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THE *CYPRIA*, THE *ILIAD*, AND THE PROBLEM OF MULTIFORMITY IN ORAL AND WRITTEN TRADITION

MARGALIT FINKELBERG

INTRODUCTION

IT IS MAINLY OWING TO THE “evolutionary model of the genesis of epic,” recently proposed by G. Nagy, that the problem of multiformity in traditional poetry, and more specifically, in the poetry of Homer, has become a hotly debated topic in contemporary Homeric studies. According to Nagy’s thesis, up to the middle of the second century B.C.E., till the completion of Aristarchus’ editorial work on the Homeric text, this text was undergoing a so-called “crystallization” process: it gradually evolved from a state of relative fluidity to one of relative rigidity, and it continued to preserve a certain degree of multiformity at each stage of this development, that is, even after it had been first fixed in writing. On this interpretation, the tradition of the oral performance of Homer continued to influence the written text of the Homeric poems, so that “the variants of Homeric textual tradition reflect for the most part the multiforms of a performance tradition.” This is why Nagy advocates abandoning “the elusive certainty of finding the original composition of Homer”; the ultimate goal of his proposed approach is the ambitious project of “a multitext edition of Homer.”¹

On the face of it, the thesis that, even after being fixed in writing, the Homeric poems continued to be orally performed conforms with the well-known fact of rhapsodic performances of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the current view, the rhapsodes, as distinct from the ἀοιδοί, the oral poets in the full sense of the word, specialized in reproducing as closely as possible the standard, that is, written, version of the Homeric poems. However, Nagy resists the notion of distinguishing the rhapsodes and the ἀοιδοί in terms of creativity. In his view, at each performance of the Homeric poems a rhapsode produced a new version of Homer; these new versions influenced the text of the Homeric poems, presumably whenever this text was edited, or even copied anew. This is why, says Nagy, although the rhapsodic performances did involve a gradual slowing down of variability, the Homeric text continued to function as a multiform even after its fixation in writing.

1. G. Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1996), 151–52, 109. See also id., *Homeric Questions* (Austin, 1996), 103–4. The “evolutionary model” was first fully formulated by Nagy in “Homeric Questions,” *TAPhA* 122 (1992): 17–60 (repr. in *Homeric Questions*, 29–63).

Clearly, what is at issue here is the status of the Homeric poems as we have them. If Nagy's argument concerning the Homeric poems as multiforms is correct, then, contrary to what we have become accustomed to believe, no single standard text of Homer ever existed, and the text we have is only one of the numerous variants of these poems that circulated in the ancient world.²

Nagy's thesis has been criticized by several scholars, most notably by S. West, B. Powell, and H. Pelliccia, all of whom have pointed out that the degree of variation in the Homeric text is insufficient for defining it as a multiform. Thus, while acknowledging that "multiformity is central to the whole of Nagy's discussion," S. West wrote: "There is, I think, in Nagy's discussion some equivocation between Greek oral heroic epic in general and the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in particular; the latter must already in the mid-sixth-century have existed as readily identified works . . . to be marked out for regular (and regulated) performance at the Panathenaea."³ In Powell's opinion, "from the moment that the Homeric poems were written down, they existed as texts and were subject to the vicissitudes of any text created in any fashion. Here is a cardinal element of the Parry-Lord thesis: oral poetry composed in performance is always something new, and there is no fixed text; but a written text is a fixed text. A written text is no longer oral poetry, or subject to the rules that govern the generation of oral poetry, although it began as such."⁴ Finally, according to Pelliccia, "The major problem for Nagy's new theory is simply that the variant recordings that we know of from papyri and the indirect sources . . . are for the most part too boring and insignificant to imply that they derived from a truly creative performance tradition. . . . [W]e are still left wondering if the banal repetitions and expansions that we find in various papyrus scraps really require us to accept, in order to explain them, a full-blown oral performance tradition."⁵

The problem, however, is that by multiformity in oral tradition, Nagy and his critics seem to understand different things. In what follows, I shall first try to assess the phenomenon of multiformity as such, and only then go on to examine the idea of the Homeric poems as multiforms.

