



ORAL TRADITION

Festschrift for John Miles Foley

This article belongs to a special issue of *Oral Tradition* published in honor of John Miles Foley's 65th birthday and 2011 retirement. The surprise Festschrift, guest-edited by Lori and Scott Garner entirely without his knowledge, celebrates John's tremendous impact on studies in oral tradition through a series of essays contributed by his students from the University of Missouri-Columbia (1979-present) and from NEH Summer Seminars that he has directed (1987-1996).

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Toward an Ethnopoetically Grounded Edition of Homer's *Odyssey*¹

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My contribution to this *Festschrift* for Professor John Miles Foley has its origin in an experimental course on comparative oral traditions titled “The Singers of Tales” that I have taught three times in quite different formats, once at Vanderbilt University and twice at Saint Olaf College. I began envisioning this course at the 1992 NEH Summer Seminar on Comparative Oral Traditions administered by Professor Foley in his capacity as the director of the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition at the University of Missouri. The seminar was one of the most pleasant, productive, and pivotal experiences of my academic career, largely because of the warm collegiality of my eleven colleagues and the generous mentoring of Professor Foley, and it continues to this day to have an effect on both my teaching and research. In the most recent incarnation of “The Singers of Tales” I decided, at great risk to my reputation as a traditional teacher and scholar, that the *form* of the course should match its *content*—that is, that the entire course should be conducted whenever possible without the aid of reading and writing.

Almost all the material that we were studying in this course was composed, performed, and in many cases transmitted without the use of writing and reading, in an “illiterate” or, perhaps I should say, “preliterate” period of history. Each successive time that I have taught this course, I have discovered that my students relate better and better to this orally generated material. This generation of students seems to be on the verge of ushering in a new “post-literate” period of history: they are engaged by the aural pleasures of music and speech and the visual pleasures of icons, and thanks to their exposure to newer methods of technologizing the word, their concept of a text is of something much more fluid than the silent, two-dimensional, black-on-white, typographical words that so tyrannized students of previous generations.

There is a certain perverseness, is there not, in expecting our students to enjoy traditional Zuni narrative poetry or traditional Appalachian folktales by sitting alone, in a quiet recess of the library and under a fluorescent light, reading a text speedily and silently, without even moving their mouths? Hence, in the most recent version of this course I determined that textbooks, written quizzes, exams, and final papers would be replaced whenever possible by public readings

¹ Ethnopoetics as a discipline has developed partly as a response to the perception of an inappropriate imposition of Western categories and aesthetics upon non-Western forms of literature. The irony of using the term with reference to Homer, the “paragon of Western literature,” is deliberate, for I am suggesting that a bardic performance of Greek epic in eighth-century BCE Ionia would have been much more distant and foreign to our experience than we generally acknowledge. In this respect, it would have had much in common with the performance-traditions of the more recent non-Western indigenous cultures with which the discipline of ethnopoetics is primarily concerned.

(even very long readings of the *Odyssey* and *Beowulf*), by shorter musical performances (with Homeric lyres, South Slavic gusles, Southern fiddles and banjos), and by oral presentations (of final research projects). The results were gratifying: students were personally engaged in these often difficult and exotic narratives, their individual and team research projects were outstanding, the class as a whole developed into a close-knit, interactive community, and, best of all, I did not have to read any examination essays or term papers. I enthusiastically recommend it.

We began the course, naturally, with Homer's *Odyssey*, and one of the first methodological obstacles that arose on the first day was the question of the relationship between the glossy, compact, rectilinear texts that the students had recently purchased from the shelves of the college bookstore and the oral performances with musical accompaniment of epic verse by a Greek bard on (let us say) the island of Chios in (let us say) the late eighth century BCE. What vestiges of the historical oral performance do these modern texts preserve? How does one textualize an oral performance? How does one take a non-spatial utterance in time and record it as a spatial and timeless and silent sequence of symbols? It happened that on that first day of class a student who was understandably trying to save some money pulled out of his backpack a tattered copy of a prose version of the *Odyssey* that his mother had used when a student at Saint Olaf College some thirty years earlier. I was startled and overreacted. I begged him not to open it, appealing to the class with as much passion as I could muster to purchase the stichic verse version that I had ordered through the bookstore, arguing that written prose is particularly unfit for representing sung or spoken epic verse, since prose is arranged in long paragraphs without meaningful breaks, while stichic verse is arranged in short lines that allow frequent pauses for silence and for catching one's breath. Trying to wax poetic I offered that prose flows continuously, like a river following its inevitable course downstream, while stichic verse ebbs and flows intermittently, like the ocean's waves lapping against the shore. I even proposed to my students, without having thought it out fully, that prose can exist only inscribed as a written text: no one sings or chants or, for that matter, even speaks in the full and sequential paragraphs of prose. At the time the hapless student, and likely the class as a whole, thought me a bit cruel and unusual, but within a few days they began to realize from personal experience that a loosely translated prose version of the *Odyssey* could convey only a synopsis of the *story* utterly divorced of its *form*. A more literal verse translation could at least convey a sense of the rhythms, the verse lengths, and the pauses, and it could even capture some of the resonance of the repetitive formulaic language of oral performance—or, as John Foley, who has coined several of the terms now used to describe this fundamental feature of oral aesthetics, would put it, the “traditional referentiality,” the “metonymic force,” the “epic register.”

We confronted this methodological obstacle repeatedly throughout the course, as we looked at several attempts by modern anthropologists, folklorists, and comparatists to record in textual form those performances of narrative poetry and folktales that they had actually witnessed (Native American, African American, and African). As we became familiar with these efforts, it struck me that those of us in classical studies, in contrast to our colleagues in anthropology, folklore, and comparative literature, continue in large part to read and study and translate our texts in much the same way as our text-oriented predecessors. We may acknowledge the orality of Homeric epic, we may refer to it as performance, we may pay obeisance to the study of comparative oral traditions, but we remain addicted to our printed texts, our book

divisions and line numbers, our *apparatus critici*, our concordances and lexica. We rarely try to reconstruct or even imagine a production of an epic performance.²

In this regard, we Homerists have fallen behind our colleagues in anthropology, folklore, and comparative studies. For them, beginning in the 1930s, a number of intellectual forces conspired to draw more attention to the contextual and non-verbal aspects of oral performance: the Prague school of linguistics, with its synchronic and contextual approach; fieldwork in various cultures of the world, which uncovered the techniques of oral composition; the adoption of a performance-oriented approach in folklore studies generally; advances in the ethnography of speaking; and, most relevant for our purposes here, the experimentation with notational systems for capturing the nonverbal aesthetic features of a performance in print.³ In 1972 Dennis Tedlock published his influential transcription of Zuni narrative poetry, *Finding the Center: Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indians*, which attempted to record by means of various typographical mechanisms such nonverbal acoustic features as pause, tempo, intonation, stress, and volume. And in 1984 Elizabeth Fine extended Tedlock's methods to record body and facial movements of the performer as well as reactions of the audience in her transcriptions of African American folktale traditions.

In my course "The Singers of Tales" we studied the attempts of Tedlock and Fine to textualize Native American and African American oral performances—they received mixed reviews from the students. On the one hand, the students faulted them for going to the extreme in their devaluation, even deconstruction, of written discourse out of their idolatry for oral performance. On the other hand, the students realized that they had contaminated the two media, the spoken and the written, not out of arrogance or ignorance, but in order to make a truly oral performance, or at least a decipherable record of it, widely available in an easily disseminated medium: the written text. Finally my colleague in the English Department at Saint Olaf College, Joseph Mbele, visited our class to talk about his fieldwork in Southern Tanzania and to read from his collection of Matengo folktales (Mbele 1999). He noted the difficulty, indeed the absurdity, of transforming a living oral performance into a typographical text; he cautioned against divorcing that text from its performing context; and he suggested that, at a minimum, the typography of such a text should reflect the performer's voice (the changes in volume, pitch, and tempo), that the margins of the text should record the physical and social setting of the performance, the time and duration of the performance, all the performer's non-verbal activity, the nature of the performer's equipment, and the audience's composition and reaction, and that the text should be accompanied by an audio or, better yet, a video recording of the performance.

