

BOOK REVIEW

Homer Between History and Fiction in Imperial Greek Literature. By LAWRENCE KIM. Greek Culture in the Roman World. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 246. £58.00/\$99.00. ISBN 978-0-521-19449-5.

It is rather surprising that the project of a history of the reception and interpretation of Homer in antiquity began to be realized only in the latter part of the twentieth century, encouraged by the widespread interest in reception theory and the history of reception that emerged at that time (4–5). Lawrence Kim's contribution to that history, which received the prestigious Goodwin Award of Merit of the American Philological Association in 2011, fills in an important chapter and provides at the same time a valuable and innovative perspective on a major tendency in the literature of the Roman Empire.

The chapter in question chronicles the demise of a long tradition, a mode of reading Homer that might be placed under the rubric Homer the Historian. The literary tendency to which that tradition fell victim was the fundamental and radical estheticism of the Second Sophistic, its rich appreciation of the power of fiction and the elusiveness of fact, and of the pleasure, cultivated by the rhetors of the high empire and clearly savored by their audiences, of experiencing the willful and self-referential dissolution of reality into fiction and fiction into reality as the voice of the orator worked its magic.

After a brief introduction, Kim plunges the reader into what should be the unquestioned domain of Homer the Historian: the classical historians Herodotus and Thucydides (Ch. 2). What Kim demonstrates in this chapter is that the tensions that were to fuel the Second Sophistic's deconstruction of this idea of Homer are already abundantly visible here. The two historians repeatedly call attention to Homer's lack of reliability (since he was a poet) but assume, with little basis or explanation, a fundamental historical reliability lying behind the *Iliad's* representation of heroic warfare and its motivations. This anticipates a question that will emerge later: "Where did Homer get his information?" (206), a question that seems to be the elephant in the room throughout the developments recounted here. It is the final impossibility of answering this unasked ques-

tion that resulted in the debunking of Homer the Historian in the Second Sophistic.

The third chapter, on Strabo, lays out the history of Homer the Geographer with admirable clarity, based largely on a contrast between the attitudes of Strabo and Eratosthenes (56–60). On one side, we have Strabo the Stoic with his stodgy commitment to the notion of Homer the Teacher; on the other, Eratosthenes, who is the exception in antiquity in dismissing this idea of the poet and asserting that Homer, like other poets, aims “at entertainment, not instruction” (56). Yet in both of these geographers we still encounter the unexplained notion that Homer knew the facts (including the geographical facts) and, properly read, can yield valid geographical information.

Kim’s reading of Dio Chrysostom’s “Trojan Oration” (Ch. 4) is, along with Ch. 5 on Lucian, the major accomplishment of the book. The effect of this slow and careful reading is to recreate what is surely Dio’s primary goal: the gradual rendering plausible of the absurd hypothesis that the *true* story of Troy is the opposite of what the *Iliad* delivers (Achilles, and not a disguised Patroclus, was *really* killed; the Trojans *really* won the war). This is an excellent illustration of the way the Second Sophistic orators turned reality on and off like a spigot, but the procedure is given a very special esthetic boost by the fact that the reality so treated here is a fiction (Homer’s) that had long had the status of “truth” among the Greeks.

From this point, it is clear how the chapter on Lucian’s *True Stories* will serve Kim’s program. The emphasis is on the episode situated on the Isle of the Blessed, where Homer is found living along with the characters he created and thus becomes, appropriately, an element of his own fiction. The world of the *True Stories* is “a literary world of Greek *paideia*” (174) and here Homer and his characters are situated entirely beyond history in a timeless sphere populated by figments of the imagination.

The Chapter on Philostratus’ *Heroicus* (“Ghosts at Troy,” Ch. 7) contextualizes that work with reference to the “true” pre-Homeric accounts of the Trojan war of Dares and Dictys (both several centuries later in their known literary form, though each trails a fabricated genealogy). The issue, again, is credibility, something the (fictional) eyewitness takes on as the Trojan war recedes back into the oral tradition in the Middle Ages. Philostratus’ dialogue, however, as it delves into Homeric criticism and lore, seems to mock even the credibility of an eyewitness account by invoking the evidence of “the ghost of Protesilaus,” who was, among those who figure in the Troy tale, the one who had the *least* opportunity to see the

war. This is another way of distancing Homer and Homeric lore from history, of situating the “truth” of poet, characters, and events—and even the history of inquiry into all three—in a sphere accessible only by the intervention of the deceased—though it might be more accurate to call them something other than “ghosts” since both Protesilaus and Achilles (visited on a similar mission in Philostratus’ *Apollonius of Tyana*) are decidedly Hesiodic ὄλβιοι ἥρωες (*W&D* 172), and not run-of-the-mill εἰδῶλα.

Kim’s study is thus a considerable contribution to the study of the literature of the high empire, as it is to that of the ancient reception of Homer. The Goodwin Committee has done us all a service in drawing attention to this book, which is built on genuinely original, interconnected readings of an underappreciated body of ancient literature.

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