

Homer's Style: Nonformulaic Features of an Oral Aesthetic

Joseph Russo

From Oral to Aural and Back Again

In the Homeric epics we have a text created within a highly traditional diction, a special poetic language, for performance before a large public situated entirely within that tradition. We do not have poetic language in our modern sense, that carefully honed personal and private idiom meant for the eye and (to a lesser extent) the ear of a small number of connoisseurs. Therefore those who make up Homer's modern audience need to know if there is a certain ideal way to hear, or read, and respond to certain stylistic habits of his that our experience of modern literature has not prepared us to understand very well. That is Question One, and the important one to answer if we are interested in experiencing Homeric poetry in its full complexity and idiomatic richness.

Are the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* genuine oral compositions? That is Question Two, which I believe it is not, and may never be, possible to answer with absolute certainty. For all the disagreement and verbal combat over this issue—from Parry's earliest critics in the 1930's to the pages of the *New York Review of Books* from March 5 to June 25, 1992—the fact is that recovering the exact genesis or *technique* of Homer's composition will always be beyond us. Therefore knowing exactly how he composed, just how much of his verse came from improvisation while performing and how much from prior memorization, and whether the newly available skill of writing was used to any degree, should be less important to us than appreciation of the distinctive and sometimes almost odd rhetoric found throughout his poetry, and of an underlying aesthetic that can make sense of both the distinctiveness and the oddness. Almost twenty years ago, at a comparatists' conference on Oral Literature and the Formula (Stolz and Shannon 1976), I suggested we shift from emphasis on *oral* to *aural* style

in an attempt to pursue the aesthetics of this style rather than its genesis. While it is still theoretically possible to doubt that Homer is an oral poet,¹ it remains beyond doubt that he is “aural” in that he composes in a style guided by the ear and meant to be heard, a style that pleases through verbal play based on an aesthetic of repetition and variation, and of relaxed fullness of expression wherever the context allows it. And yet while not discarding that emphasis on the style itself, I now believe it is fruitful to return to the issue of orality in connection with some salient but non-formulaic features of this style, seeking to understand all of them as counterpart phenomena to formulas per se, and some of them as most likely generated by composition in the act of performance as described by Albert Lord in *The Singer of Tales* (1960).

It is significant and perhaps surprising that none of these features of an oral-derived style has to do with the employment of formulas as such. For decades the definition and analysis of the formula dominated the argument over Homer’s orality, but the presence or density of formulas in a text has proved ultimately to be an insufficient basis for arguments in favor of an oral Homer.² At this point in the history of Homeric scholarship, our understanding of Homer’s technique may be best served by describing certain favorite devices or tropes and explaining their shared aesthetic.³

¹ The safest position is to describe the Homeric texts as “oral-derived.” See Foley 1990:5-8 and *passim*; 1991:22.

² Smith (1977) offers a classic example of a traditional epic text that is formulaic but not orally (re)composed in the act of performance. For the difficulties in using formula density to prove orality, see Hainsworth 1964, Russo 1976. For the balance between formulaic and nonformulaic language and Homer’s freedom to use both, see the important study of Finkelberg 1989.

³ Of course various studies of this kind have been done before. Edwards (1966) sharpens our awareness of Homer’s style by presenting a survey of characteristic devices of word (primarily adjective) position, enjambement, and sentence structure as these are related to colon structure. His overall emphasis is on the many devices of *linkage*, and to the limited extent that his study is aesthetic as well as descriptive, he does well to emphasize “the peculiar smoothness in the progression of thought in Homeric verse” (148), which is also my concern. Occasionally his aesthetic judgement lapses into apology for a mere “filler” that “pads out the verse,” a “meaningless grammatical link,” and the like (see, e.g., 144-47). Yet these stylistic features embody perfectly the principle of “epic fullness,” a term coined by Bassett (1926:134). In an earlier study of devices of linkage between successive speeches, Bassett (1920) illuminated a related aspect of the Homeric aesthetic,

Common Tropes of Extension

The bulk of my paper will be devoted to the description and explication of certain rhetorical tropes that give Homeric style its peculiar flavor, an archaic taste for redundancy and familiarity discreetly seasoned with variation and ornamentation. When, following Parry's epoch-making insight, we sought the key to Homeric oral style in the use of formulas, our concern was to examine style in order to demonstrate the poet's technique for producing verses rapidly in the act of performance. In moving from an emphasis on the *generation* of language to an emphasis on the *aesthetic presentation* of language, I am not abandoning my belief that Homer's style is either oral or orally derived, but moving the focus of investigation to a related question. Why is Homer's style so uniquely pleasing, and how may the sources of its charm reside in a variety of rhetorical features *distinct from formularity but related to it through a shared aesthetic*?