This caused us to begin to wonder—and this is my main point here—how a folklorist doing fieldwork, like Dennis Tedlock in Arizona, or Elizabeth Fine in Texas, or Joseph Mbele in Tanzania, would, if miraculously transported to an eighth-century BCE social gathering in Ionia where Homer was performing a version of the *Odyssey*, transcribe that oral performance into a textual form. What would such a transcription and textualization look like? This process proved, of course, to be very difficult to conceive. There are so many unknown aspects of the non-verbal

² This is in marked contrast to the great strides we have made as a discipline in the appreciation of ancient drama as a production rather than a text.

³ For a thorough survey of the currents of development in these fields, see Fine 1984:16-56.

and contextual features of eighth-century BCE Greek epic: the social setting of the performance, the demeanor and involvement of the audience, the length of the performance units, the nature of the singing, the role of musical instrumentation, the non-verbal cues of the bard. Nonetheless, it seemed worthwhile for the purpose of the exercise—for the fundamental questions it would raise, if nothing else—to draw up a blueprint for a text that would at least attempt to accentuate, and even highlight, some of the *vestiges* of oral performance. Moreover, this exercise was not entirely hypothetical: Homer's *Odyssey* was, after all, written down at some point in history; otherwise it would not have survived.

A Modern Scholarly Edition vs. a Fieldwork Transcription

For the purposes of our exercise we began by cataloging the most fundamental features of our modern printed texts—in this case a recent scholarly edition of Homer's *Odyssey*—and considering whether or not these features would serve our purposes in our fieldwork transcription of an ancient oral performance of the *Odyssey*.

Title. As the prospective audience of an oral performance by Homer we will surely not request, nor will the bard propose, a performance of “the *Odyssey*,” and certainly not “*The Odyssey*,” since the canonization implied by such a title is still some generations in the making. We will request something more descriptive in nature: “The Tale of the *Nostos* (‘Homecoming’) of Odysseus from Troy and his Vengeance against the Suitors when he Reaches Ithaca.” (This topic is explored in much greater detail below.)

Author. The author is the bard Homer of Chios, who reiterates his gratitude and indebtedness to his teacher, and to his teacher's teacher, and to his teacher's teacher's teacher, and makes no grand claims of originality. As generations pass, some readers of the *Odyssey* will begin to regard the author not as a historical person but as a legendary figure, a cultural icon, or a mythic embodiment of the Greek epic tradition. But the slightly stooped, gray-bearded gentleman across the courtyard sipping his wine while he tightens the strings of his *phorminx* (lyre) looks every bit a real person to us.

Editor. This is our responsibility, since we, the scribes, are the ones making use of our newly acquired writing system to transcribe an epic performance in Greek for the first—possibly second—time in history. In this role we will try to remain as unobtrusive as possible as we attempt to record the oral performance accurately as a written text.

Press. The reed pens and papyrus rolls in our hands, generously provided by an aristocratic family of Chios, will suffice as the instruments for our transcription of this performance.

Date. This is the first year of the nineteenth Olympiad. But the tale goes back several hundred years, long before the founding of the Olympics, and some of the verbal formulas and poetic expressions go back even further into the hoary past.

Location. The performance is part of a six-day wedding celebration in the palatial residence of a newly married aristocratic couple on the Greek island of Chios. Most of the upper-class residents of Chios are in attendance, along with other guests from the neighboring islands and the Ionian mainland.

Copyright. None. Intellectual property is an utterly foreign concept to this bard. Future generations of poets are welcome to quote phrases, verses, and even longer passages without attribution. In fact, our bard will consider it an honor if they do so.

International Standard Book Number (ISBN). None. No comparable convention exists in Greece at this time. Cultures of the Near East have already created systems for cataloging the texts on their clay tablets and papyrus rolls, and some generations hence the feverishly cataloging librarians of Alexandria will do the same for Greek literature, but since this is one of the earliest attempts to produce a substantial text this far West, there is no precedent for keeping such records.

Dedication. The bard's invocation to the Muse at the beginning of his performance is an acknowledgment of his poetic forebears, who taught him everything he knows.

Foreword/Preface/Introduction. None. The bard will fill us in on a need-to-know basis during his performance. We have all heard versions of this tale before, and we are sufficiently familiar with its background to recognize when this bard is doing something new and different.

Bibliography. The bard assumes that we are familiar with the tales of the "Argonautica," "Heraclea," and "Oedipodea," as well as various tales about the Achaean expedition against Troy and its aftermath, including the "Iliad" (a performance of which was reportedly transcribed some twenty years ago, though we are familiar only with the oral version), all of which he will allude to in both subtle and explicit ways throughout his performance.

Sigla/Abbreviations. We are an experienced audience. We understand without further instruction the intricate "codes" embedded in the epic diction.

Table of Contents. The proem following the bard's invocation to the Muse, although not very detailed or complete, will serve as a synopsis of what is to follow.

Footnotes. None. But we may on occasion include notes in the margins about various features of the performance: pauses, both short and long; musical interludes, both between verses and between larger scenes; the bard's vocal impersonations of characters within the tale; the bard's physical movements, including gestures; the nature and level of the audience's participation; and so forth.

Apparatus criticus. None. There is no mechanism more inherently textual and utterly foreign to oral performance than the *apparatus criticus* that hangs tenaciously to the bottom of our scholarly editions. The *apparatus criticus* is a shorthand way of indicating the relative value that a modern editor places on variant readings in the manuscripts (that one scribe records the generalizing enclitic particle τε and another the more emphatic enclitic particle γε, for example). As ours is the first transcription in history of a performance of the *Odyssey*, there do not yet exist any variant readings. That said, if our bard stumbles on a word or phrase and then corrects himself, or if he stops mid-verse and goes back and starts over again with a different verse, or if he changes his mind about the way the course of the tale is going and chooses to backtrack, we will make a note of these matters in the margins.

Line Numbers. None. But the dactylic hexameter is a stichic verse, the catalectic sixth foot with aneeps of the final syllable denoting a pause in performance at the end of each verse. In other words, these verse endings are not simply textual divisions but oral ones, allowing for pauses and occasional musical interludes in performance between the verses. Hence, we will lay out the text of our transcription stichically, writing from right-to-left, with the letter-forms

reversed, or possibly *boustrophedon* (“back and forth as an ox turns,” that is, when pulling a plow), as is the custom on inscriptions of this period. The roughly contemporary “Cup of Nestor” from the Euboean colony of Pithecusae in the Bay of Naples, for example, has inscribed on it one of the earliest (c. 740 BCE) examples of Greek writing, including two dactylic hexameter verses written from right-to-left in stichic form.

Paragraph Markers. None. Narrative units will be easily discernible by internal markers, such as the shift from third-person narrative to internal dialogue and vice versa, the inclusion of digressions and paradigmatic tales, the insertion of the sometimes rather long and independent “Homeric” similes, the imposition of the structuring mechanism of ring-composition, and by various other stylistic devices. No external markers, such as indented lines, are required to define these narrative units.

Book Divisions and Numbers. None. The twenty-four-book division used in scholarly editions a half millennium from now has no bearing on the circumstances of Homer’s imminent performance of his version of the *Odyssey*. But since this performance, which will require more than twenty hours, will be much too long for a single sitting, it will be divided up evenly throughout the six days of the wedding celebration. The length of the daily performances will still be substantial, and we will differentiate these six substantial performance units by committing each one to a separate roll of papyrus. (See below for much more on this topic.)

Format of the Text. Upper and lower case letters: No differentiation. Only one style of letter, the majuscule (capital) found on contemporary inscriptions, exists at this point in the evolution of the Greek alphabet. With regard to the type of alphabet, we will use the East Ionic version of twenty-five letters (including omega, koppa, xi, psi; excluding digamma; H = eta). *Word division:* None. The letters will flow continuously on the papyrus roll, without any empty spaces between them. Also, vowels elided in pronunciation will be written out in full, as is the convention of the period, while geminated consonants will be written singly. *Punctuation marks (period, comma, colon, semicolon, question mark):* None. These have not yet been invented. *Breathing marks:* None. In any case, the East Ionic dialect of Greek in which our bard is singing is psilotic—it has lost its *spiritus asper* by this time. *Accents:* None. The intonation of the bard’s voice will instead be indicated by small musical notations written above the text of each verse, with four different pitches, denoted by four letters of the alphabet, corresponding to the four strings of the phorminx. Musical notations will also be included in the margins to signify any musical interludes between verses.

