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# THE PROEMS OF THE ILIAD AND THE ODYSSEY

BY

B. A. VAN GRONINGEN

The proems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have not always been appreciated in the same way. An intelligent rhetor as Quintilian undoubtedly was, writes: "Again, in the few lines with which he introduces both of his epics, has he not, I will not say observed, but actually established the law which should govern the composition of the exordium? For, by his invocation of the goddesses believed to preside over poetry he wins the goodwill of his audience, by his statement of the greatness of his themes he excites their attention, and renders them receptive by the briefness of his summary" <sup>1</sup>). However, if we survey the philological literature of the last century, the opinion is, generally speaking, less favourable. It is based on some ascertainments to which a certain value cannot be denied: the prologue of a Greek epic naturally contains three elements, the invocation of the Muses, the summary of the poem, the fixation of the starting point. In fact both the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius and Vergil's *Aeneid* answer this scheme to the full <sup>2</sup>).

Homer, indeed, invokes the Muses. Because his work is no longer connected with the cult of a special deity, nor recited at its festival, he mentions Zeus' daughter who is accepted everywhere as the patroness of poetry. This invocation is only due to a sacred tradition and is not organically connected with the following epic tale.

The second element, the indication of the subject, is directly connected with the poem itself, because the latter will have to be the working-out of the theme proposed in the beginning. The purpose of this indication is obvious. The continuity of the mythical tales which, as a rule, lack a sharply defined beginning as well as a precise ending, and the facility with which the poet starts on side-tracks compel him to apply several compositional devices which are meant to safe-guard the unity and the cohesion of the whole. The more extensive the piece, the more

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<sup>1</sup>) X 1, 48 (transl. H. E. Butler, Loeb Library); cf. IV 1, 34.

<sup>2</sup>) The former invokes Phoebus and announces afterwards that he is going to treat the voyage of the Argonauts from their sailing into the Pontus till the winning of the Golden Fleece. Virgil's introduction shows the same explicitness and preciseness.

necessary those methods. One of these is the prefatory announcement of the contents <sup>3)</sup>).

Thirdly, we find the indication of the beginning of the tale. Some years ago, I had the honour to expound to you <sup>4)</sup>) that every epic, even the most extensive one, was considered as part of a greater whole. Then the starting-point must needs be announced at once.

We find these three parts considered essential *a priori* in the poem of the *Iliad* as well as of the *Odyssey*. There are other points of similarity <sup>5)</sup>: both are short and contain respectively no more than 8 and 10 verses; the syntactic structure is well-nigh the same, since both are formed as a compositional „ring”, a usual way of proceeding when one wants to round off a part and to separate it from an adjacent one; both omit to mention data which are essential, systematically speaking, a.o. the name of Odysseus, the place of Achilles' wrath in the chronology of the Trojan war etc. This similarity may be due to tradition or to the poet; for the time being, we are not yet able to choose with some certainty between these alternatives.

It is then perhaps worth while looking for parallels. First of all, we shall search in the two Homeric poems themselves. We find something, indeed. In the *Iliad* the poet invokes the Muses five times more. The enumeration of the Greek nations with their leaders and their ships as they prepared themselves for the expedition against Troy, is introduced in the second book as follows <sup>6)</sup>: "Tell me now, ye Muses that have dwellings on Olympus — for ye are goddesses and are at hand and know all things, whereas we hear but a rumour and know not anything — who were the captains of the Danaans and their lords. But the common folk I could not tell nor name, nay, not though ten tongues were mine and ten mouths and a voice unwearying, and though the heart within me were of bronze, did not the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus that beareth the aegis, call to my mind all them that came beneath Ilios. Now will I tell the captains of the ships and the ships in their order". As we see, the invocation of the goddesses and the mentioning of the subject occur both. The latter is sharply defined. As it is no tale, but an enumeration there is no question of the indication of a starting-point.

<sup>3)</sup> The technique of a recitation where the public often gave out the theme (cf. § 429 r.) had already collaborated to form this habit at a time when the poems were still of limited size.

<sup>4)</sup> *Paratactische compositie in de oudste Grieksche literatuur*, Mededeelingen 83, A 3 (1937) p. 109 (27) f.

<sup>5)</sup> Cf. S. E. Bassett, *The poems of the Iliad and the Odyssey*. Amer. J. of Phil. 44 (1923) p. 339 f., especially p. 340-1.

<sup>6)</sup> B 484 f. Here and elsewhere I avail myself of the translation of A. T. Murray (Loeb Library).

The four other cases are much shorter and are strongly resembling each other. In the same second book we find the first of these four cases (761-2); after the enumeration of the Greek army we read: "But who was far the best among them do thou tell me, Muse — best of the warriors and of the horses that followed with the sons of Atreus". In some 16 verses the exact answer to this simple question is given.

