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12 Genres of Anglophone World Literatures

Abstract: Despite Croce's warning that it is a mistake to classify works by genre, there is still a place for such considerations. Genre offers a way to break free from the segmentation imposed by categorisations of period and place, as Dimock has argued, even if one might note that the dominance of the novel has imposed a new kind of segmentation. Genre is a problem only if one expects creative artists to conform to these literary categories, but an exploration of world literatures illuminates the ways writers have merged different genres to produce new forms, while simultaneously using it to resist generic expectations derived from European literature. This is illustrated by examining four Anglophone texts of different genres which engage with Homeric epic in order to explore contemporary issues of identity and homecoming: Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*; Derek Walcott's poem, *Omeros*; Junot Díaz's short story, "Aguantando"; and Suzan-Lori Parks' play, *Father Comes Home from the Wars*.

Key Terms: Genre, epic, classical reception, omni-local, transcultural

1 Definitions and Theoretical Concepts

The concept of literary genres has frequently been traced back to ancient Greece and the work of Aristotle in particular, notwithstanding Gérard Genette's (1979) corrective inclusion of Plato within this genealogy. It is not only genre's roots in the works of philosophers whose place within 'the Western canon' is all-but-unquestioned that causes it to be regarded with scepticism especially when applied to the field of world literatures, it is also the fact that, ringing in our ears, is Benedetto Croce's old warning that to classify works by genre is "the greatest triumph of the intellectualist error" (1909, 35). So, is there a place for the consideration of genre when examining Anglophone world literatures, and if so, what insights can it yield?

Croce's concern about genre does not lead him to dismiss it altogether. He acknowledges that generic distinctions can be a useful shorthand "if it be only with a view to be[ing] understood, and to draw[ing] attention to certain groups of works" (1909, 38). The problem arises if we expect a creative work to obey the criteria of specific genres, whether that be epic, tragedy, lyric, or any others. As Croce observes, and as René Wellek endorses, artists have "always disregarded these *laws of the kinds*" (Croce 1909, 37; cf. Wellek 1970). Wellek identifies artists' lack of concern for genre distinctions as a particularly twentieth-century phenomenon (1970, 225), yet it might be more revealing to ask whether borders between genres were ever as impermeable

as the influential work of neoclassicists led us to believe. In their 1797 essay, "On Epic and Dramatic Poetry", Goethe and Schiller identify essential differences between epic and drama: most crucially, they say, the past-ness of epic contrasts with the presentness of drama (1845 [1797], 379). This idea of a sharp division between the two proved enormously influential not only in the neoclassical period, but into the twentieth century, as exemplified by Mikhail Bakhtin's distinction between the "absolutely completed and finished generic form" of epic in contrast to the "unfinalizability" of the novel (1981, 15). Goethe and Schiller's distinction, however, stems from something close to a misreading of Aristotle. For despite Aristotle's belief that literature is composed in a particular genre "according to the poets' own characters" (Poetics 1448b, 24–26; trans. Halliwell 1987, 34), which imposes clear distinctions between "more dignified" and "lighter" forms, it is clear that for Aristotle there is significant overlap between tragedy and epic, both being "more dignified" genres. Tragedy, in the *Poetics*, is declared to possess 'epic' qualities: "epic's attributes all belong to tragedy as well, though not all of tragedy's are shared by epic" (*Poetics* 1449b, 18–20; trans. Halliwell 1987, 36). This was even noted by Schiller in his correspondence with Goethe earlier that same year, when he remarked that Aristotle

is acquainted only with the generic-poetic laws of the Epopee, which it has in common with tragedy, and not with the specific ones, through which it is opposed to tragedy; thence also he felt authorized to say, that the Epopee is contained in tragedy[.] (Schiller and Goethe 1845, 247)

Holding fast to neoclassical views of genre, Schiller argued that genres should not mix; instead, the arts should venture towards a unity with each other without any form "giving up its specific advantages" (qtd. and discussed in Wellek 1981, 251). That Aristotle's vision of tragedy and epic was less severely demarcated is clear not only from the way that he begins his discussion of epic by likening it to tragedy (*Poetics* 1459a, 17–21; trans. Halliwell 1987), or from his assertion that "tragedy possesses all epic's attributes" with music and spectacle included in addition (Poetics 1462a, 14-17; trans. Halliwell 1987, 64), but also because in analysing the necessity of unity within tragedy and considering how it might be achieved, his examples are all drawn from epic (*Poetics* 1451a, 16–35; trans. Halliwell 1987).

