Almost a century ago, Milman Parry began to formulate a radical response to the so-called 'Homerian Question.' Identifying a series of recurring formulae operating within the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, he argued that these were markers of in-performance composition, a process by which pre-existing units of metrical phrasing could be combined and recombined in the moment of an epic's live performance. This work was enriched by fieldwork among South Slavic epic-singers operating within living traditions, research which (following Parry's early death) resulted in the seminal text *The Singer of Tales* (1961) written by his student Albert Lord. Parry and Lord's major innovation was to identify Homer as 'a poet singer among poet singers.' Their Homer was an oral artist, making new songs on old themes, integrating traditional elements of poetic composition with the individual singer's invention. According to this model, ancient epic songs were repeatedly and flexibly remade by generations of such poet-singers, rather than being the products of individual literary artists. Lord argues that 'The songs were ever in flux and were crystallized by each singer only when he sat before an audience and told them the tale.' Since their first publication, all of these claims have been extensively contested and refined. But the central thesis of oral-poetic scholarship, that Homeric epic emerged out of oral traditions capable of generating works of great complexity and power, rooted in a shared corpus of heroic songs flexibly composed and recomposed during their live performance, has proved a major stimulus both to scholars and to artists. This chapter examines the impact of these ideas upon the work of recent performance-makers, considering what a putative oral Homer means to contemporary artists, and how such ideas can inform or inspire the creation of new responses to ancient epic. Adaptations of epic are fast becoming part of the common currency of arts programming, and an increasingly visible component of classical reception studies. However, the influence of oral-poetic theories upon contemporary performance-makers is (as yet) an under-explored area of study, neglected by scholars whose literary expertise leads them to focus on dramatic texts and production histories, with each revisionary text or production regarded as a single, stable, and repeatable entity. The field of classical reception studies at present lacks the conceptual and theoretical means to engage effectively with works which deliberately exploit elements of 'in-performance' composition, and which positively value the qualities of fluidity and flexibility evoked by oral-poetic interpretations of ancient epic.

Responding to this lacuna, this chapter uses the terminology of 'fixed' and 'unfixed' in order to identify a range of approaches to the modern reperformance of epic narratives. These terms are adapted from director Tim Carroll's model of 'fixed' and 'flowing' elements within The Factory's version of *The Odyssey* (discussed in more detail below). In a text which clearly echoes elements of Parry and Lord's oral-poetic scholarship, Carroll writes:

> This principle of the fixed and the flowing is manifested in every part of the poem. Just as the formulas are fixed while their use is flowing, so Odysseus' journeys flow around the Mediterranean while Penelope remains fixed in Ithaca. And this, I hope, is how it will be with our performance. The events of the story we have to tell are fixed; the circumstances in which we tell them will flow unpredictably.

Carroll's discussion does not imply a hierarchy between the 'fixed' and the 'flowing', but positions them as complementary and mutually constitutive elements of a single process of epic creativity. Similarly, this chapter's proposed terminology aspires to highlight some of the ways in which 'fixed' and 'unfixed' elements can interact in order to create engaging reperformances, revisions, and recreations of ancient epic. For the purposes of the present discussion, the term 'fixed' denotes a text or production (or a part of a production) which, once made, remains relatively stable and consistent. In contrast, the term 'unfixed' describes performance structures designed to evolve, adapt, and respond to circumstance, their resulting unpredictability becoming a defining characteristic of the emerging work. But this is never a straightforward either/or situation.

