I poemi Epici Rapsodici Non Omerici
e La Tradizione Orale (Padua, 1981)

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IS THE «WORKS AND DAYS» AN ORAL POEM?

Milman Parry had little to say about Hesiod; but his answer to the question «Is the *Works and Days* an oral poem?» would have been yes. He regarded Hesiod as working within the tradition of living oral poetry, but as differentiated from Homer by being far inferior in skill. In particular he lacked the ability to embellish, to ornament. «Matter-of-fact Hesiod in his *Works and Days*» writes Parry, in a judgment which most people nowadays will find rather eccentric, «...said only what he had to say, and as a result he will never be too interesting, though that was probably no concern of his».[1]

Parry's interest, and Lord's too, was reserved for heroic poetry. It was Hoekstra and Notopoulos who first accorded extensive discussion to Hesiod's place in oral tradition. Hoekstra in his article *Hésiode et la tradition orale* in «Mnemosyne» 1957 made many important observations: that Hesiod's language is formulaic in the same way as Homer's; that he must have known other Ionian poetry besides the Homeric poems; that there must have been other didactic poetry besides the *Works and Days* (this was already argued by Nilsson in 1905);[2] and that there are Hesiodic, non-Homeric formulae which look ancient. Hoekstra's view was that a Mycenaean tradition of hexameter poetry had survived in places on the mainland of Greece in local forms and adapted to spoken vernaculars in the same way as in Asia Minor it assumed an Ionic hue. The verse inscriptions in local dialects belonged to this tradition, the existence of which ensured a favourable reception for Ionian epic in the eighth century. Notopoulos in «Hesperia» 1960 argued rather less circumspectly, primarily from the repeated phrases in Hesiod, that his

poetry was representative of a mainland, 'Achaean' tradition of hexameter poetry parallel to the Ionian tradition and going back to the Bronze Age. This hypothesis suffered from a glaring defect, which was briskly exposed by Hoekstra in his book *Homeric Modifications of Formulaic Prototypes*. If Hesiodic poetry descended directly from Mycenaean poetry via a mainland tradition, its dialect could not be that of Ionian epic. As we all know, our friend and host, Carlo Pavese, has sought to maintain the hypothesis of a continuous mainland tradition by reviving in a modified form the old idea of Fick that the Ionic dress in which Hesiod appears is not original but due to the transmission.

In subsequent articles Notopoulos went on to discover the formulaic style in, and to infer therefrom the orality of, the *Homeric Hymns* and the poems of the Epic Cycle. Geoffrey Kirk in his article *Formular Language and Oral Quality* in « Yale Classical Studies » 20 (1966) directed just criticism at Notopoulos' basic assumption that, because oral poetry is formulaic, formulaic poetry must be oral, and at the over-simple dichotomy made by him and his teachers between pure oral and literary imitation, written poetry being necessarily the latter. Kirk proposes that we should instead distinguish between « natural composition in a formular tradition » and « deliberate, self-conscious composition in a formular style », whether with the aid of writing or not. For the quantitative criterion (what percentage of the text is formulaic) he would substitute a qualitative criterion which he admits to be more subjective: the truly oral poem is to be recognized by its fluent and natural style, as well as by its observance of the principle of formular economy and the traditional restraints governing rhythm and enjambement. Applying this criterion to the Hesiodic corpus, he judges that much of it is oral, though the *Scutum* « shows signs of skilled literary intervention ».

This impressionistic verdict received support from the researches of G.P. Edwards. He showed in his book *The Language of Hesiod in its Traditional Context* (1971) that Hesiod's method of using the resources of the poetic language is not

significantly different from Homer's. The principle of economy is by and large observed; breaches of it seem better accounted for « by the working of analogy within an oral tradition than by the deliberate exercise of choice in favour of a novel expression ». Where extension of formulae occurs, it occurs in a natural and straightforward manner. Sometimes a phrase appears to have been suggested by the sound of another, indicating « not a conscious process but rather the work of voice and ear ». Rhythm and enjambement are Homeric enough. So far as these aspects of technique are concerned, then, we have no justification for differentiating between Hesiod and Homer.

There is of course a noticeable difference in style, in density. We may not wish to go all the way with Rhys Carpenter when he writes that « Hesiod builds a close, almost clumsily taut line, as though he had watched each word as he wrote it down, instead of dipping generously into the garrulous ready-made speech of the rhapsodes. The abbreviated bulk, the almost niggard terseness of expression... mark out the *Works and Days* as written literature ».[3] But we understand what he means. Here is an illustration, from the narrative about Pandora.