Akin to the neoclassical idea, based on a partial reading of Aristotle, of the dramatic 'three unities', so too Aristotle's ideas on genre were interpreted in this period in a way that extrapolated from the extant text of the *Poetics* under the guise of a straightforward reading. This is not to say that ancient literary critics did not have a firm idea of genres: Aristotle may have ventured furthest towards a decoupling of genre from metre because of his interest in the poem's ethos, but the categorisations of genre remain broadly in place for him (cf. Farrell 2003, 385-386). This does not, however, prevent him from regarding Homer's epics as "tragic poetry" on account of their "seriousness" and "nobility" (Poetics 1448b; Farrell 2003, 385). It is this overlapping which came to be overlooked and which allowed the imposition of such a firm demarcation between epic and tragedy. The reception of Aristotle, then, imposes sharper borders between genres than Aristotle's Poetics itself does, and certainly more than the creative works of classical antiquity demonstrate to be the case.

Likewise, the categorisation of Aristotle as an exclusively European thinker disregards the historical reality of ancient Greece in the fourth century BCE; a reality that came to be refashioned (for insidious ideological reasons) in the nineteenth century with the development of what Martin Bernal (1987) termed the 'Aryan Model'. The denial of Afroasiatic influences on ancient Greece prevailed well into the latter third of the twentieth century, despite African and African diaspora scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop and George G.M. James publishing works to which Bernal's more publicised text owes much (cf. Diop 1974; James 1954). Indeed, in the far-right appropriation of Classics in the contemporary era, one might say that the Aryan Model has never fully gone away.

But the Aryan Model is a false one; the reality of ancient Greece was far less monolithic (cf. Burkert 1992; West 1997). Examining details of Aristotle's life shows that, although the world the ancient Greeks were aware of was smaller than our contemporary global reality, interaction across borders was a characteristic feature. Aristotle himself was from the north of classical Greece, spent several years in Athens studving at Plato's Academy, later moved to Asia Minor, and from there, was employed by Philip II of Macedon to be tutor to his son, Alexander the Great. This was a more transcultural society than is sometimes acknowledged.

Aristotle encouraged Alexander in his conquest of the east, doing so in ethnocentric terms that might not have been strikingly out of place in the colonial discourses of Europe from the fifteenth into the twentieth century (e.g., Aristotle fr. 658). He cannot be rehabilitated as a figure untinged by the Eurocentrism that has accrued to his reception, but it would be a mistake to neglect the African and Asiatic influences on him, just as the influence of Mesopotamia on Greek epic cannot be ignored. For Bakhtin, one of the distinctive features of the novel is its heteroglossia; contrasting it with epic, he acknowledges the polyglot world from which Greek epic grew, but regards the genre as deliberately monoglossic: "creative consciousness was realized in closed, pure languages (although in actual fact they were mixed)" (1981, 12). His evidence for these 'closed, pure languages' is slight, and may be more closely related to the sense of 'pastness' noted by Goethe and Schiller than to the voices at work within the epics. While suggesting that even in the modern day little can be added to Aristotle's discussion of "these already completed genres" because they have maintained the form into which they ossified long ago (Bakhtin 1981, 8), Bakhtin overlooks Aristotle's own discussion of heteroglossia in epic (Poetics 1457b–1459; trans. Halliwell 1987). For Aristotle, a heteroglossia born out of the use of "ἡ τοῖς ξενικοῖς κεχρημένη" [unfamiliar language] and "ξενικὸν γλῶτταν" [foreign words] results

¹ For further details, see Vassar College's *Pharos* project (http://pages.vassar.edu/pharos/), which documents appropriations of Graeco-Roman antiquity by hate groups.

in a "βαρβαρισμός" [barbaric style] (*Poetics* 1458a21–22; trans. Halliwell 1987), but these are, as Wai Chee Dimock has highlighted, "necessary barbarisms" (2006, 93). Epic did not, contra Bakhtin, attempt to hide its own polyglossia; thus the first of Bakhtin's features distinguishing the novel from other genres is brought into question if the "multi-languaged consciousness" which gives the novel its "stylistic threedimensionality" has always been present in epic too (1981, 11).

2 Classical Reception and Anglophone World Literatures

If movement across borders is an important part of world literatures, as David Damrosch (2003; 72 Re-Reading Classical Approaches) asserts, ancient Greek literature should be seen as a participant in this, both crossing borders itself and receiving work that has crossed geographic boundaries. Yet the reception of ancient Greece has positioned it so firmly within the Western canon that, regardless of the historical reality, ancient Greek literature and the works of philosophers such as Aristotle have become part of a colonial apparatus which makes them contentious when looking at world literatures (73 The Colonial Education System). Aristotle et al. become part of the problem because they are hailed as the measuring-stick against which everything else is judged (cf. Friedman 2013, 501); no matter how diverse and wide-ranging were the influences at play within their work, they have come to be used as a tool to laud the West and denigrate the rest.

