

Questions in Narratives from Oral Tradition to Literature

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Abstract

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“Questions in Narratives from Oral Tradition to Literature” examines the functions of questions in fictional narratives. By attending to the interplay between performance and text, the dissertation encompasses both literature in the conventional sense and orature, a relative newcomer to literary studies that enriches the examination. The progression of chapters and of the material I analyze follows the development of narrative genres from epic song (an oral genre in an oral society; with chapters on South Slavic “The Song of Bagdad” and on Homer’s *Iliad*), to the New Testament epistles of Saint Paul (a written genre in a predominantly oral society), and novels (a written genre in a literate society, or at least one with access to printing technology and a distribution system; specifically Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, and Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*). My analysis relies on four intervening concepts: authority,

performance, writing, and irony. Tracking the use of questions—primarily rhetorical ones—through this range of genres and periods I demonstrate that, in addition to the emphatic function that rhetoric has assigned them, questions: (a) project authority, (b) espouse an ethic through their deontic illocutionary force, (c) are fundamentally antithetical, if only in the right-vs-wrong sense, and (d) are ultimately heuristic. By identifying particular mechanisms and rhetorical functions, the dissertation lays out a framework for examining questions and questioning in narratives.

In the Western oral tradition and subsequently literature, the functions of questions evolve as a result of the converging influences of the medium, genre, and historical conditions. Questions in South Slavic oral epic are characteristically devices of authority: social, epic, and narrative. Rhetorical questions in particular come as strong commands or deontic utterances. Strung together, they morph into powerful statements delivered at climactic moments. And when things go wrong, they counteract the inappropriate actions of those in power and restore justice and order. In the *Iliad*, the authority-challenging and topic-setting functions of questions merge, marking the beginnings of contentious speeches by heroes. More importantly, interrogative apostrophes and invocations to the muses by the singer/narrator mark narrative beginnings in narrative as well as in dialogue. In the New Testament, Saint Paul combines the authority of the written sources (Hebrew Bible) with the truth-seeking power of the educational oral genre of diatribe, using questions as the guiding principle of the new genre of catechism to assert the new truth. Early-modern comic novels too use the previous written sources to establish authority, but less by relying on them and filling in the gaps of what remains unsaid, and more by overriding them: the questions are ultimately mainly ironic, negating one side of the antithesis and leaving

the other implied and open-ended, thus prompting the reader to actively engage in answering them. Finally, combining the theories on questions in philosophy of language (Michel Meyer), philosophy of science (Bas van Fraassen), and literature (Christoph Bode) leads to the conclusion that, while propositions are answers to questions, narratives are streamlined, after-the-fact distillations of the originally more complex questioning and problem-solving processes. Questions as markers of narrative beginnings ultimately reveal the primal logic of the structure of narrative, while at the same time pushing against ossification as the main characteristic of the medium of writing.

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Introduction

Questions beg answers. “Sing, Goddess, the wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus!” exclaims Homer at the beginning of the *Iliad*, projecting a simple but powerful question: What is the wrath of Achilles? Ford Madox Ford makes the literary nature of the question even more direct when he starts *The Good Soldier* with: “This is the saddest story I have ever heard.” What is the story? And, more importantly, how does it end? Classical novels typically unfurl with leisurely introductions that gradually raise key questions around which the novel revolves. “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way,” opens up the question about the family drama, starting with “What is the tragedy of the Karenin family?” and slowly building to a more specific “How will Anna Karenina reconcile her familial and societal duties with the temptations of her heart and desire?” While Tolstoy may take his time in introducing the ins and outs of the Karenin family crucial to a reader’s ability to even pose the questions, Beckett mocks the literary convention of starting any work of fiction with concealed questions by overtly stating them—with his sardonic twist—at the beginning of *The Unnamable*: “Where now? Who now? When now?”

But are questions merely indicators of the starting point of a process that culminates in climax (crisis) and ends in a resolution (peripeteia)? Roland Barthes conceptually combines “all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer” into a single unit that he calls a hermeneutic code (*S/Z* 17). The question that initiates and defines the

process is not always overtly stated—as a matter of fact, it is most often merely implied—which is why Barthes refers to it as the ‘enigma.’ Enigmas exist on various levels of the plot, propelling the story by relating to particular scenes or sections, such as Chekhov’s famous gun, or an unexpected knock on the door in the middle of the night in a gothic story. But each piece of fiction comes together in the first place only as a result of the enigma that initiates the plot and consequently holds it together. A typical murder mystery describes a scene where a dead body is discovered, prompting the question “Whodunit?” This initial, overarching question renders the subsequent series of events and actions a plot. The enigma that a fictional work opens up with and that sets the story into motion is not merely a part of the story—it is the story.

The goal of my dissertation is to examine functions that questions serve as literary devices in narrative fiction. Barthes’ enigma is a compact articulation of a complex mechanism, in which its main component—the question—often remains hidden. I begin my investigation with a premise that a closer look into the overt instances of questioning in narrative fiction ought to shed light on the workings of enigmas and might, along the way, reveal aspects of questions that go beyond their widely accepted functions of information seeking and rhetorical emphasis that rhetoric has assigned them. The progression of chapters and of the analyzed materials is not entirely historic; rather, it follows the trajectory of the development of narrative literary genres from epic song (oral genre in an oral society), through New Testament epistles (a written genre in a predominantly oral society), to early-modern comic novels (written genre in a literate society, or at least a society with access to printing technology and a distribution system). Each of these genres encompasses features that appear to relate to questions in different ways. First, the genre of the epic song emerges in oral cultures and is fully dependent on its performative nature. One

of its characteristics is that it is taken for granted that its audience “never hears it for the first time”; i.e. the audience is already familiar with the characters and the plots. Rather than anticipate new answers, questions here are used for emphasis, intensification, and creating the tension—they add force to reaffirming what is already known and accepted. Epistles use questions to guide the flock, to focus their attention on a particular issue, and then prompt them to reflect on it and accept the answer offered as the right, true answer—questions here are tools of learning. In the centuries immediately following the invention of the printing press, the access to authority that the written medium bestows upon the authors becomes pervasive. It is no longer enough for authors to invite their readership to learn by reading the texts—the authors have to demonstrate their superiority on the subject by overriding other authorities. Questioning here arises as a powerful tool for prompting the readership to unlearn previous pronouncements in order to make themselves malleable to the ideas of the new text, and the novel wholeheartedly embraces the technique.

I. South Slavic Epic

Acting as key communicative devices, questions are typically thought of as soliciting information not known to the questioner. Book IV of the oldest surviving epic, *Gilgamesh*, recounts five consecutive nights during which the hero Gilgamesh awakens after a nightmare. Each account of the dream is flanked by strings of questions, beginning with: “What happened? Did you touch me? Did a god pass by? What makes my skin creep? Why am I cold?” (Mitchell 106). But none of these questions elicit answers. Instead, they act in concert with repetition to create a crescendo effect of Gilgamesh’s increasing fear—each nightmare is more terrifying than

the previous one—and his and his friend Enkidu’s impending tragedy. South Slavic epic oral tradition too yields few interrogatives of the kind that ask for new information: whose wedding is it? where does this road lead to? what is your name? Instead, questions are often used to commend, command, criticize, and encourage. Sometimes they reinforce the functions of stock characters. But the most prominent ones are the ones of the Gilgamesh kind above: questions, and particularly lengthy strings of questions, that serve a distinct rhetorical purpose of punctuating the narrative by intensifying the emotions and showcasing the oratory skill (*technē*) of the character. This function seems to be a ubiquitous feature of the oral epic, with questions simultaneously harnessing and projecting the authority of the speaker, in the dialogue and narrative alike, reaffirming the emphatic function that rhetoric assigns them as the primary one.

Erich Auerbach claims that in Homeric epic “the element of suspense is very slight,” and the effect of retardation is “to relax the tension” rather than sustain it. This is because “[w]hat [Homer] narrates is for the time being the only present, and fills both the stage and the reader’s mind completely,” consequently preventing the audience from simultaneously retaining in their minds the expectation of the crisis and the resolution that is the precondition of suspense (4-5). Yet strings of questions in the epic do create suspense, one that is not predicated merely on delay, but specifically on the delay of the resolution which the posing of a question has made necessary; strings of questions not only delay their resolution, but build the suspense by intensifying the tension of the first question with each subsequent one. During the performance of an epic song, questions create tension in a way that dominant seventh chords do in music by clearly indicating how they are and should be resolved: just as a music audience is aware that C7 resolves to F-major, so the epic-song audience knows full well that Achilles’ wrath leads him to a choice

between life-without-glory and death-with-glory, of which he chooses the latter causing even more tragedy for the people around him; but the foreknowledge of the resolution does not make either of these situations any less tense. Epic songs do “entertain and amuse,” but not in a way that, let’s say, working songs or laments do. The latter accompany actions and events, adding to them an emotional release or expression—they are fiction complementing actions and events in the real world—whereas epic song is a performative genre in that it provides for the action itself, thus rendering tension a necessary component. In this chapter I am going both against and alongside Auerbach: I go against his claim that epic song does not provide tension, that “its filling the space and time of the present merely entertains,” but I share his stance on the importance of tension, looking more closely into its modalities in the epic, particularly in the interrogative form.

In a performative genre such as epic song, any presumed narrative function ought to be correlative with its performative aspects. Walter Ong claims, regarding the context in which the epic emerges, that “in primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns in repetitions or antitheses, in assonance and alliterations” (*Orality* 34). Mnemonic strategies, not least of which is the rhythm, reflect a direct correlation with the significance of the content. In this chapter, I explore the literary functions of questions—narrative as well as rhetorical—as they combine rhythm with suspense, thus creating in the moment of performance what seems to be a tension of both epistemic (narrative) and sensory (performative) nature. At the end of the chapter I begin to inquire the role of questions in fictional realism.

II. Homer's *Iliad*

A typical interrogative situation the epic song presents is: asked and answered, with answers more often than not taking shape of actions rather than verbal responses. While the epic is a fundamentally performative genre, with a considerable degree of interaction between the singer and his audience, and a fair amount of input and influence of the audience on the song itself, the singer merely reports the questions posed by epic characters, refraining from asking any. Homer's *Iliad* too conforms to this pattern with two notable exceptions: Homer's (i.e. singer's) brief address to Menelaus in Book IV, and an extended apostrophe to Patroclus in Book XVI. In the latter, Homer interrogates the hero about his death and what led to it, but the questions are not answered.

Richard Martin claims that long speeches by the heroes in the *Iliad*—*muthoi*—are “authoritative speech-acts” in that a person of higher social status cajoles a person with less authority into action. Đuljić the Standard-bearer in the song “Captivity of Ibrahim Đuljić,” like Gilgamesh in Book IV, poses strings of questions in order to prompt his interlocutor to console and comfort him. But on the meta-diegetic level, use of *muthos* also (re)asserts the authority of the singer in the eyes of the audience. Egbert Bakker claims that invoking the names of heroes who carry with them fixed epithets—heroes who typically are the speakers of *muthos*—is a semi-ritualistic act of activating their presence in the here-and-now of the performance. But even though Patroclus is invoked in the performance, the lack of his answers can be explained by the singer visibly being outside the diegetic space of the song. Martin notes that *muthos*, being correlated to thinking, is often a result and indication of hero's reflection. While Homer's questions indicate his pondering over Patroclus' motivations and the wisdom of his decisions,

they also lay the responsibility of that reflection—by implying the necessity of coming up with answers—onto the audience. Asking questions that cannot and will not be answered can be seen as a stroke of genius in effecting pathos by directly appealing to the audience. But it also effectively shifts the narrative authority relations among the speaking and listening voices, both within and in relation to the diegetic space. In this chapter I look into the shifting nature of the questions, and how they function with relation to the narrative agents (the narrator, characters, and the audience). Namely, what impact do Homer’s apostrophe and its interrogative aspects have on narrative authority and narrative structure?

III. Pauline Epistles

When the Queen of Baghdad, in “The Song of Bagdad” performed by Salih Ugljanin, says to her visitor, “Why do you cross yourself when you are in no trouble? Why do you pretend that I do not recognize you?” she is not soliciting an answer, but demanding of her visitor to knock off his antics (Parry & Lord 36). Elucidating the connection between questioning and authority, Jauss characterizes this type of “guiding” questions (guiding the listener to new understanding, in this case the queen’s desire for him to modulate his behavior) as “a prerogative belonging to the master.” Jauss notes that the oldest recorded question in the Judeo-Christian tradition is in Genesis 3:9, when God asks: “Adam, where art thou?” These questions are not about asking for new information (as Jauss points out, God very well knows where Adam is), but mini-muthoi of sorts: they prompt the interlocutor to perform an action (come out of hiding and show himself to God), while at the same time expressing the emotional state of the speaker

(anger, disapproval) and asserting his or her authority (in this particular case, the ultimate authority of the one God).

In the context of a learning experience, the action that the interlocutor is incited to perform is that of realization, with questions serving as guidance. Socratic dialogues are a paradigmatic example of question-based dialogues that use guiding questions for mentoring purposes. They clearly illustrate the idea of, as M. B. Rowe puts it, “learning as searching,” with questions pointing the way. In the epistles of the New Testament, the apostles ask questions whose purpose is never to obtain new information, but always to impart knowledge (the truth!) to the communities of believers and, later, readers. The dialogue situation, instead of being direct (character-to-character or singer-to-audience), is now mediated by writing both spatially and, more importantly, temporally. The dialogue no longer takes place in the here-and-now. The production and recreation of the message—once synchronic and fused in the single act of performance—have separated, and are now mediated by a fixed object—the text. The written word assumes the authority of the speaker and is accepted as the source of truth, a surrogate one initially (while the possibility of a direct contact with the author exists, even theoretically), but eventually the ultimate one.

IV. Early-Modern Comic Novel

Novelistic language is inherently heteroglossic, as Bakhtin demonstrated, in that it reflects and contrasts different points of view, social strata, or historical periods, often by means of implicit references to previous works of fiction or non-fiction. These differing points of view resulting in different meanings are conflated in dialogues which take place between characters

themselves, between the narrator and the reader/audience, and between different works of fiction. In the fourth chapter I examine how questions affect (initiate, support, amplify, complicate, possibly even undermine) dramatic irony underlying novelistic heteroglossia. I analyze three major works from “the most important stages of the novel’s development” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 36), looking into the interrogative instances by Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, as well as the narrators of Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*. The three texts abound in questions directed not only at other characters and the readers, but at the writing, whether it be in the form of fiction, learning or, in the case of Rabelais, even holy writ. The object of criticism extends beyond the texts to the institutions behind them as well as the intellectual and moral transgressions of their members. Pantagruel, in Chapter 7 of *Pantagruel*, reaches Paris and immediately heads to the Library of St. Victor. The chapter lists then-prominent works of fiction, learning, and religion, allegedly housed in the library, commenting on them in scathingly mocking terms. In Chapter 6 of *Don Quixote*, the priest and the barber trash Don Quixote’s private library, blaming almost all of his hundred-or-so books for the harm that they wrought on the poor hidalgo and, by extension, lambasting their authors, content, and even whole genres. Sterne, writing under the influence of Rabelais and Cervantes, is less overt but no less disparaging, taking the reader on a journey of breaking down the logistics of the novelistic genre. These three texts are heavily influenced by the existence of the printing press. Now that other authoritative sources are easily accessible, they establish a new modality of learning and augmenting knowledge: unlearning. And what better way to implement it than in the form of ironic questions, by saying one thing and meaning another?

V. Questions of Truth and Realism

Most questions in fiction are rhetorical. They are often in the service of heteroglossia in that they reveal the multiplicity of points of view and ultimately meanings. But the meanings are not merely different, as there is always an authority that appraises and judges them, consequently leading to authority that one side or the other gains in the process. The result of this authority-driven authority-granting process is the assertion of truth in the form of literary representation.

In the epic, questions, like the action, reaffirm the truth, the known, the past. In the epistles, writers address the unaddressed “articulat[ing],” as Wolfgang Iser pointed out, “what has remained unsaid” by previous traditions (55). In the novel, the questions often actively challenge and change the known. Consequently, the manifestation of truth morphs across the three genres from something that needs to be reaffirmed in order to exist, through something to be discovered and expanded, to something to be revised and adjusted. The changes that the three stages undergo are a reflection of the times and particularly of the impact of social factors on verbal modes of expression and representation. Reflecting on Bakhtin’s claim that “[v]erbal discourse is a social phenomenon,” Victorino Tejera notes that, unlike the language which is the object of linguistic inquiry, “speaking—like doing and making—is a form of query, namely . . . at bottom it is interrogative, more than merely interactive” (17-18). If so, then the literary functions of questions deserve a much closer attention than they have received thus far. While the first four chapters are grounded in close readings, the final chapter attempts to posit the findings about the functions of questions in a larger literary context. In addition to the concepts of performance, authority, writing, and irony, which I address in the previous four stages, here I examine how questions catalyze the functioning of fiction. Furthermore, if realism reflects how

we perceive the world and how fiction represents it, than the questions we ask and the ways we ask them set the parameters of how we can and do perceive it and, consequently, ought to provide a fresh insight into realism itself.

* * *

In short, I attempt to trace the tradition of questions. An outline based on establishing patterns rather than any claims to comprehensiveness is the goal, with a somewhat ambitious attempt at expanding on the rhetorical and laying a narrative framework for examining questions and questioning in narrative literature. The literature on questions in fiction is sparse: in addition to a number of essays on rhetorical questions, Hans Jauss in *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding* provides a basic categorization of questions through a sweeping overview of literature from the Hebrew Bible to the present day, and Harry Levin's *The Question of Hamlet* and Susan Wolfson's *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry* offer helpful models of examining questions in fiction—Levin places emphasis on uncertainty rather than tension, but he also give due attention to doubt and irony as correlatives of questions; Wolfson, while limiting her analysis to a handful of Romantic poets, addresses interrogative process in relation to narrative agents: the questioning characters, the questioning narrators, the questioning readers, questioning the readers, etc. I thus rely primarily on the four intervening concepts— authority, performance, writing, and irony—to help propel my analysis. By positing questions at the core of my dissertation, I aim to explore a seemingly simple but fundamental aspect of fiction and discourse in general.

First Chapter

Authority and Rhetorical Questioning: Wondering Heroes in South Slavic Epic

This chapter is about tension and change: tension that Erich Auerbach claims is missing from the epic (specifically Homer), and which I claim is not only there, but intensified by questions and questioning; and change that the questions incite. A close reading of the multiple versions of the South Slavic epic “The Song of Bagdad” offers an insight into the functions of questions within this narrative work of oral tradition that go beyond rhetorical emphasis. Combining scholarship on oral tradition (Walter Ong and Albert Lord), more recent research that connects literary criticism with works of oral tradition (Egbert Bakker’s take on Auerbach), and a rhetorical view of South Slavic epics, I trace the concept of authority as an intrinsic and dominant element of questions. Some of the most dramatic moments in epic songs comprise rhetorical questions, and I here attempt to elucidate what makes them such a powerful rhetorical tool.

I. Information-seeking Questions in “The Song of Bagdad”

“The Song of Bagdad” (“Pjesma od Bagdata”) appears in the Milman Parry Collection (MPC) in several versions.¹ Three versions have been transcribed as sung by Salih Ugljanin, whom Parry and Lord claimed to be one of the most skilled singers they encountered during their fieldwork in Yugoslavia between 1933 and 1935. Additional versions, two by Sulejman Fortić

¹ The Milman Parry Collection, housed at Harvard University, is the largest collection of South Slavic epic song, as well as one of the largest collections in the world of audio recordings (and their transcripts) of any single living oral epic tradition.

and one by Sulejman Makić, recount the same story. As is typical for oral epic, the basic story line is similar, but the details of exposition vary among different versions sung by the same singer, and especially among different performers.² My analysis includes questions from all six versions, but for the sake of simplicity, the plot summary is of only one version—the most elaborate one sung by Salih Ugljanin.³

The reason for choosing “The Song of Bagdad” is that there are six full versions of it in the MPC, all of which have been published in the *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs* series. MPC, in addition to its unprecedented size, offers the benefit of both the audio recordings and transcripts (as both manuscripts and edited typesets). The methodology of recording and transcribing the songs has been thoroughly documented and meticulously vetted to preserve as closely as possible the oral nature of the material. The result is a collection in which songs are accessible in form in which they were sung to singers’ live audiences.⁴ Parry and Lord also did future scholars a considerable favor by critically selecting the songs. As Tomo Maretić noted well before MPC

² For how songs are molded by singers learning from one another, and how they relate to each other’s work, see Lord 99-123.

³ No.1 in the second volume of MPC’s *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs* edited by Milman Parry and Albert Lord, 8-25; No.2 is 26-39, and No.3 is 40-54. Fortić’s two versions are No.22, 198-207, and No.23, 208-16; Makić’s version is No.26, 260-7. The online version of the Milman Parry Collection contains the manuscripts of all six transcripts, albeit under different titles: Salih’s No.1 (PN668) as “Sultan Selim uzima Bagdat” (“Sultan Selim Conquers Badgad”), No.2 (PN277a) and No.3 (PN277) as “Ženidba Đerđelez Alije” (“The Wedding of Đerđelez Alija”), Fortić’s No.2 (PN676) as “Sultan Sulejman uzima Bagdat” (“Sultan Suleiman Conquers Bagdad”); and Makić’s No. 26 (PN679) as “Sultan Ibrahim [sic] uzima Bagdat” (“Sultan Ibrahim Conquers Bagdad”). MPC lists an additional version by Ugljanin (PN00277a, “Ženidba Đerđelez Alije”), but the manuscript has not been made available. I use the spelling of ‘Bagdad’ in quotations, translations, and my text to remain consistent with the English translation of the song by Parry and Lord, as well as the scholarship on it. (Similarly, the Serbo-Croatian originals use an anachronistic spelling of ‘Bagdat’ instead of the contemporary ‘Bagdad.’) The spelling of the main hero’s name varies across manuscripts, but when not quoting, I adhere to him as ‘Đerdeljez Aljija,’ which appears to be the most frequently used version.

⁴ One common drawback of other collections is that, because of the lack of audio-recording equipment, the singer would have to stop after each line, thus disrupting the flow of the song as it would otherwise be performed. The lack of the context of a performance also had an impact on the songs; one typical example is singers’ omitting the proem. Overall, songs in collections prior to MPC are shorter, likely because of the cumbersomeness for the singer of the process of transcription. For differences among different transcription methods of South Slavic epic, see Lord 124-38.

came to be, most published collections of epic and other folk songs suffer from the lack of such critical editorial approach, resulting in collections that mostly comprise songs of no discernible quality.⁵ The collection that has withstood the test of time and critique is the one by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić who, as a folklorist and a major figure of Serbian enlightenment, had initiated the trend of publishing folk songs, including epics. One important commonality between Vuk and Maretić is that both have been steeped in folk songs, and had developed a critical ear, and just as critical editorial skill. Parry and Lord might not have had such long-lasting familiarity with the epic, but have relied on those who have in a discerning and respectful manner. Rich as Vuk's collection is, MPC remains unrivaled in the authenticity of its transcripts, based on both the new technology that was available at the time and the scholars' keen approach to the methodology of collecting songs.

I.1. Synopsis: Interrogative Actions in “The Song of Bagdad”

The song opens with the singer/narrator's words: after twenty years of unsuccessfully besieging the city of Bagdad, the sultan of the Ottoman Empire is pondering whether to continue the siege or to withdraw his troops. One of his councilors suggests that the key to conquering Bagdad is to call on Đerđeljez Aljija, a Bosnian hero, to gather an army of a hundred thousand and assail Bagdad in sultan's name.⁶ The sultan dispatches the imperial messenger Suka. As he

⁵ See Maretić, 20-3. I find no fault in Maretić's appraisal of the available folk-song collections in which he finds that “there are many more bad than good songs.” He groups the published collections into those which “are so bad that there would have been no harm had they never seen the world” and those whose publishers “would have done well had they published only half, or third, or a quarter of what they had indeed published” (20-1). Maretić looks at the songs as a literary critic; thus one ought to take his comments with a grain of salt since one can assume that the editors of collections he criticizes also had ethnographic concerns.

⁶ For the historical background of Đerđeljez Aljija, see Maretić, 164.

reaches Aljija's hometown, Suka inquires of a local merchant for the location of Aljija's residence:

Bozdrđana upita tatarin:	The messenger asked the shopkeeper:
„Kamo dvore Đerđeljez Aljije?”	“Where is the house of Đerđeljez Aljija?”
(27:120-1; also in narrator's voice in 41:108,113) ⁷	

Following directions, Suka reaches Aljija's home and knocks on the gate. Aljija's mother calls from the inside of the house:

Ko mi halku dira na kapiji?	Who touches the knocker on my gate?
Doma nema Đerđeljez Aljije.	Đerđeljez Aljija is not at home.
(9:145-6; also 27:132-4, 41:123-4)	

Suka greets Aljija's mother, and demands information about his whereabouts:

Kam' gazije Đerđeljez Aljije,	Where is the champion Đerđeljez Aljija,
Da tesljimim careva fermana?	So I can deliver the imperial firman?"
(9:149-50; also 27:137-8; 41:127)	

Later, when he arrives at the local mosque to which Aljija's mother directed him, he asks the locals to point out Aljija to him:

Je lj' evode Đerđeljez Aljija,	“Is Đerđeljez Aljija here?
Da lj' je ođe, alj' ga ne poznajem?	Is he here, or do I not recognize him?"

⁷ Verse citations in this chapter are from Vol. II of Parry and Lord, 1954. When the same verse appears in multiple versions, citations are separated with a semi-colon only. When a verse with a different wording but the same meaning appears in multiple versions, citations of corresponding verses are preceded by “also.” The first number indicates page, the second verse number. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated, although I owe the translation of a number of more obscure words and terms to Parry and Lord's English version of the song in Vol. I of Parry and Lord, 1954. Finally, every question in the six versions of “The Song of Bagdad” is quoted and addressed in this chapter; I have distributed them across the synopsis and subsequent sections so as to avoid repetition, and have complemented them with questions from other songs when a particular type was not used in “The Song of Bagdad.”

(9:175-6; also 27:161-2, 41:162-3)

The messenger delivers the firman to Aljija, who receives it with due deference, bowing seven times and kissing it. Aljija then passes the firman to the priest to read it for him. He fears that the firman will pronounce a punishment upon him, and when the old man bursts into tears upon silently reading it, it looks to Aljija that his fears might be justified:

A pita ga Đerđeljez Aljija:	And Đerđeljez Aljija asks him:
Sari hođa, vais efendija,	Old priest, venerable effendi,
Rašta plaćeš, te suze ronahu?	Why do you cry, then shed tears? (10:200-2)
Sari hođa, vais efendija!	Old priest, our effendi!
Ko je mene katal učinijo?	Who has sentenced me?

(28:183-4, also 42:187-9; the second line is uttered by Aljija's mother in 41:131)

The questions in direct discourse thus far fulfill what is conventionally thought as the basic function of questions: requesting new information (i.e. information unknown to the speaker).⁸ In the case of the messenger, the information he seeks out is about empirical facts, notably physically perceptible entities, be they locations (of Aljija's house) or people (Aljija himself). Similarly, Aljija asks the imam to recount the (physical) content of the letter. But in this last instance, in addition to requesting information about the text in imam's hand, Aljija's words double as the expression of concern for the old man's feelings. Even though in some

⁸ Luka Zima's *Figures in Our Folk Poetry with Theory* (1885) is the only text I have found to directly address the use of questions (as well as antithesis and Slavic antithesis, which are relevant for my discussion below) in South Slavic epic. His is a textbook of literary theory, which at the times meant an enumeration of rhetorical devices and stylistic figures applied to literary examples, which in Zima's case are all from South Slavic epic poetry. Writing in the tradition of Classical Greek, Roman, and later, German rhetoricians, in addressing questions Zima explicitly discounts non-rhetorical ones, insisting that only rhetorical questions count as stylistic figures, and are thus of interest for poetic analysis of epics. While I agree with Zima (and the rhetorical tradition he follows) that rhetorical questions are more powerful as poetic devices, in this chapter I also identify patterns that demonstrate direct correlation between the use of all questions and authority, rendering even non-rhetorical questions germane for poetic analysis, albeit often as a contrastive example to rhetorical questions.

cases their objects of inquiry are less or not at all empirically perceptible—thoughts, feelings, intentions, or other non-externalized states—all the questions above manifest themselves as requests for new information.

The plot continues with the priest revealing to Aljija that the firman requests him to assemble an army. Aljija returns home and asks his mother for permission and blessing:

Šta ćeš mene izum pokloniti? Would you grant me your permission?
 Ho' lj' mi, majko, halaluke dati? Will you grant me your blessing, mother?
 (11:282-3)

Aljija's mother urges him to follow the sultan's order. When he reminds her that he is engaged and is about to get married, his mother advises him to write to his fiancée Fatima, who lives in the city of Buda.⁹ He does so, dispatching a messenger with a question to Fatima:

Da lj' me moreš s rzom pričekati Can you wait for me with honor?
 Jod dušmana Lauš đenerala? Protecting yourself from general Lauš
 Da lj' se moreš branit' sa Budima? Can you defend yourself and Buda?
 (28:231-3; also 11:326-8)

When the messenger reaches Fatima's home, he greets the servants, and asks:

Ja lji doma Budimka Fatima? Is Fatima of the city of Buda home?
 (28:254; also 11:353-4, 43:263-5)

Fatima receives the messenger, and immediately responds in writing, urging Aljija to gather an army and set off with them to sultan's aid. Aljija then summons seven standard-bearers and

⁹ While Đerdeljez Aljija's provenance has not been established with certainty, there is a possibility that he was a historical figure, and a 'sandžak beg' of the town of Smederevo (see Maretić 164). Fatima, on the other hand, is clearly a fictitious figure. As Heda Jason points out, Fatima was a common sobriquet for female warriors in medieval Arabic works (237), a tradition that is reflected in the Muslim strain of the South Slavic epic songs.

dispatches them to seven of his vassals. Upon their return, he greets them and verifies that they have delivered the messages:

Jeste l' svaku knjigu rasturili? Have you delivered each letter?

(43:356)

Soon, the vassals and their armies gather. In the meantime, Fatima sets into motion a plan of her own. She shaves off her hair and goes to the market, where she hears a herald announcing the sale of a horse. She asks him:

Ći' je danas đogat na telalu? Whose horse is on sale today?

(31:513; also 15:698, 45:493-4)

Hearing that the horse belongs to Budimlija Mujo, who has been convicted by the sultanate and is on the run, she asks for the price:

Koljiko je đogat ispanuo? How much for the horse?

(15:699; also 31:521, 45:503)

Grateful for the opportunity to purchase a 'winged' horse, Fatima also asks the herald to convey to Mujo that she is on her way to render a service to the sultanate and, once she accomplishes the task, she would request the sultan to pardon Mujo.¹⁰ Back at home, she gathers her panoply, mounts the horse, and departs the city. Not knowing the way to Kajniđa, Aljija's hometown, she addresses the horse:

Znaš lji dobro ka Kajniđi gradu? Do you know well [the road] to the city of Kajniđa?

(32:603)

¹⁰ At this point, Fatima is already in disguise as a man. I continue to refer to her as 'she' even though the characters in the song perceive her as a man. In the narrative, the singer too most of the time (but not always) refers to her in the feminine.

The horse leads the way, and they soon arrive at the gathering place of Aljija's army. Not recognizing her, Aljija greets her:

A pita ga Đerđeljez Aljija:	And Đerđeljez Aljija asks him:
„Barjaktare, sa koje si strane,	“Oh standard-bearer, whence you come
A s kojega grada carevoga,	And from which imperial city,
A kako te po imenu viču?”	And by what name do they call you?” (17:842-5)

She introduces herself as Budimlija Mujo and, together with the seven vassals and the army of one hundred thousand, they depart for Istanbul to present themselves to the sultan. When the army sets camp outside the city, the sultan summons Aljija. However, Aljija is not aware that the audition is also a test. When Aljija submits to the guards' request to fully disarm, the sultan concludes that his lack of wiliness makes him unsuitable to conquer Bagdad.¹¹ The sultan requests that the next representative of the army be brought in. When the imperial messenger reaches the camp, he asks for the standard-bearer:

Kamo vama z Bosne sandaktara?	Where is the standard-bearer from Bosnia?
(18:965)	

Fatima identifies herself as standard-bearer Mujo. When she enters the court, she sees Aljija's robes. Inferring what happened to him, she slays a dozen guards and approaches the sultan to kiss his hand. The sultan acknowledges her valiance and cunning, commissioning her with the siege of Bagdad. Fatima procures the release of Aljija, and they head for Bagdad with their army. As they approach the city, Fatima decides to set off on her own to find the hidden gate to

¹¹ The text merely states that, when Aljija appears before the sultan without his weapons and boots, the sultan says: “How will you conquer Bagdad for me? / Aljija is not [the hero] that the crowd makes him to be / Take him to the solid dungeon” (956-8). There is no explicit explanation as to the reason behind the sultan's decision, but after Fatima later wins his trust with her cunning in a similar test, presumably it was Aljija's naiveté that in sultan's eyes rendered him inept for the task.

the city. Once outside the city's bulwark, she receives a sign from heaven, and secretly enters the city. She finds her way to the queen, and presents herself. Recognizing Fatima's horse, the queen thinks Fatima is Budimlija Mujo, whom she once chased out of the city. Fearing the queen's wrath, Fatima acknowledges the provenance of the horse, but insists that she is the standard-bearer Komljen, a person toward whom the queen bears no grudge. The queen asks Fatima whether she is aware of the wrongs that Mujo has done Bagdad:

Jesi lj' ćula Budimljiju Muja,	Have you heard [of] Budimljija Mujo,
Zulumćara što takoga nema?	The enemy without equal? (36:970-1)

The queen offers to buy the horse, and Fatima jumps at the opportunity to trick her into riding the horse with her, promising to present the horse to the queen as a gift afterward. Once the queen is on the horse, Fatima asks her where she keeps the keys to the city gates:

Kamo tebe kljući jod Bagdata,	Where are your keys to Bagdad,
Od Azije sa grada Bagdata?	To Bagdad, the city of Asia?

(36:1024-5; also 21:1227-8, 50:932-3)

The queen points to her bosom; Fatima immediately reveals herself as Budimlija Mujo, abducts the queen, and spurs the horse with both of them on it away from the city.

By this point it becomes apparent that the right to ask questions is directly correlated with the authority of the speaker. The authority is primarily societal, i.e. it is governed by the rules of social hierarchy, resulting in the rule that the speaker who poses a question is always the one of higher social status: Aljija asks Fatima, Aljija asks messengers, Fatima asks the herald, the queen asks Fatima, etc. The authority includes the authority-by-proxy, as with messengers, who bear some but not all of the authority of their masters. The imperial messenger has a higher status

than the townsfolk in Aljija's hometown, including Aljija's mother, and Aljija's messenger is above Fatima's servants, but neither is above the recipient of the message (Aljija, Fatima), who by definition is closer in status to the dispatcher (sultan, Aljija) than to the messenger. A seeming contradiction appears when Aljija's mother addresses a question to the imperial messenger. But this question is posed before they meet face-to-face; at this point, she is technically not directing her question to the imperial messenger, but to a newcomer of unknown identity. Once they establish their hierarchy, only the messenger poses questions. However, one prominent exception does appear to this rule: heroes (Aljija) and heroines (Fatima in her subplot) pose questions even where their status is lower than that of their interlocutor: Aljija to his mother, and Fatima to the queen. The epic authority—the authority of the epic hero—stands on a par with (but does not necessarily supersede) the social authority (heroes on occasion still find themselves on the receiving end of questioning by their social superiors), rendering heroes and heroines the only true exceptions to the social-authority rule. The person posing a question in direct discourse is invariably in the position of authority, be it social or epic.¹²

The story continues with Fatima and the queen arriving at Aljija's camp; his surprise at their arrival unleashes a salvo of questions:

Mujo, brate, od kud si došao?	Mujo, brother, whence have you come?
Jesi lj' bljizu do Bagdata bijo?	Have you been close to Bagdad?

¹² I have not encountered any studies that link authority to questions in South Slavic epics or even in oral tradition. Maretić (299-301) brings up a contrastive example: kissing in South Slavic epic, often as a part of a greeting, is indicative of lower social status. The person being kissed is a social elder, while what they kiss is typically either the other person's hand or the edge of their robe (*skut*). However, even though it reflects authority relations between the characters involved, it is merely a description of an action—thus appearing only in singer's indirect discourse—rather than a speech device. The closest that any other form of (direct) speech comes to that of questions in relation to authority are two exclamation words, 'more' and 'bre,' "which the higher [in status] or elder says to the lower or younger, whereby the former is from the Greek language and means 'you fool,' while the latter is from Turkish (where it is an exclamation meaning: *hey*)" (Maretić 313). Cf. the discussion on the interjection *ō* in the second chapter.

Ko je za te ispod kabanice? Who is behind you under the rain coat?

(21:1274-6)

Fatima reveals that her passenger is the queen. She hands Aljija keys to the gates of the city, and breaks one of queen's necklaces in half, for Aljija and herself to keep as a token of friendship. Fatima heads to Istanbul with the queen, while Aljija proceeds toward Bagdad with the keys to the gates that will allow him to occupy the city in sultan's name. Fatima arrives at the sultan's palace and presents the queen to the sultan. She declines sultan's offer of money and position, and instead requests the authority to make proclamations in sultan's name for a day. The sultan assents. Fatima assembles the viziers and pashas, and slays them all on the spot, leaving the imperial imam for the last. She points to the Christian crosses that fell out of imam's turban, exposing him and the rest of the nobles as traitors. Fatima then leaves for Buda. Shortly afterward, Aljija arrives the court of the sultan, presenting him with the keys to and spoils from the city. Aljija returns home, and asks his mother if she received any news from Fatima:

Majko moja, đeneta ti tvoga! Oh, mother, by the paradise in heaven!

Imaš kakav haber za Fatimu? Do you have a message of Fatima?

Da je nisu Vlasi porobilji? Is it that the Vlachs have enslaved her?

(23:1423-5; also 39:1233-7, 51:1097-9)

With no news available, he sends a letter directly to Fatima with the same question:

Jesi lj' živa ju gradu Budimu? Are you still alive in the city of Buda?

Da ti nijesu Vlasi dosadilji? Have the Vlachs not bothered you?

A ćekaš li Đerđeljez Aljiju? And do you await Đerđeljez Aljija?

(23:1439-41, also 51:1107-9)

When the messenger arrives in Buda, he asks the servants if Fatima is at home:

Je lji doma Budimka Fatima,	Is Fatima of Buda home,
Da tesljimim knjigu jod Aljije?	So I can deliver the message from Aljija?

(23:1453-4, also 39:1261-2)

As soon as Fatima receives the messenger, she asks him about Aljija:

Je lj' došao sa grada Bagdata?	Has he arrived from the city of Bagdad?
Jesu lj' Bagdat grada prifatilji?	Have they conquered the city of Bagdad?
Jesu lj' caru hizmet učinelji?	Have they done a service to the emperor?

(23:1462-4, also 39:1271-2, 52:1128-30)

Fatima rejoices at the news that Aljija is safely back home, and replies to him that she has waited for him “with honor” and that he can start gathering the wedding party. She assembles her dowry and departs. The wedding takes place upon her arrival. However, on their wedding night, Aljija discovers Fatima’s bald head. He immediately exits their marital chamber and runs to his mother:

A pita ga majka ju odaji:	And mother asks him in the chamber:
„Šta je, sine, Đerđeljez Aljijo?”	“What is it, son, Đerđeljez Aljija?”

(24:1551, also 53:1304)

He asks his mother to negotiate Fatima’s return. She attempts to do so, but Fatima insists on talking directly to Aljija. She reprimands him for not recognizing that it was she who made his victory at Bagdad possible, and she presents her half of queen’s necklace as proof of her identity. Aljija begs her for forgiveness, and the song ends with singer’s well-wishing for the happy future of the young couple.

All of the questions above seek information and receive answers. All abide by the authority rules. However, a few outliers to this rule do manifest themselves. One appears after Fatima reaches Bagdad, as she camps outside the city. A voice from heaven addresses her with a question:

Ej, koji si do grada Bagdata? Hey, who are you, near the city of Bagdad?

E, *hinsanu*, što si pod Bagdatom! Hey, you human, at the foot of Bagdad! (35:894-5)

When Aljija's mother questions the messenger before learning his identity, the situational authority takes precedence: she is the mistress of her own house and thus in the position of authority until proven otherwise; the same goes for any heavenly being or phenomenon when addressing a mere mortal.

Situational and epic authority are special cases of the authority rule for posing questions in direct discourse.¹³ The former is triggered by lack of a clear context. The latter challenges the applicability of real-life social hierarchy in the diegetic space of the epic. But the authority rule remains. Or to put in a question-centric terms, in addition to their information-seeking function, questions in epic song perform the authority-signifying role.

¹³ As such they constitute outliers to the rule. Lack of context between characters is rare, and is typically limited to the initial moments of meeting between strangers (cases where one or more characters are in disguise do not constitute lack of context—the characters act under the pretext of their assumed identities). As for the appearance of supernatural beings, the only one featuring prominently in South Slavic epic is *vila*: an elfish being in female form that usually acts as a personification of natural forces (for an overview of the presence of vilas in South Slavic epic, and the stories and scenes in which they appear, see Maretić 314-20). Otherwise, supernatural beings and events are infrequent to the point that Maretić cites the overly conspicuous presence of supernatural beings (vilas, dragons, tri-headed Arabs) in songs as proof that they are not traditional in nature (Maretić 24-5; he specifically refers to the songs recorded from the singer and poet Ilija Divjanović).

I.2. Asking for Permission, Approval, and Advice

One engaged form of questioning is about determining future events. The answer in such cases informs not of extant objects or events and already known facts, but of something that is yet to be decided, based on knowledge and facts that the interlocutor possesses. At the beginning of the song, the sultan asks his council for advice whether he should continue or call off the siege of Bagdad:

„Moje lalje, paše i veziri!	My nobles, pashas and viziers!
Alj' nam valja Bagdat prifatiti,	Should we conquer Bagdad,
Alj' Stambola zemlju ostaviti,	Or should we leave the land of Istanbul,
Pa prijeći našoj dedovini,	And cross over to the land of our forefathers,
Dedovini zemlji Brusi ravnoj?"	The land of our forefathers, the flat Brusa?

(8:37-41; also 26:39-41, 40:28-30)

After the decision is made and Aljija receives sultan's firman, he asks his mother for advice whether to accept sultan's request to go to war with Bagdad:

Šta ću, majko, jod života svoga?	What should I do, oh mother, with my life?
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(12:426)

Šta ću, majko, caru povratiti?	What should I respond, mother, to the emperor?
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(42:219)

His mother advises him to come to sultan's aid, and next Đerđeljez Aljija dispatches a messenger to his betrothed Fatima, asking her in a letter if she is willing to wait until his return from Bagdad.

At the end of the song, after his return, he writes to her again, this time asking Fatima's permission to commence with preparations for their marriage:

Ja lji vakat i vrijeme došlo,	Has the season and time come,
Ej! da spremim kićene svatove,	Hey, to ready the colorful wedding party,
Da dovedem Budimku Fatimu?	To bring over Fatima of Buda? (23:1442-4)

The sultan's question yields plans of action that his two councilors offer in response. The sultan uses the information and ideas they present to make his final decision. The same can be said for Aljija and Fatima: in her response she offers information about her intentions not previously known to Aljija (or possibly even Fatima, as she might have not contemplated the issue until she was faced with the question in the message), and based on that information Aljija sets into motion the preparations for their wedding. Neither line of questioning is a mere inquiry—instead of facts, these questions demand responses in the form of speech acts.

