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Friedrich Nietzsche

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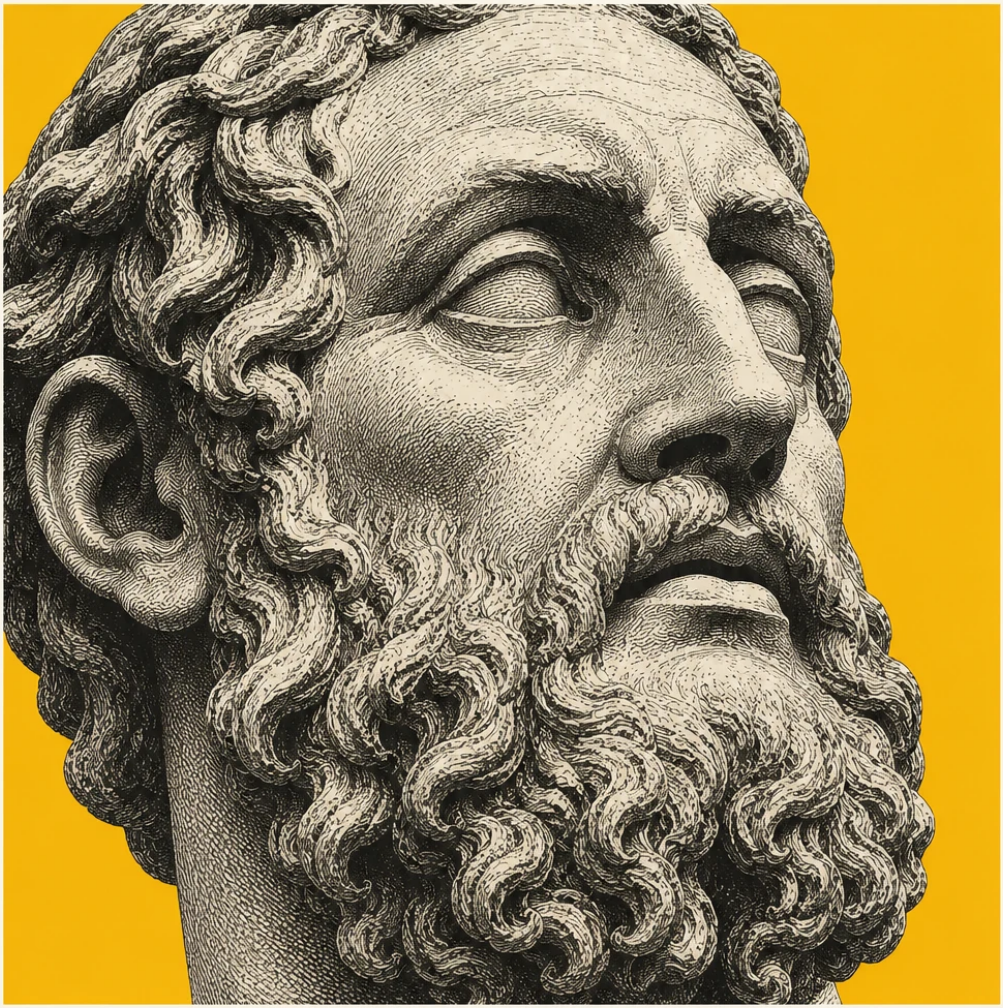
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Homer and the Study of Ancient Greek and Latin Texts

(A first lecture given at the University of Basel, 28 May 1869.)

Today, people don't seem to have any clear, settled opinion about the study of ancient Greek and Latin texts. We notice this among educated people in general, and just as much among those who work in the field itself. The reason is that the subject has many sides. It has no single, simple idea holding it together. Instead, it is a loose pile of very different kinds of research, linked to each other only by the name "philology." We have to admit openly that philology borrows, to some degree, from several other fields. It is mixed together like a magic potion brewed from the strangest liquids, metals and bones. We can even add that it hides an artistic side as well. This side, for reasons of beauty and morals, could be called commanding, because it tells us what ought to be. And it pulls against philology's purely scientific way of working. Philology is made up of history, just as much as of natural science, and just as much as of the study of beauty. It is history because it tries to understand how the characters of different peoples show themselves, in ever new pictures, and to find the rule that governs how things pass away. It is natural science because it tries to get to the bottom of the deepest instinct humans have: the instinct for speech. And finally, it is the study of beauty because, out of all the ancient worlds we know about, it tries to pick out the one called "classical." It does this hoping, and claiming, to dig up the perfect world buried underneath it, and to hold up before our own time a mirror showing the classical standards that last forever. These scientific drives and these drives toward beauty and goodness are completely different. They have been grouped under one shared name, like a kind of fake kingdom with a pretend king. The clearest proof of this is that philology, in every age since it began, has also been about teaching. A

