HOMER THE INNOVATOR

FREDERICK M. COMBELLACK

ANY person who spends very much time in the study of the Homeric poems will almost certainly find himself involved, perhaps with regret, in the study of Homeric scholarship. As he surveys various periods in its long history, he may well be impressed by the differences in emphasis which characterize the different generations. He may notice, for example, how many persons for so long a time were greatly interested in Homer's knowledge, in displaying him as a kind of encyclopedia of all the arts and sciences, a side of Homer's genius which arouses relatively little enthusiasm today. Our own century has been characterized by a pleasant variety of interest and emphasis, the greatest stimulations, I suppose, being supplied by archaeology, by Milman Parry, and by Michael Ventris. Here I propose to consider an aspect of Homeric studies in this century which is less novel, and I should say less fruitful, than some, but which is, for all that, extremely popular and important.

What I have in mind is the numerous and often vigorous efforts of many twentieth-century Homerists to convince us, not only that Homer was in general a great innovator, but also that we can now identify particular significant additions which he made to what he inherited from his predecessors.[1] These claims for Homeric originality are many and varied. They may, for instance, involve characters, or episodes, or stylistic details. We have even been told that the very kind of poem represented by the *Iliad* was a great novelty.

I shall not, of course, deal with all aspects of this movement, much less with all the individual claims. Moreover, in treating the aspects which I shall discuss, I shall follow the method employed by Odysseus himself in his Odyssean narratives and treat some features in a fairly expansive way, while dismissing others in rather summary fashion. I begin with the characters.

One type of originality which many have urged us to accept is the freshly invented character. Unfortunately, claims of this type have often involved a serious ambiguity. It is not always easy to decide whether we are being asked to believe that the character X has been created by Homer *ab ovo* or that a character named X did indeed exist in the tradition but has been so completely transformed and magnified by Homer that he may fairly be called a new creation. Apart from this ambiguity, claims for novel characters suffer from the handicap which pervades this entire field of study: a distressing lack of evidence. The inevitable result is that ordinarily advocates of this sort of innovation do not make any elaborate effort to substantiate their

1. Many years ago I discussed the emphasis on Homer's originality in Unitarian writing and pointed out some dangers which this emphasis had for Unitarianism and even for Homer ("Contemporary Unitarianism and Homeric Originality," *AJP* 71 [1950]: 337–64). Although my subject here is somewhat similar, I treat it from a different point of view and deal with some aspects of the subject not treated in the earlier paper.

beliefs. There may be a certain glitter of rhetoric, a few straws may be grasped at, but essentially we are often left merely with somebody's guess that Homer invented the character X.

As one illustration of the desperate measures resorted to by this school, we may note that some of its members have made much of the fact that Homer addresses two of his characters in the vocative: Patroclus in the *Iliad* and Eumaeus in the *Odyssey*. This form of address, we are told, demonstrates Homer's affection for two personages who are his own creations. I think myself that it is extremely interesting that on some fifteen or twenty occasions, always in introductions to speeches, Homer has said, "O horseman Patroclus," or "O pigman Eumaeus." A number of explanations for this phenomenon have, of course, been offered. I should say it is more prudent, however, to conclude that we really do not know why Homer did this. There is certainly little reason to believe that he has chosen this strange method for expressing his love for his own children, particularly when we observe that Homer apostrophizes three or four other characters. Among these are the god Apollo and also Menelaus, who is apostrophized nearly as many times as Patroclus. It would be a bold enthusiast who would ask us to believe that Helen's husband is Homer's own invention. (I might parenthetically venture the suspicion, however, that Homer's often very sympathetic picture of Menelaus may represent quite a novel modification of a less attractive traditional character.)

