

**‘A lightness that is both new and a return’: Nekyia and
katabasis in twenty-first century receptions of the Iliad**

Patrick James Moritz

School of Humanities / Department of English and Creative
Writing

University of Adelaide

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Abstract

In the Homeric epics, interactions with the dead occur in two ways: *nekyia*, a conversation with the shades of the dead, and *katabasis*, a physical descent or journey to the underworld. In this thesis, I examine how Madeline Miller's novel *The Song of Achilles* (2011), David Malouf's novel *Ransom* (2009), and Alice Oswald's poem *Memorial* (2011) engage with the *Iliad*'s representations of death. I argue that through their reception and adaptation of *nekyia* and *katabasis*, these three authors highlight new and contemporary perspectives on the events and themes of the *Iliad*.

Madeline Miller structures *The Song of Achilles* as an extended version of Patroclus' tale of his and Achilles' childhood that he tells in the *nekyia* of *Iliad* 23. I examine how the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus has previously been interpreted and argue that the novel focuses on the development of a romantic and sexual relationship between the two characters, bringing a mostly positive portrayal of queer love into the reception of the *Iliad*.

While Miller expands upon the plot of the *Iliad*, in *Ransom*, Malouf focuses on the epic's twenty-fourth and final book to examine a 'primary interest ... in storytelling itself' (Malouf 223). I argue that similarly to Homer, Malouf presents Priam's journey to Achilles' camp as a symbolic *katabasis*. In doing so, he offers two major interventions in the reception of Homer: his focus on his characters' emotions and psychology as they conduct the ransom, and his creation of the character Somax, a simple carter who accompanies Priam on his journey to Achilles' camp. These new elements and Malouf's focus on the "newness" of the ransom to his characters reinvigorates the story from the *Iliad*.

By Oswald's own estimation, in *Memorial*, she dismisses 'seven-eighths' of the *Iliad* to create a new poem consisting of three elements: the names of those soldiers whose deaths are narrated in the epic, short biographies of those soldiers, and numerous Homeric similes that she applies to new circumstances (Oswald 2). I argue that the entire poem functions as a *katabasis* with the narrator acting as a Sibylesque guide, reflecting the long history of Homeric reception through Virgil and others. In the 'oral cemetery' that is *Memorial* (Oswald 2), Oswald treats all of the dead as equals and thus reinvigorates the *Iliad* through her remembrance of the common man.

I position these analyses within an ongoing debate in Classical reception studies between aesthetics and cultural history. Drawing particularly on the works of Charles Martindale and Simon Goldhill, I advocate for a Classical reception studies that embraces the multi-faceted nature of the word 'reception', aiming to strike a balance between the contemporary and historical influences of the works I study. In the conclusion, I consider how the *Iliad* is itself retrospectively affected by the works I discuss, suggesting that the epic's continuing importance is made possible by its rebirth in each of these receptions.

Thesis Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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Notes on the Text

1. All quotations to ancient sources are in English:
 - All references to the *Iliad* are to Caroline Alexander's 2015 translation.
 - All references to the *Odyssey* are to Emily Wilson's 2017 translation.
 - All references to the *Aeneid* are to Sarah Ruden's 2008 translation

I have chosen these translations because they are all line-by-line and themselves represent an important facet of Classical reception in the early twenty-first century. Further details and references to other ancient texts that appear less frequently are contained in the Works Cited.

2. Greek words (*nekylia*, *katabasis*, *kleos*) have been italicised throughout.
3. When quoting poetry, I have further indented words that run over the line space in this manuscript.
4. In general, I have used the more commonly occurring, latinised versions of names (Achilles rather than Akhilleus, Patroclus rather than Patroklos). This is in keeping with the vast majority of receptions in which these names appear, and the translations I am using. Where there is a discrepancy between translation and reception, I have opted for the spelling of the reception. For example, Oswald calls the first man to die at Troy Protesilaus, whereas Alexander has it as Protesilaos—I use the former, including when quoting from the ancient text.
5. Following the lead of Miller and Malouf, I use Neoptolemus and Pyrrhus interchangeably to refer to Achilles' son.

‘A lightness that is both new and a return’: Nekyia and katabasis in twenty-first century receptions of the *Iliad*

Introduction

In the Homeric epics, interactions with the dead occur in two ways: *nekyia*, a conversation with the shades of the dead, and *katabasis*, a physical descent or journey to the underworld. In this thesis, I examine how Madeline Miller’s novel *The Song of Achilles* (2011), David Malouf’s novel *Ransom* (2009), and Alice Oswald’s poem *Memorial* (2011) engage with the *Iliad*’s representations of death. I argue that through their reception and adaptation of *nekyia* and *katabasis*, these three authors highlight new and contemporary perspectives on the events and themes of the *Iliad*. Although the ways in which each author engages with *nekyia* and *katabasis* vary, the interaction with death gives each work the ‘power of a death tale ... and hence lends to it a certain urgency and import beyond the surface structure of the story presented’ (Holtsmark 49). Each work retells the events of the *Iliad* within the Homeric setting, but the new perspectives they bring to those events respond to contemporary concerns. In brief: Miller presents Achilles and Patroclus’ relationship as an explicit love story between two men; Malouf considers the psychology and emotions of Priam, Achilles, and his new character Somax; and Oswald emphasises the common soldier through commemorating each death narrated in the *Iliad*. Through the study of these texts, I also promote a vision of Classical reception studies that accommodates both the aestheticist theories of Charles Martindale and the study of cultural history advanced by Simon Goldhill. As the twenty-first century progresses, I suggest a combination of these two methods will result in a field that is better able to respond to and comment on the ever-changing nature of Classical

receptions, their interactions with the past and with contemporary works, and the social and political issues they address.

The study of these texts and their use of *nekyia* and *katabasis* is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, while *Ransom* and *Memorial* have received some scholarly attention, *The Song of Achilles* has received little to none, despite good reviews and winning the Orange Prize for fiction. Furthermore, the reception and adaptation of *nekyia* and *katabasis* in each work has been underexplored. Secondly, I extend previous work on Homeric receptions into the twenty-first century. In particular, I build upon work in Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood's 2007 collection *Homer in the Twentieth Century*, which examines both scholarly and creative responses to the Homeric poems. As we shall see in Chapter 1, in the twentieth century 'shifts in the academic study of the Homeric epics were part of a much broader re-positioning of Homer in the cultural landscape' (Graziosi and Greenwood 3). These shifts and the receptions that responded to them are important precursors to the works I study. Thirdly, because each work responds to contemporary concerns and issues, they expand and alter the significance the *Iliad* can have for a contemporary reader. As a result, Miller, Malouf, and Oswald contribute to the epic's continuing importance through the rebirth it receives in each of their receptions.

Miller, Malouf, and Oswald all adapt features of *nekyia* and *katabasis* present in the *Iliad* itself. In Book 23 of the epic, Patroclus' ghost appears to Achilles, asking to be buried so that he can 'pass the gates of Hades' (Homer *Il.* 23.64). This emotional *nekyia* also contains crucial information about Achilles' and Patroclus' childhood that is used by each author I study. Although Homer does not depict a physical descent to the underworld in the *Iliad*, the journey Priam takes to Achilles'

camp to ransom Hector's body in Book 24 strongly resembles other *katabases* in Greek myth and the *Iliad*'s antecedents, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (De Jáuregui 37, note 1; Mackie "Scamander" 488-91). Priam's departure from Troy resembles a funerary procession, as 'all his dear ones followed with him / lamenting greatly, as if he were going to his death' (Homer *Il.* 24.327-28). Miguel Herrero De Jáuregui argues that this procession, and the earlier lamentation at lines 160-63, represent a symbolic death for Priam because he must go to a symbolic underworld to retrieve Hector's body (48-49). As Priam and his herald pass the tomb of Ilos at line 349, other *katabatic* elements converge: night falls, they cross a river, and Hermes appears to guide them (De Jáuregui 44). Priam then retrieves Hector's body from Achilles' hut, which is described similarly to the House of Hades (De Jáuregui 46). Erling B. Holtsmark has shown that *katabases* in contemporary works do not have to entail a literal descent into the underworld (26). Rather, the films that Holtsmark studies in his essay recreate the structure and incorporate elements of traditional *katabases*. Chief among these is a journey, 'usually [taking] place at dusk or during the night' to an 'other world' that is 'dank and dark' and located across a natural boundary such as a river or mountain range, possibly reached through an entryway in a cave or grotto (Holtsmark 25). Holtsmark shows that 'the usual purpose of the journey is to obtain spiritual or material wealth ... or to rescue a friend or friends' (26). The hero is changed by the *katabasis* and often takes on a leadership role upon his return (Holtsmark 26). The pattern of a heroic figure undertaking a dangerous journey of utmost importance and being changed upon their return 'speaks to something deeply human' and has remained prevalent across various narrative forms for millennia (Holtsmark 49). Miller, Malouf, and Oswald use the

power of this story pattern to heighten the importance of their works and the new perspectives they introduce to the story of the *Iliad*.

The authors' interaction with death also responds to prevailing concerns in their societies in the early twenty-first century. The September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, and the resulting conflicts of the United States' War on Terror, which included prominent involvement from the UK and Australia, could be said to have impacted most, if not all, of cultural production in the West in the twenty-first century, but they hold particular significance for Homeric receptions.¹ Herodotus famously lists the Trojan War as one of the first conflicts between East and West (1.3.1-1.4.1), and conflicts in the Middle East are particularly apt for comparison with Homer's epics because they occur in a similar region to the epics. In contrast to receptions before and during the First World War, which used the Homeric epics to support and to criticise the war (Vandiver 464), the receptions I study are overwhelmingly critical of war. This is unsurprising given the protracted states of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the civilian losses incurred, and the other terrorist attacks throughout the first two decades of the century.

David Malouf's lifelong fascination with the *Iliad* and the wider Trojan myth demonstrates the influence that war can have on literature. In the novel's Afterword, he writes:

One rainy Friday afternoon in 1943, when we were unable to go out into the playground for our usual period of tunnel ball, our primary-school teacher, Miss Finlay, read us a story. It was the Troy story.

For some reason, though I was a keen reader, I had never heard it,

¹ Miller is American, Malouf is Australian, and Oswald is British.

and when the bell rang and Miss Finlay dismissed us with the story left hanging, I was devastated. (*Ransom* 221).

Malouf grew up in Brisbane, which in 1943 was ‘the headquarters of General MacArthur’s Pacific campaign’, and he states that he ‘immediately connected Miss Finlay’s ancient and fictional war’ with the war he was living through (*Ransom* 221-22). The Troy story, and particularly its iteration in Homer’s *Iliad*, has stayed with Malouf throughout his life; he reads the epic ‘every couple of years’ (Malouf “Unnecessary” 81). In 1970, when, as Margaret Reynolds notes, Australia was involved in another war in Vietnam (198), Malouf wrote the poem “Episode from an Early War”, in which he tries to bring together his knowledge of the Troy story and his experience of living through war in childhood (Malouf *Ransom* 222; Reynolds 196). The *Iliad* and the wider Trojan myth clearly remained important to Malouf, and in 2002 he returned to it by writing the first draft of *Ransom*, which as Peter Conrad notes, could have been influenced by 9/11 (50). Wars bring death to the forefront of our collective imagination and, as we shall see, death has a prominent place in every reception I study.

In addition to responding to war and terrorism, Miller, Malouf, and Oswald bring new perspectives to the *Iliad*, allowing the epic to speak more directly to contemporary issues. This is a particularly pertinent facet of reception in general in the early twenty-first century because of the increasingly prominent campaigns for a greater diversity of representation in popular media over the past two decades. For example, the #OscarsSoWhite campaigns in 2015 and 2016 drew attention to the continuing under-representation of actors of colour in the film industry’s most prestigious awards, and subsequently within other areas of the film industry (Blay). Similar accusations have been levelled at the publishing industry, particularly of

children's and young adult fiction, which is overwhelmingly written by white authors and features white protagonists (Shapiro). At the same time, in the political sphere, a number of notable achievements and firsts occurred, such as Barack Obama's election, Hillary Clinton's presidential campaigns, Julia Gillard's tenure as Australia's first female Prime Minister, and the legalisation of same-sex marriage in many countries including Australia, the UK, and the USA. Representation of minority groups in media, the arts, and politics is important because it demonstrates to members of those groups that they belong to the community those organisations form: 'Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation' (Gerbner and Gross 134). Like the writers I study, those calling for greater representation in film, television, and literature take seriously the idea that the stories we tell ourselves have an impact upon how we live our lives (Boboltz). That is not to say that every text I study is perfect in terms of the representation it offers. While they all do bring new perspectives to the reception of Homer, we shall see in particular that Miller's portrayal of a queer Patroclus is influenced by heteronormative ideals. Nevertheless, the impulse towards a greater diversity of characters is an important cultural context for the works I examine.

In Chapter 1, I turn my attention to the critical contexts that inform my later analyses. I locate my work and Classical reception studies within a broad definition of "reception". I suggest that Classical reception studies might more fully embrace the multi-faceted nature of the term "reception". The resulting broad and vibrant Classical reception studies could encompass both the aesthetics promoted by Charles Martindale and the cultural history promoted by Simon Goldhill. It is in this light that I examine Martindale's theories of reception as the main theoretical basis upon which I build my arguments. I give particular attention to the weak and strong

theses that Martindale advances in *Redeeming the Text*, and also consider how to modify these positions in my own work based on the criticisms levelled at Martindale's work by Goldhill.

In the second part of Chapter 1, I consider the dual position of the Homeric epics as both 'one instance of a type of traditional oral narrative to be found the world over' and as 'the head of a Western tradition of literary epic that runs from Apollonius of Rhodes through Virgil, on to the Renaissance and beyond' (Ford 396). I begin with the work of Milman Parry, whose hypothesis of a Homeric oral tradition greatly contributed to the current state of Homeric scholarship. I then examine the epic elements adapted in the works I study as they are present in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These include ring composition, epithets, and extended similes. I close this chapter by considering how the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have been translated and used in educational settings to illustrate how Homer is also characterised as the beginning of the Western canon.

In Chapter 2, I examine how in *The Song of Achilles*, Madeline Miller responds and adds to the debates surrounding the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. I argue that Miller presents the novel as an extended form of the *nekyia* between Patroclus and Achilles in Book 23 of the *Iliad*. Over the course of the novel, which begins with Patroclus' birth and ends when Achilles' and Patroclus' souls reunite in the underworld, Miller depicts Achilles and Patroclus in an explicitly romantic and sexual relationship that is a source of joy and fulfilment for them both. The novel thus brings a mostly positive representation of a queer relationship to the reception of the *Iliad* and should receive more than the scant critical attention it has had thus far. To demonstrate the positive nature of this representation, I examine how Achilles and Patroclus' relationship has been presented previously through the

lens of David M. Halperin's four historical categories of homosexuality: pederasty, heroic friendship, effeminacy, and inversion (Halperin "How To" 91-92). Although as I have mentioned above, Miller's representation of a queer couple is limited by heteronormative stereotypes, the novel still offers a new perspective that positions Achilles and Patroclus' love for one another as something for which they should be renowned.

In Chapter 3 I argue that in *Ransom*, Malouf offers two major interventions in the reception of Homer: his focus on his characters' psychological states as they conduct the ransom, and his creation of the character of Somax, a simple carter who accompanies Priam on his journey. I argue that the novel recreates the structure of a Classical *katabasis*. In the beginning of the novel, Malouf depicts Achilles as living in an underworld of his own making and both Achilles and Priam as isolated from their families and communities due to an inability to tell their own stories. By deciding to go himself to Achilles' camp to conduct the ransom for Hector's body, Priam undertakes a symbolic descent into the underworld that Achilles inhabits. During this journey, Priam talks and shares food with the carter Somax, awakening his curiosity in the world and reconnecting him with his community. Malouf's focus on the *katabatic* elements of Priam's journey and on Achilles and Priam's emotions and psychology change important aspects of the scene of the ransom itself, making it feel new just as Malouf's characters feel reborn.

In the fourth and final chapter, I analyse Alice Oswald's 2011 poem *Memorial*, which was subtitled "An Excavation of the *Iliad*" in its original British publication. I suggest that Oswald 'excavates' three primary features from Homer's *Iliad*: the names of those whose deaths are narrated in the epic, short biographies of those soldiers, and numerous epic similes that she translates and applies to new

circumstances. I argue that Oswald repurposes the biographies and similes of the *Iliad* to demonstrate the futility of war. Oswald briefly resurrects the 218 named men who are killed in the *Iliad* and suggests that the lives they lived, though mostly unknown, are more important than the manner of their deaths. Rather than the *nekyia* of *Iliad* 23 or the symbolic *katabasis* of *Iliad* 24, Oswald's poem more closely resembles *katabases* from works after the *Iliad*. In works including the *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, the journey to the underworld includes descriptions of and conversations with many of the dead—*Odyssey* 11 in particular combines elements of *nekyia* and *katabasis* (De Jáuregui 39). In *Memorial*, Oswald's narrator also acts as a guide similar to the Sybil. As we shall see, in the 'oral cemetery' that is *Memorial* (Oswald 2), Oswald treats all of the dead as equals and thus reinvigorates the *Iliad* through her remembrance of the common man.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Homeric receptions are as varied and prolific as the scholarly field of Classical reception studies. It must also be said that the early twenty-first century, as a period, has likely ended, though I will leave it to future scholars to debate whether the end comes in 2016 with the election of Donald Trump and the Brexit Referendum, in early 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, somewhere in between, or at another time entirely. In the Conclusion, I turn my attention to what Homer means to us today. In light of the receptions I have examined and the new perspectives they have introduced to the epics, I consider why Homer and the *Iliad* in particular are popular choices for new receptions in the early twenty-first century. I suggest that we are living through what John Cant has called a 'Homerian moment', where a new medium arises and threatens the old (72). In response, authors and other artists have returned to Homer in order to make sense of contemporary events and reinvent the ancient texts. This

is demonstrated through the Australian company Brink Productions' large scale performance of Oswald's *Memorial* at multiple arts festivals in 2018. Reception is an ongoing process that allows older works to speak again through new works, diversifying representation, and addressing contemporary issues. Miller, Malouf, and Oswald achieve representation and social commentary through their engagement with Homer's techniques and their shared engagements with *nekyia* and *katabasis*. Their stories demonstrate the importance of reception and reinvigorate the Homeric epics. The field of Classical reception studies that responds to these works must be willing to change as the receptions themselves change, and to study a spectrum of receptions that is as broad as scholars wish to study. 'Meaning is always realised at the point of reception' (Martindale *Redeeming* 3), and because of the receptions I study in this thesis, and others, Homer still sings to us in our time.

Chapter 1

Preparations: The Critical Contexts of Classical Reception

Studies and Homeric Scholarship

Classical reception studies is a broad, popular, and rapidly developing field that draws on theories, works, and methodologies from outside of Classical studies to shed new light on the ever-changing status and interpretation of Classical texts. In this chapter, I examine two major contexts for my analyses of *The Song of Achilles*, *Ransom*, and *Memorial* in the chapters that follow. In the first part of this chapter, I examine the ongoing debate about whether Classical reception studies should take a more aesthetic approach or one informed by cultural history. I begin by exploring the complicated definition of reception itself and its use within Classics. I then examine the theoretical underpinnings of my later analyses, with a primary focus on Charles Martindale's work in *Redeeming the Text* (1993) and the criticisms that Simon Goldhill has made of it. I suggest that because of the nebulous definition of reception itself, there is space for both approaches in the vibrant field of Classical reception studies. In this thesis, I aim to strike a middle path between these two approaches in order to examine how the receptions I study reinvent the *Iliad* in light of past and contemporary influences. In the second part of this chapter, I examine the position of Homer in the early twenty-first century in two areas: scholarship and education. This discussion establishes the context for my later analyses and details the techniques that Miller, Malouf, and Oswald engage with in addition to *nekyia* and *katabasis*.

In the Introduction to their 2008 *Companion to Classical Receptions*, Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray define the field as studying 'the ways in which Greek

and Roman material has been transmitted, translated, excerpted, interpreted, rewritten, re-imaged and represented' (1). This long list of different processes reflects 'a broad and [a] narrow application' of the term "reception" across a variety of scholarly fields (Willis 2). Ika Willis has described two main types of reception: text-to-reader receptions and text-to-text receptions (Willis 32). *The Song of Achilles*, *Ransom*, and *Memorial* are all text-to-text receptions. Willis explains this distinction as follows:

In many disciplines, notably media and film studies, but also including traditional literary studies, reception is understood as a text-to-reader relationship: it is a process that takes place in readers or audiences. Text-to-text approaches, by contrast, are central in Classical and Biblical reception ... in these disciplines, reception scholars usually work not on audiences, but on texts which have been created in response to earlier texts. These responding texts are then seen as the place where the process of reception happens. (Willis 35)

As Willis notes, the bulk of Classical reception studies are of text-to-text receptions. These receptions can be creative or critical works. Poems, novels, plays, films, paintings and other visual arts, for example, are creative receptions, and Classical scholarship can also be studied as a critical reception of antiquity. Additionally, translations of ancient texts would represent both a creative and critical response to the Classical world. In all of these cases, there is always a broadly conceived reader present, but the focus of scholarship is on the relationship and interactions between texts. Yet Willis' 'usually' is also crucial because Classical reception scholars also study how the works of the Greek and Roman past have continued to be read in

diverse ways by diverse groups, as well as the history of Classical scholarship itself. While text-to-text reception remains the focus of most work in Classical reception studies, this work, including my own, is informed by theories and practices that arise from the study of text-to-reader reception, as we shall see.

Few Classical reception scholars have explicitly addressed these two types of reception. They are not often differentiated in the theory or practice of Classical reception, even though they might be in other disciplines (Martindale "Introduction" 1-2). One reason for this is that, most of the time, the reception of a Classical text by a reader, scholarly or otherwise, is treated as just another text to analyse. For example, in his essay "'War—What is it Good for?' in Homer's *Iliad* and Four Receptions", Seth L. Schein examines the characterisation and representation of war in the *Iliad* and then in two scholarly and two artistic receptions from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (*Homeric* 149-50). Schein is interested in how the receptions respond to the *Iliad*'s representation of war, and so, for the purposes of his argument, the differences between these receptions as texts are sidelined. It is important, I suggest, that these distinctions are not always or completely ignored. A scholarly interpretation of an ancient text is different to a new creative work that may, for instance, be purposely contradicting the ancient text on which it draws. Even though many different works can be receptions, their differences remain important. Classical reception studies can and should continue to study these various kinds of receptions, together and separately. I suggest that recognising and appreciating the many meanings of reception as a term places Classical reception studies in the best position from which to analyse the various ways that Greek and Roman antiquity are present in later societies, including our own.

The variety of receptions is perhaps one of the reasons why there is not a universally or even commonly accepted theoretical basis that sets out how studies of Classical reception should be conducted. Martindale has repeatedly drawn attention to this issue. In *Redeeming the Text*, he issued what he has subsequently described as ‘a challenge to theorize’ the emerging field (Martindale "Reception" 170-71). He followed this in 2006 with his and Richard Thomas’ edited collection *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, observing that ‘there has been little discussion about the value of such work [studies of Classical receptions], and the weaknesses, or strengths, of particular methodologies used within it’ ("Introduction" 2). And again, in a special issue of the *Classical Receptions Journal* to mark the twentieth anniversary of *Redeeming the Text*, Martindale lamented the fact that Classical reception studies were ‘often untheorized’ ("Reception" 170). Martindale is not alone in these observations. In her chapter in Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood’s collection *Homer in the Twentieth Century* (2007), Lorna Hardwick suggests that ‘the practice of receiving Homeric epic in the twentieth century is ahead of the theory’, while others in that volume ‘suggest that the model of “reception” is not entirely adequate to explain the complicated, criss-crossing dialogues between Homeric epic and twentieth century culture’ (Graziosi and Greenwood 17). I suggest that this situation offers opportunities rather than limitations. First, there is clearly ample scope for continued theoretical discussion in Classical reception studies and second, embracing the multi-faceted nature of the term ‘reception’ allows scholars to adapt existing theories and methodologies to new works, including those from outside Classics, as Martindale and others have done. As we shall see, I aim to bring together areas of the field that have been opposed to each other to analyse works in

the twenty-first century that respond to contemporary concerns through engaging with representations of the dead in the *Iliad*.

