

The Songs of Gods and Men: Internal Songs and Singers in Archaic Greek Epic

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Classics and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: 12 May 2016

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ABSTRACT

Within Homer's *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and the *Homeric Hymns*, there are a number of songs performed by internal characters over the course of the narrative. Despite similarities in theme and content between these songs, when they are divided according to the (im)mortality of their performers and the subject matter of their content, significant differences arise. Human singers wish to improve their social standing within the cosmic hierarchy. Being mortal, they are subject to death, but they can nevertheless emulate a sort of literary immortality through a celebration of *kleos*. The gods push against this. Within their own songs, the immortals instead reiterate the physical mortality that humans are attempting to overcome, emphasizing human inferiority and simultaneously solidifying the gods' own position of power. By highlighting these differences, we reveal the intricacies of the Greeks' relationship with their gods, and the critical role that song played in that relationship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to my readers, Craig Jendza and Michael Shaw, for their patience and insightful comments. An even greater debt is owed to Pamela Gordon, whose continuous support and feedback helped this project grow from beginning to end. I would also like to thank Steve Fineberg, who first taught me Greek, and Brenda Fineberg, who first taught me that I needed to learn Greek. Finally, in the emphatic last position, I would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. A. E. W. Hall, without whom this project would not exist.

Any errors that remain should be attributed to scribal interpolation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Acceptance Page	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
The Songs of Gods and Men	
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Songs of Men	5
Songs by Mortals about Mortals	8
Songs by Mortals about Immortals	27
Chapter 2: The Songs of Gods	33
Songs by Gods about Gods	36
Songs by Gods about Humans	39
Conclusion	54
Bibliography	58

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Epic

Introduction

Although archaic Greek epic (Homer in particular) has received vast attention in modern scholarship, especially concerning its relationship to song and oral culture, there has been, surprisingly, no comprehensive study of the *internal* songs—that is, those songs which are performed by characters within the text of the poems that we now have—available in the literary evidence. The last few decades have seen influential studies and interpretations of individual internal songs or singers, which have enlightened our understanding of those songs within their immediate contexts, but the lack of a comprehensive study leaves unanswered questions: Who uses song, and for what purpose? What relationship is there between singer and song content? In a larger context, what function(s) did song serve for the Greeks? By answering these questions, we can gain a better understanding of the Greeks' relationship with song, with the gods, and how they viewed the structure of their universe.

In order to answer these questions, I will analyze nearly all internal songs found in the non-fragmentary works of Homer (i.e. the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) and the *Homeric Hymns*, and occasionally I will draw upon passages found in Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. With these passages collected, I will divide them into two groups, depending upon whether the singer is mortal or immortal. Then, within each grouping of singers, I will further divide their song content between those songs that are about humans, and those songs that are about the gods. In so doing, I will demonstrate several things. First, there is a noticeable difference in content and

tone depending on whether the singer is mortal or immortal and whether they are singing about mortal or immortal objects. Second, that difference in content and tone is indicative of different goals and intentions held by each group of singers: Humans will sing about the gods to worship, praise, and placate them, but also about themselves, celebrating the famous deeds of heroes past and present, in order to obtain a sort of literary immortality that will persist beyond their own death for as long as their name is commemorated in song. The gods also sing about themselves, not in an act of self-worship, but in order to create, reinforce, and solidify their position of power within the cosmic hierarchy. However, when the gods sing about humans, they do not celebrate their exploits and achievements, rather they emphasize their mortality and painful lives that the gods gave to mankind, thus keeping humans lower in the hierarchy.

There have been several ground-breaking studies in recent decades that touch on some of these topics. Gregory Nagy's *The Best of the Achaeans* (1979, revised 1999) offers a thorough examination of *kleos*, the literary immortality that it can bestow, and the role of song and oral culture in that process. However, song is not the main focus, nor, naturally, does Nagy's book include many of the internal songs that do not preserve heroic *kleos*. Nevertheless, the key concepts of the work form a major underpinning of my own study, especially where I examine mortal song about mortals. Another important study is Jenny Strauss Clay's *The Politics of Olympus* (1989). Among other things, she has established the mythic cosmic timeline that the poems of Homer, Hesiod, and the *Homeric Hymns* occupy, and especially the critical role that the *Hymns* play in the transitional period between Zeus' ascension to power in Hesiod and his undisputed rule in Homer. This has included careful analysis of the internal songs in the longer hymns to Apollo and Hermes, but, once again, song is not the focus, nor is it exhaustively treated. However, her timeline and analysis inform my own study of the internal songs found

within the *Hymns*, and is particularly useful when considering divine songs the that gods sing about themselves and how these can be used to negotiate and solidify power.

There are, of course, other studies that address similar topics and have influenced the present work,¹ but they all exhibit the same partially complete treatment of internal song, failing to consider these songs holistically, which would allow us to understand these internal songs not just within their immediate context, but within the larger context of archaic Greek culture and thought. One major question left unanswered by these partial studies is this: Does each internal song connect merely to its local context and serve a purpose only there, or does song in general have a unified function that can be utilized over time and space by different actors? By using a holistic approach, the answers to this and other questions become clear. These songs do not merely have immediate relevance to their local context, but they form part of a larger network of song that reveals the political struggle, the push and pull, as gods and men both attempt to negotiate and solidify this position with the cosmos. Mankind wants to move up in the world and stave off their extinction, and the gods want to keep their rule and remain uncontested.

My first chapter will examine the songs that are performed by human singers. I will begin with those songs that mortals sing about other mortals, which nearly always take the form of epic, celebrating heroic deeds, and thus contributing to the *kleos*, or reputation, of the song's actors. However, human song is not strictly limited to epic, and there are examples of other genres, such as the *thrēnos* (dirge), which appear to scrutinize the heroic code and desire for glory that epic and the larger Greek society revered.

Following this, I will remain on the topic of mortal singers, but I will instead examine their songs about the gods. Much like their songs about mortals, their songs about immortals are

¹ Some of the most important include Clay 2003, Faulkner 2011, Martin 1989, and Scodel 1998, but many others can be found in the bibliography.

typically laudatory of the internal actors. The difference, however, is that the gods have no need of *kleos* and the faux-immortality that it is able to bestow, since they are already truly immortal. Instead, such songs serve to please or placate those gods to whom they are addressed or, in at least one instance, the mortal audience that is present at the performance.

For my second chapter, we will fly like a thought up to Olympus (or Helicon, or Arcadia, or...) to examine the gods and their songs. I will begin with those songs that the gods sing about themselves. Much like their human counterparts, these songs also are laudatory, but there is a natural absence of any celebration of *kleos*, since it offers no benefit to the already deathless gods. Rather, these songs serve to celebrate and reinforce the power and position that the gods already occupy, solidifying their rule in the universe.

However, as will be seen in the second half of that same chapter, divine song takes on a very different tone when it mentions mortals. Rather than offering any sort of praise or kindness, the gods belabor the frailty and inferiority of humankind, especially emphasizing the gods' own hand in creating and maintaining this condition for mortals, thus highlighting the greater cosmic hierarchy. Some mortals, however, do have special relationships with the gods, and, as a result, this critical attitude may be somewhat mollified in individual songs.

Chapter 1: The Songs of Men

Just as I have divided internal singers into two categories (i.e. mortal and immortal), the content of their songs can also be divided by the same criterion; that is to say, for mortal and immortal singers both, the content of their songs can be broadly divided between those about humans and those about gods (and, in some cases, a combination thereof). Within these broad categories, the two groups of singers approach their songs with slight differences in emphasis and function (as will be discussed later),² but the general division nevertheless remains applicable. For the present time, though, I wish to discuss only the songs performed by mortals, and will discuss the songs of immortals in a subsequent chapter.

Within each of the broad divisions of song content outlined above, it is possible to be more precise about the form and function that each song assumes. In the first case, songs about humans always preserve mortal *kleos*, which is the nearest thing to immortality that any ordinary human can hope for.³ There is additionally an (ironic) subset of this category in the form of dirges (θρῆνοι) sung for the dead.⁴ The other major category is, of course, songs about the gods. These songs can take various forms (e.g. theogonies, paeans, hymns, etc.), but they all equally serve as praise of the gods.⁵ It seems expedient to also note (as already mentioned) that some songs straddle these two categories. Each song will distinctly fall more into one category than the other, but one or more singers from the other category will nevertheless receive brief mention.

2 The focus of mortal singers is discussed below. Immortal singers will be discussed in the next chapter, but, to anticipate the conclusion, I shall summarize here: Divinely-sung songs about the immortals themselves contain faultless praise and take the same form as mortally-sung songs about the gods (i.e. theogonies, hymns of specific deities' births, etc.). The differences surface in divinely-sung songs about mortals, which, in addition to being rare, are critical of human mortality and emphasize human subordination to the gods.

3 Garvie 1994 ad 8.44–5, Nagy 1999.

4 For the θρῆνος as an ironic vehicle for immortality, i.e. that death must occur before immortality can be achieved, see Nagy 1999, ch. 10.

5 Although cf. my discussion of Demodocus' "Lay of Aphrodite and Ares" below.

The general divisions become no less clear, but this fact warrants observation since, when these intrusions do occur, they appear to be significant. Instances of this crossover will be discussed as they arise.

Before beginning the analysis of the songs themselves with the proposed schema, I suppose it would behoove me to justify said schema. That is to say, why—other than to match the division of singers into mortal and immortal—why likewise divide song content into songs about gods and songs about humans? On one hand, the answer is simple, for, as will become apparent in the evaluation of the evidence, this is simply how the content of the songs naturally falls: the primary focus of every song is either on mortal or divine characters; it seems only natural to divide the songs in this way. But, on the other hand, in addition to this implicit division, there is also more explicit evidence that songs can be divided into these two categories. This evidence comes not from a song itself, but from a comment on song. In the *Odyssey*, after Phemius' song about the *nostos* of the Greeks has drifted upstairs into Penelope's chamber, she descends and rebukes Phemius for singing this particular song because of the grief it causes her on account of her husband's absence:

337 «Φήμιε, πολλὰ γὰρ ἄλλα βροτῶν θελκτήρια οἶδας,

ἔργ' ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, τὰ τε κλείουσιν ἀοιδοί·

τῶν ἔν γέ σφιν ἄειδε παρήμενος, οἱ δὲ σιωπῆ

340 οἶνον πινόντων· ταύτης δ' ἀποπαύε' ἀοιδῆς

λυγρῆς, ἧ τέ μοι αἰεὶ ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλον κῆρ

τείρει, ἐπεὶ με μάλιστα καθίκετο πένθος ἄλαστον.

τοίην γὰρ κεφαλὴν ποθέω μεμνημένη αἰεὶ,

ἄνδρός, τοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ καθ' Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος.» (Hom. *Od.* 1.337–344)

“Phemius, you know many other things to charm mortals, the deeds of men and gods, which bards make famous. Sing one of those while you sit here, and let them drink their wine in silence. But leave off from this painful song, which always distresses my dear heart in my breast, since an unforgettable pain has come upon me especially. I yearn for such a head remembering it always, my husbands, whose *kleos* is wide in Hellas and mid-Argos.”

Here, Penelope expresses what appears to be common knowledge about bards: that they know and make famous (338 κλείουσιν) many songs about the deeds of men and gods (338 ἔργ’ ἀνδρῶν ἐτ θεῶν τε).⁶ Penelope gives no indication that bards would sing about anything other than gods and men. And, indeed, as the remainder of the internal songs will show, all the songs are about one or both of these groups.⁷

Further support for this division (and, indeed, the same divisions and content) can be found in the external songs themselves. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are primarily about the deeds of mortals, but we also see glimpses of divine action, either fighting on the battlefield along with mortals, or events that take place on Olympus. The *Homeric Hymns*, on the other hand, concern themselves almost exclusively with the actions of the gods (although occasionally such action includes kidnapping unnamed sailors, or being worshipped by unnamed maidens, etc.).⁸ Although not discussed at length in this project, Hesiod’s *Theogony* can also be added to this list: the various

6 Cf. Hes. *Th.* 99–101: ἀοιδὸς | Μουσάων θεράπων κλεῖα προτέρων ἀνθρώπων | ὑμνήσει μάκαράς τε θεοὺς οἱ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσιν. Hesiod attributes the same song content to bards as does Penelope.

