

## BOOK REVIEW

*Achilles Unbound: Multiformity and Tradition in the Homeric Epics.* By CASEY DUÉ. Hellenic Studies 81. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2019. Pp. xiii + 204. Paperback, \$27.50. ISBN: 978-0-674-98736-4.

This book offers Casey Dué's spirited argument on behalf of the Homer Multitext project that she has been working on for eighteen years together with multiple collaborators; its publication is occasioned by the completion of the group's digital edition of the Venetus A manuscript of the *Iliad*. Though much of the argument depends on work that she and her primary collaborators have already published, as well as on the work of Parry, Lord and others, the book is written in a clear and conversational style that will make it a useful introduction to the issues for those unfamiliar with earlier scholarship on an oral Homer; it is also a valuable resource for more advanced scholars who want a fuller account of the Homer Multitext project and its implications than is available elsewhere.

The preface gives an overview of the project, its aspirations and methods. Like the rest of the book, it confidently asserts the project's fundamental value in providing scholars with a "much greater understanding of the history" of the *Iliad*'s evolution and the multiformity of the tradition of composition in performance in which the Homeric epics were created (xii), but is modest in reach, "being merely preliminary to the very necessary work that has now become possible." (x). Dué is eager here and throughout to acknowledge her collaborators, and though I wearied of the frequent, clubby references to them by name in the text, it was inspiring to see a research project in the Humanities bring together scholars of Homer, specialists in digital humanities, undergraduates and many others in such an apparently congenial and fruitful way.

The introduction and first chapter offer a succinct summary of the essential scholarship that underlies the project's aims and method. Dué focusses on the concept of multiformity and its relationship to the tradition and describes the *Iliad*'s evolution over time from the oral performances of its earliest phase to contemporary printed editions. This long evolution, Dué argues, is a primary justification for the Multitext project, which aims to provide an accurate picture of the complexity

and fluidity of the *Iliad's* transmission rather than futilely seeking to recreate an authoritative version of a non-existent original, as most previous editors of the *Iliad* have done. The arguments are presented clearly with excellent supporting details; it provides a useful starting place for the more complex discussion that follows.

Chapters 2-4 each treat several examples of a different kind of testimony from successive stages of the *Iliad's* transmission: Chapter 2 discusses four ancient quotations of Homer, Chapter 3 variants found in the Homeric papyri and Chapter 4 those in medieval manuscripts, particularly Venetus A. Chapters 2 and 3 illustrate points using relatively short passages; Chapter 4 has a broader scope, discussing the role of Briseis, the Catalogue of Ships, the Doloneia and Achilles' shield. Some of the arguments are dense, and, despite Dué's notable efforts to be clear, she may lose some readers in the thicket; unfortunately, it is not easy to track multiple versions of longer passages simultaneously. Nonetheless, her overall argument is clear and persuades that multiform versions of the *Iliad* existed at all stages of its transmission, and that at least some of the alternative readings not represented in earlier editions are interesting, at least to specialists, and should be taken into account when discussing the text and its interpretation. Most interesting to me was her discussion of two multiforms of the *Iliad's* ending attested in papyri that suggest that the encounter between Achilles and Penthesilea was sometimes told immediately following the burial of Hector. Using Nagy's arguments about the name of Penthesilea, a doublet of Achilles' own, Dué intriguingly imagines ancient versions of the *Iliad* that made much more of Achilles as a lover.

Yet, however interesting this alternative might be, it is not clear that it constitutes a better ending than the beautifully understated one found in standard editions of the *Iliad*. The same is true of other examples she discusses, some of which seemed to me either very similar to or clearly worse than those represented in standard texts. Thus, Dué persuades that the Multitext project is important for our understanding of the *Iliad's* evolution and that as scholars we need to pay more attention to other versions that exist in all periods, usefully made more accessible through the on-line project; nevertheless, when she argues for an entirely different kind of text and text criticism in Chapter 5, her argument becomes more problematic. Dué speaks as though the tradition itself generates the story, which significantly limits the kind of variation she permits in a way that weakens the value of acknowledging it. Achilles is not genuinely unbound; he can only squirm a little. Moreover, despite noting that some poets are better than others, she resists any notion of poetic invention, as though choosing a beginning and end, deciding to compress or expand, to include one episode and to delete another, are not forms

of invention that affect the quality of the resulting performance and the shape of the poem.

Duë's book suggests to me that we should admire our *Iliad* not because it is the product of a single poetic genius but because it is the product of a long evolutionary process, which required the innovations of early poets, as well as the critical acuity of later scholars, to create the best from the multiform examples that exist. The Multitext project, however valuable to scholars, cannot fully replace editions for readers, which will continue to require editorial choices about quality to communicate an accessible and effective narrative.

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