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Epic and Lyric

My very title raises questions of definition. If the boundaries and essence of Greek epic are not easily nailed down, lyric is an even messier case. The texts that modern scholarship groups under that heading encompass a kaleidoscope of subgenres, metres, literary dialects, subjects, performance occasions and so forth. It is hard to define this heterogeneous corpus rigorously by reference to any single shared feature; it is much easier to define Greek lyric negatively in a rough-and-ready way: it is not epic.[1]

Before the rise of drama, epic and lyric, capaciously understood, were the only two poetic genres of recognised prestige and currency across the Greek world. Lyric from the seventh to the fifth century BCE engages with epic in manifold ways, from fine-grained allusions to traditional epic diction to explicit references to Homer as an authorial personality. Lyric texts occasionally interact with other lyric texts in similar ways, but such intra-generic connections do not seem to have been anywhere near as prevalent and pervasive – at least as far as our relatively exiguous and overwhelmingly fragmentary evidence for lyric allows us to judge. Epic does occasionally refer to lyric genres and a few epic passages have been thought to draw on lyric tropes, but the relationship between the two genres was profoundly asymmetrical. In studying how lyric deals with epic, as we shall do throughout this chapter, we examine a core lyric preoccupation that implicates the very essence of that genre.

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[1] On the definition of ancient epic and lyric, see the Introduction in this volume and Budelmann 2018: 11–14, respectively. This chapter uses the word 'lyric' in an expansive sense that includes iambus and elegy. Ancient theorisation about lyric was notably underdeveloped in relative terms, as modern theorisation about lyric has been: see Johnson 1982: 76–95 and Culler 2015, respectively.

For modern readers, Greek lyric stands in contrast to Greek epic, and early lyric texts already work in sophisticated and self-conscious ways to stake out their own distinctive positions in relationship to epic. Though these genres share significant and broad similarities, such as a concern to narrate traditional myth, many lyric engagements with epic highlight and thematise various features which are broadly characteristic of lyric itself, and which help to give this corpus a measure of substantial coherence beyond merely being something other than epic: relatively short length, a prominent speaking voice and above all a sense of occasionality which brings with it a whole deictic apparatus – a 'here', a 'now', an 'I', a 'you'. Closely studying passages where lyric is concerned to set itself apart from epic can help to give us a better sense of what these two types of texts meant to audiences in the archaic and classical periods. This particular 'epic interaction', in other words, helps to illuminate not just the nature of lyric but also the nature of epic itself.

There are several potential master narratives here. Since all of our extant, canonical Greek epic texts are often held to predate all of our extant, canonical Greek lyric texts,[2] some older scholars thought in terms of a distinct 'epic age' followed by a different 'lyric age' which witnessed an advancement of the human spirit and the birth of the individual in particular.[3] This line of thinking has fallen from favour, and with reason. Epic and lyric co-existed already from the time of the *Iliad*, which refers to lyric singing (3.54) and lyric genres (18.493). Comparative evidence from modern oral cultures would suggest that epic and lyric had co-existed for quite a long time.[4] Some canonical Greek lyric that survives in written form may well predate some canonical epic; in any event, both genres were certainly composed and performed throughout the entirety of the archaic and classical periods. The individual speaking voice is indeed an important and even constitutive feature of lyric that distinguishes it from the paradigmatically anonymous narrators of epic, but the prominence of individualised lyric personalities is better understood in generic rather than historical terms.[5] When a lyric 'I' overtly sets itself against epic, it is thematising a mode of authorial subjectivity that is an alternative to, not an advancement from, the faceless bards of epic. The two genres do not reflect separate

[2] See the timeline of ancient Greek epic in this volume.

[3] See esp. the influential Snell 1953: chap. 3. Fowler 1987: chap. 1 and Graziosi and Haubold 2009 voice cogent objections.

[4] On oral 'lyric', which may be less familiar to students of the Greek world than oral epic, see Finnegan 1977: 73–87, 135–53.

[5] On authorial personalities in both lyric and epic, and on the bardic anonymity of epic, see, respectively, Griffith 1983 and Ford 1992, who writes that 'the poetry of the past fulfilled its design as long as audiences forgot the performing poet' (7).

evolutionary stages in literary or intellectual history; they embody different and indeed complementary facets of a single overarching poetic culture.

We are now rather less inclined to read lyric as the expression of incipient individuality in part because of a much greater interest in its performance before communal audiences. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, scholars emphasised the need to read lyric as something more than just words on the page; these poems were created, so the argument goes, in order to be performed in one particular time for one particular community.[6] The lyric texts that we now read, in this framework, present themselves as the voice of an individual speaking to an audience in the here and now because that is what they were originally in fact meant to be. Indeed, one potential way of framing the relationship between epic and lyric is to think of the former as essentially panhellenic, not tied to any particular locality or performance context, and the latter as distinctively epichoric, closely linked to a single time and place. This captures an important truth: lyric speaks to the concerns of the community for which it was first performed, and some lyric texts, including the two poems discussed below, set that particular community in more or less explicit opposition to a wider community which is associated with epic poetry. Growing interest in the re-performance and later reception of lyric, however, invites us to nuance the inherited dichotomy between panhellenic, traditional epic and occasional, ephemeral lyric.[7] Wherever and whenever they were first performed, lyric texts typically look beyond the moment of their first utterance and seek to travel through space and time to reach further audiences. These texts speak vividly to the community for which they were initially performed, but they also address a larger, indefinite community comprising all those who experience the work. Indeed, as we shall see, when lyric aspires to move beyond the 'here' and imagines enduring past the 'now' of one performance, it often likens itself to those traditional epic texts which had in fact already achieved such canonicity in the real world.

