

NARRATIVE, NARRATOLOGY AND INTERTEXTUALITY:
NEW PERSPECTIVES ON GREEK EPIC FROM HOMER TO NONNUS

INTRODUCTION

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The history of ancient Greek literature can, in some way, be regarded and written as a history of epic poetry. Greek literature in its recorded form began and ended with two heavy epic ‘blows’ that were separated by more than a millennium: Homer’s *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (8th/7th century BCE) at the beginning, and Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca* (c. CE 500) at the end. In between, a continuous stream of epic production not only secured the survival of this arguably most persistent literary genre, but it also offered multitudinous opportunities for presenting and negotiating new literary aesthetics in dialogue with a centuries-old tradition. The most eminent examples are Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica* (3rd century BCE), the didactic epics *Halieutica* and *Cynegetica* by the two Oppians (2nd century CE), and Quintus of Smyrna’s *Posthomerica* (2nd/3rd century CE). However, the surviving epic poetry is, in fact, only a fraction of the actual epic production in antiquity – much of it is only known through fragments and testimonies.¹ In the Byzantine era, the ancient Greek tradition of epic poetry was revived by John Tzetzes (12th century CE), who wrote a hexametric renarration of the entire Trojan War (*Carmina Iliaca*) along with scholia on his own text.² With Tzetzes’ work the history of Greek epic symbolically rejoined its beginning.

While Homer and Hesiod have always been a key factor and constant reference points in the study of Greek epic, later (Hellenistic and, especially, imperial) epic used to be regarded as ‘second-rate’, imitative, non-original poetry for a long time.³ There has, however,

¹ See the overview provided by Latacz (2013, 82–88). On Hellenistic epic, see Ziegler (²1966). A summit of Greek epic poetry is the Egyptian area of the imperial period; see the survey by Miguélez Caveró (2009, 3–105).

² See the edition by Leone (1995).

³ See e.g. the notorious verdict by Lloyd-Jones (1969, 101), who qualified Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca* as “tasteless and turgid beyond measure”, while he condemned Quintus to be “by far the worst” among all late Greek epicists.

been a considerable increase in studies on, and re-evaluation of post-archaic epic in the past few decades. This development can largely be viewed in parallel with an according paradigmatic change in literary criticism and theory – essentially, a shift of focus from unidirectional source criticism (which often criticized later epic poets for seemingly not achieving the standards of their predecessors) to a set of more refined, dynamic, and value-free intertextual approaches that regard references and allusions not as incidental ‘soundtracks’, but, as Gian Biagio Conte put it, as an integral part in a system of a “functional rhetorical matrix” (Conte 1986, 23). Scholars thus were able, for example, to better understand the aesthetics of Alexandrian epic and the belatedness of imperial epic.

Along similar lines, in the past decades research on Greek epic has also greatly benefitted from the trends and developments in the field of narratology. The most eminent example is, arguably, the systematic and explicit introduction of narratological tools and terminology into the study of the Homeric epics by Irene de Jong.⁴ However, despite these developments and the significant progress that emanated from them, intertextual and narratological approaches can only rarely be found in systematic combination. In most cases, intertextuality still restricts itself to the level of ‘micro-philology’ exploring the creative dialogue at the level of specific passages, whereas narratology often lacks a comparative dimension concentrating on a single author or work. To put it simply, intertextuality is for the most part diachronic, but remains micro-philological, while narratology is mostly macro-philological, but remains synchronic. That being said, there are notable exceptions, and the recent years have indeed seen a certain trend towards the diachronization of narratology in the study of Greek epic. Andrew Morrison analyzes the narrative voices in Hellenistic hexametry poetry with explicit reference to their archaic models, demonstrating that Apollonius of Rhodes, Callimachus and Theocritus engage closely with the imagery, *topoi* and motifs that are inherited from their archaic predecessors (Morrison 2007). For the internal study of archaic Greek epic, the diachronization of narratology presents a potential minefield as it enters into conflict with hard-core oral theory. Egbert Bakker attempts to reconcile the positions of neoanalysis, literacy approaches and oral theory by introducing the term and concept of ‘interformularity’ into the study of archaic epic poetry (Bakker 2013, 157–169). This flexible concept, which allows for a spectre of gradation depending on the frequency of occurrence of a given formula and its context and does not presuppose textual fixity as a requirement for the significance of repetitions, admits the possibility that formulaic diction

