Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece

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1

From Letters to Literature

Reading the "Song Culture" of Classical Greece

Andrew Ford

One area of Greek cultural activity that was certainly affected by the introduction of writing was traditional song. It is only thanks to writing that we can study what we call, in a significant divergence from the Greeks, their early "literature." The translation of Greek song into texts is easily taken for granted, but I will try to show how the very creation of "classical" literature and its perennial reuse as a special source of knowledge and pleasure depended upon the ways that song texts were put to use in the latter part of the classical period. My focus will be on how the Greeks *read* what we might call, reverting to a Greek term, their poetry, except that my argument will imply that the very notion of poetry as the production (*poiēsis*) of self-standing works of verbal design, of *poiēmata* rather than of songs, was a new conception of the ancient singer's art and one that was fostered by an increasing tendency through the fifth century to consult and study songs in the form of written texts.

The "song culture" of my title is taken from John Herington's *Poetry into Drama*, which documented the ways in which Greek poetry was regularly presented and often preserved through oral performances rather than through writing and reading. Herington was able to see that, though written texts of poems were far from unknown in early Greece, "texts were no part of the performed poem as such" until well into the

fifth century.[1] Modern awareness of the oral dimensions of Greek poetry may be traced ultimately to the work of Parry and Lord on Homer,[2] but recognition of the fact that oral modes of expression and communication permeated Greek culture down through the classical age is due above all to Eric Havelock, who argued in a series of works that literacy was quite restricted in Athens until the second half of the fifth century, when a "literate revolution" transformed its traditional ways of thought.[3] Havelock is not mentioned by Herington, and this is perhaps because classicists have rejected his more far-reaching claims that alphabetic writing sparked the classical enlightenment by setting a paradigm for atomistic, abstract analysis and sequential reasoning.[4] This part of Havelock's theory has drawn legitimate and fruitful criticism: his oppositions between oral and literate mentalities appear overdrawn at times, as if literacy were a single phenomenon easily separable from orality, and as if oral and literate modes of communication had not interacted from our earliest alphabetic writing in the eighth century.[5] In addition, the technological determinism underlying Havelock's account treats the alphabet as an autonomous force in intellectual history, whereas recent studies have shown that the significance of any writing system will depend on the uses to which it is put in particular social contexts.[6]

Having conceded this much, I ask if the reaction to Havelock has not gone far enough.[7] Havelock has strongly influenced important work on archaic lyric by Bruno Gentili and Wolfgang Rösler, both of whom stress the cultural and social functions of early Greek songs that may not survive transcription onto the page.[8] Scholars not affiliated with Havelock have also illuminated cultural changes in the late archaic and classical

[1] Herington 1985: 45.

[2] Parry 1971; Lord 1960, 2000.

[3] Havelock 1982. See also Goody and Watt 1963; Ong 1982.

[4] A recent and sustained critique of Havelock is Nails 1995: 139–54, 179–91, with a survey of earlier critiques at 154 n. 17. Cf. also Burns 1981: 373 n. 18.

[5] See especially Finnegan 1977; R. Thomas 1989.

[6] Bowman and Woolf 1994; R. Thomas 1992.

[7] So also Bowman and Wolf 1994: 1–16, especially 4 with note 6. Cf. Finley 1975: 112: it is "beyond dispute that there is not a single aspect of human behaviour that has not been given new possibilities for development, change, progress, with the introduction of literacy . . . especially literacy that diffuses beyond a small, closed priestly or ruling class."

[8] Gentili 1988; Rösler 1980a. Cf. also Cole 1991, a revisionist account of rhetoric and orality that Yunis 1998 has come to grips with; Svenbro 1993; Robb 1994.

periods by giving attention to the media in which knowledge was stored and communicated.[9] It may be time to speak of a neo-Havelockian approach, one which, without falling into the untenable position of making writing the sole cause of all intellectual transformation, connects specific properties and uses of written texts with significant developments in intellectual activity.

In the study of Greek literature, however, it is more common to find scholars who acknowledge the importance of context and occasion for Greek song only to retreat to texts at the first opportunity. So in the end, Herington looks past the oral performances he so vividly evokes to plant himself on the bedrock of carefully written texts. He ventures that what made Greek song so varied and artful is the fact that "although its *performances* were universally oral, it rested on a firm sub-structure of carefully meditated written texts."[10] In this case, however, it is not clear why we should take early Greek poetry as a "performing act," as Herington urges, before it became a literary text. It is, in fact, irrelevant whether a text was presented orally or not if one assumes that composers were designing works that could be adequately captured on paper.

Progress on this point has been obstructed by focusing on the question of whether poets used writing to *compose* their works. It is usually assumed that writing allows for the kind of careful planning and revision required to produce the complex patterns in word choice and arrangement that we expect of great literature. Homeric studies are an obvious case in which it is frequently argued that the epics are too artfully composed not to be the result of painstaking construction. Pursuing the question from this angle results in predictably neoclassical alternatives. To those who, like myself, find that Homer "reads" differently from Apollonius of Rhodes or Virgil, and that their relation to letters has something to do with this, the answer usually amounts to "Those oft are stratagems which error seem, / Nor is it Homer nods but we that dream."[11] But the question is not whether singers preplan and structure their works; of course they do.[12] What may be questioned is what their planning was aiming at. To the extent that our texts of early

[9] E.g., Lloyd 1979: 239–40, 1987: 70–8; Detienne 1988; Sickinger 1999.

[10] Herington 1985: 41.

[11] Pope (*Essay on Criticism* 1.177–78) glances at Horace, *Ars Poetica* 359, where Homer is contrasted with the writerly poet Choerilus.

[12] Finnegan 1977: 73–6, 183–8.

song represent "scripts" to be embodied in performance,[13] preplanning and artistry would have been more profitably directed at creating a collective experience in which words were but one element in a fabric of music, motion, and spectacle enfolding the audience. A composer of tragedies, for example, owed his success to how his scripts fared when they were performed at the Dionysiac festivals, not to how they read in the hands of actors or in the city's archives. Modern classicists, late plunderers of those archives, may well wonder whether early Greek singers designed their songs to be completely satisfactory, or even fully intelligible, to readers, and indeed to readers like us.

