The Textual Criticism of an Oral Homer

The title of this paper is modified from that of an article by J. B. Hainsworth, which I first read as an undergraduate studying Homer at Auckland University. Apart from the deliberate similarities in titles, my present paper is not a detailed critique of Hainsworth's article, but rather uses it as a point of departure as I proceed with my own arguments.

The kind of Homeric criticism with which Hainsworth's article dealt was of course literary: he was calling for a literary appreciation of Homer which took sufficient account of Homer's orality. My topic is textual criticism: I seek to suggest that we should approach our surviving written texts in ways that do justice to this same orality. In what follows I plan to discuss how applicable to Homer are the methods of textual criticism as applied to purely written texts, and to consider an alternative way of treating the many variant readings we find in Homeric manuscripts, especially those present in the earliest papyri.

With regard to Homeric poetry, Hainsworth makes a crucial distinction between the 'work itself' and the 'performance,' stating that there is no 'real' or 'original' form; rather all that is ever heard is a 'version' of the poem. He notes that our present texts of the Iliad and Odyssey are the record of a performance, and that any other performance would yield a different text. In spite of his seeming acceptance of the fluidity of oral performance and transmission, I sense

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1 I should like to thank Timothy Boyd, Albert Henrichs, Carolyn Higbie, Gregory Nagy and Richard Tarrant for reading various drafts of this paper, and for making many helpful suggestions.


in his use of the term 'work itself' a tendency to assume, along with many scholars, the existence of a fixed 'Urtext', from which all performances somehow derive, and against which they could all, at least in theory, be compared and judged. From there it is an easy jump to the point from which one can confidently state that a given textual reading is 'superior', and another is 'inferior', or just plain 'incorrect'. This kind of judgment belongs strictly with the textual criticism of purely written epics, such as Apollonius of Rhodes and Virgil; if we are serious about accepting the orality of Homeric epic, we need to leave open the possibility that more than one reading may be 'genuine'; in other words, we need to reconsider the idea that one and only one ancient text (such as the 'vulgate', with all the connotations of authoritativeness which that name implies) is the 'right' one, and instead treat each available written text on its own merits.

Naturally I am not ruling out the existence of scribal errors in our texts of Homer – rather I am proposing to treat in a special way variant readings of the type which '. . . differ markedly from the traditional text in a way which cannot be explained by the processes of merely mechanical corruption.' I plan to do this by giving such variants the benefit of the doubt, as it were, and not automatically assuming that one reading is right and all others are wrong, as would be reasonable in the case of the text of, say, Virgil.

As far as manuscripts are concerned, what survives in the case of Homer are firstly, the papyri from the Ptolemaic period, secondly, those of the Roman period, and thirdly, the great mass of mediaeval manuscripts. When it comes to agreement with the 'vulgate,' it is the earliest papyri – those from the Ptolemaic period – which show the most significant divergences, whilst the later medieval manuscripts differ much less from our 'modern' text (e.g. the OCT). We also of course have the indirect evidence of the scholia, as well as 'quotations' from ancient authors, such as Aeschines and Plato (not to mention early inscriptions); the earlier this type of evidence is, the

4 See especially M. van der Valk, *Researches on the Text and Scholia of the Iliad*, Vol. II (Leiden, 1964) e.g. 565.

more likely it is to contain significant deviations from the ‘received text’, often preserving readings as ‘wild’ as those of the earliest papyri. As time passes, the frequency and extent of textual variation diminishes; in fact there is a distinct terminus at around 150 BC. This date is presumed roughly to coincide with the editorial work of the greatest of the Alexandrian textual scholars, Aristarchus of Samothrace (ca. 216 - 144 BC), thanks, apparently, to whom the ‘eccentric’ variations were largely eliminated from subsequent texts of Homer. I observe at this point that the way in which the Alexandrian scholars carried out their textual work (in particular the reasons behind some of their editorial decisions) is somewhat unclear to us; modern scholars can be quick to label a reading of, say, Zenodotus as a conjecture, whereas a more careful examination of the evidence illustrates that these earliest ‘editors’ of the Homeric text were often more scholarly than we give them credit for.