Although there is not a universally accepted theory of Classical reception, most studies share some basic principles. Hardwick details three major theoretical influences on Classical reception studies, deriving from the works of Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, and Hans-Georg Gadamer (6). The works of these three scholars predominantly focus on text-to-reader reception, but can and have been extended to describe how reception occurs within a new text. Like Hardwick, I begin with Jauss, who ‘developed a theory of the “aesthetics of reception”’ (Hardwick 7). As Hardwick explains,

This [i.e. the aesthetics of reception] asserted that the historical character of an artwork could not be captured merely by describing it (as did the Formalists) or examining its production (as did the Marxists). Instead Jauss developed a theory of the interaction of production and reception. This involved dialogue between producer/artist and reader/audience/consumer. To frame this dialogue Jauss used the notion of a ‘horizon of expectation’. Jauss’s adaptation of the concept focused on a horizon of experience of life and thus rooted the receiver’s mind-set in his or her social and cultural context. This was what could be said to shape expectations and interpretations of texts. (Hardwick 7-8)

Jauss’s concept of the ‘horizon of expectations’ is the foundation of work on text-to-reader receptions and operates in every text. The concept takes on a particular force when one considers how it operates in relation to receptions. Jauss argues that:

a literary work, even when it appears to be new ... awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and, with its beginning arouses expectations for the “middle and end,” which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading (Jauss 23)

Jauss’s work forms the basis of the concepts Martindale explores in *Redeeming the Text* and begins to explain the aesthetic attraction of reading or viewing a text-to-text reception.

Iser’s and Gadamer’s theories have also influenced the directions Classical reception studies have taken. Hardwick writes that Iser’s ‘work focused on reader-response as a trigger for the construction of meaning in literary texts’ (Hardwick 8). This is different from Stanley Fish’s reader-response theory, which has not been as widely used by Classical reception scholars. Instead, according to Hardwick, ‘Iser’s work covers the input to interpretation of a literary text by both the “actual” reader and the “implied” reader, that is the reader to whom the structure and language of the text speaks’ (8). This distinction is pivotal because for Iser, ‘literary texts take on their reality by being read’ and that reality, their meaning, is ‘assembled in the responsive mind of the recipient’ (Iser in Willis 73). Combining this theory with Jauss’s, it is imperative to remember that the reader of the text is always historically and culturally situated. This is true of a contemporary reader, an ancient reader, or any reader who has responded to an ancient text from the time it was written until today. Likewise, the author of a text-to-text reception reinterprets the precursor text within their historical and cultural setting. Cultural and historical contexts should therefore be pivotal to the study of receptions, though, as we shall see below, this is

an area of some debate. The observations of both Jauss and Iser build upon the works of their teacher, Gadamer, who theorised 'that the meaning to be attributed to a text was not "essential", i.e. waiting to be drawn out, but constructed as part of the historical nature of understanding' (Hardwick 8). This concept is crucial to Martindale's work, which I will examine in more detail shortly. Gadamer's theories 'suggest that the meaning attributed to an ancient [or any other] text is shaped by the historical impact of its subsequent receptions' (Hardwick 8). The consequence of this theory is that the meaning of any text is never fixed and can be affected by its own reception. Accordingly, my analyses of the relationships between twenty-first century works and the *Iliad* are mediated by countless other texts, from before and after their own publication.

In *Redeeming the Text*, Martindale offers 'a manifesto for the adoption of reception theory within the discipline of classics' ("Introduction" 1). He argues against a process of reading ancient texts that attempts to recover the meaning and interpretation of the texts as they would have been received when they were originally composed, because he deems this impossible (Martindale *Redeeming* 4). Instead, he acknowledges that 'we all approach the reading of texts with the baggage of our values and our experience, with certain categories, assumptions, prejudices and "fore-understandings"' (Martindale *Redeeming* 5). For this reason, he posits that 'the interpretation of texts is inseparable from the history of their reception' and that 'meaning ... is always realized at the point of reception' (Martindale *Redeeming* xiii; 3). The latter statement has become somewhat of a 'mantra', with William W. Batstone describing it as 'the founding claim of [Classical] reception study', which usually places that point of reception in a new text (Martindale "Response" 246; Batstone 14). Its use has reflected Martindale's

observation that 'a writer *can never control the reception of his or her work*' (Martindale *Redeeming* 3-4, emphasis in original). At the monograph's twentieth anniversary, he noted that the mantra was originally interrogative, but it has become a major touchstone of the methodology of Classical reception (Martindale "Response" 246). By combining and refining the works of Gadamer and Jauss, and implicitly Iser, within the context of Classical scholarship, Martindale 'contributed to a major reconfiguration of Classics' (Martindale "Reception" 169; Hardie 192). Although Martindale himself does not view it as such (Martindale "Reception" 169), reception is a vital and vibrant subfield of Classics that links many parts of the discipline together. As Martindale argues and as I aim to show in my work, particularly in the Conclusion, reception in all its various guises affects every element of what we know of Classical texts and of history.

Throughout *Redeeming the Text*, Martindale advances two theses, which he describes as 'weak' and 'strong'. To begin with the weak thesis, Martindale claims that 'numerous unexplored insights into ancient literature are locked up in imitations, translations and so forth' (Martindale *Redeeming* 7). Although he calls this thesis 'uncontroversial', it remains vitally important to the study of receptions (Martindale *Redeeming* 8). Indeed, the insights into older texts that can be uncovered through new works are part of the attraction of receptions. There is an aesthetic pleasure that arises from identifying references to other texts in a receptive work (Flensted-Jensen 28; McFarland 47). This pleasure extends beyond that of recognition and engages with our memories of older works, enabling an appreciation of how a new work is similar to and different from the works that it receives. The similarities and differences open up the unexplored insights that Martindale describes and, through

exploring these insights, receptions make us reconsider the works that they draw upon.

The idea that receptions affect the works they are influenced by is the starting point of Martindale's strong thesis, which has had a much greater impact on the study of Classical receptions. He argues that:

Our current interpretations of ancient texts, whether or not we are aware of it, are, in complex ways, constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been effected. As a result we cannot get back to any originary meaning wholly free of subsequent accretions. (Martindale *Redeeming* 7)

Because, for Martindale, 'meaning is always realized at the point of reception', how we interpret a text is always influenced by the contexts in which we read it.

Martindale illustrates his theses through the relationship between Homer and Virgil:

the weak thesis would be that Virgil gives us powerful insights into Homer; the strong thesis, that, since Virgil, no reading of Homer, at least in the West, has been, or could be, wholly free of a vestigial Virgilian presence—not even one given by an interpreter not directly familiar with Virgil's poems—because the Homer-Virgil opposition is so deeply inscribed, both in the exegetical tradition and in the wider culture, because the two texts are always and already culturally implicated (Martindale *Redeeming* 8).

It may well be that because of the sustained and constantly reinscribed relationship and opposition between Homer's and Virgil's works in their critical and creative receptions, even a reader who is unaware of Virgil may read the Homeric epics in

some way mediated through Virgil. The more pertinent consequence of Martindale's strong thesis for both his own and my work, is that readers with knowledge of the relationship between the two authors cannot forget that knowledge. This may be especially true for scholars who may be influenced by a vestigial presence because of their reading and training. Martindale asserts that 'we do not merely interpret "Homer" by the light of our taste, since the Homeric poems have themselves contributed to the formation of that taste' (*Redeeming* 6). Even if we read Homer after reading other Classical texts or receptions of those texts, we may find that what we enjoy in the Homeric poems is what we have enjoyed in other works, which were in fact imitating or adapting Homer.² In Martindale's theory, the existence of receptions fundamentally and irreversibly changes the interpretations of the works they receive in an ongoing and never-ending process. In each of the following chapters, I explore how this process is borne out by Miller's, Malouf's, and Oswald's works.

Both of Martindale's theses focus more on the precursor, or ancient, text than on subsequent receptions. After the publication of *Redeeming the Text*, however, he has 'argued persistently in favour of accounts in which reception is figured dialogically, as a two-way process of understanding, backwards and forwards, which illuminates antiquity as much as modernity' (Martindale "Reception" 171). The dialogical conception is crucial because it points to the continual process of reception. As a result of this continual process, 'antiquity is constantly changing as ever-changing modernities engage in dialogue with it; [and] the ancient works come to mean differently under different modern conditions' (Martindale "Reception" 171).

² I follow Martindale's lead here in using 'we' in a manner that could be universal, but most immediately applies to Classical and Classical reception scholars.

What is being received then is never just the *Iliad* or any other ancient text, but a sort of amalgamation of the text and its various receptions. Yet the original text itself remains important. Martindale has increasingly turned to the works of Walter Pater, showing that his theories of reception align with those practiced by Classical scholars of the past. Pater's words confirm Martindale's theories about reception and offer a rationale for studying it:

The composite experience of all the ages is part of each one of us; to deduct from that experience, to obliterate any part of it, to come face to face with the people of a past age, as if the middle age, the Renaissance, the eighteenth century had not been, is as impossible as to become a little child, or enter again into the womb and be born. But though it is not possible to repress a single phase of that humanity, which, because we live and move and have our being in the life of humanity, makes us what we are; it is possible to isolate such a phase, to throw it into relief, to be divided against ourselves in zeal for it, as we may hark back to some choice space of our own individual life. We cannot conceive the age; we can conceive the element it has contributed to our culture; we can treat the subjects of the age bringing that into relief. Such an attitude towards Greece, aspiring to but never actually reaching its way of conceiving life, is what is possible for art. (Pater in Martindale "Introduction" 7)

Reception is both what happens when we read and what enables us to read. It occurs equally with the most ancient and the most modern of texts. Giving attention to both text-to-text and text-to-reader receptions enables an understanding of the continuation of human culture and its disparities.

Martindale's theories about reception have not been universally accepted and have been particularly criticised by Simon Goldhill, who argues for a different conception of reception. In the special issue of the *Classical Receptions Journal*, Philip Hardie points to a 'continuing stand-off' between Martindale and Goldhill, which has more recently been described as an overarching debate between aesthetic and historicist methods of enquiry (Hardie 193; Hiscock 324). Goldhill has two main criticisms of Martindale's work: that he concentrates too heavily on so-called "great" authors, and that his focus on the aesthetics of reception creates decontextualized interpretations. Goldhill argues that:

Modern reception theory, as embodied for classicists most intelligently in the work of Martindale, focuses too restrictedly on a model of individual authors responding to individual works: Martindale on Milton on Virgil ... The aesthetic focus on an individual artist, face to face with an artist of an earlier generation, is instrumental in down-playing reception as an embedded, political, and historical process, where art is located in history, and has an effect in and on the world, and is constructed within multiple audiences over time, and the memory of those audiences. (Goldhill "Cultural" 65)

Goldhill's conception of reception being 'constructed within multiple audiences over time, and the memory of those audiences', is a useful contrast to Martindale. It offers a more dynamic view of how interpretations of receptions are created, one that I aim to incorporate. Rather than Martindale's 'chain of receptions' (Martindale *Redeeming* 7), Goldhill's 'embedded, political, and historical process' offers a more nuanced view of how meaning is constructed. We do not generally approach or read text-to-

text receptions with a hierarchical or genealogical model of influence in our minds. Rather, we respond to resonances, references and allusions as they occur to us. Accordingly, when relevant, I examine Miller's, Malouf's, and Oswald's connections to works other than Homer in a manner that treats those other influences as equally important.

Goldhill gives three additional reasons for disputing reception as only between individual authors:

First, other texts are silenced ... Secondly, the vertical relationship with a text of the past silences the horizontal connections with contemporary texts ... Thirdly, as Heidegger put it, *Die Sprache spricht*: that is, every speaker of a language is spoken by it. Any critical reading needs to take account of the historical and ideological placement of a speaker in and by language. (Goldhill "Cultural" 62)

To illustrate these issues, Goldhill takes aim at Martindale's readings of Titian's paintings of Ovidian scenes in *Redeeming the Text* (Martindale *Redeeming* 60):

First, the discussion involves no other version of these myths that would have been in Titian's mental repertoire, no other versions of sexual violence or torture, no other contemporary interest in what Ovid might be doing, although the Renaissance was obsessed with Ovid and the Classical past. All that counts is the blank Titian face to face with Ovid. Secondly, the paintings' treatment of aesthetics, gender, [and] violence [in] Ovid [is] not contextualised within Titian's contemporary world ... Thirdly, he neglects Titian's placement within

the languages and techniques of art. (Goldhill "Cultural" 62-63,
editorial errors corrected from original)

I agree with Goldhill and Ralph Hexter that we must avoid discussing only those "great" receiving authors who are already part of the canon, and whose significance in the ongoing reception of Classical texts has already been inscribed and reinscribed by scholarship (Hexter 29). That is, I suggest that in addition to considering the influence of the Greek tragedians, Apollodorus, Virgil, and others of their ilk, we must also consider more obscure influences and the relationship between other contemporary works and the receptions we study. I also accept Goldhill's criticisms of the analysis that Martindale offers in *Redeeming the Text*, although I would reframe that criticism as one of Martindale's choice of examples rather than of his theories. By applying his theory to the relationship between Titian and Ovid, and to other pairs of well-known and admired authors and artists, Martindale does not fully explore the implications of his conception of reception. This is perhaps intentional, as he has also acknowledged that *Redeeming the Text* was intended as a call to action. Accordingly, I endeavour to follow some of the implications of Martindale's work and demonstrate the effect of a variety of influences on the works I examine and how they all contribute to the evolving meaning of the *Iliad*. Through my focus on how Miller, Malouf, and Oswald incorporate *nekyia* and *katabasis* in their works, I consider how the *Iliad* is renewed through its reception and how these three texts, when read together, offer insights about the contemporary world and how we use the past.

Goldhill promotes his own study of receptions as 'a form of cultural history as much as an aesthetic project' (Goldhill *Victorian* 14). In fact, he aims to treat aesthetic response as only one of a number of equally important contexts that can

be used to understand a reception (Goldhill *Victorian* 14). In this manner, Goldhill specifically responds to Martindale's 2005 monograph *Latin Poetry and the Judgement of Taste*, in which he argues for a 'return to the aesthetic' in Classical and literary criticism more generally (Martindale *Latin* 10). Goldhill's focus on cultural history also reinforces his criticisms of Martindale's focus on individual, well-known authors. He argues that 'reception studies is most productive and interesting when we move away from the great man communing in his study with the great work of the past, toward the cultural significance of the representation of the past for a here and now' (Goldhill *Victorian* 16). If meaning is realised at the point of reception, then the study of reception is fundamentally about what the past and past works mean at that point, whether it is positioned in a reader or a text, in our present or in another age. Following Goldhill's lead would 'take reception studies closer to cultural history', and he has been criticised by Martindale himself for being 'only interested in one time period [most often the long nineteenth century], or any rate only one time period at a time' (Goldhill "Cultural" 69; Martindale "Performance" 79). Martindale would likely emphasise Goldhill's '[a] here and now' as a detriment, but Goldhill's meticulous examination of the ways in which Victorian culture interacted with Classical antiquity is vital to understanding how Classical works and cultures have been received by readers and in texts in that period. As Goldhill himself argues, 'there are few centuries as important for classicists' self-awareness as the nineteenth, whether we focus on scholarship itself or on the classicists' complicity with imperialism, racism, and nationalism' (Goldhill *Victorian* 1). Goldhill studies how Victorians interacted with Classical Greece and Rome for its own sake and because it is important for 'explaining how we [Classical scholars] have come to be who we currently are' (Goldhill *Victorian* 1). While in the following chapters I do concentrate

primarily on how three individual authors have responded to the *Iliad*, I am also interested in what Goldhill might describe as relevant questions, here adapted for my own focus ("Cultural" 61): Why is the *Iliad* a popular choice for reception in the early twenty-first century, and for what reasons do authors rewrite it? Do the works I study engage similarly with the epic and hold it in the same regard? What can these receptions tell us about how Homer and the ancient world is viewed in contemporary society, and, in a more Martindalian manner, how do these receptions affect the epic itself?

In accordance with my position that Classical reception studies can and should embrace its multi-faceted nature, I propose that a greater focus on cultural history is not incompatible with the reception theory Martindale advances. Although they have different reasons for doing so, both Martindale and Goldhill repeatedly argue against positivist, unidirectional reception histories (e.g. Martindale *Redeeming* 4; Martindale *Latin* 10; Goldhill "Cultural" 61; Goldhill *Victorian* 14). For Martindale, this kind of work is deficient because it attempts to recover an originary meaning of a Classical work, while for Goldhill, histories of works that have responded to a particular work or author do not adequately engage with receptions as artworks in their own contexts. On both sides then, there is a commitment to reception as a dialectical and dynamic process. Recognising, as Goldhill argues, that all cases of Classical reception are at least doubled because an author or artist receives the Classical past and then a reader or viewer receives the resulting work, enhances rather than contradicts the theories put forth by Martindale (Goldhill "Touch" 250). Both what Goldhill calls the 'standard model of reception'—studies of 'vertical' relationships between texts of different eras ("Cultural" 60; 62)—and his model that focuses more on the relationship between texts of the same era and how

they collectively respond to the past can be incorporated into the study of Classical reception. In contrast to Goldhill, I suggest that studying how individual artists have responded to works of Classical antiquity is a worthwhile pursuit of reception study. This can occur in conjunction with or in addition to the broader cultural history for which Goldhill advocates. I aim to attend to the broader cultural ramifications of my chosen texts while also analysing how they respond to the *Iliad* and some of the innumerable receptions of it that have shaped the epic as we know it today.

I turn now to the second major context for my analysis, that of previous Homeric scholarship. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Homer's epics occupy an intriguing dual role in the history of literature and its study. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are seen as 'the head of a Western tradition of literary epic that runs from Apollonius of Rhodes through Virgil, on to the Renaissance and beyond', and through this tradition as the first works in the Western Canon (Ford 396). Yet they are also viewed 'as one instance of a type of traditional oral narrative to be found the world over' (Ford 396). This duality is the result of a great deal of scholarly work in the twentieth century, especially the studies of Milman Parry in the 1920s and 30s. I now offer a brief overview of Parry's work and the defining features of the *Iliad* as an example of Homeric epic that Miller, Malouf, and Oswald interact with in addition to *nekyia* and *katabasis*.

Before Parry, Classical scholars had long debated the central Homeric question: 'How and by whom were the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* composed and preserved?' (Fowler 220). The answers fall into two broad camps: Analysts, who argued that the epics were compiled from various shorter poems, and Unitarians, who 'stressed that the planful design and artistic quality of the poems ... [indicated] a great poet's involvement at a late stage in their evolution' (Fowler 221). It is more useful to my

project of analysing receptions of the *Iliad* to side with the Unitarians in general, as the idea of the “great poet” Homer is a potent part of the epic’s reception. One of the major reasons for the Analyst/Unionist debate was doubt over the ability of an oral poet to compose works as long and complex as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. However, according to John Miles Foley, ‘Parry’s great achievement was to offer a third alternative that rationalized the disparate evidence presented by both factions ... the hypothesis of a Homeric oral tradition’ (“Tradition” 147). Parry established that repetitive phrases and scenes in the epics, such as epithets and arming scenes, could have been used as aids for the poet when composing in performance. He referred to these oft-repeated elements of Homer’s language as formulas and demonstrated how an oral poet could compose using combinations of them (Foley “Tradition” 147-48). Certain anachronisms in the language used and customs described by Homer are also explained because ‘the Homeric vocabulary and morphology were dependent not on what was current in the spoken language of any given time or place, but on what had entered [the] special poetic dialect over many centuries’ (Foley “Tradition” 147). The Homeric bard thus performed in a manner similar to a jazz soloist: improvising new twists on a known theme within a traditionally accepted set of options. Parry’s theory was such an influential piece of scholarship because understanding the oral tradition opened up many avenues of inquiry for scholars and offered new interpretations that might inspire creative receptions of Homer’s epics. Thinking of “Homer” as the inheritor of a long tradition is also useful when considering receptions of his work because it helps to break down notions of the *Iliad* as original and everything that follows it as derivative.

Parry’s work also prompted comparisons between the Homeric epics and extant oral traditions. After theorising the Homeric oral tradition, Parry transferred his

theoretical work to a living epic tradition by studying South Slavic bards and found that they 'employed a formulaic language in many ways parallel to the language of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*' (Foley "Tradition" 150). Other scholars have continued this work, comparing epics from traditions all across the world including India, Mongolia, Tibet, Mali, England, and Finland (Foley "Epic" 173).³ These studies have identified common elements in long narrative forms across cultures including the following: extended length, an omnibus genre, ring composition, the use of formulaic phrases and scenes, extended similes, and a focus on moments of national significance (Foley "Epic" 172; Ford 399). As we shall see, in addition to the elements of *katabasis* and *nekyia*, Miller, Malouf, and Oswald each reworks some of these epic techniques.

Epics are often distinguished from other genres by their length, the seriousness and grandeur of the action they contain, and the variety of generic elements they employ. At 15,963 lines and 12,110 lines respectively, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are 'of middling length on an international scale' of oral epics (Foley "Epic" 181). Some, like *Beowulf* at 3,182 lines, are shorter, while others, especially in Mongolian and Tibetan traditions, can run to hundreds of thousands of lines (Foley "Epic" 179; 75). Western literary epics have tended to be around the same length—around 10,000 lines for both the *Aeneid* and *Paradise Lost*, and 14,000 for *The Divine Comedy*. Most of these works ostensibly focus on one complete action. In the *Iliad*, the focus is on the wrath of Achilles, which is far reaching in its significance—Achilles holds the fate of the Greek army in his hands (Abrams and Harpham 107). Despite this focus on one action, epics generally include elements of other poetic

³ This list comprises just those that Foley examines in his chapter "Epic as Genre" in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*. It does not include secondary, or written, epic or other examples of oral traditions such as The Dreaming of Indigenous Australians.

genres. Epic can therefore be called an 'omnibus genre' because it often contains, among other elements, 'prayers, laments, proverbs, catalogues and inset stories' (Foley "Epic" 181-82). The length, seriousness and generic variability of epics mean that they are very open to interpretation and re-interpretation in receptions.

Given the nature of their composition, the structures of Homer's epics have received much scholarly attention. Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* frequently employ ring composition, 'a basic technique of poetic composition and organisation within [the epics], and in early Greek literature generally' (Schein "*Iliad*" 347). This style of composition is often seen in speeches, where 'a series of topics or ideas mentioned in the first half of a speech or description recurs in reverse order in the second half' or where a character 'respond[s] to a series of questions by picking up with that asked last and replying in reverse order' (Schein "*Iliad*" 347; Tracy 361). The elements of the poems that display ring composition thus follow the pattern a b c, c b a. This is a fundamental technique of Homeric composition, and in the *Iliad*, 'ring composition is found ... in almost every direct speech that begins and ends with an explicit statement or other indication in the text that somebody spoke' (Schein "*Iliad*" 347). In both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, a character will ask another a series of questions and the answers will be given in the reverse order to which they were asked. Stephen V. Tracy illustrates this concept with reference to Odysseus' meeting with Anticleia's shade in Book 11 of the *Odyssey* (Homer *Od.* 11.171-203). Odysseus asks his mother 'about her death, about his father, about his son, and finally about his wife ... [and] in responding she takes his questions in exactly the reverse order: wife, son, father, and lastly her own death' (Tracy 361). In this instance, Anticleia's reversal of Odysseus' questions 'carefully builds up to and, thus, emphasizes the suffering that his absence has caused' (Tracy 363), and throughout

the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, ring composition on both micro and macro levels serves a similar purpose: the repositioning, repetition, and thus re-reading of similar elements to highlight their importance.

According to Tracy, 'Homer ... was the master of combining structures' (365), and ring composition is not the only organising principle to be found in the *Iliad*. Schein argues that 'the *Iliad* is organized according to two complementary, structural principles' (Schein "*Iliad*" 345). The first is ring composition, and the second is the epic's inexorable movement towards death—'the death of Hector, the death of Achilles, the fall of Troy' (Schein "*Iliad*" 348). The ring composition of the *Iliad* as a whole is particularly evident when comparing the first and last three books (Schein "*Iliad*" 345-46). Books 1 and 24 both feature a Trojan father bringing a ransom to a Greek holding his child captive. Books 2 and 23 'present descriptions of the Greek army assembled as a large group' through the catalogue of ships and the games after Patroclus' funeral (Schein "*Iliad*" 346). Books 3 and 22 feature duels between Menelaus and Paris, and between Achilles and Hector. These two fights represent the beginning of the war through the abduction of Helen and the end of war through the fall of Troy's greatest warrior, Hector (Schein "*Iliad*" 346). These three books on either side of the other action of the poem also serve to separate the story of the wrath of Achilles from the rest of the Trojan War. This is particularly true for Books 1 and 24, which portray a greater number of days and changes of scene than any of the other books (Lateiner 18). Within these framing books, formal elements such as *ekphrases*, genealogies, and similes 'suspend the principal narration' (Lateiner 19) but almost from the movement of his withdrawal, and certainly after Patroclus decides to go into battle, Achilles' fate, and therefore those too of Hector and Troy, are sealed. Schein argues that the force of the movement towards death

complements the sophisticated ring composition, creating 'a dual structure that is simultaneously harsh and harmonious, incomplete and fulfilled' ("*Iliad*" 352). Thus, although the *Iliad* features far fewer madcap adventures than the *Odyssey* boasts, it remains open to different interpretations.

