FORMULAE OR SINGLE WORDS?
Towards a New Theory on Homeric Verse-Making*

During the last thirty years many Homerists have expressed the notion that the theory of Homeric verse-making developed by Milman Parry[1] should entail a new method of Homeric interpretation: since — so their argument — according to Parry Homeric poetry is substantially influenced by a certain technique of improvisation, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* can no longer be interpreted in the usual way, namely, on the basis of single words, each of which having its own individual meaning; Homer, rather, seems to have thought in categories of formulae, that is, in units consisting of at least two words which are inextricably connected with each other.

In fact, Parry's somewhat revolutionary theory would require a new interpretation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: instead of expounding every single word as a single unit of meaning, a comparison between the Homeric epics and the formulaic epics of other peoples and times would seem now to be the methodically more adequate procedure for the interpretation of Homer; in particular this kind of comparison would enable us to explain certain peculiarities and obvious illogicalities in Homeric poetry[2].

All these considerations are mainly based upon Parry's line of argument in two works: his French-written dissertation „L'Épithète traditionnelle dans Homère" (published in 1928; cited here as ET) and his article „Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making" (here: Studies I), issued two years later[3]. These two works are very well known and have been cited extremely often. Nonetheless Parry's dissertation has scarcely been examined in detail. When we engage here in such an examination of both works, we will meet with a serious illogicality: a fundamental change from ET to Studies I concerning an important point in the evaluation of Homer as a poet who composed his epics by means of formulae.

In this paper I intend to focus on four points:
(1) why Parry's proclamation of the formula as the one fundamental element in Homeric versification is probably a rash extension of his earlier investigation of the epithets in ET;

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[1] Completely edited (with an English translation of the early French works) in: M. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse,* ed. by A. Parry, Oxford 1971 (cited here as *MHV*).
[2] This was demanded with particular vehemence by American scholars such as A.B. Lord and J. Notopoulos.
[3] In: HSCPh 41 (1930), 73-147 (= *MHV* p. 266-324; in German translation in: *WdF Homer* [see note 17], p. 197-264).

(2) how, starting from a repeated analysis of Parry's remarks on the nature of the formula, a new (and, as I hope, more accurate) definition of the formula can be developed;

(3) the consequences which this new definition bears on the question of Homeric technique of versification and improvisation; and

(4) which consequences the application of this new concept of the formula bears on the interpretation of Homer's epics in general.

I

In ET Parry had proved in a methodically excellent manner that the *'epitheta ornantia'*, i.e., the epithets inextricably connected with a certain noun, owed their existence primarily to the specific Homeric technique of versification[4]; Homer inserted the epithets into his verses not because he wanted to relate to their actual semantic value, but because they provided an important help in spontaneous verse-production; he used them because they facilitated the composition of dactylic hexameters considerably.

There is no reasonable objection which could be raised against this first step in Parry's argumentation[5]. The difficulty, rather, is to be seen in Parry's second paper „Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making"[6], where the concept of ET is further developed. The main step in this development is that Parry here considered the epithets and the nouns as the two components of a fixed unit, the *formula*. According to Parry, the formula is a regularly used given combination of at least two words which, because of its fixed prosodic structure, always grants the possibility of easy and prompt verse-composition. Thus, the improvised production of hexameters by putting together fixed units (formulae) is somewhat comparable to the procedure of assembling a puzzle by putting prefabricated pieces together. As Parry tried to prove by analysis of certain parts of the Iliad and Odyssey (the first 25 lines of each poem[7]), these given combinations, i.e. the formulae, are exploited almost everywhere in the Homeric epics.

In this paper Parry also outlined the consequences deriving from this new concept of Homeric versification. He demonstrated that such an extremely high frequency of formulae regularly exists nowhere but in extemporized — and this means: orally created — poems. Consequently, Parry argued further that the Homeric epics could no longer be interpreted without certain methical presuppositions, as was,

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[4] Compare e.g. A. Hoekstra, *Homeric Modifications of Formulaic Prototypes*, Amsterdam 1965 (= Verh. Nederl. Akad. 71/1), p. 10-12 and J.B. Hainsworth, *The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula*, Oxford 1968, p. 13-17.

[5] Hoekstra, op. cit. [n. 4], p. 3.

[6] See n. 3.

[7] *Studies I* p. 117-125 (= *MHV* 301-307).

despite many obvious problems, still normally done in Homeric research up till ET and Studies I. Therefore, we would now have to take as the basis for our under-standing of Homeric poetry parallels from other orally composed epics, parallels which do not relate to ancient Greek language and/or culture, but to the system and technique of Homeric versification. Only by such a procedure would there be a chance of decoding the specific Homeric manner of versification and of inter-preting Homer in proper regard to this special compositional technique.

If these new results were altogether right, they indeed would provide a new starting-point in explaining the special problems in Homer, since these explana-tions would be based upon external evidence and not upon speculative beliefs or assumptions; Parry's new concept of comparing the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with other improvised epics seemed to render possible a much higher degree of general ac-cordance in Homeric scholarship as yet.