teacher could choose the parts that were most useful for education. And so the science, or at least the scientific goal, that we call philology slowly grew out of a practical job, a job that came about because the science itself needed it.

People have chased these goals of philology sometimes with more passion and sometimes with less. It depended on how cultured a particular age was and how far its taste had developed. But on the other hand, the people who work in this field tend to treat whatever goals suit their own talents as the one true goal of philology. And so it happens that the public's opinion of philology depends on how impressive the individual philologists are as people!

Today we live in a time that has seen outstanding men in almost every branch of philology. And yet people's judgment about it has become more and more uncertain, and their interest in its problems, and their wish to take part, have slowly faded. When public opinion is this unsure and half-formed, it harms a science, because its enemies, both hidden and open, have a much better chance of success. And philology has a great many enemies like this. Where don't we meet them, these mockers? They are always ready to take a swing at the philological "moles": creatures whose actual job is eating dust, and who dig up and eat for the eleventh time what they have already eaten ten times before. For enemies of this kind, though, philology is just a useless, harmless pastime that hurts no one. It is something to laugh at, not something to hate. But on the other side, there is an endless, furious hatred of philology. It appears wherever people are afraid of any ideal at all, wherever modern man bows down and worships himself, and wherever love of ancient Greek culture is seen as an old-fashioned and so very unimportant way of looking at things. Against these enemies, we philologists must always rely on help from artists and people with an artistic mind. Only they can judge how the sword of crude ignorance swings over the head of anyone who forgets the

simplicity, too deep for words, and the noble dignity of the ancient Greek. Only they understand that no progress in trade or industry, however brilliant, no school rules, and no political education of the masses, however wide and complete, can protect us from the curse of silly and crude offences against good taste. Nor can they protect us from being destroyed by the stony, deadly stare of strict classical taste.

While these two groups of opponents look at philology as a whole with jealous eyes, there are many different conflicts coming from other directions too. Philologists are quarrelling among themselves. Fights break out inside the field because of pointless arguments about who comes first, and because of jealousy between them. But most of all, the fights come from the differences, even hostilities, that are all packed into the one name "philology." These different drives do not, by any means, fit together naturally.

Science has one thing in common with art. To both of them, the most ordinary, everyday thing looks completely new and attractive, as if it had been changed by magic and were being seen for the first time. Art, the beautiful temptress, says: life is worth living. Science says: life is worth knowing. From this contrast comes a painful and stubborn split, first in the theory of classical philology, and then in the practice that grows out of that theory. We can look at the ancient world in a scientific way. We can try to see what happened through the eyes of a historian. Or we can sort and compare the language forms of ancient masterpieces, and at least fit them under some rule of how words are shaped. But when we do this, we always lose the wonderful creative power, the real fragrance, of the air of the ancient world. We forget the passionate feeling that, without our planning it, drove our thinking and our enjoyment back to the Greeks in the first place. From here on, we have to notice a clear and very surprising hostility, one that philology has every reason to regret. It comes from the very people whose help we should be able to count on most: the

artistic lovers of the ancient world, the warm supporters of Greek beauty and noble simplicity. From them we hear harsh voices crying out that the philologists themselves are the real enemies of the ideals of the ancient world, the ones who destroy them. The poet Schiller blamed the philologists for scattering Homer's crown of laurel leaves to the winds, that is, for stripping Homer of his glory. And it was none other than the poet Goethe who, when young, had supported the theories of Friedrich August Wolf, a German scholar, about Homer, but later took it back in these lines:

With your clever arguments you took away the love and worship we once felt. You tell us the Iliad was nothing more than a heap of pieces stuck together. But don't think it is wrong of us to disagree: the warm love and worship of youth leads us to know the truth, and to feel that the poem was made by one single poet.