The scope of this chapter's topic, which encompasses the lion's share of preserved Greek literature from roughly a quarter of a millennium, precludes comprehensiveness. The historical change witnessed over the course of this period and the persistent variety of lyric discourage pat generalisations about the whole corpus. My first section instead begins by exploring some historical factors which are crucial for understanding the literary relationship between epic and lyric in the archaic and classical periods. The next two sections study a pair of representatively dissimilar texts, Sappho 16 and

[6] Landmark works of enduring value include Gentili 1988 and Herington 1985.
[7] See, for example, the essays collected in Hunter and Uhlig 2017, Budelmann and Philiips 2018, and Power forthcoming.

Pindar's Nemean 7, in order to get a more substantial and fine-grained sense for how lyric can make use of epic. Finally, a conclusion returns to the big picture to reconsider the historical and literary relationship between these two genres.

Historical Orientation

The relevant definition of the 'epic' to which lyric responds seems to have developed during the archaic and classical periods. Scholars agree that our earliest preserved lyric already engages with epic in sophisticated ways, but it seems probable that the target of such engagement, and its characteristic modes of intertextuality, change significantly over the course of these centuries. The change can be summed up as a gradual and complex shift from references to traditions towards more precise allusions to fixed texts. For Sappho on early sixth-century Lesbos, epic may well have primarily or exclusively meant traditional stories told in the traditional way; for Pindar in fifth-century Thebes, epic certainly included the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, conceptualised as the fixed, individualised works of a famous author named Homer.[8] In an elegy on a recently recovered papyrus, Archilochus, writing in seventh-century Paros, borrows from the language which epic poets, composing with inherited tools, had long used to describe battles, and he applies this language to narrate a battle which the epic tradition had long canonised as part of the larger Trojan saga: how the Greeks, sailing to Troy, mistakenly landed on the Mysian plain (17a Swift; cf. *Cypria* arg. 7 *GEF*). Bacchylides, composing an epinician in the fifth century, closely reworks an Iliadic simile in a passage which exploits his audience's detailed knowledge of its singular Homeric model (Bacchyl. 13.124–32 → *Il.* 13.157–69).[9]

This transition from traditions to texts must be somehow connected with the rising fortunes of literacy and with the growing importance of written scripts as a basis for oral performances. It must also be connected with what Martin West termed 'the invention of Homer': it is during this period that 'Homer springs to life' (West 2011–13: 1.429) as an authorial personality just as vivid and distinctive as the individual speakers whom we encounter in lyric. As soon as lyric refers to Homer as an author, his name is connected

[8] Sappho, who never names Homer, retells many traditional stories from the Trojan saga, such as Helen's departure from Greece (Sa. 16, discussed below), but modern scholars debate whether (and how) she reacts to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that we read today: see Spelman 2017. Pindar, by contrast, names Homer several times (including at *Nem.* 7.21 and *Isth.* 4.37, both discussed below); he quotes Homeric character speech *as character speech*: *Ol.* 13.61 → *Il.* 6.211.

[9] On these two poems, see, respectively, Swift 2019: 227–41 and Fearn 2007: chap. 2.

with more than just the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* which are so familiar to modern readers. Simonides, in one of the earliest explicit references to Homer, attributes to him a detail from the funeral games of Pelias, a story nowhere covered in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (564 *PMG* = 273 Poltera). The 'Homer' of Greek lyric has memorialised a broader range of stories, including many recorded in cyclic epics more normally ascribed in later ages to various other, less famous authors. Thus Pindar confidently appeals to his audience's knowledge of Ajax's suicide just before dawn (*Isth.* 4.35a–9), a story recorded in the cyclic *Aethiopis* (fr. 6 *GEF*), and then describes how Homer has made Ajax's valour known throughout mankind. The Homer of early Greek lyric represents an enormous, interconnected record of the bygone heroic age which was still more monumental and imposing than the approximately 27,000 verses of Homeric poetry that we read today.[10]

This integral body of heroic epic was standardly experienced as poetry performed before a community, not as reified texts to be read in solitary leisure. Thus Simonides, in the fragment mentioned above, describes how Homer 'sung to the peoples' (οὕτω γὰρ Ὅμηρος . . . ἄεισε λαοῖς, 564 *PMG* = 273 Poltera); Simonides is imagining a rhapsode like those who performed Homeric poetry to mass audiences in his own day. The Pindaric ode mentioned above likewise outfits Homer with a staff (ῥάβδον, *Isth.*4.38), the identifying iconographic feature of rhapsodes (ῥαψῳδοί), from which Pindar derives their very name. The Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* is one of the few hexameter texts to discuss its own ostensible performance context, as so many lyric texts do: the speaker performs at the Panionian festival, where 'the chiton-dragging Ionian gather with their children and reverend wives' (ἑλκεχίτωνες Ἰάονες ἠγερέθονται | αὐτοῖς σὺν παίδεσσι καὶ αἰδοίῃς ἀλόχοισιν, 147–8). A range of other evidence combines to suggest that this is precisely the sort of occasion at which epic was indeed performed throughout the archaic and classical periods: prestigious and populous public celebrations which expressed and perpetuated community at high levels of social organisation.[11]