The most famous attempt at presenting a detailed argument for a belief in an invented character is J. A. Scott's considerable case for an invented Hector, published originally in *Classical Philology* and later repeated in one of his Sather lectures. I think most unprejudiced readers of Scott's argument are very favorably impressed. It has a careful, thorough, scholarly air about it, and I have known many students who came away completely convinced by it. Actually, if the argument is carefully examined and the evidence checked, the case proves to be, I should say, completely hollow, even when the evidence is correctly stated. Homer may have invented Hector, but Scott by no means proved he did.[2]

I hope I may be permitted to digress here for a moment to say that, although I think Scott was wasting his time in his extravagant claims for Homeric innovations, I do not want to be classified with those who, like Professor Dodds, vigorously denigrate Scott's performance and methods. There was much of the journalist in Scott, and a great deal of the advocate, but, when he began to write, Homer was in the dock being assailed with slanders such as have fallen to the lot of no other great poet in history. Scott met these assaults *autoschedon*. If he was at times careless, many of his distinguished opponents were even more so. Homeric studies in the first decades of this century needed a man like John Adams Scott.

The most thoroughgoing and scholarly approach to the problem of invented characters appeared in Renata von Scheliha's book *Patroklos* (Basel, 1943). Scheliha for the first time attempted to assemble a set of criteria by which invented characters may be recognized. The criteria are

2. See "Homer and Hector," *AJP* 65 (1944): 209–243, for a detailed examination of Scott's case.

the following: no trait of the invented character is assumed as already known; all he does is motivated by Homer himself; he plays neither in the Troy story nor in any other saga an indispensable role; his significance, however great, works itself out within the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey;* in the Cycle he plays at best a secondary role; his name and, if there is any question of ancestry, his ancestors are invented for precisely this character.

This list of criteria is at first sight rather imposing, and it may take a moment's thought before we realize that these are really all old friends after all, with whose weaknesses we have a comfortable familiarity. Though they were not so clearly stated there, they actually appeared, along with some still more dubious ones, in Scott's attempt to show that Hector was Homer's invention. Scheliha has done much to clarify the whole problem, however, by stating the criteria and collecting them into a group, and it is only fair that we should see how she puts them through their paces.

She begins by testing these criteria on a character alleged to have been recognized in antiquity as Homer's invention: Thersites, the uncomely, noisy agitator of Book 2 of the *Iliad.* We are impressed to learn that Thersites was regarded in antiquity as a character invented by Homer, and we eagerly examine the evidence cited by Scheliha. It proves disappointing. The scholia tell us first that Thersites has a significant name, and second that Thersites was Homer's guardian and had embezzled his property. In short, as evidence for Scheliha's statement that Thersites was recognized in antiquity as Homer's invention, we are given merely a statement in the scholia which in the first place is of wholly unknown date and provenience (it is only a thing "they say," *phasi*), and in the second place, so far from declaring that Thersites is the creation of Homer's imagination, actually says that he was a real man. Anyone in antiquity who took seriously this tale that Thersites was Homer's rascally guardian would probably be more likely to conclude from it that Homer must have lived about the time of the Trojan War, since his guardian fought in it, than to conclude that Thersites was not an old saga-figure. I should fancy that the tale originated as a whimsey of some humorist who thought of this amusing explanation of Homer's unique distaste for Thersites. This unknown wit would be greatly amused to know that his joke is now being taken as a basis for serious conclusions about Thersites' origin.

As it happens, the scholia also report that Thersites participated in the Calydonian Boar Hunt, and that because of his cowardice on that occasion Meleager threw him off a cliff, thus making of him the misshapen cripple he is in the *Iliad.* This tale is not, like the other, anonymous and dateless, but is attributed to Pherecydes, a respectably old source. Of course, this early connection of Thersites with another saga is troublesome for Scheliha's theory that Homer invented him; so she roundly announces that it has its origin in the effort to get all the famous figures into the great cycles of saga. This may be true.