It is interesting to note that scholarship on Homeric language and compositional technique has often called attention to features that are the opposite of charming and pleasing. Homer's awkward moments and inconsistencies have more recently been regarded benignly as natural products of oral genesis (Janko 1990; Willcock 1977; Gunn 1970, based on Lord's prior demonstrations of composition by theme). But earlier they were viewed as compositional gaucheries that would have been avoided by a writing poet who composed more carefully (Combella 1965), and still earlier as clear evidence of scribal miscopying or imperfect conflation of multiply authored sections (see almost any page of the editions of Leaf 1900-02, Von der Mühl 1946). I refer to such small-scale features as redundancy, confused syntax and bad grammar, anacoluthon, traditional phraseology awkwardly transferred to new contexts, verses out of place (because of the performer's memory lapse or the copyist's oversight?), awkward or abrupt transitions, and so on. And on the larger scale of theme

the "principle of continuity," which he pointed out was already well understood a century ago by scholars like Bougot (*Etude sur l'Iliade d'Homère*, 1888) and Zielinski (*Die Behandlung gleichzeitigen Ereignisse im antiken Epos*, 1901), with their principles of "affinity" and "continuous narrative." My study differs from these predecessors in its focus on a range of phenomena perhaps too diverse to have been accorded equally serious attention in previous discussions of Homeric style, and in its attempt to describe these seemingly unrelated phenomena as all emanating from the epic impulse toward expansiveness, which is at the heart of the oral aesthetic.

and plot, comparable phenomena would be the various inconsistencies—from unfulfilled predictions and unreconciled alternatives to outright contradictions—too well known to need repeating here. It is indeed a curious truth that the strongest evidence for Homer as an orally composing poet comes from the existence of these stylistic and narrative infelicities, which seem to suggest not that our text is inartistically composed or the product of layers of authorship, but rather that it is the transcription of a live performance (Janko 1990:328). We shall return to a detailed consideration of some of these “negative” features.

We shall begin, however, with those more “positive” qualities named above, features of style that are *both* orally (or aurally) inspired *and* aesthetically pleasing and successful as narrative devices. Consider three phenomena actively used in the construction of phrases and sentences, which I shall call *appositional*, *explanatory*, and *metonymic extension*. I suggest that the basic epic trope, what we might call the master trope of traditional epic phrase-making, can be conceived in its simplest essence as Item Plus. I am referring to the wide-ranging impulse toward repetition and expansion that earlier scholarship has identified under a variety of names referring to different but often related phenomena: the “traditional epithet,” “hendiadys,” the “adding-on style,” λέξις εἰρημένη, “parataxis,” and so forth, as well as Bassett’s principles of “continuity” and “epic fullness” mentioned above (note 3). My own terminology attempts to identify a single aesthetic impulse that issues forth in three varieties of rhetorical expansion. In plain English, appositional extension means item + slightly different aspect of the same, explanatory extension means item + aspect that significantly widens its reference or image, and metonymic extension means item + expansion that serves as a natural bridge to the next (closely related) idea. It is my contention that underlying the various stylistic tropes and the principles named variously by past scholarship as “affinity,” “continuity,” and “progression,” there is one major unifying impulse that shows itself in variety of ways. This is the fundamental impulse toward repetition and fullness.⁴

⁴ What I call appositional extension is essentially the phenomenon well characterized by Monro 1901 in his note on 15.175, the phrase γενεή τε τόκος τε: “the kind of hendiadys formed by two nearly synonymous words,” and he compares κραδίη θυμός τε, ὕβρις τε βίη τε, ἀνείρεαι ἦδὲ μεταλλάξ and similar phrases, adding “The two meanings are fused, as it were, into a single more complete conception.” While this is true enough, my point is to emphasize the same reality from the opposite side, finding

Let me illustrate this feature of style with an extended passage that renders a dialogue between a Homeric hero and a lesser goddess. At *Odyssey* 4.363-90⁵ Menelaos is telling Odysseus' son Telemachus about what he learned from the sea nymph Eidothea. The exchange of sentences and ideas between the hero and the goddess offers no purple patch of rhetoric, no specially climactic exchange of speeches; rather it is typical epic diction at its most representative. Note the many ways in which a word or idea is either repeated or extended, and how certain extensions are tightly bound to the next idea. I have underlined appositional extensions with a solid line, explanatory extensions with a broken line, and metonymic extensions with a dotted line.

