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# Zweihundert Jahre Homer-Forschung

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*Homer, oral poetry theory, and comparative literature:  
major trends and controversies in twentieth-century criticism*

1. Introduction

We shall find then . . . that [the] failure to see the difference between written and oral verse was the greatest single obstacle to our understanding of Homer, we shall cease to be puzzled by much, we shall no longer look for much that Homer would never have thought of saying, and above all, we shall find that many, if not most of the questions we were asking, were not the right ones to ask.<sup>1)</sup>

With these words, Milman Parry announced his hopes for a definitive solution to the Homeric Question asked in F. A. Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (Halle 1795). As we shall see, Parry's solution was not fashioned *ex nihilo*; it was rather a result of the fusion of several strands of ongoing research. Nonetheless, Parry's clarification of major issues of literary history and his exploration of compositional technique by stylistic analysis coupled with novel comparative study have ensured him prominence both in classical studies and in the larger field of world literature.

I shall outline the progression of oral poetry theory, beginning with Parry's immediate antecedents and concluding with current developments. As an exercise in the cartography of scholarship, I shall focus on the theory's impact on several branches of twentieth-century Homeric studies, as well as on its stimulation, in general, of the discipline of comparative research in oral poetry. Finally, I shall show how the neglect of essential theoretical discriminations has led to pointless scholarly controversy and even impeded proper appreciation of Homer's poetry.

For the bibliogr. abbreviations see p. 481.

<sup>1)</sup> M. Parry, *Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making, I: Homer and Homeric Style*. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* [HSCP] 41 (1930), 77 = A. Parry 1971, 269 = (in German) Latacz 1979, 184.

## 2. The Immediate Antecedents of Oral Poetry Theory

Prevailing Analytical notions regarding multiple authorship of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* shaped linguistic study of the poems in the nineteenth century. Although a universally agreed upon stratigraphy of the poems' content remained elusive, and although the texts of, for example, Bekker, Fick, and Robert (with Bechtel) were vitiated by mistaken theoretical preconceptions about composition, there was much useful synchronic analysis of the language of the epics directed not at reconstruction of an „Ur-text“, but simply at a fuller awareness of the nuances of diction and meter. Thus, scholars like Düntzer, Ellendt, and Hinrichs<sup>2)</sup> were already, in the later nineteenth century, beginning to account for morphological and dialectal peculiarities as features of a hexametric language of long lineage. This was further confirmed in the important writings of Kurt Witte<sup>3)</sup>, who, with K. Meister<sup>4)</sup>, was Parry's most immediate creditor. Witte's examination of the dialect mixture in the Homeric poems led him to the hypothesis of an artificial language that had come into existence under the pressure of verse-form. Never a living, everyday language for any specific people in any one time and place, the *Kunstsprache* displayed in the Homeric epics is the product of centuries-long accretion. It is a simultaneous order of forms, including dialectal elements (Aeolic datives in -εσσῑ and so on) that yield a host of metrically useful morphological variants. Witte maintained that metrical exigency also explained the reliance of the language on formulas – word combinations especially apt for use at specific positions in the hexameter line.

## 3. Parry's Work, Phase I: Stylistic Analyses

Such strands of argument Parry gathered and reinforced with carefully collected statistical evidence in his landmark University of Paris dissertation, *L'Épithète traditionnelle dans Homère: Essai sur un problème de style homérique* (Paris 1928).<sup>5)</sup> Now rote lists of repetitions in Homer had long been accessible in concordances and the *Parallel-Homer* of Carl Schmidt.<sup>6)</sup> Parry's unique contribu-

<sup>2)</sup> C. Hinrichs, *De Homericae elocutionis vestigiis Aeolicis*, Diss. Berlin 1875. On J. E. Ellendt and H. Düntzer, see the selections in Latacz 1979, 60–87 & 88–108, and the discussion on pp. 6–9 of the *Einführung*.

<sup>3)</sup> A selection of Witte's most important papers (orig. 1909–1914) is reprinted in: *Zur homerischen Sprache*, Darmstadt 1972; and see Latacz 1979, 109–17.

<sup>4)</sup> *Die homerische Kunstsprache*, Leipzig 1921.

<sup>5)</sup> Translated into English in A. Parry 1971, 1–190; see, too, the supplementary thesis, *Les Formules et la métrique d'Homère*, Paris 1928 = A. Parry 1971, 191–239.

<sup>6)</sup> C. E. Schmidt, *Parallel-Homer oder Index aller homerischen Iterati in lexikalischer Anordnung*, Göttingen 1885 (repr. 1965). Concordances: G. L. Prendergast, *A. Complete Concordance*

tion, however, was to explain the dynamics of language production within the *Dichtersprache* by his careful examination of Homer's use of the „formula“,<sup>7)</sup> which he defined as „a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.“<sup>(8)</sup> Specifically, he identified traits of economy (or thrift) and scope (or length) in the systems of repetition in the Homeric poems. He selected noun-epithet constructions as best illustrative of these properties. For each of the principal characters of the epics, there was a noun-epithet formula in the nominative case to fill the space between the trochaic caesura and the end of the verse; Parry identified over fifty different such formulas. This constituted the length of the system. Further, there was very seldom more than one such formula for a given character; hence the thrift of the system. Parry unflinchingly asserted that a poetic language of such characteristics was beyond the creative powers of any one poet or, indeed, of any one generation of poets.

This seemed to many to sound the death-knell for the sublimely inventive poet whose creative genius was being so resolutely reasserted by the Unitarian critics of the early twentieth century. Already, the whole notion of a „traditional book“ had posed, for example in the work of Gilbert Murray, a serious threat to conventional ideas of unified composition. Murray had maintained that the poetic excellence of the Homeric poems should be assessed in light of their distinctively traditional nature: each individual poet was a participant in and a contributor to that tradition; concomitantly, no one poet should be credited with the artistic greatness of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*:

we shall find among the causes of that greatness something nobler and more august than the genius of any individual man ... Each successive poet did not assert himself against the tradition, but gave himself up to the tradition, and added to its greatness and beauty all that was in him. The intensity of imagination which makes the *Iliad* alive is not ... the imagination of any

to the *Iliad* of Homer, London 1875; H. Dunbar, *A Complete Concordance to the Odyssey and Hymns of Homer* ..., Oxford 1880 – both revised by B. Marzullo, Hildesheim 1962 (Darmstadt 31983 [*Iliad*]).

<sup>7)</sup> Cf. F. W. Householder & G. Nagy, Greek, in: *Current Trends in Linguistics* 9 (1972), 739: „Even before Parry, of course, there had been recognition of *Dichtersprache* as opposed to natural language in Homer. But the stress was on the artificiality itself rather than on the internal dynamics producing it ... The prime concern for Witte was the ... dialectal layers in Homer ..., and this trend in interest was productively continued in such distinguished works as Meister's *Die homerische Kunstsprache* (1921). But the factor of varying dialectal layers is not germane to the issue: aside from the question of dialect, it is Parry's concept of the formula, and the dynamism of *jeux des formules*, which led to a more profound understanding of *Dichtersprache*, with its self-sustained equilibrium and momentum partially detached from the natural language but constantly affected by it and originally even united with it.“

<sup>8)</sup> M. Parry 1930 (note 1 above), 80 = A. Parry 1971, 272 = Latacz 1979, 187.

one man. It means not that one man of genius created a wonder and passed away. It means that generations of poets, trained in the same schools and a more or less continuous and similar life, steeped themselves to the lips in the spirit of this great poetry. They lived in the Epic saga and by it and for it. Great as it was, for many centuries they continued to build it up yet greater.<sup>9)</sup>

Now that Parry had brought the issue out of the haze of generalization, the poet's voice seemed more certainly that of Tradition, of untold numbers of dead poets who had cooperated in the fabrication of a wonderfully serviceable artificial language.

Only after writing his French thèses did Parry become convinced that he was describing an oral style. His 1929 article on enjambment<sup>10)</sup> contains the first assertion of the likelihood of oral composition of the Homeric poems. Specifically, he attributes to the circumstances of improvisation the distinctive „additive“ or paratactic quality of versification, witnessed in, among other things, the much lower incidence of necessary enjambment in Homer than in Apollonius Rhodius or Vergil.<sup>11)</sup> An oral composer had need of a pause at line-end to decide whether to end his sentence or to draw it out as the narrative moment might require.

In his two important and programmatic Harvard Studies papers, Parry explored the full implications of orality and, most significantly, carried the results of his empirical studies into the realm of literary evaluation. What he had to say in this regard directly contradicted the Unitarian credo of individual creativity inherent in Homer's artistry.

We should not seek in the Iliad and the Odyssey for Homer's own style. The poet is thinking in terms of the formulas. Unlike the poets who wrote, he can put into verse only those ideas which are to be found in the phrases which are on his tongue, or at the most he will express ideas so like those of the traditional formulas that he himself would not know them apart. At no time is he seeking words for an idea which has never before found expression, so that the question of originality in style means nothing to him.<sup>12)</sup>

<sup>9)</sup> Gilbert Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic*, Oxford 1907. 1934, 241, 256. Compare the nineteenth-century notion of the autochthonic „folk-epic“, for example, in H. Steinthal, *Das Epos*. *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* 5 (1868), 1–57.

<sup>10)</sup> *The Distinctive Character of Enjambement in Homeric Verse*. *Transactions of the American Philological Association [TAPA]* 60 (1929), 200–220 = A. Parry 1971, 251–65.

