

Homer's Threshold: The Liminal Text and Loss of Ecolinguistic Diversity in Early Literature

Nakibuddin Haider Navid

Content Writer at Mark Art Studio, London

Abstract

The earliest literary texts provide us with a glimpse of the beginning of literature in mythology. The oral tradition in which these myths were preserved were later collected into the primary epics such as Homer's The Iliad. As transitional texts that bridge the oral tradition and a culture informed and molded by written language, these texts demonstrate the quality of liminality. This paper therefore seeks to place Homer not in the Oral-formulaic school, limited to stock-epithets, but to a transitional period between the oral and the written, with references to language that suggest an inherently written quality in epic poems. Homer exists in such a threshold between two points: mythology and literature, mythos and logos, the sacred and the profane, and ultimately between oral and written language. By applying the theories of ecolinguistics, this paper examines the liminal texts of Homer in the context of Bronze and Iron Age narratives, and concludes how such early literary texts with myths of heroic city-builders, divine architects, and the politics of establishing an urban language, ultimately sacrifice linguistic diversity. This paper is therefore ultimately about what is lost in translation between the oral and written, and concludes that such loss of ecolinguistic diversity is characteristic of the threshold that Homer occupies as evident in the language of The Iliad.

Keywords: *liminality, ecolinguistic diversity*

The development of written language had altered the way narratives were told. Not only did the shift from an oral tradition to a written culture recontextualise existing mythology, but in Ancient Greece that shift resulted in the very foundations of Western literature. Such a threshold is often the concern of ecolinguistics, which seeks to recontextualise the study of language and its development with the larger ecological context in which the language develops, often by focusing on the materials with which languages are expressed. Despite having roots in oral mythology, narratives such as Homer's *Iliad* cannot be separated from the very material medium on which they are written. Such narratives need to be read in the context of the new written mythology, and the preoccupations of early written literature. Literature that is created during this period of human development feature narratives that revolve around city-building, architecture, and a glorification of the written text itself. As a result, such liminal texts show how the emergence of early literature resulted in a drastic loss in language and cultural diversity.

Development in ecolinguistic research allows us to explore these earliest forms of literature in their relation to storytelling customs, and in particular, analyze Homer's primary epics in the larger context of other oral narratives that were written down. The anthropological term "liminal" is used to discuss the role of Homer and such texts as a "threshold" between mythology and literature, and how such languages struggle to maintain their oral roots while

still trying to cope with the possibilities of a new medium. The paper is divided into three subsections that explore Homer's mythology through the concept of liminality and through the lens of ecolinguistics. The first section explores an account of language and liminality in Homer's text, particularly by defining the concept of "the liminal text" and how ecolinguistics traditionally views the threshold between oral and written literature. The second section puts Homer's epic in the context of other forms of early literature; it examines the relationship between a loss in ecolinguistic diversity and the emergence of early literature during the Bronze Age, with a discussion on how both literary and the anthropological sources describe the "early" periods in human history, before drawing comparisons between *The Iliad* and Ancient Mesopotamian texts. Finally, the paper concludes with a third section summarizing the inferences made in the arguments.

Language and Liminality in Homer's Text

In order to appreciate the linguistic politics underlying *The Iliad*, we must treat its narrative as a post-Bronze-Age, urban mythology. Such narratives are concerned with not only nation-building, but with the invention of the written alphabet to unify language itself. However, traditional scholarship treats Homer as purely an oral poet. Such a reading disconnects the composition of *The Iliad* by misplacing Homer in a pre-literate culture. As a liminal poem, *The Iliad* cannot be completely divorced from the language in which it was composed.