In the case of a written text, one tends to find the opposite situation from that which exists for Homer. For example, for the text of Virgil’s Aeneid, there are seven manuscripts dating from the fourth to the sixth centuries, and a mass of mediaeval manuscripts starting in the late eighth and early ninth century. The older witnesses are considered more reliable and authentic, and are ‘the editor’s mainstay’; whereas it is the later ones which contain more significant and complicated deviations from the ‘standard’ text.

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7 S. West, *op. cit.* 16. T. W. Allen claims to have invented the use of the term ‘eccentric’ to describe the Ptolemaic papyri; see *Homer: The Origins and the Transmission* (Oxford, 1924) 302.

8 See e.g. n. 22 below.


As far as the *Aeneid* is concerned, the conventional theory behind such a state of affairs is that over the passage of time, errors gradually creep into a text as it is copied and recopied. Such errors can arise inadvertently, or they may result from a deliberate decision to alter the current text. The first type occurs when a scribe makes a copying mistake: this may involve only the spelling of a single word, or as much as a whole line or even a group of lines. Types of accidental error include haplography and dittography; they in turn can arise from such features as homoeo-teleuton and -arcton. The second kind of mistake happens when a scribe *thinks* his current text is incorrect, and attempts to 'correct' it. This may occur because the existing text appears difficult to construe grammatically, or the content may seem inappropriate, for instance if a divinity or prominent person appears to be receiving less than adequate respect from the poet. A third kind of error, presumably accidental, can occur when marginal notes or scholia are mistakenly read as part of the work itself, and thus are copied into the main body of the text. This appears to have been frequent in the history of the Homeric text.

Each kind of error, once established in the text, has three possible fates. It may, by some good fortune, be corrected by a later scribe, either in the same manuscript which contained the error, or in a later copy. Or it may simply be reproduced in subsequent copies. Lastly, it may be compounded into a more complex error which is more difficult to detect than the original mistake. From this state of affairs it is usually possible to create a family tree or ‘stemma’, showing how errors have been ‘passed down’ from one manuscript to another over long periods of copying. This shows us several things: firstly, which

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11 For the *Aeneid*, a potential example is 2. 567-588, which are not in any of the best and oldest manuscripts. Either they did originally belong in the text, and were deleted as reflecting badly on Aeneas, or they were added later, in order to fill a perceived lacuna in the narrative. There is presently no scholarly consensus on the question of their genuineness. Compare the four lines in *Iliad* 9. 458-461 (from the speech of Phoenix): They are preserved by Plutarch, occur in no extant manuscript, and were reportedly omitted by Aristarchus φοβηθεῖς.

12 E.g. see Reynolds, *op. cit.* 282, for a (complex) stemma showing the textual history of Ovid's *Met.*
manuscripts were copied from which; secondly, how old a given error is; and thirdly, how important a given manuscript is in trying to establish the original text.

Naturally in the case of Virgil, the ‘text itself’, after the first round of copying, will not have gathered an inordinate number of errors (and hence variant readings). This is why the earliest manuscripts are the most reliable in establishing the ‘true text’. But as time progresses, errors creep in and then are recopied or compounded, contamination occurs as different readings are compared and ‘collated,’ and the number and complexity of errors multiplies. In the case of the text of the Aeneid, the complex mediaeval manuscript tradition makes it hard to see the wood for the trees.13

With Homer, as noted above, the reverse is the case: it is the earliest witnesses to the text which contain the most divergent readings, while the later manuscripts tend to converge towards the ‘received text’. If we knew nothing else about Homer, the situation might appear to be inexplicable. But if we have learned anything at all from the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord, it is surely that Homeric epic poetry was composed anew in each performance, by a poet who was a master of his tradition, both in diction and in theme. ‘From an oral point of view each performance is original.’14 And if more than one performance were recorded in writing, might we not expect the survival of more than one ‘version’ of a given episode? As Parry himself said in 1932, ‘One thing is plain: our manuscripts cannot all go back to a manuscript of Homer’s time; for their variant readings, while some are due to copyists, are for the greater part the variants of an oral tradition, which means that the manuscripts which the Alexandrians used came from different oral traditions.’15

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13 Reynolds, op. cit. 435: note the reference to silva immensa, regarding the inextricably intertwined mass of manuscripts, a situation which does not allow for the creation of a satisfactory stemma.