Asking for advice or permission seemingly presumes and acknowledges the authority of the respondent. Knowledge and wisdom are both associated with age and social seniority, and in these cases the questioner might naturally be of lower status. Yet even in these situations the questions are posed by social seniors (the sultan) and epic authorities (the hero Aljija). Such type-characters fill roles conducive to asking for advice or permission in particular contexts (the sultan of his council, the hero of his mother). Asking for information does in a way admit one's deficiency, and is a way of asking for help (in augmenting that deficiency of knowledge). But in the cases of advice, approval, and permission, the deficiency is only temporary and consequently comes second to the social superiority of the interrogator.

I.3. Offers

Similar to requests for permission, approval, and advice, offers too do not merely ask for information about extant facts, but require the engagement of the interlocutor, who is thus prompted to make a decision (a future action based on the offer being made). During her initial audience, Fatima proves her mettle to the sultan, and he offers her the necessary provisions, equipment, and ammunition:

Šta ti topa treba i kuveta?	How much do you need of ammunition and
	provisions? (34:831; also 18:989, 48:760)

The sultan makes his offer by means of magnanimous phrasing (whatever you need) that is strongly indicative of his status. Later, when Fatima appears in front of the queen of Bagdad, the queen recognizes the horse that she has admired since her encounter with Budimlija Mujo. She makes Fatima an offer:

Ho' lj' ti mene prodati đogata?	Will you sell me the white horse?
Plaću para koljiko ti drago.	I shall pay as much money as you fancy.
(36:1000-1; also 20:1206-7)	

When Fatima appears at sultan's court again, this time bringing the abducted queen of Bagdad to sultan's knees, he bequeaths upon Fatima honor and benefaction through questions:

Zbor', gazijo, zavalala ti nema!	Speak, oh hero, without restraint!
Volj' ti pašom, a volj' ti veziirom,	Do you wish to be a pasha or a vizier,
Alji voljiš muhur sahibijom?	Or the Master of the Privy Seal?
(37:1118-20; also 21:1313-5, 50:1008-9)	

After Fatima slays sultan's councilors and exposes the chief imam as a Christian, the sultan repeats his offer:

Zbori, Mujo, kad ćeš u životu, Speak, o Mujo, what you will,
 Volj' ti pašom, a volj' ti veziirom? Do you wish to be a pasha or a vizier?
 (38:1176-7; also 22:1395-6)

Finally, when Fatima's shaved head renders her ineligible for marriage in Aljija's eyes, his mother offers Fatima a compensation for returning home:

Kolj'ko tražiš podmir od Aljije, How much recompense do you seek of Aljija,
 Da podmirim gotovinu blago, May I recompense you that much with treasure,
 Da se opet na Budimu vratiš? So you may return to Buda again?
 (24:1567-70, also 53-4:1315-7; and again by Aljija in 24:1581-3)

I.4. Tension-Building Questions: Adding and Adding More and More Gradation

Questions are not always followed by an immediate answer. On occasion, questions immediately follow one another, forming clusters, sometimes even extending to speech-like lengths. "The Captivity of Ibrahim Đulić," sung by Salih, begins with a character Radovan (aka Raka) being captured by the army of the governor of the city of Zadar. In the dungeon he meets hero Ibrahim Đulić who, upon learning that both of them hail from the same border region, asks him with longing about his hometown:

Ću l', moj Rako od zemlje Turaka! Do you hear, Raka from the land of Turks!
 Šta te pitam da mi pravo pričaš. What I ask you, recount to me honestly.
 Je lj' Krajina još naš u Turčina, Is the border region still ours, Turkish,

A stoju lji bosanske gazije,	And do Bosnian roads still stand in place,
A sedu lji kahve i mehane,	And do coffee shops and taverns sit around,
A sedu lji hani pa dućani,	And do inns and shops sit around,
A kupu lj' se jage pod Udbinu,	And do agas gather under Udbina,
Pod Udbinu na lonđu zeljenu?	Under Udbina, in green wooded shade?
Svodu lj' ćete niz zemlje dušmanske?	Do they lead their men into the enemy country?
Dovodu lji roblje na alaje,	Do they bring hordes of captives,
A doćeraju stoku na buljuka,	And do they drive in herds of cattle,
A dovodu lj' kosate Mađarke?	And do they bring long-haired Hungarian women?
Ženu lj' age Turke Krajišnike,	Do the Turkish agas of the borderland marry them?
A dovodu lj' konje sedljenike	And do they bring saddled horses
Ja donosu lj' na tojage blago?	And do they bring loads of treasure?
Kaka igbal sade ju Turaka?	What is the fortune of Turks these days?
A potlje ćeš, slugo Radovane;	And then you will [tell], servant Radovan;
Sedi lj' moja kula na ćenaru?	Does my tower still sit on the border?
Je lj' se moja kula podurvala,	Has my tower started falling apart,
Alj' se kula harap učinela?	Or has it fallen into ruin?
Je lj' mi živa jostarela majka?	Is my old mother still alive?
Je lj' mi živa, svijet mijenila,	Is she alive, [or] has she crossed into the other
	world,
A sedi lj' mi sestra neudata,	Does my sister still sit by herself unwed,
Sestra Fata ju odžaku mome?	My sister Fat[im]a, in my home?

Ćeka lj' brata Đuljić bajraktara,	Does she await her brother standard-bearer Đuljić,
A sedi lj' mi dorat u podrumu?	And does my steed still sit in the stable?
Držu lj' konja dobro ju podrumu?	Do they take good care of him in the stable?
Dalj' mi Huso sedi kahvedija?	Does my servant Huso still sit there?
Ćini lj' staroj hizmet u odaji?	Does he serve my mother in her chamber?
Sedi lj' moja vijernica ljuba?	Does my faithful betrothed still sit there?
Da se ljuba nije isprosila?	Has she not been married away? (55:33-63)

Raka then answers line by line that everything is safely in its place save for Đulić's betrothed, who is about to be married away. In the quote above, Đulić runs through a list of things near and dear to him. The section includes an antithesis: all the things that still are as they used to be vs. the betrothed who is not. It comprises a long gradation: Ibrahim begins by inquiring about roads and taverns, before zooming in on his own house, then his mother, and finally his betrothed. And it is composed entirely of questions: one after another they gradually build anticipation and tension, foreshadowing the crisis that the forthcoming marriage of Đulić's beloved creates in contrast to all that is well and unchanged. The questioning authority here is a conflation of social and epic authority—Đulić is a standard-bearer and the hero of the song in contrast to Raka the servant—which, in the culmination of this questioning gradation sets up a dramatic twist that will sustain and direct the remainder of the plot.¹⁴ Single questions, as a part of a dialogue, do not always disclose the tension-building power that they possess, as they are usually immediately followed by an answer (resolution). When questions are part of a stylized ritual, as in greetings, the tension is even less apparent. But strings of questions—especially when amplified, such as

¹⁴ While extended captivity is in itself a form of subverting hero's authority *prima facie*, it is unsurprisingly often of crucial value to the plot in that it makes for a precondition for hero's demonstration of valor. For formulaic patterns of hero's captivity that point to the rootedness of the motif in epic tradition, see Detelić.

in the example above where they are compounded by gradation and antithesis—reveal themselves as a potent device for poetic emphasis and suspense.

II. Rhetorical Questions

II.1. Rhetorical Functions of Questions

All of the questions discussed thus far require answers, be they about the past (events), the present (identity), or future (advice). Even when they serve as more than just information-seeking tools—such as when Aljija poses a string of questions to the imam, asking him for the cause of his tears, and at the same time expressing concern for his apparent distress—they nevertheless demand answers. However, many of the questions in epic songs have an exclusively rhetorical function. Some of the examples above are information-seeking questions with a rhetorical *aspect* to them, but one that does not exclude the expectation for an answer.¹⁵ However, many questions preclude a response because they either answer themselves or exclusively convey a meaning distinct from the information they appear to be seeking. Such questions figure prominently in the South Slavic epic and, as is the case with information-seeking questions, display a strong correlation to the authority, both social and narrative.

II.1.a. Recognition

Greetings are a special case of the authority-bound use of questions with a subcategory of their own: recognitions. These are cases when the question that a character utters as a greeting is not about a location (where have you been?) or state (are you well?), but an acknowledgement of

¹⁵ For the discussion of the illocutionary force of questions, see the Second Chapter.

the identity of the interlocutor. Recognitions still follow the authority rule of question use.

When Fatima in disguise arrives at the gathering field of Aljija's army, he addresses her:

Zar ti s', brate, Budimljija Mujo? Is that you, brother, Budimljija Mujo?

(17:862, also 33:659, 46:613)

Aljija continues with his address to Budimljija Mujo, indicating that he does not expect an answer. Later, when Fatima (in disguise, again) meets with the queen of Bagdad, the queen acknowledges the presence of standard-bearer Komljen:

Zar ti lji si Komljen bajraktare? Is that you, standard-bearer Komljen? (20:1204)

Unlike regular greetings that are reciprocal, these greetings-cum-recognitions do not require a response.

II.1.b. Disbelief

In the scene where Fatima slays the head imam, several crosses fall out of his turban, exposing him as a secret Christian. The sultan, however, expresses disbelief and doubt:

Da lj' iz kape, al' iz tvoje šake? Is it from the hat or from your fist?

(38:1171; also 22:1336, 51:1048-9)

The question does not ask for information or even confirmation, and Fatima makes no attempt to answer it. The sultan, who has just witnessed evidence of imam's betrayal, is merely loath to accept the implications of discovering Christian crosses in imam's possession, and his question is consequently merely rhetorical.

II.1.c. Doubt

At the beginning of the song, Aljija receives sultan's firman, but is initially uncertain whether he should accede to sultan's request. He expresses to his mother doubts as to his ability to fulfill sultan's request:

Kako ću mu vojsku pokupiti,	How shall I gather an army for him,
I sa vojskom pod Bagdat otići?	And with the army go to Bagdad? (42:223-4)

II.1.d. Excoriation

When Fatima appears before the queen of Bagdad, the queen recognizes the horse and presumes that Fatima is Budimlija Mujo, whom she had expelled from the city twenty years prior. She reprimands Fatima for pretending to meet her for the first time:

Kopiljane, Budimljija Mujo!	Oh, Budimlija Mujo, you bastard!
Šta se krstiš dok nevolje nemaš?	Why do you cross yourself when there is no trouble?
Šta se činiš da te ne poznajem,	Why do you pretend I do not know you,
Kad si glavom Budimljija Mujo?	When it is you and no other, Budimlija Mujo?

(36:960-3; also 20:1168-9, 49:875-6)

She then continues:

Zar si mene Bagdat preljetijo,	Is it because you glided across and out of Bagdad,
Pa ti misliš da si utekao?	That now you think you've gotten away from me?

(20:1173-4)

II.1.e. Orders and Summons

Once Aljija decides to follow sultan's order, he dispatches messengers to his vassals ordering them to assemble armies and gather together. Aljija then addresses his servants, ordering them to make preparations in anticipation of seven armies gathering in the field:

Ej, čuste lj' ga, drugi tevabije?	Hey, have you heard him, other servants?
Iznesite čerge i čadore,	Bring out tents and pavilions,
Ja propinj'te polju zeljenome!	And pitch them on the green field! (13:509-11)

Similarly, the queen of Bagdad tries to draw the attention of her soldiers before issuing orders to stop Fatima who has just abducted her:

Đe si njojzi stotinu soldata,	Where are you, my hundred soldiers,
Što čekate na kapiju ravnu?	Who keep guard at the level gate? (21:1240-1)

The above are only some examples of the rhetorical uses of questions, ones encountered in "The Song of Bagdad." With a widened scope of analysis, the list would become longer since many questions perform more than a single rhetorical function. But regardless of the particular rhetorical function, they all come from characters in position of authority.

II.1.f. Greetings

Greetings are one of the most frequent actions in epic song. It comes as no surprise that there is a wealth of expressions to describe them as they appear in indirect discourse:

Berberinu seljam naturila,	Upon the barber, she pressed a salaam,
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I berbera Bogom braimila And called the barber a blood brother by God.¹⁶
(31:490-1)

Stasa tatar, pa him pomen dade, The messenger halted, and extended a greeting,
Seljam dade, ustavi menzila. Salaam he gave them, and held up his post horse.
Ej! Svi skočiše, seljam prifatiše. Hey! All jumped to their feet, accepted the salaam.
Hoždeldije dodaju tataru. A welcome they extended to the messenger.
(10:168-71)

Greetings constitute one of the most common uses of questions. For example, in cases where one of the greeters holds the authority-by-proxy, social norms dictate that a question be posed about the third party whose authority the character represents:

A za zdravlje pitaju sultansko For the sultan's health they inquire (27:157)
I pitaju za Alino zdravlje And for Aljija's health they ask (43:261)
Kad Fatima slježe na kapiju, When Fatima arrives at the gate,
Kahru tome hoždeldije daje, She extends welcome to Kahra
A pita ga za mir i za zdravlje, And asks him for the peace and health,
Za gaziju Đerđeljez Aljiju Of the hero Đerđeljez Aljija (28-9:259-62)

But asking about a third party is more of an exception than a rule. Short of the presence of the authority-by-proxy, a common greeting is a reciprocal action, often overtly manifesting its inherent give-and-take nature:

I svijema hoždeldiju daje. To all he gives welcome.

¹⁶ Maretić identifies calling someone a blood brother or sister a common feature of South Slavic epic (302-6). “The formula is very simple: the one who is in trouble says to the other: By god, oh brother! (By god, oh sister!) . . . and the blood-brother tie is finalized if the other accepts, without any other ritual” (302). Here Fatima is not in trouble, but is about to ask the barber for an unusual favor.

Oni njemu bolje prifaćaju.	They accept and return twofold. (43:353-4)
Seljam dade Budimki Fatimi,	Salaam she gave to Fatima of Buda
Primi Fata, poleće joj k ruci.	Fatima accepts, and leaps to her hand. (53:1313-4)
Kahro side, pa <i>him</i> seljam dade,	Kahro dismounted, and gave them salaam,
A svi momci bolje prifatiše,	And the lads accepted and returned twofold
Prifaćaju, hoždeljdije daju	Accepted and extended their welcome. (39:1255)

Reciprocity is so ingrained in the nature of the greeting that its verbal form in indirect discourse often takes a self-reflexive form:

E! Pitaju se za mir i za zdravlje	Well! They ask each other for peace and health
(37:1062, also 42:260)	

Za mirno se zdravlje jupituju.	For peaceful health they ask each other. (11:351)
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The two-way nature of the greeting establishes a social relation between two people meeting for the first time, or it reaffirms an existing relation in the case of greetings among acquaintances.

The custom dictates that each party explicitly declares a greeting and acknowledges the presence of the other(s), in the process establishing or acknowledging their mutual status within the social hierarchy. However, when a greeting in a song lies at one of the extreme ends of the social-hierarchy range within which it can appear—i.e. when one of the persons meeting is at the very top of that hierarchy, such as the sultan—the expectation of a response in greetings disappears:

“Đe si, Suka, carev tatarine?”	Where have you been, Suka, the imperial
	messenger? (9:98; also 41:77)

Sultan’s one-sided greeting affirms not so much the relation with the messenger he is greeting, but his own absolute position within the society. However, it appears that all greetings uttered in

interrogative form in direct discourse come from characters in positions of authority and, furthermore, are not followed by any responses:

Jeste l', momci, zdravo i veselo? Are you, lads, in good health and spirit? (43:355)

Aljo skoći, ruke raširijo, Aljija jumped, spread his arms,

Raširijo, te je zagrljijo. Spread them, and wrapped them around her

Jesi l', brate, u životu, Mujo? Are you, brother Mujo, alive? (50:969-71)

Sultan skoći, na koljena stade. The sultan jumped, and stood on his knees.

„De s', gazijo, Budimlija Mujo?“ Where have you been, hero Budimlija Mujo?

(50:999-1000)

Even though greetings are often formulaic, and even though once a greeting is set into motion the parties involved are bound by custom to follow through with it, in South Slavic epic the expectation of an answer seems to disappear into thin air the moment a greeting is uttered as a question in direct discourse. The reciprocity aspect of any greeting too which ought to, at least on occasion, prompt an answer or to allow for a possibility of the greeting to be initiated from someone of lower status, gives way of right to the authority rule of questioning in direct discourse: they can be uttered exclusively by characters with social or epic authority.

II.2. Topic-Setting Questions: The Questioning Narrator

In addition to direct discourse, questions appear in narration. Being posed by the singer, they are inherently rhetorical. When Aljija's messenger Kahro arrives at Fatima's house, he is greeted by the servants, at which point the singer asks:

Tale's appearance is not particularly important for the plot as he is at no point a key figure in capturing Bagdad, but as a character he nevertheless draws special attention. The question-as-a-topic foreshadows not any forthcoming deeds, but himself as a character. Tale appears frequently in South Slavic epic: a hero of medium importance who stands out as an oddball, and who as such is typically a secondary character. His appearance is one way in which epics incorporate a comic relief in the course of narration.¹⁷ Any section that focuses on him is thus an aside from the main story, and this topic-setting line marks the section that follows as a digression.

But topic-setting questions do not appear only in indirect discourse; on occasion, a hero or one of the other characters will use them to draw attention to a relatively lengthy issue they are about to address. When at the beginning of the song the sultan consults his council, Pasha Sehidiya advises him to commission Aljija. He then proceeds to tell the sultan what specifically to write in the "book" (the letter) to Aljija, prefacing his proposed content with a question:

Na koga ćeš ferman opraviti? To whom should you address the firman? (9:70)

This is one of the rare cases where a direct question—and a rhetorical one at that—is directed to a higher-up (the ultimate higher-up, no less). The content of the letter turns out to be about the valor and power of Bosnia and its potential to come to the aid of the sultanate. The pasha begins by calling Bosnia "dragon-like" (*halovita*)¹⁸ and goes on to suggest to have Aljija recruit a hundred-thousand warriors, ending with the augury that Aljija and his army will be the ones to

¹⁷ An example of a different form of comic relief is the ending of Fatima's letter to Aljija in II.4 below, where she combines humor with teasing.

¹⁸ Parry & Lord translate 'halovita' as 'enchanted,' but do not explain the etymology of their choice (*Serbo-Croatian* I, 69). Maretić explicitly notes the meaning as 'dragon-like' (*zmajska*, i.e. possessing the ferociousness of a dragon); he too does not provide an explanation, but here the root 'al' (*ala*=monster, dragon) is obvious (Maretić 249). This meaning appears more plausible here given the contexts.

conquer Bagdad for the sultan. The picture he paints of Bosnia is equivalent to a mythical beast sleeping in a cave that will awaken and, properly harnessed, accomplish a great deed for the good of the empire. When Aljija receives the imperial firman and asks his mother for permission and blessing to embark upon the adventure that the sultan commissions him with, he does so with epic authority. His mother responds with permission and augments it with advice about what to write to Fatima, beginning her directions with a question:

A šta ćeš ti knjigi udariti? And what will you write in the letter? (11:316)

Unlike Pasha Sehidija addressing the sultan, Aljija's mother has the social authority to pose a question as she addresses Aljija. She proceeds to instruct him in detail as to what specifically to write in his letter to Fatima. The letter is about Fatima's maidenly honor, his heroic honor and duty, possible death, and aiding the empire. In other words, it is a speech, as was the content of the letter that Pasha Sehidija dictated to the sultan. The function of these two questions is topic-setting, but the topic it sets is not merely a digression. The question here indicates that the speaking character is (temporarily) leaving dialogue and entering a speech.¹⁹ This too is a rhetorical function, but one directed not at the interlocutor, but at the narrative.

The digressions initiated by one-line topic-setting questions are often of Auerbach's 'externalization' type: the flow of the plot halts in order for the singer or the narrator to fill in the listener on the history or to provide an ekphrastic description of a character, an object, or an event that has just entered the narrative or, in the case of topic-setting questions, in order for one of the characters to make a (usually brief) speech-like pronouncement. Auerbach claims that externalization provides an opportunity for providing the listener with extensive background of

¹⁹ For further discussion of the function of speeches in epic song, see the Second Chapter.

events taking place, or objects or characters appearing in the narrative, and that the interruption of narrative was pointedly not for the sake of creating tension, but a leisurely way of narrating with fullness. Putting aside cases where externalization takes place purely in the indicative, the cases where it is initiated with questions do not appear to fully support his claim. Topic-setting questions focus attention on what immediately follows (and answers) them. Questions build tension. The tension is typically resolved with answers. But in topic-setting questions—which, as rhetorical questions, do not require or anticipate answers from the interlocutor—the tension serves to emphasize the topic of the speech that follows. What these speeches communicate is more important and universal than any single character in the epic, consequently giving characters without the social or epic authority (as is the case with Pasha Sehidija) the authority—narratorial authority—to preface their speeches with a topic-setting rhetorical question. This is the third type of question-posing authority, be it within (by hero or another character) or without (by the singer) the diegetic space of the song.

II.3. Slavic Antithesis

Sulejman Makić sings a somewhat different introduction to “The Song of Bagdad.” The sultan appears to be in great pain and, instead of Pasha Sehidija inquiring, the imperial imam asks the question:

Sultan care, stari gospodare!	Sultan-emperor, old overlord!
Jesi l' lašnje, da lj' moš' preboljeti,	Are you better, can you recover,
Alj' si mučno, hoćeš umrijeti?	Or are you worse, will you die? (261:39-41)

A few lines later, sultan's son Ibrahim is summoned, and he directs the same question in the same words to his father. This makes for a puzzling example because not one but two characters without either social or epic authority direct questions at the same higher-up, the sultan.²⁰ When his father informs him that he is about to die, Ibrahim expands his initial question:

„Babo, care, zemlje gospodare!	Father, emperor, the master of the land!
Pa što tebe osta najžaljije?	What remains behind you that causes you most sorrow?
Je lj' ti žao što ćeš umrijeti?	Do you regret that you are about to die?
Je lj' ti žao bijela pajtahta?	Do you regret the white palace?
Je lj' ti žao tvoja carevina?	Do you regret your empire?
Je lj' ti žao tvoja vjerna ljuba?	Do you regret your faithful beloved?
Je lj' ti žao tvoje sultanije,	Do you regret your wife,
Alj' najviše sina Ibrahima,	Or does your son Ibrahim cause you most sorrow,
Što ostade grdan sirotinja?"	For remaining a poor orphan? (261:46-54)

The sultan responds in the negative to Ibrahim's question line-by/for-line, and then reveals that his one "lingering wound" is the unfinished siege of Bagdad, at which point the sultan charges Ibrahim with following through with his will. The exposition of this "remaining wound" in this version of the song takes no fewer than 173 lines (62-230). At the point where the sultan negates Ibrahim's question line-by-line and begins to reveal what hangs heavily on his mind, it becomes clear that the initial two rounds of three-line questions by the imam and Ibrahim are part of a foreshadowing strategy aimed at emphasizing the forthcoming deathbed speech in a way that

²⁰ The only difference is that the son addresses the sultan in the first line as "[f]ather, emperor" instead of "[s]ultan-emperor" (261:39-41).

communicates a formidable amount of pathos. Not only are the questions uttered with perfect parallelism, but the second set initiates a Slavic antithesis, with Ibrahim asking the questions, and the sultan negating them and then providing the answer.

Questions and questioning, like other tropes and figures of speech in South Slavic epic, have integrated themselves into the formulaic patterns of expression typical of oral narratives. Slavic antithesis is arguably the most stylized stylistic figure that rests on questioning.²¹ It takes the form of A?→not A→but B²²: a question that poses a possibility of the answer is followed by first a negation of the proposed option(s), and then the answer that reflects the real state of affairs. In a way, it is an extended version of the topic-setting question pattern, with options and negation of given options inserted in between the question and the answer. A typical Slavic antithesis is uttered by the singer in the narrative:

Hvala Bogu, hvala jedinome!	Praise to God, one and only!
Da li grmi, da l' se zemlja trese?	Is it thunder, or does the earth shake?
Niti grmi, nit' se zemlja trese,	Neither is it the thunder, nor the earth shakes
No na Zadar pucaju topovi.	But the canons on [the walls of] Zadar are firing.

(MPC LN11:1-4)

²¹ Scholarship on the Slavic antithesis tends to focus on the antithesis part of the trope (and particularly on the Slavic antithesis being a variant of comparison rather than an antithesis per se), disregarding the role of questions. Ivanka Jovanović, for example, includes examples that start with a statement rather than a question, going as far as to state that “[i]t is true, *albeit not also relevant*, that often the first part of this figure is expressed in the form of a question” (378, emphasis mine). She appears to base her claim on the fact that not all examples of the Slavic antithesis comprise an explicit question, but does not back her assertion with any further analysis of the questions or an attempt to contrast the indicative examples with questioning ones.

²² The term was coined by Vatroslav Jagić (1865). It refers specifically to the tripartite form found most commonly in South-Slavic epic, as opposed to its variants in other traditions (Russian, Bulgarian) as well as other genres (lyric, bugarštica). The latter are more commonly and more generally referred to as negative comparisons (see Jacob Grimm’s foreword to his German translation of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić’s *Little Serbian Grammar* (*Wuk Stephanowitsch' Kleine Serbische Grammatik, verdeutscht mit einer Vorrede*, 1824).

Veselovsky calls negative parallelism (equivalent to the first two parts of the Slavic antithesis) a “riddle based on exclusion”; he compares the form to riddles because, as one-element parallelisms, “from a formal point of view, they represent a parallel in which one side is taken for granted and piques your curiosity” (qtd. in Janićijević 23). The objects of negation are not there for the sake of exclusion based on their inaccuracy or irrelevance.²³ They are neither real possibilities nor random alternatives, but epitomes of the feature they share with the topic (thunderous noise in this case) and thus serve as metaphors or comparisons. When an extended string of questions brings up alternative possibilities for the answer, the exclusion of the possibilities offered in the question is not a negation of the relevance of the proposed options but, conversely, an intensification of the shared property and subsequently the importance, magnitude, or sublimity of the real answer. The version of dramatic irony that it initially creates by dismissing and almost parodying the metaphoric use of the language, emphasizes the truth that it wishes to convey.²⁴ The poetic power of the Slavic antithesis comes from its combination of the vividness of a metaphor/comparison, the pathos of a gradation (thunder→earthquake→cannons), and the tension-building (or, as Veselovsky puts it, riddle-creating) of the interrogative form.

The quote above with the sultan and his son Ibrahim exemplifies the narrative function of the question overriding the contextualizing function of the authority: the questions are not in the service of the dialogue and the plot, but the singer (narrator) and his poetic stylization. Here too a character without social or epic authority poses the question in order to foreshadow a speech,

²³ For a discussion on the Slavic antithesis and negative comparison, see Janićijević.

²⁴ The options offered are frequently common poetic comparisons or metaphors: thunder and earthquake for loud noises, swans and snow for whiteness, etc. In that sense, their negation can potentially be seen as either a commonplace or an almost jocular self-referential poetic strategy.

but in this case the speech takes the place of a more stylized Slavic antithesis. Singers occasionally deploy the Slavic antithesis in narration, and when they do, the resolution part of it does not necessarily amount to a speech. But when the Slavic antithesis takes place in dialogue, it is typically an extended version of the tight narratorial version of it quoted above, one that offers even stronger effect of a speech foreshadowed by a topic-setting question.

II.4. Battle of Questions: Questioning the Authority of the Questioning Authority

One of the rhetorical functions of questions not mentioned in the section II.1. above is that of reproach. Fatima uses questions to reprove Aljija and his actions four times in the course of the song: the first time is when Fatima receives Aljija's letter asking her opinion as to whether he should go to sultan's aid. In her response, she begins with a one-line question:

A što pitaš Budimku Fatimu?	Why do you ask Fatima of Buda?
Aj, devljetu sljegni u hizmetu!	Go, be of service to the empire!
Ti pokupi Bosnu cip cijelu!	Gather Bosnia, all of it!
Sljegni z Bosnom caru jod indata,	Come down thundering to emperor's aid,
Pa prifati bijela Bagdata!	And conquer white Bagdad!
Fata će te s hrzom pričekati.	Fatima will wait for you with honor.
Dame skolju do tri kraljevine,	Even if three kingdoms surround me,
Braniću se sa Budima grada,	I will defend myself from the walls of Buda,
Niti odbit' vara od duvara,	They will neither chip a stone from the wall,
A deljatim Budim prifatiti.	Let alone conquer Buda.
A ne boj' se, careva gazijo!	And fear not, emperor's hero!

Ako ne šće tako juraditi,	If you do not wish to do thusly,
Spremi mene kanalji dorata,	Send to me your winged horse,
A spremi mi sablju dimiškinju,	And send me your Damascene saber,
A spremi mi siljah i oruže,	And send me your belt and your weapons,
I spremi mi tvojega dorata!	And send me your bay horse!
Ja ću caru Bosnu pokupiti,	I shall gather Bosnia for the emperor,
I devljetu od indata sići,	And come to the aid of the empire,
Z božom pomoj prifatit' Bagdata.	With God's help capture Bagdad.
Ja ću tebe đerđef opremiti,	And to you I will send my embroidery frame,
Spremit' đerđef i kudeljju moju,	Send you the embroidery frame and the thread,
Pa ti predi s majkom u odaju!	So you can go ahead and embroider with my mother

in her chamber! (12:377-98)

The form of this section is similar to topic-setting questions followed by a speech. However, here the question does not merely state the topic, but negates one—in a way, it is a condensed version of the first two of the three steps of the Slavic antithesis where an option being brought up is rejected. The content of the letter is dominated by Fatima's reproach of Aljija for even entertaining the possibility of not going to war, and urging him to follow the sultan's orders. Similar to the first example of orders and calls to attention above (II.1.e.), where Aljija's "question" addressed to his servants is a rhetorical critique of their inaction and consequently an implicit prod to action (to be eventually followed by an explicit order), Fatima here criticizes Aljija for stalling, and incites him to action. But she does not convey her opinion in straightforward terms; instead, she mocks him with a rhetorical flourish (again, a potential negative: the

option of her going to war in his place, and him taking over her handiwork duties). Fatima's initial question initiates her pointed message, which is a direct challenge to Aljija's thoughts, doubts, and uncertainties. It indicates the speaker's inverting the authority-balance, taking over the position of authority, and virtually determining the course of action for the hero.

The second time Fatima chides Aljija is in the scene where she is disguised as Budimlija Mujo. As she arrives at the gathering place to join Aljija's army before they set off to Istanbul, she appears before Aljija and exchanges greetings with him. Aljija is so impressed with her appearance that he asks her to carry the imperial standard:

Olj' mi primit' careva sandaka? Will you accept emperor's standard for me?

Begenićem tebe i đogata. I have taken a liking to you and your horse.

(32:637-641)

She takes issue with his offer and politely refuses; she thinks it too hasty of Aljija to bestow such an honor upon someone who has not yet introduced himself properly:

Ti ne znadeš ko sam ni kako sam, You know neither who I am nor how I am,

Ni s koje sam strane od svijeta. Nor whither in the world I come from.

Kako ću ti sandak prifatiti? How will I take on the standard for you?

(32-3:643-5)

In this scene, Fatima can claim neither social nor epic authority. No speech follows, so there is no indication of narratorial authority either. Here is a situation where two characters spar with

questions seemingly over formality and decorum.²⁵ The hero makes an offer with a question, which his interlocutor formally (albeit temporarily) declines with another question. Aljija then initiates the resolution of this formality-for-formality's-sake tension with yet another question:

Ta put Aljo reče lakrdiju:	That time Aljija said the words:
„Ko si, brate, dobar barjaktare?”	“Who are you, brother, fine standard-bearer?”

(33:647, also 46:601-2)

Fatima responds with a lengthy formal introduction of herself as Mujo and eventually accepts the standard from Aljija. Fatima's question is both a refusal of the standard, and a reminder to Aljija for the need for them to follow the custom. It is a refusal to immediately submit to Aljija's wishes and a clear expression of insistence on following through with the formalities. In a situation where the identities of the two characters are revealed to each other, this question-as-resistance presents Fatima as upright and demonstrates her strength of character—a strength that she is about to demonstrate both physically and morally in the course of the song—in the face

²⁵ The question-sparring dialogue that, among the ones I have encountered, probably most overtly flaunts the authority-challenging function of rhetorical questions is in a song published in *Огледало србско* (1846, 334; here I quote from Zima 56, who cites it as an example of the rhetorical figure of mimesis). Two cocky heroes issue challenges to each other:

Vako reče Orugdžiću Meho: „More vlašē! iz koje s' nahije? Kako li se zoveš po imenu? Imadeš li ostarjelu majku? Jesi li se more oženio? Postaće ti majka kukavica, Ostaće ti ljubā udovica, S kijem si se danas počerao.” Besjedi mu Pocerac Milošu: „Što me pitaš more poturico! Ja imana svoga kriti ne ću, . . . Veće more, mlada poturico, Ti otkle si, iz koga li grada? Kako li se zoveš po imenu? Je li tebi u životu majka? Da se nisi skoro oženio? Postaće ti majka kukavica, Ostaće ti bula neljubljena, S kime si se danas počerao.”	Thus speaks Orugdžić Meho: “Hey you Vlach! Which district are you from? By what name do they call you? Do you have an elderly mother? Are you already married? Your mother will wail like a cuckoo bird, Your beloved will become a widow, Because of the one whom you have challenged today.” Pocerac Miloš speaks to him: “Why do you ask me, you converted Turk! I shall not hide my faith, . . . But you, oh young converted Turk, Where are you from, from which city? By which name do they call you? Is your mother still alive? Have you gotten married recently? Your mother will wail like a cuckoo bird, Your beloved will remain untouched, Because of the one whom you have challenged today.”
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(literally and metaphorically) of the hero Aljija's powerful presence. This righteousness-focused dialogue is not dissimilar from the question-initiated speeches. But unlike the speeches, which merely state the right thing to do, or even the Slavic antithesis, where transgression is listed among potential options and then negated, in this case a transgression actually takes place. Aljija makes a mistake in his position of a leader and a hero, and Fatima's questioning leads him to correct it.

The third time Fatima reproves Aljija is during the first audience with the sultan. After Aljija ends up in the dungeon, and Fatima proves her mettle and ability to lead the army to Bagdad, she requests that Aljija be released. She then asks Aljija to fulfill his promise to obtain the indulgence from the sultan for Budimlja Mujo (whom she is disguised as), and she asks this in the form of a question:

A gura ga Budimka Fatima:	Fatima of Buda then pushes him:
„Ej, Aljijo, careva gazijo!	“Oh, Aljija, emperor's hero!
Zašto si mi besu založijo,	Why did you make me a promise,
Da mi vadiš itljak buruntiju?”	To procure a pardon for me?” (34:799-802)

Fatima's question is not only a reminder to Aljija and a formal request that he makes good on his promise (he was presumably too distracted at the time to remember to ask for a pardon for Mujo), but it also reflects the reversal of power between the characters. The hero has been temporarily indisposed, and Fatima holds his life in her hands. Her expression reflects that.

Fatima's fourth and final reproach is at the very end of the song. On their wedding night, Aljija sees Fatima's shaven head, leaves, and then dispatches his mother to Fatima's chamber to offer her a recompense for returning home. Fatima refuses and demands to speak with Aljija in

person. Aljija repeats the offer to her at which point Fatima addresses him, beginning her speech with a question:

Ta put Fata besedi Aljiji:	At that time Fat[im]a speaks to Aljija:
„Ja ti podmir prifatiti neću.	“I will not accept your recompense.
Ko je s tobom u Bagdatu bijo?”	Who was with you in Bagdad?” (24:1584-6)

The question functions doubly. It is a topic-setting phrase, with the rest of the speech answering the question: she describes her adventures from disguising as Budimljija Mujo to penetrating city gates, to abducting the queen of Bagdad, but even the answer is in the form of a string of rhetorical questions:

Ko je s tobom u Bagdatu bijo?	Who was with you in Bagdad?
Ko je tebi sandaktarom bijo?	Who was your standard-bearer?
Ko ti nađe od Bagdata vrata,	Who found the door to Bagdad for you,
I dobavi bagdatsku kraljicu,	And delivered the queen of Bagdad,
I dobavi kljuće od Bagdata,	And delivered the keys to Bagdad,
I dade ti polu od đerdana	And gave you half the neckless
Od kraljice od Bagdata grada?	That belonged to the queen of Bagdad city?

(54:1333-9)

In this dramatic climax of the story, Fatima issues a pathos-filled challenge to Aljija’s authority, as well as to his ill-informed decision—a hamartia in its original sense of missing the mark—to call off the wedding based on incomplete and misleading information.

All four examples above are not mere reproaches, but corrective speech acts. Each time hero Aljija makes a misstep, Fatima is there to help him become aware of it and to steer him

toward the proper decision and action. And in order to do this, she challenges his authority in taking the misstep in the first place. The questioning of Aljija's actions has nothing to do with information gathering. While topic-setting questions lead to statements that lay out proper and just actions, authority-challenging questions like these ones also challenge the authority of their interlocutors (be they social superiors or heroes) in order to steer their actions in the right direction.

It is not a huge leap of faith to see that the corrective effect of questioning authority harnesses the power of opprobrium that the lore imposes on the actions being reproached. This bestows moral affirmation upon the act of questioning. Compounded with gradation and antithesis (as is the case with tension-building strings of questions in I.4.), interrogative challenges to authority command a formidable amount of pathos. Other epic traditions follow these rules too. Especially the most powerful form of questioning—the authority-challenging one—recalls scenes from some of the most prominent pieces of oral tradition.

In Book VI of *Gilgamesh*, Ishtar—the goddess of fertility, love, sex, and war—lays her eyes on hero Gilgamesh. She makes him the offer of marriage. Gilgamesh however, aware of how many mortal husbands Ishtar has viciously discarded, refuses saying that her “price is too high” (Mitchell 132). But he does not stop there; he calls on her cruelty hurling insults at her:

Why would I want to be the lover
of a broken oven that fails in the cold,
a flimsy door that the wind blows through,
a palace that falls on its staunchest defenders,
a mouse that gnaws through its thin reed shelter,

tar that blackens the workman's hands,
 a waterskin that is full of holes
 and leaks all over its bearer, a piece
 of limestone that crumbles and undermines
 a solid stone wall, a battering ram
 that knocks down the rampart of an allied city,
 a shoe that mangles its owner's foot?

...

Which of your husbands did you love forever?

Which could satisfy your endless desires?

...

And why would *my* fate be any different? (132-5)

Gilgamesh recounts in sordid detail the eventual sufferings of each of Ishtar's previous husbands. But the cruelty and unfairness of Ishtar's actions he brings up is merely a description. The insult-laden challenge to her is delivered through questions that he dares address to the powerful goddess. Ishtar subsequently engages Gilgamesh in a contest—a deity against the hero of heroes with superhuman powers—initiated by Gilgamesh's challenge to her authority, status, and the righteousness of her decisions and actions. A challenge issued through a salvo of questions. And a challenge that Gilgamesh wins.²⁶

²⁶ Ishtar subsequently initiates round two of the battle, which leads to the death of Enkidu. But even though Gilgamesh loses his friend, he stands on high moral ground, not allowing Ishtar to have her way.

Closer in time and familiarity is the scene in the Book of Job in the Hebrew Bible where Job engages in a veritable battle of questions with God.²⁷ It happens when Job poses what is arguably the most probing ethical question in the Bible: the paradox of the coexistence of evil on the one hand and the justice of a benevolent God on the other. The dialogue in the Book begins with Job accusing God; Job here addresses his friends, and his grievances are interspersed with questions which, on the one hand function rhetorically by assigning blame, but on the other also receive answers from his friends.²⁸ Job's friends defend God, but they also match Job's questions with those of their own that call into question Job's doubts and accusations: as they try to answer Job's questions, they begin their answers with rhetorical questions of their own, which are both topic-setting and authority-challenging (of Job) in their function. Most of the Book of Job thus boils down to verbal sparring between Job and his friends. However, God gets the last word. He has heard the exchange, and now responds with a rhetorical question after rhetorical question (Job: 38-41). If the sparring between Job and his friends ended in a tie, God now delivers the final blow with an overwhelming salvo of rhetorical questions that neither require nor receive answers. The questions do not respond to Job's accusations because more important than staying on topic is staying on top. Their purpose is to demonstrate the grandeur of God and, most importantly, his unquestionable authority in the world—the battle is therefore decided not by the aptness of responses, but by the deft use of questions and the ability to infuse them with

²⁷ Vojislav Đurić quotes an extended Slavic antithesis from the song “Boj na Mišaru” (Karadžić 129-33), Kulin's wife directs a string of questions to the crows who have just flown from the battlefield with news of her husband, and the crows respond in negative to all her questions. Đurić characterizes this exchange as a “veritable battle of words” with words “acting as swords” (120). However, in using the word “battle” he seems to be referring more to the content (army, conquest, hope, death, loss) than the context of the exchange: crows are merely conveying the message, heartbreaking as it may be to the recipient, but they are not themselves antagonistic to Kulin's wife. However, while they do not display agency with regard to the words they utter, they do prompt the wife to abandon hope for her husband's return. Consequently, the last part of their utterance is a speech act similar in its function to the authority-challenging questions.

²⁸ Cf. Cain in Genesis, who defies God's authority by posing questions.

sublimity. The Book ends with Job acknowledging God’s authority and the ultimate justice of his actions: he admits defeat by first repeating the very first admonition (a question!) that God directed to him: “Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?” (Job:42.3). Job finally acknowledges that the proper order—one that he agrees to follow henceforth—is one where Job will “[h]ear, and I [the God] will speak; I [the God] will question you, and you declare to me” (Job:42.4). In the Judeo-Christian world, God is the one with the ultimate authority to question.

The questions in this section—questions that constitute battles for authority—do not inquire about the details of experiential reality (where the road leads, who the owner of the house is, what is the attire adorned with) or even future events (what one plans to do, what decisions has one come to). They question the appropriateness of actions, decisions, customs—they challenge the norm or what might become the norm if no resistance is given by the speaker. The norm is typically a moral or ethical one that either the society or individuals subscribe to. Asking questions is a hallmark of authority, but even questions can be questioned, and when that happens, the ultimate weapon to challenge authority is more elaborate questions. The last question makes for the last word.

III. Realism of the Questioning and the Role of Authority

Overall patterns in South Slavic epic reveal that questioning as an act of requesting information or inquiring about opinion is directly related to the social status of the speaker: only characters in position of power—social, epic, or narrative—are allowed to utter questions in direct discourse. Such questioning authority corresponds to the social norm, where questioning

(as even its contemporary verb form indicates) connotes an act of exerting power, dominance, and control. In direct discourse, the link between social status and questioning overlaps with that of status and calling one's name. This link between social authority and a linguistic feature is not unique. Founded in sympathetic magic, the avoidance of using given names for one's superiors in the Western tradition and the naming taboo in the traditions of East Asia²⁹ point to a linguistic practice the use of which is in direct correlation with one's social status. This is because "oral peoples commonly and in all likelihood universally consider words to have magic potency"; not all words are equally potent, and in particular they "think of names (one kind of words) as conveying power over things" as well as other people (Ong, *Orality* 33).³⁰ The same kind of authority-bound connection can be seen with information-seeking questions in direct discourse of the oral epic, as well as in most uses of rhetorical questions—these are cases that correspond to the social authority of the real world.

The epic authority, on the other hand, is particular to the diegetic space of the song. The authority a character possesses is not based on age, experience, or social standing, but primarily on glory based on deeds as immortalized in song. But because the epic song within the oral tradition is not a linear entity but a somewhat diffusely cyclical one—the song is performed again and again, and the the audiences are, most of the time, already familiar with the story line of any given song since the repetition is a part of the experience—the hero of the song possesses

²⁹ For examples of name-related taboos across a number of cultures, see Frazer (187-96); also cf. Genesis where God is the only one who speaks.

