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Epic Performance through *Invenção de Orfeu* and 'An Iliad:' Two Instantiations of Epic as Embodiment in the Americas

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Epic Performance through *Invenção de Orfeu* and *An Iliad*

Two Instantiations of Epic as Embodiment in the Americas

Patrice Rankine

For classical epic, the body is a problem: an absence, a barrier to the modern audience's full participation. That is, we know from our reading of ancient texts that epic performance was a communal, embodied affair. In addition to the examples of Phemius and Demodocus from the *Odyssey*, Odysseus and Achilles in the *Iliad* are storyteller and singer respectively too, embodiments of a long-standing cultural institution ubiquitous in the poems.¹ Performers in this context represent values of an immediate audience that is physically present. As the epic genre evolves, however, poets are aware that later audiences will inhabit the secondary space, whether in future performance, in Homer's case, or as a text, in the case of Virgil.² The modern, reading audience is an eavesdropper on to the actual performance, to which the text, at first blush, can only approximate, as the reader is at least one remove from the space of performance.

Bakhtinian literary criticism gives readers a template for comparing epic tradition to other phenomena.³ For example, for the novel as genre, by contrast to the epic, the absence—of the performer, of physicality—is helpful in its allowance for trust in the reader's imagination. American novelist Ralph Ellison resisted *any* stage representation of his novel because he wanted readers to work through the paradox of race in their own minds, not through

¹ Thomas (1992).

² For the work of the 'monumental poet'—whether Homer or not—in his awareness of an oral tradition, see Thomas (1992).

³ Bakhtin (1981).

the visceral physicality of performance.⁴ Absence of the body, however, is anathema to epic performance in its original setting. Given that epic is a performative genre, the contemporary reader faces this absence as a problem. Bakhtin linked the epic genre to a kind of nostalgia, wherein the craving for a long-gone, absent time cannot be recovered. Epic in performance thus runs counter to Bakhtinian sensibilities about the genre by bringing the past into the present.

An earlier stage of classical scholarship, concerned with the orality of the epic text, led to studies of textual reception. This process included textual analysis, the translation of these texts into various languages, and theories of orality and literacy.⁵ In contrast to this, a turn among contemporary audiences is towards the challenge of enlivening the texts of epic poems, which moves epic as genre beyond the manuscript, beyond Bakhtinian absence to the range of performances discussed in this volume.

I begin this particular inquiry into physical absences with Jorge de Lima's *Invenção de Orfeu* (*The Invention of Orpheus*) (1952). Lima's epic presents one extreme in how modern epic has addressed the absence of the physical body of the poet. In this first case, the poem itself *becomes* the absent body. Lima's emphasis on the power of poetry to embody lack—lack of the body, indefiniteness of meaning itself—foregrounds the Bakhtinian problem of epic absence through a *lack* of physicality. Only the text remains, as itself a body, a physical, material phenomenon.⁶ Perhaps marking an earlier period in the reception of epic, Lima turns towards the text as a whole in itself. Distinct from the more contemporary *An Iliad* (2011)—which provides my second case study here—Lima's *Invention of Orpheus* is more like its poetic successor, Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, both in its recognition of physical presence or absence and in its ghosting of the physical body in the poem.⁷ The pay-off in the case of Lima, as it was for Walcott, is memorialization. The literary epic itself reifies lost and irredeemable bodies: those of the poet; of slaves, bodies lost in the Middle Passage to the New World; and of native people ghosted through the colonial enterprise.

Following my discussion of Lima, I offer a reading of *An Iliad*, a stage adaptation, by Lisa Peterson and Denis O'Hare, based on Robert Fagles's

⁴ Rankine (2016).

⁵ Thomas (1992), Ong (2002). Even earlier theories of the textuality—or heightened literacy and its consequences—of tragedy and Platonic philosophy rest on the orality, and thus the performativity, of Homeric epic. See e.g. Havelock (1988).

⁶ This is not the place to expand on the phenomenological significance of the argument. For more on this, see Brown (2014).