And then all provisions would have perished, and the strengths of men,

 if someone of the gods hadn't grieved for me and pitied me,

 the daughter of strong Proteus the old man of the sea, 365

Eidothea; it was her spirit that I especially stirred,

 who met me as I was wandering alone away from my comrades

 because they were constantly roaming the island and fishing
 with bent hooks, and famine was wearing away their bellies—

 but she standing near me spoke a speech and addressed me: 370

 You are a fool, stranger, excessively so, and a slack-wit,

 or do you willingly dally, and take pleasure in suffering grief?

 How long now you are held on this island, and there is no means

you are able to find, and your comrades' heart is shrunken.

 So she spoke, and then I in answer replied to her: 375

significance in the fact that an essentially *single* conception is commonly expressed in *twofold* fashion, in obedience to the epic inclination to fullness and redundancy.

⁵ In all Homeric citations I use Arabic numerals for books of the *Odyssey* and Roman numerals for the *Iliad*. All translations are my own.

I shall speak out to you, for all that you are a goddess,
 that it is no way willingly I am held here, but rather I must have
given offense to the gods, they who keep wide heaven.
 But you now tell to me—the gods are aware of everything—
 who of immortals fetters me and binds me from my passage, 380
 and the homecoming, how I will make it over the fishy sea?
 So I spoke and she answered at once, bright among goddesses:
 Now indeed O stranger will I speak to you without guile.
 A certain one frequents these parts, the unfailing old man of the sea,
immortal Proteus the Aigyptian, the one who knows 385
the ocean's every depth, Poseidon's underling.
 They say he is my father and that he gave birth to me.
 If somehow you might be able to lie in ambush and to seize him,
 he would be able to tell you the way and the measures of passage
and the homecoming, how you will make it over the fishy sea. 390

In this passage we can see the three categories of extension deployed as natural and graceful functions of epic poetic diction, serving the crucial principal of linkage. The exchange between hero and goddess is unhurried and easygoing in its natural-seeming inclination to say things twice (and occasionally thrice), as if to clarify the presentation of most ideas by representing them in other wording or under another aspect. Some of my distinctions may be disputed—it may not always be clear whether an extension adds a merely appositional or a more explanatory aspect to a basic idea, or whether it moves primarily towards explanation or metonymic connection—yet I remain satisfied that however we draw the distinctions, the overall effect is one of a heavy reliance on doubling and metonymic connection to give the idiom its characteristic epic grace and fullness. The norm is to present ideas and persons with a slight redundancy, and to avoid

the abrupt or unexpected. It is against this normative background that the surprising phrase or thought, when introduced, will strike us with special force.⁶

More Specialized Tropes of Extension

More specialized tropes of extension may be added here by adducing two characteristic phenomena of Homer's style, single word appositional doubling, or glossing, and hysteron-proteron, or prothysteron.

Single word apposition is commonly used throughout the epics to restate the identity of a noun in terms usually more specific (a distinct trope from the more commonly cited doublets based on synonym or hediadys, cf. note 4 above). A complete inventory would be impossible, but representative examples follow. It is apparent that around a centrally important noun like "man," ἀνὴρ, epic diction has accumulated something very analogous to a formular system. Since the epic world is less a woman's world, a smaller system exists for the noun γυνή.⁷

men heroes	ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων <i>Od.</i> 4x, ἀνδράσι ἡρώεσσι xiii.346
men shepherds	ἄνδρες τε νομῆες
men hunters	ἄνδρες ἐπακτῆρες
men spearmen	ἀνδρῶν αἰχμητῶν <i>Il.</i> 2x
men shieldbearers	ἀνδρῶν ἀσπιστῶν
man bronzesmith	ἀνὴρ χαλκεύς
bronzesmith men	χαλκῆες. . . ἄνδρες
carpenter men	τέκτονες ἄνδρες
leader men	ἡγήτορες ἄνδρες
cowherd men	βούκοιοι ἄνδρες
suppliant . . . man	ἰκέτεω . . . ἀνδρός <i>Il.</i> 2x
king man	βασιλῆι . . . ἀνδρὶ

⁶ The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* prologues offer good illustration of the opposite pole of Homeric style. They show minimal repetition and extension; instead, the sentences move swiftly and almost confusingly in their rapid changeover of subjects and swift piling up of causes and effects. The poet sets out to excite and attract his audience by putting off his redundant, extended, and relaxed manner and making them pay heightened attention to his words.