7 One could, I think, make the argument that here Penelope is thinking about these two groups as inherently linked: bards sing about *both* gods *and* men together at the same time. Indeed, the song that incites this outburst from Penelope is about the Greeks’ *nostos* from Troy, *which Athena ordained*; the actors are mortal, but the situation is divinely orchestrated. We find this same structure in the *Odyssey*’s next internal song: the first song by Demodocus. The main actors are Odysseus and Achilles and the contest between them, but Apollo, we are told, foretold this contest, and Zeus, at the time, was orchestrating pain for the Greek and Trojans both. Once again, the action is primarily mortal, but the influence of the gods is deeply woven into the fabric of the story. For more on these passages, see below.

8 The mortals mentioned in the *Homeric Hymns* (which are focused on the gods) are never named, nor are names ever attributed to mortals when mentioned in any divine song. This namelessness is, I think, significant.

gods and divine beings of the universe are the core of the poem. Even the *Works and Days*, although drastically different from the Homeric epics, is concerned with mortal works (and the divine oversight of said works). Thus, even in the external songs, although there is once again some overlap, the content can be clearly divided between the two categories.

Songs by mortals about mortals.

Songs sung by mortals about other mortals all seem to function in the same way: they serve as a source of *kleos*. This is perhaps most explicitly demonstrated in a passage from Homer's *Iliad* (9.186–9), in which we glimpse Achilles playing his lyre and singing the *kleos* of men (9.189 ἄειδε δ' ἄρα κλέα ἀνδρῶν). Despite the explicit mention that Achilles' song is about *kleos*, we do not have any other information about the exact content of his song—certainly no direct quotation is given. However, the phrase used, κλέα ἀνδρῶν, is “the Homeric expression for what is now called heroic poetry,”⁹ and this certainly is confirmed when we consider the content of other mortally-sung songs, which concern themselves with the heroic exploits of men, especially in war.

Such a view is corroborated by a passage in the *Odyssey* (8.73ff.). Demodocus, the narrator tells us, is moved by the Muse to sing the *kleos* of men, and subsequently sings of the (otherwise unknown)¹⁰ contest between Odysseus and Achilles while they were besieging Troy. Since this episode is not otherwise attested, we do not know the exact circumstances of their quarrel, but the context of the Trojan war (and the explicit mention of *kleos* at the outset of the song) still makes this a clear example of κλέα ἀνδρῶν. Likewise, Demodocus' other human-centered song

9 Hainsworth 1993 ad *Il.* 9.189 (with further references).

10 Garvie 1994 ad 8.62–82.

also focuses on the Trojan war (8.499ff.). In it, he sings about how the Greeks deceived the Trojans with the wooden horse, and thus the Greeks were able to sack Troy. Phemius' song (1.153ff.) follows this same pattern: although he does not sing strictly about the war, he sings about the Greeks' journey home from the war (which, as the rest of the *Odyssey* will demonstrate, was no easy journey)—certainly still a song of warlike heroes and their exploits.

Last but not least is the song of the Delian maidens in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. After hymning Apollo, Leto, and Artemis (which will be discussed below), the maidens sing a song that sounds very similar to Achilles': μνησάμεναι ἀνδρῶν τε παλαιῶν ἠδὲ γυναικῶν / ὕμνον ἀείδουσιν ("having remembered the men and women of old, they sing a hymn," *HH* 3.160f.). Whereas Achilles sang about the *kleos* of men, the Delian maidens remember the men *and* women of old.¹¹ The passage recalls the endings of *Hymns* 31 (to Helios) and 32 (to Selene):¹²

ἐκ σέο δ' ἀρξάμενος κλήσω μερόπων γένος ἀνδρῶν

ἡμιθέων ὧν ἔργα θεοὶ θνητοῖσιν ἔδειξαν (*HH* 31.18–19)

Having begun from you, I will celebrate the race of articulate men—
demigods—whose deeds the gods revealed to mortals.

... σέο δ' ἀρχόμενος κλέα φωτῶν

ἄσομαι ἡμιθέων ὧν κλείουσ' ἔργματ' αἰδοὶ (*HH* 32.18–19)

... Having begun from you, I will sing

the glory of demigod men, whose deeds are made famous by bards.

These passages are more explicit about their intentions: the poet(s) will glorify the race of men and their deeds. We find in the text κλήσω (*HH* 31.18) and κλείουσ' (*HH* 32.19), both of which are etymologically related to *kleos*, as well as *kleos* itself (*HH* 32.18 κλέα). We also find *erga*

11 On the function of "remembering" in this passage, see Bakker 2002: 71f. and passim.

12 Cf. Richardson 2010 ad 158–61.

(“deeds”) (*HH* 31.19 ἔργα, 32.19 ἔργματ’), another key component in the celebration of *kleos*.

Now, the passage from the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* lacks any direct mention of *kleos* or its cognates, or even *erga*, but this does not make the passage any less relevant here. It may seem that some sort of singing about men is the only shared element between all three passages, and that may be technically true, but it is not just *any* men that they are singing about: they all specify that these are the men of old, demigods, whom they are celebrating. The exact language is different, but the meaning, I propose, is not. In the *Hymn to Apollo*, we find ἀνδρῶν ... παλαιῶν (*HH* 3.160), but in both the *Hymn to Helios* and *to Selene* we find ἡμιθέων in apposition to either ἀνδρῶν (*HH* 31.18, cf. *HH* 3.160) or φωτῶν (*HH* 32.18). At first glance, these may not seem to be at all the same, but, if we remember our Hesiod, we know that the men of old—the men whose deeds are celebrated in song by the likes of Phemius and Demodocus—were demigods. Hesiod, in his catalogue of the Ages of Man, describes the Age of Heroes:

αὐτίς ἔτ’ ἄλλο τέταρτον ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ
Ζεὺς Κρονίδης ποίησε, δικαιοτέρον καὶ ἄρειον,
ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων θεῖον γένος, οἱ καλέονται
ἡμίθεοι, προτέρη γενεῇ κατ’ ἀπείρονα γαῖαν.
καὶ τοὺς μὲν πόλεμος τε κακὸς καὶ φύλοπις αἰνῆ
τοὺς μὲν ὑφ’ ἑπταπύλῳ Θήβῃ, Καδμηίδι γαίῃ,
ᾧλεσε μαρναμένους μῆλων ἔνεκ’ Οἰδιπόδαο,
τοὺς δὲ καὶ ἐν νήεσσιν ὑπὲρ μέγα λαῖτμα θαλάσσης
ἐς Τροίην ἀγαγὼν Ἑλένης ἔνεκ’ ἠγκόμοιο. (Hes. *WD* 157–165)

Yet again Kronian Zeus made upon the much-nourishing earth
another, fourth race—more just and just better—

a divine race of heroic men, who are called
demigods, the previous generation upon the boundless earth.
Evil war and the terrible battle-cry destroyed these people,
some at seven-gated Thebes, the Kadmian land,
fighting on account of Oedipus's flocks,
and others on boats upon the depth of the ocean
heading to Troy on account of pretty-haired Helen.

The race of heroes, which was the race prior to our own (Hes. *WD* 160 προτέρη γενειή), were also known as demigods (Hes. *WD* 159–160 ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων θεῖον γένος, οἳ καλέονται | ἡμίθεοι). It does not seem unreasonable, then, considering their past existence, the “men of old” in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* are actually the demigods of the Age of Heroes. As such, it also becomes important that some of these heroes fought at Troy (Hes. *WD* 164–165 τοὺς δὲ καὶ ἐν νήεσσιν ὑπὲρ μέγα λαῖτμα θαλάσσης | ἐς Τροίην ἀγαγὼν Ἑλένης ἔνεκ' ἠυκόμοιο). The Trojan War and the heroes who partook in it were a favorite subject of epic (one need only look at the songs of Phemius and Demodocus examined below, not to mention the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* themselves), and epic itself was the genre of *kleos* par excellence. So, if indeed we are able to understand the ἀνδρῶν παλαιῶν in the *Hymn to Apollo* as heroes of the Trojan war, it becomes exceedingly unlikely that the song of the Delian maidens is anything other than a celebration of *kleos*.

Although I now hope to have demonstrated that the Deliades' song is certainly one of *kleos*, there is still one element here that is unique from the other passages just quoted: that is, the mention of women. In all these passages, as well as those sung by Phemius and Demodocus discussed above, and especially that of Achilles, there is no mention of women. However, we are

told explicitly elsewhere that women will become the object of song. The most explicit comes from the end of the *Odyssey*. Agamemnon, in the underworld, says: «... τῶ οἱ κλέος οὔ ποτ' ὀλεῖται / ἧς ἀρετῆς, τεύξουσι δ' ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἀοιδὴν / ἀθάνατοι χαρίεσσαν ἐχέφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ» (Hom. *Od.* 24.196–8). The *kleos* of Penelope, because she was so faithful to Odysseus, will never die, and the gods will make a song for her among mortals. Women can indeed be the object of song—and have *kleos*, no less (196)—and we can even see Penelope's appearance in the *Odyssey* itself as an example of such a song.¹³

I should also briefly add Helen's comment to Hector in Book 6 of the *Iliad* to this discussion: «οἷσιν ἐπὶ Ζεὺς θῆκε κακὸν μόρον, ὡς καὶ ὀπίσσω / ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ' ἀοίδιμοι ἐσσομένοισι» (Hom. *Il.* 6.357–8). The antecedent of the relative pronoun (357 οἷσιν) grammatically seems to be Helen and Paris, but Hector also seems to be implicit. In any case, Helen is without a doubt part of this group, and she says that Zeus ordained this evil fate for them so that it would become the object of song for future men. Once again, we are told that a woman will become an object of song.

The question remains, however, as to why the Deliades here include women in their song, whereas most other internal songs do not mention women (despite the fact that, as shown above, women most certainly could be the object of song). The answer to this is difficult to say with any certainty. Allen et al. see this turn of phrase as nothing more than an alternative to the “κλέα ἀνδρῶν of Homer.”¹⁴ Richardson has tentatively suggested that this could be a reference to an ancient hymn ascribed to Olen, which honored the Hyperborean maidens Arge and Opis, but

13 Agamemnon continues that his wife, Clytemnestra, will also become the object of song, but rather because of her treachery, and thus her song will bring ill repute upon all womankind (199–202). Significantly, Agamemnon does not mention his wife by name, instead referring to her as “the daughter of Tyndareus” (199 Τυνδαρέου κόυρη).

14 Allen et al. 1936 ad 3.160.

admits that this is largely speculative.¹⁵ I am inclined to agree more with Allen et al. Considering all the passages just discussed that admit that women can be the object of song—presumably even epic song—it seems not unreasonable that this is merely a variation of the more traditional stock phrase “κλέα ἀνδρῶν.” Moreover, the maidens’ own gender and the prominent placement of two female goddesses (Leto and Artemis) in the immediately prior position of their song may suggest a personal bias in their choice of content. As with Richardson’s suggestion, this is speculative, but, in either case, the answer would appear to be largely dependent upon the context.

Returning to the Agamemnon’s (Hom. *Od.* 24.196–8) and Helen’s (Hom. *Il.* 6.357–8) statements discussed just above, a significant shared feature of these two passages (and several other passages scattered throughout Homer) is the claim that song is given to mortals from the gods (both the Olympians and the Muses). I would like to say a few words about this, but it may help to quickly summarize what we have learned so far. I have argued that the gods sing about themselves (and sing little and disparagingly about humans) in order to maintain the present cosmic hierarchy; gods are the superior beings, and mortals are lowly subjects to divine will. Mortals, on the other hand, although they still admit the gods’ superiority and honor them with song, sing their own praise in order to preserve their *kleos* and to obtain literary immortality, which makes their position within the present hierarchy more favorable without actually reordering it (and thus incurring divine wrath).

However, there arises an apparent contradiction to this position when one considers two facets of the gods’ relationship with mortals: (1) that the gods help mortals to sing, and thus to preserve human *kleos*; and (2) that the gods ordain many disasters for humankind so that they

¹⁵ Richardson 2010 ad 3.158–61. For further studies of this internal song’s possible relationship to a hymn of Olen, see Peponi 2009 and Sale 1961.

will become song, which will in turn further preserve and add to mortal *kleos*. Put more simply, the gods' actions seem to be directly at odds in different scenarios: when the gods sing, they disparage humans and their mortality, completely eschewing any praise or *kleos*; but they simultaneously help mortals to sing their own *kleos* and provide further content for those songs.