As Michael Wilson argues in *Storytelling and Theatre* (2006), the assumption that a performance is either wholly 'learned' ('fixed') or entirely 'improvised' (unfixed) is at best a false dichotomy. Carroll's (2010)
('unfixed') seriously underplays the complexity of both the processes by which creative works are produced, and the (always, to some degree, variable) conditions of their live performance. The contemporary discipline of performance storytelling represents an important site for 'unfixed' reperformances of Homeric epic, perhaps the most prominent example being the work of Hugh Lupton and Daniel Morden, whose celebrated The Odyssey and The Iliad have toured both nationally and internationally, and who were awarded the Classical Association prize in 2005. The storytelling formats Pandavanti 108 (a fast-paced series of extracts from world myth and epic, created in 2011 by Ben Haggarty of the Crick Crack Club) and Myth Off (a high-octane, slam-style competitive event introduced to the UK by Clare Murphy) also offer fascinating examples of how oral traditions of epic-and myth-telling can inspire new fusions of ancient and modern performance practices. Contemporary storytelling practitioners, often explicitly drawing inspiration from oral-poetic traditions, emphasize the liveliness of their craft, and the ways in which the in-performance recomposition of an oral tale can give rise to new versions of inherited stories. However, current debates within UK storytelling also highlight the potential difficulties of any attempt to establish a rigid distinction between 'fixed' and 'unfixed' performances. Veteran storyteller Taffy Thomas offers a note of caution, describing how his own unscripted stories tend to 'settle' after repeated retellings, becoming more or less consistent, and only liable to change when 'the performer is feeling especially creative.' In the light of such complexities, the 'fixed'/unfixed' continuum proposed within this chapter is best conceptualized not as a rigid binary, but as a sliding scale, with different performance works, and even different iterations of a single work, displaying 'fixed' and 'unfixed' characteristics to varying degrees, and at different moments.

A brief survey of some recent remakings of Greek epic might help to indicate how reference to this 'fixed'/unfixed' continuum can promote a more nuanced understanding of the variety of ways in which current performance-makers respond to and adapt ideas of ancient orality. At the fixed end of the scale are dramatic revisions of epic which are themselves scripted, stable, and repeatable, often associated with a famous modern author. Such play-texts frequently contest the events and meanings of ancient epic, sometimes explicitly citing the idea of an oral tradition, and the ability of poetsingers within such a context to generate multiple versions of an epic narrative, as authorizing their own revisionist strategies. For example, in the Author's Introduction to The Penelopeiad: A Play (2007) Margaret Atwood locates the drama as 'an echo' of an originating mythic event, already filtered through the motherlode of mythic and legendary and therefore originally oral Trojan War material—fluid in nature, with different stories told in different ways in different places. In the play, like the novel upon which it is based, Penelope challenges the official version of the Odyssey, complaining: 'they turned me into a story; though not of the kind of story I would have preferred to hear.' In this sense, the Penelopeiad takes up a subversive posture towards its own literary antecedents, the performance of such work most frequently aspires to be a kind of repetition of a agreed and unchanging 'fixed' text. An Iliad (2010), by Lisa Peterson and Denis O'Hare, highlights the very limited degree to which later reperformers might be expected (or permitted) to 'unfix' elements of this kind of authored play-text. The drama's central figure is called 'The Poet', a word-wearied witness of war, whose battered presence invokes notions of an ancient, oral bard. He is, according to the Author's Note, 'a man (or woman) who talks out of a living by begging a crowd to stop, listen, and imagine for a while.' In this sense, he perhaps recalls Derek Walcott's singer 'Blind' Billy Blue in his 1992 stage adaptation of The Odyssey. But, at key moments of the play, The Poet's recollections of Troy become entangled with his remembrance of other, later wars. Concerned that the Homeric Catalogue of Ships is meaningless to his current audience, he explains: The point is, on all these ships, are boys from every small town in Ohio [... the boys of Nebraska and South Dakota. ... the twangy boys of Memphis. ... the boys of San Diego, Palo Alto, Berkeley, Antelope Valley. [...]

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10 Atwood (2007), v. The eponymous heroine of the stage version is a more trustworthy narrator than her counterpart in the novel, which repeatedly implies that Penelope's narrative may be concealing, rather than revealing, truths. See e.g. Atwood (2005), 150, 169, 180.
12 On An Iliad, see also Rankine, Ch. 27 in this volume.
13 Peterson and O'Hare (2014), 11; see further McConnell, Ch. 28 in this volume.
14 Peterson and O'Hare (2014), 27.
And the list goes on. An authorial footnote explains that the play's later producers should 'pick a couple of nearby places that produce enlisted men and women, and insert them', in order to find an equivalence for the play's address to local communities in proximity to its earliest performance spaces. A comparable moment occurs towards the drama's close, when the death of Hector sets The Poet seeking a comparison through a five-page litany of the world's major conflicts, beginning with the Peloponnesian War and finishing with:

Iraq
Pakistan
Afghanistan
Libya
Syria...