Mass audiences experienced epic in face-to-face performances, and the seriality of such performances across time and space fostered a sense of a still wider imagined community crossing generations and spanning – even helping to define – the Greek world as a whole. Simonides' reference to 'peoples' in the plural (λαοῖς, 564 *PMG* = 273 Poltera) may presume a Homer who, like the rhapsodes familiar to Simonides' contemporaries, travelled widely plying his

[10] For a diachronic approach to intertextuality, see now Kelly and Spelman forthcoming. On the wider definition of 'Homer', see Spelman 2018b with bibliography.
[11] On archaic and classical performances of epic, see Tsagalis 2018.

trade. Pindar, in the ode mentioned above, credits the rhapsode Homer with making Ajax famous among mankind (τετίμακεν δι' ἀνθρώπων, *Isth*. 4.37) and passing down his story for later generations to re-perform (λοιποῖς ἀθύρειν, 39). When Homer begins to be envisioned as an individual personality in lyric, he is generally the author of famous, canonical poems already known to everyone everywhere. The Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* helps to give a better sense of the actual social practices underwriting such grand rhetoric: the narrator promises to carry the glory of his theme 'wherever we go over the earth as we roam throughout the well-inhabited cities of men' (ὅσσον ἐπ' αἶαν | ἀνθρώπων στρεφόμεσθα πόλεις εὖ ναιεταώσας, 174–5). The speaker, who identifies himself as a blind bard who dwells in Chios and thus arguably purports to be none other than Homer himself,[12] here talks of replicating his theme in public performances throughout an indefinite multitude of Greek cities, just as countless historical rhapsodes really did throughout this period.

This double audience of epic poetry, at once both individual communities and the wider Greek world constituted by such communities, is crucial for understanding how lyric relates to epic. Some lyric poems were performed at public occasions like those at which epic was also performed, but such works usually concentrate, in a manner altogether foreign to epic, on perpetuating the glory of a particular city within the larger framework of the Greek world. Thus Pindar's *Paean* 4 appropriates the voice of the island of Keos as a whole: 'truly I, though living on a crag, am recognised by the Greeks for my excellence in the games, and I am recognised for providing the Muse in abundance' (ἤτοι καὶ ἐγὼ σ[κόπ]ελον ναίων διαγινώσκομαι μὲν ἀρεταῖς ἀέθλων | Ἑλλανίσιν, γινώσκ [ο]μα[ι] δὲ καὶ | μοῖσαν παρέχων ἅλις, 21–4). Singing these words in unison for their fellow Keans to the accompaniment of music, a dancing chorus of islanders symbolised and enacted the unity of their community; they concretely instantiated their own boast that Keos provides the Muse in abundance. Many other lyric poems, by contrast, were performed at symposia, private drinking parties that constituted a key locus for elite self-definition. Such exclusive groups could define themselves against the larger civic communities in which they were embedded. Thus Alcaeus, addressing the other members of his political faction, remembers how their fellow Mytileneans 'made Pittacus *turannos* over a gutless and ill-starred city, all together heaping praise on him' (Φίττακον πόλιος τὰς ἀχόλω καὶ βαρυδαίμονος | ἐστάσαντο τύραννον, μέγ' ἐπαίνεντες ἀόλλεες, fr. 348); elsewhere Alcaeus, for his part, recommends Pittacus for death by stoning (fr. 298).

[12] The bardic speaker instructs the chorus of Deliades to identity the poet in whom they take the most pleasure as 'a blind man who lives in rocky Chios' (τυφλὸς ἀνήρ, οἰκεῖ δὲ Χίῳ ἔνι παιπαλοέσσῃ, 172.). Spelman 2018c argues that the *Hymn to Apollo* presents itself as the work of Homer. On the tradition of Homer's blindness, see further note 22 below.

At the same time as lyric looks towards the narrower audiences of one city or a closed sympotic group, it can also aspire towards a broader reception. Theognis addresses his poetry to his young eromenos Cyrnus within a symposium, and he anticipates future symposia: 'you will be present at all banquets and feasts, reclining in the mouths of many, and with clear-sounding little auloi, attractive young men will sing of you' (θοίνῃς δὲ καὶ εἰλαπίνῃσι παρέσσῃ | ἐν πάσαις, πολλῶν κείμενος ἐν στόμασιν, | καί σε σὺν αὐλίσκοισι λιγυφθόγγοις νέοι ἄνδρες, 239–41). As the narrator of the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* envisions performing on many occasions like the one at which he now performs in the lines just mentioned, so Theognis imagines his sympotic poetry being replicated in an open-ended series of occasions. Lyric, speaking in the here and now of enunciation, aspires to a future panhellenic reception which epic has already attained as a matter of established social fact. Pindar's *Isthmian* 4, first performed in his native Thebes in honour of Melissus' athletic victory, makes this point rather explicitly. After describing how Homer made Ajax famous among mankind in the passage quoted above, the poet wishes to 'meet with the Muses' favour and light that sort of beacon of song for Melissus, too' (προφρόνων Μοισᾶν τύχοιμεν, | κεῖνον ἄψαι πυρσὸν ὕμνων | καὶ Μελίσσῳ, 43–4) – i.e. a beacon of song just as enduring and canonical as that which Homer had in fact lit for Ajax. Several other lyric texts more or less explicitly aim to do for their contemporary subject what Homer has already done for the heroes of old (Ibyc. S151 *PMG*, Simon. 11 *IEG*^{2}, Bacchyl. 13).