Indices of Names, Places, and Other Important Items. None. We are familiar with almost all the personal and place names from our experience of previous epic performances; if not, we may signify our perplexity to the bard, who will then fill in the details with a digression or expansion.

Corrigenda and Addenda. None. This is a composition-in-performance. Composition-in-performance by nature entails metrical blunders, dictional inconcinnities, factual errors, and larger narrative anomalies, and there will be no opportunity for the bard to proofread and correct these. As the Roman poet Horace will later observe: *nescit vox missa reverti* (“a word once spoken cannot be recalled,” *Ars Poetica* 390).⁴ We will be forgiving—and we ourselves will

⁴ All translations of primary Greek and Latin sources throughout this document are my own.

resist the temptation to correct these blemishes in our transcription. (See further discussion on this topic below.)

This exercise of cataloguing the various features of a modern printed edition of the *Odyssey*, and considering how these features might or might not serve our purposes in our hypothetical transcription of an ancient oral performance of the epic, brought to the attention of my students some of the essential differences between an oral performance and a written text. The students became invested in the procedure, and we were then able to consider some of these features in greater detail. I now wish to focus on three of these—Title, Division of Narrative, and Corrigenda and Addenda—in order to show how this exercise can sustain students' interest in a deeper examination of some of the most fundamental questions about Homeric performance (and, by analogy, about performances of other oral traditions). But before we can begin, we must again face, and to some extent try to resolve, the initial methodological obstacle that confronted us: What is the relationship between the modern translated texts of the *Odyssey* that we can hold in our hands (and the scholarly editions upon which they are based) and a live oral performance by Homer in the late eighth century BCE?

An Initial Methodological Obstacle

Did there ever exist—could there ever have existed—an ancient transcription of a performance of Homer's *Odyssey*? And, if so, do our modern editions, which are eclectic in nature—being based on painstaking collations of the textual readings of dozens of codices and hundreds of papyrus fragments, supported by what can be elicited from the testimony of ancient commentaries—reflect that original transcription closely enough to preserve even a vestige of a once live oral performance?

We may begin by reassuring ourselves about one obvious point of certainty: our *Odyssey* (and everything below applies equally well to the *Iliad*), regardless of how oral its background, at some point in history became a written text, for had this not occurred, we would never have known the epic. When, where, why, and how it became a text, however, are matters of great contention.⁵ One view is that the epic poet himself learned how to write and took advantage of this new technology to record his verses in a more fixed and stable medium. Advocates of this view attribute the extraordinary length and sophisticated narratological structure of the *Odyssey* precisely to the poet's ability to write. Some have even suggested that the alphabet was adopted by the Greeks specifically for the purpose of recording such monumental epics as the *Odyssey*.⁶ This view offers a romantic notion of an individual poet and his text with which we as literates have become familiar and comfortable; it also allows an editor to strive to reconstruct *the* original text of Homer in much the same way as he would *the* original text of some literate Hellenistic poet. But it fails to account for many features in the *Odyssey* that indicate that it was

⁵ What follows is a synopsis of a proposal that I offer at great length and in minute detail in Reece 2005 and somewhat more broadly in Reece forthcoming.

⁶ M. L. West (1990) has argued forcefully for an early written text of Homer; Powell (1991) proposes that the Phoenician writing system was brought to Greece precisely for the purpose of recording the Homeric epics.

not slowly and deliberately written down, with the leisure to reread, reconsider, and revise. (See further below.) Moreover, it seems most unlikely that it would ever have occurred to a truly orally composing bard to write his song down as a text. Preservation of the exact words of his song was never his goal; he could perform it again at any time. A written text served him no purpose in performance; on the contrary, he probably performed more freely and comfortably when allowed to sing at his own pace to the accompaniment of his phorminx, not with an unwieldy text to encumber him. It must have been someone other than the bard who came up with the idea of recording his song as a written text.

A second view, the polar opposite of the first, is that the textualization of the *Odyssey* was a long and complicated evolutionary process, throughout which it remained largely oral, and therefore fluid and unstable, not only among the bards of the earliest period, but also among the rhapsodes of the Archaic period, and even into the Classical and Hellenistic periods in disparate local traditions. The *Odyssey* did not become a text as we (more or less) know it until the Alexandrian librarians of the third and second centuries standardized and canonized it.⁷ This view tends to efface Homer's existence as a human being and instead attributes the *Odyssey* to a tradition, both oral and textual, that we can call, for the sake of shorthand, "Homer." Thus the epic was actually shaped by generations of mouths *and* hands, slowly crystallized, and not really fixed until the late Classical or even Hellenistic period. This evolutionary view is attractive in many respects, since it offers an explanation for several curious developments relevant to the transmission of the epics: the relative paucity of depictions of Homeric scenes in the graphic arts during the Archaic period, followed by a surge in popularity of such scenes in the late sixth century (that is, coincident with a Panathenaic textualization); the sometimes remarkable differences between our inherited text of the *Odyssey* and the quotations of the *Odyssey* by Classical authors, the textual versions reported to have existed in the manuscripts available to the Alexandrian editors, and the longer and "eccentric" readings of the Ptolemaic papyri; and the late linguistic forms, especially the "Atticisms" and "hyper-Ionisms" that reside, at least on the veneer, of our inherited text. But the drawbacks of this view are numerous as well. It fails to account for many important features of the *Odyssey* as we know it: the overall unity of its narrative; the various types of inconsistencies that remain embedded in its narrative; the absence of multiple versions of the *Odyssey*; and the fact that the development of the epic art-language appears to have been arrested at a particular moment in time. As a practical matter the evolutionary view imposes nearly impossible challenges on the modern editor of the *Odyssey*, for all textual variants must be regarded as *potentially* authentic readings. How is the modern editor to present the fluidity and multiformity of the epic tradition in the form of an edited text that has conventionally placed readings of a supposed original in the favored position above, while demoting supposed variants to the level of the *apparatus criticus* below?

A third view, which falls somewhere in between the other two, though much closer to the first, is that Homer dictated his version of the *Odyssey* to a scribe (or scribes), who recorded his words, probably with a reed pen on papyrus. The idea of textualizing the performance did not come from the bard, who would have placed no value on a written text. It must instead have

⁷ One may trace the development of the evolutionary model, namely that our inherited texts of Homer are the final product of a long evolution of a fluid oral *and* textual transmission, by following chronologically Murray 1911:298-325; Kirk 1962:98-101, 301-34; Foley 1990:20-31, 49-61; and Nagy 1996:29-112.

come from a patron, a sponsor, or a simple admirer, who was familiar with the only mechanism capable of accomplishing this task: oral dictation. Since the alphabet with which the performance was first textualized originated in Phoenicia, and since the papyrus upon which the text was first transcribed originated in Egypt, and since many components of the song itself—the tale-types, themes, and poetic forms—originated in the Levant and Mesopotamia, it does not require too great a leap of faith to suppose that the very idea of writing down the song originated from someone acquainted with the civilizations of the Near East, where the writing down of epic songs, some even through the process of dictation, and their transmission by means of written text, had been practiced for more than a millennium. Our inherited text of the *Odyssey*, in this view, is a more or less reliable record—though passed through countless hands over many generations—of what was once an oral-dictated text, that is, a scribal transcription of a performance orally delivered by a historical Homer in the eighth century.⁸ The benefits of this view are many: Homer remains a truly oral poet, but at the same time a particular text can be ascribed to him; our inherited text of the *Odyssey* can be regarded as a vestige of a real historical performance, delivered at a particular time, in a particular place, by a real living person; several of the most serious obstacles to the other views are obviated, namely that the texts that we have inherited retain several features that seem utterly incompatible with the view of an evolutionary process and, at least in some important respects, with the view of a literate Homer. I wish to highlight four of the most prominent of these features: the unity of the narrative, the various levels of inconcinnities that remain embedded in the narrative, the absence of multiple versions of the *Odyssey*, and the fixation in time of the epic art-language.