⁴ See the narratological analysis of the *Iliad* by de Jong (1987 [2004]), as well as her narratological commentary on the *Odyssey* (de Jong 2001).

can be deliberately allusive under certain conditions. *Mutatis mutandis*, Bruno Currie does the same by discussing the allusive potential of transferred motifs and type scenes in the Homeric epics and the ‘Homeric’ hymns (Currie 2016) and arguing for “allow[ing] for interplay between the typical (formulaic) and the specifically allusive”.⁵ Finally, the forthcoming multi-volume compendium *Structures of Epic Poetry* promises a comprehensive and systematic analysis of all relevant structural patterns (“Bauelemente”) in Greek (as well as Latin) epic poetry with regard to their diachronic changes and developments (Reitz and Finkmann 2019).

Outside the field of Classics, Monika Fludernik was the first to explicitly express the need for a diachronization of narratology, stating that “there has been comparatively little interest on a theoretical level in the history of narrative forms and functions” and that therefore “a reorientation of narratology in the direction of diachronic inquiry is now on the cards – no longer as a weird antiquarian interest but as a vital and exciting new area of research” (Fludernik 2003, 331–332).⁶ Ansgar Nünning, in turn, saw in diachronic narratology the potential to a new way of looking at, and writing, literary history, and he labelled the project as “applications of narratology to the rewriting of literary history” (Nünning 2003, 250).⁷ In Classics, Irene de Jong took a similar stance and called for the implementation of diachronic narratology in the study of ancient Greek narrative. The principal goal of diachronic narratology according to de Jong is to analyse the mechanisms that are at work “when we see different authors using the same narrative device across time and space” (de Jong 2014, 120), and to reflect upon how the analysis of these mechanisms can advance our understanding and interpretation of single epic poems as well as the history and

⁵ Currie (2016, 10). Further studies that look at the allusive (intertextual) character of narrative patterns in archaic Greek epic include Danek (1998), de Jong (2002), and Rengakos (2002). See also the contribution by Currie in this volume. Anton Bierl, in his overview of new trends in Homeric scholarship, calls this trend “new oral poetry” (Bierl 2015, 182–185). See also Maravela (2015) on the narrative interaction between the ‘Homeric’ *Hymn to Aphrodite* and the *Hymn to Demeter*.

⁶ Fludernik already postulated the need for a diachronic narratology in her monograph *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology* from 1996, arguing that a “diachronic journey” through literature was a prerequisite for the development of “the conceptual tools which are requisite for a ‘natural’ narratology” (Fludernik 1996, ix). She is currently pursuing a research project funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, the principal goal of which is to initiate “a major innovative reorientation in narratological study by tracing functional shifts and new narrative strategies in the history of English narrative” (Fludernik 2019).

⁷ See de Jong (2004) on narrators and narratees, de Jong (2007) on time, de Jong (2012) on space, and de Temmerman and van Emde Boas (2017) on characterization. A fifth volume on speech is in preparation (de Bakker and de Jong forthcoming).

genre of Greek epic poetry in general. Diachronic narratology is consequently defined as “the description and analysis of the history of the forms and functions of narrative devices within a given (period of a) literature” (de Jong 2014, 115).

