

BOOK REVIEW

The Making of the Iliad: Disquisition and Analytical Commentary. By M. L. WEST. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. x + 434. £89.00/\$160.00. ISBN 978-0-19-959007-0.

Despite its misleading title, *The Making of the Iliad* is not about the *Iliad*. Its subject matter is an unattested, completely imaginary archaic Greek hexameter poem whose development as a work-in-progress M. L. West sketches in some detail. When the process of composition concluded, the alleged product was closely similar to the poem transmitted as the *Iliad*, but West's concern is solely with the imaginary work-in-progress, not with its final state, and above all not with the actual transmitted epic known as Homer's *Iliad*.

Since an imaginary poem furnishes no material for scholarly investigation, *The Making of the Iliad* is also not a work of scholarship, and West's analysis of a poem that exists in his imagination is immune to criticism from scholarly reviewers. What a scholar may and must critique, however, is West's insistence that his thoughts about this imaginary epic-in-progress constitute research on the transmitted *Iliad*. A specious impression is created by assembling the imaginary work-in-progress from passages found in the *Iliad*, and by citing the publications of nineteenth and early twentieth century "Analysts" who, like West, drew upon the *Iliad* for material with which they constructed imaginary poems identified as stages of the *Iliad*. Such imaginary poems are essentially centos created by academics for use in academic discourses. Their relationship to the *Iliad* is just as factitious as that of any other "Homeric" cento would be.

West's imaginary cento-in-progress consists of a first draft of about 2000 verses that narrate Agamemnon's humiliation of Achilles and Zeus' fulfillment of his promise to restore Achilles to honor (52). The first (*circa*) 600 verses allegedly survive as Book 1 of the transmitted *Iliad*, the next (c.) 100 survive as scattered sections mainly in *Iliad* 2, the next (c.) 700 survive as a continuous span of verses in the transmitted *Iliad* 11, and the final (c.) 600 survive as substantial sections of the transmitted *Iliad* 16. This draft of an "*Achilleis*" was composed and preserved in writing by a single poet. Before completing the composition the same poet had further thoughts and made additions and modifications, which he inserted by

“cutting the roll in two and pasting in extra sheets” (14). Four “tectonic expansions,” which survive in the *Iliad* as the passages between Book 2 and Book 11, broadened the cast of characters, added an embassy to Achilles, and constructed Achaian fortifications to be fought over later (61). The poet followed these major expansions with another that developed the battle by bringing in the Achaians’ fortifications; this survives in the transmitted *Iliad* Books 12–15 (62). My summary simplifies a putative process of composition that was even more discontinuous. The major expansions were originally shorter and simpler, and they developed through an ongoing process of expansions within expansions.

West recognizes that most contemporary scholars resist such analyses of the Homeric epics, and he makes a reluctant effort to win converts by attempting to demonstrate that the epic-in-progress is actually revealed by evidence found in the transmitted *Iliad* itself. On this sole point rests West’s claim that his subject matter is indeed the *Iliad* and not a chimera. West contends that the *Iliad* exhibits “numerous structural problems” for which “the hypothesis of authorial expansions” supplies the necessary solutions (13). If by courtesy we concede that something is a problem if West says it is, I find that the “structural” problems he adduces are of two types: (1) some are problems in the transmitted *Iliad*, but they are rhetorical rather than structural problems; and (2) some are structural problems, but they are structural problems in West’s cento-in-progress and not in the *Iliad*. Neither type furnishes the evidence of insertion that West claims it does. In this short review I shall limit my comments to type (1), which is the more consequential to West’s case.

Throughout most of *Iliad* 11, including several passages referring to the Achaians in flight back to their ships, the poet does not mention the Achaian fortifications. According to West the silence is a structural problem, because it means that the fortifications built at the end of *Iliad* 7 do not exist in *Iliad* 11, and he considers this evidence that the early draft of the epic-in-progress moved directly from (the present) 3.14 to (the present) 11.84. Now to a reader of the transmitted *Iliad* it is unimaginable that the Achaian fortifications do not exist in *Iliad* 11, because Books 7 through 10 are part of the *Iliad*, the fortifications are well-established in them, and nothing is ever said about their removal. The fortifications are even mentioned early in *Iliad* 11, when the Achaians cross them on the way out. So a reader knows they still exist, and if there is a problem it can only be the rhetorical one of why the narrator declines to mention them more often. A satisfactory answer would observe that the fortifications are unimportant in Book 11, since the fighting takes place beyond them. West’s alleged omissions are pre-

dictions, hypotheticals, and contrafactuals; they gesture toward the extreme destination of a potential flight, and their phrasing even dispenses with mention of the plain the flight would have to cross. Where is the “structural” problem? If a guest invited to West’s home offered to bring wine, would West remind him also to bring a bottle?

The alleged “structural problem” to which West accords the most prominence is the notorious use of duals in *Iliad* 9.182–98. This problem is of minor importance to West’s work-in-progress, since the expansion it supposedly indicates is small. But West exploits the famous duals as a means to suppress doubt about whether “structural problems” exist in the *Iliad* at all. Like many before him, West insists that “the passage with the duals must necessarily have been composed for a version in which only two men went on the mission” (13). But this is false, as West should know, because on rare occasions Homeric duals may refer to paired groups (see Gordesiani, *Philologus* 124 [1980] 163–74). The controversial passage does feature a pair of groups, delegates and heralds, clearly demarcated as such by Nestor about ten lines before the first duals (9.168–70). Therefore to a competent reader of the *Iliad* the fundamental problem of the unclear antecedents of the duals is not, as West and others insist, “which two men out of the five?” but “two of what? men or groups of men?” Since the passage furnishes no cues for picking out two men, and does furnish indication of two groups, the antecedent must be the two groups, and the problem is a deficit of clarity rather than a structural contradiction.

West has not tested his work-in-progress hypothesis conscientiously, and sees no need to. He announces that his publication did not even require new investigation, since “the crucial observations ... were made generations ago by Analyst scholars” (55). West reduces all non-Analyst Homeric research to a single straw man whose elimination corners readers into accepting the work-in-progress as the *Iliad* simply by leaving no alternative: “my hypothesis wins because it is founded on study of the poem ..., whereas the other hypothesis is not so founded ...” (v). By this gesture West also licenses himself to ignore virtually all actual research on the *Iliad*, e.g. its characters, themes, narrative design, rhetorical figures, whatever. The publisher of this book earns no compliments from the discipline.

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