

POETIC INSPIRATION IN EARLY GREECE

It is generally agreed that the concept of inspiration is one of the most basic and persistent of Greek notions about poetry. Yet there appears to be a certain confusion on the significance of this observation. For instance, while most scholars consider that the idea is of very great antiquity in Greece, there is a recent tendency to regard the concept as a formulation of the fifth century B.C. E. A. Havelock, for example, describes the notion of poetic inspiration as an invention of fifth century philosophers,¹ and G. S. Kirk states, without discussion, that poetic inspiration was 'probably quite a new conception' at the time Euripides was writing.² This type of disagreement clearly relates to the more fundamental question of the meaning of the concept of inspiration itself. For although there is an apparent consensus that ancient notions of poetic inspiration correspond in some way to certain modern ideas about the nature of poetic creativity, little attention has been paid to these modern notions of inspiration. And unless such modern notions are investigated, the mere observation that there is a similarity is of little value.³

In this paper I consider the idea of poetic inspiration in early Greek literature from Homer to Pindar. Despite variations in the views of individual poets (related, no doubt, to changes in the function and social status of the poet during this period)⁴ the early Greek poets share certain basic assumptions about the nature of poetic creativity, and can therefore be treated together as a group. My aim in what follows is to clarify these basic assumptions, and therefore the early Greek concept of poetic inspiration.

It seems to me that there are in particular two theoretical issues in need of analysis, both fundamental to our understanding of ancient views of poetic creativity. The first is the frequent assumption that inspiration necessarily involves ecstasy or possession, and that the inspired poet takes no conscious part in the process of composition, but is merely the passive instrument of some overwhelming force. An important consequence of this assumption is that inspiration and craft or technique are seen as incompatible. All this is, of course, true of Plato's concept of poetic inspiration as *ἐνθουσιασμός* or *μανία*: throughout his work Plato describes the inspired poet as a passive instrument who knows nothing of what he is saying and who cannot explain the source or the meaning of his poetry.⁵ But there is no evidence to suggest that the early Greek poets thought of inspiration in this way. In fact *this* concept of poetic inspiration as a kind of ecstatic madness—*furor poeticus*—appears to be no older than the fifth century.⁶ Nevertheless certain scholars persist in equating early Greek notions of inspiration with the Platonic concept of *furor poeticus*. For example, E. Barmeyer⁷ refers to the traditional Greek notion 'nach der der inspirierte Dichter seinen Standort verliert und im Enthusiasmus die Gottheit über ihn kommt'

¹ *Preface to Plato* (Oxford 1963) 156. This and the following works are cited by author's name alone: E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951); R. Harriott, *Poetry and Criticism before Plato* (London 1969); G. Lanata, *Poetica pre-Platonica* (Florence 1963); H. Maehler, *Die Auffassung des Dichterberufs im frühen Griechentum* (Göttingen 1963).

² *The Bacchae* (New Jersey 1970) 10.

³ Those scholars who have discussed the subject of poetic inspiration in general have confused rather than clarified the ancient position. C. M. Bowra, for example, in his Rede Lecture on *Inspiration and Poetry* (London 1955) discusses the writing habits of many modern poets and makes some interesting observations on poetic inspiration. But elsewhere he uses his knowledge of the creative processes of modern poets to make inferences about ancient poets which are purely speculative. See e.g. *Pindar* (Oxford 1964) 8–10, 13.

⁴ See e.g. Maehler, *passim*; J. Svenbro, *La parole et le*

marbre. Aux origines de la poésie grecque (Lund 1976).

⁵ The most important texts are: *Ion passim*; *Ap.* 22a–c; *Men.* 99c–e; *Phdr.* 245; *Leg.* 682a, 719c–d.

⁶ *Archil. fr.* 120W can be related to the idea of poetic *μανία*, as several scholars have rightly pointed out; but perhaps one should not press Archilochus too far towards a general *furor poeticus*: it is the *dithyramb* he can create when lightning-struck by wine. The old analogy between poetry and prophecy, and in particular the use of verse as a medium for prophecy at Delphi, is also relevant to the origins of the notion of *furor poeticus*. But the first firm evidence that we have for such a notion dates from the fifth century. See Dodds 82; E. N. Tigerstedt, 'Furor Poeticus: Poetic Inspiration in Greek Literature before Democritus and Plato', *JHI* xxxi. 2 (1970) 163–78.

⁷ *Die Musen: Ein Beitrag zur Inspirationstheorie* (München 1968) 102.

and M. Fuhrmann⁸ speaks of the typically Greek concept of poetic creativity as 'Verzückung, Wahnsinn, Entrückung oder Rausch, als ein Heraustreten des Dichters aus sich selbst (Ekstase), als ein Erfülltsein durch den Gott (Enthusiasmus)'. A particularly good example of confusion is provided by Havelock.⁹ He rightly notes that the notion of possession is absent from early Greek poetry, but consequently concludes that the notion of inspiration is equally absent. Before the fifth century, on his view, poetry was thought of as a craft; the 'contrary conception' of poetic inspiration was invented in the fifth century. In other words Havelock assumes both that inspiration and possession are identical and that inspiration and technique are incompatible. He does not recognise any concept of poetic inspiration other than Plato's,¹⁰ nor does he appear to entertain the possibility that the concept was conceived of in different ways at different periods in antiquity.

In fact modern studies of the creative process show that there are different kinds of inspiration, both in theory and in practice.¹¹ The experience which gives rise to the concept has been described by many different poets at different periods. Obviously the experience differs from poet to poet, but an essential feature of it is the feeling that poetry comes from some source other than the conscious mind. In its most mild form inspiration is simply the moment when a thought or phrase spontaneously presents itself to the poet as the starting point of a poem.¹² Although the initial inspiration appears to come to the poet as if from some source other than himself, the subsequent composition of the poem depends on conscious effort and hard work. At the other extreme inspiration can be a much more shattering experience, involving any one or more of the following features. The poet composes with great ease and fluency, sometimes with extreme speed. No subsequent revision is necessary. Composition may be accompanied by an unusually heightened state, variously described as frenzy, intoxication, enthusiasm or ecstasy. Such a state can only be temporary and does not depend on the will of the poet. When inspiration ceases, the poet is amazed at what he has written, and can only describe himself as the instrument of some higher power.¹³

The basic feature in all these experiences of inspiration seems to be the feeling of dependence on some source other than the conscious mind. We might perhaps distinguish between two types of inspiration, one of which involves ecstasy, the other of which does not,¹⁴ but these two types are merely the opposite ends of a spectrum, and within this spectrum there are many different kinds of inspiration. It is a mistake therefore to assume that inspiration either in theory or in practice necessarily involves total abandonment of responsibility for his creation on the part

⁸ *Einführung in die antike Dichtungstheorie* (Darmstadt 1973) 73-4.

⁹ 156.

¹⁰ One reason for this concentration on Plato is, I suspect, that modern notions of inspiration (which are largely Romantic) bear more resemblance to the Platonic concept of inspiration than to anything which we find in the early Greek poets. Compare, for example, Socrates' well-known words about the inability of the inspired poet to understand his own creations with the following statement of Thomas Carlyle: 'Manufacture is intelligible, but trivial; Creation is great, but cannot be understood. Thus if the Debater and Demonstrator, whom we may rank as the lowest of true thinkers, knows what he has done, and how he did it, the Artist, whom we may rank as the highest, knows not; must speak of Inspiration, and in one or other dialect, call his work the gift of a divinity.' (*Characteristics* [1831] ed. R. A. Foakes, *Romantic Criticism: 1800-1850* [London 1968] 145).