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δόλον αἰπὺν ἀμήχανον ἐξετέλεσσεν,
εἰς Ἐπιμηθέα πέμπε πατὴρ κλυτὸν Ἀργεϊφόντην
δῶρον ἄγοντα, θεῶν ταχὺν ἄγγελον· οὐδ' Ἐπιμηθεὺς
ἐφράσαθ' ὡς οἱ ἔειπε Προμηθεὺς μή ποτε δῶρον
δέξασθαι πὰρ Ζηνὸς Ὀλυμπίου, ἀλλ'ἀποπέμπειν
ἐξοπίσω, μή πού τι κακὸν θνητοῖσι γένηται·
αὐτὰρ ὃ δεξάμενος, ὅτε δὴ κακὸν εἶχ', ἐνόησε.

Consider how Homer might have related that transaction.

Αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δόλον αἰπὺν ἀμήχανον ἐξετέλεσσεν,
δὴ τότ' ἄρ' Ἑρμείαν προσεφώνεε μητίετα Ζεύς.
« βάσκ' ἴθι, Ἑρμεία χρυσόρραπι δῶτορ ἐάων,
Ἰαπετιονίδεω Ἐπιμηθέος ἐς μέγα δῶμα,
σὺν δ' ἅμα κούρην τήνδε κομίζεο, δός τέ μιν αὐτῶι·
εἰπὲ δέ οἱ δῶρον Διὸς ἔμμεναι αἰγιόχοιο·
αἴ κέ ἑ δέξηται, τὸ δέ οἱ πολὺ λώιον ἔσται·

3. Rhys Carpenter, *Folktale, Fiction and Saga in the Homeric Epics*, 16.

οὐδ' ἀπανήνασθαι μακάρων δόσιν ἐστὶν ἄμεινον».
ὣς ἔφατ', οὐδ' ἀπίθησε διάκτορος Ἀργειφόντης.
αὐτίκ' ἔπειθ' ὑπὸ ποσσὶν ἐδήσατο καλὰ πέδιλα
ἀμβρόσια χρύσεια, τά μιν φέρον ἠμὲν ἐφ' ὑγρὴν
ἠδ' ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν ἅμα πνοιῇς ἀνέμοιο.
κούρην δ' εἵλετο χερσίν, ἀπέπτατο δ' ἐκτὸς Ὀλύμπου,
αἶψα δ' ἄρ' Ἰαοετιονίδεω πρὸς δῶμαθ' ἵκανεν,
στῆ δ' ἐπὶ λάινον οὐδὸν ἰών, παρὰ δ' ἤιε κούρη.
τοὺς δὲ ἰδὼν ἀνόρουσε, λιπὼν ἕδος ἔνθα θάασσεν,
Ἰαπετιονίδης, καὶ ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα·
«τίς πόθεν εἰς ὦ ξεῖν' ὃς ἐμὸν δόμον εἰλήλουθας;
τίς δ' ἔπεται κούρη; θάμβός μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωντα·
αἰνῶς δ' ἀθανάτῃσι θεῇς εἰς ὦπα ἔοικεν».
ὣς φάτο, τὸν δ' αἶψ' αὖτις ἀμείβετο κύδιμος Ἑρμῆς·
«Θάρσει, μηδέ τι σῇσι μετὰ φρεσὶ δείδιθι λίην·
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ μακάρων εἶμ' ἄγγελος, Ἀργειφόντης,
Ζεὺς δέ μέ τοι προύπεμψεν Ὀλύμπιος ἐς μέγα δῶμα,
τήνδε δέ μ' ἠνώγει δῶρον δόμεν, αἴ κ' ἐθέλησθα
δεξάμενος γῆμαι καὶ ὁμὸν λέχος εἰσαναβῆναι.
αἴ κέ ἑ δέξηαι, τὸ δέ τοι πολὺ λώιον ἔσται·
οὐδ' ἀπανήνασθαι μακάρων δόσιν ἐστὶν ἄμεινον».
ὣς ἔφαθ' Ἑρμείας Κυλλήνιος Ἀργειφόντης.
ἔνθ' αὖτ' Ἰαπετιονίδῃ φρένας ἐξέλετο Ζεύς,
τῶν δ' οὐκ ἐμνήσθη, τὰ περίφρων εἶπε Προμηθεύς,
νήπιος· αἰεὶ γάρ οἱ ἐπέφραδε, μή ποτε δῶρον
δέξασθαι παὰρ Ζηνὸς Ὀλυμπίου, ἀλλ' ἀποπέμπειν
ἐξοπίσω, μή πού τι κακὸν θνητοῖσι γένηται.
αἶψα δ' ἄρ' Ἑρμείαν προσέφη ἀεσιφροσύνῃσιν·
«ἴλαθ' ἄναξ· μύθωι δ' ε῾πιχαίρομαι, ὄνπερ ἔειπες,
καὶ κούρην δέχομαι. καί κεν τοιήνδε δεχοίμην,
εἰ καὶ μὴ Κρονίδης ὑψίζυγος αὐτὸς ἔπεμπεν·
καί που καί κέ τις ἄλλος ἀνὴρ τοιαῦτά γε ῥέζοι,
εἰ μή τις γῆραι γ' ἀρημένος, ὥι τ' Ἀφροδίτης
μηκέτι ἔργα μέλῃ, ἀχέεσσι δέ θυμὸν ἔδωκεν».