The next passage (*A* 218-20) does not differ much from the preceding one. The Muses are asked to tell "who it was that first came to face Agamemnon, either of the Trojans or of their allies". The answer follows at once: it is Iphidamas.

Æ 508-9 run as follows: "Tell me now, ye Muses that have dwellings on Olympus, who it was of the Greeks that first carried of an armour". We learn that it is Aias.

At last *II* 112-3: the poet invokes the Muses requesting them to relate how it came to pass that the fire fell on the ships. Then follows the narrative.

We do not learn much from these passages. As natural as the invocations of the Muses, so precise is the statement of the subjects. As only one single concrete and plain question is asked, the indication of the theme and its working-out closely correspond with each other. But a starting-point cannot possibly be fixed.

Here the *Odyssey* teaches us something more<sup>7)</sup>. When seated as a guest among the Phaeacian lords Odysseus requests the minstrel Demodocus (*Ø* 492 f.) "to sing of the building of the horse of wood, which Epeius made with Athene's help, the horse which once Odysseus led up into the citadel as a thing of guile, when he had filled it with the men who sacked Ilios". The singer complies with this request (499 f.) and he sang beginning with the god, "taking up the tale where the Argives had embarked on their benched ships and were sailing away, after casting fire on their huts, while those others led by glorious Odysseus were now sitting in the place of assembly of the Trojans, sitting in the horse". Here we find the three normal elements: Odysseus fixes the subject himself, "the building of the horse"; Demodocus begins with the divinity and chooses his starting-point. This choice, however, causes a certain discrepancy between the theme and the tale.

Twice already this minstrel had made himself heard. "The Muse moved the minstrel to sing of the glorious deeds of warriors, from that lay the fame whereof had then reached broad heaven, even the quarrel of Odysseus and Achilles, son of Peleus, how once they strove

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<sup>7)</sup> *Pro memoria* we mention *α* 325 f. Phemius sings in the midst of the suitors "of the return of the Achaeans — the woeful return from Troy" (cf. 489 f. *Ἀχαιῶν οἴτος*). This is only an indication of the subject.

with furious words at a rich feast of the gods". The invocation is mentioned indirectly, the contents of the song directly (§ 73 f.)

In § 266 v. Demodocus preludes on his stringed instrument in order to sing "of the love of Ares and Aphrodite of the fair crown, how first they lay together in the house of Hephaestus secretly". The invocation is not mentioned, but theme and starting-point are communicated to the audience. We must pay attention to the fact that the statement of the subject is no table of contents, for Homer does not allude to the revenge of cheated Hephaestus beforehand, however important this element may be in the narrative itself.

Of the so-called *Little Iliad* the two first verses are preserved: "Ilios do I sing and Dardania, land with its powerful steeds, that wrought so bitter woe to the Greeks, servants of Ares", and of the *Thebaid* the first verse: "Thirsty Argos do thou sing, o Muse, whence once the lords...". It is difficult to draw reliable conclusions from these lines, for it is perfectly unknown to us what the proems contained further<sup>8)</sup>. We ascertain that the poet of the *Little Iliad* does not invoke the Muses, but marks the contents as follows: Troy and the troubles of the Greeks. This is very general; we know that the epic related the battle of Troy from the end of our own *Iliad* onwards. But nobody can possibly know whether the poet defined the contents afterwards more precisely. This applies still more to the one verse of the *Thebaid*<sup>9)</sup>, and we are, as it were, driven back once more to the examination of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* themselves<sup>10)</sup>.

Neither the invocation of the Muse nor the determination of the starting-point do I wish to treat here, but only the indication of the contents. It is a well-known fact that the indications of the contents do not tally with the contents themselves. In the prologue of the *Iliad* we do not read anything about the vain efforts to reconcile the

<sup>8)</sup> That is why it is risky to conclude with J. A. Scott (*the Unity of Homer* p. 252-3): "It must have been more than pure accident that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* both have this perfect introduction, a perfection approached by no other early poet".

<sup>9)</sup> It is, for instance, very well possible that the *Thebaid* was the epic of the Argive assailants.

<sup>10)</sup> According to Aristoxenus there was a second proem of the *Iliad* extant:

Ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια σώματ' ἔχουσαι  
ὄππως δὴ μῆνις τε χόλος θ' ἔλε Πηλείωνα  
Λητοῦς τ' ἀγλαὸν εἶδον· ὁ γὰρ βασιλεὶ χολωθεῖς etc.

