

## PRE-LITERACY AND THE PRE-SOCRATICS

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It will, I think, be readily granted by an audience of classicists that our own discipline is not partial to the use of theory and distrusts an *a priori* approach to any problem. A self-restraint which in other fields of knowledge might be viewed as cramping the style of the investigator, by limiting the methodological choices open to him, is by ourselves felt to be a matter of pride. This accords with my own recollections of a Cambridge classical training which, so it seems to me in retrospect, actively discouraged the use of general concepts and working hypotheses lest they lead to imaginative reconstructions based on assumptions which were not amenable to strict proof or controlled by evidence which was specific and concrete.

And yet, as I look back upon the discipline of Greek studies of forty years ago, as it was taught to us and communicated through the books we read, it seems to me that it was in fact controlled by four related assumptions of the most general character, never explicitly stated, and all the more powerful as an influence over our minds because they were not. I think their influence is felt to this day and that an examination of them may still have relevance. Let me give them in what seems to me to be their related order:

The first was that Greek culture of the Classical period was a wholly literate phenomenon, much like our own. Homer, Pindar, and Aeschylus, no less than Thucydides or Aristotle, were writers whose works were composed for readers to take in their hands. It was proper to apply to them those criteria of composition which are appropriate to books silently read. One slight but rather neat illustration of this assumption is to be noted in Cornford's translation of Plato's *Republic*, where the word *poietes* is occasionally translated as "writer".<sup>1</sup> But a *poietes*, though he may have written and usually did write, is nevertheless not a *suggrapheus*. The distinction is a nuance, but perhaps an important one.

A second presumption could be stated as follows. While written Greek prose is extant only from the fifth century, and the earliest fluent Attic prose from the very end of that century, this is largely accidental. It is simply a matter of what has happened to survive. It was presumed that there existed a lost body of prose writing prior to Herodotus, both historical and speculative, at least as early as the beginning of the sixth century, and possibly earlier. The supposed existence of the Milesian school of philosophers, their works now lost, gave powerful support to this assumption. How tenaciously it is held can be seen if I quote a scholar who in other respects has proposed some interpretations of Greek culture which are non-traditional. Bruno Snell, in a monograph devoted to certain aspects of the vocabulary employed by the pre-Socratics, after noting that Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles wrote their philosophy in hexameter verse, then committed himself to this statement: "They did this despite the fact that the time

had long gone by when it would have been necessary to render an idea of literary significance in verse form.”<sup>2</sup> How does he know that? Where is this literary prose which preceded these philosophical poems? He cannot cite it for it does not exist, but its existence is presumed.

A third assumption which governed our classical studies was the most subtle and pervasive of all. It controlled our use of the dictionaries, our exercises in composition, and our style in translation. It was that the Greek language, roughly down to the spread of the Hellenistic *koine*, was constructed out of a system of interchangeable parts. I had better be careful here to clarify what I mean: not of course that the Homeric dialect was Attic, nor that the style of a Thucydides resembled that of a Plato. I mean rather that the Greek language considered as a system of signs denoting meaning behaved roughly as a constant. What was logical or illogical for Homer was equally so for Aristotle. Varieties of dialect and style were the accidents that made literature interesting, but were not connected with any change in the denotative system as such. You could, so to speak, cross-translate, if you chose, between the main classical authors. Homer's idiomatic peculiarities, or those of Aeschylus, were due simply to the fact that they were poets who lived at particular times and places. The peculiarities of Thucydides were stylistic and grammatical, but his vocabulary and syntax were perfectly understandable in Plato's terms. The language in short had a common logic, finally formalized in Aristotle's canon. The best illustration of how this assumption worked was visible in the Greek lexicon itself. To elucidate the meanings of verbs and nouns, the analytic method was in the main followed, and it still is, for in this respect *LSJ* represents little if any advance upon *LS*. What seems to be conceptually the most generic meaning is cited first, quite often from prose authors of the fourth century. Then other usages, regardless of chronology, are listed as emanations derivative from this basic meaning. In short, no dictionary exists of the Greek language on historical principles. I have cited in another place<sup>3</sup> the instructive example of the article in *LSJ* on *gignomai*, “I am born”. It can be noted in passing that the early compilers of dictionaries in the Roman and Byzantine periods were as analytically minded in this respect as we are. It is from their methods that we derive our own dictionaries, and I think it could be shown that their report on how the Greek language behaved was framed within categories which derived ultimately from the formal logic of the Academy and the Lyceum.

The fourth unstated assumption which informed our investigations of Greek literature and one which controlled the very way we thought about the Greeks was one which flows from the third, and indeed is part and parcel of it. If language be the mirror of thought, and if the semantics of the Greek language consist of a system of interchangeable parts, then the thought of the Greeks constitutes a similar system. By this I do not mean such an absurdity as that Homer's statements are to be equated with those of Pindar or Plato, but rather that Homer could have talked with Pindar, and both of them with Plato and Aristotle, in language the basic concepts of which would have been intelligible to all four. That is, they all knew, for instance, what morality and ethics were, and recognized the distinction between ethics and politics. They could have compared notes concerning education, virtue, justice, and the soul. They would have been able to compare their theologies and argue about them. They lived in a common world, and if pushed to it, they would have recognized this world as a physical phenomenon about which you could tell stories or in which you could see history taking place or upon which you could construct a metaphysics, if that is what you wanted to do. Greeks of any period could, if they chose, refer to what they saw and experienced in terms of space and matter, motion and rest, change and permanence, being and seeming, and the like. If Homer, Pindar, and Aeschylus do not indulge precisely in this sort of language, that is again because of the accident that they are poets. In the courtyards of their homes or in the agora or on the street, they would more or less understand Plato or Aristotle if they met them, even if they were not particularly interested in what they were saying, or even hostile to it. Indeed considered as representative voices of the Greek Golden Age, they were viewed as exponents of a common culture which was, roughly speaking, a constant. The dialect, rhythm, vocabulary might shift, but the same values were always there.

Habits of pedagogy contributed something to the spell of this assumption. You began with Xenophon, graduated to Plato's *Apology*, then perhaps a play of Euripides, and the Sphacteria episode in Thucydides. Later on came Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, the lyric poets; latest of all, if ever, the pre-Socratics; and Hesiod never. The effect was to read the history of Greek literature backwards. The final statement of the Greek experience was to be found in Plato more than anywhere else. He provided the basic frame of reference, especially for those apologists, many of them eloquent, who wrote and lectured in defence of a classical education. Need I cite Lowes Dickinson from Cambridge in this connexion, or Sir Richard Livingstone from Oxford? A more recent example of this habit of treating the Greek mentality as a sort of Platonic constant can be cited by reference to the first volume of Werner Jaeger's *Paideia*.<sup>4</sup> Here a conception of Greek education, already introduced in the title of the work, is proposed as the preoccupation of the author of the *Odyssey*. The story of Telemachus and his relationship to Athena and to his father is retranslated, so to speak, into an essay on the theory and practice and problems of Greek education. This is of course a theme and a problem central to early Platonism. But could it have been so for Homer? Or was it not precisely the occurrence of basic changes in the institutions, and I will add in the language and thought forms, of the Greeks which were later to create the problem and make it a possible subject of discourse?

These then are the four unstated assumptions. Let me summarize them in terms which because of brevity will sound rather sweeping and which will omit many necessary qualifications. Greek culture from the beginning was built on a habit of literacy; Greek prose discourse was commonly composed and read at least as early as the Archaic age; the Greek language is built up out of a set of interchangeable parts; Greek thought-forms give expression to a common fund of basic values and concepts. I have tied them together because a generation ago I think they still formed an interconnected system in the minds of classical scholars, and because it is possible that they stand or fall together. If the first, for example, prove untenable, then it may be time to reconsider the other three. I put this tentatively, as a prospect to be viewed and explored. The present paper is intended to start the process of exploration, but no more.