At least, this is how it appears at first glance. However, a close examination of the evidence will demonstrate that such a contradiction may not actually exist, or at least that it is more oblique than it initially seems. Let us begin from the first of the two ways that the gods help mortals: by helping them sing. Within this category, there are two subtypes by which the gods actively assist mortals: the first is by actively teaching mortals how to sing, whereas the second is assisting when invoked.

When the gods teach mortals how to sing, they do not specifically teach mortals to celebrate mortal *kleos*. Mortals can, of course, then sing about that subject, but they are not limited to that subject. In particular, mortals can also sing about the other subject of Homeric song: the gods. Thus, by helping mortals to sing, the gods are helping them to worship and delight the gods—which is what every god wants.¹⁶ Mortals can then also sing about themselves, but the agreement seems to be mutually beneficial; the gods get what they want, and mortals get a bonus.

This dual nature of song, and especially the gods' privileged position within it, is demonstrated in Hesiod's *Theogony*. The narrator recounts his interaction with the Muses when they taught him how to sing:

αἶ νύ ποθ' Ἡσίοδον καλὴν ἐδίδαξαν ἀοιδίην,

...

...ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδὴν

¹⁶ See Calame 2011 and Patton 2009.

θέσπιν, ἵνα κλείοιμι τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα,
καί μ' ἐκέλονθ' ὕμνεϊν μακάρων γένος αἰὲν ἐόντων,
σφᾶς δ' αὐτὰς πρῶτόν τε καὶ ὕστατον αἰὲν ἀείδειν. (Hes. *Th.* 22–34)

One time [the Muses] taught Hesiod beautiful song, and they breathed into me an inspired voice so that I make famous the things that will be and the things that were before, and they ordered me to hymn the race of the blessed ones always being, and to always sing about themselves first and last.

The Muses gave the narrator a divine voice so that he might make famous (32 κλείοιμι) the things that will be and the things that were before, and they ordered him to sing about the gods, but to always begin and end with themselves (i.e. the Muses). Here, there is no direct reference to mortals, but I think their presence is implied by the verb κλέω,¹⁷ which is cognate with κλέος—something which is meaningless to the gods, but of the utmost importance to men.¹⁸ Moreover, Ruth Scodel finds the variation of this phrase significant. Whereas Hesiod here is only able to sing the things that will be and the things that were (32 κλείοιμι τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα), the Muses are described only a few lines later as singing the future, past, *and* present (38 εἶρουσαι τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα). Scodel suggests that this is indicative of what the Homeric (or, in this case, Hesiod) bard is able to sing. The bard can sing of past heroic events, but no one asks Phemius where Odysseus is; “the present is not open to bardic intrusion.”¹⁹ So, whereas humans are merely implied in this passage, the gods are directly mentioned (albeit

17 So too Garvie ad Hom. *Od.* 8.73.

18 What makes *kleos* so appealing to mortals is the fact that it is immortal. Although mortals eventually die, their name and reputation do not have to die with them; they can live on forever so long as their renown is kept alive through the oral tradition (and, later, literature). This immortality is attested by the fixed epithet of *kleos* in Homeric epic, *aphthiton* (“imperishable,” see Nagy 1999: 95). Moreover, this phrase finds its roots in Indo-European poetry (as seen in the Sanskrit cognate *śrāvaḥ ākṣitam*), which similarly exhibits a concern for immortality after death—something that is inherently of interest to humankind but pointless for the already immortal gods (Floyd 1980, West 2007: 396–8; see also Nagy 1999: 16 and passim).

19 Scodel 1998: 179.

elliptically: 33 μακάρων γένος αἰὲν ἔόντων), whom the Muses directly command (33 ἐκέλονθ') to be the object of song. Moreover, the Muses also command that they themselves be sung about first and last—the two most prominent positions. Thus, although Hesiod can sing both about mortals and gods, the gods seem to be the superior term.²⁰

It seems fairly neutral when the gods help with song when invoked. Invocations occur for both songs about mortals and gods. In fact, it would appear that the vast majority of songs began with some sort of invocation: the two homeric epics begin with an invocation,²¹ as do the two Hesiodic poems; likewise ten of the *Homeric Hymns* begin with some sort of invocation;²² and even some of the internal songs appear to have had invocations.²³

One could argue that, when the Muses are invoked for songs celebrating mortal *kleos*, they are directly helping mortals in elevating their position, which would be contrary to my argument that the gods' intention is to keep mortals as far away from gods as possible in the cosmic hierarchy. However, the Muses, when they assist singers with their singing, seem to merely be a source of information for the singers—information which, with the exception of the happenings on Olympus, the singers could otherwise have obtained through oral report.²⁴ Thus, as with the Hesiod passage discussed above, there seems to be a slight favor towards divine content: by providing bards with information about events on Olympus, the Muses allow humans to sing songs about the gods; without the information, humans could still sing about themselves by gathering knowledge from oral report, but singing about the gods would be more difficult and include more guesswork. As before, this seems to be a mutually beneficial arrangement, which

20 Another example of divinely-taught song is Demodocus (Hom. *Od.* 8.43–5, 487–98). Cf. *HH* 25 (which is a pastiche of Hesiod's *Theogony*; see Allen et al. 1936: 420 and Percy 1989: 36–7).

21 The *Iliad* also has another invocation before the Catalogue of Ships (2.484–6).

22 *Hymns* 4, 5, 9, 14, 17, 19, 20, 31, 32, and 33.

23 Demodocus' third (Hom. *Od.* 8.499 ὁ δ' ὀρμηθεὶς θεοῦ ἄρχετο) and perhaps even his first song (8.73 Μοῦσ' ἄρ' αἰοῖδὸν ἀνήκεν); see Garvie ad 8.499. Others may have had invocations that are simply not mentioned.

24 Scodel 1998: 179 and passim, Garvie ad Hom. *Od.* 8.489–91 and 499.

offers only ease for humans, but benefit for the gods.

The gods also would appear to assist mortal singing in another, more indirect manner: by ordaining events which will become song. This is stated explicitly several times within the corpus relevant to this study: In the *Iliad*, Helen tells Hector that Zeus ordained their evil fate so that they would become the object of song (Hom. *Il.* 6.357–8); so too does Alcinous tell Odysseus that the gods ordained the Trojan war so that it would become song (Hom. *Od.* 8.577–80); similarly, in the underworld, Agamemnon states that the gods will prepare a song that celebrates Penelope’s loyalty to her husband (Hom. *Od.* 24.196–202).

Once again, if these claims are true, it would appear that gods are helping mortals in celebrating their *kleos* by giving them songs and/or song content for preserving and increasing that *kleos*. However, I suspect that these claims are not true, and that the *mortal* actors who speak these lines (never the gods, and never the narrator) are mistaken about the gods’ intentions. For one thing, mortals ordinarily do not have access to divine knowledge; bards, as discussed above, are one such exception, and occasionally other homeric actors would appear to approach such knowledge,²⁵ but most of the time mortals simply do not and cannot know. Furthermore, as has been demonstrated by the rest of this paper, there is little evidence, besides these claims themselves, to support their content; any other instance in which the gods seem to be helping with mortal song, the gods themselves are the primary benefactors, whereas human benefit is lucky side-effect. And, as will be seen in the next chapter, the gods’ only songs about humans reduces them and highlights their inferiority and mortality—there seems to be no good evidence to suggest that gods would help humans selflessly.

But, even if we were to take these claims as true, these evils ordained for mortals are still a

25 Scodel 1998.

steep price to pay for mortals, nor would the gods be wholly without praise in the process. First, the gods are still creating horrible suffering for mortals; even when the Greeks finally “won” the Trojan War, they had still suffered heavy losses and lost ten years of their lives. This just demonstrates that what the Muses sing about humans in the *Hymn to Apollo* is accurate: humans are frail, subject creatures. Furthermore, the songs about these great sufferings (all three passages quoted above refer to the whole or some aspect of the Trojan War) still frequently acknowledge the gods’ hands in the action, subtly admitting yet again human inferiority to the gods’ whim and will. The singers make clear that the human action is happening because one or more of the gods ordained it, subtly admitting yet again human inferiority to the gods’ whim and will.

With these preliminary considerations out of the way, let us turn to the evidence. I count a total of six human-sung songs about mortals in Homer and the *Hymns*. One is a very particular type (a dirge), which will be discussed separately in a moment.²⁶ Of the remaining five, two do not provide explicit detail about the content of the song (Achilles’ on the *kleos* of men, and the Deliades on the men and women of old).²⁷ The three remaining songs all happen to come from the *Odyssey*, and each is sung by one of the two bards, Phemius or Demodocus.²⁸ Each of these has extended description of the content, and each includes some explicit reference to the influence of the gods.

Phemius’ song comes first. His is significantly shorter than the two sung by Demodocus later, but it follows the same formula: there is human action, and divine ordinance for that action. ὁ δ’ Ἀχαιῶν νόστον ἄειδε / λυγρόν, ὃν ἐκ Τροίης ἐπετείλατο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη (“and he sang the painful homecoming of the Achaens, which Pallas Athena ordained from Troy,” Hom. *Od.* 1.326–7). Short and to the point, Phemius sings about the Greek’s painful return home that

26 Hom. *Il.* 24.719–22.

27 Hom. *Il.* 9.186–9, *HH* 3.160–1.

28 Hom. *Od.* 1.325–7, 8.73–83, 8.499–521.

Athena ordained (327 ἐπετείλατο); it is not mere chance or happenstance that the return is painful, but that at least one god wished that it be so.

Demodocus' first song offers a very similar example (Hom. *Od.* 8.73–82). The subject is the contest of Odysseus and Achilles, but we are given the specific detail that this quarrel was foretold to Agamemnon by Apollo when he consulted the oracle at Pytho (79–81 ὣς γάρ οἱ χρείων μυθήσατο Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων / Πυθοῖ ἐν ἡγαθέῃ, ὅθ' ὑπέρβη λάινον οὐδὸν / χρησόμενος [“for thus Phoebus Apollo spoke to him about the affairs in holy Pytho when he stepped over the stone threshold seeking an oracle”]). Apollo does not seem to have direct influence over these events like Athena does in Phemius' song (1.327 ἐπετείλατο), but the divine presence—if not explicit complicity—is emphasized by its very mention. However, the song continues: τότε γάρ ῥα κυλίνδετο πήματος ἀρχὴ / Τρωσὶ τε καὶ Δαναοῖσι Διὸς μεγάλου διὰ βουλάς (81–2). This quarrel was happening when the beginning of pain was coming about for Greek and Trojans alike by the will of Zeus. There is no explicit causation given, but the inclusion of this temporal clause seems to suggest such a causation; the quarrel is just one of presumably many ill-fortunes that is breaking in this tide of woe. And this, unlike Apollo's mere report of the future event, this is ordained by Zeus (82 Διὸς μεγάλου διὰ βουλάς).

The final example is Demodocus' third song (his second will be discussed below with the other songs about the gods). In it, he recounts the ruse of the Trojan horse and the ensuing slaughter (Hom. *Od.* 8.499–520). As in Demodocus' first song, the gods are not explicitly mentioned as instigators of the trick, but, also as before, their complicity is implied:

... τρίχα δέ σφισιν ἦνδανε βουλή,
ἠὲ διαπλῆξαι κοῖλον δόρυ νηλεί χαλκῶ,
ἠὲ κατὰ πετράων βαλέειν ἐρύσαντας ἐπ' ἄκρης,

ἢ ἔάν μὲγ' ἄγαλμα θεῶν θελκτήριον εἶναι,
τῆ περ δὴ καὶ ἔπειτα τελευτήσεσθαι ἔμελλεν·
αἴσα γὰρ ἦν ἀπολέσθαι . . .

(Hom. *Od.* 8.506–511)

Three plans were pleasing to them, either to strike through the hollow wood with pitiless bronze, or, having dragged to peak, to throw it down on the rocks, or to allow it to be a great, soothing offering for the gods, and in this way it was destined to come to pass, for it was their fate to perish...