The unity of the narrative: The *Odyssey* is not simply a collection of loosely related episodes—which would be the predictable result of a process of compilation by various hands over a long period, or of a process of gradual accretion within an impersonal oral tradition. Rather, the *Odyssey* is a unified narrative whose structure is most clearly observed, whose plots are most intelligently followed, and whose nuances are most pleasurably appreciated, whether by ancient listeners or modern readers, when experienced in its entirety and within a limited time frame. Episodes are organized in a thoughtful sequence from beginning to end and bound together by a network of interconnected references, by anticipatory and retrospective allusions, by comparative and contrasting parallelisms, and many other similar structuring devices. The unity of plot and time in the *Odyssey* struck Aristotle as a unique feature of Homeric epic as early as the fourth century BCE (*Poetics* 1451a, 1459a), and most critics and commentators since then have continued to be impressed by its architectonic unity.⁹ The *Odyssey* appears to be a work carefully arranged by a personal and inspired bard composing in a performance that was experienced *in toto* on some occasion that provided considerable leisure: perhaps, as we have

⁸ The oral dictation model proposed by Milman Parry (A. Parry 1971:451) and developed further by Lord (1953 and 1960:124-38) has been supported with strong and up-to-date arguments by Janko (1990 and 1998), Ruijgh (1995), and Reece (2005).

⁹ For a treatment of ring compositions; two-, three-, and six-part narrative and narratological divisions; and other examples of parallelism in the *Odyssey*, see Tracy 1997, which draws upon the seminal works of Bassett (1919), Myres (1952), Kitto (1966), Gaisser (1969), Fenik (1974), and Tracy himself (1990); see also Loudon 1999. On the use of type-scenes as building blocks for the architectonic structure of the *Odyssey*, see Reece 1993:189-206; on a specific use of ring composition to tie together a long stretch of Odyssean narrative, see Reece 1995.

suggested, at the wedding of an aristocratic couple.

The various levels of inconcinnities that remain embedded in the narrative: The *Odyssey* has survived to our day as a text that, even in the form that has been copied and recopied for many generations, does not have the appearance of having gone through an extensive editorial process—proofreading, correcting, reworking, and so on. On the contrary, it retains many features typical of oral composition-in-performance whose words once uttered could not be retracted. Indeed, inconcinnities remain embedded in every level of our inherited text as vestiges of its origin in oral performance: metrical blunders attributable to the pressures of oral composition-in-performance by a bard who did not go back to his verses after his performance to tidy up the prosodic loose ends (for instance, the prosody of *Odyssey* 7.89 discussed further below); dictional inconcinnities that have resulted from stock formulaic phrases being used in contextually inappropriate circumstances, and whose survival in our texts show that the poet had no opportunity or desire to summon back his words or revise them (for instance, Zeus thundering on a cloudless day “from the clouds on high” at *Odyssey* 20.104, 114); small factual errors and larger narrative anomalies that point to a one-time oral dictation of an epic composition-in-performance that was transmitted thereafter, blemishes and all, with remarkable faithfulness in its textual avatars (for instance, the contradiction regarding whether Theoclymenus was aboard the ship or on the shore when he observed the omen of the bird at *Od.* 15.495-538 and 17.150-65). These are not normal features of deliberately written texts, nor are they conceivable in the evolutionary model; they arise rather from the exigencies of live oral performance that, on the one hand, require that the bard extemporize as he composes during the very act of performance, and, on the other hand, prohibit the bard from retracting or correcting his song once it has left his mouth.¹⁰

The absence of multiple versions of the Odyssey: The evolutionary model, hypothetical in the case of Homer’s *Odyssey*, has been applied appropriately and productively to the presumed, and in some cases demonstrable, histories of several other oral epic traditions that were eventually fixed in textual forms—for instance, the Sumerian and Akkadian versions of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the Sanskrit *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the Persian *Shahnama*, the Spanish *Cantar de Mio Cid*, the French *Chanson de Roland*, the German *Nibelungenlied*, the South Slavic Return Song, and the medieval Greek epic *Digenis Akritis*. It is instructive, then, to compare the features of the surviving texts of these other epic traditions with those of Homer’s *Odyssey* in order to determine if the similar circumstances hypothetically posed by the evolutionary model for the composition and transmission of the *Odyssey* have produced similar outcomes. What we discover is that in these other epic traditions there have survived multiple versions that are substantially different from one another, not only in small matters of diction and detail but also in their essential poetic forms, their larger themes and narrative patterns, their overarching plot structures, and even their total lengths. These multiple versions all have equal claim to authority; hence, the search for an archetype is meaningless. In the case of the *Odyssey*, however, multiple versions have not developed. While it is true that textual variants occur in quotations of “Homer” by later Classical authors of the fifth and (mostly) fourth centuries, in the

¹⁰ For more on these narrative inconcinnities and the challenge of how to respond to such blemishes that result from composition-in-performance, see below.

reports of the third- and second-century Alexandrian scholars about what they read in earlier editions of Homer, in the readings of the surviving remnants of Homeric texts on papyri from the early Ptolemaic period (that is, the third through second century BCE), and, though to a much lesser degree, from the surviving manuscripts of the post-Aristarchean “vulgate” (after around 150 BCE), with respect to the monumental epic as a whole these variants are comparatively trivial and do not provide the evidence for substantially different versions of the Odyssean text. We have only one version of the *Odyssey*, with the same characters, the same story, and even the same sequence of episodes—all of which are, moreover, told in a very uniform meter, dialect, diction, and style throughout. There is no evidence that there ever existed any text of Homer's *Odyssey* without a Telemachus, a Nausicaa, or a Eumaeus. Nor is there any evidence of a text of the *Odyssey* that was half the size, or twice the size, of our inherited text. It seems likely, then, that, unlike these other epic traditions, our *Odyssey* goes back to a single archetype that was fixed in writing and whose text did not thereafter suffer substantial editorial tampering.¹¹

The fixation in time of the epic art-language: Our inherited texts of the *Odyssey* reveal a language that was frozen in time, a language that had previously been evolving hand in hand with the vernacular but that had in its eighth-century Ionic form become fixed. There had once existed a vibrant Mycenaean epic tradition, but our inherited texts are not Mycenaean (though there are Mycenaean words and phrases, even poetic formulaic phrases, embedded in them); thereafter there had existed a vibrant Aeolic epic tradition, but our inherited texts are not Aeolic (though Aeolic words and phrases abound, especially ones that provide metrically useful alternatives to the corresponding Ionic forms); thereafter there arose a vibrant Ionic epic tradition, and this is when the linguistic evolution that had previously so characterized the epic tradition was arrested.¹² Though the *Odyssey* continued to be performed and enjoyed—recited orally and received aurally—the epic *Kunstsprache* “art-language” in which it had for so many generations been composed had become a “dead” language. The language of the *Odyssey* attained a high degree of fixation precisely at this period, substantially in the Ionic dialect, and it continued in its later transmission to retain its Ionic forms. This fixation was surely due to textualization. Whether the writing down of the epic enabled it to gain an exceptional status, or whether an exceptional status caused it to be written down, it was textualization, the result of oral dictation and transcription at a specific time and place (in the case of the *Odyssey* during the eighth century in Ionia), that assured linguistic fixation. For the epic language did not continue to evolve linguistically—to create innovative forms and formulae—through the seventh, sixth, and fifth centuries, and thereafter, as it had in its more fluid oral form before the eighth century. The so-called “Atticisms” and “hyper-Ionisms” that occur occasionally in our inherited text are simply a veneer: metrically equivalent modernizations and modifications of an already established text.

¹¹ On the contrast between the basic fixity of the Homeric texts and the relative fluidity of some of these other epic traditions, see Merkelbach 1952:34-35; Lord 1960:198-221; Stephanie West 1988:36; Janko 1990:330-31, 1992:29, 1998:11-12; and Finkelberg 2000.

¹² For an engaging presentation of this theory of three dialectal phases from the viewpoint of oral poetics, see A. Parry 1971:325-64; from the viewpoint of legend and language, see M. L. West 1988; from the viewpoint of specific linguistic features, see Ruijgh 1957, 1985, 1995; from the viewpoint of history and archaeology, see Sherratt 1990.

In sum, not only does the oral dictation model best explain the various features of our inherited text of Homer's *Odyssey*, but it also offers us the best hope of detecting, even from evidence imprisoned in the dead texts of our manuscript tradition, at least some vestiges of a once-living oral performance of the epic. Having now confronted this methodological obstacle head on, we return to the exercise of our hypothetical transcription of the *Odyssey*, exploring in greater depth the ramifications of three possible components of our transcription: Title, Division of Narrative, and Corrigenda and Addenda.