⁷ On the language of 'haunting' and 'ghosting' in performance, where a residue of previous performances and the bodies that inhabit them remains a presence, owing to such realities as the memories of playwrights and actors, see Carlson (2003), Hall and Harrop (2010), and Young (2010).

translation of Homer's *Iliad*. The play initially opened at the Seattle Repertory Theatre in 2010 before being staged at Chicago's Court Theatre from 10 November to 14 December 2011. As an embodied performance of epic poetry, the work is a stark contrast both to the modern epic that Lima emblemizes and to Lima's celebration of the literary condensation of past epics as embodiment itself. *An Iliad* brings Homer himself to life, as it were, as ancient bard but also as war correspondent in such modern places as Iraq and Afghanistan.⁸ The performance shows the trauma of combat even for a war poet or correspondent, and thus as all good reception does, it restores something that was, so to speak, lost in translation: the actual physical and mental pain that must have been a reality not only for all the legendary figures in Homeric epic, but equally important and perhaps even more hidden, for the poet.

The performance of *An Iliad* reintroduces physical *presence*, through the body, into the literary texts of Homeric epic. I bring Plato's studies of epic performance, narrative, and mimesis, in *Ion* and in the *Republic* to bear on this project. Not only does Plato offer a framework for reading *An Iliad* as epic performance, but the question of the emotional role of the poet-performer that was central to the concerns raised in Plato's dialogues is also precisely at the core of what the practice of enlivening classical, literary epic offers a contemporary audience.

The restoration of the body to epic is a stark contrast to the legacy of epic poetry in Western traditions, such as with Lima's poem, where the text is the thing. In either case, whether through the reified text in *The Invention of Orpheus*, or the performative turn of *An Iliad*, the attempt is to redress an absence, namely that of an absence of the body in relation to the genre of epic. The performative turn that *An Iliad* evidences allows the contemporary audience to imagine what the violence of war is like based on present-day parallels. For my reading of *An Iliad*, Plato's discussion of epic performance becomes relevant: just as Plato said it would, embodying epic takes its toll on both actor and audience. But contrary to Plato's formulation, the very toll, the seamlessness between performance and reality that such a toll evidences, is one of the greatest strengths of the epic performance, which we recognize, in part, through its mediating narrative aspects over pure enactment. That is, Plato's concern regarding performance—namely, its potential to corrupt the performer and the performer's audience—points to one of the benefits of performance, that of evoking pathos and of impacting on behaviour. In Lima's alternative, no physical presence is required, other than that of the text itself. In the absence of the physical body, as Lima riffs, the Word *becomes* flesh—even as the lost body is memorialized through the text. Here epic embodiment is the poem itself as the incarnation of absence.

⁸ Robert Brough, in his 1858 burlesque *Siege of Troy*, also featured Homer as war correspondent.

THE INVENTION OF ORPHEUS: MEMORIALIZATION
AND THE EPIC TEXT AS THE PERFORMED BODY

For me—

Body refers to the whole of the poem after the title.

Embodiment is any language event that holds within it a form of being.

Dumb example: 'where is the North Star' could embody the speaker's disorientation.

Seems to be a metaphor but is not the same or a metaphor could also 'stand for' — and also embody being ness. But I use all terms as they apply to composing, not critiquing, explicating, etc.

(Jack Ridl)⁹

Contemporary performance shifts our understanding of Bakhtin's notion of nostalgia—a longing for great times and great characters *in their relative absence*—as underpinning the epic genre. Lima makes of epic a presence unrecognizable in Bakhtinian critique and one that works differently to performance—perhaps one that precedes a performative turn. Lima's poem is emblematic of 'the Word becom[ing] flesh' (John 1:14). For Lima the poem is the body. There is nothing else, no longed-for absence, no reference to something else. The words themselves 'embody being ness'. That is, 'embodiment is any language event that holds within it a form of being'.¹⁰

Lima's *Invention of Orpheus* becomes the physical monument of absent bodies that can never be restored. The slave bodies that were foundational to Brazilian national identity permeate the country's literature and cultural iconography.¹¹ From the 1500s to the 1800s, many captives died in transit or as a result of the harsh conditions of enslavement. The native to the land known as Brazil is another absence, lost bodies resulting from genocide through the centuries that began in 1500. These absences become the stuff of Brazilian national identity.¹² Lima's *Invention of Orpheus* is the realization of *poetry* as *itself* the lost physical body—of the slave, of the native, in sum, of Eurydice. That is, the myth of Orpheus' loss of his beloved to Hades is not coincidentally linked to Brazilian identity.¹³ Orphic absence is a reality best conveyed through the Portuguese word *saudade*, which is a longing for an absence that can never be filled, not nostalgia, because it matters not whether the homecoming (*nostos*) for which one feels pain (*algos*) ever happened or not. For *saudade*, the absence is the reality, not a metaphor: a physical and emotional reality embodied in daily life.