Lyric at once looks directly to a definite performance setting in a most un-epic way and glances towards the wider Greek world in which epic continually flowed. This double vision plays itself out with particular urgency in poems which directly engage with epic. The following sections consider two especially rich examples, Sappho 16 and Pindar's *Nemean* 7, which are selected partly in order to exemplify the sheer heterogeneity of Greek lyric. Respectively archaic and early classical, private and public, monadic and choral, stanzaic and triadic, feminine and masculine, these poems look, and really are, very different indeed. Nonetheless, by comparing and contrasting how they deal with epic we can get a better sense of what makes them both distinctively and self-consciously lyric.

Sappho 16

Sappho 16 has a good claim to be a sort of charter text for lyric engagement with epic. At work in this remarkable text are various overlapping and interconnected oppositions – individual vs. community, love vs. war, masculine vs. feminine, small vs. large, public vs. private, past vs. present – that

return in a long chain of later poems which react to epic, from Ibycus (S151 *PMG*) to Horace (*C.* 1.6) and onwards. Indeed, many of these later poems also react more or less directly to Sappho herself.

Augmented by an ancient papyrus published less than a decade ago, this poem is one of the relatively few fragments of early lyric in which the accidents of transmission allow us to make out the shape of the composition as a whole:[13]

o]ἰ μὲν ἰππήων στρότον, οἰ δὲ πέσδων,
οἰ δὲ νάων φαῖσ' ἐπὶ γᾶν μέλαι[ν]αν
ἔμμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὅτ-
τω τις ἔραται·

πά]γχυ δ' εὔμαρες σύνετον πόησαι
π]άντι τ[ο]ῦτ'· ἀ γὰρ πόλυ περσκέθοισα
κάλλος [ἀνθ]ρώπων Ἐλένα [τὸ]ν ἄνδρα
τὸν [μεγ' ἄρ]ιστον

καλλ[ίποι]σ' ἔβα 'ς Τροΐαν πλέοι[σα,
κωὐδ[ὲ πα]ῖδος οὐδὲ φίλων τοκήων
πά[μπαν] ἐμνάσθη, ἀλλὰ παράγαγ' αὔταν
]σαν

Κύπρις· ἄγν]αμπτον γὰρ [ἔχει] νόημμα
]... κούφως τ[ ]νοήσηι.
τῶ]με νῦν Ἀνακτορία[ς] ὀνέμναι-
σ' οὐ] παρεοίσας·

τᾶ]ς κε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα
κἀμάρυχμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω
ἢ τὰ Λύδων ἄρματα κἀν ὅπλοισι
πεσδο]μάχεντας.

Some say that a force of cavalry is the most beautiful thing on the dark earth, others a force of infantry, and others a force of ships; but I say that it is whatever someone desires. It's quite easy to make this understood to everyone: Helen, far excelling mankind in beauty, left her most excellent husband and sailed off to Troy, and she did not think at all of her child or of her own dear parents, but the Cyprian goddess led her … astray, for her purpose does not bend … this has reminded me now of Anactoria, who is not here. I would rather see her lovely step and the bright sparkle of her face than Lydian chariots and infantry in their armour.

[13] The new papyrus was published by Burris, Fish and Obbink 2014. The bibliography on Sappho 16 is, and ought to be, massive; Budelmann 2018: 128–9 and Neri 2021: 576–82 provide orientation and discussion. My text omits sublinear dots and liberally prints some uncertain supplements.

Sappho makes her point understandable to all by citing a story which was already familiar to everyone. She never names Paris, the object of Helen's overpowering desire, or her excellent but abandoned husband, Menelaus; she does not have to. Helen's departure from Greece was covered in the cyclic epic known, at least to later generations, as the *Cypria* (arg. 2 *GEF*). This pivotal episode, frequently but briefly referenced in Homer (e.g. *Il.* 2.356, 3.443–4, 6.290–2), must have been an established part of the Trojan saga from very early on. Since Helen's departure from Greece caused the Trojan War, as everyone knew, her story recalls the martial themes of the opening lines and sets them in a new light.

Sappho's argument depends on the truth of a story made famous in epic, but she uses this material to make a distinctly lyric point. Helen's departure from Greece was the cause of the Trojan War yet hardly the focus of the poetic tradition which had memorialised it; picking out a lyric moment within epic, Sappho's short poem recentres the whole long and violent saga around active female desire.[14]

The speaker is not the generally faceless narrator of narrative epic but a distinct individual who thematises her individuality.[15] Three anonymous male groups dispute the merits of three different anonymous male forces; an individual female speaker then sets herself against them and proves her thesis by citing another named female individual. The thrice-repeated definite article (οἱ, 1–2), which is grammatically masculine and pointedly plural, brings out the popularity of these rival answers, and the enumerative structure of the particles (μέν … δέ … δέ, 1–2) highlights their variety. 'On the black earth' (ἐπὶ γᾶν μέλαι[ν]αν, 2) entails a universal field of comparison, yet these many men all agree in confining their answer to a single field of human experience: war. Sappho's answer to the question 'what is most beautiful' caps its various but ultimately similar rivals by explaining their variety and reaching down to a deeper level of truth: different people find different things most beautiful because their preference depends on subjective desires. Here an exceptionally wise speaker delves into abstraction and illuminates a single universal truth beneath varied epiphenomena.[16] Everyone knew the story of

[14] Somewhat similarly, Sappho 44 puts the spotlight squarely on the wedding of Hector and Andromache, a happy moment which was a relatively minor episode within a larger epic story which did not end happily for the Trojans or for this couple in particular (Spelman 2017). On love and desire in epic, see Smith, Chapter 16 in this volume.

