

The Iliad

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Readers of this book who are familiar with the literary criticism of the *Iliad* will easily recognise my debt to such writers as Lesky, Schadewaldt, Whitman, and more recently Adam Parry, Redfield and Griffin. I have not recorded particular instances of indebtedness or disagreement, unless they bore on my argument, but there are three different kinds of indebtedness that I particularly want to acknowledge in the hope that this book is at least a partial repayment.

My first and greatest debt is to the writings of Karl Reinhardt, and especially to his seminal 1938 essay on the judgement of Paris. Of the great German classicists of his generation he was the only one who was also a literary critic of the highest order. He had a powerful and deeply ironic mind that was far more at ease with hints and questions than with description or explanation, but precisely because he respected the genius of a poet as something beyond naming he had a unique gift for evoking it from a distance for his readers to see. The quality of the 'Iliadic' has been captured more successfully by Reinhardt than by any other Homeric critic.

My second debt is to my teachers and fellow-students in the Classics Department at Indiana University, where in the early sixties I first studied Homer systematically and formed the notion that one day I might write a book about him. Finally I wish to thank my colleague Kenneth Seeskin and my students in the Humanities Program at Northwestern University for being patient and critical listeners to my lectures on the *Iliad*. The virtues of this book, if there are any, owe much to the challenge of those occasions.

My analysis in the following chapters rests throughout on a reading of the Greek text, and line references are those in the Oxford Classical Texts edition. I have quoted Richmond Lattimore's translation, with slight corrections in a handful of places. In the orthography of Greek names I have followed Lattimore's translation, except for a few very common names, including that of Achilles. I have quoted Greek as little as possible and, except for one extended passage, I have used transliteration. Classicists will bristle at this barbarism, but transliterations, which can be achieved without ambiguity, provide at least some information for the Greekless reader.

I have kept documentation very light. References to the *Iliad* generally identify only the first line of a passage by book and line number unless the context calls for defining the limits of a passage more precisely. References to the works of scholars cited in the text appear in the Bibliography, which also contains some annotation in lieu of footnotes.

Brook Manville read part of this book; Herbert Tucker and John Wright ploughed through all of it and made many suggestions on matters large and small. Claude Rawson, the editor of the series, gave me extremely good advice on improving the flow and coherence of the manuscript by rearranging some of its sections. My thanks to all of them.

I am also grateful to Northwestern University for granting me a two-quarter leave in the fall and winter of 1981-2, during which most of this book was written.

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

Each volume in this series is devoted to a single major text. It is intended for serious students and teachers of literature, and for knowledgeable non-academic readers. It aims to provide a scholarly introduction and a stimulus to critical thought and discussion.

Individual volumes will naturally differ from one another in arrangement and emphasis, but each will normally begin with information on a work's literary and intellectual background, and other guidance designed to help the reader to an informed understanding. This is followed by an extended critical discussion of the work itself, and each contributor in the series has been encouraged to present in these sections his own reading of the work, whether or not this is controversial, rather than to attempt a mere consensus. Some volumes, including those on *Paradise Lost* and *Ulysses*, vary somewhat from the more usual pattern by entering into substantive critical discussion at the outset, and allowing the necessary background material to emerge at the points where it is felt to arise from the argument in the most useful and relevant way. Each volume also contains a historical survey of the work's critical reputation, including an account of the principal lines of approach and areas of controversy, and a selective (but detailed) bibliography.

The hope is that the volumes in this series will be among those which a university teacher would normally recommend for any serious study of a particular text, and that they will also be among the essential secondary texts to be consulted in some scholarly investigations. But the experienced and informed non-academic reader has also been in our minds, and one of our aims has been to provide him with reliable and stimulating works of reference and guidance, embodying the present state of knowledge and opinion in a conveniently accessible form.

C.J.R.

University of Warwick
December 1979

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

HISTORY AND THE ILIAD

One of the most distinguished works of Homeric scholarship, *History and the Homeric Iliad* by Sir Denys Page, is an elaborate attempt to see the *Iliad* as a reflection of historical events and to reconstruct those events in the light of the text and other evidence taken from Greek and Near Eastern sources. Many other books on Homer, among them such classics as Whitman's *Homer and the Heroic Tradition*, Kirk's *The Songs of Homer* and Webster's *From Mycenae to Homer*, likewise embed the analysis of the Homeric poems in a rich matrix of historical background. Compared with the work of such scholars, the historical dimension of my study is marginal and in no way competes with any of their accounts. On the other hand, historically oriented scholars have often been very complacent about examining the types of relationship one can plausibly assume between a fictional text and various levels of historical reality. My chief aim in the following pages, beyond sketching a minimal historical framework, is to set the stage for an extended analysis of the text by clarifying the network of temporal relations in which it exists. What is the relationship of the *Iliad* to the 'historical' events it purports to describe, to the contemporary world in which it originated, and to the 'heroic society' of which it is an image? And what is the relationship between the *Iliad* as a 'heroic poem' to the subsequent city culture in which it became a canonical text?

Two other questions of a similar type require more extended answers. The first of these is the relationship of the *Iliad* to oral poetry, which is the subject of the following section. That question has a twofold nature and involves the relations of the *Iliad* both to earlier poetic traditions and to modern ideologies of reading. The second question, reserved for the final chapter, deals with the life of the *Iliad* during the 2,700 years in which it never lost its canonical status.

Herodotus, writing in the latter half of the fifth century BC, expressed the conventional wisdom of his day when he dated Homer, the author of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, about 400 years before his own time. Most modern scholars attribute the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to different poets and date both of them later than Herodotus did. They put the author of the *Iliad* in the second half of the eighth century, although Walter Burkert (1976) has recently advanced a strong case for dating the poem as late as 660 BC. The author of the *Odyssey* is now usually seen as a younger