

Annotated Bibliography

Griffin, Jasper. "The Epic Cycle and the Uniqueness of Homer" *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 97 (1977) 39-53.

The overarching difference, according to the Griffin, between the Homeric epics and the fragmentary works of the Epic Cycle is the level of sophistication. Griffin sees Homeric epics, especially the *Iliad*, as sophisticated in almost every way and the other works of the Epic cycle are not. Griffin says that the *Cycle* exceeds in the fantastic, miraculous, and romantic where Homer treats events that hark to such themes as austere as possible (p. 40). Where the *Cycle* colors scenes with crass supernaturalism where Homer prefers the cold reality of death. Homer represses crude metamorphosis, sundry offspring, and the physical properties of coitus in preference of a muted philosophical realism. Oracles are reportedly rife in the *Cycle* and characteristically un-Homeric. The *Iliad* supposedly consistently excludes "low human types and motives"; whereas the *Cycle* does not. His reasoning here escapes me. When faced with the "uncharacteristic" passages in the Homeric corpus, Griffin cites, *ad hominem*, the hesitancy of a respected scholar to recognize the line as Homeric (i.e., Wilamowitz on p. 47). Griffin's following "logical" explanation is unconvincing. In addition, I frequently failed to see some of the "hints" in Homer (e.g., Od. iii 404) that are supposed to lead a reader to understand the origin as "later" corruption of the purer Homeric idiom. Griffin has only to fear "the sands of Egypt" to the extent that his argument is an argument from silence. Most of the characteristics of the Cycle that he highlights are drawn from rather small and incomplete samples. I would like to see an appendix with notated examples of lines from the *Cypria* that show forms that "point to a considerably later date" (i.e., late seventh century). Should larger portions of these epics be found, the fragments might have to be radically reinterpreted. Homer, reduced to a selective few samples, could be characterized as un-Homeric. Much of what Griffin suggests as foreign to Homer is really in Homer, if only in scattered portions.

Willcock, M. M. "Mythological Paradeigmata in the *Iliad*" *Classical Quarterly* (1964) 141-154.

Willcock views the variations in Homer's retelling of the Meleager myth not as evidence that the *Iliad* was patterned after some previous version of Meleager in the form of a lost work. He views the retelling as yet another example of Homeric license. He sees Homer refashioning elements of the myth based on submerged motifs that tend to recur in non-linear patterns in epic. This makes sense, and I think we can see an analogy of this approach to myth in Sophocles' *Oedipus* trilogy. Willcock finds Homer sometimes careless with his details and always ready to reshape myths for extended analogical purposes. Willcock has gone some way toward addressing the questions I have had when reading such mythological references in the *Iliad*. I have tended to take Homer's word for it and yet had nagging suspicions that the stories were more than just overemphasized in some parts and underemphasized in others. I assumed, being lazy, that Homer must have had a better source than I and likely had a stock of details that had somehow been lost in later retellings of myths (e.g., Ovid). Little did I suspect that he may have been a Texan at heart, borrowing standard motifs from other stories and incorporating them into previously unrelated myths. I wonder, though, if the implications of Willcock's observations go rather beyond the question of *aition*. It seems to me that Willcock has neglected the possibility that Homer may have been purposefully putting such "corrupted" versions of the myths in the mouths of his characters for purposes other than simple narrative coherency; perhaps Homer uses them for subtler literary purposes. I can't believe that an audience familiar with the myths Homer is retelling would not perceive a certain amount of dissonance if they had not assumed that Homer's characters and not Homer were taking liberties with the myth. The poet might very well deliver the lines in character with all the willingness of an Odysseus. Rather than making a point himself, Homer might cynically be offering the audience a look at the shallow sophism of a character. I agree that this does not make sense in the context of Achilles' use of the Niobe with Priam, but here we might take Achilles' myth-making as harmless and prudent. Everything depends on the tone. Take Nestor for an example. Whenever I read one of Nestor's discursive remarks I can't help thinking him a doddering old man who is meant to be taken humorously as something approaching comic relief in a passage already burdened with tragic implications.

Heiden, Bruce. "Major Systems of Thematic Resonance in the *Iliad*" *Symbolae Osloenses* 75 (2000) 34-55.

