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# The Iliad: Configurations of the Future



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# THE ILIAD: CONFIGURATIONS OF THE FUTURE

*The Iliad promises to grant 'imperishable fame' to the heroes who fought at Troy and, with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the poem has (so far) succeeded in its aim: Achilles, Hector, Agamemnon and Odysseus are global household names, and those who died at Troy are remembered through successive editions of the Iliad, a poem that has never gone out of print. This paper investigates the relationship between the future as configured within the Iliad and the actual future of the Iliad, i.e., from our perspective, the history of its reception. Its primary aim is to shed light on three issues in the field of Homeric studies, and of literary criticism more generally: (1) the Homeric Question and the problem of allusion; (2) conceptions of time and authorial intention; (3) the making of a classic, understood here as the cooperation between a text and successive generations of readers. Beyond the field of literary studies, the argument offered in this paper bears on a larger social question: the degree to which care for the future is shaped by the concerns of the past. The Iliad featured continuously in education for over 2,600 years: this is a surprising degree of continuity, which is not the necessary consequence of qualities intrinsic to the text, for those are always subject to judgement. The success of the Iliad depends, rather, on the choices made by over 100 generations of listeners and readers. The interaction between the contents of the Iliad (the future as configured within the poem) and the responses of its listeners and readers (the successive generations who debated the desirability of continuity and change) is at the heart of the exploration in this paper.*

## Three Problems

Introductions to the *Iliad* often start with grand statements about its place and significance in literary history: Jasper Griffin, for example, announces that the *Iliad* 'bring(s) European literature into existence with a bang' (Griffin, 1987, p. vi). This big-bang vision of literature only makes sense from a specific, late twentieth-century vantage point: for its earliest audiences, the *Iliad* did not come into existence out of nowhere – it belonged to a much wider and older tradition of oral poetry. That tradition is largely lost to us: we know that it existed, mostly on the basis of linguistic and comparative evidence (see the foundational studies collected in Parry, 1971); and we can reconstruct some aspects of the early Greek oral tradition on the basis of the *Iliad* itself, other Greek poems and archaeological evidence. However, our understanding of the relationship between the *Iliad* and the wider tradition from which it stemmed remains precarious. The poems of the Epic Cycle, which survive only in fragments and were fixed in writing later than the *Iliad*, provide crucial insights, as do the mythological scenes that decorate early Greek vases (Snodgrass, 1998; Burgess, 2001), but scholars continue to debate whether specific themes, stories and concerns were already known to the earliest audiences of the *Iliad* or whether they developed later, often in response to the *Iliad* itself. This quest for the origins and originality of specific aspects of the *Iliad* is, ultimately, a version of the Homeric question: scholars discuss the relationship between the *Iliad* and the wider early poetic tradition in the hope of capturing the specific character and compositional context of the poem. The difficulty is that, from where we stand, arguments about originality are necessarily circular: we have to use the *Iliad* to reconstruct the context of the *Iliad*. Some Homerists rightly argue against stark dichotomies between tradition and innovation (for example Nagy, 1996; Foley, 1999; Scodel,

2002); this paper builds on their work and suggests that the *Iliad* became more pointedly allusive in the course of time.