While the structure of the *Iliad* has often been a source of innovation, Homer's epithets are often invoked to connect new works to the long history of the epic's reception. There is some debate among scholars as to how Homeric epithets should be interpreted, with opinions ranging from the noun-epithet pair simply meaning the noun, to the epithet representing an essential component of who or what it is describing. There is no doubt that certain combinations of epithets and names form convenient pairs for oral composition. Such epithets are combined with a number of different names and always fall in the same place in a line (Edwards 49-51). So it is that Menelaus and Diomedes are both referred to as 'of the great war cry' because their names are metrically identical (Lattimore 40). These occurrences led Parry to conclude 'that some epithets, at least, were only ornamental ... used simply to accommodate a noun to the metrical requirements of the verse' (Clark 128). Matthew Clark posits however that some epithets 'may refer beyond [their immediate] context to the rest of the poem or even the rest of the epic tradition' (130). Thus 'Zeus, Son of Kronos' may refer to the myth of successive supreme sky gods—Uranus, Kronos, and Zeus—even though that myth is not related by Homer (Clark 130). As one of the defining aspects of Homeric style, the epithet has also become fertile ground for reference, allusion, and re-interpretation. It certainly may be true that epithets that are used interchangeably among the minor characters have no great significance but there is more meaning to be found when interrogating the epithets given to the major characters. The repetition of certain epithets is noteworthy, far beyond any repetition

in a contemporary work. Achilles, for example, is called swift-footed thirty-one times in the *Iliad* (Clark 118). In Chapters 2 and 3, we shall see that both Miller and Malouf explore Achilles' character through descriptions of or references to his feet, bringing to mind his speed and his death simultaneously.

Another striking element of Homer's style is the extended or ornamental simile. Like any other simile, Homer's extended similes compare two things using an introducing word such as "like" or "as". They are distinguished by their length and by how the comparison affects Homer's action and themes. Elizabeth Minchin notes that 'the simile is marked out by an introductory feature [as] and a resumptive feature [so]' (213). They mostly follow a similar pattern—an action is described and then a comparison is made. Then, the comparison is expanded for a number of lines before the main action is reintroduced, most often with a 'so' to reinforce the comparison. The following passage is representative of the some two hundred similes in the *Iliad*:

And Ajax, springing upon the Trojans, killed Doryklos,
A bastard son of Priam, and then struck Pandokos,
And struck Lysandros and Pyrasos and Pylartes.
As when a river in flood descends to the plain,
Winter-flowing down the mountains, driven hard by the rain from Zeus,
And draws into itself and carries along dry oaks in multitude, pines
In multitude, and hurls the mass of flotsam into the salt sea,
So glorious Ajax swept the plain, wreaking havoc,
Slaying men and horses. (Homer *Il.* 11.489-97)

In this passage, the narration first details what Ajax does - he kills Doryklos, Pandokos, Lysandros, Pyrasos, and Pylartes. Then, with the comparative 'as when'

of line 492, Ajax's violence and speed is compared to a river in flood. The river, like Ajax, is a powerful force that indiscriminately carries trees along with it to the sea. With the resumptive 'so', the comparison is doubled. Ajax, like the river, sweeps the plain and destroys anyone in his path. Similes are 'fundamentally ... a means of creating a pause in the forward movement in the narrative' (Edwards 109). In Homer, similes emphasise actions by making them memorable and repeating them.

The material of the similes also affords the Homeric poet, and by extension contemporary authors retelling his epics, the ability to portray aspects of life and the world beyond what is immediately relevant to the stories of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Throughout both epics, the similes make three typical comparisons: to 'the world of living nature [animals] ... [to] landscape, usually in vigorous or violent motion ... [and to] the ordinary, productive activities of humans when not involved in warfare' (Buxton 145-46). The comparisons with nature are nearly always used to describe human activities. In the *Iliad* the movements, deaths, or ferocity of warriors, as in the simile I discuss above, are compared to powerful forces of nature, while in the *Odyssey*, natural phenomena are used to describe the feelings of the characters (Buxton 145,48). Particularly in the *Iliad*, the similes which refer to peaceful human activities also 'build up a picture of a world outside, a world alongside [the war], a world which will exist when all the bloodied dust has settled' (Buxton 152). Similes are approximately four times more frequent in the *Iliad* than in the *Odyssey* (Buxton 146). Given the similes' function of breaking the principal narration, Richard Buxton suggests that this is because the *Odyssey* is more diverse in setting and action and has less need for comparative interludes (147). In contrast to epithets and other formulaic scenes, 'all but six [similes] in the *Iliad* and two in the *Odyssey* are unique in wording' (Edwards 102). In addition to their other functions, similes in the *Iliad*

serve to individualise the deaths of many minor characters, who are often introduced only so the major heroes have someone to kill (Buxton 151; Lattimore 43-44). This is precisely the aspect of the similes that Alice Oswald develops in her 'excavation' of the *Iliad* in *Memorial*. As we shall see in Chapter 4, Oswald utilises images drawn from Homeric similes to separate her short accounts of the lives and deaths of each character killed in the *Iliad* (Minchin 212).

The final context I consider in this chapter is how Homer's epics have been and continue to be read and used in educational settings. I have chosen this context as illustrative of the way that Homer is positioned as the head of the Western literary canon. In the subsequent chapters I will discuss other receptions of the *Iliad* as they are relevant to each of my chosen works but here I want to convey an impression of the stature of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which Miller, Malouf, and Oswald interact with in various ways. Practically since their composition, and certainly from Classical Greece onwards, Homer's epics have formed an essential part of most curricula in the Western world. They were central to the education of Greeks and Romans, indeed central to all of their 'material culture and social practice' (Farrell 254). Edith Hall states that 'for a thousand years, schoolboys living under the Macedonian or Roman empires ... copied out Homeric verses, summarized individual books, and committed swathes of Homer hexameters to memory' ("Reception" 514). The influence of the Roman Empire on the societies that followed it ensured that Homer remained prevalent in education. In 1749, Philip Dormer Stanhope was able to claim that 'Classical knowledge, that is, Greek and Latin, is absolutely necessary for everybody ... the word *illiterate*, in its common acceptance, means a man who is ignorant of these two languages' (in Hall "Navigating" 318). It was not only the knowledge of Homer and other ancient authors that was desired but also knowledge

of Greek and Latin. This education was traditionally restricted to male members of the upper class, as 'education in the ancient Latin and Greek languages has always been an exclusive practice, used to define membership in an elite' (Hall "Class" 386). These factors have influenced the reception of Homer's epics, but one of the exciting things about recent works is that they can and do challenge the received interpretations of the *Iliad*, as we shall see.

Despite the societal and academic importance placed upon reading Homer in Greek, most readers of Homer have been, and continue to be, readers of translations. George Steiner claims that 'of all literary works... the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the most frequently translated' and that some translations, such as Alexander Pope's, become so popular as to become 'classics in their own right', and so influence later translations (364). E. V. Rieu's translation of the *Odyssey*, the first Penguin Classic, has sold more than three million copies since its publication in 1946, and was for a time the bestselling paperback in Britain (Hall "Navigating" 330). The popularity of Homeric translations continues. In the past twenty years, there have been a dozen new *Odysseys*, and a similar number of *Iliads* (Mason). The increasing publication of new translations suggests that more and more people are reading Homer, but there do remain some vestiges of prejudice against reading in translation. The access that women had to Greek and Latin was much less than that of men, and it is only with the publication of Caroline Alexander's *Iliad* in 2015 and Emily Wilson's *Odyssey* in 2017 that the two epics have been translated into English and published by women (E. Wilson).⁴ Hall also notes that Classics departments have not fully embraced or reacted to the change from a majority in-language curriculum to one primarily or exclusively delivered via translations ("Navigating"

⁴ Sarah Ruden's 2008 *Aeneid* was the first English translation of that epic published by a woman.

315). How old the translation is, whether it is in prose or verse, and the translator's other artistic choices can all affect the reader's experience of the epics and scholars, myself included, need to be aware of the possible effects different translations can have, especially when analysing reception. This is part of the reason why Martindale argues that we cannot return to an originary meaning of an ancient text.

Translations, like other text-to-text receptions, reinvent Homer's epic and make them more accessible and relevant to contemporary society.

Homer is still used today to confer and demonstrate social status and academic learning. This status stems from the fact that education in Greek and Latin, and through the languages, in ancient texts, was historically the province of the elite. In Britain, the divide between working class and 'educated' access to the classics informs the debates over translation covered above (Hall "Navigating" 319). In the US, commercial and material interests emphasised the importance of displaying one's knowledge of the classics. Parlour culture in the nineteenth century and book clubs in the twentieth contributed to a market for editions of "classics"—here including English-language works—that would look nice when displayed on a bookshelf (Schein "American" 272-78). The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are also regularly featured on "Great Books" courses taught in many US universities. Schein estimates that 'there probably have been more readers of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in undergraduate humanities and great books courses in the United States since the 1920s than in the 500+ years since the first printed editions of the Homeric epics' ("American" 268). These courses often examine only select books of each epic and 'there is little or no attempt to understand the poems as products of a long oral tradition or to situate them in a late eighth-, early seventh-century [BCE] historical and cultural context' ("American" 279). The existence of these courses could also

help to explain some of the continuing popularity of Homeric receptions because, at least in the US, so many people are exposed to the epics in this way.

In this chapter, I have detailed two major theoretical contexts for my analyses to follow: the debate between Classical reception studies as aesthetics and as cultural history, as exemplified respectively in the works of Charles Martindale and Simon Goldhill; and the status of the *Iliad* as both the first work of Western literature and an example of a highly traditional oral narrative found in many cultures throughout the world. I have argued that because of the two major forms of reception identified by Ika Willis—text-to-text and text-to-reader reception—Classical reception studies can and should be able to accommodate both Martindale’s and Goldhill’s conceptions of reception, and be better for it. In my work, I aim to strike some balance between the theories of these two scholars, attending to the long history of the *Iliad*’s reception and to the relationships my chosen texts have with other contemporary works. In the following chapters, we shall see how Miller, Malouf, and Oswald adapt the techniques of Homeric epic discussed above and engage with the cultural status of the *Iliad* to assist in each of their rejuvenations of the *Iliad*. The power and new perspectives that their works gain from their interactions with *nekyia* and *katabasis* are strengthened by each author’s use of Homeric techniques. This in turn enhances the sense of the rebirth of the *Iliad* itself through these receptions. The process of reception is never ending, and the meaning of a text is constantly changing. In the following chapters, I aim to demonstrate the ways in which the *Iliad*, because of its reception, is continuously reborn.

Chapter 2

Confessions from Beyond the Grave: *The Song of Achilles* as an Extended Version of *Iliad* 23.62-108.

The precise nature of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship has been debated since ancient times. As is common with most scholarly discussions of the relationship, I will begin by stating that there is 'no evidence in the *Iliad* whether their relationship was erotic or not' (Fantuzzi 187). However, from at least the composition of Aeschylus' *Myrmidons*, and later Plato's *Symposium*, many critical and creative receptions have portrayed Achilles and Patroclus as lovers, most often in a pederastic relationship resembling the arrangements of fifth century Athens. In this chapter, I examine how Madeline Miller's 2011 novel *The Song of Achilles*, with its depiction of the two characters in a romantic and sexual relationship that resembles a contemporary gay romance, responds and adds to this debate. Although the novel was well received by reviewers and won the 2012 Orange Prize—now the Women's Prize for Fiction—it has received scant, if any, scholarly attention. I argue that the novel, narrated by Patroclus, is a greatly expanded version of the *nekyia* of *Iliad* 23. Miller uses this epic element to introduce a mostly positive portrayal of queer love into the reception of Homer.

Miller's retelling of Achilles and Patroclus' story greatly resembles a contemporary gay romance, but, throughout this chapter, I refer to the two characters and their relationship as queer. I propose "queer" as an appropriate label for Achilles and Patroclus' sexuality in the novel because of its use as an 'umbrella term for LGBTQIA+ identity' and because of how it 'point[s] to fluidity in identity,

recognising identity as a historically-contingent and socially-constructed fiction that prescribes and proscribes against certain feelings and actions' (Demory 2; Giffney 2). I do not use queer in its academic sense, although it would certainly be possible and worthwhile for future work to consider how Miller uses the marginality of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship to 'to analyse the cultural construction of the [heteronormative] centre', or the traditional reception of the *Iliad* (Culler 145-46). Instead, I use David M. Halperin's four categories of historical homosexuality to examine how the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus has been represented in various literary receptions of Homer, including those by Aeschylus and Plato. I argue that Miller responds to the variety of depictions of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship in receptions of Homer and to the terminology that has been used to describe it and other sexual relationships between men. Accordingly, she eschews a coming out narrative that would, had it played out, be anachronistic. Neither Achilles or Patroclus ever identifies as a gay man, and it is their love for each other, not an attraction to other men in general, that is a defining aspect of their characters. This is in keeping with the "historical" time period of the novel. The term homosexuality was only coined in 1869 by Karl Maria Kertbeny in an attempt to describe same-sex attraction without resorting to overly moralised terms such as sodomy (Halperin "How To" 109). It is also around this period that Foucault dates the emergence of a homosexual identity, when attraction to the same sex becomes an important facet of one's identity and when the distinctions between Halperin's four historical categories become increasingly blurred (Jagose 11; Meem, Gibson and Alexander 46-48). In the words of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, queer embraces 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't

made (or *can't* be made) to signify monolithically' (8, emphasis in original). Queer suits as a description of Achilles and Patroclus' sexuality in Miller's novel because it enables a discussion that foregrounds their love without resorting to inappropriate modern identity labels.

Before I examine Miller's precursor texts, I wish to spend a moment establishing the novel's place among similar contemporary receptions of the *Iliad*, plotting, in brief, some of its 'horizontal connections' (Goldhill "Cultural" 62). Miller's novel is one of many that sets out to tell the "whole story" of Greek and Roman mythical heroes. These novels are part of the wider subgenre of historical fantasy, which combines a 'self-conscious embroidery of a real historical past [with a] realistic representation of the supernatural' (French 1). Novelists often combine stories of heroes from various ancient sources in order to portray the hero from birth to death, and a great many draw inspiration from the Homeric epics. Perhaps most famously, Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005), part of the Canongate Myth Series, features posthumous narrators—Penelope and a Chorus of Maids—who retell the stories of their lives before and during the events depicted in Homer, similar to *The Song of Achilles*. Making a previously minor character the narrator, particularly a woman, is a popular choice among authors. Emily Hauser in *For the Most Beautiful* (2016) and Pat Barker in *The Silence of the Girls* (2018) both make Briseis a princess and allow her to tell her own story of enslavement, with Hauser also following the life of Chryseis. Adèle Geras' *Troy* (2000) follows a slave in Helen's service in the final year of the war, while her *Ithaka* (2005) centres on Penelope and her household in the final years of Odysseus' absence. However, Homer's major characters are still represented, as evidenced by Valerio Massimo Manfredi's *Odysseus: The Oath* (2013) and *Odysseus: The Return* (2014), which follow

Odysseus from his childhood, through the Trojan War, to his homecoming to Ithaca, and then beyond to his final journey to appease Poseidon. Outside of literature, films and TV series have also mined Homer for inspiration. Netflix's *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018) retells the myth from the Judgement of Paris to the eponymous fall of the city. Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004) also depicts the entirety of the Trojan War; however, because it removes the gods, it does not portray a 'realistic representation of the supernatural' (French 1). The Trojan myth continues to be a popular story, so much so that Miller herself published *Circe* in 2018, a follow-up to *The Song of Achilles* in which she similarly expands upon the witch's appearance in the *Odyssey*. Miller stands out among these other works because through Patroclus' posthumous narration she emphasises Achilles and Patroclus' explicit queerness.

A synopsis of the plot here will serve to illuminate Miller's structure and the stories about Achilles that she highlights in the novel. Brief sections at the beginning detail Patroclus' unhappy childhood, the monotony of which is broken only by two events: games held by his father at which Achilles wins a running race, and a journey to Sparta with his father to attempt to secure Helen as his bride. At Sparta, Patroclus, still under ten, meets Helen's other suitors and with them all he pledges an oath to 'defend her husband against all who would take her from him' (Miller 12). Patroclus comes to Phthia after he is exiled by his father for accidentally killing another boy, Clysonymus, who had been teasing him. He and Achilles quickly become companions, and a desire that neither understands grows between them. After they share a furtive kiss, Thetis, in an attempt to separate them, sends Achilles to be tutored by the centaur Chiron, and Patroclus follows. They spend three years with Chiron, during which time they commence a sexual relationship. They are summoned back to Phthia because Helen has left Sparta with Paris, but Thetis,

whose main goal is to secure immortality for Achilles, spirits him away to the island of Scyros, where he is disguised as a girl. Patroclus again follows him there, but not before Thetis has forced Achilles to sleep with Deidameia, who will bear his son, Pyrrhus. They are discovered there by Odysseus and Diomedes, and then join the rest of the Greek army at Aulis. After Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia, the army sails to Troy, and Achilles wins glory in battle.

As the years pass at Troy, prizes, including captured women, are distributed among the soldiers. Patroclus encourages Achilles to claim some of the women as his prize in an effort to protect them from the other men, the first of these being Briseis. In the ninth year of the war, Agamemnon claims Chryseis before Achilles is able to, and then refuses Chryses' offer of ransom for his daughter. Miller then follows the plot of the *Iliad*—Achilles confronts Agamemnon to stop the resulting plague, withdraws from battle, and then Patroclus dons Achilles' armour and fights in his place. Miller represents Patroclus' death by changing from the previous first-person narration to a third-person limited style. This gives the reader a unique glimpse into Achilles' thoughts at the moment he learns of Patroclus' death:

[Achilles] sees the thing in pieces. Men, coming down the beach
towards the camp. Odysseus, limping beside the other kings.
Menelaus has something in his arms. A grass-stained foot hangs
loose. Locks of tousled hair have slipped from the makeshift shroud.
The numbness is now merciful. A last few moments of it. Then, the
fall.

He snatches for his sword to slash his throat. It is only when his
hand comes up empty that he remembers: he gave the sword to me.

(Miller 320-21)

When Patroclus gradually returns as narrator, as he begins to in the final sentence of the passage above, he is almost entirely focused on Achilles' actions. He narrates the closing events of the *Iliad* and the days that follow in a detached manner, even with regard to his own body, which he describes as his 'corpse' (Miller 324). After his death, Patroclus only wants to be buried and to go to the underworld, and Achilles' only wish is to join him. At the end of the novel, Miller refocuses Achilles' and Patroclus' love, which has been a source of joy for them, into an essential part of each of their beings.

In the final chapter of the novel, it becomes clear to the reader that Patroclus' narration is posthumous. Achilles is given a grand funeral and tomb, and his ashes are placed in the same urn as Patroclus'. Yet Patroclus still cannot pass into the underworld because his name is not marked on the tomb. Miller's introduction of the post-Homeric stipulation of burial in a marked grave allows Patroclus' narration, as the novel is the story of Achilles' life that Patroclus' shade tells Thetis to convince her to write his name on Achilles' monument. After the Greeks leave, Patroclus' spirit lingers at the tomb until Thetis visits. While Thetis stares at the pictures carved on the tomb—'Achilles killing Memnon, killing Hector, killing Penthesilea'—Patroclus berates her for forgetting him and for never really knowing her son (Miller 348). Eventually, she listens and they share stories of Achilles. Instead of the fighting, Patroclus remembers Achilles' 'skill with the lyre', and 'his green eyes laughing into mine' (Miller 349; 51). Miller shows how powerful this *nekyia* can be as it makes Thetis, who throughout the novel has hated Patroclus and appeared cold-hearted even to Achilles, grant her son and his lover their final wish. Thetis carves Patroclus' name into the tomb, his spirit goes to the underworld to be with Achilles, and the novel ends.

In the final chapter, Miller makes a case for Achilles to be remembered for more than his exploits depicted in the *Iliad*. That for which he was so renowned is only a small part of him and other events Miller retells question the worthiness of those actions. Throughout the novel, Thetis pushes her son to be the best fighter among the Greeks, hoping that the gods will grant him immortality. The very existence of Miller's novel attests to that, but it is a hollow victory. Although he kills Hector, Achilles is not alive when Troy falls, and his mother has turned her attention to Neoptolemus. Miller's brief presentation of Achilles' son draws heavily on Book 2 of Virgil's *Aeneid* and demonstrates the brutality against which Achilles and Patroclus had struggled. Having spent his childhood with Thetis under the sea, Pyrrhus is devoid of humanity. He destroys the last remnants of Achilles and Patroclus' family, killing Briseis as she flees him, and sees Patroclus as a stain on his father's honour. This violence is his undoing and leads Thetis to return to Achilles' grave and be willing to listen to Patroclus' story. In turn, Pyrrhus' harshness emphasises Achilles' other qualities and shows how destructive he might have been without Patroclus' influence. The figure of Achilles has always been more than the soldier. As we shall see in the following chapter on David Malouf's *Ransom*, returning Hector's body to Priam is a pivotal aspect of the *Iliad* and myths of Achilles, and it is the first thing for which Patroclus tells Thetis her son should be remembered (Miller 349). Despite the violence and warfare depicted in the novel, it is not how Miller wants the reader to think of Achilles either. Rather, she leaves the reader with a portrait of a character whose love is his defining and redeeming feature.

The Song of Achilles begins with Patroclus' birth and ends when Achilles' and Patroclus' souls reunite in the underworld. The majority of the novel therefore occurs

outside of the timeframe of the *Iliad*. Miller is guided, however, by the *nekyia* in Book 23, when Patroclus' shade appears to the sleeping Achilles and says:

You sleep, and have no thought of me, Achilles;
you were not careless of me when I lived, only when I died.
Bury me quickly, let me pass the gates of Hades;
the shades, the images of the worn-out dead, keep me a long way
off,
nor let me mingle with them beyond the river,
and in vain I wander by the wide-gated house of Hades.
And give me too your hand, I beseech you; for never again will I
return from Hades, once you have given me my portion of the fire.
You and I will not in life sit apart from our beloved companions,
and make plans together, but hateful death
gapes round me, allotted to me at my very birth.
And your own fate, Achilles, you who are like the gods,
is to be slain beneath the wall of the prosperous Trojans.
And I will say and charge you with another thing, if you will be
persuaded;
do not lay my bones apart from yours, Achilles,
but together, even as we were raised in your house,
when Menoetius brought me, when I was little, out of Opoeis
to your home, because of an evil murder,
on the day when I killed the son of Amphidamas—
I was a child, it was not intentional—in anger over a game of
knuckle-bones.

Then the horseman Peleus received me in his house
and reared me with kindness and named me your companion;
so let the same urn enclose the bones of us both,
the golden amphora, which your lady mother gave you.

(Homer *Il.* 23.69-93)

This passage informs the novel in three ways. Firstly, it establishes Patroclus' inability to enter Hades before he is buried. Secondly, it provides Miller with the basic facts about how the Homeric Achilles and Patroclus met and became companions. From these few lines, aided by information from poems in the epic cycle and other later works, Miller crafts her novel. Thirdly, Patroclus' desire to be buried with Achilles highlights the intensity of their connection, and this Homeric scene is one that has fuelled speculation about the nature of their relationship throughout the ages. Miller adapts and expands upon this *nekyia* throughout the novel, reframing it as the story Patroclus tells Thetis of his and Achilles' love.

The final chapters of the novel represent a direct and extended *nekyia* as Patroclus speaks to the reader and then to Thetis. Miller heightens Achilles and Patroclus' grief by cutting short the Homeric exchange. In the *Iliad*, Achilles responds to Patroclus:

"Dear friend, why have you come to me
and laid each of these injunctions on me? For you
I will surely accomplish everything and obey you, as you bid.
But stand near me, even for a little time let us embrace
each other and take solace in painful lamentation."
So speaking he reached out with his arms,

but did not take hold of him; and the shade departed beneath the
earth

like smoke, with a shrill cry. (Homer *Il.* 23.94-101)

In Homer, Achilles' reaction to Patroclus' appearance reinforces the bond between them and ends with the emotional image of the two unable to embrace. In the novel, this scene is much shorter. Miller does not need to have Patroclus explain the beginnings of their relationship again, and unlike Homer's epic, she does not give Achilles and Patroclus a chance to communicate after death. Patroclus is barely able to tell Achilles to bury him before Achilles wakes. She replaces Homer's Achilles 'reach[ing] out with his arms' and causing Patroclus' shade to disappear with her Achilles uselessly shaking Patroclus' corpse and weeping (Homer *Il.* XXIII.99-100; Miller 329). Patroclus is trapped, unable to communicate except through the story he tells. How then, given the pain and death with which it ends, is the relationship Miller depicts between the two a positive inclusion of queer representation in the reception of Homer? To answer that question, it is important to consider the various ways that Achilles and Patroclus' relationship has been presented in other works.