³⁰ Ong offers a cogent explanation of the difference in perceiving the function of names between oral and what he calls 'chirographic' or 'typographic' people (those of us whose cognitive skills developed while immersed in writing and print cultures): "chirographic and typographic folk tend to think of names as labels, written or printed tags imaginatively affixed to an object named. Oral folk have no sense of a name as a tag, for they have no idea of a name as something that can be seen. Written or printed representations of words can be labels; real, spoken words cannot be" (*Orality* 33).

the *kleos* (imperishable glory) from the very beginning of the song, even before performing the deeds that have turned him into the hero. Therefore, heroes are at liberty to deploy their epic authority in the diegetic space of the song at any given time. Epic authority does not clash with the social one: depending on the context of a particular scene, one or the other takes precedence without permanently undermining the other.

More important than decorum (expressed by social authority) and the appropriateness of individual actions (espoused in epic authority) is social propriety and justice, of which we are reminded by the narrative authority. Narratorial authority aims at truth and speeches that repeat and reaffirm what is socially acceptable and right in the given context. When challenges take place that go against authority, they are there to right the wrongs.

If questions are taken to guide and determine the content of a conversation (in dialogue) and thought (in narration), then these interrogating authoritative voices frame the content and direct the conversation (in direct speech) and consequently discourse (in the narrative as a whole). Questions ask for answers that augment the knowledge of the speaker and listener(s). Thus, when the right to question lies solely in the hands of authority figures, the questioning is limited to and focused on the truth from the perspective of social superiors and heroes. The questions they ask yield information that increase and perfect the grasp of the world as they perceive and live it.

While in a single song the social and epic authorities do not show a clear precedence of one over the other, that changes within the larger opus of epic songs. The ultimate social and political power in South Slavic epic rests with the sultans, and their existence and world views

take up notable portions of epics.³¹ Not every song mentions the sultan, however; most have some authority figures, even if they are more local ones. But all of them have heroes. And songs are primarily about heroes, even when sultans hold the ultimate authority within the diegetic space of the song. Thus the dominant point of view is that of the hero; everyone else's perspective will play into the realism of the song in proportion to their social standing as well as their role (the queen of Bagdad and her point of view do not receive much attention due to her role of a conquered party). Minor characters' stories matter only when they fill in the picture of a greater reality as perceived and lived by the people in authority, heroes always being placed on the top of the pyramid. Heroes are not only characters, not only stock characters, not only paradigms of ethical or heroic or wise behavior (or the opposite, in case of antiheroes); they are the sanctioned vantage points of reality, in individual songs as well as in the corpus of epic song as part of the oral tradition.

Of course, the fact that hegemonic power holds sway over sanctioned reality is not news. But my hope is that the account above identifies questions and questioning as formal communicative and literary (or in this case oratory) tools of power and authority, used by characters and narrators to create and maintain the hold over sanctioned reality, shaping or at least influencing the ethical norms and even cognitive mechanisms of the audience. Considering that authority plays such a prominent role in questioning, and that questions themselves are realism-determining, the most dramatic moments in South-Slavic poetry (and likely in epic poetry in general) come where authority is questioned and subsequently corrected. Here we see the weakening of the theretofore unbreakable direct correlation between status and the

³¹ The character of this ultimate power, however, changes depending on the religious affiliation of the singer and, more importantly, his audience: Muslim audiences demonstrate deference and veneration toward the sultan, while Orthodox and Catholic Christian populations typically display a reluctant acknowledgement of his status.

questioning authority, as the process of questioning shifts from a tool of status-affirmation to a narrative device.

IV. Tension and Change in Word and in Deed

Auerbach opens up the first chapter of *Mimesis* with the scene in Book XIX of the *Odyssey*. He attributes narrative's clarity, uniformity, and orderliness to the externalization of all its elements—regardless of how small or seemingly unexceptionable—concluding that “the element of suspense is very slight in the Homeric poems” as they unfurl in a “leisurely fashion” (3-4). Externalization calls for flashbacks and digressions, consequently creating the effect of retardation—the slowing down, even breaking, the cohesiveness of those elements of the narrative that build tension—and is thus “opposed to any tensional and suspensive striving toward a goal, and doubtless Schiller is right in regard to Homer when he says that what he gives us is ‘simply the quiet existence and operation of things in accordance with their natures’” (5). In spite of the excitement that Odysseus' return, the maid Euryclea's recognizing him, and his insistence on not revealing his identity to Penelope would be expected to stir up, these highs of emotional tension are weaved into descriptions that are “orderly” and “uniformly illuminated” (3). This characterization of Homeric epic does not go as far as to conjure up an image of quiet story-telling on a lazy afternoon while comfortably reclining on a divan, but it does define the mimesis of one of the greatest Western epics as evened and almost sterile, albeit lucid and to the point. This picture of Homeric style does not quite square with the image of action-packed Homeric epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, to say nothing of the whole genre of epic song. There is no question that the descriptions in the *Odyssey* and other oral epics, with

their “continuous rhythmic procession of phenomena” are externalized (6). There is no question that the instrument—a shaft for a Greek rhapsode, one-stringed lute-looking *gusle* for a Yugoslavian singer, or a sword for a Lebanese story-teller—that typically accompanies vocal delivery, emphasizing the consistency and evenness of the meter of the Homeric epic—dactylic hexameter—is there not for melodic flourish, but to keep a steady rhythm.³² And there is no question that the plot of a song, at least in an oral society from which oral epics emerge, is typically not new or a surprise to its audience, who has heard it before, and might have even requested it for the singer’s performance. All these factors might from our contemporary perspective only go to corroborate Auerbach’s claim that Homeric epic lacks suspense, making his thesis universally applicable to oral epics.³³ And they would, if the *Odyssey* were a written narrative. But like other oral epics, it is a song that was performed and consumed in a time and culture with different notion of *poesis*, to use a term that is closer in both meaning and time and that encompasses both its performative origin and its ultimate ossification in writing, rather than referring to it as ‘literature,’ which would only go to reinforce the anachronism.³⁴ Auerbach rightly notes at the beginning of his essay that a modern reader is likely to retroject contemporary literary criteria onto this historical piece of fiction. While he takes that the only out-of-place (or in this case out-of-time) assumption is that the retardation has the effect of building suspense, I

³² Meter and rhythm, which are stable throughout, and the somatic rather than merely vocal nature of performance of a song where singers use their bodies and instruments as extensions of their bodies to keep the rhythm, are all inextricable and essential as mnemonic and performative tools (Ong, *Orality* 67-8).

³³ Auerbach is careful not to make a sweeping claim that suspense is absent in the epic; but he does strongly assert that externalization and consequent retardation frustrate the build-up of suspense.

³⁴ Auerbach did acknowledge at the end of his chapter that he has “taken [both Homeric epics and the Hebrew Bible] as finished products, as they appear in the texts . . . disregard[ing] everything that pertains to their origins” (23). Indeed, these considerations do not come to bear on his close reading of the two texts, nor do they affect his comparison of the two styles. However, I do argue that the presence or absence of suspense is dependent on the historical conditions of both the creation (composition in performance) and consumption (by means of oral performance) of the songs.

would argue that the retrojection goes further, and that the modern reader is right to assume suspense, even though I agree with Auerbach that retardation does not contribute to it.

Epics are not eulogies; they are not laundry-lists of noble deeds and worthy personal characteristics, even though the character casts of both genres overlap in that they showcase the deserving and the mighty. Action, sublimity, and yes, suspense are some of the major aspects distinguishing the two. But the tension is not necessarily based on the novelty of the plot or the need for a resolution. As every child knows, knowing the outcome does not preclude the surprise, not merely feigned, but real, so the presence or absence of suspense is not predicated solely on the form of the work, but on other circumstances too. One of the main contributing factors to the build-up of tension in oral epics, counter to what contemporary aesthetics would consider intuitive, is repetition. The view of faithful imitation of previous models—be they on the scale of words or whole plots—as antithetical to surprise and suspense is a relatively new phenomenon, going back to the 18th century. In his essay “Innovation and Repetition” René Girard points out that repetition as an intrinsic part of tradition had had positive connotations until the 18th century. It was only when theology-backed—and I would add tradition-backed—insistence on the virtues of stable transcendental models begins to be replaced with philosophy, science, and technology, that the then-positive concept of imitation gradually started to be replaced with the now-negative concept of stagnation, and “the *humility* of discipleship is [now] experienced as *humiliating*” (7-12, 17). Of course, some aspects of innovation, even if they might not have gone under that name (*innovare, innovatio*), go back considerably further in time; in the earlier stages, they are associated with the medium of writing. The concept of individual authorship in itself, and the accompanying expectation of producing new works, assumes and

celebrates innovation. Greek tragedies and comedies were written and presented to the audiences as novelty (old stories with new plots), and so have all the other genres based on writing as a medium.³⁵ Girard notes that there is a curve to the level of innovation in relation to how much authors and their works draw on previous sources—not only did the connotations of ‘innovation’ shift from negative to positive, but the definition changed too, from an incremental change to a revolutionary one, reaching its climax with the 20th-century avant-garde and the French philosophers’ concept of *la rupture épistémologique*, which marks a departure from the traditions that preceded an era or a generation or, more radically from anything that preceded oneself, and in its extreme form from one’s previous work and stances (Girard 12).³⁶

In direct contradistinction to cultures based on writing, oral culture, and oral tradition with the orature it produces (the oral equivalent of literature), hold repetition as a powerful and essential mnemonic and aesthetic tool. While Girard identifies the development of philosophy, science, and technology as both a precursor and a catalyst to the shift in perception of repetition and innovation, Ong in the introduction to *Orality and Literacy*, places emphasis on writing and print as not only a communicative but cognitive and aesthetic media: “[m]any of the features we

³⁵ It is no coincidence that, as Greek poleis transitioned out of the primary oral culture, Aristotle in his *Poetics* placed emphasis on the plot and particularly its elements of crisis, peripeteia, and resolution, as the essence of mimesis. In oral narrative genres, the plot was known—what changed was primarily the ornamentation, the style, and the delivery by each singer. In the tragedy, which Aristotle showcases as the ultimate fictional genre, the plot is the most conspicuous element that is new, that changes from one play to another. But subsequent literary eras will place different emphases on other aspects of the narrative, causing the focus of mimesis to shift accordingly. For the changing definitions of mimesis in antiquity, as well as their resonances in more recent criticism, see McKeon.

³⁶ One notable attempt in the contemporary American literature that consciously goes against this current and attempts to demonstrate through fiction that innovation and imitation/repetition are not mutually exclusive—and along the way confirms Girard’s observation and prediction that the “pace [of innovation] is slackening” (18)—is the work of David Foster Wallace. According to Hubert Dreyfus, “much of Wallace’s later work [comprises] simple, apparently uninteresting clichés [that] often hide a deeper truth. According to Wallace, this fact gets covered over by the postmodern tendency to favor highly intellectualized, complex, and aestheticized principles over simple and aesthetically uninteresting ones that are nevertheless deeply true . . . Wallace’s principle goal as a writer, it might be said, is to resuscitate the truths living within these clichés, to revivify them and make them vitally relevant again” (37). These clichés, or ‘banal platitudes’ as Wallace refers to them, are contemporary equivalents of formulaic expressions as ossified versions of oft-repeated notions, that were an essential part of primary oral cultures but are now looked down upon.

have taken for granted in thought and expression in literature, philosophy and science, and even in oral discourse among literates, are not directly native to human existence as such but have come into being because of the resources which the technology of writing makes available to human consciousness” (1). While the 18th-century shift can be related to the proliferation of printed material that accelerated the development of philosophy, science, and technology, the cognitive and aesthetic shift that writing as a medium incited goes back at least to the ancient Greece. Originality, novelty, and individual authorship were all made possible by the introduction of the medium of writing.³⁷ Epic song, however, lies on the other side of the oral/written divide, and is a product and expression of a different poetics and aesthetics, and thus subject to different rules. In a narrative work of oral tradition, repetition, combined with rhythm³⁸ and paratactic form of exposition, is primarily a mnemonic device. “In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulary expressions” (Ong 34). Rhythm, patterns, etc. are all based on repetition. But important to notice is that its mnemonic role, embodied in syntactic features, is a step toward the aesthetic one, enshrined in the formulaic nature of language, especially formal and fictional one. Fixed epithets are one of the most prominent and prevalent examples. Here the repetition is not within the text, but the repetition

³⁷ Lord notes that singers of epic songs attribute authorship to tradition (incl. muses, God, etc.). Even when they make conscious changes (such as when they adjust what they perceive as inconsistencies in another singer’s performance), they see those changes as staying true to the story and the tradition that bore it (103).

³⁸ For the role of rhythm in oral cultures, see Ong, *Orality* 33-6. “Protracted orally based thought, even when not in formal verse, tends to be highly rhythmic, for rhythm aids recall, even physiologically . . . Fixed, often rhythmically balanced, expressions . . . in oral cultures . . . are incessant. They form the substance of thought itself” (34-5).

across performances and even in everyday speech, and carries with it multiple functions. Firstly, epithets have a mnemonic effect. “Oral folk prefer, especially in formal discourse, not the soldier, but the brave soldier; not the princess, but the beautiful princess; not the oak, but the sturdy oak. Oral expression thus carries a load of epithets and other formulaic baggage which high literacy rejects as cumbersome and tiresomely redundant” (Ong, *Orality* 38). Secondly, epithets fulfill metric requirements of a song: “[H.] Düntzer had noted that the Homeric epithets used for wine are all metrically different and that the use of a given epithet was determined not by its precise meaning so much as by the metrical needs of the passage in which it turned up The appositeness of the Homeric epithet had been piously and grossly exaggerated” (19). Only thirdly do epithets have the function of actually describing the noun and pointing to a particular characteristic of it. Finally, and most prominently, they have an amplifying and aesthetic function: important concepts gain special status by having epithets attached to them. In writing-based cultures “[w]ritten words are residue” (11)—they are fixed and retrievable, thus rendering vocal repetition redundant and undesirable. With ideas, thoughts, actions, and descriptions solidified in written form, repetition chafes rather than builds. But in oral tradition repetition is not corrosive; it is either rejuvenating or amplifying. Manifested through and reinforced by the rhythm and meter, formulaic syntax, and paratactic form of exposition characteristic of the oral epic, it is not only a mnemonic process, but an aesthetic form.

While the aesthetic value of repetition can, with proper introduction into its workings, be enjoyed both by a live audience and by a silent reader, a particular aspect of it emerges only during a live performance and crucially contributes to building a tension and suspense: activation. Egbert Bakker draws on the work of a linguist Deborah Tannen, who challenges our

contemporary notion that speech events are about conveying information, claiming that they are primarily about establishing ‘interpersonal involvement’: “it is this involvement that makes speech coherent and meaningful, not as information, but, much more essentially, as an instance of human behavior” (“Activation” 8-9). Bakker replaces the information-based binary of old/new—where old information is associated with dullness—with ‘activation’ of an idea in the speaker’s and listener’s mind; thus ‘activation’ indicates presence of a meaningful idea as a shared experience” (9-10). As special speech, epic song intensifies ordinary speech in general, creating “a strong overarching sense of involvement in which the entire community participates” (11). Performance of an epic song is therefore not another repetition of a known tale, but “a source of involvement” (10). Since, without writing, there is no original, each iteration of a song is not mere repetition, but reactivation, re-enactment.³⁹ Bakker brings up the *Iliad* as a paragon of what we might—anachronistically—regard as ‘old information’:

[I]t is known that Patroklos will die, and his death is anticipated numerous times in the preceding parts of the *Iliad* . . . But that does not mean that the death of Patroklos is less moving or effective in the story of the *Iliad*. On the contrary, Patroklos’ death and its anticipation is effective, not as information that was not known before, but as an experience experienced again. Just as the skillful manipulation of new information in the modern mystery novel is highly typical of our information-craving literate culture, so we may say that anticipation of the reactivation/re-enactment of what is “known” is the quintessence of verbal

³⁹ Bakker extends the notion of song performance as re-enactment as articulated by Lord: “Each performance is the specific song, and at the same time it is the generic song. The song we are listening to is ‘the song’; for each performance is more than a performance; it is a re-creation . . . This concept of the relationship between ‘songs’ (performances of the same specific or generic song) is closer to the truth than the concept of an ‘original’ and ‘variants.’ In a sense each performance is ‘an’ original, if not ‘the’ original” (Lord 101).

experience in an oral society, where “new” is associated with appearance and information. Something need not be “new information” to be effective, and much that is old information in terms of *knowledge* is highly salient in terms of *perception* (12).

Bakker does not address tension or suspense in this article, nor in another article of his where he directly addresses Auerbach’s first chapter.⁴⁰ But he does establish a direct correlation between the reactivation in a primary-oral culture (which, for the sake of consistency, I will continue to refer to as ‘repetition’) and the use of enigmas and new information in mystery novels as the epitomes of suspense in a writing-based culture. In the oral tradition Barthes’ enigma is no less of an enigma simply because the audience already knows the resolution. (Re)activation, functioning along similar lines as new/unknown information in a writing-based culture, creates tension and suspense. In the everyday speech within an oral culture, Ong points out, anything that is not relentlessly repeated (or, in Bakker’s terminology, reactivated) becomes lost to memory and thus—through gradual deemphasis—lost to reality. Living in an oral culture, like Alice and the Red Queen in *Through the Looking Glass*, one must run very, very fast just to remain in the same place. And the best and the fastest—the skillful practitioners of the special speech, i.e. the singers—even create excitement.

Helpful in parsing out the literary devices either based on or reinforcing repetition is classical rhetoric, which itself, even as it progressed into the writing- and print-based ages, retained its focus on oral delivery and performance rather than a reliance on writing. Luka Zima, in his 1880 literary-theory primer (‘literary theory’ at the time standing primarily for literary

⁴⁰ Bakker, “Mimesis as Performance: Rereading Auerbach’s First Chapter,” 1999.

rhetoric) uses examples from Serbo-Croatian epics to illustrate a wide repository of literary tropes and figures. A great number of them rely on and are in essence variants of repetition, be they based on phonetic repetition (alliteration, assonance, homoioarcton, homoeoteleuton, antanaclasis, polyptoton, paregmenon, etymologizing, paranomasia, anaphora, epiphora, symploce, epizeuxis, anadiplosis, gradatio, kyklos, antimetabole, epanodos, strophe; 268-320), or on syntactic-grammatical repetition (pleonasm [incl. parapleroma], epanalepsis, polysyndeton, epithet, epexegetis, synonymy, tautology, and the figure of denial and assertion; 157-80).⁴¹ Many of these figures combine with other rhetorical figures to form more complex ones, of which repetition is not a necessary but a frequent element. Combining classical rhetoric and oral epic, Zima demonstrates that, while repetition arises as a result of a need for mnemonic devices, it ends up having powerful literary effects, notably through intensification.

Looking at the workings of repetition in oral epic, as it manifests itself through rhythm, formulaic language, and activation, a two-sided picture of the nature of tension and suspense emerges, as they appear and work through two relatively distinct modes in orature and literature. On the one hand, the emotional suspense that appeals to audience's empathy with the character as they undergo ordeals and tribulations.⁴² On the other hand, the action-based suspense, which hinges on the plot and either the activation of known actions (in oral tradition) or its unravelling

⁴¹ The examples listed are figures that manifest themselves by "adding words unnecessary for the meaning," but in certain cases, even figures that omit or reorder (rather than add) words incorporate repetition. Figures like ellipsis and parallelism frequently rely on repetition to convey the omitted elements of the utterance or to assert the order. For examples, see Zima 181-201.

⁴² A first-hand account of the sublime emotional effect an epic song leaves on its audience is found by a person with one foot in the oral and the other in the literary world: Gerhard Gesemann, a German Slavist and a philologist. He tells an anecdote about his own experience during the World War I. "When I observed, at the border between Montenegro and Albania at the end of 1915, parts of beaten army and processions of poor refugees pass by, and when I saw how they bivouacked here and there, that is when an old improviser from the second round of reservists moved me and all other listeners to tears with his elegy about the second calamity of the people (after the battle of Kosovo); in that song of his, Serbian hills and rivers and valleys drenched in blood lamented about the war and the adversity that afflicted the people, and in a more distressing way than in the David's elegy with Saul and Jonathan in the Old Testament" (51).

through previously unknown, new information (in written literature). Another way to put it is that in orature tension and suspense are based on amplification, exhibiting a subliminal nature; in literature, they emerge from the need for a resolution that an enigma creates. In neither case are these two modes mutually exclusive, and indeed, epic song does provide cases where the twin does meet. The combination of repetition and questioning manifests itself through the use of rhetorical questions. As I noted in section I.4 above, in the scene of Ibrahim Đulić lying “rotting” in a cell and inquiring about his hometown, the tension-building enigma inherent in a question, be it an information-seeking one or a rhetorical one, is compounded with antithesis and gradation in building a high level of emotional tension and narrative suspense. Further amplifying the effect are rhetorical-literary figures. Of the nineteen phonetic figures listed above in reference to Zima’s catalog of figures, eight are present in the 31-line long quoted section: alliteration (lines 34, 53-5, 57, 59), assonance (37-8, 46, 50-2, 54, 57), homoeoteleuton (35, 37, 40, 45, 51-2) paranomasia (51-2), anaphora (36-9, 43-4, 46-7, 53-4), epiphora (58-9), anadiplosis (39-40), gradatio (42-7, 55-63). Of the nine syntactic-grammatical ones, seven are present: pleonasm (56-7, 60, 62), epanalepsis (37-8, 39-40, 50-2, 53-4, 55-6, 58-9, 62-3), polysyndeton (36-9, 39-40, 43-4, 46-7, 53-4), epithet (40, 44, 46, 53, 62), synonymy (37), tautology (51-2), and the figure of denial and assertion (62-3). As a catalog, these questions are a form of externalization, but the obvious gradation in which they proceed, orderly as it is, can in no way be taken to be a level, composed, and tension-obliterating manner of narration.⁴³ On the contrary, it slowly and almost unstopably builds the tension and the emotional charge. Not only is the language laden with repetition-based formulas, and thus a far cry from being tension-free,

⁴³ Ong notes that “[a]n oral culture has no vehicle so neutral as a list” (*Orality* 42). I would imagine Auerbach would heartily agree, as it is hard to imagine a more even externalizing technique. But it is hard to characterize in good conscience an utterance so densely packed with figures of speech as ‘neutral.’

but the artful (in oral tradition more than in literature in its literal sense of ‘skillful’ rather than referencing a nebulous individual genius) combination with antithesis and gradation provides an effective augmentation to the enigma-forming questions, creating a powerful moment of suspense even as it externalizes.

But are rhetorical questions merely another rhetorical figure (an oratory/literary device) intensifying the language of the epic? The basic definition of rhetorical questions is that they do not require or anticipate an answer. One reason might be that the answer is known to the asker and the questions serve to intensify the delivery.⁴⁴ Another—and likely overlapping with the first—is that the distinct syntactic form of questions imbues an utterance with a special meaning. Examples of rhetorical questions in section II.1 above reveal a pattern where what is being communicated systematically has a deontic meaning: what is vs. what ought to be. In recognitions, the speaker contrasts the appearance of the person before him with the image he has in his mind (what you look like differs from what you *ought to* look like, i.e. the image in my mind’s eye based on what you looked like the last time we met, or on what I imagined you to be); in scenes of disbelief, the speaker contrasts what happened with what they believe to should have happened (it looks like the cross fell out of vizier’s hat, but it *oughtn’t have* since he is a Muslim luminary and *ought not* be harboring crosses about his person); in excoriations, the speaker contrasts actions that took place with proper one’s in a given social context (you are trying to hide your identity, whereas you *ought to* come forward about it); in orders and calls to attention, the speaker contrasts the interlocutor’s inaction with the action that the speaker desires or finds proper (you must not have heard what I said, otherwise you *ought to* be acting upon it

⁴⁴ As Zima puts it: “while with the ordinary [verbal] delivery the listener might hear it but not pay attention to it, when one is asked [a question] instead, even the one who was maybe about to nod off is going to jump up” (143).

already); finally, greetings are similar to recognitions, although they appear to be more formulaic and therefore less forceful in asserting a deontic meaning. All of the categories and examples in them reveal that the meaning being communicated is primarily deontic in nature, i.e. it, to use Bakker's term, activates in speaker and listener's minds primarily a sense of obligation (in certain contexts also prohibition and permissibility) in the sense that its Greek root reveals it to be: the right thing to do.⁴⁵

A deontic statement is by definition an inducer of change: from what is to what ought to be. In this process, questions emphasize the authority dynamics. Like imperatives, questions are the prerogative of those in position of authority. Unlike imperatives, which are straight-forward in that they set a clear direction, questions exhort. By merely implying the course of action they guide rather than direct. By simultaneously creating tension and conferring at least a portion of the authority onto the interlocutor, they are heuristic. Accentuating the dialogic nature of the verbal exchange, questions facilitate interpersonal involvement; they are thus inducers of change. Most of the time, the change is minor and limited to a particular situation: stirring the action of the interlocutor back to what is considered right and proper. In doing so, the authority of the speaker is a conduit of a larger social authority, thus giving strong ethical weight to the pronouncement. When the speaker is one in the position of power, he is merely reasserting the authority he already possesses. On the other hand, when the speaker is one with less authority

⁴⁵ Topic-setting questions and the Slavic antithesis can also be said to fall into this category, albeit with lesser degree. Topic-setting questions, rather than indicating a contrast, fall into the category of deontics in the way Makoto Suzuki defines them. According to him, "the correctness or truth of a deontic statement [can] be understood in terms of the bestness of a piece of advice (instruction, order, suggestion, or demand) in the imperative mood" (ii). Topic-setting questions can thus be phrased as imperatives of the kind: "Listen what I am about to say on the topic X," where X is the subject brought up in the question. Slavic antithesis, similarly, includes the deontic aspect in a circumventing way. While most rhetorical questions merely imply the contrast, and explicitly state only one of its elements, Slavic antithesis specifically brings up both; but then, instead of urging toward an action, it emphasizes a particular quality of the action already taking place or the object being commented upon.

than his interlocutor, he appropriates the social, and by extension ethical, authority to make a pronouncement by the very act of asking questions. Then, by way of elliptical expression, he deploys rhetorical questions to stir to action by acknowledging the agency of the interlocutor and creating a moment of interpersonal involvement: rhetorical questions are not another rhetorical figure that merely intensifies speech, they are words that incite action, but unlike imperatives, they achieve their effect through a dynamic authority-based dialogical process.

The change that is being incited is most frequently incremental; rather than forging a new path, it is more of a rectification, e.g. asking the counterpart to admit, stop pretending, accede, etc. In an oral society, where tradition encourages steadiness, change is not only a largely undesirable, but a tricky concept. In everyday life things change: day to nights, warm to cold, life to death. But in terms of repetitive actions, i.e. actions based on tradition, the instinct is to retain. Change does happen over time, but it is not perceived to happen: members of the community continue to believe that the tradition as a set of rules and obligations—i.e. as a nomological and deontic system—is fixed.⁴⁶ Like everyday ‘ought’ statements, deontic utterances in epic song express a need for particular actions and attitudes. Orders are seen as merely action-guiding and conduct-coordinating, but it takes rhetorical questions to emphasize the change. When issued from a position of little, less, or no authority, they complement the deontic aspect with the emphasis on the process of changing. In that context, the rhetorical question must be an elaborate and powerful one: powerful enough to overcome the lack of social authority of the speaker. And in the most pathos-imbued and sublime cases of challenging and

⁴⁶ Ong cites cultural and societal homeostasis as one of the main characteristics of oral societies. Borrowing the term ‘structural amnesia’ from Jack Goody and Ian Watt, he notes that, even though incremental change does take place, typically at a glacial speed, it happens without the members of the society registering it—in their minds tradition is stable (Ong, *Orality* 46-9).

inverting the dynamics of the authority structure, rhetorical question can even be described as epic. The long string of questions by Ibrahim Đulić in captivity conveys an intense emotional state that emerges from the strain between his desires and the reality, and culminates in implied deontic statements about both Đulić's beloved (ought to wait for him) and himself (ought be able to return home and marry her).⁴⁷ But his vivid description of personal emotional turmoil is no match to the ethically probing question of justice that Fatima appeals to when, at the end of "The Song of Bagdad," she reproaches Aljija, demanding through a salvo of rhetorical questions that he acknowledge her deeds and contribution to the conquest of Bagdad. The most powerful interrogative deontic pronouncements incite change by demanding action—different action—and are ethically probing and meaningful. But they go even further: they demand a new narrative. Fatima insists on one that will include her as a worthy and crucial player in the *narrative* of the conquest of Bagdad. When Gilgamesh faces Ishtar, or Job the God, they challenge the existing narratives of divine supremacy, and use rhetoric in attempts to assert universal justice (universal from the human point of view, at least) over divine omnipotence, successfully in the case of Gilgamesh and unsuccessfully in the case of Job. To make this kind of impact—in word and in deed—in face of the overwhelming stagnant authority, the speakers must deliver elaborate speech-like rhetorical questions infused with sublimity. In return, whether they succeed or not, they render themselves a new type of a hero: a hero in the making, a change-inducing hero, using words not only to express, but to affirm their heroism.

* * *

⁴⁷ As I noted above, there is a considerable amount of overlap of rhetorical figures in songs. Even though the questions Đulić poses are information-seeking rather than rhetorical, they end up in an implied deontic statement which is typical of rhetorical questions.

Auerbach is right in claiming that some literary devices—including externalization and retardation—work differently and with different effects in Homeric songs and in more recent narrative fiction. But what we know about oral tradition in general and epic song in particular does not support the thesis that tension and suspense are weak let alone lacking in the *Odyssey* or other epics, Homeric or otherwise. Externalization and retardation might not contribute significantly to tension and suspense on their own, but they do so in combination with other literary devices—notably the devices that are deployed differently and with different effects in fiction that arose from cultures based on writing. I began my argument with Auerbach because of the stress he places on tension and suspense in epic, but also because he does it in the context of literary mimesis. Throughout his book, he demonstrates an inextricable connection between mimesis and change: the representation of change is what often most prominently distinguishes one literary style or era from another. As he notes in his first chapter on the *Odyssey* and the Hebrew Bible, the former is characterized by stagnation: the plot is known, the characters do not mature or change in any notable way as they move through the diegetic time and space of the song. Epics are an expression as well as a tool for the perpetuation of tradition. Even though no tradition ever remains the same and every tradition gradually changes over time, epics undergird the status quo and highlight its values. But the one engine of change, on a small scale but with powerful—as is much else in the epic—potential, is the questions. They are both descriptive and potentially prescriptive. But most importantly, in the world—real and diegetic—where everything either is or ought to be maintained and perpetuated as-is, questions—specifically from those with less authority—are the one venue of possible change. And since inciting a

meaningful and radical change is interestingly never the person in the position of power, the change is also always a challenge.

Second Chapter

Performing Questions in the *Iliad*

I. Agon and Antithesis

Many of the questions in the *Iliad* reflect the patterns identified in the South Slavic epic, ranging from information-seeking questions to rhetorical ones, whose primary function lies in their connotative rather than explicit meaning. Priam inquires from Helen about the identity of the warriors he sees outside Troy (3:167, 226-7). Achilles greets Athena as she appears to him (1:201-3). Nestor praises Odysseus (10:545-6). Thetis expresses concern for her son Achilles.⁴⁸ The most frequent use of rhetorical questions is reproach, typically from a position of authority such as when Athena reprimands Odysseus and his troops for wavering or when Calchas addresses the Achaeans, but also as a challenge to authority, such as when Helen confronts Aphrodite, or Odysseus Agamemnon.⁴⁹ Reproach is sometimes even reflexive, as when Helen directs it at herself (2:180). In addition to singular ones, strings of questions appear too, although none that are as long as the ones quoted in the first chapter: after Achilles greets Athena with a question as she appears to him, he then continues his greeting with another question with

⁴⁸ 1:361-2; cf. Aljija's concern for the old imam in Parry & Lord 10:200-2.

⁴⁹ Athena to Odysseus: 2:174-8; running across five lines, this is one of the longer questions in the *Iliad*; cf. Fatima reprimanding Aljija for questioning whether to come to the Sultan's aid in Parry & Lord II, 12:377-98. Calchas to Achaeans: 2:323; the question and the short speech is embedded in a longer speech by Odysseus (2:284-332). Helen to Aphrodite: 3:399-405. Odysseus to Agamemnon: 4:350-3; Odysseus' scolding of Agamemnon is reminiscent of Fatima scolding Aljija when she meets him disguised as Budimlija Mujo for the first time (32-3:643-5); in both cases the underling chides their social superior for overstepping the bounds of custom or propriety.

which he reproaches not his interlocutor, but a third party, thus rendering the questions topic-setting ones.⁵⁰

But among the various categories of rhetorical questions, the topic-setting ones are in the *Iliad* considerably more frequent and prominent than in South Slavic epics. Therefore, the *Iliad* proves to be a more apt text to demonstrate that topic-setting questions are different from most rhetorical questions, and fulfill a function that is not only rhetorical. To explicate the latter, it is helpful to first look more closely into the rhetorical aspects of rhetorical questions and to unpack the mechanism through which they convey the meaning behind the denotative one. All questions, including rhetorical ones, carry with them what J. L. Austin calls illocutionary force. It can be defined as simply as what an utterance does in addition to what it most explicitly states, and questions demonstrate it in several aspects. First, “many illocutionary acts invite by convention a response or sequel” (117); questions do so explicitly and forcefully. Rhetorical questions in particular largely fall into two of Austin’s five categories of illocutionary forces: behabitives (“reaction to other people’s behavi[or] and fortunes and of attitudes”; 160), and exercitives (“assertion[s] of influence or exercising of power”; 163, 155)—the former channel the dialogic function of questions, and the latter the deontic one.⁵¹ As is often the case with illocutionary utterances in general, rhetorical questions too have multiple illocutionary forces built into them (Austin 41-2; also see Searle 23).⁵² For an illocution to be felicitous, the person

⁵⁰ 1:201-3; Achilles’ second question is a reproach of Agamemnon, which Achilles weaves into his greeting to Athena.

⁵¹ In John Searle’s categorization (a revision of Austin’s categories), they all belong to directives: “attempts . . . by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (11).

⁵² For an attempt to explain rhetorical questions using Austin’s theory of performatives and Serle’s theory of speech acts, see Steinmann. He, however, limits his analysis to a single function of rhetorical questions: that of using the question form to emphasize the statement opposite of the one stated in the question; i.e. the question “Is this noble?” is merely a more emphatic way of stating “It is not noble.”

uttering it must be authorized to do so (8, 14-5). As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, rhetorical questions can be posed only by those in position of authority or those who are attempting to assume a position of moral higher ground. Finally, the illocutionary force of a particular utterance provides “a reference . . . to the *conventions* of illocutionary force as bearing on the *special circumstances* of the occasion of the issuing of the utterance” (115, my emphasis). In epic song the convention (asserting or challenging authority based on social or epic status) directly correlates with the balance of power among the interlocutors. In the *Iliad*, one of the most frequent circumstances for deployment of rhetorical questions, particularly ones that express reproach, are agonistic dialogues.

Topic-setting questions often serve as a launching pad for a speech, and a contentious speech at that. The question in the *Iliad* most frequently repeated verbatim is uttered by Hera no fewer than five times, each time at the very beginning of her address to Zeus, and always in response to something he had just said.⁵³ The question, “Most honoured son of Kronos, what sort of thing have you spoken?” (αἰνότατε Κρονίδη ποῖον τὸν μῦθον ἔειπες;) is not a request for information, nor even an offhand reproach of Zeus’ stance on an issue along the lines of “don’t be silly,” which would swiftly dismiss the topic communicating that there is no need to linger on it.⁵⁴ Rather, it is a cue that she is about to address the issue at some length.⁵⁵ In other words, the question marks a beginning of a contentious speech. Being a response to someone’s words, and

⁵³ 1:552, 4:25, 14:330, 16:440, and 18:361.

⁵⁴ Cf. the formula οἷον ἔειπες, which Emily Allen-Hornblower claims “is generally used in contexts where the speaker is setting the addressee aright,” such as in 7:455 (Zeus to Poseidon) and 8:152 (Nestor to Diomedes) (n.p.). All translations from the *Iliad* are Richmond Lattimore’s. The Greek is taken from the Loeb collection.

⁵⁵ Hera’s speeches that follow her pointed question are relatively short by the standards of the *Iliad*—7, 4, 10, 17, and 6 lines respectively—but long enough to make a point. Richard Martin characterizes Hera in relation to Zeus as “a natural challenger” (57).

a part of a longer speech are the two most common special circumstances that characterize interrogative illocutions in the *Iliad*. Achilles utters most and some of the longest speeches in the *Iliad*. At the beginning of Book I, his first address to Agamemnon is a docile one. However, once Agamemnon demands a recompense for yielding Chryseis, Achilles immediately challenges him with a speech, which he opens with a question (1:122-3).⁵⁶ In the ensuing battle of questions with Agamemnon, Achilles' longest and most forceful speech in this exchange, and the last one before Athena calms him down, begins with a rhetorical question too (1:149-51).⁵⁷ The plot of the *Iliad* thus begins with a battle of questions.

Battles of questions are a part of a larger category of agonistic dialogues.⁵⁸ In the *Iliad*, such dialogues do not only punctuate the narrative—they are the norm, comprising much of the action.⁵⁹ The most frequent occurrence of questions is, as might be expected, by Achilles, the main character of the *Iliad*. Both the first and the last question in the *Iliad* are his (1:123 to Agamemnon, mentioned above; 24:519-21 to Priam).⁶⁰ The ones most closely in keeping with the characterization of Achilles as the promulgator of the plot of the *Iliad* are the questions he directs to Agamemnon, as he criticizes his actions, first about Agamemnon taking away Achilles' slave Briseis, and later when he decides to call an end to his anger and join forces with

⁵⁶ Son of Atreus, most lordly, greediest for gain of all men, / how shall the great-hearted Achaians give you a prize now?

⁵⁷ O wrapped in shamelessness, with your mind forever on profit, / how shall any one of the Achaians readily obey you / either to go on a journey or to fight men strongly in battle?

⁵⁸ One way Homer himself describes the agonistic nature of some of the dialogues in the *Iliad* is ἀντίβιος ἔπος (1:304 and 2:378).

⁵⁹ Jessica Wolfe poses an interesting idea that eristic speech is not only representative of physical battle and thus violent, but that it can also be used to prevent physical violence, such as when “Pallas Athena seizes Achilles' sword in midair and tells him to ‘cease contention’ with his adversary and instead use ‘words’ to attack Agamemnon” (158-9). As Wolfe's example shows, agonistic dialogues, far from being mediating or pacifying means, are imbued with combativeness partially because they frequently serve as a surrogate for physical battle.

⁶⁰ How could you dare to come alone to the ships of the Achaians / and before my eyes, when I am one who have killed in such numbers / such brave sons of yours?

Agamemnon again. Achilles reproaches his juniors too, such as when he begins his dialogue with Patroclus in Book XVI with gentle teasing (16:6-10, 12-3, 16-8).⁶¹ But he gets to stand on the receiving side of the battle of questions as well: even though he begins the dialogue with Patroclus by asserting his own authority through questions, Patroclus quickly turns around and challenges Achilles' determination not to join the fight against the Trojans, also using questions (16:29-32).⁶² Achilles is similarly reproached, but at much more length and with more pathos, by old Phoinix in Book IX (9:434-605), with a speech that begins with a question (9:437-8).⁶³ Questions thus figure prominently and consistently in the *Iliad*—a story of agon among men, most apparently in deed, but just as importantly in word.

While the linguistic category of performatives neutralizes the antithesis of word and action, as Gregory Nagy claims, dialogue-based questions in the *Iliad* do not only create or reinforce the opposition between interlocutors; their content, and consequently structure, reflect an underlying antithesis of choice (Nagy, Foreword xi).⁶⁴ Many questions present the interlocutor with a choice, similar to the opening of a Slavic antithesis described in the previous chapter. In Book X, Menelaus inquires of Agamemnon:

⁶¹ “Why then / are you crying like some poor little girl, Patroklos, / who runs after her mother and begs to be picked up and carried, / and clings to her dress, and holds her back when she tries to hurry, / and gazes tearfully into her face, until she is picked up?”; “Could you have some news to tell, for me or the Myrmidons? / Have you, and nobody else, received some message from Phthia?”; “If either of these died we should take it hard. Or is it / the Argives you are mourning over, and how they are dying / against the hollow ships by reason of their own arrogance?” For an analysis of Achilles' address to Patroclus in 16:7-19, see Ledbetter.

⁶² “But you, Achilleus; who can do anything / with you? May no such anger take me as this that you cherish! / Cursed courage. What other man born hereafter shall be advantaged unless you beat aside from the Argives this shameful destruction?” For an argument claiming that Patroclus' reproach is a purposeful and strong challenge to Achilles that “bring[s] about the plot of the *Iliad*,” see Adam Parry 12.

⁶³ [H]ow then shall I, dear child, be left in this place behind you / all alone?

⁶⁴ Here too the status of questions as a special category within performatives comes to light. Antithesis is not based on it being a true/untrue statement of its referent, which would be the case for non-performative statements, but it cannot be characterized as being felicitous/infelicitous either, as is the case with performatives.

πῶς γάρ μοι μύθῳ ἐπιτέλλεται ἠδὲ κελεύεις;

αὐθι μένω μετὰ τοῖσι δεδεγμένος εἰς ὃ κεν ἔλθῃς,

ἢε θεῶ μετὰ σ' αὐτίς, ἐπὶν εὖ τοῖς ἐπιτείλω;

How then do you intend this order that you have given me?

Shall I wait where I am, with them, and watch for your coming,

or run after you, when I have properly given the order? (10:61-3)

In questions like this, the speakers present two opposing alternatives, asking the interlocutor, or sometimes even themselves, to make a choice.⁶⁵ While the answer to the given choice in this example is not obvious, in other cases it is implied or even urged, such as when Hera asks

Aphrodite:

ἢ ῥά νύ μοί τι πίθοιο φίλον τέκος ὅττι κεν εἴπω,

ἢέ κεν ἀρνήσαιο

Would you do something for me, dear child, if I were to ask you?

Or would you refuse it? (14:190-1)

In addition to asserting the basic force of (in this case motherly) authority, the question has an illocutionary force to it of urging the interlocutor to make the “right” choice, yet still leaving with them the choice-making power.⁶⁶ However, most questions are rhetorical ones, with the

⁶⁵ See 3:180 (Helen); 11:404 and 11:407 (Odysseus); 17:91-7 (Menelaus); 17:443-50 (Zeus); 18:6-7, 20:344, and 21:54 (Achilles); 21:562 (Agenor); and 22:122 (Hector). Except for the first example where I interpreted Helen’s words as directed to herself and not her interlocutor in that scene (Priam), all other instances are marked as the hero having “spoken to his own great-hearted spirit” (ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς ὄν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν).