The second issue addressed in this paper concerns the poet's voice and its treatment of time within the narrative. Even leaving aside the question of who actually composed the *Iliad* (the poem is 'likely to be the result of extremely complicated processes involving both orality and writing, which we can no longer reconstruct,' Cassio, 2002, p. 114), there are also considerable difficulties in characterising the poet's voice as it emerges from within the text. The poet asks the Muse for information, and the Muse knows everything – past, present and future. This divine collaboration with the Muse helps to explain some peculiarities in the poet's treatment of time: he is present at Troy and can see the battlefield before his eyes, but he is also present to his audience, people who lived long after the Trojan War. Repeatedly the poet compares the mighty heroes who fought at Troy with the far less impressive human beings 'who live nowadays': a mighty hero like Diomedes, for example, could pick up and throw a stone that no two men could lift these days (*Iliad* 5.304, cf. 12.449 and 20.287). The poet describes his audience only in the most general terms, as weaklings compared to the heroes of old: the 'nowadays' of the poem thus remains constantly applicable. Historians try to map the concerns of the *Iliad* onto the political and social contexts of possible original audiences. For example, some argue that the *Iliad*, with its searching exploration of authority, fits the palatial culture of the late bronze age, when power structures were diffuse and unstable; another argument is that the rapid social and political changes of the seventh century are reflected in the concerns of the poem (for a lucid overview of historical contextualisations, see Osborne, 2004). The fact remains, however, that the themes and concerns of the *Iliad* are relevant also after the late bronze age and the seventh century BCE: commander-in-chief Agamemnon is exposed as authoritarian and weak in the poem; the common soldier Thersites rebels against his generals and is ridiculed in the assembly; and Achilles, in the extremity of his behaviour, seems inhuman even to the gods. Through a reading of these characters, historians attempt to delineate possible political contexts for the earliest performances of the *Iliad*, but no interpretation leads to a single original audience, or a specific political agenda in support of which the *Iliad* must have been composed. Flawed leaders like Agamemnon are always interesting; and critics of authority, like Achilles and Thersites, are never entirely comfortable. The *Iliad* tells a story that remained relevant generation after generation. This is something that the ancient Greeks themselves articulated in their earliest responses to the poem: as early as the sixth century BCE, Xenophanes claimed that Homer had been a universal teacher since time immemorial (fr. 10 DK).

The vertiginous truth is that Xenophanes' statement still applies: the *Iliad* continuously featured in the educational curriculum for over 2,600 years. We can trace the history of that tradition from Xenophanes himself to the schools of classical Athens (where boys were made to learn difficult Homeric words: Aristophanes fr. 233 K-A), the library of Alexandria in Lower Egypt, the Roman educational system, the monasteries of Byzantium, the efforts of Boccaccio and Petrarch to establish the first chair of Greek in Florence (on which Pertusi, 1964, offers crucial insights), and the school and university programmes that have followed since. Homer's *Iliad* has been translated into all major languages worldwide, including Esperanto (Young, 2003, offers a catalogue of the printed history of Homer up to 2000). In short: the *Iliad* enjoys the unusual status of a text that was, and is, relentlessly passed on. Traditional explanations of this status refer to the intrinsic qualities of the *Iliad* – but the very notion of intrinsic qualities is problematic. Homer's success 'is not a necessary or natural consequence of either age or quality; age is liable to go out of fashion, and quality is always debatable' (Burkert, 1987, p. 43). Literary qualities, in other words, are qualities perceived by specific, historically located, audiences and readers. The increasing emphasis on reception is part of a larger argument about literary value, continuity and the making of a classic. Herrnstein Smith (1983, p. 30) presented

the issue clearly and succinctly: 'The value of a literary work is continuously produced and re-produced by the very acts of implicit and explicit evaluation that are frequently invoked as "reflecting" its value and therefore as being evidence of it. In other words, what are commonly taken to be the signs of literary value are, in effect, also its *springs*. The endurance of a classic canonical author such as Homer, then, owes not to the alleged transcultural or universal value of his works but, on the contrary, to the continuity of their circulation in a particular culture.' The issue hinges on cultural continuity and the possibility of change. From one perspective, the centrality of Homer may seem like a fact of life; but, from another, it depends on the active choices of specific educators, publishers and other agents who were and are in a position to choose what to pass on to others. The third problem addressed in this paper concerns the role of the text and the role of the reader in the making of a classic, where 'reader' also includes the institutional, political and cultural contexts of the reader.