This is of course precisely that art of embellishment in which Parry found Hesiod wanting. But we must bear in mind, firstly, that its employment in Homer is uneven – it sometimes happens that a piece of action which might have been treated in that expansive style is dispatched in a couple of lines – and secondly that the story of Pandora has a didactic context; to have spent two or three hundred lines over it would have been disproportionate. It would be fairer to measure it not by the standard of the main-line narrative of Homer but by that of the stories he tells in parenthesis; the story of Bellerophon as it is told in *Iliad* 6, for example, is not dissimilar in tempo.

Edwards goes on to consider a point that I raised in my edition of the *Theogony*. I said there «In all probability, Hesiod wrote his poems down, or dictated them. A period of oral transmission in which rhapsodes other than Hesiod spoke of him in the first person, or berated a deceased Perses with his faults, or talked of 'my father and thine, foolish Perses', or boasted of a success at Chalcis which had never been theirs, is not easy to conceive, and the impression that the poems give of direct contact with a pronounced personality would surely have been diluted by such transmission». Edwards considers that the personal references in the poems may suggest that they were recorded in writing in the poet's lifetime, but do not prove that they were *composed* with the aid of writing: they might have been composed orally and recited on many occasions before being written down. In Hesiod as in Homer, he concludes, we are dealing with poems whose language and style show features which are best explained by reference to an oral tradition which these poets inherited and themselves practised.

The question that Edwards poses himself is a blunt alternative: «was Hesiod an oral poet, or did he compose with the aid of writing?». We shall have to consider presently whether these are absolute alternatives, and what exactly is meant by them. But first let us note that where Edwards speaks of the poems being composed orally, he speaks of their being recorded in Hesiod's lifetime rather than of their being written down by Hesiod, even if in another place he speaks of the recording of the text «whether in the poet's own hand or in someone else's». We see here the enduring influence of the Parry-Lord conception of the oral poet who can only flourish so long as he is illiterate: if his poetry is recorded, someone else will have been responsible. As Adam Parry pointed out in his epoch-making article *Have We*

Homer's Iliad?,[4] (at least it ought to have made an epoch) and in his introduction to his father's collected papers, this assumption rested on a false generalization from the situation of the 20th-century Balkan guslar initiated in the world of letters. The idea of a poet who is himself illiterate dictating to an amanuensis is entirely possible, but there is no reason to prefer it to the idea of the literate poet writing for himself (except in the case of the blind poet of the Delian Hymn to Apollo). Once we assume the poet to be involved in the writing operation, we may just as well let him be a writer.

What is of capital importance in Adam Parry's article is the insistence that the poet in a live oral tradition *must* be involved in the writing operation, for otherwise what is written will not be his poem but at best a variant of it. Whatever Iliads may have been recited by Homer or anyone else before rapt audiences, the one that was written down is the one that we have. According to the experts, the oral poet never repeats himself exactly. No two recitations are identical. It follows that the version produced in the writing operation would not be identical with any previous recitation. Indeed, the changed circumstances of the reproduction might well bring about a greater than usual mutation, for better or worse. Parry submits, and I am convinced he is right, that the exceptional length of our *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is a result of these changed circumstances.

There are still American writers, not least among the pupils of Lord, who speak glibly of the Homeric and Hesiodic poems as being 'oral', and proceed to discuss them just as if they were transcripts from tape-recordings. I recently read a book by a lady who uses without apparent discomfort the expression « extant oral Greek epic ». But a generous observer might allow that scholarly thinking has moved on since 1960 to a more sophisticated position: to the recognition that what Milman Parry proved was the traditional and oral nature of the *style* in which early Greek hexameter poetry is composed, and not the oral