The Iliad collects the myths, histories, and concerns of the people of the Greek Heroic Age, largely considered to be during the Mycenaean era. As an epic poem, it presents to us with a definitive tone the origins of Western civilization. Contemporary critical consensus remains strongly in favor of the Oral-formulaic theory, first proposed by Milman Parry and Albert Lord, that Homer's epic poems were conceived in an oral tradition and thus belong to a culture that had yet to develop, or establish, a language that could be written down. As primary epics, they are believed to be part of a tradition where stock-phrases, epithets, and epic-similes favor improvised-recitation through their alliterative and mnemonic verse-structure. Thus, the Oral-formulaic approach to Homer postulates that the Homeric "text" is not a part of the language with which it was originally composed. The extant text is recorded in an Ionian Greek dialect, which has since come to be regarded as Homeric Greek. However, many of its maritime terminology has traces of an Aeolian dialect, thus allowing the poem to be communicated across different Greek dialects, adding to the poem's accessibility (Knauth and Liao 208).

The language of *The Iliad* contains onomatopoeic words that suggest the maritime sounds for its seafaring voyagers. Words translated as "roaring-sea" and "the wine-red-sea" are onomatopoeic in nature. Such language usage points to the conscious use of words for the unique use of the poem itself and are said to "contribute to an aquatic polyphony whose original sound is transmitted throughout European literature" (Knauth and Liao 210). Moreover, the question as to whether Homer composed the poem at different Greek localities also arises, thereby making him akin to a wandering-bard, with each local environment inspiring different aspects of the various books of the text, and thus becoming a song that ultimately brought a sense of national unity to his audience.

The authenticity and survival of *The Iliad* has given rise to two general approaches: analysts, such as F.A. Wolf, who believed that “Homer” is not a single individual, but many poets whose collective work is *The Iliad*. These poets added to the epic as written practices became available; and unitarians, such as E.V. Rieu, who accepted Homer to be one man and the progenitor for their theology (Jones xxxix-lviii). Logic dictates that since Homer’s epics were originally oral performances, they must have at one point been written down, and the oldest Greek texts mention the need to establish a standardized Homeric text for bards, and Greek education as late as 600 BCE (xl). It is known that nearly all surviving texts of ancient Greek literature were collected and copied by Greek scholars in Egypt c. 300 BCE, and it is these texts that form the basis of our translations. Still, these early Greek scholars raised the issue of “many Homers” due to the repetitive, oral nature of the text itself (Jones xli). English translations began in 1539 CE, and the most influential translation has been by George Chapman in 1559 CE.

In recent years, Parry and Lord’s conclusion that the Homeric epics originated in a completely oral context has been brought into question. Jack Goody, in his works *The Myth of the Bagre* and *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*, discusses how the Greek epics were sung in cultures that had some minimal contact with literacy. Moreover, they are more formal and tightly composed than poems which had no contact with literate societies, such as the myth of Bagre in Ghana (Abram 285). Goody also argues that the culture represented in *The Iliad* should not be considered to be a “pristinely oral culture” since it was likely to have been indirectly influenced by writing systems which “existed for economic and military accounting by the Minoan and Mycenaean cultures on the island of Crete and by the literacy of the neighboring societies of the Near East, societies with which the Greek merchants must have been in frequent contact” (Abram 286).

Evidence of written texts exists in Book VI of *The Iliad*, when Glaukos and Diomedes confront each other on the battlefield, and the former reports the myth of Bellerophon:

Proteus was enraged at what he heard. He stopped short of putting Bellerophon to death – he did not think it right to do so – but instead sent him off to Lycia carrying a fatal message, a folded tablet on which he had written signs with a deadly meaning. Proteus told Bellerophon to hand this tablet to his father-in-law, the ruler of Lycia, thus ensuring Bellerophon’s death. (Jones 104)