## Eternal Presence

The *Iliad* starts with an order: 'Sing, goddess, the wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus.' Like all second-person addresses, the opening invocation establishes a specific relationship between speaker and addressee. The poet asks the goddess to sing and she evidently complies because what follows, after that initial order, is precisely a song about the wrath of Achilles. 'Song' is a word the poet uses for his own performance: the Muse sings, and the poet sings too, about the same topic. So, after the proem, their voices blend, and we can no longer distinguish between the Muse and the poet – until he comes to face particular challenges. Before launching into the massive 'Catalogue of Ships' in book 2, for example, the poet suddenly puts some distance between himself and the Muse, re-establishes his own individual voice with the pronoun 'me,' and asks, again, for divine support (*Iliad* 2.484–93; all translations are based on Verity, 2011):

> Tell me now, Muses who have your homes on Olympus –
> for you are goddesses, and are present, and know everything,
> while we hear only rumour, and know nothing –
> who were the commanders and princes of the Danaans.
> As for the soldiery, I could not describe or name them,
> not even if I had ten tongues and ten mouths,
> an indestructible voice, and a bronze heart within me,
> unless the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Aegis-Wearing
> Zeus, were to recount all those who came to besiege Ilium.
> So I shall relate the ships' captains and the number of their ships.

This passage has been much discussed (including Graziosi and Haubold, 2010, pp. 1–8). What I want to focus on here is what it says about divine presence and knowledge. Are the Muses present in the sense that they are in the company of the poet and his audience, or are they present at Troy, at the time of the Trojan expedition? There is no straightforward answer to this question. Clearly, the Muses and the poet enjoy an intimate relationship, and the result of that relationship is the performance itself, in front of an audience. But the 'presence' of the Muses, in our passage, does not just concern their impact on the poet and his audience: it is closely linked to the Muses' own knowledge of the Trojan expedition, and to their divine powers more generally: 'you are goddesses, are present, and know everything.' In ancient Greek 'to know' and 'to see' share the same root, and this is an etymological link that was felt. The poet on his own can only 'hear the rumour,' but after summoning the Muses he delivers a Catalogue of Ships that offers an aerial view of the whole Greek world, followed by a Catalogue of the Trojans where the coast and inland populations of Asia Minor are organised in a clear visual order (Danek, 2004). Ancient audiences and readers of the *Iliad* thought that Homer was blind – and even, in some versions, that he had been blinded by the Muses. His disability matched his divine gift

for seeing, in vivid detail, what had happened at Troy (Graziosi, 2002, pp. 125–63). The poet, then, was present at the performance, before people 'such as they are nowadays,' but he was also a blind (i.e. divinely inspired) eye-witness at Troy.

In general, the *Iliad* conveys a clear sense of the poet's presence at Troy, and even of the specific vantage point from which he sees the action: he views the battlefield from above, facing Troy and keeping his back to the sea (Strauss Clay, 2011). The curved coastline, with its beached Achaean ships, is arranged before him 'like a theatre' as the ancient scholar Aristarchus put it (Σ *ad Il.* 14.35); beyond the beach lies the Trojan plain, and beyond the plain is the citadel of Troy. When Homer describes what happens 'on the left' or 'on the right' of the battlefield, he is speaking from that specific viewpoint, hovering somewhere above the sea. He is, however, not confined to observing things from there: he can zoom in and describe, for example, how Polypoetes' spear breaks through Damasus' forehead, and makes pulp of the brain inside (12.181–7). He can observe at close quarters how a pair of horses trip over a branch, breaking free of their chariot – and then zoom out in order to show how the horses join a chaotic, general stampede towards Troy (6.38–41, with Graziosi and Haubold, 2010, *ad loc*). Contemporary readers often comment on the cinematic qualities of Homer's poetry (e.g. Winkler, 2007); but there were no helicopters in antiquity from which to take aerial shots, and no cameras zooming in or out. For the ancient Greeks, Homer's powers were truly divine: they called him 'the divine singer,' and with good reason. Apart from the poet, only the gods could view things from above, or observe the fighting at close quarters, objectively, and without fear of death. The poet himself makes that point at *Iliad* 4.539–44:

> Then no longer could a man have faulted their war-work, on arrival –
> someone who, as yet unhurt and unstabbed by the piercing bronze,
> moved about in their midst, as Pallas Athena led him
> taking his hand, and holding off the oncoming spears.

