

responds to), but it does not follow either that the shield is unreadable or is understood by Achilles as such.

Perhaps most open to question are arguments that seem to overestimate the extent to which ‘future fame’ in the *Iliad* is inaccessible to the poems’ actors. While the precise content of ‘the song to come’ is strictly unknowable to the poem’s characters because they will not be there to hear it, the receptive conditions in which such song is imagined to resonate, and certain elements of its content, are often represented in the poem as predictable. Therefore, when L. reads Helen as projecting an ‘anticipated but unknowable meaning’ (p. 56) into the future at 6.357–8, he does not bring out fully the extent to which the contents of Helen’s speech (Paris’ weakness, the suffering that has resulted) grasp in advance what will make her and Hector *αἰδιμοί* (for *κλέος* as predictable on the basis of the kind of songs that are familiar from the past, one might compare e.g. 9.524; see also Achilles’ predictions about the immediate consequences of his conduct at 18.121–5). When evoking ‘men to come’ (*ἔσσομένοις*), Helen posits cognitive continuity between present and future by assuming that what conditions emotional investment in stories now will continue to obtain, and thus grounds the emergence of future song in a transcontextual receptive recognition. Rather than deferring to a ‘future song’ that will ‘pass judgement and give meaning to the events of the present’ (p. 56), Helen participates in that process.

Regardless of how persuasive or not L.’s readings of such episodes might be found, however, the probing intelligence, conceptual subtlety and interpretative ambition of this book ought to ensure it a wide and attentive readership.

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HOMER AS AN IDEA

PORTER (J.I.) *Homer. The Very Idea*. Pp. xiv + 277, ills. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021. Cased, £22, US\$27.50. ISBN: 978-0-226-67589-3.

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This book is the culmination of P.’s work of two decades on Homer as the history of an idea. His first study on the concept of Homer not as a person but as an idea and cultural phenomenon was published as an article with the same title as this book (*Arion* 10 [2002], 57–86), which he further developed into a chapter entitled ‘Homer: the History of an Idea’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer* (2004, pp. 324–43). Through these previous works P.’s formulation of Homer as an idea has already been engaged with in the scholarship of classical reception, for example in the chapter ‘The Idea of Homer’ in L. Jansen’s *Borges’ Classics* (2018).

In the opening chapter, ‘Why Homer?’, P. explains that his interest is not in Homer the historical individual or Homer as a poet, but in ‘a cultural history . . . of an idea, a point of concern, a fascination, and an obsession that was born and reborn every time Homer was imagined as the presumed poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*’ (p. 5). ‘This book is not intended as a work of literary criticism’ (p. 5). He asks his own brand of ‘Homeric questions’ (p. 11), represented by chapter titles ‘Why Homer?’ (Chapter 1), ‘Who Was

Homer?’ (Chapter 2), ‘Apotheosis or Apostasy?’ (Chapter 3), ‘What Did Homer See?’ (Chapter 4) and ‘Why War?’ (Chapter 5), with which he charts the history of how the idea of Homer has manifested itself from antiquity to today, illustrated by a wide range of case studies. His aim is ‘not to solve the mystery of who Homer was but to understand how and why the idea of Homer arose, the various forms it took, and why it has exerted so great a fascination for so many millennia’ (pp. 10–11).

P. traces the first articulation of the concept of Homer as an idea in Giambattista Vico’s *Scienza nuova seconda* from 1730 (p. 33), followed by Nietzsche (p. 4), who provocatively asked, regarding Homer, ‘has a person been made out of a concept, or a concept out of a person?’ in ‘Homer und die klassische Philologie’ (1869). However, P. observes that the denial of or ambivalence about Homer’s existence as a person or the historicity of the Trojan War goes back earlier into the Renaissance and further into antiquity, including the ancient allegorists and the Roman Stoic Epictetus (pp. 33–4). To this genealogy P. adds Robert Wood’s ‘An Essay on the Original Genius of Homer’ (1767) and Friedrich Albert Wolf’s *Prolegomena to Homer* (1795). These works made Homer indistinguishable from the tradition that produced him and ‘a synonym for this process itself’ (p. 35).

Regarding the question of ‘Why Homer?’, where his attraction comes from, P. identifies three factors: (1) his suggestive but elusive voice in his poetry; (2) Homer’s connection to Troy, a place of fascination in its own right; and (3) Homer’s and Troy’s connection to a traumatic past (p. 23). He identifies what many of Homer’s readers must have felt but not have necessarily been fully aware: the fact that we cannot pin down Homer as a historical person, the fact that we cannot pin down where Homer’s Troy is and the fact that Homer is ‘an idea of something that remains permanently lost to culture’ (p. 31), and all these are making Homer a compelling presence. As he puts it succinctly (p. 40), “‘Homer’, the problem and the puzzle, has been good to think with’, stimulating poets, artists, historians, philologists and archaeologists to produce works around the idea of Homer.