Title

During Homer's own lifetime the title of his epic was not simply the *Odyssey*. When referring to Homer's version of the tale, people would have used a longer and more descriptive title, such as: "The Tale of the *Nostos* ("Homecoming") of Odysseus from Troy and his Vengeance against the Suitors when he Reaches Ithaca—according to Homer of Chios." Homer himself may have introduced his performance for the first transcription of his epic even more expansively, since this was an extraordinary occasion, and since he intended to deliver his tale in an especially ambitious manner. He may have announced that he was going to begin this particular performance *in extremas res* ("at the end of things"), already in the tenth year of Odysseus' return, and that he would fill in the background with a description of the circumstances at home in Ithaca and an account not of the travels of Odysseus but of his son Telemachus; then he would narrate the traditional tales of the adventures of Odysseus on his return from Troy, but he would place the majority of these tales in the mouth of Odysseus himself, as he entertains his Phaeacian hosts during his stay on the island of Scheria; this would be followed by the extended and climactic narration, upon Odysseus' arrival in Ithaca, of the sequence of recognitions by his son Telemachus, his nurse Eurycleia, his wife Penelope, and his father Laertes; and a great deal of attention would be paid to providing a satisfying account of Odysseus' just and appropriate vengeance upon his wife's suitors.

Why do we suppose that Homer and his contemporaries used a longer and more descriptive title? Although references to the poet Homer by name survive from a very early period, possibly even as early as the seventh century (Hesiod [?] fr. 357, Callinus [according to Pausanias 9.9.5]),¹³ and although there also survive many early references to the heroes and heroines of Homer's two epics (the Atreidae, Achilles, Hector, Aias, Priam, Paris, Helen, Odysseus, Penelope, Circe, and others), there is not a single surviving reference to Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey* by title until the time of Herodotus in the late fifth century (2.116.6, 2.116.15, 2.117.6, 4.29.3)—after which these titles come into general use, as often in Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle. This is because such titles as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are features of a writing and reading and cataloging culture (that is, one with booksellers, schools, and libraries).

¹³ For other early references to Homer by name, see Xenophanes fr. 10, 11; Heraclitus fr. 42, 56 (among others); Pindar *Pythian* 4.277, *Nemean* 7.21 (among others); Simonides fr. 59.1.

What were Homer's epics called during the 250-year period between Homer and Herodotus? The evidence is very slim, but Stesichorus (*Palinode* 1), in a reference to the abduction of Helen as related by Homer, mentions simply "this tale":¹⁴

οὐκ ἔστ' ἔτυμος λόγος οὗτος
οὐδ' ἔβας ἐν νηυσὶν ἐυσσέλμοις
οὐδ' ἵκεο πέργαμα Τροίας

This tale is not true, // you did not travel on the well-decked ships // nor did you reach the walls of Troy.

And Pindar (*Nemean* 7.20-21) refers to Homer's "tale of Odysseus":¹⁵

ἐγὼ δὲ πλέον' ἔλπομαι
λόγον Ὀδυσσεός ἢ πάθαν διὰ τὸν ἀδυεπὴ γενέσθ' Ὀμηρον

I expect that greater // did the tale of Odysseus become than his experience because of the sweet-songed Homer.

Perhaps comparative evidence can shed some light on the question: in their interviews with Milman Parry and Albert Lord, the *guslari* of Yugoslavia expressed no need for, and showed no awareness of, titles for their songs.¹⁶ When pressed to come up with one—and Parry was not shy about pressing them rather hard at times—they offered long descriptions that changed with subsequent performances:¹⁷

"The song about Marko Kraljević when he fought with Musa."

"The song about when the two pashas spent the winter in Temišvar, and all seven kings surrounded them."

"The song of how the ban captured Uskok Radovan and put him in prison, and Dulić and Velagić were there with thirty and two comrades."

Standardized titles like "The *Odyssey*" and "The *Iliad*" are accoutrements of a written text, not of an oral song. And so, in keeping with our attempt to retain in our hypothetical transcription some of the vestiges of oral performance, let us designate the title as "The Tale of

¹⁴ Fragment 15 in the edition of Page (1962).

¹⁵ Edition of Maehler (1971).

¹⁶ See also Foley's (2011-) treatment of this phenomenon in the node "The Illusion of Object" in The Pathways Project: http://pathwaysproject.org/pathways/show/Illusion_of_Object.

¹⁷ See the transcription of Parry and Lord's conversations with the singers Sulejman Makić and Salih Ugljanin in M. Parry et al. 1953-54:I: 266-67, 354.

the *Nostos* (“Homecoming”) of Odysseus from Troy and his Vengeance against the Suitors when he Reaches Ithaca—according to Homer of Chios.”

Division of Narrative

In our transcription of Homer’s performance the divisions of the narrative will be demarcated very differently from the book divisions of our modern editions. Our inherited twenty-four-book division is largely a result of serendipity—the fact that there were twenty-four letters in the New Ionic alphabet that had become the standard in the Hellenic world by the late fifth century—rather than a reflection of breaks in the historical performance of a singing bard. The book divisions are almost certainly post-Homeric, probably post-Classical, and most likely Hellenistic. The earliest actual reference to a book division to survive is by the grammarian Apollodorus of Athens (late second century BCE), who refers to *Iliad* 14 by the Greek letter Ξ.¹⁸ An ancient tradition, reflected in pseudo-Plutarch’s *De Homero* 2.4, associates the twenty-four-book division with the Alexandrian scholar Aristarchus; a scholium to *Iliad* 3.1 that appears to have as its source the work of the second-century CE scholar Nicanor attributes the division of books according to letters of the alphabet to the work of the grammarians generally, proposing that the poet himself made his work one body, in imitation of nature, and arranged his verses in an uninterrupted sequence;¹⁹ and Eustathius, in his commentary on the *Iliad* (at 1.1), attributes the division into twenty-four books to “Aristarchus and after him Zenodotus” [*sic*].²⁰ Recent attempts to date the book divisions earlier than the Hellenistic period, and even earlier than the Classical period, are largely unsuccessful, I think,²¹ and the extreme view that they go all the way back to an eighth-century Homer is utterly unconvincing.²²

While it is generally agreed that many of the transmitted book divisions have been judiciously chosen, coinciding with natural breaks in the narrative such as a scene change or the dawn of a new day, we must admit that some clash harshly with the poet’s own narrative divisions, destroying the integrity of his narrative units: for instance, the division between Books 11 and 12 of the *Odyssey* (which would better be placed at 12.7/8); or the division between Books 12 and 13 (which would better be placed at 13.17/18 or 13.92/93). This poses an interesting challenge to modern editors of the Homeric epics: M. L. West, for example, admits to the temptation in his recent Teubner edition of the *Iliad* (1998-2000) to abandon the book structure altogether and number the lines of the *Iliad* continuously from beginning to end. As a

¹⁸ According to a Milan papyrus *P. Mil. Vogl.* 1.19 (also printed in H. Erbse’s edition (1969-88) of the Iliadic scholia—on Book 14, papyrus 9).

¹⁹ The scholium is printed in J. Nicole’s edition (1891) of the Iliadic scholia on the Geneva codex (at *Iliad* 3.1). On the scholium’s significance to the issue of book division, see Nünlist 2006.

²⁰ See van der Valk’s edition (1971:I, 9, l. 4).

²¹ See the debate on this issue initiated by Jensen (1999).