Mirto offers an excellent discussion of the relationship between the imagined observer, the poet and the audience in this surprising passage (in Mirto and Paduano, 1997, p. 925). What strikes me is that, in this description of a hypothetical eye-witness, a goddess is involved. Seeing what happened at Troy, without fear of death, is a matter of divine favour.

The invocation to the Muse at the beginning of the *Iliad* is not an empty poetic convention: it says something crucial about how the poet views things, and how he relates to time. He can be with his audience and simultaneously present at Troy, back in the time of the Trojan War. He can view the action from a divine vantage point above the sea: his powers recall Muhammad's miraculous 'night journey' (based on Surah 17.1 in the Qur'an), as Henrietta Mondry points out to me. The poet's ability to grasp as one, to know everything – past, present, and future – in one act of viewing, has clear implications for the plot of the *Iliad*, and for the way in which the audience relates to that plot. According to Aristotle, Homer selects and presents his story in a way that enables the audience to see it all at once (*Poetics* 23.1459a30–4):

> Just as we said before, Homer would seem to speak divinely compared to the rest, in that he did not attempt to make the war a whole, even though it had a beginning and an end. For the story would otherwise have been too large and not easily seen at one time, or, if scaled down in length, too closely woven with detail.

This passage is often quoted in order to congratulate Homer for limiting the plot of the *Iliad* to a handful of days towards the end of the Trojan War, rather than trying to cover the whole story of the war from beginning to end. But there is more to this passage, as Purves (2010, pp. 24–64) points out. Aristotle makes his point specifically in relation to Homer's divine powers, his vision, and his ability to collapse time. According to him, Homer makes the plot of the *Iliad* 'capable of being seen all at once,' *eusynoptic*, to use his word: the story becomes an image. The audience can see and know everything in one viewing, with the help of Homer and, ultimately, the Muses.

## The Possibility of Difference

While the audience, the poet and the Muses take in the plot of the *Iliad* in a single viewing, the characters inside the poem do not know what is going to happen to them. Again and again, they express their hopes and fears, while we know exactly what kind of future awaits them. This disjunction between our knowledge and the characters' own ignorance is one of the most devastating aspects of the *Iliad*. The death of Hector, which is the final major event in the poem, dramatises the difference between our perspective and that of the characters with particular force. Until the very last moment, Hector hopes against all hope that he might defeat Achilles: it is this state of mind that gives him the strength to stop running away, and face Achilles in single combat (Strauss Clay, 2002). For Hector the future remains at least marginally open, until Achilles delivers his mortal blow. It is only then that Hector, moments before dying, speaks with prophetic clarity: he tells Achilles that he too is about to be killed, by Paris and Apollo. We know that this is exactly right: the death of Achilles lies beyond the narrative of the *Iliad*, but everybody always knew that Achilles was destined to die young, at Troy. Some poets and artists gave the details: Achilles would die by an arrow shot delivered by Paris and driven by Apollo into his heel, the only vulnerable part of his body. (Textual sources and images listed in *LIMC* vol. 1.1 *s.v.* 'Achilles' pp. 181–5; for analysis and discussion, see Burgess, 2009). Hector does not provide anatomical details, and this led to the supposition that the detail of the heel is post-Homeric: the earliest literary source to mention it is Statius *Achilleis* 1.269, but we know from one vase painting that the story of Achilles' heel was known as early as the sixth century BCE (cf. *LIMC* vol. 1.2 *s.v.* 'Achilles' no. 850). Hector's words, foretelling the death of Achilles, are precise and final: we immediately recognise them to be true. Achilles, by contrast, dismisses them out of hand. He tells Hector (*Iliad* 22.365–6):

> You die now: as for my death, I will accept it whenever Zeus
> and the other immortal gods decide to deliver it.