The authors' final ellipse again cues an advisory footnote for future directors/performers:

As time goes on, it may be necessary to add a war or wars at the end of the list to reflect current events. This should be done with great restraint and include only major conflicts.

This is a relatively rare instance of a 'fixed' dramatic text authorizing its later performers to introduce their own additions, based on future global events. However, Peterson and O'Hare's tone is markedly cautious. Such alterations should be made with 'great restraint', and only in response to 'major' armed conflicts. The play's writers explicitly evoke the importance of 'ancient oral tradition' in shaping their understanding of an epic story 'spoken out loud and passed from storyteller to storyteller for centuries before it was ever written down', and their footnotes do potentially allow later artists some small degree of flexibility, aimed at ensuring that 'The Poet's song will 'stay current'...

However, these limited concessions do not seriously challenge the authoritative status of the play's 'fixed', authored text. Rather, in their delineation of the precise moments at which textual flexibility might, under certain circumstances, be permitted, their concessions may actually serve to enhance the customary authority of the 'fixed' dramatic script.

By contrast, the 'unfixed' end of the continuum is characterized by works which have significant elements of performer autonomy deliberately built into their format and structure. For example, The Factory's version of The Odyssey (first performed in 2012) locates its own 'unfixed' status at the heart of the work's identity. The company made its name devising irregular pop-up performances of Hamlet and The Seagull in which revolving casts of actors had their roles decided via pre-show games of chance, and incorporated random props (brought along by the audience) into each one-off restaging of these classic texts. The company's version of The Odyssey goes even further, abandoning the 'fixed' scripts which structured its previous shows to create almost wholly 'unfixed' performances. In The Factory's The Odyssey, the twenty-four books of the ancient epic are improvised in response to a series of challenges and constraints generated by audience members pulling shards of pottery (each inscribed with an instruction) out of a passed-around hat. The notion of an oral Homer is central to this structure, as Carroll explains:

We have learnt some fixed elements, especially of song and dance; but how these 'formulas' combine to tell the story will change from one performance to the next. Like 'Homer', we will have to decide in the moment which stories to tell and which to leave out; and, like 'Homer', we will have to adapt the telling of our stories to many different circumstances.

Depending on the particular audience(s) involved, and their degree of knowledge (or concern) regarding 'correct' responses to classical epic narrative, these interactions can lead to some striking revisions of familiar Homeric episodes. For example, at a performance of The Odyssey at The Nursery, London (July 2013), when Menelaus asked the audience for advice regarding the Old Man of the Sea, he was instructed 'bite him'. He did, and the resulting scene diverged significantly, and with splendid absurdity, from its model in standard editions of the epic.

The results of The Factory's working methods may sometimes be chaotic, but such 'unfixed' performances should not be written off as mere undisciplined anarchy. As Carroll's account of the group's preparation (with its embedded appeal to Homeric 'formulas') reveals, a significant degree of training is required for a company to be able to improvise together effectively, and their 'in-performance' creative decisions are often underpinned by a shared repertoire of exercises, games, and songs. Storytelling practitioners, such as Morden and Lupton, similarly undertake rigorous and extensive training processes in order to be able to improvise fluently and engagingly before, and in response to, their changing live audiences. In Audience Participation in Theatre (2013) Gareth White borrows the term 'procedural authorship' from computer game designers to designate the process of establishing a