This is clearly meant as a transitional passage between the *Iliad* and the end of the *Cypria*. Less clear is the proem of the so-called *Old Iliad*:

Μοῦσας ἀείσω καὶ Ἀπόλλωνα κλυτότοξον  
Λητοῦς καὶ Διὸς εἶδον· ὁ γὰρ βασιλεὶ χολωθεῖς etc.

quarellers, neither about Patroclus and his death which is, for all that, the unexpected cause of the decisive change in Achilles' heart, nor about the revenge on Hector and so, at the same time, about the end of the wrath. In the first verses of the *Odyssey* no mention is made of that which happens in Ithaca, of Telemachus' part in the course of events, of Odysseus' retaliation. Scholars have wanted to explain these deficiencies. We need not treat all their efforts materially. It will do to quote some clear examples, because to me only the method and the principles are of interest. About the proem of the *Iliad* we read in Croiset's extensive History of Greek Literature as follows<sup>11</sup>): "Ces vers, en raison même de leur peu de précision, ne peuvent pas avoir été composés par un aède pour servir d'introduction au poème après son achèvement complet. C'est donc bien l'auteur de la *Querelle* (viz. mainly book A) qui a dû les mettre en tête de son chant; seulement ne devient-il pas probable par là-même qu'en les composant, il n'avait aucune intention arrêtée de développer les événements qui figurent aujourd' hui dans l'*Iliade*?"

And about the prologue of the *Odyssey* a little further<sup>12</sup>): "On peut conclure de là que cette sorte de prélude poétique a dû être composé en vue d'un groupe de chants qui comprenait les événements notables de la première partie (i.e. the tale of Odysseus' travels) dans un temps où la seconde (i.e. the narrative of that which happens in Ithaca) n'avait pas encore pris sa place et sa forme actuelles". In both cases this view, to which *mutatis mutandis* a great many investigators revert, means that the proems preserved have not been written for our *Iliad* and our *Odyssey*. This opinion is again and again connected with a certain theory about the composition and the origin of the two poems and is used to support this theory. But it is based upon the conviction that the old Greek poet can reasonably only give an indication of the contents which tallies completely with the real contents. This conviction, however, is nothing but an unproved *a priori* which, moreover, may even be erroneous.

A few words on the proem of the *Odyssey* taken from Bergk's Griechische Literaturgeschichte<sup>13</sup>) may throw light on a totally different way of interpretation: "Das Schweigen des Dichters (viz. about the second part of the poem) liesse sich rechtfertigen durch die Absicht, der Darstellung selbst nicht vorzugreifen". This means that in principle, it is true, introduction and contents must correspond with each other, but that the poet, by reason of a premeditated purpose,

<sup>11</sup>) Vol. I p. 108.

<sup>12</sup>) Vol. I p. 273.

<sup>13</sup>) Vol. I p. 663 n. 18.

deviates from the rule. Materially seen, the purpose is the following: he wants to keep the audience in suspense. This purpose is certainly not in accordance with the poet's habits: as we know, he never fears to announce beforehand what he is going to say or intends relating later on<sup>14</sup>). But in rejecting this application of a principle we have not yet refuted the principle itself and it might still be true that the poet is led by conscious designs and not by the natural and unpremeditated current of his inspiration. This distinction sounds a little mechanical, but it is, all the same, no less real<sup>15</sup>). So once again the question may be put: is it so certain that Homer proceeded according to such semi-rhetorical principles? Let us take an other example. Bassett is of opinion<sup>16</sup>) that the poem "gives the theme of the tale... with just enough detail to catch the attention". The restriction is essentially the same as the one proposed by Bergk, but here the interest must not apparently be excited by that which the poet does not tell, but by such details as he communicates beforehand. Materially, the difficult question then arises, c.g. in the *Odyssey*, why Homer chooses from the many adventures of his hero which he is going to relate, exactly one so unimportant as the eating of Helios' kine, which, moreover, does not concern Odysseus himself, but chiefly his comrades. And the same question of principle presents itself again.

Real insight will not be reached by assuming in anticipation a number of unproved methodical principles but by a careful and, at the same time, sharp observation of the facts themselves. Sharp, because nothing may escape our attention; careful, because we may only combine those facts which force themselves as connected upon our observation.

First of all then, we must throw light on a fact known to everyone but which is perhaps more important than one thinks. In what way do the poets again and again announce the theme of their tale? First of all by one single word: *μῆνιν* in the *Iliad*, *ἄνδρα* in the *Odyssey*, *Ἴλιον* in the *Little Iliad*<sup>17</sup>), *Ἄργος* in the *Thebaid*<sup>18</sup>). This is not so much a statement of the contents, but sooner a very concise indication of the subject, the theme itself<sup>19</sup>). All details are omitted for the

<sup>14</sup>) Cf. G. E. Duckworth, *Foreshadowing and Suspense in the Epics of Homer, Apollonius and Vergil*, 1933.