1.

The issue of multiformity in traditional oral poetry was first introduced by A. Lord, Nagy's teacher at Harvard, in chapter 5 of *The Singer of Tales*.⁶ Lord proceeds from emphasizing those elements in the oral poem that remain stable at every performance of a given traditional subject:

2. Even if Nagy is correct in arguing that Aristarchus did succeed in producing such a standard text, this argument can hardly affect the status of our vulgate: although the latter could well have been influenced by Alexandrian editions of Homer, it nevertheless cannot be regarded as directly deriving from one of these editions, including that of Aristarchus. See further M. Haslam, "Homeric Papyri and Transmission of the Text," in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. I. Morris and B. Powell (Leiden, 1997), 84–87 (with bibliography).

3. S. West, "Elements of Epic," *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 August 1996, 27.

4. B. Powell, *BMCRev* 97.3.21; for Nagy's answer see *BMCRev* 97.4.18.

5. H. Pelliccia, "As Many Homers As You Please," *New York Review of Books*, 20 November 1997, 46.

6. A. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA, 1960). The passages quoted are from pp. 99–101 (my italics).

When the singer of tales, equipped with a store of formulas and themes and a technique of composition, takes his place before an audience and tells his story, he follows the plan which he has learned along with the other elements of his profession . . . the singer thinks of his song in terms of a flexible plan of themes, some of which are essential and some of which are not. . . . To the singer the song, which cannot be changed (since to change it would, in his mind, be to tell an untrue story or to falsify history), is the essence of the story itself. *His idea of stability, to which he is deeply devoted, does not include the wording, which to him has never been fixed, nor the unessential parts of the story.* He builds his performance, or song in our sense, on the stable skeleton of narrative, which is the song in his sense.

It is against this background that Lord's definition of multiformity should be read. It runs as follows:

Our real difficulty arises from the fact that, unlike the oral poet, we are not accustomed to thinking in terms of fluidity. We find it difficult to grasp something that is multiform. It seems to us necessary to construct an ideal text or to seek an original, and we remain dissatisfied with an ever changing phenomenon. I believe that once we know the facts of oral composition we must cease trying to find an original of any traditional song . . . The truth of the matter is that our concept of "the original," or "the song," simply makes no sense in oral tradition.

Again, following Lord's concept of multiformity, while the essence of the story remains the same in all its versions, its wording and unessential parts are variable. Applying this principle to the Greek epics would mean that, although the cause of the Trojan war will always be Helen and not any other woman, Hector will be slain by Achilles and not vice versa, Odysseus will eventually come home, and Agamemnon will be assassinated at the moment of his return, the poet was nevertheless free to introduce additional details that would fit the main outlines of the saga or to elaborate on its basic "facts" without at the same time interfering with the essentials.⁷ Or, as J. M. Foley wrote when formulating his assessment of Lord's contribution: "Lord illustrates the fairly conservative structure of the oral epic song and its fluid parts; even from the same singer, stability from one performance to the next is likely to lie not at the word-for-word level of the text, but at the levels of theme and story pattern."⁸

It follows, then, that an oral poem is rigid and fluid at one and the same time. It is rigid in its essentials and fluid in the unessential parts of the story. And of course it would always be fluid in wording. It is important to emphasize in this connection that, as Lord showed, the lack of consciousness as regards the single word as a unit of speech is one of the characteristic features of oral poetries and probably of oral societies in general:

The singers themselves . . . do not think in terms of form as we think of it . . . Man without writing thinks in terms of sound groups and not in words, and the two do not necessarily coincide. When asked what a word is, he will reply that he does not know, or he will give a sound group which may vary in length from what we call a word to an entire line of poetry, or even an entire song.⁹

7. Cf. M. Finkelberg, *The Birth of Literary Fiction in Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1998), 68–73, 151–60.