15 HSCP 43 (1932) 46-7. Henceforth in this paper Parry’s work will be referred to from the 1971 collection: The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford, 1971); abbreviated as MHV.
Apparently this prospect seems unlikely, or even unsettling to some scholars. For example, S. West sees no connection between the unusual variants of the ‘eccentric’ papyri and the nature of oral tradition.\textsuperscript{16} M. van der Valk feels that ‘if . . . the Homeric text was transmitted originally orally . . . the whole basis of our Homeric text becomes uncertain’.\textsuperscript{17} While the latter response suggests special pleading, the former indicates the need to examine more closely these unusual variants in the way I have suggested above.

At this point I need to clarify my procedure. In a text which was written down as it was composed, whenever a variant occurs it is usually possible to choose one reading as original, and the other as a corruption of it (for example by the theory of the lectio difficilior). With Homer, I shall be considering variant readings, each of which appears as ‘authentic’ as the other; in these cases by comparing both internal and external evidence I hope to show that neither variant can be shown to be ‘the correct reading’ – rather both are ‘correct’. Thus I will use terms such as ‘authentic’, ‘original’, ‘genuine’, etc., to characterize readings which appear to be Homeric in both nature and lineage, but not in order to rule out other readings as ‘spurious’ or ‘inauthentic’. For the same reasons I shall avoid using such terms as ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’.

As an example of what I mean, let us consider the well-known variant in the proem of the \textit{Iliad}.

The ‘vulgate’ of \textit{Iliad} 1.4-5 reads:

\begin{quote}
~\textit{Ηρώων, αυτοὺς δὲ ἔλωρια τεῦχε κύνεσιν οἰνωνίσι τε πᾶσι Δίος δὲ ἐτελείετο βουλή,}
\end{quote}

Zenodotus read:

\begin{quote}
~\textit{Ηρώων, αυτοὺς δὲ ἔλωρια τεῦχε κύνεσιν οἰνωνίσι τε δαίτα Δίος δὲ ἐτελείετο βουλή.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} S. West, \textit{op. cit.}13.

\textsuperscript{17} M. van der Valk, \textit{op. cit.} 266-7.
One immediately notices that Zenodotus' text presents a neater parallel between lines 4 and 5: a chiastic arrangement involving accusative - dative - dative - accusative: 'prey for dogs and for birds food'. It also gives line 5 a great deal more alliterative effect - note the preponderance of dental stops:

οἰωνοίσι τε δαίτα, Δίος ὡ ἐπελεξεῖ το βουλή.

Much of this effect is lost by the removal of δαίτα in the 'vulgate' rendering.

Now conventional textual criticism would be inclined to reject Zenodotus' reading precisely because of the 'nicer' parallel between lines 4 and 5; the reasoning would be that, if δαίτα were 'original,' no scribe in his right mind would remove it and replace it with πάσιν, a reading which destroys the parallel chiastic construction, as well as undermining the alliterative force of line 5. In other words, the lectio difficilior must be original, since one can easily understand how it was changed into the lectio facilior, while a change in the opposite direction is much harder to justify.

So much for internal evidence. By external evidence I mean manuscript or other testimonial support, and in this case δαίτα, while it lacks quantity of manuscript support, nevertheless makes up for it in age: when we consider the evidence of Aeschylus in Suppliants 800, it becomes likely that he had access to a version of Iliad 1 which had δαίτα rather than πάσιν. Thus the reading can be dated back into the fifth century.