<sup>11)</sup> Parry's statistics and conclusions have been rejected by some: D.L. Clayman & T. van Nortwick, *Enjambement in Greek Hexameter Poetry*. *TAPA* 107 (1977), 85–92, „there is no special relationship between unperiodic enjambement and oral composition.“ Others have refined and reaffirmed them: see M. Cantilena, *Enjambement e poesia esametrica orale: una verifica*, Ferrara 1980.

<sup>12)</sup> M. Parry 1930 (note 1 above), 146–47 = A. Parry 1971, 324 = Latacz 1979, 242.

This statement is an intrusion by oral theory into the field of literary criticism, an infringement that was to polarize scholarly opinion and trigger an emotional response in many readers and critics of Homer. For Parry's dictum regarding the inapplicability of conventional notions of artistic originality to the Homeric epics seemed to preclude the search for carefully devised and intentionally deployed meanings in the poems. In short, Parry forbade higher criticism as it had been practiced for two and a half millennia! For Parry, the whole issue was

whether we should read Homer as we read written poetry, which is for us the natural form of poetry, or whether we should not rather try to gain for our reading the sense of style which is proper to oral song.<sup>13)</sup>

#### 4. Parry's Work, Phase II: Comparative Oral Epic

Comparative literature had furnished a vital subdiscipline of modern Homeric scholarship at least since Robert Wood's comparison of Homer with Ossian in his *Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer* (London 1769; 2nd ed. 1775).<sup>14)</sup> By the late nineteenth century, a wide range of nonclassical poetries had been examined for parallels with Homeric epic.<sup>15)</sup> For example, Andrew Lang's *Homer and the Epic* (London 1893) includes enlightening discussion of analogies between the *Iliad* and the *Chanson de Roland*. W.P. Ker's *Epic and Romance* (London 1897) and H.M. Chadwick's *Heroic Age* (Cambridge 1912) are complementary studies detailing the social and intellectual premises of heroic poetry. Contemporaneous with Parry's comparative works was C.M. Bowra's *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* (Oxford 1930), which used analogy with other „primitive“ epics to illustrate the artistry of Homer. In 1932, the first volume of the Chadwicks' compendious *Growth of Literature*<sup>16)</sup> began an unprecedented survey of the world's repository of primitive poetry.

Milman Parry gave a new impetus to such comparative study of epic poetry. With the second of his *Harvard Studies* articles<sup>17)</sup>, he had sought to consolidate the case for oral composition strictly on the basis of internal linguistic and stylistic evidence. He now sought to test this structure of theory against the observed practices of a living tradition of oral poetry. His choice of Yugoslav epic was

<sup>13)</sup> *About Winged Words*. *Classical Philology* [CP] 32 (1937), 63 = A. Parry 1971, 418.

<sup>14)</sup> See K. Simonsuuri, *Homer's Original Genius: Eighteenth-Century Notions of the Early Greek Epic* (1688–1798), Cambridge 1979.

<sup>15)</sup> See R.C. Jebb, *Homer: An Introduction to the Iliad and the Odyssey*, Glasgow 1887, 131–36.

<sup>16)</sup> H.M. & N.K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, 3 vols., Cambridge 1932–36–40.

<sup>17)</sup> *Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making, II: The Homeric Language as the Language of an Oral Poetry*. HSCP 43 (1932), 1–50 = Parry 1971, 325–64.

prompted by the work of Mathias Murko<sup>18)</sup> of the University of Prague; Murko had attended Parry's soutenance de thèse, probably at the invitation of Antoine Meillet.<sup>19)</sup>

In 1933 and again in 1934–35, Parry made extensive field studies in Yugoslavia, overcoming considerable logistical obstacles.<sup>20)</sup> He collected some 13,000 Serbo-croatian texts, including about 3,500 phonograph discs. An example of the sort of corroborative evidence Parry thus found is contained in his study of „Whole Formulaic Verses in Greek and Southslavic Heroic Song“, <sup>21)</sup> written shortly after his first trip to Yugoslavia. Here, for the first time in the comparative study of epic, we find a scientific method of inquiry used to sharpen general notions of similarity between Homer and a demonstrably oral poetry:

When one hears the Southern Slavs sing their tales he has the overwhelming feeling that, in some way, he is hearing Homer ... When the hearer looks closely to see why he should seem to be hearing Homer he finds precise reasons: he is ever hearing the same ideas that Homer expresses, and is hearing them expressed in phrases which are rhythmically the same, and which are grouped in the same order ... In both the poetries we find the same idea being stated in just the length of a verse, or in the part of the verse which stretches just from one of the rhythmic breaks to one of the verse ends.<sup>22)</sup>

Here was substantiation by analogy from a living oral poetry of a deduction made four years before in the paper on enjambment.

<sup>18)</sup> Esp. *La Poésie populaire épique en Yougoslavie au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1929; see also: *Neues über Südslavische Volksepik*. *Neue Jahrbücher für das Klassische Altertum, Geschichte und deutsche Literatur* 22 (1919), 273–96 = Latacz 1979, 118–52.

<sup>19)</sup> See the Foreword to Ćor Huso: *A Study of Southslavic Song*, in: A. Parry 1971, 439–41.

<sup>20)</sup> A. Parry 1971, xxxvi: „There were no rules laid down for Parry's investigation. He had to learn the language, which meant getting to know a good deal of dialect; to choose his assistants; and to evolve the best methods of approaching singers and prevailing on them to sing. The recording equipment, involving aluminium discs, he had built by a firm in Waterbury, Conn., and for power he depended on the battery of his Ford V-8 (1934), which he brought over to Yugoslavia with him. Banditry was not uncommon in the inland valleys, and an air of risk and adventure always accompanied Parry's several trips into the interior.“ And see, in general, pp. xxxiv–xli. The „air of risk and adventure“ has apparently not altogether disappeared from such field work – see G. Leuze, *Guslari u Jugoslaviji; Volksgesang im heutigen Jugoslawien; Erster Bericht: Der äußere Rahmen*. *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft [WJA]* 12 (1986), 21–34, esp. 22.

<sup>21)</sup> TAPA 64 (1933), 179–97 = A. Parry 1971, 376–90 = (in German) Latacz 1979, 267–88.

<sup>22)</sup> *Ibid.*, 182 = 378 = 271. Despite his apparent reliance on scientific method, for Parry the appeal of oral poetry (and thus of Homer) was fundamentally romantic: H. Levin, *Portrait of a Homeric Scholar*. CP 32 (1937), 266 = *id.*, *Grounds for Comparison*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972, 146: „The moment he cherished most occurred toward the end of one of his earliest days in the Serbian hills, during the summer of 1933. They had settled at an inland village and at length come across a *guslar*, the first epic poet Parry had ever known, an old man who claimed



The potentials of this sort of comparative study were immense. Unfortunately, Milman Parry himself did not live to participate in the further application of his discoveries to the analysis of oral poetry – that has been left to his successors.<sup>23)</sup>

Milman Parry's goal had been F. A. Wolf's – to recapture the true mode of existence of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Wolf had postulated the oral genesis of Homeric poetry; Parry brought home implacably the full implications of oral provenance. He asked that we recalibrate our criteria of aesthetic evaluation to an art *toto caelo* different from that for which those criteria had originally been designed. He justified such a recalibration by removing an impenetrable barrier of time: his examination of a modern equivalent for an irreclaimable ancient situation yielded results superseding those of 200 years of historical reconstructionism. These results required that terms such as „originality“, „creativity“, „unity“, „structure“, either be carefully redefined or else excised altogether from our critical idiom where oral poetry was concerned.

Since the bulk of Parry's published work is devoted to the compilation of evidence in support of particular arguments, it is not easy to isolate the philosophic bases of his thought. But in an address near the end of his life on „The Historical Method in Literary Criticism“, Parry made it clear that his work had always been actuated by an unswerving allegiance to science and the historical method; he alluded again to a question from Ernest Renan's *The Future of Science*<sup>24)</sup> with which he had opened his dissertation on traditional epithet:

How can we seize the physiognomy and the originality of early literatures if we do not enter into the moral and intimate life of a people, if we do not place ourselves at the very point in humanity which it occupied, in order to

to have been a warrior in youth and to have cut off six heads. All afternoon he sang to them about his battles. At sunset he put down his *gusle* and they made him repeat a number of his verses. Parry, very tired, sat munching an apple and watching the singer's grizzled head and dirty neck bob up and down over the shoulder of Nikola, the Hercegovinian scribe, in a last ray of sunlight. ‚I suppose‘, he would say, in recalling the incident, with crisp voice and half-closed eyes, ‚that was the closest I ever got to Homer.‘“ Cf. A. Parry, 1971, xxxvi–xxxvii: „Parry himself loved to dramatize what he was doing. The photograph of him in native dress costume [p. 438] ... reveals a romantic and even histrionic side of himself which reminds one of T.E. Lawrence ... Parry was in a way romantic, but in another way, logical.“ I am grateful to Prof. E.-R. Schwinge for reminding me of this curious mix of scientist and romantic in Milman Parry.

