

I have excluded many old but ambiguous favourites of the Analysts; not all that remain are certainly the result of compound authorship, but some of them are, and they suffice to prove, what is already evident from the nature of oral ~~poet~~ poetry and the study of language and cultural background, that the Iliad is to some considerable extent a product of many generations of oral composition. More important, these anomalies indicate certain points in the narrative structure where earlier poetical versions have been used by the main composer, and others where he or some successor has elaborated his original large-scale plan. Sizeable expansions of one kind or the other obviously took place in the first half of the poem and in its last four books.

11. Structural Anomalies in The Odyssey

p. 228 " . . . indeed my belief in a pre-eminent singer for the greater part of each poem is incompatible with most Analytical explanations. More important, I am not even satisfied that their unspoken ^{main} premise is correct - that our ~~Odys~~ Odyssey is made from two or three or four major elements built up in a systematic and recoverable sequence. I am not convinced that there were two or three or four elements rather than twenty or thirty or forty. The oral tradition had presumably been expanding from at least the 11th century B.C. onwards, and there could have been literally hundreds of versions of the

p.228 main themes of the Odyssey by the time the monumental composer started work - for he, as will be seen, is the one fixed element that we have to accept. How these versions must have reacted with each other and with him, and whether his immediate sources were poems of 500 or 3000 verses, we may never know. The old-fashioned Analysts, inspired with confidence that by the grace of God no problem is insoluble, have divided up the poem between hypothetical but sternly delimited composers and into different and determinable layers of composition; but none of their accounts is really convincing in detail. . .

p.229 That there are signs of major structural inconsistency, and that some of these presuppose a complex development of some kind from earlier and shorter versions to the monumental epic as it was eventually recorded in writing, is the foundation on which the Analysts built - and this at least, however baroque or flimsy the edifices they have imposed on it, may be accepted as solid.

p. 240 The possibility remains, of course, that the singer of the originally independent underworld poem was the same as the composer of the monumental poem - that this composer used an earlier piece from his own oral repertoire as an element of his more ambitious later conception. Something similar must certainly have happened with many other episodes, in both Iliad and Odyssey, in which the inconsistencies with the surrounding poetry are both minor and more or less mechanical. Yet even the originally independent short poem may itself have been taken over and expanded or conflated from earlier poetical versions. There are hundreds of possibilities in this kind of situation, and it is misguided, if ingenious, to attempt to assign definite originators, definite elaborators (apart from broad distinctions between rhapsodic and pre-rhapsodic and so on), and definite relationships between them.

p. 242 Two other traditional stumbling-blocks are Odysseus's disguise and the removal of the arms. That there are inconsistencies in each case is undeniable, yet I disagree with Analytical critics from Kirchhoff to Page and would classify these inconsistencies as minor ones, possibly caused not by the mechanical juxtaposition of incompatible versions but by changing intentions on the part of a single main poet - who may of course have known different versions of his