On the other hand, the 'usual' reading πάσιν has its own internal and external support. It can be shown to be formulaic in this position (as indeed can δαίτα - cf. Iliad 1.424); also it provides a less obvious (and hence more subtle) balance between the two phrases - i.e. not the

\[ κυσίν ὅ ἐπειθ ἐλωρα κάπιξ воίς ὀρνυν δείπνων οὐκ ἀναίνομαι πέλευν. \]

\[ Cf. Od. 17.213; and for ... πάσα, Δίος ... in the same metrical slot as Iliad 1.5, see Od. 12.416. \]
simple chiastic structure of the reading with δαιτα. And of course it has the vast majority of manuscripts in its favour.

Thus both readings can be shown to be ‘genuine,’ on internal and external grounds: both fit well in context, and each has an ancient tradition behind it. However, traditional text-critical thinking forces scholars to make a choice. We can compare various opinions about the two readings: Pfeiffer\(^20\) thinks that Zenodotus’ δαιτα is the genuine original reading, which Aristarchus replaced with his own πάσι; Kirk,\(^21\) on the other hand, sees πάσι as authentic, and, without giving any reasons, characterizes Zenodotus’ δαιτα as ‘a fussy change of the vulgate’; similarly van der Valk\(^22\) describes the reading of Zenodotus as ‘a subjective conjecture’. However van der Valk also explicitly states as ‘absurd’ the possibility that Aeschylus and Sophocles had access to texts of Homer, which contained respectively the readings inherited by Zenodotus and the vulgate.\(^23\) Since he cannot accept the consequences such a view would entail, he necessarily must reject it out of hand.\(^24\) However, to repeat, my point is that if we look closely at the internal and external evidence for each reading, we shall find that both of them have good evidence in their support.\(^25\) Problems arise when we treat the Homeric material as if it were a fixed written text.\(^26\)

Since Zenodotus is the earliest of the three great Alexandrian scholars, I shall look at another example involving his readings.\(^27\) He has the reputation of being the least conservative (that is, if one

\(^{20}\) R. Pfeiffer, \textit{op. cit.} 113.


\(^{22}\) M. van der Valk, \textit{op. cit.} 68.

\(^{23}\) \textit{Ibid.}

\(^{24}\) \textit{Ibid.} for a list of other scholars for and against each reading.

\(^{25}\) See especially R. Pfeiffer, \textit{op. cit.} 111ff.

\(^{26}\) I also note the scholiastic comment that δαις is never used for the food of animals in Homer, whereas it is in fact so used at 24.43.

\(^{27}\) I realize that our knowledge of Zenodotus’ readings derives from the later
considers the 'vulgate' to be the standard, which I have already implied is not my approach) of the three. His 'alterations' to the text range from, on the one hand, the most 'minor' (e.g. νῶιν for νῶι at Iliad, 8.377), include variations in one word (e.g. δαίτα for πάσι in 1.5), and extend to the rejection of whole groups of lines (e.g. 1.396-406). In fact one of the more significant ways in which Zenodotus' readings differ from those of the 'vulgate' is in his treatment of groups of lines. Sometimes he appears to contract or conflate two lines into one, e.g. 1.219f, 1.446f, etc; in 2.55 he expands one line into two, in 2.60-70 he contracts eleven lines into two, and so on. In cases where there is no extant manuscript support for his readings, scholars have often assumed that he was indulging in pure conjecture. In cases where there is some support, one might suppose that it was Zenodotus' reading which has given rise to the (later) manuscript evidence. There are a few cases, however, where the only support for a Zenodotean reading is to be found in a relatively early papyrus, thus raising the possibility that Zenodotus had available to him a text with the given reading already in it, in other words, reversing the direction of the influence.

