



## Part II

# Performance: Epic







## 6

# The *Odyssey* as Performance Poetry

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Twenty years ago, in 1987, Oliver Taplin and Beaty Rubens made their tour of Greece for the BBC 4 programme, *An Odyssey round Odysseus*. I was their historical adviser, and introduced them to Emporio on Chios, Lefkandi and Eretria, Old Smyrna, the stinking open sewer under a flyover near Izmir that is all that is left of the river Meles beside (or from) which Homer was born, and other historical Homeric sites; we travelled together for a fortnight, while I acted as gooseberry to the burgeoning romance between the two lovers. In the course of this odyssey Oliver and I had many discussions about our conflicting views of Homeric performance. Oliver published his theory many years ago as *Homeric Soundings* (1992). Here at last is my response to our ongoing discussion, which I dedicate to Oliver and Beaty, in memory of conversations which started in the great-eighth century *megaron* on the top of the windy hill of Ayios Elias at Emporio on Chios, with a pair of eagles circling overhead.

How did sympotic poetry begin?<sup>1</sup> Of course some would say that it never had a beginning, that alongside the grand epic tradition or traditions there must always have existed shorter musical forms which were the precursors, or indeed fully formed examples of, the later lyric and elegiac forms that we now associate with the *symposion*: all that we are observing is the absence or presence of evidence for a generic form that must always have been there.<sup>2</sup> And in a certain sense this must be true, just as it must be true that there were always more or less ritualized forms of eating and drinking. As Francis Cairns said in relation to the generic forms in literature:

The genres are as old as organized societies; they are also universal. Within all human lives there are a number of important recurrent situations which, as societies develop,

<sup>1</sup> This reflection of almost half a lifetime finds its starting point in two articles, that of my oldest sympotic friend Chico Rossi—Rossi (1983), and that of Bill Slater—Slater (1990). I have been thinking about their implications for twenty years.

<sup>2</sup> See the lively and idiosyncratic discussions of Andrew Dalby (1998) and (2006), ch. 1.





come to call for regular responses, both in words and in actions. Because literature, which in early society means poetry, concerns itself with these situations, it is natural that renderings and descriptions of these responses should become the staple subject-matter of literature. Of very great importance in early societies, both on a personal and a public level, is religion, which performs many functions allotted to secular disciplines in more developed societies. Hence, among the standard responses to standard situations encapsulated in literature, a large and important group will be of a religious nature. Our classical genres are therefore in essence older than recorded Greek literature and already established in the cultural heritage of the Greeks long before the Homeric poems or their ancestors were composed.

(Cairns (1972), 34)

Nevertheless there is development and change. If we define the *symposion* as an activity deriving from the Homeric *dais*, and evolving towards eastern ideas of luxury and refinement, what are the conditions that lead to those specific forms of elegiac and of lyric poetry designed for the *symposion*? The *symposion*, it seems, creates a place of performance for poetry which has in essential respects altered from any that could have existed before. The ancient world was insistent upon the distinction between the earlier seated feast of the gods and the Homeric heroes, and the reclining posture of the archaic and classical age; later they even knew that they themselves must change from a seated to a reclining position when discussing the ancient *symposion* (Athenaeus 11.459–60). But despite this knowledge there seems little speculation about the consequences of the changed posture for the group of participants and their forms of entertainment. The most obvious of these is of course the greater exclusivity and sense of separateness achieved with the reclining banquet. A seated banquet has no limit to the number of its participants; a reclining banquet is limited by what Birgitta Bergquist has termed the dynamics of sympotic space: the diagonal across the drinking room must not exceed the distance needed for communication along this diagonal, if everyone is to participate in the verbal games and musical activities appropriate to the *symposion*. Thus the sympotic group will normally be defined by the number of couches that can be fitted around the walls of an *andrôn* whose size is limited by its diagonal, and whose walls therefore contain a minimum of three, and normally from seven to eleven couches, up to an absolute maximum of fifteen, giving a group of up to double these numbers with two participants on each couch.<sup>3</sup> So the size of the group and the sense of exclusiveness among the participants must change from the seated Homeric *dais* which has no such limitation on numbers. Given restrictions of space and expense, the entertainment will often at least initially be provided from within the group: the

<sup>3</sup> Bergquist (1990).





early lyric and elegiac poet is a member of the group and discourses on equal terms with the others: the professional poet of the Homeric epic whose social class is that of a *dēmiourgos*, different from the other participants, is more difficult to accommodate until rediscovered in the grand tyrannical *symposium* of the late archaic age. This last development can be seen in the shift from the personal poetry of the ‘amateur’ poet (Archilochus, Tyrtaeus, Alcaeus) to the generic style of the ‘professional’ (Theognis, Anacreon, Simonides, and Pindar).<sup>4</sup> Archaic poetry takes account of this change in forms of conviviality in terms of both attention span and audience participation, as we see emerging such sympotic forms as the *catena*, the alternation of singers, and the performance by successive members of the group. So poetry becomes shorter and more structured, and its themes change to reflect the interests of a smaller and more exclusive group; and it also involves the audience more directly in its performance.