[15] The opening verses exemplify the priamel, which may justly be regarded as the lyric rhetorical structure par excellence: see Race 1982: 54, who also discusses our poem (63–4).

[16] Others (e.g. Hutchinson 2001: 162) understand these opening statements as incompatible with the thesis that what is most beautiful is whatever someone desires. But κῆν' ὅτ|τω (3–4) is pointedly neuter and general. Underlying our passage is a common type of priamel in which variety is contrasted with an underlying universal; cf. Solon 13.43–64, Pind. *Nem.* 4.91–2, 7.54–6, *Isth.* 1.47–9. The superlative κάλλιστον (3) need not be exclusively

Paris and Helen from epic, but it takes someone as wise as Sappho to explicate a larger truth instantiated in that old story.

Sappho traces a triangular temporal path common in lyric, moving from the mythical past to a timeless universal truth and then to an instantiation of that general idea in the present. She concludes in ring composition by giving her own particularised answer to the question of what is the most beautiful thing on earth: for her, it is what she desires, the absent Anactoria. The visions of sublime masculine force in the opening lines are replaced by the vanished step and irreplaceable face of one woman, whose bright sparkle recalls the gleam of armour and, in Sappho's eyes, surpasses its beauty. The poet's voice is as distinctive and singular as the object of her desire.

In this context, the question of what is most beautiful to an individual is parallel with the question of what one chooses to sing about. If Sappho's poem enacts her own desire by exalting the beautiful Anactoria above instruments of war, then it is but a small step, or a short leap, in reasoning to think that epic poetry which exalts war reflects its author's desire for combat. On this reading, Sappho's personal preference for Anactoria over armies thus becomes simultaneously a statement about her own generic identity as a lyric rather than epic poet. We are not too far from the *recusationes* of later poets who more explicitly shun epic themes to embrace a lyric worldview and aesthetic.[17]

This poem, so often and so rightly read as a meditation on individual subjectivity, is at the same time also about different forms of group sociality. Sappho's personal lyric subjectivity is intertwined with the community in which her poetry was embedded. Her social context remains controversial, but most scholars suppose that her works were first performed for a socially exclusive and exclusively female audience of some sort.[18] Indeed, it is often

aesthetic; it can mean 'finest, best' rather than 'most beautiful', though the latter sense comes to dominate in what follows as the flow of thought moves in new and surprising directions. A desire for war was inherently ambiguous – either laudably masculine or straightforwardly perverse – and in this poem erotic desire also looks morally complex.

[17] Anacreon eleg. 2 *IEG*²: 'I do not like the man who speaks of quarrels and tearful war when drinking by the full mixing bowl but rather he who remembers lovely celebration, mingling the radiant gifts of the Muses and Aphrodite' (οὐ φιλέω, ὃς κρητῆρι παρὰ πλέῳ οἰνοποτάζων | νείκεα καὶ πόλεμον δακρυόεντα λέγει, | ἀλλ' ὅστις Μουσέων τε καὶ ἀγλαὰ δῶρ' Ἀφροδίτης | συμμίσγων ἐρατῆς μνήσκεται εὐφροσύνης); Xenophanes 1.19–22 *IEG*²: 'it is right to praise the man who, having drunk much, reveals noble thoughts . . . and one should not at all go through the wars of the Titans or giants or centaurs, the fictions of men of old' (ἀνδρῶν δ' αἰνεῖν τοῦτον ὃς ἐσθλὰ πιὼν ἀναφαίνει . . . οὔ τι μάχας διέπειν Τιτήνων οὐδὲ Γιγάντων | οὐδὲ < . . . > Κενταύρων, πλάσμα<τα> τῶν προτέρων); note further Stesichorus 172 Finglass and Ibycus S151 *PMGF*.

[18] For one book-length view on Sappho's performance context, see Caciagli 2011; D'Alessio 2018 brings out the difficulty of inferring her performance context(s) from extant fragments and explores complex pragmatic strategies at work in her poetry.

inferred on the basis of other fragments that Anactoria was a member of Sappho's 'circle' who is absent in our poem because she has now left that group – presumably in order to marry a man somewhere else (cf. esp. fr. 96). Sappho's desire for another member of her private female community thus stands in implicit opposition to the civic masculine communities behind the various armies of the opening lines; one woman's frustrated love for another woman is set against men working together towards violent ends. By exalting Anactoria above war, Sappho's poem thus affirms the solidarity of her small circle apart from, and in contradistinction to, the larger patriarchal groups that fought wars and staged performances of epic poetry which lionised martial valour.

Focusing on Sappho's individual voice and the social dynamics of her group should not obscure how this ode also interpolates larger, more varied audiences. The opening lines ostensibly respond to multiple anonymous male groups. With supreme hauteur, the poet asserts that it is easy to make her point understood to 'everyone' (π]άντι, 6), and that faceless everyone becomes an implicit addressee of her words. What is most beautiful is what 'someone' (τις, 4), either a man or a woman, desires; this indefinite pronoun of the desiring subject is as faceless and universal as the 'everyone' who will understand Sappho's point. Several other fragments look forward to the future reception of her poetry in comparably vague terms, and from early on her work did in fact travel far beyond the narrow confines of her group. Athenian vases from the fifth century already depict Sappho as a named figure, attesting to a robust interest in her authorial and biographical personality. Earlier still, Anacreon of Teos probably responds to her work and associates it with lowercase-L lesbian desire (358 *PMG*). In order to achieve such a widespread dissemination so rapidly, Sappho's poems must have been picked up and re-performed at masculine symposia during or relatively soon after her own lifetime.[19]

What did it mean for ancient Greek men to re-perform Sappho's work, giving voice to her words and in doing so making them, in a sense, their own? We can imagine that this experience would have revolved around Sappho's radical alterity,[20] but this perhaps underrates the capacity of subsequent performers and readers not only to assume her themes and dialect but also to take on her subjectivity. The first-person voice of her lyric, like that of all lyric, is an open-ended invitation to anyone who cares to accept it. Sappho 16 highlights the universality of individuality, and its potentially universal

[19] On Sappho's visions of later reception, see Spelman 2018a: 155–62; for the documented early reception, see Yatromanolakis 2007.