<sup>15</sup>) Whoever takes the trouble to compare two poets of the first rank as Aeschylus and Callimachus, will clearly notice this difference.

<sup>16</sup>) O.c. p. 340; cf. p. 342: the antithesis between Odysseus and his comrades in the poem draws the attention to the hero.

<sup>17</sup>) The words *καὶ Δαρδανίην ἐὺπῶλον* do not add anything essential.

<sup>18</sup>) Cf. above p. 4.

<sup>19</sup>) Cf. already Naeke's *Opuscula* I p. 268 about the *Iliad*: "*Μῆνιν* pollicetur: quod argumentum quam grave sit, aptissime monstrat ex effectu: *οὐλομένην ἢ μυρία* et quae sequuntur"; and Bassett o.c. p. 340 where he speaks about *οὐλομένην*, and *πολύτροπον*, which both "characterize the theme".

time being, but we may declare emphatically, on the basis of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* which we possess completely, that these initial words are uncommonly expressive and exact. It would be difficult to give in a single word a more striking *résumé* of the psychological drama of the *Iliad* and of the tale of Odysseus' adventures. To the question whether we justly assume that Homer intends indicating the subjects in his prologues we may answer in the affirmative, already with a view to these two words only. But there follow all sorts of things which clamour for formal and material explanation. Simple observation must again be our starting-point.

In the four cases at present known to us the theme-word is defined in the same grammatical form, first by a sounding epithet, then by a relative clause. In the *Iliad* we read: *Μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος | οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρὶ Ἴαχαιοῖς* etc.; in the *Odyssey*: "*Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε Μοῦσα πολύτροπον*"<sup>20</sup>), *ὅς μάλα πολλά* etc.; in the *Little Iliad*: "*Ἴλιον ἀείδω καὶ Δαρδανίην ἐύπωλον, | ἧς περὶ πολλὰ πάθον* etc., and in the *Thebaid*: "*Ἄργος ἄειδε θεὰ πολυδίψιον, ἔνθεν ἄνακτες* etc."<sup>21</sup>) This simple statement already enables us to draw two conclusions. It bears out the opinion that the poet really wants to indicate the contents with the first word. It shows, moreover, that everything which follows is subordinate to it, that is to say that it forms a current of ideas which that one word sets into motion. Materially, however, there are various possibilities. A mind, systematically trained and systematically writing will define the theme-word with an exact statement of the contents and we shall read a survey, logically justified, of the real narrative. But such treatment presupposes a purposeful strain of the attention; such a sustained exposition, consequently set up, requires strenuous perseverance and active guidance of a trained mind. There is a quite different way of thinking, a passive, automatic and flowing one, which does not choose the successive ideas on account of their suitability for a broad context, but immediately accepts them when they spontaneously arise. These two extremes, however, can also cooperate in all sorts of intermediate forms.

Unconcerned observation shows once again how the Homeric proems behave in this respect. The proem of the *Odyssey* runs as follows: "Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices, who wandered full many ways after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy. Many were the men whose cities he saw and whose mind he learned, aye, and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the sea, seeking to win

<sup>20</sup>) For *πολύτροπον* see Appendix A.

<sup>21</sup>) A fifth example is easily deduced from  $\text{ᾠδ. 492-3}$ : „Sing me the building of the horse of wood, which Epeius made with Athene's help etc."

his own life and the return of his comrades. Yet even so he saved not his comrades, though he desired it sore, for through their own blind folly they perished — fools, who devoured the kine of Helios Hyperion; but he took from them the day of their returning. Of these things, Goddess, daughter of Zeus, beginning where thou wilt, tell thou even unto us". It seems obvious: here is a case in which the two tendencies mentioned above are both working. On the one hand the poet's attention is undeniably drawn towards the adventurous wanderings of his hero: he speaks of towns which Odysseus visited, of men whose mind he learned to know, of trouble at sea and of the struggle for the preservation of his own life and that of his comrades. All this is put in general terms, nothing is specified; his attention is not bent upon the details of his narrative. Exactly for this reason it may easily be conceived that he goes astray, if it is allowed to say so. Speaking more precisely: the casual nature of the association of his thoughts and the freedom of his inspiration bring him on a by-path which he certainly did not mean to tread. It is said that Odysseus wanted to save his comrades also. Directly and by antithetical association the thought urges itself upon his mind that Odysseus did not succeed in doing so and was unable to save them. The question: why not? automatically arises and brings about the idea that they owe their doom to their own folly. Is it strange that the poet now mentions their sin? The association of ideas indeed seems quite obvious, and so does the last remark that Helios deprived them of their return. So what does happen in this poem? The poet mentions the theme with one pithy word, *ἄνδρα*; afterwards he communicates in general what happened to this man, but meanwhile a casual detail catches his attention and breaks the line which was not strained too tightly. The result is that an element of very little interest in the whole finds a place here. Then the poet pulls himself as it were together, back to the right path when saying: *τῶν ἀμόθεν γε θεά, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπέ καὶ ἡμῖν*. That strange *ἀμόθεν* is not only a symbol of the formal and traditional character of the indication of the starting-point, but also a direct consequence of the inefficient statement of the contents which is so abruptly broken off <sup>22</sup>).