4. Adam Parry, « Yale Classical Studies » 20, 1966, 177-216.

composition of the actual texts we have. It is interesting to note that students of Old English poetry have been going through a similar cycle of opinion. Here too we have a body of verse preserved in writing, composed in a common style, formulaic; a phrase occurring in one poem is liable to turn up in any other, without any relationship of direct dependence being apparent. In *Biowulf* as in the *Odyssey* we read descriptions of minstrels in the dining-hall singing to a stringed instrument of deeds of valour – in one case apparently improvising a song on Biowulf's newly-won victory over Grendel. Further, the close relationship of Old English metre to that of Old Saxon, Old High German and Old Norse poetry, together with the existence of many parallel poetic phrases and a common background of mythology, prove that this poetry belongs to a common Germanic tradition which must have been oral in its earlier phases. In 1949 Lord subjected a short passage of *Biowulf* to formulaic analysis and showed the result to Francis P. Magoun Jr. Soon Magoun was publishing articles, which aroused great interest in the world of Anglo-Saxon studies, claiming that *Biowulf* was 70% formulaic and must have been orally composed by an illiterate singer. He supposed that if all of Old English poetry had survived instead of a mere 30,000 lines, the proportion of formulaic language would approach 100%. Other scholars extended the analysis to non-narrative poems, with similar results. Now there is a stumbling block in Old English poetry which is not paralleled in early Greek. Most of this poetry is anonymous, but there is one poet with a name, Cynewulf, and we know his name because of his habit of working it into his poems, letter by letter. He lived at a time when writing had been in use in England, at least among the clergy, for over two centuries. And he composed poems that translate certain Latin sources pretty closely. Here if anywhere is a thoroughly literate poet. Yet his work has a formulaic content roughly comparable to that of *Biowulf*. I think the same would be found to be true of the *Battle of Brunanburh* and other short narrative poems with which the tenth- and eleventh-century continuations of the

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle are embellished – poems clearly composed ad hoc to stand in the Chronicle. If one grants that these are literary poems, it becomes impossible to use the formulaic criterion to identify 'oral' poems.[5]

The work of Magoun and his disciples is now viewed with considerable scepticism in so far as it goes beyond the descriptive. It has some common features with the work of Notopoulos on extra-Homeric Greek poetry. One such feature is the relaxation of the standards applied by Milman Parry, the concentration on the quantity of repeated expressions without corresponding attention to the economy principle, and the over-liberal view of what is to be counted as formulaic. Another is the extension of a theory developed in connexion with heroic narrative poetry to poetry of other categories, without very much thought being given to the question whether something like a riddle or a charm or a gnomic poem is likely to have been transmitted by the same kind of process of creative reproduction as the heroic poem.[6]

This brings me back to Hesiod. Thanks to Parry and Lord and Adam Parry, to name no others, we can claim to have some insight into the processes by which the Homeric poems came into being. Is the same insight valid for the *Works and Days*?

The study of comparative literature does not give a great deal of help. The Balkan guslars do not appear to traffic in gnomic or didactic poetry. There is some evidence for oral gnomic poetry among the Finno-Ugric peoples and in Africa. Often it is called forth by some special occasion like a wedding, when the bride and/or bridegroom are treated to a sententious recital of good advice, or a young man's naming ceremony, or his setting out on a journey. But such occasions are not essential. Among the Tatars it is quite common for a short series of general reflections or proverb-like utterances to be put together extempore as a

5. On the question of formulaic composition in Old English Poetry: Ann C. Watts, *The Lyre and the Harp* (Yale 1969).

6. On wisdom literature outside Greece: references and more material in the introduction to my edition of the *Works and Days* (Oxford 1978).

contribution to the general conversation. The Russian traveller Valikhanov encountered a sultan of one of the Kazakh tribes whom he took to be an imbecile, because his intermittent utterances consisted of rhymed couplets of rather general import, accompanied by alarming rollings of the eyes. Probably the man was simply making conversation in the most formal and polite way he knew. The steppe peoples are apparently much given to voicing their thoughts of the moment in extempore verses. We appear to be dealing here with genuine improvisation without forethought, not the kind of improvisation used by the singer of inherited tales. We do not hear of traditional gnomic poems learned by one singer from another.

In the ancient Near East there was a long tradition of written wisdom literature, a tradition with which the *Works and Days* shows some affinity. Certain of the oriental texts carry indications that they were intended to be heard rather than read. The subtitle of the Egyptian *Instruction of Ptahhotep* says that Ptahhotep is instructing the ignorant, a benefit for him that will listen. A Babylonian didactic work found at Ras Shamra and Boghazköy begins «Hear the counsel of Šubê-awīlum». This is of course far from showing that these were oral compositions, and I do not know that anyone has suggested that they were. I do not think anyone doubts, for that matter, that the *Works and Days*, and everything else composed in archaic Greece, was intended to be heard rather than read. It is not until well on in the fifth century at Athens, probably later in some parts of Greece, that we can reckon with a reading public of any size. When the Muses visited Hesiod on the mountain they did not give him a pen and skill at writing, they gave him a staff and a wondrous voice, αὐδὴ θέσπις, and they taught him fine singing, ἀοιδή. He prays to them for ἱμερόεσσα ἀοιδή as he launches into his genealogy of the gods. After he won a three-legged cooking pot for a performance at the funeral games of Amphidamas, he dedicated it to the Muses «where they first put him on the road of fine singing».

This much is clear: he is an oral performer, and when he thinks of himself as the servant of the Muses it is the performance that is at the centre of his thought, not some previous effort of composition, and not some previous or subsequent effort of writing. But is he an oral composer? And are the written compositions we have from him oral compositions in all but appearence, or were they, in that favourite phrase of scholars, composed with the Aid of Writing?