Most scholars first reacted somewhat irritatedly to this new theory, but soon, mainly in the United States, became increasingly positive[8], finally even enthusiastic. Especially important impulses for a wider reception of Parry's theory were brought about by Albert Lord's book 'The Singer of Tales'[9]. Here the concept of compari-son and analogy was led further by a detailed analysis of Serbo-Croatian impro-vised poetry, and thereafter it was not only American, but also British and Dutch Homerists who considered this new theory and new method of interpretation of the Homeric epics as an important improvement.

However, in the subsequent reception of ET and Studies I — which latter was mainly restricted to the nature and to the function of the formula — problems began to show up: it became apparent that Parry's definition was unable to account entirely for the complex problems implied by this concept. His definition[10] turned out to be too rigid; but since most Homerists wanted to make further use of Parry's apparently important findings, efforts were made — by taking Parry's formula-concept in Studies I as the starting-point — to give the formula a more universal definition and to make it applicable to more and more parts of Homeric poetry: here the attempts of Notopulos, Bowra, Russo, Patzer, Hainsworth and Whallon may be mentioned[11].

In sum, all these results were unsatisfactory: a consensus on how a formula had to be defined to correspond to all different shapes found in Homer could not be

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[8] A.B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1960.

[9] The first to see the importance of Parry's theory was the French scholar P. Chantraine, who already in his review of *ET* spoke of a new starting-point in Homeric research (RPh 3 [1929], 294-300).

[10] In the second version in *Studies I* defined thus: „a group of words which under the same metrical conditions is regularly employed to express a given essential idea" (p. 74).

[11] Further explanations of these different formula-concepts in my dissertation, where the theory summarized here is outlined at some length, *Homerische Versifikationstechnik. Versuch einer Rekonstruktion*, Frankfurt/Bern/New York 1987, p. 16-24.

reached[12]. Accordingly, Homeric scholarship began around 1970 to turn away from research on the formulae; what remained was mainly the application of the hitherto existing findings on other archaic Greek hexameter-poetry, namely on the poems of Hesiod[13], the result of which application being that the post-Homeric technique of hexameter-production is substantially different from the Homeric technique. The search for a generally acceptable model for the Homeric epics, however, lost momentum and scholarly interest turned increasingly back to problems of pre-Parry philology[14].

As has been said, the reactions of American and later mainly British and Dutch Homerists to Parry's theories were intense and widely positive. On the other hand, most scholars in the German-speaking countries remained sceptical; indeed the hereby implied demand to abandon the method of explaining Homer only on the basis of the *Homeric* texts (Ὅμηρον ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν) led to an almost total rejection[15]. There seemed to be something threatening in Parry's theory which induced many German scholars not to give it due recognition; instead they insisted on interpreting Homer only by means of the Homeric texts themselves and not by means of comparison with non-Homeric or even non-Greek texts.

Characteristic for this rejection is Karl Reinhardt's statement in the preface to his book 'Die Ilias und ihr Dichter': „If this (i.e. Parry's) assumption is correct, it would have been better for this book never to have been written." Equally negative were statements concerning Parry's entire work: even expressions like 'formula-chasing' were put to use[16]. Now this negative evaluation was not altogether wrong, since many Parryists were exclusively occupied with the detection of new formula-types, whereby concrete explanations and interpretations of the Homeric text played an unimportant role. Nevertheless, with Parry's findings a new assessment of the Homeric poems and a new method of their interpretation is undoubtedly necessary, however many difficulties this may imply: the problem 'oral poetry' cannot be handled just by denying or passing silently over it.

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[12] The problems in formula research after Parry became manifest in the paper of J.A. Russo, „Is 'Oral' or 'Aural' Composition the Cause of Homer's Formulaic Diction?" (in: Oral Literature and the Formula, ed. A.B. Stolz and R. Shannon, Ann Arbor 1976), where the definitions developed so far are all declared as at least partially right: since every definition covers just one single aspect, the formula can be defined only as the sum of all aspects. In other words: according to Russo, the nature and the function of the formula cannot be described precisely.

[13] For further references s. my dissertation [n. 11], p. 21, n. 33.

[14] Compare e.g. the book by J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death*, Oxford 1980 (esp. p. XIII-XIV), the poetic concept in the new commentary on the *Iliad* edited by G.S. Kirk (Cambridge 1985 ff.), the motto of a symposium on Homer held in Amsterdam 1986 (*'Homer Beyond Oral Poetry'*, published: Amsterdam 1988), the paper of V. di Benedetto, „Nel laboratorio di Homero (II)", Rivista di Filol. (1986), 385-410, or the concise introduction into Homeric poetry by J. Latacz, *Homer. Eine Einführung*, Munich ²1989.

[15] Compare E. Dönt, *Forschungsbericht Homer (V 2)*, AAHG 23 (1970), 129.

[16] See n. 15.

The fact that Parry's findings were either praised or ignored rather rashly explains why detailed analyses of his argumentation were lacking until about ten years ago. It obviously took a certain distance to assess the theory of *improvised* poetry (extended later to an oral poetry-theory) from an impartial point of view. One of the first attempts of this kind is to be found in two articles by J. Latacz, published in a collection of papers on Homer edited and commented upon by the same scholar[17]. Without underestimating Parry's merits Latacz showed here that many of Parry's findings concerning the Homeric epithet and the oral nature of Homeric diction had already been established in the nineteenth century, and indeed, chiefly by *German* Homerists. Therefore, Parry's findings were neither particularly revolutionary nor farfetched; on the contrary, they must have embraced an actually-existent characteristic of Homeric diction.