Despite the number of theories and the confident assertions of their protagonists, one of the great unsolved mysteries of epic poetry is where and how was it performed. The length and continuity of its narrative structure have often seemed to imply a festival or competition venue, and perhaps a public performance, such as the *Hymn to Apollo* claims for the performance of ‘Homer’ on the island of Delos, and such as the stories about the contest of Homer and Hesiod presuppose. Certainly later there was a strong tradition that the Homeric epics had been (or at least came to be) performed in competition at a particular festival such as the Panathenaea.<sup>5</sup> Others have looked to the great Ionian festivals such as the Anthesteria on Delos,<sup>6</sup> or to other unspecified festival contexts. Others have tried to assert either the aristocratic or the plebeian character of the epics.<sup>7</sup> Recognizing that there is no convincing early evidence in favour of any of these contexts, yet others have taken refuge in simple evasion: for James Redfield, ‘We should not speak of the “background” of the poems as though we could reconstruct Homeric society and then apply this reconstruction to the interpretation of the poems’; and ‘song in Homer is of two types, which we may call song-for-something and song-for-itself’;<sup>8</sup> for Seaford the poems simply lie in a pre-political frame before the polis or in the proto-polis.<sup>9</sup> In this respect Barbara Graziosi goes

<sup>4</sup> Compare the distinction of Nagy (1990), 342: ‘the symposium was a last stand for non-professional performance of both monodic and choral composition.’

<sup>5</sup> This widely held view has recently been reasserted by Haubold (2000); but as he points out (p. xi) ‘The Great Panathenaea does not answer the question of who first heard Homer’—or indeed where.

<sup>6</sup> Auffarth (1991).

<sup>7</sup> Maehler (1963), 34; Dalby (1995), 279: ‘a kind of literature which is essentially a discourse among the people’.

<sup>8</sup> Redfield (1975), xi, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Seaford (1987) 2.





even further, when she contrasts epic with lyric, and claims that the Homeric poems deliberately offer no context of performance, in order to create a universal appeal:

Archaic lyric, elegy and iambus privilege one context of performance which is then evoked whenever the poem is recited or read. Nothing of the sort can be said about the Homeric poems: there is no allusion there to an original context for which the poems were meant, nor do we find the poet addressing a privileged audience . . . it is important to note that the original context of performance (whether real or imaginary) is not contained within the Homeric poems and that this makes it very easy to separate performance from composition.<sup>10</sup>

It is not however true that ‘the Homeric poems say nothing specific about their intended audience’, nor that they ‘carefully avoid giving any clear indications.’<sup>11</sup> As Nagy rightly points out, the problem is rather that they reveal nothing about that audience which is consistent with the structure of the poems themselves: ‘the epic poetry of Homer refers to epic poetry as a medium that was performed in the context of an evening’s feast. Yet we know that the two epic poems of Homer, by virtue of their sheer length alone, defy this context.’<sup>12</sup> It is this problem that prevents us from specifying a common context of performance for either of the two poems.

We should therefore consider them separately. The *Iliad* is not a self-reflective poem: nowhere do we find a poet performing an epic or even a fragment of an epic for the kings in private or in public. The poet sings the *klea andrôn* and regards this activity as justifying the deeds of his heroes; but nowhere does he describe the relation of his activity to the world which is the subject of his song. There is no audience except Patroclus for Achilles’ melancholy singing in his tent (9.186–94); there is no description of an epic performance on the Shield of Achilles, either in its depictions of peace or in those of war: there are popular forms of performance, the wedding song and dancing, the vintage song, but there is no aristocratic banquet or great festival. In the main story, the kings in council never seem to engage in feasting with music or other entertainment. Only once is a place of performance mentioned, obliquely—in the banquet of the gods at the end of *Iliad* 1. 595–604. Here the quarrel of Zeus and Hera is settled by Hephaestus, and the gods sit feasting in the palace of Zeus; while Hephaestus acts as cupbearer, drawing nectar from the *krater*, moving among them to the unquenchable laughter of the gods, as the wine circulates *endexia*—in the proper fashion of the later *symposion*, from left to right; and they feast all day until sundown, while

<sup>10</sup> Graziosi (2002), 46f.