⁹ The quote is from a personal exchange with Jack Ridl, who is a contemporary American poet. While his work has no direct association with Lima, an email conversation that I had with him regarding epic poetry, quoted here, is pertinent to this chapter.

¹⁰ Ridl, in an email to myself.

¹¹ Freyre (1956) is central to this construction.

¹² Haberly (2012).

¹³ Rankine (2011).

Lima's poem was written in 1952. Born in 1893, Lima's presence in Salvador at 16 certainly deepened the African dimensions of his poems. Earl Fitz characterizes Lima as a poet who 'makes use of traditional folk rhythms and ballads while also working pure Africanisms into his poetic diction'.¹⁴ Lima became a doctor in 1914 but then also pursued poetry and during his lifetime published five books of poetry. Modernism and surrealism inform his work. Fitz sees tradition and invention—European folk traditions mixed with the slave and native pasts—in such poems as 'A Negra Fulô' and *Poemas Negros*.

The poem reworks the heroic narrative of epic, now in the context of New World traditions and figures. Lima reshapes a literary, poetic tradition. *The Invention of Orpheus* is structured in cantos, beginning with the *fundação* (foundation), a word with whose Latinate resonance Lima plays. The allusiveness expected in the poetic epic tradition is present from Lima's first lines. Homer sang of the man ('*andra moi*'), Odysseus, the heroic explorer; Virgil of '*arma virumque*', 'arms and the man'; Lima incorporates the tradition, singing of a man 'without arms' ('*sem braço*'). Odysseus was famed for his cleverness and having travelled much ('*polytropos*'), whereas the baron of Lima's poem is *not* famed. He 'fulfills only his fate', a fate not precisely linked to any larger social project or national tradition—not ostensibly at least. Similar to Vasco da Gama, he navigates 'day and night'. Lima's hero, however, is more like Columbus than da Gama, in that the sought-after refuge is elusive. The hero's island and the love he seeks are unattainable, but there is a sense that, in this case, unattainability is the existential condition not only of the journey to the New World, but also of human life: we everyday heroes 'reinvent the sea with your Colombuses and call back doves over the waves': '*Reinventamos o mar com seus colombos, e columbas revoando sobre as ondas*' (1.3).

The poem does not quite have a typical beginning, middle, and end. The depths or profundity of the sea constitute the poem's thematic centre as the hero seeks an unattainable island. In the cantos that form the body of Lima's poem, we encounter attempts to shape a reality no more tangible than the *ondas* or the waves of the sea, an island simultaneously shaped and eroded through the *ondas*. Within this context, the poetic and literary influences that one critic calls a montage,¹⁵ a wave of references, are also elusive but shape the poem. One cannot help but think of Derek Walcott's much later Caribbean Sea, *O-mer-os*, the bone-white sea that is also the Nobel Laureate's epic predecessor, Homer, or Omeros.

For the Portuguese language, Camões's *Lusiads* (1572) is the literary epic, treating the blacks (Moors) and Indians of the poem as antagonists. While Camões establishes his heroes in contrast to these subalterns (with 'no trace of irony'¹⁶), Lima displaces the superiority of the Portuguese authority figures.

¹⁴ Fitz (1976).

¹⁵ Sá (2000).

¹⁶ Hart (1976), 45. Cf. Faia, Ch. 21 in this volume.

The hero of *The Invention of Orpheus* already has what he seeks: 'No one finds the island because we all know it. The same with the known geography in our eyes' (1.2, 'A ilha ninguém achou | porque todos a sabíamos. | Mesmo nos olhos havia | uma clara geografia'). The sought-after island is eternally renewed, similar to the life forms it sustains. It is no accident that part of Lima's geography in Brazil is the vast Amazon that sustains and transforms vibrant life forms. The inventiveness of this space might include an orchid growing from a tree rather than in the ground. All living things respond to the inventiveness of Orphic song, which is best symbolized in Orpheus' ability to draw lovers.

But Orpheus himself is never present. He is and is not the hero of the poem, in the same way that the epic hero (Achilles, Aeneas) is and is not his antecedent. The unattainability of an end—love found, song accomplished, life complete—is a mark of abundance and simultaneously of frustration. Through the technique of montage, or palimpsest,¹⁷ Lima transforms the baron of his poem into a postmodern everyman:

A baron distinguished
 Not by arms
 Not with limit/edge and fame
 Fulfills only his fate:
 To love, to celebrate his woman
 To sail day and night,
 By water and by sea,
 The island that he seeks and the love he loves.
 (1.1)

The metaphoric power of the poem is in every form. Every thing-in-the-world is a metaphor, and every metaphor is a thing-in-the-world. In this context, Orpheus is the hero, but he is not present; the name stands in for loss and the emotion it produces, *saudade*.