It was in the late twenties and early thirties of this century that the first of these came under attack. Not, it is true, directly, for the scholars involved do not seem to have wished to raise such general considerations, but nevertheless their findings pointed toward the need of some revision of previous ideas concerning Greek literacy. The crucial publications were the work of two Americans. Milman Parry in 1928<sup>5</sup> demonstrated that the verse of the Homeric epics is an oral instrument, the character of which is comprehensible only on the assumption that it was designed and perfected by singers who themselves could neither read nor write. Rhys Carpenter in 1933 and again in 1938,<sup>6</sup> organizing the evidence already available to epigraphers, produced the conclusion that the Greek alphabet could not have been invented earlier than say 720 B.C. One must I suppose tread here warily, particularly as fragments of earlier alphabetic inscriptions, or what appear to be such, continue to turn up, for instance at Sardis and Gordion. But since I detect a continuing and persistent reluctance among scholars of Greek literature to accept Carpenter's findings, let me quote a recent statement on this question from an authoritative source: "Nothing needs to be added to Carpenter's succinct comment, 'The *argumentum ex silentio* grows every year more formidable and more conclusive'."<sup>7</sup>

No attempt, so far as I am aware, was initially made to connect these two findings, nor to draw the conclusion that the Homeric poems despite their sophistication were in all likelihood a creation of a non-literate culture. One reason was no doubt that in the minds of Greek scholars the phrase 'non-literate culture' seemed to be a contradiction in terms. Greek literature by definition had to be a written literature composed for readers, and Greek poetry was assumed to be that kind of literary phenomenon that it is in our own culture, furnishing an aesthetic supplement to the prosaic statement, an embellishment as it were which beautifies and dignifies the day's work. The formulaic technique was therefore treated as poetic artifice in the modern sense of

the word 'poetic', that is as a device of improvisation designed to assist in telling a good story. It was viewed from the standpoint of its entertainment value.

The question looming over the horizon was patently a larger one. If the alphabetic script became first available only shortly before 700 B.C., and if it had no immediate predecessors, then do the Homeric poems survive as a massive exemplar of the *only* way in which, down to the time of their composition, any communication would be put on record and preserved? I say the only way because they alone survived to be written down. Without Parry's findings it would have been possible to argue that they came into existence only as a literary product, and after 700 B.C., but his conclusions, added to those of Carpenter, made it inevitable that the two epics must be accepted as the only available evidence of an oral culture, the conditions of which gradually disappeared from Greece at a rate to be determined by further investigation.

I have argued elsewhere<sup>8</sup> - and here I must ask forgiveness for offering certain propositions as working hypotheses without finding space to defend them in depth - that in fact the kind of composition we call poetic was *ab initio* a device invented to serve the needs of preserved record in an age of wholly oral communication. Preservation could occur only in the living memories of actual human beings. The syntax of the statements made in oral poetry had therefore to conform to certain psychological laws which operate to lessen the strain on the effort of the memory, and to guarantee some fidelity of repetition. This proposition is applicable in the first instance to the Homeric poems which on examination reveal the fact that they are indeed encyclopedias of 'typical information', necessary to preserve the practices and attitudes of a culture. The epic 'syntax' (using this term in the widest sense) in which the epic statement is made is not only essentially narrative in character, but repeats and reports all information so far as possible in the form of concrete and particular events which happen in sequence, not as propositions which depend on each other in logical connexion. The typical character of the statement made,<sup>9</sup> and yet its incorporation in a specific and narrative context, are, it is suggested, twin phenomena which betray a vehicle designed to preserve a culture in the living oral memory.

These observations, I should add, apply to Hesiod as to Homer, both of them composers very close to the oral culture, but while Homer is embedded in that culture, Hesiod is attempting a type of composition which for its organization avails itself of the help of the eye as well as the ear. He is looking at his papyrus as he sets down the lines of his material and he is able to rearrange this material in new ways.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the two poets stand together as representative of the kind of statement which was capable of preservation and transmission under pre-literate conditions, never more so than in the fact that they both employ a method of reporting and describing phenomena, which I have elsewhere styled the "god-apparatus". We are now edging nearer to the subject of this particular paper - the role of the pre-Socratics in the dawning age of proto-literacy. But before I actually reach them, let me dwell a little further on the gods of Homer and Hesiod considered not as objects of cult - and they rarely emerge in this guise in either composer - but as a necessary ingredient in the vocabulary of oral description and orally preserved record.

If all our knowledge of our environment - remember we are living in a wholly non-literate society - and all the moral directives we give our children have to be reported and preserved as a narrative series: if the facts have to be stated either as things that happen or as things that are done (and the latter form of statement is in fact preferred), then the preserved record must be populated by agents who perform acts regarded as important or produce the phenomena which require explanation. A moral principle is not stated as such, but exemplified as something that Achilles or Odysseus said or did or should not have done. Equally it may be exemplified as what Zeus or Apollo said or did. This latter theological form of report becomes inevitable

when we deal with the physical environment: the weather, skies, and sea. Only Zeus and the other gods are available: they have to be super-agents, that is, divine, in order to be everywhere, in order to cover the territory.

Let me at this point illustrate from Homer himself. By the opening of the twelfth book of the *Iliad*, the Trojans under Hector have pressed their advantage until the Greeks quite literally have their backs to the wall - that wall the construction of which was described in Book vii. The bard chooses at this point to add a historical footnote. The wall no longer exists in his day. Time and the processes of nature have eroded and destroyed it:

That was the time when Poseidon and Apollo took counsel  
To efface the wall, leading against it the might of rivers,  
All that from the Idaean hills flow forth into the sea,  
Rhesos and Heptaparos and Charesos and Rhodios. . .  
[a catalogue of eight names of rivers]. . .  
Of these all the mouths together were converted by Phoebus Apollo  
And for nine days against the wall he discharged their flow. And Zeus rained  
Continuously, that all the faster he might put the wall back into the sea-wash.  
The Earth-shaker in person, holding trident in hand,  
Was in the forefront, and from their place all the foundations did he despatch  
on the waves,  
Even of beams and stones that the Achaeans, working hard, had placed there.  
And he made things smooth by the strong-flowing Hellespont  
And again the great shore with sands he covered,  
Having washed away the wall. And then the rivers he converted to move  
Down the flow by which before he had discharged their fair-flowing water.<sup>11</sup>

Several things are to be noticed about this method of description. In our language, it refers to a gradual and prolonged physical process of the years which eroded and removed the earthworks. But to be amenable to preservation in the epic record, this kind of fact has to be compressed into a single nine-day storm. That is, historical time is condensed in order to achieve a single fictionalized episode which can then take its place in that panorama of episodes which makes up the bard's vocabulary. The single large episode in turn is built up out of components which are events taking place in the Troad. The adjacent rivers rise in flood: and the flood waters wash against the obstruction. The force of their pressure, and their terrifying speed, are symbolized in the exaggerated and impossible statement that all rivers in the district were combined to produce the effect. Upon the flood there is then superimposed the rain storm. Conceptually speaking, this was its original cause, but cause and effect come in reverse order, because you feel and are afraid of the flood first before you realize its cause in the falling rain. Flood and rain are then supplemented by the current of the Hellespont, suggested in the epithet. In the context, the listener is encouraged to imagine the swollen waters of the strait joining in the task of leveling the earthwork. Finally, the normal peaceful order of nature is restored. The rivers resume their wonted channels, while on the now deserted shore the empty sand covers all.

We can replace this Homeric account by an equivalent. We can say that a construction of beams, stones, and earth-filling formed a rampart. This is standing near the Hellespont and a prolonged period of unusual precipitation in the adjacent hills results in the fact that the rivers normally flowing northwards overflow their banks and the countryside is flooded. The force of the flood washes out and demolishes the earthwork and the forces of the current in the strait subsequently deposit sand over the remains.

This kind of language takes the objects in the account and renders them in terms of categories and classifications, and then connects these together in a series of relationships. The earthwork

is of a given type of construct with given resistance. The flood is caused by a given and unusual quantity of water from given directions, and it in turn produces certain physical forces which have a given result through the application of physical pressures. The locale is defined and this includes the adjacent shore and currents of the straits, which develop a supplementary effect also physical, namely the silting-up. An episode has now been replaced by a phenomenon, and the events composing the episode have been rendered into sequences of cause and effect.

What is Homer's equivalent, in this instance, for our methodology of cause and effect? Surely it is to be found in the personal decisions and acts of persons. In this case, because Homer is dealing with physical phenomena, these have to be the decisions and acts of gods. First, a process which is historical - namely, the disappearance of the fortification - is represented by a personal decision of two gods to efface it. The subordinate events which compose the episode are then represented as the acts of gods. The accumulated destruction wrought by water erosion is replaced by Apollo's sudden conversion of the rivers as though he took their eight mouths and held them together like spouts. The pressure of the water on the wall is his personal discharge, as though he were bombarding it with a hose. The rainfall is Zeus' act, the loosening of the foundations under pressure is presented in the image of Poseidon picking and pushing at them and levering them out. The final slow silting-up is rendered as though it were a matter of taking a spade and a bucket and covering them over.