Like Hector's prediction, Achilles' words are also immediately recognisable to us: in this case, they are not prophetic, but fallibly human. We are all prepared to believe that we shall die 'whenever'; what we do not want to know is exactly when or how we are going to die. That kind of prophecy is best ignored.

The human need for an open future, and for the possibility that things may be different and better in future, emerges also earlier in the *Iliad*, when Hector meets his wife Andromache for the last time, and confronts the prospect of his own imminent death. His baby son, Astyanax, is also present at the scene and, though too young to speak, deeply affects the last conversation between his parents. He is an embodiment of his parents' future, and of their emotional investment in that future: he thus forces on them an attitude of hope, even when there are in fact no reasonable grounds for hope. We know that Hector is about to die, that Troy will fall, and that Andromache and Astyanax will meet a bad end. At some level, Hector and Andromache know this too – and yet, throughout their meeting, they build alternative futures for themselves. When Andromache intercepts Hector as he is about to leave the city, she begs him not to go out and fight. She tells him that his own courage will kill him, and then delivers a speech that follows closely the conventions of a funerary lament (Graziosi and Haubold, 2010, pp. 44–6 and *ad* 405–39). In short, she performs Hector's funeral in front of him: she makes him confront what will happen to him, to her, and to Astyanax – should he go out and fight. From our perspective, she foreshadows the end of the poem, for the *Iliad* itself closes precisely with the funeral laments for Hector. From her own perspective, however, Andromache enacts one possible future, and then proposes an alternative course of action (*Iliad* 6.429–39):

> Hector, you are my father and my revered mother
> and my brother, and you are my tender husband;
> come, show me pity, and stay here on this tower, and
> do not make your son an orphan and your wife a widow.
> Station the people beside the fig tree, where the city
> is most easily scaled and the wall is open to assault –
> three times their best men have made an attempt there,
> under the two called Ajax and far-famed Idomeneus,
> and under the sons of Atreus and Tydeus' stalwart son;
> perhaps some man skilled in divine revelations has told them,
> or it is their own hearts that instruct them, and urge them on.

Ancient readers expressed outrage at Andromache's suggestion, and it has to be said that she violates the very fabric of Homeric language: many resonant formulas suggest that leaders should protect 'the people,' not turn them into human walls for Troy (Haubold, 2000, pp. 88–9). One ancient critic commented: 'Andromache tries to give counter-military advice to Hector' (Σ *ad* 6.433–9). Another defended Andromache: 'It is not typical of women, but it is typical of her [...] because she loves Hector.' (Σ *ad Il.* 6.433). Many centuries later, Alexander Pope agreed with that latter comment, and pointed out that Andromache did not talk like a soldier, but like a woman who tried to keep her husband safe by engaging him in a conversation about tactics (Mack, 1967, p. 354).

Hector refuses to be drawn into the details of Andromache's plan: he simply claims that 'all those things' are on his mind too, and then tells her firmly that he must return to the battlefield. His reasons have the weight of tradition behind them: he would feel shame before the men and women of Troy, should he withdraw behind his troops. He does not want to do so, in any case: he has learnt to fight in the first line of battle, and to win great glory for his father and himself. The choice is not between life and death, but between a cowardly death or a glorious one (*Iliad* 6.448–65):

> For I know full well in my mind and in my heart
> that the day will come when sacred Troy will be destroyed,
> and Priam and the people of Priam of the fine ash spear.
> Yet I am not as troubled by the Trojans' future pain,
> or by what Hecuba herself will endure, or lord Priam,
> or my brothers, the many and brave men who will
> fall in the dust, overcome by our enemies, as much as
> by your pain, when some bronze-shirted Achaean
> leads you weeping away, robbing you of the day of freedom;
> to be in Argos, weaving at the loom at another woman's command,
> and carrying water from the spring Messeïs or Hypereia,
> much against your will; and a harsh necessity will lie upon you.
> And some man when he sees you shedding a tear will say:
> 'That is the wife of Hector, who was always the greatest
> of the horse-breaking Trojans, when they fought around Ilium.'
> That is what they will say; and it will be a fresh grief for you,
> widowed of a man who might have saved you from the day of slavery.
> May I be dead, and hidden under a mound of the heaped earth,
> before I hear your cries as you are dragged captive away.