Is there, nonetheless, a place for ideas of genre in the study of Anglophone world literatures? Dimock has compellingly argued that genre offers a way to break free from the segmentation imposed by traditional categorisations of period and place (2006, 85). The dominance of the novel in scholarship on Anglophone world literatures has imposed a new kind of segmentation, but it is one that can be overcome by more, rather than less, attention to genre. An understanding of genre enables us to see how writers have very deliberately overlapped different genres with each other in Anglophone world literatures to produce something new, or have resisted generic expectations derived from 'the West' (along the lines of a postcolonial model of 'writing back'), or have shown that European formulations of genre do not necessarily fit a context that is neither anchored in nor concerned with Eurocentric contexts. Thus, even when generic classifications have been derived from European literature and its tenets, an awareness of the deliberate fuzziness of genres and the proliferation of new forms in the modern day should prevent genre analysis falling into the trap Mariano Siskind identifies: that of de-politicising, de-culturating world literatures (2011, 354).

To explore how this has worked in practice, I will do what may at first seem counter-intuitive: start from the genre and one of the texts that stands at the core of the Western canon: Homer's epic, the Odyssey. Examining four late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century Anglophone texts from the African diaspora, all of which engage with the idea of identity and homecoming specifically through the tropes of the *Odvssey*, we see that each plays with and adapts not only plot features (some of which can be found in epics from around the world, thereby accentuating that the key here is the genre of epic), but epic conventions themselves. Rather than examining these works through the lens of Helen Tiffin's 'canonical counter-discourse' (1987), the focus will be on the worlds created which are not in thrall (resistant or not) to the Western canon. These are works that explore the "unhomely", in Homi Bhabha's sense, relating "the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (2004, 15). By engaging with the Odyssey, all the texts in their different ways show not just an altered Homeric homecoming trope, but a new articulation of homecoming as it is conceived in the worlds of these texts, worlds in which "unhomeliness" is not "homelessness", but rather a relocation of both home and world (Bhabha 2004, 13). The classical engagement of these works is "omni-local", to cite Emily Greenwood's articulation of the necessary move away from a false claim of classical texts' "universality" towards a perception of each work's equal relation to another within a global, transhistorical network of artworks (2013, 357–359). What becomes clear in the comparison of these four is that they are united just as much by their exploration of contemporary racial discourse, the legacies of enforced diaspora, and the creation of new identities as they are by their engagement with epic, and that these themes are as central to the works as their Odyssean resonances are. The conception of diaspora articulated by Stuart Hall can be seen in the choice of these four modern texts, a conception that is "defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity" (Hall 1990, 235).

Only one of these Anglophone works remains, though debatably, epic. Yet the others use features of epic to create their new genres, if genres can be seen to be constantly re-thought and re-defined afresh, as Siskind suggests (2011, 354). Applying fractal geometry to literature, Dimock argues for the recognition of epic's "survival as a spilled-over phenomenon" in the modern era (2006, 96). This is not a case of the epic genre being passed on or inherited wholesale; rather, epic is one node in the constantly shifting constellation of forms that world literatures create.

The four works are, in order of pronounced proximity to the genre of ancient Greek epic, Derek Walcott's poem, Omeros (1990); Junot Díaz's short story collection, Drown (1996); Suzan-Lori Parks' play, Father Comes Home from the Wars, Parts 1, 2, and 3 (2015); and Ralph Ellison's novel, Invisible Man (1952). While the novel has dominated scholarship on Anglophone literature, this selection of texts underlines the benefits of exploring literature across genres. Each of these works engages with Homer's *Odvssey* both narratively and on the level of genre, entering into a dialogue with epic conventions that wrests them from the Eurocentric sphere into which they have often been cast. The distance from both epic convention and the Homeric plot varies, as does the extent to which this engagement is overt or camouflaged, but in

each case it would be a mistake to presume that epic and the *Odyssey* provide a more important key to the work than its more local concerns. Equally it would be wrong to think that all 'epic' features in these works are responses to classical epic, rather than recognising these forms as neither derived solely from Europe nor as being in any sense particularly European.

These four works, by writers from the Caribbean and the United States, are united by their shared concern with enforced diaspora, slavery, and its legacy in contemporary racial discrimination. But it would have been equally possible to examine literature from other Anglophone regions and to observe a similar kind of merging and interrogation of genre. Even maintaining a connection with ancient Greek epic, one could explore, for example, the way Salman Rushdie engages with the *Odyssey* alongside the Ramayana in his 2005 novel, Shalimar the Clown, or Australian writer David Malouf re-envisions Homer's *Iliad* in *Ransom* (2009), or Njabulo Ndebele recasts the Odyssey in South Africa in The Cry of Winnie Mandela (2003). The ways in which each of these writers negotiates genre, classical antiquity, and contemporary concerns varies, but there is a common thread running through each that comes to the fore in their innovative use of generic forms.

