

Non-repetition in Homeric Epic

This paper explores unique expressions in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* at several levels, from individual words (sc. *hapax legomena*, gathered in M. Kumpf's monograph), to short noun-based phrases (drawing upon the *hapax ezeugmena* assembled by J. Dee in *Iuncturae Homericae*), and syntactically complete indicative-main-verb sentences, for which as yet no repertory exists, although one might perhaps be assembled from a properly-tagged digitized text. (A higher level, "type-scenes" discussed inter al. by W. Arend and B. Fenik, is addressed only in passing.)

Such an examination is all the more important because for the nine decades since Milman Parry began publishing, much of the attention of scholars has, understandably, been drawn to the "low-hanging fruit" made so spectacularly conspicuous in the old concordances of Prendergast and Dunbar, viz. the complex systems of "formulae" that led to the creation of the "oral-formulaic theory."

The first level seems uncontroversial: in any reasonably large corpus of text, "oral" or "literate," there will be a large number of words that occur only once. That is true even for the famously "formulaic" diction of the Homeric epics: more than 2000 of the over 7000 non-capitalized words are *hapax*, although a significant percentage are prefixal compounds of common root verbs. Noun-epithet combinations show a more striking proportion; 2330 occur more than once, whereas more than 3670 are unique. The paper briefly discusses the possible implications of those facts before moving to the principal topic, the nature and degree of repetition in whole sentences.

That is of course a realm of enormous scope; even if a full database of the relevant material existed, it would be, as Diels said of a proposed *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, a

“monstrosity.” The paper presents select samples of sentences, extracted from the standard sources of Gehring and Cunliffe, which contain verbs of low, medium and high frequency to illustrate the difficulty of establishing clear boundaries between what is “formulaic repetition” and what is not.

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