⁷ Book and line citations are given only when significant distinctions might be made between the two epics. The interested reader may consult the Concordances or *Ibycus*.

doctor man	ἰητρὸς . . . ἀνήρ
human man	βροτῶ ἀνδρὶ
man hunter	ἀνδρὸς θηρητῆρος
Sintian men	Σίντιες ἄνδρες
Arkadian men	Ἄρκαδες ἄνδρες
Thracian men	θρηῆκες . . . ἄνδρες, θρηκῶν ἀνδρῶν <i>Il.</i> 3x
Koan men	Κόων . . . ἀνδρῶν
Phoenician men	Φοίνικες . . . ἄνδρες
woman household-manager	γυνὴ ταμίη
woman house-mistress	γυνὴ δέσποινα
woman corn-grinding slave	γυνὴ . . . ἀλετρις
woman female-day-laborer	γυνὴ χερνήτις
person(s) wayfarer(s)	ἄνθρωπος ὁδίτης, <i>xvi.</i> 263, ὁδιτῶν ἀνθρώπων 13.123
ox bull	βοῦς . . . ταῦρος
eagle bird	αἰετὸς ὄρνις
birds. . . vultures	ὄρνισιν . . . αἰγυπίοισιν
pig boar	σὺ καπρίῳ, σὺ . . . καπρίῳ <i>Il.</i> 2x
falcon hawk	ἴρηξ κίρκος 13.86-87

Since the doubling most often consists of a more narrowly descriptive noun added to a more generic noun, this phrase habit has something in common with the familiar noun-epithet combination so fundamental to epic diction. Both figures embody Item Plus in the form of noun + descriptive word. The similarity is all the more pronounced when the epithet of the combination—Parry’s “traditional epithet”—is not an adjective but a noun, a not uncommon occurrence, typically when *nomina agentium* or patronymics are used as modifiers (e.g. Κρονίδης Ζεὺς, νεφεληγερέτα Ζεὺς, ἵπποτα Νέστωρ, Πηληϊαδέω Ἀχιλλῆος, Λαερτιάδω Ὀδυσσεύς, Ἀγαμέμνωνος Ἀτρεΐδαο, Κυλλήνιος ἀργειφόντης, and so on). What I am proposing, then, is that the trope long familiar to us as the epic “noun-epithet combination” be classified as one of several “common tropes of extension” as described above, the epithet bestowing an extension that is always appositional and is explanatory to the extent that it enlarges the idea or image.⁸

⁸ After creating my threefold classification of tropes of extension and expansion, I realized that O’Nolan (1978) had anticipated me in one point. In his “Doublets in the *Odyssey*” he defines doublet as “a combination of two terms that are to all intents synonymous” and equates it with the hendiadys noted by Monro (above, note 4). He then explicitly connects the doublet to the noun-epithet formula as being “twin tool[s]. . . of the

- he went to the pigs, and left the yard and the palace
- 16.173-74 first she put a well-washed cloak and a tunic
around his torso
- xxi.537 they opened the gates and pushed aside the bolts
- xxiv.206 for if he is going to capture you and see you with his eyes
- xxiv.346 [Hermes, dispatched by Zeus to aid Priam]
arrived quickly at Troy and at the Hellespont

Some of these cases admittedly give less awkwardness than others. In 15.188 and 16.340-41, for example, we may feel the effect only of a mild afterthought supplementing the main activity as if offering a piece of background information. In most instances we feel the reversed order more forcefully. And yet the recurrence of some of these formulations shows that some prothysteronic expressions tended toward formulaic status. Forms of the verb for being born (*γίγνομαι*) are regularly localized at the end of its verse, and the act of putting on a heavier outer covering and a lighter under covering—whether on couches or men’s bodies—seems to be formulaic in a sequence that must begin with the second, outer layer and then pass to the inner. The act of bathing seems, in comparison, less formulaically fixed in second position. In 5.264 the bathing of Odysseus illogically follows the maids’ clothing him, but in 4.49-50 the first sequence of actions presents bathing followed, properly, by rubbing with oil, but then presents the servants putting cloaks on the guests before putting on the underlying tunics.

