

DIALOGUES ON THE RECEPTION OF HOMER'S
ILIAD

HAYWOOD (J.), MAC SWEENEY (N.) *Homer's Iliad and the Trojan War. Dialogues on Tradition*. Pp. x+224, ills. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Cased, £85. ISBN: 978-1-350-01268-4.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X19000477

The book under review explores the *Iliad's* place in the broader tradition of Trojan War narratives. Its wide-ranging scope and innovative conception are signalled in the table of contents. Here we find announced five pairs of essays by 'Jan' and 'Naoise': the first pair is on 'Navigating Tradition' (about the *Iliad* and the *Erra*), the second on 'Visualizing Society' (Euthymides and Rossetti), the third on 'Staging Conflict' (in Euripides and Shakespeare), the fourth on 'Seeking Truth' (Herodotus and Schliemann), and the fifth on 'Claiming Identities' (about Godfrey of Viterbo and Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy*).

As the brief (six-page) introduction explains, the book's unifying theme is 'dialogue'. On the one hand, the authors see story traditions as fundamentally dialogic, in that each new contribution to a story tradition not only continues, but also engages with and thereby transforms that tradition. On the other hand, the book originated in an (actual) dialogue between its two authors and has been executed as a kind of 'dialogue' between them: one essay will sometimes refer to the other within its section, always using the author's first name. Readers are introduced right away to a running thread of meta-discourse, which, while playful, has a serious purpose: 'we hope that our dialogic method ... makes a contribution to the study of classical receptions by capturing something of reception as process' (p. 3). The authors also aim to 'shed light on specific case studies' and 'highlight several important themes' in Iliadic reception, and to 'offer new insights on ... the *Iliad's* place in the wider Trojan War tradition' (p. 3).

The book's five essay pairs juxtapose close readings of works selected from a startlingly wide range of time periods and media: 'Visualizing Society', for instance, reads a sixth-century Attic vase next to a nineteenth-century Italian painting, while 'Claiming Identities' juxtaposes readings of a twelfth-century Latin prose-poem and a twenty-first-century Hollywood blockbuster. Each section is prefaced by 2–4 pages (by both authors) discussing the two essays in relation to the section's theme. 'Navigating Tradition' usefully sets the stage by showing how the *Iliad* on the one hand (Haywood) and the very roughly contemporary Akkadian poem *Erra and Ishum* on the other (Mac Sweeney) seek to position themselves within their respective poetic traditions. The remaining eight essays present cases studies in Iliadic reception.

While no target audience is specified, this book could prove useful to a variety of readers. For classical scholars wishing to test the waters of reception studies (perhaps for teaching purposes), the book offers an impressively varied array of entry points. At least one topic – and more likely several – ought to be of interest to any given scholar. Anyone wanting to enrich a university-level course on epic will find here a set of ready-made topics, issues (suggested by the discussion of the section themes) and avenues for further reading (in the footnotes). As each essay gives considerable attention to historical and cultural context, many could also be assigned as fair introductions to the particular works with which they deal: the essays on the *Erra* and on Schliemann come to mind especially here.

Moreover, the book's accessible prose style(s) and (almost perfectly) consistent translation of Greek and Latin terms (*Aristeia*, p. 17, and *poesis*, p. 39, are not translated – but these are rare exceptions) may make it an attractive option for students and scholars in other disciplines whose interests include Trojan War materials. Indeed, at times it seems clear that non-classicist or student audiences are very much in the authors' minds, as, for example, when Haywood takes the time to lay out clearly and efficiently why Athens' rough treatment of Melos in 415 BCE is an important subtext for Euripides' *Trojan Women* (pp. 77, 91–2).

On the other hand, this book will be less useful for readers interested in understanding how its arguments or methods fit within larger frameworks of ongoing scholarly debate. To be sure, the close readings are supplemented with ample citation in the footnotes. However, while the essays come across with the freshness of new readings, and these readings may indeed contain new insights, it is left to the reader to recognise those insights as new. Particularly regrettable is the lack of any discussion situating the book in the field to which it aims to make a contribution, namely reception studies. This omission makes it difficult to evaluate the book as 'an experiment in historiographical methodology' (p. 3). On the conclusion's final page, a comic-style word balloon asks: 'Did it work then, this whole dialogue thing?' (p. 190). The ensuing word-balloon dialogue suggests that the book's success rests partly in its self-conscious participation in the very process of reception that it studies. But surely there are important differences between the sort of 'reception' in which the book engages and that which it studies. A focused discussion of the notion of scholarship as reception might have brought out more clearly the book's contribution in this respect.