The reason for this lack of respect and reverence must lie deeper. Many people are unsure about it. Maybe scholars have no feel for art and beauty, so they cannot do justice to the ideal. Or maybe the urge to say "no" to everything has become their guiding rule, one that tears things down and smashes sacred images. But when even lovers of the ancient world, full of such doubts and hesitations, point to today's study of ancient Greek and Latin texts as something doubtful, how much influence must we give to the angry outbursts of the practical-minded critics and the empty slogans of people who are famous only for the moment? It would be very unwise for me to answer those critics today, especially when I think about who is sitting in this audience. At least it would be unwise if I don't want to end up like that clever speaker in Sparta. He stood up in public to praise and defend the hero Herakles, and someone cut him off by asking: "But who has ever said anything bad about him?" Still, I can't help thinking that some of these doubts are still ringing in the ears of quite a few people here. You can still often hear them from noble men with artistic gifts.

Even an honest scholar must feel these doubts himself, and feel them very painfully, in moments when he is feeling low. For the single person, there is no escape from these conflicts. But what we claim, and what we write on our flag, is this: the study of ancient Greek and Latin texts, taken as a whole, has nothing at all to do with the quarrels and squabbles of the individual people who practise it. This field is a strange half-and-half creature. Its whole movement, both in science and in art, is aimed at one thing, even if it moves as slowly as a giant: building a bridge across the gap between the dreamed-of perfect ancient world and the ancient world as it really was. That dreamed-of perfect ancient world may be nothing more than the beautiful flowering of the German longing for the sunny south. In this way, the study of ancient texts is only chasing the final purpose of its own existence, which is to melt together drives that were enemies to begin with and were only forced together. We can say whatever we like about how this goal can never be reached. We can even call the goal itself an unreasonable demand. But the effort to reach it is very real. And I would like to try to show, with an example, that the most important steps in this field never lead away from the dreamed-of perfect ancient world, but toward it. I want to show that just when people are wrongly talking about holy shrines being torn down, new and better altars are being built. So let us look at the so-called Homer question (who really wrote Homer's poems) from this point of view. The poet Schiller called the most important problem in this question a piece of crude ignorance from narrow-minded scholars.

That important problem is the question of whether Homer was one real person.

Today you hear everywhere the firm opinion that the question of whether Homer was one real person is out of date, and that it is something quite different from the real Homer question (who really wrote Homer's poems). It is also true that, for a certain period, such

as the period scholars are in right now, the center of the debate may move away from the problem of the poet as a person. Right now, for example, scholars are making a careful attempt to rebuild Homer's poems without the idea of one person behind them, treating them as the work of several different people. But where is the real center of a scientific question? It is rightly found at the point where the rising flood of new ideas has swelled up, that is, where one scholar's specific research touches the whole life of science and culture. In other words, if someone says the heart of the question is how it matters for the history of culture, then in the field of Homer studies he must take his stand on the question of whether Homer was one real person. That question is the truly fertile oasis in the desert of the whole debate. Here is why. In the case of Homer, the modern world tested a great new way of looking at history. I won't say it fully learned it, only that it tested it. And without giving my own opinion yet on whether this test went well, or even could go well, it was at any rate the first time this fruitful way of thinking was ever used. Through it, scholars learned to see that figures in the life of ancient peoples, which looked solid and fixed, were really beliefs packed together into one shape. Through it, they saw for the first time the amazing power of the spirit of a whole people to show its customs and beliefs in the form of one person. Historical criticism has now confidently taken up this method of making seemingly solid persons dissolve into thin air. So it is fair to point to that first attempt as an important event in the history of science, without asking whether it worked in this particular case or not.