Part of the difficulty in discussing and defining Achilles and Patroclus' relationship arises from evolving conceptions and representations of sexual relationships between men from antiquity and today. David M. Halperin argues that same-sex attraction and gender expression between men throughout history can be broadly classified into four categories: effeminacy, pederasty, friendship, and inversion (Halperin "How To" 91-92). Of these four, Halperin convincingly argues that Homer's portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship is not pederastic, as it has most often been characterised, but more closely aligns with other portrayals of heroic friendship found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Books of Samuel* in the Old

Testament (Halperin *Hundred* 76). The three friendships between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, David and Jonathan, and Achilles and Patroclus all feature an intense and intimate relationship between two men who are socially or politically asymmetrical (Halperin "How To" 99). In the case of Achilles and Patroclus, although Homer states that Patroclus is older and able to give good counsel, Achilles is by far the stronger and more respected in the Greek army, and therefore has a greater social standing (Homer *Il.* 11.787-88; Halperin *Hundred* 78). In each of these friendships, the 'weaker' friend dies, which spurs the other friend on to greater feats of heroism (Halperin *Hundred* 79). Jonathan Shay's work also attests to the intense bonds that can form between soldiers by comparing the experiences of PTSD in Vietnam Veterans with Homer's portrayals in the *Iliad* (Shay 39-41). Although these heroic or military friendships are not sexual, the tradition of writing about them 'provided socially empowered men with an established discursive venue in which to express, without social reproach, sentiments of passionate and mutual love for one another' (Halperin "How To" 101). Achilles and Patroclus are an undeniably important part of this tradition (Butler 32-33). Halperin, Shay, and Marco Fantuzzi all comment on how the language used to describe the intensity of their relationship has coloured interpretations and receptions from the Classical era onwards; we are unable to read a depiction of love between men without thinking that it is, if not homosexual, then at the very least homoerotic (Halperin "How To" 100; Shay 40; Fantuzzi 190). It is the reception of the *Iliad*, particularly across different cultures and time periods, that has contributed to and perhaps created ambiguity about how the relationship is portrayed in Homer.

The ambiguity of the relationship results in three usual interpretations of Homer's depiction of Achilles and Patroclus. The first is that it was not sexual, while

the second and third maintain that it was a sexual, indeed a pederastic, relationship, and the argument between them is which character performed which role. Halperin uses both pederasty and “active” sodomy to refer to various and often socially sanctioned arrangements involving ‘the male sexual penetration of a subordinate male—subordinate in terms of age, social class, gender style, and/or sexual role’ (“How To” 95). The most famous of these arrangements is Classical Greek pederasty, which ‘at least from the sixth/fifth century onwards ... involved a precise etiquette with asymmetrical roles for the lover (*erastes*) and the beloved (*eromenos*)’ (Fantuzzi 226). The English translations of these terms—lover and beloved—clearly indicate the one-way direction of attraction: ‘it is the younger partner who is considered sexually attractive, while it is the older one who experiences erotic desire for the younger’ (Halperin “How To” 97). Greek pederasty had social as well as sexual elements. As the younger partner was not perceived to particularly enjoy the sex, they received gifts, money, and social and political assistance as their reward (Halperin “How To” 97). Both partners could also be spurred on to impress the other in military, political, or civic service (Fantuzzi 222-24). Pursuing a pederastic relationship did not represent a threat to the traditional expression of masculinity, as long as the relationship remained in the confines of the age-differentiated roles (Halperin “How To” 98). Like the tradition of heroic friendships, pederasty also offered men the opportunity to express their sexual preference for members of their own sex, although that was never seen as constituting a statement of identity in the way that coming out does today (Halperin “How To” 98-99). It is again within this discursive tradition that Achilles and Patroclus are a paramount example, primarily because of influential Homeric receptions.

Receptions of Homer in the Classical period that explicitly portrayed Achilles and Patroclus as a pederastic couple have had a great influence on the general understanding of their relationship. In the now-lost play *Myrmidons*, Aeschylus depicts Achilles as the *erastes* and Patroclus as the *eromenos*; Achilles 'honoured the intimacy of [Patroclus'] thighs by bewailing [him]' (Aeschylus Frag. 136). In Plato's *Symposium*, however, Phaedrus states that Aeschylus had it wrong, and that Patroclus was the *erastes* and Achilles the *eromenos* (179e-180b). Aeschylus and Plato have both found supporters throughout history, with various authors and scholars citing different parts of Homer to support their own view (Butler 28-30). In the context of pederasty, this debate is important because a relationship never lasted beyond the time when the *eromenos* grew a beard (Butler 28). Beyond this context, I suggest it is hardly important how Achilles and Patroclus might have had sex, as even the possible existence of such activity has become a prominent part of the reception of the *Iliad*. The debate has been so influential that it is sometimes assumed that Homer did explicitly depict Achilles and Patroclus in a sexual relationship (Meem, Gibson and Alexander 13). Miller avoids the discussion of pederasty by making Achilles and Patroclus the same age and depicting them as both desiring the other. In fact, she does exactly what Aeschylus and Plato did before her: she interprets the pivotal but obscure relationship presented in the *Iliad* as the most common sexual relationship between men in her time. In Miller's case, this is a coupling in which both partners' romantic and sexual needs and desires are met.

In different societies throughout history, male friendships and pederasty have been socially accepted to a certain extent because they 'express the male subject's virility and imply a thoroughgoing rejection of everything that is feminine' (Halperin

"How To" 102). Halperin's other categories of effeminacy and inversion, however, were not accepted because they represent threats to normative masculinity. In contrast to contemporary notions of effeminacy that equate it with flamboyance, Halperin argues that effeminacy 'was for a long time defined as a symptom of an excess of what we would call *heterosexual* as well as homosexual desire' (Halperin "How To" 92, emphasis in original). Effeminates were men who enjoyed the company of women more than that of other men and who acted against a 'normative masculinity [that] entailed austerity, resistance to appetite, and mastery of the impulse to pleasure' (Halperin "How To" 93). This was a gender expression that threatened normative masculinity even though it did not always equate to same-sex desire. While Halperin's effeminacy does not correlate exactly with contemporary meanings of the word, his category of inversion covers both gay men who may act like women as well as transwomen. Inversion, Halperin argues, represents 'a wholesale surrender of masculinity in favour of femininity, a transgendered condition expressed in everything from personal comportment and style to physical appearance ... and preference for a receptive or "passive" role in sexual intercourse [with men]' (Halperin "How To" 102). These notions are intertwined because of how often masculinity is equated with sexual penetration, and therefore, with power (Halperin "How To" 101). Within the classifications that Halperin explores, desiring to be sexually penetrated by another man and experiencing pleasure from that act represents a complete rejection of the foundations of masculinity. Halperin admits that the distinctions between effeminacy and inversion are blurry—effeminacy is essentially a difference in gender expression whereas inversion is an atypical gender expression coupled with same-sex desire ("How To" 103). While Achilles and Patroclus have most often been portrayed in a pederastic relationship, in some

receptions notions of effeminacy and inversion are present as a threat to them and those around them. In Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, for example, Achilles and Patroclus' sexual relationship threatens the Greeks' success at Troy because the other Greeks believe that Achilles has lost interest in fighting (1.3.143-52). As we shall see, the potential shame that Achilles might endure because of his relationship with Patroclus is a major motivating factor behind Thetis' actions throughout the novel.

Not every reader throughout history has interpreted Homer's depiction of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship as sexual. To give two contemporary examples, in Petersen's *Troy*, the two are cousins, while Massimo Manfredi describes Patroclus as Achilles' 'shadow, his lieutenant on the field, [and] a kind of older brother off the field' (Manfredi *Oath* 255). In a comprehensive study of the reception of Achilles and Patroclus in the ancient world, Fantuzzi notes that even as Aeschylus and Plato represented Achilles and Patroclus as a pederastic couple, in a dialogue contemporaneous with Plato's *Symposium* Xenophon insisted that they were just friends (232). As I stated earlier, the evidence for reading Achilles and Patroclus in light of other heroic friendships is compelling but I suggest that Fantuzzi goes too far in attempting to present this reading as definitive. Building on Halperin's comparisons to *Gilgamesh* and the *Books of Samuel*, Fantuzzi further argues that if Homer had explicitly represented a sexual relationship between Achilles and Patroclus then that aspect of their relationship would not have altered the events or interpretation of the *Iliad* (193; 210). Fantuzzi argues that this is because throughout the poem, Homer 'not infrequently highlights the special intensity of [Achilles and Patroclus'] connection'—at the embassy, as Patroclus moves about the camp and tends the wounded, as Patroclus dons Achilles' armour, and through Achilles'

behaviour after Patroclus' death (192; 94-213). In contrasting his 'objective reading of the *Iliad*' with other 'erotic interpretation[s] ... that [merge] the actual text of Homeric poem with its eroticized reinterpretations' (Fantuzzi 3), Fantuzzi represents precisely the type of reading and scholarship—trying to get back to an unobtainable originary meaning—against which Martindale argues in *Redeeming the Text* (Martindale *Redeeming* 4-5). Even though when we read the *Iliad* itself we may not read Achilles and Patroclus as lovers, that does not mean receptions are wrong to portray them in this way. As I argued in Chapter 1, uncovering new insights into older texts is part of the appeal of receptions for the reader, partly because receptions can make us reconsider our interpretations of their precursor texts.

I now return to answer my earlier question: how is Miller's depiction of Achilles and Patroclus' love positive, even though she does not change the events of the *Iliad* and they both die? Within the contested reception of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship, Miller offers a contemporary romance between two men that is, for the most part, a source of joy and fulfilment for the characters. This reception is important in the early twenty-first century because it offers a new perspective and representation within the broader reception of Homer. My analysis moves roughly chronologically through the novel. I begin by examining how Miller portrays Patroclus' and Achilles' families and the other mentors they encounter during their youth before discussing Miller's presentation of the Trojan War. I consider how Miller uses this period to demonstrate the benefits and detriments of the Homeric system of honour and *kleos* and Patroclus' and Achilles' differing abilities, as well as Miller's underdeveloped presentation of Patroclus and Achilles as a queer male couple. Finally, I discuss her presentation of Achilles' death.

In the *nekyia* of *Iliad* 23, Patroclus reminds Achilles of their long companionship, but Miller's extended version of the story in the novel begins with Patroclus' birth. In the early stage of the novel, Miller highlights Patroclus' and Achilles' complicated and unconventional birth families. The novel opens:

My father was a king and the son of kings ... He married my mother when she was fourteen and sworn by the priestess to be fruitful. It was a good match: she was an only child, and her father's fortune would go to her husband (Miller 1)

These opening lines highlight that Patroclus' father Menoitius sees his child first and foremost as a continuation of his legacy and a line of kings. He arranged his wedding for his own material and political gain, not for love. This backfired for him, as his wife was, in Patroclus' words, 'simple' and 'quite stupid' (Miller 1). Apollodorus suggests three different women as Patroclus' mother (Apollodorus III.176), but this characterisation of her as 'simple' appears to be Miller's invention. She describes Patroclus' birth as such:

When I was delivered, a boy, [Menoitius] plucked me from her arms, and handed me to a nurse. In pity, the midwife gave my mother a pillow to hold instead of me. My mother hugged it. She did not seem to notice a change had been made (Miller 1)

From his earliest moments, Miller's Patroclus lacks a maternal figure, and he grows to be a 'disappointment' to his father because he 'was not fast ... was not strong [and] could not sing' (Miller 1). His father's contempt of him casts a shadow over Patroclus' character for much of the novel, making him feel inadequate and unworthy of Achilles' friendship when they first meet. His mother appears in his memories only

once, in a scene so idyllic he is 'almost sure [he] made it up' (Miller 4). The lack of affection between Patroclus' parents, and their lack of care for him, is in stark contrast to the relationship that he develops with Achilles during the novel.

Achilles' mother is likewise mostly absent, though her presence looms large over the entire novel. Thetis is the biggest impediment to Achilles and Patroclus' relationship in the novel. From Patroclus' perspective, she is a frightening and ruthless goddess, not the helpful and prematurely grieving mother of the *Iliad* (Homer *Il.* XVIII.52-64). She is described as 'taller than any woman [Patroclus] had ever seen', with 'luminous' skin that is 'impossibly pale' (Miller 51). Miller continuously references Thetis' connection with the sea to emphasise her power and otherworldliness. She smells like 'sea water laced with dark honey' (Miller 51); her voice is 'the grinding of rocks in the surf' or 'the sound of waves breaking on stone' (Miller 51; 61). Even her dresses are embodiments of the sea, 'the colour of an uneasy ocean', they '[cling] to her skin as if damp' and '[shimmer] like fish-scale' (Miller 103; 60; 81). Despite her status as a lesser divinity, Thetis is undoubtedly powerful. She is often compared to lightning, and grass seems to 'wilt beneath her feet' (Miller 81). Unlike Patroclus' parents, Thetis does care for Achilles, although seemingly only because she cannot bear to see him die. She believes that if Achilles becomes famous enough he will be made a god and she sees Patroclus as a threat to that fame—ordering him not to disgrace Achilles. The irony is of course, that Achilles' fame has endured long enough that almost 3000 years after the composition of the *Iliad* his name and deeds are still known. Despite Thetis' objections to their relationship, Miller makes Achilles' and Patroclus' love for each other part of Achilles' fame.

In addition to the dramatic irony that results from her concern that Achilles will not be remembered, Thetis is a major source of foreshadowing through prophecies that she reports to Achilles and Patroclus about when Achilles will die. On Scyros, she confirms that if Achilles goes to Troy he 'will die a young man there' (Miller 157). Although she does not know how much longer her son will live, Thetis knows that 'Hector's death will be first' (Miller 160). In response to this knowledge, and Patroclus' plea that he not kill Hector, Achilles utters what will become a refrain for him throughout the war: 'He's done nothing to me' (Madeline Miller 161; 230; 241). With each successive iteration of this phrase the implicit "yet" grows louder as the novel draws closer to the final events of the *Iliad*. Miller further foreshadows those events with another prophecy delivered by Thetis during the war: that within two years the 'best of the Myrmidons will die' and that Achilles will be alive when it happens (Miller 250). None of the characters knows for certain who this will be, but Miller's characterisation makes it clear that the second prophecy refers to Patroclus. The foreshadowing and Thetis' regular appearances undercut Patroclus' happiness at the extra time he has with Achilles and his own statements that he 'did not plan to live after [Achilles] was gone' (Miller 177). It is therefore Thetis, not the Trojans or the disapproval of the other Greeks, who is the greatest threat to Achilles and Patroclus in the novel.

In contrast to Menoetius and Thetis, Peleus is loving and kind. At Phthia, he houses a palace full of foster boys, because he 'had once been a runaway himself ... and had a reputation for charity towards exiles' (Miller 21). At their first meeting, Peleus offers Patroclus the opportunity to leave his past behind him, and predicts that he 'still may make a good man' (Miller 28). Peleus thus begins to undo the psychological damage done to Patroclus by his own father's neglect. He also

represents a link to an older generation of heroes, most prominently the Argonauts and Heracles. When they are young boys at Phthia, Peleus is the first to tell Achilles and Patroclus the story of Meleager, who was 'the finest warrior of his day, but also the proudest' (Miller 57). Miller derives this story from the one Phoinix tells in the embassy in Book 9 of the *Iliad*, and tells it again when the novel reaches that point (Homer *Il.* 9.524-605; Miller 294). In Phthia, Peleus tells Achilles and Patroclus of how, after a disagreement between Meleager and the king of Calydon, Meleager withdrew from battle and the city suffered many losses (Madeline Miller 57). Peleus cuts the story off because Achilles is 'tormenting' and play-fighting with Patroclus instead of listening (Madeline Miller 58). At this point in the novel, the story serves three purposes: it foreshadows Achilles' disagreement with Agamemnon and his refusal to continue fighting at Troy; it demonstrates the process by which heroes earn ongoing fame or *kleos*; and it continues the development of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship. Miller's use of this story throughout the novel also replicates the ways that the stories within Homer's epics have been received and interpreted differently by various cultures since their composition. Indeed, her own retelling of Homer's epic to represent queer love in the early twenty-first century demonstrates how stories told at different times can acquire different significance and relevance.

Within the novel itself, Miller demonstrates the importance of reception when Phoinix finishes the story of Meleager. At Troy, Phoinix acts as an advisor and mentor to Achilles and Patroclus and connects the pair most strongly with other Greek myths. This is similar to the character's role in the *Iliad*, where his old age and connection with Achilles make him a substitute for Peleus (Mackie "Achilles" 2). When Phoinix concludes the story of Meleager that Peleus had begun earlier in the novel, Miller shows the danger that Achilles' withdrawal from battle poses to his

fame. In Miller's embassy scene, Phoinix tells the story as he does during the embassy in the *Iliad* (Homer *Il.* 9.524-605). He tells Achilles how Meleager refused entreaties and offers of gifts to re-join the fighting multiple times, and that it was not until his wife Cleopatra begged him to fight that he did so. Yet by that time, 'too many lives had been lost to his pride', and his countrymen hated him for abandoning them for so long (Miller 294). He warns Achilles that if he persists: '[he] will no longer be so honoured, for all [he] beat[s] back the war' (Homer *Il.* 9.605). In both the *Iliad* and *The Song of Achilles*, Achilles' attempt to regain his honour after Agamemnon's insult risks its destruction. Miller further highlights another connection between the two stories—the heroes' lovers. While in the epic Homer hints at the connection between Cleopatra and Patroclus (Swain 274), in Miller's novel Patroclus is astounded by the similarity, as is Phoinix's intention: 'Cleopatra, Patroclus. Her name built from the pieces as [his], only reversed' (Miller 294). Miller demonstrates that Patroclus is inspired by the example of his forebear whereas in both the epic and the novel, the story has no effect on Achilles. Within Miller's own reception of Homer, she shows the reception of another story changing over time and having significant impact on the actions of her characters. This process highlights the ways in which Miller gives greater focus than Homer to Achilles and Patroclus' love, and to parts of Achilles' character other than his martial prowess.

Much of this increased focus on the non-martial elements of Achilles' character is the result of Patroclus' narrative voice. Patroclus is enamoured of Achilles from the first moment they meet, when he 'gasp[ed] at the cold shock of [Achilles'] beauty' (Miller 20). Even from the biased perspective of a narrator who is in love with him, Miller presents Achilles as a well-rounded and admirable character. In contrast to the other heroes, most notably Odysseus—who Patroclus encounters

when they are suitors to Helen—from childhood Achilles is truthful and kind; he '[does] not like to lie' (Miller 30). He initially befriends Patroclus because he finds the other boy 'surprising' (Miller 35). Even at a young age, Patroclus is able to challenge Achilles in a way that no other would be allowed. Patroclus is the first person beside Thetis and Peleus to see Achilles fight, and he is able to goad Achilles into responding to his playful insults (Miller 43-45). Their friendship is natural, it 'came all at once ... like spring floods from the mountains' (Miller 46). Achilles is able to share every part of himself with Patroclus, and by extension with the reader. It is his other skills that initially intrigue Patroclus, such as his ability to juggle and particularly his skill with the lyre. For his sixteenth birthday, Patroclus carves a wooden figure of Achilles playing and singing (Miller 91-92). More than anything else, the love he has for Patroclus is the defining aspect of Miller's portrayal of Achilles.

It is only when Achilles and Patroclus are at Chiron's cave on Mount Pelion, where Thetis cannot see them, that their relationship becomes sexual. Chiron is extremely prominent in other ancient works about Achilles—Apollodorus, for example, states that Chiron raised Achilles from his infancy (Apollodorus 3.172)—though his importance is downplayed in the *Iliad* in favour of Thetis, Peleus, and Phoinix (Mackie "Achilles" 2-3). Miller draws more heavily in this section upon works by Roman authors Statius and Valerius Flaccus, in which Patroclus follows Achilles to be taught by the centaur, as he does in the novel (Statius *Achilleid* 1.174-5; Valerius Flaccus *Arg.* 1.407-410 in Fantuzzi 264). Chiron has a great 'influence' on the area around his cave that Patroclus experiences as a warmth that combats Thetis' icy presence (Miller 73; 81). At the centaur's cave, Achilles and Patroclus are free from societal expectations, as evidenced in Achilles' request that Chiron not call him 'Pelides' or 'son of Peleus', as at the cave he is 'just Achilles' (Miller 71). From

the moment that Chiron decides he will teach Patroclus as well as Achilles, he acknowledges a strength in the two of them being together and is tacitly accepting of this new dimension in their relationship.

In contrast to the 'dour lyre-master [at Phthia] ... or Peleus himself, half drowsing as he spoke', Miller depicts Chiron as an engaging teacher who asks Achilles and Patroclus what they want to learn (Miller 73). Their education with Chiron demonstrates Achilles' and Patroclus' differing prowess. As soon as he arrives, Patroclus is drawn to the surgical instruments, just as Achilles is naturally drawn to weapons. They both learn the skills of healing from Chiron, though Patroclus is more interested and must develop his skills and knowledge of plants more than Achilles must practice with a spear. While Achilles acts out an innate and semi-divine skill, Patroclus' skill is entirely human—learnt and honed through many long hours. By having Patroclus learn healing skills directly from Chiron, Miller contradicts Homer, who says that Patroclus 'learned of [healing] from Achilles' after Achilles had himself learnt from Chiron (Homer *Il.* 11.831). This change strengthens Miller's characterisation of Patroclus as he also develops throughout the novel and as we shall see shortly, he gains his own reputation among his fellow Greeks at Troy.

Crucially, Chiron also makes Achilles and Patroclus, and by extension the reader, question how their society operates. He says to Achilles: 'you are the greatest warrior of your generation, and all the generations before ... men will hear of your skill, and they will wish for you to fight for them ... what will you answer?' (Miller 85). The question itself, and the young Achilles' answer of 'I do not know' makes the reader consider why Achilles needs to fight (Miller 85). As he repeatedly says throughout the novel, the Trojans have never harmed him. Ultimately, Achilles

fights for himself, because he could not bear to live with ‘the loss of his brilliance, the withering of his grace’ that will occur if he does not go to fight at Troy (Miller 158). Their education with Chiron deepens Miller’s characterisation of Achilles just as much as it does for Patroclus and invites the reader to examine and appreciate Achilles’ motivations when he goes to Troy.

The male mentors I have discussed—Peleus, Phoinix, and Chiron—support Achilles and Patroclus in the lead up to and during the Trojan War; however, once the war is underway, Miller highlights their individual prowess. Miller depicts Achilles’ physicality and his superhuman abilities as an integral part of his character, not as something that he must develop. He is so skilled with weaponry that Chiron tells him that ‘there is nothing [Chiron] can teach [Achilles]’ about warfare (Miller 85). Patroclus remarks that ‘divine blood flows differently in each god-born child’ and that ‘Achilles’ miracle was his speed’ (Miller 42). He constantly notices the source of this speed—Achilles’ feet. He states that ‘up close, [they] looked almost unearthly’ and that as Achilles fights ‘his feet beat the ground like a dancer’ (Miller 41; 42). Miller draws the reader’s attention to Achilles’ feet in a way that resembles his Homeric epithet: swift-footed Achilles. It is not just Achilles’ feet that are remarkable; his entire body moves quickly, and he delights in its power. At Phthia, ‘he liked to play games against his own skill’ and on Scyros he delights in the rare opportunities he is able to run (Miller 41; 131). It is this pride in his own skill that sets in motion both Patroclus’ and Achilles’ own death. In Miller’s novel as in the *Iliad*, Achilles’ choice to live a short and glorious life rather than a long and peaceful one overshadows the entire depiction of the Trojan War. Although Achilles proves again and again that he is the best Greek fighter, both he and Patroclus know that the end is near, and that it will be brought about by Achilles’ own heroism.