8. J. M. Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988), 43.

9. Lord, *Singer of Tales* (n. 6 above), 25.

Even when claiming that he has repeated his own or another singer's song "word for word," the oral singer, without even being conscious of this, is never able to be exact in following his prototype. He repeats it "point by point" rather than "word by word." This clearly indicates that he analyzes his song in units of narrative rather than in verbal units such as words.¹⁰

It would be wrong, therefore, to treat the oral poem as, to use the expression coined by A. Parry, "a Protean thing," if by "Protean" one means that the poem changes its identity at every new performance.¹¹ Rather, each new performance would present a new variation on the same easily identified theme. But even so it would be fluid enough as compared with the written text. This is not to say of course that the written transmission preserves the text as entirely fixed and unchangeable: interpolations, corrections, omissions, alternative wordings, and so forth, are well-known characteristics of this form of transmission. But this is another kind of changeability, amply exemplified, for example, in medieval manuscript transmission and having nothing to do with the multiformity characteristic of the oral tradition. The causes and effects of these two phenomena are entirely different, and they cannot be accounted for along the same lines.

Now consider the following. As pointed out by R. Merkelbach as early as 1952, when compared with the high degree of variation characteristic of other epics, such as, for example, the *Chanson de Roland*, the Homeric poems show an extremely high degree of textual stability; in Merkelbach's view, this shows that a normative text of Homer already existed at a very early stage.¹² In a similar vein, S. West argues that, in view of the fact that the variants attested in the Homeric papyri are relatively few and for the most part trivial, the hallmark characteristic of the Homeric text is its essential uniformity. "This strongly suggests," she writes, "that something was done to standardize the text and inhibit the proliferation of variants."¹³ According to R. Janko:

All our sources basically agree over matters of dialect, plot, episodes and so forth; other oral epics recorded in writing have a far wider range of textual variation, e.g. the *Nibelungenlied*, *Chanson de Roland*, *Mahabharata* or *Digenes Akrites*. All of our MSS somehow go back to a single origin, and have passed through a single channel; it is improbable that more than one "original" of the *Iliad* ever existed, even if different rhapsodic performances and editorial interventions have led to the addition or (rarely) omission of verses here and there. This basic fixity needs to be explained.¹⁴

Finally, M. Haslam, proceeding from Janko's linguistic analysis of early hexametric poetry, argues that in so far as one assumes that the Homeric poems' linguistic evolution was arrested at a very early point, this should be taken as proof of an early textual fixation of these poems:

10. Cf. Finkelberg, *Birth of Literary Fiction* (n. 7 above), 123–29.

11. A. Parry, "Have We Homer's *Iliad*?" *YClS* 20 (1966): 182.

12. R. Merkelbach, "Die pisistratische Redaktion der homerischen Gedichte," *RhM* 95 (1952): 34–35.

13. S. West, "The Transmission of the Text," in A. Heubeck, S. West, and J. B. Hainsworth, *A Commentary on Homer's "Odyssey"*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1988), 36.

14. R. Janko, *The "Iliad": A Commentary*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1992), 29.

It is impossible to explain this arrest except in terms of the fixity provided by writing. We are free to postulate rhapsodic performance of a memorized text, but unless this was controlled by an invariant, i.e. a written text, some linguistic development would have been inevitable. If there is one thing that research into oral traditions has shown, it is that they are inherently labile: change, however imperceptible to performers and audience, does not stop. Yet it did stop, prior to Hesiod: this can only be due to writing.¹⁵

Although Merkelbach and S. West connect the standardization of the Homeric text with the tradition of the so-called Pisistratean recension, that is, the codification of the text of the Homeric poems in sixth-century Athens, while Powell, Janko, and Haslam place this standardization much earlier, in eighth-century Ionia, this does not change the basic fact that all these scholars share the contention that one standard text of Homer existed from quite early in antiquity. Note now that, whereas the comparative evidence from other epic traditions fully corresponds to Lord's definition of multiformity in oral poetry, the extent of variation attested for the text of Homer is insufficient to meet this definition. As M. L. West has pointed out only recently, the so-called "wild variants" of Homer as attested in the earlier Ptolemaic papyri and quotations by the Attic authors diverge from the medieval vulgate "not in narrative substance but with substitution of formulae, inorganic additional lines, and so forth."¹⁶ Now if the Homeric poems were indeed multiforms in the sense given to this term by Lord, it would be reasonable to expect some degree of variation also in details of plot, that is, in what Lord defined as the unessential parts of the story. However, this is not the case. Note again that it is precisely the absence of this kind of variation that Merkelbach emphasized when comparing the Homeric poems with the *Chanson de Roland*.