I suggest that we see here a demonstration of the basic functional purpose served by the god-apparatus as a recording device. Let us look at it backwards from the vantage point of our own more abstract habits, habits I suggest which could not mature in a pre-literate situation. For our abstract process, the orally-preserved record prefers a pictorialized image. For causal relations, there are substituted concrete acts represented as the decisions of persons and performed on objects by these persons acting as agents. The preference, I suggest, is dictated by mnemonic needs. The mind is allowed to avoid the impossible labour of rearranging events and materials in causal sequences which it would then have to memorize. Instead, the minstrel's medium short-circuits the experience and synthesizes it as an event so that it can be rendered in this 'theological' form. Just as in recording and repeating the terms of the human situation, and in describing or prescribing moral norms, the play of human habit and behaviour, reported in images of men acting, had to function in place of the ethical abstractions that we use ourselves; so also, in recording the situation of the external environment, the play of divine habit and behaviour had to function in place of causal accounts of relationships between forces and materials. Since there are no men extended through the environment to provide the behaviour, the consciousness demands that supermen be put there to supply the need. Otherwise it would be impossible to summarize with coherence the effect of storm and earthquake and flood, and the complex effect of the seasons, the warm sun, the spring winds, and winter cold. Nay, even the regular motions of the stars cannot be explained as motion for there is no such category in the mind. They will rise and set only as events occurring in narrative situations as the acts of persons.<sup>12</sup>

In a well-known story of Joseph Conrad's,<sup>13</sup> a primitive African is stoking the boiler of a river steamer as it slowly makes its way up the endless green vistas of the Niger. He knows he also has to watch the water gauge, for the powerful god inside the boiler is always thirsty; and if the supply runs short, the god will in his rage burst out of the boiler and overwhelm the industrious savage. This is a perfect though very simple paradigm of that efficacy with which even Homeric man could 'think'. The action of heat on water, to produce a resultant steam pressure and the action of heat on hot air to produce a resultant explosion are chains of cause and effect which describe what happens in terms of law and which utilize a language which classifies the facts under forms of matter and energy in order to do this. The animistic version of the same connected events short-circuits the explanation and makes it into a much simpler and more effortless picture of an agent with given powers and passions. His angry god bottled up in the boiler is something that the savage can both remember and express in his own vocabulary. But the concreteness of

his vision does not prevent him from being an effective servitor of the god: that is, an efficient boiler-tender. As he stokes up the god to keep him comfortably warm, he also interrupts this process to pour water into him to keep him comfortably wet. This is the way the god likes it, and being continually placated by the proper ceremonies, he produces the results which his servant seeks. The boat's paddle-wheel revolves; the journey proceeds. Pictorialized comprehension has been carried far enough not only to live with a phenomenon, but within limits to use it. What of course the savage cannot do is to make an engine. His kind of language can express his acceptance of the engine and describe the proper way to live with it. It cannot help him to invent the machine in the first instance because he cannot rearrange his experience in terms of cause and effect. He lacks the know-how. To see and to recognize and to act is within his power, but to 'get on top of' the phenomenon, expressed in the Greek verb *epistasthai*,<sup>14</sup> is beyond him.

It is time to turn our attention at last to the pre-Socratics, for in them if anywhere should we surely seek for confirmation, if it exists, of the propositions concerning the character of Greek culture which have been put forward. Let us summarily restate them. Greek society before 700 B.C. was non-literate. In all such societies experience is stored in the individual memories of the members of the society and the remembered experience constitutes a verbal culture. The verbal forms utilized for this purpose have to be rhythmic to ensure accurate repetition, and the verbal syntax has to be such that statements, reports, and prescriptions are cast in the form of events or acts. The Homeric poems, and to an almost equal degree the Hesiodic, exhibit these symptoms. They constitute not literature in the modern sense, but orally stored experience, the content of which incorporates the traditions of a culture group and the syntax of which obeys the mnemonic laws by which this kind of tradition is orally preserved and transmitted. Finally, so far as the tradition formulates and transmits reports on the physical environment of the society, it will utilize a god-apparatus as the medium by which the phenomena to be described can be most easily cast into the required syntax, and so most easily recalled.

The pre-Socratics, by common consent, were thinkers whose speculations centred mainly (though not exclusively) on the character of the physical environment. Since they initiated this type of speculation in a field of vision, so to speak, that had hitherto been pre-empted by Homer and Hesiod, would we not expect their own early statements in the first instance to take the form of correction or contradiction of the Homeric-Hesiodic world view? If a new physical rationalism was to be introduced, then the previous traditional habits of looking at things stood squarely in the way and had to be removed.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, since they themselves were writers, it could be guessed that in the first instance they would find most objectionable or irrelevant in the Homeric and Hesiodic statements precisely those elements which resided there because of mnemonic necessity - that is, the rhythm, the verbal narrativization with its dynamism and its concreteness, and the use of the god-apparatus. The initial problems confronting the pre-Socratics would be syntactical, rather than philosophic in any larger systematic sense. They would be aware of the need of a new language and, it would follow, of a new mode of thinking, which could replace descriptions couched in terms of powerful and arbitrary agents and of acts performed by them, and could substitute a different mode of description, which, to judge by our own sophisticated speech, would be analytic and conceptual.

So far, so good. But we might also expect a good deal of ambiguity in their own attempts to break with their predecessors. Cultural change does not occur in neatly separable episodes with clear breaks in between. If they were seeking to change the traditional modes of describing the world, the tradition was still very much part of them. And it should be added that though the alphabet was in use by 700 B.C., while their own speculations were not undertaken until the 6th and 5th centuries, we would still be justified in asking whether the shift to literacy in Greece during the Archaic Age was sudden and automatic. On the evidence, it would not seem to have been so. The question here is not the availability of writing and of writers, upon which so much

scholarly attention has been focused, but the availability of readers. Any diffusion of the reading habit would depend upon a reform of that ancient Greek school curriculum which had depended upon memorized recitation; a reform, if that is the word, which would enforce mastery of the alphabet as an automatic reflex at a tender age. This would take a long time - how long is a matter of dispute. But it is safe to conclude from the epigraphical evidence alone that Greece in the Archaic period was only craft-literate, if I may use the expression, not literate.<sup>16</sup> Under such conditions, the pre-Socratics would be expected to compose on papyrus, but under what I may call 'audience control'. In their own inner thoughts, they were trying to break with the oral tradition. But their public still had to memorize their statements and consequently these would reflect a transitional stage in the passage from pre-literacy to literacy. The philosophers would want to reach forward, but also be impelled to look behind, and their style of composition would be expected to reflect this ambivalence.

Do the pre-Socratic writings furnish evidence to support these expectations? I say their "writings", a term which should be used with the qualifications already suggested, but the very mention of it brings up an initial question of method. I cannot view any examination of the pre-Socratics as possessing much validity which does not in the first instance focus on their *ipsissima verba*, so far as these are recoverable. To quote from a recent text-book in this field: "It is legitimate to feel complete confidence in our understanding of a pre-Socratic thinker only when the Aristotelian or Theophrastian interpretation, even if it can be accurately reconstructed, is confirmed by relevant and well-authenticated extracts from the philosopher himself."<sup>17</sup> Now this means that, in determining the original lines of Greek philosophic activity, the so-called Milesians must be discarded. Our knowledge of them as speculative thinkers depends wholly on the later doxographies. Certainly, an imposing modern literature on the Milesian metaphysics does exist,<sup>18</sup> and no doubt certain concessions must be made to its existence. But I must make it clear for the purpose of the present treatment that Milesian evidence is not available. Our business in testing our propositions lies with Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides, the three initial thinkers with whom I will try to come to terms. Viewing them as speculative pioneers who anticipate the literate future, let us mark in them the symptoms, if they exist, of their involvement in a pre-literate past.