Hector must fight – not in order to save Troy, but precisely because Troy will fall (Taplin, 1992, pp. 123–4 and Görgemanns, 2001, p. 116). Through Hector's words, Andromache's suggestions are revealed for what they are: futile attempts to build alternative futures. In the face of imminent destruction, what matters to Hector is dying well, and being remembered for it. He even projects

Andromache into the future, casting her in the role of his living memorial. Her pain is his future glory – and indeed there is a suggestion that she will suffer even more, precisely because he was a brave soldier. And it is when he expresses this thought that Hector breaks down: he admits that he would rather be dead, than witness his wife's future suffering. Andromache accused Hector of being on a death mission ('your own courage will kill you') and Hector ends his speech by wishing to be dead. The two speeches mirror each other: she performed a funeral lament for her still living husband, and he responds by wishing to be dead, rather than witness her future bereavement. After that, he cannot even look at his wife in the eye.

Hector turns his attention to his baby son, and tries to pick him up. The baby is frightened of his helmet, and lets out a mighty yell. So Hector puts down his helmet on the ground, then picks up his baby, throws him about in his arms, and utters a prayer on his behalf. The gesture is familiar: we have all seen fathers lift up their babies, and make them squeal with a mixture of fear and elation. Hector behaves just like any father. And yet his gesture is also a chilling visual reminder of what will shortly happen to Astyanax. After the fall of Troy, an Achaean soldier will pick up this baby and, rather than throw him lovingly about, throw him off the walls of Troy. Scholars have long debated whether the poet of the *Iliad* already knew the precise modalities of Astyanax's death, or whether the story was invented precisely as a response to this passage in *Iliad* 6 (see Kullmann, 1960, pp. 186–7; Burgess, 2001, pp. 65–7; Graziosi and Haubold, 2010, *ad* 466–81). In the end, we shall never know for sure, not least because 'the poet of the *Iliad*' is a conceptually vague category. What we do know is that, in the Epic Cycle, the death of Astyanax precisely mirrored his last encounter with Hector: the verbal correspondences are striking, in fact (see esp. *Little Iliad* fr. 29 in West, 2003). The precise verbal echoes suggest that the *Iliad* became more allusive, complex and resonant through the framing provided by the Epic Cycle. To use Aristotle's magic word, it became more *eusynoptic* in the course of time, enabling us 'to see more all at once.' The superimposition of Hector's last, loving gesture with the enemy's fatal act produces the same effect as Achilles' last words to Hector. We recognise our own human hopes, and simultaneously remember the specific, brutal end of those who died at Troy.

Hector, who has just declared that Troy will fall and Andromache will be enslaved, now imagines a quite different future. With his baby son in his arms, he cannot but pray that Astyanax may grow big and strong, and that Andromache may finally be happy (6.474–81):

> He kissed his dear son and dandled him in his arms,
> and spoke in prayer to Zeus and all the other gods:
> 'Zeus, and all you other gods, grant that this son of mine
> may be marked out above the Trojans, as I am, and be
> strong and brave as me, and may he rule Ilium by might;
> and may men one day say as he returns from battle "This man
> is far better than his father." May he kill his enemy and
> bring home bloody spoils, and may his mother's heart be glad.'

Hector, and this is quite typical of him, imagines what people will say of him in the future, and conducts his life on that basis. Whether Andromache rejoices at the prospect of more wars is unclear. When Hector hands baby Astyanax back to her, she smiles and cries at the same time. When she goes back home, she communicates to her servants the need to mourn for Hector, while he is still alive. Later, when Hector finally dies, Andromache repeats her initial verdict: that he was killed by his own excessive courage (*Iliad* 22.454–9 with Graziosi and Haubold, 2003). The enemy lies beyond Andromache's world view: all she sees, and can hope to influence, is Hector's own determination to fight. It is his courage that makes her a widow (cf. *Iliad* 6.407 and 6.431–2).