<sup>23)</sup> Apart from a few tantalizing, brief pieces: a review of W. Arend's *Typische Scenen bei Homer*. CP 31 (1936), 357–60 = A. Parry 1971, 404–7 = (in German) Latacz 1979, 289–94; an abstract of a proposed article on Homer and Huso, I: *The Singer's Rests in Greek and Southslavic Heroic Songs*. TAPA 66 (1935), xlvii; and several pages of a projected book entitled *The Singer of Tales*, in: A. Lord, Homer, Parry, and Huso. *American Journal of Archaeology* [AJA] 52 (1948), 37–40 = A. Parry 1971, 469–73.

<sup>24)</sup> *L'avenir de la science*, Paris 1890.

see and to feel with it, if we do not watch it live, or rather if we do not live for a while with it?<sup>25)</sup>

Milman Parry's work, though sometimes called revolutionary, was in reality only a high point in the positivistic trend in literary scholarship (and especially in classical studies) dating back to the nineteenth century. This was a movement based, as René Wellek has said, on „the whole underlying assumption that literature should be explained by the methods of the natural sciences, by causality, by such external determining forces as are formulated in Taine's famous slogan of race, milieu, moment.“<sup>26)</sup> Parry's statistical orientation emulated the procedures of the exact sciences. Here was no mere impressionistic aestheticism; here was a „hard science“ methodology, one that, by careful scientific observation of a text, located cause and effect in a specific historical moment – oral performance.<sup>27)</sup> Or so it seemed.

## 5. Hard Parryism

Parry was fortunate in leaving behind a student and co-worker who has proved a most fervent and energetic apostle.

Parry himself did not live long enough after making his monumental collection to think out his theory in detail, let alone to develop it and present it to the learned world in completeness. Working from the clues that he left, I have tried to build an edifice of which he might approve.<sup>28)</sup>

Albert Lord's *Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass. 1960) offers an extensive report from „the living laboratory of Yugoslav epic.“ The bulk of discussion centers on the education of the singer, the various stages of apprenticeship from novice to professional. The compositional devices of formula and theme are treated and the equivalence of performance and composition is repeatedly stressed. Lord

<sup>25)</sup> Harvard Alumni Bulletin 38 (1936), 778 = A. Parry 1971, 409.

<sup>26)</sup> R. Wellek, *The Revolt against Positivism in Recent European Literary Scholarship* [orig. 1946], in *Concepts of Criticism* (ed. S.G. Nichols), New Haven 1963, 256. Cf. S. Rothblatt, *The Revolution of the Dons*, London 1968, 153: „In Cambridge in the 1860s the very air seemed full of Comtianism ... Historical method was replacing the older science of human nature with its stress on psychology and logic. Biblical and classical scholarship had become increasingly historical-minded.“

<sup>27)</sup> Taine used the analogy of the study of fossil shells: „Why do you study the shell, except to bring before you the animal? So you study the document only to know the man. The shell and the document are lifeless wrecks, valuable only as a clue to the entire and living existence. We must get hold of this existence, endeavor to re-create it“: *Literary Criticism: Pope to Croce* (ed. G. W. Allen & H. H. Clark), Detroit 1962, 482.

<sup>28)</sup> Lord 1960, 12.

particularly emphasizes the fluidity of tradition, the absence of textual fixity, and the innocence of the unlettered *guslar* of even the very notions of syllable, word, or line. He explains the effects on songs of variations in audience stability. One learns, too, of the evaluative criteria of a critical audience, of the importance, for instance, of the singer's facility in „ornamentation“ of thematic „multiforms“. Chapters on Homer and various medieval poems of possible oral origin make recommendations about their correct appreciation.

Lord's own contributions to oral theory (to the extent that they may be distinguished from Parry's) focus on two subjects: thematic composition, and the oral dictated text. Themes such as arming, eating, sailing, oath-taking, etc. had already been studied by Walter Arend in *Die typischen Szenen bei Homer* (Berlin 1933). Parry himself had praised the book for „not finding falsely subtle meanings in the repetitions“<sup>29)</sup> and suggested a causal explanation of the phenomena: a rich oral tradition had facilitated the improvisation of such scenes, with varying ornamentation of core elements to suit the poet's needs.

Lord sought to show that just as line-by-line composition proceeded by the instinctive placement of interacting formulas, so too scene-by-scene composition advanced by the disposition and interplay of themes or complexes of themes.<sup>30)</sup>

We are apparently dealing here with a strong force that keeps certain themes together. It is deeply embedded in the tradition; the singer probably imbibes it intuitively at a very early stage of his career. It pervades his material and the tradition.<sup>31)</sup>

Parry's work on stylistics had aimed at proving the all-pervasiveness of formulas in Homer. A van Gennep had found a parallel for this extensive formulaicity in Serbian epic,<sup>32)</sup> and Parry's own work in Yugoslavia seemed to confirm it. Now Lord was arguing, also on the analogy with Serbocroatian poetry, that larger verbal aggregates exhibited the same relative fixity and that an entire song should be thought of as a sequence of multiforms – more or less elaborated – each summoning to mind other individual themes or complexes. The formulaic systems and thematic patterns were clues to the oral genesis of the compositions. Thus, individual genius was less responsible than the tradition for organizational accomplishments on all levels. The resources of the tradition and variable circumstances of performance (audience stability, etc.) gave each song its particular shape.

<sup>29)</sup> Parry 1936 (note 23 above), 360 = A. Parry 1971, 407 = Latacz 1979, 294.

<sup>30)</sup> Cf. *Homer's Originality: Oral Dictated Texts*. TAPA 84 (1953), 127: „The themes of oral poetry are the repeated narrative or descriptive elements, and they function in building songs in much the same way in which the formulas function in building lines. The formula content of the theme is variable depending on the wishes of the singer to lengthen or shorten his song“ [= Kirk 1964, 71 = Latacz 1979, 311].

<sup>31)</sup> Lord 1960, 98.

<sup>32)</sup> *La Question d'Homère*, Paris 1909.

In an effort to induce the performance of a poem of Homeric dimensions, Parry engaged the most skilled singer of tales he encountered, Avdo Mededović. The result of two weeks of singing (four hours per day) was the 12,311-line Wedding of Smailagić Meho.<sup>33)</sup> While its quality has been variously assessed, its sheer length showed that songs of Homeric scale were within the competence of an unlettered singer. In 1953, Lord drew the conclusion that oral dictation may have been responsible for the magnitude of Homer's monumental epics. An eighteenth-century Milman Parry had taken advantage of the newly domesticated Phoenician alphabet to transcribe the work of a consummate genius. The great length and excellence of the epics are attributable in part to optimum conditions of performance/composition.<sup>34)</sup>

This theory rehabilitated the notion of *ipsissima uerba*. Though the tradition was fluid and no one song was ever exactly repeated, the rhapsodes, by Lord's theory, may have had access to an authentic transcription obtained in the eighth century B. C. just as Avdo's had been in 1935. Further, the sharp stylistic distinction

<sup>33)</sup> Lord 1948 (note 23 above), 42 = A. Parry 1971, 476; Lord notes that „another song from the same singer [Parry Collection, Text no. 6082] ... runs to about the same length.“ See A. B. Lord & D. E. Bynum (ed. & trans.), *The Wedding Song of Smailagić Meho*, 2 vols., Cambridge, Mass. 1974. As Prof. W. Burkert has pointed out to me, the validity of this particular experiment in oral dictation is perhaps somewhat undermined by the fact Avdo had heard a version of the poem read from a printed edition some years before performing it for Parry. But, given the great disparity in length between the two versions (2160 lines vs. Avdo's 12,311), I am inclined to agree with Lord 1960, 79, that „Avdo made no attempt to memorize a fixed text. He did not consider the text in the book as anything more than the performance of another singer; there was nothing sacred in it ... If the printed text is read to an already accomplished oral poet, its effect is the same as if the poet were listening to another singer.“ There is a succinct discussion of the complicated pedigree of the Wedding Song in E. Kujundžić's foreword to his Serbocroatian reprinting of the 1974 Harvard edition: *Ženidba Smailagić Mehe*, Sarajevo 1987. On the question of the utility in general of the Homer/Avdo analogy, see D. Wender, *Homer, Avdo Mededović, and the Elephant's Child*. *American Journal of Philology* [AJP] 98 (1977), 327–47.

<sup>34)</sup> *Homer's Originality* (note 30 above), 132–33 = Kirk 1964, 76–77 = Latacz 1979, 317: „The chief advantage to the singer of this manner of composition is that it affords him time to think of his lines and of his song. His small audience is stable. This is an opportunity for the singer to show his best, not as a performer, but as a storyteller and poet. He can ornament his song as fully as he wishes and is capable; he can develop his tale with completeness, he can dwell lovingly on passages which in normal performance he would often be forced to shorten because of the pressure of time or because of the restlessness of the audience. The very length of the Homeric poems is the best proof that they are products of the moment of dictation rather than that of singing. The leisureliness of their tempo, the fullness of their telling, are also indications of this method.“ Avdo Mededović's song, too, is abnormally long within Serbian tradition; as Prof. Latacz remarked to me *per ep.*, „In normal circumstances, Avdo would never have sung a song of that length ... Avdo was hired by Parry for eight days ... and he made the best of it“; cf. B. Hemmerdinger, *Épopée homérique et lais héroïques serbes*. *Revue des Études Grecques* 90 (1977), 78–80.

between poems of unlettered singers and literary productions – the central axiom of the Yugoslav analogy – was not jeopardized. There was now, on Lord's view, no need to postulate a literate poet in order adequately to account for the organizational and artistic skill manifest in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

James Notopoulos joined Lord in the work of consolidating Milman Parry's oral theory as a scholarly subdiscipline. His own comparative contributions were in the area of Modern Greek rather than Yugoslav literature.<sup>35)</sup> Perhaps most important in Notopoulos's work, however, was his insistence not only on the likelihood of an illiterate Homer but also on the need for a specialized critical instrument by which to explicate his poetry.