It often happens that, before a discovery that changes an age, a series of striking signs and wonderful feelings come first. Even the experiment I just mentioned has its own interesting history, and that history goes back to a surprisingly ancient time. Friedrich August Wolf, a German scholar, pointed out exactly where the ancient Greeks

dropped the question. The high point of Greek studies of history and literature, and so also the high point of their most important question, the Homer question (who really wrote Homer's poems), came in the age of the scholars of ancient Alexandria. Up to then, the Homer question had gone through a long, steady chain of development, and the position of those scholars seemed to be the last link in that chain. Indeed, it was the last link the ancient world was able to reach. These scholars believed that the Iliad and the Odyssey were made by one single Homer. They said it was possible, as a matter of the human mind, for two such different works to come from the head of one genius. In this they disagreed with the 'Separators' (who said two poets wrote the epics). But the Separators stood for the most extreme doubt of a few lone people in ancient times, not for the ancient world as a whole. The two books leave a different overall impression. To explain this while still assuming that one poet wrote both, scholars pointed to the different stages of the poet's life. They compared the poet of the Odyssey to the setting sun, meaning he wrote it in his old age. These critics never stopped hunting for differences in the language and ideas of the two poems. But at this same time, they also worked out a history of Homer's poem and of its handing down by word of mouth. According to this history, the differences were not Homer's fault. They were the fault of the people who wrote his words down and the people who sang them. People believed that Homer's poem was passed from one generation to the next by word of mouth. Mistakes were blamed on the singers, who made things up on the spot and sometimes forgot things. At a certain point, around the time of Pisistratus, ruler of Athens, the poems that had been repeated aloud were said to have been collected and written down. But the writers, so the story goes, took some liberties with the text. They moved some lines around and added outside material here and there. This whole theory is the most important one in literary studies that the ancient world produced. In particular, the ancients saw that

Homer's poems were spread by word of mouth, which is very different from the habits of an age that learns from books. That shows a deep ancient wisdom that deserves our admiration. Between those times and the generation that produced Friedrich August Wolf, we have to jump over a long empty stretch of history. But in our own age, we find the argument left exactly where it was when the ancient world lost the strength to keep arguing. It does not matter to us that Wolf took as a certain fact, handed down from the past, what the ancients themselves had only put forward as a theory. One very typical feature of this theory is that it takes the question of whether Homer was one real person completely seriously. It assumes that a person's works will always show a certain level of inner harmony. And with these two helpful extra assumptions, anything that seems to fall below that level, or to clash with that inner harmony, is at once thrown out as not really by Homer. But this feature, instead of wanting to accept a real, solid person who was more than human, also climbs through all the stages leading up to that high point, with more and more energy and clearness. A person's personal character is felt more and more strongly and is stressed more and more. People insist ever more firmly that a single Homer was possible. If we go backwards from this high point, step by step, we find a guide to understanding the Homer problem in Aristotle. For him, Homer was a perfect, tireless artist who knew his goal and how to reach it. But there is still a trace of childish criticism in Aristotle. It shows in the simple way he went along with the popular belief that Homer wrote the model for all comic epics, a poem called the Margites. If we go back even further than Aristotle, we see that people were less and less able to picture a single person. More and more poems were credited to Homer. And every period shows how critical it was by how much, and what, it counted as Homer's work. As we look back in this way, we naturally sense that far beyond the time of the historian Herodotus there lies a

period when a huge flood of great epic poems was all linked to the name of Homer.

Let us imagine that we are living in the time of Pisistratus, ruler of Athens. Back then, the word "Homer" covered a huge pile of very different poems. So what did people mean by "Homer" at that time? It is clear that the people of that generation could not picture one real person, or see where his work began and ended. By then, Homer himself had come to matter very little. And here we run into a serious question: what came before this period? Did Homer as a person slowly fade away into an empty name, because no one could get hold of him? Or had all the Homeric poems been collected into one big body, with the nation simply and innocently picturing itself as the figure of Homer? In other words: was the person made up out of an idea, or was the idea made up out of a real person? This is the true Homer question (who really wrote Homer's poems), the central problem of whether Homer was one real person.

But this question becomes even harder to answer when we look for an answer from a different side: from the poems themselves, the ones that have come down to us. Today it is hard for us to clearly understand the law of gravity. It takes real effort to grasp that the earth changes the way it moves when another body in space changes its position, even though nothing physical connects the two. In the same way, it takes some work to get a clear picture of this amazing problem. The problem is like a coin that has passed from hand to hand for so long that its original, very clear stamp has worn away. Here are poems so great that even the greatest geniuses lose heart when they try to match them. These poems hold up images that can never be beaten, for all later generations to admire. And yet, whenever we try to grab hold of the poet who wrote them, we find only a hollow, shaky name. Nowhere do we find the solid core of a strong, real person. Even the poet Goethe, who was a genius himself, tried and failed to

solve the mystery of why Homer is so out of reach. He asked: "For who would fight against the gods? Who would fight even against one god?"