¹¹ See e.g. R. E. M. Harding, *An Anatomy of Inspiration*² (Cambridge 1942); B. Ghiselin, *The Creative Process* (Berkeley 1952); J. Press, *The Fire and the Fountain* (London 1966); P. E. Vernon (ed.), *Creativity*

(London 1970) 53-88; K. Dick (ed.), *Writers at Work* (Penguin 1972).

¹² See e.g. C. Day Lewis' account in *The Listener*, 28th April, 1966: 'For me, at any rate, "inspiration" is the moment when some phrase comes to me out of the blue and offers itself as a seed from which a poem may grow. This seed, clue, donnée, whatever, as you call it, swims up into my mind, not usually as an idea, but in a form of words.'

¹³ See e.g., Rilke's description of the way in which his *Sonnets to Orpheus* were written (*Briefe* [Wiesbaden 1950] ii 412): 'Sie sind vielleicht das geheimste, mir selber, in ihrem Aufkommen und sich-mir-Auftragen, rätselhafteste Diktat, das ich je ausgehalten und geleistet habe; der ganze erste Teil ist, in einem einzigen atemlosen Gehorchen, zwischen dem 2. und dem 5. Februar 1922 nieder-geschrieben, ohne dass ein wort im zweifel oder zu ändern war.' Cf. Nietzsche's comments on inspiration in *Ecce Homo* (1888) trans. W. Kaufmann (New York 1969) 300-1. Sceptics may like to note T. S. Eliot's comment in *Selected Essays*³ (London 1951) 405.

¹⁴ A distinction between two types of inspiration is also made by Harding (n. 11) 65, and by Stephen Spender in Ghiselin (n. 11) 114-15.

of the poet. And it is certainly a mistake to impute such notions to the early Greek poets, as I shall show.

The second issue which needs clarification concerns the definition of, and the distinction between, the concepts of poetic inspiration and poetic genius. Inspiration can be broadly defined as the temporary impulse to poetic creation, and relates primarily to the poetic process. Genius is a permanent quality on which poetic creativity depends and relates primarily to the poetic personality. These ideas are similar in that they both account for the element in the poetic process which is felt to be inexplicable, and both can be contrasted with the technical aspects of composition. But they are basically distinct from each other. The one—poetic inspiration—accounts for poetic creativity in terms of a temporary visitation from some external, or seemingly external, force; the other in terms of permanent qualities inherent in the poet. The beginnings of both of these ideas are, I suggest, discernible as early as Homer, and failure to distinguish between them has clouded our understanding of ancient views of poetic creativity.¹⁵

THE MUSES

In early Greek poetry inspiration is, of course, characteristically expressed in terms of the Muses. I shall not discuss here the question of how the idea of the Muses originated,¹⁶ but I take it that whatever else the Muses stand for they symbolise the poet's feeling of dependence on the external: they are the personification of his inspiration. The Muses inspire the bard in two main ways: (a) they give him *permanent* poetic ability; (b) they provide him with *temporary* aid in composition. Homer and the early Greek poets in general do not distinguish between these two ideas, neither do classical scholars. But they are nevertheless distinguishable. In fact they are the forerunners of the two concepts, outlined above, which account for the inexplicable element in poetic creation. The Muses' gift of permanent poetic ability corresponds to the explanation of creativity in terms of the poetic personality; their temporary aid in composition corresponds to the explanation of creativity in terms of the poetic process.

Homer expresses the first idea, permanent poetic ability, by saying that the Muses love bards, teach them and give them the gift of poetry. Typical of this attitude is the description of Demodocus at *Od.* viii 44–5:

τῷ γάρ ῥα θεὸς πέρι δῶκεν ἀοιδῆν
τέρπειν, ὄππῃ θυμὸς ἐποτρύνῃσιν αἰεΐδειν.

Homer does not tell us precisely what the gift of poetry entails, nor does he speculate as to the reasons for its bestowal. But evidently it is a permanent gift of poetic ability, rather than a temporary inspiration. Failure to recognise this can be exemplified by Harriott's discussion of the gift idiom: 'the Greeks expressed the belief that poetry is in some mysterious way "given", and that it comes from a source external to the poet and is other than he is. This view of inspiration is still current, although partly replaced by psychological theories in which poetry is held to emanate from the unconscious mind.'¹⁷ There is a difference between lines of poetry being 'given' to a poet and the 'gift' of poetic ability, which are here confused. I shall discuss elsewhere the full implications of the uses of the gift idiom to denote the bestowal of permanent poetic ability, and the relationship of the idea to the concept of poetic genius. For the purposes of this paper I wish merely to point out this difference between the temporary inspiration and the

¹⁵ See below, n. 17.

¹⁶ The etymology of the word *μουσα* is uncertain. See e.g. Maehler's summary of the problem, 16–17, n. 5. For general information on the Muses see e.g. M. Mayer, *RE* xvi (1933) 680–757; W. Otto, *Die Musen* (Darmstadt 1956); Harriott 10–33.

¹⁷ 50–1. For confusion over the concepts of inspiration and genius see e.g. E. E. Sikes, *The Greek View of Poetry* (London 1931) 20; G. M. A. Grube, *The Greek and Roman Critics* (Toronto 1965) 9; A. Sperduti, 'The divine nature of poetry in antiquity', *TAPA* lxxxi (1950) 233.

permanent gift of poetry which the Muses grant, and the fact that we can discern here the beginnings of a distinction between the concepts of poetic inspiration and poetic genius.

We gather that the Muse is believed to inspire the bard in a temporary sense from, for example, the description of Demodocus at *Od.* viii 73, where the Muse provides the immediate impulse to song: *Μοῦσ' ἄρ' ἀοιδὸν ἀνήκεν ἀειδέμεναι κλέα ἀνδρῶν*.¹⁸ The invocations to the Muses—a traditional feature of early Greek poetry—also imply the notion of temporary inspiration. Sometimes the poet simply asks the Muse to help him begin, or to join in his song. But often the poet asks the Muse for something specific, such as knowledge of events, or sweetness in song.¹⁹ We can look at these invocations in two ways: (a) in pragmatic terms, that is, in terms of their significance for an audience, (b) in terms of the poet's need for divine assistance. Undoubtedly ancient poets use invocations to establish their authority, to guarantee the truth of their words, and to focus the attention of the audience at strategic points. But the invocations also express the poet's belief in divine inspiration. The point at which the appeal ceases to be genuine is, of course, problematic. But a comparison between the invocations of the early Greek poets and those of their literary successors strongly suggests that the former spring from a real, religious belief in the Muses.²⁰

KNOWLEDGE

It has often been pointed out that the invocations in Homer are essentially requests for information, which the Muses, as daughters of Memory, provide. This is clear from the detailed invocation before the catalogue of ships:

*Ἔσπετε νῦν μοι, Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι—
 ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαὶ ἐστε, πάρεστε τε, ἴστε τε πάντα,
 ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν—
 οἳ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοίρανοι ἦσαν.
 πληθὺν δ' οὐκ ἄν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω,
 οὐδ' εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλώσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἶεν,
 φωνῇ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη,
 εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι, Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
 θυγατέρες, μνησαίαθ' ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον.*

(*Il.* ii 484–92)²¹

Some scholars, however, evidently think that it is misleading to connect information with inspiration. Havelock, for example, says that the invocation quoted above 'shows how true it is that the Muses symbolise the minstrel's need of memory and his power to preserve memory, not a spiritual inspiration, which would certainly be inappropriate to a muster-list'.²² And W. W. Minton observes that in the Homeric invocations 'the poet does not ask for help or guidance in

¹⁸ The same idea may also be expressed at *Od.* viii 499: *ὁ δ' ὄρμηθεις θεοῦ ἄρχετο, φαίνε δ' ἀοιδήν*. The problem is whether to take *θεοῦ* with *ὄρμηθεις* or with *ἀρχετο*. See the discussions of e.g. O. Falter, *Der Dichter und sein Gott bei den Griechen und Römern* (Würzburg 1934) 9; Harriott 42. And cf. *Pi. fr.* 151.