<sup>11</sup> Graziosi and Haubold (2005), 115; Graziosi (2002), 88.

<sup>12</sup> Nagy (1990), 21.





Apollo and Muses provide the music, singing alternately with sweet voice, until it is time for bed.<sup>13</sup> The songs the Muses sing are not described, but they are surely not epic; they are ‘amoebœan’, so shorter, possibly lyric pieces. This reference to amoebœan poetic entertainment has indeed aroused disquiet among commentators as being somehow inconsistent with the normal Homeric picture of Apollo; I would add that the entire context seems to reflect an awareness of the rituals of the *symposion*, which could perhaps be held to support G. S. Kirk’s contention that this may be ‘a late-aoidic elaboration’. We do not therefore know what the performance context of the *Iliad* might have been, and we are free to imagine on the basis of the structure of the poem any occasion that might suit it. It may indeed be true (as Oliver Taplin suggested) that the structure suggests three or perhaps four great sweeps, which might have been designed for and even performed on successive days of a public festival in some early Panhellenic religious or civic event.

The picture in the *Odyssey* is quite different, as Stephanie West points out.<sup>14</sup> The poet is explicit; the art of the professional *aoidos* is central to the narrative, and the claim is made specifically again and again that the *aoidos* performs his epic in the banquets of the heroes—and apparently nowhere else, certainly not in any festival context.

Demodocus’ performances in the palace of Alcinous are described in detail. On the first occasion he is presented as a man to whom the Muse has given the gift of song, while taking away his sight, so that he can sing the *klea andrôn*, and specifically the story of the quarrel of Odysseus and Achilles; Odysseus himself is moved to tears (8.62–92). Later in the same book at a second banquet Odysseus asks Demodocus, who he says has surely been taught by the Muse or Apollo, to sing of how Odysseus created the wooden horse and how Troy was sacked. Demodocus begins his song as a traditional epic performance, with a formal invocation to the god, and describes the events in graphic detail; again Odysseus breaks down in tears (8.482–535).

The feast and the poet are here envisaged as the centre of the heroic life. Phaeacians, we are told, delight in the feast, the dear lyre and dances, clean clothes, hot baths and bed; they are famed for seamanship, speed of foot, dancing and song (246–9). As Odysseus says to his hosts (9.5–11):

There is no more delightful end than when *euphrosyne* rules among all the people, as the banqueters in the room listen to the singer, seated in order, the tables before them

<sup>13</sup> Kirk (1985), 114, who describes the scene as ‘unparalleled’.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. West (1988), 96; given Graziosi’s long discussion of the *Hymn to Apollo* 165–73, I am puzzled by the absence of any discussion of this aspect of the *Odyssey* in Graziosi (2002), ch. 2. Dalby (1995) denies that this is a portrayal of the Homeric *aoidos*, because he wishes to assert that epic poetry is a poetry of the people: but he does not explain why the poet has offered this picture, or how it fits into the peasant household that he envisages.





filled with meat and bread, and the servant draws the wine from the mixing bowl and pours it into each cup: that is what seems to me to be the best thing in the world.

Odysseus' palace is no different (17.264–71):

Eumaeus, this must surely be the fine house of Odysseus: it would be easy to recognize and pick out even among many. There are buildings on buildings, and the court is well fenced with a wall and cornice, and the double gates are well protected: no man could force it. And I see that many men are feasting within, for the smell of fat is there, and the lyre sounds, which the gods have made as companion of the feast.

The songs of Phemius are like those of Demodocus, freshly composed episodes from an epic 'corpus' imagined as covering the whole age of heroes. In book 1 he sings of the *nostoi* of the heroes, prefiguring of course the whole theme of the *Odyssey* as the return of Odysseus; again he provokes tears in Penelope (1.325–44); otherwise his songs are not described in any detail, but he is of course in the end pardoned for having performed for the suitors, as the prototype of the bard whose story is now approaching its end. And in turn (as many commentators have pointed out) Odysseus himself becomes the bard, similarly singing a fragment of the heroic corpus, as he recounts his own exploits in the palace of Alcinous over four whole books.

The only other occasion of performance mentioned in the *Odyssey* is the lay of Ares and Aphrodite, sung in public by Demodocus, together with a dance by a chorus of young men (8.256–366). It is not clear whether these are two separate entertainments, followed by a third ball dance, or a single 'narrative dance'; if the latter, this would surely suggest that Demodocus' song was (like that of the Muses in the *Iliad*) in some sense choral rather than in epic metre.