⁶⁶ Here the heuristic aspect of questions demonstrates their illocutionary nature. Unlike perlocutionary acts, which require a particular kind of response from the interlocutor, and/or a third party to confirm that a certain kind of effect has taken place (e.g. “Why don’t you do X?” urges one [an illocutionary act] to do X, but it can be said to have persuaded one [a perlocutionary act] only if one responds to my urging in a certain way, by let’s say, either acquiescing to do X or by actually doing X), illocutionary acts merely possess force of the utterance itself, regardless of the effects they might prompt.

antithesis implied rather than overtly stated, and built into the illocutionary force and deontic nature of the question. When Athena asks Ares:

Ἄρες Ἄρες βροτολοιγὲ μαιφόνε τειχεσιπλήτα

οὐκ ἂν δὴ Τρῶας μὲν ἐάσαιμεν καὶ Ἀχαιοὺς

μάρνασθ', ὅπποτέροισι πατήρ Ζεὺς κῦδος ὀρέξῃ,

νῶϊ δὲ χαζώμεσθα, Διὸς δ' ἀλεώμεθα μῆνιν;

Ares, Ares, manslaughtering, blood-stained, stormer of strong walls,

shall we not leave the Trojans and Achaeans to struggle

after whatever way Zeus father grants glory to either,

while we two give ground together and avoid Zeus' anger? (5:31-4)

she is projecting the illocutionary force or suggesting, urging, even ordering, while at the same time rendering her utterance a deontic one by proposing an alternative to their current course of action (we *are* here, but we *ought to* leave). The rhetorical effect—i.e. the illocutionary force—of rhetorical questions is not limited to urging: Thetis, for example, expresses concern for her son Achilles (Achilles laments in silence vs. Achilles ought to share his grief with his mother; 1:361-3), then laments his destiny (Thetis gave birth to and raised Achilles vs. maybe she ought not have to for his own benefit; 1:414); Hera accuses Zeus for plotting behind her back (Zeus plots vs. he ought not to; 1:540); Athena asks Zeus for permission (Zeus might be angry about Athena's request and consequently not grant it vs. he ought to willingly permit her daughter to express her thoughts; 5:421-2); Teucer urges Agamemnon (Agamemnon is demanding that Teucer act vs. he ought to trust that he will do his best willingly 8:293-4); and Poseidon, in the voice of Thoas, mocks Idomeneus (Achaeans are experiencing a setback vs. Achaeans ought not

to have boasted; 13:219-20). The most frequent illocutionary force of rhetorical questions in the *Iliad* boils down to reproach, including the first one in the *Iliad* where Achilles strongly reproaches Agamemnon's decision, to the last one, where Achilles issues a gentle reproach bordering on concern to Hector's father Priam.⁶⁷ The implied opposite of the action being reproached is, of course, what one ought to do. When Odysseus addresses Diomedes: "Son of Tydeus, what has happened to us that we have forgotten / our fighting strength?" (11:313-4), the implied opposite is that they ought not to forget (or even have forgotten) their strength, but ought to keep fighting with ever lasting vigor. Exceptions emerge with instances of positive illocutionary force. When Nestor praises Odysseus' horses ("how did you win these horses? Did you go into the great company / of the Trojans, or did some god meet you and give them to you?" [10:545-6]), the two options he presents are not opposites, nor is there an implied opposite in relation to the two. However, even with an overt illocutionary force of praise, this question turns out to be an information-seeking one, as Odysseus eventually answers it. In an agonistic dialogue, even the "ideally powerful speaker" such as Zeus must take into account the resistance he will encounter from his interlocutors (Martin 55-7). Using a trope that proposes or at least implies a desired course of action, juxtaposing it (explicitly or implicitly) with its opposite, and backing it up with the authority imbued in the trope itself makes for a strong proposal. The binary antithesis forcefully suggests only two choices, and prods the interlocutor to assume the *reductio-ad-absurdum* approach to addressing the issue, with one option clearly on the side of propriety.

⁶⁷ Wolfe notes that the sharp language of characters in Homeric epics has been noted by a number of critics, from early to more recent ones. Plutarch in his *Moralia* "praises Homer for making his characters 'reproach' [*psogus*] each other 'without touching upon bodily characteristics,'" while most of the marginal glosses of the first translator of Homer into English, George Chapman, "on speeches made by Homer's characters focus on admonitory, caustic, sardonic, or otherwise scoffing speech" (152-3). Martin identifies a "tactic evident in flying *muthoi* [which] depen[d] on the juxtaposition of praiseworthy foil with blameworthy addressee" (74).

II. When Apostrophe and Questions Converge

Questions have thus far appeared in dialogues (between characters) and in narration (singer to audience). But there is one more narrative constellation where they appear. Dialogues among heroes are one of the most prominent aspects of the *Iliad*, but characters in the song are not the only ones using second-person utterances. There are two situations in the *Iliad* where vocative and second-person addresses on the one hand and questions on the other merge in the narratorial voice: one is the apostrophe to Patroclus, and the other is invocations to the muses. Book XVI contains most instances of the apostrophe, all of them to Patroclus, both before and after his death in battle.⁶⁸ One of them is in interrogative form:

ἔνθα τίνα πρῶτον τίνα δ' ὕστατον ἐξενάριξας

Πατρόκλεις, ὅτε δὴ σε θεοὶ θάνατονδ' ἐκάλεσαν;

Then who was it you slaughtered first, who was the last one,

Patroklos, as the gods called you to your death? (16:692-3)

For the Homeric apostrophe, particularly its iterations in the *Iliad*, scholarship indicates several characteristics. The oldest and still current interpretation sees it primarily as an indication of sympathy on behalf of the narrator toward a character.⁶⁹ Claims that apostrophe in Homer is a result of metrical necessity have successfully been countered with not only rebuttals of meter being the deciding factor, or a factor at all, but arguments for its other functions.⁷⁰ Some scholars interpret Patroclus' death as a premonition of the death of Achilles, with Patroclus acting

⁶⁸ The *Iliad* contains nineteen apostrophes. Eight to Patroclus, seven to Menelaus, two to Phoebus Apollo, and one each to Achilles and Melanippus. There are also a few instances of apostrophe to unspecified addressees. For a list and a preliminary categorization of apostrophes in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, see Henry.

⁶⁹ For a list of scholia that indicates apostrophe to Patroclus as an expression of sympathy, see Henry 8-9, and De Jong 13 & 250n40.

⁷⁰ For a list of bibliography on both sides, see Yamagata 91.

as his surrogate (θεραπῶν), dying a death that can be seen as a ritualistic one on Achilles' behalf as he urges Achilles to curb his anger that originally set into motion the narrative of the *Iliad*.⁷¹ Finally, Adam Parry looks at how the narrator's apostrophe to Patroclus echoes earlier ones to Menelaus. Death threatens Menelaus in Book VII in combat with Hector. But the plot demands that Menelaus live; otherwise the Achaian contingent would leave, having no reason to stay any longer before Troy, effectively ending the story. Thus apostrophes to both Menelaus and Patroklos are about the threat of death. And questions by the narrator in the *Iliad* too are about death. They come in the guise of information-seeking questions: of the eight questions posed by the narrator, five inquire about the names of slain heroes (5:703-4, 8:273, 11:299, 14: 509-10, 16:692-3), and one addresses Heracles' death (22:202-4).⁷² There are no apparent antitheses as is typical of the questions posed by characters, and they hardly even register as rhetorical questions as the narrator immediately follows them with answers (i.e. he poses them as topic-setting questions). Just as the apostrophes follow a pattern of invoking death, so do questions by the narrator. As is the case with apostrophe, asking repeatedly about heroes might not in itself lead to any conclusions, but invoking death in all of them does, by bringing up the life-vs-death antithesis—the most epic of all antitheses—without explicitly stating it.

Emily Allen-Hornblower identifies the paradox of the singer expressing sympathy at the moment of hero's pinnacle of *aristeia* (martial feat), connecting this timing to tension building. She suggests that “[e]ach new apostrophe contributes to generate a sense of apprehension in the audience and to gradually build up the *tension* underlying the entire episode of Patroclus' glory

⁷¹ For references to Patroclus as Achilles' surrogate, particularly in Book XVI, see Allen-Hornblower n.p. n76. Nagy interprets Patrocleia as a ritual substitution (*Best* 292–295).

⁷² The remaining two questions ask for names of heroes, including the one that initiates the catalog of ships (2:487, and 17:260-1).

on the battlefield that will culminate in his death” (n.p., emphasis mine). “[T]he majority of apostrophes addressed to Patroclus in the *Iliad* occur in scenes in which the hero is explicitly threatened by death” even though they do not necessarily bring up death explicitly (n.p.). The narrator’s questions, on the other hand, do, although the death is of others. Apostrophes to Patroclus in Book XVI begin in the indicative. Allen-Hornblower suggests that they “function like an ominous musical leitmotiv,” echoing the shadow of death that loomed over Menelaus and that now looms over Patroclus (n.p.).⁷³ Narratorial questions address death directly and, distributed across the whole song and echoing each other, appear to follow the same pattern as the apostrophes: the pattern Allen-Hornblower identifies as tension building. Finally the singer issues an apostrophe in the form of a question, the same one that he has been asking throughout the song: “who was it you slaughtered first, who was the last one?” The question-cum-apostrophe that comes after multiple instances of similar questions and apostrophes respectively is comparable to the strings of questions in South Slavic epic, such as in “The Captivity of Ibrahim Đulić” quoted in the previous chapter. The repetition that crescendoed through the stringing of questions based on anaphora, now manifests itself in the use of the same question formula by the narrator throughout the work (“who then was the first and who the last”), combined with the apostrophe to Patroclus. The repetition-based tension-building of questions on the one hand, and the prolepsis of the apostrophe on the other, merge in Book XVI.

One might expect for the two second-person-based tropes to merge at—and into—a moment of sublime pathos; however, the point of convergence is not the point of Patroclus’ demise. Allen-Hornblower states that “Patroclus has already accomplished practically all of

⁷³ Adam Parry convincingly demonstrates that the vocative is used not merely for metric purposes as some scholars have suggested; he claims that the reason for the vocative must be poetic as it is not the “equivalent of a third-person statement” (13).

Achilles' objectives from the time he kills his very first man in battle, Pyraichmes (16:287); from then on, he defies Achilles' instructions by going beyond the limits Peleus' son had clearly established" (n.p. n49). However, I would argue that the key turning point in the plot—in contradistinction to the development of the pathos—of Patroclus' demise is not where he slays Pyraichmes, but following the death of Sarpedon. After Patroclus kills Zeus' son, Sarpedon (16:482), Zeus decides that Patroclus must die (16:647), then dispatches Apollo to collect Sarpedon's body (16:667-75). As soon as Apollo accomplishes his mission, the narrator turns back to Patroclus, who is now launching another offensive. At this point the narrator addresses Patroclus, explicitly stating in the apostrophe that death is his destiny (see quote above). The death of Pyraichmes might mark the end of Patroclus' task as set by Achilles, but the death of Sarpedon marks the point at which the machinery of the plot begins to move to fulfill in concrete terms the half of Achilles' plea to Zeus that Zeus did not approve.⁷⁴ The question of the apostrophe is there to remind Patroclus of his going too far in his mission ("who was it you slaughtered first, who was the last one?"). Allen-Hornblower articulates the fourth characteristic of Homer's apostrophe that finds consensus among scholars: apostrophes in general (including those to Menelaus) appear when "the plot finds itself at a crucial juncture" (n.p.).⁷⁵ So why does the narrator deploy a crucial question before that rather than at the climactic moment of Patroclus' death? It appears that questions are typically used not at the moment of the crisis of action and the highest emotional charge, but where the dramatic part *begins* to unfurl. Since

⁷⁴ The two halves of Achilles' plea to Zeus are that Patroclus gain glory, and that he return safely; Zeus approves the former but not the latter half, thus prompting Patroklos' death in battle. Allen-Hornblower notes that Achilles is conspicuously absent at the moment of Patroclus' death, as is any divine intervention. Many of the earlier apostrophes, notably those to Menelaus, are uttered at moments where his life is at stake, but immediately before the danger is averted. In the case of Patroclus' death, there is no divine intervention to prevent his death, and none even after he dies (including Thetis' avoidance of conveying the news of Patroclus' death to Achilles) (n.p.).

⁷⁵ Cf. Zyroff, who also claims that apostrophes mark a pivotal point in the plot (37-9).

“Patroclus is . . . the only kind of man who could bring about the plot of the *Iliad* as we have it” (Adam Parry 12), the questioning apostrophe to Patroclus marks the point where the narrative of Patroclus’ demise is about to unravel in concrete and unstoppable terms—i.e. it marks its beginning. Thus rhetorical questions in the *Iliad* fulfill not only a rhetorical function of emphasis (achieved through the illocutionary force of the question, including the illocutionary force in topic-setting questions of marking a speech or a description), but a narrative one of announcing the beginning of a subplot of the narrative.

III. Invocations and Authority

The other prominent instance of the narrator of the *Iliad* using second-person addresses and vocative are invocations of the muses. Invocations of the muses constitute an interesting case of transference of authority that stands out in the language that displays a rather clear-cut picture of the power dynamics that governs characters and their relations and actions in an epic world. Homeric scholarship offers a number of insights into the workings of authority through language, both in dialogues and in narrative. John Adams Scott in his 1903 article, addresses the use of ὦ, typically used in vocative exclamations and addresses, noting that the interjection indicates “throwing off of reserve” and often impatience is a marker of familiarity, is conspicuously absent in apostrophe, thus confirming them as imbued with “dignity and elevation.” It can thus be used only by those in position of authority, including deities (195-6). D. Shalev, in his 2001 article, analyzes the use of appositive phrases accompanying rhetorical questions, marking as questions utterances with ambiguous interrogative form, and explicitly stating the illocutionary force of those questions. Even though he makes no explicit mention of

authority, he notes that in Platonic dialogues, the characters who use these phrases that emphasize the rhetorical question of the speaker, are as a rule “strong” characters, with Socrates himself being the character who most frequently uses appositive phrases (557-8). Milman Parry’s famous study of fixed epithets concludes that the meaning of fixed epithets is irrelevant—their mere presence is.⁷⁶ First, they are markers of an epic song and an epic situation (context): they tell us that what is being retold is a tale of epic significance. Second, they mark characters of particular nobility: only heroes and deities deserve a fixed epithet to be attached to and associated with their name. The three language-specific markers above—interjection ὦ, appositive phrases juxtaposed with rhetorical questions, and fixed epithets—are all intrinsically connected to the status of the speaker (social authority) and the dignified context of the uttering act (epic/narrative authority). Finally, Martin identifies *muthoi* that are performed by the heroes in the *Iliad*: these are full, exaggerated speech-acts of heroes that focus on the speaker and are performed by characters in power or those claiming power over their opponents (14, 21-2, and *passim*). Characters indicate their authority when in dialogues they use the interjection ὦ, or when they perform *muthoi*. But the narrator too can mark the authority of a character by way of deploying fixed epithets or appositive phrases. While none of these instances directly relate to questions, they demonstrate that the power structure that permeates the diegetic world of the song is reflected in and reinforced from both the inside and the outside of its diegetic structure by means of rhetorical devices that constitute epic language.

In Homeric dialogues, the rhetorical questions exchanged between characters in the *Iliad*, are undergirded by antitheses that point to the proper and desirable actions vs. the ones that the

⁷⁶ Subsequent scholarship that attempts to refute the whole or part of his argument does not affect my point here. E.g. see Adam Parry’s article, where he concedes the metrical necessity, but strongly argues against minimizing the meanings of fixed epithets.

speaker finds unacceptable or even reprehensible. While the expression heuristically leaves the action and the outcome up to the interlocutor, it leaves little doubt as to which outcome is the ethically proper and socially sanctioned one. The only way for the interlocutor not to follow the guidance of the speaker is to counter the implied proper solution with a speech of one's own, expounding on the counterargument in a battle of questions. The fact that the battle of questions is not only about personal attack (flyting), but about the propriety of actions implied by or stated in the antithesis reinforces the conclusion that the authority a speaker reasserts by asking a question is not merely one of personal power and social dominance—it is the authority that comes by aligning oneself with social propriety. The social propriety upheld by epic song is expressed and promoted by its characters—specifically heroic characters—in the dialogues, but even more so by the narrator who, in the case of oral tradition, is always embodied in performance in the figure of a singer. Singers claim their authority in no uncertain terms. A singer is the custodian and carrier of tradition. He is the one who officially inherits the knowledge of the past, and then transmits it to the current generations. In addition to being the authority on worldly knowledge, a singer invokes the muses in their capacity both as goddesses of inspiration and knowledge and as daughters of Memory, compounding his already impressive (albeit limited) poetic authority with divine inspiration.⁷⁷ He then demonstrates the reach of his access to the information about and knowledge of events past and the characters who inhabited it by showcasing his expansive (but in narratological terms limited) omniscience through both narration and the dialogues. There is no need for the narrator to build an agonistic spirit in

⁷⁷ The only other deity the narrator in the *Iliad* addresses is Apollo who, perhaps not coincidentally, is the god of music. But not all of narrator's references to the divine source of his tale are invocations. In 12:176 he brings up his own limitations as a singer, conveniently reminding the audience of the kind of capacity necessary to retell a tale such as the one he is singing: "It were too much toil for me, as if I were a god, to tell all this."

narration.⁷⁸ Indeed, nothing in the language of the questions posed by the narrator in the *Iliad* indicates agon or even antithesis. The events he narrates constitute the lore that social norms are based on, so the singer is an uncontested authority both in terms of factual knowledge and social propriety.

Of the eight questions by the narrator in the *Iliad*, the first seven ask for the names of particular heroes. The first question initiates the catalog of the ships in Book II (2:487). Three times the narrator asks “Who then was the first and who the last” (ἔνθα τίνα πρῶτον τίνα δ' ὕστατον) that Hector, Ares, and Patroclus respectively killed (5:703-4, 11:299-300, 16:692-3).⁷⁹ Twice he asks for names of victims with a different phrase (8:273, 14: 509-10). Thus, all but the last two questions are followed by lists of heroes, with no antithetical or agonistic elements, but with the full authority of the knowledge of the facts, with names (i.e. identities of the heroes) being the most important ones. While most lists of names that the narrator provides in the *Iliad* are short, the (in)famously long catalog of ships in Book II is preceded with the following extended invocation:

ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι:

ὕμεῖς γὰρ θεαί ἐστε πάρεστε τε ἴστε τε πάντα,

ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν:

οἳ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοίρανοι ἦσαν:

⁷⁸ Martin brings up cases where “[a]udiences can force a poet into an agonistic stance either against other poets (as happened to the modern Cretan bard Barba-Pantzelyo) or against the audience itself, as in the case of a Romanian epic singer who accused his backup musician of falling asleep, in such a way that the audience knew its own attention was being criticized.” However, he concedes that “the performer is still in control” (6). The singer’s authority encounters no real challenge—the objects of his address in such performative contexts are targets rather than rivals.

⁷⁹ The juxtaposition of the first and the last (whom Patroclus killed) can be seen as a potential antithesis, but instead of contrasting one to the other, it merely uses them as signposts of a continuum: the narrator does not list only the first and the last enemy Patroclus killed, but all the ones in between too, with no apparent hierarchy, let alone opposition, among them.

πληθὺν δ' οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω,
 οὐδ' εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἶεν,
 φωνὴ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη,
 εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
 θυγατέρες μνησαίαθ' ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον:
 ἀρχοὺς αὖ νηῶν ἐρέω νῆάς τε προπάσας.

Tell me now, you Muses who have your homes on Olympos.

For you, who are goddesses, are there, and you know all things,
and we have heard only the rumour of it and know nothing.

Who then of those were the chief men and the lords of the Danaans?

I could not tell over the multitude of them nor name them,
not if I had ten tongues and ten mouths, not if I had
a voice never to be broken and a heart of bronze within me,
not unless the Muses of Olympia, daughters
of Zeus of the aegis, remembered all those who came beneath Ilion.

I will tell the lords of the ships, and the ships numbers. (2:484-93)

Martin notes that genealogies, as a genre of social cohesion, are one of the most important poetic genres (if not the most important one) in oral societies (85-6). In the invocation above, the narrator does not miss the opportunity to remind the audience that extensive genealogical information is a stuff of transcendent nature. He unabashedly emphasizes that not only are superhuman powers necessary to perform the feat of listing the warriors in the Greek camp, but the information is coming from the divine realm rather than him as an individual. The authority

of the narrator is similarly perceived as two-fold: received from above and earned through deeds. De Jong adds that a narrator's invocation of muses in order to "ad[d] a divine dimension both to his focalization (the reliability of his narrative) and his narration (the aesthetic perfection of his narrative) . . . is typical for archaic religiosity." She refers to Albin Lesky's principle of 'Doppelte Motivation' wherein "in the Homeric epics an activity is often ascribed to a human and a divine cause *at the same time*," resulting in an ambiguity as to the source of information and the subject of narration (47-52). But unlike other instances of authority assertion where the initiative comes from those with authority, invocations are being initiated, not unlike authority-challenging battles of questions, by the person in position of less authority, who is making the move in order to demonstrate and impose his budding authority upon his audience.

IV. Topic-Setting Questions as Invocations

Many scholars and editors of epic songs in other traditions (such as South Slavic epic) tended to ignore the invocation proem, treating it not as a part of the song, but as a part of the paratextual—or, in the context of an oral delivery, paraperformative—apparatus.⁸⁰ But there is no reason why questions should be thought to have become markers of narrative beginnings in the form in which we find them without going through the stage of—or indeed originating from—ritualistic invocation. Once the singer invokes the muses (or other divinities in other

⁸⁰ Gérard Genette defines paratext as those elements (often extratextual) that surround and frame a text that are typically not determined by the author and that often can be changed without altering the work itself. In that strict, book-based definition of paratext, my use of the term 'paraperformative' here might appear misleading, as invocations and proems are crafted and performed by the singer. As Parry and Lord demonstrated in their fieldwork, proems and invocations are more about the performative situations than about the plot. The narrative function of invocations and questions within them that I show in my argument conflates with their paratextual one.

traditions), he asks them a question, and then, inspired by them, proceeds to answer it.⁸¹ The setup of the performance makes it clear that the question is answered not so much by him, but primarily through him. The first question by the singer in the *Iliad*, in Book II, immediately follows the invocation of the muses (2:484-7; see quote above). The singer's question in Book XIV too follows a somewhat shorter invocation of the muses. The question in Book XVI contains no invocation per se, but the question is addressed to the, by then dead, Patroclus (see quote on page 82 above). Each of these is a question to the divine (or otherwise preternatural) source of information. By presenting themselves as conduits between the eternal and the worldly, singers posit themselves as authorities—specifically authoritative sources—on what they are about to retell.⁸² Furthermore, the shorter questions-cum-invocations echo the long one. De Jong identifies the ordinal “the first” in the topic of the shorter invocations as echoing superlatives in the answers (“the first” and “the best”) (50). I would suggest that these explicit superlatives echo the implied superlative in the long version: “chief men and the lords” (ἡγεμόνες καὶ κοῖρανοι). But more importantly, the short and the long versions echo each other both formally (address in the imperative→appeal to the divine power and/or inspiration→question) and in terms of a performative situation (ritualistic act). Just as the actions of heroes in the *Iliad* are a combined result of divine intervention and individual

⁸¹ Cf. the dismissal of the importance and role of questions evident in much of the scholarship on Slavic antithesis, described in the previous chapter.

⁸² Cf. Martin's observation that those in the *Iliad* who receive *muthos* from gods are those who command the group (60). Elizabeth Minchin identifies the functions that invocations to muses at the beginning of a Homeric song fulfill in relation to their audience. One of those functions is establishing a formal relation with the muses, in which a singer “acknowledges (or implies) that she is one who knows . . . , he asks her to help him with factual details . . . , and with the performance of sustained passages of song.” Minchin brings these aspects up to compare them to everyday speech situations, and to demonstrate that these aspects of invocation establish both the muses and (at least a part of) the audience as a ‘knowing recipient’—i.e. interlocutors with the knowledge of the content the singer is about to recount (26-7). However, Minchin does not delve into what the act of invocation establishes for the singer as a performer. In my approach I follow Albert Lord in that the role of the singer should always be assessed with due consideration given to the context of the (oral) tradition.

determination (Doppelte Motivation), so the song is a combination of divine inspiration and individual skill and knowledge of “facts.” And just as the implied antithesis of two possible choices in the rhetorical questions in dialogues invokes the explicit one, so a question posed by the singer at the beginning of a narrative section implies an appeal to the muses for conferral of narrative authority. In other words, topic-setting questions constitute a shorthand for formal invocations. Formally, questions are the most crucial element of an invocation as it pertains to the narrative. Even without other elements of a ritualistic invocation (imperative to the goddesses or gods, exposition of the feebleness and unreliability of human/singer’s memory and knowledge, and the consequent need for divine inspiration as a key requirement of a successful narration), questions remain as (no longer paratextual, but) strong rhetorical and narrative markers of a beginning of narration.

V. Topic-Setting Questions as Narrative Beginnings

In his analysis of *muthoi* in the *Iliad*, Martin points to the formal overlap between the speeches given by the characters in the form of a dialogue, and the narration. Not only are speeches marked as *muthos* more reflective of the song’s narrative sections, but the speeches by the song’s main hero Achilles in many ways resemble and mirror the narration. Martin identifies three basic categories of *muthoi* based on the content of the speeches: flyting, commands, and feats of memory (47). While the first two are exclusive to dialogues, feats of memory, on the other hand, echo the singer’s narration, not unlike how Achilles’ speeches echo those of the narrator. Flyting and commands are about the individuals involved in the verbal exchange, while feats of memory have a wider, communal significance. Therefore, the three categories can be

further divided into two—flyting and commands on the one hand, and feats of memory on the other—that correspond to the dialogue/narration binary. Rhetorical questions in dialogues establish the authority of what they are about to say, but their authority is based on social norms and the rhetorical effect of antithesis. Rhetorical questions in dialogue and narration draw their authority from different sources, but mirror each other in form and, more importantly, perform one important common function. The pattern emerges of rhetorical questions serving as openings for speeches that have the primary illocutionary force of asserting the authority of the speaker and, by extension, claiming that the utterance that follows is not a mere individual statement, but one that is proper by wider standards of the society or divine forces, or sometimes both. Whether they are genealogically related or not, the pattern itself makes topic-setting questions—and, by extension, all rhetorical questions—conducive to asserting authority of higher, or wider, power, which in turn is asserted for the purpose of opening up and of presenting a speech of the *muthos* kind.

But why use questions as markers of narrative beginnings? Heinrich Lausberg states that any topic (*materia*, which is also considered to be the initial phase in the *res*, the conceptual content of any speech) ought to be posited as a question, since different speakers (and especially orators—he is addressing primarily oratory rhetoric) will address the same topic from different points of view. Logical as it sounds by rhetoricians' standards, topic-setting questions in epic song appear to have more to do with the performative setting of the epic song where the characters exist solely in the diegetic world of the song, while the narrator is present in the real space and time embodied in the singer. Rhetorical questions in the dialogue and those by the narrator seem to follow distinct rules: the former are based on antithesis and mark the beginnings

of speeches as parts of agonistic dialogues; the latter mark the beginnings of distinctive narratives (distinctive both in terms of independent and as remarkable in that they stand out).

Both assert authority before they delve into a speech that is meant to be both powerful and forceful. Questions in dialogues do, for the most part, act as rhetorical questions in that they do not entice or require an answer, while the singer/narrator's questions do supply answers.

However, the singer's act of singing takes place in the real spacetime, and the contribution of the muses cannot be as neatly detached from that of the narrator. Instead of rhetorical questions that propel agonistic speeches, narration deploys topic-setting questions that propel a narrative.⁸³

In his seminal article on apostrophe, Jonathan Culler quotes Northrop Frye in stating that “[t]he lyric poet normally pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of nature, a Muse, a personal friend, a lover, a god, a personified abstraction, or a natural object. . . . The poet, so to speak turns his back on his listeners” (Frye, *Anatomy* 249-50, qtd. in Culler 60).

Culler takes the apostrophe as fundamental to, but also reflective of, the whole lyrical genre as a premise in order to claim that “if we would know something of the poetics of the lyric we should study apostrophe: its forms and meanings,” and then dives right into that very analysis. I don't have an authority whose quote would imply about questions what Frye's quote implies about apostrophe. But I do believe that I have, over the course of the first two chapters, demonstrated how questions frame epic song as a narrative genre. In an oral society, epic songs are not fiction: they are considered as (semi-)historical and/or (semi-)mythical. The distance from and the inability to directly access the full information about the events it presents is overcome by the singer's “special” abilities of access. The song he sings is an answer to the question he addresses

⁸³ This statement needs qualification. Martin notes that not every muthos is marked as such in the *Iliad*, but every mention of muthos does correspond to one. The same goes for topic-setting questions: not every new topic begins with a topic-setting question, but every topic-setting question does open up a new topic.

to the muses about a particular event or a series of events. Made possible and continuously reasserted by the singer's performative role, this position of a conduit between a divine source and a mortal audience also converges in the singer the role of asking the question with the role of pronouncing the answer. Combined with the way questions function in a social context where only those with authority can pose them, these two functions render questions, particularly rhetorical questions with their strong illocutionary forces, the focalizers of authority and, by extension, of reality.⁸⁴

As an information-seeking utterance, question is indeed the former (i.e. initial) one in the question-answer binary. However, the rhetorical function of a rhetorical question does not automatically place them at the beginning of anything really: since the main effect they fulfill is that of a particular illocutionary force (chiding, commending, etc.), they can appear at any point of a discourse. That, however, is not the case with topic-setting questions. Martin distinguishes *muthoi* from *epea*, but then within the category of *muthoi* identifies a special case of 'winged words' (*ἔπεα πτερόεντα*), which are a special, particularly emphatic and powerful type of *muthoi*. 'Winged words' emphasize the performance aspect of the utterance: they are not merely about content (the realm of *epea*), but about how that content is delivered, and that 'how' always has to do with public performance (an action in itself).⁸⁵ Questions too are a particularly emphatic type of performatives, with a category of rhetorical questions and within it a particular subcategory of topic-setting questions that emerge in the performative and narrative functions of epic song.

Performance in oral societies is a way of reaffirming communal values, but not all performances

⁸⁴ For the discussion of questions and authority as focalizers of realism, see First Chapter.

⁸⁵ 'Winged words' refers to highly marked speech in dialogues between people close to each other, in a public setting, and with the intention to make the interlocutor do something, corresponding to what John Searle referred to as authoritative directives (Martin 30-2).

are equal. Some are more about the individual (such as Martin's examples of flyting and commands), and some are more communal (feats of memory). Considering the communal significance of such feats of memory (and possibly, to some extent but not entirely, the vanity of the performer), they are marked with ritualistic invocation that included a question to a muse and the answer proffered. A question on its own can be seen as a shorthand for a fully developed invocation, one that marks a beginning point of a (sub-)narrative that needs to be delivered with some authority.

VI. Questions in Performance and Writing

Culler's essay begins with a statement that can be aptly applied to questions: "literary critics . . . turn aside from the apostrophes they encounter in poetry . . . repress[ing] them or rather . . . transform[ing] apostrophe into description. Whether this is because *writing*, in some innate *hostility to voice*, always seeks to deny or evade the vocative, it is a fact that one can read vast amounts of criticism without learning that poetry uses apostrophe repeatedly and intensely" (59, emphasis mine). An equivalent kind and degree of ignoring and repression can be said to be taking place with scholarship on questions in narrative fiction.⁸⁶ The reason might be that questions in general are seen as more of a grammatical than a rhetorical, expressive, or poetic issue, but a discomfort with vocative, as well as with a reliance on voice and presence of an interlocutor are also potential factors, albeit not necessarily the only ones. Culler himself notes that apostrophe, being a remnant of the tradition of oral societies where every utterance

⁸⁶ I primarily have in mind scholarship that takes questions as a focal point of analysis. But a general dismissal to include questions and questioning even as a secondary consideration is ubiquitous too; an example that comes to mind with regard to epic poetry is the strong assertion by some critics that questions in the Slavic antithesis are merely optional, in spite of their regularity and a consistent prominent position at the very beginning of the trope (Janićijević)—a claim that many aspects of this chapter demonstrate as untenable.

required an interlocutor, “is [generally considered] insignificant because conventional: an inherited element now devoid of significance” (60). What attention rhetorical questions have received has, to the best of my knowledge, not differentiated them in any significant way from other literary tropes, especially in terms of their narrative function.

Particularly interesting to note in Culler’s statement is the opposition between writing and the role of a physical voice, which bears on the performative aspect of questions in epic song. Culler claims that apostrophe is primarily a lyrical device that goes against narrative (66) even though the three main functions of apostrophe he identifies earlier in the article can be seen as all falling under the umbrella of invoking the muses, which in oral tradition is a device of narrative song. The first function is “mak[ing] the objects of the universe potentially responsive forces”; the second is rendering (typically inanimate) objects of address animate; the third is dramatizing the image of the speaker, usually as one with powers to speak to inanimate or dead objects and people, but also as one—a special one—whom forces of nature and supernatural beings speak to. The second function is unique to the apostrophe, but the first one, of an expectation—a forceful one that borders on demand—of a response is even more pronounced in questions.⁸⁷ The third function of dramatizing the speaker is particularly apt for the role of a singer as an intermediary between the muses and his audience (61-3). Culler’s fourth function—a special, lyrical kind of temporality that is really a non-temporality that results in an introverted and inside-looking point of view—is a decidedly modernist interpretation of the function of apostrophe, and his examples stretch between romanticism and modernism. While in this last function apostrophe—particularly apostrophe in writing—moves inward, questions—particularly questions in an oral

⁸⁷ The response is new information in the case of information-seeking questions, and action or some other kind of response in the case of rhetorical questions.

tradition—branch outward. When the narrator poses a question to an absent speaker, at least a part of that question diverges and moves in the direction of the audience. Questions too, like apostrophe, “mak[e their] point by troping not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself” (59). Question creates tension that requires resolution and, when delivered with the force of a live, trained voice of a singer, the demand for an answer is very immediate. Culler is careful to note that these functions that overlap with the oral-tradition provenance of poetry do not to reduce it to a “poetic convention and the calling of spirits as a relic of archaic beliefs” (62); nevertheless, the wall of the oral/written divide brings to bear on the function of both the apostrophe and the questions. But similarities are here more important than differences; they point to questions deriving their particular effect at least in part from their intrinsically dialogic nature and the consequent reliance on the vocative and an expectation of a response, as well as (if not more importantly) on their ritualistic function of evoking the muses in order to commence a narration. Early in his argument Culler identifies apostrophe as a residue of oral mentality of needing an interlocutor in any kind of speaking situation (including writing), but then he drops the issue of writing as soon as he brings it up. Looking at both apostrophe and questions through the lens of the oral/writing divide provides sufficient indications that writing not only changes to some degree the functions of apostrophe and questions but, more importantly, appears to hide some of the underlying reasons for those very functions that have their roots in the oral tradition.

The most apparent feature of rhetorical questions that significantly changes in the transition from performing to writing is the shift from a ritualistic to a narrative function, at least when used by the narrator. In a performative context, the implied narrator and the implied

audience are not abstractions that exist only in the mind of the real reader, but are embodied in the singer and his audience. The question is a part of a ritual that the performative context necessitates in order for the narration to be successful (i.e. felicitous, in Austin's terms). In their original context, topic-setting questions are part of invocations that serve a performative function of formal beginnings. Elizabeth Minchin compares invocations to contemporary paraperformative acts, such as the lowering of lights or the raising of a curtain in a theater (27 n9). Shalev notes that in Platonic dialogues it is not uncommon for explicit illocutionary expressions to mark new topics, i.e. beginnings of discrete sections in dialogues (551-2). And Parry and Lord's fieldwork on Serbocroatian epics demonstrates that in their original context of an oral society, the endings of epic songs often trail away, but their beginnings are always clearly marked. What remains of the formal paraperformative markings of the beginnings of narrative performatives are topic-setting questions.

Having said that, I cannot go as far as to claim a literary-historical genealogy of rhetorical questions or their subcategory of topic-setting questions. I see no definitive way to tell which particular aspects of questions in the *Iliad* belong to the oral tradition, and which have been influenced and shaped by the advent of writing. While the *Iliad* is a product of oral tradition, it does come to us in written form, the exact formation of which still remains clouded.⁸⁸ Adam Parry gives a cautious account of the limitations that we run into when we try to assess the origins of the Homeric epics and how much they owe to the oral tradition vs. the technique of written composition: "the *style* of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as the poems have come down to us, shows many features of a style originally created for oral composition. That the poems

⁸⁸ For a convincing evolutionary model of the morphing of Homeric epics from centuries-old oral tradition into written documents, see Nagy, *Homeric Questions*.

themselves, as we have them, were in fact composed in the process of improvising recitation has not been proved, and probably cannot now be proved” (1). He coins the phrase “the oral affinities of Homeric style” in reference to the combination of the oral-tradition elements and the possibility of the intervention of written composition (2). Martin concedes that we don’t know if the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are oral epics, then adds that it doesn’t really matter in the end. But there is little contestation among Homerists that the *Iliad* has deep roots in the oral tradition. The *Iliad* remains one of the earliest and most significant narratives situated at the transition from orality to writing. Even though my analysis remains limited to tracing the patterns we have access to through the available transcript of the *Iliad* rather than attesting changes as they historically evolved, the formal structure of the questions analyzed within their textual as well as performative contexts, offers insights into not only rhetorical but also narrative functions of questions—and by extension the narrative structure itself—that otherwise might remain hidden.

Third Chapter

Canonizing through Catechism in the Pauline Epistles

I. Rhetorical Questions in Authentic Pauline Letters

The epistles of Paul, coming after the four gospels and the Acts, constitute the third part of the New Testament. Unlike Jesus, who never put anything in writing, Paul communicates and evangelizes through writing. His letters were a way for him to stay in touch with the communities of the Jesus movement that were spread across the vast expanse of the Roman Empire (from Rome, across the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, Asia, and Galatia, all the way to Damascus and Jerusalem).⁸⁹ But more importantly, for Paul writing was a rhetorical tool as well as part of a narrative strategy. He is reported to have been physically unimpressive, and a lackluster speaker.⁹⁰ But in the oral society that recognized oratory as the main form of authoritative speech, he strengthened his still predominantly oral evangelical activity by incorporating and deploying the relatively nascent medium of writing. His oral gospel (the proclamation of ‘good news’ about Jesus) was consequently second to his writings. In an environment where there was no shortage of self-declared prophets and apostles (some of whom are mentioned in his letters), Paul uses writing to assert his authority as the apostle of Christ. This strategy not only proved effective in his dealings with the budding communities of the Jesus movement at the time, but inspired others to follow in his steps by writing pseudonymous letters

⁸⁹ John G. Gager articulates a cogent reason why Jesus-movement communities and the Jesus movement itself during the first century CE should not be referred to as Christian; instead he encourages the use of the more historically accurate term ‘Jesus movement’ (viii, 22-5).

⁹⁰ He even states it himself in 1 Corinthians (1:17, 2:1) and 2 Corinthians (11:6).

that also eventually became part of the New Testament. Most notably, Paul’s writings have left a mark on perception, interpretation, and practice of Christianity so strong that “[m]any historians have remarked that [nowadays] there is perhaps more of Paul than Jesus in official Christianity” (Harris 316), and that elevated his status to the point where he is now considered “*the* apostle, the supreme theological authority for every conceivable brand of Christianity” (Gager 37).⁹¹

The New Testament continues the tradition of asserting through rhetorical questions one’s authority to speak—in this case the authority to narrate the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον).⁹² Here I will look at the seven letters that are generally thought to be authentic, i.e. authored by Paul himself.⁹³ Of these seven, three are shorter (mere 25 verses in Philemon, 89 in 1 Thessalonians, and 104 in Philippians), and four are longer (149 verses in Galatians, 253 in 2 Corinthians, 433 in Romans, and 437 in 1 Corinthians).⁹⁴ In addition to their length, the two groups of letters differ in their

⁹¹ In the introduction *Reinventing Paul*, Gager claims that much of the scholarly work done until the late twentieth century suffers from misinterpretations of Pauline letters (3-19). For some implications of the impact that scholarship on oral tradition has had on the reading of Paul, see Tsang 205-7. In the past few decades, two scholarly initiatives arose to reinterpret Pauline epistles. One began with the publication of E. P. Sanders’s 1977 book, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, that prompted the reexamination of “old-school” assumptions of the anti-Jewishness of Pauline letters. The other is the one by oral-traditionalists, who attempt to reread Pauline epistles (as well as the Hebrew Bible and the rest of the New Testament) in the context of oral societies that they morphed within. Both contributed greatly to a clearer vision of the Pauline letters and the two bibles, and are succinctly characterized in a statement by Gerd Theissen on the hermeneutics of the bible: “In various ways a demand has been expressed not only that the meaning of what has been transmitted be developed, but that this also be confronted with its own empirical realities—in other words, that the conflict between the past’s interpretation of itself and a critical analysis of that interpretation be made clear. Not least of all it is hoped that we might thereby achieve a greater freedom from the self-interpretations of the present” (145).

⁹² One representative example from the gospels can be seen in Mark 11:27-33, Jesus’ authority is for the first time explicitly questioned by the “chief priests, scribes, and elders” during his second visit to the Temple. He responds to them with a question and ultimately wins the argument. This minimalistic battle of questions (one question each) thus asserts his narrative authority.

⁹³ While debates on the authorship of Pauline letters continue, the consensus among scholars remains that only seven of the thirteen letters that are now part of the New Testament were authored by Paul himself: 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, Philemon, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans.

⁹⁴ Divisions into chapters and verses, and for that matter words (including punctuation) are later editorial interpolations; Paul’s letters were originally most likely written in *scriptio continua*.

general tenor that reflects Paul's attitude toward the communities he addresses, as well as in the number of rhetorical questions deployed in the texts. The former three are warm and friendly, as well as conciliatory (Philemon), encouraging and filled with praise (1 Thessalonians), and hymnal and expressing gratitude (Philippians); the latter four are passionate, exhortatory, even on the verge of being confrontational.⁹⁵ The former three contain considerably few if any rhetorical questions: none in Philemon, one in Philippians, and two in 1 Thessalonians; while the latter four contain both a higher number and a higher frequency: 20 in Galatians, 26 in 2 Corinthians, 83 in Romans, and 104 in 1 Corinthians.

From the point of authority, the distribution of rhetorical questions matches the historical context of the texts. Philemon stands out from other Pauline letters. It is the only one addressed not to a congregation, but to an individual. However, even though the letter addresses the reader in the first-person singular, it makes it clear at the beginning that it ought to be read not only to the household head himself, but “to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church [assembly, ἐκκλησία] in your house” as well (1:2).⁹⁶ Addressing Philemon as his “partner” (κοινωνός, 1:17), Paul does not make any overt assertions of his authority over Philemon, likely because the request he is issuing is part an order and part asking for a favor, but also out of respect for Philemon's position and authority in the community that is having the letter read to them. Similarly, in his letters to the Christian communities of Thessalonica and Philippi, Paul is addressing congregations who have accepted him as a spiritual leader, and with

⁹⁵ Both 1 Thessalonians and Philippians contain brief attacks, respectively on Jews (2:14-16) and proponents of circumcision (3:1-20); but rather than contributing to the general tone of the two letters, these two sections stand out. As such they have attracted scholarly attention, with subsequent claims that the former might be a later interpolation, and the latter an independently written declaration.

⁹⁶ All quotes from the New Testament are from the New Revised Standard Version as published in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

whom he has a generally cordial and trusting relation (he mentions toward the end of his letter that Philippi was originally the only of the Christian communities he mentored that he accepted financial assistance from; 4:15). As the two communities do not question his apostolic authority, he needs neither to assert nor to reassert it; consequently he addresses them as himself a member of the congregation, speaking as a brother among and to brothers and sisters, using virtually no questions.