The idea of folk poetry seemed to offer a bridge over this problem. People said that a power deeper and more basic than any single creative person had been at work. They said that a whole people, at the happiest time of its life, when its imagination and its skill at shaping things were at their very peak, had created these enormous poems. There is something almost intoxicating about this idea of a poem made by a whole people, because it is so broad and universal. As art lovers, we enjoy the feeling of a people's gift bursting out, wide and overwhelming. We take delight in it the way we delight in a huge waterfall that nothing can hold back. But as soon as we look at this idea up close, we find ourselves, without meaning to, swapping it for something else. Instead of the spirit of a whole people making poetry, we picture a crowd of people making poetry. We imagine a long line of folk poets in whom personal character means nothing. In them, the stormy movement of a people's spirit, the deep natural insight of a people's eye, and the endless richness of a people's imagination were once strong. We imagine a line of original geniuses, each tied to a certain time, a certain kind of poetry, and a certain subject.

People were right to be suspicious of this idea. Nature hands out her rarest and most precious creation, genius, very sparingly. Could it really be that she suddenly decided to pour out her gifts so generously, all in one direction? And here the prickly question came up again: couldn't we manage with just one genius, and use him to explain why these poems, with their unmatched excellence, exist today? So now people began searching closely for exactly what this excellence and uniqueness consisted of. One group said it could not lie in the way the whole works were built, because that building is far from perfect. Instead, they said, it must surely be found in single songs,

above all in the separate pieces, not in the whole. A second group, on the other hand, took shelter behind the authority of Aristotle. Aristotle had especially admired Homer's "divine" gift in choosing his whole subject, and in the way he planned it and carried it out. If this overall plan could not be clearly seen, this group said, that was not the poet's fault. It was the fault of the way the poems were handed down to later generations. Over time, people touched them up and slipped in extra lines, so the original shape of the work slowly became blurred. The harder the first group hunted for unevenness, contradictions, and confusing passages, the harder the second group worked to clear away whatever, in their view, hid the original plan. They hoped, if possible, to leave nothing behind except the actual words of the original epic itself. The second group, of course, held firmly to the idea that one groundbreaking genius had composed these great works. The first group, on the other hand, went back and forth between two ideas. One idea was that there was one genius plus a number of lesser poets. The other idea assumed only a number of individual singers, some good and some just average. But it also claimed there was a mysterious outpouring, a deep national urge to make art, which showed itself through these individual singers, who were little more than a channel for it. It is this last group that we have to thank for presenting the Homeric poems as the expression of that mysterious urge.

All these schools of thought begin by assuming that the problem of the poems' present form can be solved by a judgment of taste about beauty. But first we must wait for a decision on where exactly the proper dividing line falls between the man of genius and the poetic spirit of a whole people. Are there typical differences between what the man of genius says and what the poetic spirit of a whole people says?

But this whole contrast is unfair and misleading. Nothing in modern thinking about beauty and art is more dangerous than the idea that there are two kinds of poetry: folk poetry on one side, and poetry by one single poet on the other, which people usually call poetry by trained individual poets. This idea was a reaction, or, if you like, a false belief. It came right after the most important discovery ever made by the science of history and old texts: the discovery and appreciation of the spirit of a whole people. This discovery opened the way to a truly scientific view of history. Until then, history had been just a pile of facts, and in many ways it still is today. People expected new facts to keep being added, and they feared this huge, overflowing heap would never be put into proper order. Now, for the first time, people understood something. They saw that the power of larger groups and larger wills, which they had long felt, was greater than the tiny, pitiful will of one single person.[1] They now saw that everything truly great in the world of the will could not have its deepest root in the weak and short-lived will of one person. And finally, they discovered the strong instincts of the masses. They decided that these hidden, unaware drives were the foundations and supports of what we call world history. But this newly lit flame also threw a shadow. That shadow was the very false belief I mentioned before: the belief that set folk poetry against poetry by one single poet. In this way, people stretched the idea of the spirit of a people until it also meant the mind of a people. They were misled by a tempting comparison. They took the principle of a larger group personality, which really works only in the world of the will, and applied it to the world of thinking and artistic ideas. The masses have never been flattered more than this, when the crown of genius was placed on their empty heads. People imagined that new outer layers kept forming around a small core, so to speak. They thought these pieces of folk poetry grew like a snowball growing as it rolls, picking things up as they were handed down by word of mouth. But they were ready to think of that core as being as tiny as

possible, so tiny that they could sometimes get rid of it completely without losing anything from the size of the snowball. According to this view, the text itself and the stories that grew up around it are one and the same thing.