But this may be only incidental in the *Odyssey*. Let us, therefore, cast a look on the introduction of the *Iliad*. "The wrath do thou sing, O Goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles, that baneful wrath which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans, and send forth to Hades many

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<sup>22</sup>) That is the reason why *τῶν* is not a clear reference to the preceding sentence, but a vague summary of that which the poet might have heard. Bassett (p. 341) translates too precisely: "anywhere in the wanderings".

valiant souls of warriors, and made themselves to be a spoil for dogs and all manner of birds; and thus the will of Zeus was being brought to fulfilment; — sing thou thereof from the time when at the first there parted in strife Atreus' son, king of men, and goodly Achilles". The resemblance and the difference between the two proems strike us at once. The resemblance consists in the relative clauses following the theme-word with its epithet, which are kept as general as those of the *Odyssey*: we read of grief for the Achaeans, of dead warriors and corpses violated by beasts of prey. The difference is that there is no transition here to particulars. On the contrary, the mentioning of Zeus' plans which will accomplish themselves, leads us away from the facts to the most general background. But essentially there is similarity here too: the poet is influenced by the two tendencies discussed above. The theme-word *μηρις* calls to his mind a general image of what he is going to relate, but the strongly associative character of his imagination causes him to work out the epithet *ούλομένη*, first of all in its consequences, finally in its metaphysical cause<sup>23</sup>). Homer does not talk about the course of events itself; there is no real summary of the contents.

So the same way of thinking, the same poetical technique is decisive as to form and contents of the two proems: no sharp discipline of the mind, but easy association of ideas, "strains of unpremeditated art". Again and again the poet is fascinated by the things at hand and expresses them in an unconcerned way; his muse is the inspiration of the moment, not a lasting purpose.

It is necessary to return to the opinion of those who judge that the preserved proems were never written for our *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, but for other epics. It is worth while asking what epics can possibly be meant, if we put as a principle that the proem must give an efficient survey of the contents. Apart from the theme-word both restrict themselves to general expressions from which it is impossible to construct a better fitting whole, and the mentioning of the killing of Helios' kine, being a very particular fact, never can find a reasonable place beside the foregoing generalities in a systematically projected statement of contents. For the latter, as well as the theme-word, bring *Odysseus* into particular evidence<sup>24</sup>). Should then that epic of the "man"

<sup>23</sup>) The idea that Zeus' will forms the chief motive (so already Aristophanes and Aristarchus, cf. schol. *A* 5-6, *A* 604, *N* 348) or an important auxiliary element (so Bassett p. 345) in the *Iliad* is, I think, exceedingly far-fetched. If this thought had not been expressed in the proem, nobody would have proposed the theory. But the belief that the proem must give a real table of contents, peeps out here.

<sup>24</sup>) Even there where the doom of the comrades is mentioned for the first

end in the death of "comrades?" This would make a queer poem. The conclusion seems to be justified that the preserved proems fit as well, or if we prefer to say so, as badly to the preserved poems as to other epics of which we can construct the contents at will. For there is but one alternative: either the statements of the contents remain unsuitable or the poems are monstrosities.

If we assume that the prologue must not contain a real survey of the contents, but that it grows spontaneously in a poet's mind, which follows a free course and listens more to his muse than to a theory, this disagreeable dilemma no longer exists. This idea fits also very well into the frame of our knowledge concerning the epic technique of the archaic period. The poet performs his work with startling ease; verse is strung on to verse in a supple and elegant way; it is not a stiff and wearisome wrestling on from step to step, but an easy gliding on which, of course, does not exclude utmost expressiveness of diction and intensity of feeling; nothing seems to cost him any trouble; nowhere severe discipline of thinking becomes apparent, which keeps the inspiration within bounds. What is more: this conception fits also in the frame of our knowledge as regards all archaic Greek poetry. The "tournure d'esprit" which called theoretical philosophy and rhetoric into existence, was hardly awakening. Pindar knows that a prologue should emanate its glow till far in the distance, but next to that aesthetical demand of glorious beauty he lays no intellectual claim to matter-of-fact adequacy. The primary actions and reactions strongly predominate over the secondary and the cerebral ones.