The original Greek word used for “tablet” and “written” is πιναξ πτυκτος (*pinax ptyktos*), and πτυκτος is a homonym of the Greek word for “wall,” τεῖχος, which in turn is derived from the Proto-Indo-European word “tek-,” to weave or to make. The walls of Ilium, that is the Trojan walls, are impenetrable, but they are architectural feats, created by Poseidon and Apollo at the order of King Laomedon of Troy. Later in the poem, the tide of battle revolves around Hektor breaking the Greek wall erected on the Trojan shoreline, thereby gaining an advantage over the Greek forces: “there was a great roar from the gate as the planks were smashed to splinters by the impact of the stone and the bars gave way ... the panic-stricken Greeks fled back to their hollow ships, and all hell broke loose” (Jones 215). Hektor is able to break a man-made wall because “the wall was built without the goodwill of the immortal gods, and

it did not last for long" (203). In contrast, the Trojan War continues because of the walls of Ilium. The significance is between the wall and the written text – both are examples of urban, human constructions that last only when they are divinely inspired. *The Iliad* is named after the famous walled city, as though the very architectural integrity of the poem and the city are meant to preserve the myth.

With Homer, we glimpse a culture near its end, at a mythology that has passed through the centuries and reached a decadent point when it is undergoing a change. In his introduction to E.V. Rieu's revised translation of *The Iliad*, Peter Jones writes:

Homer comes at the end of a tradition of oral storytelling going back hundreds of years (so that he has, in a sense, inherited the work of hundreds of earlier oral poets); and that his art consists in the unique way he has reworked these traditional, typical materials devised to enable the oral poet to recite in the first place – from phrase and sentence at one level to 'theme' and story-pattern at larger levels – into the masterpieces we have today. (xxxix)

This divide, between the oral and the written, marks one of the most contentious moments in the development of human language as far as ecolinguists are concerned. In 1996, in one of the earliest scholarly books on ecolinguistics, titled *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram explores the significance of breath and air in oral cultures. The spoken utterance, both in recited poetry and in everyday language, was uniquely a part of the ecosystem. However, when the ancient Greek alphabet emerged, the advent of the written vowel "was obtained at a high price. For by using visible characters to represent the sounded breath, the Greek scribes effectively desacralized the breath and the air ... negating the uncanniness of this element that was both here and not here" (252). This leads to the emergence of a Western "alphabetized" urban civilization where "lacking all sacredness, stripped of all spiritual significance, the air is today little more than a conveniently forgotten dump site" (258).

Thus, Homer's status as a poet between the oral and the written world exposes that loss in language. This is his threshold: a poetry that exists between the oral tradition and the individual text; the sacred and the profane; *mythos* and *logos*; the agricultural society and the urban civilization; and between mythology and literature. This is only increased further whenever we read these texts in translation. These early "proto-literate" texts are transitional, and thus they are liminal.

The term "liminality" has its roots in anthropology, derived from the Latin word *limen*, to mean "threshold." First developed in the 20th century by Arnold van Gennep and later by Victor Turner, the term is used to describe the middle-stage of any sociocultural ritual, where during a "liminal stage" the participants exist in ambiguity, where their pre-ritual status is lost while the fulfilled state of their post-ritual state is yet to be accomplished. Turner explains:

The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal

entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. (359)

In oral cultures, the liminal being exists as an outsider, whose status as someone both inside and outside the norm allows for the role of a storyteller. As written culture evolves and the poet assumes a similar role, it is the written text that becomes liminal. In *The Iliad*, this constant flux on the text can be seen in several degrees of liminality. All the heroes of the poem are liminal beings: they are essentially demigods and treated as Olympian-bred or Olympian-born. The precarious state of Homer being either the definitive author of *The Iliad*, or merely an amalgamation of diverse voices makes his role in the poem an example of liminality. Whether a single poet named Homer composed the *Iliad* or not, what remains important for the liminality of its text is that for, all intents and purposes, the narrator of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* has been given a name, and we call him Homer. It is this narrator who invokes the Muse:

Achilles' baneful wrath – resound O goddess – that impos'd
 Infinite sorrows on the Greeks, and many brave souls loos'd
 From breasts heroic; sent them far, to that invisible cave
 That no light comforts; and their limbs to dogs and vultures gave (Chapman 1.1-4).