Thus with the perspective of some 60 years we now have a better chance of avoiding spontaneous reactions to Parry's findings and can re-examine the oral poetry-theory more objectively. As we shall see, this is especially important in respect to the basis of this theory, the line of arguments in ET and Studies I. In such a re-examination a logical problem in the continuation from ET and Studies I arises, a problem which — as far as I can see — has not been noticed yet. This problem relates directly to the definition of the formula.

II

The formulae mainly treated in Homeric research are those of the noun-epithet type, like δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς / πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς or κορυθαίολος Ἕκτωρ, which are, according to Parry's concept developed in Studies I, „given" word-groups prefabricated for the purpose of easy verse-production[18]. This formula-concept, however, is preceded by an almost contrary definition in ET, which is summarized in the English translation as follows[19]: „in every noun-epithet formula there are two elements of which one is fixed and the other variable. The fixed element is the substantive. Apart from its variation in the genetive and dative plural, it has always the same metrical value, and this predetermined value is what the poet must reckon with. The variable element is the epithet. It can be assigned whatever metrical value the poet chooses, and it can begin or end pretty much as he wants. So the poet *creates* the noun-epithet formula of the desired measure by adding x syllables of the epithet to the predetermined value of the substantive" (italics mine).

At this stage Parry obviously saw an autonomy of both constituents of the formula whose elements he determined to be (1) the noun, normally implying a

[17] J. Latacz, „Einführung", and: „Tradition und Neuerung in der Homerforschung", in: *Homer. Tradition und Neuerung,* ed. by J. Latacz, Darmstadt 1979 [Wege der Forschung, 463], p. 1-23; 25-44.

[18] Especially *Studies I* p. 77 and 78.

[19] *MHV* [cf. n. 1], p. 84 [= ET p. 105].

prosodic *invariable* structure and (2) the epithet, normally implying a prosodic *variable* structure. *It is therefore only in the process of versification that are created what must appear to the recipients of Homer to be fixed given units.*

When we take this original definition seriously, it means: the unit called 'formula' contains two elements with completely different functions: only the noun corresponds with the poet's intention to express a certain idea, even if the intention is limited to such a simple idea as e.g. naming Achilles as subject of an action. This poetical intention to express a certain idea is to be considered as the starting-point of any literary production, in oral poetry as well as in written poetry (Parry accordingly speaks of 'given ideas'). Indeed to assert that Achilles (and not Agamemnon, Odysseus, Hector, Aiax or Apollo) is the subject in a sentence not because this was a result of the poet's intention, but because a noun-epithet formula dictated it, would be absurd. Therefore, we have to conclude that in the word groups 'noun + epithet' the *noun* is usually chosen individually by the poet, that is, in relation to the narrative context; contrary to the noun, the employment of the *epithets* is dictated by metrical exigencies.

Nevertheless, there is one objection to be made against this division of the formula, which will probably come immediately to mind: if epithets and nouns are not to be thought of as being inextricably connected with one other, how, then, is the fact to be explained that the same epithets are always connected with the same nouns and appear in the same verse-parts? One of the foremost advantages of Parry's theory was to provide an explanation for the remarkable phenomenon that in Homeric poetry a certain noun is regularly accompanied by a certain epithet. Was Parry not right in abandoning the concept of the *'generative'* formula in favor of the *'complexe'* formula, that is, the formula as a given, predetermined unit? Now, when we examine his argumentation closely, it becomes apparent that logical exigencies did not necessarily force this change from the results in ET to the argumentation in Studies I; Parry therefore could, even should have continued in another direction.

Against the assertion that formulae were exploited by Homer as fixed units and that for this reason Homer composed his poems mainly by employing these units, we can raise the following objection: for Homer, a poet skilled in the technique of improvisation, there indeed existed certain given *lexical solidarities* between noun and epithet. Lexical solidarity means that for a certain noun there apparently was a strictly limited number of epithets automatically present in the poet's mind. Familiarity with the oral tradition placed these epithets at Homer's disposal; accordingly, their form and number is strictly determined by the metrical exigencies of the dactylic hexameter. This coherence or solidarity of noun and epithet enables the use of epithets without direct recurrence to the context. One point, however, is to be stressed here: *the employment of a certain noun does not necessarily compel the poet to insert the epithet which is solidaric with that noun.*

This first result concerning the relation of noun and epithet is supported by the following consideration: assuming that a noun would *always* trigger in the poet's mind the addition of one certain epithet (Parry speaks of the formula as a *unit*), the problem would remain unsolved as to how the remarkable variety within this word group is to be explained. Actually, Achilles is not always just δῖος, but also πόδας ὠκύς, ποδάρκης δῖος or μεγάθυμος — and above all: in many verses of the Iliad his name is not accompanied by any epithet at all[20].