In all of these descriptions there is no suggestion that we should differentiate the singing of the actual narrative itself from the imagined performances contained within it. Two of the two examples, that of Phemius in the final banquet and that of Odysseus as epic narrator in the palace of Alcinous, indeed raise an important question about the interplay between narrative and performance: for here the figure of the narrator appears both within the narrative and as a presenter of the narrative, in the first case described, in the second performing. This ambiguity points in turn to the fact that there are indeed three levels of performance involved: the poet as actor within the narrative, the poet as narrator of parts of the narrative, and the poet who performs the *Odyssey* itself, and who therefore is a poet who narrates the poet narrating the (poet's) actions.

Furthermore this corresponds to the themes and structure of the *Odyssey* itself: the poet of the *Odyssey* envisages his bard and therefore himself as singing within the context of the banquet, and taking part in action much of





which occurs in the context of the banquet, so that the action itself takes place within the banquet and is recalled in the banquet; both narrative and recollection belong there, for a high proportion of the episodes are cast as recollection within the context of the banquet, or as events taking place around the banquet. More importantly still, the entire structure of the *Odyssey* is also adapted to the banquet as place of performance; so that his whole poem is a celebration of the banquet in both content and structure. Thus Homer constructs his epic around an architecture which is clearly designed for performance in the banquet; the episodes, the breaks within the narration are the natural breaks that belong within the banquet context. This insistence on the rhythm of the banquet and this self-conscious attention to the setting and the performance needs of the banquet surely invite us, indeed compel us, to accept the 'original' intended place of performance of the *Odyssey* as a series of separate but doubtless consecutive banquets. For, as I demonstrate in the appendix, the narrative itself is structured as a series of 'cantos', in which each canto presents an episode which is suited to be told within the context of a single banquet; the poem most naturally divides into a series of some forty or so sections, each comprising roughly 200 to 400 lines, and not into larger units. These canto divisions are more natural and more obvious than the book divisions which we owe to the Alexandrian scholarly tradition, although these themselves often coincide with the episodic banquet divisions—naturally, for the Hellenistic world still thought in sympotic terms.<sup>15</sup>

Each 'canto' is marked off by breaks which are both natural points of rest in the story, and also related to the banquet milieu. Thus the narrative is punctuated by dawns, arrivals, departures, sleep or rest, and other natural breaks; the scenes are set in a succession of feasts by an author whose self-consciousness implicates the epic poet in his own narrative. This narrative, I believe, is designed for a series of performances rather than a single session: if we were to imagine a public performance, we must at least suppose a month-long series of religious festival or public feasts.<sup>16</sup> But the type of banquet envisaged within the poem seems more restricted than such public occasions; it takes place among aristocrats and in the *megaron*, a room devoted to the activity of feasting. Moreover the audience as they listen take part in the performance: the narrative, as is inevitable in such a situation, is addressed

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Giangrande (1968), Cameron (1995), ch. III. Griffin (1987), 35 already noted: 'the action of the *Odyssey* shows a definite tendency to divide into separate days, each followed by an appearance of rose-fingered Dawn, but perhaps there is also a feeling that an after-dinner song, a single book, is now over, and it is time for bed. That would be a possible way of reciting the poem: a book after dinner for twenty-four nights.'

<sup>16</sup> Compare the Ptolemaic *Letter of Aristeas*, in which the series of questions and answers on kingship (187–300) takes place over a succession of seven royal banquets.





directly to them, and they themselves become the participants in the series of banquets conjured up before them. They too take part in a succession of feasts of more or less exotic type, they visit the Cyclops' cave and partake in the feast as guests and as reluctant sacrificial meat, they taste Circe's magic potion and are transformed into animals, they are shipwrecked with Odysseus and survive to be welcomed by Nausicaa and her people, the ideal Phaeacians, in a succession of banquets in which Odysseus the bard sings his own story within the narrative, as it is itself being sung to the real audience by Homer himself. And finally with a supreme artistic irony the story reaches its climax in a banquet scene, in which the audience is required to become fully engaged in the closing action. The poet-hero enters the *megaron* and bolts the doors, and 'as easily as a poet skilled in the lyre strings the cord around a new peg looping the twisted sheep's gut at both ends, so without effort he strung the great bow and with his right hand tried the string, which sounded sweetly in answer like the cry of a swallow' (21.406–11): the poet's lyre is transformed into the hero's bow and he turns it on his audience; with each twang of the lyre a listener drops dead: and suddenly it is their contemporary hall that fills with night, it is their meat that drips red, as wailing and lamentation arise, and the walls and roof beams in the flickering light of the oil lamps are spattered with blood (20.345 ff), as they try desperately to hide from the wrath of the poet-hero. And then in a final act of apology the poet returns them to reality, as he discovers himself in the form of Phemius, cowering among the overturned benches, and through Phemius pleads for their forgiveness. This is the first and most powerful scene of audience participation in the whole of western literature. 'The end of their story is also the end of ours.'<sup>17</sup>