Thersites also appeared in the Cyclic *Aethiopis*, where he seems to have played a characteristic role and to have come to a suitably bad end when he

derided Achilles for being sentimental about the queen of the Amazons after he had killed her. Since I cannot see that Thersites' role in the *Aethiopis*, so far as we can follow it in Proclus' summary, tells us anything about his origin, I am quite willing to grant that it is consistent with the theory that Homer invented him; but I suspect that any unprejudiced reader who examines what the scholia and the Cycle have to say about Thersites will be likely to feel that, if they have any value in this problem (which I doubt), they do far more to suggest that Thersites was a traditional figure than to support Scheliha's statement that he was recognized in antiquity as Homer's invention. I do not share the confidence of scholars who have convinced themselves that Thersites is pre-Homeric, but neither have I seen any reason in the scholia, Scheliha, or elsewhere to feel confident that Homer invented him.

Before leaving Thersites we might mention that Eustathius has a long note on him in which he repeats the various points made by the scholia and adds the information that Homer introduced his friends into his poetry as admirable characters so as to make them memorable. Examples cited are Tychius in the *Iliad*, Phemius, Mentor, and Mentes in the *Odyssey*. This aspect of the search for Homer's novel additions to the Troy story seems to have gone out of fashion—which is just as well.

Quite often, the champions of invented characters not only show great modesty in the extent of the evidence they offer, but also reveal a similar lack of ostentation in the magnitude of the characters alleged to be novelties. It is widely assumed, for example, that most, if not all, of the *Iliad*'s little fighters, those men who appear only to be killed, are inventions of the moment. This is not a question which I should expect to heat many passions, and for all I know these claims of the novelists may in general be quite correct.

A trifle bolder, though in the same unpretentious category, is Scheliha's claim that Homer invented Phrontis, son of Onetor. At this point I think many a person reasonably familiar with the Homeric poems may pause and ask himself, "Who is Phrontis?" Phrontis is hardly a character in Homer at all. He is mentioned once, by Nestor in his talk with Telemachus in the third book of the *Odyssey*. Nestor says that on the way home from Troy Menelaus accompanied him as far as Sunium, but there Menelaus' helmsman Phrontis suddenly died. He was a remarkably fine helmsman, and Menelaus delayed his journey in order to give him a proper funeral. And that is all. I do not know how Scheliha can be so certain that Homer invented Phrontis. Neither do I feel greatly interested in whether Homer did invent him or not. It almost looks like the last resort of despair that the searchers after invented characters should hit upon this luckless fellow who plays no part in either poem but appears for only a moment in a narrative told by one of the characters.

I conclude this sad story of the quest for invented characters with a very brief consideration of one of the criteria almost universally employed: we are regularly asked to note how appropriate to his role is the invented

character's significant name. This point was made by Scott in his Hector case and by Scheliha in connection with Thersites and the minuscule Phrontis.

The whole question of the significant names in Homer is a highly complex one and only tangential to my present purpose. It is enough here to limit ourselves to the blunt statement of fact: That a character's name is significant, and even that its significance seems especially appropriate to the character's role in Homer, cannot legitimately be taken as evidence that Homer invented the character, the name, and the role. This criterion would be valid only if (1) historical characters with appropriate significant names were unknown in Greece; and (2) we knew that Homer alone among Greek poets baptized his creations with appropriate names. Actually, of course, neither of these conditions obtains. I should think, incidentally, that those who have asked us to note that Hector is a name cleverly invented by Homer to fit his invented character, who holds fast when his city is assailed, might have been somewhat embarrassed when the name Hector apparently turned up on a number of the Linear B tablets from Pylos with no heroic connotations and no obvious cunning appropriateness of meaning. Enthusiasts for novelty, however, have not ordinarily been much embarrassed by troublesome evidence.

Insofar as there is any evidence within this realm of the invented characters, I should say it is inconvenient for the novelists. The best, and possibly the only, evidence at our disposal consists of the epithets which Homer applies to his characters. It is at once notable and incontrovertible that a considerable number of the character epithets in Homer do not fit very well the role which the character has in the poem. The natural inference is that such epithets were originally created for other episodes in the character's career.