It seems to me that with these views the question concerning Homer's proems is answered more satisfactorily than has been done up to now to my knowledge. But exactly when a general tendency of the mind is expressed in the nature of this proems, other prologues too must, in principle, show the same peculiarities. This is indeed the case and in a very striking measure.

We may, for instance, open the collection of the so-called *Homeric Hymns*. Most of them are so short that a comparison is out of the question. In nearly all the others the narrative is closely connected with the indication of the theme<sup>25</sup>). But the Hymn in honour of Apollo is exceedingly instructive. The first verse mentions the theme: Apollo I will sing; and as a general characterization the second verse adds that all the gods in Zeus' dwellings tremble when he appears.

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time, it is Odysseus who tries to save their lives. It is again Odysseus who does not succeed in doing so. Here and elsewhere Homer takes a special interest in the individual, the one hero, not in the nameless group of the many.

<sup>25</sup>) Cf. e.g. the Hymn to Demeter: in vs. 4 the tale has already begun.

This idea engrosses the poet's attention all at once; he leaves the matter which he probably intended treating and offers a series of images which illustrate this thought: we see him bend his bow, all gods jump up from their seats, only Leto, his mother, remains quiet at Zeus' side, takes away his arms and leads him to a chair and there Apollo receives the cup which Zeus reaches him; Leto rejoices about such a son. Then the poet greets this goddess, who bare two radiant children, Artemis on Ortygia, Apollo on Delos, close to the sacred palmtree near the Cynthus. Presently the poet will relate, indeed, the birth of the god and this intention explains why the first part of his poem ends with this particular. But the whole train of thought, preceding it, is clearly characterized by letting itself go on the stream of natural associations. The poet continues: "How shall I sing thee that art celebrated in so many hymns? For everywhere, o Phoebus, a range of songs lays ready for thee". Once more this idea is worked out and only then, in vs. 25, we hear what the subject will be<sup>26)</sup>.

Hesiod's two poems are still more important. The "*Ἔργα*" have a poem of 10 verses. It begins with the invocation of the Muses and a theme-word. For we read: "Muses of Pieria who give glory through song, come hither, tell of Zeus your father and chant his praise"<sup>27)</sup>. *Αἴα* is the theme-word and, indeed, with perfect justice. For what expresses better the basis and the trend of the whole work than the belief in Zeus almighty, maintainer of right and justice? It is necessary to quote literally what follows: "Trough him mortal men are famed or unfamed, sung or unsung alike, as great Zeus wills. For easily he makes strong, and easily he brings the strong man low; easily he humbles the proud and raises the obscure, and easily he straightens the crooked and blasts the proud, — Zeus who thunders aloft and has his dwelling most high. Attend thou with eye and ear, and make judgments straight with righteousness. And I, Perses, would tell of true things". The connection with the real contents of the poem is here still vaguer than in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. But we observe the more keenly that other characteristic, the spontaneous development of mutually connected ideas and images: Hesiod works out the motive "Zeus"; this inspires him; it leads him to a path which, it is true, runs parallel with the main road, but does not coincide with it, neither materially nor formally. Hesiod's method is practically the same as Homer's way of thinking.

It is perhaps difficult to summarize the contents of the "*Ἔργα*". For

<sup>26)</sup> The further course of this hymn shows in different places other examples of this easy gliding from one idea to another without systematic control of the mind.

<sup>27)</sup> Translation of H. G. Evelyn-White (Loeb Library).

the *Theogony*, on the other hand, it is very easy. The poem is a systematical genealogy of the gods and, at the same time, a cosmology and cosmogony. If anywhere, the prologue may be constructed here in a strictly logical form: invocation of the Muses, statement of the subject-matter, fixation of the starting-point, which would almost naturally be the real beginning of the world and the divine genealogy. In reality the poem consists of not less than 115 verses. "From the Heliconian Muses let us begin to sing", runs the first verse, giving, in this way, a variant of the ordinary invocation. The last two verses (115-5) give a real invocation together with the starting-point: "These things declare to me from the beginning, ye Muses who dwell in the house of Olympus, and tell me which of them first came to be". So this poem too is composed as a "ring". But it interests us especially what is enclosed by this ring and merely the word "that" (*ταῦτα*) in the penultimate verse shows that some indication as to the contents must precede. Let us see whether this is true and how it is given. The first mention of the Muses of the Helicon is followed (as far as vs. 10 inclusive) by a picturesque description of the dances which these goddesses perform on the sacred mountain during the night. They sing, we are further told, of Zeus, and Hera, of Athena and Apollo and all the gods; not less than 19 of them are enumerated here. Do we not recognize that double striving which we observed in Homer? The simple naming of the Muses evokes in the poet's mind the image of the dances of the divine chorus, but his intention to sing of the gods, though not yet expressed, is already alive and brings about an enumeration of their names. It is, as it were, a first foretaste of the principal dish which he intends serving. But again Hesiod wants to tell something else, how those same Muses have ordained him as a poet and charged him to sing *μακάρων γένος αἰὲν ἔόντων, σφᾶς δ' αὐτὰς πρώτων τε καὶ ὕστατον* (34-5). Here the poet interrupts himself asking: "Why all this?" and with a usual device<sup>28)</sup> he repeats the thought expressed at the beginning: "Come thou, let us begin with the Muses" (36).