The second chapter, ‘Who Was Homer?’, expands on the theme of Homer’s elusiveness in visual art, discussing how Homer’s portraiture has developed from the idea of ‘Homer’. This chapter contains a fascinating in-depth analysis of J.-A.-D. Ingres’ famous painting *Homer deified, or, The Apotheosis of Homer* (1827) along with its preparatory studies by the artist and the ‘Louvre Homer’ and the Hellenistic relief sculpture by Archelaus of Priene known as the *Apotheosis of Homer* that influenced him. P. demonstrates how Ingres combined the ‘image of Homer as a living poet en route to being canonized’ and ‘the image of Homer as a long-dead but by now securely elevated poet’ (p. 49). He concludes the section with by now a familiar refrain, ‘What these portraits represent is not a person but an idea – the idea of Homer’ (p. 56).

Chapter 3, ‘Apotheosis or Apostasy?’, discusses varied reactions to Homer across the ages, making him ‘simultaneously the most revered and the most reviled poet of antiquity’ (p. 85). This chapter is enlivened with many interesting examples of how Homer is discussed and depicted in philosophy, literature and visual art, including a detailed analysis of the *Apotheosis of Homer* by Archelaus of Priene and Samuel Butler’s *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1897). The latter is a particularly eloquent case study, showing how Butler played ‘havoc with the convention of Homer’s anonymity and impersonality’ (p. 124). ‘To rebrand the author of the *Odyssey* as a woman – an unprovable hypothesis – is to expose the fragility of the Homeric Question with particular point’ (p. 124). The chapter concludes with a convincing observation that Homer’s status has been sustained ‘as much by his station in the gutters and margins of the tradition as by his coronation in the official corridors of culture’ (p. 128). ‘The best measure of Homer’s standing in culture’, as P. puts it, is ‘his capacity to continuously produce culture in his wake’

(p. 128). He continues: ‘Needless to say, the Homer in question here is not the poet and not his poems, but the very idea of Homer, which is irreducible to both’ (p. 128).

Chapter 4’s title ‘What Did Homer See?’ is a witty question that leads to the discussion of Homer’s legendary blindness as a *topos* (p. 145) as well as the multi-layered site of Troy, which prompts the question ‘Which phase of Troy – if any – corresponds to Homer’s Troy?’ (p. 155). P.’s star example in this chapter is Jorge Luis Borges’s ‘Escheresque’ (p. 167) short story ‘The Immortal’, which utilises the multiple layers of Troy and the multiple images of Homer as scattered fragments to construct ‘the image of Troy as Troy is reflected in Homer’s mind and in the minds of all those who have come after him’ (p. 169). P.’s conclusion is that ‘Troy and Homer has no life but only an afterlife, and that neither one nor the other can be coherently imagined, let alone seen’ (p. 174).

The final chapter, ‘Why War?’, has a markedly sombre tone. Here P. deals with the uncomfortable fact that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are poems about war. We are faced with the conundrum, ‘How can the greatest of Greek poets be appreciated when his poetry is so very troubling?’ (p. 190) To be sure, his poems ‘*problematize war*’ (p. 201; P.’s emphasis), but there have been ‘disenchanted readings’ of Homer. Prominent among them is Simone Weil’s ‘resolutely disenchanted and disenchanting reading of Homer’ (p. 213). Weil and others also directly challenged the ‘appropriation of Homer by European and especially German nationalists that culminated with the Nazis. The roots of this movement, they recognized, ran deep in modern culture, where the study of Homer had played so immense a role in fashioning that culture’s sense of identity’ (p. 213).

This book does not directly discuss how Homeric poems should be read. Indeed, any reader who happens to find this book on a library shelf with only the main title *Homer* shown on its spine will be surprised that it gives little information about the contents of the poems. Instead, it demonstrates the immense potential of the poems and their author to create new ideas according to the perspectives of their readers.

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ARISTARCHUS ON HOMER’S *ILIAD*

SCHIRONI (F.) *The Best of the Grammarians. Aristarchus of Samothrace on the Iliad*. Pp. xxvi + 908, ills. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018. Cased, US\$150. ISBN: 978-0-472-13076-4.
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This volume sets out to replace K. Lehrs’s *De Aristarchi studiis Homericis* (1833¹, 1882³) as a comprehensive treatment of Aristarchus of Samothrace as a Homeric critic. Amongst its predecessors, A. Ludwich’s *Aristarchs Homerische Textkritik* (1885) focused on textual issues, whereas A. Roemer’s *Die Homerexegese Aristarchs* (1924), while correcting and supplementing Lehrs, proved too apologetic and biased.

S. succeeds in producing a systematic descriptive encyclopaedia of Aristarchus’ philology: clearly written and elegantly produced, this volume is a major achievement, unlikely to be