A different path of attack is to ask where song texts were kept and how they were put to use in the archaic and classical periods. My interest, then, is not primarily in the use of writing in the composition of song, nor in its preservation. What needs more discussion is the possibility that the availability of written texts of songs may have influenced their reception and even suggested new ideas of their nature and function.[14] Before this suggestion is dismissed as a vagary, let me offer a small but indisputable example. Acrostics are a verbal effect most readily available to readers. The earliest known acrostic in Greek literature comes from the fourth century B.C.E., when Chaeremon spelled out his name at the beginning of a suite of trimeters (*TrGF* 71 F 14b). This is the Chaeremon whom Aristotle described as a composer in the "readerly" as opposed to "performative" style (*Rhetoric* 1413b13).[15] The trick was taken up by bookish Hellenistic writers such as Nicander, who signed a work in this way (*Theriaca* 345–53). But the habit of poring so closely over texts also allowed readers to "discover" acrostics in Homer, notably the word *leukē* ("white") in the opening of *Iliad* 24 as reprised by Aratus' *leptē* ("subtle," *Phaenomena* 783–87), like the phenomenon itself.

To focus this question, I will ask when did the Greeks begin to read their own "literature," and when do we find them taking up song texts and going through them (silently or aloud) as a way of fully experiencing and enjoying the benefits song was thought to offer? The passage of song from performance event to the object of such reading I call

[13] To borrow a concept from Nagy 1996.

[14] The history of Greek reading has chiefly occupied Italian and French classicists; see the contributors to and bibliography in Cambiano, Canfora, and Lanza 1992 and the bibliography in Detienne 1988: 530–8.

[15] See Hunter, this volume: 218–20, on these stylistic concepts of Aristotle.

"textualization" to distinguish it from transcription, or the simple writing down of the words of a song. The mere existence of song texts does not tell us much about the uses to which they were put. The evidence will suggest that songs were increasingly textualized in the period from Simonides to Plato; this is not to say that songs were being written down with greater frequency in this period, but that their transcriptions were being put to new uses – as works of art to be enjoyed in private reading and not as scripts or promptbooks to be memorized for performance and reused in social contexts. Allowing that our evidence is slim, I shall argue that it is significant that only very late in the fifth century do we find songs being approached, studied, and enjoyed in the form of texts – fixed and isolated verbal constructs demanding a special form of appreciation and analysis.

If Havelock's insistence that written texts were slow to make their way to the center of Greek cultural life remains a significant contribution, the oral–textual transition may be thought a trivial part of larger cultural developments that made classical Greek culture and literature different from archaic – unless some consequence attaches to the specific technology of writing. In my account, writing played a key role in this development in two ways. The most obvious property of written texts is their reductiveness. A written version of a Greek song would have almost certainly omitted its music, and it certainly lacked dance or gesture, to say nothing of costume, and such potent intangibles as the tenor of a maiden's or a boy's voice. Thus, when songs were reduced to words on a page (albeit to rhythmical words that may reflect and refer to their original circumstances and modes of performance), they sacrificed a wealth of appeal and significance. But as these texts, originally contrived as mnemonic aids for prospective performers, came to be used by skilled readers in their private leisure, the formal symmetries that repeated study of a text could disclose came to substitute for the lost meanings of performative context. Put generally, I suggest that texts helped Greeks shift their criticism from evaluating songs in moral and social terms to focusing on their intrinsic formal properties.[16] The second feature of texts that came into play was, equally obviously, that they could preserve old songs. When combined with the formalist

[16] Gentili 1988; already *in nuce* in Davison 1968: 113, Havelock 1978: 18–20. Ford 2002 is a fuller account of this transformation.

satisfactions that texts could supply, this gave a new lease on life to songs that were not often re-performed or whose performance modes were dying out. Writing, then, was crucial for the Greeks to construct their classical literature.

The process I am describing is abstract, but can be illustrated by an example from the end stage of the process. Aristotle famously says in the *Poetics* (1453b3–7) that a well-made tragedy should have the same effect when one "hears," or perhaps "reads" (*akouōn*), it as it does when one sees it performed; for "the reader" (*ton akouonta*), as he was called, hearing a well-constructed version of the Oedipus story should be as emotionally engaging as seeing it performed.[17] Here is a Greek who can find full satisfaction in reading a play, and a play that premiered almost half a century before he was born. The survey that follows asks, in effect, how old the attitude of Aristotle is and how much writing came into it. I will review the main evidence that has been adduced in reconstructing Greek literacy, with a special focus on what kinds of song texts were in existence at a given time, where they were kept, and how (little) they were used. It will be seen that different genres underwent textualization to different degrees and at different times, and I can only sketch a large and complex development. But I hope this account, incomplete as it is, may provoke further reflection along these lines.

COUNTING LITERACY

We must assume that some Greek songs were written down as early as the earliest singers of whom we have any substantial knowledge. Putting aside the vexed question of Homer, this means that choral lyric, for example, was already being transcribed in the seventh century B.C.E., from which survive more than 140 verses of a densely symbolic and obscure ritual song known as Alcman's Louvre *Partheneion* ("maiden song," *PMG* 1). It is hard to imagine how Hellenistic scholars came to possess such an abundance of archaic lyric if there were not some copies from a very early time that were preserved by their composers or by those who commissioned the songs, whether individual patrons or cities with temples for storage.[18]

[17] On ἀκούειν here, cf. Schenkeveld 1992: 132, 141.

[18] See Pöhlmann 1990 for this argument, though he depicts the archaic age as rather like the Hellenistic *Mouseion*, except with fewer missing volumes.

At the same time, it is hard to see that the manuscript of such a song would have found many readers. The probability is that early song texts lacked colometry (except in the case of stichic verse), music, and other conveniences for reading, including a standard orthography. Altogether, a lyric song text of the archaic period was fairly useless to anyone who had not already heard the song.[19] These considerations are supported by the likely low numbers of people who were skilled enough to tackle such texts in archaic Greece.[20] Some of Havelock's critics have assumed that classical and even archaic Greece was full of readers, but only on the basis of hasty generalizations from the evidence. Just as Havelock may be faulted for lumping all uses of letters under the single category of literacy, those who would infer "widespread literacy" from one or another archaic use of writing neglect the fact that literacy admits of many levels and forms. For example, the use of public inscriptions from the middle of the seventh century has often been cited as evidence of a wide reading public, but Rosalind Thomas has pointed out that inscriptions can serve an array of social and symbolic functions, and we are rash to assume that such monuments stood there to be read by all.[21]

Again, because the unlettered in a society may be surrounded by a wider literacy network, we cannot infer from the use of ostracism in fifth-century Athens that "the ordinary Athenian was a literate person" and that "a widespread ability to read and write is a basic assumption of the Athenian democracy."[22] The design of the institution of ostracism may be owed less to exploiting a generalized literacy among the citizens than to the imitation of the heroic custom of choosing champions by lot. I think particularly of the scene in the *Iliad* (7.175–90) where the Greeks choose who will fight Hector by scratching identifying marks

[19] Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1900: 41 was sensitive enough to such issues to assume that early song texts must have had musical notation in order to function as commercial books; he theorized that such indications were lost when schoolteachers dispensed with them. But school books appear earlier in the record than trade books, and there is no evidence for musical notation before the middle of the fifth century. The grammatists' indifference to such notation as might have existed could signal the fact that the only real way to get a song was by hearing it.

