

The Muses' Playground 4

Turning epic into text

Epic development

- Between Homer and the next accessible installation in the development of epic, there is a space of over 400 years...
- ...however, we have fragments and indications of work in the epic genre from the interim period:
 - Hesiod, usually paired with Homer although generally thought slightly later, with a didactic thrust
 - *The epic cycle*, a loosely related group of hexameter poems on themes similar to that of the Iliad and the Odyssey – further episodes from the Trojan war, the *nostoi*, etc

Epic textualisation

- Fixing of the Homeric text in city states, e.g. Athens
 - 6th C BC; possibly to become a set part of the Panathenaic festival under Hipparchus
 - Attendant adjustments of the text
 - E.g. inclusion of Athens in the Ships Catalogue Hom. *Il.* 2.546:
And they that held the strong city of Athens, the demos of great Erechtheus, who was born of the soil itself, but Zeus' daughter, Athena, fostered him, and established him at Athens in her own rich sanctuary. There, year by year, the Athenian youths worship him with sacrifices of bulls and rams. These were commanded by Menestheus, son of Peteos. No man living could equal him in the marshaling of chariots and foot soldiers.
- But some performance-related improvisations seem to have been included in Homer texts as late as 3rd C BC
- The *Mss* do not fully stabilise until 2nd C BC

Epic textualisation

- Analysis of Homer in Alexandria
 - Systematisation of Greek literature
 - The earliest extant *Mss* of Homer: 3rd C BC;
concurrently scholia and fragments of commentaries
on the text
- So what does that mean: Text-bound literatures
emerging
 - Book division in Homer is not original, but integral to
Apollonius' *Argonautica* and (later) Vergil's *Aeneid*
- Epic backlash: Callimachus

Epic text: Apollonius of Rhodes

- A poet and a scholar
- Early 20th C scholarship: Did Apollonius distance himself from Callimachus or did he try to write a Callimachean epic?

Callimachean features of Apollonius

- Shift in focus compared to earlier tellings of the story: Apollonius' lead character is Medea, not Jason
 - Is there criticism of Homeric-style epic in this? Jason as an anti-hero?
- Frequent inclusion of *aitiai*
- Mythological references that can only be resolved by recourse to literary intertexts, including Callimachus' own
 - On Herakles/Hylas *Arg.* 1.1212-20, cf. Call. *Ait.* Fr. 22f
 - Indication that re-reading of a set text has become the norm

'Tension between tradition and innovation is an important factor in the aesthetics of Alexandrian poetry. Such authors as Apollonius, Callimachus or Theocritus show throughout that their poetry is "made of literature". Guided by the principle of intertextuality, their writing employs an extremely sophisticated technique of citation and allusion in order to evoke in their readers' mind the texts and manner of the "classical" genres and their prominent exponents, thereby highlighting the innovative tendencies of the new poetry against the background of the texts referred to.'

(Effe, B. (1997) 'The Similes of Apollonius Rhodius: Intertextuality and Epic Innovation', in: A Companion to Apollonius Rhodius, ed. T. Papanghelis et al., Leiden, 147)

Epic text: The *Argonautica*

- Epic features changing as text becomes the primary medium:
- Speeches continue to be signposted
 - Such signals were felt to be necessary by Hellenistic critics...
 - ...but their placement in verse does become more free, and they contain a much higher degree of variation
- Reduction of Homeric-style repetition
- Similes:
 - Most of Apollonius' similes have a counterpart in Homer, used for effect
 - Difference, or similarity?
 - More closely bound to the narrative context (very few golden-throned Heras here!)
 - Only on occasion disparate, but for effect
 - More closely bound to the themes of the narrative

An example, A.R. 4.35ff

- *“And as a bondmaid, torn from a wealthy house, whom fate has lately driven from her native land, not yet has she experienced hard toil, but still unaccustomed to pain and slavish work walks on in misery beneath the cruel hands of a mistress; even so the maiden full of passion rushed out of her house”*
- Contrast: Medea is not a slave – but her passion is as irresistible and as destructive
- Comparison: A Homeric motif applied in an erotic context
- Compare: Hom. Il. 6.454-461:
 - *...when some brazen-coated Achaean [455] shall lead thee away weeping and rob thee of thy day of freedom. Then haply in Argos shalt thou ply the loom at another's bidding, or bear water from Messeis or Hypereia, sorely against thy will, and strong necessity shall be laid upon thee. And some man shall say as he beholdeth thee weeping: “Lo, the wife of Hector, that was pre-eminent in war above all the horse-taming Trojans, in the day when men fought about Ilios.”*

The non-existent divide



The non-existent divide

- ‘When Roman poets do begin to write epic, they do so not as strangers to Greek literary culture, but as participants in a cultural transformation that had been shaping the entire Mediterranean world since the death of Alexander the Great.’

