

p. 1 But in recent years both sides have begun to agree on the opinion that, whatever the authorship of the Iliad may be, it is still in some sense a work of art and has undergone some formative influence from a single poet.¹ This poet may have composed the whole poem or he may have transformed independent poems into a unity, but in either case the poem may, and indeed must, be considered as a single work of art.

3.41 p. 1 Such an inquiry does not assume that the Iliad is the unaided work of one man, but it does assume that its present form is the product of a single mind transforming traditional material into an artistic whole. On the one hand it excludes the view that the completed poem is largely the result of chance and caprice, and on the other hand the view that the poet was completely his own master and the Iliad is what it is simply because Homer chose so to compose it.

p.2 Some points will be considered in detail later, but here it is essential to see that the Iliad in its method of narration presumes an audience acquainted with the main outlines of its story.

3.71 p. 42 Critics of the nineteenth century thought they had found an exact parallel in the growth of the Finnish Kalevala from separate lays. The poem existed as a whole, and in country places the separate lays were still sung. Here seemed to be a parallel to the growth of the Iliad. The belief was not severely shaken when it was known that the composition of the whole poem was the work of a nineteenth-century savant, Lönnrot. It was thought that he had merely restored to its pristine unity an epic which had been broken into fragments by the habit of piecemeal recitation. But now it is clear that the Kalevala is an artificial composition. It lacks any coherent unity, and is simply a series of separate lays strung together. The contradictions involved in the composition are far greater than in the Iliad, and it is clear that the lays were always separate, even though they deal, like the Edda Poems, with one group of stories. A consecutive poem can and has been made out of them, but it is not a unity like the Iliad.

p. 43 But it is hard to believe that the Homeric manner and outlook were possessed by many generations of poets before Homer. The Iliad owes much to tradition, but it has qualities such as no tradition can impart, qualities which are lacking in the Nibelungenlied.

3.72 p. 44 Literary history provides us with two main types of such reshaping, and we must decide to which of these the Iliad belongs. On the one hand, we have the Nibelungenlied, where the old story is entirely retold. The language and the morality belong to the twelfth century instead of to the ninth, as in the Song of Hildebrand, and this alone makes a great difference. But there is also a difference of scale. . . . On the other hand French literature shows quite a different process at work. The Song of Roland is the earliest example of a long series of poems on the same subject. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the poem we possess in the Oxford manuscript was often retold, but the retelling was not the creation of a new poem but a very simple adaptation of the old poem to new manners.

p. 45 The relation of the remaniements to the original chason is more like that of Dryden's Tales from Chaucer to the original, than like that of Tennyson's Idylls to such poems as Gawain and the Green Knight. Here then are two sharply contrasted processes of literary development. The one is real development, the other is little more than adaptation. We must decide to which of these two classes the Iliad belongs. Is it a completely new version of an old story, like the Nibelungenlied, or is it a mere remaniement of an old poem, like the later version of the Song of Roland?