[20] W. V. Harris 1989: Chapter 3, 114–15 finds a relatively rapid expansion in reading and writing between 520–480, with rates remaining relatively low thereafter (5% to 10%) into the fourth century.

[21] R. Thomas 1996; Anderson 1987; *pace* Harvey 1966; Knox 1985: 5.

[22] Turner 1952: 8.

on pebbles and then drawing lots. It remains significant that ostracism required thousands of citizens to cast ballots inscribed with the victim's name, but caches of pre-inscribed ostraca indicate that it worked, at least in part, through the sharing of ballots among the lettered and the unlettered. In addition, we should note, as Havelock does, that ostracism only required an ability to write and recognize names, not the skills to tackle philosophic or poetic texts.[23] Havelock points to Strepsiades reading his accounts in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (18–22), which only requires recognizing names (all in the dative, unfortunately for him) and numbers. To this should be added a passage from Aristophanes' *Wasps* (958–61), where an elementary education in reading and writing is all an unscrupulous politician needs to embezzle public funds. A number of democratic institutions required no more than this level of reading, such as the deme lists of enrolled citizens or the identification tags (*pinakia*) required to get into the courts. In other realms of culture as well, name literacy would have been enough to appreciate the countless *kalos* inscriptions (so-and-so is "beautiful") on vases or to applaud the epigram for Thrasymachus that metrically spelled out his name (DK 85 A8). A wide dissemination of this kind of literacy is all Euripides would have needed to depend on when contriving the famous scene in the *Theseus* (frag. 382 Nauck) in which an illiterate herdsman can only spell out for the audience – by describing the shapes of the letters – the name of Theseus that he discerns on a sail coming into port. If this was the right level at which to pitch a conceit intended to involve the whole theater, we can see why similar scenes were composed by Agathon and Theodectas.[24]

Havelock's picture of restricted early literacy is thus not easily refuted, but its significance for literature may be questioned. After all, a good story needs a good plot, no matter whether it is told or written, and a live performer can bring down the house with *le mot juste* at the right moment as forcefully as a careful writer can by putting it in the right place. Structure, surprise, irony, and even verbal echoes and most figures of speech (e.g., anaphora) are not the monopoly of either written or oral expression. Moreover, a good deal of Greek song is easily memorizable and therefore can be textualized by memory. According to Aelian, Solon once heard his nephew sing a song of Sappho

[23] Havelock 1982: 102 n. 32, 191, 199. [24] *TrGF* 39 F 4, 72 F 6.

over wine and liked it so much he asked the boy to teach it to him.[25] Sapphic stanzas are short enough and metrically constraining enough for us to suppose that the words were transmitted verbatim. Do we have, then, in oral transmission, virtual texts right from the start? If so, what difference could writing down these virtual texts make to verbal art? For Solon also seems to show that it was possible in the archaic age to conceive of a song as a text in the sense of a fixed structure of words. According to Diogenes Laertius (1.60), Solon practiced textual revision on a song of Mimnermus when he bade him to "take out" (*exele touto*) an ethically offensive verse (praying for a quiet death at sixty), "remake" it (*metapoiēson*), and "sing it thus" (*hōde d' aeide*).[26] Oral performers are not thereby indifferent to getting the words "right."

I submit, however, that to focus on the stable text behind such contexts is to impose our textualist values on more complex social practices. When an Athenian aristocrat took on the themes and dialect of a lady from Lesbos, the words were a small part of the show. So, too, Solon's debate with Mimnermus is not so much quotation or citation as conversation in song. The debate is a moral, not a literary one, and Mimnermus' words are less a text than a pretext for Solon's own performance. The game of repeating and varying models will go on.[27] I have no doubt that symposiasts like Solon could run off an impressive stretch of popular songs; indeed, collections of songs suitable for symposia such as the *Theognidea* are likely to be among our earliest collections of nonepic poetry.[28] But the "text" that is "quoted" or reactivated must find its meaning in its relevance to its new situation. If the words of a song may remain the same, their original verbal contexts have virtually no force in determining their meaning in comparison to the contexts in which they are re-performed. It is not only children of rock 'n' roll who will know this, but any who are willing to think of Greek song as analogous

[25] Sappho, *Testimonia* 10 Voigt = Stobaeus, *Anthology* 3.29.58.

[26] Solon frag. 20, Mimnermus frag. 6 West. The merit of Calame 1995 is to show the complexities involved in "reading off" references to the "original" circumstances of performance from archaic and early classical Greek texts. Contrast the anecdote about Solon with the facile assumption of Burns 1981: 374 that Sappho is too "intimate" to have been preserved through repeated oral performance. In a similar way, Knox 1985: 3–4 takes a "personal tone" in archaic poetry as evidence that the author used writing.

[27] On early "quotations" of Homeric and other poetry, see Ford 1997.

[28] Ford 1993.

to popular music that is encountered primarily by the ear and not by the eye. We cannot know Greek song except through philology, but we need not therefore make singers philologists, in effect transferring to the text our own relation to the text.[29]

WHERE LITERACY COUNTS: SCHOOLING

An institution that, by contrast, does bear directly on the question of writing and literary culture is education, for it seems that from the first Greek teachers of reading and writing used poetic, especially epic, texts as school books. Schooling in letters is first attested for Ionia in the later sixth century,[30] but there has been a good deal of debate about how rapidly it spread and when *paideia* came to involve not only the traditional lyre teacher (*kitharistēs*) but the letter teacher (*grammatistēs*) as well. Havelock's intellectual history led him to posit that elementary education in reading and writing became normalized in Athens somewhere between the childhood of Socrates and that of Plato (i.e., the 460s and 420s, respectively).[31] But many point to the 480s, when Athenian vases begin to represent school scenes complete with tablets, styluses, and book rolls. It is hard not to connect this with what Rudolph Pfeiffer described as the "sudden appearance" of references to writing and reading in poetry from the seventies of the fifth century.[32]

The vases, however, leave the extent of such education unclear.[33] The fact that they sometimes show book rolls inscribed with poetic phrases does not imply that all their viewers read widely in poetry, for in such representations the writing is often nonsensical, a decorative part of the scene; and when poetic tags can be read they are usually key words for

[29] See Bourdieu 1990, a stimulating essay on this theme.