One of the most important implications of Parry's work is the need for an aesthetics which emanates from an understanding of the oral technique of composition, the form and mentality of oral poetry.<sup>36)</sup>

The work of Lord and Notopoulos as well as of their students and converts in propagating Milman Parry's theory of oral composition has been marked by an almost fanatical loyalty to the master. For them, his writings constitute an *ipse dixit* of almost theological quality. One result of this hagiographic attitude has been a certain rigidity, a narrowness of outlook that has brought conflict of course with scholars who reject oral theory, but also with those who would modify or revise it. As time passes, fewer and fewer true believers remain: Albert Lord may be the last as well as the first!

## 6. Early Reaction among Homeric Scholars

In the first twenty-five years after Parry's death in 1935, scholars pursuing traditional directions of investigation reacted only very slowly to his theory of oral composition. Before the publication of his collected papers in 1971, his Paris dissertations were not translated from the French and all of his later work appeared only in scholarly journals. The disruptions caused by the Second World War also slowed reaction. Albert Lord's Harvard dissertation was not completed till 1949 and not published till 1960 (as *The Singer of Tales*). Developments were more rapid and far-reaching after 1960.

Regarding the impact of Parry's work on Homeric criticism, we may safely say that it hastened the demise of the already moribund old-style Analysis. The theory of oral composition of Homer's poems furnished new explanations for the putative narrative inconsistencies that Analysts attributed to multiple authorship.

<sup>35)</sup> See esp. Notopoulos 1964 and Parataxis in *Homer: A New Approach to Homeric Literary Criticism*. TAPA 80 (1949), 1–23.

<sup>36)</sup> Notopoulos 1964, 48.

An oral poet simply did not work from the logical presuppositions of a lettered composer: inconcinnities in his work are not traces of poor editorial management by some inept later compiler; they are rather quite typical of the oral storytelling techniques observed in the field and postulated by analogy for Homer. The Analysts' very perception of them as inconsistencies results from the misapplication of literary standards to oral poetry.

In fact, Analysis has been almost entirely supplanted by Neoanalysis<sup>37)</sup>, which stresses not textual alterations and manipulations subsequent to Homer, but the influences of pre-existing epic materials available to Homer and adapted (more or less smoothly) for use in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.<sup>38)</sup> As, for example, A. Heubeck<sup>39)</sup> and W. Kullmann<sup>40)</sup> have pointed out, Neoanalysis might seem readily amenable to oral theory, since it too presupposes earlier versions of epic tales, couched in a formulaic idiom maturing slowly over a long time. And, indeed, some critics have harmonized the two critical outlooks: Bernard Fenik<sup>41)</sup> in the United States, for example. The majority of Neoanalyst practitioners, however, insist on a literate Homer. „It was the original intention of neoanalysts to bridge the gap between unitarianism and (old) analysis.“<sup>42)</sup> The Neoanalysts, like the Unitarians, believe in „a comparatively high degree of individual creation in the Homeric epics.“ To this creativity, writing seems indispensable.

Already in the quarter century before Parry began his work, Unitarian scholars had carried far the process of illuminating and assessing the marks of a single organizing genius behind the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Unitarian reaction to Parry's oral theory was essentially to reject (or ignore) it as inadequate to account for the

<sup>37)</sup> Exceptions are A. Dihle, *Homer-Probleme*, Opladen 1970, and H. van Thiel, *Iliaden und Ilias*, Basel 1981.

<sup>38)</sup> See W. Kullmann, *Zur Methode der Neanalyse in der Homerforschung*. *Wiener Studien* 15 (1981), 5–42, and M. E. Clark, *Neoanalysis: A Bibliographical Review*. *Classical World* [CW] 79 (1986), 379–94.

<sup>39)</sup> *Die Homerische Frage*, Darmstadt 1974, 151: „Daß die neoanalytische Forschungsrichtung und ihre Ergebnisse zu denen der *oral-poetry*-Forschung nicht in unüberbrückbarem Gegensatz zu stehen brauchen, daß sie sich vielmehr in glücklicher Weise ergänzen können, sollte nicht übersehen werden.“

<sup>40)</sup> *Oral Poetry Theory and Neoanalysis in Homeric Research*. *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 25 (1984), 311: „The two approaches do not contradict each other in all their components. The basic results of the research done by Parry and his followers were accepted by almost all Homeric scholars when they were presented. Neoanalysts share the basic conviction that the necessities entailed by improvised poetry account for the formulaic character of Homeric language ...“

<sup>41)</sup> See, e.g., „*Iliad X*“ and the „*Rhesus*“: *The Myth*, Brussels 1964, and *Homer: Tradition and Invention*, Leiden 1978. Cf. L. M. Slatkin, *The Wrath of Thetis*. *TAPA* 116 (1986), 1–24, and G. Crane, *Calypso: Backgrounds and Conventions of the Odyssey*, Frankfurt a. M. 1988.

<sup>42)</sup> Kullmann 1984 (note 40 above), 311; cf. J. T. Kakridis, *Homeric Researches*, Lund 1949, 9–10.

structural complexity and artistic richness of Homer's poetry. In German-speaking areas, Albin Lesky made clear the importance of oral theory while noting also its shortcomings<sup>43)</sup>, and such scholars as W. Schadewaldt<sup>44)</sup> and A. Heubeck<sup>45)</sup> took account of Parry's work, but finally argued that, though Homer's antecedents may have been oral bards, he himself far surpassed them. Others, like K. Reinhardt<sup>46)</sup> and F. Eichhorn<sup>47)</sup> went forward with their Unitarian studies, either unaware of Parry's work or simply dismissing it out of hand. In the United States, already in 1938, the Unitarian Samuel Bassett attacked Parry for „reviving the nineteenth-century hypothesis that Homer was not, at least in ideas and diction, a great creative poet, but rather the last of a long series of ever-inferior bards.“<sup>48)</sup> Bassett was among the first of many to question the validity of the Yugoslav analogy because „South-Slavic folk poetry ... produced no Homer.“<sup>49)</sup>

For many critics, the very idea of unlettered composition carried negative connotations. In the United States W. C. Greene<sup>50)</sup> and in Britain C. M. Bowra<sup>51)</sup>, a scholar who did much to disseminate Parry's findings, both argued that Homer must have used writing. Indeed, as Prof. Latacz has rightly observed, Lord's theory of the oral dictated text is a kind of compromise measure, preserving an oral Homer but accounting for both the manner of transcription and the

<sup>43)</sup> A. Lesky, *Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im homerischen Epos*, in: *Festschrift für Dietrich Kralik*, Horn 1954, 1–9 = *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bern 1966, 63–71 = Latacz 1979, 297–307; and *Homer*, in: *RE Suppl.* 11, Stuttgart 1967, 687–846. German readers should now consult the concise, well-informed, and very current discussion in D. Boedeker, *Amerikanische Oral-Tradition-Forschung: Eine Einführung*, in: *Vergangenheit in mündlicher Überlieferung [Colloquium Rauricum Bd. 1]* (ed. J. von Ungern-Sternberg & H. Reinau), Stuttgart 1988, 34–53.

<sup>44)</sup> See, e.g., W. Schadewaldt, *Die epische Tradition*, in: *Der Aufbau der Ilias: Strukturen und Konzeptionen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1975, 26–38 = Latacz 1979, 532–37.

<sup>45)</sup> See note 39 above.

<sup>46)</sup> *Die Ilias und ihr Dichter* (ed. U. Hölscher), Göttingen 1961.

<sup>47)</sup> E.g., *Homer's Odyssey: Ein Führer durch die Dichtung*, Göttingen 1965; cf., in France, E. Delebecque, *Construction de l'Odyssee*, Paris 1980, and, in the United States, G. E. Dimock, *The Unity of the Odyssey*, Amherst, Mass. 1989.

<sup>48)</sup> *The Poetry of Homer*, Berkeley 1938, 18.

<sup>49)</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. the strictures in F. Dirlmeier, *Das serbokroatische Heldenlied und Homer*, Heidelberg 1971.

<sup>50)</sup> *The Spoken and the Written Word*, HSCP 55 (1951), 23–59.

<sup>51)</sup> His paper, *The Comparative Study of Homer*, *AJA* 54 (1950), 184–92, and his *Heroic Poetry*, London 1952, contain significant notices of Parry, but none the less insist on a semi-literate Homer at the least; it is only in *Homer and His Forerunners*, Edinburgh 1955, that Bowra subscribes explicitly to a thoroughly oral poet and follows Lord (without referring to him) in positing an eighth-century dictated text. Cf. Bowra, *Memories: 1898–1939*, Cambridge, Mass. 1967, 322: „I like to think that I was one of the first Englishmen to grasp the importance of Parry's work.“

monumental scale of the epics.<sup>52)</sup> An English historian, H. T. Wade-Gery, went so far as to conjecture that the principal motive for adopting alphabetic writing in Greece was to record Greek verse;<sup>53)</sup> again, the structure and dimensions of the poem were seen as conclusive evidence.