The Trojans are uncertain as to what should be done with the horse, and they are at an impasse between three plans. One of the plans—specifically the third one in the emphatic final position—is that the gift be left as a gift *for the gods* (509 ἔάν μὲγ' ἄγαλμα θεῶν θελκτήριον εἶναι). I do not think it is coincidence that this option that involves the gods is the most emphatic. Not only is it emphasized by position, but this is also, of course, the plan that is taken up and comes to pass (510 τῆ περ δὴ καὶ ἔπειτα τελευτήσεσθαι ἔμελλεν). Further emphasis is given by the impressive concatenation of particles, conjunctions, and adverbs (510 περ δὴ καὶ ἔπειτα). Moreover, whereas μέλλω can simply mean “to be likely to happen” or “about to happen,” it can have the stronger force of “*destined to happen*,”²⁹ which suggests divine handling. Furthermore, the reception of the horse is destined *to be brought about* (510 τελευτήσεσθαι)—another verb with divine associations.³⁰ Then, finally, we are told that it was destiny (511 αἴσα) that Troy should fall—yet another word strongly associated with the gods (and even personified *as a god herself*).³¹ Thus, even though there is no direct statement that the gods caused these events, the text very heavily suggests their influence.

29 LSJ s.v. μέλλω I c.

30 As a TLG proximity search of Homer will show for the lemmas τελευτάω and Ζεύς.

31 LSJ s.v. Αἴσα.

However, at the end of the same song, divine agency is finally explicitly mentioned:

ἄλλον δ' ἄλλη ἄειδε πόλιν κεραϊζέμεν αἰπήν,
αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεῖα προτὶ δώματα Διηφόβοιο
βήμεναι, ἦύτ' Ἄρηα σὺν ἀντιθέῳ Μενελάῳ.
κεῖθι δὴ αἰνότατον πόλεμον φάτο τολμήσαντα
νικῆσαι καὶ ἔπειτα διὰ μεγάθυμον Ἀθήνην.

(Hom. *Od.* 8.516–520)

And he sang how one in one place, another in another place, ravaged the lofty city, but Odysseus walked first to the house of Deiphobus, like Ares with godlike Menelaus. There, he said, Odysseus dared and won his most terrible battle thanks to magnanimous Athena.

Once the Greeks have emerged from the horse, Odysseus goes off to wage his most daring battle, and, thanks to the help of Athena (520 διὰ μεγάθυμον Ἀθήνην), wins. This is the same construction (διά with accusative) that we saw above in 8.82 (Διὸς μεγάλου διὰ βουλᾶς). Moreover, as if explicit mention of divine intervention were not enough, the two characters of the scene are described in terms of gods: Odysseus goes off *like Ares* (518 ἦύτ' Ἄρηα) with *godlike* (518 ἀντιθέῳ) Menelaus. Divinity seems emphatically visible in this passage.

So, having set forth all these examples, why is this significant? Why, in these human-focused passages, are the gods and their control over the situation not only mentioned, but even highlighted with the vocabulary of divine workings? The answer to this question has already been touched upon above, but it warrants being mentioned here again: humans are subject to and lesser than the gods. Humans know it and gods know it, and both reflect this position in their songs. Here, although the bards do not so much explicitly state their inferiority, they do

demonstrate unambiguously that humans are subject to the whim of the gods; if the gods fate, decree, or otherwise choose to bring something about, it will happen, and the human actors and events must necessarily follow along.³² We shall see later that the gods are more direct in stating the inferiority of humans and their mortality to themselves, but even here there is an implicit concession of that fact, even among the celebrations of *kleos* that attempt to partially close that gap.

I would now like to turn to a mortal song that is slightly different than those already discussed. As we have seen, mortal songs with mortal objects nearly universally take *epos* as their genre. There is one exception, however, that is of a completely separate genre, namely the *thrēnos* or dirge. There is but one mortal dirge within the works pertinent to this study (and, strangely enough, one *immortal* dirge, as will be discussed in the chapter on the songs of gods). In Book 24 of the *Iliad*, a funeral is given for Hector, whose body was recently retrieved from Achilles' possession. Among other ritual funerary elements, we are told that professional singers (*aidoi*) were placed around the corpse to sing the *thrēnos*:

οἱ δ' ἐπεὶ εἰσάγαγον κλυτὰ δώματα, τὸν μὲν ἔπειτα

τρητοῖς ἐν λεχέεσσι θέσαν, παρὰ δ' εἴσαν ἀοιδούς

θρήνων ἐξάρχους, οἳ τε στονόεσσαν ἀοιδὴν

οἱ μὲν ἄρ' ἐθρήνεον, ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναῖκες. (Hom. *Il.* 24.719–722)

And when they lead him into the splendid house, they then placed him on a corded bier, and they set bards around him, leaders of the dirge, and they sang the dirge, a moaning song, and the women groaned alongside.

32 For example, if we should wish to understand Phemius' song of the Greeks' *nostos* as a metapoetic reference to the *Odyssey* itself, then it is quite clear that Odysseus often made deliberate attempts to avoid so much pain, e.g. ordering his men to not eat the cattle of the sun, but events turn out contrary to what is best in spite of the best human planning. Cf. Hom. *Od.* 12.295 and 338.

Unfortunately, as with so many of the internal songs discussed so far (and many others yet to be discussed), no quotation or summary of the song's content is provided. Instead, we are left to draw conclusions from four pieces of information: (1) the song is performed by *aidoi*, (2) it is a *thrēnos*, (3) it is groan-inducing (721 *στονόεσσαν*), and (4) the women groan in accompaniment.

Looking at (2), the genre of the song, we may expect to derive rather a lot about the song's content from this information; we know that *epos* consists of *κλέα ἀνδρῶν*, and we shall soon see what elements make up a hymn or theogony, so we should likewise expect the designation “*thrēnos*” to be equally illustrative. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Whereas we have multiple examples each of internal and external epic, theogonic, and hymnic poetry, we only have two examples (in the present corpus) of dirges, and neither provide any content for the song. Later lyric poets developed the genre further, but these and other later instantiations may not provide an accurate representation of the form or content of the *thrēnos* in Homeric times.³³

Turning to (1), the singers of this dirge, we find that they are bards. In the *Iliad*, this is the *only* mention of bards in the entire text, so we cannot say much about what their songs typically look like from this confined space. However, if we allow ourselves to also pull from the *Odyssey*, we find several *aidoi*, most notably Phemius and Demodocus, whose songs are described and length in the text of the poem and most of which have already been discussed above. In particular, those songs are what we now classify as epic, and, as has already been discussed above and can be inferred from the Homeric stock phrase for referring to epic—*κλέα ἀνδρῶν*—we know that that genre is all about praising manly deeds and conferring literary immortality. Thus, we might expect that this *thrēnos* would have the same positive function because it is performed by the same class of singers. However, while I am not suggesting that we should

33 Alexiou 2002: 10–4, 102–3. But cf. Macleod 1982 ad 723–76.

entirely rule out a positive nature for that genre—indeed, Gregory Nagy has shown how the *thrēnos* is a constituent in the collection of songs that maintain the fallen hero’s immortality³⁴—I think it may not be quite so simple, but rather more ambiguous.

If we turn to the final two items in my list, (3) that the song is groan-inducing and (4) that the women do indeed groan alongside it, the view of the *thrēnos* as being wholly positive seems unsustainable. Not only is epic a celebration of heroic deeds and achievements—things worth praising and pursuing—but, in Homer, epic song is explicitly linked with delight.³⁵ The dirge sung for Hector, by contrast, instead produces groans in its audience (721 *στονόεσσαν*, 722 *ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο*), suggesting that it is very different from—or rather the opposite of—traditional epic song.

We may further explore the groan-inducing nature of this *thrēnos* by turning to the *gooi* of Hector’s kinswomen, which immediately follow this dirge (Hom. II. 24.723–76). The first woman to speak is Hector’s wife, Andromache:

«ἄνερ, ἀπ’ αἰῶνος νέος ὄλλεο, κὰδ δέ με χήρην 725
 λείπεις ἐν μεγάροισι· πάις δ’ ἔτι νήπιος αὐτῶς,
 ὄν τέκομεν σύ τ’ ἐγὼ τε δυσάμμοροι, οὐδέ μιν οἴω
 ἦβην ἴζεσθαι· πρὶν γὰρ πόλις ἦδε κατ’ ἄκρης
 πέρσεται· ἦ γὰρ ὄλωλας ἐπίσκοπος, ὅς τέ μιν αὐτὴν
 ῥύσκει, ἔχεις δ’ ἀλόχους κεδνάς καὶ νήπια τέκνα· 730
 αἰὶ δὴ τοι τάχα νηυσὶν ὀχῆσονται γλαφυρῆσι,
 καὶ μὲν ἐγὼ μετὰ τῆσί· σὺ δ’ αὖ τέκος ἦ ἐμοὶ αὐτῆ

34 Nagy 1999: 174–7.

35 Hom. *Od.* 1.347, 8.429, also Hes. *Th.* 98–103. See Scodel 1998: 183 and esp. Garvie 1994 ad 8.44–5. Odysseus and Penelope, however, each have negative reactions to epic at various points in the *Odyssey*, but they seem to be the exception to the rule, and their reactions are the result of their own personal involvement in the affairs being sung about.

ἔψαι, ἐνθά κεν ἔργα ἀεικέα ἐργάζοιο,
 ἀθλεύων πρὸ ἄνακτος ἀμειλίχου, ἢ τις Ἀχαιῶν
 ῥίψει χειρὸς ἐλὼν ἀπὸ πύργου λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον, 735
 χωόμενος, ᾧ δὴ πού ἀδελφεὸν ἔκτανεν Ἴκτωρ
 ἢ πατέρ', ἠὲ καὶ υἷόν, ἐπεὶ μάλα πολλοὶ Ἀχαιῶν
 Ἴκτορος ἐν παλάμησιν ὀδᾶξ ἔλον ἄσπετον οὐδας.
 οὐ γὰρ μείλιχος ἔσκε πατήρ τεὸς ἐν δαί λυγρῆ·
 τῷ καὶ μιν λαοὶ μὲν ὀδύρονται κατὰ ἄστρ, 740
 ἄρρητον δὲ τοκεῦσι γόον καὶ πένθος ἔθηκας
 Ἴκτορ· ἐμοὶ δὲ μάλιστα λελείπεται ἄλγεα λυγρά.
 οὐ γὰρ μοι θνήσκων λεχέων ἐκ χειῖρας ὄρεξας,
 οὐδέ τί μοι εἶπες πυκινὸν ἔπος, οὗ τέ κεν αἰεὶ
 μεμνήμην νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμέματα δάκρυ χέουσα.» (Hom. *Il.* 24.725–45)

“Husband, you passed from life young, and you leave me a widow in your halls.
 And your son is still just a babe, whom we bore, you and I, most miserable, nor
 do I think that he will reach adulthood, for this city will be wasted first. For you
 who watched over it perished, you who guarded it, and sustained the cherished
 wives and young children; soon they will endure hollow ships, and I myself
 among them. And you, child, will follow me where you will perform shameful
 labors, suffering for a relentless master, or some Achaean will snatch you by the
 hand and throw you from a tower, a mournful death, angered because Hector slew
 some brother or father of his, or even a son, since many of the Achaeans have
 bitten the vast earth by the hands of Hector. For your father was not gentle in

baneful war. Therefore the men mourn for him throughout the city, and you have set up unspeakable grief and pain for your parents, Hector. And for me especially there will have been left terrible pains. For you, dying, did not hold out your hands to me from your bed, nor did you say to me a wise word, which I could remember every night and day as I cry.”

Andromache’s lament seems more critical of Hector’s death than laudatory of his life:

Andromache has been left a widow (725 χήρη), and she fears that their son will die before coming of age (727–8 οὐδέ μιν οἶω | ἦβην ἕξεσθαι), all because Hector died (729 ἦ γὰρ ὄλωλας ἐπίσκοπος). She mentions Hector’s martial prowess only to highlight how much worse their sufferings will be as a result (736–9). Christine Perkell has convincingly argued that Andromache’s and the other women’s lamentations are actually “subversive of [epic]’s defining purpose of memorializing heroic deeds” because they mourn the hero’s death rather than celebrate it.³⁶ If these are the groans that the *thrēnos* evoked, it is difficult to conceive of the song as being strictly positive.

With this discussion in mind, we may return to the question of song content. I will not propose a direct answer to what the bards might have sung, as it would be nothing more than guesswork. However, I think the *tone* of their song can be more accurately reconstructed in light of the morose funerary context and chastising laments that follow. Although the *thrēnos* may ultimately contribute to Hector’s eternal glory among humankind and even celebrate his heroic achievements, it is undermined at length by the subsequent *gooi* of the kinswomen, and I suspect that the dirge itself might also have contained such elements as the laments that subvert the

36 Perkell 2008: 93. Cf. Pantelia 2002, who argues that Helen and her lament show awareness of *kleos* and the importance of the epic tradition, unlike Andromache and Hecabe, and thus occupies the emphatic final position of the three laments. However, it should be noted that Helen’s speech contains praise of Hector’s domestic kindness towards her, and nothing of his martial prowess, and thus does not constitute a traditional celebration of *kleos*.

traditional presentation of male heroic values.