[1] Of course, Nietzsche later realized that this was not true. (Note from the translator.)

In fact, though, this contrast between folk poetry and poetry by one single poet does not exist at all. On the contrary, all poetry, including folk poetry, needs a single person in between, someone who actually shapes it. So this much-misused contrast only makes sense if by 'a poem by one single poet' we mean a poem that did not grow out of the feelings of ordinary people. It would have to be a poem written by a poet who is not one of the people, in a setting that has nothing to do with the people. For example, it might be something that ripened slowly in the study room of a learned man.

Linked to the false belief in crowds making up poetry together is another false belief. It says that folk poetry belongs only to one particular period in a people's history and then dies out. And indeed, this follows naturally from the first false belief I mentioned. According to this school of thought, as folk poetry slowly fades away, poetry by trained individual poets takes its place. This new poetry is the work of single minds, not of masses of people. But the same forces that were at work back then are still at work now. And the way they work has stayed exactly the same. The great poet of a time when people read and write is still a folk poet, in just as full a sense as the folk poet of a time when no one could read. The difference between them is not in how their poems come into being. The difference is in how the poems spread and are passed along; in short, in handing down by word of mouth. Without the help of writing, this handing down by word of mouth is always in danger. It runs the risk of leaving

inside the poems traces of all the different people who passed the poems on by speaking them.

If we apply all these ideas to Homer's poems, we see that our theory of a poetry-making spirit of the people gets us nowhere. We are always sent back to the single poet. So our task is this: we must separate what could only have come from one single poet's mind from what was, so to speak, swept along by the stream of passing poems on by speaking them. And that second part makes up a very important piece of Homer's poems.

Ever since the history of literature stopped being just a list of names, people have tried to understand and describe the personal character of each poet. Part of the method is a kind of mechanical method. It says that we must explain, that is, work out from general rules, why this or that personal character turned out this way and not some other way. So people now study the details of a poet's life, his surroundings, the people he knew, and the events of his time. They believe that if they mix all these ingredients together, they can build the personal character they are looking for. But they forget that the key living spark, the special personal qualities that cannot be pinned down, can never be produced from a mixture like this. The less we know about the poet's life and times, the less this mechanical method can be used. And when all we have is the writer's works and his name, it becomes almost impossible to find his personal character, at least for those who trust this mechanical method. This is especially true when the works are perfect, when they are pieces of folk poetry. For these mechanical thinkers, the best way to spot a poet's personal character is to notice where he departs from the spirit of the people: his odd turns and hidden hints. So the fewer of these differences there are in a poem, the weaker the traces of the single poet who wrote it will be.

Scholars believed they could see departures in Homer's poems, parts that were dull or below the usual standard. All of these were blamed on handing down by word of mouth, which became the scapegoat. So what was left of Homer's own personal work? Nothing but a string of beautiful, striking passages, picked out according to each person's own taste. Each scholar used his own artistic sense to pick out whatever seemed special and beautiful to him, and then he called that total 'Homer.'

This is the heart of all the mistakes about Homer. From the very beginning, the name Homer had nothing to do with the idea of perfect beauty, or even with the Iliad and the Odyssey. The idea that Homer wrote the Iliad and the Odyssey is not something handed down to us from history. It is a judgment of taste about beauty.