Through her characterisation of Achilles, Miller examines how the Homeric system of honour and fame operates to the benefit and detriment of her characters. The martial excellence of the Homeric heroes is part of a reciprocal contract: 'the noblemen are honoured by their people because they achieve fame ... and this in turn encourages the warriors to continue their display of prowess and maintain their good name' (Clarke 77-78). The ultimate prize for such Homeric warriors is a kind of immortality afforded through their lasting fame. The entire time he is at Troy, Achilles knows that he will soon die and that 'memory is all [he] can hope for' (Miller 280). The desire to be remembered spurs him and the other heroes on to great feats as they compete amongst each other for glory. As Patroclus remarks, while there were many heroes, 'some had a whole epic, others just a verse', and for some, like Achilles, their fame endures through ongoing reception (Miller 233). In the novel as in the *Iliad*, the heroes' honour is represented by the war prizes they receive. This system allows all of the soldiers to gain their share if they particularly distinguish themselves, although Achilles normally receives the biggest share (Miller 213-14). However, because their honour is bound up in their prizes, if their prizes are damaged or taken away so is their honour. This constant renegotiation of status, rank, and honour is the principle at the centre of the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles in both the *Iliad* and Miller's novel (D. F. Wilson 5). Primarily through Thetis' actions, Miller promotes Achilles and Patroclus' relationship, rather than Agamemnon's insult to Achilles' honour, as the greatest threat to Achilles' *kleos*.

At various points throughout the novel, Miller highlights the counterpart of the honour system: shame. No character in the novel ever feels guilt but they avoid at all costs anything that might be able to shame them. Patroclus comes closest to expressing guilt over his killing of Clysonymus, but this is quickly overshadowed by

his realisation that his father exiled him not for the crime itself, but for his 'lack of cunning' in not somehow covering it up (Miller 48). Other than this instance, all other possible transgressions in the novel threaten shame. For example, when Patroclus attempts to relieve his desire for Achilles by masturbating, he thinks: 'there was shame in this thing that I did, and a greater shame still in the thoughts that came with it' (Miller 89). Masturbation here does not have the same damning connotations that it might have in a Christian worldview; rather, Patroclus is concerned by the embarrassment that might occur if it is discovered that he has to turn to such means, and the greater embarrassment and social consequences that threaten should Achilles publicly renounce him. An even greater threat is presented to Achilles. While he is perfectly comfortable acting the girl on Scyros—Patroclus notes that the dress he wears is 'an irritant, but not a crippling shame, as it would have been to another boy' (Miller 130)—the suggestion that Odysseus and Diomedes might tell the world about it is enough to make Achilles listen to their request that he join them at Troy. Miller has Patroclus explain that the Greeks 'reserved their ugliest names for men who acted like women' (Miller 154). While some sexual contact was permitted between men, arrangements such as pederasty reinforced gender roles through their strict hierarchies (Halperin "How To" 102). By dressing as a girl and continuing his sexual relationship with Patroclus into adulthood, Achilles risks upsetting the gendered hierarchies of his patriarchal society. In essence, Odysseus and Diomedes threaten him with the stain of what Halperin calls 'inversion'. Being shamed for this and thereby losing his chance at immortal glory is the fear that hangs over Achilles and Patroclus' relationship and is the fear that motivates Thetis as well.

While Achilles wins glory on the battlefield, Miller also emphasises that the war provides Patroclus with the opportunity to achieve his own renown. One day, he

stumbles across the healers' tent and, using the skills he learned from Chiron, removes an arrow from a wounded soldier without causing extra pain or risking infection (Miller 235-37). He begins helping out in the tent more and more and he eventually 'develop[s] a reputation, a standing in the camp' that is all of his own and not related to his position as Achilles' companion (Miller 247). Patroclus comes to know the many Greek soldiers, both the commanders and the commoners, and they know him as well. This is in direct contrast to Achilles, who comments that 'it's simpler if they just remember me' (Miller 248). Through his skills as a healer, Patroclus becomes the 'best of the Myrmidons' referred to in the prophecy Thetis delivers (Miller 250).

Although I have described Achilles' and Patroclus' relationship as positive, Miller's depiction of Patroclus becomes problematic during her representation of the Trojan War. Throughout the long years of the war, Miller's Patroclus only joins the fighting when absolutely necessary. As the war drags on, he only joins the battle at Achilles' request so that he can 'bear witness to [Achilles'] miracles' (Miller 228). Once he is there, Patroclus never actually takes part in the fighting, as Achilles stays near enough that he kills any Trojan who comes close. These scenes do serve to enhance Miller's portrayal of Achilles' skill in battle, but they also play into a heteronormative idea that there must be a more active and violent, and consequently, a more passive and gentler partner in a relationship. Even though in the *Iliad* Patroclus is socially inferior to Achilles, Shay argues that 'Homer's portrait of Patroclus' character is unwavering: [he] is a formidable, efficient killer *and* a gentle, compassionate human being' (Shay 47, emphasis in original). The attention that Miller gives to aspects of Achilles' character other than his skill in battle does not extend as fully to Patroclus' character.

Furthermore, even though Miller has Patroclus as narrator emphasise the ways that honour and glory operate on the battlefield in Homeric culture she downplays what in that system is his greatest accomplishment: the killing of Sarpedon, a son of Zeus. In the *Iliad*, Patroclus and Sarpedon face off in a duel presented like many others in the epic. They hurl spears from their chariots, and Sarpedon's strikes and kills one of Patroclus' horses, throwing him to the ground. They then come together again (Homer *Il.* 16.462-72). Sarpedon misses, allowing Patroclus' spear to '[strike], there where the lungs close in around the beating heart' (Homer *Il.* 16.481). Patroclus is clearly praised for this deed in the simile that follows:

So [Sarpedon] lay stretched out before his chariot and horses;
roaring, clutching at the bloodied dust.

As when a lion coming among a herd slaughters a fiery, great
hearted

bull among the shambling cattle,

and it dies groaning under the lions' jaws,

so at the hands of Patroclus did the leader of the shield-bearing

Lycians

rage as he lay dying (Homer *Il.* 16.485-91)

In Miller's novel, Patroclus kills Sarpedon almost by accident. He throws his spear into Sarpedon's stomach, knocking him off the chariot. Sarpedon's neck is broken when he hits the ground. As in the *Iliad*, Patroclus yanks his spear from Sarpedon's chest (Homer *Il.* 16.503-05) but does so in the novel only so that it will appear as though Achilles has killed him (Miller 315). Through her portrayal of Achilles, Miller demonstrates that it is possible to depict a queer man as equally skilled with the lyre as he is with a spear. In modifying Patroclus' ability in battle, Miller lessens some of

the Homeric connections between him and Achilles, and borders on presenting a queer couple based on stereotypically heteronormative gender roles. In my view, this does not wholly invalidate the novel as a positive portrayal of queer love because of the representation it brings to the reception of Homer. There is certainly more to be written about the ways in which Miller relies on heteronormative stereotypes to portray Achilles and Patroclus as a loving couple. That is, however, beyond the scope of my current investigation.

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed how Miller cuts short the *nekyia* between Patroclus and Achilles in favour of having Patroclus narrate the events of the novel to Thetis. For Achilles, the lack of a final conversation with Patroclus means a prolongation of his grief. In her depiction of Achilles' last deeds, Miller closely follows the Homeric model. In both the *Iliad* and Miller's novel, Achilles' grief leads to self-mutilation. He has to be physically restrained from slicing open his throat when first told of Patroclus' death (Miller 321; Homer *Il.* 18.33-34), covers himself in ash (Homer *Il.* 18.23-24), and shears off his hair (Miller 321; Homer *Il.* 23.140-53). As befitting Achilles' description of Patroclus as his husband (Miller 123), Achilles performs many roles normally done by women in the funeral process. In both the *Iliad* and Miller's novel, Achilles is the chief mourner at Patroclus' funeral. In the epic, 'he cradles the head of [Patroclus] ... the same gesture that is performed by Andromache at Hector's funeral' (Halperin *Hundred* 84). Miller similarly writes that Achilles 'collects [Patroclus'] ashes himself, though this is a woman's duty' (334). After these acts of mourning, Achilles eventually settles on his characteristic violent excess. So great is his anger and grief at Patroclus' death that, as in Homer, Miller's Achilles expresses the desire to eat Hector's raw flesh and mutilates his corpse daily (Miller 328-34; Homer *Il.* 22.346-47). He maintains his anger until Priam comes to

him with a ransom for Hector's body, after which Achilles finally burns Patroclus' body. When the battle begins again, Achilles fights carelessly as he is, in a sense, 'already dead' (Shay 49).

Although Miller has foreshadowed it throughout the novel, she devotes only a short passage to Achilles' death. Miller first presents Hector's death as an assurance and rehearsal of Achilles' own. As Achilles chases Hector around the walls of Troy, 'it looks, almost, as if Achilles is chasing himself' because Hector is wearing Achilles' armour. Patroclus comments that as Achilles kills Hector 'it is his own death he holds, his own blood that will spill' (Miller 325; 28). As Thetis foretold, Hector's death comes before Achilles' own. However, Achilles' death does not occur in the way that the reader might have been expecting. Miller includes one last mention of Achilles' feet as Patroclus narrates his fight with the river god Scamander: 'those feet never stumbled, not once, in all the time I knew them. If a mistake had come, it would not be there' (Miller 326-27). So it is that when Apollo helps Paris to kill Achilles with an arrow, Paris does not need to aim for Achilles' heel, as he has heard. Instead, Apollo states: 'he is a man ... not a god. Shoot him and he will die' (Miller 336). More than just an eleventh-hour twist, Miller here emphasises that Achilles' choice to fight at Troy, to choose the immortality of fame and to love Patroclus, has made him fully human.

In *The Song of Achilles*, Madeline Miller follows Achilles and Patroclus from early childhood until they reunite in the underworld after their deaths. She demonstrates that in contrast to many other receptions of the Homeric relationship, the romantic and sexual partnership is a source of joy and fulfilment for the two characters. By eschewing a coming out narrative, Miller portrays Achilles and Patroclus' relationship as one unconcerned with the labels that other authors and

scholars have tried to place upon it. In the novel, Achilles and Patroclus are not just friends, or cousins, or in a pederastic relationship. Instead, they are undeniably queer, and their relationship resembles a contemporary gay romance. This portrayal is not perfect, as Miller still relies on some heteronormative stereotypes, but it represents a positive inclusion in the reception of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship which has otherwise been overly concerned with who did what to whom or whether or not Homer depicted them as lovers. The novel takes the form of an extended version of Patroclus' *nekyia* in *Iliad* 23 and Miller twice demonstrates the positive effects of reception in the change of significance of the Meleager story and in Thetis finally allowing Patroclus to join Achilles in the underworld. The novel itself also demonstrates why the ongoing reception and rewriting of texts can be so powerful, as it allows new perspectives, characters, and interpretations to enter a tradition and be recognised as part of it. This is not just beneficial for new works—because reception is a dialectical process, new works have an effect on the works they retell. Our understanding of how Achilles and Patroclus act in the *Iliad* can deepen and be revitalised because of how Miller presents the two characters in *The Song of Achilles*.

Chapter 3

Priam's *Katabasis* in Malouf's *Ransom* and *Iliad* 24

Priam's ransom of Hector's body from Achilles is one of the most memorable scenes of the *Iliad* and it has been represented countless times in literature, visual art, and film. In this chapter, I examine how in his 2009 novel *Ransom*, David Malouf imitates and adapts the metaphorical *katabasis* of *Iliad* 24 to explore his 'primary interest ... in storytelling itself—why stories are told and why we need to hear them' (Malouf *Ransom* 223). As Donna F. Wilson has shown, the act of giving or taking compensation for an offence, whether it be in the form of a ransom or revenge, occurs throughout the *Iliad* and the scenes in which this occurs are 'key structuring devices in the poem' (14-15). Within the plot of the *Iliad*, Priam bringing ransom to Achilles for Hector's body is critical in breaking the impasse caused by Agamemnon's actions in Book 1. Malouf reinscribes the importance of this scene by retelling it while simultaneously adding his own interpretation to the ongoing reception of this important moment. Malouf offers two major interventions in the reception of Homer: his focus on his characters' emotions and psychology as they conduct the ransom, and his creation of the character Somax, a simple carter who accompanies Priam on his journey to Achilles' camp. As a result of these additions, Malouf introduces an alternative context in which to consider the Trojan War—one of forgiveness. In this chapter, I argue that the novel's central action recreates a Classical *katabasis*. In the beginning of the novel, Malouf depicts Achilles as living in an underworld of his own making, and both Achilles and Priam as isolated from their families and communities due to an inability to tell their own stories. Throughout his journey to Achilles' camp, Priam learns the importance of storytelling from Somax's

example. Malouf emphasises that the ransom is a new and unprecedented action for his characters and in doing so, he makes the ransom and its depiction in the *Iliad* feel renewed.

Malouf uses the same elements as Homer does to portray Priam's journey as a *katabasis*. In the novel, as in the *Iliad*, Priam is inspired by the goddess Iris to go to Achilles (Malouf *Ransom* 45-48; Homer *Il.* 24.169-90). He then leaves Troy in a procession that Malouf likens to those of the soldiers going to and returning from battle (Malouf *Ransom* 102-03). As Priam goes through the gates and the crowds disperse, Malouf writes: 'whatever it was is over. Or, mysteriously, has just begun' (*Ransom* 107). These words end the second part of the novel, casting the start of Priam's journey as the symbolic end of his previous life. There is also a very real danger in Priam going to the Greek camp—Achilles could refuse him, take him captive, or kill him. The lamentation in the *Iliad* and the procession in *Ransom* highlight these possibilities. As we shall see, the journey to Achilles' camp is a physical and emotional one for the king of Troy. As is customary in *katabases* (Holtmark 26), Priam receives divine assistance from a disguised Hermes, who Malouf notes is the 'escort of souls to the underworld' (*Ransom* 159). Hermes appears just before Priam and the carter Somax cross the river Scamander, which represents the River Styx. This sequence is pivotal and also signifies the crossing of an emotional barrier within Priam. On the other side of the river, a battlefield and landscape of 'utter devastation' (Malouf 155), Priam retrieves the body of Hector and also gains important self-knowledge: what it really means to be a father and not just a symbolic figurehead. Due to the connections that Malouf creates between Priam and Achilles, Priam's journey also affects Achilles, allowing him to release his anger. While Malouf and Homer both employ katabatic elements to convey the significance

of Priam's journey, Malouf also uses the structure of the descent to develop his exploration of Priam's and Achilles' emotions. Both characters begin the novel in isolation from those around them. By recognising the common feelings within each other and their common mortality, they are able to re-join their respective communities. As Priam crosses the river Scamander to return to Troy, a liminal barrier which in the *Iliad* also represents his return from the world of the dead (De Jáuregui 44), Achilles and Priam are 'visited by a lightness that is both new and a return' (*Ransom* 211). Malouf's novel and its *katabasis* are, structurally, both a return to Homer's epic and something new entirely because of his concern with how Priam and Achilles think, feel, and interact at that moment.

The emphasis that Malouf places on the physical world strengthens the *katabatic* structure of the novel. Malouf begins each of the novel's five sections with detailed descriptions of the setting.⁵ These descriptions reflect how 'beauty and its manifestations in the world are a central concern of Malouf's narrative' (Brennan 1). In Parts 3, 4, and 5 of the novel they also each reinforce a different element of Priam's *katabasis*. First, Priam and Somax reach the river Scamander, 'just at dusk, with the light beginning to fade' (Malouf *Ransom* 111). In both the *Iliad* and *Ransom*, the river is a liminal space representing the boundary between the symbolic mortal realm and the underworld of Achilles' camp (De Jáuregui 44; Mackie "Scamander" 491; Holtsmark 25). Priam and Somax rest here, and it is here that Priam begins to change, as we shall see shortly. They reach Achilles' camp in Part 4 where 'under the low thatched roof the air is thick with the smell of pitch from pinewood torches that sputter and pour out smoke and acrid fumes; and of animal fat and the sweat of

⁵ Antonella Riem Natale has also compared this five-part division to the five-act structure of tragedy (98), but here I focus on how the parts of the novel support its *katabasis*.

unwashed bodies' (Malouf *Ransom* 167). These features reinforce the similarity between Achilles' hut and the House of Hades (De Jáuregui 46). Furthermore, Malouf also draws on images of a Christian Hell that is dark, smoky, and teeming with the dead (Holtsmark 25-26). The opening of Part 5 directly references those who have died in battle on the plain with obvious allusions to an underworld:

The sun is already up and has begun to burn off the crisp white groundfrost as they leave the stockade wall behind them ... On either side as they pass, the barrows of the dead. Ghostly figures materialise for a moment among them, then dissolve. (Malouf *Ransom* 205)

As Priam and Somax travel back to Troy the night is ending and the otherworldliness of the plain is dissipating. Yet their journey is still haunted by the dead as they leave the symbolic underworld, having retrieved Hector's body. Achilles and Priam have negotiated a truce but they cannot change the course of the war. Like other heroes who undertake *katabases*, Priam and Achilles then 'assume roles of increased responsibility and leadership ... on the basis of [their] experience' (Holtsmark 26), although in their cases they resume their leadership roles with renewed vigour. Priam has travelled to the metaphorical underworld Achilles has inhabited, and the ransom has offered them both an opportunity to return, briefly, to their living communities.

At the beginning of the novel Malouf depicts both Achilles and Priam as isolated from their families and their communities. He draws inspiration for this depiction directly from Homer. In the *Iliad*, the story of Achilles' wrath highlights his withdrawal from the social and military life of the Greek camp. When he calls the

assembly at the beginning of Book 1, it is clear that Achilles 'cares about the *whole* army' (Shay 24, emphasis in original). Yet as the epic progresses Achilles appears to become more unreasonable and loses compassion first for his fellow Greeks and then for anyone at all following Patroclus' death (Shay 26). The ransom is crucial in ending Achilles' anger and reintegrating him into the society of the Greek army (D. F. Wilson 127). In *Ransom*, Achilles and Priam are already withdrawn from their communities, but through the course of the novel, and especially through Priam becoming comfortable with telling his own story, they re-join their respective societies, even if only for the brief period before their deaths.

In addition to being withdrawn from his community, Malouf depicts Achilles as already dead and inhabiting an underworld of his own making. Thetis has drawn away from Achilles because of his impending death. The novel opens: 'The sea has many voices. This man is listening for the voice of his mother' (Malouf *Ransom* 3). Malouf describes how, in his childhood, Achilles was able 'to slip out of his boyish nature and become eel-like, fluid, weightless, without substance in his mother's arms', but now 'his spirit [has] made a crossing and not come back ... he [is] his father's son and mortal' (Malouf *Ransom* 5-6). In his silence he is listening, even though Thetis' voice is now 'no more than a faint far-off echo to his senses, an underwater humming' (Malouf *Ransom* 5). While Achilles has 'for the whole of his life ... been drawn' to water, 'his mother's element', at the beginning of the novel Malouf emphasises instead that as a mortal, 'earth is [Achilles'] element', and 'one day, he knows, he will go back to it' (Malouf *Ransom* 4). Although Achilles' listening for his mother indicates a desire to reengage in society, his silence is at the root of his problems. When he felt his mother's influence leave him, 'he had grieved. But silently, never permitting himself to betray to others what he felt' (Malouf *Ransom* 5).

Brennan posits that in the novel, 'Achilles' wrath plays second fiddle to his grief' (1); this is because Achilles is grieving for both Patroclus and himself, and he is doing so in complete isolation.

For Malouf, Achilles' continued mistreatment of Hector's body is an expression of his grief and anger that further isolates him and puts his fame and glory at risk. This is seen most clearly through Malouf's depiction of the Myrmidons, who 'no longer know what authority they are under' (Malouf *Ransom* 29). When Achilles first mutilated Hector's corpse, 'his men could not imagine what he was up to' and 'their only explanation' for his continued mistreatment of it is 'that he is mad' (Malouf *Ransom* 29). Achilles' men do not question him about his actions and begrudgingly obey his orders. Just as the story of Meleager in the *Iliad* and *The Song of Achilles* demonstrates, the danger for Achilles at this moment is that he will go too far and no longer be remembered as a great hero. Through Achilles, Malouf posits that 'a man's acts follow him wherever he goes in the form of a story' (Malouf *Ransom* 6). As in Homer, and as we saw in Miller's novel, Malouf's Achilles knows that his death is coming and that knowledge is what has driven him to be honoured above all others. His story is vitally important to Achilles because fame is the only immortality he will have, the only reward for his short life. As Grant Farred argues, Achilles is a 'figure who wants to be celebrated ... recognized by those he respects ...[and] needed by those who disrespect him' (1103). Despite this desire, at the beginning of the novel, Achilles' actions and his silence, his lack of storytelling, isolate him and mean that he cannot move beyond his rage and grief—he is 'a prisoner of his own fate' (Rhoden 7). This is in contrast to the *Iliad*, in which Achilles hosts the games after Patroclus' funeral and joins in the community of the Greek army (Homer *Il.* 23.262-897). Malouf is much more interested in the 'thinking of

Achilles' than Homer had been (Farred 1103). The first part of the novel is therefore a long reflection on Achilles' current position and on the events and choices that have brought him to Troy and made him alone in the world. He has accomplished most of the deeds for which he will be renowned. Yet at the beginning of Malouf's novel, Achilles fame is not guaranteed—he needs the rebirth he receives when he conducts the ransom with Priam to bring him out of the underworld he has created for himself.

In contrast to Miller's portrait of Achilles as one who, above all else, loved Patroclus, Malouf's Achilles thinks of the 'bursts of violence and elation; of fatality and fatal contradictions', and of the deaths of Patroclus and Hector (*Ransom* 6). His intimate connections with these two 'ghosts'—Patroclus and Hector—further compound Achilles' isolation (Malouf *Ransom* 10). Malouf writes that when Patroclus came to live in Peleus' palace 'the world, for Achilles, reassembled itself around a new centre' (*Ransom* 13-14). Patroclus is the only person capable of shaming Achilles for his decision not to help the Greeks when their ships are threatened, and it is with great reluctance that Achilles lets Patroclus don his armour and fight in his place. Patroclus' death in that armour foreshadows and ensures Achilles' own. Homer 'portrays Achilles as virtually dead from the beginning of Book 18 on', because 'with the death of Patroclus, Achilles himself dies' (Schein "*Iliad*" 355). The same is true in *Ransom*. In the first part of the novel, the only times that Achilles speaks are to Patroclus in flashbacks and when Achilles addresses his bones and tells them that he will join Patroclus 'soon now. Soon' (Malouf *Ransom* 21). Like Miller's Achilles after Patroclus' death, Malouf's Achilles no longer has any interest in war or honour, only his own death. There is no reason why Achilles should listen to Priam's request and so it is all the more remarkable that he does.

In both the *Iliad* and *Ransom*, the only reason that Achilles has for living after Patroclus' death is to enact his revenge on Hector, his 'implacable enemy' (Malouf *Ransom* 10). When the two men meet in battle, Hector wears Achilles' armour 'to mock him' (Malouf *Ransom* 22), but Achilles' feels as though he is fighting himself—'the two heroes are each other's mirror image' (Reynolds 201). Thus, for Achilles, Hector's death is 'like watching for a second time the dreamlike enactment of his own' (Malouf *Ransom* 22). This connection between Achilles and Hector is also Homeric: as the entire epic moves towards Hector's death, it is clear that Achilles' own will follow soon after (Schein "*Iliad*" 348). Malouf focuses on a moment that Homer gives little attention to, the period between Patroclus' funeral and Priam's appearance in the Greek camp. At this moment, he refigures Achilles' famous wrath as an expression of his grief for both his own and Patroclus' death. In Malouf's novel, Achilles' abuse of Hector's body is an attempt for 'rage to fill him ... that would assuage his grief' (*Ransom* 27). Separated from his community, his mother, and with only the ghosts of Patroclus and Hector left to him, Malouf's Achilles is waiting 'for something to appear that will break the spell that is on him' (*Ransom* 35). That something is Priam.

Like Achilles, Priam stands apart from his community. Priam 'is obliged, in his role as king, to think of the king's sacred body ... as at once a body like any other and an abstract of the lands he represents' (Malouf *Ransom* 43). Malouf here references ideas of the 'dual body of the king' as well as considering how thinking of himself in this way affects Priam psychologically (Brennan 5). His kingship is highly ceremonial and he has embraced the symbolic aspects of his kingship in an effort to appear 'fixed and permanent' (Malouf *Ransom* 54). This means that like Achilles, Priam is often silent because his herald Idaeus speaks for him. As he has aged,

Priam has welcomed the fact that he does not speak in public because his subjects cannot hear how 'cracked and thin' his voice has become (Malouf *Ransom* 54). Yet while Priam has succeeded in making himself the unchanging centre of Trojan society, he has trouble forming connections with other people. He does not notice if his herald, who is always called Idaeus, is the same man all the time or changes, as 'it is the office and the name that matters, not the person' (Malouf *Ransom* 97). Priam himself is also a figurehead and is unable to reconcile his public and private selves.