In June 2016, a conference was held at the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas at the University of Oslo, the goal of which was to test and apply those new theoretical and methodological perspectives on Greek epic by bringing intertextuality and narratology into a productive dialogue and by widening the two concepts to where their respective ‘blind spots’ lie. However, in contrast to Fludernik’s and de Jong’s conceptualization, which primarily (if not solely) focuses on the history of isolated narrative devices, the scope of this conference was meant to be as broad as possible not only with regard to the Greek epic texts taken into account (therefore covering the entire range from archaic to late imperial epic), but also concerning the possibilities of the application of intertextual and narratological questions and approaches. First and foremost, the diachronization of narratology in the study of Greek epic will of course look at how specific narrative parameters travel through the history of Greek epic, how and under which factors they change, and how these changes affect the understanding and interpretation of single epic poems and/or the history of Greek epic poetry. In a wider sense, however, the relation of Greek epic to other literary genres that (can) use similar narrative devices (such as e.g. lyric, drama, the novel) is of equal relevance, and therefore also questions about how authors of various literary genres exploit epic narrative parameters in an intertextual manner in order to initiate a dialogue with their epic ‘predecessors’.⁸ Consequently, questions relating to genre and generic classification should be viewed in close connection with narrative issues, too; an eminent (and hotly debated) example is the question of long vs short epic poetry and its (non-)classification in antiquity (‘epos’ vs ‘epyllion’).⁹ In a similar vein, the analysis and discussion of ancient literary criticism is an important aspect as well, since ancient literary criticism often combines narratological and intertextual approaches, most notably in the Homeric scholia.¹⁰ Furthermore, it may also be suggested that diachronic narratology could (and should) include, and be coordinated with, other more recent trends in narratology such as cognitive narratology and narratological character analysis.¹¹ Finally, with regard to later

⁸ See e.g. Hunter (2014) on Odyssean story telling strategies and their aftermath in Theocritus *Idylls* and the ancient Greek love novel.

⁹ See the survey article by Bär (2015) and the contribution by Verhelst in this issue.

¹⁰ See the seminal study by Nünlist (2009).

¹¹ The contributions by Bär and Verhelst in this volume offer attempts at combining diachronic narratology with narratological character analysis. For a combination of diachronic and cognitive narratology, see e.g. the paper

(viz., imperial and Early Byzantine) epic, the role of paraphrases and, therefrom, the ambilateral interplay between hexametric texts and prose narratives become also highly relevant. In this context, it is important not to focus solely on verbal intertextuality and/or generic traditions, but also to consider narrative aspects and the narrative ramifications that arise from the transition from one textual genre to another.

The selection of papers from the conference included in this special issue of *Symbolae Osloenses* offers an array of complementary perspectives from which narratology (or narrative analysis broadly conceived) and intertextuality can converge productively and enhance the literary analysis of Greek epic poetry. One such perspective is the study of narrative techniques, devices, patterns and motifs across the genre. This is the overarching theme of the three papers in the first section of the issue. Irene de Jong follows the trajectory of the *topos* of *oroskopia*, that is, gods observing events on earth from a mountain top, in Greek and Latin epic from Homer, who introduced the device by presenting the gods watching the action on the Trojan plain from Olympus in *Iliad* 7, to late antique epic. De Jong distinguishes two variants in the post-Homeric development of the *topos*, the *ouranoskopia* (gods watching from heaven) and the local *oroskopia* (gods watching from a nearby mountain). Her analysis shows how later epic poets consistently employ these variants, thus creating an intertextual tradition for the *topos*. The next two papers turn to characteristic devices of the epic narrator and of the Greek epic style. Thomas Schmitz surveys the transformations of apostrophe – addresses by the narrator to a character – in Homer, Apollonius and Nonnus. He finds that the ‘Homeric’ type of apostrophe, short address to an individual hero for enhancing emotional effect and vividness, is employed sparingly by Apollonius. The Hellenistic poet has a predilection for extended and collective apostrophe, address to a group (gods or heroic characters), and even concludes his poem with an extended apostrophe to the Argonauts, which blends epic and hymnic style and language. This is a prime example of the ‘Hellenistic’ apostrophe that signals the intertexts and genres embedded in it. Nonnus, who, like Apollonius, clusters his apostrophes in a poetologically significant part of the poem (Book 25), employs both the ‘Homeric’ and the ‘Hellenistic’ apostrophe but also varies the latter type by including in Book 25 a ‘Hellenistic’-type apostrophe to Homer, labelled by Schmitz as ‘intertextual’ apostrophe. The Nonnian narrator even employs a type

by Minchin (2014). Minchin compares the narrative distinctiveness of Homeric orality vs Vergilian literacy in relation to the different cognitive effect that an audience perceives depending on whether they listen to an epic performance or read a written text. Furthermore, see also the contribution by Maravela in this volume, who discusses the cognitive effects of *νήπιος*-prolepses on the epic reader.