[30] The earliest testimony, Herodotus' account (6.27) of 120 children in Chios learning letters (*grammata*) in 496, is somewhat isolated but is supported by later anecdotes. See Pöhlmann 1989; W. V. Harris 1989: 57–8.

[31] Havelock 1982: 27, 187; cf. Havelock 1963: 40. See Woodbury 1976, 1983 for detailed critique and discussion.

[32] Pfeiffer 1968: 26, citing Aeschylus, *Suppliants* 179 (cf. *Prometheus Bound* 460–61, 788–89); Pindar, *Olympian* 10.1–2; Sophocles, *Triptolemus* (*TrGF* F 597).

[33] Webster 1973: 61 counts 100 school scenes on Attic red-figure vases and judges the sum substantial, but the low ratio (as against, for example, 1,400 athletic scenes) may indicate that formal schooling was a comparatively rare and elite pursuit.

the quick orientation of the viewer.[34] Hence, though the school scroll on the Douris cup (of about 490–80) is inscribed with words that may be construed as an awkward hexameter, they may simply be a melange of two incompatible epic incipits.[35] In addition, there is reason to think that schooling in poetic texts (always privately paid) was a preserve of the elite. François Lissarague points to the surprising presence of drinking vessels in the school scene of the Douris cup; he persuasively explains these as referring to future symposia where this tuition in song will be put to use.[36] More recent studies have in fact pushed the full alliance of education and literacy into the early fourth century.[37]

In the absence of hard figures on the spread of reading in the fifth century, we may ask what students were reading and how. Our earliest discursive account of what the *grammatistēs* ("teacher of letters") taught comes as late as Plato's *Protagoras* (325e–6b), ostensibly describing conditions at around 430 but written almost half a century later. This is late, as are the texts that confirm it, but education is a traditional institution and I will give reasons below for thinking that in its essentials it describes early teaching too.

Protagoras, appealing to commonplace ideas about school, describes how *grammatistai* "set their students on benches and compel them to read and to learn by heart poems by good poets, in which are to be found much valuable advice and many narratives that praise and celebrate worthy men of the past, so that the child may imitate them with enthusiasm and conceive the desire to be like them" (*Protagoras* 325e–6a). Any kind of text can afford practice in decipherment and

[34] Immerwahr 1964.

[35] ΜΟΙΣΑΜΟΙ / ΑΜΦΙΣΚΑΜΑΝΔΡΟΝ / ΕΥΡΩΝΑΡΧΟΜΑΙ / ΑΕΙΔΕΙΝ (= Μοῖσα μοι—ἀμφὶ Σκάμανδρον ἐύρροον ἄρχομ' ἀείδειν). "Muse, to me—I begin to sing about wide flowing Scamander." The cup, reproduced on the cover, is Berlin, Staatliche Museen 2285. On the inscribed scroll, see Beazley 1948: 337–8; Immerwahr 1964: 18–19. The best image is that in Kirchner 1948: 11, plate 22.

[36] Lissarague 1987: 130, 132. Such details are not uncommon; a splendid example, an Attic volute crater published by B. Girou in J.-B. Caron et al., eds. *Mélanges d'études anciennes offerts à Maurice Lebel* (Quebec, 1980), shows boys reciting before teachers amidst all the appurtenances of a young man's leisure: walls decked with javelins for sport, a strigil for the gymnasium, and an oil flask for dinners and symposia, all activities in which the boys will join with other youths of similar tastes and education.

[37] Robb 1994, especially 185–97; T. J. Morgan 1999.

penmanship,[38] but the use of poetry was justified ideologically as a form of disciplining students in traditional ethical and political virtue; such a high-minded rationale would also have distinguished the education provided by *grammatistai* from the inculcation of craft literacy. It is also notable that the teacher of letters makes his students memorize the works; this suggests that letter teachers advertised (and perhaps initially chose) song texts less in order to equip students with the ability to read literature than to prepare them to act and perform in the right ways. In this, they would have followed the example of the music teachers, who had always used song to make their charges harmonious and orderly citizens.[39] As Protagoras is marshaling common assumptions to make his case, we can accept his description of parents enjoining teachers to "pay more attention to their children's good behavior (*eukosmia*) than to their learning letters and lyre-playing" (*Protagoras* 325e).

The passage from *Protagoras* goes on, significantly, to contrast the curriculum of the *kitharistai* ("lyre teachers"). They teach "other things" of the same improving character, and here, too, action and performance are the focus. First the student learns to play the lyre in tune and then learns "good poems of other poets, lyric composers, performing them to the lyre" (*Protagoras* 326a–b).[40] It is rarely noted that texts are only mentioned in reading classes, and that these texts are, for understandable reasons, limited to the stichic, recitable verses of didactic hexameter or gnomic elegy and epic, forms that require no music to be adequately performed (e.g., Hesiod, Solon, and Homer). Another Platonic passage on grammatical education, from the *Laws*, confirms this restricted curriculum (810e–11a): "We have numerous poets in hexameters, trimeters, and all the spoken meters, some serious and some humorous, that thousands upon thousands maintain should be crammed into those among the young who are to be properly educated,

[38] Turner 1965.

[39] Cf. the emphasis on virtue (σωφροσύνη) and deportment (εὐτάκτως) in the praise of "old" musical education at Aristophanes, *Clouds* 961–4; cf. also Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 159. A practical aspect is not to be overlooked, since epics were likely the most attractive reading matter available at the time, Ionian philosophy being too recherché.