Most prothysterica can be absorbed easily enough by a reading or listening audience, apparently because the two acts often form a closely connected sequence in behavior that is highly familiar and to some extent ritualized (bathing, clothing, and hospitality are often elaborated in the familiar “typical scenes” well documented by Arend 1933). In effect they merge in the mind as if a single two-part activity. The least familiar and truly unique prothysteron, however, that of 13.274, occurs in a lying tale of Odysseus that is furthest from a typical epic description, and may be an ad hoc creation improvised (by the poet as well as by his character!) in performance. The awkwardness is remarkable: not only does the description lack the cushion of familiarity, but the two actions of dropping

off and picking up a passenger are too formally opposed to permit easy merger into a single two-part activity.

Ambiguous syntax, bad grammar, and anacoluthon

Some of Homer's rhetorical features can be seen as more distinctively "negative" in the resistance to lucidity they offer the hearer or reader. Usually on a larger scale than the tropes of extension, but far less frequent, we find perplexing instances of ambiguous or incorrect syntax or grammar, sometimes in the form specifically called anacoluthon, where a construction is begun but dropped in favor of a new construction, and sometimes resumed after an interval in an inappropriate or awkward form. From the perspective we have established, we may understand anacoluthon as the unraveling of tightly organized syntax in deference to the impulse to take in new matter too quickly, an aspect of what we have called epic expansiveness or fullness. A simple example is found in the simile comparing the Myrmidons to wasps in *Iliad* xvi.264-65:⁹

They, having a brave heart,
each one flies forward and defends his own children

The Greek begins with a plural participle for "having," then surprisingly switches to the singular "each one" and a singular verb for "flies." The apposition of plural and singular may be felt as slightly awkward or strained, but is not unduly distracting. But more severe cases can be cited.

At xvi.317-22 Nestor's two sons, Antilochus and Thrasymedes, each slay a Trojan opponent in battle. The poet begins with the plural subject, "sons," as if intending to describe the success of each in turn, "the one did this, the other did that." But it looks as if an afterthought takes over once

⁹ I am indebted to Janko 1992 for singling out the anacolutha of xvi in his exemplary *Commentary*. Throughout his volume he shows a strong interest in oral phenomena, but I should warn the reader that he uses "oral apposition" in a sense different from mine, as equivalent to anacoluthon such as at xvi.317-22 (1992:359; and at 353 he calls anacoluthon "oral syntax"). Some of the anacolutha of xvi are also discussed by Chantraine 1953:15-16, who notes that in xvi.265 the word $\pi\alpha\varsigma$, "each one," eases the transition; and he adduces 9.462-63 as showing a "similar freedom of movement" to 12.73ff.

the first slaying is underway: the interesting and unexpected intervention of the brother of the just slain Trojan, who lunges into the scene to take revenge. The syntax is admittedly ragged and the sequence jerky, as Atymnion's brother Maris attacks Antilochus and is intercepted by Thrasymedes who dispatches him. The literal translation is:

And the sons of Nestor—one wounded Atymnion with a sharp spear,
Antilochus, and drove the bronze point through his flank,
and he fell forward. But Maris from close up with his spear
lunged at Antilochus in a rage over his brother
standing in front of the corpse; but godlike Thrasymedes
got him first before he could wound, and did not miss him. . . .

The anacoluthon need not be felt as a blemish, since the slightly disorganized and abrupt movement of the description nicely captures—perhaps mimics—the presence of confusion and the unexpected on the battlefield. There are, however, still stronger anacolutha to cite.

Consider xvi.401 ff., where Patroklos' stabbing of Thestor is a complete syntactic mess, hard to follow with the eye or the ear. I translate literally, keeping close to the Greek word order, to capture the full confusion of the original:

He fell with a thud. But he [Patroklos] to Thestor, Enops' son,
in his second onrush, he sat huddled back in his well-polished chariot,
he had lost all his nerve and the reins had slipped
from his hands—him did he come up close to and stab with a spear.

The impulse to expansiveness here seems to have overrun all the boundaries of clear syntactic organization. It is from a passage like this that we can make the strongest case for our text as the record of a live performance, for what writing poet, with the capacity to review critically what he had created, would have let such language stand?