[20] 'When an Athenian aristocrat took on the themes and dialect of a lady from Lesbos', suggests Ford (2003: 23), 'the words were a small part of the show'.

appeal depended, and depends, in part on its ability to do so. The men who sung Sappho at symposia were the same men who heard martial epic performed at civic occasions and who fought for their cities in actual wars. Some might even have met the sight of an army in glittering armour with an aesthetic thrill. Sappho sets herself and her poetry in opposition to epic, but her lyric gained its appeal in part through its ability to complement epic by speaking to different values and different aspects of human life in all of its varied complexity.

Pindar's Nemean 7

Written in order to celebrate the victory of the young Sogenes of Aegina in the pentathlon at the Nemean games, Pindar's *Nemean* 7 is radically different from Sappho 16. This epinician was publicly performed by a local chorus on Aegina and valorises the sort of militaristic ethos and masculine communal solidarity which Sappho so ostentatiously disprefers. It is therefore all the more illuminating to compare how these two poems negotiate their relationship to epic.

Pindar takes direct aim at Homer (20–30):[21]

ἐγὼ δὲ πλέον' ἔλπομαι
λόγον Ὀδυσσέος ἢ πάθαν
διὰ τὸν ἀδυεπῆ γενέσθ' Ὅμηρον·

ἐπεὶ ψεύδεσί οἱ ποτανᾷ ‹τε› μαχανᾷ
σεμνὸν ἔπεστί τι· σοφία
δὲ κλέπτει παράγοισα μύθοις. τυφλὸν δ' ἔχει
ἦτορ ὅμιλος ἀνδρῶν ὁ πλεῖστος. εἰ γὰρ ἦν
ἔ τὰν ἀλάθειαν ἰδέμεν, οὔ κεν ὅπλων χολωθείς
ὁ καρτερὸς Αἴας ἔπαξε διὰ φρενῶν
λευρὸν ξίφος· ὃν κράτιστον Ἀχιλέος ἄτερ μάχᾳ
ξανθῷ Μενέλᾳ δάμαρτα κομίσαι θοαῖς
ἂν ναυσὶ πόρευσαν εὐθυ-πνόου Ζεφύροιο πομπαί

πρὸς Ἴλου πόλιν.

I expect that Odysseus' fame came to be greater than his suffering because of sweet-speaking Homer, for in his lies and flying craft there is something grand. Poetic skill deceives people, misleading them with tales, and the great mass of mankind has a blind heart. For if they saw the truth, then the mighty Ajax, angered over arms, would not have fixed his smooth sword in his gut. He was

[21] Cannatà Fera 2020: 150–6 catalogues extensive bibliography on this challenging ode. The following discussion offers one view on numerous points of controversy.

> the best in battle besides Achilles of all those whom the breezes of the straight-blowing Zephyr sent to Ilus' city on swift ships in order to bring back to fair-haired Menelaus his wife.

Before we discuss similarities, it is worth first highlighting some differences in how this passage and Sappho 16, composed around a century earlier, conceptualise and engage with epic. Sappho never names Homer in her extant verse; Pindar here and elsewhere reacts to a definite authorial personality. Odysseus was memorialised countless times in a variety of media, from other lyric poems (e.g. Alcm. 80 *PMGF*, Stesich. 170 Finglass, Thgn. 1123–9) to the visual arts (see *LIMC* s.v. Odysseus), but in our passage he has acquired an exaggerated reputation thanks to Homer alone: it is his remarkable 'winged skill' (ποτανᾷ ‹τε› μαχανᾷ, 22) which has enabled a false story to take flight and travel throughout the Greek world. This Homer is not just an author immanent in his own poems but the subject of biographical legend. Pindar's reference to the 'blind heart' of the masses (τυφλόν . . . ἦτορ, 23–4) plays on the tradition that Homer himself was blind. That resonant detail originally evoked the 'second sight' that set the great bard apart from others;[22] Pindar instead makes metaphorical blindness commonplace among Homer's gullible mass audience.

Whereas Sappho 16 presumes and thematises universal knowledge of a central event in the Trojan saga, Pindar is also capitalising on his audience's fine-grained knowledge of canonical texts. Odysseus' 'suffering' (πάθαν, 21) looks directly towards the programmatic opening lines of the *Odyssey*: 'on the sea he suffered many pains in his own heart' (πολλὰ δ' ὅ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν, 1.14). In Pindar's ornate description of Ajax (27–30), the otherwise otiose emphasis on the sea journey to Troy is calibrated to recall the Iliadic Catalogue of Ships, where Homer recounts all the ships that travelled to Troy and himself picks out Ajax as second best after Achilles (*Il.* 2.768–9).