Priam remains an aloof, symbolic king even to his own family. He knows his children only in a ceremonial way: 'their relationship to him [is] formal and symbolic' (Malouf *Ransom* 136). At birth they were presented to him for his blessing and acceptance, not for his love (Malouf *Ransom* 52). His closest relationship is with his wife, Hecuba, although Priam realises that 'he has known and not known' her because of their shared commitment to their roles (Malouf *Ransom* 51). Unlike Priam, Hecuba is able to display emotions and love for her family. She tells him of her pain and anger at the deaths of her sons, that 'it is [her] flesh that is being tumbled on the stones' (Malouf *Ransom* 52). Yet as much as Hecuba's 'women's talk unnerves [Priam]', Hecuba also reinforces Priam's position as Troy's 'great centre and source' (Malouf *Ransom* 52; 60). The act of ransom and the stories that he tells and hears during the novel allow Priam the chance to be a father and husband, not just a king.

Priam's isolation stems from his inability to tell his own story and it is when he tells this story to Hecuba that he begins to enact his plan to ransom Hector's body. To convince Hecuba of his plan, Malouf has Priam tell her of what happened when he was a child, then called Podarces, and Troy was sacked by Heracles. Podarces

was hidden among the slave children of the palace and would have been condemned to a life of slavery had his sister not picked him out from among them. Heracles, as a cruel joke to ensure he would always remember the moment, renamed Podarces as Priam, meaning 'the price paid' in Greek (Malouf *Ransom* 74). This traumatic childhood experience means that Priam is uniquely suited to undertake the ransom of Hector's body. This story is presented by Malouf as both new and old, public and private. Although Hecuba has heard this story many times—Priam acknowledges that it is 'a tale every child knows and has heard a hundred times over' (Malouf *Ransom* 63-4)—the emotion of the experience is a secret Priam has kept hidden. In telling the story to Hecuba and asking her to 'imagine ... what it was like to *be* that child', he regains ownership of it (Malouf *Ransom* 64, emphasis in original). I suggest that here Malouf also implicitly asks his reader to imagine what it would be like to be the terrified Podarces, and that this imagination continues throughout the novel. The emphasis that Malouf places on the thoughts and emotions of Priam, Achilles, and Somax enables the reader to better empathise with the characters as they are presented in the novel rather than the epic.

By emphasising similarities in their characters, Malouf also demonstrates how Priam and Achilles are well placed to move past the animosity between them. Both Achilles and Priam have dual and divided natures: as Achilles has felt both mortal and immortal, of earth and of water, so too has Priam felt that he is both slave and king. Both characters also faced two possible futures at one point in their lives and this duality continues to influence them throughout the novel. Priam tells Hecuba that he has lived his other life 'if only in a ghostly way' as he has often 'in the darkness of [his] thoughts ... sought him [Podarces] out' (Malouf *Ransom* 69; 77). He has wondered how his life would have been even though he has been unable to escape

the ceremonial trappings of his kingship. Achilles, on the other hand, was able to move between his two natures and is grieving the loss of that ability in the novel (Malouf *Ransom* 7). This is in marked contrast to the *Iliad*, in which Achilles raises the possibility that he will return to Phthia and live a long and unremarkable life (Homer *Il.* 9.356-63). When Priam breaks his silence and tells his story he breaks free of his duties as king and the expectations of the role and thus, through the ransom, he is able to offer Achilles 'the chance to break free of the obligation of being always the hero' (Malouf *Ransom* 59). In Malouf's novel, the ransom is remarkable because Achilles does not expect Priam to offer it and Priam does not expect Achilles to accept it.

Malouf continually highlights the "newness" of Priam's act even though the ransom and its depictions in literature and visual art are not new at all. This novelty is often a feature of *katabasis* narratives; for example, Odysseus asks Circe how he can possibly consult the dead because 'no one before has ever sailed to Hades by ship' (Homer *Od.* 10.502-03). As one who was himself ransomed, Priam is uniquely placed to undertake this particular journey. Priam is willing to risk his own safety because he believes that the only solution to his problems is to do 'something that has never been done before or thought of. Something impossible. Something new' (Malouf *Ransom* 58). Malouf emphasises throughout the novel that Priam going himself to ransom Hector's body is an act both unthinkable and unprecedented. Yet this act is not new or impossible. It is possible and very ancient because it is depicted in Homer. While the act might not be new to his readers, it is new to Malouf's characters. Through exploring their thoughts and emotions, Malouf highlights 'moral novelty' of Priam's decision to go to Achilles (Conrad 51). It matters that Priam believes he is doing something unthinkable, and that Achilles too feels

‘immobilised and outside time’ when Priam appears before him (Malouf *Ransom* 185). Malouf places great emphasis on the emotions and psychology of his characters, so when the ransom feels new to them, it might also be renewed for the reader, whether they have read Homer or not.

If the ransom is new and old for the reader, so too are the characters of Achilles and Priam because they are constructed in relation to iterations of their characters in the *Iliad* and its various receptions. Brennan argues that Malouf ‘weaves his narrative to ensure his readers are conscious of two artistic presences: Homer and himself’ (4). Following Martindale, I would further argue that the idea of “Homer” as an artistic presence is an amalgamation of the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and their countless receptions. In his Afterword, Malouf states that much of the novel is composed of “‘untold tales’ found only in the margins of earlier writers’ (*Ransom* 223). This is a similar approach to his 1978 novel *An Imaginary Life*, which depicts the later life of the Roman poet Ovid in exile, about which there are few facts in our recorded history (Randall 17-18). In *Ransom*, the culmination of Achilles’ grief is that his ‘runner spirit has deserted him’ (*Ransom* 35). Malouf evokes what he calls Achilles’ ‘special distinction among the Greeks’, his ‘swiftness of foot’, to indicate that in grief, Achilles has lost an integral part of himself (*Ransom* 35). Malouf here plays upon Achilles’ Homeric epithet, as Achilles is called ‘swift-footed’ 31 times in the *Iliad* (Homer *Il.* I.58; Clark 118). Furthermore, Malouf’s statement that ‘when [Achilles] is not fighting, he is a farmer’ interacts with his depiction in the *Odyssey* (*Ransom* 4). When Odysseus goes to Hades, Achilles’ shade tells him that he ‘would prefer to be a workman, hired by a poor man on a peasant farm, than rule as king of all the dead’ (Homer *Od.* 11.489-91). In his Afterword, Malouf acknowledges Apollodorus’ *Library* as the source of the story of Priam’s childhood (Malouf *Ransom* 223-24). In that text,

the bare facts of the story are presented but not of the emotions that Priam shares with Hecuba in Malouf's version (Apollodorus 2.147). It is in the gaps or, as Malouf describes them, the 'margins' of earlier stories (*Ransom* 223), that Malouf sources material with which to make the story of the ransom new. He brings these elements together and gives them new life, just as Priam and Achilles experience a renewal after the ransom.

The most striking new element of the novel is Malouf's invention of Somax, 'a simple carter, [who], for one day ... became Priam's companion on his journey to the Greek camp' (*Ransom* 224). This original contribution to the reception of the *Iliad* reinforces many of Malouf's primary concerns in the novel, bringing the emotions and psychology of all his characters to the forefront of the reader's mind. Malouf has stated that Somax 'could not have appeared in the *Iliad*', demonstrating that reception and the opportunities it provides for innovation are crucial for his exploration of storytelling (Malouf "David Malouf" 7:06-7:11). Somax stands in stark contrast with Malouf's depiction of Achilles and Priam. He is not a hero or a king; he is an ordinary man who 'brings into the reader's focus the everyday world that exists in tandem with the world of kings and heroes' (Smith 164). In place of the silence of Achilles and Priam, Somax is endlessly chattering and is renowned, as Hermes remarks, as a 'spinner of tales' (Malouf *Ransom* 157). Through telling Priam about his life, Somax is the catalyst of a change in Priam from the isolated king he once was to the man who conducts Hector's ransom. Somax's ordinariness signals that stories are important for everyone, not just for the likes of Priam and Achilles.

Through Somax, Malouf reflects upon the effect of war on everyday life and everyday people. This has been a recurring theme throughout his career in his earlier novels *Fly Away Peter* (1982) and *The Great World* (1990), which were

respectively set during the First and Second World Wars. For Malouf, who himself has connected the Troy story to WWII, to the Vietnam War, and to Australia's involvement in Afghanistan, the Trojan War is a symbolic representation of every war (Reynolds 197). In each of these novels, including *Ransom*, 'Malouf concentrates on the individual, eschewing the wider scale actions and effects of battle to bring us to the heart of war as a human experience' (Rhoden 1). In Malouf's *oeuvre*, war is 'both extreme and quotidian', at the limits of human experience and also seemingly inevitable (Rhoden 2). He concentrates 'not on the fanfare and drama of the famous battles and arguments, but on bringing the reader to the heart of war: its elemental closeness to everyday life' (Rhoden 6). War throws everyday life into contrast, and in Malouf's novels he shows how it affects ordinary people. Through this focus, 'he stresses subjective experience as essential in situations that would seek to deny the personal' (Smith 155). In *Ransom*, these subjective experiences are expressed through stories that remind us of shared human experiences.

The stories that Somax tells Priam teach the king about the world and much of what he has not experienced because he has been too preoccupied with his reign. The bulk of these stories occur by the river Scamander in Part 3, at the centre of the novel, representing the transition from Priam's routine existence into something unknown. The river also marks the symbolic entrance to the underworld of Achilles' camp. The length of this section and its positioning in Malouf's structural systems indicate that Somax's story is just as important as the ransom itself. Just as Hecuba is affected by Priam telling her how he felt when Heracles sacked Troy in his youth, so too is Priam affected by Somax's emotion. He notes the ease with which Somax can speak, 'full of emotion', of his son's death, the 'memory of it so present and raw' (Malouf *Ransom* 157; 136). Priam initially thinks that Somax's chatter is

‘unnecessary’ and has ‘no point or use’ because in his world, ‘silence, not speech, was what was expressive’ (Malouf *Ransom* 125-26). Yet he comes to see that while Somax’s speech is ‘of no importance’, it is full of ‘interest’ (Malouf *Ransom* 127). Priam’s realisation of this interest is reflective of how the novel as a whole moves from ‘silence to conversation’ (Brennan 4). While Achilles and Priam are both silent at the beginning of the novel, as we shall see shortly, Priam applies the lessons that Somax inadvertently teaches him to his own conversation with Achilles, and so the simple carter assists with the ransom in ways that go beyond transportation.

Priam’s movement back towards his community begins as he shares a meal with Somax by the river. At this point in the story, Somax causes Priam to question what he has previously taken for granted and to experience the simple pleasures he has never before enjoyed, such as washing his feet in the river. Freed from the constraints of his rigid and ceremonial life, Priam discovers that ‘what [is] new [can] also be pleasurable’ (Malouf *Ransom* 122). Brennan posits that ‘while the ultimate achievement of Priam’s journey is the repatriation of Hector’s body, of equal importance, in Malouf’s novel, is how his engagement in and with the world awakens his curiosity’ (3). Interest and curiosity allow Priam to be exposed to a life that as a king he has not lived and, more importantly, to empathise with Somax and later with Achilles. His time with Somax makes him think differently, as the following passage demonstrates:

It had never occurred to [Priam] that the food that came to his table so promptly might have *ingredients*. That a griddlecake or pikelet might have some previous form as batter. That batter might consist of good buckwheat flour and buttermilk, and that what you experienced as goodness might depend on the thickness of the

batter or the lightness of a wrist. Or that ingenious arrangements might need to be made before a thing as simple as a mere pikelet could make its entry into the world. Or that one of the activities a man might give his attention to, and puzzle his wits over, was the managing of these arrangements, the putting together, in an experimental way, of this or that bit of an already existing world to make something new. (*Ransom* 127-28, emphasis in original)

Until this moment, Priam has acted as he should as a king. He has been the 'unchangeable' centre of Trojan life and has spoken 'only to give shape to a decision he had come to' (Malouf *Ransom* 54; 126). In this 'epiphany [of] the ordinary everyday' (Brennan 5), Priam learns to appreciate the simple beauty of the natural world and to consider his subjects and himself as human beings with shared experiences and concerns.

While the passage above reveals how Priam's thinking has transformed, I suggest that it is also a metaphor for Malouf's own 'recipe' of Classical reception. The 'ingredients' of that process are the various traditions and texts that Malouf draws upon to create the novel. The 'ingenious arrangements' refer to how the novel moves from Malouf's head into the world to be read, and the 'lightness of a wrist' is his particular skill and talent. Those that 'puzzle [their] wits over' the novel are its readers, reviewers and scholars, who may find in it something new made out of elements combined from earlier works. Malouf asks his reader to consider the similarities between what he has made, Homer's work, and the many receptions of it throughout history, and to re-examine why they still want to hear the story anew. Yvonne Smith suggests that 'belief in the significance of stories is a key aspect of Malouf's understanding of the human' (Smith 157). In *Ransom*, he shows how telling

the stories of our lives enables self-realisation and more profound connections with others. During his *katabasis*, Priam retrieves Hector's body from the underworld of Achilles' camp, but he is changed emotionally and psychologically because he listens to Somax's stories.

Somax is able to tell his stories with such confidence because, unlike Achilles and Priam, he is secure in his own identity. In part, 'identity is not conflicted [for Somax] in the way it is for Priam and Achilles' because there is no other Somax for the reader to compare with Malouf's character (Smith 165). Unlike Priam, Somax resists the division of identity that would occur when Priam seeks to rename him as Idaeus. Somax likes his name: 'it fits him ... rather well' and 'represents his life story' (Malouf *Ransom* 98; Smith 165). Attached to the name Somax are all of his deeds, his sadness and his happiness. Secure in who he is, Somax can reflect upon his life and readily share his stories with others.

Somax does exactly that in Part 5, where Malouf ends the novel with a final reflection on how stories evolve as they are told over and over. As the memories of Troy and the war fade, Somax lives on and tells his story of how one day he drove Priam to meet Achilles:

In the early days, while Troy still stands solid and gleaming on its high hill, the figures he has to speak of, Priam, Hecuba, Achilles, will still, in the minds of his listeners, be sharers of their own world, creatures like themselves of flesh and blood. Later—when Troy has become just another long, windswept hilltop, its towers reduced to rubble, its citizens scattered or carried off, like Hecuba and Hector's wife Andromache and Cassandra and the other Trojan women, into

exile and slavery – all he has to tell, which was once as real as the itch under his tunic and the lice he cracks between his nails, will have become the stuff of legend, half folktale, half an old man's empty bragging. (Malouf *Ransom* 216)

This passage is characteristic of Malouf's approach to Somax throughout the novel. He brings together many different elements to balance a realistic portrayal of a common man while highlighting the unusual position in which Somax finds himself. In the passage above this is most evident in Malouf's reference to Euripides' *Trojan Woman*—Hecuba, Andromache, and Cassandra—in the same sentence as the lice that make Somax itchy. Yet throughout the novel Somax retains his dignity and sense of self. Like Priam and Achilles, Somax has also symbolically died and been reborn over the course of the novel and so takes on a kind of leadership role upon his return (Holtsmark 26-27). Even in advanced old age, he creates and maintains community by telling stories. He is not believed, and people think that 'like most storytellers, [Somax] is a stealer of other men's tales, of other men's lives' (Malouf *Ransom* 218). In this, Somax is rather like Malouf himself, taking what he pleases from the *Iliad* and its receptions to craft his own story.

Somax's prominence in the novel reflects Malouf's almost complete focus on the human and natural realm, rather than that of the supernatural and the gods. Although Iris and Hermes do still feature in the novel, it is only through the experiences of the human characters that the reader knows of them. Unlike in Homer, there are no reports of councils on Olympus in Malouf's novel. There are still some characters, however, who are accustomed to the gods' interferences. Priam, for example, 'knows from long experience what is expected of him' when he feels Iris' presence (Malouf *Ransom* 41). Yet while the appearance of the divine is still an

event to be remarked upon in *Ransom*, Malouf emphasises instead what is everyday and ordinary. In Homer, the gods play a much greater part in Hector's ransom. It is they who decide that Achilles has gone too far, and Thetis and Iris prepare Achilles and Priam respectively for their meeting (Homer *Il.* 24.104-187). Malouf instead makes Priam puzzle out for himself what he needs to do, and leaves Achilles completely in the dark. Malouf's Priam also decides to humble himself completely by refusing his chariot and demanding to travel on the cart with Somax (Malouf 91-92). This proves to be a pivotal decision for Priam, as it is through listening to Somax's stories that Priam comes to know himself and understand his role as both king and father.

Instead of Homer's meddlesome gods, Malouf's characters, and particularly Priam, appeal to a sense of chance to guide their actions. The ransom is a forgone conclusion in Homer, as it is the gods who decree that it must occur (Homer *Il.* 24.31-86). In *Ransom*, Priam himself puts the gods aside, telling Hecuba that they must 'leave [the fate of Troy] to the gods. Or to chance' (Malouf *Ransom* 61). Leaving things up to 'chance' is powerful suggestion and 'a move in the novel from the Classical towards a modern view of the human' (Smith 161). It frightens Hecuba—'she cannot bring herself to use [the] word' (Malouf *Ransom* 62). Yet this sense of chance is much more in keeping with Malouf's focus on his characters' emotions. He shows Priam worrying about whether Achilles will help or harm him, and Achilles as shocked at Priam's sudden appearance in his hut (Malouf *Ransom* 58-59; 180-81; 74-75). Because Priam and Achilles are unsure how their meeting will end, because there is only a chance that it will go well, Malouf's depiction of the ransom becomes new.

We come now to Malouf's depiction of the ransom itself and most importantly to the ways in which he fundamentally changes the tenor of the exchange between Achilles and Priam, even though the events he depicts are largely the same. This change is first evidenced by Malouf's inversion of the famous image of Priam on his knees supplicating Achilles. In the novel, Achilles, believing that his father has appeared, falls to his knees, 'so the whole scene, as [Priam] had imagined and acted it out in his mind, does not take place' (Malouf *Ransom* 176). Nor does the scene occur as it is portrayed in the *Iliad*, in which Priam 'with his arms ... clasped Achilles' knees and kissed the / terrible man-slaughtering hands', or in other works of art and literature which have previously recreated the scene (Homer *Il.* 24.478-79). In the *Iliad*, Hermes tells Priam to 'entreat the name of [Achilles'] father, the name of his mother / of the lovely hair, and his child' in order to convince him to give back Hector's body (Homer *Il.* XXIV.466-67). Priam decides only to appeal to Achilles' feelings for Peleus, twice imploring him: 'Remember your father' (Homer *Il.* 24.486; 24.504). In the novel the memory and image of Peleus is invoked by Achilles himself, and Priam instead asks Achilles to imagine if he were in the king's position. 'Think what it would mean to you, Achilles,' says Priam, 'if it was [your son's] body that was lying out there' (Malouf *Ransom* 182). This emotional appeal 'catches [Achilles] entirely off guard' (Malouf *Ransom* 182), and is only possible because Malouf's Priam has learnt, from Somax's stories, that fatherhood can be more than a symbolic and honorific relationship.

Through demonstrating Achilles' and Priam's similarities and ability to conduct Hector's ransom, Malouf also suggests an alternative context—one of forgiveness—for the Trojan War, only to remove it just as quickly. Achilles and Priam are both aware of what their futures hold. Achilles experiences 'the pious recognition of the

old man he will never become' (Malouf *Ransom* 9), while simultaneously 'the young man he is resists' what he knows he must do (Malouf *Ransom* 10). The possibility of a different future is signalled by Achilles sensing, just before Priam's appearance, that 'he has moved into his mother's element' (Malouf *Ransom* 172). Being once more influenced by his water-dwelling immortal mother, Achilles again has the possibility of returning home and quietly living out his days. This brief illusion is shattered by Priam's evocation of Achilles' son Neoptolemus, 'a fiery-headed agent of such destruction as all [the preceding] nine years of slaughter have not seen' (Malouf *Ransom* 186). After Priam mentions Neoptolemus, Achilles and Priam are reminded of their fated futures, and Priam 'falls to his knees at last and clasps Achilles' hands' (Malouf *Ransom* 186-87). The *Iliad*, and the numerous other works which have depicted the fall of Troy, reassert their influence, and 'so the scene is acted after all' (Malouf *Ransom* 187). Yet the moments between Achilles and Priam that offered a different ending still influence the remainder of the novel.

The renewal that Priam and Achilles feel, the 'lightness that is both new and a return', is short-lived (Malouf *Ransom* 211). Malouf devotes much of the fifth and final section of the novel to an account of Neoptolemus' botched killing of Priam, an event not recounted in the *Iliad*, though it is presented in other texts, such as Virgil's *Aeneid* (2.550-63). In the *Aeneid*, during the sack of Troy, Priam puts on armour 'last worn / Decades ago' and prepares to go out into the thick of battle before Hecuba stops him and he goes with her to shelter at a shrine (Virgil 2.509-10; 518-25). Once there, they witness Pyrrhus kill their son Polites, and Priam confronts him, yelling:

Achilles was your father? It's a lie.

This isn't how he fought. He had respect

For a trusting suppliant's right. He sent me back

To my throne, with Hector's corpse for burial

(Virgil 2.540-43)

Virgil here invokes the ransom to create a contrast between Achilles and his son. Malouf follows this lead, but goes further. His depiction of Neoptolemus' killing of Priam has none of the glory of the deaths in the *Iliad* or others depicted in the *Aeneid*. There is no exchange of boasts or insults, no final words, and no valiant yet feeble effort of Priam throwing a spear in an attempt at defence (Virgil 2.544). Instead, 'Priam has tripped in flight' and Neoptolemus 'hacks and hacks' at him (Malouf *Ransom* 212-13). Although Priam must face this gruesome end, Malouf shows that how he lived is more important. The connections between *Ransom* and other works enable an examination of the many stories about Priam's and Achilles' lives from a new angle focusing on the ransom of Hector's body rather than any of their other violent acts in the war.

Although the story must go on and conclude in Achilles' and Priam's deaths, Malouf maintains a sense of optimism following the ransom. As Priam remarks while travelling back to Troy, 'I am still here, but the *I* is different' (Malouf *Ransom* 209, emphasis in original). Achilles and Priam have spent time in a metaphorical underworld and have been changed by the experience—they have died and been reborn (Holtsmark 27). The ransom matters because it affords Achilles and Priam the opportunity to confront the conflicted nature of their identities. Priam has acted as king and father, and 'feels his homecoming now as the coming home to a state of exultant wellbeing' (Malouf *Ransom* 211). Achilles, for his part, has given up his anger and, as a result, 'his heels glow' (Malouf *Ransom* 211). While Achilles and Priam are fated to die, Somax survives the fall of Troy and continues to tell his stories. Malouf has even suggested in interviews that Somax could himself be

Homer (Malouf "David Malouf" 8:30-8:37). This suggestion points to how entangled the idea of Homer and the unanswerable Homeric question are in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as we know them today, a point to which I shall return in the Conclusion. Somax's survival and the possibility of the continuation of the story beyond the pages of the novel resemble the survival and continuation of the story of Troy. A person like Somax could very well have been the beginning of a traditional story that was passed down orally through centuries until it became fixed as the *Iliad*. That thought very much accords with how Malouf presents storytelling in the novel because with each new teller, Somax's story would be reborn and continue to foster community.

If 'meaning is always realized at the point of reception', then every time we read, hear, or see a story, our interpretation will be different, even if ever so slightly (Martindale *Redeeming* 3). This is especially so when we read a story that has been retold by a different author, in a different time, who is consciously trying to make that story feel new. In *Ransom*, Malouf explores why we want to tell and hear stories by demonstrating that stories enable his characters to connect with one another and in telling them, to learn about themselves. Achilles and Priam both begin the novel in isolation, in metaphorical underworlds, but return to their communities at its end largely due to Priam telling his own story and listening to those of Somax. Malouf suggests that listening to and telling stories is critical to harmonious relationships, to community, and to solving conflicts. The ransom he depicts is not a violent act; rather, it is an exchange between two men who recognise that they share more in common than the conflict that makes them enemies. By focusing on the ransom and how Priam and Achilles think and feel as they conduct it, Malouf reinvigorates the *Iliad* itself.