It follows, then, that while the scholars who deny that the Homeric poems should be treated as multiforms proceed from Lord's criterion of multiformity, which allows for fluidity both in the unessential parts of the story and in its wording, for Nagy himself the fluidity in wording alone is sufficient to classify a given poem as a multiform. Of course, the question here is not whether it is Lord's or Nagy's idea of multiformity that is more appropriate. In that it agrees with the comparative evidence supplied by other traditional epics but disagrees with the evidence of Homer, Lord's definition of multiformity as fluidity in both wording and elements of narrative does not allow us to subsume Homer under the same category as the other epic traditions. As distinct from this, Nagy's idea of multiformity as fluidity in wording alone is not subject to this limitation. What is at issue here is, therefore,

15. Haslam, "Homeric Papyri" (n. 2 above), 80–81. Cf. R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod, and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in Epic Diction* (Cambridge, 1982).

16. M. L. West, "The Textual Criticism and Editing of Homer," in *Editing Texts. Texte edieren*, ed. G. W. Most (Göttingen, 1998), 95. As far as I can see, West's suggestion that the source of most of the "wild variants" is the intimate acquaintance of those who produced them with the text of Homer has much to recommend itself. See *ibid.*, 98: "He [the copyist] was not transcribing an unfamiliar or a sacrosanct text word by word. He was producing a new exemplar of a poem that he had running in his head. Perhaps he was writing whole stretches of it out from memory, introducing echoes of similar passages elsewhere, whether unconsciously or because he thought it would be just as good so." Cf. also Haslam, "Homeric Papyri," 69, 77.

the question as to the position of our text of Homer as against other traditional poetry.

The problem, however, is that, as distinct from the medieval and the South Slavic epics, we have no clear idea of the degree of variation allowed in Greek epic tradition itself. All our evidence relating to this issue is of a comparative nature. Obviously, as long as we have no criterion by which to judge the standard of multiformity accepted in the tradition to which Homer belonged, there can be no clear-cut answer to the question whether even what may seem trivial variations in wording would suffice to define the Homeric epics as genuine multiforms. The following comparison of the *Iliad* and the *Cypria* is a preliminary attempt to fill this gap.

2.

In Book 2 of his *History* Herodotus argues that in so far as it is said in the *Iliad* that on their way from Sparta to Troy Paris and Helen spent some time in Sidon, Homer could not have been the author of the *Cypria* for the simple reason that the latter gives a different version of this episode (Hdt. 2.117):

It is said in the *Cypria* that Alexander came with Helen to Ilium from Sparta in three days, enjoying a favorable wind and a calm sea. (trans. M. Finkelberg)¹⁷

Compare this with Proclus' account of the same episode, which he also relates to the *Cypria*:

Helen and Alexander . . . put very great treasures on board and sail away by night. Hera stirs up a storm against them and they are carried to Sidon, where Alexander takes the city. From there he sailed to Troy and celebrated his marriage with Helen. (trans. H. G. Evelyn-White)¹⁸

This version agrees with that of Apollodorus, although Apollodorus does not specify his source (*Epit.* 3.4):

But Hera sent them [sc. Alexander and Helen] a heavy storm which forced them to put in at Sidon. And fearing lest he should be pursued, Alexander spent much time in Phoenicia and Cyprus. But when he thought that all chance of pursuit was over, he came to Troy with Helen. (trans. J. G. Frazer)