Thus, many scholars simply could not accept oral theory on aesthetic grounds. Those receptive to it as an explanation of composition often saw dire consequences for the enterprise of literary criticism. Parry himself had written a telling critique<sup>54)</sup> of a paper by his former teacher, George M. Calhoun<sup>55)</sup> of Berkeley, in which he objected to the detection of precise and subtle significance in Homer's use of the „winged words“ formula. In this case, Parry argued that the oral poet was merely drawing on a speech introduction formula that usefully avoided repetition of a speaker's name mentioned just previously. In a pair of sobering articles, F. M. Combellack observed that Parry had effectively disallowed conventional literary criticism by showing that Homer's poems were not literary at all. As for the identification (or assumption) of deliberate artistic purpose, „the hard fact is that in this post-Parry era critics are no longer in a position to distinguish the passages in which Homer is merely using a convenient formula from those in which he has consciously and cunningly chosen le mot juste.“<sup>56)</sup> This was an intolerable impasse.

While some critical studies of Homer remained strongly magnetized to the core of Parry's and Lord's theoretical axioms, many critics, particularly in England, France, and Germany, chose simply to proceed with conventional literary analysis of a Unitarian cast, either relying on the conviction that Homer was literate (defended or undefended by historical evidence) or not bothering to confront the issue of oral vs. literate genesis at all. Others, especially in England and the United States, subscribed to oral theory as cogent literary history while engaging in literary criticisms essentially unmodified by that subscription. But perhaps the largest contingent of scholars preferred to revise oral theory to bring

<sup>52)</sup> Latacz 1979, 13–14; so too, A. Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature* (trans. J. Willis & C. de Heer), London 1966, 38–39, speaks of the theory as „a halfway house.“

<sup>53)</sup> The Poet of the Iliad, Cambridge 1952, 39: „the Iliad is what it is because of the impact upon an oral technique of a brand-new literacy invented by the Greeks themselves.“ Cf. K. Robb, *Poetic Sources of the Greek Alphabet: Rhythm and Abecedarium from Phoenician to Greek*, in: Havlock 1978, 32: „In order to perform a very old task (preserve orally formulated material) in a new and better way the Greek did indeed borrow a superior technology from his Semitic neighbors, a script ... It was the conversion of that technology to the special needs of recording Greek poetry on some enduring substance which provoked into existence the world's first complete alphabet.“

<sup>54)</sup> *About Winged Words*. CP 32 (1937), 59–63 = A. Parry 1971, 414–18.

<sup>55)</sup> *The Art of the Formula in Homer – ΕΠΕΑ ΠΙΤΕΡΟΕΝΤΑ*. CP 30 (1935), 215–27.

<sup>56)</sup> F. M. Combellack, *Milman Parry and Homeric Artistry*. *Comparative Literature* 11 (1959), 208; cf. *Contemporary Unitarians and Homeric Originality*. *AJP* 71 (1950), 337–64.



it in line with an interpretive stance based on the ideal of a consciously creative Homer.

## 7. Revision and Beyond

As we have already seen, an eminent early subscriber to oral theory – C.M. Bowra – felt compelled, at least at first, to qualify it by the supposition of a literate or semi-literate Homer. The idea of a composer simply reshuffling cards of metrically serviceable formulaic material<sup>57)</sup> was too unpalatable. Some critics even postulated a Homer operating not within but actually despite his inherited conventions of narration and versification. It was a case of „Homer against His Tradition“.<sup>58)</sup> Milman Parry's son, Adam, for example, argued that the poet could represent Achilles' iconoclastic position in heroic society only by making him misuse the language of traditional epic.<sup>59)</sup> But the naively mechanistic view of oral composition was soon dispelled by a (still ongoing) reassessment of the nature of „formula“ in and of itself and by a reconsideration of the effects within the purview of formulaic composition.<sup>60)</sup> Most important from the technical angle were studies by A. Hoekstra<sup>61)</sup> and J.B. Hainsworth<sup>62)</sup> shedding light on the malleability and mobility of Homeric formulas within the infrastructure of the hexameter line. Investigations of the dynamics of „structural formulas“ and of deep and surface manifestations, the latter drawn from generative grammar, have not always led to useful definitions and distinctions.<sup>63)</sup> Still, the economy or thrift of Homeric formula is now commonly considered much less stringent than Parry thought.<sup>64)</sup> Regarding the semantic content of formulas, literally hundreds of

<sup>57)</sup> The metaphor is from A. van Gennep 1909 (note 32 above), 52, and is quoted by Parry 1932 (note 17 above), 6, n. 1 = Parry 1971, 329, n. 1.

<sup>58)</sup> Cf. J. Russo, *Homer against His Tradition*. *Arion* 7 (1968), 275–95 = (in German) *Latacz* 1979, 403–27.

<sup>59)</sup> *The Language of Achilles*. *TAPA* 87 (1956), 1–7 = Kirk 1964, 48–54.

<sup>60)</sup> For recent annotated bibliography of formula studies, see M. W. Edwards, *Homer and Oral Tradition: The Formula*, Part I. *Oral Tradition* 1 (1986), 171–230, and id., ..., Part II. *Oral Tradition* 3 (1988), 11–60.

<sup>61)</sup> *Homeric Modifications of Formulaic Prototypes: Studies in the Development of Greek Epic Diction*, Amsterdam 1965.

<sup>62)</sup> *The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula*, Oxford 1968.

<sup>63)</sup> See, e.g., J. Russo, *A Closer Look at Homeric Formulas*. *TAPA* 94 (1963), 235–47, and *The Structural Formula in Homeric Verse*. *Yale Classical Studies* [YCS] 20 (1966), 219–40; M.N. Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer*, Berkeley 1974. For an opposed view, W. W. Minton, *The Fallacy of the Structural Formula*. *TAPA* 96 (1965), 241–53.

<sup>64)</sup> See, e.g., E. Visser, *Homerische Versifikationstechnik: Versuch einer Rekonstruktion*, Frankfurt a.M./Bern/New York 1987, condensed in *Formulae or Single Words? Towards a New Theory on Homeric Verse-Making*. *WJA* 14 (1988), 21–37.

investigations of formulaic diction have shown that the deployment of formulas is context-sensitive within both the immediate narrative setting and the world of the poem as a whole.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, a recent study has argued that „the nonformulaic elements in the traditional diction were complementary to the formulaic elements.“<sup>66</sup> The artistry of the oral poet is no less sophisticated and admirable than that of his literate counterpart.

Even in the area of noun-epithet combinations, where Parry had made his first, seemingly airtight investigations, the identification of deftly controlled significance in formulas has progressed in direct counterpoint to the arguments of the hard Parryists. Adam Parry's student William Whallon published several essays on artistically significant epithets and epithet groups.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, a steady stream of studies, including two book-length works since 1982<sup>68</sup>, has focused on many subtle, aesthetically appropriate epithets. Such research has ruled out any simplistic notion of oral composition as automatic or unsophisticated.

The revisionist position on oral theory was given wide circulation in 1966 by Yale Classical Studies, volume 20. Here were collected a number of important revisionist arguments by G. S. Kirk<sup>69</sup>, Adam Parry<sup>70</sup>, and J. Russo<sup>71</sup>, among others, regarding formula and formulaic composition, verse and sentence structure, enjambment, and the validity of the Yugoslav analogy. Anne Amory, in her discussion of „The Gates of Horn and Ivory“, contended specifically that the images of horn and ivory were at the center of a subtly modulated network of imagery. But, on a more theoretical plane, she also decried the devaluation of Homer's individual artistry as a dangerous and regrettable propensity of certain oralists.

Even if we believe that Homer was an illiterate bard working entirely within an oral tradition, we do not have to deny him control over his material to the extent that some recent critics seem inclined to do, for some of the

<sup>65</sup> See, esp., A. A. Parry, *Blameless Aegisthus: A Study of AMYMΩN and Other Homeric Epithets*, Leiden 1973. Cf. J. P. Holoka, „Looking Darkly“ (ΥΠΟΔΡΑ ΙΔΩΝ): Reflections on Status and Decorum in Homer. *TAPA* 113 (1983), 1–16, and U. Sacks, *The Traditional Phrase in Homer: Two Studies in Form, Meaning and Interpretation*, Leiden 1987 [orig. Diss. Harvard 1978].

<sup>66</sup> M. Finkelberg, *Formulaic and Nonformulaic Elements in Homer*. CP 84 (1989), 196.

<sup>67</sup> Gathered and revised in *Formula, Character, and Context: Studies in Homeric, Old English, and Old Testament Poetry*, Cambridge, Mass. 1969.

<sup>68</sup> P. Vivante, *The Epithets in Homer: A Study in Poetic Values*, New Haven 1982, and D. Shive, *Naming Achilles*, Oxford 1987 [orig. Diss. Toronto 1985]. The latter, a study of unique and equivalent formulas signifying Achilles in all grammatical cases, reaches the conclusion that „the underestimated factor of equivalence ... allows the poet to choose the phrase whose meaning is more suitable in the particular context“ (130).

<sup>69</sup> *Formular Language and Oral Quality*. YCS 20 (1966), 155–74 = id., *Homer and the Oral Tradition*, Cambridge 1976, 183–201.

<sup>70</sup> *Have We Homer's Iliad?* YCS 20 (1966), 177–216 = Latacz 1979, 428–66.

