

BOOK REVIEW

Homer's Divine Audience: The Iliad's Reception on Mount Olympus. By TOBIAS MYERS. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. 256. Hardback, \$85.00. ISBN: 9780198842354.

After a year spent watching live entertainment performed before cardboard cut-outs and digitally animated crowds, the audience's place in the spectacle has rarely been so apparent. In his sensitivity to the internal audience's role in framing, enhancing and mediating the spectacle for an external audience, Myers' *Homer's Divine Audience* makes a timely, insightful and illuminating contribution to the growing body of scholarship on Iliadic reception generally and in particular on how the *Iliad's* internal audiences reflect the poem's engagement with extradiegetic audiences (see especially David Elmer's *The Poetics of Consent: Collective Decision Making and the Iliad* [Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013]).

The "divine audience" in Myers' title does double work; it refers both to the intradiegetic, and ontologically divine, audience and also to the *Iliad's* extradiegetic audience, who is "divine" insofar as the poet draws their perspective into "partial alignment" (6) with that of the Olympians. Through this alignment, Myers argues, the poet anticipates the potential responses of his audience, invites them to adopt certain perspectives and encourages them to be mindful, and at times critical, of their responses to the narrative—even those that the poet seems to generate by design. In particular, Myers argues that through the Olympians' reactions to the *Iliad's* story and through their interactions with Zeus, the poem's "internal narrator persona" (2), the poet offers the audience a *mise en abyme* of their own conflicting experiences of the *Iliad*; like the gods, the audience is variously positioned as partisan supporters, sympathetic viewers, detached critics and complicit witnesses of the *Iliad's* story.

As Myers explains in the introduction (1-25), the book's argument consists of two layers: the base layer presents "a detailed description of the *Iliad's* conception of spectacle as it emerges through the perspective of 'Zeus and the gods'" (7). At the heart of this layer is Myers' observation that scenes of divine viewing evoke

one of three paradigms of spectacle: entertainment at a *daïs* (banquet), the formal duel and funeral rites. The second layer is a metaperformative analysis of the function of the *Iliad*'s presentation of its action in terms of spectacle. That is, Myers examines how the *Iliad* guides, complicates and critiques the audience's engagement with (a performance of) the *Iliad* by framing the story as a series of staged spectacles, viewed by internal audiences. Myers' approach is broadly narratological, and though he is specifically concerned with the experience of a live audience (with whom the *daïs* paradigm would resonate particularly strongly), his analysis is applicable to a silently reading audience as well, if only perhaps less vividly so.

With particular attention to the proem, Chapter 1 (27-64) examines how Zeus and the poet overlap in their joint orchestration of battle. When the poet brings Zeus' gaze and objectives into alignment with his, he invites the audience to perceive the battle as a spectacle—the product of “deliberate staging and direction” (29)—and induces them to feel that they, the poet and the god, are all “watching the same action” (51). In these moments, Myers argues, spatial and temporal distinctions disintegrate, a phenomenon that he likens to representational strategies used by archaic Greek vase painters.

Chapter 2 (65-108) focuses on how the Olympians' spectatorship of the action of Books 1-4 mediates the audience's reaction to that stretch of narrative. Myers argues that the poet here “defines the gods' role as viewers by drawing on two specific paradigms of live event: entertainment at a *daïs* (banquet), and the formal duel” (66). That is, as spectators of the *Iliad*'s story, the gods are alternately shown either to enjoy and critique the action at a safe remove from it, like banqueters listening to a poetic performance, or to be partisan viewers who may either intervene to alter the direction of the story or otherwise accept complicity in the outcome, like spectators of a duel. The second part of the chapter shows how scenes involving divine viewing—and the paradigms of spectatorship that emerges from them—inform the audience's responses to the story. Reading the exchange between Zeus and Hera in Book 4 as a *mise en abyme* of the experience of the extradiegetic audience, Myers shows how the poet engages and challenges the audience by compelling them to acknowledge their complicity in the bloodshed to come. Here and elsewhere, Myers is particularly engaging in his discussion of the audience's complicity in the *Iliad*'s violence, offering a fresh perspective on how the poem's audience is meant to respond to its carnage.