In each of the versions adduced, Helen and Paris leave Sparta and arrive in Troy. However, while in Herodotus' version they go to Troy directly, reaching it "in three days," the version used by Proclus and Apollodorus describes their long sojourn in the Levant. Both Herodotus and Proclus refer explicitly to the *Cypria* as their source. This can only mean that the *Cypria* meant by Herodotus and the *Cypria* meant by Proclus were in fact two different poems.¹⁹

17. Cf. *Il.* 6. 289–90, with the Scholia; for the discussion see, e.g., M. Davies, *The Epic Cycle* (Bristol, 1989), 41; A. Bernabé, *Poetarum epicorum Graecorum: testimonia et fragmenta*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1987), 52–53; J. S. Burgess, "The Non-Homeric *Cypria*," *TAPhA* 126 (1996): p. 81 and n. 20.

18. T. W. Allen, ed., *Homeri opera*, vol. 5 (Oxford, 1912), 103.4–12.

19. Cf. J. G. Frazer's commentary on Apollod. *Epit.* 3.4 (Apollod. *The Library*, vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library [London and New York, 1921], p. 174, n. 2): "It seems therefore that Herodotus and Proclus had different texts of the *Cypria* before them."

While describing the likeness of Palamedes found among Polygnotus' paintings in the Lesche in Delphi, Pausanias makes the following remark (10.31.2):

Palamedes was drowned out fishing, and I know from reading the epic of the *Cypria* that it was Diomedes and Odysseus who killed him. (trans. P. Levi)

While Pausanias' version concurs with the one told by Dictys Cretensis, Proclus' account of the *Cypria* sums up the subject of the death of Palamedes in a brief sentence that does not allow either proof or disproof.²⁰ Apollodorus, however, has the following (*Epit.* 3.8):

Having taken a Phrygian prisoner, Ulysses compelled him to write a letter of treasonable purport ostensibly sent by Priam to Palamedes; and having buried gold in the quarters of Palamedes, he dropped the letter in the camp. Agamemnon read the letter, found the gold, and delivered up Palamedes to the allies to be stoned as a traitor. (trans. J. G. Frazer)

The prominent role that the art of writing plays in this episode makes it unlikely that Apollodorus' version of the death of Palamedes could be the original one. Note, however, that, judging by the fact that it was already taken for granted in Gorgias' *Defence of Palamedes*, this version must have been at least as early as the fifth century B.C.E.²¹

According to Proclus' account of the *Cypria*, the sequence of the events relating to the first stages of the Trojan campaign was as follows:

Then the Greeks tried to land at Ilium, but the Trojans prevent them, and Protesilaus is killed by Hector. Achilles then kills Cynus, the son of Poseidon, and drives the Trojans back. The Greeks take up their dead and send envoys to the Trojans demanding the surrender of Helen and the treasure with her. The Trojans refusing, they first assault the city etc. (trans. H. G. Evelyn-White)²²

Three episodes can be discerned in this account: (1) the death of Protesilaus; (2) Achilles' victory over Cynus and the subsequent burial of the dead; (3) negotiations with the Trojans concerning the restoration of Helen and the possessions.

Compare this to the account of the same events found in Apollodorus' *Library* (*Epit.* 3.28–31):

Putting to sea from Tenedos, they made sail for Troy, and sent Odysseus and Menelaus to demand the restoration of Helen and the property. But the Trojans, having summoned the assembly, not only refused to restore Helen, but threatened to kill the envoys. These were, however, saved by Antenor; but the Greeks, exasperated at the insolence of the barbarians, stood to arms and made sail against them. . . . Of the Greeks the first to land from his ship was Protesilaus, and having slain not a few of the barbarians, he fell by the hand of Hector. . . . On the death of Protesilaus, Achilles landed with the Myrmidons, and throwing a stone at the head of Cynus, killed him. When the barbarians saw

20. Allen, *Homeri opera*, 5:105.15–16 (ἐπειτά ἐστι Παλαμήδους θάνατος). Cf. Dictys Cretensis *Belium Trojanum* 2.15.

21. Gorgias in 82B11a DK; the same version is probably alluded to in Eur. *Or.* 432, with Scholia. See also Hyg. *Fab.* 105.