He is still fascinated by this first idea and develops it in another way. Now he does not see the singing chorus anymore on the mountains of Boeotia, but in the palace of Zeus, where it pours out its delicate voice. This is a pure counterpart of the first piece and so we cannot wonder that here again the theme of the song is indicated as *θεῶν γένος αἰδοίων... ἐξ ἀρχῆς, οὓς Γαῖα καὶ Οὐρανὸς εὐρύς ἐτικτεν... δεύτερον αὐτὲ Ζῆνα... αὐτίς δ' ἀνθρώπων τε γένος κρατερῶν τε Γιγάντων* (44 f.). We notice that this is not simply any more a list of names; it is already a concise theogony; we approach the real

<sup>28)</sup> Cf. *Paratactische compositie* p. 19 f.

contents of the whole. But again the poet leads us away from it. For he cannot yet get rid of his first inspiration. He tells us the birth of the Muses, the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, their entering into the dwellings of their father on the Olympus, who "is reigning there as a king", "but distributed fairly to the Immortals their portions and declared their privileges" (71, 73-4). For the third time this is a clear allusion to the substance of the poem. But for the third time Hesiod swerves away. He now mentions the names of the Muses and singles out Calliope as the principal one, because she grants eloquence to the kings when they have to settle contests. But the minstrels also owe their glory and joy of life to the Muses, and therefore "Hail, children of Zeus! Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are for ever, those that were born of Earth and starry Heaven and gloomy Night and them that briny Sea did rear. Tell how at first gods and earth came to be, and rivers, and the boundless sea with its raging swell, and the gleaming stars, and the wide heaven above, and the gods who were born of them — and how they shared their honours — These things declare to me" (104-114). Here at the end of this long introduction we read at last a pretty accurate survey of the subject which the Muses are requested to sing. To sum up, the conflict between the two tendencies which both engross the poet's mind is very clear, indeed. On the one hand the image of the Muses strongly engages his attention and four times over he develops a certain aspect of that image. But thrice it is interrupted by the other motive which forces itself, more and more distinctly, upon his consciousness: the subject-matter of his poem, the genealogy of the gods. A systematically trained mind does not work in this way. But it does not cost much trouble to understand and even to appreciate this way of proceeding.

The result of our observations (for we hardly did more than to observe) is the following: the epic proems reflect with startling precision the mental activity of the poets which, notwithstanding all difference of matter and personal disposition, shows a distinct identity of characteristics. The knowledge of the subject to be treated, which is, as a rule, indicated by a sharply defined theme-word, does not entail a clear summary of this subject. It rather works as a tendency and asserts itself in various ways, sometimes also in different places. It is a *δύναμις* which seldom becomes a full *ἐνέργεια*. This realization is not only impeded by the little force of the tendency itself, but also by the automatism of association of thoughts and images, which actively thwarts it. The straight way of systematic composition coincides only now and then with the capricious, but picturesque path of inspiration. So both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are introduced by a proem which does not come up to strict demands of rhetoric methodics, but wears

the very characteristics, inwardly and outwardly, of the technique of the old *ᾠοδοί*. And so we have to accept them as they are. We may not criticize and reject the preserved texts on account of a theory of our own; we must start from the data themselves.

At the end of this essay we must, however, still cast a look outside the bounds of our subject proper. It is a well-known fact that the so-called Homeric Hymns bear still another name in Antiquity, viz. that of *προοίμια* <sup>29)</sup>. This is by no means remarkable if we could only think of those poems which in 20 or 30 verses contain no more than an invocation of a god adorned with many epithets, a short myth or a concise description of his power. They may be used as real prologues to an extensive epic tale. It becomes, however, difficult when the word is used to designate such voluminous poems that they cannot serve this purpose any more, but must be standing by themselves <sup>30)</sup>. Part of the solution may perhaps be sought in the material fact that a contest in epic recitation and epic poetry may extend over several days and may have begun with a collective proem of considerable length <sup>31)</sup>. But there seems to be more to be said, for the proem in itself must have contained the element which came to such a growth. By the light of our statements it is easy to distinguish this element. At a religious contest, the god of the festival is, of course, invoked and not the Muse. This may happen in a short prelude, containing mainly epithets and the like. But exactly as Hesiod at the beginning of his *Theogony* gets fascinated by the ideas which the invocation of the Muse awakes and only finds release in no less than 100 verses, so a poet can be inspired by the personality of the god of the festival in such a measure that the prelude grows larger and larger till it becomes an ample poem, so ample that it becomes at last an independent entity. Accidental inspiration grows so strong that it does not suffer anything beside it. The freedom of composition and the absence of premeditated system causes in this way a prologue, which is essentially a part of a whole, to develop into a poem which stands by itself.