Chapter 4

The Reader's *Katabasis* in Alice Oswald's *Memorial*

In her 2011 poem *Memorial*, subtitled “An Excavation of the *Iliad*” in its original British publication, Alice Oswald does away with the *Iliad*'s story of Achilles' wrath to focus instead on the deaths that occur in Homer's epic. She ‘excavates’ three primary features from Homer's *Iliad*: the names of those whose deaths are narrated in the epic, short biographies of those soldiers, and numerous epic similes that she translates and applies to new circumstances. As the poem unfolds the reader is guided through each death that occurs in the *Iliad* in turn. I argue that in this manner, the poem represents a *katabasis* most similar to those presented in *Odyssey* 11 and *Aeneid* 6. Oswald's poem highlights the experience of ordinary soldiers and remembers them not for their actions in the war, but for their lives before it. She suggests that the only noteworthy outcome of war is death of those who fight and the grief of those who love them. As in Homer's underworld, all of the dead are treated equally in *Memorial*, no matter who they were or what they achieved in life. Oswald thus uses the ‘power of the death tale’ to highlight the experiences of ordinary soldiers (Holtsmark 49). As I intend to demonstrate, the poem profoundly engages with the oral tradition and reinvigorates the *Iliad* through its remembrance of the common man.

In her foreword to the poem, Oswald describes *Memorial* as ‘a kind of oral cemetery’ (Oswald 2). This description points to how strongly the poem draws on the oral tradition; the three elements that Oswald excavates are also ‘characteristic elements of traditional oral epic’ (Minchin 202). An audiobook narrated by Oswald was released at the same time as the poem and Oswald has given many public

readings of it, excerpts of which are freely available on YouTube. A large-scale performance was also mounted by the Australian company Brink Productions at the Adelaide Festival, Brisbane Festival, and London's Barbican Centre in 2018. The poem's interaction with orality has guided much of the scholarship published on the poem so far—for example, Stephe Harrop '[responds] to specific live performance' and argues that *Memorial* is a "Voiced Text", a 'type of oral poetry that begins life as written composition only to modulate to oral performance before a live audience' (Harrop 79; Foley *How to* 43). Carolin Hahnemann, Elizabeth Minchin, and Corinne Pache all consider the differences between reading and hearing or viewing the poem, with Hahnemann positing that 'for a full appreciation of the poem one must experience it (at least) twice, once by hearing the verses recited aloud and once by following the arrangement of the words on the page' (2). In this chapter, I concentrate on the printed poem in order to examine elements of its textual physicality and to devote more space to close analysis of its features.

My focus is on the 'cemetery' part of Oswald's description of the poem. I argue that throughout the poem, the narrator guides the reader through 'the aftermath of the Trojan war' (Oswald 2)—a battlefield that is now a cemetery, a battlefield that has become an underworld. Oswald draws inspiration from post-*Iliadic* examples of *katabasis*, such as those in the *Odyssey* and *Aeneid*. In both of these epics, in addition to gaining knowledge about how to proceed with their journeys, Odysseus and Aeneas also gain an appreciation of what the underworld is like. The scene in *Odyssey* 11 'conflates a necromancy scene [*nekylia*] with a visit to the Underworld' (De Jáuregui 39); among others Odysseus talks with Elpenor, Tiresias, his mother, Agamemnon, and Achilles (Homer *Od.* 11.50-80; 90-151; 154-226; 389-

465; 473-537). He also sees other infamous inhabitants of Hades, lucky ones like Minos and Orion, and also the unlucky:

Tityus, the son of Gaia,
stretched out nine miles. When Leto, Zeus' lover,
was traveling to Pytho, through the fields
of beautiful Panopeus, he raped her.
Two vultures sit on either side of him,
ripping his liver, plunging in his bowels;
he fails to push them off. I saw the pain
of Tantalus, in water to his chin,
so parched, no way to drink
(Homer *Od.* 11.577-585)

In the biographies of each soldier in the poem, Oswald gives information about the dead similar to what Odysseus tells the Phaeacians of those he sees in Hades. For example, of 'Scamandrius the hunter', Oswald's reader learns that he 'knew every deer in the woods [and] used to hear the voice of Artemis', and also that he died when 'Menelaus stabbed him / One spear-thrust through the shoulders / And the point came out through the ribs' (Oswald 18). In this manner, Oswald momentarily brings the reader's attention to the memory of each soldier, guiding them through her 'oral cemetery'.

The presence of a guide, in the form of the narrator, reflects a Virgilian influence on Oswald's poem. I propose that the reader of the poem is the one who is going down to this underworld and is guided by the narrator in a similar manner to the way in which the Sybil guides Aeneas, or later, to how Virgil guides Dante

through Hell and Purgatory in *The Divine Comedy* (Hall *Return* 203). In the *Aeneid*, the Sybil tells Aeneas how to enter the underworld and accompanies him there. She shows him the Fields of Mourning (Virgil 6.440-449) and prompts him to move on when he is distracted talking to Deiphobus, instructing him which branch of the road to take (Virgil 6.539-543). At Aeneas' request, she also describes the punishments received by those in Tartarus (Virgil 6.562-627). The narrator in *Memorial* acts in this role, often directly addressing the reader and telling them, for example, that 'you can see the hole in [Echepolus'] helmet just under the ridge / where the point of the blade passed through' (Oswald 14). However, unlike the realms of the dead presented by Virgil and Dante, Oswald's underworld does not contain an Elysium or Paradise. Instead, like Homer's underworld in the *Odyssey*, every dead soldier is treated the same, and they all occupy the same desolate space. The imagery of the underworld and *katabasis* is present throughout the poem, and, as I will now demonstrate, Oswald's egalitarian treatment of the soldiers emphasises their senseless deaths.

Hahnemann and Pache both divide *Memorial* into three parts based on the prevalence of each of the poem's three main features: the names of the dead, the biographies of the dead, and the repeated similes which separate the biographies (Hahnemann 1-3; Pache 174). In the first part, the names of each of the 218 characters killed in the *Iliad* are printed in a list in 'monumental, funerary capital letters' (Harrop 79), as follows:

PROTESILAUS

ECHEPOLUS

ELEPHENOR

SIMOISIUS

(Oswald 5)

The second part that Hahnemann and Pache describe is the main bulk of the poem, in which biographies of the dead are interspersed with extended similes, most of which are printed twice. The final part of the poem follows Hector's biography, and consists of ten unrepeated similes, each printed on its own page, and concludes with a final repeated simile. In my analysis, I focus upon the differing sources of each of the poem's three major elements, and particularly how they enable the remembrance of the dead. The names, biographies, and similes each have unique influences and it is in their combination that Oswald's memorial and refutation of war comes to fruition.

My analysis begins as the poem does, with the litany of the names that connects the poem with physical rather than literary ways of commemorating the dead. In both the list at the beginning of the poem and at the first time a soldier's name is printed in their biography, it is printed in capital letters, as follows: 'the first to die was PROTESILAUS' (Oswald 13). This capitalisation makes the names of the dead stand out on the page, especially in contrast to other names printed "normally", and emphasises Oswald's focus on the dead rather than who might have killed them. Currently, it remains a feature of only written text as Oswald has not rendered the list of names or the capitalisation vocally in either readings or the audiobook of the poem, and it was not a feature of Brink Productions' performances. In addition to the poem's pivotal connections to oral and literary forms of commemorating the dead, which I shall examine shortly, it is also a poem 'profoundly responsive to modern iconographies of remembrance' (Harrop 80). The capitalised names resemble both names on tombstones, and, particularly in the list at the start of the poem, lists of names on physical war memorials. Hahnemann demonstrates that the practice of commemorating war dead can be traced back to Classical Athens and that, in both

physical monuments and ceremonies of remembrance, lists of the dead are an important component of more modern war memorials (Hahnemann 3-9). She especially connects *Memorial* with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington DC, which is organised without any reference to the soldiers' military ranks, 'thereby commemorating them not so much as soldiers but as human beings' (Hahnemann 10). Unlike a physical war memorial, in the biographies throughout the poem Oswald is able to expand on how the soldiers in the *Iliad* lived, individualising them and emphasising the senselessness of their deaths.

Oswald plays against the typical iconography of physical war memorials by recording and commemorating the lives of both the Greek and Trojan soldiers. While most physical war memorials only remember the dead of one side of a conflict, the Greeks and Trojans are mostly indistinguishable in Oswald's poem (Hahnemann 20). It does not matter to Oswald if the soldier she describes in a biography is Greek or Trojan, if he plays a greater part in the war, or more often, if his death in the *Iliad* serves to heighten the fame of whoever killed him. What matters to Oswald is that the soldier is a man—with the exception of the horse Pedasus, they are all men—who has lived and leaves behind him a family that will mourn him. In a particularly apt comparison, Hahnemann points to the memorial to Turkish and ANZAC forces at Gallipoli as the closest real-world equivalent to Oswald's achievement. On the Gallipoli peninsula, across the Hellespont from where Troy once stood, a stone commemorates the dead with a message sent from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to the first Australian and New Zealand visitors to the site after the First World War. It reads:

Those heroes that shed their blood
and lost their lives...

You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country.

Therefore rest in peace.

There is no difference between the Johnnies
and the Mehmetts to us where they lie side by side
here in this country of ours...

You, the mothers,
who sent their sons from far away countries
wipe away your tears;

Your sons are now lying in our bosom
and are in peace.

After having lost their lives on this land they have
become our sons as well.

(as printed in Hahnemann 25)⁶

Like this stone monument, Oswald's poem is a physical and literary memorial of the dead. While it engages with the techniques of oral poetry, and has been adapted as a performance work, this physicality and its connections with real-world monuments remain integral parts of the work.

Oswald herself firmly positions *Memorial* as part of the oral tradition, proclaiming that her 'reckless dismissal of seven-eighths of the [*Iliad*] is compatible with the spirit of oral poetry, which was never stable but always adapting itself to a new audience' (2). Her approach to what she calls translating is 'fairly irreverent' and she explains that 'instead of carrying the words over into English, [she uses] them as

⁶ Comments in 2019 by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that Australians with anti-Islamic sentiments who visited Turkey would be treated similarly to WWI ANZAC soldiers, and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison subsequent invocation of this stone pledge demonstrate the fragile nature of such cooperation between former enemies and the continuing threat of war.

openings through which to see what Homer was looking at' (Oswald 2). This approach enables the occurrence of very modern images, such as a death being described as 'like a lift door closing' (Oswald 17). The poem is still undoubtedly in the Homeric tradition, as by exclusively using biographies and extended similes Oswald engages with some of the defining features of Homeric epic (Foley "Epic" 172). As I discussed in Chapter 1, in the *Iliad* the information given about the warriors and the similes that often describe their deaths create much of the interest in the epic's many battle scenes (Buxton 150-51). They 'suspend the principal narration' of the battles and give glimpses of the world beyond the plains of Troy (Lateiner 19). Oswald's arrangement of biographies also resembles a catalogue, such as the Catalogue of ships in Book 2 of the *Iliad* (Minchin 202; Homer 2.494-759). Just as oral poets such as Homer once did, Oswald creates a new work by using traditional structures and reinterpreting traditional material.

Oswald also engages with the techniques and features of Greek lament. In her foreword, she posits that the two poetic forms that comprise her poem arise from different poetic traditions: 'the similes from pastoral lyric ... [and] the biographies from the Greek tradition of lament poetry' (Oswald 1). She describes how Homeric accounts of lament feature a 'professional poet (someone like Homer) [who] led the mourning and was antiphonally answered by women offering personal accounts of the deceased' (Oswald 1). The most famous of these laments is the description of Hector's funerary rites that closes the *Iliad* (Homer *Il.* XXIV.707-804). At the conclusion of the epic, Andromache, Hecuba, and Helen give personal accounts of the dead Hector, alternating with singers who are clearly professional (Holst-Warhaft 111). Greek laments were antiphonal, but despite there being only one distinct written voice in *Memorial*, Oswald's alternation of biographies and similes and the

repetition of the similes themselves create a kind of antiphonality throughout the poem (Pache 175). There is a clear differentiation between the material in biographies and that in the similes. The biographies are specific and tailored to each man they describe, while the similes tend to be more general and, as in Homer, gesture beyond the immediate story to create what Oswald calls 'an antiphonal account of man in his world' (Oswald 2). This world that Oswald portrays is ultimately a contemporary one, as *Memorial* functions as a lament of those long dead—the narrator knows, for example, that 'in years to come someone will find [Damasos'] helmet' (Oswald 45). The connections with lament enhance the negative opinion of war that Oswald expresses throughout the poem.

Structurally, the tripartite division described by Hahnemann and Pache both resembles lament and supports my reading of the poem as *katabasis*. Lament 'typically begins with an address to the dead, followed by a narrative section about the past (or the future), and a return to address and lament in the concluding section' (Pache 174). This is reflected in *Memorial* by the vocative function of the list of names, which is followed by the vignettes of the dead soldiers' lives interspersed with the similes 'consider[ing] the human condition from a wider perspective' (Pache 175), and concluded by the final similes. In addition to resembling the structure of lament, the list of names at the poem's start and the similes at its end also act as an introduction and conclusion to the reader's *katabasis*. Especially because of its resemblance to a physical war memorial, the reader is prepared to encounter the dead by the litany of names. The similes at the end of the poem enable a final reflection on the dead men the reader has met and impart a 'lingering melancholia' (Minchin 215). The *katabasis* of the poem changes the reader's perception of death

in the *Iliad*, even if ever so slightly, because Oswald highlights each dead soldier as a individual worthy of being remembered.

Oswald's focus on the dead as human beings rather than as only soldiers is evidenced by her reordering of information in the biographies. Consider the accounts of the death of Protesilaus. In *Memorial*:

The first to die was Protesilaus
A focused man who hurried to darkness
With forty black ships leaving the land behind
Men sailed with him from those flower-lit cliffs
Where the grass gives growth to everything
Pyrasus Iton Pteleus Antron
(Oswald 13).

As she will continue to do throughout her poem, Oswald highlights the man before considering any military implications. In the *Iliad*, however, Protesilaus' death is recounted in the Catalogue of Ships, and so his connection to the people he led is more prominent: 'those who held Phylake and flowering Pyrasos / ... / of these Protesilaus the warlike was leader - / while he lived' (Homer *Il.* 2.695-99). There is no Homeric equivalent to Oswald's description of Protesilaus as a 'focused man'; Homer only mentions that Protesilaus was an 'older and better' warrior than his brother, who now leads their people (Homer *Il.* 2.707). This paraphrasing, as Oswald describes it, is crucial to understanding her different concerns and is also connected with the elements of the oral tradition. Oswald conveys the same basic information, even using similar English words to those that Alexander would later use in her

translation as quoted above, but by playing with the order of that information, she highlights the humanity of the dead characters.

In a similar way, Oswald often emphasises the family of the slain warriors, and particularly gives more focus to women in her poem than the *Iliad* does. Many soldiers are identified by the names of their fathers. This is in keeping with the *Iliad*'s own commemorative function, one that recorded the names and deeds of heroes in order to pass their fame down to later generations (Minchin 203). Oswald ensures that the mothers of the dead are also mentioned, even when, in the case of Elephenor, 'nothing is known of his mother' (15). By drawing attention to the absence of Elephenor's mother in the *Iliad*, Oswald highlights her inclusion in *Memorial*, a poem not concerned with celebrating the deeds of warriors but with remembering those who died as men with families who loved them.

Fittingly, Oswald often moves away from the battlefield to consider how the family the soldier leaves behind will react to news of his death. This begins with Protesilaus, whose 'wife rushed out clawing her face' (Oswald 13)—in the *Iliad* her 'cheeks [are] torn with mourning' (Homer *Il.* 2.700)—and continues until Hector's body is returned to Andromache, 'sightless / Asking only to be washed and burned / And his bones wrapped in soft cloths / And returned to the ground' (Oswald 72). Whereas the ring construction of the *Iliad* focuses on fathers ransoming their children, the first and the last biographies in *Memorial* consider and acknowledge how the deaths recounted affect the wives of the fallen. There is the grief of Protesilaus' wife and that of Andromache, as well as a gesture towards the funerary rites that must be given to the dead, a task overwhelmingly performed by women. While Oswald does not employ ring composition, Protesilaus' and Hector's biographies hold special significance as the first and last biography. In both of these

biographies, Oswald explores the effects of war on those who fight as well as those who are left behind, as she does throughout the rest of the poem.

One aspect of the oral tradition in which Oswald does not engage is the granting of fame to the victors of war. This is an undoubtedly contemporary concern. The *Iliad* is equivocal about the nature of war; it 'does not celebrate warrior-heroism and the honour and glory to which it can lead, without also calling attention to the cost of this heroism in human terms' (Schein *Homeric* 2). Even as recently as World War One, poetic receptions used Homer to both glorify and criticise the war (Vandiver 464). Oswald, however, uses the many ways that Homer describes deaths and their effects on soldiers' families to highlight that war is always destructive. Throughout the poem, as the reader in their *katabasis* meets more and more men who lost their lives for a chance at glory, Oswald consistently denies their killers that fame. Although she sometimes mentions who kills a soldier, the killer is never celebrated and the slain warrior remains the focus. The killer often remains passive, as in the case of Echeolus who 'died at the hands of Antilochus' or Simoisius who 'was met by Ajax in the ninth year of the war / And died full tilt running onto his spear' (Oswald 14-15). In the latter example, Ajax appears to be standing still, whereas in the *Iliad* it is twice stated that 'Ajax struck [Simoisius]' (Homer *Il.* iv.473; iv.80). The killer can merely be an agent of fate, as implied in the biography of Menesthius who 'came overland to Troy not quite knowing why / Until he met Paris' (Oswald 30). Once again, Paris has no agency in Menesthius' death and the implication is that Menesthius came to Troy simply because it is where he was fated to die. In Oswald's poem, the character who is stated to kill the most people is Diomedes, but he is presented as 'a madman a terrible numbness', and not celebrated for his prowess (Oswald 21). Most prominently, Oswald never mentions who is responsible for three

of the *Iliad*'s most significant deaths: those of Sarpedon, Patroclus, and Hector. In each of these biographies, the focus remains solely on the dead men themselves. Sarpedon is 'killed by a spear'; it does not matter to Oswald that the spear was thrown by Patroclus (Oswald 61). Likewise, it is 'the rare and immediate light / of Apollo', not Hector, that kills Patroclus (Oswald 63-64), and a disembodied 'spear [that] found out the little patch of white / Between his collarbone and his throat' that kills Hector, not Achilles (Oswald 71). For Oswald, the killer is not important and does not need to be remembered. For that, we have the *Iliad. Memorial* offers a chance to celebrate the humanity of those who died.

Despite this celebration of the humanity of the dead men, a great many of Oswald's biographies equate the dead with their armour. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, Achilles' armour is especially prominent in the *Iliad* because both Patroclus and Hector die wearing it, thus symbolically enacting Achilles' own death. In *Memorial*, Oswald only briefly mentions that Patroclus 'borrowed [Achilles'] armour' (Oswald 63), and instead draws the reader's attention to the armour of the lesser-known soldiers. She marks the deaths of Agelaos and Iphidamas by suggesting that they become their armour as they die (Harrop 82). In both instances, Oswald extends imagery present in Homer. In the *Iliad*, Agelaos 'fell from his chariot, and his armour clashed upon him' (Homer *Il.* VIII.260). Oswald retains the focus on the sound Agelaos makes as he falls from his chariot as she fuses man and armour (Harrop 82). In her words, Agelaos 'fell made of metal banging on the ground' (Oswald 31). In the case of Iphidamas, Oswald expands greatly on the information provided by Homer, portraying him as a 'big ambitious boy' who is so obsessed with warfare that 'even on his wedding night / He seemed to be wearing armour' (Oswald 38). She also expresses more sympathy towards Iphidamas. While Homer seems to

regret that Iphidamas ‘had known no delight from [his wife]’ before he ‘took his rest in brazen sleep’ (Homer *Il.* XI.243; XI.41), Oswald uses his death to emphasise that war only results in loss: ‘Poor Iphidamas now he is only iron / Sleeping its iron sleep poor boy / ... / Far from his wife all that money wasted / All that hard work ... wasted’ (Oswald 38). In the *Iliad*, the numerous scenes of warriors strapping on their armour and the description of the shield Hephaestus makes for Achilles contribute to the epic’s glorification of the war’s victors. In contrast, Oswald’s attention to armour furthers her exploration of the cost of war. The war that she presents is not glorious; it is noisy, wasteful, and ultimately dehumanising.

Oswald also presents armour as one of the many things that dead men leave behind on the battlefield, giving her poem an imagined physicality that reinforces its connections with real-world war memorials and my reading of it as a *katabasis*. She says of Damasos that ‘in years to come someone will find his helmet / Shaped like a real head’ (Oswald 45). Here again, Oswald builds upon imagery present in the *Iliad*, in which Damasos is killed when a ‘spear struck ... through his bronze-cheeked helm / ... and the brains / were all splattered within it’ (Homer *Il.* 12.183; 12.185-86). At this point, rather than replicating a description of Damasos’ gruesome and unique death as she does elsewhere in the poem, Oswald considers the aftermath of the war. The joint biography of the brothers Socus and Charops demonstrates that immediately following the fighting, ‘the mud of Troy’ becomes a place where carrion birds feast on those unburied (Oswald 43). In Homer, Odysseus’ threat to Sokos that birds, ‘eaters of raw flesh, will tear at [him]’, stands in contrast to the honourable funeral rights that Odysseus himself expects to receive (Homer *Il.* 11.454). For Oswald, no part of war is honourable; it is only ‘black wings coming down every evening / Bird’s feathers on your face / unmaking you mouthful by mouthful’ (Oswald 43). Oswald’s narrator

speaks from a time when the Trojan war is long over and thus knows that someone will find Damasos' helmet and that Protesilaus, Hector, and all the others, have 'been in the black earth now for thousands of years' (Oswald 13). War makes an impact on the landscape. The dead leave behind their armour and their bones, making the battlefield a cemetery and quasi-underworld. In the world outside the poem, those that are left after wars end erect monuments to the fallen. Yet Oswald makes it clear from the first biography until the last that these soldiers should be remembered for more than just the moment of their deaths.

Although the biographies constitute the vast bulk of *Memorial's* commemoration of the dead, the repeated similes that occur between the narrations of the warriors' deaths are perhaps the most distinctive feature of the poem. They reinforce the themes of the biographies and enhance the otherworldly feeling of the reader's journey through Oswald's 'oral cemetery'. Every one of Oswald's similes can be traced to a Homeric image (Hahnemann 31-32). Importantly, they do not follow the exact structure of an extended epic simile, as can be seen when Oswald's similes are compared with their Homeric inspiration. In *Memorial*:

Like a man steps back
Seeing a snake almost under his foot
In a heathery hollow
The fear flutters his knees it
Sucks him white he steps back
(Oswald 16)⁷

Whereas in the *Iliad*:

⁷ The simile then repeats. I will only cite the page of the first iteration of each simile.

godlike Alexandros saw [Menelaos]
emerging among the front fighters, and was shaken in his heart,
and he drew back into the band of his companions, shunning
death.
As when a man sees a snake in a mountain glen
and leaping back stands at a distance, and trembling seizes his
limbs
and he draws back again, and pallor claims his cheeks,
so godlike Alexandros slipped back
(Homer *Il.* 3.30-36)

As discussed in Chapter 1, Homer's similes follow a distinct pattern: an action occurs and is then compared to something similar (Minchin 213). In the above example, Paris sees Menelaos and steps back among the Trojans, 'as when a man sees a snake...'. The simile develops, then ends by linking back to the initial action with a resumptive word or phrase: 'so godlike Alexandros slipped back'. The 'so' in line 36 is crucial. Oswald's similes start similarly to Homer's, most often using 'like' as the comparative word. Yet it is not always obvious what the simile is describing. The three lines before Oswald's snake simile read: 'North of Troy he was stepping backwards / When the darkness hit him with a dull clang / His name was Democoon' (Oswald 16). Democoon's step backwards is displaced from the simile that describes it and even more significantly, the simile does not end by linking back to Democoon's action. Instead, the simile is repeated and after the repetition, a new biography begins. Thus, while the extended similes are highly reminiscent of Homer's, Oswald adapts their structure to make them relevant to more than one action.

Readers of the printed poem have a great deal of choice in how they interact with Oswald's repeated similes. Hahnemann, Harrop, and Minchin have all noted that the repetition functions differently on the page from that in performance (4-5; 85; 212). A reader may choose to skip the repetition or to dwell over the second simile in order to consider its relation to what has just been read (Harrop 85). Furthermore, as the similes are repeated and lack the returning 'so' of their Homeric counterparts 'they can refer both to the passage that precedes as well as to the passage that follows them' (Pache 183). Readers can thus revisit a simile if they are struck by a particular comparison in a biography that follows it. The ability of the reader to choose how they interact with this feature of Oswald's work points again to the importance of *Memorial* as a written artefact, even though it engages heavily with the oral tradition.