The liminality of Homer comes from being projected onto the poem as its driving voice: he maintains a presence within the language of the poem as a liminal narrator. He is both present and absent, as he is channeling the Muse, and channels all of mythology into the literature of poetry. It is a deeply ritualistic recitation, and hence gives the text itself the quality of a liminal text. Not only does the poem begin *in medias res*, but it begins with a ritual.

Jones describes Homer's narrative presence as both "subjective" and "restrained" as though "he were nothing but a camera, dispassionately surveying the scene without making any judgements upon it" (xxix). Jones continues the comparison with authors such as Virgil – who is "constantly alerting us to the 'correct' view of matters," and to modern novelists – who "can rarely resist the temptation to tell us how to interpret a character or scene" (xxx). But in oral poetry, where a poem is recited in public, the presence of the bard is never denied. Thus, this dichotomy of presence in absentia, not unlike that of Achilles himself, is yet another example of Homer's liminal presence in the text. With time, Homer as a narrator has become just as much a part of the text as his characters.

Ecolinguistic Diversity and the Emergence of Literature

The development of ecolinguistic research in the past two decades has allowed us to apply its assessment of language to varying forms of literature. In ecolinguistics, the relationship between languages and their ecology is explored, and as such, ecological diversity is believed to be reflected in linguistic diversity. Just as we cannot truly separate a liminal text from the medium in which it is written, so too we must not separate a physical manifestation of language from its natural ecology. According to an ecological perspective on the emergence of language, language is sensate. It originates from the human body's physical perception of its surrounding environment. Thus, we may say that onomatopoeic expressions and

analogic epithets, like dialect, are highly dependent on its natural environment. In 1996, Abram established this relationship between an ecology and the corresponding language that emerges from it, and conversely, he cautioned that the loss of such an ecosystem corresponds to a loss in language itself:

As technological civilization diminishes the biotic diversity of the earth, language itself is diminished. As there are fewer and fewer songbirds in the air, due to the destruction of their forests and wetlands, human speech loses more and more of its evocative power. For when we no longer hear the voices of warbler and wren, our own speaking can no longer be nourished by their cadences. As the splashing speech of the rivers is silenced by more and more dams, as we drive more and more of the land's wild voices into the oblivion of extinction, our own languages become increasingly impoverished and weightless, progressively emptied of their earthly resonance. (86)

In 2003, Nettle and Romaine developed Abram's theory further and found that extinctions in biodiversity in certain areas correlate to the extinctions of highest linguistic diversity, and thus their combined attempt explores the causes for loss of diversity in not only nature, but human culture as well (13).

Such an ecolinguistic diversity is lost at the very moment that the earliest forms of written culture emerged. Literature and written languages emerged alongside the creation of urban civilizations, and as dynamic and diverse oral myths faded into a relatively singular, unchanging written language, the ecolinguistic diversity of that area too was lost. This is evident in the myths expressed through such liminal texts as discussed above.

The earliest evidence for written language is c. 3000 BCE in the Near East. Written records in the ancient world corresponds to the development of complex social systems where administration and trade, along with systematic rituals and religious practice, existed. This was the Bronze Age (c. 3500-1200 BCE), which was followed by the Iron Age (c. 1200-800 BCE). Karen Armstrong combined the two periods under the broader umbrella term of "Early Civilisations," starting with the earliest cities, through to the writing of *The Iliad*. After the Neolithic period, she regarded it as one historical epoch for myths (21).

Mesopotamia marks the beginning of written history in the region, and its earliest written accounts speak not only of recording trade-contracts, receipts, and practical expenditures, but also a literary and religious tradition expressing existing mythology as well (Biggs 13). These early Sumerian literary compositions were done in cuneiform texts on clay tablets which speak of the origins of human beings, as well as record the divine-inspired dreams seen by kings. In Book 2 of *The Iliad*, the description of Agamemnon's dream is similar to such literary forms.