In 4.88f, where the 'vulgate' has the two lines:

Πάνδαρον ἀντίθεον διζημένη, εἰ ποι ἐφεύροι
eῦρε Δυκάσσος ύιὸν ἀμύμονά τε κρατερόν τε

Zenodotus has the single line:

Πάνδαρον ἀντίθεον διζημένη, εὑρε δὲ τόνδε.

scholia, and that the possibility is always present that such scholia may be presenting their own views rather than those of Z.

28 Other examples from the first four books of the Iliad: 2.156-168 contracted to one line; 2.681 and 718 'altered'; 3.423-6 contracted into one line; in 4.123f the order of lines is reversed. In all of these examples, the only evidence is from the scholia to Venetus A, and once from Eustathius.

29 See n. 22 above for only one of a plethora of examples.

30 Scholia to these lines in the manuscript Venetus A.
This variant is found no extant manuscript, except for the papyrus φ41. φ41, which contains portions of books 3, 4 and 5, is dated by Allen to the third century BC,\textsuperscript{31} and more specifically by S. West to 280-240 BC.\textsuperscript{32} West considers the possibility that the papyrus reading is due to the influence of Zenodotus' text, but thinks it more likely that the debt was the other way around: 'On the other hand, Zenodotus must have had MS. support for some, if not for all, of his readings.'\textsuperscript{33}

Both readings are clearly 'acceptable' in terms of grammar and flow of thought; the 'vulgate' includes epithets complimentary to Pandarus, which Zenodotus (and thus presumably his source) omits. The difference between each version could easily be explained as a difference in emphasis, arising from different versions. As well as calling Pandarus αἰσχροκερδής and ἥ τίαντων ἅρα, the scholia discuss how the longer version appears to be overly 'anthropomorphic,' since why would the goddess Athena need to look around for Pandarus, as if she didn't know where he was? On the other hand, the other point of view is mentioned, namely that when a god or goddess takes human form, he or she has to resort to human activities.\textsuperscript{34} Thus each reading can be supported by both internal and external evidence. To repeat, both the short and the long version have ancient support, and both can be justified on the grounds of language and narrative flow.

I mention for comparison a line from Odyssey 12. To put the line into context: Odysseus and his men have anchored their ship on the island of the sun; whilst Odysseus is elsewhere on the island, his men, desperate for food, have decided, against the orders of Odysseus, that it is better to kill and eat the cattle of the sun god and risk sudden destruction, than to starve to death slowly. So, after rounding up the cattle, they prepare to sacrifice them. Usually such a sacrifice would include the sprinkling of white barley; but as none was available, oak


\textsuperscript{32} S. West, op. cit. 64.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. 69.

\textsuperscript{34} Scholia to manuscripts A and T; also the D-scholia.
leaves had to suffice. Thus we get the following line:

αὔτὰρ ἐπεὶ ὅ ἐξαντο καὶ ἔσφαξαν καὶ ἔδειραν.

(12.359)

The more ‘usual’ sacrifice formulation has two lines, which include the sprinkling of the barley, as well as the drawing back of the victims’ heads:

αὔτὰρ ἐπεὶ ὅ ἐξαντο καὶ ὀὐλοχύτας προβάλοντο,
αὐέρυσαν μὲν πρῶτα καὶ ἔσφαξαν καὶ ἔδειραν.

(Iliad, 1.458-9; also 2.421-2)

I highlight the pieces of the two lines from the ‘expanded’ version which have been used for the ‘shorter’ version. In the Odyssey passage, the lack of barley grains leads to the omission of the second half of the first line, and thus also the pulling back of the victims’ heads in the first half of the second line. In other words, we have here an ‘abbreviated’ version of part of the regular sacrificial form, based on differences in the narrative context. Thus we note the existence of a ‘long’ and a ‘short’ version of a particular element in a type-scene, each tailored to fit into its respective context. So when we find evidence for both a ‘long’ and a ‘short’ version belonging to the same passage, we must at least allow for the possibility that both are valid and ‘original.’