Beyond this unresolved clash of perspectives between husband and wife, Hector engages in a conversation with us, those who will talk about him in future. The Irish poet Michael Longley offers his own reflections on Hector and his prayer, in a short lyric poem entitled 'The Helmet' (1995):

> When shiny Hector reached out for his son, the wean
> Squirmed and buried his head between his nurse's breasts
> And howled, terrorised by his father, by flashing bronze
> And the nightmarish nodding of the horse-hair crest.
>
> His daddy laughed, his mammy laughed, and his daddy
> Took off the helmet and laid it on the ground to gleam,
> Then kissed the babbie and dandled him in his arms and
> Prayed that his son might grow up bloodier than him.

Through his vernacular idiom, Longley places the episode against the background of The Troubles, and thereby questions the literary and moral legacy of Homer, poet of war (Hardwick, 2007, pp. 58–9). The question he asks is that of many, countless other readers of the *Iliad*: whether there can be a difference – or whether we always have to imagine wars and more wars, like Hector when he holds up his baby. (Cf. Simone Weil, *L'Iliade ou le poème de la force*, English translation, Holoka, 2003.)

## One More Question

Homer sees and knows through the Muses, who are always, perennially, 'present.' We can only understand his plot, and more specifically his treatment of time, if we take seriously Homer's divine inspiration. The Muse, the poet, and the audience know, with prophetic clarity, what will happen to the characters inside the narrative. The characters themselves, by contrast, hold on to the illusion of an open future. Achilles declares that he will die 'whenever' – precisely at the moment when Hector reminds us exactly when and how Achilles is going to die. Hector lifts up his baby and prays that he may grow up stronger than him – and this gesture is a precise visual reminder that Astyanax has, in fact, no future. This superimposition of a fate fixed in tradition and of our human need for difference – for the possibility that things may in fact be different in future – is typical of the *Iliad*. Some allusions will have resonated in the ears of early audiences, some accrued later. The poems of the archaic Epic Cycle described Achilles' death at the hands of Paris and Apollo, and told how an Achaean soldier picked up Astyanax and hurled him off the walls of Troy. More allusions gathered in the course of time: through Longley, for example, the Irish Troubles resonate through the *Iliad*. My general contention is that we should not get too obsessed with the freshly made *Iliad*, with what exactly its earliest audiences knew (whoever they were). The point, rather, is that a text like the *Iliad* becomes more allusive and richer, it gathers more future – as it were – in the course of time. And this, of course, poses one more question: what I might mean by 'a text like the *Iliad*.'

It seems to me that the *Iliad* establishes a particular kind of cooperation across time: its audience is very broadly defined as the weak people who live 'nowadays,' and that nowadays is an ever-shifting present. Of course, there are many contingencies in the actual transmission and reception of the *Iliad*: the archaic connection between poetry and other forms of ritual memory; the institutionally sanctioned performances of Homer in Athens; the conquests of Alexander the Great and the foundation of the library at Alexandria, the Roman reception of Greece, the role of ancient literature in Byzantine education, the Italian Renaissance, Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, and the connections between classics and class (on which see e.g. Hall, 2008). And yet, in all this, there is also a cooperation with a poem that, from the start, addressed itself

to future audiences, and relied on their understanding of how things are, and how they could, perhaps, be different and better.

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## Abbreviations

DK Diels, H. and Kranz, W. (eds.) (1951–52) *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*.

K-A Kassel, R. and Austin, C. (eds.) (1983–) *Poetae Comici Graeci*.

Σ Erbse, H. (ed.) (1969–88) *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem*.

*LIMC* Kahil, L. et al. (eds.) (1981–97) *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*.

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