Homer's lengthiest anacoluthic fault is probably at *Od.* 12.73ff., the very long delay of 28 verses before the second member of a pair is named. It will take a close look at the Greek to appreciate the full awkwardness here. Verse 73 begins with "The two peaks, the one reaches the wide sky," οἱ δὲ δὺω σκόπελοι ὁ μὲν οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἰκάνει. Both "peaks" and "the one" are in the nominative case, a forgiveable instance of "oral syntax," where a writer of correct Greek prose would have put the plural in the

genitive case and said “Of two peaks, the one. . . .” The serious awkwardness does not lie here, however, but in the way the second peak seems for twenty-eight verses to have been forgotten, although “the one” included the untranslatable particle *μὲν* that implies that a second parallel and related item will soon follow. But the poet instead enlarges upon details surrounding the first peak, then upon other details to which he rambles rather loosely. When, at verse 101, he finally comes around to mentioning the second peak, he has of course lost any notion that it was to be in the nominative, part of the nominative apposition used in 73. “The other peak you will see,” Odysseus is told, *τὸν δ’ ἕτερον σκόπελον ὄψει*, with the peak now in the accusative case. Homer does retain a thin fiber of connection by using the particle *δέ* answering to *μὲν* 28 lines earlier—probably the longest deferment of *δέ* after *μὲν* in Greek poetry and perhaps in any surviving Greek text!

Anacoluthon of this breadth certainly suggests a poet composing and expanding his description in the act of performance, and the combined presence of all the anacolutha throughout the Homeric text certainly must count as likely markers of an oral style.¹⁰ By this I mean a style that may be based in part on memorization and more or less faithful reproduction of some passages, but which in passages like those we have examined is very likely obedient to the vagaries of momentary inspiration and ad hoc creation of verses.¹¹

There are many more instances of careless or incorrect grammatical constructions we could cite. The famous description in xxiv.527-28 of Zeus’ two jars containing good and evil gifts for humankind is marred by a construction so unclear that Pindar apparently mistook Homer’s meaning

¹⁰ Chantraine’s (1953:12-21) chapter II, “La construction appositionnelle et la syntaxe d’accord,” although not presented as an argument for oral composition, implicitly makes a good case for Homer’s style as oral. Chantraine was one of the early scholars to endorse Parry’s work, and his discussion of Homeric syntax seems often to assume “oral syntax.”

¹¹ See Willcock 1977 and 1978 for an excellent discussion of ad hoc language in the *Iliad*, with the assumption Homer is an oral poet.

and understood that there were three jars.¹² And this is only one of many cases where we must abandon strictly grammatical readings of the text and construe *ad sensum* rather than *ad litteram*, as the commentaries repeatedly remind us.¹³

If we see anacoluthic and grammatically weak construction as signs of oral composition on the restricted level of phrase, verse, and passage, we can go further and add another kind of non-sequitur on the level of thematic construction. Homer's composition by theme and scene-type has been well documented and hardly needs further illustration. But there exist passages where the thematic sequence seems to have been tampered with. Although such inconsistencies have traditionally been condemned by modern scholars as textual corruptions (and were suspected or athetized by the Alexandrian editors), some recent studies have shown how these incongruities may well be inevitable in the oral recomposing of traditional material. Gunn (1970) has two good examples of this phenomenon. He analyzes *Od.* 5.85-96 and 15.130-50 and makes a good case for the text as the transcript of a performance in which the singer has momentarily skipped a beat, moving either too soon or too late to the appropriate verse, and thereby slightly muddling a sequence that should have been perfectly clear. Other examples of such orally derived awkwardness are given by Willcock (1978) and Russo (1987). Such "mistakes" must naturally seem more grievous to the eye, on the printed page, than to the ear of those immersed in the flow of a live performance. One is tempted to imagine what cannot be historically confirmed for Homer—but is in fact experienced by a modern audience in a live performance of drama, music, or song—namely that the audience instinctively compensates for the mistake, be it omission or intrusion, by supplying what is needed or subtracting what is inappropriate, and soon has forgotten that anything was amiss.

If we are fully aware of these and similar oral stylistic features of our

¹² *Pyth.* 3.80-82. I owe this observation to Macleod 1982:133. The literal rendering of Homer's Greek actually does suggest three jars: "A pair of jars lies at Zeus' threshold, of the evil gifts that he bestows, and another one of good." It is the force of a long tradition of construing the passage *ad sensum* that gives the generally accepted picture of two jars.