Why this difference between *Iliad* and *Odyssey*? Is it pure chance that the content of the *Iliad* is silent about the role of the poet, and that its very structure seems inconsistent with any notion that it could have been performed in whole or in part in the context of the feast; whereas the *Odyssey* is so insistent on locating the poet within the feast, and on dividing itself into a series of episodes, each of which is placed in relation to the feasting context? How does this relate to the changes that we must assume to have taken place in the role of the poet with the coming of the reclining *symposion*?

The question is as much one about presentation as about actual performance. In the conclusion of her excellent book, Graziosi revives the useful distinction made by Erich Auerbach between representation and reality.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Haubold (2000), 98, of the *Iliad* in relation to its audience.

<sup>18</sup> Graziosi (2002), 236–55; cf. Auerbach (1953). If I seem to be engaging too intently with the work of Graziosi, it is because I regard her book as the most interesting and subtle of all the modern studies of 'Homer'.





Here it is essentially the representation by the poet that we are concerned with: how and why did he thus represent the art of the *aoidos*? Of course it follows that, if this representation corresponds to the perceived structure of the poem, it has some possibility of being a representation of reality; but this is not so important, because the representation is itself the only reality that we can know.

There are two possible types of response to this question, and they are by no means exclusive of each other, indeed perhaps both are correct. The first is traditional: it might be argued that there had always existed a form of epic specifically suited to the aristocratic feasting context, alongside a form perhaps designed for more public performance. Thus the difference between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* could reflect a double tradition, of public festival and of private feasting performance; each poem would then be formally adapted to the context of performance in accordance with two separate oral epic traditions: such theories have of course been held in the past to explain the difference in ethos between the two poems;<sup>19</sup> and there are many versions of the traditional analyst position that could be held to be compatible with such a view. I have no problem with such a picture; indeed, despite their differences, I believe that there was a substantive continuity between Homeric feast and archaic *symposion*.<sup>20</sup>

However on this occasion I wish to explore a more dynamic model of the development of sympotic song. Like the poet of the *Odyssey*, Stesichorus also envisages the feast as a place where both poem and singer are located: ‘The hero [Adrastus] addressed him thus: Alcmaon where have you risen to go, leaving the banqueters and our excellent bard?’ (Stesichorus S148: *POxy.* 2618.) Various scholars have indeed fixed on the figure of Stesichorus as representing a significant step in the development of different generic forms from the epic; for, despite his closeness to Homeric diction, he seems to be seeking to transform the language and stories of traditional epic for performance in a different setting: the purpose of his poetry seems to be to produce poems shorter, better articulated, and therefore more suited than the epic tradition to performance within a context of festival or citharodic contest, or

<sup>19</sup> For instance Griffin (1980), 15, who sees the *Iliad* as aristocratic, the *Odyssey* as less so; though I feel that from a formal point of view he has inverted the natural distinction between public epic and private performances suitable for the aristocratic feast. I agree with Haubold (2000), 100: ‘With the *Odyssey* we enter a different world. Here, too, the people play an important role; but standing in the shadow of the more prominent “companions” (*hetairoi*) and “suitors” (*mnesteres*), they become the object of narrative scrutiny in a different way’; cf. 105, ‘a shift from “people” to “companions”’; 127, ‘the suitors and companions . . . become the Odyssean groups *par excellence*’.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Murray (1983); in this respect I have always been close to the position set out by Wecowski (2002), although I do not accept all the consequences he seeks to draw from it.





some other social context which requires performances of shorter length, such as the *symposion*. He has often seemed to mark a transition or a breaking down of Homeric forms: wherever heroic epic had been previously performed, it was now seeking more varied audiences and roles.<sup>21</sup> I believe that the author of the *Odyssey*, with his self-conscious reflections on the role of the poet, belongs in this period of transition.

The most significant new place of performance was the *symposion*, in itself a direct descendant of the Homeric feast, but requiring a more fluid style of performance, a less monolithic storyline. The *Odyssey* belongs in a period of experimenting with new forms of poetic composition: it seeks to tell a long epic tale within the feasting context; moreover it is articulated in a form of episodic composition which enables the author to lay down and take up his story within a series of banquet or sympotic occasions. The author of the *Odyssey* and Stesichorus are both perhaps attempting in their different ways to adapt Homeric epic to a new context, that of the *symposion*. That would explain the reaction of other sympotic poets.