¹⁹ On invocations in early Greek poetry see e.g. Falter (n. 18) 4–7, 12, 18–23, 34–50; Harriott 41–9, 72–7.

²⁰ On this see e.g. R. Häussler, 'Der Tod der Musen', *AuA* xix (1973) 117–45; S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace* (Indiana 1967) 2–16.

²¹ Harriott (40) appears to miss the point of these lines. The bard does not speak 'as if his physical strength will not be equal to the long task of recounting the

participants in the war', but rather stresses that, however great his physical strength, he will not be able to recall the necessary information without the prompting of the Muses. The contrast made here for the first time between divine knowledge and human ignorance is a persistent theme in early Greek literature. See e.g. *Ibyc. fr.* 1. 23–6; *Sol. fr.* 17; *Xenoph. fr.* 34; *Pi. N.* vii 23–4, *Pa.* vi 50–8, viib 15–20; B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (New York 1960) 136–52. Invocations in Homeric epic occur elsewhere at *Il.* i 1, ii 761, xi 218, xiv 508, xvi 112; *Od.* i 1. Cf. also the quasi-invocations at *Il.* v 703, viii 273, xi 299, xvi 692. For scholarship on Homeric invocations see Harriott 44.

²² 177.

“how” he shall tell his story; there is no suggestion of a plea for “inspiration”; only for information’.²³ Neither scholar makes it clear what he means by ‘inspiration’: but whatever it is, they both agree that it is incompatible with factual content in poetry. But why should inspiration not include, or even consist of, information? In fact, as Minton himself points out, the Chadwicks have shown that much early oral poetry associated with the ‘poet-seer’ is informational in character, and that traces which suggest that such ‘seer-poets’ once existed in Greece have been found in both Homer and Hesiod. What Minton does not note is the Chadwicks’ insistence on the widespread connexion between inspiration and information in such poetry, summarised thus by N. K. Chadwick: ‘The association of inspiration and knowledge of whatever kind acquired by supernatural means is ancient and widespread. Inspiration, in fact, relates to revealed knowledge.’²⁴ It is not therefore a contradiction to say that the invocations in Homer are requests for inspiration—even though the inspiration might consist largely of information.

The association of the Muses with knowledge of one sort or another continued throughout the early period. It was, amongst other things, Demodocus’ knowledge of the *facts* of the Achaean expedition which caused Odysseus to wonder at the bard: he must have been taught by the Muse or Apollo²⁵ since he sang of the fate of the Achaeans as if he himself had been present, or as if he had heard from someone else (*Od.* viii 487–91). Hesiod depicted the Muses on Mount Olympus singing of past, present and future (*Th.* 36–40) and clearly the gift of poetry which the Muses bestowed on their chosen bards involved the power of true speech. When the Muses made Hesiod a poet they told him that they could reveal the truth when they wished:

ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
ἴδμεν δ’, εὖτ’ ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι.

(*Th.* 27–8)

These ambiguous lines have been variously interpreted,²⁶ but what cannot be disputed is the fact that the Muses are here represented as having the power to tell the truth. The chief difficulty is to determine the precise nature of the distinction drawn between truth (*ἀληθέα*) and plausible fiction (*ψεύδεα . . . ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα*). The conventional, and I think the correct, interpretation is that Hesiod is here contrasting the true content of his own poetry with the plausible fiction of Homeric epic. West rejects this interpretation on the grounds that ‘no Greek ever regarded the Homeric epics as substantially fiction’. But Homer *was* criticised for misrepresenting the truth.²⁷ Harriott’s suggestion that in these lines Hesiod is faithfully reporting the Muses’ warning that if he were to offend he would be punished by being ‘misled into recording a lying vision’²⁸ seems to me to be singularly unlikely: Hesiod would hardly preface his work with a warning that what followed might be untrue; on the contrary, the proem to the *Theogony* is surely to be regarded as a plea for the infallibility of the poem as a whole. There is, of course, an important difference between the kinds of knowledge bestowed by the Muses in Homer and in Hesiod. The knowledge which Homer’s Muses grant is primarily knowledge of the past—that is, knowledge as opposed to ignorance. Hesiod’s Muses, on the other hand, are responsible for both truth and falsehood: what they give Hesiod is true knowledge as opposed to false. And the poet speaks with the authority of one who believes that his knowledge comes from divine revelation.²⁹

²³ ‘Invocation and Catalogue in Hesiod and Homer’, *TAPA* xciii (1962) 190.

²⁴ *Poetry and Prophecy* (Cambridge 1942) 41.

²⁵ As e.g. W. Marg points out, *Homer über die Dichtung* (Münster 1957) 10, the precise significance of this alternative is now lost to us. But the overlapping of the domains of Apollo and the Muses clearly stresses the importance of knowledge and truth in the poetry of this period.

²⁶ See e.g. K. Latte, ‘Hesiods Dichterweihe’, *AuA* ii (1946) 159–63; Lanata 24–5 and bibliography there;

Maehler 41; A. Kambylis, *Die Dichterweihe und ihre Symbolik* (Heidelberg 1965) 62–3; West *ad loc.*; W. J. Verdenius, ‘Notes on the Proem of Hesiod’s *Theogony*’, *Mnem.* xxv (1972) 234–5; P. Pucci, *Hesiod and the Language of Poetry* (Baltimore 1977) 9–16.

²⁷ See e.g. *Pi. N.* vii 20–4; Heraclit. *fr.* 56, *cf. fr.* 42; Xenoph. *fr.* 11; *Pl. Rep.* 377d, and in general F. Mehmel ‘Homer und die Griechen’ *AuA* iv (1954) 16–40. See also Maehler 41 and Verdenius (n. 26) 234.

²⁸ 113.

²⁹ *Cf. Th.* 104–14; *Op.* 661–2.