Unlike the brotherly warmth and affection that infuses the embracing tone of the former three letters, the tenor of the latter four is assertive and at points antagonistic.⁹⁷ All four longer letters contain explicit defenses of Paul's claim to the status of apostle: Galatians and Corinthians are openly questioning his teaching and his apostolic authority, and in Romans he is addressing an audience that he has not met in person, thus making it vital for him to first to establish his authority before laying out the gospel. In Galatians, Paul has heard that the members of the Jesus-movement there "are quickly deserting the one who called [them] in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel" (1:6). He fills the first two of the total of six chapters with a defense of his authority as the apostle of Christ, drawing on both the human authorities of the three 'pillars,' James, Cephas (Peter), and John, who "recognized the grace that had been given to [Paul]" (2:9), and on divine authority from which he "received [the gospel] through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:12), before he launches into chastising "foolish" (ἀνόητοι) Galatians for giving credence to competing gospels.⁹⁸ In Corinthians, Paul is writing to what Harris calls a "quarrelsome group" of individuals with divisions (σχίσματα) and factions

⁹⁷ However, rebuke and confrontation in letters of antiquity do not necessarily imply adversarial relation; on the contrary, they are common signs of honest friendship when directed from the more authoritative of the correspondents (Stowers, *Letter-writing* 39).

⁹⁸ George A. Kennedy finds that the function of not only the first two chapters, but the whole narrative of Galatians, is "to establish Paul's ethos and thus to support his claim of the truth of his Gospel" (145).

(αἰρέσεις) among them, espousing a confrontational attitude as they display enmity among themselves; consequently the first issue Paul addresses in his response is the need for Corinthians to come together (συνέρχονται) in unity within the community (1 Corinthians 1:10-1). As they turn to Paul with questions as to their quandaries and contentions, they at the same time channel their contentious mindset into questioning his authority to answer them and “to dictate their behavior” by comparing him to other self-professed sources of wisdom (Harris 340). The divisions within the Corinthian Christian community have taken the form of multiple alliances with different spiritual authorities, most notably Paul and Apollos (1:11-2), giving Paul another opportunity to affirm the superiority of his gospel and defend his own authority. The Second Corinthians comes after Paul had fallen out with his congregation due to the work of competing self-proclaimed apostles (whom he sarcastically calls “super-apostles,” ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι) and then reconciled again, thus providing him with a renewed opportunity to reassert his credentials. Finally, in Romans, Paul addresses an audience he has never met. He is addressing a small community within a metropolis that nourished religious freedom and was consequently a home to numerous religions and cults, which likely provided for a tougher audience that needed stronger arguments to counter competing claims readily available by other religions that thrived in close mutual proximity within the capital of Rome. There are no specific problems that the congregation is seeking his advice on, and he subsequently writes the most comprehensive of his letters that retains the epistolary structure while coming close to a treatise on the Jesus movement in terms of its form. As with the previous three longer letters, he begins by establishing his authority.

Galatians, First and Second Corinthians, and Romans display the three distinct uses of rhetorical questions—authority assertion, secondary illocutionary force(s) (in addition to the primary force of projecting authority), and topic setting—but also a new one: a catechetical one, which exists not on its own, but as a result of the conflation of the previous three in the context of letter-writing. In Galatians, the first two rhetorical questions appear in 1:10: “Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people?” Paul answers the second question (“If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ”), and then goes on to present his apostolic credentials, including his relation to god (thus answering his first question). The two questions set the topic for the long section that takes up the bulk of the first two chapters. Most of the remaining questions in the letter similarly fall into the category of topic-setting questions—e.g. “Why then the law?” followed by an answer (3:19-20) or “Is the law then opposed to the promises of God?” also followed by an answer (3:21-2). Then there are questions that typically contain at least two illocutionary forces, one of which is Paul’s assertion of his authority: e.g. by asking “Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?” from a position of authority, Paul reproaches the Galatians for losing faith in him, even turning against him for unjust reason (4:16).⁹⁹ However, the most impactful questions are the ones that come in clusters. The highest frequency of questions in Galatians comes at the beginning of chapter 3. After defending his position as a true apostle, Paul now switches the topic to his flock:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes

that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! [2] The only thing I want to

⁹⁹ For an exhaustive list of illocutionary forces (also referred to as ‘functions’) of the rhetorical questions in Pauline epistles, as well as possible English translations and commentaries, see Burquest and Christian (for Galatians and 1 Corinthians), Moore (for 2 Corinthians), and Burquest (for Romans). Later scholarship, however, brings some of these interpretations into question (for a recent example, see Gager). Insightful comparanda on the use of rhetorical questions in foundational religious texts are Najla Abdul-Aziz Al-Fadda’s study of rhetorical questions in Hadith, and Kenneth M. Craig Jr.’s monograph on interrogatives in the Hebrew Bible.

learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? [3] Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? [4] Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing. [5] Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? (3:1-5)

This string of questions comports with the use of rhetorical questions as a sign of authority, combined with the illocutionary force of chastising the Galatians. But the questions do not stand on their own—they are followed by elaboration, and thus can be taken as topic-setting questions as well.

This combination of multiple functions of rhetorical questions is more stark and effective in 1 Corinthians, where the highest frequency of questions is not in the section about the congregation, but in chapter 9 where Paul initiates another defense of his apostolic authority.¹⁰⁰ He begins with a barrage of questions, posing no fewer than fourteen rhetorical questions within the first ten verses.

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? [2] If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

[3] This is my defense to those who would examine me. [4] Do we not have the right to our food and drink? [5] Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the

¹⁰⁰ In contrast to 1 Corinthians, the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians (10-13) contain a somewhat similar defense of his apostolic authority, but combined with a ferocious attack on the competing self-proclaimed apostles (the ‘super-apostles’).

Lord and Cephas? [6] Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? [7] Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk?

[8] Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same?

[9] For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? [10] Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? (9:1-10)

In these clusters of what appear to be topic-setting questions, Paul does two things. He creates composite topic-setting questions, strengthening the rhetorical effect of the topic they announce and that he is about to present, similar to the character of Ibrahim Đulić in I.4 of the First Chapter above. But then he also augments the existing three functions that each rhetorical question purports with the function of information-seeking questions—what we think of as the very basic function of questions in general—to seek new information. When he begins with a simple question, “Am I not free?” he is asserting his authority to speak or/and write to the congregation, and implying the illocutionary force of making a statement/assertion. He is also setting a topic: the rhetorical effect does not end with the implied answer ‘yes,’ prompting Paul to develop the topic.¹⁰¹ He obliges, first with additional questions and ultimately with actual answers which at times become rather extensive, thus matching the promise created by question clusters. At first sight, these questions might not look any different from topic-setting questions.

¹⁰¹ As John Beekman points out, the presence of οὐ or μή in yes/no questions implies the answer even if the context does not (15-8). However, there is a number of exceptions to this rule in Pauline letters as well as in other parts of the New Testament. Although Beekman attempts to account for these exceptions, I do not find his explanation convincing as it does not appear to be consistent with the cases where the presence of οὐ or μή does follow the general rule.

However, Paul's letters are responses to actual inquiries addressed to him by congregations. Some of the questions he poses are reiterations of questions posed to him, and some are elaborations of those questions (and thus closer to topic-setting questions because of the intervening action of the narrator). While these questions are technically rhetorical ones since they end up being answered by the speaker, on the narrative level, unlike topic-setting questions in story-telling narratives, they perform the information-seeking function—they are the equivalent of a lecturer repeating or paraphrasing (and, along the way, possibly altering or developing) a question from the audience.¹⁰² Even though questions and answers are being voiced by the narrator, the context makes it clear that the questions are not (entirely) the narrator's.

While Galatians as well as First and Second Corinthians can be seen as written versions of actual dialogues (the congregation asking questions in their letter, and Paul responding to them in his), and Paul's rhetorical questions as an appropriation of actual information-seeking questions posed by the congregation, in Romans Paul's questions become self-generated, fully rhetorical ones. There are no information-seeking questions posed to him through correspondence; all questions are his own. To be sure, he anticipates questions that Romans might potentially ask of him, but that can be said of any piece of writing with an implied readership.

The first questions in Romans appear at the beginning of chapter 2, when Paul's narrative shifts to the second person:

¹⁰² With no letters addressed to Paul surviving, it is difficult to definitively categorize each question. But the important thing is that the context makes it clear that the questions in the text are a mixture of the three categories stated above.

Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? [4] Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (2:3-4)

The questions here are similar to those that appear in dialogue of the *Iliad*: they imply an antithesis, a choice between two and only two options. But the full power of his rhetoric manifests itself at the beginning of chapter 3:

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? [2] Much, in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. [3] What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? [4] By no means! Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true, as it is written,

“So that you may be justified in your words,
and prevail in your judging.”

[5] But if our injustice serves to confirm the justice of God, what should we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) [6] By no means! For then how could God judge the world? (3:1-6)

Paul continues with the questions, following them with another longer quote from the Psalms, before he begins to answer the questions in more detail by developing what is at the same time the exegesis of the Psalms (and Jewish law in general) and his gospel.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ At the time, there existed no definitive version of the Hebrew Bible. For a definition and summary of Jewish law as a “religious-social-political-legal constitution of the Jewish people” in Paul’s time, see Stowers, *Rereading*, 34-6.

Paul's letters are manuals for thought and action: how an individual ought to think and act in order to receive God's grace and be judged favorably. In the case of the oral epic deontic statements are at the same time heuristic: they guide rather than direct, and they place some of the authority to do the right thing on the shoulders of the interlocutor. But in the epic, the right thing to do in any given context is already known—it is determined by custom and tradition, and there is no need to expound on it. In Paul's letters, however, deontic statements present new information. The context and/or the conundrum that they address is one that the interlocutors are familiar with, and may have incited or experienced themselves; but the right course of action in the given context is up for debate, and an authoritative determination is sought out. Paul thus combines the actual questions asked by his interlocutors (in Galatians and Corinthians) or the ones he anticipates his audience is likely to be interested in and consequently ask (in Romans) and turns them into rhetorical questions of his own, with topic-setting, authority-asserting force that they carry with them.

However, the new information Paul presents is not equivalent to what and how a storyteller would recount a story unknown to the audience. If the main type of rhetorical questions in South Slavic epic was an authority-asserting one by characters, and in Homer additionally the topic-setting one by the narrator, in the Pauline letters of the New Testament, the dominant type of question is one that asks: "Then what?" (τί οὖν);¹⁰⁴ or, to be more specific: "Based on the available/given information that we know and/or have in writing, how should one think and act?" As a sub-type of topic-setting questions, this question does not ask for more information about the topic, which is what a story is, but assumes that there is one correct answer to the question—

¹⁰⁴ Glyn Griffiths enumerates all instances of the "What then?" questions in Romans only (4:1, 6:1, 6:15, 7:7, 8:31, 9:14, 9:30, 11:7), but does not analyze them beyond identifying them as a linking device and finding solutions for his immediate concern of translating them accurately into the language of Kadiweu.

i.e. one and only one correct course of action—and asks for it to be revealed. The answer is expected to be a combination of what an answer to a deontic question would be (an ‘ought to’ statement) and the answer to a topic-setting question (an elaboration). Even though the “Now what?” question is not the most frequent one, it is what most of the questions in the seven of Paul’s letters lead to. The questions do not stand on their own: they are always answered by the narrator, and together form a unit. The basic structure of the question-and-answer pattern can be broken down into three steps: (a) topic-setting, (b) request for elaboration of the topic, and (c) specific verdict on how one ought to think and act based on the given information. These rhetorical questions are posed and answers articulated by someone who assumes the authority of and positions himself as an interpreter. Paul uses questions in the manner of South Slavic epic, to both express and reassert his position as an authoritative speaker. And like the Homeric singer, he draws his authority from a divine source. Part of that authority comes from his status as the self-proclaimed apostle of Jesus. The other part he derives from a commonly accepted source of divine authority: in this case the written source of the Jewish law. The law is the Urtext on which he builds his argument. He presents himself as an interpreter of the information available: how should one understand the scripture, and how should one think according to it and act based on it? He provides the answers to these questions the final version of which he articulates himself.

II. The Role of Writing

II.1. Writing as a Medium of Authority

Paul derives his authority from two sources. One is the apostolic status that he established for himself by claiming to have witnessed a revelation of Jesus Christ and that he continued to (re)build with his congregants by spreading the gospel. Kennedy illustrates this when he claims that “[t]he whole labored argument [in chapters 3 and 4 of Galatians] essentially rests not on the scriptural passages cited nor on the logical acceptance of Paul’s premises by his opponents . . . but on the Galatians’ acceptance of his authority in making these proclamations and their experience of Paul’s teachings” (149). However, although the choice of passages from the scripture makes them subjective, the quotes were seen as objective by the audience to whom the passages were familiar and who saw the scripture as authoritative (14). Thus Jewish scripture too played an important role authority-wise; indeed, I would argue that the texts he quotes—and the way he quotes them—were Paul’s second source of apostolic authority. Very few people in turn-of-the century Roman Empire owned copies of the Hebrew Bible; if they did, they likely owned only pericopes; and even those fragments people did not read the way we do now, but used them as a reference to refresh their memory of the contents that they were already familiar with and could reproduce orally. As was the case with other pieces of writing, the law was not read silently in private, but was commonly the object of public readings. In spite of this, as Martin S. Jaffee points out, “[i]n the literary culture under formation in the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple, the book—especially the portions ascribed to Moses or his prophetic heirs—was equated increasingly with its written version rather than with the event of its interpretive performance” (19). But books, including the ones of the Jewish law, weren’t

merely written accounts: “inscribed objects in general, and books in particular, commonly functioned as ritual objects whose iconic significance transcended that of the information they preserved” with the effect that “the sacral aura . . . commonly surrounded them” (16).

Consequently, books were not only sources of information, but the medium of the conferral of authority. Most people still received what “was written” aurally: “the characteristic organs of the literary life were the mouth and the ear, and its main textual reservoir was the memory” (18).¹⁰⁵ But writing guaranteed the accuracy, importance, or significance of the content of what “was written.” Writing in itself was not necessarily authoritative—writing was not a *sine qua non* for the education of young nobles, and most writing was done by scribes, many of whom were slaves. It was more a catalyst than a source of authority. It is only when combined with a source of authority—divine or that of a mentor or a social superior—that writing added considerable gravitas.

In an oral epic tradition, singers serve as silent interpreters of the content of the songs: their performance is indeed vocal, but the singers always claim to merely transmit the tradition, and any individual interpolations remain so-to-speak silent, or at least not overtly claimed. In a chirographic tradition, the silent interpreters of the content of the scrolls are the scribes: any intentional changes they make to the text become part of the text. Both the singers and the scribes make their contributions without acknowledging their authority. Paul, on the other hand, identifies himself as the author of the text. For a letter, that might be a perfectly ordinary practice. But for a record of a gospel, the overt statement of authorship rises to a new level of

¹⁰⁵ Jaffee's argument revolves around the claim that “[a]n act of oral delivery . . . was posited not only as the origin of a book, but as the guarantee of its authenticity” (26). In other words, in the context of the Second Temple Jewish law, the conferral of authority went the other way too, from the oral to the literary. The two directions—the written lending authority to the oral and vice versa—do not appear mutually exclusive; the common denominator is the context of performance, whose ceremonial and ritualistic nature imbues both the oral and the written with the aura of authority.

significance. Formally and permanently attaching his name to a written record of the gospel is the last step of an authority-building process. In addition to reasserting his own authority, he reasserts the authority of a written source of the bible. And he uses it to build his own written document, with the authority writing carries with it. Consequently, the use of writing as a medium gave Paul not only a way around his predicament with public oratory, but conversely related the power of his gospel to the level of a “written word” performed in a ritualistic setting.

In epic poetry, and in oral tradition in general, the medium of authority (i.e. the medium through which the ‘truth’ is conveyed) is a human: the singer. With the Jewish scripture, the authority is transmitted through writing. And just as the singers appropriate the divine authority by means of invocations, so the prophets, apostles, and eventually scholars now appropriate the authority of the written knowledge by positing themselves as interpreters. Paul engages this double authority: the authority of the speaker as anointed (the religious equivalent of inspired) is a vestige of oral tradition, while the reliance on written sources is a new addition that comes with the written culture. Then he goes one step further: in addition to proclaiming his apostolic authority through the revelation of Jesus Christ, and positing himself as an interpreter of the authoritative written word, he also establishes himself as a new type of authority—a writer of the new written word.

II.2. Performative Context: Written Composition, Oral Delivery, Shifting Voice

Just as it is important to understand the context of historical Paul (e.g. that he was an apostle of the Jesus movement that attempted to spread the word of God to the Gentiles, rather than to establish a radically new religion, let alone an anti-Jewish one), so it is important to read

Paul's rhetoric in light of the historical and performative context when it was written down, i.e. to read it philologically. In Paul's day writing as well as reading was a slow affair: texts in Greek were written in *scriptio continua*, with no punctuation or passage divisions. Reading such texts could not have been smooth or fast—it was a process very different from what the word conveys today, “the activity of declaiming a text before an audience in a social performance approaching the gravity of ceremonial ritual,” and thus “connected to ritualized, public ceremonies rather than private study” (Jaffee 17). The interplay of the oral and the written was not merely a matter of transition where the former fades away and the latter is being gradually phased in: as they interacted, the two exerted a mutual impact. As Jaffee notes in his book on the intersection of oral and writing with regard to the Torah, “the act of writing introduces its own changes into the character of the oral text. Not only does it wrest the text from its social matrix of performance, fixing a living and constantly shifting text into a much less malleable form[, but even] more important[ly] it changes the nature of the oral tradition that continues to surround and mediate the written text to its audience” (5).¹⁰⁶ But the oral affected the written, primarily in its rhetoric: rhetorical devices that writers used and that the listening audience was familiar with and responsive to were primarily oral (rhetoric as a discipline is, after all, primarily if not solely about oral delivery). Without the help of punctuation, spaces, spatial arrangements, divisions into paragraphs or chapters, written text was treated as a tool for oratory performance, be it a memory device, or a tool of transferring texts over large distances. To do this, rhetoricians trained their students to “impose the interpretive conventions of formal oral speech upon the written texts” (Stowers, *Rereading* 18).

¹⁰⁶ For a summary of the impact of literacy on the modes of communication and thinking, as well as its limitations, in the turn-of-the-millennium Roman empire, see Jaffee 15-27.

Kennedy notes that, even though letter-writing was common from the early days of writing (one of the most famous orators, Isocrates, preferred the written word as early as the fifth century BCE), as a formal genre of communication it remained relatively inconsequential in comparison to oratory well into the Common Era. One indication of this is the fact that rhetorical manuals, common as they were from the time of Isocrates, gave no attention to epistolary technique until Demetrius' *On Style* that was written 223-5 (Kennedy 86). The lack of formal training combined with the unregulated distinction between the oral and the written and particularly in the writing of letters might have been the reason that letters in antiquity still deployed many of the oral rhetorical devices that would clearly convey the meaning of the text to the audience only if properly performed by the reader. Gager identifies one such prominent rhetorical device: the shifting voice of the narrator or, in Stower's terms, speech-in-character (προσωποποιία): when the narrator shifts to a different voice (that of the implied interlocutor, or a character, often not clearly defined, but usually with an implied character that is in some way either opposed to or noticeably different from the narrator). Pauline letters deploy speech-in-character, but it remains a challenge to later readers to determine (a) where they begin and where they end, as well as (b) who the speaker is in each instance (70-5). Thus it becomes the challenge to identify the speaker of some of the rhetorical questions, and consequently to determine the authority dynamic of the relevant sections of the text.

II.3. The Educational Role of Letter-writing and Diatribe

Paul's letters are the oldest examples of a flourishing trend that characterized the Jesus-movement and early Christianity. In his book on letter writing in Greco-Roman antiquity,

Stowers goes as far as to call early Christianity a “movement of letter writers,” the evidence of which can be found in “more than nine thousand letters written by Christians in antiquity” that survive to this day (*Letter-writing* 15). Stowers establishes that “[m]ost types of letters used in the Greco-Roman world were associated with the *epideictic* division of rhetoric” (27). In antiquity, it was “through honor that a person’s rightful place in society was defined,” and that the sense of self-worth and the interaction with the rest of the society depended on. The acts of bestowing praise or assigning blame, especially in public, were of great importance to the three social institutions that Stowers identifies as central to the Greco-Roman culture: hierarchical relations such as client-patron ones, relationships between equals such as friendships, and the relationships within households, which combined the characteristics of the first two. Thus letters as a genre of epideictic rhetoric were not limited to what is by modern standards considered personal communication, but exerted a wider social impact (27). One of the more prominent uses of letters was broadly speaking educational: as “exhortations to the philosophical life” in order to “affect the habits and dispositions of the reader(s) according to a certain model of what it means to be human.” Since the purpose of the writers was not merely to inform, but to mentor, Stowers aptly terms these kinds of letters “conversion literature”—a function of letters (the illocutionary force of the genre) that over centuries created and conveyed a powerful aura of pedagogy, instruction, and exhortation (37-9). For centuries before Paul, starting with the disciples of Socrates, the Greco-Roman world cherished a tradition of letter-writing. And when Stowers took up that tradition in his study with a premise that “[i]t is more helpful to think of letters in terms of the actions that people performed by means of them” (15), he is really deciding

to approach the whole genre as a performative, a speech act of “spiritual development by means of epistolary paraenesis” (39-40).

Paul’s epistles are thus an extension of a long tradition of letter-writing for what were then seen as philosophical reasons, but today would more accurately be interpreted as educational (learning and personal enlightenment combined). As David M. Carr demonstrates in his book on the literary origins of scripture and literature, across the Mediterranean civilizations, literacy and education were closely interconnected, even though writing had not originally emerged as an educational tool. The oldest writing system in the region surrounding the Mediterranean, Mesopotamian cuneiform, emerged first as tools of trade, and then was used for religious purposes, before its use spread to what we now consider literature and education, with letter-writing eventually establishing itself as one of the dominant educational literary genres.¹⁰⁷ In parallel to it, an orally based tradition made just as strong an impact on the style of Pauline letters as letter-writing did: philosophical diatribe (διατριβή).¹⁰⁸ Stowers defines it as “the public discourse which aimed at the philosophical conversion of the common man on the street” (*Diatribes* 75). Structurally, a diatribe takes the form of a fictional dialogue, with the narrator in the role of a teacher who “employed the ‘Socratic’ method of censure and protreptic” (76). The diatribe establishes an authority dynamic where “the imaginary interlocutor . . . is not an opponent but a student or fellow discussion partner. The mode of discourse is not polemic, where one tries to do damage to an opponent and his credibility, but rather indictment (ἔλεγχος), where a person exposes error in order to lead someone to the

¹⁰⁷ The only other writing system in the region that most likely evolved *ex nihilo* is Egyptian hieroglyphs. However, unlike cuneiform, there is virtually no evidence of the early stages of their development. For the history of both see Senner 27-76.

¹⁰⁸ For examples of diatribe in Greco-Roman tradition, see Stowers, *Diatribes* 48-78. For the history of scholarship on diatribe, see 7-47.

truth” (117). By creating and manipulating the imaginary surrogate of his interlocutor, the author harnesses (potential) divergent opinions of his empirical interlocutors in order “to transform the students, to point out error and to cure it” rather than to merely convey information; deploying diatribe (a medium of rebuke) in the form of letters (a genre of friendship and mentorship) renders it more conducive to reception and acceptance (76, 71).¹⁰⁹ Stowers looks at a number of orators and philosophers who have deployed diatribe, including Seneca, the contemporary of Paul. The objections Seneca includes in his letters display a consistent use of quotation (or its equivalent) and question. The quote—real or imagined—is most frequently that of the interlocutor, usually introduced with ‘inquis.’ The subsequent questions ask about how to respond to the situation introduced by the quote; in other words, the question is often of the “What then?” type (sometimes literally so) (72-5). This structure changes in Paul’s letters with regard to the sources of information or opinion expressed in the imaginary dialogue. While the quotations and the subsequent questions in Seneca’s letters are between the narrator and the interlocutor, in Paul’s letters the quotations come from the third source: the Jewish scripture. Diatribe is a two-way polemic, with the interlocutor (typically the student) on the one side, and the narrator (typically the teacher, with all the inherent authority that the position carries with it) on the other. But Paul’s letters place the interlocutors in the position of challengers not only to the authority of the narrator and the author of the letter, but to the scripture too, which the writer aligns himself with by positing himself as its interpreter.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Neil Elliott’s comparison with drama: “Diatribe resembles drama in that it portrays characters—really only embodiments of attitudes or emotions, roles—that the audience is invited to ‘try on’. In doing so, diatribe implicitly imposes a set of values and premises. By controlling the ‘objections’ that an imaginary interlocutor raises, the speaker can manipulate the range of possibilities perceived by the audience, and thus set the bounds for the ensuing argument” (124-5).

Within the traditions of educational epistolary and philosophical diatribe, Paul initiated a trend of interpreting the faith and settling theological issues in epistolary form. That new tradition relies on quoting authoritative written sources and interpreting them in epistolary form that, as Stowers noted, gradually transformed from hortatory in Paul's time to judicial and deliberative rhetoric in the fourth and fifth centuries CE (*Letter-writing* 43). By harnessing the functions and power of both sides of imaginary dialogues, the questions constitute a catechetic form that not only reminds and guides (as in the South Slavic epic), not only announces the topic and narrows down the choices (as they do in Homer), but propels the inherent authority of questions to make a dominant and unchangeable interpretation the one and only truth. If the interrogator of authority-asserting questions is a social senior, and the poser of topic-setting questions a divinely inspired story-teller, the author of a fictional dialogic form that is put in writing, one who provides both the questions and the answers, is a teacher and a mentor. And when the topic of that fictional dialogue is the interpretation of the scripture, the mentor becomes a spiritual leader: a sage and a master. Paul is thus both an extension of a centuries-old tradition of educational letter-writing, and the first one (as far as the current evidence supports) in the new tradition of relying in letter-writing on authoritative written sources to establish his argument and authority.

II.4. Shifting Authority in the Narrative of a Fictional Dialogue

In the epic song, both the narrator and the characters (the ones with clout) speak from a position of authority. The only exceptions are challenges to the authority that the speaker could justify and validate by custom and social mores. In his epistolary narratives, Paul too deploys

multiple voices. One of them belongs to the writer; the others are for the most part not ascribed to any particular name, but they can be taken to be spoken by imaginary characters. However, unlike the characters in epic songs who are all imaginary even when they are considered to be historical or pseudo-historical figures, characters in Pauline epistles are surrogates for the audience: actual congregants in the case of Corinthians and Galatians (empirical audience), and assumed congregants in the case of Romans (implied audience). Consequently, Paul infuses into his rhetorical questions a quality that Homeric invocations and topic-questions do not possess. Invocations ask questions that the singer himself then answers (the poetic conceit is that the muses will answer them using singer as their medium). The question is one that the audience is interested in, but it is the question that the singer poses on his own behalf, as the mouthpiece of tradition. Paul, however, does not ask a question that he is interested in—he overtly articulates a question that is on his audience’s mind or that they have articulated in their correspondence to him. By repeating aloud the question from his audience, Paul articulates the doubts and queries from his community. These questions reflect the extant multiplicity of opinions, and Paul uses them to offer only one answer. In narratological terms, if the singer of Homeric epic takes on the role of the implied narrator, Paul, at the point where he posits the rhetorical questions, assumes the role of a second-person narrator. “These are things that you are wondering and/or asking of yourselves and myself,” he seems to imply as he poses the questions. But the answer is one—the narrator’s logic trumps the multiplicity of implied answers that come from different questions into a single, right, ‘true’ answer. This is not mere Socratic dialogue—this is fictionalized Socratic dialogue, with the narrator not only conveying both sides, but in full control of what each side is saying.

Furthermore, by asking questions in speech-in-character, Paul appropriates the tradition of an authority-challenging speaker of lesser authority. He poses questions that either ask for clarification or that challenge his gospel. One of the main effects of this technique is, of course, that he assumes control over the challenges to his own pronouncements. But by leaving his imaginary interlocutor unnamed—one who can equally be a student or an authority figure such as a Jewish teacher—Paul turns on their heads both the Socratic dialogue (where the authority figure asks the questions) and the authority-challenging non-authoritative figure from the oral tradition.¹¹⁰ As a newcomer to the religious tradition, Paul is the one doing the challenging; yet in his fictional dialogue, he has a (fictional) authority figure challenge him, and he has the last word. The challenge-by-questions takes place only on the rhetorical level; on the level of the narrative, questions serve as topic-setting questions for Paul's interpretation.

III. The Narrative Function of Rhetorical Questions in Pauline Letters

Three terms that characterize Paul's epistles are: inclusive, dominant, and radical.¹¹¹

Unlike Jesus who spoke Aramaic, Paul wrote in the lingua franca of the Roman Empire: Greek, and particularly the vernacular version of it, the *koine* (κοινή; common, everyday dialect).¹¹² The universality (catholicism) of his gospel is present in his language on a different level too: "And

¹¹⁰ Paul's use of ambiguous fictional interlocutor is similar to that of Seneca, who "has skillfully created the same type of situation found in the diatribe where the philosopher moves back and forth between contact with his audience and the interlocutor, producing a calculated ambiguity about precisely who is being responded to or addressed" (Stowers, *Diatribes* 75).

¹¹¹ I have extracted these three terms from Stephen L. Harris, even though he does not explicitly single them out to characterize the Jesus movement. While I agree with Werner H. Kelber that "[i]t is easier to explain . . . what the early Jesus tradition is not, and 'harder to find a suitable language to describe what it is'" (Kelber paraphrasing and quoting David Parker in Kelber 122), these three terms appear particularly apt in the context of the discussion on rhetorical and narrative functions of rhetorical questions.

¹¹² Romans is an example of Paul's explicit awareness of his audience not speaking Aramaic: when he uses an Aramaic word (e.g. *abba*, father), he immediately translates it into Greek (8:15 and passim). For how common, wide-spread, or unified *koine* was, see Hogeterp.

we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting (συγκρίνοντες) spiritual things to those who are spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:13). The very term συγκρίνω has a double meaning: mainly ‘to interpret,’ but also ‘to combine.’ And Paul interprets both the Jewish law and the Jewish faith on the one hand, and the gospel of Jesus Christ on the other, with a mission of bringing together not only the faith but the faithful too, Jewish and Gentile both—a premise of the Jesus movement that eventually paved its way to becoming a global, if not entirely universal, religion. Within this inclusive movement and ultimately world religion, Paul continues to be a dominant figure. His letters (authentic and pseudonymous ones) constitute the third section of the New Testament, making Paul second only to Jesus in his impact on the Jesus movement and, later, on Christian thought.¹¹³ He was radical in his claims, both as a former Pharisee in his approach to the Jewish tenets of the covenant with god, and as a promoter of the new religion, claiming that Jesus Christ “introduced a radically different relationship between God and all humanity” (Harris 316). While more recent scholarship questions the radicalism of his gospel in the context of Judaism,¹¹⁴ Paul also radically opposed the existing political order and the social assumptions behind it, offering an alternative to covenantal nomism.¹¹⁵ “Paul set his gospel of Christ and the new communities he catalyzed in opposition to the Roman imperial order: the whole system of hierarchical values,

¹¹³ The oldest surviving document of Christian faith, and consequently the oldest text in the New Testament, is Paul’s first letter to Thessalonians.

¹¹⁴ For an exhaustive, and in many ways revolutionary for biblical studies, comparative study of Palestinian Judaism and Pauline gospel, see Sanders. By identifying commonalities and differences between the two (rather than relying primarily on fragmental Pauline writings to make judgments about the Jewish law), Sanders provides a solid foundation for identifying Paul’s theology and how it both builds on and departs from the Jewish religion. Sanders demonstrates that Pauline gospel is not as sharply opposed to the Jewish religion as was previously thought (his conclusions are often summarized with a quote from his book: “*this is what Paul finds wrong with Judaism: it is not Christianity*”; 552). For a more recent discussion of this new perspective on Paul, see Gager.

¹¹⁵ For a definition of covenantal nomism, see Sanders 75, 236. For differences between Jewish covenantal nomism and Paul’s alternative (which Sanders terms ‘participationist eschatology’), see Sanders 543-56, esp. 548-9.

power relations, and ideology of ‘peace and security’ generated by the ‘wealthy, powerful, and nobly born’ and dominated by ‘the rulers of this age,’ at the apex of which stood the imperial savior” (Horsley 3 and *passim*). And possibly the most radical aspect of Paul’s gospel and the Jesus-movement and later Christianity in general is that “[i]n the long cultural revolution . . . the focus of meaning gradually shifted from the heavens to the soul. Whereas previous cultures had projected what was meaningful onto the cosmos, now the focus of meaning shifted to a metaphysics and cosmology inside the head” (Stowers, *Rereading* 2).

In addition to these three ambitious characterizations, Paul’s disproportionately large—in comparison to Jesus—imprint on Christianity can be seen as having been shaped and amplified by writing. “In contrast to Jesus, who apparently wrote nothing, Paul speaks directly to us through his letters” (Harris 317). Writing made it possible for Paul to transcend parochial orality and to establish the Jesus movement in such manner that will make it possible to later make Christianity universal based in large part on the written canon that he provided. Kelber claims that Jesus’ refusal to put and/or leave anything in writing ought to be interpreted in the context of the norms of an oral society:

it is precisely the great importance attributed to these matters [of the issues that Jesus most frequently preached, such as marriage and divorce] that accounts for the variability in the rendition of the sayings tradition . . . To transmit Jesus’ word(s) faithfully meant to keep them in balance with social life, needs, and expectations. In paraphrasing a statement by Ong (in response to a student’s question as to why Jesus did not resort to writing), one might say that his (Jesus’) sayings were considered far too important to be frozen into scribal still life (122).

But this changes with Paul. Partially because he was considered lacking as an orator, partially because he dealt with communities physically distant (his writings were letters, not notations of his speeches), and possibly for other reasons (including the shifting mode of the use of writing and the consequent changes in thinking), Paul finds ways to use writing in a rhetorically efficient manner.¹¹⁶ But by far the most far-reaching effect that Paul's letters have achieved is canonicity: by putting elements of his gospel in writing, he has established a canon.¹¹⁷

As I demonstrated in the First Chapter, questions in South Slavic epic offer themselves as the avenue of change by challenging the existing power but in a way that is didactic rather than anarchist, collaborative rather than antagonistic, socially inclusive rather than one-sided. This continues to be the case with Pauline epistles with the result that, by appropriating the authority of the Jewish law through interpretation, and by putting it in writing, Paul creates a new beginning.¹¹⁸ The change the Jesus movement incited is reflected in the questions, the way they are being asked, and the message they are trying to convey: not only to guide the way, but to pave—rather than merely remind of and reassert—a solid, unchangeable, ultimately unquestionable one. As the letters become longer and the tone more authority-asserting, a pattern of question-and-answer arises. In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, for example, Paul: (a) announces a quote with a phrase “for it is written” (γέγραπται γάρ, v.19; elsewhere the phrase also appears as ἀλλὰ καθὼς γέγραπται), (b) quotes an authority (v.19), (c) asks a string of

¹¹⁶ Paul's letters also stood out in their length. As Tsang points out, Paul's letters are considerably longer than the papyri of the time, or most of Cicero or Pliny the Younger's correspondence (214-5).

¹¹⁷ Speaking of canonization of both Jewish and Christian doctrines by means of privileging the texts, Kelber characterizes the process as exclusive, both as authoritative and as limiting: “Canonicity . . . signified an approach to the pluriform oral-scribal tradition via selectivity and exclusivity. It secured cultural identity, but it did so . . . at the price of closing the textual borders. Viewed against the *mouvance* of the Jewish and Christian textual tradition, the creation of the canon marks a principally authoritative and unmistakably reductive move” (124-5).

¹¹⁸ He never claims that he does; if anything, his rhetoric is heavily infused with eschatological themes, as he clearly expected the revelation (παρουσία) to arrive in his lifetime.

rhetorical questions (v.20), and then (d) responds to the questions (1:21-2:16). Embedded in the last part is a section that follows the same pattern: 2:9 / 2:9 / 2:11 / 2:11-3. This pattern in 1 Corinthians matches the one Stowers identifies in Romans. He argues for a reconsideration of the current division into paragraphs that was imposed on the text around 1500s; instead of considering 3:1-8 and 3:27-31 as digressions as was the case in traditional interpretation, he suggests looking the whole long section 2:17-5:11 as a fictional dialogue between Paul and an imaginary Jewish teacher. Consequently, the section can be divided as follows: (a) apostrophe (2:17-29), (b) dialogue (3:1-9, 27-4:2), (c) scriptural chain (3:10-9), (d) announcement (3:21-6), and (e) exegetical argument and *exemplum* (4:3-5:11) (*Rereading* 231). Stowers differentiates the apostrophe from dialogue (both laden with rhetorical questions) on the one hand, and announcement and exegetical argument on the other. But the basic structure matches the one I have suggested above; both are question-and-answer catechetical units of narrative that quote authoritative texts. This structure is not so much reflective of the epistolary genre, but of the purpose of the letter that the structure of the narrative helps convey. Questions initiate; but they do not try to create the conceit of an absolute beginning as is the case with story-telling topic-setting questions—they set in motion the process of interpretation that will in fact create a new meaning which, in turn, retroactively renders the questions a beginning. The pattern follows that of invoking the muses in Homeric epic; however, instead of summoning the muses in the moment of the performance and through the performance, the appeal is to a piece of writing, and through it to the divine. The medium of writing becomes the manifestation of the divine authority, not just as a source, but as a product too. Just as in the invocation of the epic performance the singer projects himself as the one through whom the muses speak, so here Paul

projects himself as the one authorized with interpreting the scripture, and thus the one through whom the audience can and is to receive its meaning (the truth!). Paul's use of questions is not merely a rhetorical technique, but a narrative one. He combines the sacred aura of religious texts with the narrative features of epistles (specifically their conduciveness to mimicking a dialogic form and the necessity of being performed, as well as its hortatory and epideictic character as a genre). The questions and what follows them reflect the function of the narrative of each of the letters: what one ought to think and do.

Walter Ong, writing about tools and technology in a general sense, says that “[t]he more we transform the external world, the more we transform our own interior lives” (“Technology” 191). The form and the medium impact the way we think and act, and the advent of writing has induced a veritable paradigm shift in human thinking. On a smaller scale, the writing has imposed a change in the use and function of questions—and particularly rhetorical questions—in narratives. The catechistic form of Pauline letters is a structural amalgam that appears to be a direct result of its historical context. The mixture of authoritative and non-authoritative voices. The mixture of dialogic (oral) and epistolary (written) form. The mixture of poetic and prosaic elements. The mixture of written composition and oral delivery. The mixture of the established Jewish law and the emerging Jesus-movement doctrine. But creating such binaries can be misleading and even inaccurate. All of these elements intercross— Jewish writing with Jesus-movement oral tradition; Greco-Roman epistolary with Jewish religious; teacher authority with student inquisitiveness... —making it difficult if not impossible to extract and categorize them into neat binaries. They meld into a seeming mishmash—one that might not have particularly

stuck out in the Greco-Roman society where mishmashiness was the norm.¹¹⁹ However, because this mixture is solidified in written form with questions as the guiding force of its underlying catechism, drawing on the sacred aura of religious texts in general and the educational character of letters in particular, it becomes not just something new—it becomes the canon. When a question-and-answer based fictional dialogue introduces to a two-way dynamic (narrator and interlocutor) a third element (an authoritative source), and is then committed to writing, a diatribe becomes catechism, story-telling becomes a declaration. Auerbach claims that “the [Hebrew] Bible’s claim to truth . . . is tyrannical—it excludes all other claims” (14).¹²⁰ But while the book form of the Hebrew Bible vouches for its authority coming from god, Paul’s epistles reflect his struggle to not only convey the message, but establish and maintain his own apostolic authority along the way.

¹¹⁹ At least when it comes to letters, a mixture was common of religious, social, political, and private spheres; see Stowers, *Letter-writing* 32-5.

¹²⁰ Craig modulates the claim, allowing for “a greater degree of play and maneuvering along the way” (10).

Fourth Chapter

Ironic Questioning in the Early-Modern Comic Novel

I. Irreverent Authority: Framing in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*

At the beginning of the first volume of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, in “The Author’s Prologue,” the narrator Alcofribas Nasier lists a number of reputable books—Plato’s *The Banquet* and *The Republic*, Galen’s *On the Natural Faculties* and *On the Use of the Various Parts of the Human Body*, Homer’s the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and Demosthenes’ *Oration*s—picking up on images and tropes from them and otherwise drawing on their content.¹²¹ The prologue seems to be following in the steps of Homer’s invocations to the muses and Paul’s references to the Hebrew bible, summoning the authority of higher powers and established sources in order to establish the validity of and commence one’s own narrative. To do this, Homer pleaded in interrogatives directly to the muses, and Paul posed rhetorical questions to his audience only to provide answers from the Hebrew bible and then interpret and augment them himself. Rabelais too poses rhetorical questions prominently as he brings up one textual authority after another in order to establish the authority of his own book. But then alongside the textual authorities he draws on as sources of wisdom he introduces those he shows clear disdain for: Plutarch, Heraclides Ponticus, Eustachius, Cornutus the Stoic, Politian, and

¹²¹ Alcofribas Nasier is an anagram for François Rabelais. What is now published in English as a single tome under the title *Gargantua and Pantagruel* was originally five separate books. I refer to each not by volume number, but by their titles: *Gargantua*, *Pantagruel*, *Tiers Livre*, *Quart Livre*, and *Cinquiesme Livre*. Although *Pantagruel* was published before *Gargantua* (1532 and 1534), when presented together, the first four books have been edited and published in this particular order since Rabelais’ time. In the preface to his monograph on Rabelais, Rabelais’ most notable commentator in the twentieth century M. A. Screech notes that “Rabelais encouraged . . . publishing collected editions in which *Gargantua* precedes *Pantagruel*” (*Rabelais* xiv). *Cinquiesme Livre* was published posthumously; Screech calls it “a palpable fake,” an assessment I tend to agree with (xvii).

Friar Lubin. These sources too—and the contrast the juxtaposition creates—are in the service of establishing the authority of the narrator and the book. Midway through the prologue, Rabelais poses a long string of rhetorical questions asking the reader not to commit the same mistakes that these latter authors did. He prompts his readers to reflect on the purpose of books by first reflecting on the purpose of his introduction:

And what's the point, do you suppose, of all this preliminary stuff, this warning flourish?" (7). Warning readers not "to be so superficial when you're weighing men's work in the balance," he shifts the topic to the issue of appearances vs. content: "Wouldn't you yourself say that the monk's robes hardly determine who the monk is? Or that there are some wearing monk's robes who, on the inside, couldn't be less monkish? Or that there are people wearing Spanish capes who, when it comes to courage, couldn't have less of the tearless Spanish in them?" (7-8).

The appearance of the authorities he criticizes is two-fold: it is founded on the author's name (someone from times past whose reputation is established primarily by dint of having survived as a source) and on the medium of their work (written down and then copied or printed—the authority of Paul's "it has been written"). But it would be unwise, he says, to automatically acknowledge and accept such authority. Conversely, the comical outward appearance of books like, for example, his, does not preclude them from containing and conveying profound insights and truths. Answering eventually his own rhetorical questions with "you have to actually open a book and carefully weigh what's written there" ("fault ouvrir le livre et soigneusement peser ce que y est deduict"), he articulates one of the oldest instances of the injunction not to judge a book

by its cover (8). The questions he asks do not only summon previous textual authorities as did Homer's and Paul's. Here, they are also an invitation to "bring a higher level of understanding to a book" ("à plus hault sens interpreter ce que par adventure cuidiez") i.e. to assume authority over the authority of the written sources by engaging in critical reading.¹²²

The first question in the main body of *Gargantua* (after the prologue) is about genealogies—the most authoritative genre in oral societies, which preserves its aura well into writing societies. Rabelais poses a question about another source that the tradition and knowledge rely on: previous written texts. Juxtaposing the two authoritative genres, he explicitly evokes their authority: "Don't we have the *authority* [*l'autorité*] of Plato, in his *Philebus* and his *Gorgias*, and that of Horace, too . . . ?" (8, emphasis mine). He appeals to these written authorities in earnest, even as in his narrative he jokingly implants a common topos: a work of fiction coming from a "real" text that had been lost or forgotten and which the author found somewhere hidden or put away (10), and then decided to retell to his readers (all of Ch. II). The reference to genealogies in general lays out the context for the narrator presenting the genealogy of Gargantua and, in the following four chapters, the account of his outlandish birth

¹²² It is worth pointing out that, as Bakhtin noted, the narrator's promise of addressing serious issues in the guise of humor "could hardly be understood as a simple conventional means to awaken the reader's interest, although such means were used in the literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" (*Rabelais* 111). Thus I find a close look into *Gargantua* and its prologue not unjustified, especially considering that they were written after the second volume had already been published.