of apostrophe rooted in the rhetorical tradition as a tool in his vivid engagement with the narratees. The narrator's interaction with the narratees constitutes also the broader frame for Anastasia Maravela's contribution which investigates the narratorial νήπιος-comment across Greek epic poetry. Her discussion draws the contours of a stable, albeit continuously developing and varied, intertextual tradition for this narrative device. The tradition encompasses both the types of characters that are targeted by a narratorial νήπιος-comment (warriors doomed to fail or die and suffering wives) and the typology of the comment itself: the Homeric variants of the νήπιος-comment – the “tragic-proleptic”, the “cognitive”, and the “critical” – are employed also by Hellenistic and later epic narrators, but “cognitive”-type νήπιος-interventions gain in popularity. Maravela identifies a possible case of narrative intertextuality in Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica* as the primary narrator in that epic poem replicates the Homeric technique of creating chains of interactions between narratorial νήπιος-comments and νήπιος-judgements at intradiegetic level (“nepic clusters”), letting the characters comment on the νήπιος-comments of the primary narrator and vice versa.

The next two contributions, inspired by narratological character analysis, investigate the transformations of two famous transtextual characters in Greek epic narratives, Heracles and Odysseus. Silvio Bär's article revisits the figure of Heracles – one of the most complex and inconsistent characters in Greek mythology and epic – in the Homeric epics and in the poetry of Apollonius. Bär draws attention to the virtual presence of Heracles in both Homeric epics. In the *Iliad*, Heracles is a character from the epic plupast, whose involvement in the sack of Troy is evoked to foreshadow the second, imminent destruction of the city. This exemplary function and virtual presence of Heracles is replicated in the *Odyssey*. Bär suggests that this poem attempts to cross out Heracles from epic memory by foregrounding his cruel, uncivilized side and by extraditing him to two extraterrestrial locations, Heaven and the Underworld. Apollonius, on the other hand, transposes Heracles onto the diegetic level. The contradictory sides of his character are evoked and diverging focalizations of him are juxtaposed to open new perspectives on a traditional character. Various traditions about Heracles' role in the Argonautic expedition are allusively interwoven in the narration, while his *dodekathlos*, inscribed as a “narrative palimpsest” behind the main narrative, invites metapoetic reflection on potentially alternative narrative strategies and contents for the main plot. Berenice Verhelst explores how the characterization of male heroes in four late antique epyllia invites comparison with Homer's versatile Odysseus. Verhelst diagnoses a certain ambiguity in the narrative treatment of Odysseus in Triphiodorus' *Sack of Troy*. Odysseus as a character in the plot is presented in an exclusively positive light, culminating in his

evaluation as “faithful” by the primary narrator. Many of the central character-traits of the Homeric Odysseus have been passed on to Sinon, the truly guileful hero of the *Sack of Troy*, whose allusions to stories of treachery associated with Odysseus serve to incorporate in the poem the anti-Odysseus threads in the epic tradition. In Musaeus’ *Hero and Leander* the swimming and suffering protagonist is shaped as a very Odysseus-like character whose adventure at sea and first meeting with Hero evokes Odysseus’ struggle with the waves and his encounter with Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6. However, as Verhelst argues, the many inversions in the narrative situation indicate that Leander represents a new type of Odysseus, downscaled and adapted to a role essentially inspired from the novel. The character of Paris in Colluthus’ *Abduction of Helen*, the unseamanlike shepherd with the inappropriate amatory rhetoric, is the antipode of both the Homeric Odysseus and the novelistic hero Leander. Finally, the *Orphic Argonautica* stages two potential Odysseuses: Jason who fails in his role and Orpheus, the “alternative Odysseus”, who succeeds with music, not rhetoric, and who holds the role of a homodiegetic narrator – but with a different audience and purpose than the Homeric Odysseus.