The two systems that structure the narrative of the *Iliad* as a whole are ring-composition and movements. Thematic resonance seems to be a rubric comprising both systems or at least a feature common to both systems. If Heiden's theory is correct and if we take the Doloneian adaptation seriously, then we must reconsider the complete integrity of Homeric authorship. He does say that the poet seems to have chosen to announce distant thematic relationships not through narratorial comment but rather through "the arrangement of his material." This begs the question of the intellectual

subtlety of the audience, not to mention their mnemonic prowess unless we are to assume that he means subconscious recognition. What percentage of the audience could remember the kind of detail that Heiden suggests is necessary to connect the sections thematically if the "performance" were oral—not to mention the inherent subtlety of the thematic resonances he proposes? If we assume that audience recognition of thematic resonance on both the archsystemic and the subsystemic levels is crucial to appreciation of the poem—a rather expansive assumption—and that audience appreciation is at least a desired if not comprehensively achievable poetic goal, then Heiden's conclusions seem to point to a literary epic—a work thematically conceived or recompiled in manuscript form.<sup>1</sup> The same question might be asked of the poet's ability or desire to compose a work so interconnected by chiasmic structure. I am not satisfied with Heiden's characterization of his categories as "not intrinsically difficult or obscure" (p. 37). It is telling that he finds it necessary to create diagrams for the "non-specialist." It is precisely the function of a diagram to present in a collapsed or accordion form that which is presumably too distended in its full expression for ready analysis. A listening audience would most likely be completely at a loss to connect subsystemic resonance over the narrative distances he suggests (e.g., in the A to Z extremity of the chiasm). Along with this, Heiden himself suggests that the resonance of themes in the C column, though not centered around events as much as recurrence of narrative subject matter, is not random aggregation—a feature of oral epic—but a purposeful and therefore literary feature (p. 47). These would more likely be discovered as he has discovered them—by longterm scholarly perusal and by a critical conversation between scholars over years of study. It seems a far stretch to expect oral recitation and what one might call the development of bardic groupies to produce such a sophisticated hermeneutic of the epic. Again, assuming Heiden is correct, the poet of the *Iliad* should strike the reader as celebrating life attained by means of retreat and recapitulation as more judicious than the open and manly pursuit glory (p. 50). Heiden concludes that the themes of the work develop along a trajectory. This trajectory appears to parallel the trajectory of Achilles' development as a character.

West, M. L. "Rise of the Greek Epic" *Journal of Hellenic Studies* cviii (1988) 151-172.

Whereas the *Iliad* is usually seen as seminal, in many respects, to subsequent epic tradition, we may now see it, if we accept the evidence such far-ranging contributions, as itself a fantastically variable pastiche of traditional epic elements from Indo-European, Mycenaean, Aeolic, and possibly even Levantine literature that has been creatively reworked but still shows layers of both directly and indirectly borrowed material. Seeing the *Iliad* in this way shows it in a favorable relief to all such contributing literature. West's evidence for the Indo-European layer of evidence is linguistic, typological, stylistic, and thematic: it shows signs of word/concept consistency, similar verse types (invocations, incantations, and paid verse making to kings and nobles), and the convention of "three-name" lines with a concluding epithet. Distinguishing between early and late Mycenaean, West refers initially to the "appearance in the tablets of elements of Homeric vocabulary and morphology" and later more strenuously to those "features of the epic that belong to an earlier stage of Greek than [that] of the Linear B tablets," such as freedom in placing preverbs and phrases and words that appear un-metrical but would have been metrical in "an earlier stage of Greek." He generally suggests that occurrences of "phantom consonants" and more archaic rules of meter than in Homer illustrate this. The Late Mycenaean/Aeolic/Thessalian contribution appears to be thematic. West suggests that the idea of a city besieged and sacked is not novel but that five of the most "organic" characters—by which he means "most bound up with cardinal events, or make a decisive contribution..."—in the *Iliad* are geographically coherent with Thessaly. Further, Aeolisms appear to be repleat in the Homeric corpus. Most of West's evidence for influence is based on quick laundry that are germinal in nature and which the promised book would likely further explain. The thematic evidence is hardest to prove beyond some universally common human experience and therefore is weakest. After all, we can only imagine how many societies—Indo-European, Levantine, Egyptian—held such themes loosely in common. The Levantine influences fall squarely in this category. Funny that I should find them more interesting.

Kullmann, Wolfgang. "Oral Poetry Theory and Neoanalysis" *GRBS* 25 (1984) 307-323.