The prologue in many ways resembles that of Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly* (*Stultitiae Laus*, first published two decades earlier in 1511): both are apologies of the satirical genre that address serious issues. Both bring up authoritative sources and even make similar references: to *Sileni Alcibiadis* and *Pythagorae symbolae*, both of which are Erasmian adages (see Screech, *Rabelais* 128) in the prologue to *Gargantua*, to dogs as both a reference to Plato's dog ("that most philosophical of animals, who gnaws the bone in order to get through to what really matters," 129), and a presumably etymologically motivated metaphor for the cynicism of their prose, and to Democritus in the prologue to *Pantagruel*. However, Erasmus' prologue lists authoritative sources of satire, i.e. examples of the genre he himself uses; his prologue also addresses Thomas More and draws on his authority while invoking his appreciation for "jests seasoned with a touch of learning and a dash of wit" (Erasmus 3). On the other hand, Rabelais' prologue lists and juxtaposes two types of sources: the reliable and the unreliable ones; and his narrator directly addresses the reader. Erasmus' prologue thus establishes the book as another authority, while Rabelais' prologue transfers some of that authority to the reader.

(through his mother's left ear). Then, in Chapter VI, the narrator invokes both the oral tradition and the written texts, both the passed-on stories and histories, as well as religious texts of the Christian faith, challenging and attacking—and thus seemingly forestalling—the reader's possible incredulity:

any decent man, any sensible man, always believes what he's told and what he finds written down. Doesn't Solomon say, in Proverbs, 14, *Innocens credit omni verbo*, "An innocent man believes every | word"? And doesn't Saint Paul say, in 1 Corinthians, 13, *Charitas omnia credit*, "Charity believes everything"? Why shouldn't you believe me? Because, you say, there's no evidence. And I say to you that, for just this very reason, you must believe with perfect faith. Don't all our Orthodox argue that faith is precisely that: an argument for things which no one can prove?

And is there anything in this against the law? or our faith? or in defiance of reason?—or Holy Scripture? Me, I find nothing written in the Holy Bible that says a word against it. And if God had wanted this to happen, can you possibly say it wouldn't have happened? Ha! (21-2)

The text continues listing accounts of other similarly incredible births in the form of insincere and glib questions remonstrating any possible dubiousness as to the veracity of these accounts. While appearing to try to forestall readers doubting the account of Gargantua's birth, the narrator in fact exposes the hilarity of any attempt to take the mythical wondrous births and the sources that contain them with any seriousness. The questions he asks are of a new type: their main purpose is not to build or assert authority, not to iterate the known and the sanctioned or to

establish the truth. The questions here outwardly question the authorities that came before them by simultaneously drawing on some and mocking the others in a, from a reader's point of view, productive, fertile juxtaposition that sheds more light on the issue than a single point of view.

Still early in the book, in Chapter IX, the narrator provides as clear and explicit a guide for evaluating textual sources as it can get without it turning into expository writing. The topic is white and blue—colors chosen for Gargantua's outfit, and meant to symbolize “joy, pleasure, delight, and rejoicing [for white], and blue [for] heavenly things” (26). But apparently the meanings Gargantua's father attributed to the colors clash with the meanings ascribed to them in a popular book of the time, *All about Colors (Blason des couleurs)*. So the narrator poses questions (“Who tells you that white means faith and blue means determination? . . . And who wrote [the book with definitions of colors]?” 26), responds to them in a well-reasoned and almost somber manner by describing the (poor) style and (lack of) logic behind the arguments in *All about Colors*:

without reason or cause or any likelihood of sense or accuracy, [the author of that book] has laid down prescriptions (*founded only on his own personal authority*) for what the various colors mean—and this is the | method always used by tyrants who want what they say to take the place of good sound reason; it is emphatically not the method of truly wise men and scholars, who satisfy their readers strictly by reasonable argument. (26-7, emphasis mine)

Then without skipping a beat he tops it up with a crass scatological joke at the expense of such uncritical and self-righteous writing (“A dirty asshole always has a good supply of shit,” 27) before reverting to his jocular prose, further expounding on his claim. Written authorities are

good, but if taken uncritically, they become tyrannical; thus they must be weighed against other sources of knowledge.¹²³ The book subsequently pours out a continuous stream of various types of authoritative sources: sayings, quotes or paraphrases familiar to the educated audience, references to scholars, titles of books and the names of their authors. In referencing an almost excessive number of written texts, Rabelais exploits the spirit of Renaissance and Christian humanism and the attention they lavished on the texts of antiquity. “Rabelais sought his authority from a wide range of classical thinkers and from a multitude of contemporary writers. . . . such authors . . . should often be thought of as *auctoritates*, ‘authorities’. They are not presented as infallible in themselves, but are often considered as the vehicles of authoritative wisdom” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 11). When Rabelais makes a reference to a familiar source, he derives only a portion of authority from that particular source. In *Tiers Livre*, for example, Rabelais ascribes a portion of his authority to Diogenes,¹²⁴ but then attributes the remainder of the story-telling inspiration and, consequently, authority to wine: “this bottle: this—this is my true, my only fountain of inspiration, my spring of Helicon, my bubbling Hippocrene, my unique rapture” 244). Only part of the authority to tell and write lies with a written source—the rest lies with the author, the last link in the Platonic chain of inspiration. And by extension, as Rabelais

¹²³ Cathleen M. Bauschatz compares Rabelais’ attitudes toward ‘instruire’ and ‘plaire’ (mirroring Horace’s *prodesse et delectare*) as two facets and driving forces of his emphasis on education in *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, noting that the former book relies more on negative and the latter on positive examples and parallels, and claiming that “Rabelais is suggesting educational reform” by, among other things, insisting that the student “go the next step from passive absorption to active use of the material studied,” with this emphasis being made more forcefully in *Gargantua* than in *Pantagruel* (37). Reliance on the negative rather than the positive can be seen not only on the level of the whole work, but on a smaller scale, such as in Gargantua’s letter to his son in Ch. VIII of *Pantagruel*, which is the most overt statement on education and humanism in general. Gerard J. Brault claims that “the most celebrated passage in Gargantua’s letter [the so-called Hymn to the Renaissance] emerges not so much as a glorious tribute to the dawning French Renaissance . . . but as a harmless parody of a commonplace theme in humanistic writings of the period [historical and literary figures in Antiquity]” (623-4). The relevance of emphasizing the negative (including what is not [the case] as opposed to what is) will become clearer below in the discussion on *Don Quixote* and ironic questions.

¹²⁴ “And what do you think I ought to do, as I whirl my barrel?”

has already explicitly stated, when the readers read, the chain of authority extends to them, as does the authority to interpret. Four centuries before Barthes retroactively kills him off as the author, Rabelais lays out the kinds of responsibility the reader, being “the very space in which are inscribed . . . all the citations out of which a writing is made,” has in discerning the truth (“The Death” 1132): to be sure, the authors are responsible for providing accurate and reasoned arguments in their books, but it is ultimately up to the reader to judge how well they have succeeded in that respect.

To further drive this point home, the narrator follows his assessment with a model of how to assess written sources “by philosophical reasoning as well as by accepted authority, in full accord with what the ancients have said” (28). The following chapter (Ch. X) is a tour de force of demolishing the argument of the author of *All about Colors*, and doing so by pitting it against other textual sources. In under three pages, the chapter lists no fewer than seventeen citations of ancient authorities describing various properties of color white in support of the narrator’s claim (and, by extension, that of Gargantua’s father) that it symbolizes happiness, joy, and excitement. This is the approach that, as Bakhtin points out, arises from the medieval mindsets and traditions of the grotesque and carnivalesque, which pursue not refutation but change through laughter that “heals and regenerates,” and seek not to exclude but to subsume through change, with the result that “the world is seen anew” (*Rabelais* 70, 66). This style is, according to Bakhtin, less sarcastic and asinine, and more fertile and celebratory. It is meant to be less censurable and destructive, and more critical in order to be constructive and productive. Screech characterizes Rabelais as one of the “*homines ludentes* whose propaganda purposes were not blunt, hate-ridden explosions of prejudice but gay, balanced, harmonious forays leading to the righting of wrongs,

the establishment of harmonies, the restoration of sanity” (*Rabelais* xvi).¹²⁵ The meaning behind the color white that Alcofribas presents as widely accepted is, according to his analysis, an example of an arbitrary assignation of a definition that gained traction merely because it was presented in writing by ancient authors. By redefining the symbolism of color white through reasoned discussion and by supporting it with sources that he presents as more reliable, Alcofribas models early in the novel the process of reading. The reader ought to question extant knowledge, perceptions, and assumptions, rethink them logically, find reliable sources, ultimately coming to a clearer, more cogent, and ultimately truer understanding.

However, not every attempt at assessment or revisionism is an occasion for questioning. In Ch. XVII, Gargantua arrives in Paris, and Rabelais’s narrator uses the opportunity to present invented etymology for a number of terms related to the city, including its name. The original name for the city, Lutetia, he claims comes from Greek (“‘Snow White,’ because of the lovely white thighs of the ladies of the city”), while its French name replaced the Latin one after Gargantua arrived and took Parisians for a joke (“*par ris*, ‘for a joke,’” 43). The explanations are there for entertainment value. The context and the content, as well as the absence of references to actual reliable authorities, make it clear that the narrator is not challenging any established notions. The explanations are there to cause a laugh with contesting interpretations, not to make

¹²⁵ Screech again agrees with Bakhtin in claiming that Rabelais parts ways with the long tradition of cutting satire: “Rabelais knew his Roman satirists and frequently draws upon them. Yet he has little in common with Juvenal, Horace or even Persius, where hatred is concerned. A satirist working in the Roman tradition of moral indignation and hatred of wickedness stirs up his reader to just such indignation and hatred, emphasising all that favours these unlovely passions. Where he does make us laugh, such a satirist . . . exploits not true laughter but that ‘bastard laughter’ caused by pain and suffering: sardonic laughter. There are passages of that sort in Rabelais’s writings, but they are rare. A comic satirist has both a more difficult and more attractive task. His artistic challenge is to turn evil and error, even at their most frightful and terrible, into sources of amusement and laughter. This is Rabelais’s special genius, one not to be found again in French literature until Molière” (*Rabelais* 5).

an argument that the existing meanings ought to be replaced with new ones. And, accordingly, no questions are posed.

Once Rabelais establishes in the first few chapters the role of the readers by modeling how to use questions in the process of reading, i.e. to approach with a critical mind the status quo of the customs, beliefs, institutions and their representatives—and the narrator is there to help them sift through the authorities and discerningly judge and separate them into those to abide by and those to reject—then the questions posed directly to the readers taper off, virtually disappearing from the extradiegetic narration, and the remainder of the questions in *Gargantua* are of the types encountered previously: information-seeking ones, rhetorical questions whose main function is their illocutionary force, and questions that are integral parts of major speeches (see chapters named after speeches: XIX, XXXI, and L), almost all of which appear in dialogue. Thus questions appear most prominently at the beginning of *Gargantua*, and in extradiegetic narration addressing the reader. The probing questions gradually reappear starting with Ch. LII (of the total of fifty-eight chapters). Here, the book begins to provide possible concrete answers as to the narrator's questions from the opening: what is the wisdom that this text offers? After the war that takes up most of the book has been completed, soldiers paid and sent back home and heroes feasted and compensated, the main protagonist of the war, the monk, asks Gargantua's father to create an abbey according to his rules. After the destruction, a new institution comes into being, one with more enlightened rules instead of the established ones. The monk's question that at the same time downplays his authority and brings up the issue of governance ("And how . . . should I govern others, when I don't know how to govern myself?" 115) triggers a multi-chapter description of the Abbey of Thélème: one that is "not ordered and governed by

laws and statues and rules, but according to [the inhabitants'] own free will" (124). Unlike the insensible and sometimes downright silly authorities attacked early in *Gargantua*, the Abbey of Thélème is a place where "the three monastic virtues [of poverty, chastity, and obedience] are stood more or less on their heads" (Screech, *Rabelais* 189), and replaced by harmonious, rational, and practical manifestations of riches, gender egalitarianism, and freedom. One can question the sincerity of the voice of a narrator as irreverent as Rabelais' is, proposing such a utopian solution. But there is no question that it constitutes a response (rhetorically) and a resolution (narratively) to the questions posed at the beginning of the work. In terms of content, this is the utopian denouement to the climax achieved with the actions of war in the middle of *Gargantua*; narratively, it is the resolution to the tension posed at the beginning with questions to the readers. The last question is the one about the poem of warning in Chapter LVIII. The narrator presents it as "Found on the Foundations of the Abbey at Thélème" implicitly projecting its aura of rationality onto the poem (128). The last question and the last paragraph of the book openly question the abbey's wisdom and reliability, urging the reader to take it—and indeed everything else—with more than just a grain of salt.

Throughout the five books the distribution of questions—at least the ones by the narrator—is consistent: the bulk of the ones posed by the narrator are in the prologues, with only a handful in the remainder of the narrative. The two exceptions are the first few chapters of *Gargantua* (chapters VI and IX—about Gargantua's birth and colors respectively), and the last two chapters of *Tiers Livre* with almost a dozen questions in the narrative about the properties of the herb Pantagruelion. This brings into focus the overall structure of the five books. Richard Berrong provides evidence for plentiful echoes between the first two books, one of the main ones

being the tripartite binary that characterizes the two wars in the first two books: “folie/raison, excès/limites, désordre/ordre” (13).¹²⁶ In his article “An Exposition of Disorder” he primarily compares *Gargantua* to *Pantagruel* in the light of their structural differences, posing the question: “Is *Gargantua* a reworking of *Pantagruel*?” While he elucidates important similarities between the two, he does not bring up the possibility of *Gargantua* being written and subsequently serving at least in part as a paratext for *Pantagruel*. Both take “tripartite constructions organized around the birth, education, and prouesses militaires of their respective protagonists,” and once *Gargantua* is placed before *Pantagruel*, rather than being a reworking of it, as a prequel it creates the effect of *Pantagruel* echoing the structure of *Gargantua*.¹²⁷ Both, as R. H. Armitage points out, “deal with youth, education, teachers, war, and peace,” with virtually the same protagonist, but with a major difference in that *Gargantua* more forcefully drives home the message that it is “a book of *ideas* . . . more interested in the *propaganda* than in the *folastries* [‘flightiness’ as Raffel translates it]” and places further emphasis on education (945-6, 948).¹²⁸ Furthermore, since *Pantagruel* criticizes the institutions of the then-contemporary France in a way closer to the traditional literature of sarcasm, Rabelais subsequently writes a prequel that frames both *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, as well as the two or three books to follow, in a more idiosyncratic style. Thus the extended narration at the beginning of *Gargantua* serves

¹²⁶ On formal echoes between *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, also see Screech, *Rabelais* 131. Questions too echo each other, such as ones in Chapter IX of *Gargantua*, which in their content and form (extradiegetic) echo questions from the prologue.

¹²⁷ While Screech might be right in claiming that “to study them in this order thwarts any serious attempt to understand the development of Rabelais’s art and thought,” the purpose of this chapter is not to analyze the creative process, but rather to look at the finished work (*Rabelais* xiv).

¹²⁸ Bauschatz claims that, “what seems in the Prologues like a metaphoric use of imagery describing the process of education is actually well grounded in the ideas on pedagogy which are found in the words themselves” (43).

as an extradiegetic model upon which the intradiegetic world is built, and as a guide as to how to read the predominantly intradiegetic world of *Pantagruel*, as well as the subsequent three books.

The bulk of the prologue in *Gargantua* is a reference to Socrates, directly comparing his book to silenus—the object Socrates mentions in Philemon. Screech, revives an old comparison of Rabelais to Democritus and Lucian in terms of him being a “Laughing Philosopher” (“Introduction” xxv). But he is also the “Interrogating Philosopher” of the likes of Socrates. He questions the world around him, and prompts others to do the same with particular attention to those aspects of the world that feel somehow ‘off.’ He begins *Gargantua* with questions, and ends it with potential answers, which he then returns to questioning in the very last paragraph. But for the most part, his mélange of irreverent humor and idealism is not clear-cut in terms of where the former ends and the latter begins. The questions he poses to the reader are clear, as are the options he provides, but the assessment of the options and the final decision are ultimately left in the hands of his readers by leaving them in the diegetic space of the story, committed to print and thus, as the prologue suggests, subject to reader’s evaluation. Whereas the deontic statements in the epic were, for the most part, implied through the illocutionary force of the statements and were modeled by the characters as implicit role-model members of the society, Rabelaisian narrative continues the Pauline model of addressing the reader directly. But differentiating *Gargantua and Pantagruel* from both the epic and the epistles is the content of the deontic statements: not only about the behavior of an individual within a society, but about the actions of a reader and, as such, a learner. Because in addressing the issues of “religion, politics and economics,” the book is really about the action of acquiring knowledge and education specifically, and humanism as an educational and cultural endeavor more broadly. The function

of questions here is not only dialogic anymore, but dialectic. The authority that the questions harness and channel questions, subverts, and reconstructs; but rather than being indifferent and aloof, it is instead engaged, irreverently pointing a finger at everything and everyone, including itself.

II. Learning through Irony: From Antithesis to Dialectic in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*

II.1. Authority, Truth, Irony, Questions

The narrator in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is the source of questioning. But even though he pokes at the dominant institutions of the real world, he remains the master of his own, diegetic one. He is thus at the same time the underdog and the authority. In *Don Quixote* too the authority is not fixed, but here it is even more fluid, shifting between voices not only in the dialogue between the main two protagonists, but in the narration too as the narrative voice seamlessly slips from one narrative level into another in this famous anti-romance that James A. Parr insists is not yet a novel, but an 'anatomy' because it "anticipates the self-conscious, self-questioning, experimental texts" of the novel (xv).¹²⁹ The questioning, consequently, mimics Rabelais' questions posed in the prologue, but becomes even more prominent in the dialogue between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

¹²⁹ Parr borrows Northrop Frye's definition of 'anatomy': "form of prose fiction, traditionally known as the Menippean or Varronian satire and represented by Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, characterized by a great variety of subject-matter and a strong interest in ideas. In shorter forms it often has a *cena* or symposium setting and verse interludes" (Frye, *Anatomy* 365). In referring to the novel as "self-conscious, self-questioning, [and] experimental," Parr singles out novels by Joyce, Proust, and "the writers of the Spanish-American Boom" over "that privileged anomaly called the realistic novel" (xv). In his tome on the subversiveness of the discourse in *Don Quixote*, Parr places emphasis on narration over the dialogue, identifying the following narrative voices: inferred author (equivalent to Wayne Booth's implied author), editorial voice (supernarrator), historian, second reader, narrator of "Curiosity," translator, Cide Hamete, and Cide Hamete's pen (19). Parr characterizes Cervantes' narration as "slippery" due to the paucity of textual markers that indicate where one narrator stops and another begins (15).

Both parts of *Don Quixote* begin with a prologue in which the author directly addresses the readers and foreshadows the content. In the First Part, Cervantes' interlocutor (a "friend") announces that the purpose of the book is to "undermine the authority and wide acceptance that books of chivalry have in the world and among the public" (8). And the prologue to the Second Part delivers the ultimate 'spoiler alert' by revealing that "Don Quixote . . . is, at the end [of the novel], dead and buried" (458). By revealing some of the content of his novel, Cervantes seemingly borrows a page from the textbook of Greek tragedy which, unlike comedy, takes on mythical, pseudo-historical, or historical events, i.e. events that the audience was familiar with. J. A. K. Thomson explains how the mechanism of Greek tragedy, in contrast to modern drama, relies and capitalizes on audience's familiarity with the plot: while "the method of the modern dramatist is to engage the interest of the house by a continual shock of the unexpected," the role of a Greek dramatist was to provide "variety and surprise" by means of (re)introducing an already known story "in detail and incident" (37-8). The audience's awareness of the story—the key components of which the characters are not aware of—is crucial to the effective functioning of dramatic irony as the characters learn their destiny and the audience learns the details of the story. In *Don Quixote*, the two prologues reveal the book's purpose to undermine the basic premises of chivalric novels in the First Part, and the actual ending in the Second Part. But the plot that follows, of the two main protagonists venturing into unknown territories—literally and metaphorically—is not one of continuous and considerable development even though the novel as a whole is unquestionably original. Harry Levin describes the plot as "an infinite series of variations, [that] remains almost repetitiously simple"; the pattern repeats itself of "the protagonist, attempting to put his heroic ideals into action, [being] discomfited by realities in the

shape of slapstick comedy” (*Example* 131).¹³⁰ With the basic formula of each episode remaining the same (and thus to be expected by the reader), the novelty of *Don Quixote* comes down to the author conveying the details of each adventure, thus setting the stage for the novel to unfurl in the dramatic-ironic manner of the Greek tragedy.

Cervantes’ narrator, like Rabelais’, attaches particularly close attention to the written sources and the validity of their content. Chapter VI makes for a jovial critique of the mostly fictional works popular at the time, as four characters sift through Don Quixote’s library, deciding which volumes ought to be burnt for the deleterious effect they have had on the delirious Don Quixote, and which deserve to be rescued. They approach the process as if following Rabelais’ recipe: not with arbitrary judgment or preference, but with rational adjudication. The priest explicitly states three criteria as the saving graces for the books that they deem meritorious (‘meritorios’): they “ha[ve] authority” (‘autoridad’), are “intended to entertain and satirize,”¹³¹ and are “books of the understanding” (‘libros de entendimiento’ 49-50). While these criteria for older written sources closely mirror those expressed in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, unlike Rabelais who continues to reference written authorities throughout the five books, Cervantes hardly brings them up again (the ones that are most frequently mentioned thereafter [usually by Don Quixote] are works that have not survived the wrath of the barber and

¹³⁰ Levin’s definition of the basic structure of an episode in *Don Quixote* corresponds to the first of the three categories identified by A. J. Close: “chivalric adventures interspersed by the hero’s conversations with Sancho; critical discussions of the romances; romantic interludes” (31-2); Close supplies literary precursors to these categories (31-7), but also notes that in the Second Part, delineation between episodes becomes visibly blurrier (44-52).

¹³¹ The translator, Edith Grossman, identifies this sentence as traditionally “the most obscure in the entire novel,” and claims to have “followed the interpretation offered by Martín de Riquer” in translating it (50 n16). The phrase “no hizo tantas necesidades de industria” seems to refer to what Aristotle described as “straining the plot structure to excess” and thus violating “the principle of necessity or probability” (Halliwell 42, 48), i.e. failing to maintain an internal logical consistency of a work of fiction. Grossman’s translation, “intended to entertain and satirize,” takes into account the overall context of the chapter, and results in a more elegant solution, albeit not immediately obvious from the original phrase.

the priest—two members of the local intelligentsia who were read well enough to make an informed determination). But even though the priest’s words appear to mirror Cervantes’ sentiments about these particular works and the authority they embody, just as in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, the prologue instructs the reader to take critically any mention of the authority of particular written sources.¹³² Cervantes’ “friend,” whose help he solicited in order to make the book more erudite, advises him to reference numerous authorities in order to “give the book . . . authority” (“dar . . . autoridad al libro,” 7). But unlike Rabelais who winnows out the reliable sources for the reader, Cervantes has his interlocutor friend provide a long list of advice about potential authors and authorities beginning with a rhetorical question: “Do you want to see if what I say is true?” (¿Queréis ver si es verdad lo que digo?). The solution to Cervantes’ professed fear of public judgment is an itemized list of stale commonplaces and worn-out conventions followed by the purposes they fulfill when used in writing; thus the truth (verdad) that his friend wants him to see (ver) is not to be found in the authoritative sources—more specifically in the “right” ones—but is ironic, and he says as much in the end when he dismisses the need to reference authorities for the sake of establishing and bolstering one’s own as

¹³² Robert Bayliss protests that “the prologue’s inclusive invitation to interpret according to one’s judgment has been taken at its word, while the conclusion’s exclusive claims to authority have been ignored” (393); however, he seems to overlook the fact that, if one takes to heart the ‘inclusive invitation’ in the prologue, one is bound to approach *any* written source critically, including the ending of the book that presented the exhortation in the first place. As for the *written* sources being the main source of authority, Frederick A. de Armas, in the third chapter of his book *Quixotic Frescoes* (“At School with the Ancients: Raphael,” 29-51) makes a sustained argument that the prologue to the First Part goes beyond written sources as it “conceals an extended commentary on the earliest of the Stanze decorated by Raphael, the Stanza della Segnatura” (33).

“trivial” (“de tan poco momento”).¹³³ In the prologue, Cervantes takes on the role of a Greek alazon, less in its most prominent definition of the one who pretends to be more than he is, and more in its secondary meaning of what D. C. Muecke calls the ‘victim’ of irony—the character who is not aware of a truth that other character(s), author, and/or the audience are aware of. Cervantes feigns not to be aware that to cite acknowledged authorities is not, in itself, a path to truth since the sources can be spun any way one wants and merely citing them amounts to no more than platitudes, and to write a good and authoritative book one need not rely on the extant written authorities. Unlike Rabelais, Cervantes does not outright state this, but introduces an extradiegetic character (his “friend”) to make the point, starting with a rhetorical question about the truth (verdad).

The purpose of this narrative strategy becomes clear in the last paragraph: the prologue could have ended with the friend’s exhortation to Cervantes to “strive, in plain speech, with words that are straightforward, honest, and well-placed, to make [his] sentences and phrases sonorous and entertaining, and have them portray, as much as [he] can and as far as it is possible, [his] intention, making [his] ideas clear without complicating and obscuring them” (8). If it did, it would have validated Nadeau’s claim that Cervantes’ open invitation to the reader to exercise interpretive freedom is attenuated by him providing directions as to how to read the narrative

¹³³ Cervantes’ friend states that such an attempt is trivial specifically because the purpose of the novel is to undermine the authority of the genre of chivalric novels. However, that does not mean that avoiding to cite authorities as a path to truth is limited to Cervantes’ book or attacks on a particular genres. Carolyn A. Nadeau goes as far as to claim that “Cervantes all but obliterates his sources,” further drawing conclusions that, by doing so, Cervantes “impl[ies] that neither the writer nor the reader cares about models for the text,” “is rethinking the notions of the authority of sources, author, reader, and ultimately of the text itself,” and “shift[s] from traditional imitation, in which authority is deferred to the source but validated by its modern position, to a literary convention that endorses artistic originality” (6-8). For my argument, however, it is sufficient to note that Cervantes is following in Rabelais’ steps by questioning written authorities overtly and ironically.

(10).¹³⁴ But it didn't. Cervantes resumes narration, ending the prologue by noting that his main achievement in the novel is not the depiction of the character of Don Quixote, but "of the famous Sancho Panza, his squire, in whom [is] summarized . . . all the squirely wit and charm scattered throughout the great mass of inane books of chivalry" (9). The dialogue between stuffy preconceptions and novel ideas, between other people's work, perception, and knowledge and one's own, between seeing and truth, that the two friends begin to examine in dialogic form foreshadows the exchange between the two protagonists, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Cervantes does not provide a manual for reading as Rabelais does, but he does make it clear which character to keep an eye on as the voice of reason, albeit not the authoritative let alone definitive one. "[E]lemental, simple, grotesque and pitiful" rather than "the remote and fastidious Intellectual" is how Thomson describes the character who stands at the source of irony in ancient Greek comedy (5)—characteristics that can be just as well applied to the features that Rabelais endows his characters with and the way he presents the world. The four characteristics cannot be attributed solely to either Sancho Panza or Don Quixote, but they do characterize elements of their interaction. In their exchanges, Don Quixote retains the authority, in terms of both social status and the educated and eloquent pronouncements. Sancho does not gain the authority in any definitive sense—he loudly admits that he does not have authority and would not challenge his master's (584)—but his voice nevertheless gains importance in the exchange with Quixote. If Don Quixote is the alazon (the one who pretends to be more than he is), then

¹³⁴ Nadeau relies on Michel de Certeau's argument that "reading operations [the practitioner's constructions of a text] manipulate the reader by insinuating their inventiveness into the cracks in a cultural orthodoxy" (qtd. in Nadeau 11). I agree that this can be said for non-ironic rhetorical questions, which reduce the possible answers to two antithetical options, and then point to the "right" one. However, ironic, open-ended rhetorical questions, initiate genuine inquiry, even as the framing of any question steers that inquiry in a certain direction.

Sancho Panza is the eiron (the mischievous challenger)—the source of irony, in both its indicative and interrogative forms.

Taking *Don Quixote* as an ironic novel is not a new interpretation. Norman Knox describes Cervantes as “undoubtedly the dominant model of grave irony,” and more specifically dramatic irony (171, 186) and Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are not infrequently mentioned in passing as the alazon and the eiron.¹³⁵ Although the basic definition of irony (stating something contrary or at least different from the intended meaning) bears no ostensible relation to questioning, questioning lies at the very source of irony. Sedgewick calls the original ironist—the eiron—a ‘dissembler,’ borrowing the term from the 1911 *Century Dictionary and Encyclopedia*, and noting that the Greek term derives “from the Ionic εἶρομαι, to ask, or more definitely, to ask questions” (16). The most famous eiron remains to this day Socrates, indicating the overlap between the aesthetic and didactic function of the trope, as well as the fact that both irony and rhetorical questions are based on differences and contrast rather than on similarities, like metaphor- and metonymy-based tropes.¹³⁶ Indeed, while similarity-based tropes abound, the difference-based ones are mostly limited to irony, sarcasm, antiphrasis, asteismus, micticismus, and charientismus (Norman Knox 36).¹³⁷ To this list I would add rhetorical questions. Both irony and questions go to the heart of fiction: the issue of privileged knowledge. In the case of information-seeking questions the interlocutor is expected to know more, while with rhetorical

¹³⁵ See, for example, Frye, *Northrop* 153, Shroder 298, and Nnolim 184.

¹³⁶ In his tome on irony, Søren Kierkegaard defines it as “infinite absolute negativity” (278). More recently, Frye defines irony as “simply the attitude of the poet as such, a dispassionate construction of a literary form, with all assertive elements, implied or expressed, eliminated” (*Anatomy* 40-1). Linda Hutcheon falsely cites Booth as “attack[ing]” this aspect of Frye’s definition, but Booth’s critical edge is directed toward Frye’s claim that an ironist does not moralize, not toward his claim that the ironist asserts by negation (Hutcheon 232, Booth x).

¹³⁷ Also cf. litote, paralipsis, to some extent occupation and, of course, plain lying.

questions the speaker knows not only more but, more importantly, better. Muecke notes that irony is not merely an aesthetic trope, since in addition to intellectual, it invites (by implicitly dispensing) moral judgment (*Compass* 21). This ironic moral judgment is a more comprehensive version of antithesis-based deontic function of rhetorical questions and, this common function, at least in its original form, is dialogic. The eiron does not state, but elicits answers and insights from the interlocutor by means of questions. Dilwyn Knox cites sources exemplifying that Socrates uses irony only when deprecating others or when trying to elicit the truth from others, but not when expounding on a topic himself (120). In spite of all these similarities, rhetorical questions receive very little attention as a tool of irony beyond a perfunctory nod to Socrates as a relentless questioner.¹³⁸ Irony and rhetorical questions, like most other rhetorical figures, use comparison with something different for emphasis or ornamentation; but they also resemble each other more closely in that they are based on contrast rather than similarity, derive from a dialogic form (alazon-vs-eiron and question-and-answer), and express a certain deontic attitude (expectation, desire, and/or moral judgment). Thus neither trope is merely descriptive (like metaphor-based ones) or associative (like metonymy-based ones); rather, both are change-inducing—whether in thought/knowledge or action—by creating not only potential but need for change.

¹³⁸ Quintilian mentions them briefly; Muecke specifically brings up rhetorical questions as a category of irony, but summarizes its role to a single page before moving on. Socrates begins from the premise that all he knows is that he knows nothing. He learns from questioning: self-examination from information-seeking questions, and examination of others from the rhetorical ones.

II.2. Ironic Questions in *Don Quixote*

Unlike in Rabelais, the most overt critique in *Don Quixote* is aimed at a specific genre of literature—chivalric novels (*novelas de caballería*)—rather than at a wide range of dominant institutions, as in Rabelais.¹³⁹ But, as in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, the line between what is criticized and what is asserted as the alternative is not straightforward. Cervantes brings up explicitly from the very start the madness of Don Quixote and asserts the opinion that it derives from his overindulgent reading of chivalric novels. Yet fiction and imagination are not uncritically cast away, but critically (re)examined. The eponymous protagonist of a genre criticizing another genre espouses dynamic opposites without being reduced to a mere caricature: even though the narrator and more than one character in the novel consider him to be afflicted by “profound madness” (*grande locura*, 423); nevertheless, when he launches an impassioned defense of his worldview, his predicament does not come across as sheer insanity that overtakes his “very fine [and] considerable intelligence” (*bonísimo entendimiento; el felicísimo talento de su ingenio*, 423-4), but as an astonishing “mixture of truth and falsehood” (*la mezcla . . . de verdades y mentiras*, 427). The questions about Don Quixote—both his character as the protagonist and his symbolic connotations—punctuate not only inconsistencies within a particular genre of fiction (chivalric novels), but the issue that the genre of chivalric novels prominently connotes: the tension between imagination and the material world, and how they relate to each other. The first question in *Don Quixote* is the second sentence of the prologue:

¹³⁹ Barbara Fuchs observes that, in spite of the book presenting itself as an ironic attack on a particular literary genre, chivalric novels had no serious claim to truth to start with. The truth the novel destabilizes is the historical truth, and the narrative modes it questions are those of “the immutable, unquestionable narrative of the nation’s history” (145). Thus *Don Quixote* follows in the steps of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in casting a wide ironic net that spans considerably more than its diegetic world.

And so what could my barren and poorly cultivated wits beget but the history of a child who is dry, withered, capricious, and filled with inconstant thoughts never imagined by anyone else, which is just what one would expect of a person begotten in a prison, where every discomfort has its place and every mournful sound makes its home? (3)

Here we already have an accurate foreshadowing of the level of prominence that ironic antitheses and juxtapositions take in the novel.¹⁴⁰ Just as Cervantes highlights his genius by referring to his wit by means of overstated and excessive humility ('el estéril y mal cultivado ingenio mío'), so the forte of his novel comes through a collection of understatements: his book is a collection of 'pensamientos varios y nunca imaginados' which nevertheless come together to make a consistent 'historia'; and the book itself is described as 'seco' and 'avellanado,' but nevertheless 'un hijo'—young, vital, and presumably full of potential. The material he builds on—if by material one assumes fictional works of chivalry—is indeed dry and withered. But his 'various thoughts never imagined by anyone else' "created a new form by criticizing the old forms" (Levin, "Example" 129), molding that material into something fresh and new that will grow and mature on its own.¹⁴¹ This first question is both topic-setting (the purpose of his novel, his 'child'), and ironic, undoing the topic as soon as he sets it. Its irony is of the old, Aristotelian type: that of excessive humility combined with the other "classical" type, the contrast between what is said and what is meant in terms of praise and blame: praising by blaming and blaming by

¹⁴⁰ In this case ironic in its original—alazon vs. eiron—meaning of the contrast between exaggeration and understatement.

¹⁴¹ Cervantes does not shy away from overtly stating the power of, even praising, his creative genius, as he does in, for example, the prologue to his *Exemplary Novels* (*Novelas ejemplares*) where he bluntly states his ingenuity. Here, however, he couches it in ironic terms.

praising.¹⁴² The antithesis inherent in irony—one that conflates each of the two opposing actions with deontic valuations of the two alternatives—is the same kind of antithesis present in rhetorical questions in the epic song; but while the irony in the prologue expresses in the indicative comments on extant sources (books of chivalry written in the past), rhetorical questions are about the future one: Cervantes’ book that, from the reader’s perspective, is about to unfurl.

Not only do questions figure prominently in the prologue to *Don Quixote*, as they do in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, but they offer an apt preview of the ironic function that questions assume in *Don Quixote*. The first three questions are of the How-come-X-is-the-case? type.¹⁴³ The fourth one brings up the issue of establishing the truth,¹⁴⁴ while the last one in the prologue shifts the authority for establishing the truth onto the interlocutor.¹⁴⁵ While the mocking in the first three questions highlights ironic form (saying the opposite of what is meant often and using mockery for the purpose of eliciting laughter), the latter two demonstrate its ultimate function: prompting the reader to reexamine the extant truth and direct him toward an alternative answer. Mario Socrate provides a thorough analysis of both prologues and establishes them as a frame for the novel, and Salvador J. Fajardo goes one step further and asserts that the prologue, more

¹⁴² Quintilian VI.ii.15-6, VIII.vi.55-6.

¹⁴³ The second question is from Cervantes to his friend: “For how could I not be confused at what the old legislator, the public, will say when it sees that after all the years I have spent asleep in the silence of obscurity, I emerge now, carrying all my years on my back, with a tale as dry as esparto grass, devoid of invention, deficient in style, poor in ideas, and lacking all erudition and doctrine, without notes in the margins or annotations at the end of the book, when I see that other books, even if they are profane fictions, are so full of citations from Aristotle, Plato, and the entire horde of philosophers that readers are moved to admiration and consider the authors to be well-read, erudite, and eloquent men?”; the third question is a response by the friend to Cervantes: “How is it possible that things so trivial and so easy to remedy can have the power to perplex and absorb an intelligence as mature as yours, and one so ready to demolish and pass over much greater difficulties?” (4-5).

¹⁴⁴ “Do you want to see if what I say is true?” (5, by the friend).

¹⁴⁵ “How do you intend to fill the void of my fear and bring clarity to the chaos of my confusion?” (5, by Cervantes).

than being a manual for reading the novel (as many critics agree), is an anchor to which the reader is invited to return since it makes him a better reader not only before reading the novel but even after reading the novel.¹⁴⁶ As a manual for reading the novel, the prologue, like its predecessor in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, is grounded in questions as its guiding principle.

After the prologue, the first question in the book is Don Quixote's very first utterance, and at the same time his first imaginary creation: having prepared to embark on an adventure as a knight errant, he creates the image of "a lady to love" as part of his first imaginary feat:

would it not be good to have someone to whom I could send him [a giant defeated in battle] so that he might enter and fall to his knees before my sweet lady, and say in the humble voice of surrender: 'I, lady, am the giant Caraculiambro, lord of the island Malindrania, defeated in single combat by the never sufficiently praised knight Don Quixote of La Mancha, who commanded me to appear before your ladyship, so that your highness might dispose of me as you choose'? (Ch. I)

Don Quixote's initial and temporary quest—which will end soon afterward when he returns to his village to recruit a squire and gather more equipment¹⁴⁷—as well as his brief stay at home before he embarks on the book-long adventure with Sancho Panza, comprise several more

¹⁴⁶ Fajardo claims that the reader, with the help of the prologue, by the end of the novel becomes a "Model Reader," but then, upon returning to the prologue becomes a "Superreader" (5). In this the reader mimics the steps gone through by the writer, who wrote the prologue after finishing the novel and also, paradoxically, the author's friend mentioned in the prologue, who offers advice on how to write a book that has already been written (1-5). Parr then conflates the supernarrator with the superreader, granting them editorial control to "organiz[e] and manipul[at]e the discourse of all the subordinate voices" (11). Parr's whole book identifies and analyzes the numerous ways *Don Quixote* points to and relies on authority, and yet at the same time continuously subverts it, forestalling the possibility of establishing an absolute authority, including that of the supernarrator.

¹⁴⁷ The creation of the imaginary lady frames the first episode of Don Quixote's adventures: departing on his own and then shortly returning to better prepare for his adventures. The episode begins with a question and ends with one when, on his way back to the village, Don Quixote appeals to his imaginary lady by quoting a poem that begins with another question that invokes her (non-)existence: "¿Donde estás, señora mía, | que no te duele mi mal?" (Where art thou, my lady, | that thou weepst not for my ills?, Ch. V). Parr calls it "a false start" (12); I would argue that the episode is not so much a false start but a test/trial narrative, one that fails because it is not set up as deliberately and consistently dialogic, but is only accidentally so.

questions. First, Don Quixote addresses the world in general invoking doubt (*duda*, Ch. II).¹⁴⁸ He then has an exchange with two other characters he encounters along the way, with all but one of the questions in the exchange bringing up lying (*mentir*) and truth (*verdad*, Ch. IV).¹⁴⁹ Finally, in his conversation with household members, questions circle back to doubt (*duda*, Ch. VII).¹⁵⁰ Once he finally departs with Sancho, questions in the early conversations between them revolve around seeing (*ver*, *mirar*) and actions performed or to be performed by characters (Chs. VIII-X). While the actual content and context of these questions might be trivial, put together, the wording and the nature of the questions in the beginning chapters of *Don Quixote* frame the narrative in terms of the truth of and doubts about reality, and the perception of the general state of things, echoing the questioning *ver/verdad* dyad brought up in the prologue.

A cursory overview of the questions exchanged between the main two characters in the First Part points to a conventional power-dynamic: most of the questions are posed by the person in the position of authority, Don Quixote (ninety-eight, vs. seventy-one by Sancho); in the majority of chapters the questions by Don Quixote outnumber those by Sancho if only slightly (ten, versus nine chapters in which Sancho poses more questions than Don Quixote). However, the distribution of questions, as well as their categories paint a different picture, as several distinct categories of questions emerge. First are the information-seeking questions: direct requests for information, followed by answers by the interlocutor that provide the information

¹⁴⁸ “¿Quién duda sino que en los venideros tiempos, cuando salga a luz la verdadera historia de mis famosos hechos, que el sabio que los escribiere no ponga, cuando llegue a contar esta mi primera salidad tan de mañana, desta manera?”

¹⁴⁹ “‘Minte’, delante de mí, ruin villano? —dijo don Quijote.”; “Así es verdad —dijo Andrés—; pero este mi amo, ¿de qué obras es hijo, pues me niega mi soldada y mi sudor y trabajo?”; “Si os la mostrara —replicó don Quijote—, ¿qué hiciérades vosotros en confesar una verdad tan notoria?”