The 'Homeric' texts in view probably extend beyond the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Indeed, Pindar's elliptical argument seems to draw upon, and thematise, his audience's knowledge of cyclic epic. Ajax's suicide proves that the vast majority of men have a blind heart because if the majority of Greeks who travelled to Troy had recognised the truth, namely that Ajax was the second best after Achilles, then they would have awarded him, rather than Odysseus, the arms of Achilles – and so Ajax would not have killed himself. The version(s) of this material transmitted in the lost poems of the epic

[22] *H. Hy. Ap.* 172, quoted in note 12 above, is perhaps the earliest extant reference to Homer's blindness, to which Pindar also alludes at *Pae.* 7b.18. The origin of the tale is presumably *Od.* 8.63–4: 'him the Muse greatly loved, and she gave him good and bad: she deprived him of his eyes but gave him sweet song' (τὸν περὶ Μοῦσ' ἐφίλησε, δίδου δ' ἀγαθόν τε κακόν τε· | ὀφθαλμῶν μὲν ἄμερσε, δίδου δ' ἡδεῖαν ἀοιδήν). On the symbolism of Homer's blindness, see Graziosi 2002: 147–50.

cycle are a matter of debate, but each of Pindar's several references to the episode evidently agrees in presupposing that Odysseus used misleading speech to persuade the Greek army to award him the arms of Achilles – rather like how in *Nemean* 7 Homer persuades a panhellenic mass audience through his own cunning speech.[23] Here Pindar relies on the accepted truth of other Homeric stories in order to impugn Homer's tale about Odysseus.

Epic now seems to mean something rather different, in historical terms, from what it had meant in Sappho 16, but there are also robust and important lines of continuity. Like Sappho, Pindar presumes the universal fame of epic. Homer's lies have been widely accepted as truth because the vast majority of men (ὅμιλος ἀνδρῶν ὁ πλεῖστος, 24) has a blind heart (23–4), in the present as in the mythical past. Once again the first-person voice asserts itself through an emphatic pronoun (ἐγώ, 20), breaking both with tradition and with contemporary consensus. As Sappho sets herself above those who lack the wisdom to see that what is most beautiful is whatever someone desires, Pindar distances himself from 'the great mass of people' (24) who knew the *Odyssey* but lacked the acumen to see through its lies. When predicated of a past event, ἔλπομαι (20), 'I expect', expresses a relatively confident belief falling short of absolute certainty; the verb is appropriate here because inference is the only available tool: nobody could claim direct, first-hand knowledge of the ancient Odysseus. Indeed, the hero's 'suffering' (21) recalls Odysseus' exotic wanderings beyond known human geography and without any corroborating witness (cf. *Od.* 11.366) – the very experiences referred to in the line from the *Odyssey* (1.4) to which Pindar refers. He deduces that these fantastical tales, corresponding to nothing in quotidian experience, never really happened.

This rationalising critique targets Homer's non-rational means of persuasion. His lies pass for truth because 'there is something *semnos*' (σεμνὸν ἔπεστί τι, 23) about them. Elsewhere in Pindar the adjective just left untranslated is consistently applied to matters divine, but here it does not imply that Homer's art is 'pseudo-divine'.[24] *Semnos* means something like 'august' in relation to deities; predicated of human speech and art it can convey pomposity and deceit (e.g. Ar. *Ran.* 1104). 'Grand', in colloquial American English, might capture something of the ethical and poetic nuances (cf. Burnett 2005: 202: 'pretentious'). The adjective here modifies an indefinite neuter pronoun *ti*, 'something' (23), a small word which makes a big point: there is something in Homer's poetry, something undefinable and inexplicable, that enables it to lead people astray.[25] Pindar has

[23] See Spelman 2018b: 187n37 for bibliography. [24] Most 1985: 158.

[25] This is what we might term the indefinite of epistemic modesty, used of phenomena, frequently divine, which surpass complete understanding: cf. *Ol.* 8.25, 9.26, *Pyth.* 5.76, *Nem.* 4.41, fr. 52k.13, 25. Race (1997: 74) apparently takes *Nem.* 7.23 as a form of litotes ('great majesty'), but there is no good parallel (contrast *Ol.* 10.43).

in view the bewitching enchantment of Homeric narrative, what a Greek might call its *thelxis*.[26]

Within the ode as a whole, one key purpose of our passage is to link up with the central myth, which stands in equally calculated but more implicit opposition to Homer. In the cyclic *Returns*, Neoptolemus makes his way back from Troy on foot and completes his journey unharmed (arg. 4 *GEF*); in the *Odyssey* he has returned safe from the war and is still ruling over the Myrmidons a decade after the sack of Troy (3.188–9, 4.5–9). In *Nemean* 7, by contrast, Neoptolemus sails homeward, like other heroes, and never reaches his intended destination; instead he dies in Delphi, thus fulfilling the plan of destiny: it was fated that one of Aeacus' descendants would forever dwell in Apollo's sanctuary as a hero integrated into cult (44–7).[27]

Pindar's story explains Neoptolemus' honoured place in the panhellenic sanctuary of Delphi, something which Homeric poetry did not account for at all. Whereas Homer's tale of Odysseus' fantastical adventures during his return from Troy relies on the enchantment of grandiose words, Pindar's true tale of Neoptolemus' return from Troy is externally verified by the objective reality of traditional panhellenic worship. He also appeals to a notional contemporary Molossian, a person with a special inherited connection to Neoptolemus (38–9), as a well-qualified witness who will approve of his story (64–5); there were no Cyclopes around in the fifth century to corroborate Odysseus' exotic wanderings. Homer's art depends on his artificial craft (μαχανᾷ, 22) and purely human skill (σοφία, 23); Pindar forefronts his connection to the divine and stresses his own truth (cf. 11–17, 48–52, 61–9). Whereas Sappho valorises a lyric theme in contradistinction to epic warfare, Pindar lays claim to fulfil the same social function better than Homeric epic: to provide an inspired, true and authoritative account of the heroic past. Homer's authority and claim to accuracy are grounded in the Muse (cf. *Il.* 2.484–93, *Od.* 8.487–91), who transmits the truth about the past through the faceless bard like sunlight though a window; Pindar's authority and claim to truth depend not just on his connection to the divine but also on a complex rhetorical personality whose ethic breathes through every line of this poem, not least in those lines that reject Homer's tale about Odysseus.