Thus, the conclusion seems inevitable to me that the constituents of the noun-epithet formula are not connected inextricably and that therefore the generally accepted idea of the formula as a fixed unit has to be abandoned[21]. Instead we have to divide the formula into those constituents put into a verse because of (1) *semantic value,* the function of which constituents being determined by poetical intent (as in our example: the name Ἀχιλλεύς) and (2) *prosodic structure,* the function of which constituents being determined by the meter (epithets regularly connected with the name of Ἀχιλλεύς are 1: δῖος, 2: ὠκύς, 3: πόδας ὠκύς, 4: ποδάρκης δῖος, 5: 0^{22}). Applied to the noun-epithet formula in general, this means that the nouns represent the intent of the poet because Homer chose them with regard to their individual meaning and in relation to the context. The epithets, on the other hand, are not chosen from the stock developed in the epic tradition after deliberate reflection, but rather because they are easy-to-use filling elements in an improvised production of dactylic hexameters.

III

Now if this division of the noun-epithet formula is to have any impact on the explanation of the Homeric poems, we must examine whether this distinction between semantic and metrical function can be extended beyond the noun-epithet type. In the case of a positive answer, we would have gained with this generative formula-concept a principle explaining not only Homer's way of producing verses, but even how he verbalized his poetic ideas. Thus the present stand-still in oral-poetry

[20] See n. 22.

[21] Nor does Hainsworth's model of a primary and secondary shape lead further, because here only two possible additions of epithets are taken into account. These two different additions may not be in contradiction with the principle of economy, but by four possible different variations the system of the primary shape looses its heuristic value.

[22] Based on Gehring's *Index Homericus* the following data: in the nominative case the name Ἀχιλλεύς (with two λ) occurs 171 times in the Iliad; the name is placed 160 times at the end of the hexameter. Here the name is accompanied 92 times by an epithet or epithet combination (δῖος: 34x; ὠκύς: 6x; πόδας ὠκύς: 31x; μεγάθυμος: 1x; ποδάρκης δῖος: 20x); in 68 verses there is no epithet. From these 68 verses there is an expression that may be considered as a formula, as a predetermined word group, the expression αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεύς, but even then there still remain 51 (= 31.88%) occurences of Achilleus' name without a fixed connecting element.

research may be able to be overcome, since by demonstrating the general possibility of this distinction between content and meter it would become evident that Homer did not develop and work out his ideas on the basis of packs of several (at least two) words, but on the basis of single words[23].

With this new concept of versification arises, however, the problem of how Homer's technique of improvised verse-making is to be conceived in general, the concept of verse-making by a technique whereby the poet simply puts together his verses from predetermined word blocks having been abandoned. But before answering that question we have to address the issue of whether the generative concept of the formula can be extended beyond the noun-epithet type.

The starting-point — I repeat, only the *starting*-point — here must be taken from those verses concerning themes characteristic of the epic genus as a whole and, as such, influenced by tradition, since it is only here that we can expect with some certainty the employment of the *traditional* technique of verse-making. This applies especially to those verses which are part of a repeated scene-type: here the permanent repetition clearly indicates the influence of *traditional* composition. First, then, we have to establish the typology of each scene type according to the constituents 'grammatical structure' and 'thematic structure'; thereafter, those verses which are comparable with each other in both aspects can be analysed in closer detail. The final step would be the possible distinction of the traditional and individual elements in Homer.

Thematically there is one scene-type especially suited to the attempt to separate tradition and individuality: the theme 'killing in battle'. Firstly, these killing-scenes are those most likely to have been firmly established in the epic tradition, as becomes immediately apparent when other epics having war as their main theme are compared with the Iliad. Secondly, the *high frequency* of Homeric killing-scenes allows them to be considered as essentially influenced by traditional patterns; on the other hand, these verses show a *more variable structure* than those usually treated in oral-poetry research, namely those which introduce direct speech. In these respects, therefore, 'killing-verses' are traditional — but at the same time also individual, since they (as opposed to the formulae introducing direct speech) correspond to the context by individual representation of both subject *and* object. Thirdly, the killing-scenes provide abundant material for detailed investigation.

A complete analysis of this scene-type in Homer is carried out in detail in my

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[23] When we consider the single word with its prosodic scheme as the normal unit in Homeric verse-production, we have to make one restriction. Sometimes two closely connected words obviously imply only *one* prosodic scheme. These word-connections are termed by P. Maas as *Wortbild* (in: *Greek Metre*, Oxford 1962, § 135: a *Wortbild* is a word group „formed by an important part of the sentence (i.e. noun, verb, &c.) together with any prepositives (i.e. monosyllabics, enclitics, conjunctions, &c.) that go with it". A word-group like κατὰ θυμόν, for example, normally implies for Homer not two separate prosodic schemes of a pyrrhic and a trochee, but *one* scheme of a third paeon (ᴗ ᴗ – ᴗ).

dissertation[24]; it would take too much space to reproduce it here in full. In sum, this analysis bore the following results: with regard to their *grammatical structure*, most Iliadic killing scenes demonstrate the following form: 'constellation comprising one main clause, i.e. containing one predicate'. As for the *contents*, there are many scenes where Homer, without giving any further details, bluntly states that one warrior had killed another.