¹⁵⁰ “¿Quién duda de eso? —dijo la sobrina”; “Pues, ¿quién lo duda? —respondió don Quijote.”

sought. Then there are rhetorical questions, carrying with them illocutionary force(s): they make a point that can be conveyed in non-interrogative form, and do not require an answer. Among them are the usual suspects, such as topic-setting questions, which launch a speech or a statement of substantial length and, most prominently, questions of challenge. This last type, when posed by Sancho as the character who, between the two, is the underling, is equivalent to authority-challenging questions in epic. Its counterpart from Don Quixote's perspective—and the counterpart of the epic questions of reproach—are rhetorical questions of excoriation. Both can further be divided into those that challenge/excoriate *actions* of a character (specifically actions that are perceived as socially or contextually inappropriate, similar to authority-challenging questions in epic) and those that challenge/excoriate the perception of reality, i.e. the truth.¹⁵¹

Unlike in the epic, where excoriating questions are infrequent and authority-challenging questions are rare, in *Don Quixote* the excoriating/challenging questions figure prominently on both sides—the authoritative side (the character in position of power and, to a limited extent, the narrator) and the non-authoritative side (characters on the receiving end of authority). In the chapters with the highest number of questions, Don Quixote's questions are primarily information-seeking (he inquires from Sancho about the details of his recently accomplished mission). That leaves the bulk of questions that challenge either the perception of reality (the truth) or the subsequent actions in those chapters in the hands (mouth?) of Sancho. Thus, even

¹⁵¹ In surveying the history of the term and discussing the notion of 'romantische Ironie,' Lilian R. Furst acknowledges *Don Quixote* as one of the rare works between Socrates and the Romantics that expanded its notion and use from a rhetorical trope to a more far-reaching literary mode. She cites Schlegel's claim that "Die Philosophie ist die eigentliche Heimat der Ironie" as support for her own claim that "[t]he center of gravity of Schlegelian irony lies in fact less in the artistic than in the ontological realm," rendering irony "an exciting epistemological instrument perfectly suited to handling the ambivalences of the universe" (33-4). Crucial here is the linchpin that Furst identifies (taking cue from Schlegel) in irony's fulfillment of its broader function: its "becom[ing] a mode of perception," specifically perception of "the ubiquity of paradox" (34). However, Furst is yet another in the long lines of scholars who have made critical insights into the functioning of irony without paying heed or obeisance to its interrogative roots.

when Don Quixote's questions correspond to his authority in one aspect (their number), Sancho's questions provide a no less dominant counterpoint. In his questions Sancho continues the epic tradition of using them to address the social (in)appropriateness of superiors' actions, but to a lesser extent. Much more frequent are questions about the perception of reality: the truth of things. More importantly, these pronouncements come from someone not in a position of authority, neither as a character, nor as a narrator, and not even as an esteemed reader (even though Rabelais' readers were social underdogs in comparison to institutions of the church and Sorbonne, as Screech notes, they were still well-educated bourgeoisie). Now, finally, the authoritative pronouncement can come from anywhere. Even lowly Sancho's authority is being questioned, most notably at the end of the First Part, which ends with his wife grilling him about his judgments and actions during the adventures he undertook with Don Quixote (an action echoed at the end of the Second Part, where Don Quixote undergoes a similar ordeal by his niece and housekeeper, Ch. LVIII).¹⁵² A pattern thus emerges of the voice *facing* the authority being the apt one to prompt the reexamination of the truth established by the authority.

The rhetorical questions that have been most common in the epic and epistles by those in the position of power are uttered by Don Quixote surprisingly sparingly: in the first volume of the novel, there are only four instances of him chastising Sancho Panza and equally few topic-setting questions.¹⁵³ Questions that Don Quixote directs toward Sancho are overwhelmingly those that ask him to confirm what Don Quixote expects to be the case. One form of this

¹⁵² Cf. *Gargantua*, which ends by the narrator questioning the very solution that the book presents. A more extended instance of Teresa interrogating Sancho appears in Ch. V of the Second Part where, according to Edward H. Friedman, "it is evident that the reader is supposed to note that Sancho has assumed the dialogical space of Don Quixote and Teresa that of Sancho. This is one of numerous signs of Sancho's increased power" (7).

¹⁵³ Rhetorical questions with illocutionary force of chastising: 255, 322, 324, 401; topic-setting questions: 117, 151, 155, 260.

question is a rhetorical question about the existence of other options with the expectation that the interlocutor will deny the options and side with Don Quixote's viewpoint, or with Quixote answering the question himself. Both appear, for example, at the beginning of Ch. XVIII when Don Quixote asks Sancho, "what else could those who so brutally took their amusement with you be but phantoms or beings from the next world?" and then soon afterward asks again and also answers, "tell me: what greater joy can there be in the world, what pleasure can equal that of conquering in battle and defeating one's enemy? None, most certainly there is none" (124-5).¹⁵⁴ When Don Quixote welcomes back Sancho from what was supposed to be a visit to his master's lady Dulcinea, he peppers Sancho with no fewer than twenty-two questions (257-60). While he begins with information-seeking questions ("where, how, and when did you find Dulcinea? What was she doing?" etc.), he soon begins to phrase his questions in a way that betrays his preconceptions as to what had happened, expecting Sancho merely to confirm them: "when you gave her my letter, did she kiss it? Did she place it on her head? Did she engage in some ceremony worthy of such a letter?" (258).¹⁵⁵ Finally, some of the questions in this category even more effectively combine the question and expected answer in a single rhetorical question. Half way through the First Part, Don Quixote defends in front of Sancho his desire not to stop short of the unprovoked, apparently meaningless, and downright silly actions in what he perceives to be the tradition of imaginary knights errant, doing so with a rhetorical flourish: "if I can do this without cause, what should I not do if there were cause?" (194).¹⁵⁶ Some of these questions are

¹⁵⁴ "¿qué podían ser sino fantasmas y gente del otro mundo? . . . dime: ¿qué mayor contento puede haber en el mundo, o qué gusto puede igualarse al de vencer una batalla y al de triunfar de su enemigo? Ninguno, sin duda alguna."

¹⁵⁵ "cuando le diste mi carta, ¿besóla? ¿Púsosele sobre la cabeza? ¿Hizo alguna ceremonia digna de tal carta, o qué hizo?"

¹⁵⁶ "si en seco hago esto, ¿qué hiciera en mojado?"

pithy but powerful. Early in the novel, Sancho Panza echoes Don Quixote's dream-like vision of their adventurous future and the rewards it will bring to them, prompting Don Quixote to direct his very first question to Sancho Panza; the question is a succinct rhetorical one meant to reinforce the fulfillment of the promises he has made him if he joins him as his squire: "Well, who can doubt it?" (57).¹⁵⁷ While most of these questions contain either question words/phrases that challenge any possible alternatives, as do 'what else' and 'what greater' above (e.g. "Is it possible?", "who do you think . . . if not?" 163), a particular subtype of these questions that ask Sancho to confirm Don Quixote's *perception* of reality typically include verbs of sensory perception or cognition, such as 'see,' 'hear,' or 'read.'¹⁵⁸ In most such cases, the seeing is not hypothetical but actual; when Sancho asks Don Quixote to consider the possibility that his sight might be deceiving him, and that the shiny object on top of the approaching stranger might not be the legendary helmet of Mambrino (but, as later becomes apparent, a barber's basin), Don Quixote exclaims, "[h]ow can I be mistaken . . . do you not see . . . ?" (153).¹⁵⁹ Some of Don Quixote's questions involving seeing and hearing are less about sensory perception and more about attitudes—and thus more hypothetical—mirroring the question above in asserting his commitment to acting as a knight errant by denying Sancho's apparent misapprehension about knightly duties: "Where have you ever *seen* or *read* that a knight errant . . . ? . . . have you ever *seen* a more valiant knight than I . . . ? . . . Have you ever *read* in histories of another

¹⁵⁷ "Pues, ¿quién lo duda?" In addition to the examples above, rhetorical questions of this type (eliciting confirmation by denying other options) include: 104 (what else ¿qué nos faltaba?), 116 (so badly . . . that? "¿Tan malas . . . que?"), 124 (what else "¿qué podían ser sino . . . ?"), 125 (what greater . . . what . . . can equal "¿qué mayor contento puede haber . . . o qué . . . igualarse . . . ?"), 146 (How can that be? Is it so essential . . . that? "¿Cómo puede ser eso? . . . ¿Tan de esencia . . . que . . . ?"), 156, 194 (if . . . [then] what . . . ? "si . . . ¿qué hiciera . . . ?"), 262 (to whom . . . but to you? ¿a quién . . . sino a ti?), 400.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Ralph Flores who, in his discussion on authority in *Don Quixote*, draws a connection between "the prologue author's 'purpose'—his *mira*" on the one hand, and "*mirar* . . . the way something looks" on the other (92).

¹⁵⁹ "¿Cómo me puedo engañar . . . ? . . . ¿no ves . . . ?"

who . . . ?” (71, emphasis mine). But in many cases, seeing is also cognitive, in the meaning of ‘understand’; when Sancho questions him about the purpose of his actions, Don Quixote responds: “Do you not see, Sancho . . . ?” (263).¹⁶⁰ By shifting the object of his rhetorical questions from the interlocutor to himself and his perception of the world, Don Quixote changes their function from that of imposing the speaker’s authority onto the interlocutor to that of questioning his own perception and consequently actions. The shift in the object of the question changes their effect from reasserting authority and certainty to questioning both. The utterances undermine the underlying deontic force of the assertions: no longer does the speaker channel his dominance onto the world around him in order to make things happen as they ought to. The questions, by targeting the speaker, his utterances, attitudes, and actions, instead of those around him, weaken the certainty and definitiveness of the issues they bring up. Instead of projecting the speaker’s attitude and verdicts on their surrounding by means of the rhetorical questions’ deontic force, they reveal the uncertainty of his pronouncements.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ “¿dónde has visto tú, o leído jamás, que caballero andante . . . ? . . . ¿has visto más valeroso caballero que yo . . . ? . . . ¿Has leído en historias otro que . . . ?” Other instances of rhetorical questions that seek to confirm perception of reality include: 126 (see), 129 (hear), 143 (see), 193 (have I not told you), 195 (noticed), 253 (hear), 263 (see).

¹⁶¹ These rhetorical questions are clearly different from the epic ones (asserting authority), Pauline ones (topic-setting ones asserting the truth), or even Socratic ones (questioning and chastising by apparent self-blame and self-effacing). The closest equivalent I could find is in the prologue to the twelfth-century epic poem, *The Conference of the Birds*, by the Persian Sufi poet Farid ud-Din Attar. In the prologue (which as an encomium to god’s creation can also be taken as a proem), two types of rhetorical questions dominate the narrative. The first is the questions about the god; even though these are rhetorical questions posed by the poet, they assert god’s authority over all the people. The second type are questions about the poet, other people, and even inanimate object, self-disparaging to all in the face of god’s might (“How can I boast I know reality?, 10; “How could any person’s soul arrive there?” 9; “But how can our confused perplexity / Begin to understand His sovereignty / How can the turning heavens penetrate / His secrets in their still unstable state?,” 12). This latter type of rhetorical questions can be seen as a special category; their somewhat confusing conflation of authoritative form of rhetorical questions and humbling content can be explained by the fact that they are used by singers and poets who as bards speak from the position of authority, yet the content they convey is one of humility in comparison to a mightier force (of god, in this case). However, these kinds of questions are typically not used in dialogue, fictional or not, thus making Don Quixote’s pronouncements stand out.

Even when Don Quixote's rhetorical questions come closest to the excoriating kind typical in the epic, they are for the most part ontological, about the state of things. In a scene where Don Quixote asserts in words his conviction that their adventures will eventually result in success, fame, and riches, he excoriates Sancho's doubts in the form of questions: "what would *happen* [i.e. how would things *be*] when I, having won it, make you its ruler? Will you render that impossible because *you are not* a knight, and *do not wish to be* one, and *do not have the courage or desire* to avenge offenses and defend your realm?" (105, emphasis mine).¹⁶² Don Quixote's questions here target not Sancho's actions, but his state of being, desires, and mental make-up as they pertain to Don Quixote's plans and aspirations. He is, by trying to impose his own perspective, really looking to have his own acknowledged and thus reasserted. The apparent insecurity in his own perceptions, or at least openness to have it redacted, is further complemented by the types of information-seeking questions he poses. Unlike epic authority figures who, when asking for information, typically ask for factual information or advice, Don Quixote as a rule inquires after Sancho's thoughts, feelings, knowledge, and opinions: What do you want, brother Sancho? "¿Qué quieres, Sancho hermano?" (104).¹⁶³

¹⁶² "¿qué sería de ti si, ganándola yo, te hiciese señor della? Pues ¿lo vendrás a imposibilitar por *no ser* caballero, *ni quererlo ser, ni tener valor ni intención* de vengar tus injurias y defender tu señorío?" Other instances of Don Quixote excoriating Sancho's words or attitudes include: 144 (What do you mean [don't tell me] "¿A qué llamas . . . ?"), 198 (You call it "¿. . . le llamas . . . ?"), 201 (Do do you think "¿Piensas tú que . . . ?"), 255 (Do you think . . . that . . . ? . . . Do you not realize . . . that . . . ? . . . who do you think has . . . ? "¿Pensáis . . . que . . . ? . . . ¿Y no sabéis . . . que . . . ? . . . ¿y quién pensáis que . . . ?"), 322 (what are you saying "¿qué es lo que dices . . . ?"), 324 (did you not just say to me "¿no me acabaste de decir ahora . . . ?"), 401 (You have dared to speak such words "¿Tales palabras has osado decir. . . ?"). Don Quixote does indeed pose questions that are much more closely in line with those of authoritative figure in epics in that they excoriate the *actions* of underlings, but apart from a handful of instances addressing Sancho (204, 253, 406, 420) they are directed to secondary characters in the novel.

¹⁶³ Other instances of this type of question include: 116 (Sancho my friend, are you sleeping? Are you sleeping, friend Sancho? "Sancho amigo, ¿duermes? ¿Duermes, amigo Sancho?"), 132 (Did you say that "¿Que te . . . ?"), 145 (Did you know her "¿conocíste la tú?"), 155 (Why are you laughing "¿De qué te ríes . . . ?"), 253 (What do you think "¿Qué te parece . . . ?"), 256 (Why do you say that "¿Por qué lo dices . . . ?"), 261 (what do you think "¿qué te parece a ti que . . . ?"), 406 (What do you think "¿Qué te parece desto . . . ?"). The only information-seeking questions that do not fall into this category are: 117 (Then you have been beaten as well? "Luego, ¿también estás tú aporreado?"), 148 (What sound is that, Sancho? "¿Qué rumor es ése, Sancho?"), and 194 (have you kept the helmet of Mambrino safe? "¿traes bien guardado el yelmo de Mambrino?").

Harold Bloom characterizes the dynamic between the two protagonists—specifically as it manifests itself through conversation—as “center[ing] upon the authenticity of dialogue between Sancho and the Don, who change one another through mutual listening” (*Cervantes’s* vii).¹⁶⁴ As noted in the first chapter of this study, questions coming from the characters not in the position of authority—i.e. authority-challenging questions—incite change. But while the antithetical aspect of the questions does carry over into the novel, rather than being choice-making, they now become ironical.¹⁶⁵ Questions clustered at the beginning frame the novel as ironic, authority-challenging, change-inducing one. Sancho too, in conformity to Bloom’s characterization of the two as complementing each other and learning from each other, and as Cervantes implied in the prologue, frequently poses information-seeking questions to Don Quixote. The closest Sancho comes to asking to have his perception of reality confirmed is in Ch. XVII where, under the influence of Don Quixote’s imaginary vision of the world, Sancho allows for the possibility that the figure walking into their room might not be what he knows him to be, asking Don Quixote: “Señor, can this by any chance be the enchanted Moor . . . ?” (118).¹⁶⁶ Other than this instance, Sancho’s information-seeking questions inquire about facts. When Don Quixote brings up a magic potion in a flask, Sancho is quick to ask: “What flask and what balm is that?” (72); when the two protagonists lie motionless after being beaten, Sancho asks for Don Quixote’s estimate: “how many days does your grace think we’ll need before we can move our legs?” (104); and when Don Quixote shares one of his chimeras involving two battling figures, Sancho wonders:

¹⁶⁴ Close comes to the similar conclusion about the dialogue progression between the two by analyzing it in terms of E. M. Forster’s definition of ‘round’ characters, i.e. in their ability to surprise the reader rather than conform to type-character expectations (53-60).

¹⁶⁵ See the comparison with irony above as based on contrast, dialogic/dialectic, and expressing a deontic attitude.

¹⁶⁶ “Señor, ¿si será éste, a dicha, el moro encantado . . . ?”

“Why do these two gentlemen hate each other so much?” (126).¹⁶⁷ The other prominent type of Sancho’s information-seeking questions to Don Quixote are those that ask about actions, specifically those that ask for guidance and/or instructions. When the two see in distance a large cloud of dust that Don Quixote imagines to be caused by two warring camps (but then turn out to be a flock of sheep), Sancho asks: “Señor, then what should we do?” (126, “Señor, ¿pues qué hemos de hacer nosotros?”). When Don Quixote decides to enter the imagined battle, Sancho realizes that his donkey would remain unattended and asks: “but where will we put this donkey so we’re sure to find him when the fight’s over?” (127).¹⁶⁸ Such fact-based and practical questions appear to comport with the image of Sancho as the voice of reason in the novel, less through asserting and more by means of pointed interrogation, especially in contrast to Don Quixote’s information-seeking questions that are predominantly about his imagined and mistaken perception of the world around him.

But Sancho’s information-seeking questions also counterbalance the rhetorical questions that he poses, which are more in line with those typical of the epic underlings that challenge or

¹⁶⁷ “¿Qué redoma y qué bálsamo es ése?”; “Pues, ¿en cuántos le parece a vuestra merced que podremos mover los pies?”; “Pues, ¿por qué se quieren tan mal estos dos señores?” Other instances of this type of questions by Sancho include: 131 (“¿y qué es esto que me ha sucedido?”), 133 (“¿Cuántas muelas solía vuestra merced tener en esta parte?”), 146 (“¿Cuántas han pasado hasta agora?”), 148 (“¿en qué lo echa de ver vuestra merced ahora más que nunca?”), 176 (“¿. . . se le entiende a vuestra merced de trovas? . . . ¿Carta misiva, señor?”), 191 (“¿qué le iba a vuestra merced en volver tanto por aquella reina Magimasa, o como se llama? O, ¿qué hacía al caso que aquel abad fuese su amigo o no?”), 192 (“Y ¿es de muy gran peligro esa hazaña?”), 199 (“¿Que la hija de Lorenzo Corchuelo es la señora Dulcinea del Toboso, llamada por otro nombre Aldonza Lorenzo?”), 441 (“¿Adónde va, señor don Quijote? ¿Qué demonios lleva en el pecho, que le incitan a ir contra nuestra fe católica?”).

¹⁶⁸ Other instances of this type of question include: 135 (“¿adónde habrá costillas que la sufran? . . . ¿qué aprovechará estar en campo abierto o no?”), 157 (“¿quiere vuestra merced darme licencia que departa un poco con él?”), 162 (“¿qué será cuando me ponga un ropón ducal a cuestras, o me vista de oro y de perlas, a uso de conde extranjero? . . . ¿Qué hay más . . . sino tomar un barbero y tenelle asalariado en casa?”), 193 (“¿qué es lo que vuestra merced quiere hacer en este tan remoto lugar?”), 199 (“¿qué se ha de hacer de la firma?”), 203 (“¿qué es lo que ha de comer vuestra merced en tanto que yo vuelvo? ¿Ha de salir al camino . . . a quitárselo a los pastores?”), 255 (“¿qué mercedes me puede hacer?”), 262 (“¿piensa vuestra merced caminar este camino en balde . . . ?”).

refute the actions of those in power.¹⁶⁹ Sancho challenges Don Quixote on several occasions, and when he does, it is typically with regard to his actions, specifically what Sancho perceives as the inappropriateness of Don Quixote's actions. He poses the first one in the episode of the windmills; after Don Quixote gets knocked out by the windmill, Sancho approaches him with shouts of reproach: "Didn't I tell your grace to watch what you were doing . . . ?" (59).¹⁷⁰ Later, when both of them find themselves beaten, Sancho urges Don Quixote to teach him how to make a healing potion: "What is your grace waiting for, why don't you make it and show me how it's done?" (72).¹⁷¹ Sancho's last attempt in the novel to confront Don Quixote's about his actions with a rhetorical question is during their last adventure before returning home, when the knight is about to attack a procession of penitents, when Sancho exclaims: "Where are you going, Señor Don Quixote?" (441).¹⁷² But almost equally frequent are questions that are not about actions but about perception, namely the rhetorical questions that negate shared (specifically Don Quixote's) perception and/or knowledge. In their first adventure with the windmills, the chimera of evil giants that Quixote's desire to prove himself as a knight errant has so spontaneously inflated is

¹⁶⁹ As is the case with Don Quixote, Sancho too asks a relatively small number of rhetorical questions with clear illocutionary force: 106 (surprise), 107 (exasperation), 116 (assertion), 117 (rebuke), 146 (confirmation), 151 (seeking agreement), 192 (dismissal, surprise), 203 (reproach), 421 (assertion), as well as one topic-setting question (204). There is even one instance where the illocutionary force explicitly acknowledges Sancho's lack of authority, albeit not as a question: "no puede ser mandato" ("I can't give . . . order[s]" 105; cf. the monk's similar statement in interrogative form in *Gargantua*: "And how . . . should I govern others, when I don't know how to govern myself?" 115). And, as is the case with underdogs in epics, when Sancho finds himself in a situation where he has the upper hand, he does not shy away from posing rhetorical questions that assert his authority by carrying the illocutionary force such as that of exhorting: 110, 209, 410.

¹⁷⁰ "¿No le dije yo a vuestra merced que mirase bien lo que hacía . . . ?"

¹⁷¹ "¿Pues a qué aguarda vuestra merced a hacelle y a enseñármelo?"

¹⁷² "¿Adónde va, señor don Quijote?" Other instances of this type of question include: 73 ("¿qué hemos de hacer? ¿Hase de cumplir el juramento . . . ?"), 103 ("¿Qué diablos de venganza hemos de tomar . . . ?"), 120 ("¿para qué consintió que lo gustase?"), 129 ("¿Qué es lo que hace?"), 192 ("¿es buena regla de caballería que andemos perdidos por estas montañas . . . ?"), 200 ("¿qué se le ha de dar . . . de . . . le envía y ha de enviar?"), 254 ("¿cómo es posible que pone vuestra merced en duda el casarse con tan alta princesa como aquésta?"), 263 ("¿cómo hace vuestra merced que todos los que vence por su brazo se vayan a presentar ante mi señora Dulcinea . . . ?").

swiftly punctured—for the reader if not for Don Quixote—with Sancho's pithy and level-headed: “¿Qué gigantes?” (“What giants?” 58). Having gone with Don Quixote through many adventures and misadventures, by Ch. XLIX Sancho has a much better grasp of how his master’s mind works and specifically where his distorted perception of the world comes from:

Is it possible, Señor, that the grievous and idle reading of books of chivalry could have so affected your grace that it has unbalanced your judgment and made you believe that you are enchanted, along with other things of this nature, which are as far from being true as truth is from lies? How is it possible that any human mind could be persuaded that there has existed in the world that infinity of Amadisés, and that throng of so many famous knights, so many emperors of Trebizond, so many Felixmarts of Hyrcania, so many palfreys and wandering damsels, so many serpents and dragons and giants, so many battles and fierce encounters, so much splendid attire, so many enamored princesses and squires who are counts and dwarves who are charming, so many love letters, so much wooing, so many valiant women, and, finally, so many nonsensical matters as are contained in books of chivalry? (423)¹⁷³

This last category of questions where Sancho challenges and on occasion outright refutes Don Quixote’s perception of the outside world spans the novel but also grows in length and punch

¹⁷³ Other instances of questions negating shared perception or knowledge include: 59 (“¿No le dije yo a vuestra merced . . . que no eran sino molinos de viento, y no lo podía ignorar sino quien llevase otros tales en la cabeza?”), 117 (“¿cómo llama a ésta buena y rara aventura . . . ? . . . ¿qué tuve sino los mayores porrazos que pienso recibir en toda mi vida? . . . ¿No le he dicho . . . ?”), 129 (“¿Qué locura es ésta?”), 131 (“¿No le decía yo . . . que los que iba a acometer no eran ejércitos . . . ?”), 132 (“¿Cómo no? . . . ¿era otro que . . . ? . . . ¿son de otro que . . . ?”), 134 (“¿juré yo algo, por dicha?”), 194 (“¿qué causa tiene para volverse loco? ¿ . . . qué señales ha hallado que le den a entender que la señora Dulcinea del Toboso ha hecho alguna niñería con moro o cristiano?”), 195 (“¿qué ha de pensar, sino que . . . ?”), 420 (“¿es posible que sea vuestra merced tan duro de cerebro, y tan falto de meollo, que no eche de ver que es pura verdad la que le digo, y que en esta su prisión y desgracia tiene más parte la malicia que el encanto?”).

with which they are delivered. They do so to the point of overtaking the position of authority from the interlocutor. Where the epic saw rare but powerful 'battles of questions' between the characters in the position of authority and underdogs fighting over the right course of action, Sancho and Don Quixote's exchanges follow that dynamic, where the authority is inverted, if not in social status, at least in the eyes of the reader with regard to the content of their discussion. But the reliability of the information presented is not that black and white. Sancho too gets drawn into Don Quixote's mirages who, for his part, shows moments of acute lucidity. Which takes us back to Bloom's notion of their dialogue as a dialectic one. To learn from each other they must be open to one another's differing opinions and, in turn, make their own pronouncements less than definitive. Questions reflect this attitude by veering away from antithetical ones typical in the epic or catechetical ones in Paul's epistles, forming a new (or, to be precise, reviving an old, Socratic) category of ironic questions. One could argue that the questions between the two main protagonists fit the types of categories presented above because they reflect the characters of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: a fanciful knight with a set image of the world who, when the reality does not match his preconceptions, is willing to bend that reality to his imagination and, on the other hand, a rather pragmatic squire willing to listen and sometimes accept and acquiesce to some of the absurd claims of his master, but also equally willing to challenge him when his more down-to-earth nature prevails. However, it would be equally valid to claim that the characters are what they are because they fit a narrative mold conducive to such questions being posed: challenging, status-quo denying, action inducing questions coming from a non-authoritative position.

The questions the two protagonists pose to each other do not result in clear answers, equilibrium of knowledge, or compromise. If Kurt Lewin's maxim, "If you want truly to understand something, try to change it" (qtd. in Stam 31), is true, then Bloom's claim of the two protagonists changing each other results from their mutual understanding. But while there is some of both (changing and understanding), they are far from thorough, let alone complete. Only the last category of Don Quixote's direct questions about Sancho's feelings and thoughts receives direct answers. But when Don Quixote poses questions to Sancho, his answers, as a rule, neither confirm nor accept his master's claims or assertions. Sancho's answers to some of the questions quoted above illustrate the most typical responses. When Don Quixote claims that being a knight errant is the highest of callings, asking Sancho to confirm it, Sancho responds that "[t]hat must be true . . . though I don't know anything about it," and proceeds to state what he does know to be the case, which is that they won only one battle, lost property, and endured multiple beatings (125).¹⁷⁴ Sancho occasionally answers in the negative: when Don Quixote asks him about who transcribed the message to Dulcinea that Sancho was supposed to memorize, Sancho responds that "truth be told, nobody transcribed the letter for me because I didn't take any letter" (257).¹⁷⁵ Sancho goes as far as to strongly confront his master; when Don Quixote exclaims, "Who can doubt it?" Sancho retorts: "I doubt it" (57).¹⁷⁶ A pattern of Don Quixote's questions emerges where they remain unanswered (and unconvincing due to his self-subverting phraseology), receive Sancho's answers that attempt to counter the claim (often containing some iteration of a 'but' phrase), deflect it, or outright reject it.

¹⁷⁴ "Así debe de ser —respondió Sancho—, puesto que yo no lo sé; sólo sé que . . ."

¹⁷⁵ "si va a decir la verdad, la carta no me la trasladó nadie, porque yo no llevé carta alguna"

¹⁷⁶ "¿quién lo duda? . . . Yo lo dudo"

Sancho's questions being of a different type, so are Don Quixote's responses. When Sancho poses factual information-seeking questions, Don Quixote either provides a response enveloped in a veil of his imagination, or fails to provide an answer, along the lines of: "I do not know" ("no sabré" 104). The same goes for responses to Sancho's questions about their course of action; even when Sancho inquires about a manifestly mundane issue as to where to place the donkey, Don Quixote does not fail to deliver a heroic-sounding response: "What you can do is let him find his own adventures" (127).¹⁷⁷ When Sancho addresses rhetorical questions with a particular illocutionary force to his master, Don Quixote either ignores him or offers a response along the lines of: "Be quiet, Sancho my friend" ("Calla, amigo Sancho" 59). Needless to say, when Sancho challenges his master's vision of the world, Don Quixote typically does not leave off his flights of fancy, but rather digs his heels in. Whichever direction the inquiry goes, the questions and their answers—when there are answers—appear to either bounce off of or wiggle by each other. Both characters do indeed buy into each other's perspectives at times, but while Bloom's "mutual listening" does take place during the interrogative instances, there is little "chang[ing] one another" during these particular moments. If anything, questions create and maintain the tension between the two characters' views and intentions—the tension of irreconcilable views—pointing to a new and different function of rhetorical questions as a rhetorical figure, particularly in relation to irony.

¹⁷⁷ "Lo que puedes hacer dél es dejarle a sus aventuras"

II.3. Open-endedness of Ironic Questions

Charles Presberg and Elias Rivers call Cervantes' prologue to the First Part an "anti-prologue" because it begins by "dup[ing readers] into thinking that the Prologue is not a fictional simulation, but an extra-fictional utterance," but then ends up being "invaded by novelistic fiction" with Cervantes "dramatiz[ing] the process of trying to write a prologue" (Presberg 219; Rivers 150, 149). Presberg argues that this approach reflects the anti-romance that it precedes by "pos[ing] problems, issues and dilemmas that are not only relevant to general questions of literary aesthetics, but also to their author's fiction" (237). Of course, Presberg's "problems" are nothing other than questions, since the book resists virtually any final, let alone clear-cut, answers. In *Don Quixote*, according to Tom Lathrop, "when something—*anything*—is stated, sooner or later it will be contradicted" (10). Lathrop's is a somewhat amplified articulation of the many facets of the dialectic nature and structure of *Don Quixote*: life vs. art, reality vs. imagination, body vs. soul, grandeur vs. delusion, as well as words vs. deeds, humor vs. cruelty, fiction vs. literary criticism, or the narrative of Don Quixote the character vs. the narrative of *Don Quixote* the text.¹⁷⁸ Thus Lathrop's "contradicted" too might be more accurately replaced by "questioned," since the interactive nature between these opposites (or, true, contradictions) prevents them from being resolved. So when Cervantes refers to his book as "historia verdadera," it is these dialectic opposites that prevent us from dismissing it as such. The text is dialectically effective so much so that "Don Quixote . . . despite his supposedly anachronistic nature (a seventeenth-century character who aims to revive medieval institutions of chivalry) . . . has proven to be truly protean and adaptable to modern and postmodern circumstances,"

¹⁷⁸ For definitions and discussions of the last four, see Levin (*Example*), Nabokov, Riley, and Friedman.

“serv[ing] as an open ideological canvas for its readers” for more than four centuries and becoming “the New Criticism’s worst nightmare [because of its subverting and rejecting any] single way of reading” it (Bayliss, 383, 388, 391). Not only is the text of the novel “slippery” (Parr 15), even one of the basic premises of the novel—Don Quixote’s madness—cannot be established with finality. After all, when Sancho Panza directs his attention to the sanity of his master in Chapter XXIV of the Second Part—“Is it possible that a man who knows how to say all the many good things that he’s said here can say he’s seen the impossible foolishness that he says he saw in the Cave of Montesinos?”—his putative answer only delays the actual one: “Well now, time will tell.” (619). Hutcheon sheds light on why irony turns out to be an apt device to present the opposition-based, dialectically-driven world for which *Don Quixote* continues to attract attention and incite critical discussion. Her division of the functions of irony is based on the affect and its intensity that the functions are associated with, consequently ranging from emphatic to inclusionary on the positive-affect side, and from decorative to elitist, exclusionary attacking on the negative (with seven intervening stages on each side, 221).¹⁷⁹ Irony in its essence is based on and results in differences that both oppose and attract each other, engaging in “a dynamic relationship, a communicative process”; irony is thus an “interaction not only between ironist and interpreter but between different meanings, where both the said and the unsaid must play off against each other” (220). Hutcheon unveils the mechanism the effect of which Richard Brown describes in terms of freedom. He differentiates two main types of irony: one is the ritual irony, of the likes described in Bakhtin, which is sanctioned and controlled/regulated by those who are being ironized (the king, the church, etc.);

¹⁷⁹ For a thorough categorization of the types of irony (rather than their functions/effects) see Muecke, who divides them based on the mechanism by which they achieve ironic effect from irony as rhetorical enforcement to Catch 22 irony (*Irony* 8-13).

the other is what he calls the “unbounded, unofficial, subterranean irony, irony that is radically free” (559). This is the type that “strives to liberate us from moralism of any stripe” and thus consequently “not only *serves* freedom[, but] *is* freedom” (559). The freedom that the author of irony achieves is not only to impact his readers by dispensing knowledge, but to actively engage them by endowing them with agency and prompting them to use it. It is the freedom of being able to change the world and have one’s authorship acknowledged, even sanctioned.¹⁸⁰

The resistance of the novel to be interpreted in a single way begins with its main character, for whom neither characters nor the reader can say for certain if he is mad or wise, and when he is which (Susan Byrne argues that his shifts from madness to sanity—most explicitly at the end of the novel when Quixote exclaims “I was mad, and now I am sane” [937]—is not motivated only by novelistic needs, but also by practical ones, such as the need to be sane in order to make his final will and testament as well as his last confession and penance valid and receive last sacraments, and not only, as critics have claimed, for Cervantes to forestall another plagiarized novel; 81). Reasons might not be only practical in terms of developing the plot, but logistical in terms of the historical circumstances: analyzing multiple layers of narrative in the First Part, de Armas argues for the likely influence of “the debates raging in Italy over Ariosto’s

¹⁸⁰ There is an endless amount of discussion on the effects literature has on social change, with some authors attracting attention more than others (Dickens comes to mind even more so than many of the avant-garde authors). This dialectic process of reading literary ironic narratives has most recently been developed into action beyond literary dialectic in Augusto Boal’s *Theater of the Oppressed*. The Forum Theatre aspect of it in particular goes the furthest in relating a dialectic process to the real world by putting words into action. Based on “problem-posing rather than problem solving at the onset”, its “end goal is not to convince others of one right model for behavior but rather to present an *anti-model* that ‘must always present doubt and not certainty’” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 95, 93; quote is from Boal 1992, 232). Particularly pertinent is the five-step process of enacting real-life scenes, while incorporating new perspectives and improvised optional narratives (Cahnmann-Taylor 93-5), which can be taken as one way of enacting the reading process. The technique embraces laughter as a crucial part of the process: “Boal distinguished this kind of cathartic release of tension [bursts of laughter during rehearsal and improvisation of ‘changing scripts’] from the Aristotelian catharsis, which, he maintained, disempowers, tranquilizes, and dilutes the desire for change. In contrast, the group-generated laughter represented cathartic releases of tension through performance, having the potential to release spect-actors from detrimental blocks to change both in the performance and in real life” (99).

use of multiple plots” and compares sections of the novel that “move from linearity to interlace” to “the Greek novel and to a lesser extent the Italian romances” (*Don Quixote* 113-8). Arthur Efron, identifying all scholarship that acknowledges the irreconcilable tension of meanings in *Don Quixote* as ‘perspectivist’ interpretation, accounts for the success of the novel by its effectiveness in countering what he calls ‘Dulcineism’: “the belief that human life is satisfactorily conducted only if it is lived out in close accord with prescribed ideals of the received culture,” i.e. in its placing itself in opposition to tradition (11). Surveying scholarship on Cervantes, both Close and Bloom note that “critics have failed to agree on most of the book’s fundamental aspects” (Bloom, *Cervantes’s* 146). Just as Cervantes’ characters resist being boxed into caricatures, so the text as a whole resists clear-cut interpretations of its symbolism and meaning. Bloom compares it to *Hamlet* in the failure of subsequent generations to answer the questions that the two texts raise.¹⁸¹ Its remarkable efficiency in doing so testifies to its success as a dialectic tool, one between the text and the reader. And even though the frequency of explicit questions posed in *Don Quixote* does not match that of *Hamlet*, the ultimate unanswerability, or open-endedness to be more precise, of the questions fits their ironic nature not only on the sentence level (the level of verbal irony), but on the level of the work as a whole (the level of Socratic irony). Of course, that means that the questioning process is not only, or even primarily, between the characters, but between the text and the reader. They are about change—one that is incited by reading the text. The diegetic space of the novel cannot and does not change; but the extradiegetic, after reading the text, ought to.

¹⁸¹ Levin notes in *The Question of Hamlet* that *Hamlet* contains more questions than any other Shakespearean play, while Normand Berlin goes as far as to claim that *Hamlet* “contains more questions than any other play in our tragic tradition” (65).

Spurring the change is the eiron. Frye says that an ironic comedy is primarily *speculum consuetudinis*, where the eiron “is conventional, but his strength resides less in the conventions he observes than in his pragmatic attitude” (*Northrop* 155-6).¹⁸² ‘Pragmatic’ here means primarily ‘independent’—a non-conforming free thinker. While alazons, in conformity with the type-set nature of their character, follow the custom and expectations to the letter and then some, eirons take a different approach. An eiron is a problem-solver, an engineer, someone with the pragmatic approach of questioning the prescribed custom and figuring out, offering, and/or following an alternative narrative to the customary one (or one, as the case is in *Don Quixote*, prescribed by the alazon who in an ironic comedy is the equivalent of the tragic hero). This alternative narrative is one that counters Don Quixote’s view of reality who, according to Frye’s definition of comedic alazon, “has conditioned himself to act a single part, and so falls into the bondage of his own law” (149); on a larger scale, this eironic questioning “deliver[s us] from tragedy” with its tyranny of “the absurd law,” of “what [according to the tragedy] is and must be” (157, 152). After all, Frye extends the definition of eiron to “the one who laughs last”; according to this definition, the eiron in tragedy is opposite the audience, while the eiron of the comedy “is the audience itself” (155); he thus brings the questioning process out of the text and into the real world.

The primary effect of questions between Don Quixote and Sancho is not stirring the conversation toward one of the predetermined options (such as the antithetical authority-challenging questions in epic, which present two choices: the right and the wrong one), but laying out a pattern of and initiating a dialectic process. But without predetermined choices or

¹⁸² Frye’s article is about the comedies of Jonson and Shakespeare, but his analysis is applicable to *Don Quixote* as he himself implies when in passing he brings up Don Quixote as an example of an alazon, “based on the same comic laws” (153, 150).

provisional answers (answers to what?—the questions are for the most part rhetorical to start with), what do these questions lead to? Both Bakhtin and Screech emphasize the role of laughter in Rabelais, and particularly in its apparent attempt at revising opinions of and attitudes toward institutional sacred cows. Screech says that “comedy and humour are often linked with religious or philosophical beliefs, with ethical norms, with social morals and conventions, which are by their nature less stable and less permanent elements in human culture” (*Rabelais* 1). As was the case in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, humor combines with the deontic force to establish a dynamic, dialectic process, which as Bakhtin notes, uses laughter to subsume its opposite, and ultimately transform the reader’s view of both opposites that were initially presented. The institutions are based on rules, and so are fictional genres (such as chivalric novel) and, more broadly, the perception of reality and our articulation of it: the truth. Many of the questions that Don Quixote asks as a de facto authority figure are ontological in nature. They use the available information (from immediate surrounding, previous knowledge, and books) in order to interpret it into a meaningful narrative. But it is Sancho’s often witty and humorous questions that then take that interpretation and question it, in fact rewriting the perceptible world into a revised, logically more sound truth, but not a definite one—open-ended instead.¹⁸³

Dilwyn Knox, in his book on medieval and Renaissance *ironia*, makes two important points about irony that are important for how it relates to rhetorical questions: that the underlying antithesis of irony is not one of meaning but of propositions (26-33), and that during the Renaissance Socratic replaces Aristotelian irony (97-146). By propositions, he means statements

¹⁸³ André Brink notes that “the notions of original and copy, reality and representation/illusion/fake, acquir[e their] full significance only if one bears in mind that the whole of the *Don Quixote* is presented to the reader as a Spanish translation from an original document in Arabic” (22). The novel thus implies that the truth does not derive from a single authoritative source, but is subject to collective authority that includes composition and revision.

(grammatically sentences) rather than concepts (words, terms), since truth value cannot be assigned to contradictory or opposite terms, but only to statements (24-6). The irony of these “truth” statements is in Renaissance works often presented with expressions that “emphasize the speaker’s belief, albeit feigned, that his statement is true: [*credo* (‘I believe’),] *scilicet* (‘of course’), *vero* (‘truly’), *videlicet* (‘clearly’), and Biblical Hebrew and vernacular equivalents like *annam*, *invero* (‘indeed’), *certamente* (‘certainly’), *veramente* (‘truly’), and so on” (28). These phrases appear to have had a similar, if not the same, effect in Renaissance writing that they do in today’s texts: emphasizing the speaker’s belief in his assertions based on opinion and perception rather than on verifiable evidence. This way of expressing irony highlights the fact that its function is not so much about description, poetic expression, or rhetorical emphasis, but primarily about beliefs and perception, both of which are evolving cognitive processes rather than static entities. Paradoxically (and appropriately so for the purposes of irony), using expressions such as *credo* thus weakens rather than strengthens the speaker’s point, making it vulnerable to reconsideration, criticism, and revision, the prime example being Don Quixote’s self-questioning questions.

As for his other important point, the revival of Socratic irony, Dilwyn Knox identifies three defining points of Renaissance irony: breaking off from derogatory aspects of irony (which are relegated to sarcasm and/or referred to separately as Aristotelian dissimulation) and focusing on its playfulness and humor, the focus on self-deprecation (both sincere and ironic), and the dialogic nature of irony, with all three characteristics focusing on eliciting the truth. However, he does not discuss the interrogative aspect of either Socratic irony (even though questioning is routinely associated with it), or of medieval and Renaissance *ironia*. He does note that both

humor and witticism on the one hand and self-deprecation on the other are used in order to elicit truth by, in Erasmus' words, "refut[ing] their [interlocutors'] arrogant ignorance."¹⁸⁴ Thus, in a dialogic context (i.e. when irony is not about a third party), the function of irony converges with that of rhetorical questions in questioning, challenging, and subverting the interlocutor's position. And even though Dilwyn Knox's book pays no heed to Bakhtin's work in general, and the notion of heteroglossia in particular, his tripartite characterization of medieval and Renaissance *ironia* comports with Bakhtinian characterization of the Renaissance novel as dialogic and based on humor. These two characteristics appearing in concert reveal that the dialectic nature of the early-modern novelistic discourse stems from it being one of mutual questioning, highlighting the fact that the dialogic nature of the novel is really about mutual questioning. Specifically, it is about rhetorical questioning, which demands of the interlocutors to reexamine their original or current position.¹⁸⁵

While most rhetorical figures function on a scale that can be contained in a single word, phrase, or an image, irony even in this smallest and most basic form functions on the level of a narrative, challenging an existing one and offering in its place an alternative narrative. This is probably why irony is compared to, more often than to any other figure, allegory. Other rhetorical figures can be said to require narrative context, even when they most immediately invoke merely a single image: Burns' simile "my love is like a red, red rose" would not be

¹⁸⁴ "horum arrogantem inscitiam" (qtd. in Dilwyn Knox, 118-9). Knox's third insight that irony is used only in reference to interlocutors' ideas reinforces this end of irony.