Pindar too, often claims to have special knowledge from the Muses, as for example at *Pa.* vi 51–8:

ταῦτα θεοῖσι [μ]έν
 πιθεῖν σοφοῦ[ς] δυνατόν,
 βροτοῖσιν δ' ἀμάχανο[ν εὐ]ρέμεν·
 ἀλλὰ παρθένοι γάρ, ἴσθ' ὄτ[ι], Μο[ι]σαι,
 πάντα, κε[λαι]νεφεῖ σὺν
 πατρὶ Μναμοσ[ύν]α τε
 τοῦτον ἔσχετ[ε τεθ]μόν,
 κλύτε νῦν.³⁰

Like Hesiod, but more obsessively, Pindar insists on the truth of what he has to say³¹—an insistence which is all the stronger because he is acutely aware of the power of poetry to perpetrate falsehood.³² Pindar sees it as part of his task to combat such falsehood, and he is able to do so because he, as prophet of the Muses, has access to knowledge which is hidden from ordinary mortals. In similar fashion Empedocles appeals to the Muses to give him knowledge which will set him apart from other mortals, and he evidently regards the supernatural origin of his poetry as a guarantee of its truth.³³ In a more modest Homeric spirit, Plato trades on the traditional function of the Muses as purveyors of the truth when he remarks (albeit ironically) at *Repub.* 547a that the Hesiodic myth of the four ages of man must be true since it comes from the Muses. A. W. Allen has argued that from the first the Muses were not only the inspirers of poetry, but also the possessors of all knowledge. And he makes the pertinent point that 'as long as the range of poetry included all forms of knowledge, it fully corresponded to the range of the Muses' authority'.³⁴ The frequent and recurrent association of the Muses with knowledge in early Greek poetry suggests a close connection between poetic inspiration and knowledge during this period.

MEMORY

The ancient tradition which made the Muses the daughters of *Μνημοσύνη* is further evidence of such a connexion. The goddess *Μνημοσύνη* first appears as mother of the Muses in Hesiod,³⁵ but the connexion between memory and the Muses is already apparent in Homer's use of the verb *μυνήσκομαι* of the Muses' function at *Il.* ii 492.³⁶ For Plato it was a commonplace that one of the tasks of the Muses was to remind the poet, as we can see from Socrates' words at *Euthydemus* 275c: he, like the poets, must invoke Memory and the Muses in order to remember a previous conversation. Several scholars have stressed the importance of this aspect of the Muses,

³⁰ Cf. e.g. *Pi.* O. x 1–6, xiii 93–100; *Pa.* viib 15–20; *Ibyc. fr.* i. 23–6; *Bacch.* xv 47.

³¹ See e.g. O. iv 17–18, vi 20–1, vii 20–1, xiii 52 and *P.* i 86–7 on the importance of truth in general. *Ἀλάθεια* is invoked at O. x 3–4 and at *fr.* 205. Pindar's concern for truth is also evident in his characteristic use of arrow and javelin imagery as at e.g. O. xiii 93–5, *P.* i 42–5, *N.* i 18, vi 26–7. See further Bowra, *Pindar* 26–33; Harriott 69–70; Maehler 96–8.

³² See e.g. O. i 28–32, *N.* vii 20–3. In general on this persuasive power of poetry see e.g. Harriott 117–20; J. de Romilly, 'Gorgias et le pouvoir de la poésie', *JHS* xciii (1973) 155–62.

³³ *Fr.* 3, 4, 23.11, 131. The view expressed by Falter (n. 18) 40 that Empedocles' invocation to the Muse in *fr.* 3 is nothing but 'poetische Einkleidung, Motiv, keineswegs aber aus wahren Glauben erwachsen' is rightly

refuted by W. J. Verdenius, 'The meaning of *Πίστις* in Empedocles', *Mnem.* 4 i (1948) 10–11. Cf. P. Boyancé, *Le culte des Muses chez les philosophes grecs* (Paris 1936) 241. Clearly the goddess in Parmenides' proem *fr.* 1.22–32 also guarantees the truth of his message, but she is not identified as a Muse. See e.g. Harriott 65–7.

³⁴ 'Solon's Prayer to the Muses', *TAPA* lxxx (1949) 65.

³⁵ *Th.* 53–61 with West *ad loc.* To the references there given add *Th.* 915–17; *PMG fr.* 941; *Pi.* *Pa.* vi 54–6, viib 15–16; *Pl. Theaet.* 191d; *Plut. Mor.* 9d, *fr.* 215h, 217j. See further e.g. B. Snell 'Mnemosyne in der frühgriechischen Dichtung', *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* ix (1964) 19–21; A. Setti, 'La Memoria e il canto', *Stud. Ital.* xxx (1958) 129–71.

³⁶ Cf. e.g. *Certamen* 98; *Pi.* *N.* i 12.

pointing out that at times the Muses seem to be little more than a personification of memory.³⁷ Havelock goes so far as to say that the Muses in Homer have nothing to do with inspiration because they 'are connected with special feats of memory'.³⁸ This dissociation of inspiration and memory is misguided: there is no inherent incompatibility between inspiration and information, as I have pointed out, and the fact that *we* might identify the source of the poet's inspiration as an internal one does not mean that the poet or his audience feels it to be so. Furthermore Havelock's contention that the Muses embody the bard's powers of *memorisation* is highly dubious, as is his theory that *Μνημοσύνη* chiefly implies the notions of recall, record and memorisation.³⁹

The precise nature of poetic memory in early Greece has been much discussed. J.-P. Vernant, in an article entitled 'Aspects mythiques de la mémoire et du temps'⁴⁰ argued that the psychological function of memory in early Greek poetry is not to reconstruct the past accurately, but to transport the poet into the past, to give him a direct vision of 'l'ancien temps'. Memory of this type, to be distinguished from historical memory, is the privilege of poets and seers, who have in common 'un même don de "voyance"'. As evidence for this latter statement Vernant cites the phrase *τά τ' ἔόντα τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἔόντα* which is used in connexion with Calchas' prophetic skill at *Il.* i 70 and of the Muses' song at *Hes. Th.* 38 (note that it is used of the Muses, not of *Μνημοσύνη* as Vernant states). In fact this phrase suggests that what poets and seers have in common is *knowledge* rather than vision. Of course the connexion between knowledge and sight is very close in early Greek literature—at *Il.* ii 485, for example, the Muses know everything because they have seen everything⁴¹—but the 'don de "voyance"', of which Vernant speaks appears to be something rather different from sight in the sense of knowledge. The poet's knowledge, he says, is the result of 'une vision personnelle directe. La mémoire transporte le poète au cœur des événements anciens, dans leur temps', a contention which is supported by reference to Plato's *Ion* 535b–c, where Socrates asks Ion about his mental state during his rhapsodic performances:

τότε πότερον ἔμφρων εἶ ἢ ἔξω σαυτοῦ γίγνη καὶ παρὰ τοῖς πράγμασιν οἶταί σου εἶναι ἢ ψυχῇ οἷς λέγεις ἐνθουσιάζουσα, ἢ ἐν Ἰθάκῃ οὔσιν ἢ ἐν Τροίᾳ ἢ ὅπως ἂν καὶ τὰ ἔπη ἔχη;

The experience here described by Socrates seems to me to be something quite different from that described by the bard at *Il.* ii 484–92 (and, it may be added, has nothing much to do with memory). The rhapsode—and he is a rhapsode, not a poet—is transported into the scenes he evokes, but in the *Iliad* it is the Muses who see the events of the past, not the bard. Furthermore, the ecstatic state of the rhapsode has no parallel in Homer: we are simply told that the Muses were present and saw the events. The implication of the invocation, and in particular of 492, is that the Muses can communicate their knowledge to the bard, but there is no suggestion that they do so by transporting him into the past and giving him a direct vision of a bygone age. Both here and in the other references cited by Vernant⁴² the poet is envisaged as being in contact with the powers of the Muses rather than actually having these powers directly himself.