The two Homeric poems themselves provide the best illustration of this. Of the fifteen or twenty epithets applied to Odysseus in the *Iliad*, some are honorifics which might decently be applied to any heroic character whose name had an appropriate metrical value: *dios*, *theios*, *antitheos* are examples. (Even *ptoliporthos*, I think, need not certainly refer to Odysseus' importance in the capture of Troy. Any hero might be called a city-sacker.) Other Iliadic epithets stress the peculiar intellectual qualities of Odysseus: *polumētis*, *polumēchanos*, *poikilomētēs*. There is one group of epithets, however, whose relevance to the Odysseus of the *Iliad* is hard to justify: *tlēmon, polutlas*, *talasiphron*. Our interest in this group is increased when we discover that, although these words are used in the poem occasionally as adjectives with common nouns, they are used as character epithets of no person except Odysseus. Nothing in Odysseus' role in the *Iliad* justifies the poet in singling him out as a person who is unique for what he has had to endure. The natural assumption is that there were other episodes in Odysseus' career which inspired these epithets. We just happen to have another poem describing his unique trials on his way home from Troy. Unless we believe that Homer produced the *Odyssey* before the *Iliad*, the natural conclusions are (1) that Odysseus is not a character invented by Homer;

and (2) that Odysseus' uniquely difficult homecoming is part of the pre-Homeric tradition.

The same kinds of conclusions are, I think, plausibly applied to various other Iliadic characters who have epithets that do not fit their roles in the poem. I do not mean to overemphasize the value of this evidence or to maintain that what I have called the "natural" assumption and the "natural" inference must be regarded as absolutely certain. I am quite willing to grant the possibility, for instance, that Homer, when he invented a character, thought it desirable to equip his inventions now and then with mysterious epithets which would suggest to his audience that he knew a great deal more about these characters than he was telling at the moment. I am afraid, however, that this explanation belongs in the category which Denys Page has neatly called "the remotely conceivable alternative."

These epithets are embarrassing to the novelists in another way. The inappropriate epithets may be used effectively by the Whig dogs who are skeptical about innovations. But appropriate epithets cannot be used to support a claim for original invention.

I turn next from the invented characters to the newly invented episodes. Here I may follow a somewhat different method, since there is no point in considering various claims for invented episodes and dealing with the evidence offered in support of the claims. There is probably no evidence yet discovered which can properly be used to support a claim for innovation in this field. It is hardly any exaggeration to say that the critics who have convinced themselves that an episode in the poems is Homer's own addition to the traditional store base their belief merely on their feeling that the episode is so superlatively well done that it must be Homer's original creation. This is the kind of reasoning which lies behind the conviction that the farewell of Hector and Andromache in Book 6 of the *Iliad* and the scene with Priam and Achilles in Book 24 are original inventions of Homer. Here, again, there is often ambiguity in just what is being claimed. Has Homer invented a completely new incident, or has he done remarkably well what earlier poets had done with less success?

But, although it is hard to find evidence to support a claim that an episode is Homer's invention, the poems occasionally provide some grounds for suspicion that an episode is traditional. Just as inappropriate epithets might be interpreted as indicating that a character is traditional, inappropriateness in an episode might possibly be a valid criterion for guessing that an episode is traditional. If some episode does not really fit Homer's narrative very well, this may be because the episode is a part of the traditional heritage that Homer thought was too good or too popular to leave out. Helen's identification to Priam of the Greek heroes after nine years of war, or the duel between Hector and Aias in Book 7 of the *Iliad*, coming so soon after the duel between Paris and Menelaus in Book 3, might seem to some critics examples to be explained in this way.