For Lima, the rivalry of influence, the rivalry that calls upon Camões as Portuguese progenitor is relaxed into waves (*ondas*) of the cantos flowing in and out. Lima's intertexts include Camões, Fernando Pessoa (*Mensagem*), Afonso Arinos de Mello Franco's *The Brazilian Indian and the French Revolution*, and Paulo Prato's *Voyage to Brazil*.¹⁸ The range of intertexts in the body of the poem makes it an epic accomplishment in modern terms, and the particular intertexts allow for a distinctly Brazilian literary contribution, if we follow the declaration of *omophagia*, the consumption of bodies that marked Brazilian modernism following the Week of Modern Art in 1922.¹⁹ The unattainability of actual bodies also marks the poetic experience, since 'Lima rejects, almost

¹⁷ Sá (2000). ¹⁸ Sá (2000).

¹⁹ i.e. similar to the way that Portuguese reported that the Tupi consumed their enemies to incorporate their strength, so the Brazilian poet would consume the literary and artistic discourses of their European, Asian, African, and native surroundings to become whole.

completely, the closed work, language as a mode of communication' and the poem 'rarely evokes the real world'.²⁰ Lima's epic represents an attempt at creating a *verbal* new world and an *actual* new world better and more human, an 'island' that we never quite reach.²¹

One of *The Invention of Orpheus*' central montages merges Orpheus and Christ.²² Orpheus, the figure of invention, is appropriate to a context wherein artists consume artistic forms only to reincorporate them into their own textual bodies. Orpheus' dismemberment is one aspect of the classical story. But the word becoming flesh is a Christian motif, one in which Lima finds a certain narrative resolution. Orpheus is the hero of Lima's poem because he best symbolizes both the inventiveness of life and the unattainability of sought-after love. During the fourth song Lima finds his way to the Trinity, leaving the 'passing madness' (*loucura efemera*) for the 'white calm' to which he now returns: 'Relighting this Lamp. And this one. And this one. You know which Three they are. *Laudamus Te.*' (*Reacendo esta Lampada. E Esta. E Esta. Sabeis quais sao as Tres. Laudamus Te.*) As Canto 6 begins the movement towards the end of the poem, the poet conveys the futility of an incorporation that moves ever into death: 'Here is the end of the world, here is the end of the world where even the birds sing to engulf it in flames.' (*Aqui é o fim do mundo, aqui é o fim do mundo | em que até aves vêm cantar para encerrá-lo. | Em cada poço, dorme um cadáver, no fundo, | e nos vastos areais—ossadas de cavalo.*) The language becomes increasingly referential to Catholic symbolism: 'O my Lord, *de profundis clamavi ad te, Domine*' (6.1, 3). As texts form the body of Lima's poem, so is the Word for him flesh. There is no separation between the world and *The Invention of Orpheus*; the world that the poet constructs is the reality of our existence.

If we think of this in terms of *saudade*, we see it perhaps in terms of invention, the creative process that always makes anew yet undoes at the moment of creation. For the poet, the physical body is no more real than the elements out of which the invention is shaped; words are no more immaterial—no less performed—than the physical body onstage. Words are a product of incorporation and in truth never exist without the body. Ridl, to return to his notion of the body of the text, left us with a caveat: 'I use all terms as they apply to composing, not critiquing, explicating, etc.' If this is the case, then the poem is as much the process as it is the words on the page or the performance onstage.

²⁰ Costa Santos (2005), 722; my trans.

²¹ Cavalcanti (2010).

²² Cavalcanti (2010).

AN *ILIAD*: PERFORMANCE IN PLATO AND THE PERFORMATIVE TURN IN CONTEMPORARY EPIC

Absence might still be the link between epic performances such as *An Iliad* and the epic text, but embodying epic rhapsodically reifies contemporary resources in ways that Bakhtin could not have imagined. Even as the poet in *Omeros* encounters the ghost of Homer in London and confesses to his own missing knowledge of the poem, so contemporary poets revel in ruins, but those fallen edifices are not necessarily bound in past time. Timothy Edward Kane's performance of Homer in *An Iliad*, his very embodiment of the poet, allows for the expression of empathy, not as a residue, but as a continuing emotion that contemporary audiences no doubt share with figures from the past, embodied in the present. The 'great men' of Bakhtinian epic are shown to be no further away than the seat next to you at the theatre.