22. Allen, *Homeri opera*, 5.104.24–105.6.

him dead, they fled to the city, and the Greeks, leaping from their ships, filled the plain with bodies. And having shut up the Trojans, they besieged them; and they drew up the ships. (trans. J. G. Frazer)

Comparison of Apollodorus' account with that of Proclus shows that although the episodes they adduce are the same, the order in which these episodes emerge is different: in Apollodorus, the embassy precedes the landing and does not, as in Proclus, follow it. This seems to indicate again that, though Proclus and Apollodorus used the same version of Paris' journey from Sparta to Troy, Apollodorus' source as regards the initial stages of the Trojan campaign was not identical to the *Cypria* that Proclus had.

Thus, we can discern several different versions of such episodes concerning the initial stages of the Trojan war as Helen's elopement with Paris, the Achaeans' landing in the Troad, and the death of Palamedes. On the whole, the tradition relating to the beginning of the Trojan war seems to have displayed considerable fluctuation in such details as the name of Protesilaus' slayer,²³ the name of his wife,²⁴ the manner of Cynus' death,²⁵ and probably many others. At the same time, the cluster of the subjects "The Elopement of Helen," "The Death of Protesilaus," "The Duel of Achilles and Cynus, or the Landing," "The Negotiations about Helen," and "The Death of Palamedes" is common to all the variants, including those that treat the beginning of the Trojan war only incidentally. That is to say, in Greek tradition about the beginning of the Trojan war, the subjects in question belonged to what Lord called "the stable skeleton of narrative."

As far as we know, the only traditional source that treated the beginning of the Trojan war was the *Cypria*. This seems to indicate that all the variants mentioned above, including those that do not detail their source, ultimately stem from different versions of this poem. Or should we rather say, in the vein of Nagy's approach, that there were several *Cypria* or, for that matter, several *Iliades parvae* or *Iliu perseis*, none of them more authoritative than another?²⁶ However that may be, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Greek tradition dealing with the first stages of the Trojan war fits in perfectly with Lord's definition of multiformity: while the general framework of the story about the beginning of the war remains the same, the details are subject to quite substantial fluctuation. This seems to

23. Hector, Aeneas, Achates, and Euphorbus are among the candidates. See Eust. *Il.* 2.701 and *Od.* 11.521; and cf. J. G. Frazer's Loeb commentary on Apollod. *Epit.* 3.30 (n. 19 above). See also n. 30 below.

24. The name Apollodorus gives Protesilaus' wife, Laodamia, consistent as it is with the common tradition, is at variance with Pausanias' evidence that in the *Cypria* the woman's name was Polydora. See Apollod. *Epit.* 3. 30; Paus. 4.2.7 = *Cypr.* frag. 17 Allen.

25. According to Ovid *Met.* 12.82–145, Cynus was invulnerable to metal (cf. also Arist. *Rh.* 1396b16–18), and Achilles killed him by strangling him with the thongs of his own helmet. Proclus' account of the *Cypria* does not detail the circumstances of Cynus' death, but Apollodorus has Achilles kill Cynus by throwing a stone at his head.

26. Cf. Burgess' remark in "The Non-Homeric *Cypria*" (n. 17 above), p. 90, n. 51: "For example, Bernabé collects fragments and testimonia under the heading '*Iliades parvae*' on the theory that there were different poems using this title." Note that this kind of approach makes irrelevant the old controversy whether the *Cypriaca* is a variation of the *Cypria* title or an entirely different poem. On the *Cypria/Cypriaca* controversy see, e.g., E. Bethe, *Der Troische Epenkreis* (Stuttgart, 1966) 18; Bernabé, *PEG* (n. 17 above), 38; Burgess, loc. cit.

indicate that, as far at least as variability is concerned, the Greek tradition does not differ from other heroic traditions: it is no more rigid than the medieval or South Slavic tradition and its variability cannot be reduced to the wording alone.