Another example of an episode whose inappropriateness may be interpreted as an indication that it is part of the pre-Homeric tradition is the encounter between Achilles and Aeneas in Book 20 of the *Iliad*. Many an

Analyst has urged his readers to note that this episode is ludicrously unsuited to its context. Walter Leaf's criticism may be taken to illustrate this attack in its more restrained moods:[3]

> Far from having any special appropriateness to this point of the war, it is glaringly inconsistent with its context. Achilles issues from the camp burning with the fury of insatiable revenge; yet his advice to his very first adversary is to go away "lest some harm befall him." In the whole of this speech there is not one word belonging to the situation. Achilles is in a merciful and, indeed, bantering mood. . . . When they come to blows Achilles is actually "afraid" at his adversary's cast and his own return blow fails of its effect. Finally, after hearing of "what might have been," we find Poseidon suddenly coming forward as a champion of the Trojans, in contradiction of all his policy, and saving Aineias for the future glory of his family. There can, in short, be little doubt that we have here a separate poem . . .

Of all these typical Analytical difficulties, the only one which need occupy us is the incongruity in the mood of Achilles. There is no denying, I think, that this is patently, almost ridiculously, out of place. If we put the difficulty in this way, it may appear that the scene belongs in the same class as the scene with Helen and Priam on the wall: the difficulty is one of chronology; the thing wrong with the scene is that it belongs at another period of the war. This is not, however, the whole story, since there is one significant difference between the scene on the wall and the conflict between Achilles and Aeneas: the scene on the wall is in itself chronologically out of place, while the conflict between Achilles and Aeneas is not. It is inherently implausible that Priam should not recognize Odysseus, who had been in the neighborhood for nearly a decade and who had spoken in the Trojan assembly—and spoken most impressively too. No amount of care and thought that the poet might give to matters of style and phraseology could change this basic fact. A conflict between Achilles and Aeneas, however, might occur with equal plausibility at any time in the war before Achilles' death. There is no reason whatever why it should not occur at the period when Homer puts it, after Achilles' return to battle following the death of Patroclus. Indeed, any poet who, like Homer, is interested in postponing for a thousand lines or so the climactic meeting with Hector might well feel it was an especially happy thought to have one of the preliminary bouts be between Achilles and Troy's second-best hero. These are the considerations that lead me to say that the difficulty here is not really due to the scene's position in the story. There is a chronological difficulty, but it arises, not from the inherent nature of the episode, but from the style that the poet uses in treating it.

Let us turn now from Leaf to Homer and see just how he does treat it. The previous book, 19, has emphasized for us Achilles' impassioned state. His grief for Patroclus and his hatred for Hector and the Trojans are so intense that he will not eat or drink, but has thought only for battle. And in the fighting that occupies Books 20–22 he consistently shows himself a bloodthirsty killer who gives quarter to no one. The only incongruous

3. *The "Iliad,"* ed. Walter Leaf, 2nd ed. (London 1902), 2: 348–49.

episode is the first after his return to battle, his meeting with Aeneas. Achilles comes against Aeneas, we are told, like a raging lion, but his speech to Aeneas is oddly gentle. The following abbreviated paraphrase, though probably slanted for my purpose, does not, I think, falsify the mood: "Aeneas, why are you standing out here so far from your lines? I suppose you imagine that you'll become king of Troy if you fight me? You deceive yourself. You'd never get the kingship from Priam's family, even if you killed me. And I think you'll have a hard time doing that. Remember that day when I chased you down Ida? You ran that time without looking back. Zeus saved you then, but I don't think he will now. I suggest that you withdraw into your own lines. You might get hurt if you stand here."

These words obviously do not sound at all characteristic of the impassioned man who is described and shown to us in action elsewhere in this part of the poem. Achilles sounds more like the person Homer hints was the normal Achilles, the Achilles without one or the other of his terrible wraths.

A hostile critic might in a waspish moment describe Aeneas' speech in answer to Achilles as a farrago of prolix and untimely irrelevance, but any problems that it may contain are not such as concern us here. We may merely note that he entertains Achilles with about sixty lines of genealogical and gnomic material, interrupting himself now and then to suggest it would be well to stop talking and get down to business. The part of the scene that interests us is the second speech of Achilles, a speech made more or less to himself after Poseidon has foiled him by pouring a mist over his eyes and carrying Aeneas away to safety, incidentally and courteously fetching Achilles' spear back and putting it at his feet.