¹⁸⁵ Incidentally, "mutual listening" compounded by mutual questioning as the framework of a dialectic process answers the question that Brian Phillips poses and addresses in his 2005 article: "*Don Quixote* is a book about the human experience of the aesthetic image. Why is it not written in the first person?" (374). Prioritizing one side to the point of granting them the authoritative voice of the narrator would abate the dialectic process. It would also relegate the novel to the long tradition of comedic works which deploy the alazon-vs-eiron dynamic and in which, as Frye notes, "from Plautus to the movies . . . these central characters of comedy [eirons] are seldom very interesting people," thus having less reason for the novel to stand out from it (*Northrop* 150).

performing its full function without the master narratives of love and romance fiercely working behind the scenes to give it meaning. But this particular simile does not challenge or prompt the change of the course of the narrative, i.e. what happens, but rather augments it with new information. Good irony, on the other hand, does not just criticize one type of narrative by relying on others (e.g. criticize the narrative of the institution of religion as holy and untouchable by relying on and invoking already established narratives of monks as laughably sinful and corrupt)—that would be sarcasm—but hints at the fact that there are alternatives, even though it does not necessarily spell them out. Claire Colebrook brings this up when she claims that “other figures of speech make a comparison, contrast or likeness while irony invokes an absent or hidden sense” (15).¹⁸⁶ But even when irony does not spell out that hidden sense, it reveals enough of it for the reader to be able to deduce the basic outline—after all, as Norman Knox points out “[u]nlike the criminal, he [the ironist] wants to get caught” (147). Unlike sarcasm, the irony “requires that, while the fallacy [the object, or in Muecke’s terms, the victim of irony] is exposed and overthrown by the admissions which it has itself demanded, the truth should be set in the clearest light” (Thirlwall 485).¹⁸⁷ That hidden sense—the truth—is an alternative narrative. When Sancho exclaims “What giants?” he denies Don Quixote’s reality and goes on to spell out the competing narrative of the windmills, as he does after he asks Don Quixote about

¹⁸⁶ See n136 above.

¹⁸⁷ Bryant Creel claims that the most overt criticism of sarcasm (which he refers to as ‘satiric malice,’ but which engenders the same kind of derisive mockery as sarcasm does) is expressed in the twenty nine chapters in the Second Part of the novel when the Don Quixote and his squire are hosted by the Duke and Duchess. “The ducal country house reveals itself to be the home of malicious ridicule, base frivolity, and aggressive ill-will. . . . That type of satire and the spirit that underlies it stand in conspicuous contrast to both the childlike goodness of Don Quijote and the delicately reproving attitude with which Cervantes himself subtly and implicitly places the Duke and Duchess in an unfavorable light” (110). To this I would add that the satire of the Duke and Duchess exhibits no questioning, listening, (re)examining, or learning, as their questions addressed to either Don Quixote or Sancho Panza are either of the traditional epic kind or straight-forward mocking sarcasm. They only listen to have their expectations of what the answer would be confirmed in order to laugh at the speaker’s expense.

the effect of the books of chivalry on his mind (58 and 423, quoted above). But when he asks his master, “how can you call this a good and singular adventure if it left us the way it left us?” he is looking to define their experience in terms that are different from the rules of the genre of chivalric novels (117). And when he later wonders, “is it a law of chivalry that we should wander through these mountains with no path or direction, looking for a madman who, when he’s found, may feel like finishing what he began and I don’t mean his story but your grace’s head and my ribs, and break them completely?” he is spelling out the narrative that is likely to happen precisely in order to change its course (192).

But while Sancho occasionally answers his rhetorical questions, irony typically merely hints at the alternative narrative. The problem is that what is said and what is meant does not always—or even typically—correspond to a neat antithesis. Dilwyn Knox brings up a generic example:

A announces that he has felled a young tree causing an obstruction. B, smiling ironically, remarks: “Very clever”. C believes that B thinks that A has cut down the wrong tree. On the other hand, D believes that B thinks that A has cut down the correct tree, but that A does not deserve extravagant praise for such a simple task. But both C and D understand B is being ironic. (36)

Knox goes on to explain the difference based on antithesis (contraries vs. contradictories, based on Aristotle’s four-part division of oppositions). But for the questioning nature of irony, it is important to note that there typically is no one clear-cut alternative that is being hinted at. Thus, even when irony is expressed as a statement or a command, it is inherently a question, an enigma to be resolved by the interlocutor. John C. Thirlwall defines verbal irony as “a figure which

enables the speaker to convey his meaning with greater force by means of a contrast between his thought and his expression, or to speak more accurately, between the thought which he evidently designs to express, and that which his words properly signify” (483). When the intended meaning is too complex, evasive, or ambiguous to articulate (or when it is yet to be determined, such as in irony that blames without fully articulating the alternative that could be praised in a given context) stating it in negative terms means stating it “more accurately.” In a literary text, verbal irony is by definition a combination of verbal and dramatic irony: it is not only the characters who learn about how the plot unfurls—the learning is a two-way street; and the way the readers learn—at least in part—is by means of ironic statements on behalf of the characters—open-ended ones that do not merely confirm the what while filling in some of the details of the how, but bring up new issues or old issues in a new way, dissect them in front of the reader, and then leave the room.

Framing the topic and then leaving it to the interlocutor to provide the content makes for a large area of overlap between irony and questions, which makes it curious that, in the many categorizations of irony, questions have not secured a more prominent place. The driving force of irony is the disparity in knowledge between two groups: characters and the audience in dramatic irony, one group vs. another in cosmic irony, or two interlocutors in verbal irony. But, with the possible exception of Socratic irony, which is more didactic than literary, the resolution of irony is not merely a result of equalizing the imbalance of knowledge by exchange and osmosis. Yes, the drama of Greek tragedy and its pity and terror lie in characters learning what the audience already does, and the same goes for other types of irony. But what does the audience gain if characters in the diegetic spacetime of a single drama learn what the audience

already knows (i.e. the relevant information about all the characters and the ending of the story)?

The key to irony is not some sort of a trick that the audience plays on imaginary characters who are at their mercy. Rather, the drama, the pity, the terror come from the audience's insight into the how the ironic plot unfolds, how the characters find out what they were not aware of. The devil is in the detail—in the detail of the story. Quintilian marks that the contrast can be detected when “the delivery, the character of the speaker or the nature of the subject . . . is out of keeping with the words” (VIII.vi.54). Thus the ironist provides the readers with minimal clues, and asks them to do the work by reexamining the connections within the narrative that is being presented.¹⁸⁸ The classical audience knows the key elements of the plot—what Seymour Chatman calls the kernels of narrative. But trying to deduce the details of the original plot originally merely hinted at—details that help one fill in the blanks—is what the audience gains from the ironic setup and why they come to the theater. Dramatic irony is a two-way street, with both sides—characters and the audience—gaining in knowledge. The same triad of agents (characters-author-audience) is at the core of the ironic questions in early-modern comic novel; but the roles of the author and the audience are different, almost reversed. The author knows and introduces the skeleton of the plot, one that the audience is aware of: monks are corrupt, scholars are stuffy and overbearing, war is pointless. The author provides the details—a new plot that describes the shenanigans of characters representative of the main points of the plot. But then the audience is required to continue the process of filling in the gaps beyond what is stated by the text—something that questions in combination with irony demand with even greater force than

¹⁸⁸ Even fewer cues than in a non-ironic narrative, which already requires the reader to do a fair amount of detective work. Umberto Eco hints at the importance of such cues when he characterizes a narrative fiction as “necessarily and fatally swift, because, in building a world that comprises myriad events and characters, it cannot say everything about this world. It hints at it and then asks the reader to fill in a whole series of gaps” (3).

irony on its own. The details are not stated in their entirety. To be sure, as Eco points out, they never can be stated in full in a text, but here that becomes obvious and, instead of ignoring the glossed-over details, their lack is highlighted, and with a finger pointed to those missing details, the inquiring eyes are pointed at the reader.

The difference between information-seeking questions and rhetorical ones corresponds to the difference between metaphor-based tropes and irony-based ones. The former create knowledge, they augment it and expand it; the latter assume the audience's existing knowledge to be flawed and seek to first attack and weaken it in order to ultimately have the audience revise it according to the guidelines provided by the text. (In that respect they also correspond to dramatic and verbal irony.) When Burns says that his "love is like a red, red rose," he is introducing his love to his audience. When Shakespeare says that his "mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" or that "no . . . roses see I in her cheeks" (Sonnet 130), he too is introducing his love to his audience, but only as a secondary function of the poem. Its primary function is to make fun of Petrarchan clichés and commonplaces and ultimately prompt the audience to revise their perception and knowledge of it. This is Shklovsky's estrangement (defamiliarization) in action. Rhetorical questions perform the same function, but with even more directness and force. Luigi Gallucci writes in an epigram:

Atticus, you deny Fate exists, and ask what Nemesis can do.

See, then, what your Fate is and what Nemesis can do.

Why were you not Philodes, why was Apollo not Python?

Why was Hylas not brutish, why was the gazelle not a hunter?

Why does someone infamous for vices gleam with gold?

Why does virtue become harmful and oppress the virtuous?

Why was Fortune unable to make you a king?

Why did the goddess Fortune not want me to be Pope? (qtd. in Dilwyn Knox 30)

Unlike irony presented in indicative statements which makes a case and then rests, leaving it to the reader to take it or ignore it and move on, rhetorical questions create the tension by opening the door to competing narratives: they make it uncomfortable to leave the situation as-is. Compounding it with repetition and gradation, as is the case in the example above, further amplifies this effect. But the writer does not provide an answer or a solution, leaving it to the reader to supply it. And to do that, the reader, ideally, must provide for a logical explanation of why one option is better than the other. And to do *that*, he must reexamine his rooted beliefs and knowledge, specifically those aspects of it that are being contradicted by the aspects of the text he is being asked to question.

III. Palimpsestic Reading: Unlearning in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*

The prologues of Rabelais and Cervantes begin by addressing the readers: Rabelais calls them fellow guzzlers, while Cervantes gallantly absolves them of the expectation to be generous to his work. Both Rabelais and Cervantes address their readers throughout the work, and so does Sterne. But while Rabelais and Cervantes frame their fictional narratives with prologues in which they directly address their readership, Sterne commences his novel without one, yet the narrative nevertheless prominently features the narrative voice—one that is too intrusive to recede into the background.

The first chapter of *Tristram Shandy* ends with a brief exchange between Tristram's parents at the moment of his conception:

Pray, my dear, quoth my mother, have you not forgot to wind up the clock?—
Good G—! cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate
 his voice at the same time,——*Did ever woman, since the creation of the world,*
interrupt a man with such a silly question? Pray, what was your father saying?
 ——Nothing. (6)

The chapter begins in medias res, with a scene not immediately clear, and creating a reasonable expectation for the end of the chapter to provide at least a tinge of illumination. What it does provide, in the course of only a few lines, is four voices interacting with each other: two characters (father and mother), the reader, and the narrator. Three of them are asking questions, with no answers in sight—only avoidance.

One issue that *Tristram Shandy* explores with consummate perseverance is the beginnings. Unlike the narrators of Rabelais and Cervantes, who frame the narrative at the beginning, and then leave the reader to it, Sterne reintroduces the beginning again and again: by the end of the book he not only fails to supply the narrative promised by the title, but even fails in his repeated attempts to set up an apt beginning for it. Where and, more importantly, how does one begin the story of Tristram Shandy? The novel presents a series of attempts and failures to identify that narrative beginning and enact it in a manner that would satisfy the demands of the genre and the expectations of the audience as well as the narrator. Each attempted answer only begets new questions, creating the narrative of infinite digressions that only end in more questions. This comports with the pattern of the previous two novels: each

models its main purpose at the beginning through the use of questions: Rabelais models the critical approach to established written sources; Cervantes models the questioning of words and actions; and Sterne models the reader's approach to novels: the reader ought not to look for answers, but encounter, if not devise, new questions.

Sterne's questions too are ironic. The main feature of irony is that it leaves what it wants to say unsaid. Sterne's key critic, Wolfgang Iser, accounts for the first-person narrator of *Tristram Shandy* in terms of the tension between tradition and innovation characteristic of the eighteenth century:¹⁸⁹

every tradition produces a silence by what it says, and traditions perpetuate themselves through the sequent articulation of what has remained unsaid. These unavoidable omissions open up a space for interpretation, which is necessary for the subsequent appropriation of the tradition, whose features are bound to change if its impact is to be preserved within the new context (55-6)

Iser dismisses the possibility of an omniscient narrator since the genius of *Tristram Shandy* is in "conveying the limitations of knowledge as a means of experiencing subjectivity" (56). Iser too does not delve into questions even as he prominently quotes the following passage that mirrors one from Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*:

Tell me, ye learned, shall we for ever be adding so much to the *bulk*—so little to the *stock*?

Shall we forever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another?

¹⁸⁹ René Girard identifies the eighteenth century as the time when the key shift in literature (and even more broadly) from emphasis on repetition (i.e. tradition) to innovation and originality takes place.

Are we forever to be twisting, and untwisting the same rope? for ever in the same track—for ever at the same pace?

Shall we be destined to the days of eternity, on holy-days, as well as working-days, to be shewing the *relics of learning*, as monks do the relics of their saints—without working one—one single miracle with them? (V.1.309-10, Iser omits the first sentence in his quote)

At first sight, *Tristram Shandy* seems to comply with Phillips' dictum to be written in the first person (see n185 above). Yet Tristram, even though the narrator, reverts to dialogic form by introducing and consistently reintroducing an imaginary interlocutor, who is sometimes Sir, sometimes Madam, sometimes Sir Critick, and sometimes gentle reader, and even supplying some of their side of the dialogue, especially when one side or the other poses questions. This comports with Iser's claim that Tristram-the-first-person-narrator offers a better insight into the immediacy of the experience than does the hindsight that (semi)omniscient narrators rely on; or, as he puts it "what it is to be caught up in the midst of things without having recourse to a grandstand view that would facilitate an answer" (56). Iser's wording here is curious, mainly the emphasis on the need for answers. Because even though the questions the narrator poses in the book are not consistent (other than being directed at one of the imaginary interlocutors), the need for answers is.

One way to reconcile the inconsistency in use of questions by Tristram-the-narrator (some are rhetorical, some information-seeking, and many merely implied) is to apply Barthes' definition of enigma: the first of the three elements of the "*hermeneutic code* . . . whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which

can either formulate the question or delay its answer” (17). This way of identifying questions might sound overly broad to the point of meaninglessness, but it is not unjustified. To support this assertion, allow me to compound the semiotic view of Barthes with one from philosophy of science by Bas van Fraassen. In trying to articulate the nature of a scientific explanation, he goes against previous articulations, most prominently Carl G. Hempel’s deductive-nomological model of explanation as a conclusion drawn from a large body of data based on identifying patterns, and defines it as an answer to a question, even when that question is discovered and articulated after the answer. This reinforces Barthes’ claim that questions do not have to be explicit, as they can be “formulate[d]” by a “variety of chance events.” Following Iser’s logic, *Tristram Shandy* is a search for answers, even if along the way it stumbles, fails, or merely avoids articulating the questions. Tristram’s inability to find and provide answers makes it possible for him to “stay in and to communicate ‘the middle of things’” (Iser 57). Unlike Padgett Powell’s recent *The Interrogative Mood: A Novel?*, which is composed entirely of questions and consequently leaves the impression of a lyrical work even as it strives to build a narrative, here is a hero who finds (or actively places?) himself almost continuously in a web of questions and incomplete answers that yield more questions: a process of continuous overwriting.

The drive to relentlessly question (authorities, tradition, institutions, custom) in the three works can be said to stem from the humanistic tradition of the times (Rabelais and Cervantes more so than Sterne).¹⁹⁰ That same humanistic tradition, according to C. S. Lewis, identified “chivalrous romance and scholastic philosophy” as “[t]he two especial objects of their aversion” (29). While these two objects appear to neatly correspond to the topics of the novels

¹⁹⁰ Bakhtin characterizes *Tristram Shandy* as “a peculiar transposition of Rabelais’ and Cervantes’ world concept into the subjective language of the new age” (*Rabelais* 37).

by Cervantes and Rabelais, the two novels cannot be taken as representative examples of humanistic tendencies or goals as described by Lewis. He claims that the “war between the humanists and the schoolmen [scholastics] was not a war between ideas: it was, on the humanists’ side, a war *against* ideas,” in which humanists placed the criterion of “eloquence” above all else; thus the effect of humanism on philosophy was that “the New Learning created the New Ignorance” (30-1, emphasis mine). In literature, Lewis criticizes humanism for imitating the form rather than content of Latin literature by overly relying on its most superficial features, “[e]levation and gravity of language,” consequently “creat[ing] a new literary quality—vulgarity,” by which Lewis means excessive refinement of form that does not correspond to the content (24).¹⁹¹ But, while Lewis quotes Rabelais as an example of the humanist anti-idea attitude launched by writers against philosophers, neither Rabelais nor Cervantes can be accused of vulgarity as Lewis defines it; their work is not one with an overly polished surface but a sophisticated resistance to inapt dualisms and oversimplifications. They go not against the ideas, but against the stale, static institutions of society and literature, i.e. against what used to be ideas but has in the meantime been reified into established institutions. And while Lewis rightly notes that humanism sometimes went too far in emphasizing Cicero as a model, the writings of Rabelais and Cervantes at least also adopted from Cicero (and potentially Plautus, Seneca, and Quintilian) the concept of ‘unlearning’ (*dediscere*) as a precursor to learning and a more productive iteration of the ‘New Learning and New Ignorance.’¹⁹² While New Ignorance is

¹⁹¹ Lewis’s ‘vulgarity’ is not to be confused with Rabelais’ and Cervantes’ irreverence; ‘kitsch’ might be a close enough alternative, anachronistic as it is.

¹⁹² Plautus, *Amphitruo* 687; Cicero, *Pro Quinctio* xvii.54; Seneca, *Epistles* L.8; Quintilian I.i.5. To Lewis’s credit, he did acknowledge the possibility that “[p]erhaps every new learning makes room for itself by creating a new ignorance” (31). But in the case of humanistic literature, he decidedly saw it as a negative phenomenon, as the term he chose connotes.

about forgetting things, replacing old (useful) knowledge with new one that might or might not be better (and often isn't), unlearning is about an active act of revising existing knowledge, something that all three novels heartily encourage and do.

Juxtaposition of what is and what is expected (i.e. what ought to be) is present in epic questions in the form of antithetical questions. These questions continue into the early-modern comic novel, but in addition to offering a binary choice, a new type of questions emerges: questions that frame the narrative by modeling how to read and, specifically, how to process the information provided in the form of varying points of view or inconsistent or even contradicting information without offering answers as epic and Paul's epistles do (in form of antitheses and catechism). While the questions with their various rhetorical functions are spread out through the narrative, the narrative-framing questions appear to be confined to—or at least figure most prominently in—the initial sections of the novel. This does not limit their function or effect; on the contrary. They set the pace and, even when they give way to the descriptions, events, references, or rhetorical devices, the juxtaposition of two dominant points of view that comprises the narrative thread is predicated upon, reflects, and harks back to the questions posed at the beginning as it prompts the reader to beget new ones.

Once a narrative is in progress, there are only so many ways it can end. To recall the music analogy, there are only so many chords that can resolve a dominant seventh chord. Or as Hamlet put it: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, | rough-hew them how we will" (V.ii. 10-1). But beginnings are up to the author to decide on and form. The history of literature in terms of the development of genres and narrative techniques is in many ways a history of beginnings: from classical ones (as defined by Aristotle and categorized by Horace's *ab-ovo* vs.

in-medias-res division) to a wide range of avant-garde, modernist, and post-modern ones.¹⁹³

Questions that were topic-setting and invocations and appeals to written authority, now become questions about those extant authorities in order to revise the truth. The questions are less *for* information and more *about* the available information, i.e. about the method of reading that information. And while Iser looks at the overtly intertextual instances in *Tristram Shandy* as examples of palimpsestic writing, in all three novels questions frame the text as a palimpsest not to writing but to reading: not the palimpsest scrubbed and overwritten by the author, but a palimpsest to be created by the readers. The idea of reading as a process of simultaneous unlearning and learning is not new, but the new medium of print as a mass medium now further facilitates the process. So, in the end, the palimpsest has not been scraped altogether and replaced with an entirely new and different content; rather, it is being continuously processed by an ideally careful, selective, and critical reader-cum-editor.

The three novels do not offer solutions—Lewis is almost right in criticizing them for “jeer[ing] and . . . not refut[ing]”—but they do exalt and model the workings of a critical and dynamic mind, at least in the initial stages of inquiry. Michael Hays notes that “fiction allows one to enter the realm of the taboo, testing truths or asking impudent questions, thereby replacing the old catechetic structures [in this context, catechetic=dogmatic] and forcing open the closed horizon in which priority was given to already formed, canonical answers” (qtd. in Jauss, viii-ix). These impudent questions that we now take for granted are rare in the oral epic, but figure prominently in the (printed) early novel. Bakhtin claims that dialogism and heteroglossia not only contribute to the enstrangement effect in the novel, but that the “auto-criticism of discourse”

¹⁹³ For an overview of narrative beginnings in prose and drama, see Richardson. His edited volume begins by identifying *Tristram Shandy* as the first of “two key moments in the history of literature [that] continue to resonate among narrative beginnings” (1).

initiates the cycle driven by two opposing processes, “canonization” and “re-accentuation,” which results in the subversive character of the novelistic genre (*Dialogic* 412-7). In combination with laughter, which “open[s] men’s eyes on that which is new” (94), narrative-framing and dialectic questions compound the novelistic authority-challenging authority with an inquiry-based, almost scholarly aspect that goes beyond mere ‘jeering’ of sarcasm and strives not just to comment on but to propel the perennially evolving process of understanding.

Fifth Chapter

Questions in Narrative Fiction

“Now that you know that the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything is '42,' all you need to do is find out what the ultimate question is.”

—Deep Thought, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

It is curious why the scholarly findings on the rhetorical functions of questions have been so limited, not to mention the narrative functions, which have hardly been touched upon. The attempt to answer that question begins with another question: why do rhetorical questions dominate over information-seeking ones? Quintilian divides questions into two categories: ‘simple’ (*simplex*, which are the equivalent of information-seeking ones), and the ones used as a figure of speech (*figuratum*, i.e. rhetorical questions; IX.ii.7). Adhering to this basic division, rhetoricians from the antiquity to the present day have held that the rhetorical questions are “a device of pathos or . . . a means of sharpening the line of thought”; the main effect they ascribe to rhetorical questions is emphasis, thus accounting for their prevalence (Lausberg 339). While noting that rhetorical questions amplify the rhetorical effect of the utterance, they do not really go into what lies behind that effect, nor how the effect unfolds once it is made. Rhetoric does acknowledge that there might be other functions of questions, especially when used in literary contexts, but relegates their study to philosophy (40, 863). Philosophy of language in particular has yielded much on the use of questions in language in general. Instead of trying to apply those

findings onto narratives, I have approached the task bottom-up, analyzing texts on their own terms, using along the way the intermediary concepts of authority, performance, writing, and irony in the attempt to allow the patterns of question use to emerge first, subsequently identifying and assessing their narrative functions in addition to rhetorical ones. Incomplete and somewhat arbitrary as the arc of the genres and texts I have chosen might be, it offers an insight into the mechanisms of the emphatic rhetorical function of questions, a glimpse into some of their narrative functions, as well as a sense of their evolution.

The beginning of the answer to the question why rhetorical questions predominate over information-seeking ones lies in the affinity that questions in general have with imperatives, as well as with the subsequent implications for the speaker and the interlocutor. Linguists and logicians, according to C. E. M. Struyker Boudier in his brief history of questions, “interpret [questions] as kinds of orders, or at least as urgent requests” (11). As requests for answers, questions carry an imperative to respond, in words or in deeds. Thus the uttering of a question is, at its very bottom, an exercise of authority; questioning is about power. When questioning appears in epic song, no one involved—not the interlocutors, not other characters, and not the audience—learns much new. Rather, their questioning is along the lines of Sophist questioning as Michel Meyer describes it: “For the sophist, questioning serves only as a pretext for giving his own opinion as an answer . . . a discussion is but an occasion to assert himself in front of an audience” (“Dialectic” 281-2). Regardless of the social status of the speaker, the rhetorical questions in epic song deploy the imperative illocutionary force of the interrogative form, consequently acquiring the primary illocutionary force of asserting and projecting the social—and by extension moral—authority of the speaker. By drawing the authority not just from the

interrogative form but also from the moral power of the lore, and complemented or reinforced by other rhetorical devices such as repetition, questions in South Slavic epic song perform a corrective function in that—especially in climactic moments—they use authority to align word and deed, knowledge (σοφία) and virtue (ἀρετή).

The *Iliad* in particular demonstrates that, in addition to the ethical judgment and the assertion of mores, rhetorical questions become increasingly emphatic as the heroes hurl them at each other. Boudier wonders: “isn’t to challenge also a peculiar kind of ‘question’?” (13). Both South Slavic epic songs and the *Iliad* offer ample evidence that the obverse is also the case: to question is to challenge. Questions are sometimes mere pro forma ritual (when the speaker is a person in the position of authority), but sometimes—more dramatically and in the *Iliad* more frequently—they become a true, plot-driving challenge (when the speaker is an underdog challenging a social superior). The starkest and most common kind of rhetorical question in the *Iliad* belongs to the category of utterances that Richard Martin defines as *muthos*: a performative pronouncement that not only challenges characters’ past words and actions, but stirs them to action. Such questions offer a strong affirmative answer to Boudier’s question: “Isn’t it essential to the question as such that it put people to the test, that it place them on the sharp side of the edge between yes and no, that generally it challenge them to answer?” (13). Antithetical questions used by the heroes of the *Iliad* are a variant of yes-no questions that demand of the interlocutor to state their position and then follow through based on the secondary illocutionary force implied in the questions—deontic—that carries with it moral judgment. The edge they are placed at is a decisive moment—a forking of the path, and thus the beginning of a new one. But the performative aspect of rhetorical questions extends beyond the diegetic world of the heroes,

and is mirrored in the relation between the singer (who is also the narrator) and his audience. Just as the questions mark beginnings of particular action for heroes, so they mark the beginnings of a (sub-)narrative associated with that action in a ritualistic setting of song performance.

Pauline epistles primarily exhibit topic-setting questions that emphasize the finality of the author's claims. Similar to riddles, they articulate a question and then provide an answer that supplies new information. But while in riddles both the question and the answer are new to the interlocutor, topic-setting questions in Pauline letters are at least partially dialogic by the very nature of their genre. We do not have the correspondence in which questions are posed to Paul, so there is no way of confirming how close his renditions of those questions are to the original ones, but from the context of his letters, it is apparent that he expands on some of them and adds some of his own. Paul's questions forestall actual dialogue by directing and developing it unilaterally, then imprinting the imposed meaning into writing and rendering it—for the future the unalterable—truth of the for-it-is-written (*γέγραπται γάρ*) kind. Thus, even though the form of Pauline epistles derives from the oral genre of diatribe—which rhetoricians interpret as 'play' in opposition to 'for real' situations—in writing it becomes a powerful vehicle for claiming authoritative and unalterable new truth.

Unlike the epic and Paul's answers, where both sides of the answer are clear and unalterable (you shouldn't do this, instead you ought to do that), with ironic questions only one side of the answer is unequivocal (no!), while the other is open to articulation in collaboration with the reader. In addition to satisfying a speaker's demand for a response (in words or action), as Boudier briefly but incisively mentions almost in passing, a question "may be interpreted as a pre-eminent way to show who or what the person 'is' or where he stands, just as the questions

about things makes it possible for them to be exposed in the light of truth” (13). It is ironic that only well into the history of the written (and printed) fiction does the story begin to treat its audience not merely as an object of recounting, a passive listener or reader, but as an active interlocutor, an active participant in a dialogue and, as Boudier proposes, “a potential opponent and inquirer” (14). Roots of dialectic are in the oral dialogue, but the inquiring aspect of the dialogue does not really show up in oral traditions when it comes to the recounting of fictional narratives. As Michel Meyer points out, Greek philosophers cultivated the inquiring type of dialogue as a means of learning, only to promptly replace it with propositional logic, thus allowing questioning, “the main component of true thought, to atrophy into a subordinate matter of philosophy” (Boudier 16). In the Renaissance, however, with the revival of classical sources comes a less obvious revival of the spirit of questioning. This time round, however, possibly because of a different medium (writing and print), it surfaces in a different form. Unlike epic questioning, which is (like Socratic) decisively erotetic in that implies a strong yes or no answer, ironic questions are maieutic in expecting a strong position only on the one side of the proposed opposition. It is unlikely a coincidence that this stage in the evolution of rhetorical questions took place in the Renaissance period, with the revival of classical thought, and when the demarcation between story and history, between the humanities and the sciences, was still far from stark, leaving the curious mind and critical thought in search of a productive path of inquiry.

I. Michel Meyer's Problematology

Among scholars on erotetic logic Michel Meyer appears to have made it his life's work to come up with a general theory of meaning and language based on questions. He calls the current conception of language a "propositional model because its basic unit is the judgement, the proposition, with the declarative sentence, which is true or false, as its linguistic counterpart," and sees it as being inherited from the antiquity ("The Interrogative" 121). Meyer accuses Plato of diminishing the role of questioning in his middle and later dialogues (starting with *Meno*), discarding the questioning from the dialectic process, replacing questions with hypotheses that lead to unproblematic (unquestionable) answers, and establishing a propositional logic as a basis of acquiring knowledge where questions are a mere justification of *logos* (Plato's *logos* is "conceived as made of judgments [the answers, in Socrates' *logos*]", and in which the audience is diminished from active participation to passive reception, with the "epistemological role . . . reduced to zero" ("Dialectic" 285-7). The drawback of the classical model is that "[i]t presupposes that language is referential, and unequivocally so" ("The Interrogative" 123). Meyer excavates the substrate of judgments, and consequently redefines them as "the results of some solving-process; they correspond to the deleted interrogatives" (127). Once the answers resolve the problem at hand, questions disappear and "the answer does not appear as an *answer*, but as a mere statement, whose origin is irrelevant to its 'value,' i.e., to what it asserts, its truth" (129). Having identified the origin in questions, Meyer concludes: "Meaning is the question-answer relationship inherent in any discourse," or simply, "meaning is answerhood" (131-2). Consequently, he sees the classically based propositional model of meaning and language as not only outdated but inadequate. His goal is to replace judgments as

“the basic measure of meaning” (123). In place of a propositional model of language, and in opposition to it, Meyer proposes an alternative theory of meaning: problematology. “It is based on the idea that language use is a response and therefore implies the presence, implicit or not, of an underlying problem in the mind of the locutor as well as of the addressees” (122-3).

Two take-aways from Meyer’s theory most relevant to the current discussion are: (a) language at all its levels (and with it thinking, logic, and understanding) follows the rules of questioning, and (b) if a referential way of viewing language corresponds to a representational model of literature, then with the problematological model of language we can reassess fiction in terms of the questions it poses, not only answers, and thus unveil not only narrative crossroads, but also potential nodes, as Christoph Bode identifies them as. Meyer’s theory, at first glance, seems to contrast sharply with the classical view of questions as literary devices for emphasis. But that is not necessarily the case. In epic song, for example, questions that drive the plot have, as Meyer predicted, receded from the discourse. But they do come back with force and panache at the beginnings of the climactic moments, where the stakes are high. And in such moments they draw the attention (emphasis) while at the same time driving the plot by emphasizing its key problem (problematology). In Pauline epistles—and catechetic texts in general—questions surface with greater regularity, as well as with greater fidelity to the original discourse that gave rise to the narrative (question and answer). However, because of the nature of the medium—writing, fixed in space and time—the text loses its live-interaction aspect, and ends up both conforming to and explaining the Platonic emphasis on propositions: once the answer is fixed in writing, without the possibility of adding further questions to it, it becomes the end point of the argument (the conclusion, the truth), and thus the main feature of the text. A text that emphasizes

propositional logic—beginning with questions and premises, and ending with conclusions—gravitates toward a linear form (vs. nodal), with clearly defined start and end points, instead of the shape that it takes in a live discussion (if such a shape can be identified at all—likely a combination of a spiral, net, and possibly other forms). But Meyer’s model does not draw a clear distinction between information-seeking and rhetorical questions, and relies heavily on those aspects of questioning that are characteristic mainly of information-seeking questions. Rhetorical questions seem to have a logic of their own. One way to look at them is to consider them as imposing a particular line of inquiry—or, as epic song makes clear, a particular viewpoint or value—onto the interlocutor and, by extension, the listener or the reader. But ironic questions seem to also break the linear direction of the discourse and the thought process, and I do not see that Meyer’s model is able to fully account for that.

II. Bas van Fraassen’s Pragmatics

In addition to the philosophy of language, the philosophy of science too has looked into the workings of questions, providing insights relevant to narrative fiction. Building a model of scientific explanation, van Fraassen explains that any event covered by a scientific explanation is “enmeshed in a net of causal relations” (124). While “[w]hat science describes is that causal net,” the net is so vast and complex that it is impossible (and ultimately unnecessary) to describe it in its entirety. Therefore, the explanation “consists in drawing attention to certain (‘special,’ ‘important’) features of the causal net,” i.e. the “salient features . . . referred to as ‘the cause(s)’ or ‘the real cause(s)’” (124-5). Van Fraassen ultimately comes up with the same definition for scientific explanation as Meyer does for narratives: “it is an *answer*” (like Meyer, he insists that

explanations are not merely propositions or lists of propositions; 134). Specifically, it is an answer to a why-question of the type, “Why (is it the case that) P?” where ‘why’ can be taken to be “a function that turns statements into questions” (126). Salient elements of the explanation are determined by both the why-questions and the necessity/causality, the context of which is further determined by available contrast classes, i.e. by the possible alternatives. This is where narrative ambiguity comes in. Unless the contrast class is clearly spelled out, the same why-question can yield multiple distinct answers/explanations, all of which can be considered scientific and valid. Van Fraassen borrows the example from Norwood Russell Hanson: “Consider how the cause of death might have been set out by a physician as ‘multiple haemorrhage,’ by the barrister as ‘negligence on the part of the driver,’ by a carriage-builder as ‘a defect in the brakeblock construction,’ by a civic planner as ‘the presence of tall shrubbery at that turning’” (125). These are all valid answers to the same question of why a person died, but differ in what they consider salient factors and how those salient factors are assembled into a causal narrative. While logically, the explanation begins with a question, like in narratives (as Meyer notes), in the final versions of explanations, the questions often disappear.

Van Fraassen’s most direct articulation of the model of scientific explanation is immediately preceded by two real-life (or possibly fictional) stories that serve as examples. This is no coincidence. Other than scientific explanations being narratives of their own, both scientific explanations and fictional narratives are driven by narrative necessity. Van Fraassen himself identifies ‘necessity’ as “the term that links stories and causation,” i.e. fictional and scientific narratives (113). Narratives are structured extractions of salient elements from the causal net. ‘Chekhov’s gun’ rule exhorts writers—originally playwrights but subsequently

authors of other genres of narrative fiction too—to use only those details in the recounting that are relevant to and in some way contribute to some important facet of the overall narrative: the gun hanging on the wall in the first act must contribute to the action in the last, same as all other elements of the narrative. It is not that the events themselves necessitate a certain progression the way Aristotle described they ought to, but that the ones that are selected by the author for recounting are salient for the outcome of the narrative. Van Fraassen thinks of scientific explanation as a narrative that ought to account not only for causal relations but for causal processes and interactions as continuous events in space and time. And the “essential clue to the correct account” of explanations specifically and narratives more generally is a why question (129).

Rhetorical questions in the previous chapters all comport to this characterization of causality-tracing, context-creating, narrative-driving questions. Antithetical rhetorical questions typical in epic are simple yes-no questions that either pose (when the speaker is the underdog) or project onto the interlocutor (when the speaker is an authority figure) a why-question, and then imply the answer considered to be right in a given context. Topic-setting questions in Paul’s epistles come with elaborate answers and are the clearest fictional form of a why-question followed by an answer/explanation. But ironic questions are different. They diverge from why questions in that the latter are bona fide information-seeking questions, while ironic questions are not. As rhetorical questions, they maintain the authority-projecting characteristic of the epic rhetorical questions, they sometimes provide and often imply answers, and like antithetical questions, they clearly state the position of the speaker. But now it becomes clear that they are a hybrid of rhetorical and information-seeking questions since like why-questions they allow for

multiple answers based on multiple possible contexts with accompanying differing contrast classes. Since the context of the contrast class determines what is relevant for an explanation, and the context in fiction is often deliberately opaque, the possible answers will differ and are not limited to one. Into all the characteristics of rhetorical questions, ironic questions fold in an important facet of information-seeking questions: the openness to a new answer. The very nature of irony not only allows for but encourages multiple meanings.

Like Meyer, van Fraassen finds that a theory of scientific explanation must be a theory of questions. Like Meyer, he denies that scientific explanation is a relation between theory and fact (i.e. representational), but is instead a relation between theory, fact, and context; hence his model is referred to as ‘pragmatic.’ Put together, Meyer’s and van Fraassen’s theories provide the explanation of the narrative structure (in terms of their components) and the mechanisms of narrative (as a spatio-temporal process) that Roland Barthes tagged as enigmas. They reveal the reliance of narratives on questions: both fictional and scientific narratives are answers to questions, whether they are overtly stated or not. But reliant as they are on the narrative conventions, (fictional) stories and (scientific) explanations are not identical in structure or the type of questions that they comprise.

III. Christoph Bode’s Nodality

Christoph Bode explains that the main difference between events in stories (narrative recountings) and real-world ones is that the narrative is composed of events that are connected causally, while real life comprises nodes: moments in the sequence of events when the agent is faced with a choice that will determine the outcome. The choice is real (subject to free will) and

the outcome thus not predetermined. Sequences of events that comprise nodes are called Future Narratives (FNs). Narratives—all linear narratives—in their attempt to make sense of entities and events in the real and virtual worlds are necessarily *past* narratives as they attempt to streamline the complexity of the totality of facts and events in order to make sense of them. FNs are not future because they are recounted in future tense or because their plot takes place in the future (as in many science fiction narratives). A narrative about the future, such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “is simply a past narrative whose temporal point of telling has been projected into the future” (10). FNs are narratives because they link events. The subsequent events are not singular (the outcomes are as “yet undecided, open, and multiple”; 1), and the connection is consequently not linear. Nodes, by their nature of always and only existing in the present moment, are ephemeral, and thus quickly “disappear, leaving a trail of actuality. Once possibility has solidified into fact, we are able to retrospectively identify cause-and-effect chains that seem to explain why ‘this had to be’” (68). This solidifies and further elucidates Meyer and van Fraassen’s observation that, even though narratives are brought into existence and held together by questions, those very questions often disappear from the narratives leaving only answers to speak for themselves.

Bode thus establishes the following sequence: as nodes disappear they leave a trail of meaningful propositions/statements (Meyer); the events that remain as a result of (now past) nodal moments are then bound by the force of necessity (van Fraassen), ultimately giving those events—strung together into a narrative—meaning. Everything that has preceded a node (i.e. the past) is characterized by causality, determinacy, and narrative necessity, and is thus closed, while everything that lies beyond a node carries a character of contingency and indeterminacy and is

consequently open. It would be easy to say that, with nodes gone, and the force of necessity taking listeners or readers on the wave of the inevitable narrative, consequently taking away free will and agency, they can do little but passively follow. But that wouldn't be true. Anyone who has witnessed a fierce debate among friends or coworkers about a previous night's episode of a popular TV show and what the next episode might bring, can attest to the active, even ferocious, energy that goes into debating potential continuations of the story. However, the suspense that stirs this kind of debate is not created by narrative content—it results from a temporal pausing that is imposed on the audience by either extra-narrative circumstance (a delay between episodes) or by the structure of the narrative (insertion of a different episode or a digression and a delay in continuing a particular line of plot). The effect is comparable to that of rhetorical questions in much of orature and literature: even though they are not indispensable for the narrative, they provide emphasis (as rhetoricians of antiquity rightfully claimed) by marking the points in time when choice-making (and all the consequences that come with it) is imminent. There are no real nodes there—all a reader is left with are events that solidified after nodes have disappeared, even though those events might be conveyed with carefully planned delays in order to create a sense of anticipation that resembles the anticipation and suspense that real-life nodes incite. But while rhetorical questions do not mark real choices when they are posed within the diegetic space of a narrative, questions do pose problems (narrative-creating ones, the way Meyer defines them), rather than merely recount them, when they are not directed at another character in the diegetic space of the narrative but at the audience or the readers. Ironic questions in particular break the mold of narrative necessity and pose truly nodal questions. It's because they allow for alternative outcomes—ones not outlined in the narrative. This is what

irony does when it merges with questions. And this is how the functions of the two major types of questions (information-seeking and rhetorical) come together. The information-seeking aspect bring with them the openness to something new. The rhetorical aspect contributes the ability and the need to assert one's authority and control over the future events. Irony makes both possible.

Irony pushes a narrative as close as possible toward a Future Narrative without actually turning it into one. Questions in real life are nodes. Questions are also imperatives in disguise. In narratives they stop being nodes since they are followed by linear plots and thus fail to meet Bode's requirement that they be followed by multiple streams of events, at least within the given narrative. But even when their function is not actively fulfilled, their original purpose and nature still gently linger in the air, prodding readers or listeners to imagine alternative outcomes. Thus they promote an active process of creating not just meaning (which every narrative asks its audience to do) but an alternative narrative. Albert Einstein begins his *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory* by likening science (specifically Euclidian geometry) to "the magnificent structure" of a "noble building." Bode too sees FNs architecturally, specifically like "an old mansion with many different rooms and corridors, on different floors . . . the structure that allows you to go from here to there" (20). A specific path that one takes within these structures constitutes a narrative (a discrete 'run-through,' as Bode calls it) and, like in any structure, multiple choice can be made at different times. While FNs prompt us to imagine and explore alternative ways, ironic questions prompt us to create them by imagining them, even though this creative process takes place outside and parallel to the given narrative, rather than as a part of it.

IV. Real vs Realism

No wonder literary theory and philosophy have downplayed questions for such a long time. In a diegetic world propelled by narrative necessity, questions are real in their Barthesian sense of embodying a problem that drives the story (enigma), but they are stripped of their most important feature: nodality. Meyer and Bode have recalled their importance for science, where they have been neglected due to the tendency to think of reality in narrative terms. But what about fiction? Does the lack of nodality render questions in fiction impotent?—Just like the ironic rhetorical question that it is, the answer to it ought to be along the lines of an answer to Sancho's ironic questions in *Don Quixote*: a categorical 'no!' followed by a careful consideration as to where to go from here.

Narratives recounted in the present tense—especially those with a considerable amount of dialogue—have a balance of the immediacy of an unmediated real-life in-the-present moment, while at the same time imbuing the action with meaning that comes only after the narrative has selected and sequenced the salient elements of the (real or virtual) world's totality of entities and events. In his short story "The Map," Jorge Luis Borges explains that the most accurate map would be one that would cover the entire surface of the Earth. His "On Exactitude in Science" tells of cartographers creating a map that was exactly the size of the empire it represented, uselessly covering it in its entirety. The resulting extinction of both the map and its cartographers points to the futility of an absolutely realistic representation. The beauty—and complexity, and utility—of realism is that it provides us with templates of organizing selective information about the reality into a meaningful whole. Realism is about what is being described. It is about what aspect of reality or fiction, group or individual, action or word we decide to

depict. It is about who does the speaking and how, and the verbal and orary/literary tools they use to steer the discourse. And it is about how it is all being described. Information needs to be sifted, choices made, and then presented in a form that holds meaning.

“There are said to be certain Buddhists whose ascetic practices enable them to see a whole landscape in a bean,” says Roland Barthes at the very beginning of *S/Z*. And Borges ends his short story “Undr” with the utterance of a single word that comprises the entirety of the poetry of the people of Urns. Both accounts describe attempts at containing the complexity of the human reality, and the just-as-human need for and fascination with transforming it into a different, streamlined, and more contained medium. Questions initiate narratives in the first place and ultimately make them meaningful. Questions also give those ossified narratives the life force that makes it possible for them to branch into our reality and stir us to creating further narratives. A question, to borrow James Joyce’s line from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, “like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.” But when a question does surface in a narrative, at the very least it opens up a crack into the substrate that holds it together in the final form it takes in writing or in print. At its best, it turns the reader into a creative author, harking back to the oral roots of dialogue as the fundamental form of discourse (communication) and dialectic (understanding and learning), and propelling realism by not allowing a narrative to hold on to an ossified form.

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