Our knowledge of the statements of Xenophanes rests on a total of one hundred and nineteen lines and part-lines of poetry which are quoted in later authors. Forty-nine of these are hexameters, sixty-nine are in elegiacs, and one is an iambus prefaced to a hexameter. His more speculative statements seem to be concentrated in his hexameters. On the face of it, then, his composition is poetic, and favours rhythms which the oral style had rendered familiar, while demonstrating that greater metrical variety which we associate with the lyric poets. Is this accident? Did he cling to poetry by mere force of habit when a prose style existed which would have better served his purpose? His own verse supplies some indications that he sees his own role as that of an oral poet:

By now there are seven and sixty years  
Buffeting my thought across Hellas' land.<sup>19</sup>

This has been taken to refer simply to the exile enforced upon him after his native Colophon fell to Persia. But in what has survived of him, he nowhere shows any sense of loss over this event. His world is pan-Hellenic and these lines would seem to describe that career proper to an itinerant whose method of publication required him to move from audience to audience. To be sure, a Homer or a Hesiod would not have referred to his poetry as 'thought' (*phrontis*). This interesting new twist of vocabulary points forward to the discipline of philosophy rather than backwards to the traditional themes of epic.

But he still moves in the epic world. One of his stanzas runs as follows:

You sent the ham of a young goat. You got a fat leg  
 Of a fatted bull, a prize for a man to obtain  
 Whose glory will range over all Hellas nor give out  
 As long as the family [*genos*] of Hellenic songs persists.<sup>20</sup>

The first two of these lines have baffled interpreters. I would myself suggest that the exchange of gifts of meat is an elegant metaphor for an exchange of poetic offerings.<sup>21</sup> These no doubt were written on papyrus. Xenophanes thus is addressing a colleague who had originally addressed a poem to him - a poem of merit, but Xenophanes has matched it with a better one as a token of his affection for the recipient, and also of his own superior prowess. For had not his poem celebrated the colleague in a way which will make him, and therefore also Xenophanes, forever famous? If this suggestion is correct, the conceit is ingenious. As for the last two lines, they surely presume that Xenophanes' poem will be recited, for a man's fame depended on this, and also that the recital depends on an audience which uses the language, in this case Greek, in which the poem is to be rendered. So Xenophanes visualizes Greek poetry as a kind of single family of songs, even as Homer and Hesiod had viewed the minstrels themselves as members of the same tribe or family.<sup>22</sup> Hellas, and not any particular city-state, is again evoked as the provenience of this kind of poetry. It is a Hellas not of readers but of listeners.

Xenophanes is of course a new kind of bard, and he is trying to dedicate his art to new and non-Homeric purposes. And it is congruent with his sense of new purpose that he is also more self-consciously aware of his own virtuosity or skill (*sophia*) as a bard,<sup>23</sup> a skill he contrasts with the mere brawn of the successful athlete, even as he contrasts the athlete's social prestige with his own undervalued merits:

Better than brawn  
 Of men or horses is my skill.<sup>24</sup>

The term "skill" is double-edged. It refers to the virtuosity of the poet, but it is going to be converted by the philosophers into a sign which shall index the new virtuosity of a special kind of poet - the poet turned thinker. We see the process beginning here. Xenophanes is a self-conscious master of skilful song but, a professional among professionals, he is turning upon his predecessors a critical eye, as our next examples show.

His own chosen vehicle of instruction and education is the symposiastic recitation which supplemented public recitation given in the arena or market-place. The evening banquet, ceremonially organized, leads up to the musical performance and Xenophanes now lays down some guidelines to indicate the kind of recitation he thinks is needed. It is still Memory, be it noted, as in Hesiod,<sup>25</sup> who inspires or assists the singer: that is, the sources of song are traditional. But the repertoire on which memory is to draw has now to be censored:

Not battles of Titans or Giants  
 Or of Centaurs, the fictions of our predecessors.<sup>26</sup>

This is a direct criticism of Hesiod's *Theogony*. Xenophanes has to move within the thought-world of the oral period, but in offering his own type of communication, he seeks to alter the direction of a tradition rather than to break with it. Thus also he acknowledges Homer's functional role in Greek culture:

Since from the beginning according to Homer all men  
 have been instructed that. . .<sup>27</sup>

The verse breaks off and we do not possess Xenophanes' summary of the Homeric curriculum.

But he is himself committed to a discourse, poetic as it may be, which yet must correct and revise the Homeric and Hesiodic prototypes. What is his central correction? Some would find it in verses like the following:

All things to the gods did Homer and Hesiod assign  
Which among human beings are a reproach and shame.<sup>28</sup>

In this fashion, he attacks the morality of the divine actors in the epic narratives. Does he then offer to revise our conceptions of divine ethics? Does he propose a new theological morality? Not so far as we know. The famous lines in which he does offer positive doctrine of his own constitute a frontal attack on what I have called the god-apparatus, considered not as a moral system but as a mechanism of description.

One *theos* supreme. . .  
Not resembling mortal men in shape or in intelligence [*noema*]. . .  
Always remaining in the same place without being disturbed.  
It is not appropriate for him to shift about from one place to  
another. . .  
Quite apart from labour he ordains all things by the wit of his  
intelligence. . .<sup>29</sup>

Discarding all those preconceptions we associate with theology as a modern exercise, and explicitly those associated with the doctrines of Hebrew and Christian monotheism, and regarding the sentences as wholly Greek and uttered in a contemporary context, what god or gods is Xenophanes talking about, and what authors is he correcting? On the surface, he is addressing himself in general to the anthropomorphic deities of Homer. But I think it can be shown that he has a more specific target.

Hesiod's *Theogony* presents the era of the Olympians as marking the final supremacy of order in the cosmos and of the civilized virtues among men. These gods begin to emerge in their proper place in the succession at line 453, and their status becomes secure at line 885. In particular, the poet marks the advent of Zeus, whose own title of 'Counsellor' is matched by the poet's emphasis on the intelligence required to guarantee his safe birth and early nurture.<sup>30</sup> His ascendancy does not go unchallenged, first by the sons of Iapetus. Here it is his intelligence that is put to the test, and it is his intelligence that prevails.<sup>31</sup> The contest between himself and Prometheus is described as a battle of wits.<sup>32</sup> A second ordeal supervenes. He has to lead his faction of the gods in a battle against the Titans which shall end in their defeat and imprisonment. To win it he needs the physical prowess and the natural forces possessed by the three giants whom he frees from Tartarus. The crucial decision to free them is once more marked as an act of intelligence.<sup>33</sup> The prolonged character of the conflict for which their aid is enlisted is then described. The participants endured a labour which was exhausting.<sup>34</sup> All the gods were involved, as members of two confronting armies which, like the Greeks and Trojans, fought for ten years. The intensity, duration, and universality of the conflict are stressed three times over in variant formulae.<sup>35</sup> A last desperate effort wins victory for Zeus and his forces. This is preceded by a dialogue in which Zeus, appealing to his three allies the giants, reminds them that it was his counsels that gave them freedom to assist him.<sup>36</sup> They replying affirm the superiority of the intelligence of Zeus, and promise that they will try to match it with one of their own.<sup>37</sup> The last battle then erupts. Both sides use might and main. The cosmos is shaken. Zeus in person moves from Olympus and hurls his bolts. The shock nearly convulses earth and firmament as the gods collide. Earthquake and windstorm accompany the discharge of Zeus' shafts.<sup>38</sup> As the Titans are finally secured in Tartarus, the poet again reminds us that it is the counsels of Zeus which have achieved this.<sup>39</sup> Zeus faces one last challenge, from Typhoeus, and again, it is his intelligence that discerns the danger.<sup>40</sup> After similar physical exertions, including a leap from Olympus,<sup>41</sup> he vanquishes his last adversary. The labour of the gods, adds the poet, was now completed, and Zeus is 'elected' or 'nominated' king at last, a consummation once more achieved through the aid of intelligence.<sup>42</sup>

When the surviving lines, admittedly few, in which Xenophanes records his 'theology' are compared with this Hesiodic account, it is difficult to resist two conclusions. On the one hand,

when the philosopher asserts the primacy of the intelligence of one god, as a factor central to the successful exercise of power, he is being guided by Hesiod's assertion of the vital importance of intelligence as a quality of Zeus' own nature and as an instrument of his success in three crucial contests. On the other hand, the philosopher, in denying that this exercise of power involves any labour or movement from place to place, is explicitly correcting Hesiod's narrative, and demanding that so far at least as Zeus is concerned, he cease to be a physical agent achieving his will through physical acts. Xenophanes is as anxious as Hesiod to assert the supremacy of this god. But he probably intends also to correct Hesiod by asserting that this god's power is unique<sup>43</sup> and also not anthropomorphic. The role of other gods and allies in the struggle therefore disappears. In fact, comparing another statement of the philosopher already noticed,<sup>44</sup> we conclude that he intended to suggest that there never was a struggle. The epic story disappears, to be replaced by a statement of cosmic control exercised somehow outside events, through sheer thought.