A great deal of work has been done in the field of classical reception studies on the afterlife of Odysseus and the *Odyssey* (see especially Stanford 1954 and Hall 2008). The following discussion is informed by the theoretical approaches of that subset of classical studies, which is as interested in the illumination of the ancient works by the modern as it is in that of the modern by the ancient. Nonetheless, however much one looks at global responses to the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, it is hard to deny a Eurocentric bias in the discipline (and even the name) of Classics. Approaching this work from a perspective of world literatures not underwritten by a dynamic of core and periphery (\nearrow 7 Cosmopolitanism beyond the Center-Periphery Model), but rather perceiving the classical elements as individual fragments brought together on an equal basis with influences from other times and places to create a new whole which, collage-like, is different than the sum of its parts, strives to decolonise the work of what was formerly referred to as 'the classical tradition' and to unseat classical antiquity from the privileged position it has occupied.

2.1 Derek Walcott

Derek Walcott's 1990 poem, Omeros, confronts these issues when it asks, "Why not see Helen / as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow" (Walcott 1990, 271). The sentence pulls the reader up short: in a poem written in a Dantean "rough-textured terza rima" (Walcott, qtd. in Sampietro 1992, n.pag.), peopled with characters named Achille, Hector, Philoctete, and Helen, and itself entitled Omeros, surely we were not wrong to read the poem with Homer in mind? Helen Kaufmann (2006) has written engagingly about the way that this moment serves as a salutary reminder to decolonise our own reading; to become aware of the Eurocentric appropriation we have been enacting if, when we hear of a fight between the St. Lucian fisherman Achille and Hector, we focus on the way it reflects the ancient battle between the Greek Achilles and Trojan Hector. That *Omeros* is in dialogue with Homer's epics, as well as with those by Virgil and Dante, is undeniable, but a stance too dominated by the traditions of European literature might lead one to overlook the other strands at play within the poem. The figure of Seven Seas / Omeros within the poem exemplifies the integration of multiple strands of influence into one, with none dominating the rest. Thus, within Walcott's poem, Omeros is the bard who composed the *Odvssey*, he is the West African griot Achille meets on his hallucinatory journey 'back to Africa', he is Seven Seas hanging out at Ma Kilman's bar, and his name, too, is born not only from the Greek rendition of 'Homer', but in recognition of Dunstan St. Omer, artist and friend of Walcott's, who designed the St Lucian flag. On the level of plot, *Omeros* makes many allusions to the Homeric poems; on the generic level, this is no less true. Like the epics with which it engages, *Omeros*' scope is capacious both temporally and spatially; like Virgil's and Dante's, the poem is constructed as a poem for the nation, telling St Lucia's history as well as its present. Its metre and its length immediately suggest epic, but unlike classical epic, its time is now. Contrary to Goethe and Schiller's categorisation, Walcott's poem demonstrates that the 'pastness' of epic has more to do with the history of Europe than with an innate quality of epic. Omeros does not distance itself from the present for the very same reason that the *Odyssey* does: in the Homeric epics, we often hear that the men of that time are stronger than those of today, more heroic than any Homer's audience could imagine in their own time of the seventh century BCE. The age of heroes, the epics tell us, has now passed. But for Walcott, this is the very reason why *Omeros* is set in the present: Achille, Philoctete, Helen, and all the other characters of the poem are the everyday people of Gros Islet, and their modern heroism is recognised. Likewise, there is no invocation of the Muse in Walcott because this is not a tale to be told by a higher power; instead Walcott himself claims the role: "I sang of quiet Achille" (1990, 320), correcting the *Iliad's* opening line "Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles" both in its attribution of inspiration and in Achille's defining characteristic (now quiet, rather than raging).

Walcott's frustration with Eurocentric categorisations of genre is clear in his response to the question of whether or not *Omeros* is epic:

I do not think of it as an epic. Certainly not in the sense of epic design. Where are the battles? There are a few, I suppose. But 'epic' makes people think of great wars and warriors. That isn't the Homer I was thinking of; I was thinking of Homer the poet of the seven seas.