[40] οἵ τ' αὖ κιθαρισταί, ἕτερα τοιαῦτα, σωφροσύνης τε ἐπιμελοῦνται καὶ ὅπως ἂν οἱ νέοι μηδὲν κακουργῶσιν· πρὸς δὲ τούτοις, ἐπειδὰν κιθαρίζειν μάθωσιν, ἄλλων αὖ ποιητῶν ἀγαθῶν ποιήματα διδάσκουσι μελοποιῶν, εἰς τὰ κιθαρίσματα ἐντείνοντες.

making them good listeners through repeated readings and widely learned through getting entire poets by heart."[41] Recitability is obviously the determining consideration, for Plato goes on to add that some teachers compiled key texts (*kephalaia*) from the poets and combined these with entire (dramatic) speeches (*rhēseis*) that had to be memorized to make a student "good and wise" (*Laws* 811a).[42]

The bifurcated curriculum outlined here suggests that lyric texts did not, by and large, become school texts. Thus the textualization of sung lyric took a different course from that of recited verse, and some of its fifth-century turning points are reflected in comedy.[43]

A famous scene in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (1353–90) dramatizes a felt decline in musical culture among the younger generation of the 420s. At a dinner party, old Strepsiades tries in vain to have his son take up a lyre and perform a song (*melos*) of Simonides. A *nouveau riche*, Strepsiades evidently wants his son to take part in the high Athenian culture as described, for instance, by Dicaearchus (frag. 88 Wehrli): at fifth-century Athenian symposia the "most discerning" (*synetōtatoi*) and "wisest" among the company performed not only the customary short drinking songs (*skolia*) as the myrtle branch was passed, but also more difficult songs by the likes of Stesichorus, Simonides, or Alcaeus and Anacreon. When Strepsiades' request is rebuffed, he lowers his standards and asks for a recitation to the myrtle branch of one of the speeches of Aeschylus (*Clouds* 1365). Finally, he is left with asking for a recitation from the younger poets who are so clever (1370). He is at last gratified with a speech (*rhēsis*, 1371) from a discourse of Euripides on incest.

Strepsiades' recalcitrant son finds older lyric "archaic" and suitable for a "dinner for cicadas" (*Clouds* 1360). The "cicada" Athenians, a

[41] λέγω μὴν ὅτι ποιηταί τε ἡμῖν εἰσίν τινες ἐπῶν ἑξαμέτρων πάμπολλοι καὶ τριμέτρων καὶ πάντων δὴ τῶν λεγομένων μέτρων, οἱ μὲν ἐπὶ σπουδήν, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ γέλωτα ὡρμηκότες, ἐν οἷς φασι δεῖν οἱ πολλάκις μυρίοι τοὺς ὀρθῶς παιδευομένους τῶν νέων τρέφειν καὶ διακορεῖς ποιεῖν, πολυηκόους τ' ἐν ταῖς ἀναγνώσεσιν ποιοῦντας καὶ πολυμαθεῖς, ὅλους ποιητὰς ἐκμανθάνοντας· οἱ δὲ ἐκ πάντων κεφάλαια ἐκλέξαντες καί τινας ὅλας ῥήσεις εἰς ταὐτὸν συναγαγόντες, ἐκμανθάνειν φασὶ δεῖν εἰς μνήμην τιθεμένους, εἰ μέλλει τις ἀγαθὸς ἡμῖν καὶ σοφὸς ἐκ πολυπειρίας καὶ πολυμαθίας γενέσθαι.

[42] On the social practice of reciting *rhēseis*, cf. Theophrastus, *Characters* 15.10, 27.2, and other passages discussed by Pickard-Cambridge 1988: 276.

[43] Cf. the implicit distinction between "learning" a lyric song by ear and having a tragic speech (*rhēsis*) copied out for memorization (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 151–3).

cultural elite in the generation after Marathon, are referred to by Thucydides (1.6.3) and described by Heraclides Ponticus (frag. 55 Wehrli): they pursued a life of elegant leisure (*habrosynē*) and represented themselves as intellectuals (*phronimoi*). The gold "cicada" pins they wore in their hair were one of the ways, along with their ways of singing, their Ionic dress, and their luxurious style of life, that showed them to be distinguished. Aristophanes portrays this high culture on its way out, and Eupolis attests that older lyric performance traditions were in decline during the Peloponnesian Wars: "it's out of date to sing (*archaion aeidein*) the songs of Stesichorus and Alcman and Simonides." Tunes from the tragic poet Gnesippus are more in favor, which the young can sing in their revels "to woo women from their homes." Eupolis also informs us that the same fate befell Pindar, whose works were "already consigned to silence because of most men's failure to appreciate beauty."[44] The fact that Eupolis used Pindar's own trope of "silence" for obscurity indicates he exaggerated, but the last epinician known to have been written in lyric meter was by Euripides. The form was revived in stichic meters in the Hellenistic age.[45]

The diagnostic scene of *Clouds* may be connected with the bifurcated curriculum of the schools if we assume, as Protagoras says, that the wealthy sent their children to school earliest and kept them longest (Plato, *Protagoras* 326c). As grammatical education expanded, the result would be that advanced skills on the lyre were rarer than the ability to recite (as Aristophanes, *Wasps* 959–60); recitations could be got without an instrument, even at a pinch, from a book. Thus, Strepsiades' son is incapable of performing a Simonidean song (*melos*) but can recite trimeters, at least those of the popular Euripides. As their performative modes became less familiar and as the institutions that supported them were fading, texts of lyric songs could become valuable cultural commodities. Some sought to acquire texts of songs that they were no longer likely to meet frequently in social life. These are the kind of people Euripides refers to in *Hippolytus* (451–2), who "possess writings from the ancients and are always among the Muses," and know all the

[44] Eupolis, *PCG* 148, 398.

[45] Fifth-century quotations of Pindar are short, memorable phrases of the sort "water is best," "law is the king of all," or "Athens the violet crowned." Only in Plato does one find Pindaric citations that suggest he used a written text; see Irigoin 1952: 11–26.

stories.[46] Alongside them were collectors of clever and novel lyrics, described by Aristophanes (*Wasps* 1056–9) as collecting the poems of certain poets and putting them in armoires among their sachets, so that they might "smell of cleverness."

Texts of recitable songs, by contrast, were well established in schools and were obtainable in other ways. By the end of the fifth century, educational texts combined nonlyric verse selections and prose writings of an impressive and informative character. In his *Laws*, Plato gives a slightly expanded description of the letter teacher's workbooks. The Athenian describes available school books as the "non-lyric teachings of poets that repose in texts, some metrical, others without meter's articulations, but prose compositions deprived of rhythm and harmony, all slippery texts that have been left to us by such [wise] men" (810b–c).[47] As in *Protagoras*, reading instruction includes only nonlyric songs, but to these have been added extracts of prose wisdom. Xenophon confirms both sorts of education: Nicias' son Niceratus was proud of having learned the entire *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by heart (*Symposium* 3.5), but Euthydemus, who had had the "best" paideia, collected (*syllegō*) "numerous writings of poets and sophists" (*Memorabilia* 4.2.1). A school library described by the comic poet Alexis (*PCG* 140) contained recitable verse – Orpheus, Hesiod, Epicharmus, tragedy, Choerilus – and "all kinds of texts," perhaps a reference to prose. If we construe "tragedy" as referring to tragic *rhēseis* (as in *Laws* 811a), we have the same range of material, both ethically and metrically.