Odysseus' praise of Demodocus at *Od.* viii 489–91 might appear to provide better evidence for Vernant's theory:

λίην γὰρ κατὰ κόσμον Ἀχαιῶν οἶτον ἀεΐδεις,
ὄσσο' ἔρξαν τ' ἔπαθόν τε καὶ ὄσσο' ἐμόγησαν Ἀχαιοί,
ὥς τέ που ἢ αὐτὸς παρεὼν ἢ ἄλλου ἀκούσας.

But the possibility that the bard might have heard of the sufferings of the Achaeans from someone else is somewhat difficult to reconcile with the notion that he was given a personal vision of them. He sings *κατὰ κόσμον*, a phrase which refers as much to the form as to the

³⁷ See e.g. J. Duchemin, *Pindare poète et prophète* (Paris 1955) 26.

³⁸ 163–4.

³⁹ 100.

⁴⁰ *Journal de Psychologie* (1959) 1–29 repr. in *Mythe et*

pensée chez les Grecs (Paris 1974) 80–107. See also M. Detienne, *Les maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque*² (Paris 1973) 15, 24–7, 110.

⁴¹ See further Snell (n. 21).

⁴² 83 n. 9.

content of his song: it is both true and well structured.⁴³ What amazes Odysseus is the reality and vividness of Demodocus' account, but this does not imply that he has visionary powers. The first of the two alternative ways in which the bard might have acquired his knowledge would be compatible with vision (although it does not imply it), but the second renders this possibility highly unlikely since information from someone else can create the same vividness as the bard's personal presence at the events. In fact it seems to me that Homer is here offering a formulation of the idea of poetic imagination as a form of visualisation, an idea which is found fully developed in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1455a22) and in Longinus (15.1).⁴⁴

One of the basic confusions in Vernant's argument is his failure to distinguish between ecstatic and non-ecstatic inspiration either in prophecy or in poetry. For example, the 'don de voyance' of which Vernant speaks is highly appropriate to Cassandra as she is depicted in the *Agamemnon*. In her frenzy she does have a direct and personal vision of various episodes relating to the past, present and future of the house of Atreus. That she actually *sees* what she describes is clear from her words at, for example, 1125: ἰδοὺ ἰδοῦ.⁴⁵ It has long been recognised, however, that, with the exception of Theoclymenus at *Od.* xx 351–7, prophecy of this visionary nature is absent from Homer. The *μάντις* in Homer is largely concerned with the technique of interpreting omens, not with having visionary experiences of events inaccessible to ordinary human beings.⁴⁶ Vernant's remarks about poetry are similarly misleading. For example: 'La poésie constitue une des formes typiques de la possession et du délire divins, l'état d'"enthousiasme" au sens étymologique.' This statement is certainly true of Plato, but one cannot use Plato as evidence for pre-Platonic views of poetry. The notion that memory is a power of poetic or prophetic vision is, I think, easier to reconcile with an ecstatic theory of inspiration in which the poet or prophet is literally taken out of himself than with the more intellectual concept of inspiration which we find in Homer and the early Greek poets. That is not to say that poetic memory during this period is simply a process of factual recall.

The substantial implications of the ancient connexion between Memory and the Muses in oral poetry were first recognised by J. A. Notopoulos.⁴⁷ He pointed out that there are at least three different ways in which memory is important in such poetry. First, memory serves to perpetuate and hence immortalise κλέα ἀνδρῶν. The immortalising power of poetry is recognised from Homer onwards and is a central theme in Pindar's poetry. The latter repeatedly emphasises the Muses' function as bestowers of immortality.⁴⁸ Second, memory conserves information—a point too obvious to need substantiation. Third, and most important, memory is the means by which oral poetry is created. Homeric epic is based on a vast and complex system of formulas and word groups, which the bard must retain in his mind to use as the building blocks of his composition: in oral composition of this type memory is a creative force, since the bard must not only memorise the oral diction out of which his poetry is made, but also create his song from it. Memory is thus at the heart of this type of oral poetry for without it composition is impossible. Memory and inspiration, far from being incompatible, are vitally connected: memory is virtually the source of the poet's inspiration.

PERFORMANCE

The widely held view that there are certain fundamental differences between oral and

⁴³ See Lanata's excellent discussion of this passage, (1938) 465–93.

⁴⁴ I hope to discuss the history of this concept in a later article.

⁴⁵ Cf. 1114, 1217.

⁴⁶ See e.g. E. Rohde, *Psyche*, trans. W. B. Hillis (London 1925) 289; Dodds 70.

⁴⁷ 'Mnemosyne in Oral Literature', *TAPA* lxi

⁴⁸ See e.g. *Hom. Il.* vi 358; *Od.* viii 73, 580; xxiv 196–7; *h.Ap.* 298–9; *Theog.* 237–52; *Sapph. fr.* 55, cf. *fr.* 193; *Bacch.* iii 71, 90–8, ix 81–7, x 9–18; *Pi. O.* viii 70–80, x 86–96, *P.* i 93–100, iii 112–15, iv 293–9, v 45–9, vi 5–17, xi 55–64, *N.* vi 26–35, vii 11–16, ix 48–55, *I.* v 53–7, vii 16–26, viii 56–63, *fr.* 121; *Pl. Smp.* 209d–e.

literary poetry has recently been challenged by R. Finnegan.⁴⁹ She demonstrates that no one model will cover all types of oral literature and argues that there is no clear-cut differentiation between oral literature on the one hand and written literature on the other. Nevertheless it would clearly be false to say that oral poetry is exactly the same as written poetry in all respects. The one aspect in which oral poetry obviously does differ from literary poetry is in its performance—a point which Finnegan herself stresses. Indeed she describes performance as the ‘heart of the whole concept of oral literature’.⁵⁰ In general classical scholarship has not seen that this important difference between oral and literary poetry has a direct bearing on the concept of poetic inspiration.

One of the essential features of the Parry–Lord theory of oral formulaic composition is that oral poetry is composed and performed simultaneously. This is not to say that the bard is merely an illiterate improviser or to imply that hard work and thought may not go into the composition beforehand. But it is at the moment of performance that the poem is fully composed for the first time.⁵¹ Composition, therefore, does not depend on flashes of inspiration which mysteriously provide ideas or phrases to the poet, but on a steady flow of words. The oral poet is both a composer and a performer: he needs not only memory and a command of technique, but also fluency and confidence or ‘presence’ as a performer. What must therefore be emphasised is that inspiration in oral epic poetry is inextricably connected with performance.

The Muses in early Greek poetry do more than simply provide information. *Od.* xvii 518–21, for example, shows that they also inspire the bard with the power to mesmerise his audience. When the Muses made Hesiod a poet, they inspired him with a wonderful voice: *ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδὴν / θέσπιν* (*Th.* 31–2).⁵² The significance of these words is not generally stressed. Fluency of composition is a common characteristic of inspiration in all periods. To take one example from ancient literature, Cratinus describes the inspiring effects of wine in *fr.* 186: ‘Lord Apollo, what a flood of words! Streams splash, his mouth has twelve springs, Ilissus is in his throat. What more can I say? If someone doesn’t stop him up, he’ll swamp the whole place with his poems!’⁵³ Harriott,⁵⁴ amongst others, points out that the comparison of flowing speech to a river goes back to Homer. In the *Iliad* (i 249) Nestor’s eloquence is described in the well known line: *τοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ γλώσσης μέλιτος γλυκίων ῥέειν αὐδῆ*. Hesiod emphasises the effortless flow of the Muses’ voices in similar language (*Th.* 39–40), and those whom the Muses love have this gift of fluency (*Th.* 96–7, *cf.* 84). Harriott and others draw our attention to these passages, but fail to pin-point their significance. Surely the significance of the comparison of the poet’s utterance to a stream is that in oral poetry fluency is vital. Since composition and performance are simultaneous, without fluency composition breaks down.

