

The Origins of the Epic

- p. 49 We might indeed feel that an epic poem so long as the Iliad must have been written, being beyond the power of any man to remember. This consideration appealed strongly to Wolf and plays an important part in his Prolegomena. But modern research has disproved his contentions. Men whose memories have not learned to rely on books can remember enormous quantities of verse.
- p. 52 The important thing is that he composed for recitation, and whether or not he composed on paper hardly affects the character of the poem as we have it.

Repetitions and Contradictions

- p. 89 Homer, however, does not merely repeat phrases and single lines. He repeats sets of lines, either with or without alteration. . . In antiquity the method was to mark them as spurious, though they have managed to survive in our texts. Their method was to regard as dubious any set of lines which had appeared before and was not organically necessary in its place. This method is open to criticism. Even allowing that some such lines are spurious, it is by no means certain that the first place is the genuine place and the second the spurious. The earlier might as easily be interpolated from the
- p. 90 later as the later from the earlier. Again, the test that the context does not suffer by the removal of a line or lines is not an adequate test of genuineness in Homer. Of all poets he writes the loosest and least periodic style, and even a large number of his unrepeated lines may be removed without any great damage to the context. Lastly, the repetitions are so numerous that their presence must be explained, before they can be excised, and this the Alexandrians failed to do. And naturally, for there can be no explanation of an interpolation so wholesale as this. In modern times the repetitions have been treated in a different way, and in particular they have formed a corner-stone of the Higher Criticism. When one passage reproduces another, one or the other of the passages tends to be considered as a later imitation of the first, and by the vigorous application of such a test, efforts have been made to distinguish later from earlier passages in the poem. To the sophisticated mind this argument carries force. Just as later Greek poets imitated and robbed Homer, so may the writer of a later part of the Iliad have robbed the writer of an earlier part. The ancients had small conscience about literary plagiarism and no law of copyright. So wholesale imitation and borrowing of lines is perfectly possible. But in practice the test is not easy to apply. Which of any two similar passages is the earlier?
- p. 98,99 There is no need to recapitulate here the blunders of great men like Fick, Bethe, and Wilamowitz. When they approach the question, a great blindness has too often descended on them, and they have utterly mis-stated the evidence. They have been adequately routed by Professor Scott in his book The Unity of Homer, and there is no need to repeat his arguments here.
- p. 99 There are, of course, a few inexplicable and unquestionable contradictions. . . Aristarchus regarded such inconsistency as the poet's right. Just as Virgil makes the wooden horse of three different woods, so too Homer seems to have been poetically inexact about the studs on the sword of Agamemnon. But these cases are not germane to the present issue, nor are they those on which the Higher Criticism has thought fit to diatribe. They are instances of Homer nodding.