If we expect the wrathful Achilles to express angry indignation at this outrageous interference with his desire for vengeance on all Trojans, we are disappointed. Just as Achilles had been surprisingly courteous in talking to Aeneas, so his reaction to this marvel that has cheated him of his victim is notably mild for a man whose capacity for wrath has already impressed us and whose state of mind at this time is supposed to be one of passionate hatred. Yet what he says is, in effect, this: "Well, well, how surprising. Here's my spear back again, and I don't see the man anywhere. I thought he was just boasting when he said the gods were fond of him, but apparently not. The hell with him. I bet he was glad to get away and won't trouble me again. I'll just get my men together and see if we can find some other Trojans to attack."

How are we to explain this glaring discrepancy of mood between the Achilles the poet has described for us and the Achilles who speaks? For the orthodox Analyst, of course, everything is as simple as usual: we have here an extract from another poem, produced at another time by another poet, and inserted into the *Iliad* with that carelessness about literary propriety and good sense habitually found in the hacks and editors who worked on the *Iliad* job. If we doubt, however, that the *Iliad* was made in this way, this easy explanation is not available to us.

Many of those who do not accept the general methods and principles of orthodox Analysis would nowadays go so far as to agree that Homer did not

invent this meeting of Achilles and Aeneas out of whole cloth for this place in the *Iliad*. I have no doubt myself that it is a traditional episode and, as usually told, was imagined as not involving an Achilles filled with wrath for the dead Patroclus. It is very possible that Homer himself had treated this event in other poems. In telling the story here, Homer has been influenced by other treatments of it, whether by himself or others. But granting this much does not at all mean granting that we have here a "quotation" from another poem—whether by Homer or another—in anything like the normal sense of that word, or that another poem, no matter when composed or by whom, has been "inserted" into the *Iliad*. In the light of what we now know about oral poetry, it seems much more likely that a favorite story has been composed afresh for this portion of the *Iliad*, but "composed" in the manner of the traditional oral epic. And it is, I suggest, the technique of oral composition, or the occasional limitations of that technique, that has produced the incongruous mood of Achilles. It is characteristic of what friendly critics call the economy, and unfriendly critics might call the laziness, of the oral method, that various things are sometimes out of keeping with their surroundings. The pull of his standard method of composition has in this instance, I suspect, caused the poet to retain features, and possibly even phrases, of this story of Achilles and Aeneas that do not fit the context into which he now places it. Just as the oral poet does not consistently remold phrases to suit a particular situation, so, I suspect, he did not, when creating an unusually long poem and using in his great creation a number of traditional episodes, consistently and carefully remold all the aspects of a familiar episode to make it fit the framework in which he now places it.

If we think that this explanation of Achilles' mood is too hard on Homer, that it makes him nod excessively, we might find one hint of a possible, slight rational element in his procedure with Achilles and Aeneas. It is conceivable that this fight put Homer in something of a dilemma. Since he is bent on creating a vast epic, he wants to include as many as possible of the good stories that he knows. Since Achilles' only appearance on the battlefield within the framework of his epic follows the death of Patroclus, episodes showing Achilles in battle will be hard, if not impossible, to put elsewhere. The meeting of Achilles and Aeneas is a famous old story that he wants to include, but there is one immutable feature of this meeting that involves the poet in a difficulty: Achilles cannot kill Aeneas; that would be contrary to the facts of history. This rational consideration might, even if it is only subconscious, provide some reason for toning down Achilles here, for not making him here Achilles the killer. At the very least, it might contribute to the willingness to retain the tone which we may guess was present in earlier versions.