(Walcott qtd. in Bruckner 1990, 13)

Walcott rejects Homer's identity as a distinctly Greek bard here, instead conceiving of him as a global, transcultural storyteller, a 'poet of the seven seas'. As well as the idiomatic sense of 'the seven seas' referring to any large number of different seas,

and the joking reference to the brand of vitamins, Walcott may also here allude to the Sumerian hymns, composed in Mesopotamia around 2300 BCE, in which they are first mentioned. Walcott is staking a claim for a conception of Homer that is both transhistorical and transcultural, as we see embodied within the poem both in the multiple bardic figures it depicts and in the status the work itself occupies as a modern Caribbean epic (⊿16 Canons and Canonicity in Anglophone Literature; ⊿24 The Caribbean).

2.2 lunot Díaz

Junot Díaz's approach to epic is rather different. Having structured his first collection of short stories, *Drown* (1996), loosely around the *Odyssey*, he removed the most explicit of these allusions before publication:

Drown is a reverse Odyssey, always organized it that way. The story of a father's absence told from Telemakos' point of view. There were many more references in the first drafts (to Cyclops, to the cattle of the Sun) but they were so obvious I had to get rid of them.

(Díaz, in email correspondence with myself – 15 March 2009)

The phrase 'so obvious' is striking, indicating the problematic nature of engagement with the Western canon which, if too explicit, has tempted critics into reading the work as only an engagement with European literature. Walcott protested that for Omeros to be merely a re-writing of Homer would imply that the Caribbean was a "second-rate Aegean" (1997, 232); Díaz attempts to avoid such reductive, misguided readings by eliminating the explicit intertextual references.

Yet, to observe Díaz's engagement with classical epic need not, necessarily, result in a reductive or Eurocentric reading, particularly when one recalls that in moments of his later work, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (2007), Díaz is in dialogue with Aimé Césaire, Ralph Ellison, and Derek Walcott who have also riffed on and adapted Homeric epic (cf. M^cConnell 2013, 1–2, 35–37); these transnational connections are as central to Díaz's work as the ancient epic is. The history of European colonialism, slavery, and diaspora scattered ideas as well as people; if it were ever true that Graeco-Roman epic was distinctly European (and the transcultural reality of the ancient Mediterranean belies this), Europe's imperial expansion in the latter half of the second millennium, ensured that that is no longer the case. Literature of the African diaspora has, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. observes, "complex double formal antecedents, the Western and the black" (1988, xxiv). The intertextual engagement with the *Odyssey* by a writer such as Díaz may be less a mode of 'writing back' than of reassembly, as both Walcott (1992) and Gates (1988, xxiv) have termed it. Díaz's work, like that of Walcott, Parks, and Ellison too, can be seen to Signify upon the *Odyssey*, to "repeat with a difference" (Gates 1988, xxii) the classical epic. This Signifyin(g) is borne out of the black vernacular tradition, the exploration of which is, for Gates, "an ideal way to confound a Eurocentric bias" (1988, xx). One need not shy away from analysing engagements with a Eurocentric tradition when considering Anglophone world literature so long as these are not asserted as more valuable or illuminating than the other strands of intertextuality and creativity within the work.

Junot Díaz's short story "Aguantando" forms part of his first collection. In the way the stories inter-relate, peopled by a cast of characters who criss-cross the collection, Drown can be read as a short-story cycle, following Forrest Ingram's definition of the genre as one in which "the reader's experience of each [story] is modified by his experience of the others" (Ingram 1971, 13). Díaz extends this even further, with *Drown*'s Yunior traversing his wider oeuvre, and featuring in both his novel, *The Brief Wondrous* Life of Oscar Wao, and his second short-story collection, This is How You Lose Her (2012).

That short-story cycles share affinities with epic traditions has been noted since Ingram traced the roots of the genre back to works including Homer's *Odyssev*, Ovid's Metamorphoses, Giovanni Boccaccio's Decameron, and the Arabian A Thousand and One Nights (Ingram 1971, 13; 17). Orality is important here, in the roots of both epic and short-story cycles, the latter of which could be regarded as a liminal genre, poised between the oral and the written, the novel and shorter narratives (713 Decolonizing World Literature through Orality). Rocío Davis regards the short-story cycle as a "hybrid form" (1997, 3), which makes it particularly fitting to reflect the complexities of identity. As Stuart Hall has argued,

The New World [...] has to be understood as the place of many, continuous displacements: of the original pre-Columbian inhabitants, the Arawaks, Caribs and Amerindians, permanently displaced from their homelands and decimated; of other peoples displaced in different ways from Africa, Asia, and Europe; the displacements of slavery, colonisation, and conquest.

(Hall 1990, 234)

Davis suggests that the fact that writers have "appropriated the short-story cycle as a metaphor for the fragmentation and multiplicity of ethnic lives is itself an articulation of the between-culture position and the complex process towards self-identification" (1997, 22). When this is considered in tandem with the links between short-story cycles and oral traditions, a connection made explicit by Edwidge Danticat's 1996 collection, *Krik? Krak!*, the potency of the genre is brought to the fore.