But the case of the *Iliad* does prove to be different. Although references to the events of the Trojan war dealt with in the *Iliad* are much more numerous than those relating to the events of the *Cypria*, no fluctuations in the names of the characters or in the order of the episodes like those observed above have ever been attested for the *Iliad* subjects.²⁷ This seems to indicate that while the *Cypria* (and, by implication, the other poems of the Epic Cycle) functioned as one multiform traditional poem among many, the status of the *Iliad* (and, by implication, the *Odyssey*) was different.

Let us suppose now that this difference was due to the fact that whereas the text of the *Iliad* and that of the *Odyssey* had been fixed in writing at a very early stage, the *Cypria* and the other Cyclic epics continued to function as oral poems in the proper sense of the word. If correct, this supposition would give us a clear-cut distinction between the written and therefore the uniform text and the oral and therefore the multiform one. However, the real situation seems to have been much more complicated. As a matter of fact, there is no sufficient reason to suppose that all those who directly quoted the text of the *Cypria* or adduced various episodes from this poem were referring to the oral performance of the poem in question. After all, we know for certain that the *Cypria* that Proclus had in mind contained eleven books, and Pausanias, for one, explicitly says that he learnt about the circumstances of Palamedes' death (which, as we saw, are not identical to what Apollodorus and others tell of the same episode) from reading the *Cypria* (ἐπιλεξάμενος ἐν ἔπεσιν οἶδα τοῖς Κυπρίοις, 10.31.2). That is to say, the difference between the *Iliad* and the *Cypria* as we have them is not that between a written and an oral text but, rather, that between a written uniform and a written multiform text.

It follows, then, that while Nagy is right in concluding that the fixation of oral poems in writing does not necessarily affect their multiform character or produce a variant that is more authoritative than the others, his conclusion fits the Cyclic epics rather than the poems of Homer. Obviously, some additional factor, and not simply their fixation in writing, was responsible for the remarkable uniformity of the Homeric poems. This must have been a factor that was not present in the case of the *Cypria* and the other poems of the Epic Cycle. As far as I can see, the canonization of the Homeric poems that resulted from their public recitation at the Panathenaea supplies us with the factor in question. Indeed, while there is a difference of opinion about whether a written text of Homer existed even before this event (see section I above), most scholars agree that in the sixth century B.C.E. the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* became codified in Pisistratean Athens in order to be

27. As S. Lowenstam has shown in a recent article, the evidence of the vase paintings strongly suggests that till the sixth or even the fifth century B.C.E., such fluctuation did occur; see his "Talking Vases: The Relationship between the Homeric Poems and Archaic Representations of Epic Myth," *TAPhA* 127 (1997): 21–76. See also below, with n. 28.

recited at the new festival of the Panathenaia and that it was this codification that acted as a powerful unifying factor in their subsequent history. As S. Lowenstam put it, “the traditional eighth- or seventh-century dating may be correct, but for whatever reasons—illiteracy, difficulty of transcribing the poems, lack of opportunity to perform the canonical version until the revised Panathenaia—it took a protracted period of time for our versions of the poems to become authoritative.”²⁸

Of course, it is hard to say what canonization of a text not considered sacred in the strict sense of the word would mean in terms of fluidity. Perhaps another example touching upon the relationship between the *Cypria* and the *Iliad* may throw some additional light on the processes involved. While the Homeric Catalogue of Ships remarks in passing that Protesilaus, the first Achaean to lose his life at Troy, had been killed by an unidentified Δάρδανος ἀνήρ, the *Cypria*, which relates the episode in full, explicitly mentions Hector as responsible for Protesilaus’ death.²⁹ Characteristically, it was the *Cypria* version rather than that of the *Iliad* that became predominant in the later tradition. Note indeed that, although we saw that there was more than one version of the name of Protesilaus’ slayer, Hector is mentioned not only by Proclus but also by Apollodorus, in Scholia on Lycophron, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and, by implication, in his *Heroides*.³⁰ This was obviously the reason why Demetrius of Scepsis emended the Homeric text by changing τὸν δ’ ἔκτανε Δάρδανος ἀνήρ at *Iliad* 2.701 to τὸν δ’ ἔκτανε φαίδιμος Ἴκτωρ. In itself a valuable example of how an extra-Homeric and presumably unauthoritative tradition could influence even the text of Homer, this emendation also demonstrates the limits of this influence. Indeed, sensible though it was, neither this emendation nor other significant changes proposed by ancient scholars became part of the vulgate.³¹ The only variations that entered the Homeric text have been trivial variations in wording.