Both the Mesopotamian and Mycenaean civilizations were based on agricultural communities which had evolved into urban cities. The corresponding mythology celebrated such themes as preservation, human creativity, and immortality. This relatively advanced development comes near the end of the Neolithic period and at the beginning of the next, which is marked by the city and by human architecture. In other words, written language was developed

during an advanced Neolithic or agricultural stage of human civilization – the mythology of crops, fertility, and vegetation was expressed through a literature of ziggurats, pyramids, and acropolises, often under siege.

Greek mythology begins as an agricultural mythology. This is true both in theme and content; it begins as an oral tradition. The advent of agriculture is marked by the beginning of the cultural period known as the Neolithic era (c. 10,000 BCE). Greek language itself developed its own identity through Greco-Armenian speakers from the Near East diverging from a Proto-Indo-European language family around 5000 BC; this in turn corresponds with the Neolithic spread of agriculture from Asia Minor to Greece before 4000 BC (Atkinson and Gray 91-93). Settlers from the Near East brought the archetypal cognates of the Greek pantheon from the hypothetical Proto-Indo-European culture, and furnished it once their own language evolved. Mycenae is historically considered to be the age of heroes, and the great king of *The Iliad*, Agamemnon, is the king of Mycenae. The Mycenaean civilization and its corresponding Dark Ages make up much of the setting for Greek mythology. The presence of Linear B in Homeric Greek is a clear indication that Greek mythology has had some incarnation in the Mycenaean culture.

Greek mythology is about agriculture, whereas Greek literature is about urban culture; second, Greek mythology follows an oral tradition, whereas Greek literature begins a literary tradition; and third, Greek mythology in its earliest form stems from the Neolithic era, whereas Greek literature in its earliest form originates in the Iron age. These mark distinctive differences in the very personality of the ancient narratives by the time we discover them. Homer unifies the myths in *The Iliad* in c. 1000-800 BC. A period of nearly 9000 years separates the beginning of agriculture, and its equivalent myths, to the beginning of Greek literature which records those myths. Additionally, a period of at least 3000 years separates the origin of a writing system to the first written expression of it. Homer was as distant from the Greek myths as we are distant from Homer.

Nearly all of the dominant myths of these Early Civilizations revolved around the holy city. The heroes emerging from this period are all either divinely-inspired architects or city-builders. Gilgamesh is an epic-hero, a city-king, and someone who seeks immortality. Similarly, both Achilles and Hektor are confronted with a choice between heroic valor, glory, or death. In Book 5, Diomedes proves his strength so well that he represents the sort of affront mortals, with the security of cities and the written text, could challenge the immortals themselves. A wounded Aphrodite cries: “The son of Tydeus, dauntless Diomedes, stabbed me ... This war is no longer a struggle between Trojans and Greeks, the Greeks are fighting against the gods as well” (84).

Odysseus is similarly an architect at the end of the Trojan Cycle; Oedipus is a savior of Thebes upon outwitting the Sphinx; Aeneas is the founder of Rome; Moses is an architect at first and later the one who brings the “Ten Commandments” – the writings of God, before leading the Hebrews to the “Promised Land.” In *The Iliad*, too, we see this preoccupation with city-builders: Laomedon, the ancestor of Priam, is said to be a corrupt king who duped the god Poseidon into building the impenetrable walls of Ilium, before which the entire Greek fleet

have struggled for ten years in *The Iliad* (Chapman 441-460). It should also be noted that myths of the flood were a recurring motif, and Laomedon's contract is with the earthshaker Poseidon. Catastrophic deluges and flooding echoed the plight of the city. As Armstrong argues: "The maintenance of civilisation seemed to require a heroic effort against the wilful and destructive powers of nature. These fears are especially evident in their flood myths" (22). The entirety of Book 21 in *The Iliad* is devoted to a maddened, Gilgamesh-like Achilles fighting the personification of the river Scamander.