The meeting of Glaucus and Diomedes, the duel between Hector and Aias, and this episode of Aeneas and Achilles suggest that meetings between two heroes which do not have a fatal outcome—what might be called the "knightly encounter"—were a popular theme in early Greek heroic poetry. I have suggested that Homer himself may have treated this knightly encounter between Aeneas and Achilles either in a separate poem or as

part of a different context before he set to work on the *Iliad*. If we are prepared to grant that Homer spent some years of busy poetical activity before he produced the *Iliad*, and I should say this is a thoroughly plausible, if not demonstrable, assumption, we must, I think, draw the further conclusion that Homer himself had a role in the creation of the pre-Iliadic tradition. I hope I shall not be accused of a frivolous love of paradox if I suggest that we may therefore be justified in saying that for all we know a number of the traditional elements in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* may be Homer's original invention, the products of his pre-Iliadic poetical career.

If I were myself interested in this pastime of guessing at originally invented scenes in Homer, one thing I might fasten on would be the *Odyssey*'s scenes in the hut of Eumaeus. These charming pastoral episodes may very well represent an expansion of the poet's normal range, if there was only one poet, or may at least represent an expansion of the normal range of early Greek epic poetry. But a critic may well ask, "How can we tell what the normal range of Greek epic poetry was at the time the *Odyssey* was created?"

Another sort of novelty which it is now fashionable to attribute to Homer is the invention of what Kirk has conveniently called the monumental epic. According to this theory, the *Iliad* dwarfed its predecessors in size just as it greatly surpassed them in quality. There was not, we are told, a gradual development toward longer and longer poems, but a single magnificent leap by a poet of the highest genius, a leap which Kirk has compared to "a leap from the largeish pot to the perfectly colossal one" in the development of "the monumental Geometric amphora."[4] This theory is not one which lends itself very well to critical discussion, since there is no way to support or to undermine it by an appeal to evidence. About all we can say, I should think, is that this is a thing which may possibly have happened.

I turn finally to what is perhaps the most interesting and difficult of all the aspects of Homer the Innovator: to what extent and in what ways did Homer manipulate and modify the traditional formulary language so as to produce splendid new effects? Here, of course, we come into contact with the new stimulus and the new point of view introduced into Homeric studies by Milman Parry. Parry himself recognized the possibility of innovations of this kind, but in much of his own sadly incomplete published work he often seemed to limit drastically Homer's stylistic originality. But in recent years we have seen Parry's work inspiring new, and at times almost impassioned, efforts to claim for Homer a splendid series of innovations in the cunning and often subtle modifications of the inherited phraseology.

A considerable portion of the vast and commendable ingenuity which has been displayed in this realm has, I think, been wasted by being applied in the wrong place. If we want to demonstrate innovation in Homer's use of formulas, it is of no value to point out passages in which the critic believes Homer has used a *normal* formula in a fine new way—not, that is, as a merely convenient metrical unit, but as a phrase deliberately chosen for its specially fine appropriateness. Quite apart from the difficulty that different critics may disagree about the fine appropriateness, there is the further

4. G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 281.

difficulty that the noble aptness may be accidental. "For all that any critic of Homer can now show, the occasional highly appropriate word may, like the occasional highly inappropriate one, be purely coincidental—part of the law of averages in the use of the formulary style."[5]

What we need, if our case for novelty in the use of formulas is to be anything but a guess, are passages in which Homer employs an unusual phrase in a context where the normal formula would otherwise fit but where it might seem for one reason or another less suitable. The kind of thing I mean may be illustrated by a phrase in Book 16 of the *Iliad*.

Twenty-two times in the *Iliad* and eight times in the *Odyssey*, Homer ends a line with a phrase *nephelēgereta Zeus*. Once and once only he substitutes a different phrase of the same shape: "kinēsēi pukinēn nephelēn steropēgereta Zeus" (16. 298). It would seem that Homer carefully avoided the normal formula because of the immediately preceding *nephelēn*. Leaf long ago noted the oddity and explained it correctly. I suppose the searchers for this kind of deliberate artistry must have mentioned this passage, though I do not recall having seen it discussed. But there has been discussion of a similar passage that occurs later in the *Iliad*. Twenty-nine times in the *Iliad* Homer ends a line with the phrase *podas ōkus Achilleus*. Only one line, 23. 168, ends with the phrase, *megathumos Achilleus*. In 1964, Götz Beck gave an interesting explanation of it.[6] Since Beck's explanation, however, appeared in a doctoral dissertation, and in a footnote at that, it may be worth repeating here.