If we combine both categories, we get about 60 scenes in the *Iliad* where the description of death in battle comprises one clause and thus — according to a law of oral poetry — one verse. The content, then, is always: 'X killed Y'; the formal structure: *one* hexameter with the syntactic constituents 'subject — predicate — object'. These 60 scenes of similar content provide a section from the text of the *Iliad* which furnishes the basis for an analysis of various verse-structures, yielding in turn hints as to Homer's procedure in improvised verse-production. Limitations of space make it impossible to render all the different steps of this examination here, but the main points can be demonstrated by example.

Now, when we try to apply the concept of dividing the formula into semantic and metrical components to 'killing-verses' of the type described in the passage above, there doesn't seem to be any really new evidence to be gained. The following four verses provide examples:

E 43   Ἰδομενεὺς δ᾽ ἄρα Φαῖστον ἐνήρατο, Μήονος υἱόν
O 332   Αἰνείας δὲ Μέδοντα καὶ Ἴασον ἐξενάριξεν
Ξ 514   Μηριόνης δὲ Μόρυν τε καὶ Ἱπποτίωνα κατέκτα
Z 12   Ἄξυλον δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἔπεφνε βοὴν ἀγαθὸς Διομήδης

These verses represent perfectly the entire scene-type 'killing in battle': the active persons (the grammatical subjects) belong to both opposing sides (three Achaeans and one Trojan), the four subjects represent three different prosodic schemes, the four predicate-forms vary prosodically, and finally, every object shows a different prosodic scheme.

In the case of the acting persons, examination of the semantic and metrical function of the single verse parts provides an obvious result: the names Idomeneus, Aineias, Meriones and Diomedes have been put by Homer into the verses because he wanted to refer to these persons and to no one else. These elements, therefore, are to be considered semantically functional.

A similar finding seems to apply to the names of the objects Phaistos, Medon, Iasos, Morys, Hippotion and Axylos: six on the whole unimportant persons, who are individualized in some detail only in those scenes which tell of their deaths. Thus we are told here that Phaistos is a Maeonian whose father bore the name Boros (E 43 f.); Medon is a half-brother of little Aiax, and the warrior killed together with him, named Iasos, is an Athenian leader and son of a certain Sphelos (O 333-338); as for Morys and Hippotion, Homer, before describing their deaths, had

[24]   See n. 11 (p. 41-65).

provided some detailed information about 500 verses before (N 792-794), and Axylos is the son of Teuthras by Arisbe (Z 12-18). These details on the dying persons also indicate a semantic function of their names; nevertheless we should take a greater factor of uncertainty into account here, for it seems at least possible that, in contrast to the acting persons, a (context-)semantic function for these names is invoked by the poet in these particular situations only[25].

Also the third type of words apparently indispensable in killing-scenes, the verb, is clearly semantically functional, since the poet hereby informs the recipient what the outcome of the interaction between subject and object is to be. As is evident several times in the *Iliad*, it is not necessarily the case that the encounter of two combatants ends with the death of one of the warriors; several times it also breaks off with a wounding or a dispute (the most notorious being the encounter of Glaucus and Diomedes in book VI).

The last element existent in all verses is the conjunction, in every verse the particle δέ. Here, too, the assumption of semantic functionality is probable: in Homer as well as in all subsequent Greek literary texts every principal clause is normally connected with the foregoing clause, and this means: the conjunction is generally an indispensable component in any kind of language, not only in the Homeric *Kunstsprache*.

Thus, in a first recapitulation we find in all central parts of the verses elements with semantic function and nowhere contextually irrelevant elements whose employment could be considered to have been influenced by the meter. If this were our final result, it would mean either that the division of the formula would be based on a false supposition, or it would prove the falsity of the oral poetry-theory in general, which then would be just a methodically improper extension of an investigation of a special word group, the epithets.

This, however, would be a premature conclusion. In fact, it is true that in the Greek language there must be a predicate and connecting element beside the subject and the object to make a complete clause, and this applies to Homer as well; not yet explained, however, is hereby a remarkable prosodic variety within these two components. This variety can be illustrated first for the predicate representatives by

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[25] Hereto a minor example in passing: the object in E 43 is characterized further within the same verse in which Homer reports the death of that individual, Phaistos: Μῄονος υἱόν. Whether or not this characterization was already in the pre-Iliadic tradition associated with the name Phaistos is difficult to determine; nevertheless there is a certain indication that this was the case. Idomeneus was, as is well known, a Cretan prince, and it is fully possible that the name Phaistos was associated with him: Phaistos is a place in Crete, the site of a famous palace. If, however, Phaistos, described here as a Maeonian, was traditionally a Cretan, then the possibility exists of regarding Μῄονος υἱόν not necessarily as a determinatic of content but rather as a reaction to the metrical structure in this verse brought about by the employment of the names Idomeneus and Phaistos. This structure leaves an adoneic space at the verse-end and into this space Homer inserted a metrically fitting bit of information which was not originally connected with the name of the object.