One thing that is clearly new here is the pairings themselves. For this reviewer, the section titled 'Seeking Truth' features not only rich readings but also a particularly well-motivated pairing. The essays on Herodotus (Haywood) and Heinrich Schliemann (Mac Sweeney) reveal surprising parallels in how those two figures used Homer to craft portraits of themselves as seekers of historical truth. By contrast, 'Staging Conflict' does not so clearly add up to more than the sum of its parts. It is true, as stated in the section's preface, that both Euripides' *Troades* and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* represent words and speeches as potentially unreliable and 'dangerous', and it is fair to say that both works meditate 'on the power of their own art and on the limits of that power' (p. 76). But these points could also be made about much of the Western canon. Thus it seems that more work would be needed to show that there is something distinctively 'Iliadic' (p. 76) about these two plays' treatment of the unreliability of speech.

A concluding chapter (by both authors) reflects on memorialisation as dialogue. As the *Iliad* memorialises Trojan War figures, so too instances of Iliadic reception memorialise the *Iliad* and 'create their own' version of it in the process. One interesting idea advanced in the conclusion is that the *Iliad*'s centrality impacts the very nature of meta-discourse within its tradition. In the wake of the *Iliad*, that is, 'each new contribution must not only talk to the same text, but must position itself in relation to the very *idea* of there being a core text' (p. 187). This concluding discussion has been well prepared in advance, especially by the demonstration in 'Godfrey's Hall of Mirrors' that the idea of the *Iliad* was very important even for a twelfth-century writer with no good information about the poem's contents. Still, it may be going too far to claim that Trojan War narratives 'must' respond to the *Iliad*'s centrality: not all medieval texts, for instance, show the same level of interest in the *Iliad* as did Godfrey. Of course, it would be impossible to prove any broad claim about the nature of Iliadic reception by relying on a few selected cases studies. But much can be gained by exploration, and this book does the invaluable service of inviting

such exploration, whisking all corners across the ages from book to poem to play to painting, asking us to look and see.

The book is attractively produced, with readable fonts and a nicely chosen painting by Rembrandt featured on the cover (on which see the final paragraph of p. 189). Typographical errors are an occasional distraction. The index and many subsection titles make it easy to follow one's interests or to revisit particular passages.

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A MODERN VERSION OF THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES

VAIL (K.) *Reconstructing the Shield of Achilles*. Pp. 189, colour ills. Los Angeles: Story Merchant Books, 2018. Paper, US\$29.99. ISBN: 978-0-9991621-8-7.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X19001367

This is not a scholarly book, but an interesting book. Its strength and its contribution are V.'s photographs of a shield that she has fashioned from metal and designed to be as faithful as possible to the Homeric Shield of Achilles (*Il.* 18.468–608). The book includes images of the entire shield (with an account of her materials and process) and 22 close-ups of individual scenes from her shield. As a visual artist working in metal, V. knows well the constraints and opportunities, both material and technological. V. has also fashioned her shield with consideration of a range of ancient Greek art (from the third millennium to the second century BCE, most from the seventh to the fifth centuries). V. has produced a Shield of Achilles of interest in itself and also as a hermeneutic or heuristic tool to think about the Homeric passage.

V. asks: Assuming that Homer's audiences envisioned *something*, what might their imagined shield have looked like? Section 4, 'Vail's Reconstruction of Achilles' Shield', is the best part of the book; it has an image of her shield, then the 22 individual scenes with a serviceable translation of the relevant passages underneath each image. V. has created a depiction of the words of the Homeric Shield, with some care and skill. Readers will also benefit from Section 7, 'Historical Motifs and Notes to Scenes on Achilles' Shield'. Here V. reproduces again the images she has made of the scenes on the Shield and considers comparanda from Greek art. These sections (4, 7) are both intriguing and useful.

The rest of the book is not impressive. Much of it consists of an oversimplifying, glorifying account of the *Iliad*. It feels like a throwback to the days of unselfconscious, uncritical moralising tales from what V. calls 'the heroic forefathers of Western Civilization' (p. 106). (The very kind of moralising questioned so hauntingly 80 years ago in Louis MacNeice's 'Autumn Journal IX'.) V. says she is 'mining Homer for spiritual gems' and 'beautifully simple ideals' (p. 105), claiming 'all of life's lessons are contained within it' (p. 89). Achilles? To V. he is not problematic: 'we are still celebrating the great and unfading glory of Shining Prince Achilles' (p. 29), and, romanticised: 'More awesome