17 Peterson and O'Hare (2014), 27.
18 Peterson and O'Hare (2014), 80-4.
19 Compare Atwood (2007), 28, which authorizes the reinstatement of an excised passage rather than the introduction of new text.
20 Peterson and O'Hare (2014), 13.
21 See also Harrop (2013a).
series of rules, practices, and protocols, which allow a performer to respond skilfully, in the moment of live encounter, to unpredictable interactions with an actively participating audience. This term offers a useful way of conceptualizing the task of the performer within 'unfixed' performance works. Rather than learning the lines of a 'fixed' script, the performer of 'unfixed' epic is more likely to be engaged in developing a deep personal knowledge and understanding of a given story, learning to improvise fluently within a group of collaborating artists, or mastering a series of skills, competencies, and creative procedures which may be called upon at any moment of their performance. The resulting 'unfixed' works may benefit (as does The Factory’s The Odyssey) from an overt sense of jeopardy, with the audience wondering how (and, indeed, whether) performers will manage the feat of reperforming an epic narrative without the support of a 'fixed' text. However, they are also predicated upon what John Miles Foley calls 'rule-governed flexibility', their characteristic combination of meticulous preparation and in-performance spontaneity serving as a profound imaginative link with practices of ancient epic as evoked by oral-poetic scholarship.

There are also performances which occupy a middle ground, developing a complex, shifting fusion of the 'fixed' and the 'unfixed' within a single event. Kate Tempest's Brand New Ancients offers a striking recent example of a performance work containing a significant degree of interplay between 'fixed' and 'unfixed' elements. The remainder of this chapter will analyse this example in detail, not only identifying the presence, but also beginning to analyse the potential value, of 'unfixed' elements within contemporary performances responding to ancient epic.

Brand New Ancients was developed and first performed at the Battersea Arts Centre (London) in 2012, and is an extended poetic text following the lives of two brothers growing up in South London. The 'Brand New Ancients' of the title are our modern selves, trapped in daily drudgery and deprived of a sense of mythic context that might lend meaning and even grandeur to our struggles. The piece passionately argues that

Thus, the poem focuses on 'Small heroics. Everyday epics'. Like Derek Walcott, Tempest (whose work as a writer and performer synthesizes spoken-word poetry and rap) claims never to have finished reading the Iliad, and she has described parts of the Iliad as 'boring'. And, despite a scatter of famous names (Pandora, Medea, etc.) used to point up the contrast between the world of myth and the modern mundane, this isn’t a poem which directly follows the plot of any extant ancient epic. However, a closer consideration of Brand New Ancients onstage offers a clearer sense of how the idea of an oral Homer may be informing Tempest’s performance strategies. Brand New Ancients is, in Tempest’s own description, a poem 'written to be read aloud'.

But the stage set-up for the show goes some way beyond this modest prescription, with a four-piece band (cello, violin, drums/electrics, and tuba) ranged on a curved rostrum behind a central microphone. The positioning of this mic, downstage centre, would seem to fix the poet’s position. But from the get-go, Tempest subverts the formality (and implicit hierarchy) of this spatial arrangement, popping into the space in front of the mic to talk to her audience before the poem proper begins, to (in her own words) 'say hi'.

In November 2013, at the Royal Court Theatre, she used this moment to express her admiration for the building she found herself in, and for the writers who had worked in the space before her. She also talked about working with a ‘brilliant fucking storyteller called Daniel Morden’, and gave a brief retelling of a fable she learned from him, about the need to clothe the truth in the fabrics of story. She then introduced the band, and moved on to address the role of the audience in the event about to kick off: 'I don’t want you to feel that you have to be invisible,' she said. (A few months later, at the Lyric, Hammersmith—another formal theatre setting—Tempest said something similar: 'I don’t want you to feel like you have to pretend you’re not here.' Then she adds, 'fourth wall... fuck that,' chuckling gruffly at her own naughtiness.)