These comparisons and contrasts between poet and philosopher serve to conform the hypothesis, first, that the Homeric-Hesiodic account of the physical environment dominated the Greek mind before the pre-Socratics, thus providing the pre-Socratics themselves with their frame of reference, and second, that in many vital respects they sought to break with this account. The thought of Xenophanes looks back to that entire context in Hesiod which comprehends the advent, struggles, and final triumph of Zeus. Here, in the formulaic style of oral epic, is stated an over-all world view which the still living oral culture of semi-literate Greece had accepted as a working model. This was the model that originally confronted and challenged the mentality of the pre-Socratics. The initial effort required was to attack what I have called the god-apparatus, considered as a narrative device for describing the purposes or forces or principles that control the cosmos. The idea of control itself is traditional, as also is the notion that this control requires intelligence. Xenophanes on the one hand is breaking with traditional modes of description, but equally he is using them and being guided by them. His relation to his prototype has all the ambivalence we should expect from a thinker in a period of crucial transition. He selects, refines, and rationalizes, but he does not altogether reject. For is he not himself still a child of a semi-literate culture?

Anaxagoras later was to repeat and reinforce this correction of Homer and Hesiod, and of their god-apparatus, with more sophistication.<sup>45</sup> It can be said of Xenophanes, however, that his attack on the god-apparatus was so decisive that his successors accepted the results. Greek philosophers after him never used the old method of polytheistic narrative to describe phenomena. Many of them, like Xenophanes, were conservative enough to retain *theos* as a useful descriptive symbol, but only provided it was unified and stripped of concrete and pluralized activities.<sup>46</sup>

The quotations on which we rely for our knowledge of the style and speech of Heraclitus appear to be taken from a manuscript collection of his sayings.<sup>47</sup> When precisely this was compiled it is impossible to say. The clues to the philosopher's own situation are to be sought however not in the existence of this book but in the verbal form in which he originally cast his doctrines. Making allowance in some cases for garbling in transmission, it is still possible to perceive the simple principles on which he constructed his style.<sup>48</sup> A few examples grouped in ascending order of complexity will suffice as typical demonstration:

- (1) Harmony invisible over visible prevailing
- (2) The beast that walks with blow is pastured
- (3) Law (verily is) obedience to counsel of one<sup>49</sup>

English and indeed any modern syntax cannot cope with the original compression. Numbers 1 and 2 consist of four Greek words, and number 3 of either four or five. With brevity there is also achieved a total autonomy. Each statement is self-contained and exhaustive; nothing can be added to it. Moreover, while each arrangement of words stimulates a reflective response, this

comes as a kind of delayed reaction in the mind. The words evoke situations which are pictorial and concrete. The secret harmony, like an enemy in the dark, overwhelms its rival. A boy is driving the cows to the field with a stick. Zeus nods while Olympus quakes.<sup>50</sup> These are the kinds of events which are woven into the flow of the Homeric and Hesiodic pictorial consciousness, but they have now been somehow distilled out and concentrated. The Greek words also betray a kind of solemn lilt, as though we were hearing fragmentary dactyls, spondees, trochees. Occasionally the sayings even break into recognizable poetry which lasts but a few syllables. And while metre seems to persist occasionally as a sort of hangover, some equivalent of its rhythmic effect is supplied acoustically in the form of assonance, as in example 1, and also semantically in the form of paradox, as in example 2, where the beating and the shepherding, two contrasted operations, are juxtaposed contrapuntally.

Acoustic aids to memorization are supplemented by a type of mnemonic which relies on meaning and not on sound, that is through the construction of images which are antithetical in their emotional effects. We shrink from a blow but welcome the green pastures to which it guides us. This is a different kind of rhythm, but it is rhythm. The memory is encouraged to construct an associative chain which has the effect of making the mind jump from one position to its opposite.

We can take a more extended example which can be divided into five cola:

- (a) The order here the same of all
- (b) Neither any of the gods nor any of men has made
- (c) Nay, it was ever and is and shall be
- (d) Fire ever-living
- (e) Kindling in measures and quenching in measures.<sup>51</sup>

The devices here employed, of repetition, assonance, antithesis, and symmetry, are of course more obvious in the Greek than in the English version. The vowels of the first colon, for example, exploit the repeated 'o' sound six times. Each colon has elements of symmetry within itself. What is more interesting is a further relationship of syntax, achieved not just by stark juxtaposition of two parallel aphorisms, as in a previous example, but by piling up several statements in series and linking them by devices which exploit both echo and antithesis so that a development and amplification of meaning is achieved. Thus colon (b) is placed in antithesis to colon (a), but colon (c) echoes and amplifies colon (a), and (d) is an echo of (c), which at the same time adds a new key term of "fire". Finally colon (e) completes but also amends the image of immortal fire of (c) and (d), for in place of the sameness and eternity it substitutes the see-saw image in which we watch the blaze light up, and then again on the same hearth there is only smoke and dying embers.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that statements of this type were framed not to be read but to be heard and memorized.<sup>52</sup> Here is a variant of the formulaic style, a term hitherto confined to the cola of the Homeric hexameter. These Heraclitean statements have been characterized by scholars as oracular,<sup>53</sup> but this does not get to the genetic roots of the style. Oracles in fact were habitually expressed in the standard Homeric medium.<sup>54</sup> Here on the contrary the hexameter is discarded: that is, the help of the regular pulse, struck on a musical instrument to enforce the proper succession of memorized words, is also discarded. The fact that other kinds of rhythm are substituted should not obscure the essential point, that these rhythms are less regular, or more precisely that the pattern within any given statement is unique. One line in this style is not a variant of any other. The hexameter flow has been broken. For this reason it would appear that each statement to be retained in the memory can only last a given number of words - the fewer the better. The longest saying in the collection<sup>55</sup> is only two and a half times the length of the last example cited. Each statement therefore ends up as self-contained and autonomous. You cannot add to it or subtract from it. The memory recalls it complete but has to relax after recalling it. Hence also firm connexion riveted in the memory between different statements is abandoned.

In the epic, all statements were narrativized and had been able to retain narrative connexion. The Heraclitean statements are hoarded separately. The hexameters of Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles, by retaining the metrical 'lead', made possible greater continuity of thought.

For confirmation that this Heraclitean style is an oral style, we can turn to those of the philosopher's sayings which reflect the conditions of communication in his epoch, and the situation in which he publishes. He never refers to readers or books; his world is that of the listening audience:

While this my *logos* is forever  
Human beings become non-intelligent of it  
Both before they listen and at first after listening.  
They have no skill of listening or speaking.  
The non-intelligent after listening resemble the deaf:  
The saying testifies for them: present yet absent.  
Not to me but to the *logos* having listened  
It is skilful to agree that all is one.  
Of all whose *logoi* I have listened to  
No-one reaches so far as to recognize  
That the skilled is separated from all.<sup>56</sup>

This last saying is particularly striking so far as it implies that even Heraclitus did not think of himself as reading the works of his contemporaries or predecessors (Hesiod, the Milesians or Xenophanes may be in his mind),<sup>57</sup> but as listening to their recitation. In what situation might this occur? How does he visualize his own public and that of his contemporaries?

What is the intelligence or wit of them?  
To the bards of the peoples they attend  
And make the conversation of the crowd their instructor  
Not knowing that the many are inferior and the few are superior.<sup>58</sup>

This is an unmistakable vignette, sharply etched, of the epic recital being given in a city square as a regular civic performance attended by the populace who in the intervals of the recitation discuss the performance, compare notes on the story, and thus renew for themselves that instruction in their own traditions which Plato was later to characterize in his descriptions of poetic performance in the *Republic*. The audience is pluralized as *demoi*; that is, the minstrel is presumed to be moving from city to city.