(Farrell, 2007, 428)

- ‘Greek learning, the knowledge not just of Greek texts, but of how Greeks studied their texts, was always a force in Roman literature.’

(Goldberg, 2007, 435)

The beginnings of Roman literature?

- The earliest extant evidence for epic literature at Rome is dated to roughly the same period as Apollonius
- However, grammarians make mention of songs of heroes of old sung at banquets potentially similar to Greek oral tradition
 - Similar practice at Rome tempting as scholars presuppose shared Indo-European roots for archaic literature in both cultures
 - In scholarship sometimes *carmina convivalia*
 - Also tempting to posit such a tradition as it would have conveyed ideas of early Roman history to later historiographers

Developing Roman epic

- Livius Andronicus, likely of Greek descent, dated to the second half of the 3rd C BC:
 - The *Odyssey* in Latin
 - Now only in fragments
 - Andronicus main work would, however, have been for the stage: comedy and tragedy
 - Saturnian verse
 - Influenced by Alexandrian criticism and practise
 - Cf. Sheets, 1981

Developing Roman epic: Naevius

- Seemingly the first to write Latin epic on Roman history: the first Punic war (264-241 BC)
 - *At the time of the second Punic war the Muse with winged step / introduced her warlike self to Romulus' fierce race* (Porcius Licinus, 2nd C AD)
 - The connection of epic to national expansion will become increasingly relevant
- Again in Saturnian verse
- *Bellum Punicum* only one example of Naevius manifold production – like Andronicus, he also writes drama

Questions: early Roman epic

- Neither Livius Andronicus nor Naevius belonged to the upper classes – Andronicus of Greek descent, Naevius from Campania
- Both did more extensive work in other genres, and we have considerably more fragments of early Roman drama and satire than we do epic
- It is only with Ennius (3/2nd C BC) that writers seem to embrace the view that writing Roman epic should be the highest ambition of a poet

Continuities: Ennius' *Annals*

- Told the history of Rome from foundation to about 170 BC, Ennius' own times
- Opens with a dream sequence where a vision of Homer's spirit appears to the narrator: 'Ennius' *becomes* Homer
- The closer relationship to Homer encourages comparison, and makes the reader search for equivalents
 - On character level
 - On theme level

Continuities in change

- Uses the hexameter
 - Frowns on the earlier use of Saturnian verse:
 - ‘Others have written historical poetry, in the meter that fauns and satyrs used to sing’ (Enn. *Ann. Fr.* 7.1)
 - ...but is found by later Latin authors to have written clumsy and harsh verse himself
 - The hexameter affords easier resemblance to Homer
 - The hexameter more pliable to the creation of artistic effects
- Latin is not Greek – Ennian sound play is very different from Homer’s:
- Alliteration
- Redundancies (not repetition!)
- (Figura etymologica)
- Similes follow the Apollonian pattern of thematic connection
- Competition: note that this is literary competition!

Carefully then, taking great care, desiring
A kingdom, they together take the auspices and augury.
On the Murcus Remus sits in wait and watches
For a favourable flight alone. Noble Romulus on high
Aventine seeks and watches for the high-soaring race.
They vied to call the city either Rome or Remora.
All men cared which one became their ruler.
They wait as when the consul is about to give
The signal, all watching anxiously the starting gates
To see how soon he sends the painted chariots from the barrier
So the people wait, worry on each face for their
Affairs, for which should be given the victory of highest rule.
Meanwhile the sun had set into the depth of night.
Then struck by rays a shining light showed itself openly
And at once on high from far away a beautiful winged
Left-moving flight advanced. Just as the golden sun arises,
There came from heaven a dozen blessed bodies
Of birds, settling on the place with noble wings.
Thus Romulus saw that given to himself alone,
Confirmed by auspices, were the base and bulwark of a kingdom.

The contemporary backdrop

....the high-soaring race.

***They vied to call the city either
Rome or Remora.***

***All men cared which one
became their ruler.***

***They wait as when the consul
is about to give***

***The signal, all watching
anxiously the starting gates***

***To see how soon he sends the
painted chariots from the
barrier***

- The audience in the passage situated as the audience for the races in the Circus Maximus in the Iudi Romani
- Romulus and Remus in a race of sorts
 - Remus implied to be the loser, mora = delay
- Ties together past and present, pulling readers in

To take away:

- The essence of epic changes as text becomes the primary medium and exact re-reading an option
 - Intertextuality increasingly important: ‘made of literature’
- Roman epic develops later but continually in tandem with Greek literary fashions – and in all likelihood from similar background
- Examples: Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Ennius
- Ennius will become a crucial intertext for later Latin epic