There is a lot going on in this low-key, off-the-cuff preamble. Tempest’s referencing of the Royal Court’s tradition of radical playwriting positions her as a slightly overawed) successor to generations of literary artists, but her mention of Morden (a performance storyteller) also aligns her with orally inspired approaches to creating and transmitting narratives. The performing poet implicitly figures herself as poised between two traditions just as, spatially,
she locates herself between the upstage ‘performance’ space (delineated by the fixed mic and the stage’s lighting state), and the more social, shared space of the auditorium. This positioning, like her invitation to the audience to resist ‘invisibility’, runs counter to both the divisive architecture of the proscenium arch and the naturalist heritage of the Royal Court Theatre (famous for pioneering ‘kitchen sink’ dramas like John Osborne’s Look Back in Anger). This is a smart choice. Tempest’s audience isn’t necessarily the Royal Court’s usual demographic. The evening after I was in the audience, David Jubb (Artistic Director of the Battersea Arts Centre) tweeted: ‘In @royalcourt main theatre with audience full of 20 & 30 somethings. Beer has just poured off circle into the stalls @brandnewancients.’ In addressing this audience directly, framing the ‘fixed’ text of Brand New Ancients with an ‘unfixed’ preamble rich in self-deprecating humour, Tempest establishes the ‘rules’ or (in Foley’s phrase) ‘the keys to performance’, which will characterize the coming experience. This ‘unfixed’ moment becomes an opportunity to subvert preconceptions about the status of writing, the hierarchies of the performance space, and the relationship between stage and auditorium.

Passages of ‘unfixed’ playfulness also emerge later in the evening, often arising as moments of interplay between the formal text of Brand New Ancients, the poet’s commentary on her own work, and her developing perceptions of how each gig is going. For example, at the Royal Court Theatre, Tempest followed up the phrase ‘like mime artists in France’ (describing the overuse of drunken executives) with a comic aside: that’s ‘one for the theatre crowd’ she says. The ‘mime artists’ line isn’t improvised—it is present in the poem’s published text. But the choice to highlight it in this particular way is a direct response to the current situation and location. Tempest’s voice is both cocky and crooning, she is deep in the narrative moment and yet also able to glance out at our real, shared situation. Tempest’s urban th-fronting, which means that she pronounces the initial ‘th’ of ‘theatre’ as an ‘f’, adds a note of double-edged self-deprecation to the aside, cheekily alert to the class dynamics of her own presence within the artfully distressed environs of the Jerwood Theatre Downstairs.

There is a characteristic piece of physical business that sometimes accompanies such moments: an open-palmed shrug (usually off-balance, with a horizontal twist to the shoulders), which is part sheepishness and part sheer chutzpah. This gesture can be fluid in its meanings: sometimes it starts out looking like an apology for a moment of bathos, or for an uneasy rhyme (‘shoulders/soldiers’), but often it ends up looking like a celebration of Tempest’s own daring and dexterous swooping between linguistic registers. In a wordless gesture of self-commentary, the poet can slide from rueful to gleeful in an instant, acknowledging and manipulating her audience’s reactions to her words, before slipping back into the rhythms of the show’s rehearsed and scored text. At moments like this, the poet’s ‘unfixed’ commentary on her scripted performance draws her audience into an intense feedback loop of mutual observation and reciprocal pleasure.

Comic banter also plays a key role in Tempest’s ‘unfixed’ interactions with her audience. Onstage at the Lyric, Hammersmith (January 2014), she follows up her unflattering depiction of graphic artist Tommy’s colleagues (‘arseholes everywhere’) by looking out and asking (in a phrase we would more usually expect to hear during a stand-up comedy set): ‘Any advertising executives in tonight? There’s laughter from the crowd, the odd cry of ‘yeah’. ‘This one’s for you’, the poet mutters darkly, only to stop herself a couple of lines later, to modify the abrasiveness of this exchange, and insist she was only joking. Then she picks up her ‘fixed’ text again, or tries to, but hesitates, pauses, and loses her thread. She consults with the band about her next line. They confer with each other. They laugh. Shrug. Tempest turns back to the audience: ‘That’s how this shit is’ she says. Again, the poet strays beyond her fixed text, developing free vocal interactions with her audience, and embracing the unpredictable consequences of these (even when disruptive). Tempest’s ability to create such moments of ‘unfixed’ communication with her audience plays a key role in creating a mood which is more akin to the comedy or the storytelling club, the poetry slam or the music gig, than it is to formal, four-walled theatre. Theatre critic Lyn Gardner describes Tempest as an artist who is ‘utterly responsive to her audience’: ‘it matters that we are there; it matters that these stories are told. It matters that we listen.’ In the case of Brand New Ancients, it is often the moments of ‘unfixed’ comedy and self-commentary—playful, cheeky, scathing, endearing—which facilitate this trademark responsiveness, guaranteeing that each show develops into a unique iteration of the poet’s epic narrative of ordinary people finding heroism in their everyday lives.

