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of themes has developed as between different regions, different generations, different singers and different occasions is not easily determinable, to say the least, even with the amount of information collected by a Parry. Not all this information is yet available; but when it is we shall see, I suspect, that even the whole of it is inadequate for that degree of understanding, even of a single short song, that many Homeric scholars think they can achieve for the massive and remote Iliad or Odyssey. To some extent, it is true, the Homeric tradition is likely to have been more consistent, better organized and therefore more predictable than the Yugoslav or any other modern oral tradition of which we know; but how much less information we have! Nearly the whole of it has to be tortuously levered out of the poems themselves. Comparatively speaking a great deal has been inferred, some of it reasonable and helpful and much of it, I hope, to be found within these covers; though I am aware of having occasionally transgressed in other chapters beyond the austere limits defined in this one. Yet I have already stated my conviction on pp. 228f., and it is repeated here: that classical Analytical theories which claim to distribute particular elements in the Iliad and Odyssey between two, three or more separate, successive and distinguishable poets utterly founder - except in a few cases where a short passage is repeated with progressive or degenerative variants, and even there a single singer is often possible - on precisely this complexity and impenetrability of oral traditions, in which each singer, according to his own tastes and qualities, takes over material from others and then conflates it with other material and then conflates that conflation with other confluations.

*founder?*

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In the light of these difficulties, and in constant awareness of the plurality and complexity of oral poetry, it is not without value to do, at least for some of the time, what every oral singer intends his audience to do: to take his poem as it stands, as a unity, whatever its history and however diverse or even fortuitous the means by which it achieves its effects. The obvious and identifiable post-Homeric additions should never be ignored; but for the rest, in the closing chapters which follow, I propose to regard the Homeric poems primarily as poetry, albeit as oral poetry, and not as mere concentrations of diverse and disparate elements.

THE SONGS OF HOMER

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