The anthologizing of verse and prose wisdom is attested for the late fifth century in the opening of a work by Hippias the sophist; he advertised that it contained "some things said by Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod, Homer, and by many other poets, and by prose writers, some Greek and some foreign" (DK 86 B6). This is important because it supports Havelock's interpretation of an important passage from Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1109–14): just before Aeschylus and Euripides begin attacking each other's verse, the chorus assures them that they need not fear

[46] ὅσοι μὲν οὖν γραφάς τε τῶν παλαιτέρων ἔχουσιν αὐτοί τ' εἰσὶν ἐν μούσαις ἀεί, ἴσασι . . .

[47] πρὸς δὲ δὴ μαθήματα ἄλυρα ποιητῶν κείμενα ἐν γράμμασι, τοῖς μὲν μετὰ μέτρων, τοῖς δ' ἄνευ ῥυθμῶν τμημάτων, ἃ δὴ συγγράμματα κατὰ λόγον εἰρημένα μόνον, τητώμενα ῥυθμοῦ τε καὶ ἁρμονίας, σφαλερὰ γράμμαθ' ἡμῖν ἐστιν παρά τινων τῶν πολλῶν τοιούτων ἀνθρώπων καταλελειμμένα.

being oversubtle because the audience has shed its former simplicity and "we're all veterans now, and everyone has a book from which to learn clever bits" (*ta dexia*).[48] The implications of this line for Athenian literacy and literate culture depend on identifying the kind of books referred to. After discarding implausible suggestions that these were books of poetics or texts of plays, or even a first edition of the *Frogs*, Leonard Woodbury concluded that the line is a backhanded compliment that the Athenians are "bookish to the extent that they have been to school and have acquired the skill of reading."[49] Havelock suggested a "pamphlet of quotations" from tragedy to guide the audience through the contest:[50] I think it likely that Aristophanes refers specifically to the popularity of school anthologies, with what Plato (*Laws* 811a) calls their "key sayings (*kephalaia*) and entire speeches (*rhēseis*)" that one learned to become "good and wise." Aristophanes' characterization of these books as containing "clever bits" (*ta dexia*) suggests the quality one displayed at symposia by "dexterously" handling the exchange of song.[51] Many in fifth-century Athens were hungry for a snatch of verse wherever it could be got. In Aristophanes' *Wasps* (580), jurors relish the prospect of forcing a famous tragic actor "to pick out (*apolexas*) the finest speech (*rhēsis*) from *Niobe* and recite it."

READING LITERATURE

Whether memorized in school or conned privately as a preparation for the evening, all these texts remain scripts for oral presentation. As long as the song text is a device facilitating eventual performance, we do not yet have "books" for reading alone. This is what makes another passage in Aristophanes' *Frogs* significant: Dionysus explains why he has come to seek Euripides in the underworld (52–4): "Indeed when I

[48] εἰ δὲ τοῦτο καταφοβεῖσθον, μή τις ἀμαθία προσῇ / τοῖς θεωμένοισιν, ὡς τὰ / λεπτὰ μὴ γνῶναι λεγόντοιν, / μηδὲν ὀρρωδεῖτε τοῦθ' · ὡς οὐκέθ' οὕτω ταῦτ' ἔχει. / Ἐστρατευμένοι γάρ εἰσι, / βιβλίον τ' ἔχων ἕκαστος μανθάνει τὰ δεξιά.

[49] Woodbury 1976: 353. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1907: 120–7 argued for a trade in tragic texts, but see Sedgwick 1948; on tragedy and writing, see Segal 1982.

[50] Havelock 1963: 55–6, cf. Davison 1968: 107–8.

[51] E.g., at *Wasps* 1222: τούτοις ξυνὼν τὰ σκόλι' ὅπως δέξει καλῶς. Cf. also *Clouds* 548, *Knights* 233, Dionysius Chalcus 4.4 West (δεξιότης τε λόγου).

was reading to myself the *Andromeda* aboard ship, a vehement, heart-rattling longing (*pothos*) suddenly overcame me."[52] Here is the first clear example Greek literature affords of a person reading poetry to himself for the satisfaction of reading it, and not for study or rehearsal.[53] Now Dionysus is clearly a ridiculous figure in the scene, and his reading may be of a piece with his effete and unmanly saffron robe.[54] Woodbury, who holds that "literacy had become general by the date of the *Frogs*," yet appreciates that even in 405 "books did not yet fit easily into the general view of life. They were the latest thing, but somehow odd and out of place, and the object of some suspicion and derision."[55]

Some scholars identify as our earliest evidence for silent reading a passage from Euripides' *Erechtheus* (frag. 369 Nauck), usually dated to 422.[56] In view of our sparse documentation, not much hangs on a difference of seventeen years, but this text is worth comparing. The passage from the *Erechtheus* is sung, probably by the play's chorus, old men in a besieged Athens. They use the first-person singular, assuming the voice of a single old man; he longs for peace in which his weapons might gather cobwebs while he binds garlands on his gray head and "unfolds the tablets' voice, which wise men make resound."[57] The word used for peace (*hēsychia*) can also mean leisure, and the garlands (*stephanoi*) suggest that this desired state is being exemplified in that great institution of civilized leisure, the symposium.[58] The metaphor of "unfolding the tablets' voice" means, I suggest, that the old man would like to brush off his old sympotic song book and, as was customary at symposia, lend his voice to songs that in war must lie silent on the

[52] Καὶ δῆτ' ἐπὶ τῆς νεὼς ἀναγιγνώσκοντί μοι / τὴν Ἀνδρομέδαν πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν ἐξαίφνης πόθος / τὴν καρδίαν ἐπάταξε πῶς οἴει σφόδρα.

[53] A funeral relief from the same period provides our sole sculptural example of a person reading alone. Immerwahr 1964: 36 suggests the deceased was a poet, but the book, like the hunting dog beside the reader, may be a mark of status rather than occupation.

[54] Dionysus' use of the word *pothos* ("longing") may reflect contemporary literary talk: Gorgias lists "pain-loving longing" (πόθος φιλοπενθής) among the effects of listening to poetry (τοὺς ἀκούοντας εἰσῆλθε, *Helen* 9).

[55] Woodbury 1986: 242.

[56] Knox 1985: 9; cf. Turner 1952: 14 n. 4; Davison 1968: 107.

[57] δέλτων τ' ἀναπτύσσοιμι γῆρυν / ἃν σοφοὶ κλέονται.