Songs by mortals about immortals.

As demonstrated above, songs about mortals, despite slight variations in content or genre, all seem to work toward the same end: *kleos*—and thus literary immortality—for the object of the song. Such a simple, all-encompassing, unifying principle seems equally to be available for songs about the gods. When mortals sing for or about the gods, it seems to be about delighting the named divinities for some reason or another.³⁷

The first example comes from Book 1 of the *Iliad*. After returning the daughter of Chryses, a priest of Apollo, in order to appease the plague, the Greeks perform ritual sacrifice, feast, and then honor the god with song and dance:

οἱ δὲ πανημέριοι μολπῇ θεὸν ἰλάσκοντο
καλὸν ἀεῖδοντες παιήονα κοῦροι Ἀχαιῶν,
μέλποντες ἐκάεργον· ὁ δὲ φρένα τέρπετ' ἀκούων. (Hom. *Il.* 1.472–4)

And all day the youths of the Achaeans long propitiated the god with song and dance, singing a beautiful paean, dancing for the Far-worker; and it delighted his heart when he heard it.

Here, the singing itself does not receive much description other than its genre, the paean,³⁸ which is used for thanksgiving (as here) or victory in war, but the result of the singing is made explicit:

Apollo delights in hearing it (474 ὁ δὲ φρένα τέρπετ' ἀκούων).

We see the paean similarly deployed in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* when the god has

³⁷ See Calame 2011: 335 and passim, and Furley 2007: 119 and passim.

³⁸ For more on the paean as genre, see Kirk 1990 ad 1.473, Richardson 2010: 147f. Cf. also *Il.* 22.391–4 and Richardson 1993 ad loc.

kidnapped the Cretan sailors and leads them on a procession to Pytho:

βάν ῥ' ἴμεν· ἦρχε δ' ἄρα σφιν ἄναξ Διὸς υἱὸς Ἀπόλλων
φόρμιγγ' ἐν χεῖρεσσιν ἔχων ἐρατὸν κιθαρίζων
καλὰ καὶ ὕψι βιβάζ· οἱ δὲ ῥήσσοντες ἔποντο
Κρηῆτες πρὸς Πυτὸ καὶ ἰηπαίων' ἄειδον,
οἳοί τε Κρητῶν παιήονες οἳοί τε Μοῦσα
ἐν στήθεσσιν ἔθηκε θεὰ μελίγηρυν ἀοιδίην. (*HH* 3.514–9)

They walked, and lord Apollo, son of Zeus, led them, playing a lovely song with lyre in hand, stepping fine and high. And the Cretans followed to Pytho, dancing and singing *Ei Paieon*, like the paeans of the Cretans, into whose breasts the Muse placed sweet-voiced song.

In this instance, Apollo is physically, visibly present, and he himself leads the song and the procession that is in his honor, supplying the music with his lyre (515 φόρμιγγ' ἐν χεῖρεσσιν ἔχων ἐρατὸν κιθαρίζων). Moreover, the entire scene appears to be etiological, giving the mythological origins for later cultic activity.³⁹

The celebrations on Delos from earlier in the same *Hymn* is also likely an instance of repeated cultic activity (*HH* 3.146ff.). The hymnist mentions several worthwhile spectacles, but the one given the most attention, and the one relevant for this study, is the song and dance of the Delian maidens. The second half of this song has already been discussed above in the section on the songs about mortals, but the maidens began by singing about the gods:

πρὸς δὲ τόδε μέγα θαῦμα, ὄου κλέος οὐ ποτ' ὀλεῖται,
κοῦραι Δηλιάδες Ἐκατηβελέταο θεράπναι·

³⁹ See Richardson 2010 ad 514–9.

αἶ τ' ἐπεὶ ἄρ' πρῶτον μὲν Ἀπόλλων' ὑμνήσωσιν,
αὕτις δ' αὖ Λητώ τε καὶ Ἄρτεμιν ἰοχέαιραν (*HH* 3.156–9)

And in addition to this great marvel, the *kleos* of which will not ever perish, are the Delian maidens, the attendants of the Far-shooter. And when first they hymned Apollo, in turn they hymn Leto and Artemis the arrow-pourer.

Appropriate to the context of the external hymn, and appropriate to the festival at which they are performing, the maidens begin by hymning Apollo, and then moving on to his mother and sister, Leto and Artemis. As with the paeon just discussed in Book 1 of the *Iliad*, the purpose of this song is made explicit: to delight the god (149–50 οἱ δὲ σε πυγμαχίῃ τε καὶ ὀρχηστῷ καὶ ἀοιδῇ | μνησάμενοι τέρπουσιν).⁴⁰

As has been shown above, the songs that mortals sing about the gods, although they take different forms, all share a common goal: pleasing, placating, or otherwise honoring the god(s). However, there is one internal song (and one external song) that does not easily fit into this pattern. That song is the so-called “Lay of Aphrodite and Ares,” Demodocus’ second song in Book 8 of the *Odyssey* (266–366).⁴¹ The song narrates at length Aphrodite’s illicit affair with Ares, and her husband Hephaestus’ scheming that catches the adulterers red-handed. Although the song could be construed as a hymn to Hephaestus,⁴² in which his *technē* is highlighted and praised, such an interpretation does not wholly solve the problem here; for all the potentially positive statements about Hephaestus, he is still in a rather unfortunate position, and this does nothing to alleviate the rather unflattering presentation of Aphrodite (and, to a lesser extent, Ares). Aphrodite is not only caught cheating on her husband—an act which in itself would be

40 For a more general treatment of the Delian maidens, see Kowalzig 2007: 65ff. and Peponi 2009.

41 The external song is the long *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, which will be discussed below.

42 See Clay 2011: 149f. with further bibliography.

disastrous for any *mortal* women⁴³—but is further exhibited in this uncomfortable position for the other gods to see and mock her.

This is certainly contrary to what we have seen above; all the other mortal songs about the gods unconditionally praise them. This is very clearly not the case here. However, despite the stark difference from other *internal* songs, this depiction is not entirely unique. The long *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* narrates a very similar tale: Zeus, after being fed up with Aphrodite's mixing of the immortal gods with mortal men and women resulting in mortal children (*HH* 5.51), inspires in Aphrodite a desire for a mortal lover herself, which is a source of great shame for her (*HH* 5.247ff.). The exact circumstances are slightly different, but the main point remains the same between the two songs: Aphrodite sleeps with someone and is shamed for it.

But how does this make better the picture of Aphrodite depicted in Demodocus' lay? Well, it does not. But the evidence suggests that such an unflattering depiction is traditional; in addition to the passage discussed above, one may also compare Aphrodite's laughable appearance on the battlefield at *Il.* 5.330ff. Despite the peculiarity of these passages compared to the other internal songs discussed so far, their traditional nature suggests that they are not really peculiar at all, and, thus, not problematic for this paper.⁴⁴

Moreover, and, I think, more importantly, scholars have repeatedly pointed out that this song, although seemingly not applicable to Odysseus and his situation, is indeed a very important and relevant song for the narrative of the *Odyssey*.⁴⁵ Whereas Demodocus' other two songs are

43 See Garvie 1994 ad 8.266–369 and cf. Lysias 1.

44 Hephaestus and Ares are also elsewhere depicted poorly, e.g. when all the gods laugh at the former in *Iliad* 1. See Heubeck et al. 1988: 363 and Garvie 1994: 294, who says that the gods cannot really suffer (cf. mortals), and thus their quarrels and misfortunes are not serious and can be laughed at by gods and men alike. However, the only time when they really can suffer is when they are tied up closely with mortals, which is what Zeus is grieved about in *H.Aph.*; he keeps having mortal sons and having to watch them die. Cf. also Thetis throughout the *Iliad*. For more on the praise and blame of Aphrodite in her *Homeric Hymn*, see Bergren 1989.

45 See esp. de Jong 2001 ad 8.266–366 (with further bibliography) and Garvie 1994 ad 8.266–369. To varying

relevant to Odysseus' past, this one is applicable for his future, when he will return to his wife and the suitors who are trying to sleep with her. As already alluded to above, if Penelope were to be caught in the same or similar situation as Aphrodite, it would have disastrous and very real fallout. The divine action, however, at least from a mortal perspective, is all in good fun and helps to relieve tension in the human sphere, both with respect to anxieties about adultery and the more immediate tensions that have arisen between Odysseus and the Phaeacian youths, who taunted Odysseus.⁴⁶ As with other songs in the *Odyssey*, this one has clear narrative relevance, and I believe this aspect is what dictates the content that otherwise seems somewhat aberrant. This song, although about the gods, is more intended for a mortal audience than divine, contrary to the trend we have seen thus far.

In way of conclusion, before proceeding to an analysis of the songs of gods, I hope to have made clear the general trends found in those internal songs that are performed by mortal singers. When singing about other humans, song content is laudatory and serves to celebrate the *kleos* of its actors, thus contributing to the continual process of obtaining and maintaining the literary immortality that can be achieved through song, which in turn offers some relief to the human condition of physical mortality. At the same time, human singers also focus their songs on the gods, likewise praising their power and exploits. However, such praise does not offer the same promise of immortality as do songs about humans, since the gods are already immortal. Instead, singing about the gods pleases the divine listeners, either in an attempt to receive some specific favor, or to merely maintain favor and avoid subjugation to further pains than those already

degrees, I think all internal songs have an immediate narrative function, some of which are discussed in this study. But, in general, I am more concerned with the function of songs, not within their immediate context, but within the larger tradition in which they are located. This tells us how the Greeks used songs more generally, not just to solve a particular problem in a particular poem. Both are worthy endeavors, but they yield very different results.

46 de Jong 2001: 206f.

afforded by the human condition.

Chapter 2: The Songs of Gods

The content of the songs sung by the gods can be divided into the same two categories previously used to divide the songs of men: song content focuses primarily either on gods, humans, or a combination of the two. Unlike mortal songs, which are more often about human subjects than divine and tend specifically to promote mortal *kleos*, divine songs are rather the opposite: treatment of immortal subjects is slightly more common, and mentions of mortals tend to be derogatory, shying away from the celebration of human *kleos*. The reason for this difference, I argue, is simply that the gods have different goals than mortals. For mortals, who wish to obtain the nearest alternative to immortality, the celebration of *kleos* is the logical conclusion. The gods, on the other hand, already have immortality, so a celebration of their own achievements is not strictly necessary. Moreover, by eschewing praise of mortal deeds, the gods can continue to enjoy their position at the top of the hierarchy without having to share it or having others encroach upon it.

However, although this answers why the gods avoid singing about mortals, the question remains as to why the gods sing about themselves. As I have argued at length in the previous chapter, mortal song about mortal subjects is a way to obtain something near to immortality: *kleos*. By extension, one may then expect that immortal song about immortal subjects would have a similar goal—but such a view makes no sense; the gods are already immortal in body, and thus they have no need for song, which can only confer immortality to one's name and reputation. So the natural question that then arises is this: Why *do* the gods sing about themselves?

Although individual songs and their immediate context can yield slightly different functions

or reasons for that particular song, in general, the songs that the gods sing about themselves seem to highlight and reinforce the gods' position within the cosmic hierarchy. When the gods sing a theogony, we can reasonably assume that it resembles something like Hesiod's *Theogony*, which culminates in Zeus' supreme rule and the Olympian order. Likewise, when the gods sing a hymn, they surely highlight the *timai* portioned out to individual gods, and ultimately explain how those gods fit into the mythic hierarchy, just as the *Homeric Hymns* do.⁴⁷ The gods want to solidify and reinforce their own superior position.

