M.L. West, *The Making of the 'Iliad': Disquisition and Analytical Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 441 + x pp.

It must be said straight away that M.L. West's recent book, *The Making of the 'Iliad': Disquisition and Analytical Commentary*, is remarkable and engaging, even electrifying, if not always persuasive in every detail. One can only hope that this work will have a refreshing effect on Homeric studies, namely that of 'starting, or re-starting', 'the kind of critical study that […] the *Iliad* needs' (p. 431). As the author puts it in his 'Preface', '[…] a single individual's efforts, however spirited, will hardly suffice to check the momentum of the bandwagon and redirect it onto a different path. But it may be that some of those who have let themselves be carried on by it for lack of alternative transport may now take the opportunity to dismount and reappraise the situation, and with their defection the vehicle's inertial mass will diminish' (p. v).

By a happy coincidence, the book comes together with the first volume of West's opera minora, *Hellenica: Selected Papers on Greek Literature and Thought*, vol. I: *Epic*, issued in the same year by the by the same publisher and providing a broader intellectual context for his Homeric opus. In the following, I will focus on *The Making of the 'Iliad'*, but it is of course most rewarding to read this book alongside his *Hellenica I*.

The Making of the 'Iliad' falls into two parts: 'Part I. Disquisition: The Making of the *Iliad*' (six chapters, pp. 1–77) and 'Part II. Analytical Commentary: The Made *Iliad*' (pp. 79–430), followed by a disillusioned 'Envoi' (p. 431), briefly dealing with possible reactions West envisions from his prospective readers, by a rigorously selective bibliography (pp. 432–434), and by a general index. The first part presents both the author's views regarding the poet's intellectual and artistic

background and the principal assumptions and theses of West's compositional analyses to follow. The second one is a commentary that explains the actual turns of the narrative of the *Iliad* ('why the narrative takes the form it does') with a view to elucidate 'what is going on in the poet's head' when he expands and changes his poem (p. v).

At first glance, what the author tries to do, paradoxically enough, is to pursue a basically unitarian agenda for the *Iliad* using traditional analytical tools. As we will see, however, there is much more to the method advocated in this book.

In brief, West embraces the analytical concept of the existence of earlier and later layers of composition recognizable in the *Iliad* based on diverse anomalies, inconsistencies, and discontinuities in the arrangement of the poem, yet ascribes these inorganic or purposeless phenomena to the consecutive stages of the artistic development of a single poet responsible for the *Iliad* in its (more or less) present form. In a word, an *Ur-Ilias* there is (unfinished, by the way), although expanded and developed not by a horde of minor poets, or oral performers, across centuries, but by its original composer over his productive lifetime. Importantly, we are said, he did not only progressively add new material at the end of his poem, but made many insertions in parts he conceived earlier. In this manner West accounts for the unquestionably strong inner links between different episodes and for the artistic unity of the overall structure without losing sight of disruptions, inconsistencies, and inorganic elements of the narrative. What is more, this long-time work of the poet, disruptive as it was for the (rather modest, but still innovative) original plan of the poem, actually adds to the intellectual and especially emotional depth of the *Iliad* as these secondary expansions include many of the most arresting scenes and episodes of the poem.

In chapter one of the first part, West presents a series of propositions that in principle are not defended in detail, but only asserted here: (1) 'The *Iliad* is (almost entirely) the work of one poet'; (2) 'He was not the poet of the *Odyssey*'; (3) 'He was not called Homer'; (4) 'He composed the *Iliad* with the aid of writing and over a long period'; and finally (5) 'He did not produce it in one continuous progression from Α to Ω'. In what follows, I will mainly focus on the proposition (4) and (5).

In connection with this last proposition, West invokes the case of the Embassy to Achilles in Book Nine of the *Iliad*, a notorious *aporia* of Homeric scholarship and cornerstone of many 'pluralistic' theories regarding the origins of the poem (p. 13–14). To explain the famous alternation between plural and dual verb forms applied to the five envoys visiting Achilles (Ajax, Odysseus, Phoenix, and two heralds) it is better to assume that the poet originally had only two messengers, but then added the old Phoenix to give more emotional force to this episode. So far so good, and West makes an excellent point against an 'oralist'

explanation of the episode: after listing the five characters in IX 168–170 an oral poet would have consistently used plurals henceforward, which is not the case. Consequently, we need to assume an authorial insertion into, or alteration of, a text (partly) fixed in writing before.

Here, however, lies a crucial problem of West's ingenious interpretation. To put it simply, he must assume that the poet '[p]robably […] did not read through his whole text with a view to ensuring that it flowed smoothly, but simply made additions as they occurred to him' (p. 14). In a word, instead of an oral poet unable to revise his work and so producing the *Iliad*, or some parts thereof, sequentially in its present order, we have a literate (or dictating) poet unwilling or incapable of reworking his poem or some parts thereof. This is probable, perhaps even plausible, but the degree of the poet's tolerance or (in-)sensitivity to such inconsistencies becomes a critical issue when the contemporary scholar's attention to them is the only guide in our analytical enterprise. Technically speaking, for longer insertions (shorter ones could be introduced in a lower or upper margin of, say, a papyrus scroll) West assumes cutting and pasting procedures, inserting extra sheets into a roll cut in two (p. 14). As a result, we need to imagine the poet of the *Iliad* as working for decades, amid intensive travels, on the same original roll of papyrus (or some other writing material, but leather seems even less practical for such a use), expanded when needed using new 'patches'.[1] In the case of the Embassy, remaining in the literate paradigm for the 'making of the *Iliad*', one may ask oneself for argument's sake whether the old 'pluralistic' explanation does not remain a serious alternative. A later 'Homerid' poet, working on the authoritative version of the poem, would surely not revise or change the word forms in the original text (here: the duals) when inserting his additions to the *Iliad*.