As a short-story cycle, *Drown* retains epic's interest in storytelling and orality. However, Díaz adapts the epic form for his own purposes: by fragmenting the often-imperialistic epic into smaller tales and reuniting these into the new, cohesive structure of the story cycle, the form of Díaz's work reflects the rupturing of the lives and identities of so many in the African diaspora as a result of slavery and colonialism, as well as the ways that Caribbean peoples have rebuilt their sense of identity and nationhood in the wake of historical horrors.

Díaz engages with the genre of epic, but does so in a way that reflects his collection's concerns with identity, diaspora, and oppression. This engagement with epic is, as in the case of Walcott's Omeros and the works of Parks and Ellison to which we will turn in a moment, not only on the level of genre but also of narrative. The 'reverse *Odyssey*' of *Drown* is particularly prominent in "Aguantando", where the father's return echoes Odysseus' return to Ithaca in a number of respects, each of which is recast to reflect the son's Telemachean perspective. Thus, the famous recognition scene of Odysseus by Eurycleia, brought about when she sees the scar of the wound he suffered while hunting as a boy, is here inverted: the father traces the son's wounds, reminding us that in this story it is those left behind at home who have suffered (cf. McConnell 2020).

2.3 Suzan-Lori Parks

Suzan-Lori Parks' Father Comes Home from the Wars, Parts 1, 2, and 3 (2015) also narratively engages with the Odyssey in its tale of a man returning from war, its concern with the fidelity of the wife who stayed at home, and the double-standard applied to male and female behaviour within a relationship. In Parks' case, this double-standard is scrutinized rather than overlooked as it seems to be in the Homeric tale. That Parks' play will be a wry take on the *Odyssey* is signalled in the opening scene when we learn the name of the protagonist's dog: Odd-See. It is not only an Odyssean dog that flags up this reception, many of the characters' names cast sidelong glances at the Homeric epic: the protagonist, Hero, a slave compelled to fight for his master on the Confederate side, returns from war having renamed himself Ulysses after the Union leader, Ulysses S. Grant, but also reflecting the Roman version of Odysseus' name. Homer appears in the play too, not as a bardic figure, but as a fellow slave betrayed by Hero, and Hero's lover is Penny (cf. Macintosh and McConnell 2020, 125–129). The narrative intertextual strands are both playful and compelling, and those on the level of genre are no less so.

Even the inclusion of Homer as a character defies epic convention. Aristotle asserted that "the poet himself should speak as little as possible, since when he does so he is not engaging in mimesis" (Poetics 1460a, 7–8; trans. Halliwell 1987, 59) and this is one of the elements that Goethe and Schiller reiterated in their 1797 essay. The physical embodiment of the bard would, Goethe and Schiller felt, detract from the divine inspiration of the Muses, which should reach the audience as directly as possible (1845, 382). But Parks - in keeping with other contemporary playwrights, such as Walcott (The Odyssey: A Stage Version, 1993) and Lisa Petersen and Denis O'Hare (An Iliad, 2015) – is not interested in the elevation to a divine plane; instead, her play is one in which the previously unvoiced characters of classical epic have a chance to speak. Rather than focusing on powerful leaders as epics from Homer's Iliad to Virgil's Aeneid, from The Epic of Sundiata to Luís de Camões' *The Lusiads* have done, Parks' play tells the story of a group of slaves living through the American Civil War. Gore Vidal's remark that, "[w]hat the Trojan War was to the Greeks, the Civil War is to us" (1988, n.pag.) is seen to be no less true here: both contributed to a people's vision of themselves. Yet Parks' play demonstrates that the analogy exists as much as a result of the slaveholding societies in each as in anything more heroic; she foregrounds, as we will see Ralph Ellison earlier did with *Invisible Man*, the centrality of African American people within the American nation. Father Comes Home from the Wars finally tells the stories of the slaves, present in the world of the Homeric epics too but persistently overlooked, denigrated, or - as in the case of the Odyssey's Eumaeus and Eurycleia – shown to be exceptions to the rule of how slaves are imagined to think and behave. If narratives of civil war are retold as foundational tales to explain a nation's history, as we see in the Aeneid, the Lusiads, and the Sundiata, Parks' play offers a tale of people who have been marginalised in narratives of this history of the United States, that of those African American people enslaved until the end of the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction.