I am not the first person to ask why the gods do something that is traditionally seen as a mortal activity. Kimberley Patton, for example, in a recent monograph,⁴⁸ has explored at length the depictions on Greek vases of gods carrying out religious rituals—sacrificing, pouring libations, and so on. She dismisses the projectionist theory—that is, that the gods are thoughtlessly shown performing the same acts as humans, even though such acts (i.e. sacrificing) make no sense to be carried out by a god (i.e. to whom, exactly, is the god sacrificing? To himself? To some even greater power?). At first, I imagined that I would have a note stating “*pace* Patton,” since, to some degree, I *do* think the gods are depicted as singing because mortals sing: the gods are in our image, and thus do what we do. However, I agree that the projectionist theory does not offer a wholly satisfactory account. As Patton points out:

“divine ritual almost invariably does *not* exactly resemble human ritual.... Why not? Among the results ‘on the ground’ are the ways in which divinely performed rituals, as represented textually and iconographically, often have the historical effect of reinscribing and reinforcing particular devotional forms at the expense of others.”⁴⁹

47 See Clay 1989.

48 Patton 2009.

49 Patton 2009: 11.

This failure to exactly match human ritual manifests itself even in our body of evidence. Indeed, if singing gods truly were a mere projection of human singing, the content of the songs of the gods should be identical to the songs of humans. But, on the contrary, I argue that the content is markedly not identical! What the gods sing about mortals is quite the opposite of what mortals sing about themselves. Moreover, by allowing the gods their own unique intents for their songs, we can achieve much more nuanced readings of the text.

The most ready example is to be found in Jenny Strauss Clay's reading of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*.⁵⁰ Hermes, as the last born of the gods, and apparently not yet an established member of the Olympian pantheon, uses song to negotiate his own position and secure his place within that pantheon. Should we instead choose to see his songs as mere projections of human activity (humans sing theogonies and hymns, and thus so too do the gods), his songs, and the hymn as a whole, lose their particular significance and function in negotiating power.

Furthermore, although I would concede that singing gods at some early point could be the natural result of projection, at this point, in the texts that we have, the gods' use of song is deliberate and effective. Song, for mortals and immortals both, is a powerful tool that each side has learned to use effectively for their own ends. As seen in the previous chapter, the gods are even able to influence mortal song—which is mortals' strongest tool to increase their own position in the universe—to be favorable to themselves and their own goals by subtly demonstrating human frailty and divine superiority—two facets which, as we shall see, will reappear in divine songs.

Thus, in conclusion to the question of why gods sing about themselves, I would both agree with and expand upon Patton's conclusion: the gods not only “practice and reinforce [their] own

50 Clay 1989: 95ff.

religion,⁵¹ but, moreover, they reinforce the larger cosmic hierarchy, of which they are a part, and which their religion seeks to maintain. The gods singing about themselves creates and maintains cosmic stability.⁵²

With these preliminary points out of the way, let us turn to the songs of the gods themselves.

Songs by gods about gods.

Hermes sings two songs in his *Homeric Hymn*. The first is a hymn, in which he sings about his mother and father, Maia and Zeus, and their relationship that ultimately resulted in Hermes' own conception and birth. He then sings about his mother's home and the things within it.⁵³ The second song is a theogony, in which he recounts the gods in the order of their birth and the honors attributed to them, giving Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses, the privileged first position within his song.

These two songs, both in form and content, as we have already seen, have parallels in mortal internal and external songs: hymns frequently recount a divinity's birth, and a theogony, naturally, provides a history of the entire race of gods. Likewise, as we will soon see, these genres also find other instantiations among the other songs of the gods. In general, these genres of song, whether sung by mortals or immortals, all have similar form and content.

However, Hermes' songs, ironically, are rather similar to mortal song in their function. Whereas I argue in general that immortal song is about *solidifying* power rather than *negotiating* power, and that mortal song is concerned with negotiation, Hermes' songs, as Clay has convincingly argued, do indeed negotiate power. Hermes, as not yet a full-fledged member of the

51 Patton 2009: 171.

52 So too Clay 1989.

53 *HH* 4.53–61.

Olympian pantheon, uses song to obtain his position and *timai*. With the first song, his own “hymn to Hermes,” Hermes legitimizes himself and his divine birth, not only naming his parentage (Zeus and Maia), but also describing the mutual, extended relationship that his mother had with the king of gods and men that resulted in his conception. Although the topic of his birth is traditional to the hymnic genre, the special attention that he pays to his parents’ reciprocal relationship, and his aggrandizing of his mother’s home/cave is unique and serves his own ends.⁵⁴ With his second song, the theogony, Hermes both describes and creates the ordered universe that he wants, of which he is an honored member.⁵⁵ Thus, for Hermes, who, in the *Hymn*, is in a liminal state, neither mortal nor yet a full-fledged god, his songs play a critical role in his transition to a full member of the pantheon.

And this, naturally, ties in which Clay’s larger argument that the *Homeric Hymns* occupy a time in between the chaotic beginnings of the universe found in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, in which Zeus’ rule is still nascent and not yet solidified, and the unquestioned authority of Zeus found in the Homeric epics. In the *Homeric Hymns*, the Olympian pantheon is still being finalized, and the gods’ *timai*—their spheres of influence—are still being distributed. The *Hymn to Hermes*, much like the *Hymn to Apollo*, narrates the god’s induction into the pantheon and his acquisition of his powers.

However, this interpretation leads to a contradiction with what I have already proposed about the songs of the gods. Previously, I have said that divine song is used to solidify power, but Hermes’ songs, clearly, are being used to negotiate his position within the hierarchy. However, this view is only applicable for the *initial* instantiation of these songs, and one must remember that the gods operate in time differently than mortals. Although gods are born at some specific

54 Clay 1989: 108–11.

55 Clay 1989: 138.

moment in time, they are thenceforth forever. Likewise, although these songs may represent one unique moment, they simultaneously portray something eternally repeated. Clay words this well, while discussing the first entrance of Apollo into Olympus at the beginning of his Hymn:

“In defiance of our mortal temporal categories, but in complete harmony with those of the divine, the opening scene of the Hymn to Apollo portrays both the first epiphany of the new god on the threshold of Olympus and his eternally repeated entrance into his father’s house. In this unique but recurring sequence, the god manifests himself fully, as he did the first time, and as he will forever.”⁵⁶

This timelessness is further suggested by the strange arrangement of tenses that accompany that passage, which switch from the present, to the imperfect, to the aorist, and back to the present again, all within the span of Apollo’s entrance and the gods’ return to calm.⁵⁷ Although scholars and the traditional grammars have been unable to account for this oddity, Clay instead suggests: “for the gods...past and present are almost interchangeable. Each divine manifestation resembles every other.”⁵⁸ And it is with this understanding of time that these songs do not just serve as an initial negotiation of power, but that they serve as an eternal representation of the cosmic order. Thus even the songs of Hermes, which most fully reveal their oblique function, continue to promote and reiterate the order achieved after their initial performance.⁵⁹

Although these songs play a very particular role within their context, the other divine songs exclusively about the gods seem to have a less complex role within their own contexts, probably not least of all because they come from much shorter *Homeric Hymns*, which are necessarily less fleshed out than their longer collection-mates. One such song comes from the *Hymn to Pan* (*HH*

56 Clay 1989: 29. Cf. Bakker 2002.

57 Clay 1989: 22ff.

58 Clay 1989: 26.

59 Cf. also Nagy 1990: 59, who argues that Hermes’ theogony “authorizes” the gods and confirms their authority—a function that he ascribes (rightly) to all theogonies.

19), in which the Nymphs hymn the gods on Olympus, especially Hermes, ultimately narrating the birth and epiphany of Pan on Olympus, where he is accepted as one of the gods. The parallels with the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* should be obvious, and not particularly surprising, considering the two gods' father–son relationship. Just as Hermes was born but not yet an Olympian, so too was Pan born, only to frighten away his nurse, suggesting an unaccepted status. However, when he is revealed to the other gods on Olympus, he delights them all, thus securing his position.

The last divine song that treats *only* immortal objects is within the *Hymn to Artemis* (HH 27), wherein Artemis, the Muses, and the Graces hymn how Leto bore outstanding children. The song makes up a mere two lines, but tells us that its main focus (like so many hymns) is a birth narrative. Here, again, we may draw parallels with one of the longer *Hymns*, this time, naturally, to *Apollo*. The *Hymn* begins with a terrifying, bow-wielding Artemis, but the scene is ultimately deescalated with the unstringing of the bow, and the tension is fully released (no pun intended) with song and dance—the exact same pattern that occurs in *Apollo*, in which the god enters Olympus to the fright of the other gods, but his mother unstrings the bow and the others relax, and, in his second entrance to Olympus, he initiates song and dance, in which all the gods delight.

Songs by gods about humans.

And it is to this song, the song of the Muses in the *Hymn to Apollo*, that I would now like to turn, as it is the first of several divine songs that mention humans, and it presents most explicitly the relationship between mortals and immortals as it is depicted in immortal song. When Apollo

arrives on Olympus playing the lyre...

Μοῦσαι μὲν θ' ἅμα πᾶσαι ἀμειβόμεναι ὀπι καλῇ
ὕμνευσίν ῥα θεῶν δῶρ' ἄμβροτα ἠδ' ἀνθρώπων
τλημοσύνας, ὅσ' ἔχοντες ὑπ' ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι
ζώουσ' ἀφραδέες καὶ ἀμήχανοι, οὐδὲ δύνανται
εὐρέμεναι θανάτιό τ' ἄκος καὶ γήραος ἄλκαρ. (HH 3.189–93)

The Muses, responding all together with a beautiful voice, hymn the immortal gifts of the gods and of men the sufferings, as many as they have from the deathless gods, living senseless and helpless, able to find neither a cure for death nor a guard against old age.

The main contrast here is between “the immortal gifts of the gods” (190 θεῶν δῶρ' ἄμβροτα) and “the sufferings of men” (190–1 ἀνθρώπων | τλημοσύνας). It is not just that the two topics of song are different in their content or tone, but their contrast is brought into greater relief by the enjambment of τλημοσύνας (191). Reading word by word, line 190 suggests that the Muses sing the gifts of the gods *and* of men (θεῶν δῶρ' ἄμβροτα ἠδ' ἀνθρώπων), but, when the reader or listener gets to the first word of the following line (191 τλημοσύνας), the previous interpretation is shattered and replaced with another very different meaning; the gifts are for the gods alone, whereas humans have toils.

And this reversal is given much greater and sustained importance than the initial surprise of the enjambment: these τλημοσύναι and their effects are expanded in great detail over the next three lines—whereas the gifts of the gods elicited a mere three words from the Muses. The first point of expansion is, I think, the most important: mortals have these sufferings *from the gods* (191 ὅσ' ἔχοντες ὑπ' ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι). So it not just that the gods have gifts and mortals have

sufferings, but the gods instituted that division. The next two lines describe not the τλημοσύναι themselves, but the general inability of humans to exchange their condition—which is surely either the result or a component of the aforementioned τλημοσύναι. The most important elements here come from the final line: humans are able to find neither a remedy for death (193 θανάτιό τ' ἄκος) nor a defense against the effects of aging (193 γήραος ἄλκαρ). The mortality and aging of human bodies is of course a common trope of Homeric literature,⁶⁰ and it, of course, contrasts with the deathlessness and agelessness of the gods, emphasized earlier in this passage by ἄμβροτα (190) and ἀθανάτοισι (191).

The relationship between gods and men depicted in this song, both implicitly and explicitly—that the gods are superior to men, and that man's inferiority is meted out by the gods—is, as I argue, the foundational relationship upon which all divine songs that mention mortals are situated. More than that, this relationship is present in all the external songs for which we have some idea of the content, even those songs by mortals. The tone is, of course, different—the gods are here disparaging, whereas mortals are hopeful in their ability to elicit positive change—but the structural arrangement of a superior (immortal) and an inferior (mortal) term is the same.

This relationship, however, is more difficult to tease out from the other divine songs that mention mortals, as none are as explicit as the song of the Muses in the *Hymn to Apollo*. Nevertheless, there is a detectable subtext. For example, we may turn to another song of the Muses, this time in Hesiod's *Theogony*:

... αἱ δ' ἄμβροτον ὄσσαν ἰεῖσαι
 θεῶν γένος αἰδοῖον πρῶτον κλείουσιν ἀοιδῆ
 ἐξ ἀρχῆς, οὓς Γαῖα καὶ Οὐρανὸς εὐρύς ἔτικτεν, 45

60 Cf. the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* and the Ages myth in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (109ff).

