Beye. C. R., The Iliad, The Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition, 1966

p. 13 This hypothetical account of the origin and development of Greek epic poetry
provides for the view that one man was responsible for creating the Iliad and the Odyssey,
but that he did so by the means available to illiterate oral poets, and that his language,
his style, his story, indeed most of the elements of his spics were not original with him.
The image of the poet as amanuensis agreed with much of the Homeric criticism of the
nineteenth century which was influenced by studies of folk poetry and research into the
heterogenetic development of the Pentateuch. Some Homeric scholars, who were aware of the
formulaic nature of the epics, chose to believe that they were created over a long period
of time by means of a general creative impulse of ballad singers, that the epics did not
reveal the impress of any single intellect. A concomitant belief was that the epics were
put together arbitrarily (although following the traditional plot) out of a number of shorter
saga pieces much like the songs of Demodokos in the Odyssey. No final arguments may be
brought against this point of view, although two compelling, and, for many, overwhelming
arguments are that poets have always considered this conception of the Iliad and Odyssey
to be nonsense, and that comparative studies have never discovered any group of ballads
or pieced-together epics that could approach the masterly qualities of the Greek epics.

                  Tastes change, new vogues appear; most informed persons
p.14/ today are convinced (as a matter of faith, necessarily) that individual men created
out of their own conception the Iliad and the Odyssey or that one man composed them both.
How far we may go in ignoring traditional poetic elements when speaking of one man's
having composed an epic is a delicate point. Are any of the elements of style personal?
The extraordinarily formulaic nature of the epics, together with allusions to older things
that are not quite rightly understood by the poet and the occasional introduction of narra-
tive that is not altogether apt yet seems to be something of a cliche - all this
suggests the mechanical repetition of tradition. On the other hand, the absolute control
of the plot and the well-developed point of view consistently maintained throughout the
story suggest that the tradittional material has been impressed by one vision.

p. 32 The toleration of inconsistency may appear to be a peculiar aesthetic principle,
since it seems to be immediately an assault upon the human intelligence. All criticism
of Homer, however, must come to grips with the inconsistencies. The nineteenth-century
Homeric scholars were engaged in an heroic effort to discover the origins of the Iliad
p.33/ and Odyssey. Proceeding upon the assumption that no works of such length could
be a product of oral tradition but must be rather an amalgam of far shorter pieces, they
worked at discovering the original limitations of the individual shorter pieces. The
single most important criterion which came to them out of their association with the nine-
teenth-century novel was the presence of inconsistency. This, they said, revealed
different levels of the Iliad and Odyssey, or if not that, then the artlessness of the
persons who organized the separate pieces into a whole. However, it seems absurd to assume
that anyone who was objjectively putting together an Iliad of an Odyssey, fully conscious
and possessed of leisure, would not have been equally aware of the inconsistencies, and
sufficiently determined to remove them. Far more reasonable is it to assume that the in-
consistencies were altogether consonant with epic art, and that those of our Iliad and
Odyssey are traditional and organic. If this be so, we may call them a stylistic device
when the poet seems to have introduced them consciously. Otherwise they are a perfectly
natural concomitant of spontaneous oral presentation.

p. 34 Athene's directions to Telemachos in the first book of the Odyssey, offer a more
complicated state of inconsistency . . . The orders are plainly contradictory, and must
be accounted for. The traditional solution is that a later composer joined the first book
to the second and in so doing took from the speeches of the suitors in the second some of
the contrary advice which Athene offers in the first. Again this solution fails to come
to grips with the