

A Battery of Canons: Homer and Collaborative Writing

The Troy tale as a whole has no single authoritative version, no individual “canon.” Rather, it is a multitranscript, composed of many different authorial voices (Nagy, n.d.). The canon of the Troy tale is fluid, shaped not by a central author but by specific influential works, most notably *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, along with the lost epics. Over time, plays such as *Trojan Women* and *Ajax*, developed, reinterpreting parts of the tale to tell a new story. This communal understanding bears similarities to the history of the online collaborative writing project known as the SCP Foundation, or SCP Wiki.

This paper will draw comparisons between the development of the Troy tale as the surviving texts have shown, and that of the SCP Wiki, in which authors describe the nature and containment of anomalous objects, written in the style of bureaucratic documents. Over 7000 “SCPs” have been written, alongside collections of stories describing the Foundation’s efforts, and a collective understanding of the implied universe has developed. While the community popularly states that “there is no canon,” the Wiki itself notes that it is more accurate to say there are “a multitude [of canons] which touch, cross, and dip into each other” (TroyL, n.d.). Building on Lord and Perry’s theory of oral-formulaic composition and how the Troy tale developed from it (1981), this paper will explore the similarities between the consolidation of the tale and the development of the Foundation’s universe. Using the Foundation as a case study, it will explore how such a framework of events can influence a narrative over time.

The Wiki’s earliest entries can be compared to the early versions of the Troy tale, before it was consolidated into the epics. Originally, all that was “known” was one anonymous post, which implied the existence of other entities and a “Foundation” capturing them. Early authors, therefore, were free to make up additional details, such as a system for classifying the entities or the command structure of the Foundation. If other writers liked the new ideas, they incorporated them into their own stories. While each entry was its own “instance” of the Foundation, with different

interpretations of its mission and status, a shared understanding of the universe developed by consensus (Anonymous and Modern_Erasmus, n.d.). This is similar to the episodic nature of the early Troy tale; the sections of the modern epics were originally standalone stories.

Consider on its own now the embassy to Achilles, notable for being much older than other sections (Page 1959, 297–315): it follows a formulaic, dialogue-based structure, that could easily be told as its own conversation. Further, if taken without knowledge of the preceding events, it implies a larger overarching narrative, making it an excellent worldbuilding piece. Much like in the early SCPs, the story is being told as much by what is implied as what is said.

Over time, both the Troy tale and the Foundation's universe began to consolidate into a "baseline" version. Two years into the Wiki's history, much more of the universe's lore had been developed. There was an understanding of the Foundation's structure, the major locations the objects were contained at, and even recurring characters based on major authors. While the precise details were intentionally unspecified, one had to have a good reason to break from the general consensus. Likewise, the consolidation of the Troy tale into the epics meant that the understanding thereof stabilized. While the overarching narrative maintained some flexibility, there was a general understanding of what to expect.

While the Foundation and the Troy tale are not perfectly comparable, the development of the former can provide some insights into that of the latter. In both cases, there is an idea of the narrative, an abstract framework of events, but the details are dependent on the telling. The Wiki was developed communally, with no one author dictating the Foundation's universe. However, by consensus, the fandom developed a general understanding of their world. Likewise, the Troy tale crystallized into a more set form with the Homeric epics, but the specifics remained in flux. Analyzing the decentralized way the SCP Wiki's universe developed can provide a new perspective for understanding the Troy tale and the way it was consolidated.

Works Cited

- Anonymous and Modern_Erasmus. n.d. "History Of The Universe: Part One." SCP Wiki. Accessed April 28, 2024. <https://scp-wiki.wikidot.com/history-of-the-universe-part-one>.
- Lord, Albert Bates. 1981. *The Singer of Tales*. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Nagy, Gregory. n.d. "The Homer Multitext Project." Center for Hellenic Studies. <https://chs.harvard.edu/curated-article/gregory-nagy-the-homer-multitext-project/>.
- Page, D.L. 1959. *History and the Homeric Iliad*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- TroyL. n.d. "Canon Hub." SCP Wiki. Accessed April 29, 2024. <https://scp-wiki.wikidot.com/canon-hub>.