[58] Also the model for peaceful retirement at Euripides, *Heracles* 673–7.

page.[59] This old soldier is a traditionalist, not a Euripidean Dionysiac: his book is not a trade paperback but a venerable object (cf. the "folded tablet," *pinax ptyktos*, at *Iliad* 6.169), and it is certified to contain the sort of thing that cultivated men were accustomed to perform or "make resound."[60]

In *Erechtheus*, as in other early references to song texts, a charged metaphorical intensity, when unpacked, has to do with the paradox of translating song to text and text to voice, with the tensions between the world of oral performance and that of reading.[61] In *Frogs*, by contrast, Dionysus reads to himself, and he seems to read an entire play, not just ethically admirable speeches. Yet he also reads as a shipboard marine (*epibatēs*), and while this detail sets up a joke, it suggests the breadth of those who were collecting song texts. Officers in the army had much leisure that had to be filled in a dignified way, and song books would furnish them with materials for their messes. I am partly thinking of the third-century Elephantine papyrus, a collection of drinking songs, some elegiac and some dactylo-epitritic, that was found among the possessions of a soldier stationed there.[62] It is not unlike the text that Euripides' old soldier in *Erechtheus* looks forward to performing.[63] This is also a background against which we may consider Plutarch's story

[59] "Unfolding the voice" (ἀναπτύσσοιμι γῆρυν) applies to performing a metaphor appropriate to handling tablets; a complementary metaphor is Euripides, *Alcestis* 967–70, where books of Orphic songs are called "Thracian tablets which the Orphic voice wrote down" (Θρῄσσαις ἐν σανίσιν, τὰς / Ὀρφεία κατέγραψεν / γῆρυς). Other references to Orphic books (quoted and discussed in the chapter by Henrichs, 52–4) suggest a tension between performed song and text: their books are insubstantial smoke in Euripides, *Hippolytus* 953–4 and an oppressive "din" (*thorybos*) in Plato, *Republic* 346e.

[60] "Audible" is at the root of *kleomai* here, as of *kleos*, the word for "fame" or "oral tradition."

[61] The first reference to writing connected with poetry is in the mid-century *Prometheus Bound* 461, where Prometheus' gift to humanity of "putting letters together" is called "memory of all things, the handmaiden who gives birth to the Muse" (μνήμην ἁπάντων, μουσομήτορ᾽ ἐργάνην). The kenning (appropriate in a catalogue of inventions, for one must struggle to name what has just come into being) expresses both the low, technical utility of writing as servant and its higher use (via Athena *Erganē*; cf. Chapter 2, 39) as a tool in the production of art.

[62] Ferrari 1989.

[63] One might perhaps take in this sense the peculiar metaphor in *Frogs* 1113 of book owners as clever "veterans" (ἐστρατευμένοι).

of the Athenian captives in Sicily after 413 (*Life of Nicias* 29). Plutarch says that those who managed to escape working in the mines profited from their "mannerly deportment" (29.2).[64] This may mean that they were formally educated. He adds that "some" (others?) were "saved by Euripides" because of the Sicilians' passionate "longing" (*epothēsan*) for the poet. Plutarch's account is not altogether clear in its organization (29.2 and 29.3 seem to tell the Euripides anecdote from two different perspectives) but may be clarified if we apply distinctions with which we are now familiar. He goes on to tell (29.4) how many eventually came back and thanked Euripides for saving them; some of these became teachers (*ekdidaxantes*) on the strength of whatever poems (*poiēmatōn*) of his they remembered (*ememnēnto*), while others remained in the wilds but could sing Euripidean songs (*melōn*) in exchange for supper. I infer that the former got their poems (i.e., *rhēseis*) at school and so were able to function as teachers of letters (i.e., *grammatistai*). Where the others got their Euripidean songs we can only guess; some may have been in choruses, but it was easy for them to pick them up, as many did, by seeking out his songs from those that knew them (29.5). So great was the Sicilians' "longing" (*epothēsan*) for the poet that they would implore passersby for remembered bits and pieces of them, a "sample or a taste" that they would memorize and pass among each other (29.3).

The schooled seem to have fared better in Sicily of 413 than did the listeners, and books were clearly on the way in. A booksellers' quarter in Athens is first attested in 414 in Aristophanes' *Birds* (1288), and Xenophon mentions a wrecked ship full of "written *biblia*" (*Anabasis* 7.5.12–14).[65] Here, too, we should place Plato's reference (*Apology* 26d–e) to the books of Anaxagoras on sale for a drachma (hardly inexpensive) in the "orchestra."

It is also toward the end of the fifth century that we first find a Greek writer producing a discourse designed only to be read: this is Thucydides' famous claim to have written (*egrapse*) an account of the Peloponnesian War that was meant to have permanent interest insofar as human nature does not change (1.1, 22).[66] Hecataeus of Miletus had spoken of "writing" (and of "speaking," *mytheitai*) his work (*FGrH* 1 F 1),

[64] ἥ τ' αἰδὼς καὶ τὸ κόσμιον.

[65] Further references in Davison 1968: 108.

[66] See Edmunds 1993 and Yunis, this volume: 198–204.

but Thucydides' text is designed not to please contemporary audiences but to be a "possession for all time" (1.22.4). In implicitly setting his own work off against Herodotus' history lectures (*apodexis*, proem) and in the contempt he shows for the "competition piece" (*agōnisma*) that may win the temporary approbation of a volatile audience (1.22; cf. 3.38), Thucydides adumbrates a contrast that Aristotle drew in his *Rhetoric* (3.12) between the "writerly" style (*graphikē*) and one meant for (competitive) performance (*agōnistikē*).[67]

In the fourth century as well, writing is explicitly associated with carefully working over a composition. Pfeiffer remarked that early fifth-century references to writing most often stress its benefits as a preserver of information, and this idea persists in the rhetorician Alcidamas, who recognizes that written discourses can be left behind as "memorials" of those ambitious for honor. But Alcidamas adds that writing down one's speeches also makes it possible to study progress in eloquence, since written drafts permit comparison more easily than do two orations held in the memory (*Sophists* 31–2). Plato, too, in his discourse against writing in *Phaedrus*, allows that texts may be useful not only as aide-mémoire but for achieving a highly finished style. He dismisses such "poets or speechwriters or law writers" when they lack true philosophical knowledge: they have nothing more worthwhile to show than what they have written, "turning it back and forth, gluing it and taking things away" (*Phaedrus* 278d–e). With this, the first instance of our "cut and paste" terminology, the technology of writerly composition has arrived. The *Phaedrus* is also the first Greek work to mention the idea of organic composition (264c), a notion that governs a whole, stable, and fixed text. The fact that Plato's strictures against poetry in the *Republic* make no allowance for such an approach but focus only on how song seeps into the minds of audiences and corrupts them shows that Havelock's *Preface to Plato* was right to identify Plato's agenda as a cultural critique of Greek song performance traditions.