a synopsis of all verb-forms used in this scene-type; the following list contains the different forms occuring in the Iliadic killing-scenes:

prosodic scheme	scheme with initial and final phonem	form
⏑	v ⏑ c[26]	ἔλ᾽
⏑ ⏑	v ⏑ ⏑ c	ἔλεν
	v ⏑ ⏑ v	ἔλε
⏑ —	v ⏑ — v	ἔλε
— ⏑	c — ⏑ v	πέφνε
	v — ⏑ c	εἷλεν
	v — ⏑ v	εἷλε
	cc — ⏑ c	κτεῖϝεν
	cc — ⏑ v	κτεῖϝε
— ⏑ ⏑	v — ⏑ ⏑ c	ἔκτανεν
	v — ⏑ ⏑ v	ἔκτανε
⏑ ⏑ —	v ⏑ ⏑ — c	ἐλέτην
	cc ⏑ ⏑ —	ἐλέτην
⏑ — ⏑	c ⏑ — ⏑ v	κατέκτα
	v ⏑ — ⏑ c	ἔπεφνεν
	v ⏑ — ⏑ v	ἔπεφνε
⏑ — ⏑ ⏑	c ⏑ — ⏑ ⏑ c	κατέκτανεν
	c ⏑ — ⏑ ⏑ v	κατέκτανε
	v ⏑ — ⏑ ⏑ v	ἐνήρατο
⏑ ⏑ — ⏑	v ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑ c	ἐνάριξεν
	v ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑ v	ἐνάριξε
	v — — — c	ἔκτεινεν
— ⏑ ⏑ — x	v — ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑ v	θυμὸν ἀπηύρα
	v — ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑ v	ἐξενάριξεν
	v — ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑ v	ἐξενάριξε
⏑ ⏑ — ⏑ ⏑ —	v ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑ c	ὑπὸ γούνατ᾽ ἔλυσεν
	v ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑ v	ὑπὸ γούνατ᾽ ἔλυσε

I want to stress here that all these predicate forms are taken from those killing-scenes with just *one* predicate and without a detailed explanation of the circumstances. As for the names of the subjects and objects, such a variety clearly would be impossible.

Now the same procedure for the conjunction representatives: a closer examination of the elements which connect the clauses with each other shows considerable variety, too:

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[26] v stands for vowel, c for consonant.

prosodic scheme	scheme with initial and final phonem	form
0	c	δ'
◡	c ◡ v	δέ
	c ◡ c	δ' ἄρ'
◡ ◡	c ◡ ◡ v	δ' ἄρα
◡ −	c ◡ − v	δ' ἄρα
	c ◡ − c	δ' ἔπειτ'
◡ − ◡	c ◡ − ◡ v	δ' ἔπειτα
◡ ◡ −	c ◡ ◡ − c	δ' ἄρ' ἔπειτ'
◡ ◡ − ◡	c ◡ ◡ − ◡ v	δ' ἄρ' ἔπειτα

Only two possible explanations can account for this formal variety in both predica-
te and conjunction representatives: it depends either on *semantic* or on *metrical*
function.

There is some reason to believe that an assumption of semantic function-
ality of each single variant is untenable. Thus, all the verses containing these dif-
ferent forms are identical in structure and content with the exception of the per-
sonal names. Nor does the etymology of the single verbs seem to have required spe-
cial employment in the *Iliad*. So ἐξεναρίζειν and ἐναίρειν originally meant 'to
strip off the arms, to spoil', but in the Iliadic killing-scenes they are mostly employ-
ed without any relation to 'arms' at all. Πεφνεῖν − actually 'to strike' − is used
also, when the death of a warrior is brought about by a spear-shot, and ἐλεῖν ('to
take [away]'), when used in the battle-scenes, expresses no more the idea of 'taking
away' than do e.g. the verbs derived from the root κτεν-, κτον-. Finally, all the
verses in which these verb-forms occur belong to different narrative contexts.
Whether Achaeans or Trojans attack, whether the combat is single or massed,
whether the actions take place on the right or left side of the battle-field, the single
verbs cannot be assigned to a specific context which could account for their em-
ployment as a result of an individual poetic intention.

The most important fact, however, to be gleaned from these two types of sen-
tence-component is the absence of metrical doublets: despite their considerable
number and, in the case of the verbs, etymological variety, all forms correspond to
different prosodic schemes. It was this very absence of doublets that suggested to
Parry the metrical functionality of the *epithets*. In *written* poetry doublets occur
rather often, so that we may conclude that in this sort of literary production the
poet chose the epithets in relation to the semantic context.

Therefore, when we compare the Homeric employment of these verb-forms
with their employment in other poetry undoubtedly composed with the aid of
writing, we can expect to see a significant difference, especially by an analysis of
verses with the same thematic context (epic verses with the content 'X killed Y',

expressed in *one* clause). Similar verses are to be found in the so-called 'Posthomerica' of Quintus from Smyrna, a poet of late antiquity, who imitated Homeric diction and style closely, but doubtless wrote down his verses; and indeed, in the 'Posthomerica' doublets appear several times as underlined:

prosodic scheme	scheme with initial and final phonem	form
⌣ ⌣	v ⌣ ⌣ c	ἔλεν
	v ⌣ ⌣ v	ἔλε
	cc ⌣ ⌣ v	κτάνε
— ⌣	v — ⌣ v	εἶλε
	v — ⌣ c	εἶλεν
	cc — ⌣ v	κτεῖνε
	cc — ⌣ c	κτεῖνεν
	c — ⌣ c	δάμνατ', δάμναθ'
⌣ —	v ⌣ — c	ἔλεν
— ⌣ ⌣	v — ⌣ ⌣ v	ἔκτανε
	c — ⌣ ⌣ v	δάμνατο
⌣ — ⌣	v ⌣ — ⌣ v	*ἔπεφνε*
	v ⌣ — ⌣ v	*ὄλεσσε*
	c ⌣ — ⌣ v	*κατέκτα*
	c ⌣ — ⌣ v	*δάμασσε*
	v ⌣ — ⌣ c	*ἔπεφνεν*
	v ⌣ — ⌣ c	*ὄλεσσεν*
	v ⌣ — ⌣ c	*ἐνήρατ'*
	c ⌣ — ⌣ c	*δάμασσεν*
	c ⌣ — ⌣ c	*δάιξεν*
⌣ — ⌣ ⌣	v ⌣ — ⌣ ⌣ v	*ἐνήρατο*
	c ⌣ — ⌣ ⌣ v	*κατέκτανε*
	c ⌣ — ⌣ ⌣ c	*κατέκτανεν*
⌣ ⌣ — ⌣	v ⌣ ⌣ — ⌣ v	*ἐδάμασσε*
	v ⌣ ⌣ — ⌣ v	*ἐδάιξε*
	v ⌣ ⌣ — ⌣ c	*ἐδάμασσεν*
	c ⌣ ⌣ — ⌣ v	*κατέπεφνε*
	c ⌣ ⌣ — ⌣ c	*κατέπεφνεν*
— ⌣ ⌣ — ⌣	v — ⌣ ⌣ — ⌣ c	ἐξενάριξεν
⌣ ⌣ / — ⌣ ⌣		δόρυ / ἔμπεσεν

All these facts seem to justify the assumption that the multitude of verb-forms used in the *Iliad* to express the idea 'he killed' exists primarily to allow improvised verse-production. The variety of the different verb-forms should warn us to consider

their semantic value as absolutely identical. Homer may have felt a certain differen-
ce in their semantic value, so that we ought better to term them 'homonyms', but
these differences can, even *must* be ignored in this context, for Homer obviously
ignored them, too. Because of their *similar* meaning Homer was able to use them as
real synonyms, and this means that the decisive fact in their employment is metrical
exigency. This system of homonyms is likely to have been developed in pre-Ho-
meric oral poetry, where the theme 'killing in battle' probably already followed the
same pattern as in most of post-Homeric epics. Hence we may conclude: as to the
verbs, it is only their *predicate function* in the killing-scenes ('he killed') which re-
sults from semantic reasons (there must be a predicate denoting 'he killed'), and not
their actual realization in the individual form.

Thus when the traditional singer (and, indeed, Homer) wanted to create a verse
with the content 'X killed Y' by means of the traditional technique — which was
obviously strongly influenced by a technique of improvisation —, he could be sure
that, having placed the names of the combatants in the verse, he always had at his
disposal a verb-form easily fitting the prosodic situation brought about by these
names. Normally, he only had to take into account a certain amount of space for
this word-type, but this space could be almost anywhere in a verse. In the act of
improvisation, therefore, Homer could concentrate on the main issue, that is, on
the placing of the personal-names as representatives of subject and object.

As was the case with the verbs, so too among connecting elements are prosodic
doublets missing; limitations of space do not allow a demonstration here as exten-
sive as was given in the predicate forms, but the list on p. 32 demonstrates the
extent of prosodic variability clearly enough. Accordingly, Homer, when conceiv-
ing a verse-structure, had to remember to leave some room for this element, usually
in the second place of the clause, but, when giving the verse its final shape, had
some variants to fill out this yet empty space[27].

With this description we can get a notion of how the Homeric technique of
verse-production worked: Homer did not use given word-blocks, his basis rather
was the semantically functional single-word, which cannot be replaced by any
other. In the process of versification in the imaginative rhythmical structure called
'hexameter' (which was instantaneously present in the poet's mind at any moment)
he proceeded in such a way that he first placed the semantically most important
elements (in our example: the personal names) and then adapted to this basic struc-
ture material whose semantic content is likewise indispensable, but whose prosodic
scheme is variable (in our example: the verb-forms and conjunctions).

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[27] The reader ought not to reject as unrealistic this model of versification which starts
from the principle of the preliminary calculation of certain spaces for certain sentence-parts
and at the same time the preliminary calculation of their possible completion in the act of
speech: in the end it is the same principle by which we build sentences in normal speech. For
the present I shall refrain from citing the literature demonstrating this principal conformity.

These elements, however, cannot be the only constituents of a hexameter produced by improvisation, since in that case the verse would contain only *semantically functional* elements; thus there would be no difference between them and verses composed by writing. Even at that stage, when the names, the verb and the conjunction have been placed, there must be some space in the verse still not filled out with verbal components: only when a poet has much room at his disposal for the semantical nucleus of a verse is he able to place the different metrical schemes deriving from his poetic intention easily and quickly. This means that the semantical nucleus of a verse does not fill out the verse completely: necessarily there remains some void space. Now, for the completion of *this* space Homer obviously made use of material only loosely connected with the basic content of the verse and therefore on the whole semantically dispensable: it consists usually either of some general information about one of the persons involved (e.g. epithets or stereotype structures such as 'son of ...') or of explanation as to the way the action was carried out (e.g. adverbs that denote quickness or intensity, or nouns referring to instruments used in the action).