The focus of Chapter 3 (109-39) is the divine spectatorship of the duel between Aias and Hector and of the construction of the Achaean wall in Book 7.

Myers argues that the tiered arrangement of the audiences of this duel, like that of the previous duel, “offers a *mise en abyme* of the spectacle experience offered by the poet to his listeners” (115-16); the poet invites the extradiegetic audience “to recognize in the watching gods a reception activity analogous to their own” (118). Myers suggests that the poet chose Apollo and Athena in particular as the divine spectators of the duel in order to “dramatize the tension” between two competing audience responses: “desire for Achaean victory,” represented by Athena, and “pity for the doomed Trojans” (118), represented by Apollo. In his briefer discussion of the Achaean wall, Myers sees a shift from the *Iliad*’s presentation of its action as a live event (as in a duel staged before live audiences) to a lasting product of artifice (as in Helen’s tapestry). In this, Myers expands on Andrew Ford’s metatextual reading of the Achaean wall as an analogue for the monumental *Iliad* by calling attention to the fact that this metatextual monument, like the *Iliad*, has a live audience.

In Chapter 4 (141-177) Myers argues that the battles of Books 8-22 encourage the audience to adopt a partisan perspective toward the Achaeans, while occasionally also challenging them to question the limits and legitimacy of their partisan position. The audience is encouraged to adopt such a perspective by means of the presentation of the battles as formal duels (a paradigm, Myers maintains, that invites partisan engagement), and also by taking cues from the gods, who “suggest some of the ways in which an invested viewership might be responding” (155). The repeated references to the gods’ pity for the Achaeans, for example, encourages the audience to view the Achaeans accordingly. In addition to the duel paradigm, Myers argues that the poet also meaningfully presents the battles of Books 16-22 as a funeral spectacle, staged in honor of the dead: “just as the funeral games in Book 23 resemble a controlled, sanitized version of war, so conversely the warfare resembles a vicious, lethal version of such games” (162). The final section of the chapter argues that Zeus and the poet join forces to stage the *theomachia* through the lens of multiple paradigms of spectacle, especially that of the formal duel.

Chapter 5 (179-206) focuses on the gods’ spectatorship of the scenes involving Achilles and Hector (and his corpse) in Books 22 and 24. Myers argues that the poet constructs Achilles’ face-off with Hector through the alternating deployment of three paradigms of competitive engagement: *promachoi* combat, the formal duel and athletic competition. The effect is to give the audience the increasingly vivid awareness that they are “watching a staged event,” even as “the nature

of the spectacle keeps shifting" (191). At the same time, the presentation of multiple possible lenses through which to view Achilles' pursuit of Hector creates tension in the audience. By framing it as a chariot race, for example, the poet challenges the audience to recognize or reject the "correspondence ... between the role of spectators at a race and all of those who gaze upon Hector and Achilles" (192). At the climax of the poem, the poet increases the audience's emotional involvement in the action by symbolically "implicating" them "in Hector's killing" (197). By having Zeus shift responsibility for Hector's death "onto an audience-figure, Athena, with the silent complicity of the group as a whole" (197), the poet suggests the audience's complicity in Hector's demise. In the final section of the chapter, Myers reads the end of the *Iliad* as a funerary ritual that celebrates and honors Ilios even as it effects its destruction in the performative moment.

A brief conclusion (207-210) compares divine spectatorship in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by way of justifying the sensible exclusion of the latter from this study. Compared with the *Iliad*, Zeus' control of the action in the *Odyssey* is less pronounced; the *Odyssey* lacks a central arena that focuses the gaze of internal and external audiences; and explicit references to divine viewing are few and far between.

Homer's Divine Audience makes an important contribution to the study of the *Iliad's* engagement with its audience. On the whole, I found Myers' approach to be sound, his readings perceptive, his discernment of the *Iliad's* deployment of various paradigms of spectacle illuminating and his analysis of the gods' role as mediators of the *Iliad's* story convincing.

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