οἳ τ' ἐκ τῶν ἐγένοντο, θεοὶ δωτήρες ἐάων
 δεύτερον αὖτε Ζῆνα θεῶν πατέρ' ἠδὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν 47
⁶¹ ὄσσον φέρτατός ἐστι θεῶν κάρτει τε μέγιστος 49
 αὖτις δ' ἀνθρώπων τε γένος κρατερῶν τε Γιγάντων 50
 ὑμνεῦσαι τέρπουσι Διὸς νόον ἐντὸς Ὀλύμπου
 Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο. (Hes. *Th.* 43–52)

And they, sending forth an immortal voice, make famous with song first the revered race of the gods from the beginning, those whom Gaia and broad Ouranos bore, and the others born from them, the gods, givers of good things. Second, in turn, they sing about Zeus, the father of gods and men, how much he is the bravest of the gods and best in strength. And then the Olympian Muses, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, hymning the race of men and of strong Giants, delight the mind of Zeus on Olympus.

The song begins as a traditional theogony, starting from the earliest gods (44 ἐξ ἀρχῆς ... Γαῖα καὶ Οὐρανός) and moving on to the Olympians (47 Ζῆνα)—much as Hesiod's *Theogony* does in the external narrative enclosing this internal theogony. This part of the song certainly serves a similar function as those other internal songs that the gods sing about themselves: it glorifies the reign of Zeus, and thus the present cosmic hierarchy, which came about after he quelled the generational successions of the earlier gods (which, again, is concordant with the external *Theogony*).

The part of this song that is presently of interest is what concludes this otherwise traditional theogony: the Muses hymn “the race of men and of strong Giants” (50 ἀνθρώπων τε γένος

61 I delete line 48, which is bracketed in West 1966 and Solmsen et al. 1990. For the difficulties associated with the line, see West 1966 ad loc.

κρατερῶν τε Γγάντων). Compared with other internal theogonies (such as that of Hermes in the *Hymn to Hermes* discussed above, or the other theogony that the Muses sang earlier in Hesiod's *Theogony*), this “theogony” (in name only, apparently) is unique in its mention of both humans and giants. The natural question, then, is why conclude with these elements that are otherwise unprecedented in a genre nominally about the births of the gods? My answer—at least the short version—is the same that it has been throughout this paper: mentioning here giants and men contributes to the gods' agenda of solidifying their rule with song. But this answer ought to be explained more fully.

The Muses' song quoted above is not given in direct discourse within the poem, but rather is summarized for us. Moreover, that summary appears to be rather compressed, as the humans and giants occupy but a single line in the poem handed down to us; we should assume, I think, that the Muses had rather more to say than what is given. Naturally, reconstructing what they said comes down largely to guesswork, but there are clues that, I think, allow us to make very educated and probable guesses. In particular, I think the mere mention of the giants tells us not only the tone of this part of the song, but the specific narrative that the Muses would have included, namely the Gigantomachy. I come to this conclusion for two reasons: First, the Gigantomachy is the Giants' only myth.⁶² Second, taken as a model, the rest of the *Theogony* is suggestive that attempted coups such as the Gigantomachy are at home within the genre. Examples abound: the succession myth, the Titanomachy, and the Typhoeus episode. Moreover, in addition to the shared genre of the internal and external theogonies, scholars have repeatedly demonstrated the programmatic nature of the Muses and their songs within the *Theogony*,⁶³ thus further suggesting that the Muses' song would contain one or more examples of uprising to

62 Gantz 1993: 446.

63 E.g. Clay 2003: 70; Stoddard 2003 and 2005.

parallel those found in the external narrative—a position which the Gigantomachy would fill perfectly.

Such an episode would also contribute to my larger argument that the gods use song to celebrate and solidify their own position of power. By recounting such a formidable yet ultimately unsuccessful attempt against their authority that is so completely and utterly quelled, the gods demonstrate just how strong they are, and how firm their rule is. Thus, for this reason and those discussed above, I suggest that we are expected to understand the Muses' reference to the Giants here as evocative of the Gigantomachy.

But I have as yet said nothing about the humans in this passage, who, for the present study, are the more important of the two groups mentioned. Indeed, determining what the Muses might have sung about the humans in this passage is more difficult to reconstruct than for the Giants. However, the preceding comments about the Giants will, I think, prove useful here. As already discussed, the Gigantomachy would surely set a certain tone for this part of the song. Previously, when singing about the gods, the song certainly would have been laudatory and authorizing, perhaps interspersed with the succession myths also found in the external *Theogony*. Turning to the Giants, however, although the authorizing function is still at play, the frightening power of the immortals has come to the fore, and, more specifically, the ways they will exercise that power if their rule is threatened or questioned. This aspect in particular seems operative here: by pairing the humans with the Giants in their song, the Muses seem almost to be providing a cautionary or even didactic element to their song. Humans, while they are trying to improve their position within the hierarchy through the literary immortality attainable via song, had better not attempt to overstep their bounds. Although it is impossible to reconstruct exactly what the Muses sang, the juxtaposition of humans with the Gigantomachy certainly seems a potent reminder of

mortals' position within the hierarchy and the punishment that awaits them should they try to reverse it.

The next song that I would like to discuss is quite different from any of the others examined so far. I include it, however, because it demonstrates yet another aspect of the power that song is able to exert. The song is that of the Sirens in Book 12 of the *Odyssey*:

δεῦρ' ἄγ' ἰών, πολύαιν' Ὀδυσσεῦ, μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν,
185 νῆα κατάστησον, ἵνα νοιτέρην ὄπ' ἀκούσης.
οὐ γάρ πώ τις τῆδε παρήλασε νηὶ μελαίνῃ,
πρὶν γ' ἡμέων μελίγηρυν ἀπὸ στομάτων ὄπ' ἀκούσαι,
ἀλλ' ὅ γε τερψάμενος νεῖται καὶ πλείονα εἰδώς.
ἴδμεν γάρ τοι πάνθ' ὅσ' ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ
190 Ἀργεῖοι Τρῶές τε θεῶν ἰότητι μόγησαν,
ἴδμεν δ' ὅσσα γένηται ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ. (Hom. *Od.* 12.184–91)
Come hither on your way, much-praised Odysseus, great glory of the Achaeans.
Bring in your ship so that you may listen to our voices. For not yet has anyone
driven past this place on his black ship before hearing the sweet song from our
lips. Rather, having delighted in it, he goes back knowing more. For we know
everything that the Argives and Trojans suffered in broad Troy by the will of the
gods, and we know as many things as happen upon the much-nourishing earth.

This song is unique within the confines of this study for several reasons. First, it is the only song here examined that is presented as a direct quotation (albeit second-hand by Odysseus). Although other songs sometimes begin to blur together with the external narration so as to become nearly indistinguishable,⁶⁴ none are truly quoted. Second, although the Sirens still technically fit neatly

64 See, e.g., Garvie 1994 ad Hom. *Od.* 8.266–369 and Goldhill 1991: 51 on the Lay of Aphrodite and Ares. Cf.

into my dichotomy when phrased as mortal and immortal, as they are indeed immortal, their position becomes ambiguous when we reconsider the dichotomy as existing between human and god. To call the Sirens “gods” is, I think, incorrect. Rather, they seem to be nearer to the category of monsters, such as Scylla and Charibdys, who, although immortal, are not gods like Zeus, or Apollo, or even the Muses and nymphs. And since the Sirens are neither human nor god, it makes sense that their song should also differ from the songs of either of the preceding two categories.

However, before turning to an analysis of their song, I think there are still further elements that set the Sirens apart. Even if we prefer not to get hung up on the technicalities of terminology, the Siren’s unique status is still visible from other angles. For one thing, the Sirens seem to exist more within the mortal realm than the immortal, which, I will argue below, also informs their song. They apparently live on earth (whereas the gods live on Olympus), they make themselves clearly visible to mortals (unlike, e.g., Athena, who repeatedly disguises herself), and their singing is clearly intended for a mortal audience (while the gods sing for other gods).

And by as much as they are moved closer to mortals, the Sirens are removed all the more from the gods. For one thing, the *Odyssey* gives us no indication that they ever leave their rocks down on earth, changing them out for some holier place, as the gods are wont to do. Moreover, the Sirens never appear to have divine company. Their songs are intended for a mortal audience (more on that in a moment). The other lesser divinities, however, either go to Olympus, or are accompanied by Olympian singers or audience members. The Muses, for example, repeatedly go up to Olympus to sing for Zeus and the other gods, even singing along side Apollo’s lyre playing in the *Hymn to Apollo* (*HH* 3.189ff.) or Artemis’ own singing in her *Homeric Hymn* (*HH*

Scodel 1998: 171.

27.15ff.). Likewise, the nymphs sing with Pan in his *Hymn* (*HH* 19.19–21), and although neither of them are technically Olympian, their song tells us that Pan has indeed been to Olympus and received the blessing of all the gods there (*HH* 19.42–7).

This physical separation from divine company is paralleled in the content of the Sirens' song itself and, I think, deliberately so. As already mentioned, their song is intended for a mortal audience. As Ruth Scodel has demonstrated, the Sirens' song is unique in that it "is truly directed at a specific audience."⁶⁵ Indeed, they address Odysseus by name, with epithet and all (Hom. *Od.* 12.184 πολύαιν' Ὀδυσσεῦ, μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν). Moreover, rather than singing a hymn or theogony or anything else that we have come to expect from divine singers, the Sirens claim to know everything that took place in the Trojan War, and everything that happens on the earth (189–90). The Sirens appear to sing human *kleos*. Although the other gods know this information, they do not sing about it—the nearest they come is when the Muses provide this information to bards for their songs. Humans, however, will sing this sort of content, but they do not have the omnipotence that the Sirens appear to have; human song about human events, even when assisted by the gods, is limited to what information could in theory be obtained through oral report, but Sirens have no such limitations.⁶⁶ Moreover, the Sirens' offer to sing of *kleos* for Odysseus, rather than offering the delight that is traditionally attributed to song,⁶⁷ or even the weeping that Odysseus experiences during the first and third songs of Demodocus, the Sirens' song will only lead Odysseus to his death—an ironic twist on the immortality that *kleos* usually offers. Indeed, Ruth Scodel is right to call the Sirens' song an "anti-song."⁶⁸

With all this information in mind, the question then arises as to how the Sirens' song fits into

65 Scodel 1998: 188.

66 Scodel 1998: 189 and passim.

67 Hom. *Od.* 1.347, 8.429, cf. Hes. *Th.* 98–103. See Scodel 1998: 183 and esp. Garvie 1994 ad 8.44–5.

68 Scodel 1998: 188.

my argument. To put it succinctly, it does and does not. Although I have here located the Sirens' song among my discussion of the gods' songs, they are not really gods in the same way as Zeus, or Hermes, or the Muses, or even the Graces. They are immortal, but they are monsters more than gods, just like Scylla or Charybdis. As such, we should not expect their songs to have the same goals as the gods. And this has been shown in their song content; their goal is to attract whatever sailors happen to pass by and lead them to their death. Likewise their song, although it purports to offer a celebration of *kleos*, only offers an ironic, ignominious death, and thus differs also from the songs of men. Their goal is animalistic and lacks the grander designs that characterize the other songs—both mortal and immortal—that are discussed in this study.

Nevertheless, I include this song in my study for several reasons. First and foremost, although such motivation may seem counterproductive to my own claims, their song highlights that my approach to internal song is but one of many possible approaches. As explained above, I chose to divide singers between humans and gods based on textual evidence, but these categories nevertheless offer some degree of fluidity. The Sirens fall somewhere on the spectrum between gods and men. In structuralist terms, Sirens (like other types of monsters) serve as mediators between gods and mortals.⁶⁹ By a different approach, the Sirens could even be categorized entirely differently, say if one were to divide singers along gender lines, or audience, or location. There is more work that could be done here, and each different approach will likely yield different insights.

Another reason for the Sirens' inclusion, which is more productive for my argument, is that they provide yet another example of how powerful song can be—even beyond the scope of what humans and gods use song for. Just as I argue that humans and gods bend song for their own

69 Csapo 2005: 226–9.

respective needs, so too do the Sirens. But their goals, as discussed above, are vastly different in nature than those of either of the former; they have no desire to acquire more power or a better quality of life, nor do they express any need to solidify their current position. Instead, they are using song for purposes beyond those two main functions that I have laid out in this study. By operating outside of my primary schema, the Sirens' use of song goes to demonstrate just how powerful and wide ranging the practical use of song can be.