The next triad of articles turns attention to intertextual relations between specific epic poems with emphasis on their narrative features and aspects. Bruno Currie revisits the much-debated issue of the relationship between the two Homeric epics and examines their intertextual relationship in the light of four shared narrative features: beginning *in medias res*, initial declaration and subsequent duplication of the poem’s theme, closure with scenes involving fathers, and use of “interlaced storylines” and concomitant adherence to a “continuity of time principle”. Currie argues that in the *Odyssey* these narrative features are not drawn randomly from a repertory but in order to allude specifically to their use in the *Iliad*. In addition, Currie suggests that the handling of the “interlaced storylines” in the *Odyssey* shows greater ease and maturity compared to the *Iliad*. Marcelina Gilka examines the multiple intersections between Colluthus’ epyllion *Abduction of Helen* and *Iliad* 3 which features Helen and Paris twenty years later. Gilka argues that Colluthus’ presentation of the first meeting between Paris and Helen is endowed with an increasingly ironic and ominous colour when viewed against specific details in the narrative situation in *Iliad* 3. Conversely, the character of the *Abduction of Helen* as a prequel to the *Iliad* allows it to subvert and re-define to a certain extent the narrative situation in *Iliad* 3 by suggesting inter alia that Helen was not the innocent victim of love and Aphrodite that she claims to be in *Iliad* 3. Gilka’s productive conception of intertextuality as a bilateral negotiation of meaning between the later and the earlier epic narrative is worth noticing. In the last paper of this section Laura

Miguélez Cavero monitors the creation of a unique, Christian and epic, narrative voice by the narrator of Nonnus' *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John*, through a detailed analysis of the construction of the narrative voice in the first three parts of the "Hymn to the *Logos*" (Jo 1:1-14). Miguélez Cavero argues that the voice of the Nonnian paraphrastic narrator is a product of multi-layered intertextuality as it reverberates faithfully the voice of the Johannine narrator, filtered through contemporary 'orthodox' Christian exegesis, and blends it with a narrative voice which wields the conceptual apparatus and expressive repertory of the Homeric narrator.

The last article of the issue by Ahuvia Kahane leads us all the way back to the early phase of Greek epic, the Homeric poems and the Epic Cycle, and to the root of the epic style, formulaic diction. Kahane's contribution opens up the discussion about a potential synergy of narratology and intertextuality in the literary hermeneutics of Greek epic to encompass the dimension of orality which has been viewed as hardly compatible with the concept of intertextuality.¹² By examining the contexts evoked by select short formulas from the Homeric epics and from the *Ilias Parva*, Kahane highlights the crucial role of the mechanism of analogy which is operative even when the formulaic diction shows a significant degree of variation. According to Kahane, even the smallest element of epic diction has the potential to trigger hermeneutically significant association(s). The narrative situation(s) with which a formula is associated is an important parameter in the collective production of meaning. Kahane asserts that the diction and patterns of oral poetry can incorporate semantic, poetic and narratological values.

The contributions in this thematic issue attempt to direct attention to forms and the literary practice of narrative intertextuality in the longest living genre of ancient Greek literature, that is, epic poetry. The editors hope that the interpretations offered and the theoretical and methodological reflections raised by the individual contributions will inspire further studies to illuminate the development of narrative features, techniques, characters and motifs across the genre. The narratological analysis of ancient epic would benefit from a better understanding of the conditions under which the employment of a narrative device, motif or character by an epic poet may be viewed as allusive to earlier instantiations, or put differently where the limit goes between drawing from a narrative tradition and engaging in specific intertextual dialogue.

Finally, the editors would like to express sincere thanks to our colleague Professor emeritus Øivind Andersen for offering critical assessment of and advice concerning the

¹² See the discussion on p. X above.

individual contributions and the coherence of the issue as a whole. The final responsibility for any shortcomings in form or content rests with the editors.

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