It is time to define our terms more exactly. «Oral composition» is rather a loose term. Composition is a mental process; «oral» is a predicate of the presentation. «Oral composition» implies a relationship between the composition-process and the oral presentation, but fails to define it as precisely as we should wish. It might cover, at one extreme, the case of a poet who composes a complete poem in his head and subsequently recites it, without having made any use of writing. It would be quite possible to imagine an illiterate society in which that was the normal practice, and one would naturally speak of such a society having oral poetry. At the other extreme it might describe the unpremeditated effusions of the Kazakhs. Between the extremes it may describe the activity of the man who has his subject matter well established in his head, because he has heard it from another man or thought it out at leisure; who has moreover a fair idea of how to express it in verse, because he has heard it so expressed, or heard similar material so expressed; and who is still able to exercise a certain degree of choice in performance, abridging, expanding, finding the definitive words. Such is the guslar, and such I take it, was the Ionian singer of tales in 750 B.C. Parry and Lord speak much of «improvisation», but we must not imagine that the bard embarks upon his performance with nothing ready in his head except his thesaurus of useful words and phrases.

Now what do we mean by composing with the aid of writing? It might cover, at one extreme, the case of the man who recites a couple of hundred verses standing on one leg, writes them down while they are fresh in his mind more or less exactly

as he recited them, perhaps reads them through, and proceeds at once or the next morning to recite a continuation. It might cover the man who recites at dictation speed to an amanuensis in successive sessions, not reading or altering anything that has been written, but helped by having more time to think than when reciting to an audience. It might cover either of these men if they afterwards tampered with the written text, changing a phrase, adding a line or a passage. And at the other extreme it might cover the man who composes word by word onto the manuscript with many crossings-out and much sucking of the pen. This last man could not be called an oral poet; the other men, I think, reasonably could.

So it is not really meaningful to ask in terms of a stark antithesis «is the *Works and Days* an oral poem or was it composed with the aid of writing?». Nor is it simply a question of how far along a continuously graded scale it stands. There are two intersecting axes: one for the degree of adherence to the completely oral poet's method of verbalization, that is, proceeding linearly forwards at a brisk and even pace sustained by the use of traditional language without seeking novelty of phrase; the other for the degree of interference with the result during or after the writing process. Hitherto scholarly discussion of the «orality» of early Greek poems has concentrated on applying criteria which are relevant to the first of these axes, and neglected the second.

We have seen that study of Hesiod's use and modification of formulae, his rhythm and enjambement patterns, and so on, does not disclose anything inconsistent with the oral poet's method of verbalization. We have seen also that he is an oral performer who prays to the Muses that his song will be good and who rewards them if it is – Muses, incidentally, whom he makes the daughters of Memory. We may assume that his performances involved quite extensive memory of premeditated material, but it seems unlikely that he would have needed a written text for that purpose. The amount of material included and its arrangement will have been subject to some fluctuation

from performance to performance, at any rate in the *Works and Days*, where much of the material (unlike that of a narrative poem) possessed no intrinsic structure and could be put together in different ways. It is natural to suppose that most if not all of the material that appears in the written version of the poem had previously been recited, and in much the same language. To that extent we may feel we are reading oral verse.

But to ascertain whether we are reading a free, linear composition that corresponded to a recitation piece and was left as it came out without retouching, we must analyse not the language but the structure and the connexions. I have not now got time to undertake a complete analysis of the structure of the *Works and Days*. I shall pick out a few points that bear on the question before us.

An oral poet starts with what I call a prospect, an idea of what the scope of his poem is going to be; he may later extend it. In both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* a prospect is announced in the opening lines which does not reach as far as the poet eventually gets, while conversely towards the ends of both epics we see them looking forward to events which they never reach, the deaths of Achilles and Odysseus respectively. In the *Works and Days* too the initial prospect relates only to the earlier part of the poem. Zeus is praised not as the god who controls the weather and the growth of crops, as he will appear later on, but as the god of justice who punishes the proud and the unjust and supervises *themistes*. The following section shows that the prospect includes getting Perses to work, as well as protest against unjust kings. But there is no sign that it includes technical instruction about agriculture. Nothing prepares us for this until at line 381, after a section where Hesiod seems to be free-wheeling, he suddenly pulls himself together and makes a fresh start. Now that free-wheeling section is held together (insofar as it *is* held together) by the idea of preserving prosperity after you have earned it. « May you die old leaving another child in the house » (378) sounds like a benign conclusion. Then suddenly Perses is jerked back from the edge of the grave to be instructed in the

first principles of farming, and a broad new prospect opens out. It does not seem very likely that a Hesiod who was planning a major section on how to *become* prosperous would first ramble on about how to *stay* prosperous. I infer that the agricultural instruction represents an extension beyond the original prospect. But if Hesiod began the written poem without envisaging this very important part of the subject matter, the implication is that moral sermon and technical instruction on agriculture had previously been separate items in his repertoire, if indeed the second was already present in it.