Even when Greek poetry ceased to be orally composed, there was still the association of inspiration with performance: throughout the classical period, poetry was always composed for some kind of audience; it was never simply a private expression. Hence performance was important and the Muses continued to provide inspiration in performance as well as in composition. The frequent invocations to the Muses to give sweetness in song should be interpreted with this in mind. For example, Alcman *fr.* 27: *Μῶσ’ ἄγε Καλλιόπα θύγατερ Διὸς / ἀρχ’ ἐρατῶν ἐπέων, ἐπὶ δ’ ἕμερον / ὕμνω καὶ χαρίεντα τίθη χορόν*.⁵⁵ Pindar begins *Nem.* iii with an invocation which is clearly a request for help in performance:

⁴⁹ *Oral Poetry* (Cambridge 1977).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 28, *cf.* 133.

⁵¹ See M. Parry, ‘Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making’, *HSCP* xli (1930) 77–8 = *The Making of Homeric Verse*, ed. A. Parry (Oxford 1971) 269–70; A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge Mass. 1960) 13–29; M. N. Nagler, *Spontaneity and Oral Tradition* (Berkeley 1974) xxi, xxiii, 20–1. On the whole topic of prior composition, memorisation and performance see Finnegan (n. 49) 73–87.

⁵² *Cf.* *Th.* 97; *Hom. Od.* i 371.

⁵³ *Ἄναξ Ἄπολλον, τῶν ἐπῶν τῶν ρευμάτων, καναχοῦσι πηγαί, δωδεκάκρουνον τὸ στόμα, Ἴλισσὸς ἐν τῇ φάρυγι τί ἂν εἵπομι’ ἔτι; εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἐπιβύσει τις αὐτοῦ τὸ στόμα ἅπαντα ταῦτα κατακλύσει ποιήμασιν.*
Cf. *Ar. Eq.* 526–8; *Pl. Leg.* 719c.

⁵⁴ 88–9, 124. *Cf.* *Kambylis* (n. 26) 144–6.

⁵⁵ *Cf.* e.g. *Hes. Th.* 104; *Pi. fr.* 75; *Ar. Av.* 737–50, *Ra.* 675.

Ὡ πότνια Μοῖσα, μᾶτερ ἀμετέρα, λίσσομαι,
τὰν πολυξέναν ἐν ἱερομηνία Νεμεάδι
ἴκεο Δωρίδα νᾶσον Αἴγιαν· ὕδατι γάρ
μένοντ' ἐπ' Ἀσωπίῳ μελιγαρύων τέκτονες
κώμων νεαῖαι, σέθεν ὅπα μαιόμενοι.⁵⁶

The Choruses in Aristophanes also frequently invoke the Muse for help in performance, as, for example, at *Peace* 775–80: ‘Muse, having driven away the war, join in the chorus with me, your friend, celebrating weddings of the gods, banquets of men and festivities of the blessed.’⁵⁷ In the context of both victory celebration and dramatic competition, composition and performance are united, and the Muse relates to both.

THE POET AND HIS MUSE

What is the precise nature of the relationship between the Muse and the poet in early Greek poetry? Whatever it is, the poet is certainly not the unconscious instrument of the divine, as some scholars have suggested. G. M. A. Grube, for example, says of the invocations in Homer: ‘When Homer invokes the Muses on his own account, everything is inspiration and he speaks as if the poet were but a passive instrument.’⁵⁸ The first three words of the *Iliad* (*Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά*) might indeed be taken to suggest that the poet is nothing but the instrument of the goddess. But the request for specific information at 8 (Who then of the gods brought them together to contend in strife?) suggests that the poet is an active recipient of information from the Muse rather than a passive mouthpiece. The same is true of all the other invocations in the *Iliad*.⁵⁹ The proem of the *Odyssey* makes the poet’s active role even clearer:

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα . . .
τῶν ἀμόθεν γε, θεά, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπέ καὶ ἡμῖν.

The relationship here envisaged between the poet and the Muse is an intellectual one—the Muse is asked to communicate with the bard, not to send him into a state of ecstasy—and it would be a mistake to interpret these invocations as evidence for the view that the bard takes no part in composition.

The early Greek poets in general express their belief in their dependence on the Muse, but they also stress their part in composition. For example, at *Od.* viii 44–5, Alcinous says of Demodocus:

τῷ γάρ ῥα θεὸς πέρι δῶκεν ἀοιδὴν
τέρπειν, ὅππῃ θυμὸς ἐποτρύνῃσιν ἀείδειν.

These words make it clear that poetry is both god-given and the product of the bard’s own θυμός.⁶⁰ There is a similar combination of human and divine elements in Phemius’ claim at *Od.* xxii 347–8:

αὐτοδίδακτος δ’ εἰμί, θεὸς δέ μοι ἐν φρεσὶν οἶμας
παντοίας ἐνέφυσεν·

It might be argued that the two halves of this statement are contradictory: because the gods have implanted the paths of song in him the bard cannot claim responsibility for his composition. But these lines, like the previous example quoted, must surely be understood in the context of

⁵⁶ Cf. e.g. *P.* iv 1–3, *N.* vi 28–9.

⁵⁷ Μοῦσα, σὺ μὲν πολέμους ἀπ-
ωσαμένη μετ’ ἐμοῦ
τοῦ φίλου χόρευσον,
κλείουσα θεῶν τε γάμους
ἀνδρῶν τε δαίτας

καὶ θαλίας μακάρων·
Cf. *Ach.* 665–75.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.* (n. 17) 2.

⁵⁹ See above, n. 21.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Od.* i 346–7.

Homer's language. Dual motivation is, of course, a characteristic of Homeric epic and a god's prompting does not exclude a personal motivation.⁶¹ The two halves of Phemius' statement are therefore complementary rather than contradictory: he is both self taught and the recipient of divine aid. It has been suggested that *αὐτοδίδακτος* refers to the technical aspects of composition (form, style etc.), whereas *οἶμας* refers to the subject matter of his song,⁶² but this seems to me to be too precise a distinction. Whilst the word *αὐτοδίδακτος* clearly implies a notion of skill or technique, the metaphor of the path or way of song should not be restricted to subject matter.⁶³ The general point of Phemius' claim is that he does not simply repeat songs he has learnt from other bards, but composes his songs himself.⁶⁴ The particular point which is relevant to the present discussion is that although Phemius stresses the divine origin of his poetry he is very much aware of his own part in composition. This attitude is typical of the early period of Greek literature as a whole in the way that poetry is described in both human and divine terms.