The published text of Brand New Ancients may be ‘fixed’, but live performance allows for the creation and elaboration of a series of ‘unfixed’ elements and exchanges. Tempest has described how, over the course of making and performing the show, she progressed from feeling like the author of a text to...

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26. This invitation is supported by a lighting plot which subtly raises the house lights at a series of key moments, especially those when the poet-performer moves outside the world of her intimate text for passages of reflection, interpretation, and direct exhortation.
25. Gardner (2013). The first drafts of Brand New Ancients were written as part of a scratch process supported by the Battersea Arts Centre so that, from the outset (as Tempest observes), I knew that it was a piece that was going to be performed for audiences. Kate Tempest in conversation with Justine M’Connell, AFGRD (University of Oxford), 24 February 2014.
being a performer of something that exists'. The latter state, she said, means that 'you are able to perform without the fact that you wrote it getting in the way; so you can change it if you want to', bringing her performance of *Brand New Ancients* close to Foley's category of 'Voiced Text', a 'type of oral poetry that begins life as a written composition only to modulate to oral performance before a live audience'. This category shift makes possible the off-the-cuff riffs and remakings of extant material which promote such a powerful sense of liveness, reciprocity, and 'unfixedness' in performances of *Brand New Ancients*.

So what's the place of a (notional) oral Homer in this performance? Justine McConnell has described Tempest as a 'brand new Homer', arguing that 'performance poetry is the modern descendant of the oral poetry scene which gave us the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*'. However, such confident alignments of a contemporary artist with 'Homeric' performances can be problematic, since there is no direct lineage of surviving practices for the modern reperformer of ancient Greek epic to inherit. Contemporary performers can only reactivated classical epic using their own, distinctively modern, skill sets, engaging their listeners through performance contexts which are meaningful to twenty-first-century audiences (and often significantly unlike the kinds of environments in which an archaic, oral Homer might have sung).

Positioning a work like *Brand New Ancients* within a direct Homeric lineage oversrates the degree to which the archaic compositional and performance techniques proposed by oral-poetic scholarship might (practically) be available to the present-day artist. It simultaneously downplays the vital role played by some distinctly modern performance disciplines, and their creative communities, in developing environments within which ancient epic poems, and their associated oral practices, can be explored, adapted, and appropriated by new generations of performing artists. Tempest herself has described how her sense of ancient poetic practices was first stimulated as a result of her embeddedness within contemporary genres of public poetic speech. It was through 'rap artists that I knew', she says, 'that's how I found out about Homer'. The jazz at the beginning of the twentieth century, contemporary spoken-word practices have created a generation of artists who display virtuosic skill in the creation of (wholly or partially) 'unfixed' performances. To modify one of John Miles Foley's 'proverbs' describing oral performance, it is the current genre of rap and spoken-word poetry, and not a revived or recovered Homeric orality, which 'enable' the emergence of *Brand New Ancients*, and which fuel the 'unfixed' reciprocity of the show's performance dynamics.