The later sections on sailing and on the days of the month likewise arrive unheralded, and they have less connection than farming with the initial *mise en scène* involving Perses. I see them as further additions to the plan, as was long ago suggested by Friedländer. After the sailing section Hesiod seems not to have anything else definite on his programme, because for the next seventy lines he is free-wheeling again, giving miscellaneous advice apparently as it occurs to him associatively. He seems to have come to conceive of his poem by this stage as a general compendium of useful advice. If so, there is nothing unsuitable in the Days section, or in the section on bird omens which followed in some ancient texts.

My view of the poem, then, is that it grew in scope as Hesiod composed it, that is to say, as he wrote or dictated it. He did not envisage at the outset a poem which should begin with a series of stories and homilies to Perses and the kings, pass on to instruction on farming, then deal with sailing, then dissolve into a jumble of assorted advice, and lastly treat of the days of the month. This growth of the poem by stages may well have been discontinuous. Hesiod may have come to a stop several times, considering his work finished, and then thought of more to add. After the book was written he may have recited the hotchpotch in something like the same form, but I do not believe it existed in this form until the book was complete. In that sense it is not an oral poem.

I am not sure that the sections added were always added at

the end of what had been written. The sailing section ends «Observe due measure: καιρὸς δ' ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἄριστος». Then: «And in due season (ὡραῖος) bring a wife to your house». The new section is linked to the old by the idea of «the right time»; but it is a feeble link. The idea is too general itself to suggest the subject of marriage. The connexion would have have been a stronger one if this advice about marriage and the various precepts that follow it originally stood directly after the agricultural section, which ends with a reminder of ploughing in season, ἄροτος ὡραῖος, and a mention of the seed lodging in the earth. This might well lead on by association to the ὡραῖος γάμος, and the advice on running the farm would be well followed by advice on choosing a wife. If that was the original sequence, Hesiod has broken it by inserting the sailing section (as an appendix to the year's works) and then done his best to smooth the transitions by making the passage end with a line about observing due times.

I think there is a clearer case of an insertion within the sailing section. It is here that we find the two autobiographical passages of the poem, the one about the poet's father migrating to Ascra and the one about the funeral games of Amphidamas. Now between these two passages we find an isolated bit of advice which fits much better immediately after what precedes the first passage; and what follows the second passage is the logical continuation. Further, the second passage begins very abruptly and oddly. It has already been hypothesized 28 lines before that Perses desires to go to sea; the advice is in progress; and suddenly we come to this new paragraph beginning «When you adopt the idea of sailing, I will tell you the measure of the sea». If you take out the two autobiographical passages 633-42 and 646-62, the whole section reads smoothly and coherently. But as it stands we have a text which no one composing in a linear fashion could have produced. Of course the passages are authentic, but they disrupt a coherent piece of writing and appear as a superimposed layer.

There are one or two other places in the poem where surprising transitions, or separations of lines that would make better sense adjacent, would be most satisfactorily accounted for by author's insertions in a fixed (i.e. written) text or the conflation of passages composed at different times. I came to a similar conclusion about a few lines of *Theogony*, and won the approval of my «Gnomon» reviewer. I believe that certain Homeric passages require the same kind of solution, and I am glad to see that this extraordinarily neglected concept of the author's interpolation (something which must be far more common in real life than the alien interpolation) has recently been taken up by George Goold in an article on Homer.[7]

Hesiod and Homer were oral poets and performers, but they set some of their poetry down in writing, and it was impossible for this to be no more than the transcript of an ordinary recitation. They could see that they were making something lasting, and they knew it was a challenge and an opportunity. When they felt dissatisfied with a recitation they had given, the only thing to do was to try to give a better one next time. When they felt dissatisfied with what they had written, the natural thing to do was to tinker with it. They were not pen-poets in the sense that Apollonius was, but they did compose, in the rather limited sense that I have tried to define, with the aid of writing.

DISCUSSIONE

C. Pavese

None of the features of the *Erga*, so acutely observed by West, seem to be a proof of written composition. They are just as well reconcilable with oral composition. Some are even better reconcilable with oral composition. Gnomic poems do exist in oral traditions: e.g. *Hávamál*, *Exeter Gnomes*, oriental Instructions. In Greece, Χείρωνος ὑποθῆκαι.