²² So Whitman 1958:283, Goold 1960:288-91 and 1977:26-30, and Heiden 1998 and 2000.

compromise he honors the *Iliad*'s transmitted book structure, but he runs the lines from one book into the next without any break.²³

In the absence of books, book numbers, and book divisions in the Archaic and Classical periods, references to episodes in the Homeric epics are made by means of titles and descriptions. The earliest surviving example is the label "The Games for Patroclus" on an Athenian black-figure vase painting by the early sixth-century artist Sophilos (Athens National Museum 15499)²⁴ depicting a crowd of spectators attending the funeral games for Patroclus—an episode that is narrated in Book 23 of the *Iliad*. Classical authors such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle refer to episodes of the Homeric epics by means of similar titles and descriptions:

- The Handing over of the Scepter (viz. to Agamemnon) (Thucydides 1.9.4)
- The Catalogue of Ships (Thucydides 1.10.4; Aristotle's *Poetics* 1459a36)
- The *Aristeia* ("Prowess") of Diomedes (Herodotus 2.116)
- The Pitiful Affairs concerning Andromache (Aristotle's *Ion* 535b6)
- The Prayers (viz. of the ambassadors to Achilles) (Plato's *Cratylus* 428c, *Hippias Minor* 364e)
- The Fight at the Wall (Plato's *Ion* 539b)
- Achilles Rushes against Hector (Aristotle's *Ion* 535b5-6)
- The Pitiful Affairs concerning Hecuba and Priam (Aristotle's *Ion* 535b7)
- The *Apologoi* ("Stories") to Alcinous (Plato's *Republic* 614b; Aristotle's *Poetics* 1455a2, *Rhetoric* 1417a13)
- Odysseus among the Dead ("Plato's" *Minos* 319d)
- The Foot-Washing (Aristotle's *Poetics* 1454b30, 1460a26)
- How Odysseus Leaps upon the Threshold, Reveals himself to the Suitors, and Pours out his Arrows before his Feet (Aristotle's *Ion* 535b3-5)

Aelian, the third-century CE rhetorician, in his summary of the plots of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, lists several (probably ancient) titles of the episodes that compose both epics (*Varia Historia* 13.14):

The Ancients used to sing the epic tales of Homer, which had previously been divided into parts. They called these parts, for example: "The Battle at the Ships," "The Doloneia," "The *Aristeia* of Agamemnon," "The Catalogue of Ships," "The Patrocleia," "The Ransom," "The Funeral Games for Patroclus," and "The Breaking of the Oaths." These were the titles with regard to the *Iliad*.

With regard to the other [the *Odyssey*]: "The Affairs in Pylos," "The Affairs in Sparta," "The Cave of Calypso," "The Affairs concerning the Raft," "The *Apologoi* of Alcinous," "The Cyclopeia,"

²³ See M. L. West 1998:106 and also his justification (2001:65) for printing a continuous text. Three earlier editions of Homer's epics actually adopted this practice: I. Bekker's 1858 editions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, J. van Leeuwen's 1912 edition of the *Iliad*, and V. Bérard's 1924 edition of the *Odyssey*.

²⁴ See vase image at <http://www.history.pku.edu.cn/olympics/picEN/slides/P0027.jpg.html>.

“The Nekyia,” “The Affairs of Circe,” “The Foot-Washing,” “The Slaughter of the Suitors,” “The Affairs in the Countryside,” “The Affairs in the House of Laertes.”²⁵

How, then, shall we divide up the epic performance of our Chian bard in our hypothetical transcription? It seems obvious that our divisions should reflect the breaks of the live oral performance. This raises many questions: How long did a Greek bard sing without a short break? How long without a substantial break? What factors played a part in the length of a performance (desire for thematic unity, desire for roughly equal lengths of performance, or simply the comfort, patience, and level of interest of both the bard and his audience)?

On the one hand, we may reasonably assume that our historical bardic performance will be far shorter than the entirety of our monumental inherited epic: the entire *Odyssey* (12,110 verses) would take about twenty hours to perform, much too long for one sitting, even for a very strong bard and a very patient audience. On the other hand, I suspect that, although the bard will take short breaks fairly frequently between the shorter episodes (e.g., the love-story of Ares and Aphrodite at *Odyssey* 8.266-366) to pause for a rest or for something to eat or drink, he will take much longer breaks between the larger performance units—the ones that compose the entertainment for the day—and these larger performance units will be much more substantial than our transmitted single book units. In the case of our performance of the *Odyssey*, I think they will have corresponded roughly to our inherited four-book units, each taking between three and three and a half hours to perform:

Books 1-4: The adventures of Telemachus, during which we glimpse Odysseus only through the eyes of his son, his wife, his former comrades in Troy, and the suitors in Ithaca.

Books 5-8: Odysseus’ concurrent travels from Ogygia and his stay among the Phaeacians. The description of the council of the Gods at the beginning of Book 1 is recapitulated at the beginning of Book 5, a narrative device probably intended, after a night’s intermission, to recall the previous day’s story and smoothly make the transition to the narrative to follow.

Books 9-12: Odysseus’ tales of his adventures to his Phaeacian hosts. This is a clearly demarcated unit both chronologically and narratologically. Chronologically, it disrupts the sequence of time with a flashback that takes us back ten years. Narratologically, the poet allows his main character to speak in his own voice throughout; this is a “story within the story,” told by an internal character in the first person rather than by the external narrator in the third person.

Books 13-16: Odysseus’ arrival in Ithaca and his stay in Eumaeus’ hut. This unit offers a “calm before the storm.”

Books 17-20: Odysseus’ arrival at his own home and his testing of those in his household.

Books 21-24: Odysseus’ vengeance and his reestablishment of proper order in Ithaca.

²⁵ We may add Strabo 1.2.5 for possible titles of other Iliadic episodes: “The Trial,” “The Prayers,” “The Embassy”; Strabo 1.2.11 for possible titles of other Odyssean episodes: “The Wanderings of Odysseus,” “The Arrival of Odysseus in Ithaca,” “The Massacre of the Suitors,” “The Fight in the Countryside with the Ithacans.” Lucian (*De Saltatione* 13) uses the title “The Shield” in a reference to Book 18 of the *Iliad*. Similar titles of episodes are used in the ancient hypotheses and scholia of both epics, which, though later in attestation, no doubt reflect titles at least as ancient as the Alexandrian period: in the case of the *Odyssey*, for example, “The Assembly of the Gods concerning Odysseus’ Return to Ithaca from Calypso’s Island” and “Telemachus’ Search for his Father in Pylos”; see Dindorf 1855:1-6.

In Homer's portrayal of the bard and his songs within the *Odyssey*, which is surely to some extent a self-portrayal, performances are of various types and varying lengths, ranging from short comical songs such as Demodocus' love story of Ares and Aphrodite (8.266-369) (around 10 minutes) to Menelaus' story of his return from Troy (4.332-586) (around 25 minutes) to Odysseus' story of his own return (9.14-12.453) (around 3 hours and 37 minutes). The last is particularly interesting. Odysseus, as bard, is tired after 2 hours and 25 minutes and wishes to stop (11.330-31, "now it is time for me to sleep"), but the enthusiasm of his Phaeacian audience inspires him to continue for more than another hour (11.375-76: "we could listen to your story until dawn"). Is this a reflection of a real historical performance, in which the bard tailors his song to his audience, cutting his song short if they are bored or tired but continuing longer if they are receptive and enthusiastic? Folklorists and anthropologists who do fieldwork among the singers of other oral traditions often speak of how performances are affected by the demeanor of the audience.

In the case of Homer's performance of the *Odyssey* (and the *Iliad*, too, I think), we appear to have six performance units of perhaps three to four hours apiece. This raises another interesting question: What type of social occasion would have accommodated a performance of probably six days' duration? A natural candidate would be a religious festival of some sort. Poetic contests and performances of various kinds were associated with festivals from the earliest period, and rhapsodic performances of epic were regular in some of them: the Olympian festival to Zeus, the Delian festival to Apollo, and the Pan-Ionian festival to Poseidon and Apollo. Nonetheless, I prefer to visualize the occasion of performance as the celebration of a wedding of an aristocratic couple in the case of the *Odyssey* and the observance of a funeral of an aristocratic ruler in the case of the *Iliad*. The *Iliad*, after all, is a song about war and death, and it teaches its audience how to die a noble death. Funerals are a leitmotif throughout the epic, which approaches its conclusion with a long description of the funeral games for Patroclus in Book 23 and meets its end with a description of the funeral of Hector in Book 24, with bards singing a dirge in the background (24.719-22).²⁶ The *Odyssey* teaches its audience about marriage, offering paradigms of bad ones (Agamemnon and Clytemnestra), ambiguous ones (Menelaus and Helen), and good ones (Odysseus and Penelope), and after the obstacles of several improper "marriages" between Odysseus and Circe, Calypso, and Nausicaa have been overcome, the tale ends, more or less, with Odysseus and Penelope returning to their old marriage bed (23.296) while a bard provides a wedding song in the background (23.130-36).²⁷

In any case, in our transcription of the *Odyssey*, we must disregard the transmitted book divisions and instead divide the epic up into the larger units that reflect actual performance. Each

²⁶ We are reminded of Hesiod's claim that on his only journey abroad he won a tripod as the poetic victor in the funeral games of Amphidamas (*Works and Days* 654-57).