One of the conventional ways of describing a poet is to call him a *Μουσῶν θεράπων*, and *θεράπων* is a revealing word. It does not imply that the poet is passive or servile but rather suggests a close relationship between the Muse and the poet who attends here.⁶⁵ Theognis specifies the nature of this relationship more precisely when he describes the poet as a messenger (*ἄγγελος*) of the Muses.⁶⁶ The relationship between the poet and the Muse is described in a number of different ways by Pindar, as for example in *fr.* 150: *μαντεύεο, Μοῖσα, προφατεύσω δ' ἐγώ*. This metaphor conveys Pindar's sense of dependence on the Muse, but also stresses his part as the *προφήτης* (one who interprets and proclaims) of her message.⁶⁷ As Dodds explains: 'The words he uses are the technical terms of Delphi; implicit in them is the old analogy between poetry and divination. But observe that it is the Muse, and not the poet, who plays the part of the Pythia; the poet does not ask to be himself "possessed", but only to act as the interpreter for the entranced Muse. And that seems to be the original relationship. Epic tradition represented the poet as deriving supernormal knowledge from the Muses, but not as falling into ecstasy or being possessed by them.'⁶⁸ Dodds is clearly right in saying that 'the Muse, and not the poet . . . plays the part of the Pythia', but to infer from this that the Muse is actually *possessed* seems to me dubious. It is difficult to see who or what might be possessing the Muse, and Pindar nowhere makes any reference to possession. The emphasis in the fragment is on Pindar's position as the intermediary between gods and men, not on the psychological state of the Muse. Pindar also emphasises his active role in poetic creation by his use of the term *εὐρίσκω*, as at *O.* iii 4-6:

*Μοῖσα δ' οὐτῶ ποι παρέ-
στα μοι νεοσίγαλον εὐρόντι τρόπον
Δωρίῳ φωνὰν ἐναρμόξαι πεδίλῳ
ἀγλαόκωμον*⁶⁹

And elsewhere he describes his poetry as simultaneously the gift of the Muses (*Μοισᾶν δόσιν*) and the product of his own mind (*γλυκὺν καρπὸν φρενός*).⁷⁰ Poetic creativity depends both on inspiration and on conscious effort.

⁶¹ See e.g. Dodds 1-18; A. Lesky, *Göttliche und menschliche Motivation im homerischen Epos* (Heidelberg 1961).

⁶² See e.g. Lanata, 13-14.

⁶³ See e.g. O. Becker, 'Das Bild des Weges', *Hermes Einzels.* iv (Berlin 1937); Harriott 64-5.

⁶⁴ See e.g. W. Schadewaldt, *Von Homers Welt und Werk*³ (Stuttgart 1959) 78-9; Dodds 10; Maehler 22-3; Harriott 92 and bibliography there.

⁶⁵ See *Pi. P.* iv 286-7 where the free attendant (*θεράπων*) is contrasted with the slave (*δράστας*). For *θεράπων* of the poet see e.g. Hes. *Th.* 100; *h. Hom.* xxxii 20; Choeril. *fr.* 1; *Ar. Av.* 909. Cf. *Bacch.* v 192 (*πρόπολος*); *Sapph. fr.* 150 (*μοισσοπόλος*).

⁶⁶ See B. A. van Groningen, *Theognis: Le premier livre* (Amsterdam 1966) *ad. loc.* and M. S. Silk, *Interaction in Poetic Imagery* (Cambridge 1974) 89 who notes that '*Μουσῶν θεράπων* is an absolutely conventional periphrasis for the poet; *Μουσῶν ἄγγελος* is live metaphor'.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Pi. Pa.* vi 6; *Bacch.* ix 3. On *προφήτης* see E. Fascher *ΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ* (Giessen 1927); H. W. Parke, *CO* xxxiv (1940) 85; Fraenkel on *Aesch. Ag.* 1099.

⁶⁸ 82.

⁶⁹ Cf. *O.* i 110, *N.* vi 54, viii 20, *fr.* 122.14; *Bacch. fr.* 5. Cf. *ἔρευνᾶν* at *Pa.* vii b 20. And in general see Becker (n. 62) 73; Maehler 96; Harriott 60-1.

⁷⁰ *O.* vii 7-8. Cf. *N.* iv 6-8; *Bacch.* xii 1-3, xiii 220-9.

CRAFT

Like Pindar the early Greek poets as a whole seem to have had a very balanced view of poetic creativity, more balanced than some scholars would allow. Havelock,⁷¹ as I have already said, maintains that in the early period poetry was thought of as a craft and that the ‘contrary conception’ of poetic inspiration was invented in the fifth century. Other scholars take the directly opposite view. Barmeyer,⁷² for example, suggests that the early Greek *αοιδός* is to be regarded as inspired rather than as a craftsman. And Svenbro in his recent book argues that ‘pour Homère et Hésiode l’aède tient sa parole “de la Muse”, il n’apparaît nullement comme le “producteur” de son discours’⁷³ and even that ‘l’idée même de l’aède comme auteur du chant est en effet “systématiquement” rejetée par Homère’.⁷⁴ The situation of the choral poet, on the other hand, is completely different: ‘toujours en quête de commissions . . . il doit *insister* sur le fait qu’il est le “producteur” de son poème afin d’être rémunéré, et il le fait au moyen de nombreuses métaphores fondées sur l’analogie entre poète et artisan’.⁷⁵ In his zeal to stress the importance of the different social situations of the Homeric *αοιδός* and the choral poet Svenbro ignores the continuity in attitudes to poetry which exists between them. The notion that the poet receives his words from the Muse is not confined to Homer and Hesiod any more than the notion of the poet as craftsman is confined to Pindar and the choral poets.

In the *Odyssey* the bard is included in a list of *δημοεργοί*:

τίς γὰρ δὴ ξείνον καλεῖ ἄλλοθεν αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν
ἄλλον γ’, εἰ μὴ τῶν οἱ δημοεργοὶ ἔασι,
μάντιν ἢ ἰητῆρα κακῶν ἢ τέκτονα δούρων
ἢ καὶ θέσπιν αοιδόν, ὃ κεν τέρπησιν ἀείδων;

(*Od.* xvii 382–5)

Svenbro argues that this passage cannot be taken as evidence for the idea of the poet as craftsman, referring to Vernant’s observation that the word *δημοεργός* ‘ne qualifie pas à l’origine l’artisan en tant que tel . . . il définit toutes les activités qui s’exercent en dehors de l’*οἶκος*, en faveur d’un public’.⁷⁶ Now it may be true that the word *δημοεργός* in itself does not imply the notion of craftsmanship, but the context in which the word occurs must surely be considered. The fact that the bard is included in a list of people who have specialised skills which can be of use to the community suggests that he too possesses a certain skill. When Phemius has to justify his existence to Odysseus he does so on the grounds that he is *αὐτοδίδακτος*, a word which clearly implies that there is at least an element of skill in the poet’s activity. At *Od.* xi 368 Alcinous praises Odysseus for telling his story *ἐπισταμένως* (that is, skilfully) like a bard. And, as I have pointed out, the phrase *κατὰ κόσμον* used of Demodocus’ song at *Od.* viii 489 refers as much to the construction as to the contents of the song.⁷⁷

The importance of skill in poetry during the early period is also apparent from the frequency of references to the teaching and learning of poetry, and from the repeated use of skill words vis-à-vis poetry: *οἶδα*, *ἐπίσταμαι*, *σοφός*, *σοφία*, *τέχνη*.⁷⁸ Bruno Snell has shown that the word *ἐπίσταμαι* in the early period means primarily know (how).⁷⁹ Similarly *οἶδα*, *τέχνη*, *σοφός* and *σοφία* denote practical ability and knowledge rather than ‘wisdom’. Homer uses the word *σοφία* only once, and in connection with a carpenter (*Il.* xv 412). And Hesiod uses the

⁷¹ 156.