I next turn to a passage in Iliad 3, of which a variant is partially preserved in the Ptolemaic papyrus Ψ40, dated between 285 and 250 BC.35 (In addition we happen to have Zenodotus’ text reported in the scholia to Venetus A, but I omit a discussion of it here: it has the lines in a somewhat different order.) The passage in question contains the arming of Paris and Menelaus before their duel.

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35 S. West, op. cit. 40.
(3.330-339, in Allen’s *editio maior*\(^{36}\))

First he put the greaves around his legs, fine ones, fitted with silver ankle-pieces. Second he put on his breastplate about his chest, of his brother Lycaon; and fitted it to himself. And about his shoulders he threw his silver-studded sword of bronze, and then his shield great and sturdy. And upon his mighty head he put a well-made helmet with horse-hair crest; and terribly did the plume nod from above. And he took a stout spear, which fitted his hands. And likewise warlike Menelaus donned his battle gear.

S. West discusses the papyrus variant lines in the light of 'all the great arming scenes in Homer'.\(^{38}\) She lists the following: *Iliad* 5.735 ff (Athena), 11.16 ff (Agamemnon), 19.364 ff (Achilles), and *Odyssey* 22.122 ff (Odysseus); she further states that the order is always the same: 1) Greaves, 2) Cuirass (or breastplate), 3) Sword, 4) Shield, 5) Helmet, 6) Spear (or spears). She makes the comment that it was particularly important to put on the shield before the helmet, for reasons of convenience: the plume of the helmet would interfere with the shield-strap if the helmet were donned before the shield.\(^{39}\)

In considering the papyrus' 'additional lines' 339abc, I observe firstly that the shield does still precede the helmet: indeed, items 4, 5, and 6 appear in order at the beginning, with greaves and sword being placed last. Now the preceding lines (328-338) have all dealt with the arming of Paris (using several lines repeated in other arming scenes), with that of Menelaus getting only the single line 339 in the 'vulgate.' The papyrus version gives Menelaus four lines instead of one, and moreover none of the three extra lines is repeated from the earlier description, indeed one is 'unique' in Homer. Rather than Menelaus' arming being simply a repetition of Paris', it is more of a summary, with shield, helmet, and spears all mentioned in the same line. Thus one scholar's implication that the papyrus version 'has brought down the Homeric passage to the level of primitive epic poetry' by unartistic and tedious repetition, which 'only says that the armor of Menelaus was identical with that of Paris',\(^{40}\) is simply false, and

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\(^{37}\) *Iliad* 3,339a-c:

- b (= *Iliad* 18.459, cf. 3.331)
- c (= *Iliad* 2.45 etc.)

I here acknowledge my debt to the computerized database *Homer in the Papyri*, compiled by Dana F. Sutton, of the University of California, Irvine, 1990.

\(^{38}\) S. West, *ibid.* I notice that West omits the arming of Patroclus in *Iliad* 16.130 ff. Also all six elements are not always present: in the passages from *Iliad* 5 and *Odyssey* 22 the first three items are missing.

\(^{39}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{40}\) M. van der Valk, *op. cit.* 545-6.
overlooks the obvious: the second description relates to the first by not repeating it, which would be rather 'tedious' (to use the same scholar's term), but by summarizing it, as mentioned above. In fact, the additional line 339a uses words for shield and helmet which are different from those used in Paris' arming. Thus the papyrus version still focuses upon Paris' arming, but also devotes some space to that of Menelaus: the two go together without any problems of 'tedious' or 'artless' repetition. (I note that, in contrast to van der Valk, Kirk suggests that a fuller description of Menelaus' arming would have underlined the unbalanced nature of the contest. This seems to me as unlikely, if not more so, than van der Valk's suggestions.) In this connection I note other 'abbreviated' scenes which mention lists of arms, such as Iliad 13.264-5 (which is admittedly not an actual arming scene), where spears and shields appear in one line, helmets and breastplates in the other.