Lyric poets often reflect on the themes appropriate to their songs; there is a strong tradition that their poems are particularly suited to the activities appropriate to the *symposion*, especially the drinking of wine, the pleasures of Aphrodite and the place of the Muses as entertainment in this sympotic world. Wine, women, and song, the famous triad of western conviviality finds its first explicit mention in Solon F 26: 'These are the works that are dear to me, those of the Cyprian goddess, those of Dionysus and those of the Muses, who bring joyousness to men (*euphrosynai*).'<sup>22</sup> But as I have argued before, this relationship between the reclining *symposion*, poetry, sexual fulfillment, and wine is there long before, in our earliest sympotic evidence, Nestor's cup: 'I am Nestor's cup, well made for drinking. But he who drinks from this cup, straightway the desire of Aphrodite of the lovely crown will seize him.'<sup>22</sup> This is the positive programme of the new poets. But they also have a negative view.

Sometimes they offer a contrast with other potential activities in a theme which I will designate, '*Nicht diese Töne*', from the heart-stopping moment in Beethoven's Ninth, before the great ode to *Freude* (which is of course the translation into German of *euphrosyne*): 'O Freunde, nicht diese Töne! Sondern lasst uns angenehmere anstimmen, und freudenvollere!' Thus Stesichorus appears to contrast war and feasting: 'Muse *thrusting wars aside* and

<sup>21</sup> Rossi (1983), Burkert (1987), Dalby (2006), 16 f.

<sup>22</sup> Murray (1994). Dalby (2006), 107–8 seriously misrepresents this evidence, in claiming that the cup discovered on Ischia is large and four-handled, and a direct attempt to replicate the cup of Nestor described by Homer: he has clearly never seen the object in question, or read the archaeological literature on its discovery.





with me celebrating the weddings of the gods, the banquets of men and the festivities of the blest' (F 210 = Aristophanes, *Peace* 775 ff.). And Anacreon says: 'I do not like him who, drinking wine by the full *krater*, talks of strife and bloody war, but him who, mingling the shining gifts of the Muses and Aphrodite, recalls delightful *euphrosyne*' (F 2 West).

Xenophanes in one of the earliest and fullest set of rules for the *symposion* repeats this theme (F 1 West):

Praise the man who in his drink displays noble thoughts, as memory and his zeal for virtue allow. *It is not good to recite the battles of Titans or of Giants or of Centaurs, the inventions of former men, or the violence of faction, in which there is nothing of benefit, but it is good always to have regard for the gods.*

Xenophanes' rejection of past poetry is more moral and less hedonistic than is the case with the other poets: the sympotic poet here rejects both the works of older poets who performed songs about the heroic world and those newer sympotic poets who present current political problems, in favour of moral and religious songs.

Similarly Ibycus F 282 in a long *recusatio* which in many respects recalls the epic world in the manner of Stesichorus, renounces epic themes in favour of praise of Polycrates, in a poem of sympotic form which is surely composed for a sympotic context. In all these different ways epic was then a contested theme in the *symposion*.

This rejection of the traditional themes of epic poetry is part of a competitive world, in which the rivalry of poets on behalf of their style of poetry as particularly suited to the *symposion* is at issue. The trope implies that epic themes had indeed been adapted and presented as competition for what became more normal in the sympotic context, monodic and personal lyric, the poetry of love and pleasure.

*Nicht diese Töne!* What does this rejection of the music of the past amount to? Who are these others so despised? Reflecting on the function of lyric poetry within the *symposion* and the possible rivals for attention in this context, we might most obviously point to the didactic and hortatory poetry of elegy, to poets like Theognis, Callinus, or Tyrtaeus. Is there perhaps here being played out a contrast between the poetry of the *aulos* and the poetry of the lyre, between a poetry that sees itself as defining a moral parameter or military purpose for the group, and one that celebrates its pleasures? But these two contrasting types of sympotic occasion were not yet rivals: it is only with the fifth-century sympotic poets that pleasure and duty came to seem to be opposed to each other in the different sympotic practices of Sparta and Athens.<sup>23</sup> It is I

<sup>23</sup> See Murray (1991).





suggest Xenophanes who gives the answer: the rejected poets are not the moralizing poets of elegy, among whom Xenophanes himself belongs, but those who have attempted to adapt epic and heroic themes to the world of the *symposion*, and also those who, like Archilochus and Alcaeus, have sought to use sympotic poetry for the political aims of the *hetaireia*. In contrast the mainstream lyric poets of the *symposion* self-consciously proclaim themselves poets who devote their poetic skills to the pursuits of love and pleasure.