²⁷ According to an ancient tradition Homer gave his epic the *Cypria* as a dowry at his daughter's wedding (Pindar fr. 265). It may have been a practice in antiquity to offer mythical paradigms of marriage (even bad ones) at wedding festivals: so Catullus 64, a wedding song that I believe was derived ultimately from a poem by the sixth-century BCE lyric poet Stesichorus, encloses a description of the marriage of Theseus and Ariadne within a description of the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, and Cleitias' painting on the famous early sixth-century BCE François Vase (<http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/images/pottery/painters/keypieces/tiverios/9-p70try2-medium.jpg>), which was perhaps a wedding present, depicts these very same marriages.

of these six larger units, which individually comprise about 2000 verses, will fill a single roll of papyrus that is about twenty-five feet long (a typical length for papyrus rolls in later antiquity). Our transcription of the *Odyssey*, then, will appear as six papyrus rolls deposited together in a receptacle, perhaps a decorated urn of some kind. Not only will this division into larger units better reflect the dynamics of the original performance, but it will also allow readers of subsequent generations to detect patterns and themes in the epic that would be obfuscated by the division into smaller units of twenty-four. I have often found it enlightening myself to disregard a book division and read straight through to the next book, pausing instead at the larger thematic breaks. By such a disregard of book division I detected, for example, an elaborate ring composition in the *Odyssey* that stretched from Book 21 to 22—a characteristic Homeric *hysteron-proteron* in which the suitors are slaughtered in exactly the reverse of the order in which they earlier made trial of the bow (Reece 1995). I therefore encourage my students to read through the transmitted book divisions of the *Odyssey*, just as I encourage them, in their reading of other oral narratives, to disregard the artificial breaks imposed by textualization: verse, section, chapter, and book divisions.²⁸

In sum, if we wish to retain in our hypothetical transcription of the *Odyssey* some of the vestiges of oral performance, we must do away once and for all with the transmitted book divisions in favor of larger performance divisions.

Corrigenda and Addenda

A composition-in-performance by nature entails metrical blunders, dictional inconcinnities, factual errors, and larger narrative anomalies, for there is little opportunity to pause, to reconsider, and to correct any blemishes. The Roman poet Horace complains in his *Ars Poetica* about Homer's lapses—*indignor quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus* (“I am annoyed whenever good Homer dozes,” 359)—but as we have already noted, he seems aware of the reasons for these lapses—*nescit vox missa reverti* (“a word once spoken cannot be recalled,” 390). As an audience we will be tolerant of these lapses—and in our transcription we will resist the temptation to correct any blemishes that we witness in the performance.

We will resist the temptation, for example, to correct the occasional metrical blunders by the poet, such as:²⁹

²⁸ In their reading of the New Testament Gospels, for example—another fundamentally oral narrative that has suffered all the accoutrements of textualization—I find that the most artificial, and unfortunate, chapter division occurs in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, a unified narrative that begins at chapter 4.25 and ends at chapter 8.1. Here, as in the *Odyssey*, the ring composition that unifies and sustains the narrative is utterly obfuscated by pausing at chapter divisions. It is notable that the same Richmond Lattimore who translated the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* also published a translation (1979) of the four Gospels and Revelation without any chapter and verse divisions.

²⁹ Quotations of Homer's *Odyssey* are here, and elsewhere, from the edition of von der Mühl (2005). Von der Mühl prints these two metrically irregular verses in his text and houses the “corrections” of various textual critics in his *apparatus criticus*. Other editors, such as T. W. Allen (1917-19), have elected to print “corrected” versions of these verses in their texts.

Odyssey 7.89: ἀργύροισι δὲ σταθμοὶ ἐν χαλκῷ ἕστασαν οὐδῶ
 “Silver doorposts stood upon the bronze threshold.”

Odyssey 13.194: τοῦνεκ' ἄρ' ἀλλοιδέα φαινέσκετο πάντα ἄνακτι
 “Therefore everything appeared unfamiliar to the master.”

We appreciate that the metrical infelicities in the inner metra of these dactylic hexameter verses (specifically, that they have too many syllables and do not scan properly) have resulted naturally and understandably from the pressure of oral composition-in-performance; they may be corrected should the poet have the opportunity and leisure to review the passages, or should the text later go through an extensive editorial process. But in our transcription of a composition-in-performance, to correct them would be to apply a literary standard upon an orally produced poem.

We will also resist the urge to tidy up those oddities that have resulted from stock formulaic phrases being used in contextually inappropriate circumstances. I am not speaking of the so-called “ornamental” epithets that may strike a modern literate audience, more concerned with *le mot juste* than their ancient illiterate counterparts, as contextually inappropriate: for instance, the rejoicing Odysseus is “much-suffering” (πολύτλας); the adulterous villain Aegisthus is “blameless” (ἀμύμων); the shameful suitors are “godlike” (ἀντίθεοι), the lowly swineherd is “chief of men” (ῥοχάμος ἀνδρῶν), and the beggar has a “queen mother” (πότνια μήτηρ). Nor do I refer to the longer formulaic phrases that appear too loosely used—at least to the modern reader—when the context is not so typical, such as the several times in the *Odyssey* when the plural form of the dative pronoun is used to designate even a single addressee of a speech: τοῖς ἄρα μύθων ἦρχε (5.202), τοῖσι δὲ μύθων ἦρχε (7.47, 13.374, 17.100, 17.184, 19.103, 19.508). I am speaking rather of passages where, on the one hand, the bard seems to have somewhat more latitude in his selection of phrases, and where, on the other hand, the phrases are selected with such little consideration of the context that one can scarcely deny that, should the bard have an opportunity to summon back his words and revise them, he will readily do so. For example, at *Odyssey* 20.102-19 in response to Odysseus' prayer for an omen, Zeus thunders formulaically “from the clouds on high” (ὑψόθεν ἐκ νεφέων, 104). But only a few verses later a servant-girl emerges from the house and expresses her amazement at the peculiar nature of this event: she hears thunder when there “is no cloud anywhere” (οὐδέ ποθι νέφος ἐστί, 114). This dictional inconcinnity goes beyond the tolerable extension of ornamental epithets and stock formulaic phrases to inappropriate contexts; it is a blunder, even by the aesthetic standards of oral poetry. Passages such as these are the natural result of a composition-in-performance by a bard who has no opportunity and no desire to summon back his words or revise them—a desire lacked, perhaps more surprisingly, over hundreds of years by later editors as well.³⁰

³⁰ As Janko (1998:8) says of this passage: “Neither Homer nor his putative editor makes any use of the technology of writing to correct [this contradiction]. How remarkable that it is still in our text!” On the implications of such contradictions for the composition and transmission of our texts in general, see Gunn 1970; Janko 1990 and 1998. Of course, where some find dictional and narrative inconcinnities attributable to the pressures of oral composition-in-performance, others find clever and sophisticated devices attributable to poetic virtuosity and artistic genius; see, for example, Nagy 1999.