But the same cityscape had an emerging class system that was marked by inequality: the fact that it was a community that evolved from farming to one that was based on trade, shows that economic surplus existed that led to such things as income inequality. Slavery and wealth appropriation were common in these ancient cities – a community evolved out of the necessities of survival to one where the environment was not simply exploited, but ruled. Mythology served to solidify such propaganda much as it does today. The emergence of a writing system in itself would separate the literate elite from the illiterate poor: written mythology and texts were thus the concerns of the privileged who could take their time to contemplate spirituality, morality, and art. The politics behind cosmic order, citywide natural disasters, written laws, the rites of priest-kings, the morality of soldiers, and conquests of the radical Other, are prevalent in urban mythology.

The advent of written language corresponded with the advent of city-building, and both literature and architecture, indeed the very notion of human creation – sanctioned by divine beings – is central to the myths themselves. The fact that we are reading *The Iliad* is in itself a part of the story, and thus its themes of creation are able to cross the threshold we call liminality. In fact, it was perhaps intended to be the medium with which a myth is written and which determines its content. We ignore the significance of the form and the medium in which the texts are preserved at the risk of losing semantic context.

Myths, in their original form, were meant to be dynamic, and the foundation for that was that they allowed room for further reinterpretation. By contrast, a literary text is meant to be definite with a close emphasis on its structural integrity. In other words, one may liken a cultural myth to an organism in nature, and a literary text to the foundations on a work of architecture. Ecolinguists consider this to be a form of urban-propaganda that leads to a loss of diversity among indigenous languages. The diversity of indigenous languages become either condemned or annihilated in favor of the language of the new city-nation, the multilingualism of an indigenous locality is silenced in a reverse Tower of Babel effect "where multilingualism is a debilitating punishment visited upon humanity" (Nettle and Romaine 190). Such a loss in ecolinguistic diversity continues in modern nation-building as well, where language is considered "the pedigree of nations" and standardized linguistic models are imposed:

The extension of Greek national sovereignty over parts of the territory of Macedonia was accompanied by particularly aggressive measures aimed at Hellenization of the Slavic speaking population, among them the prohibition of the use of any language but Greek in public. People were fined, sent to prison, or forced to drink castor oil, and

children beaten at school, if they were caught speaking their own language. (Nettle and Romaine 174-175)

While the Greeks mentioned refers to a post-Iron Age Greece, the sentiment remains that nation-building often led to a politics of language, where diversity was quenched with an authoritarian thumb:

Environmental damage, like language death, has global effects, but the burden at the moment falls most heavily on the developing countries, which have some of the highest rates of biolinguistic diversity. This is yet another reason why the extinction of biolinguistic diversity has been ignored: it is seen as largely a Third World problem. (Nettle and Romaine 24)

The same is true of ancient Greeks: “Being linguistically different condemns the Other to being savage” (58). *The Iliad* is particularly expressive of this sentiment in its representation of several Greek city-states, each with different languages that are ultimately unified under the fleet of Agamemnon.

This unification of language is one of the central points of difference between the Greeks and the Trojans. The Greeks under Agamemnon had a sort of unity that the multilingual and diverse group represented by the Trojans lacked. In Book 4, the narrator of *The Iliad* remarks:

As for the Trojans, like sheep that stand in their thousands in a rich man’s yard, yielding their white milk and bleating incessantly because they hear their lambs, so a hubbub went up through the great army. Their speech and dialects were all different, as they spoke a mixture of languages – the troops hailed from many parts. (Jones 72)

In contrast, the simile used for the Greeks is different: “Agamemnon shepherd of the people ... It is he who will get the credit if the Greeks beat the Trojans and capture sacred Ilium” (Jones 69).

Ecolinguistic diversity is a characteristic of this unification:

The narrators of the *Odysseia* and the *Ilias* are aware of human heteroglossy and even polyglossy, but they consider non-Greek idioms as inferior or even barbarian ... though the Trojan war is not presented as a war of languages. The variegated idioms of the allied forces of the Trojans in the siege of Troy are rhetorically very impressive ... but they contribute above all to the glory of Greece and Greek language. (Knauth and Liao 208)

The passage from Book II, Chapman’s translation of the aforementioned line 807 reads “The rude unletter’d Caribae, that barbarous were of tongue / Did under Naustes’ colours march.” The Caribae were an ally of the Trojans, and their foreignness is defined as barbarous. By extension, their association with the Trojans render the heroes of Troy just a language away from barbarity.