7. G

Homer used to compose gnomai in Neon Teichos, in a shoemaker's shop (according to the *Vita Herodotea*). In didactic poems a personal reference is almost normal. Anyhow, the *Erga* had in any case to be transmitted orally with the personal references to Hesiod: and so, why shouldn't they be also composed orally by Hesiod? – As regards the thematic incoherence, West is right in observing it in Hesiod. But this is not a proof either way. On the contrary a certain incoherence is better reconcilable with oral than with written composition. The themes are jointed to each other paratactically by the force of association. «Interpolationsjagd» is, as one knows, a rather subjective job. To detect author's interpolations seems to me even more rarefied. Anyhow, even granted, but not conceded, that the piece on sailing is an addition, it can just as well be an oral extension made by Hesiod in a successive performance. Hesiod like any oral poet surely recited his *Erga* many times with many changes.

West

You raised many points in your question. Certainly there is a good deal of evidence of gnomic poetry in other written traditions, and there is evidence for other early Greek poems of this type, not only the Χείρωνος ὑποθῆκαι but e.g. the Μεγάλα ἔργα. There is some evidence for collections of sayings ascribed to Sisyphus and Pittheus; and clearly this became, and probably it was already in Hesiod's time, an established «genre». The Old-Norse poems that you referred to (*Hávamál, Sigrdrífumál*): well, this is of course a written tradition by the time we get it; and I was rather limiting myself to what could actually be a certainly oral state.

Pavese

But they were not composed by the aid of writing, because Roman writing came up much later (about 1200 in the North) whereas all scholars agree that *Hávamál* and the other poems were composed about VIII and X century. They could not possibly be written in runes!

West

This is not impossible. To go back to the Anglo-Saxon field, the corpus of Old English poetry comes to us similarly in a Latin alphabet; but the famous poem called *The Dream of the Rood*, which comes in a manuscript form, is also found inscribed in runes, at least in a fragment.

My opinion about your second point is that only if Hesiod writes the poems down is it easy to understand that later rhapsodes, who reproduce these poems reciting them in a fixed form, can use the first person, and the audience understands «this is what Hesiod says».

Your last point is about the disorganization of the text. All depends on the nature of the incoherence. There are certain kinds of incoherence which – I think – are characteristic of interpolation in a written text, and I was arguing that the *W.D.* show this kind of incoherence and not the more general kind of incoherence which one might find in a freely composed oral text, proceeding linearly.

B. Gentili

L'originale argomentazione del West mi lascia perplesso sul suo punto nodale. Egli ritiene che le inserzioni di passi palesemente estranei al contesto siano da spiegare come interpolazioni d'autore, che presupporrebbero un testo prefissato cioè scritto. Mi sembra ovvia l'obiezione che, se Esiodo avesse veramente interpolato se stesso sulla base di un testo scritto, avrebbe fatto inserzioni coerenti con il contesto, non estranee ad esso. Se i passi indicati dal West sono davvero di Esiodo, è piú logico pensare che la loro attuale dislocazione non sia opera del poeta stesso e che il testo di cui disponiamo sia da intendere piuttosto come una compilazione antologica di versi esiodei. Qualcosa di analogo all'antologia teognidea.

West

I wouldn't say that these insertions are so foreign to the context that the alternative you suggest would be preferable. It was right to ask the question what Hesiod's motive for making an insertion in this text would be, and there one can only speculate. I'm sure that most authors nowadays constructing an extended composition would be liable to insert something in a passage they had written. Hesiod might very well have thought of the sailing section at a later stage of his work as something that he wished to add to his poem, and decided to put it as an appendix to the year's works. As regards the autobiographical passages that I suggest he did insert in the sailing section, it does look as if he inserted them out of a real desire to give information about himself; he does seem to drag these pieces of information in; and the same ap-

plies to other passages in Hesiod: the story of how he met the Muses likewise is dragged in for its own sake rather than essential to the context of the hymn to the Muses. You suggest, I think, that these passages might at some stage exist separately, were known to be by Hesiod and were then conflated with the rest of the poem by a redactor. You have 19th-century precursors of this kind of view (people like Kirchhoff and Schoemann) distinguishing various different Hesiodic poems which would be put together by a redactor in the *W.D.* – Some people may prefer this view of the poem; I prefer mine.

W. Burkert

Your paper has set out new and most interesting structural criteria for written composition of the *Erga*. The one thing I found a little bit disappointing is the final remark that things would be quite similar in Homer. Is it possible to phrase or to develop these criteria in such a way as to differentiate between Homer and Hesiod?

West

You seem to be presupposing that *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are oral epic and must therefore be distinguished from Hesiod. I don't think it is so. *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, I believe, are produced in the same way, over periods of weeks, at least, if not months. You couldn't produce these texts otherwise, and I also believe that they have in places (not perhaps very many places, but a few places) suffered from changes made in a written text. So I don't wish to differentiate Hesiod from Homer in the way you are wishing to.

G.S. Kirk

If you still maintain your opinion that Hesiod is older than Homer, don't you think that the use of writing for poetic purposes is something improbable at such an early date?