In looking at other examples of 'typical scenes,' in particular of sacrifices, I notice that there is considerable flexibility in retaining or omitting 'essential' elements. For instance, in the two sacrifice episodes of Iliad 1 and 2 (1.458-469 and 2.421-432), ten of the twelve lines are identical, and in the same order. However when we move to Odyssey 3 (3.447-73), we get only five of these same lines, and in a much longer passage overall. By way of contrast, in Odyssey 12 (12.359-365) we find a considerably shorter version, but still with six of these lines. In each of the Odyssey passages a flexibility of composition is exhibited which should lead us to treat with a more open mind passages, like that discussed above, where more than one version of an episode is preserved.

In connection with the subject of 'typical scenes,' I should at least refer in passing to the substantial contributions which have been made in this area, beginning with Walter Arend, and including

41 G. S. Kirk, op. cit. 316.

42 Cf. also Iliad 23.457 ff. (Thetis requesting new armor for Achilles); 19.359 ff.

43 For these passages I refer to the OCT of Allen and Munro.

44 See also above, pp. 44-5. In these examples the elements are in the same relative order.
(among many others) significant work by Albert Lord, Bernard Fenik (on battle scenes), and G. S. Kirk. In a useful article summarizing scholarship on the subject, Mark Edwards points out that 'Use of type-scenes is probably a better test for orality, at least in Greek poetry, than use of formulae'. He also indicates that more work needs to be done on how type-scene structure relates to oral versus written style.

The purpose of this brief (and ongoing) study has been to attempt to show that more than one variant reading in a particular passage can be considered 'authentic,' in the sense outlined earlier. I am trying to look at extant variants in the light of what we know about oral poetry; the examples discussed in this paper represent only a fraction of the variants preserved in the papyri and scholia. I refer again to the work of Lord, in particular his use of the term 'multiform' to describe poetry that is ever-changing, possessing no 'original' version. In this connection I also mention the work of G. Nagy, who in an upcoming book develops the concept of mouvance; in addition he presents the idea that the oral tradition of 'Homer' must be explained as an evolutionary process, and he proposes a sequence of (at least) five successive periods of increasingly rigid forms of 're-composition-in-performance.' Furthermore Nagy adduces relevant parallels from such other literatures as Old French, Provençal, and Classical Arabic: he notes that, for example, three of the earliest

45 Die typischen Szenen bei Homer (Berlin, 1933); reviewed by M. Parry in MHV 404-7, first published in 1936.
46 In The Singer of Tales, e.g. 68-98 and 186-197.
49 In Oral Tradition, 7/2 (1992) 284-330; the quote is from 289. Edwards observes that Parry had already noted this in 1933-35: MHV 451-452.
50 Ibid. 290.
51 See above, p. 40.
52 A. B. Lord, op. cit. 100.
manuscript versions of the *Chanson de Roland* possess not a single identical verse in common with each other.\(^{53}\)

I have chosen not to discuss here the somewhat irrelevant question of the literacy of ‘Homer’ himself. I do note the variations on the theory of the dictated text,\(^{54}\) including the hypothesis of B. Powell relating the origin of the Greek alphabet to the first writing down of the Homeric epics.\(^{55}\) In spite of the attractions of the dictation view, it has been pointed out that little study has been done regarding the effects of dictation on a dictated text.\(^{56}\) In any case, this study has sought to show that the evidence points rather to a plurality of written texts, of equal ‘authenticity’ and authority, which do not all derive from a common archetype.

By way of comparison I mention briefly some potentially parallel situations occurring in other disciplines, the first being the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible. Some scholars have held the view that ‘different pristine versions’ of the various biblical books, each of equal status, existed, and that they reflected oral reformulations of these books; in some cases multiple variants in a passage have been accorded equal authenticity with each other, in much the same way that I have been suggesting for Homer.\(^{57}\) In addition the appearance of the Dead Sea Scrolls has led to new theories of the history of the biblical text, including the ‘local texts’ theory of F. M. Cross.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{54}\) E.g. A. B. Lord, and more recently R. Janko.

