Beye, Chas. Rowan, The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition, 1966

p. 237 "The Homeric question" arose principally because nineteenth-century scholars were convinced that no one man could compose and remember, without the aid of writing, poems as long as the Iliad and Odyssey. They knew that a system of writing appeared not to exist at the time the poems were created. They sought, therefore, on the basis of their evidence to create reasonable hypotheses for the existence of these poems. The obvious conclusion was that each poem was an amalgam of smaller poems. The task them turned to attempting theories which would explain the process of growth and development, a process that supposedly transformed these small poetic bits and pieces into two long epic poems. There were almost as many theories as there were men studying the poems; a hint, perhaps, of the instability of the assumptions upon which the theories were built. Two, however, grew to dominate, one explaining the Iliad, and the other, the Odyssey.

The most popular theory that explained the growth of the Iliad is often called the "Kernel" theory. In English, it is best developed in the introduction and commentary by Walter Leaf to the Greek text of the Iliad (London, 2nd edition, 1900). To put it briefly, Mr. Leaf suggests that at an early time there was an epic poem recounting the quarrel of Agamemnon and Achilles and the latter's subsequent angry behaviour. In the passage of time, there came to be added to this kernel various episodes from other epics until finally the full Iliad as we know it was assembled. Proof for this hypothesis was sought in a close examination of the text, a search for awkwardness, inconsistencies, contradictions, illogical repetitions, and the like that would demonstrate that various spisodes were in origin alien to each other. In the same manner, attempts were made to discover which passages seemed to presuppose others in the story in order to demonstrate the new-
p. 238 / ness or antiquity of any given episode. The theory advanced for the Odyssey held that essentially three poems were welded together, the Telemachia, the travel stories, and the narrative of most of the last twelve books of the poem. (Considerable scholarly opinion since the Alexandrian period has insisted that the last part of the twenty-third book and the whole of the twenty-fourth are definitely a very late addition to the original poem.) In demonstrating that these three sections were not originally kindred, scholars established a similar set of criteria as they had for the Iliad.

p. 238 Any thorough understanding of these theories or related ones depends upon a know-= ledge of German because naturally their best exposition is in that language. Various English scholars have discussed (if often only to attack) them. Andrew Lang, in his Homer and the Epic (London, 1893), gives a useful survey of major nineteenth-century scholarly judgments. He then proceeds to discuss their improbability. He argues that only by thinking of the Iliad and Odyssey as poetry and not as prose exercises in logic can one truly grasp their unity. He further remarks that those who would deny the unity of each poem spend their energies examining minutiae so that they have no way to consider each epic in its entirety. He then challenges in considerable detail a number of these German arguments, always keeping his eye on the poems' integrity. The book is a wise review of a number of important, though often strange, opinions, several of which are still held in some countries to this day. Lang's discussion also shows the way in which men were affected by notions of the scientific method and of scholarship as a thing apart from traditional humanistic pursuits.

p. 239 A sometimes hilarious, sometimes irresponsible attack on German Homeric studies is mounted by J. A. Scott in his The Unity of Homer (Berkeley, 1921). He sets out to prove by statistical evidence that the poems show throughout common characteristics of style and language that would imply unity. He furthermore points out that any number of supposed inconsistencies and contradictions are based on almost ludicrous conceptions of poetic creation as well as a complete misunderstanding of the mentality either of poets or of editors (who in several theories were