ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τόδε εἰπέ καὶ ἀτρεκέως κατάλεξον,  
ὄπιπῃ ἀπεπλάγχθης τε καὶ ἅς τινος ἴκεο χώρας  
ἀνθρώπων, αὐτούς τε πόλιός τ' ἐὺ ναιεταούσας,  
ἡμὲν ὅσοι χαλεποί τε καὶ ἀγριοὶ οὐδὲ δίκαιοι,  
οἱ τε φιλόξενοι καὶ σφιν νόος ἐστὶ θεουδής.

But now tell me this and give me the report, unswerving, on  
what ways you were blown off course, and what lands you reached,  
of humans, they themselves and their cities well-built,  
<on the one hand> all those who are hard to deal with, and savages,  
unjust,  
and <on the other hand> those who are friendly to strangers, with a  
mind that fears the gods.

And when the hero can finally, after answering Alkinoos' earlier questions ("What is your name" "What land are you from?" *Od.* 8.548–63), start his story, the brief narrative of the first adventure in the Wanderings picks up the remaining themes of the primary proem (*Od.* 9.39–46):

Ἰλιόθεν με φέρων ἄνεμος Κικόνεσσι πέλασσεν,  
Ἰσμάρω· ἔνθα δ' ἐγὼ πόλιν ἔπραθον, ὤλεσα δ' αὐτούς·  
ἐκ πόλιος δ' ἀλόχους καὶ κτήματα πολλὰ λαβόντες  
δασσάμεθ', ὡς μή τίς μοι ἀτεμβόμενος κίοι ἴσης.

<sup>10</sup> See de Jong 1987: 33.

<sup>11</sup> On the formulaic ironies of this passage, see the Epilogue as well as Chapter 2.

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Epos *and* aoidē

ἔνθ' ἣ τοι μὲν ἐγὼ διερῶ ποδὶ φευγέμεν ἡμέας  
 ἠνώγεα, τοὶ δὲ μέγα νῆπιοι οὐκ ἐπίθοντο.  
 ἔνθα δὲ πολλὸν μὲν μέθυ πίνετο, πολλὰ δὲ μῆλα  
 ἔσφαζον παρὰ θίνα καὶ εἰλίποδας ἔλικας βοῦς.

From Ilium the carrying wind took me to the Cicones,  
 to Ismarus; there I sacked the city, and destroyed them all;  
 taking their wives and many possessions from the city,  
 we divided it all, so that no one was cheated of his fair share.  
 There I urged that we be fleeing with swift foot;  
 but they, fools, they would not listen.  
 Then much wine was drunk and many sheep  
 they slaughtered and many cattle with rolling gait and curvy horns.

Just like the poet, the hero takes the sack of a city as starting point (πόλιν ἔπραθον, ‘I sacked the city’, picking up the proem’s Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε, ‘after he had destroyed Troy’s sacred citadel’, *Od.* 1.2). And in both cases there is a contrast between the hero and his Companions, who ignore, as νῆπιοι, ‘fools’, his advice and indulge in the undue consumption of meat, thus bringing doom upon themselves.<sup>12</sup> There is also interlocking: in the one case, told by the hero, the undue feast happens in a decidedly heroic and Iliadic setting; in the other case, the poet reports on events that occurred in an Otherworld, far from the battlefields on which epic glory is won. But regardless, each time the Companions perish in spite of all the efforts of their leader to save them.

We begin to see, then, that the hierarchical relation between the two narrators is coming under pressure. And so is the distinction of the hero’s internal and the poet’s external audience. “I will now first tell you my name, *so that you too know it*” (ἄφρα καὶ ὑμεῖς εἴδετ', *Od.* 9.16–17), says the hero before beginning his long story, using language that recalls the beginning of the poem in yet another way: the scalar particle καί, which includes the audience in the set formed by the speaker himself (“you too as well, in addition to me”), is reminiscent of the end of the proem, where the audience, and the narrator, are included by the same particle (εἰπέ καὶ ἡμῖν, ‘tell us as well’, *Od.* 1.10). We may perhaps see in this inclusion a veiled reference to Odysseus himself, the narrator of the second proem, whose story is being referred to (“tell us, Muse, so that we too [in addition to Odysseus] know it”); after all, the poet invokes the Muse to tell about

<sup>12</sup> The contrast between Odysseus and the Companions is also highlighted at yet another significant starting point in the poem, *Hermes’ speech to Calypso*, just before the actual first appearance of the hero (5.110–11; cf. 5.133–4).

events for which Odysseus, who has been there and seen it himself, is the sole source.<sup>13</sup> The hero is the only human who does not need the Muse to gain access to the monstrous and fabulous world of the Wanderings, and in addressing the Muse, the poet asks her to grant him access to what Odysseus already knows. Soon we will hear it from the man himself.