Neoanalysis is concerned with the history of motifs as taken from earlier poetry, including the persons and plot from the epic cycle of the Trojan War. Neoanalysts consider the greater part of the Cycle to have been delivered orally before the *Iliad* was composed. They believe that the unity of the composition of the *Iliad* argues for the original composition of the *Iliad* as a whole. Taking the recurrent motifs as the function of a poet reflecting the common experience of his epoch, and focusing on the "more specific motifs or specific nuances in general motifs," the neoanalyst outdoes the oralist in respect for the continuity of epic tradition. In short the individual shaping by a single poet, the "semi-rigid" dependence

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Nimis *Signs of Orality: The Oral Tradition and Its Influence in the Greek and Roman World*, ed. E. Anne Mackay (Brill 1998), 65-78. Nimis offers an alternative argument to Heiden's.

on motifs taken from earlier epics, the similarity of these motifs to fixed formulae, and liberation from the model of Serbian epic poetry help oralists transcend the strictures of the Parry model while allowing the fundamental assertions of the traditional analyst. The neoanalysts argument is weakest where it perceives the need for a model for written epic, deferring the necessity for original impetus and ignoring the possibility of some sort of punctuated equilibrium in the evolution of poetic invention.

Kopf, E. Christian. "The Structure of the Amazonia (*Aetheopis*)" in R. Häggied. *The Greek Renaissance in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century*. Stockholm: Publisher Not Given, 1983.

According to Kullman, the *Aetheopis* was orally delivered before the *Iliad* was formed and, after a period of oral transmission, was transcribed and subtly changed—perhaps on the model of a written *Iliad*. While motifs from the earlier oral version of *Aetheopis* are incorporated into the *Iliad*, they are not slavishly mimicked but are artistically refined and transformed to show greater delicacy of narrative art, intellectual expression, and religious meaning. Kopf, on the other hand, sees Iliadic sensitivity springing from an earlier version of the *Aethiopsis* or *Amazonia*; I am not sure which or if they are one in the same. While Kullman sees the *Iliad* as a virtuosic perfection of motifs found in *Aethiopsis*, Kopf conjectures that *Aethiopsis* provides the inspiring pathos for scenes later merely imitated by the *Iliad*. I am incredulous of Kullman's and Kopf's claims that either *Iliad* 8, 16, and 18 or *Aetheopis* find their nexus in such themes. The scenes in the *Iliad* seem sufficiently brilliant to have provided a model for a later *Aethiopsis*—relative dating being yet a debatable matter—and perhaps the apparent parallelism is purely coincidental. Both views argue, albeit more transparently than before, for greater appreciation of *Iliadic* genius.

Visser, Edzard. "Formulae or Single Words? Towards a New Theory on Homeric Verse-Making" *Würzburger Yearbuch für die Altertumswissenschaft* 14 (1988) 21-37.

Visser describes Parry's theory of epic compositional technique as instructive but flawed. The instruction comes as the recognition of a system of versification integral to oral verse production. But where Parry considers the epithet and noun two components of a fixed formula, Visser objects on the grounds that Parry's definition could not comprehend all the varieties of so-called "formulae" later found in Homer. Visser's contribution begins with his observation that there is an inconsistency between ET and Studies I: prefabricated formulae vs. one fixed element and one variable (i.e., the substantive and the epithet). Visser then distinguishes between the semantic and metrical constituents of the Homeric hexameter, arguing that the semantic use of a particular noun does not limit the epithet to an analog subset; rather, he says, the particular noun limits the epithet to a metrically restricted subset with some semantic variety. His limited contribution is to exemplify a broader application of the revised theory by analyzing one-line kill scenes in the *Iliad*—an extremely limited subset of the *Iliad*—where he shows nouns, verbs, and conjunctions forming the semantic foundation for a line of poetry and adverbial and adjectival modifiers added for *variatio*. Both Parry and Visser attempt to allow for the dismantling of Homeric verse with a view toward showing certain elements to be improvised or based on traditional elements which were themselves improvised. Visser is helpful to the extent that he liberates and expands Parry's approach; but, in my opinion, Homer's *poetic* genius and internal consistency transcend both men's formulae.<sup>1</sup> This is simply here for use in class discussion: To say that the Homeric corpus was likely composed orally because rote formulae were used simply as structural facilitators is to perilously ignore both the subtlety of the audience's ear and the ready genius of a great poet. What this means to us after Visser is what it should have meant to us well before Visser: Homer's epics are subtle works of art which can, fruitfully, be given careful attention both semantically and structurally. Visser's own samples are less than ideal, as they deal with little more than one thousandth of the Homeric corpus and are likely skewed. He assumes that, given a multitude of potential variations, Homer has limited himself to formulae because of the exigencies of extemporaneous composition. I propose we examine the corpus of literary epic to see if this phenomenon is not also reproduced in literary epic.