An Iliad has seen several restagings since its original 2010 production.²³ For the play's Chicago premiere under the direction of Charles Newell, actor Timothy Edward Kane performed a one-man show that was recognizably the central story of Homer's *Iliad*: Achilles' rage and the devastation it causes to his own ranks, and to Hector and the city of Troy (Fig. 27.1). Returning to some essential propositions regarding epic performance from Plato, Kane at times *narrated* the story of Homer's *Iliad*, in ways that recalled the basic distinctions between diegesis and mimesis outlined by Plato in Book 3 of the *Republic*: 'If in no way does the poet himself *pretend*, the entire thing would be poetry and narrative in itself, without mimesis' (393c11–d2). At crucial moments, as in the argument between Achilles and Agamemnon from *Iliad* 1, Kane took on the role of those characters, as if stepping into passages where the English translation of the Greek text might have quotation marks. Plato helps the contemporary audience to frame *An Iliad* as epic, rather than any other staged genre (tragedy, for example). As Plato points out in the *Republic*, even an epic poet, like Homer, is in fact *performing*, acting, whenever he embodies the role about which he is informing his audience. Kane, or the rhapsode he plays, to use Plato's genres from *Ion*, is emotionally exhausted from simply telling the story for all these years.

Socrates' statement in *Ion* about the poet's potential has an unexpected resonance for representations of war: the implication is that its devastation

²³ Stephen Spinella and Denis O'Hare each gave performances for the New York Theater Workshop, which ran from 6 March to 1 April 2012. See Isherwood (2012). The Lantern Theater Company staged the play's Philadelphia premiere, which ran from 10 November to 11 December 2016; Peter DeLaurier played The Poet. See Bilderback (2016). Chicago's Court Theatre itself restaged the play in 2013.

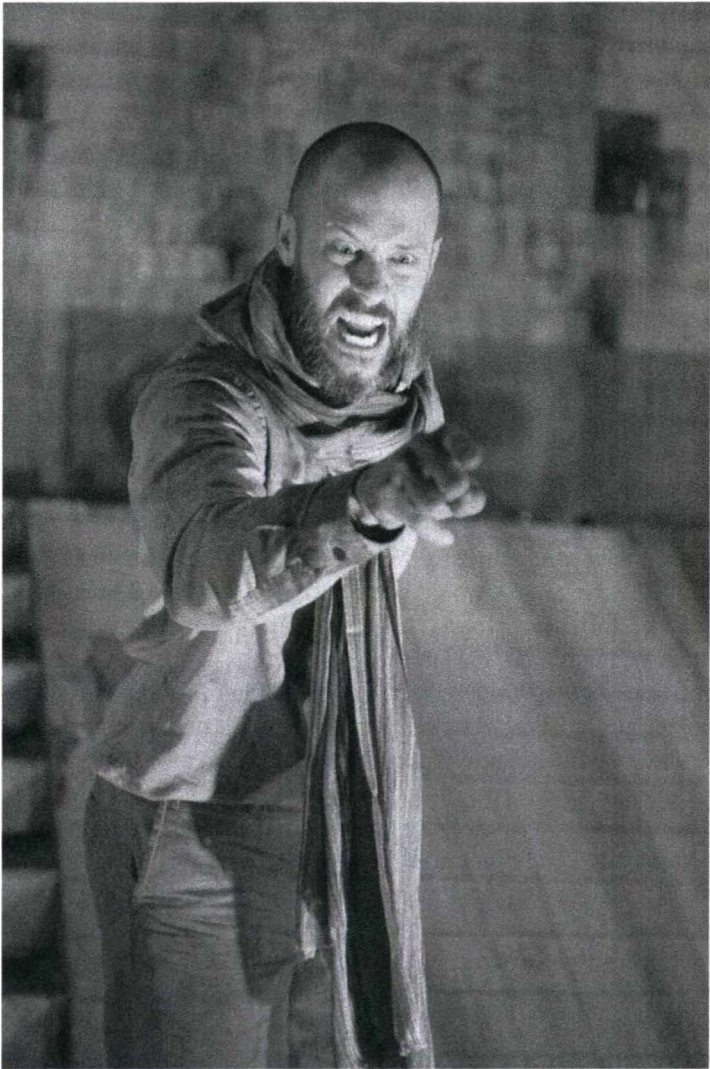


Fig. 27.1 Timothy Edward Kane in the Court Theatre, Chicago production of *An Iliad* (2011).