<sup>71</sup> See note 63 above.

current uncasiness about the degree of art which we may impute to an oral poet rests on false premises.<sup>72)</sup>

This was clearly aimed at the hard Parryists. Albert Lord's pontificating response, „Homer as an Oral Poet“<sup>73)</sup>, was actually an extended polemical review of the Yale Classical Studies volume. He maintained that the symbolism of the *Odyssey* had been studied over-ingeniously by Anne Amory. The scenes under consideration are rather specific instances or „multiforms“ of a traditional theme. We have to do with oral verse-making technique, not with an orchestrated arrangement of literary associations. Anne Amory Parry's rebuttal went directly to the heart of the controversy:

It is false to assume that Homer could have done only what Yugoslav bards do. Since we have Homer alone to represent the Greek heroic oral tradition, the only thing we can be sure of is that whatever artistic merits are visible in Homer must have been within the powers of the poet (or poets) who composed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.<sup>74)</sup>

Since those words were written, a whole host of revisionist studies, both in Europe and America, has reinforced them.<sup>75)</sup> Critics have searchingly evaluated and reevaluated nearly all aspects of Homeric epic. In general, they have disclosed in ever greater detail the brilliance of the poetry's metrical and formulaic effects, patterns of imagery and theme, use of simile<sup>76)</sup>, and narrative strategies on all levels. Their conclusions are overwhelmingly Unitarian or, as I would dub them, Neounitarian. Though the predominant interpretive method is „New Critical“, that is, grounded in close reading (explication de texte), there has also been a greater openness to more innovative and unconventional avenues of elucidation: psychoanalytic<sup>77)</sup>, structural<sup>78)</sup>, semiotic<sup>79)</sup>, narratological<sup>80)</sup>, even decon-

<sup>72)</sup> Anne Amory, *The Gates of Horn and Ivory*. YCS 20 (1966), 36.

<sup>73)</sup> HSCP 72 (1968), 1–46

<sup>74)</sup> A. A. Parry, *Homer as Artist*, *Classical Quarterly* 31 (1971), 6.

<sup>75)</sup> See J. P. Holoka, *Homeric Originality: A Survey*. CW 66 (1973), 257–93 = *The Classical World Bibliography of Greek Drama and Poetry* (ed. W. Donlan), New York/London 1978, 37–75.

<sup>76)</sup> W. C. Scott, *The Oral Nature of the Homeric Simile*, Leiden 1974.

<sup>77)</sup> E.g., B. Simon, *Mental Life in the Homeric Epics*, in: *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece: The Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry*, Ithaca/London 1978, 53–77, and W. T. MacCary, *Childlike Achilles: Ontogeny and Phylogeny in the Iliad*, New York 1982.

<sup>78)</sup> E.g., A. Schnapp-Gourbeillon, *Lions, héros, masques: Les représentations animales chez Homère*, Paris 1981. Cf. C. Edwards, *The Parry-Lord Theory Meets Operational Structuralism*. *Journal of American Folklore* 96 (1983), 151–69.

<sup>79)</sup> E.g., S. A. Nimis, *Narrative Semiotics and the Epic Tradition: The Simile*, Bloomington, Ind. 1987 [orig. Diss. Minnesota 1982].

<sup>80)</sup> See A. L. T. Bergren, *Odyssean Temporality: Many (Re)Turns*, in: C. A. Rubino & C. W. Shelmerdine (eds.), *Approaches to Homer*, Austin, Tex. 1983, 38–73, and I. J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Odyssey*, Amsterdam 1987.

structive.<sup>81)</sup> Gregory Nagy has fused the methodologies of linguistics and anthropology in a number of provocative studies.<sup>82)</sup> The vexed question of unified artistry within the Homeric poems seems either beside the point or simply no longer in need of consideration.

## 8. Oral Literature Research

Though oral poetry theory in its pure formulation has generated great controversy in the particular area of Homer studies, it has also sparked an intense interest in the classification and study of other oral literatures, both living and dead, around the world.<sup>83)</sup> In 1953, for example, Francis P. Magoun sought to use Parry's statistical model of formulaic density to prove the oral character of the *Beowulf* epic.<sup>84)</sup> Soon, scholars began to operate on other literatures with Parryist tools. The early works of one literary tradition after another – Old English, Medieval French and German, etc. – have been scrutinized for evidence of oral origin.<sup>85)</sup> The business of classification, description, and literary analysis under new oral poetic ground rules has boomed. As in the case of Homeric studies, a revisionist phase has followed, as scholars became dissatisfied with the crudity of the standard formulaic litmus test. The definition of formula itself proved difficult to pin down, and certain troubling exceptions came to light. There were, for example, highly formulaic poems of almost certainly literate provenance.<sup>86)</sup> There were also cases of oral poets becoming literate and yet composing in the old oral style<sup>87)</sup> – something Albert Lord's experience had supposedly ruled out.

<sup>81)</sup> E.g., P. Pucci, *Odysseus Polutropos: Intertextual Readings in the Odyssey and the Iliad*, Ithaca 1987, and M. Lynn-George, *Epos: Word, Narrative and the Iliad*, Atlantic Highlands, N.J. 1988 [orig. Diss. Cambridge 1984]. On deconstruction in general, see note 107 below.

<sup>82)</sup> See, esp., *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*, Baltimore 1979.

<sup>83)</sup> See R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, Cambridge 1977, and J. M. Foley (ed.), *Oral Traditional Literature: A Festschrift for A. B. Lord*, Columbus, Ohio 1981. There is now a new scholarly journal, *Oral Tradition* (1986–), devoted exclusively to this subject area.

<sup>84)</sup> The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry. *Speculum* 28 (1953), 446–67 = *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism* (ed. L. E. Nicholson), Notre Dame, Ind. 1963, 189–221.

<sup>85)</sup> See M. Curschmann, *Oral Poetry in Medieval English, French, and German Literature: Some Notes on Recent Research*. *Speculum* 42 (1967), 36–52 = Latacz 1979, 469–96.

<sup>86)</sup> See R. E. Diamond, *The Diction of the Signed Poems of Cynewulf*. *Philological Quarterly* 38 (1959), 228–41, and L. D. Benson, *The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry*. *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 81 (1966), 334–41; cf. J. P. Holoka, *The Oral-Formula and Anglo-Saxon Elegy: Some Misgivings*. *Neophilologus* 60 (1976), 570–76.

<sup>87)</sup> See, e.g., R. S. Spraycar, *La Chanson de Roland: An Oral Poem?* *Olifant* 4 (1976), 63–74, and Spraycar & L. F. Dunlap, *Formulaic Style in Oral and Literate Epic Poetry*. *Perspectives in Computing* 2.4 (1982), 24–33.

In the case of non-living traditions, although consensus regarding orality versus literate character has often been elusive, the search for answers to the questions of composition and appropriate critical methodology has been conducted with great enthusiasm on many fronts. In the case of living traditions, there have been strenuous efforts to record oral materials and then to characterize them scientifically. A recent bibliographical reference work lists over 1800 items devoted to material in some ninety different language areas.<sup>88)</sup> Though it is difficult to generalize meaningfully, the following elements and inquiries are typical of oralist research: First, a preoccupation with classification; that is, can traces of oral composition be identified in a text of uncertain origin? What are the distinctive elements in a text known to be of oral provenance? Second, a concern to prescribe proper critical approaches to oral compositions as generically distinct; that is, are we obliged to take into account the genesis of a work as we elucidate it? If so, what kinds of interpretative and evaluative statements will have meaning? How may we avoid possible misconceptions stemming from our habituation to literary compositions? How may we achieve a right reading of oral poetry?

Another byproduct of the post-Parry preoccupation with the category of oral composition has been the study of „orality“ as a cultural phenomenon.

We as literates, inheritors of 2500 years of experience with the written word, are removed by a great distance from the conditions under which the written word first entered Greece, and it requires some effort of the imagination to comprehend what these were and how they affected the manner in which the event took place. More accurately, rather than speak of destruction, we should say that what set in with the alphabetization of Homer was a process of erosion of „orality“, extending over centuries of the European experience, one which has left modern culture unevenly divided between oral and literate modes of expression, experience, and living.<sup>89)</sup>

Studies of the oral mind set lie at the intersection of anthropology, psychology, sociological, and intellectual history.<sup>90)</sup> In Italy, Bruno Gentili<sup>91)</sup>, in the United

<sup>88)</sup> J. M. Foley, *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research: An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography*, New York/London 1985.

<sup>89)</sup> E. A. Havelock, *The Alphabetization of Homer*, in: Havelock 1978, 4.

<sup>90)</sup> See M. Fantuzzi, *Oralità, scrittura, auralità: Gli studi sulle tecniche della comunicazione nella Grecia antica (1960–1980)*. *Lingua e Stile* 15 (1980), 593–612; also G. Nieddu, *Alfabetismo e diffusione sociale della scrittura nella Grecia arcaica e classica: pregiudizi e realtà documentaria*. *Scrittura e Civiltà [S&C]* 6 (1982), 233–61, *La metafora della memoria come scrittura e l'immagine dell'animo come δέλτος*. *Quaderni di Storia* 10.19 (1984), 213–19, and Testo, *scrittura, libro nella Grecia arcaica e classica: Note e osservazioni sulla prosa scientifico-filosofica*. *S&C* 8 (1984), 213–61, and E. Pöhlmann, *Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit gestern und heute*. *WJA* 14 (1988), 7–20.