It was left to Aristotle's *Poetics* to provide a method for coping with tragedies and epics as texts. The reductions in his treatment of tragedy exactly correspond to the qualities a text can and cannot preserve. For example, Aristotle recognizes that music makes tragic pleasures extremely intense (1462a19) and is the most powerful (*megiston*) of its

[67] On writing and writerly style, see O'Sullivan 1992: 42–63 and Hunter, this volume.

"seasonings" (1450b18). However, the *Poetics* notoriously neglects both the business of rhythm and harmony and the choral odes that are a defining feature of the genre, and song (*melos*) figures mainly as a formal marker of genre (Chapters 1–3). So, too, Aristotle acknowledges that spectacle can have astounding effects (1453b9) and can provoke the tragic emotions of pity and fear, but he assigns this art to scene painters (1450b15–20) and prefers that poets evoke emotions from the structure of the action (1453b1–3).

Thus does Aristotle bypass the stirring ("psychagogic") effects of performance to find the "soul" of tragedy in its plot, a well-composed "structure of actions" (1450a35–9).[68] Structure is timeless, and so the context of performance is neglected in the *Poetics*, which does not even mention the theater of Dionysus.[69] The variables of performance, of course, may have to be omitted by a systematic theorist, but Aristotle also shows a marked irritability toward performers. The "power" of tragedy remains even without actors and performance (1450b18–19); it can perform its job "even without movement," that is, without acting, simply by being read (1462a11–18). In fact, it is one of epic's few advantages that it has no need of "gestures" (*schēmata*, 1462a3) to be performed; tragic performers can behave like apes and "stir up a great deal of motion," as if without it the audience would not perceive what is happening (1461b29–31). Aristotle's desire to get past performance was not an idiosyncrasy of his age. Sometime around his death, the Athenian politician Lycurgus ordered that official copies be made of the plays of the three great fifth-century tragedians. These texts (according to legend, the ultimate ancestors of our own tragic texts) were deposited in a public archive with the express purpose of preventing actors – that is, performers – from departing from the script as it was determined by a city clerk.[70]

[68] Cf. Yunis, this volume: 190–2, on the effect of performance in contrast to reading.

[69] Cf. Hall 1996. Aristotle recognizes the audience in making a purification (*katharsis*) of their emotions the goal (*telos*) of tragedy, but by and large what audiences mainly do in the *Poetics* is interfere with the proper functioning of the art (e.g. 1453a30–9).

[70] [Plutarch] *Lives of the Ten Orators* 841f, on which see Pfeiffer 1968: 82, R. Thomas 1989: 48–9. Pfeiffer 1968: 204 notes that the old inclination to pick out the best writers in a given form, as in *Frogs*, "must have been settled by the second half of the fourth century when Heraclides Ponticus wrote *On the Three Tragic Poets*" (frag. 179 Wehrli).

I thus conclude that it is significant that solitary reading is first attested in the late fifth century. Texts of songs are doubtless very old in Greece, but they do not appear to have circulated widely outside of the archives of professional singers and other specially interested parties before the end of the fifth century. If schooling in letters became a notable pursuit of some Athenians around the time of the Persian wars, at the century's end Aristophanes could still poke fun at mass audiences' pretensions to literary sophistication. A significant body of serious readers of song texts is only clearly visible in the fourth century. What I call textualization was the appropriation of such objects by highly literate minorities who made the primary criterion of their value the play of language, the one aspect of song a text can best capture. Then, as now, fixed written texts allowed interpretation to exploit the precise observation of word usage and formal patterning.

Of course, nothing in principle prevented people from quoting and reflecting on songs without a text at hand. Plato's *Protagoras* dramatizes close readings of a long, complex Simonidean ode that is quoted at length from memory by the participants and then broken down to its minutest elements for analysis (339a–47a).[71] But the intellectuals who gather for conversation in *Protagoras* are hardly typical. Note that it is Simonides they choose to discuss, a favorite of the "cicada" crowd but beyond the reach of Strepsiades' son in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Their taste in song is as recherché as their methods for making it relevant are novel. The high-flown, technical literary discussion in the *Protagoras* reflects the writerly assumptions of its author and his educated readers. It is noteworthy as well that the conversation switches in the dialogue from discussing virtue by expounding estimable old songs to a dialectical exchange; performing song was no longer the prime way to exhibit quality.[72] In this regard, it is significant that it is from Plato's prose text, and from no other independent source, that we can read as much of this Simonidean song as we can. Given the rage for reading philosophic texts and for dialectic in preference to singing old lyric, Simonides' song had to find a home in the great writing of Plato.

[71] On the discussion of Simonides' ode in the *Protagoras*, see Yunis, this volume: 195, 207–8.

[72] Cf. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1491–5: "There's no charm in talking idly by Socrates' side, throwing poetry away and neglecting the most important things in the art of tragedy."

"In archaic Greece literature preceded literacy," begins a classic account of ancient textual transmission.[73] While it is obvious what the authors mean, it is not quibbling to say that, on any of the usual meanings given to "literature," they put the cart before the horse.[74] I have argued that literacy preceded and fostered the idea of literature, a new way of putting the Greek heritage of song to use as isolated, fixed, and tangible works of verbal design. One implication of this is familiar: the meaning that can be extracted from a song text through the interplay of its lexical items must be subordinated to the entire effects of its situated performance. More generally, I urge that readers of early Greek poetry realize they are dealing with something more than verbal patterning. Like all song, this song had a social life, and that life was its most meaningful presence, however ephemeral, variable, and hard to retrieve it may be.

It would be romantic to evoke all the extratextual aspects of song that gave it its full significance in context – and problematic too, since context is mostly recoverable only from other (contextualized) texts. Circularity threatens any attempt at contextualization, but retreating into a hermetic formalism offers no way out of the difficulty. It is possible to be more realistic about how texts worked in a society. To do so, we take up the tools Aristotle forged, but we need not remain confined to them. For those who wish to consider Greek song in its historical dimensions (and some may not), its meaning is to be derived not simply from textual and intertextual plays of words but also from a contextual and intercontextual meaning-making process. The literally unforgettable songs that we read were surrounded by a untranscribable world that we can only read, but we must find ways to do so if we wish to unfold once again the tablets of song.

[73] Reynolds and Wilson 1991: 1.

[74] For a capsule history of the evolution of the concept of "literature," see R. Williams 1976: 183–8.