<sup>29)</sup> Cf. Thuc. III 104, 4; Pind. *Nem.* 2,2.

<sup>30)</sup> This has been denied, e.g. by Wilamowitz (*Ilias und Homer* 440, but the text of Thucydides III 104, 4 mentioning the Hymn to Apollo which counts 546 dactylic hexameters, suffers no contradiction.

<sup>31)</sup> This is the theory of W. Schmid (*Griech. Lit. Geschichte* I 232-3).

## APPENDIX A

### Πολύτροπος

The epithet *πολύτροπος* which, at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, is conferred upon the hero of that poem, may have two meanings, a literal one: "much-wandering"<sup>32</sup>), and a metaphoric one: "wily". In Homer himself there is no direct instance to be found of the second meaning, but in H. Hom. Herm. 13 and 439 it certainly occurs. Moreover, Plato has explained the word in this way<sup>33</sup>) and Livius Andronicus translates it as *versutus*. Herodotus (II 121 ε 3) uses *πολυτροπίη* in the meaning of "craft". The first meaning does not seem to fit badly into α 330 in connection with the following idea, but ι 19 f. Odysseus, when introducing himself to the Phaeacians, mentions his cunning as his principal quality. It may look as if the formal similarity of the proems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* suggests a means of choosing between the two possibilities. For, we might say, *πολύτροπον* will perform the same function as its counterpart *ούλομένην* and the relative clauses *ὄς μάλα πλάγχθη* etc. will be a development of the idea expressed in the epithet, exactly as *ἦ μοι' Ἀχαιοὺς ἄλγε' ἔθηκεν* explains *ούλομένην*. Yet this seems to force the parallelism. For neither *έύπωλον* in the *Little Iliad* nor *πολυδίψιον* in the *Thebaid* are in any way connected with the following idea. They are merely adorning epithets. There is still another great difference between the value of *πολύτροπον* and *ούλομένην*. *Μῆνιν* is, in itself, perfectly clear, but this is not the case with *άνδρα*. It is the epithet which makes explicit that Odysseus is meant. So there is, I think, no reason to give an other meaning to *πολύτροπος* than the one which was generally accepted in Antiquity.

<sup>32</sup>) So Liddell-Scott-Jones s.v.

<sup>33</sup>) *Hipp. min.* 364 E f.

## APPENDIX B

α 15—19

We read, for instance, in Croiset's *Histoire de la Littérature grecque* (I 272 n. 4): "Quant aux vers 15—19, ils rompent l'enchaînement naturel des idées, qu'il serait aisé de rétablir, comme le remarque Kirchhoff, en rapprochant du commencement du vers 15 (*ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι*) la fin du vers 19 (*ἑοὶ δ' ἐλέαιρον ἅπαντες*). The verses which he wishes to cancel are to be explained in the same way as the so-called survey of contents in the proems. It is absolutely certain that the proem itself is finished after verse 10, for with verse 11 commences the description of Odysseus' condition at the beginning of the tale. But in the same way as in 7—9 part of the contents thrusts itself upon the poet's attention merely by the mentioning of Odysseus' comrades, so the image of his hero's wearisome return to Ithaca is conjured up in his mind when he speaks about the forced sojourn with Calypso. To him who does not easily follow the poet's train of thought there is still another difficulty, which made even Aristarchus consider the words *οὐδ' ἔνθα πεφυγμένος ἦεν ἀέθλων | καὶ μετὰ οἷσι φίλοισι* as a parenthesis. A wholly logical idea would be e.g.: "But when, as the seasons revolved, the year came in which the gods had ordained that he should return home to Ithaca, then Zeus spake in the middle of the gods". Instead of the latter part of the sentence we read: "not even there was he free from toils, even among his own folk". It is evident that this thought is an immediate consequence of the naming with so special emphasis of Ithaca. This name draws the poet's attention to the toils which are awaiting the hero there. So it is out of the question that we should have here an amplification of the insufficient survey of the contents in the proem itself.