<sup>91)</sup> See *Poesia e pubblico nella Grecia antica: Da Omero a V secolo*, Rome/Bari 1984, <sup>2</sup>1989 = *Poetry and Its Public in Ancient Greece: From Homer to the Fifth Century* (trans. A. T. Cole),

States, Walter Ong<sup>92)</sup> and Eric Havelock<sup>93)</sup> are among the leading figures. Hand in hand with this research goes speculation about the cultural impact of literacy and textuality, as in the work of the Englishman J. Goody<sup>94)</sup> and the German W. Wimmel.<sup>95)</sup>

## 9. Oral Poetry vis-à-vis Literary Criticism, History, and Theory

The students of each generation, approaching the literature of some past period with the clearer insight which has been won for them by the earlier generation, will find in the best opinions on that past elements which jar with one another, or things which have been left out, or things which have been given too much place; and if they have head enough not to become befuddled by details – which is the great hazard – they will in their turn give a truer picture.<sup>96)</sup>

Though no one hypothesis about the fabrication of Homer's epics has emerged triumphant, „orally evolved“ or „orally derived“ may be the most common catch phrases among scholars who trouble themselves about literary history. Few doubt that, historically speaking, the Homeric *Kunstsprache* evolved over a long period of time, and that Homer was master of an art of oral composition, whether or

Baltimore 1988, and Gentili & G. Paioni (eds.), *Oralità: Cultura, Letteratura, Discorso*, Rome 1985.

<sup>92)</sup> See, e.g., *Interface of the Word*, Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture, Ithaca 1977, and *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London/New York 1982. Cf. V. Labrie, *Cartography and Graphic Analysis of the Physical Universe in the Odyssey Story*, *Journal of Folklore Research* 20 (1983), 219–42.

<sup>93)</sup> See, esp., *Preface to Plato*, Cambridge, Mass. 1963, the collected essays in *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences*, Princeton 1982, and *The Muses Learn to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present*, New Haven 1986. Cf. C. P. Segal, *Tragédie, oralité, écriture* (trans. V. Giroud), *Poétique* 50 (1982), 131–54, and T. M. Lentz, *Orality and Literacy in Hellenic Greece*, Carbondale, Ill. 1989.

<sup>94)</sup> See Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge 1968 = *Literalität in traditionellen Gesellschaften*, Frankfurt a. M. 1981; id., *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*, Cambridge 1986, and, most recently, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*, Cambridge 1987. Cf. D. Tannen (ed.), *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy*, Norwood 1982, and the cautionary remarks in R. Finnegan, *Literacy versus Illiteracy: The Great Divide? Some Comments on the Significance of „Literature“ in Non-literate Cultures*, in: *Modes of Thought: Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies* (ed. R. Horton & R. Finnegan), London 1973, 112–44.

<sup>95)</sup> *Die Kultur holt uns ein: Die Bedeutung der Textualität für das geschichtliche Werden*, Würzburg 1981. See, too, Latacz 1989, 26–29. Cf. F. H. Bäuml, *Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy*, *Speculum* 55 (1980), 237–65.

<sup>96)</sup> Parry 1936 (note 25 above), 779 = Parry 1971, 409.

not he relied to some degree on the new devices of literacy.<sup>97)</sup> Though one may quibble over specific formulas, internal evidence, taken as a whole, overwhelmingly supports the oralist explanation of the distinctive linguistic and stylistic qualities of Homer's poetry. In this regard, oral poetry theory has made a valuable contribution to literary historical reconstruction. Readers of Homeric and other early epics are now aware that these poems emerged in a context essentially different from that of works conceived and produced within a tradition fully literate throughout. The historical matrix of our texts is better understood because of the work in comparative epic inspired by Parry's initial field investigations. Again, while one may dispute the validity of a particular analogy between Homeric composition and, say, Yugoslav or Old English or Bantu or what have you, the preponderance of evidence favors the main hypotheses of oral poetry theory.

If we grant – even if only for the sake of argument – that the Homeric poems were composed orally, what are the implications of that mode of composition for the critical interpretation and evaluation of the epics? It is on this question that scholarly disagreement has raged since Parry. As we have seen, oralists at the extreme position taken by Lord have maintained that criticism of an oral composition must recognize that the creative mentality of an illiterate author differs radically from that of his literate counterpart. On their view, the critic will be ill-advised to ascribe intricate, premeditated significance to verbal repetitions that in fact served practical prosodic purposes. Also stressed are the limits of audience insight imposed by the manner of reception of the work of art. Even if the performer could have included carefully designed nuances of sense or expression, involved devices or sub-surface complexities of meaning, his audience could not even have perceived, much less fully appreciated them. The singer simply could not afford to overtax the resources of concentration his listeners might reasonably be expected to bring to bear. The critical corollary is obvious: we must not attribute to the singer a delicacy of imagination or depth of creative intention that would have been lost on those for whom the work was fashioned.

What continues to go unremarked is the crucial fact that oral theory and the disagreement it has triggered result from a redefinition or conceptual repositioning of the work of art. It is simply assumed – by hard liners, revisionists, and opponents of the theory alike – that if a poem is orally derived, then certain aesthetic parameters are in place; the exact nature of those parameters may be disputed, but few have objected to the assumption that oral provenance makes a text

<sup>97)</sup> Most European Homerists (A. Heubeck, A. Lesky, U. Hölscher, W. Schadewaldt, inter alios) have argued that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are works of written composition based on oral diction. J. Latacz, *Kampfparänese, Kampfdarstellung und Kampfwirklichkeit in der Ilias, bei Kallinos und Tyrtaios*, Munich 1977, 4–7, has aptly coined the phrase „epische Sprachkompetenz“ to describe the literate composer's facility in the diction of oral composition.

different in essence from one existing in written form *ab ovo*.<sup>98)</sup> On this view, our proper object of study is the oral performance of which the text is – more or less directly – a written record. A bit of the fluid epic tradition has congealed in the fixed text.

In „Homer“ we confront a paradox unique in history: two poems we can read in documented form, the first „literature“ of Europe; which however constitute the first complete record of „orality“, that is, „non-literature“ – the only one we are ever likely to have.<sup>99)</sup>

The critic's task is accurately to envisage the original manifestation as it was for the composer and its first audience.<sup>100)</sup> He must recalibrate his tools of explication with this goal in mind. Our text is merely evidentiary and not in and of itself the final object of our attentions, certainly not in the way that a writer's production is. Thus, those who cannot abide the consequences of orality for criticism of the poetry have felt compelled to argue that we do not in fact have to do with an orally derived work of art. Hence all of the energy expended on reconstruction of the historical context of the poems' origin, hence the sense of urgency about the dating of Greek literacy. The possibility of proving written creation *in illo tempore* holds a special allure, because the consequences for literary interpretation seem so momentous.

It is in precisely this matter of locating the art object, however, that oral theorists and Homerists in general are guilty of theoretical naiveté. The fact is that our apprehension of the Iliad and the Odyssey is the same as our apprehension of a work composed in writing to begin with; that is, our knowledge of the poems derives from a sequence of written (later, printed) symbols. The poetry of Homer has *for us* the same physical basis, the same ontological status as that of, say, Vergil or Milton. Only by virtue of its acquisition of this physical form, however that may have come about, do we have access to the art of Homer at all. The inflexible insistence on scientific reconstruction of the moment of creation rules out a criticism that adequately addresses this situation.

A listener's experience is strictly auditory. Understanding is contingent on an effectively automatic association of word sounds and semantic values, and for

<sup>98)</sup> But see R. Finnegan (note 94 above) and J. Latacz 1989, 20; cf. E. Lämmert, *Bauformen des Erzählens*, Stuttgart <sup>7</sup>1980.

<sup>99)</sup> Havelock (note 89 above).

<sup>100)</sup> Cf. Notopoulos 1964, 49–50: „Much of the Homeric Question is the product of trying to adjust a poem to a preconceived mentality that is an obstacle to understanding older literature. An oral poetics demands a transformation from a bookish mentality to one which apprehends books merely as modes of preservation of oral poetry. Only with that transformation will the mist be clarified.“ This is in essence the position taken by F. A. Wolf in 1795: see *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (ed. R. Peppmüller), Halle <sup>3</sup>1884, cap. 18 = Latacz 1979, 30–31 = *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (ed. & trans. A. Grafton et al.), Princeton 1985, 92.



him as for a reader meaning gives rise in the consciousness to a fictive cosmos of objects and events viewed by the mind's eye – the „world of the poem“. But there is this radical dissimilarity, directly owing to the difference in physical make-up of the perceived work: the listener's focus of attention must change at a rate exactly corresponding to the rate of progression of sound formations and, thereby, of semantic units or combinations of units – words, phrases, sentences, sentence clusters – as they are enunciated by the retailer (singer, ἀοιδός, rhapsode, *scop*, guslar, or what have you). In the absence of a settled text, there can be no simultaneous existence of all the elements of the work of art. The poem has no other manifestation than a sequence of evanescent sound waves. The velocity of phonetic and semantic elements makes a hearer's awareness distinctly unlike that of a reader. As students of the intellectual history of orality have shown so cogently, the singer of tales operates in an environment altogether dissimilar to that of a literate poet, regarding both type of performance undertaken and manner of consumption by its audience.