Heraclitus himself is limited to similar conditions of communication. But how can his own speech compete with the traditional poetry? He, like Xenophanes before him and Plato after him, would like to purge the oral performance of its Homeric elements altogether:

What Homer deserves is to be flung out of the assemblies  
and beaten up  
And Archilochus too.<sup>59</sup>

The bards won their victories at these assemblies where the populace gathered to listen to prize-winning recitations. Hesiod had commemorated a victory of his own under these conditions. Heraclitus notes the self-exaltation, the bard's power and desire to exploit his audience emotively, as fundamental to the poetic art, yet as constituting its major limitation:

Only impressions are what the most impressive can be  
conscious of and keep (in his head).  
Yet Right shall indeed catch up with the artificers  
and testifiers of falsities.<sup>60</sup>

The man of "impressions" who also creates an "impression" is the bard, who gains esteem and is honoured and talked about for his performance. He is the artificer of his own poetry. The

Greek term *tekton* became traditional in this context.<sup>61</sup> Likewise he carries his poem in his head, an enormous memorized repertoire, but for all that a repertoire which, in the view of Heraclitus, is only a series of visual impressions and images. These compositions, in short, are misleading fictions.<sup>62</sup> Heraclitus returns to the same theme again:

One thing in place of all is elected by the best ones  
Glory eternal from men who are mortal  
The majority gorge themselves like domestic animals.<sup>63</sup>

"The best" I would interpret to be not the warriors or statesmen but the bards, masters of communication, aristocrats in the sense that they sit at the right hand of princes.<sup>64</sup> But for Heraclitus their vision is limited to gaining a temporary fame. As for the majority, they provide the passive and receptive audience.

These sayings, in effect, report on the conditions of an oral culture when Homer, Hesiod, and the poets still dominated the whole arena of preserved communication, and provided the thought forms and syntax in which, and only in which, the Greeks could sum up their experience of themselves, their history, and their environment. As Heraclitus himself says:

Of the most is Hesiod instructor:  
Him they conceive to know most  
Who did not recognize day and night:  
They are one.<sup>65</sup>

Heraclitus, no less than his audience, is compelled to have daily acquaintance with Hesiod's world. Yet it is precisely this acquaintance that he would wish to disrupt. He does not want to live in this world. No wonder, then, that he is obsessed by the difficulty of making statements which shall be from his point of view correct: and once a statement has been correctly worded, it appears no less difficult for an audience to take in what has been said or to communicate it to others. Out of a total of some one hundred and thirty sayings, no less than forty-four,<sup>66</sup> or thirty-four per cent, are preoccupied with the necessity to find a new and better language, or a new and more correct mode of experience, or are obsessed with the rejection of current methods of communication and current experience. This statistic is striking in a man who in later tradition was represented as a philosopher of materialism and fiery flux. Fire, in fact, is mentioned in only five<sup>67</sup> of his sayings and has been inserted in the text of three more<sup>68</sup> by scholars who perhaps have been a little overzealous to justify the traditional estimate of him. Clearly, if we take his *ipsissima verba* seriously, his preoccupation with problems of vocabulary, and of the psychological response to vocabulary, must be regarded as central.

I lack space in this article to extend to this thirty-four per cent the analysis and discussion that this group deserves. I will permit myself only two observations. The aphorisms of Heraclitus are framed for oral memorization. Yes, but in choosing the aphorism rather than the hexameter, he stylistically breaks new ground as a thinker and refuses the easier role of those who continued in the bardic metre and idiom.<sup>69</sup> It is possible to speculate that the restriction of his own metier to one city, and therefore to one public audience, thus avoiding the bard's itinerant role, may have made it possible for him to choose a style which offered greater challenge to memorization. The aphorism of course had a popular ancestry as ancient as the hexameter. And as noted above it employs characteristic formulas and rhythms of its own. But to employ it at all was to break with the easy and, one is tempted to say, mindless flow of the bard's metrical and musical spell. Particularly, as also noted, it was to discard the accompaniment of a musical instrument. It was to attempt exposition in a style more tough and more challenging. And so Heraclitus it was who, I suggest, furnished the prototype and ancestry for the achievement of the first philosophical prose. In the remains of Xenophanes, Melissus, Anaxagoras, and Diogenes, we can still see the self-contained statement, pregnant and often balanced, being strung with its fellows on a continuous string to provide a running logic, as the autonomy

of the aphorism begins to break down. In the words of Diogenes, the thing to do was to construct a beginning and a continuous exposition.<sup>70</sup> This achievement was stylistically beyond the Ephesian pioneer, but in his break with bardic metre he was indeed a pioneer. Need we wonder at his obsession with the right way of speaking and the correct comprehension of it?

When he presents his own world-view - it would be a mistake to call it a system - he tries to unite the diverse phenomena of human experience and speech under the term *logos*. This is his over-riding principle, and its centrality in his thinking has at last been adequately and forcefully presented in a recent treatment of the subject.<sup>71</sup> But what is this *logos* if not a new principle of language and its use? It represents a way of speaking, a verbal formula, or finally the principle embodied in such a formula. It is a verbal secret, difficult to frame, pervasive in application, which shall comprehend states and conditions or situations which on the surface are antithetical. In demanding our attention to this verbal symbol, Heraclitus, I suspect, focuses his opposition to the Homeric language of narration, and asks that our statements be made timeless, non-particular, and comprehensive. His foe is not the flux in the universe, but the flux in the Homeric speech.

Of the poem of Parmenides, there now survive one hundred and forty-eight lines and seven part-lines along with six lines of Latin translation. Taken as a whole, it must have been very close in style to that of traditional minstrelsy; for even among the surviving lines, the commentary of Diels-Kranz has been able to identify nineteen verbal echoes of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and four of the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. These can be supplemented by the addition of about twelve more reminiscences of Homer, and at least eleven of the *Theogony*.<sup>72</sup>

These preliminary statistics sufficiently reveal how traditional is his vehicle of communication. In fact, the philosopher's relationship to Homer and Hesiod goes deeper than this. As we shall see, he has his memory tuned to certain central situations in their poems. But what we should first ask is this: does he choose this epic style to be the matrix of his thought out of antiquarian zeal? Is his poetry merely an external embellishment which in fact complicates a task which he could better have undertaken in prose? Or is the style functional to his role in his contemporary society?

The poem supplies some internal evidence on this point. It is cast in the form of a dialogue, or rather a monologue. Parmenides in the first person discovers himself to us in the opening lines as a passenger in a horse chariot which is conducted by maidens to the gateways of night and day, guarded by the goddess of Right (*Dike*). The maidens persuade her to open the gates and the chariot passes through. The goddess takes Parmenides' hand and begins an address to him which appears to last through the remainder of the poem. Critics have tended to isolate these preliminaries as though they formed a kind of ornamental preface. They can, however, be understood much more naturally as the device by which Parmenides dramatizes his own relationship to his audience. If his mentor addresses him orally, this is only a reflex of that oral situation in which Parmenides continually found himself as he launched similar admonitions on his own public. It is a confirmation of this view that as we read the poem it is difficult to escape the illusion that it is we who are being addressed by the philosopher, rather than the philosopher addressed by the goddess. The illusion is deliberate. Its precedent lies in the familiar device of inviting the Muse to sing the wrath of Achilles.

Thus also the symbolism of the poem never once assumes a situation of books and readers, but always of reciters and listeners. The maidens parley at the gateway with the goddess in traditionally oral terms. The philosopher approaches, as it were, the throne of the goddess who graciously receives him in oral audience, as Zeus receives petitioners in Homer. And she speaks with the traditional formulas of Homeric oral address.<sup>73</sup> The verbs in which she describes the effort of cognition demanded by her pupil are all taken from the Homeric vocabulary, and therefore draw no sharp distinction between verbal inquiry and mental inquiry, between verbal declaration

and mental cognition.<sup>74</sup> Twice she asks her disciple to "hear".<sup>75</sup> When she warns against the error of men who are uninstructed, she describes them as deaf and blind with mouths agape,<sup>76</sup> much as Heraclitus described the audience listening in the marketplace. She admonishes her pupil himself never to employ an eye unsteady, nor a noisy ear or tongue.<sup>77</sup> When the time comes for her to add an appendix to her doctrine in the form of a cosmology, which is regarded by her as a fiction, she describes it as though it were a poem composed in regular epic style.<sup>78</sup>

Like Xenophanes, Parmenides describes himself as an itinerant. His goddess, he says, "conveys the man who knows through all the towns".<sup>79</sup> His medium therefore has to be that Homeric speech which Greeks of all dialects understood. Accordingly, we could reasonably expect that where he seems to borrow verbally from Homer and Hesiod, he need not in fact be imitating their particular poems, but rather borrowing from the common stock of standard epic formulae and epithets upon which any Greek minstrel could draw at will.