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is thereby understood and processed, to an extent, as a kind of therapy for the pain that lingers in its aftermath.²⁴ As a poet, Homer is proclaimed in antiquity as an expert

²⁴ Contemporary performers associated with at least two recent projects, namely Theater of War and Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives, bring a kind of therapy to troops suffering from combat trauma. For the mission and scope of Theater of War, see <<http://www.philoctetesproject.org/>>; for Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives, see <<http://ancientgreekmodernlives.org/>>.

[in] war and many other things, and how noble and ignoble men associate with one another, and craftpersons and laypersons, and how the gods associate with one another and with men, and astronomical phenomena, and subterranean phenomena, and the generations of gods and heroes. (531c4–9)

In the passage, Socrates questions the poet's implicit claim to teach virtue, to be an instructor on the nature of divinity, to have understanding of cosmology, physics, and genealogy. Only a tad less broad-ranging, Kane's bard/rhapsode in *An Iliad* claims as soldier and as war correspondent to *know* war's devastation, and he thus provides a contemporary instantiation of the Socratic problem of expertise. How *could* Kane know, as an actor, unless he himself has served on the battlefield? The claim of expertise—and exposure—is important because it speaks to a potential, personal toll on the performer.

Socrates suggests that if Ion, as a performer of Homeric epic, was also master of this range of human disciplines, from war, to politics and commerce, theology, geography, and history, he would certainly be '*akroasasthai deinos*' ('remarkable to listen to'), worth the price of admission—and worthy of the reclusive Socrates' attendance at the theatre. Even mastering just one of these crafts, outside acting itself, would be remarkable, and this is precisely the issue that Kane's performance raises. The performer, potentially, possesses a skill or *technē* that we might call 'enviable'.

Descriptions of *An Iliad* echo the pay-off Plato imagines that rhapsodic performance could have, were the poet truly in full possession of his craft. As Mary Houlihan writes: 'Kane portrays a storyteller whose eternal mission is to wander through time recounting this tale. He might be "as old as the story itself", the actor says.'²⁵ Kane is the soldier wracked with trauma from combat; then the poet tired of telling and retelling the tale; and now the war correspondent, by explicit analogue, in Iraq or Afghanistan, equally exhausted. The *Chicago Tribune* reviewer describes the show as 'jaw-dropping': 'Aside from Kane's astonishing command of the script, he made clear to everyone in the theater that telling the story of human conflict was coming at enormous cost to the teller.'²⁶

The connection between Plato's *Ion* and Kane in *An Iliad* situates the adaptation squarely within the realm of the performance of epic, particularly as it pertains to later, rhapsodic performances of Homeric epic. As we move from *Ion* to the *Republic* the concern for the impact of such a performance on the actor becomes central. Even enacting one role might deplete the person performing epic, not to mention the role of one who has encountered the horrors of war. For his body to convey the depletion of such a performance, Kane appears onstage—the set itself a 'dilapidated sewer'—in a raggedy outfit

²⁵ *Chicago Sun Times*, 16 November 2011.

²⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, 26 December 2011.

that bespeaks his tattered state.²⁷ This body is and is not Kane's body. *An Iliad* offers seamlessness between performance and reality. Kane's rags reveal the true emotional toll of acting, of performing various roles—of soldier, of athlete, of husband or wife—not only onstage, but also in life. The actor only amplifies everyday lived experience by portraying in heightened fashion what we all go through in real life.

An Iliad is precisely interested in the question of acting's impact on the moral self. Kane's raggedly dressed body is wracked with weariness, an outward sign of an emotional—and moral—reality. Reviewer Chris Jones reveals the extent to which the performance is as much about acting as it is about the poem:

Crucially, it just feels like Kane—whose ravaged physical appearance is very different from his usual all-American charm—is spilling out the contents of his mind and heart, in service of some higher duty. Acting work at this level is often marked by a palpable unselfishness, a willingness to subjugate self to character and material, and that's exactly how it feels here. It is a masterpiece of acting—the clear high point of Kane's career to date—that should not be missed.²⁸

Role playing calls the actor to a 'higher duty'. Jones sees the acting here as 'palpable unselfishness': Kane 'subjects his 'self to character', calling upon the epic poet as teacher of morality.