¹³ The General Index in vol. II of Leaf 1900-02:658, for example, has an entry "Constructio ad sensum," listing xi.690, xiii.564, xvi.281, xvii.756, xviii.515, 525, and xxii.84.

text, what does it mean for our editing of such texts? Regarding such features as repetition, apposition, expansion, and other forms of the Item Plus trope, we need do nothing more than relax and enjoy a slower tempo for unfolding the segments of a story. But regarding those features of style that have often been criticized as awkward and mistaken use of language, we must give up the centuries-old project of emending them to make more correct Greek or more consistent expression. Richard Janko (1990) has recently suggested that we must always have an eye on the apparatus, wary of modern editors' tendency to normalize differences or awkwardnesses that we now recognize as likely to be orally generated. He goes on to remind us that we still possess no Homeric texts edited with a full post-Parry mentality. Janko's article is an excellent starting point for any future editor of a Greek oral epic text. He gathers several paradigmatic examples where, for two similar passages, the manuscripts offer variation in one word and the editors—both the ancient Alexandrians or the modern Oxford scholar—have ignored this difference and made the passages entirely uniform.

Conclusion

My arguments in the course of this paper may have some aura of paradox about them. I have claimed that stylistic redundancy bordering on “padding” is really an aesthetic plus (no conscious pun was intended here), and that anacoluthon and other inconsistencies of sequence are acceptable and in fact the natural products of a great poet's technique. There is an entire realm of comment left untouched here, the extensive comment that could be made on Homer's very obvious excellence as a wordsmith and a story-teller, which I and others have offered elsewhere.¹⁴ An unfortunate tradition continues in Homeric criticism whereby opponents of the oral school of criticism imagine themselves as defenders of the poet's

¹⁴ See my recent commentary on *Od.* 17-20 (Russo et al. 1992), as well as my previous publications. Contributions to the appreciation of Homer's uniqueness and creativity with both diction and theme, written under the influence of Parry and Lord, are too numerous to list here, but include Hainsworth 1964, 1970; Russo 1968; Segal 1970; Nagler 1974; Willcock 1977, 1978; Edwards 1980; Sacks 1987; Finkelberg 1989; Martin 1989; Foley 1987, 1990, 1991. See also Holoka 1973 for an excellent survey of “Homeric Originality” that includes many orally oriented studies.

individuality and creativity, and see the followers of that school as promoting a Homer who is little more than a mechanical reproducer of traditional fixed phrases. Such objections to the oral theory began with some of the earliest critics of Parry's work, who at least had some justice when they disputed Parry's exaggerated claim that Homeric verse is virtually all formulaic, a claim long abandoned by Parry's successors. But anti-oralist critics continue to publish earnest defenses of Homer's capacity for unique language, subtle allusion, successful plot construction, brilliant handling of character, imagery, and so on.¹⁵ I must point out that Homerists in the Parry-Lord tradition have not overlooked excellences of this sort, as the bibliographical record shows. But the oralist perspective has also been able to make unique contributions to criticism beyond the more obvious kinds of observation that show Homer to be a fine poet in some of the same ways that literate poets are fine poets. The originality of the best criticism in the Parry-Lord tradition lies in its development of a new aesthetic, one that finds a particular kind of beauty in features of style, construction, allusiveness, and referentiality¹⁶ that would not strike the reader as obvious virtues in contemporary literature. This paper will be successful to the extent that it has unfolded a few of these virtues, and taken steps toward integrating them into a larger vision of Homeric style.

Haverford College

¹⁵ A good case in point is Richardson 1987. He shows that *hapax legomena* have a greater place in Homeric diction than one would expect if one believed (but who nowadays does?) Parry's claim that epic verse is almost entirely formulaic, and that these unique elements contribute moments of great poetry. This is a good observation, but there is no reason why it cannot be harmonized with the belief in a great oral poet capable of fine poetic effect both by staying within his traditional diction and occasionally reaching beyond it for a new word, phrase, or idea. It is unfortunate that Richardson concludes his insightful study with an uninformed swipe at oralist critics, whom he crudely caricatures as believing in a poet "tied to the apron-strings of his tradition" and simply "reshuffling the index cards." Such criticism can only stem from limited acquaintance with the best scholarship in the oralist tradition.

¹⁶ I use the term in Foley's (1991:38-60) technical sense, which opens up a new perception of the great "depth" behind some of Homer's traditional language.