When the hero takes over the floor from the poet, his story is not merely “embedded”; the boundary between the internal and the external audience begins to fade, and we are listening to Odysseus himself. The impact of *epos*, Odysseus’ narrative, is such that *aoidē* has to reassert itself by means of explicit references to its own proem after the hero has finished his tale and the poet can resume *his* (*Od.* 13.88–92):

ὡς ἡ ῥίμφα θέουσα θαλάσσης κύματ’ ἔταμνεν,  
**ἄνδρα** φέρουσα θεοῖς ἐναλίγκια μῆδε’ ἔχοντα,  
**ὅς** πρὶν μὲν μάλα **πολλὰ πάθ’ ἄλγεα ὄν κατὰ θυμόν**  
 ἀνδρῶν τε πτολέμους ἀλεγεινά τε κύματα πείρων,  
 δὴ τότε γ’ ἀτρέμας εὔδε, λελασμένος ὅσ’ ἐπετόνθει.

Thus running lightly, it cut through the swellings of the sea,  
 carrying a man with thoughts similar to the gods,  
who earlier had suffered many woes in his spirit,  
 living through wars of men and the painful waves;  
 but then he slept undisturbed, forgetful of all that he had suffered.

The placement of *ἄνδρα* at the beginning of the line and its combination with a digressive relative clause containing *μάλα πολλὰ πάθ’ ἄλγεα ὄν κατὰ θυμόν* are unmistakable echoes of the primary proem.<sup>14</sup> It is striking that the epic poet can retake the floor only when Odysseus is fast asleep. The hero’s forgetting “all that he had suffered” becomes the reverse of his remembering, that is, telling, enacting his sufferings. In other words, the hero’s forgetting becomes the necessary condition for the poet’s remembering and the continuation of the tale.

### **Just like an aoidos**

The relationship between Odysseus and the narrator takes on supplementary features when the hero in the course of his story reaches subjects that belong to the domain of recognizable contemporary genres of song and performance. During his account of his visit of the dead in Book Eleven,

<sup>13</sup> Bakker 2009: 134. On the semantics of inclusive scalar particles (*also, too, even*), see Bakker 1988a: 27–56).

<sup>14</sup> See also de Jong 2001: 317; Bakker 2009: 130. For the placement of *ἄνδρα*, see Kahane 1992.

Odysseus tells of his encounters with the queens and heroines of the past, in a poetically charged and complex stretch of his narrative (II.225–327). The hero's performance is a clear allusion to the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, as numerous critics have noticed.<sup>15</sup> Odysseus the “amateur” competes with the poetic “professional,” outdoing him in fact, in having the advantage of the eyewitness: he has been there and seen these mythical subjects – mythical for Odysseus no less than for us – with his own eyes. The rivalry involves the narrator of the matrix narrative in which Odysseus performs, if we assume that Homeric and Hesiodic poetry both belonged to the repertoire of the rhapsode, the performer of *aoidē*.<sup>16</sup> In rhapsodizing the *Catalogue*, Odysseus does what the performer does in rhapsodizing Homer. The *Odyssey* incorporates another genre in the way outlined earlier, but in having a character, not the narrator, perform the rivaling genre, it achieves effects specific to this poem. Poet and hero coalesce. The two roles, Odysseus and Homer, hero and poet, merge into each other in a passage that has been considered spurious and interpolated by Analysts,<sup>17</sup> but which is in fact one of the great moments in this poem that is driven by intertextual poetics.

Odysseus' performance of a *Catalogue* is the context for Alkinoos' famous compliment of his guest (*Od.* II.367–8):

σοὶ δ' ἐπὶ μὲν **μορφῇ ἐπέων**, ἔνι δὲ φρένες ἐσθλαί,  
μῦθον δ' ὡς ὄτ' **ἀοιδός** ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας.

Upon you is comeliness of *epea*, in <you> are noble *phrēnes*;  
and the tale, as an aoidos you have most expertly told it in all its detail.

These words can be taken as applying to Odysseus' extended *epos* as a whole, but their utterance at this particular juncture, after Odysseus' performance of his *Catalogue*, is significant. It is as if Alkinoos is taking *μορφῇ ἐπέων*, ‘shapely form of words/lines’ in the external sense: not as words represented in epic, but as the hexametric lines that *are* epic. There are multiple coalescences and alignments here. The hero becomes a poet,

<sup>15</sup> Most recently Rutherford 2012: 161–7.

<sup>16</sup> See Martin 2001, in a discussion of the intertextual features of Odysseus' account in a socio-poetic perspective (“one performer responding to contemporary and *competing* repertoire traditions,” p. 29), suggesting the possibility, furthermore, of a Homeric response to Orphic (rhapsodic) performance traditions centering on the autobiographical account of the poet's descent. On first-person narrative as a shamanistic feature, see Meuli 1935: 168 (cf. Thornton 1970: 16–37; Burkert 1996: 68).

<sup>17</sup> For example, Page 1955: 33–9, who considers both the *Catalogue* and the “Intermezzo” (i.e., the conversation between Odysseus and his hosts interrupting the narrative: *Od.* II.333–84) interpolations into a *Necyia* that is in itself an interpolation. Some thoughts on the genetic status of the *Necyia* in Chapter 5 below.