In order to make the entire argumentation more evident, this reconstruction of Homeric verse-making, so far described only theoretically, shall now be exemplified by a concrete analysis of one verse: E 43. The situation preceding this verse is that the leaders of the Achaeans have cut their way through the Trojan phalanx; the Trojans turn in flight; every Achaean leader kills one enemy; finally Agamemnon pierces Odios with a spear, a scene finished in E 42.

In the next scene Homer intended to describe a situation in which the demise of another Trojan is described in the shortest possible form. As the acting person Homer chose Idomeneus, – Antilochos, Aias, Odysseus, Thoas, Diomedes and Agamemnon having already distinguished themselves in the battle. The name Idomeneus may then have triggered the name of his victim, since a connection between the island of Crete (where Idomeneus was king) and Phaistos (the site of a Minoan palace) seems to be not unlikely.

From this semantically defined starting-point in the verse-structure – Ἰδομενεύς (nominative), Φαῖστον (accusative) – derive the following metrical consequences: the name Idomeneus implies a choriambic, a prosodical scheme regularly placed by Homer in the *first* hemistich[28]. When the name of the object, Φαῖστον (a trochee or spondee), is set in relation to the choriambic and when we consider the structure of the caesurae in the hexameter[29], we get the following most natural disposition:

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[28] Fundamental on this subject the paper by E.G. O'Neill Jr., „The Localization of Metrical Word-Types in the Greek Hexameter (Homer, Hesiod and the Alexandrians)", YClS 8 (1942), 103-178.

[29] H. Fränkel, *Der homerische und kallimachische Hexameter*, in: Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens, Munich 1962, p. 100-156.

Ἰδομενεὺς ‿ ‿ Φαῖστον ‿ – ‿ ‿ | – ‿ ‿ – x ‖

The two short syllables in the second dactyl are usually filled by the semantically indispensable, but prosodically variable connective element; under the prosodic conditions given by these names the only possible completion can be δ' ἄρα. For the continuation after the trochaic caesura the most metrically convenient word form would be a second paeon, a form which reaches from this caesura to the bucolic diaeresis, another main point of incision in the Homeric hexameter. In the scene-type 'killing in battle' the epic tradition provided one (and only one) prosodically fitting verb-form: ἐνήρατο (see the table on p. 31 above).

The semantic nucleus of the verse is herewith determined, the first four meters are complete. Now, for the end of the verse Homer could either add a bit of information in general conformity to the context but, in relation to the semantic nucleus of the verse, only decorative in nature (for example δουρὶ φαεινῷ), or after the bucolic caesura he could already introduce the next theme, a closer description of Idomeneus' victim. For the remaining adoneus Homer chose material by which a person previously unmentioned is individualized, but which in his prosodic scheme is dependent on what has been said before in this verse:

Ἰδομενεὺς δ' ἄρα Φαῖστον ἐνήρατο, Μῄονος υἱόν.

IV

In this description of the Homeric technique of verse-making some problems are simplified and others not even mentioned, limitations of space here forbidding the detailed exhibition of the entire argumentation; again I refer to my dissertation where I have described the proceeding at some length and where the probable production of about 60 Homeric verses is simulated.

In conclusion I want to make a few remarks on the question as to which consequences this new concept bears on the interpretation of Homer in general. There are mainly two: when we separate tradition (which now means: the mainly metrically functional elements) and individuality (the semantically functional verse-parts), two consequences are evident:

(1) principally, Homer must be interpreted exactly in the same way as any other poet: he obviously thought in categories of single words and not in formulaic word blocks. Thus the repeatedly demanded special poetics for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as oral poetry are not necessary, since in principle this new concept of Homeric versification allows the same method of interpretation as in any other poetry; and

(2) this new concept implies the problem of how to recognize with some certainty any given word as being semantically or metrically functional, especially outside a field so strongly influenced by tradition as the killing-scenes.

As I see it, the attempts to solve this second problem must go in the following direction: it is necessary to establish from the text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as many scene-structures as possible, however small they may be (there are enough

Homeric indices and concordances). Once these structures are established, the individual components can be compared according to prosodic scheme and verse-position with other components. This will probably be laborous and not very exciting work, but it might be rewarding.

This kind of research would increasingly elucidate the background of the metrically determined traditional material employed in Homeric verse; the integration of results reached so far could considerably shorten the process. In the end we would have gained an at least approximative insight into the extent of traditional material in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and, *vice versa*, insight also into what is semantically functional; from this insight then could be derived that for which this concept was ultimately developed: the chance to separate traditional verse-production (whose form depends on the act of non-metrical, 'natural' speech) from elaborated verse-production (which tends to suppress semantically context-irrelevant parts and to insert only words which are determined by a direct relation to the specific context). It is impossible to address this issue here, nor is that the purpose of this paper. The essential intention is to show that even the most traditional parts of epic speech (which are doubtlessly rooted in a technique of improvisation, even if the epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were in fact not composed by improvisation) were not *formulae* or fixed given units employed by Homer for the production of verse. Rather, the regular basis in Homeric verse-making was the single word, and Homer, therefore, can generally be interpreted like any other poet.

Koblenz   EDZARD VISSER