Nevertheless, it remains true that the great majority of his epic reminiscences exhibit a very specific relationship to the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Theogony*. That is to say, he is still living in a thought-world controlled by these poems. Yet the relationship is often quite bizarre. On the one hand, it is as though this philosopher were forced to practise minstrelsy within a tradition wholly dominated by these three poems; as though he not only knew them by heart, but found all his own frame of reference in them. Yet on the other, it is as though, in spirit and purpose, he were quite remote from them, so that he uses their language clumsily and incongruously to mean things it was never intended to mean.

Sometimes his use of a Homeric formula has the quality of a bad pun. Thus in the *Iliad* (Book v) the Trojan Pandarus, disgusted with his marksmanship, avows that when he gets safely home, his head can be severed from his shoulders by "some foreign man", if he does not get rid of his bow once and for all. The Greek for 'foreign man' can, by a change of gender, also mean 'foreign light', and the metrical pattern of the two words determines them as suitable to form the clausula of a hexameter. Parmenides adopts the clausula and adapts it to signify the 'foreign light' borrowed by the moon from the sun, though he has to reverse the syntax to do this.<sup>80</sup> Or again, in the same fifth book of the *Iliad*, Diomedes wounding Ares is said to "rend through his fair flesh". The phrase once more provides a metrical clausula. Parmenides, with a slight shift in syntax from indicative to infinitive, can keep the metrical pattern but adapt the formula to mean an exchange of bright colour.<sup>81</sup> The meanings of flesh, skin, and colour overlap in the same Greek word.

In these examples, the incongruity between original and adaptation is complete. They almost sound like acoustic accidents. But there is a large range of borrowings which exhibit a kind of verbal faithfulness to Homer while completely altering his context. For example, Parmenides uses an adjective in two variant forms which can be translated as 'unlearning', 'unlearned', or 'unlearnable'. He also uses the corresponding verb 'to learn by inquiry'. He applies these positively to the task of learning through doctrine, and negatively to describe notions which are illogical, absurd, and so unknowable. Among these last is the notion of destruction: it is 'unlearnable'. The same phrase appears in the third book of the *Odyssey*.<sup>82</sup> Telemachus, in search of news of his father, comes to Nestor and says that while the fates concerning other Trojan heroes are known, in the case of Odysseus "his destruction (*olethros*) is unlearned". The identical combination of noun and adjective is then borrowed by Parmenides from a particular context to express the generalization: destruction is (in a logical sense) unlearnable and so illogical. In borrowing, we also note, he subtly alters the semantics of what he borrows. *Olethros*, one Homeric word for a man's violent end, now is coming to mean the principle of destruction or passing away. The word has been stretched and generalized.

Examples like these seem to reveal that the philosopher's memory is responding to controls







We conclude that Parmenides like his two predecessors composed within the context of an oral culture: that the world view of that culture was still furnished by Homer and Hesiod: that the philosopher's task was of necessity to revise this world view and the language in which it was expressed: and yet that at the same time he can argue for change only within a frame of reference supplied by his traditional prototypes.

This paper has inevitably avoided coming to terms with the philosophies of the pre-Socratics properly considered. It has concentrated more on the past which still controlled them than on the future to which their efforts pointed. Enough has perhaps been said to suggest that the significance of these early speculative systems - if that is the proper word for them - may lie centrally in the demand that they do make for a new syntax and a new use of language, a new method of making statements about our physical environment. We conclude then by a suggestion. It is possible that in this enterprise our three philosophers stand together. The one unmoving and untroubled *theos*, the one common eternal *logos*, and the eternal unmoved unbegotten *esti* - could all three of these constitute a frontal attack upon the narrative sequence of experience and the narrative portrait of reality so long enforced by the need of oral memorization? For such a conclusion, our survey of the pre-literate condition may have partially prepared us. But demonstration must await a further opportunity.<sup>98</sup>

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#### NOTES

- 1 As at *Repub.* 397 c 8 cf. 598 e 4 where ποιεῖν is rendered as 'write'.
- 2 B. Snell *Die Ausdrücke für den Begriff des Wissens in der vor-Platonischen Philosophie*, Philol. Untersuch. 29, Berlin, 1924, p. 8.
- 3 E. A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, Oxford, 1963, p. 191 n. 6.
- 4 W. Jaeger, *Paideia* (Eng. trans.) Book 1 cap. 2 p. 29 "We have tried to show that the character of Telemachus in the first four books of the *Odyssey* is so presented as to serve a deliberate educational end." The notion that Greek culture is homogeneous is examined critically by A. M. Parry, "A Note on the Origin of Teleology", *JHI* 26 (1965) 259-62.
- 5 Milman Parry, *L'Épithète Traditionnelle dans Homère*, Paris, 1928: *vid.* also *HSCP* 41 (1930) 73-148 and 43 (1932) 1-50.
- 6 Rhys Carpenter, "The Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet", *AJA* 37 (1933) 8-29, and "The Greek Alphabet, Again", *AJA* 42 (1938) 58-69.
- 7 L. H. Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece*, Oxford, 1961, p. 16: the controversy over date is briefly reviewed in Havelock *op. cit.* p. 49 n. 4.
- 8 Havelock *op. cit.* pp. 42 ff.
- 9 *Vid.* A. M. Parry, "The Language of Achilles", *TAPA* 87 (1956) 1-7.
- 10 For a sample of Hesiod's method, *vid.* Havelock, "Thoughtful Hesiod", *YCS* 20 (1965) 61-72.
- 11 *Iliad* xii. 17-33.
- 12 As in Hesiod's star-calendar, cf. *WD* 417-419, 565-567, 619-620.
- 13 "Heart of Darkness", in *Youth and Two Other Stories*, Doubleday (N.Y.), pp. 110-111.

- 14 On ἐπιστήμη in distinction from other cognitive terms *vid.* Snell, *op. cit.* pp. 81-96.
- 15 W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. I, p. 141, "Yet until the rise of a more scientific outlook. . .there was no alternative explanation of the past."
- 16 J. A. Davidson, "Literature and Literacy in Ancient Greece" Parts I and II, *Phoenix* 16 (1962) 141-156 and 219-233.
- 17 Kirk and Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Cambridge, 1957, p. 7.
- 18 Hence presumably Kirk and Raven (*op. cit.* pp. 74-162) feel compelled to offer an elaborate reconstruction of Milesian doctrine, which does not meet their own stated criterion of evidence: *vid.* also Guthrie *op. cit.*, pp. 54-58, 76-88 and 115-151 on the presumed Milesian *archae*. The Theophrastean account of these seems to depend on Aristotle: *vid.* McDiarmid, "Theophrastus on the Presocratic Causes", *HSCP* 61 (1953) 1-156.
- 19 Diels-Kranz, *FVS* 21 B 8.
- 20 D-K. 21 B 6.
- 21 *cf.* the Aeschylean "slices from Homer's dinners" (*Ath.* viii. 347 e).
- 22 Hesiod, *Theog.* 94-5.
- 23 M. Bowra, *Problems in Greek Poetry*, Oxford, 1953, pp. 16-19.
- 24 D-K. 21 B 2, lines 17-18.
- 25 Havelock *op. cit.* p. 100.
- 26 D-K. 21 B 1, lines 21-22. The στάσις σφεδανός repudiated in the next line can also be referred to the ἔρις θεῶν of the *Theogony* (line 705, *cf.* lines 710 and 637, and also *Iliad* i. 6) rather than as in D-K *ad loc.* to Alcaeus.
- 27 D-K. 21 B 10.
- 28 D-K. 21 B 11.
- 29 D-K. 21 B 23, 26, 25.
- 30 *Theog.* 457, 465, 471, 494.
- 31 *Theog.* 537 Διὸς νόον ἔξαπαφίσκων, 613 ὡς οὐκ ἔστι Διὸς κλέψαι νόον οὐδὲ παρελθεῖν.
- 32 *Theog.* 534, *cf.* the parallel epithets in lines 545, 546 and 559, 561.
- 33 *Theog.* 626, 653, 658.
- 34 *Theog.* 629 δηρὸν γὰρ μάρναντο πόνον θυμαλγέ' ἔχοντες,  
881 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥα πόνον μάκαρες θεοὶ ἐξετέλεσαν.
- 35 *Theog.* 629-634, 635-638, 646-648.
- 36 *Theog.* 653.
- 37 *Theog.* 656 ἴδμεν, ὃ τοι περὶ μὲν πραπίδες περὶ δ' ἔστι νόημα,  
661 ἀτενεῖ τε νόῳ καὶ ἐπίφρονι βουλήν | ῥυσόμεθα.
- 38 The physical convulsion, *Theog.* 678-682 and 702-704, and the physical activity of Zeus, 687-693 and 705-706.
- 39 *Theog.* 730.
- 40 *Theog.* 838 εἰ μὴ ἄρ' ὄξυ νόησε κτλ.