West

It is surprising that writing was used so early for the use of recording poems; but it is something that undeniably happened. There is no problem about materials: it doesn't have to be papyrus; they could have used skins, or wood, or lead (Pausanias refers to a story about a text of the *Erga* on lead, and we have lead documents from as early as the VI century). And I think that the difference between – say – 700 B.C. and

600 B.C. in terms of literacy was that about 600 there would be a larger number of people that were able to write, and in the habit of writing. But *not* that in 700 people were able to write just two lines, whereas in 600 they were able to write tens of thousands of lines. You can write what you want, if you can write, and there is nothing to stop you going on as long as you have the will to.

F. Lasserre

Je ne suis pas certain que le problème soit posé dans ses termes les plus adéquats quand on oppose poème oral à poème écrit. L'élaboration du poème se fait dans un travail mental plus ou moins secret. Sa récitation par l'auteur lui-même ou par un rhapsode peut subir toutes les vicissitudes propres à une performance poétique orale, notamment le glissement de la version initiale à la version formulaire, le raccourcissement ou l'amplification du poème, l'adaptation aux circonstances de la récitation. Jesper Svenbro, dans une thèse excellente au moins sur ce point, a bien décrit les conditions de cette plasticité en se référant à l'*Odyssée* et aux exemples rarement alléguées, mais très instructifs, de l'épopée kirghize (*La parole et le marbre*, Lund 1976). Vient enfin la mise par écrit: l'oeuvre sera bien différente si le poète préside lui-même à cette dernière métamorphose ou si elle est le fait d'un rhapsode désireux de fixer sur le papyrus le dernier état d'une tradition orale; bien différente aussi si le texte conservé est celui que le poète utilisait comme aide-mémoire ou celui qu'il a établi définitivement pour le léguer à la postérité.

La question que nous avons donc à poser est celle-ci: de quel processus résulte la version du poème d'Hésiode qui nous est parvenue? Sans préjuger des résultats d'une analyse visant à répondre à cette question, je puis dire au moins que si Hésiode a procédé lui-même à la fixation écrite de son poème, à quelque fin que ce fût, on ne peut plus parler de poème oral au sens propre du terme. Et j'ajoute que le différences notées par M. West entre la conception de la narration chez Homère et chez Hésiode, avec l'example si caractéristique du mythe de Pandore, qu'on pourrait ramener aisément à un seul facteur, à savoir que Hésiode ne recourt pas aux schémas narratifs typiques de l'épopée orale – les *narrative patterns* de Lord –, me paraissent significatives plutôt d'une forme écrite définite décidée par Hésiode que d'une rédaction de rhapsode au terme d'une transmission orale.

WEST

Rhapsodes continued to function for centuries after Hesiod, at least until the III century A.D. – We would like to know more about the stages by which they evolved from what is called the status of « creative » singers to the status of merely « reproductive » singers; but the production of written texts was clearly a very important event which tended to the fixation of what rhapsodes recited. In the V century B.C. rhapsodes were a common sight at public games and so on. But by that time they were apparently already reciting fixed texts, identifiable with the texts of the Homeric and Hesiodic poems: the texts that we know; and Hesiod himself, after he had produced his written poem, continued to recite it or recite versions of it. The same would apply to the poets who created the Homeric poems. They didn't cease to be reciters because they had written something down; though I think there would probably be a different relationship between the text and the recitation *after* the poem had been written down from before, because the very action of writing a particular version down would tend to fix that particular version in the poet's own mind. I don't think one can say much more than this about that problem.

M. CANTILENA

I shall be grateful if you will clarify some points I didn't understand in your interesting paper. First, you say that the «author's interpolations» disrupt a coherent and linear composition. I don't understand why this coherent composition should be already a written one. At the most we should have an orally composed text with some written insertions. And anyway we don't find any difference in the « method of verbalization » all over the text, and – as you admit – this is the method of oral poetry. Second, I don't understand why Hesiod, if he had the *aid* of writing, didn't use this aid better than he did. The structure of the *W.D.* defies every attempt to interpret it. Rather than botch as well as possible a rambling text, he might have composed it with more reflection and so with better consistency. Otherwise writing was no aid at all, but only an impediment, its only purpose being that of crystallizing the incoherences of a previous text.

WEST

About your first question, I don't think these may be regarded as insertions in an oral text because we can still see so clearly how

coherent it would be without the insertions. If these pieces had been inserted in a text which was still in an oral state, then I think we should expect that this text would have been recomposed in such a way that the insertion would not stand out in such a rough way. About your second question, I must agree that it is possible to use writing in composition to greater effect, but we are here in the very earliest stages of the use of writing in relation to poetry. The written book must still have been considered very much subordinate to the recitation of the spoken word. One doesn't know why Hesiod wrote these things down, whether just to have a visible token of his own creativity, or as an aid to memory. But, I think, one can't ask for the same standards in literary composition when writing is just being used in this rather limited way.