There is a clear local motivation to Pindar's hostile engagement with Homer in *Nemean* 7. The devaluation of Odysseus is closely linked to the exaltation of Ajax and Neoptolemus, two of the 'spear-clattering Aeacidae' (δορικτύπων | Αἰακιδᾶν, 9–10) with whom the Aeginetans cherished a link of

[26] θέλγω and cognate words linked to song: *Od.* 1.337, 12.40, *H. Hy. Ap.* 159, Pind. *Pyth.* 1.12. In other contexts the verb can connote lying and misleading speech: LSJ s.v. 2.

[27] Cf. Spelman forthcoming on the parallel narrative about Neoptolemus in Pindar's *Paean* 6.

descent. Championing ancestors of the victor and of his local audience, Pindar sets himself against the paradigmatically panhellenic figure of Homer. Yet a strong dichotomy between epichoric lyric and panhellenic epic would miss much of what is going on here. This ode obviously seeks to gratify its Aeginetan audience, but at the same time it also seeks to endure and spread throughout the Greek world – just as the *Odyssey* had, unfortunately, already done. Homer told a mendacious fable about Odysseus; Pindar holds up 'a mirror for fine deeds' (ἔργοις δὲ καλοῖς ἔσοπτρον, 14) that reflects Sogenes' accomplishment for all to see. His poem provides true and authentic glory that will last long after his subject's death (κλέος ἐτήτυμον, 63; cf. 12–16, 31–2, 67–9).

Pindar's manifold and persistent engagement with Homer in this ode and throughout all of his poetry is motivated in no small part by a desire to frame himself as Homer's equal, a poet of recognised authority and universal reach, a classic alive in the present day. The 'I' that speaks so emphatically in our passage is not just any lyric individual but an inspired and authoritative author, Pindar of Thebes. He sets himself apart from the masses who accepted Homer's lies, and in doing so he invites all who encounter this text to join him in doing so. All readers and listeners who can see through Homer's misleading skill may be initiated into the community of the wise, those endowed with the moral and intellectual virtue to understand and appreciate Pindar's poetry.[28]

Conclusion

Lyric, our earliest category of non-epic text, itself provides the earliest evidence for a seductive implicit hierarchy of genres in which epic is at the top, both chronologically prior and, at least in some nebulous way, more important than everything else. At the same time, lyric often evinces a self-conscious sense of being something qualitatively different and potentially better than its big sister.

This chapter has discussed two different case studies in order to emphasise the variety of lyric, but it nonetheless risks giving a misleading impression of uniformity. Sappho 16 and Pindar's *Nemean* 7 both oppose themselves against epic; the inverse strategy of co-operation rather than antagonism was equally possible. Sappho 16 may be contrasted with Alcaeus 140, composed on the same island at roughly the same time. Alcaeus describes an impressive visual display of copious armour, which might seem to be very beautiful indeed. This extended ecphrastic description, both as a whole and

[28] On 'the wise' (σοφοί) as Pindar's audience, see Spelman 2018a: 235–6.

in its fine-grained diction, recalls the epic type scene of arming.[29] Alcaeus imbues his contemporary faction with the lustre of the heroes of old; he siphons off the same epic exaltation of masculine martial valour which Sappho 16 subverts. Pindar exemplifies both antagonism and co-operation within his own oeuvre. We can hardly infer from Pindar's *Nemean* 7 that the poet harboured some sort of global hostility to Homeric poetry; *Isthmian* 4 leverages the authority of epic in the opposite way but to a very similar end: it celebrates Homer as a paradigm of objective truth, enduring aesthetic value, and panhellenic reach in order to lay explicit claim to that same exceptional status (37–45). Homer is uniquely useful to Pindar for thinking about the nature of authorship, whether through opposition or imitation.

Across the centuries, lyric employs epic as a constant point of reference, for assimilation, for differentiation and for various more complex mixes of comparison and contrast. 'What is this poem doing with epic?' is reliably a useful and enlightening question to ask. The modes and targets of lyric allusivity changed over time during this watershed period, but the underlying picture of epic remains basically stable. Studying how lyric engages with epic can help us to get closer to a sense of what these two genres meant to ancient audiences, if not something like an emic definition of both.

Further Reading

This chapter seeks to complement Graziosi and Haubold 2009 and Kelly 2022, which cover related topics. Fowler 1987: chap. 1 provides orientation to the historical relationship between epic and lyric in the archaic and classical periods. Rissman 1983 and Nisetich 1989, respectively, provide book-length treatments of Sappho and Pindar's relationship to epic. Graziosi forthcoming and Morrison forthcoming respectively, offer important recent contributions to these subjects.

[29] Compare Alc. 140.3–5 with *Il.* 3.336–7, 11.41–2, 16.137–8, 15.480–1.