Where then might the poet of the *Odyssey* fit into this picture? As the greatest and perhaps the last poet of the epic tradition, I suggest that he seems in his very insistence and self-consciousness to be seeking to place himself within the new world of the *symposion*; both groups, the old and the new poets, try to define themselves against each other: ‘singer envies singer’ in the words of Hesiod (*WD* 25–6). His attempt did not succeed, because he could find no successor: there is no subsequent tradition of sympotic epic. But I confess to believing that, though Homer may have lost this particular battle, his achievement in the *Odyssey* was to create a new form of epic, and a sympotic poetry which, in the sophistication of its narrative and the complexity of its multiple layers of performance technique, is far superior to anything offered by his contemporaries or rivals.

And lest my readers imagine that this vision of a sympotic *Odyssey* is as solipsistic as any other vision of Homeric performance, let me assert that I am merely reviving an ancient belief: the classical world also saw the narrative of the *Odyssey* as taking place in the context of the *symposion*. The Penelope Painter is well known for his use of themes from the *Odyssey*: around 450 BC he represented the killing of the suitors in the way that I have presented it, as taking place within the *symposion*. On one side of a (sympotic) *skyphos* Odysseus with two female companions (Athena and Penelope?) stands by the door of the *andrôn*, his bow drawn to shoot; on the other side the suitors seek to defend themselves: one of them, wounded, turns in anguish, another starts up with a gesture of alarm from the couch on which they have been reclining, while a third upends a table (typical furniture of the *symposion*) to hide behind it.<sup>24</sup> So too in the early fourth century, the *herôon* of Trysa in Lycia was covered with relief scenes (now in Vienna), many of them related to the ‘reclining banquet’ motif: one series in particular, on the inner side of the sanctuary wall, west of the south entrance, shows in a series of five scenes the killing of the suitors as a wholly sympotic episode.<sup>25</sup> The first scene shows Penelope and servants with Eumaeus moving right towards a door. The

<sup>24</sup> Berlin Antikemuseen 2588.

<sup>25</sup> LIMC s.v. Mnesteres II nos 9 and 14. The best pictures of the Penelope Painter cup are in Boardman (1989), no. 246, and of the Trysa monument in Eichler (1950).





second is modelled on the classical votive relief:<sup>26</sup> Odysseus and Telemachus replace the worshippers who would normally appear on the left, Odysseus with his bow drawn, while the reclining figure of the hero is transformed into a suitor who starts up from the couch with hand outstretched in a gesture of alarm rather than greeting. On the third scene there are two couches and four symposiasts, one using a cushion or table to defend himself, one trying to pluck an arrow from his back, one standing and hiding behind a bed coverlet, while the fourth is apparently already dead, his cup fallen to the floor. The fourth scene is similar, with one couch and four figures, one hiding behind a cushion or table, one apparently shot in the stomach, with two standing figures, one crouching, the other (perhaps female) who seems to cringe away. On the final relief a single couch holds a man hiding behind a coverlet. These artists were not indulging in an anachronistic image of the Homeric banquet as a contemporary *symposion*, but reliving the experience intended by Homer himself.

For the author of the *Odyssey*, as for these artists, the *symposion* is not just a simple place of performance, but an enclosed world devoted to the enactment of adventure, in which the imagination is transformed by a sense of companionship and separation from the outside: the *symposion* is itself an odyssey, a voyage of discovery of self as well as of the imagined geographical space of the external world. In such an atmosphere the poet's listeners can be induced to participate in the adventures they are hearing, to perform the story in their own imaginations: it is Homer's ability to create this dimension within the sympotic space that makes me wish to present the author of the *Odyssey* to you as the first and the greatest of all sympotic performers.<sup>27</sup>

## APPENDIX: THE SYMPOTIC STRUCTURE OF THE ODYSSEY

These divisions are merely suggestions intended to illustrate the principles on which the *Odyssey* has been constructed in sympotic 'lays'; they are not definitive, nor do they necessarily correspond to actual divisions used by the poet or poets in possible performances.

**Canto 1: Book I:** Telemachus receives his orders; the feast of the suitors at Odysseus' palace; Telemachus sleeps (444 lines).

**Canto 2: Book II:** The assembly on Ithaca; Telemachus departs and sails through the night (434 lines).

<sup>26</sup> Dentzer (1982).

<sup>27</sup> This paper has been presented to audiences at the Universities of Salerno (2006), Tulsa (Oklahoma), and UCLA (2007): I am grateful for their often sceptical comments.