Most conveniently, the author singles out three different types of expansions by the original poet. He distinguishes 'three orders of magnitude': the major ones he calls 'tectonic expansions'; particular self-contained episodes (West's 'episodic expansions'); and finally shorter passages, the 'sub-episodic expansions', 'inserted within or between episodes' (p. 58). I dare say that the most important contribution of West's book regards the order of 'tectonic expansions'. His overall vision of major inconsistencies in the narrative (many of them already detected by different Analytical scholars, but most often ascribed by them to multiple poets), when the poet clearly veers off course from his original plan set up in Book One, looks entirely convincing and taken as a whole proves highly illuminating, and highly rewarding, to the reader of the *Iliad*. On the other hand, I think that the most serious problems are posed by the very notion of 'episodic expansions'. According

[1] Incidentally, this lengthy and meticulous procedure seems to exclude the possibility of an (illiterate) oral poet dictating his text to someone else, his scribe or scribes.

to West, these include e.g. the Achaean and Trojan Catalogues in Book Two and the Teichoskopia in Book Three.

This method is often in danger of some arbitrariness. What is and what is not – to put it in general terms – inorganic or purposeless? Let me give here just one example, the Diapeira, or the Testing of the Army in Book Two, an important point in West's commentary. Scholars have long felt uneasy about serious problems with the flow of the narrative in Book Two and West detects here 'various diversions from the plan which are not well harmonized among themselves' that evidently represent 'more than one layer of expansion' (p. 101). The original plan would have been to let Agamemnon, now full of optimism because of his (fallacious) dream, give the order for battle and attack the Trojans. Both the meeting of the elders and the assembly of the army look simply superfluous as far as the decision-making process is concerned. However, the Diapeira, for all the twisted logic of Agamemnon's seemingly pessimistic speech to the army, well serves the purpose of portraying the Achaeans as a collective character of the *Iliad*, presenting both their vacillation, even despair, and their ultimate resolve and thus explaining their readiness to stay far away from their homes and besiege Troy for ten long years. This is exactly what we need to understand at this point, when the characters of the leading individuals had already been sketched earlier. That is why we need both the meteoric presence of Thersites, repeating in his idiosyncratic ways Achilles' accusations against Agamemnon, and the intervention of Odysseus restoring military discipline. All this is not to deny that some 'stitches' in the narrative's fabric are clearly visible. But do we really need to take it as a series of 'secondary expansions' slowing down the narrative?

The rationale of the famously disquieting Teichoskopia ('[r]ationally, Priam should by this time know who was who, but his first opportunity in *Il.* is treated as the first overall', p. 131), or of the Achaean and Trojan Catalogues seems unquestionable, so do we need to assume here later authorial additions? Or perhaps can one envision serious and 'organic' reasons for the poet to break the seemingly 'natural' flow of the plot in order to achieve a poetic goal otherwise unattainable on the original plan of the poem? After all, the very originality of this plan, namely the extreme selectivity of the narrative entering *in medias res* of the Trojan War, and leaving the plot in the very same manner, must have confronted the poet with the requirements alien to his less innovative colleagues. In other words, authorial insertions of different kinds might have been equally 'natural' to him as, and at times must have prevailed over, such considerations as those of the 'natural' flow of the plot, especially in the early parts of the poem, when the stage is still being set out. Briefly put, some 'episodic expansions' may simply belong to the original plan of the whole, as conceived in the poet's head, while still being expansions, i.e. later insertions, from a technical point of view.

On yet another level, leaving aside such obvious cases as the Doloneia, the general question remains why some, and only some, of the 'stitches' in the *Iliad* are patently visible to the reader whereas others seem much better integrated, or concealed, or polished? I think there is still no escape: we ought to assume that such phenomena often bespeak a complex subsequent history of the text of the *Iliad*. This is to say that West's theory does not entirely save us from the need for an analytical sensitivity to other possible layers of the text that may not be due to the original composer. This regards in particular the order of West's 'sub-episodic expansions'.

On the other hand, we are not saved from some arch-Unitarian considerations either, as another big question is what are the implications of West's theory for our general interpretation of fundamental intellectual or spiritual aspects of the poem? How should we study the poet's vision of the gods or of the human condition based on a text in which, say, 'juvenile' and more mature strata of his thought are intertwined? Or are they readily recognisable and distinguishable from one another? It is left to the scholars who will embrace West's overall vision – finding in it an alternative means of transport and taking 'the opportunity to dismount and reappraise the situation' – or to West himself (cf. already p. 65–66), to build upon this theory towards a new intellectual paradigm of the poet of the *Iliad*. Or, as the author repeatedly stresses himself (p. 55–58), was 'most of this […] seen long ago'? *Tant mieux!* One additional value of this great book is to reopen many a debate in Homeric scholarship proving that not only the report of the death of the keen-sighted Analysis, but also of that of the sensitive Unitarianism was an exaggeration. Whether the two approaches are reconcilable now, as a result of M. L. West's stimulating study, is an open matter.

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