And yet, Tempest's fusion of contemporary techniques with mythic archetypes is profoundly informed by an underlying sense of ancient epic as a genre of performance within which a poet stands up in front of a co-present, live audience, reaching for and finding eloquent words to address shared experiences. In the old days, the text of *Brand New Ancients* begins, 'the myths were the stories we used to explain ourselves'. Homer as evoked by Tempest is not a literary artist, but an in-performance maker of rhymer. As the poet says: 'People have been rapping words since Homer, and before'. In this way, Tempest positions her own modern practices within a quasi-mythic heritage of performed poetry stretching back to ancient epic. Historical authenticity (modern artists literally doing what 'Homer' did) isn't the issue here. What matters in this formulation is an urgent sense of an imagined oral Homer as authorizing the present-day public speech of poets and rappers and rhymer of all kinds, each bringing their own improvised, provisionally eloquent to bear upon the age-old struggles of living. This Homer is a legend, a myth; perhaps best understood as an enabling fantasy. But what Barbara Graziosi has described as the 'fictionality' of this ancestral presence does not diminish the impact of an oral Homer upon a whole range of contemporary artists who invoke the ancient epic-singer, an 'imaginary and multiform figure', to authorize their own projects of devising, improvising, and generally 'unfixing' ancient epic narratives.

As this chapter has contended, a notional oral Homer informs a diverse array of contemporary theatre texts and performance practices, and a full appreciation of the different ways in which oral-poetic theory can influence the creation of these depends upon an ability to identify and interpret the interplay between 'fixed' and 'unfixed' elements both within particular performances, and within different iterations of the same production or event. For the authors of play-texts, the example of an oral Homer is most often evoked in order to contextualize and facilitate their own revisionary literary
strategies, giving rise to a stimulating range of new epic dramas which, nevertheless, remain largely 'fixed' in their content.

However, for contemporary performers across (though not limited to) the genres of devised theatre, performance storytelling, and spoken-word poetry, an imagined oral Homer is just as likely to serve as inspiration for the creation of deliberately unpredictable 'unfixed' performances which strive to generate present-day equivalents for the flexibility and spontaneity attributed to the earliest, preliterary, performances of epic. Focusing on ancient epic as a set of performance practices, rather than a series of narrative or poetic tropes, such contemporary works require new modes of analysis and interpretation, capable of acknowledging performer training (like the practices of The Factory), 'procedural authorship' (creating flexible or interactive performance structures, rather than 'fixed' scripts), and performers' 'unfixed' interactions with their live audiences (like Tempest's metatextual commentaries on/ in performances of Brand New Ancients) as critical sites for current receptions of Homer. There is also challenging work yet to be done in exploring the role played by contemporary performance practices in creating a rich variety of 'enabling' events for 'unfixed' re-makings of ancient epic.

The oral-poetic Homer evoked (both explicitly and implicitly) by today's devising theatre companies, performance storytellers, and spoken-word poets may not, ultimately, be locatable as a historical personage, but despite (perhaps because of) this mythic elusiveness, the ancient epic-singer is inspiring a provocative new emphasis on epic orality and 'unfixed' modes of performance among twenty-first-century artists.

Multimodal Twenty-First-Century Bards
From Live Performance to Audiobook in the Homeric Adaptations of Simon Armitage and Alice Oswald

Emily Greenwood

The bard is both a fertile and a largely fictional presence in contemporary British poetry. Arguably this figment of the poetic imagination is nowhere more alive than in contemporary adaptations of Homer, which engage with the question of what it might mean to adapt Homeric orality into contemporary poetic idioms. Taking the 'Homeric' works of two high-profile contemporary British adapters of Homer, Simon Armitage and Alice Oswald, this chapter explores the way in which the absent/present, anachronistic figure of the bard is a foil for the poet's live voice. I suggest that, in both poets, the idea of the Homeric bard encapsulates the complex, inter-media, multimodal, mediated status of contemporary Homeric adaptations.

Armitage and Oswald both evoke Homer as bard in their different ways. In Armitage's case, fascination with Homer-the-bard is spelled out most explicitly in his serio-comic travel journal Walking Home: A Poet's Journey, which narrates an experimental poetry tour of the Pennine Way undertaken in the summer of 2010. The premise was that Armitage would walk the 256 miles of the Pennine Way as a 'penniless poet' earning his food and accommodation by giving poetry readings in each of the towns where he stopped for the night. In the preface to the travel journal he explains the project in terms of age-old poetic traditions, telling readers that 'Poetry has always wandered' and characterising himself as 'a traveller-poet'. At the end of the journal, Armitage concludes that the occupation of wandering poet is not economically viable as

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2 Armitage (2012), ix.