**Canto 3: Book III:** Telemachus with Nestor; sacrifice and feast; Telemachus departs (497 lines).

**Canto 4: Book IV 1–346:** Telemachus feasts at Menelaus' palace (346 lines).

**Canto 5: Book IV 347–623:** The story of the old man of the sea; the feast at Menelaus palace (276 lines).

**Canto 6: Book IV 624–847:** The suitors on Ithaca plot (223 lines).

**Canto 7: Book V:** Odysseus leaves Calypso; his shipwreck; he sleeps on the beach (493 lines).

**Canto 8: Book VI:** Odysseus meets Nausicaa (331 lines).

**Canto 9: Book VII:** Odysseus arrives at Alcinous' palace as the last libations are being poured; all go to sleep (347 lines).

**Canto 10: Book VIII 1–234:** Alcinous feasts Odysseus, who hears the lay of Demodocus on the quarrel of Odysseus and Achilles (234 lines).

**Canto 11: Book VIII 235–586:** Games and dancing; Demodocus performs in public the lay of Aphrodite and Ares; the evening feast; Demodocus sings at Odysseus' request the sack of Troy (351 lines).

#### Books IX–XII: The song of Odysseus

**Canto 12: Book IX 1–306:** The feasting of the Cyclops; night falls (306 lines).

**Canto 13: Book IX 307–566:** The blinding of the Cyclops and the escape (259 lines).

**Canto 14: Book X 1–243:** Circe feasts the crew (243 lines).

**Canto 15: Book X 244–574:** Circe feasts Odysseus (330 lines).

**Canto 16: Book XI 1–334:** Odysseus offers food in the Underworld. At 334 the song ceases, and Odysseus apologizes to his hosts, asking for bed and a safe journey—an obvious resting point in a narrative otherwise too long. The banqueters beg him to continue (334 lines).

**Canto 17: Book XI 335–640 + XII 1–7:** The visit to the Underworld continued; return from Circe's island to sleep on the shore (312 lines).

**Canto 18: Book XII 8–260:** Scylla and Charybdis (258 lines).

**Canto 19: Book XII 261–453, XIII 1–184:** the island of the Sun; Odysseus loses his crew and arrives at Calypso's island; he finishes his story (376 lines).

**Canto 20: Book XIII 185–440:** Return of Odysseus to Ithaca; the meeting with Athene; Odysseus disguised (265 lines).

**Canto 21: Book XIV 1–184?:** Feast in Eumaeus' hut (184 lines).

**Canto 22: Book XIV 184–533:** Odysseus entertains Eumaeus at supper with his false story; Odysseus sleeps while Eumaeus keeps watch (349 lines).

**Canto 23: Book XV 1–300:** Return of Telemachus; preparations; farewell feast with Menelaus and Helen; voyage as night falls (300 lines).





- Canto 24: Book XV 301–492:** Feast of Odysseus and Eumaeus; the latter's story lasts till dawn (191 lines).
- Canto 25: Book XV 493–552, XVI 1–320:** Arrival of Telemachus; Odysseus and Telemachus meet, feast, and sleep (379 lines).
- Canto 26: Book XVI 321–481:** The suitors plot; Eumaeus brings news from town; Odysseus and Telemachus eat and sleep (160 lines).
- Canto 27: Book XVII 1–327:** Odysseus goes to town; meeting with Argos (327 lines).
- Canto 28: Book XVII 328–606:** Insults to Odysseus (278 lines).
- Canto 29: Book XVIII:** The beggars at the feast; the feast ends and all depart (428 lines).
- Canto 30: Book XIX 1–348:** Odysseus talks with Penelope (348 lines).
- Canto 31: Book XIX 349–604:** Eurycleia recognizes him; the story of the scar; Penelope retires to sleep (255 lines).
- Canto 32: Book XX 1–240:** Preparations for the feast (240 lines).
- Canto 33: Book XX 241–394:** The last supper begins; the poet breaks in with an authorial comment to increase suspense: wait for the next episode (390–4) (153 lines).
- Canto 34: Book XXI:** The contest of the bow (434 lines).
- Canto 35: Book XXII 1–199:** The slaughter begins (199 lines).
- Canto 36: Book XXII 200–501:** Mentor-Athene appears; the slaughter continues (301 lines)
- Canto 37: Book XXIII:** Odysseus and Penelope (372 lines).
- Canto 38: Book XXIV 1–202:** The souls of the suitors enter Hades (202 lines).
- Canto 39: Book XXIV 203–548:** Odysseus goes to visit Laertes; the feud is ended (345 lines).

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