The final song yet to be discussed in this paper is the dirge sung by the Muses for Achilles in Book 24 of the *Odyssey*:

ἀμφὶ δέ σ' ἔστησαν κοῦραι ἀλίιοιο γέροντος
οἴκτρ' ὀλοφυρόμεναι, περὶ δ' ἄμβροτα εἶματα ἔσσαν.
Μοῦσαι δ' ἑννέα πᾶσαι ἀμειβόμεναι ὀπι καλῇ
θρήνεον· ἔνθα κεν οὔτιν' ἀδάκρυτόν γ' ἐνόησας
Ἀργείων· τοῖον γὰρ ὑπώρορε Μοῦσα λίγεια.
ἐπτὰ δὲ καὶ δέκα μὲν σε ὁμῶς νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμᾶρ
κλαίομεν ἀθάνατοὶ τε θεοὶ θνητοὶ τε ἄνθρωποι (Hom. *Od.* 24.58–64)

And around you stood the daughters of the old man of the sea wailing pitifully, and place around you ambrosial garments. And all nine Muses, responding with a beautiful voice, sang the dirge. And there you would not have seen anyone of the Achaeans not crying, for the clear-voiced Muse moved them thus. And for seventeen nights and days did the deathless gods and mortal men lament you.

As is befitting the ultimate position in my catalogue, this song is by far the most difficult to analyze. First and foremost, this is a song sung by the gods for a mortal hero. This finds no direct parallel among any other song discussed herein, not even in the Sirens' song (as will be

explained below). Second, and further complicating our task of decoding this unprecedented item, no content is provided for this internal song, neither as a quotation, nor even as a summary. Third, and compounding the issue of the second, the only other parallel of the genre (θρῆνος)—the dirge sung for Hector in Book 24 the *Iliad*—also lacks any indication of its content, which eliminates any possibility of deriving content from comparative analysis.⁷⁰

Despite these difficulties, comparing Achilles’ funeral with Hector’s may nevertheless prove illuminating, even if we cannot use it to reconstruct either of the songs themselves. The two funerals seem closely paralleled, as we may expect. The Homeric funeral, as with later Greek funerals, would have been ritualistic to a high degree.⁷¹ Furthermore, that the two greatest heroes from either side of the Trojan conflict should receive similar funerals seems only fitting. Hector’s funeral has already been discussed, but a brief recapitulation here will facilitate comparison. The most important elements to remember are the kinswomen gathered to lead the weeping and lamentation (here Hector’s wife, mother, and sister-in-law—Andromache, Hecabe, and Helen) (Hom. *Il.* 24.710–2, 722ff.) and the bards who were gathered to sing the θρῆνος (720–2), although we can point to other parallels between the two funerals, such as the placement of the body on a bier (*Il.* 24.719f. τὸν μὲν ἔπειτα | τρητοῖς ἐν λεχέεσσι θέσαν, cf. *Od.* 24.44 κάτθεμεν ἐν λεχέεσσι), or the pyre and burning of the corpse (*Il.* 24.778ff., cf. *Od.* 24.65ff.).

The singers and kinswomen are integral parts of the funeral ceremony, and thus we should expect their appearance at Achilles’ funeral as well. The kinswomen find their parallel in the presence of Thetis and the Nereids. Just as Hector’s mother Hecabe was present at his funeral, so too is Achilles’ mother, Thetis, present at her son’s. And, since Achilles has neither a wife nor a

70 Comparison with later θρῆνοι may also prove problematic, as classical usage of the term differs from Homeric usage; see Alexiou 2002: 10–4, 102–3.

71 See Alexiou 2002, Pantelia 2002, and Perkell 2008. Cf. Thuc. 2.52.4 for a famous reversal of Greek burial practices during the great plague.

sister-in-law to complement the role of Hector’s Andromache and Helen—indeed, in lieu of any *mortal* kinswomen—it is only natural that Achilles’ relatives through his divine mother, the sea nymphs, should attend the ceremony.

Similarly, singers would need to be present for the dirge. However, in the *Iliad*, at least, there is no mention of any professional singers on the Greek side. In fact, the *only* bards mentioned in the *Iliad* are those at Hector’s funeral, and the next best alternative appears to have been Achilles himself.⁷² Now, of course, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. However, considering that singers were an integral component of a properly executed funerary ceremony, the absence of mortal bards at the funeral—whether by non-existence or otherwise—must have been significant for the Greeks. Moreover, even if the Greek camp did have sufficient bards for the funeral, it seems not unreasonable that they should be replaced by the Muses in this instance. For one thing, we have already seen how Hector’s mortal kinswomen have been replaced with immortal kinswomen for Achilles, according to his own divine parentage, and since he would appear to have no mortal kinsfolk on hand to attend instead of or in conjunction with the immortals (albeit based on the absence of evidence).⁷³ In addition, this would not be first time that Achilles received special treatment on account of divine favor, not least of all because of the pleading of his divine mother. The most notable example is the shield and other accouterments of war that Thetis elicits from Hephaestus (*Il.* 19.369ff.), but we may also note, in the immediate context of the funeral, that even the prizes for Achilles’ funeral games came from the gods:

μήτηρ δ’ αἰτήσασα θεοὺς περικαλλέ’ ἄεθλα

θῆκε μέσῳ ἐν ἀγῶνι ἀριστήεσσιν Ἀχαιῶν.

⁷² See *Il.* 9.186–9 and the discussion above.

⁷³ So too Macleod 1982 ad 721–2.

ἤδη μὲν πολέων τάφῳ ἀνδρῶν ἀντεβόλησας
ἠρώων, ὅτε κέν ποτ' ἀποφθιμένου βασιλῆος
ζώννυνταί τε νέοι καὶ ἀπεντύνονται ἄεθλα·
ἀλλὰ κε κεῖνα μάλιστα ἰδὼν θηήσασο θυμῷ,
οἷ' ἐπὶ σοὶ κατέθηκε θεὰ περικαλλέ' ἄεθλα,
ἀργυρόπεζα Θέτις· μάλα γὰρ φίλος ἦσθα θεοῖσιν. (Hom. *Od.* 24.85–92)

And your mother, having asked the gods, placed in the middle of the contest very beautiful prizes for the chiefs of the Achaeans. And already you have been present at the funerals of heroes of war, whenever, with the death of a king, young men gird themselves and prepare themselves for prizes; but had you seen the gorgeous prizes that the goddess, silver-footed Thetis, had set up for you, you would have marveled at them. For you were very dear to the gods.

But I have yet to address the question of what the Muses sang. Unfortunately, as with my previous analysis of the dirge at Hector's funeral in Book 24 of the *Iliad* discussed in the previous chapter, I here must once again decline to propose any specific song content. However, even more so than in the dirge for Hector, I suspect that this dirge would have lacked any celebration of *kleos*—at least as much as can be avoided in the ritual context—because of who the singers are. The gods, as this chapter has demonstrated, do not celebrate human *kleos*, and I expect that this song would be no exception (despite its other exceptional qualities). Moreover, as was also demonstrated previously, the ensuing *gooi* of the kinswomen (not explicitly mentioned in this passage, but described at length for Hector's funeral) undercut the traditional values of male heroic virtue and the search for *kleos* at the cost of human life and suffering. Thetis especially has bemoaned Achilles' destiny for a short life but eternal glory even before his

death, and we should expect those same views (also shared by Hector's kinswomen, Andromache especially) would have resurfaced in her *goos*. Any celebration of traditional *kleos* in the dirge would have been subsequently subverted.

Conclusion

This study reveals that, despite similarities in topic and theme, the songs performed by humans and gods in archaic Greek epic differ significantly from one another in several key respects. In particular, the gods and humans have very different goals while singing. Humans wish to improve their social standing within the cosmic hierarchy. They are encumbered by eventual death that cannot be physically overcome, but they can nevertheless emulate a sort of immortality through song and the celebration of *kleos*; for as long as their name and deeds are recited as part of the oral tradition, they will never be forgotten, and they will live on in the memories of listeners. The gods push against this. Within their own songs, the immortals instead reiterate the physical mortality that humans are attempting to overcome. Moreover, the gods phrase this harsh truth in terms of their own superiority; it is not just that humans suffer, but that they suffer because the gods have made it so. This has the twofold effect of also emphasizing the gods' own power and rule. Likewise, the gods will sing about their own births and exploits, further reiterating and solidifying their rule and superior position within the cosmic hierarchy, which they have in mind to create and maintain.

However, despite these overarching tendencies in song, individual songs, as we have seen, can also have very specific, localized functions. For example, the hymn and theogony that Hermes sings in his *Homeric Hymn* on one hand fit the model for divine songs in that they depict the cosmic hierarchy of the gods and thus reinforce it by the act of reiteration, and on the other hand add a new component to that hierarchy: Hermes. As a newly born god, Hermes has not yet been assigned a place in the pantheon, and thus he uses song to attain the position he desires, on one hand by the same act of reiteration that reinforces the hierarchy, and on the other hand by

literally trading song to Apollo to obtain his own *timai*. The “Lay of Aphrodite and Ares” sung by Demodocus in Book 8 of the *Odyssey* also serves a specific purpose in its own narrative beyond traditional praise or depiction of the gods. For Odysseus, and for the reader, the song of adultery provides a foil for Odysseus’ own situation, wherein, unlike the licentious Aphrodite, his wife Penelope is behaving as a Greek wife was expected to. There are even songs that do not consider these cosmic political struggles at all, such as the song of the Sirens. These monsters, being neither human nor divine, have no investment in either changing or maintaining the cosmic hierarchy, and thus exhibit completely different goals in their songs, but all while exploiting what their audience expects and wants to hear in regular song.

These two observations—that song can have both local and global implications—are important because they reveal a much more nuanced and influential view of the power of song. Whereas previous studies have focused exclusively on the functional deployment of a given internal song within a localized context, my research shows that these songs also have goals beyond their immediate context, rather that they fit into a much larger program that extends between different works and authors. Although local goals are still applicable and important, these songs are doing double duty by also contributing to an ongoing universal political struggle. That song is able to perform both functions simultaneously is an indication of how powerful and important song was for the ancient Greeks.

Similarly, the observations I have made offer further insight into the Greeks’ worldview. These songs tell us something about their view of their own lives—the hope and pain and desperate, calculated grasping for something better, some relief—on one hand from larger problems like human mortality, and on the other hand from more immediate problems like deliverance from a plague, or anxiety about adultery. Likewise, I think we learn something about

the Greeks' relationship with their gods. The Greeks knew how to please their gods, but they also knew how hard they were able to push back without punishment. At the same time, by producing literary depictions of what they thought the gods sang about, the Greeks reveal something about their conception of divine motivation and thought, especially about humans and human action.

The Greeks perceived a constant tug-of-war between themselves and their gods.

Finally, although I am certainly not the first person to demonstrate this, my work once again shows just how powerful song could be for the Greeks. Song could literally change the universe, and effective deployment could bring about significant change. Song could be used to teach, to advance, to repress, and to destroy. Thus, internal songs in archaic Greek poetry have strong narrative implications.

Despite the progress made here, there is still much work left to be done. First and foremost, Hesiod has been largely neglected in the present study in consideration of time and space. However, internal songs abound in Hesiod, as well as references to Hesiod the character / narrator as singer. Exploring these passages in depth would add much detail especially to our understanding of the gods' influence on human song and teaching. The *Theogony* especially would further refine our understanding of the theogony as a genre, both via the external song itself, as well as the various internal theogonies, and the character / narrator's references to the composition of (what is presumably) the poem itself. Even beyond the archaic epic treated in this paper, I suspect that song continued to be a powerful narratological tool in later writers and genres.

Similarly, genre is given short shrift, but I expect that further refinements and observations about various internal songs can be gained from considering the genre more fully: To what degree does it affect content? Can any singer perform any genre? Are some goals better suited to

particular genres?

Genre could also be used to divide songs, rather than singer and song content as I have done. Divisions could also be made by gender, location, audience, or any other number of criteria. But as was seen in chapter one, the songs (and singers) lend themselves to a division according to performer and content. However, that is not to say that it is the only reasonable or logical choice of division, nor the only one that would yield results. But, I leave those opportunities untried for future scholars.

Nevertheless, even with these questions yet to be answered, the present study offers a substantial addition to our understanding of archaic Greek epic. Internal songs, in addition to suiting a local, narratological context and function, formed part of a larger political struggle taking place between gods and men. Humanity wants to improve its lot, but the gods want to maintain the status quo.

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