⁷² *Op. cit.* (n. 7) 70.

⁷³ *Op. cit.* (n. 4) 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 193. Cf. 195.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 193–5.

⁷⁷ On the notion of poetic skill in Homer see especially Schadewaldt (n. 64) 70–5.

⁷⁸ For the teaching idiom see e.g. Hom. *Od.* viii 481,

488, xvii 519, xxii 347; Hes. *Th.* 22, *Op.* 662; Sol. *fr.* 13.51. Cf. the idea that man learnt to sing from the birds: Democr. *fr.* 154; Alc. *fr.* 39, 40. For *οἶδα* see e.g. *Od.* i 337; Alc. *fr.* 40; Archil. *fr.* 120.2. For *ἐπίσταμαι* see e.g. *Od.* xi 368; Hes. *Op.* 107; Archil. *fr.* 1.2; Sol. *fr.* 13.52.

⁷⁹ *Die Ausdrücke für den Begriff des Wissens in der vorplatonischen Philosophie* (Berlin 1924) 81–3.

word of skill in seamanship (*Op.* 649) as well as of Linus' musical skill (*fr.* 306). Craftsmen of many different varieties are described as *σοφός*—including poets.⁸⁰ Snell points out that *σοφός* originally meant 'one who understands his craft': the emergence of *σοφ-* words to mean 'wisdom' in a more intellectual sense was a gradual process.

The use of the word *ποιητής* to mean poet⁸¹ is evidently based on the notion of the poet as craftsman, but the evidence I have cited shows that this concept did not suddenly emerge from nowhere in the fifth century. In a fragment attributed to Hesiod (*fr. dub.* 357) poetic composition is likened to stitching:

*ἐν Δήλῳ τότε πρῶτον ἐγὼ καὶ Ὅμηρος ἀοιδοὶ
μέλομεν, ἐν νεαροῖς ὕμνοις ῥάψαντες ἀοιδῆν.*

The etymology of the words *ράπτειν*, *ῥαψιδεῖν*, *ῥαψιδός* and their precise meaning when applied to poets is uncertain, but clearly they involve an idea of craft.⁸² Craft metaphors, as Svenbro rightly observes, become more frequent in the poetry of Bacchylides and Pindar—the poet is described not only as a stitcher and weaver of songs, but also as builder, carpenter or sculptor.⁸³ Svenbro argues that this use of craft metaphors is to be understood in terms of the professional poet's economic dependence on his patrons. Since what he produces is not tangible, the poet is in a weaker position than the craftsman as regards payment: he must therefore emphasize that his poetry is 'une merchandise' and portray his activity 'comme une activité artisanale afin d'être rémunéré'.⁸⁴ This theory sheds more light on Svenbro's own preoccupations than on Pindar. *P.* v 72–6 indicate that Pindar was an aristocrat,⁸⁵ and the tone in which he addresses, for example, Thorax at *P.* x 64–6 or Hiero at *P.* i 85–94 suggests that he was on equal terms with his patrons rather than an inferior subject.⁸⁶ Pindar's craft metaphors reflect his attitude to his art, they do not tell us about his social status. And whilst it is true that Pindar uses a large number of craft metaphors when speaking of his poetry, he says much more about his poetry in general than do his epic predecessors—a point not noted by Svenbro. He is more self-consciously articulate about his poetry—more self-conscious about his inspiration and genius as well as about his craftsmanship. Svenbro is not the only scholar guilty of one-sidedness in discussing Pindar's attitude to poetry. Grube, for example, claims that Pindar 'despises technique and training; everything in poetry is natural talent'.⁸⁷ This statement is misleading. Whilst Pindar does contrast the true poet who is a poet by nature (*φυᾶ*) with the poet who has merely been taught his craft,⁸⁸ he never denies the importance of technique in poetry. His frequent use of craft metaphors and his own evident concern with technique show that he regarded technique as a vital ingredient in poetry. But for the true poet mere technique is not enough.

CONCLUSIONS

It was Plato who, so far as we know, first opposed the concepts of poetic inspiration and

⁸⁰ See Snell (n. 79) 5–7, where he gives a list of *σοφοί* including seers, generals, steersmen, doctors, coach drivers, wrestlers, cooks, and farmers. For *σοφ-* words of poets, see e.g. *Sol. fr.* 13.52; *Ibyc. fr.* 1.23; *Theog.* 770, 995; *Pi. O.* ii 86 and other references cited by Lanata 83–5 (Pindar, of course, invests the terms *σοφός* and *σοφία* with a new significance: in particular *σοφός* denotes for him a rare individual, set apart from his fellows both by his inborn nature and by his communion with the gods); *Xenoph. fr.* 2.12; *Ar. Nu.* 547, *Pax* 797, *Lys.* 368. For a detailed study of the subject see B. Gladigow, *Sophia und Kosmos* (Hildesheim 1965).

⁸¹ *Hdt.* ii 53; *Ar. Ach.* 654. See further e.g. Harriott 93–4. Similar terminology for the poet's craft occurs in Sanskrit and other I.E. languages. See M. West, 'Greek

Poetry 2000–700 B.C.' *CQ* xxiii (1973) 179 and bibliography there.

⁸² For a sensible discussion see Harriott 94.

⁸³ See e.g. *Bacch.* v 9–10, xiii 223, xix 8–10; *Pi. O.* vi 1–4, 86–7, *P.* iii 113, vi 9, *N.* ii 1–2, iii 4–5, *I.* i 14, *fr.* 194.

⁸⁴ *Op. cit.* (n. 4) 178–9, 187, 168–70.

⁸⁵ See Wilamowitz *Pindaros* (Berlin 1922) 124; M. R. Lefkowitz, 'τὼ καὶ ἐγώ: The First Person in Pindar', *HSCP* lxxvii (1963) 229–32.

⁸⁶ See the further criticisms of St. Fogelmark in his review of Svenbro, *Gnomon* l (1978) 13–24.

⁸⁷ *Op. cit.* (n. 17) 9.

⁸⁸ *O.* ii 83–88. Cf. *O.* ix 100–2, *N.* iii 40–2.

technique when he described inspiration as *ἐνθουσιασμός*. Even Democritus, who is often considered a precursor to Plato, evidently did not consider inspiration and technique as incompatible: *Ὅμηρος φύσεως λαχὼν θεαζούσης ἐπέων κόσμον ἐτεκτῆνατο παντοίων* (DK fr. 21). In fact throughout early Greek poetry there seems to be an equal emphasis on craft and inspiration. If we are unable to accept this fact, it must be because we have certain preconceived notions about the concept of poetic inspiration and its relation to the idea of poetry as a craft. Doubtless the notion of inspiration originated from the poet's feeling of dependence on the divine. And this feeling corresponds to the belief of many poets throughout history that, as Dodds put it, 'creative thinking is not the work of the ego'.⁸⁹ But the idea of poetic inspiration in early Greece differs in a number of important ways from subsequent conceptions. It was particularly associated with knowledge, with memory and with performance; it did not involve ecstasy or possession, and it was balanced by a belief in the importance of craft. But although it therefore laid far more emphasis on the technical aspects of poetic creativity, it was nevertheless an idea essentially connected with the phenomenon of inspiration as we know it.

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⁸⁹ 81.