True to Plato's concerns, performance brings into the present the heroes of the past. The Bakhtinian description of the epic genre as one of past times no longer truly applies. Contemporary performance makes of these roles not the absent gods and heroes of the past, but transforms those heroes and gods into you and me. Kane likens the soldiers on the battlefield, Paris and Menelaus, to sports stars, our contemporary gods and heroes. Kane makes the emotional impact of these roles felt to his audience, citizens who are themselves athletes, soldiers, husbands and wives, sons and daughters.

MEMORY AND INCANTATION

'Someday it will help to have remembered'

(Virgil, *Aeneid*)

Kane's rhapsode remembers anger. He says that he is reminding you of the anger you feel when you are ready to pay for your groceries, and the person behind you has cut you off without so much as a polite gesture. As Kane in the role of rhapsode in *An Iliad* narrates, your response might be, 'I could kill'.

²⁷ *Timeout Chicago*, 21 November 2011.

²⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, 21 November 2011.

Such is your bile, the *mēnis* you feel, a raw emotional trigger. ‘You press that anger down’, Kane says, using his hands to emphasize the weight of the emotion that you must fight back. The difference between you, as an average citizen, and Achilles, as warrior, is that you do not kill, whereas he does. The difference between you, as the audience member, and Kane, as rhapsode, is that you carry on with your day and try to forget about your seething rage, whereas he relives that emotion every time he tells the tale, whether as the 3,000-year-old spirit of Homer, the war veteran, or the actor. In other words, whereas you ‘let it go’, as Kane says you must, and as he says Achilles should have done, the soldier, the veteran, and even the actor, cannot. The war veteran’s combat trauma demands that he live in the psychotic break, that he repeat the moment of trauma over, and over, and over again.²⁹ Similarly, the actor must manufacture this rage nightly. The difference is that whereas the person suffering from combat trauma cannot help the repetition, for this is the very definition of trauma, the actor chooses to remember. The actor approximates that trauma, attempts to provide a mimesis of what it might be like to live in that psychosis. This is what makes acting a craft: the actor has control, whereas the person suffering from combat trauma does not. The actor manufactures and manages anger; Achilles and the person suffering from combat trauma cannot control it.

In addition to performing an individual’s rage, the actor moves the realm of emotions from the individual to the community. Certain traumas to the individual seem all but forgotten in the main. The emotional impact of war on soldiers, for example, is not an issue of central importance to the community, if for no other reason than that the soldiers are quickly forgotten. The actor, as a kind of medium (a different analogy to that of therapist), performs the mimesis of trauma, as if he himself is reminding the audience of the soldier; the actor brings the traumatic dream alive, in front of our very eyes.³⁰ In other words, Kane stands in the psychotic break, from event to repetition to trauma, the actor replacing both the all-but-spiritual role of the poet and Plato’s philosopher. Kane remembers—the traumatic slaughter of Hector on the battlefield, the Second World War, murders on the mountainsides of Afghanistan—so that the average citizen can forget. As medium, however, the actor helps the audience to embody the trauma caused to the community, which is only just beneath the surface. ‘Medium’ is not far from the perception of theatre critic Jones, in his review of *An Iliad*:

Kane’s Poet rattles off a bravura list of pretty much every major war in the world from Troy to Afghanistan (Crimean, Mexican War of Independence, et cetera, et

²⁹ For more on the relationship between the epics and how they manifest combat trauma, see Shay (1995).

³⁰ Schechner (2000).

cetera, et cetera). In that moment—by far the most remarkable of a consistently fascinating evening—Kane’s lips start to move as if he were in the middle of an exorcism.³¹

Jones’s description aptly moves the conversation back to a Platonic observation about the rhapsode, who is an actor, as divinely inspired. The actor’s recitation becomes incantatory, resembling more inspiration or possession, as much as craft. Kane releases the audience through his own possession, the transference of trauma on to the actor.

Performance theorist and director Richard Schechner, in his discussion of the significance of rehearsal, or preparation, to the actor’s transformation, uses similar language to that of Jones:

Rehearsal is a way of making unknown material (the play to be performed) so familiar to the actors that the audience can successfully believe that what they see is a way of living. The professional actor is a person who is skilled in this kind of magic deception; or invocation of belief.³²

Rather than dismiss the actor based on similar observations to that made of Ion, Schechner explains how the craft of acting becomes a kind of possession. Repetition makes ‘unknown material . . . so familiar’ as to cause cognitive dissonance, perhaps for actor and audience alike. The role becomes ‘so familiar’ to the actor that it resembles ‘a way of living’ to the audience. Schechner likens actors to ‘masters of ecstasy’ and he continues: ‘exact preparations and exact performance assure that the link between past and present will not be broken’.³³ Kane becomes the 3,000-year-old poet from the past, able to tell of wars of today and yesteryear.