The unique phrase occurs in the passage describing Achilles covering with fat the body of Patroclus as it lies on the funeral pyre. The relevant sentence runs thus: "dēmon helōn ekalupse nekun megathumos Achilleus / es podas ek kephalas." Beck suggests that the poet might have found it objectionable to end one line with the normal *podas ōkus Achilleus* and then begin the next one with *es podas*. Sensitive to this unpleasant collocation, Homer therefore avoided it by substituting the unique line ending *megathumos Achilleus*. Almost simultaneously with Beck's work, C. M. Bowra included this passage in his short discussion of "occasions when he [viz. Homer] might use a standard form and does not do so . . . ," but he suggested a reason different from that of Beck: "When Achilles prepares the funeral of Patroclus, he is not *podas ōkus* but *megathumos* (Ψ 168), as if on this solemn occasion it were inappropriate to stress his speed of foot and right to stress his greatness of heart. . . ."[7] Comparison with the passage in Book 16 suggests that Beck's explanation is to be preferred. But, whatever the explanation may be, these two passages represent, I think, the kind of innovation which must be sought out by anyone who hopes to show that Homer was a conscious innovator in this aspect of style.

5. See "Milman Parry and Homeric Artistry," *Comp. Lit.* 11 (1959): 208.

6. *Die Stellung des 24. Buches der "Ilias" in der alten Epentradition* (Diss. Tübingen, 1964), p. 40, n. 2.

7. H. J. B. Wace and F. H. Stubbings, eds., *A Companion to Homer* (London, 1963), p. 31. W. B. Stanford has suggested that *megathumos* may have been chosen here to repeat the *e*, *a*, and *u* vowels of *ekalupse nekun* ("Euphonic Reasons for the Choice of Homeric Formulae," *Hermathena* 108 [1969]: 15).

From time to time, of course, various recent critics have found instances of what they believe to be similar deliberate modifications of the inherited formulary style. Enough convincing examples have been collected to make a reasonably good case for the belief that once in a while Homer did indulge in deliberate innovations of this sort. Further study may well reveal other instances. But it seems to me that possibly the most impressive feature of all the activity in this field is the almost unbelievably small number of convincing examples so far produced. I do not feel very hopeful that the ultimate total will be great enough to enable even Homer's least critical champions to claim that he shows this kind of novelty oftener than, say, once in a thousand lines.

From the facts and theorizing that have so far emerged from this search for stylistic novelties, I should say we are justified in drawing two rather contradictory conclusions: (1) It looks as though Homer sometimes broke away from his normal formulary method and composed with something more like the modern poet's deliberate choice of phraseology. If this is granted, a fair further conclusion would be that he may very well have sometimes employed standard formulas with full consciousness that they were especially effective in a given case. (2) The remarkably small number of instances in which Homer seems to have employed a deliberately chosen unusual phraseology makes it all but certain that this was a kind of innovation in which he either had very little interest or had very little ability. A fair further conclusion from this would be that he very seldom employed the normal formulas with the deliberate purpose of producing an especially fine original effect. In an evaluation, therefore, of any given instance of what seems to us an especially appropriate use of a normal formula, the possibility that the appropriateness may be purely coincidental not merely remains, but remains very strong indeed.

The results of this discussion are, I am afraid, largely negative. We may plausibly guess that Homer made many changes of many kinds in what he inherited from his predecessors. But the nature of the evidence that he offers us is such that modern critics are very seldom in a position to make plausible claims concerning the details of his innovations.[8]

University of Oregon

8. A version of this paper was presented at a meeting of the Classical Association of Canada in Calgary in the spring of 1968, and a somewhat different version was given at the University of Colorado in the autumn of that same year. Although I have made many changes, I have not thought it worth while to rewrite the paper to remove the stylistic traits that mark it as "oral prose."