In his notes on the revision, Jones mentions that Homer’s historical time period did not allow him to use a unifying word for all of Greece, but rather that he used three terms – Achaens, Argives, and Danaans:

Homer does not call Greece or the Greeks by their received ancient and modern names, Hellas and Hellenes ... but since Agamemnon's expedition did in fact consist of Greeks from what we know as the central and southern Greek mainland and islands (Mycenaean Greece) ... [they] have all been called 'Greeks' throughout this translation. (lxiv)

The depiction of Troy in *The Iliad* itself brings this to mind. The Greeks and Trojans in Homer's epic are culturally homogenous: they worship the same gods, share similar cultural values, and most importantly, speak the same language (Jones xii). Helen, as a demigoddess herself, has her identity torn between two empires: Spartan and Trojan. Yet, by removing any true cultural demarcations of the Trojans, Homer is appropriating them as Mycenaean figures, belonging to the Mycenaean "Age of Heroes." This is the Helen we see, not an historically exotic, linguistically diverse Helen or Achilles, but a Homeric one. Knauth and Liao note:

Heteroglossy concerns only the allied forces, whereas the Trojans are supposed to speak Greek or a Greek dialect. In the *Ilias* [sic.] – neither on the narrative nor on the discursive plane – they are surely not represented as Luvian speaking people, since only the allied Carian troops, who belong to the Luvian linguistic area, are characterized as "barbarophon". In Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, the Greek dialects are designated as foreign glossai; their moderate use in poetry is recommended, they become "barbarisms", if their use turns excessive. (208)

In other words, ecolinguistic diversity was eradicated in favor of a more coherent literature that reflected the very Greek history of heroes of the Mycenaean civilization.

Conclusion

A literary text that seeks to present an existing mythology is inadvertently about preservation: even holy texts seek to save or record that which can otherwise be lost. Oral narratives about heroes and cosmogonies, on the other hand, were creative endeavors. Rather than being driven by a desire to preserve, they sought to add to the community knowledge. The mythopoeic minds that speculated about the nature of the cosmos would not condescend to capture or preserve the wisdom of the gods – human beings, by their very transient and mortal limitations, would be considered unqualified to mimic the cyclical rhythms that were visible in nature. Hence a Muse is invoked; her language channeled; her voice borrowed. In other words, the concept of a singular authority to something as wide and vast as cultural mythology, did not exist. It perhaps did not exist until written languages were invented.

In liminal texts, there is an active theme working to emphasize the very fact that myths are now being written down. From celebration of divine architecture to the preoccupation with the Holy City. The great cataclysms of urban mythology feature great floods that inundate man-made civilization as it falls under the weight of its own hubris or affront to nature; heroes are celebrated who sacrifice themselves for the betterment of the city; and the record of history comes to the foreground as the most important achievement of that culture – be it a history of war or a history of the gods themselves. The great fear is impermanence, and a loss of all things: Morality, Nature, and Life, because in the end the ultimate loss is Spiritual. The

unification of cultural myths is initially done by bringing them together under a single dialect, or in this case, under a single language. The Oral-formulaic approach to Homer's epic poems gives only a limited view of the rich and diverse, proto-literate threshold in which these poems exist. By reading them as merely oral constructions, we run the risk of ignoring the kind of linguistic-thought formations that the advent of literacy encouraged in human mythopoesy.

Unfortunately, the very act of writing down narratives which were meant to be dynamic, contributes to the loss. Perhaps the authors and poets of the urban myths felt that such a loss was inevitable, but as we sit today with a tradition of written literature informing us, we must stop to think about the cost at which such a tradition has come into existence.

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