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*epos* is posing as *aoidē*, and the poem's external audience merges with the Phaeacians in Alkinoos' hall.

The link between Odysseus' narrative and the features of recognizable performance genres is formally, formulaically, encoded. Odysseus finishes his *Catalogue* with language that anyone in the audience familiar with a parallel (competing?) poetic tradition will have recognized (*Od.* II.328–30):<sup>18</sup>

πάσας δ' οὐκ ἄν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω  
 ὅσσας ἠρώων ἀλόχους ἴδον ἠδὲ θύγατρας  
 πρὶν γὰρ κεν καὶ νύξ φθίτ' ἄμβροτος.

All of them, there is no way I could tell or name them,  
 all those women I saw who were consorts or daughters of heroes;  
 Before <I could do this>, the immortal night would have dwindled away.

These lines are built on the same formulaic pattern as the invocation of the Muses in the *Iliad* at the beginning of the *Catalogue of Ships* (*Il.* 2.488–92):

πληθὺν δ' οὐκ ἄν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω,  
 οὐδ' εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἶεν,  
 φωνὴ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δὲ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη,  
 εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο  
 θυγατέρες μνησαίαθ' ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον.

Their multitude, there is no way I could tell or name <them all>,  
 not if I had ten tongues, ten mouths,  
 a voice unbreakable and a heart of bronze,  
 if the Olympus-dwelling Muses, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis  
 did not make present in my mind all those who came under Ilion.

There used to be a time when such repetitions were thought to be without poetic or even semantic significance: due to the work of Parry and Lord, the formulaic system was thought to have generated the phraseology appropriate to a particular kind of situation, which could then be used by poets throughout the tradition as a formulaic, ready-made way of expressing that situation.<sup>19</sup> In the present case, that situation would be a speaker being confronted with the magnitude of a given body of information. There would be no special relationship

<sup>18</sup> Note that *Od.* II.328 occurs two more times in the *Odyssey*, once later in the *Necyia* (*Od.* II.517), when Odysseus assumes the role of a chronicler of the Trojan War (and hence a poet of heroic epic material) in answering Achilles' question about his son Neoptolemos. The other occurrence happens at 4.240, again in connection with the Trojan saga, when Helen recounts (4.240–64) an episode in which Odysseus visits Troy in disguise. Book Four, with the story of Menelaos' Wanderings and Helen's storytelling, is a microcosmos of the Odyssean interaction of *epos* and *aoidē*. See also *Od.* 3.113–14 (Nestor about the Trojan War).

<sup>19</sup> Parry 1971.

between any two instantiations of a given formula, since each would be necessitated independently in its context.

The acknowledgment that Homeric language is formulaic, however, does not mean that the utterance of a formula is always done without the memory of other occurrences. Language (whether or not formulaic) is not autonomous, and utterances are never made in isolation, independently of a given context. In an oral tradition two contexts may be linked by the deliberate repetition of a significant formulaic utterance, which may be remembered for being performed in a particularly significant context. The argument of this book will rely at various points on such deliberate repetition. In the Epilogue there will be a more detailed discussion of this “interformularity.” In the present instance, then, we may consider taking the formula as a deliberate evocation of the Muse invocation introducing the *Catalogue of Ships* in the *Iliad*. The formula links hero and poet in what has been called epic *recusatio*, a “refusal to give a full presentation of complex things.”<sup>20</sup>

But the repetition does not mean that the two contexts are identical. Odysseus may not be a poet, but he is in a position to outdo one. Whereas the Iliadic narrator has to emphasize hearing and hearsay (in a word, *kleos*, *Il.* 2.486), Odysseus can claim personal memory and eyewitness status, in other words, the position not of the poet, but of the Muses themselves. Furthermore, the narrator of the *Iliad* begins his *Catalogue of Ships* with the *recusatio* formula, whereas Odysseus utters it to *conclude* his *Catalogue of Women*. And the second time he utters the formula precisely in order to *preclude* a catalogue: instead of the whole list of Neoptolemus’ exploits the speaker will mention only one.<sup>21</sup> This difference in discourse function is matched by a difference in reason for making the *recusatio*. The narrator of the *Iliad* cites typically human, physical, limitations (lack of stamina, a voice that will wear out, *Il.* 2.489–90), but then goes on to present the catalogue all the same, with the indispensable help of the Muses (2.491–2). For Odysseus, on the other hand, the fundamental constraint is not a voice that will wear out, but time. It is lack of time that makes him cut short his *Catalogue of Women* and limit the catalogue of Neoptolemus’ achievements to just one item.

Time, in fact, is what constrains Odysseus’ tale in other ways as well. If *epos* is allowed to run its course unchecked, it will obstruct the progress of

<sup>20</sup> Ford 1992: 73–6.

<sup>21</sup> As in the case of Helen’s *recusatio* formula. Note the ἄλλ’ οἶον, ‘(not . . .) except such as’ in both cases (*Od.* 4.242; 11.519).