- 41 *Theog.* 842, 855.
- 42 *Theog.* 881, 884.
- 43 With D-K 21 B 24 οὔλος ὄρᾱ οὔλος δὲ νοεῖ οὔλος δέ τ' ἀκούει compare *WD* 9 κλυθι ἰδῶν αἰῶν τε, and *Theog.* 700-701 εἶσατο δ' ἅντα | ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδεῖν ἤδ' οὔσασι ὄσσαν ἀκοῦσαι, 661 ἀτενεῖ τε νόφ̄ καῑ ἐπίφρονι βουλή̄ | ῥυσόμεθα, 644 κέκλυτέ μευ κτλ., and 664-5 ἐπήνεσσαν δὲ θεοί, δωτῆρες ἔαων | μῦθον ἀκούσαντες. There are no Hesiodic spectators, no thinkers, no listeners, other than the one god.
- 44 See above n. 26.
- 45 D-K. 59 B 12.
- 46 Heraclitus B 32, 67, 78, 79, 102; Parmenides B 12, B 13; Emped. B 31; Diogenes B 5.
- 47 Diog. Laert. ix. 5. cf. the excellent discussion in Kirk and Raven pp. 184-7.
- 48 *Vid.* K. Deichgräber, *Rhythmische Elemente im Logos des Heraklit* pub. by Akademie der Wiss. und der Lit. in Mainz, 1962.
- 49 D-K. 22 B 54, 11, 33.
- 50 B 33 in effect rationalizes the statements of Hesiod *Theog.* 881-885 and *WD* 1-8.
- 51 D-K. 22 B 30.
- 52 Kirk and Raven p. 185. "The surviving fragments have very much the appearance of oral pronouncements put into. . . easily memorable form." As Kirk notes, Diels himself first propounded this view. But see also below, note 69.
- 53 So Burnet, *Early Gr. Phil.* p. 132 and Kirk *loc. cit.*
- 54 Wallace McLeod, "Oral Bards at Delphi", *TAPA* 92 (1961) 317-325.
- 55 D-K. 22 B 1. Although Kirk *loc. cit.* calls this a "structurally complicated sentence", it in fact obeys the same laws of colometric composition noted of previous examples, *vid.* Deichgräber *op. cit.* p. 57.
- 56 D-K. 22 B 1, 19, 34, 50, 108.
- 57 cf. Heraclitus B 40.
- 58 D-K. 22 B 104.
- 59 D-K. 22 B 42: τῶν ἀγώνων refers to occasions of the type described Hes. *WD* 653-657.
- 60 D-K. 22 B 28.
- 61 *vid.* *LSJ sub voc.*
- 62 cf. Xenophanes (above, n. 26).
- 63 D-K. 22 B 29.
- 64 *Theog.* 94 ff. and the discussion in Havelock *op. cit.* pp. 110-111. Demodocus is styled a "hero" at *Od.* viii. 483.
- 65 D-K. 22 B 57. I take the correction to be specifically of *Theog.* 748 ff. (rather than also of *Theog.* 123 as D-K *ad loc.* and other scholars) where Day and Night are presented as coeval and occupying the same locale. That is, Heraclitus is preoccupied with the same Hesiodic context that engaged the attention of Xenophanes and Parmenides.
- 66 D-K. 22 B 1, 2, 5, 17, 19, 21, 23, 28, 29, 34, 35, 40, 41, 42, 45, 46, 47, 50, 51, 55, 56, 57, 70, 72,

- 73, 78, 79, 80, 83, 86, 87, 92, 93, 95, 101, 101a, 102, 104, 106, 107, 108, 110, 113, 114: To these could be added 13, 18, 22, 27, 54, 71, 74, 97, 117, 118, 123 if viewed in the same light. (I agree with others in rejecting 112 and 116.)
- 67 D-K. 22 B 30, 31, 61, 76, 90.
- 68 D-K. 22 B 14, 64, 67; *per contra logos* occurs in nine sayings, 1, 2, 31a, 45, 50, 72, 87, 108, 115.
- 69 Hence perhaps he is more aware of the written word as a medium than is Xenophanes or Parmenides, cf. B 59, retaining with Kirk and Guthrie the MS reading γραφέων, and cf. B 101a if the advantage of eyes over ears be taken to refer to reading (his sayings) as against listening to a recital. B 87 might then be taken to refer also to his own sayings heard, read and digested.
- 70 D-K. 64 B 1.
- 71 By Kirk in *Heraclitus, the Cosmic Fragments* and Kirk and Raven, *op. cit.* chapter 6.
- 72 I will not here burden the footnotes with a complete statistical review of epic reminiscences. Their frequency can be inferred from what is said in the rest of this paper.
- 73 D-K. 28 B 1 lines 23-25, cf. *Iliad* i. 361, xviii. 385, 424, *Od.* i. 120 etc.
- 74 φράζω D-K 28 B 2 line 6 and B 6 line 2, νενόμισται B 6 line 8, πολύδηριν ἔλεγχον B 7 line 5, φατίζω B 8 line 60, and the combinations of φράζω and γινώσκω B 2 line 9, of λέγειν and νοεῖν B 6 line 1, of φάσθαι and νοεῖν (reiterated) B 8 line 8, of ἀνοήτων ἀνώυμων B 8 line 17, of νοεῖν and φατίζειν B 8 line 38, of λόγος and νόημα B 8 line 50. πυνθάνομαι and its cognates, used frequently by the philosopher, signify ambivalently both hearing and learning.
- 75 D-K. 28 B 2 line 1, B 8 line 52.
- 76 D-K. 28 B 6 line 7.
- 77 D-K. 28 B 7 line 4.
- 78 D-K. 28 B 8 line 52, cf. line 60.
- 79 D-K. 28 B 1 line 3.
- 80 *Iliad* v. 214, Parmenides D-K. 28 B 14.
- 81 *Iliad* v. 858, Parmenides D-K. 28 B 8 line 41, cf. also Emped. D-K. 31 B 21 line 14.
- 82 Parmenides D-K. 28 B 1 line 28, B 2 line 6, B 8 line 21: *Od.* iii. 88, cf. *Od.* iii. 184 and the reiteration in the Telemachus-Nestor episode of the noun ὄλεθρος and the verb πυνθάνομαι.
- 83 Havelock, "Parmenides and Odysseus", *HSCP* 63 (1958) 133-143.
- 84 D-K. 28 B 1 lines 4, 24-25.
- 85 *Iliad* xvii. 75-78.
- 86 *Iliad* xvii. 444 ff.
- 87 *Iliad* xix. 401 ἄλλως δὴ φράζεσθε, cf. Parm. B 1, 4 πολύφραστοι ἵπποι and n. 74 (above).
- 88 *Iliad* xix. 409-10, 420.
- 89 D-K. 28 B 1, lines 22-26.
- 90 *Iliad* i. 418.
- 91 *Iliad* xviii. 95 and xxiv. 132, and cf. n. 88 (above).
- 92 D-K. 28 B 1, lines 12, 14, 18, 19.

- 93 cf. Havelock *op. cit.* on their Homeric character.
- 94 D-K. 28 B 8, lines 14, 25-27, 29-31, 37, 42-44, 49.
- 95 *Theog.* 453-865.
- 96 *Theog.* 616, 718, 731-733, 813, 622.
- 97 *Theog.* 720, 726-8, 738-40 (cf. 700, 814, 116), 745-748, 748-754, 809-813.
- 98 This paper was first delivered as a lecture to the Institute of Classical Studies on 24 January 1966.