We will also resist the urge to correct any of the factual errors that naturally arise over the course of an epic the size of the *Odyssey* (87,765 words). These errors are not serious in the context of the larger narratives, and they probably go unnoticed by Homer's listening audience. For example, in his conversation with Penelope at *Odyssey* 17.150-65 the prophet Theoclymenus assures her that Odysseus has already returned to Ithaca and is plotting destruction for the suitors. He recalls the omen of the bird that he had earlier observed, and his prophetic interpretation to Telemachus, as he sat on the well-timbered ship (160-61). But two books earlier, when the omen actually occurred, the entire crew, including Theoclymenus and Telemachus, were explicitly said to have already disembarked and to have gathered on the shore (15.495-538). It is not surprising to find blemishes of this sort in a long orally composed epic; they are a feature of most truly oral traditions. But it is rather surprising to find that during the textual transmission of the *Odyssey* the original form is faithfully retained in spite of what are perceived even in antiquity as blemishes.³¹

And of course we will not wish—nor will we be able—to tamper with the larger narrative anomalies that inevitably occur over the course of an oral performances of an epic the size of the *Odyssey*. For example, having met up with each other in Eumaeus' hut in Ithaca, Odysseus and Telemachus plan together the slaughter of their enemies (16.186-321). In the face of daunting odds, Odysseus devises an elaborate plan to overcome the 108 suitors: after they are both in the palace, he will at the appropriate moment nod to his son, who is then to gather up all the weapons that are lying about the hall and place them in a lofty chamber; if the suitors ask what he is doing, he is to claim that he is removing the weapons from the smoke of the fire, which is befouling them, and that, moreover, their removal will prevent the suitors, drunk with wine, from using them in the event of a quarrel; further, Telemachus is to leave two swords and two spears and a pair of oxhide shields in the hall for himself and his father (16.281-98). It comes as somewhat of a disappointment that this well devised and elaborate plan is abandoned with no comment three books later (19.1-46): at Odysseus' initiative both father and son remove the weapons together, with the help of Pallas Athena; there is no surreptitious nod; the false explanation for the removal of the arms is directed at the nurse Eurycleia rather than the suitors; and no mention is made of retaining a pair of arms for father and son—an oversight that challenges them sorely in the initial stages of the combat to follow (22.100-25).³² Here the bard is simply steering the narrative in one direction, but then he changes his mind in the course of his performance. He does not take the initiative, and does not have the opportunity, to go back and correct the anomaly. Neither shall we.³³

³¹ The scholia to this passage report that these verses—in some cases 17.150-65, in other cases just 160-61—were athetized in many of the texts available to the Hellenistic editors (that is, not omitted, but simply marked with an obelus, a horizontal stroke, to express some doubt about authorship), apparently because of this narrative inconsistency.

³² I still find the most articulate summary of the problems in this passage to be that of Woodhouse (1930:158-68), though it is somewhat dated by its lack of awareness of oral theory.

³³ The discomfort of later editors with this anomaly, as attested by the athetesis by Zenodotus of 16.281-98 and the asterisks attached by Aristarchus to 19.4-12 (to signal that these verses were wrongly repeated elsewhere), has not led to the expulsion of any of these verses from the textual tradition.

The examples of inconcinnities in Homer's *Odyssey* marshaled above can be multiplied many times over in each of the four categories simply by paging through our inherited corpus of Greek epic verse.³⁴ We can also find useful comparanda of all these categories of inconcinnities, from the smallest to the largest, in many other demonstrably orally composed narratives; for they are common, perhaps necessary, features of oral composition-in-performance. For example, one may compare with great benefit Homer's *Odyssey* and Salih Ugljanin's *Captivity of Djulić Ibrahim*, a South Slavic Return Tale that resembles the *Odyssey* in many of its themes and details:³⁵ a seemingly long-dead hero attempts to return home from a military mission but confronts many obstacles to his return; meanwhile, his wife is on the verge of remarrying; he finally arrives home in disguise and goes about the task of testing his servants, friends, family members, and wife; he is identified by means of a token; the tale ends in a "remarriage," followed by the departure of the hero to fulfill an oath. I encourage all students of Homer, and of comparative oral traditions in general, to consider, in addition to these thematic similarities, the many vestiges of orality that these two epic texts have in common: namely, the inconcinnities that they share at all the various levels discussed above. Like the Homeric inconcinnities, the instances in this South Slavic return song span a wide range: unfinished or metrically faulty verses; formulaic phrases that are blatantly inappropriate to the context; factual blunders, especially involving names and characters; and larger narrative anomalies. It is this last category that provides us with a most instructive comparandum to Homer's *Odyssey*. On his return home from prison the hero Djulić confronts the warrior Milutin, who refuses to allow him to pass. Djulić promptly cuts off Milutin's head, strips him of his clothes and arms, and puts them on himself; he then continues on his journey (verses 456-508). But 250 verses later (after verse 763) the singer Salih pauses in his performance, realizing that he has made an error: if Djulić is wearing Milutin's clothes and arms, those at his home will not recognize him as a prisoner who has recently escaped. Milman Parry's assistant Nikola Vujnović asks Salih to go back and start his song again from the point of the combat with Milutin; Salih does this, correcting his error by stating emphatically that although Djulić killed Milutin, he did *not* strip him of his clothes and arms (verse 810).³⁶

In the case of Salih Ugljanin's *Captivity of Djulić Ibrahim*, the causes of this and other inconcinnities are demonstrable: they arise from the exigencies of live oral performance—on the one hand, the pressure on the singer to extemporize as he, at least at some level, composes during the very act of performance and, on the other hand, the inability of the singer to retract or correct

³⁴ On metrical irregularities, see A. Parry 1971:191-239, 266-324; on formulaic illogicalities, see Combellack 1965; on factual and narrative anomalies, see Scott 1921:137-71; Bowra 1962:44-60; Kirk 1962:211-52.

³⁵ Parry Collection number 674, sung and recorded on 24 November, 1934, at Novi Pazar; transcribed in M. Parry et al. 1953-54:II:55-74; translated, with notes, in 1953-54:I:90-113, 339-58).

³⁶ For examples of similar narrative "slips" on the part of extemporaneously composing South Slavic singers, see Lord 1938 and 1960:94-95; Gunn 1970; Foley 1990:47-48, 359-61, 373-77. If left to their own devices, the singers will often begin to set the narrative anomaly straight in as unobtrusive a way as possible as soon as they recognize it. On the other hand, sometimes a singer will not perceive the anomaly and will continue to repeat it in subsequent performances.

his song once it has left his mouth. It follows by way of analogy that the same causes are probably responsible for the inconcinnities embedded in our text of Homer's *Odyssey*.

We return now to the Homer of our transcription of the *Odyssey*, who, unlike Salih, will not be given the opportunity to go back and tidy up the loose ends of his narrative of Theoclymenus' omen in Book 17, or of Odysseus' elaborate plan to slaughter the suitors in Book 16. We will resist the urge to "improve" on Homer and will transcribe the narrative as he performs it: the fact that these inconcinnities will be retained in subsequent copies of this text through hundreds of years of transmission attests to the faithfulness of the textual tradition to this original archetype. This is a stark reminder of the dire importance of our task of transcription.

Conclusion

Well, all this is quite implausible, of course. We cannot experience a live oral performance of Homer's *Odyssey*. All we possess is a text that has been passed down exclusively in written form for at least 2,500 years and has thereby experienced many of the expectable textual accretions.

But as we read our modern text of the *Odyssey*, speedily and silently, while we sit alone under a fluorescent light in a quiet recess of our library, is it not at least salutary to keep in mind that this text was in its archetypal form a transcription of an oral performance? Would it not be pleasant occasionally to try to re-create the sounds of the words and the music accompanying them, to try to observe the bard's pauses within and between verses, to try to imagine the bard's gestures and the audience's responses? Would it not offer a more historically authentic experience to disregard book divisions altogether and instead take our breaks between larger units of performance? Would it not be enlightening to craft an *apparatus* more appropriate than our *apparatus criticus* for the study of an oral tradition—one that would record performance variants instead of textual variants; one that would identify other epic attestations of words, formulas, type-scenes, and story patterns so that we could acquire an appreciation of their epic resonance and thereby become a more learned and perceptive audience?

As I have often discovered, both to my delight and dismay, when I have thought that I have stumbled upon a new and original idea, John Foley has already anticipated me. So here too he has already begun considering the potential for such an edition of the *Odyssey* and has already started mapping out some possible innovations by actually experimenting with a short specimen of text (*Od.* 23.69-103), accompanied by interlinear and marginal notations, and weighted down not by an *apparatus criticus* but by an "*apparatus fabulosus*."³⁷ Whether or not further progress down this path toward a more ethnopoetically grounded edition of Homer's *Odyssey* (and *Iliad*) is feasible and worthwhile remains to me an open question. Perhaps simply imagining one, as we have here, is adequate for the purpose of highlighting the fundamental challenges faced by those yearning to appreciate the aesthetics of an ancient oral performance on its own terms.

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³⁷ See Foley 1999:241-62; he has mused further on some of the challenges to the creation of such an edition in Foley 2005. See also the ethnopoetically grounded edition of a South Slavic oral epic in Foley 2004, which consists of a book and an electronic edition.

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