\(^{55}\) Barry Powell, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet* (Cambridge, 1991) (developing an idea first suggested by H. T. Wade-Gery, in *The Poet of the Iliad*, Cambridge, 1952). Powell imagines that Homer dictated his poetry to the inventor or ‘adaptor’ of the Greek alphabet - and suggests his name may have been Palamedes (236). The vexed question of the dating of the Greek alphabet I believe is correctly dealt with by the Semitic scholars F. M. Cross and J. Naveh: see especially the latter’s ‘Semitic Epigraphy and the Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet’, in *Kadmos* 31 (1992) 143-152. The proposed date given there is about 1100 B.C.

The second comparable situation is the New Testament, specifically the book of Acts, whose text presents the textual critic with unusually thorny problems. Rather than there being one basic text with minor variants, there are two distinct forms of the text, called the Alexandrian and the Western. Both have early papyrus support, but the Western version is nearly ten percent longer. One of the theories advanced to account for this state of affairs contends that a perceived freedom to ‘... incorporate from oral tradition all kinds of additional details’ led to a ‘... wild and uncontrolled growth of the text during the first and second centuries’. In addition I notice with approval the rejection of the methodology by which one or more manuscripts are compared to an external standard, and the replacement of this methodology by one in which manuscripts are first compared directly with each other. One might also think of how the existence of different versions of some episodes in the four Gospels can be thought of (at least in part) as surviving written records of one or more oral ‘performances’.

Lastly I turn to the area of music, and refer once again to the article which motivated this paper. Hainsworth mentions the refuge sought by some scholars in musical analogies: Whitman in eighteenth century chamber music, and Havelock in jazz. In following up both references, I was somewhat disappointed to find only the briefest of descriptions. In this connection I can now cite a paper by Leo Treitler which argues that Gregorian plainchant melodies were composed and transmitted in a manner analogous to the composition and

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58 In Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls, ed. H. Shanks (New York, 1992) ch. 11.
61 E.g. the two versions of the Lord’s Prayer, in Matthew 6 and Luke 11.
62 Hainsworth, ‘The Criticism of an Oral Homer’ (see n.2) 94.
transmission of oral poetry. Treitler identifies musical 'formulas' as well as a 'formulaic system,' along essentially the same lines as the Parry-Lord formulation. In addition I mention an unpublished PhD dissertation which contains a detailed analysis of the improvised performances of a jazz pianist, with specific reference and comparison to Homeric oral formulaic techniques. The jazz analogy is perhaps most pertinent when one bears in mind that no two performances are ever the same, and that none is more 'correct' than another; the most that can be said is that one is more 'inspired' (and inspiring) than another.

As we continue to derive enjoyment and inspiration from Homer, although it usually has to be from a written text, let us endeavour to be mindful of that peculiar (to us) phenomenon of orality, along with all of its associated elements of tradition, freedom and innovation. Let us bear in mind that the poet had more than one way of singing a particular tale, and if fate has preserved evidence for us of this 'multiformity,' may it be a source of enrichment, rather than embarrassment, for our experience of Homer.

Graeme D. Bird
Harvard University

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64 Gregory E. Smith, Homer, Gregory, and Bill Evans? The Theory of Formulaic Composition in the Context of Jazz Piano Improvisation (unpublished PhD diss. Harvard University 1983). When learning jazz piano myself, I can recall being told to transcribe and memorize the improvised solos of the masters (from tape recordings), and then to use them as a basis for my own original performances.

65 I also draw attention to the following quotes about jazz: 'The good musician, he's playing with it and he's playing after it. He's finishing something. No matter what he's playing, it's the long song that started back there in the South.' 'Jazz . . . has a rich, available tradition, and yet it thrives on freedom and innovation.' 'The blues had an active improvisational tradition.' And in reference to a song entitled 'Tiger Rag': 'There was no single composer: The music was still part of an aural tradition.' Quoted from L. Porter & M. Ullman, Jazz: From its Origins to the Present (Prentice Hall, 1993) 5-6, 16, 31.