Father Comes Home from the Wars is, generically, drama; narratively, it has epic elements drawn from Homer, and genre-wise, it includes one of the most recognizable epic traces that persisted through Greek tragedy: the messenger speech. It is the dog, Odd-See, who returns and tells those who remained at home about the war and Hero's role in it. As a dramatic device, the messenger speech underlines tragedy's roots in epic; the messenger assumes a role similar to that of the epic poet at this moment in the drama and is thereby endowed with an authority that is further enhanced by narrating events they have witnessed with their own eyes. The narration of these events, which will only reach the audience in the retelling rather than by enactment, constitute moments within the drama which veer close to the form of epic. In addition, Parks includes a chorus within her play of "Less than Desirable Slaves", which is another playful glance towards the Greek dramatic form via one of the elements which has proved notoriously hard to 'translate' onto the modern stage. Yet this is not to suggest that Parks is in thrall to established dramatic conventions; indeed, she is well-known for what she terms her "slightly unconventional theatrical elements": distinctive "Rests" and "Spells" to indicate what should happen in the silences between characters on stage (Parks 2015, n.pag.).

Since her 2001 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, Topdog/Underdog, Parks has reflected on the figures of American history as akin to those of Greek mythology:

Lincoln is the closest thing we have to a mythic figure. In days of great Greek drama, they had Apollo and Medea and Oedipus – these larger-than-life figures that walked the earth and spoke – and they turned them into plays. Shakespeare had kings and queens that he fashioned into his stories. Lincoln, to me, is one of those. (Parks interviewed by Shenk 2002).

Just as Topdog/Underdog applied the names of two giants of American history to two African-American brothers, so too in Father Comes Home from the Wars, Parks compels her audience to hold the ancient resonances in tension with the scenes played out on stage and so to question whether the names and titles imposed on us can ever be defied. This theme is not only threaded throughout the foundations of the play, but is also emphatically embodied when Hero renames himself Ulysses. Has he

stepped closer to the embodiment of the hero of the Union side in the Civil War, or has he stepped away from his American roots towards those of Greek mythology; or, as Parks' play seems to suggest, might he have done both simultaneously?

2.4 Ralph Ellison

Finally, we turn to Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel, *Invisible Man*, which also engages with the Odyssey on the level of plot (cf. Rankine 2006; M^cConnell 2013). Ellison has sometimes been seen as declaring his prioritisation of Greek myth over African American folklore when he explained,

I knew the trickster Ulysses just as early as I knew the wily rabbit of Negro American lore, and I could easily imagine myself a pint-sized Ulysses but hardly a rabbit, no matter how human and resourceful or Negro.... My point is that the Negro American writer is also an heir of the human experience which is literature, and this might well be more important to him than his living folk tradition. (Ellison 1995, 58)

It is, however, equally possible to read this not as hierarchy but as a signpost to Eurocentric readers that classical mythology is as much the inheritance of African American people as it is of Europeans, white Americans, or anyone else (cf. Rankine 2006, 138). Invisible Man bears out this non-hierarchical view of the two, with the folkloric Brer Rabbit and equally folkloric (though also epic) episode of Odysseus and the Cyclops Polyphemus, merging together at certain moments (e.g. Ellison 2002, 176–190). When it comes to his later, unfinished novel, Juneteenth, the syncretisation of the two myths is comically rendered when Choc Charlie declares to Donelson, "'don't nobody name of Polly mess with Brer Rabbit, male or female'", only to be corrected, "'That's his name, [...] Polly-fee-mess" (Ellison 1999, 324). Narratively, then, Ellison engages with the folklore of the ancient Greeks and of African Americans simultaneously, merging the two in a way which, collage-like, retains the separate outlines of each even while together they create a new whole. Indeed, Ellison used the metaphor of collage when thinking about the United States as a nation: "we are a collage of a Nation, and a Nation that is ever shifting about" (Ellison 1988, 419). These words were spoken by Ellison at a memorial service for the artist Romare Bearden, famous for his collages including his Odysseus Series (1977) which, like the other modern works already discussed, also engages with the Homeric epic and 'repeats [it] with a difference'. Collage not only personifies diversity in a society (the different origins and forms of all the pieces coming together to make a unified whole), but it incorporates the history of diaspora within its form because the fragmentary nature of the collage recalls the enforced fragmentation (geographic, familial, psychological) of diaspora. As Elizabeth Alexander has explained, prompted by her reflections on Bearden, "[c]ollage constructs wholes from fragments in a continual, referential dialogue between the seemingly disparate shards of various pasts and the current moment of the work itself" (2007, 36). This is what we see in Ellison's Ulyssean Brer Rabbit, or Brer Rabbit-esque Ulysses, with the disparate folkloric 'shards' being woven together. This act of "collaging", of "weaving together", is the construction of an identity; the collage can be a "model to describe the presentation of self-identities in African-American literature and culture" (Alexander 2007, 35).