Literacy is a quality of mind, conditioning our experience of Homeric epic as inevitably as, on Parry's view, illiteracy did that of its original consumers. Readers may control the progression of the work, stop or reverse the flow, juxtapose widely separated items in the narrative procession, and in general approach a perception of the work as a simultaneously manifested whole. They can therefore detect and assess all the various relations of sound and sense, image and metaphor, episodes and themes, etc. that are commonly the subjects of literary critical inquiry, whether or not such relations were discernible by non-readers.<sup>101)</sup>

The question unavoidably arises whether readers are entitled to assign a work significances that, given what we know of oral composition, the poet could hardly have intended. Within classical studies, the appeal to auctorial intention is still held to be indispensable for the valid determination of textual meaning.<sup>102)</sup> Outside classical studies, however, the whole question of the relevance of auctorial intention to the critical act was hotly contested, chiefly because of the Anglo-American school of „New Criticism“ that rose to prominence in just the same decades ('30s, '40s, and '50s) when oral theory was being formulated and solidified.<sup>103)</sup> Formalist critics rigidly insisted on appeal only to textual evidence and not to historical/ biographical data (verifiable or not), while historicists or intentionalists took the

<sup>101)</sup> J. Latacz 1989, 88–89, argues that such detection and assessment by readers took place very early for the Homeric poems.

<sup>102)</sup> See, e.g., G. Jäger, *Einführung in die Klassische Philologie*, Munich <sup>2</sup>1980, 109: „Es soll vor allem sichtbar werden, in welcher Weise der Autor ein bestimmtes Thema behandelt, in welcher *Absicht*, in welcher *Situation* und vor welchem *Publikum* er dies tut.“

<sup>103)</sup> See the essays conveniently collected in: *On Literary Intention* (ed. D. Netwon-de Molina), Edinburgh 1976.

opposing position<sup>104</sup>) Although neither camp succeeded in conclusively defeating the other, the whole issue or appeal to author's intention as against appeal to textual autonomy was a principal element in the literary theoretical arguments of the time. Since the 1960s, such critical schools and movements as structuralism/semiotics<sup>105</sup>, reader-response criticism<sup>106</sup>, and deconstruction<sup>107</sup> have taken the critical enterprise far beyond any constraints imposed by naive respect for auctorial intention.<sup>108</sup>) John Ellis has sensibly described the special status of literary texts, which

outgrow the original context of their utterance, and ... function in the community at large. They do not function in that original context, are not dependant on that context for meaning, and are not judged according to their appropriateness or success in achieving what was to be achieved there. Therefore, when we decide to treat a piece of language as literature, that decision is in itself a decision not to refer the text to its originator nor to treat it as a communication from him.<sup>109</sup>)

Furthermore, even were one to concede the relevance of auctorial intention to literary analysis, the whole question is moot in the case of Parry's Homer because we do not analyze the work (i.e., performance) to which – on Parry's view – the author's intentions were directed. As soon as the oral performance was precipitated as a written text, the issue of auctorial intent became extraneous. We must recognize the historical likelihood of an ontological transformation of the work of art. Our Homer exists as a written text; this fact confers on the epics an autonomy, a freedom from delimitation by auctorial intention (or critics' notions

<sup>104</sup>) E.g., E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven 1967.

<sup>105</sup>) See, e.g., D. Sless, *In Search of Semiotics*, Totowa, N.J. 1986.

<sup>106</sup>) On this critical movement, see, esp., R. Warning (ed.), *Rezeptionsästhetik*, Munich 1975, J. P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post Structuralism*, Baltimore 1980, and I. Crosman, *Annotated Bibliography of Audience-Oriented Criticism*, in: *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (ed. S. R. Suleiman & I. Crosman), Princeton 1980, 401–24. Cf. W. Barner, *Neuphilologische Rezeptionsforschung und die Möglichkeiten der Klassischen Philologie*, *Poetica* 9 (1977), 499–521.

<sup>107</sup>) See, e.g., J. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, Paris 1967 = *Of Grammatology* (trans. G. C. Spivak), Baltimore 1976; J. D. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, Ithaca 1982; V. B. Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction*, New York 1983, chapters 9–12 in: G. Thurley, *Counter-Modernism in Current Critical Theory*, New York 1983, and H. J. Silverman (ed.), *Derrida and Deconstruction*, New York/London 1989.

<sup>108</sup>) On the complexities involved in the author-text-reader relationship, see, e.g., the discussions in M. J. Valdés & O. Miller (eds.), *Identity of the Literary Text*, Toronto 1985, and J. D. Johansen, *Hypothesis, Reconstruction, Analogy: On Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Literature*, *Semiotica* 74.3/4 (1989), 235–252.

<sup>109</sup>) *The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis*, Berkeley 1974, 111–12.

of it). Particularly (but not only) in the case of an oral poet, concern for the genesis of the text in the mind of an intending agent must not nullify new interpretations and evaluations of the artistry exhibited by that text in its present mode of existence.<sup>110</sup> Indeed most literary theorists today (again, outside the field of classical studies) would grant the same autonomy to works originally conceived in writing.

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have for us, as they have had for all who have known a fixed text, meanings and values they did not have either for their author or for their first audience. We may discover effects very likely unintended by Homer.<sup>111</sup> To say this is not to surrender our right to elucidate such effects. Unintended does not mean non-existent, so long as we carefully demarcate the context of our critical endeavors. As a subject of historical and biographical inquiry, Homer may never be closer to us than in the person of a modern Serbocroatian *guslar*, unpalatable as that may be to the aesthetic sensibilities of some students. This is what made the biography-by-analogy written by Albert Lord so seductive. And from this same perspective, the Homeric epics may be approached as oral performances, with all that implies about interpretive procedures and conclusions. However, in my opinion, this would entail a deleterious restriction of critical discussion to statements about cause, that is, to how and why – historically – words came to be arranged as they are, rather than to the effects those words have on Homer's readers. Criticism would be deflected from the work to its creator.

The poetic phenomenon, being linguistic, is not simply the message, the poem, but the whole act of communication. This is a very special act, however, for the speaker – the poet – is not present; any attempt to bring

<sup>110</sup> Cf. R. W. Stallman, s. v. *Intentions*, in: *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (ed. Alex Preminger et al.), Princeton 1965, 399: „When the critic relies upon the author's declared intention, either the author's work or the critic's interpretation of it is deficient. Once the work is produced, it possesses objective status – it exists independently of the author and of his declared intention. It contains, insofar as it is a work of art, the reason why it is thus and not otherwise. The difference between art and its germinal event is absolute ... All parts of the work of art are, ideally, relevant or functional to the whole. Irrelevant to the objective status of the work as art are criteria which dissolve the work back into the historical or psychological or creative process from which it came ... The critic answers the question What is the work's organizing principle? Analysis discovers what is intended by each part, all parts having relationship one to the other (the Jamesian canon). All analyses are open to criticism, all judgments are corrigible. The critical reader is the ideal reader.“

<sup>111</sup> Assuming one has the temerity to adjudicate between what was intended and what unintended by a poetic genius. On the issue of readers as participants in the formulation of textual meaning, see R. Crosman, *Do Readers Make Meaning?* in: *The Reader in the Text* (note 106 above), 149–64; and, in general, W. Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore 1978, and *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, Baltimore 1989.

him back only produces interference, because what we know of him we know from history, it is knowledge external to the message, or else we have found it out by rationalizing and distorting the message.<sup>112)</sup>

From the point of view of our own inescapably literate apprehension of them, the Iliad and the Odyssey must be treated as independent entities, proper sources in themselves of verification for literary critical assertions. They may legitimately be viewed as poetic texts rather than exclusively as oral performances, for the former they patently are, the latter they can never again be (if indeed they ever were). We have to do with two distinct perspectives, the one literary critical, the other historical and/or biographical. We need not suppose that either perspective – *provided it is not confused with the other* – will necessarily lead to misreading or misjudgment. Each point of view has its own focus, locates its subject differently. Neither stance disallows the other, because each addresses itself to a discrete object. If this fact is borne in mind, the sometimes rancorous disputes of the past may be avoided in the future, and critics of Homer may get on with their proper task – the enlargement of our understanding and enjoyment of Homer's poetry.<sup>113)</sup>

#### Abbreviated citations

Havelock 1978	E. A. Havelock & J. P. Hershbelt (eds.), <i>Communication Arts in the Ancient World</i> , New York 1978.
Kirk 1964	G. S. Kirk (ed.), <i>The Language and Background of Homer: Some Recent Studies and Controversies</i> , New York/Cambridge 1964.
Latacz 1979	J. Latacz (ed.), <i>Homer: Tradition und Neuerung</i> , Darmstadt 1979.
Latacz 1989	J. Latacz, <i>Homer: Der erste Dichter des Abendlands</i> , Munich/Zürich 1985. 21989.
Lord 1960	A. B. Lord, <i>The Singer of Tales</i> , Cambridge, Mass., 1960.
Notopoulos 1964	J. A. Notopoulos, <i>Studies in Early Greek Oral Poetry</i> . HSCP 68 (1964), 1–77.
A. Parry 1971	A. Parry (ed.), <i>The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry</i> , Oxford 1971.

<sup>112)</sup> M. Riffaterre, *Describing Poetic Structures: Two Approaches to Baudelaire's les Chats* [orig. 1966], in: *Structuralism* (ed. J. Ehrmann), Garden City, N. Y. 1970, 202.

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