The link between philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the—shamanistic, ‘enthusiastic’—therapy of Homeric poetry lies in the fact that each form claims a place in the healing of the self. The show is as much about us, the audience, as it is about the actor: ‘Shamans are audience-oriented; their performances are designed to involve, please, scare, and affect audiences.’³⁴ In *An Iliad*, the actor proposes that the true burden of performance is on him, not on us. The therapist helps the patient; the exorcist frees the possessed from a spiritual burden. The actor would arrogate the roles to himself. He is ‘the man who *knows* and remembers’.³⁵ Kane remembers so that we, the everyday citizens, can forget.

At the same time, the proposition that *An Iliad* explicitly raises about the role of the actor, the exaltation of actor to exorcist, is essentially the issue that troubled Plato both in *Ion* and in *Republic*. Whereas Plato questions what the poet does as *technē* in *Ion*, Schechner makes the work of the exorcism *explicitly*

³¹ *Chicago Tribune*, 21 November 2011. ³² Schechner (1994), 174–5.

³³ Schechner (1994), 178–9. ³⁴ Schechner (1994), 183.

³⁵ Cited in Schechner (1994), 182.

that of technique. What is more, the actor in modern performance theory takes on the larger social responsibility that Plato would give to the philosopher: that of 'the man who *knows* and remembers'. This transfer, to a degree, of social and ethical responsibility from audience to the actor, from the many to the one, makes the actor either a jaw-dropping Superman (and perhaps even a scapegoat) or a fraud.

Plato dismissed the tradition of epic performance, perhaps in favour of a style of inquiry that was textual, dialogic, and ultimately philosophical. Nevertheless, Kane's rhapsody demonstrates the pay-offs to embodying epic, which transforms words into flesh and blood. In the first place, *An Iliad* helps to locate the genre of epic, given a performative turn, in a different place from Bakhtin. Rather than a monumental genre of time past, epic becomes the everyday, although its quotidian existence depends upon its relationship to the past tradition. *An Iliad* returns us to historical questions about the impact of performance on audiences by calling attention, through epic, to the actor, in ways that other genres might obscure. Finally, *An Iliad* calls attention to the Platonic question of the toll that performance takes on the actor, not as the disinvested rhapsode of *Ion*, but rather as the narrative poet of Plato's *Republic*, whose roles call into question the nature of character itself, that of the poet and also of the audience. The epic performer remembers so that the audience can forget.

THE PERFORMATIVE TURN

The two instantiations of epic performance I have explored show two different—though not necessarily sequential—approaches to how to treat an absence. Lima's 1952 epic is a classically literary epic. However, despite its textual approach to epic, the poem highlights an absence in its transformation of words into a meaningful whole, 'the Word becom[ing] Flesh'. On the other hand, *An Iliad* evidences a different turn in the physical performance of contemporary epic. Writers, playwrights, and directors seem to be addressing an absence in classical epic, that of the body, through the potentialities inherent in theatre. These two approaches, that of Lima and that of Peterson and O'Hare, are not necessarily diachronic; the same culture might well produce both approaches to epic simultaneously, as is the case in contemporary American society, evidenced if we put *An Iliad* alongside such literary texts as Christopher Logue's *War Music* (2015) (although, this too was, of course, originally written for radio performance³⁶). However, it may well be significant

³⁶ See Power, Ch. 17 in this volume.

that the performative turn is occurring within an American culture, whether of Brazil or of the United States, that has collectively reached maturity in terms of its understanding of how classical epic worked, a result of over a century of Western 'discovery' about the ancient genre.

The divergent approaches represented in *The Invention of Orpheus* and *An Iliad*, moreover, demonstrate the potential pay-offs of either within a given culture. For Brazil, the history of lost bodies—of black slaves and those native to the land—necessitates an embodiment through the text, if any commemoration of those lives is possible. One can imagine such an approach in the United States as well, but the remnants of native and African languages and practices surface in Brazilian culture in a way that makes Lima's approach visceral. The cultural milieu of endless war, on the other hand, has resulted in various attempts to address the times with reference to ancient epic. These include Shay's approach in *Achilles in Vietnam*, Theater of War, and Ancient Greeks/Modern lives, to name only a few practices that allow a viewing of the modern war hero in light of the ancient text. The performative turn of *An Iliad*, where memorizing is essential, is an instance of such embodiment.