References

- Arend 1933 W. Arend. *Die typischen Szenen bei Homer*. *Problemata*, 7. Berlin: Weidmann.
- Bassett 1920 Samuel H. Bassett. "ΥΣΤΕΡΟΝ ΠΡΟΤΕΡΟΝ ΟΜΗΡΙΚΩΣ (Cicero, Att. 1, 16, 1)." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 31:39-53.
- Bassett 1926 _____. "The So-Called Emphatic Position of the Runover Word in the Homeric Hexameter." *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 57:116-48.
- Chantraine 1953 Pierre Chantraine. *Grammaire Homérique. Tome II, Syntaxe*. Paris: Klincksieck.
- Combella 1965 Frederick M. Combella. "Some Formulaic Illogicalities in Homer." *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 96:41-56.
- Edwards 1966 Mark W. Edwards. "Some Features of Homeric Craftsmanship." *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 97:116-79.
- Edwards 1980 _____. "Convention and Individuality in *Iliad* 1." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 84:1-28.
- Finkelberg 1989 Margalit Finkelberg. "Formulaic and Nonformulaic Elements in Homer." *Classical Philology*, 84:179-97.
- Foley 1987 John Miles Foley. "Reading the Oral Traditional Text: Aesthetics of Creation and Response." In *Comparative Research on Oral Traditions*. Ed. by J. M. Foley. Columbus, OH: Slavica. pp. 185-212.
- Foley 1990 _____. *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Foley 1991 _____. *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Gunn 1970 David M. Gunn. "Narrative Inconsistency and the Oral Dictated Text." *American Journal of Philology*, 91:192-203.
- Hainsworth 1964 J.B. Hainsworth. "Structure and Content in Epic Formulae. The Question of the Unique Expression." *Classical Quarterly*, 14:155-64.
- Hainsworth 1970 _____. "The Criticism of an Oral Homer." *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 90:90-98.
- Holoka 1973 James P. Holoka. "Homeric Originality: A Survey." *Classical World*, 66:257-93.
- Janko 1990 Richard Janko. "The *Iliad* and its Editors: Dictation and Redaction." *Classical Antiquity*, 9:326-34.
- Janko 1992 _____. *The Iliad: A Commentary, Vol. V: Books 17-20*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leaf 1900-02 Walter Leaf, ed. *The Iliad*. London: Macmillan. 2 vols.
- Lord 1960 Albert B. Lord. *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Macleod 1982 C. W. Macleod, ed. *Homer. Iliad. Book xxiv*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martin 1989 Richard P. Martin. *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Monro 1901 D.B. Monro, ed. *Homer's Odyssey, Books xiii-xxiv*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Nagler 1974 Michael N. Nagler. *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- O'Nolan 1978 Kevin O'Nolan. "Doublets in the *Odyssey*." *Classical Quarterly*, 28:23-37.
- Richardson 1987 N. J. Richardson. "The Individuality of Homer's Language." In *Homer: Beyond Oral Poetry*. Ed. by J. M. Bremer, I. J. F. De Jong, and J. Kalff. B. R. Grüner: Amsterdam. pp. 165-84.

- Russo 1968 Joseph Russo. "Homer Against his Tradition." *Arion*, 7:275-95.
- Russo 1976 _____. "Is 'Oral' or 'Aural' Composition the Cause of Homer's Formulaic Style?" In *Oral Poetry and the Formula*. Ed. by B. A. Stolz and R. S. Shannon. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Coordination of Ancient and Modern Studies. pp. 31-54.
- Russo 1987 _____. "Oral Style as Performance Style in Homer's *Odyssey*." In *Comparative Research on Oral Traditions*. Ed. by J. M. Foley. Columbus, OH: Slavica. pp. 549-65.
- Russo et al. 1992 _____, Manuel Fernandez-Galiano, and Alfred Heubeck. *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey, Vol. III, Books xvii-xxiv*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sacks 1987 Richard Sacks. *The Traditional Phrase in Homer*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Segal 1970 Charles P. Segal. "Andromache's Anagnorisis: Formulaic Artistry in *Iliad* 22.437-476." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 75:33-57.
- Smith 1977 John D. Smith. "The Singer or the Song? A Reassessment of Lord's 'Oral Theory'." *Man*, n.s. 12:41-53.
- Stolz and Shannon 1976 B. A. Stolz and R. S. Shannon, eds. *Oral Literature and the Formula*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Coordination of Ancient and Modern Studies.
- Von der Mühl 1946 Peter Von der Mühl, ed. *Odyseea*. Basel: Helveticae.
- Willcock 1977 Malcolm M. Willcock. "Ad Hoc Invention in the *Iliad*." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 81:41-53.
- Willcock 1978 "Homer, the Individual Poet." *Liverpool Classical Monthly*, 3:11-18.