There is only one road that takes us back to the time before Pisistratus, ruler of Athens, and helps us understand what the name Homer really meant. On one side, this road runs through the reports that have come down to us about where Homer was born. From these reports we see something important. His name is always linked with heroic epic poems. But he is no more called the maker of the Iliad and the Odyssey than he is called the author of the Thebais, or of any of the other old epic poems of the Trojan cycle. On the other side, there is an old story, handed down by word of mouth, about the contest between Homer and Hesiod. This story proves that when people heard these two names, they naturally, without thinking about it, pictured two kinds of epic poetry: the heroic kind and the teaching kind. It also proves that the name "Homer" was about subject matter, not about style or form. This made-up contest with Hesiod did not show even the faintest hint of a personal character. But from the time of Pisistratus onwards, the Greek sense of beauty grew amazingly fast. People felt more and more strongly that some of those epics were worth more, in terms of beauty, than others. The Iliad and the Odys-

sey rose up out of that deep flood of poems, like things floating up from deep water, and they have stayed on the surface ever since. As this sorting by beauty went on, the idea of Homer slowly became narrower. In the old meaning, which was about subject matter, "Homer" was the father of the heroic epic poem. This changed into a meaning based on taste and beauty: Homer became the father of all poetry, and also its very first model. This change happened at the same time as a new, reason-based kind of criticism. That criticism turned Homer the magician into a poet who could actually have existed. It defended the many different subjects and styles of all those epics against the idea that one single poet made them all. And little by little it lifted that heavy load of old Trojan-cycle epics off Homer's shoulders.

So Homer, as the poet of the Iliad and the Odyssey, is a judgment of taste about beauty. But this does not mean we are claiming that the poet of these epics was just an imaginary being, someone who could not have existed because of what beauty demands. Only very few scholars of the study of ancient Greek and Latin texts would hold that opinion. Most of them argue that one single person was responsible for the overall plan of a poem like the Iliad, and also that this person was Homer. We can accept the first part of this claim. But, following what I have said, the second part must be rejected. And I very much doubt that most of the people who accept the first part have thought about the points that follow.

The overall plan of an epic like the Iliad is not one complete whole. It is not like a living body where every part grows together. Instead, it is a number of pieces strung together, a collection of thoughts and scenes arranged according to the rules of beauty and taste. Of course, one way to measure how great an artist is, is to see how much he can take in with one single look and then lay out in rhythm and verse. But the endless flood of pictures and events in Homer's epic forces us to admit that such a wide view is almost impossible. When a poet can-

not see the whole thing at once with an artist's eye, he usually stacks one idea on top of another, and tries to fit his characters into one big, all-covering scheme.

The better he knows the basic rules of what makes art beautiful, the better he will manage this. He may even get some people to believe that he took in the whole subject with one single, powerful glance.

The Iliad is not a carefully woven wreath; it is more like a loose bunch of flowers. As many pictures as possible are crammed onto one canvas. But the man who put them there did not care whether the way the pictures were grouped was always fitting and pleasing in its rhythm. He knew very well that nobody would ever look at the collection as a whole. People would only look at the separate parts. But this stringing together of pieces shows a sense of art that was not yet very advanced, and was even less fully understood or widely valued. So it cannot have been the real deed of Homer, the real Homeric event that changed history. In fact, this overall plan came later, much later than the time when Homer became famous. So those who search for the "original and perfect overall plan" are chasing a ghost. The risky journey of passing poems on by speaking them had already come to an end just when the orderly arrangement showed up. The damage done to the poems along that journey could not have touched the overall plan, because the plan was never part of what was handed down from one generation to the next.

Still, the fact that the overall plan is not perfect should not stop us from seeing the person who arranged the poem as someone different from the real poet. It is likely that everything made in those times with deliberate, planned thinking about beauty was far, far worse than the songs that rose up naturally in the poet's mind and were set down with natural, unplanned power. But we can go even further. If we also compare the other old epic poems of the Trojan cycle, then the person

who arranged the Iliad and the Odyssey clearly deserves credit for doing something fairly great in this deliberate, technical kind of putting-together. This is a credit we might have been ready to give from the start, and in my view it ranks among the very highest in the field of natural, unplanned creation. We might even be ready to call this act of putting things together very important. Think of all those dull passages and contradictions. People treat them as very important, but really they only depend on the reader's personal view, and we usually see them as stony leftovers from the time when the poems were handed down by word of mouth. Could they not simply be the almost unavoidable flaws that come to a poet of genius who takes on a work with almost nothing like it before, and which turns out to be hard beyond measure?

Let me point this out: once we understand how very differently the natural, unplanned and the deliberate, planned ways of working operate, the whole Homer question shifts. In my opinion, it also becomes clearer.