That this is so may give one more hint to the enduring appeal of classical epic, particularly for those reflecting on the ruptures caused by slavery and colonialism, and the reassembly required in their wake. There has been much debate over the way that the Homeric epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were composed, but few would now disagree that they were transmitted by what were known as 'rhapsodes'. The etymology of the Greek word 'rhapsode', coming from rhapsõidein, meaning 'to sew together', describes the way these performance poets composed their works, stitching together stories from a range of oral sources. Like Homer and the rhapsodes, Bearden 'stitches together' fragments from different sources, layering them over each other, improvising from his own imagination, and applying his creative genius to form a unique and innovative whole. What Bearden physically did with papers, paints, and glue, Ellison, Parks, Díaz, and Walcott, do with their words and imaginations. No wonder, then, that the genres of the works thus composed are likewise a collage: epic forms united with short fiction, drama and the novel, woven together to create a new whole that no longer aims to fit, nor do they fit, into one single generic category.

Invisible Man and its protagonist exemplify Bakhtin's idea of 'unfinalizability', not least in the novel's uncertain ending (in particular, the question of whether or not Invisible Man will emerge from his subterranean home). This is unsurprising given the pronounced influence of Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground (1864) on the prologue and epilogue of Ellison's novel, combined with the fact that Bakhtin developed his idea of 'unfinalizability' from his reading of Dostoevsky (cf. Bakhtin 1973). Yet the epic nature of Ellison's novel goes beyond the plot and the Odyssean allusions: Invisible Man is itself epic in its establishment of itself as a tale for and of the nation. If Ellison's closing line, "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (2002, 439) seemed to deny the specificity of the novel's racial concerns and drew a negative response from African-American critics when it was published (e.g. Killens 1952), one must also remember that Ellison was adamant that no American culture existed without having been influenced by African Americans, as his essay, "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks" (1970) argues. Invisible Man is a national text just as much as Virgil's story of Aeneas is; but unlike the Aeneid which, by its setting in the distance past is able to fast-forward in time to the founding of Rome and even to the contemporary period of Augustus' reign, Invisible Man stops, 'unfinished', with the future uncertain. Such a break midway through the action is, in fact, exactly what we see in the epics of Homer and Virgil, but they – unlike Ellison's novel – can rely on the audience being able to "complete" the story by their knowledge of the mythic tradition, and by the "flashforward" which episodes such as the *ekphrasis* of Achilles' shield has afforded the audience (Iliad 18.478–608).

3 New Conceptions of Genre

The answer to the question of whether *Invisible Man* qualifies as epic cannot be singular. It can only be 'yes, but also...'. This is the flipside, denied by Bakhtin, of his idea that the novel, unlike other genres, can incorporate a range of genres into itself without losing its own status as a novel. The fact that a similar process has already been seen to take place in the poetry of Walcott, the short fiction of Díaz, and the drama of Parks, highlights the fallibility of Bakhtin's sharp distinctions between epic and the novel. What an exploration of genre in Anglophone world literatures demonstrates is that the boundaries between genres, never as fixed as Aristotle has often been thought to claim, have become integrally permeable in the modern world. This is a development already identified by Croce at the start of the twentieth century, but when it comes to consideration of Anglophone world literatures, this permeability may be seen to take a more conscious and thoroughgoing form. The linguistic commonality between Anglophone world literatures signifies a shared history via the imperial activities of Britain. No Anglophone nation has escaped the imperialistic attention of Great Britain at some stage in their history, and in many cases this involved a shared history not only of colonialism, but of enforced diaspora. The permeability of genre, then, is not so much a question of "disregarding" genres' boundaries (Croce 1909, 37) as of deliberately piecing them together in unexpected ways to create a new collage of genre that reflects the history of fragmentation and reassembly of Anglophone nations.

Homi Bhabha suggested that the "transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees - these border and frontier conditions - may be the terrains of world literature" (2004, 17). The new worlds created by these "border and frontier conditions" are formulating new genres too. Drawing not only from the genres canonised by Aristotle and his neoclassical proponents, but also from forms of narrative developed in different parts of the globe, these writers are not so much disregarding generic convention as putting it to new use alongside other forms, and thereby creating a new conception of genre. Wellek was right when he declared that "boundaries are being constantly transgressed, genres combined or fused", but it need not follow that the concept should be "called into doubt" as a result (1970, 225). Rather, the traces of the old genres in the new forms should be seen as just one layer in the complex creation of these works: like the scraps of paper and material that Romare Bearden combined, painted, and glued to create his collages, they take their place as fragments reassembled in new ways, alongside new materials, in the creation of world literatures.

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