It can be supposed, therefore, that although it is not out of the question that slightly different versions of the Homeric text did exist, these were not authoritative enough to affect what was considered by all as a canonic text, and they eventually died out. If we take into account, first, that the Panathenaic festival, at which the text of the Homeric poems was regularly recited, was among the central events of the public life of Athens and of the whole of Greece, and, second, that it was this same text that was memorized at schools all over the Greek world, this can give us at least an approximate parameter for appreciating the special status that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* enjoyed in the ancient world. Obviously, no such conditions existed in the case of the Cyclic epics. The subsequent history of the Homeric epics on the one hand and the Cyclic epics on the other points in the same direction. A

28. *Ibid.*, 63.

29. *Il.* 2.701; Allen, *Homeric opera*, 5:105.1.

30. Apollod. *Epit.* 3.30; Schol. on Lycophr. 245; Ov. *Met.* 12.67–68; *Her.* 13.65–66 (Laodamia to Protesilaus).

31. According to S. West, “Elements of Epic” (n. 3 above), Zenodotus’ alternative reading of *Od.* 1.93 and 285, according to which Athena sends Telemachus to Crete rather than to Sparta where he actually arrives in our *Odyssey*, is “what many would regard as the most disconcertingly suggestive of all ancient Homeric variants.” See also ead., “Transmission” (n. 13 above), 43.

handful of fragments and a brief summary of the contents excerpted from the *Chrestomathy* of Proclus is all that has remained of the Cyclic poems. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which had become canonical texts to be learnt at schools all over the Hellenic world even during the Byzantine period, survived.

Note now that, although we saw that the poems of the Epic Cycle can consistently be described as multiforms in Lord's sense, they supply no evidence about the processes of gradual crystallization as suggested by Nagy. Indeed, in spite of the fact that we have the unique opportunity of following different versions of the *Cypria* through the period of one thousand years, from Herodotus in the fifth century B.C.E. to Proclus in the fifth century C.E., no movement from fluidity to rigidity like that postulated by Nagy can be observed in the case of this poem. The *Cypria*, even quite late in antiquity, circulated in several written versions (as the *Song of Roland*, the *Nibelungenlied*, and other epics circulated in the Middle Ages), each version delivering the story in a somewhat different way. In other words, the written transmission of the Cyclic epics displays the same multiformity at all stages of their existence, thus reflecting in the written form the multiformity of the oral tradition. But there has always been only one version of the *Iliad*. This can only indicate that at some early stage the history of the Homeric text became not simply a history of a written text, but a history of a written text that was also considered canonical in the civilization to which it belonged. In that, its status was closer to the status of the Bible than to that of the *Chanson de Roland* or the *Nibelungenlied*.³² We should continue, then, to speak of this text in terms of emendations, interpolations, scribal errors, and other phenomena that are characteristic of manuscript transmission.³³

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32. It is worth mentioning in this connection that in both the case of the Hebrew Bible and that of the New Testament, a very rich apocryphal literature exists that did not become part of the canonical list of "inspired" texts. For an analogy between the Homeric tradition and the tradition of the Hebrew Bible, see now M. L. West, "The Textual Criticism" (n. 16 above), 102.

33. An earlier version of this paper was read at the conference "Epos and Logos: Ancient Literature and Its Oral Context," held at the Victoria University of Wellington in July 1998. I am grateful to the fellow participants for their helpful comments and discussion. I am also grateful to the referees of this journal for their stimulating criticism of the earlier version.