We believe that a great poet wrote the Iliad and the Odyssey. But we do not believe that this poet was Homer.

This question has already been settled. Think of the generation that made up all those many stories about Homer, that turned the contest between Homer and Hesiod into a poem, and that thought all the poems of the epic cycle were by Homer. When those people said the name "Homer," they did not mean a special style of beauty. They meant something special about subject matter. That age placed Homer among artists like Orpheus, Eumolpus, Daedalus, and Olympus. These were the legendary inventors of a new kind of art. So, out of gratitude, people credited them with all the later works that grew out of that new kind of art.

And the amazing genius to whom we owe the Iliad and the Odyssey was one of these grateful later people. He too gave up his own name, offering it like a sacrifice on the altar of Homeros, the legendary first father of epic poetry.

Up to now, gentlemen, I believe I have shown you the basic questions of thought and of beauty that lie behind the problem of whether Homer was one real person. I have strictly kept all small details out of the way. I did this because I assume that the main shape of this huge mountain, full of tunnels and holes, which we call the Homer question (who really wrote Homer's poems), is easiest to see when you look down on it from a high place far away. But I think I have also reminded two things to those lovers of the ancient world who so enjoy blaming us scholars for having no respect for great ideas and for loving to tear things down without building anything. First, those "great" ideas, such as the idea of Homer as a single poetic genius who could not be split up or touched, were, before the time of Wolf, simply too great. That is why, when we try to grab hold of them now, they turn out to be completely empty inside and slip through our fingers. If the study of ancient Greek and Latin texts comes back to those same ideas and tries again to put new ideas in old forms, the ideas only look the same on the outside. In truth, everything has become new: the bottle and the mind, the wine and the word. Everywhere we see signs that for the last hundred years this field of study has lived side by side with poets, thinkers, and artists. Because of that, the pile of ashes that people once called the study of ancient Greek and Latin texts has now turned into good, even rich, soil where things can grow. [2]

[2] Translator's note: Nietzsche later realized that, sadly, this claim was not true.

There is a second thing I would like to remind those lovers of the ancient world who turn their backs on the study of ancient texts because they are unhappy with it. You honour the everlasting masterpieces of the ancient Greek mind in poetry and sculpture. You think you are much luckier than earlier generations, who had to live without them. But do not forget that this whole magical land was once buried under mountains of prejudice. It took the blood, sweat, and hard work of countless people in our field to lift that world out of the deep pit it had sunk into. We admit that our field did not create this world, and did not compose that everlasting music. But is it not an achievement, a great achievement, to be just a skilled performer who lets the world hear, for the first time, music that had lain hidden for so long, looked down on and impossible to read? Who was Homer before Wolf's brilliant research? A good old man, at best called a "natural genius," and in any case the child of a rough, uncivilized age, full of mistakes against good taste and good manners. Listen to how a top scholar wrote about Homer as late as 1783: "Where does the good man live? Why did he stay hidden for so long? By the way, can't you get me a shadow portrait of him?"

We ask to be *thanked*. Not for our own sake, because each of us is only a tiny speck. We ask it in the name of philology, the study of old texts, itself. Philology is not one of the Muses, and it is not one of the Graces. It is a messenger of the gods. Long ago the Muses came down to the dull, suffering farmers of Boeotia. In the same way, Philology comes into a world full of dark colours and gloomy pictures, a world full of the deepest sorrows that can never be healed. And it speaks to people kindly, to comfort them. It tells them about the beautiful, godlike figure of a faraway, rosy, happy magical land.

It is time for me to finish. But before I do, I must add a few personal words. I hope the occasion of this lecture gives me the right to do so.

It is only fair that a scholar of old texts should state his goal, and the way to reach it, in a short motto, like a statement of what he believes. Let me do this with a saying by the Roman writer Seneca, which I will turn around the other way:

"What used to be the study of texts has become philosophy."

By this I mean that all the work of studying texts should be held inside, and surrounded by, a philosophical way of seeing things. In that way of seeing, every small, separate, isolated detail fades away like steam, as something hateful. Only great, unified views are left. So now that I have told you what I believe about my work, I hope you will let me feel that I am no longer a stranger among you. Please assure me that, by working together with you toward this goal, I am truly living up to the trust that the highest leaders of this community have honoured me with.

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