No matter how the reader chooses to engage with the repeated similes, they still provide much of the poem's rhythm. As the poem is written without a fixed metre or punctuation, the repetition of the similes provides a sense of rhythm and helps to separate and further individualise the biographies. This is especially evident towards the end of the poem. Between the narration of Patroclus' and Hector's deaths, the biographies become shorter, often just a line such as 'there lay Dryops' (Oswald 67). At the same time, the similes seem to take up more space in the poem and their constant repetition enables an accelerating pace. The page following Dryops' death reads thus:

Like that dog in the barn
Lying in a darkless half-sleep guarding his sheep
All night there's a lump of growl stuck in his throat
So the fox tip-toeing through the woods

Worries him awake

[simile repeats]

And DEMUCHUS

LAOGONUS

DARDANUS

And TROS begging for his life

But his life was over

Like when two animals have found a little luckiness

Of clear-running water in the mountains

One dies and the other drinks it

[simile repeats]

And MULIUS and RHIGMOS

Like on a long beach the rustle of the sea

Opening its multiple folds unfurling waves

(Oswald 68-69)

This passage corresponds with Achilles' rampage in Book 20 of the *Iliad* (Homer *Il.* 20.455-89), but Oswald characteristically mentions Achilles only in passing. Although both Oswald and Homer do not reveal much about these soldiers, Oswald at least

gives them greater significance because of the similes that follow and precede their deaths.

As the reader becomes comfortable with the repetition it becomes especially noticeable when a simile is not repeated. I suggest that these unrepeated similes ultimately represent the randomness of death in war. Throughout the middle section of the poem, a total of five similes are not repeated (Hahnemann 31). There is nothing special about these similes, or the biographies around them, that causes this change. The similes themselves range in length from two lines to eleven, some of the longest in the poem. The first two unrepeated similes – ‘like a traveller trudging across a plain’ and ‘like a farm boy looking after the pigs’ (Oswald 41) – alternate with lines describing two deaths – ‘And Hippodamos died /... / and Hypeirochos died’ (Oswald 41). In the *Iliad*, these two men are killed by Odysseus in the space of a single line. By not repeating the similes that follow their deaths, Oswald individualises them more than they are in Homer’s epic: ‘and Odysseus killed Hippodamos and Hypherichos’ (Homer *Il.* 11.335). At the same time, because some of the similes in this middle section are not repeated, the deaths seem to come more quickly. This section corresponds to the passages in the *Iliad* in which the Trojans appear to gain the upper hand and begin burning the Greek ships. Oswald also uses more lists of names here in a manner that resembles another catalogue, a defining feature of Homer epic (Foley “Epic” 172). The unpredictability of the similes destabilises the reader’s experience. In both the *Iliad* and *Memorial*, death can come quickly and unexpectedly, which Oswald highlights by changing her now-established technique.

The close proximity of the unrepeated similes also resembles Oswald’s creation of ‘acts’ within the poem by grouping similes that describe similar

phenomena.⁸ For example, beginning with the shared biography of the brothers Adrestus and Amphius and ending with the biography of Amphimachos, all of the similes contain some description of water (Oswald 40-46). This group includes the first two unrepeated similes in which the traveller ‘comes to a river and stands helpless / Looking down at that foamy swiftness sweeping to the sea’ and the farm boy ‘tries to cross a river in a rainstorm / And gets swept away’ (Oswald 41). Over the course of eight similes, Oswald explores the destructive power that water can have, reflecting Homer’s tendency to compare the acts of war to ‘landscapes ... in vigorous or violent motion’ (Buxton 145). In contrast to some of both Homer and Oswald’s comparisons to the violent deaths of animals, these water similes develop a picture of war as futile. In some ways, war is unnatural because, ‘like a fish in the wind / Jump[ing] right out of its knowing / And land[ing] on the sand’, the only result of war is death (Oswald 42). On the other hand, Oswald raises the idea that ‘like the war cries of cranes going south escaping the rain’, human warfare might be inevitable. What is not inevitable is its celebration and one of Oswald’s most powerful similes makes this clear. She describes how in Autumn ‘God rains on the roof hammering his fists down’ because ‘he has had enough of violent smiling men’ (Oswald 44).⁹ She writes that ‘now every one of us is being looked at / Under the rain’s lens’ and that ‘this is water’s world / And the works of men are vanishing’ (Oswald 44). In this simile, the longest in the poem, Oswald demonstrates both the destructive power of water and draws a direct comparison between it and warfare. If war is all that the works of men will amount to then it will be washed away, ‘clattering to the sea’ (Oswald 44). Yet it is possible that humans can move beyond and away

⁸ I take this term from Helen Morse’s description of how Chris Drummond arranged Brink Productions’ performance.

⁹ In *Iliad* 16.384-392, it is Zeus who rains down.

from warfare, and part of that process lies in remembering what truly happens in war: death, and only death.

In contrast to the group of similes that emphasise the destructive power of water, in a later group of similes Oswald uses fire and light imagery to emphasise the importance of the lives of the men she names. The first of these three similes follows and connects with Patroclus' biography:

And the rare and immediate light
Of Apollo with one hand
Stopped him

Like moonlight
Or the light of a bonfire
Burning on the cliffs
When sailors get blown along
Homesick over the sea
They notice that far-off fire
And think of their wives
(Oswald 63-64)

The relationship between this simile, Patroclus' biography, and the *Iliad* is complex and multi-layered. In the *Iliad*, the 'light of Apollo' that was responsible for Patroclus' death was the removal of his helmet and the revelation to Hector that he was not Achilles (Homer *Il.* 16.790-93) whereas Oswald compares it to moonlight and the light of bonfires. The contrast with Apollo's traditional association with the sun sets up a contrast between the rest of the simile and how Achilles' grief over Patroclus'

death is portrayed in the *Iliad*. In Oswald's simile, the light of Apollo is a hopeful rather than hurtful light; it is the light that alerts sailors that they are close to home and their families instead of the light that separates Achilles and Patroclus and ultimately causes many more deaths. Achilles, Patroclus, and all the rest shall not return home like the soldiers of the simile because the war carries on. In the *Iliad*, the war continues in part because Thetis asks Hephaestus to make new armour for Achilles. It is from the passage in which Achilles is preparing himself to re-enter the battle that Oswald's moonlight simile is drawn:

He took his great strong shield,
whose light shone afar, like the moon.
As when to sailors at sea there appears the light
of a watchfire burning ...
...
so the flare from Achilles' shield, beautiful and intricately wrought,
reached the high clear air.
(Homer *Il.* 19.373-80)

In the *Iliad*, this simile serves to emphasise the excellence of Achilles' shield and the hope that his return to battle will give the Greeks. Oswald takes this image and, by connecting it to the death of Patroclus, changes it into a reminder of the communities that will grieve the men she describes throughout the poem.

The moonlight simile acquires yet another significance through its repetition. In the biographies following the repeated simile, the moonlight and watchfires become the colour of battlefield remains:

EUPHORBAS died

Leaving his silver hairclip on the battlefield

And HIPPOTHOUS

SCHEDIUS

PHORCYS

LEOCRITUS

Like little campfire stars lit round the moon

(Oswald 64-65)

Because the repeated similes can refer forwards and backwards, Oswald implicitly compares Euphorbas' hairclip with Achilles' shield, putting them on the same level of importance as artefacts of life. At the same time, Euphorbas is one of the five men described as like a campfire star. As this simile develops, Oswald shows how the light of these men, their lives about which we know nothing, affects other people. The light of these little stars combines until it 'is unspeakable it is breaking out of heaven / And every star openly admits to god / Making the shepherd glad' (Oswald 65). Although there is scant information about any of these five men, Oswald makes it clear that they too are worthy of being remembered and would have made the people who knew them glad. The sequence concludes with a final simile that deals explicitly with fire, and offering hope that the war will soon end. It follows the biography of Podes, 'a close friend of Hector', who 'time itself finished' (Oswald 65):

Like fire which is what

A kind of visible vanishing

That lights up trees

The wind whisks it round
It is nothing it is exhausting
Whole thickets lose their footing and fall
Under the weight of that light
(Oswald 66)

This simile more closely resembles the group of water similes, making the reader consider both the destructive power of war and its inevitable end. War, like fire, is a 'visible vanishing', no more than the end to the lives that Oswald remembers in her poem.

Although Oswald seeks to give the same attention to each of the dead soldiers, this is not always possible because Homer does not give all of the dead the same attention. Nevertheless, Oswald does share the emotions that the deaths of Patroclus and Hector create in the *Iliad* with those men about whom little is known. This is achieved through the similes that surround them and through Oswald's concentration in their biographies on other sections of the *Iliad* in which the two characters appear rather than only on their deaths. Patroclus' biography is preceded by a simile that alters in its repetition – one of only two in the poem. The simile is directly related to Patroclus' life, setting up the information that will follow in the biography:

Like anger which is so rapturous so other
It can turn a man any man into a murderer
Then all his learning is outwitted
He has to leave his home his country
And go begging for shelter

With blood printed on his hands
And where he goes
People stare and whisper
(Oswald 62)

In its repetition, Oswald highlights 'with *blood* printed on his hands', alluding to Patroclus' murder of Clysonymus, which she then expands upon in his biography (Oswald 63, emphasis in original). This simile also connects with Achilles in two ways. First, the comparison to anger that is 'so rapturous so other' that 'wherever [the man] goes / people stare and whisper' is a clear reference to how Achilles acts in the *Iliad* after Patroclus' death. In *Memorial*, Achilles is only explicitly referred to twice, in two of the final biographies before Hector's (Oswald 69-71). Oswald's simile here evokes his presence and universalises it: any of the men that Oswald describes could be driven to such a madness by the war. Secondly, the corresponding simile in the *Iliad* occurs at the start of the meeting between Priam and Achilles in Book 24:

with his arms [Priam] clasped Achilles' knees and kissed the
terrible man-slaughtering hands, which had killed his many sons.
As when madness closes tight upon a man who, after killing
someone
in his own land, arrives in the country of others,
at a rich man's house, and wonder grips those looking on,
so Achilles looked in wonder at godlike Priam
(Homer *Il.* 24.478-83)

In the *Iliad*, this simile invokes the moment when Patroclus and Achilles meet at the exact moment that Priam and Achilles meet (Buxton 153). Oswald places another

connection in this comparison, preparing the reader for Patroclus' death by using a simile that in Homer refers back to Patroclus' life, one that occurs during the event that ultimately ends Achilles' anger. As with the moonlight simile that follows Patroclus' death, the repetition of the simile and its position after the description of another character's death broadens the emotions attached to the sequence beyond just those expressed by Patroclus, Achilles, and Priam.

Oswald uses the position of Hector's biography—the last in the poem—to reiterate many of the themes she has raised in other places. The biography begins 'and HECTOR died like everyone else' (Oswald 71). To Oswald, it does not matter if the man she is describing is the prince of Troy or the lowliest soldier; they have all died because of an ultimately senseless war and they all deserve to be remembered. As with Patroclus' biography, Oswald here only briefly mentions how Hector died, using his biography to reference instead another part of the *Iliad*, the scene between Andromache and Hector in Book 6, to draw upon the emotions it generates. As discussed above, this final biography resonates strongly with the first, of Protesilaus, as both feature the dead man's wife. Andromache does more than Protesilaus' wife, as she does in the *Iliad*, and becomes a symbol for all the families who will grieve the fallen warriors described in the poem. Hector's vision of her fate—'himself dead / And her in Argos weaving for some foreign woman'—allows a glimpse into the future that awaits many of the women who Oswald has included in *Memorial* (Oswald 72). They are affected by more than just the loss of their sons and husbands; they are at risk of slavery, abuse, and death themselves. Andromache's mythological fate is testament to the trials that women face after a war has finished. Fittingly, this final biography also acts as a bridge between the dead and the living because it is the only one to mention funerary rites (Minchin 211). As Hector's bones are 'wrapped in

soft cloths / And returned to the ground' (Oswald 72), the reader emerges from the underworld cemetery of the poem.

Although the poem focuses on death, its final similes offer a reflection that also considers life. Following Hector's death, there is a series of ten unrepeated similes concluded by a final, repeated, simile. As discussed above, between Patroclus' and Hector's deaths, the pace of the poem increases dramatically as the biographies get shorter in comparison to the similes. As such, the ten unrepeated similes function like a sigh of relief after the narration of Hector's death because there are no more deaths to come. Furthermore, the first of the ten similes—'like leaves who could write a history of leaves'—sums up what Oswald has been trying to achieve throughout the poem (Oswald 73): that is, to leave some record of some of the 'thousands of names', of the thousands of people, who have died in the war (Oswald 73). These ten unrepeated similes paint a bleak picture of war. If war is all the men are remembered for, 'dead bodies are their lineage / which matter no more than leaves' (Oswald 73). Five of the similes describe how war reduces humanity to an insect-like state that wastes our short lives. We are 'like wandering tribes of flies', 'like crickets', 'like strobe-lit wasps', 'like tribes of summer bees', 'like locusts ... A hanging banner of insects trying to outfly flame / They hide by drowning' (Oswald 76-80). But Oswald ends on a slightly more positive note with the final, repeated, simile:

Like when god throws a star
And everyone looks up
To see that whip of sparks
And then it's gone

Like when god throws a star

And everyone looks up
To see that whip of sparks
And then it's gone
(Oswald 83-84)

Although war may make the lives of men short, it does not mean that those lives are not remarkable.

Through a metaphorical *katabasis* in the 'oral cemetery' that is *Memorial*, Oswald brings the reader's attention to each of the soldiers whose death is narrated in the *Iliad* (Oswald 2). She draws upon a variety of influences, both literary—the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, the tradition of Greek lament, WWI poetry—and physical monuments of mourning, especially war memorials. The reader is prepared for the *katabasis* of the poem by a list of the names of the dead. They are then guided by the narrator through the deaths of the *Iliad*, separated by repeated similes in a manner that resembles how the Sybil points out the denizens of the underworld to Aeneas. The poem ends with a series of similes that bring the reader out of the realm of the dead and allow reflection on the fragility of life. Oswald highlights the ordinary men who fight alongside the likes of Achilles and Hector. By focusing on their lives before the war and the moments of their deaths, Oswald expands the significance of the *Iliad*. Oswald makes the *Iliad* not just the story of Achilles' wrath, or the deaths of Patroclus and Hector, but the story of the lives and the deaths of 218 soldiers.

Returning to the Living: Conclusions

Charles Martindale argues that ‘antiquity is constantly changing as ever-changing modernities engage in dialogue with it; [and that] ancient works come to mean differently under different modern conditions’ (Martindale “Reception” 171). In this Conclusion, I explore how the *Iliad* itself is changed by the rebirth and renewal it undergoes in Miller’s, Malouf’s, and Oswald’s works. Primarily, I attempt to answer the question of why these authors have chosen to engage with Homeric epic. To do so, I enlist John Cant’s description of the Coen Brothers’ film *O Brother, Where Art Thou* as representing a ‘Homerian moment’, where a new medium arises and threatens the old (72). I suggest that we are living through such a moment and authors are engaging with Homer because his works continue to speak to us. Through an analysis of Brink Productions’ 2018 performance of *Memorial*, I demonstrate how the meanings of the Homeric epics continue to evolve.

In the Introduction, I posited that Miller’s, Malouf’s, and Oswald’s receptions of the *Iliad* respond to a post 9/11 world order. Global terrorism and particularly the 9/11 attacks, Bali Bombings, and the 7/7 London Bombings, brought war and death closer to the everyday lives of ordinary citizens in wealthy western countries. The works I have discussed—written by an American, an Australian, and a British poet—reflect this proximity. Interacting with the *Iliad* to process these events is particularly apt as there are significant resonances between the myth of Troy and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They take place in a similar geographic region and have lasted for a similarly protracted length of time, often seemingly with no end in sight. The actual fighting is, however, extremely different. Miller and Malouf both contest the ideas of honour that are pivotal to the Homeric pursuit of *kleos*: in both novels, Achilles in particular is praised and remembered for things other than fighting. These

contemporary wars have also had substantial civilian costs. In *Memorial*, Oswald reminds us that all soldiers whose deaths are narrated in the *Iliad* had families that would have mourned them, even though they have not often been commemorated in the reception of Homer. All death in *Memorial* is senseless and unnecessary, just as the untold destruction of civilian lives through terrorism and the wars of the early twenty-first century has been.

The first two decades of the twenty-first century have also witnessed great technological change that has particularly impacted the ways we produce, consume, and discuss the arts. The change of centuries, and millennia, was marked by the Y2K panic, and, throughout the past twenty years, technology has become increasingly integrated into our daily lives. The arrival of YouTube in 2005 and the advent of the smartphone have democratised video sharing and filmmaking, as nearly every person now has a device capable of shooting high quality video footage in their pocket. Streaming services such as Netflix have also revolutionised the ways we watch films and television shows, and there are similar services available for audio books. I suggest that the increasing move to digitisation and entertainment-on-demand represents what John Cant has described as a 'Homerian moment', when an older medium gives way to a new one (72). Cant uses this term to refer to the recording of the folk music of the American South in the Coen Brothers' 2000 film *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, itself a reception of the *Odyssey*. He argues that:

We use the myth of Homer to personify the process by which the oral culture of the archaic world was first written down. In what we might call the Homeric moment, the spoken becomes the written and a cultural transmutation takes place that destroys one tradition but feeds the creation of another. And, as the Coens remind us, the

process continues, books are made out of other books, films out of other films; but, more than this, technology makes possible other transmutations of medium. (Cant 72)

Miller, Malouf, and Oswald retell the *Iliad* amidst this Homeric moment. There is destruction here—one tradition, medium, or technology, may die—but in its place is a renewed creation and evolution. The process that Cant describes is itself a *katabasis*.

This process of destruction and creation is visible in Brink Productions' performance of *Memorial*, which offers a return to and adaptation of oral performance. The production was mounted at the 2018 Adelaide Festival, the 2018 Brisbane Festival, and at London's Barbican Centre as part of its 14-18 NOW World War One Centenary commissions. Each iteration featured Australian actor Helen Morse as the narrator, a team of seven musicians and singers, three principal dancers, and a local volunteer chorus of at least 150 members with a wide range of ages.¹⁰ In the text version of the poem, Oswald explicitly connects *Memorial* with the oral tradition in her foreword, while in performance the bodily and vocal presence of the narrator raises the question of whether or not the experience of oral epic poetry can be recreated. This production is not isolated. There have been other performances of the Homeric poems in recent even just at the Adelaide Festival and Fringe, both comic and serious. The narrator of a performed *Memorial*, whether it is Oswald herself, Helen Morse, or another, strongly resembles one image of Homer: a virtuoso poet holding an audience's attention with a tale of great importance. The addition of music in Brink Productions' performance creates another link with the

¹⁰ I saw performances on March 1st and 6th at the Adelaide Festival, and September 29th in London.

bards of the past who accompanied themselves on lyres. Yet the skills and the contexts of these performances are not the same. Epics and their performance were originally mass entertainment, while the audience who would attend a poetry reading or an arts festival is significantly more limited. More importantly, while the performers of Homeric poetry were celebrated for their ability to adapt traditional tales in performance, Oswald or Morse are reciting a memorised text. Fittingly, this memorisation becomes part of the memorialisation of the dead in the poem. They are held in the narrator's memory and that narrator is celebrated for their ability to recall the details and sustain the performance.

The addition of music in Brink Productions' performance strengthens the links between the poem and ancient lament. The singers provide a second voice to that of the narrator, creating a true antiphonal response. Often, after Morse recited a simile, it would be taken up by the singers on the repetition. In fact, the first simile of the production was the 'fish in the wind' simile, sung as a refrain by the singers between Morse's words, which followed the order of Oswald's text. This refrain and the choral ending, which repeated 'thousands of leaves, thousands of names', were the most prominent in the production, emphasising the unnaturalness of war and the desire to remember the dead. The effect was such that Morse's act of remembrance enabled others to remember.

The Chorus of over 150 volunteers acted as both participants and spectators in the poem's presentation. The performance opened with a spotlight on Morse standing among the bodies of the Chorus, who gradually rose after Morse touched one who represented Echeolus. The audience of the performance therefore sees the ghosts that in the poem are only imaginary and are thus brought physically into the poem's *katabasis*. This feeling is enhanced by the structure of the theatre and

proscenium arch which resembles a cave (Holtsmark 25). Throughout the performance, the Chorus continued to move on and off stage, performing various roles. At times, they moved around Morse peacefully, seemingly unaware of what she was narrating while at other points they would march purposefully, sometimes appearing to engulf Morse as she continued to narrate. Sometimes a member of the Chorus would stand in for the soldier whose death Morse was describing. The production used the variety of volunteers, particularly the children. One child tugged at the arm of a woman on the ground as Morse talked about Simoisius, but only a few minutes later the stage was full of children running playfully around Morse. The movements of the Chorus reinforced the humanity that Oswald's words give to the dead.

The performances as part of the Barbican Centre's WWI commemorations demonstrate important resonances between Oswald's contemporary work, Homer's ancient one, and the event and works of a century ago. As Elizabeth Vandiver argues, during the First World War 'the Homeric paradigm of war was the image most readily available to poets of all classes who set out to write about war' (452). Unlike more contemporary adaptations of Homer, including Oswald's, these soldier-poets used Homer to both glorify and criticise the war efforts (Vandiver 464). Oswald's written text, her readings, and Brink Productions' performances offer no such glorification of war. The image these works present is one of devastation and futility. Brink Productions visually reinforce this connection by having some of the Chorus members appear dressed in WWI army uniforms. They stand silently at attention while other members of the Chorus move around them and Morse declares: 'this is it now this is the mud of Troy' (Oswald 43). In the First World War, the mud of Troy was to again become a battlefield, a fact emphasised by the

production's Australian origins. Compared to the horrors of more modern warfare, Homer's account of the Trojan war can seem more glorious and honourable, especially as there is no 'random and anonymous death' (Vandiver 454). But Oswald's poem and its various performances remind their audiences that no matter the cause or the time, war has one result: the deaths of those who fight.

In the previous chapters we have seen how Miller, Malouf, and Oswald have introduced new perspectives to the reception of the *Iliad*. Miller uses an extended version of the *nekyia* in *Iliad* 23 to position Patroclus as the narrator of *The Song of Achilles* and to depict Achilles and Patroclus in a queer relationship. Following the model of *Iliad* 24, Malouf structures *Ransom* as a *katabasis*. In doing so, he emphasises the psychology and emotions of Priam and Achilles, who both begin the novel in despair and grief but find renewal and the ability to reconnect with their respective communities following the ransom. Oswald moves attention away from these prominent characters of the epic to instead focus on each and every soldier whose death is narrated in the *Iliad*. The narrator of *Memorial* guides the reader through each death and so the poem resembles the *katabases* found in the *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Miller, Malouf, and Oswald all interact with works other than the *Iliad*—the *Odyssey*, the *Library* attributed to Apollodorus, and Virgil's *Aeneid* are especially prominent sources. But they also have important connections with contemporary texts. Miller's novel is one of many novels, films, and TV shows from the past two decades that set out to tell the "whole story" of Greek and Roman mythical heroes. Those works that retell the Trojan War include the ransom of Hector's body as a prominent feature, reinscribing its significance and lending Malouf's reinvention of the scene more power. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Oswald's poem also has important links with contemporary physical war

memorials. Each work is thus a combination of what Simon Goldhill has described as vertical and horizontal relationships ("Cultural" 62). They use the *Iliad* to make meaning in their present time and in doing so affect what the *Iliad* itself means for that present. Because of Miller, Achilles and Patroclus can be a positive example of a queer couple instead of a pair shrouded in mystery or engaging in an ancient practice that would now be illegal. Because of Malouf, Priam's journey to ransom Hector's body is not just something that is expected of him but a brave and original act that changes his thinking and that of Achilles. Because of Oswald, the *Iliad* becomes not just the story of the wrath of Achilles but a tribute to the lives of 218 men.

This thesis leaves open many avenues for future research covering different types of reception. I have examined the prevalence of *nekyia* and *katabasis* in three receptions of the *Iliad*, but these devices are more prevalent than in just the works I have studied here. Future work could expand to cover receptions of the *Odyssey*, and beyond Homer. Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad* would be of particular interest as it combines some of the approaches I have discussed. The novel is structured as a confessional narrative from the perspective of Penelope in Hades, interrupted by a Chorus of the twelve maids hanged by Telemachus in *Odyssey* 22 (Homer *Od.* 22.458-474). Atwood's novel thus resembles Miller's in its use of *nekyia* as narration and Oswald's poem in the tour of the underworld that Penelope gives the reader. More broadly, there is scope for further study of the other receptions of the Homeric poems that I have mentioned throughout this thesis, both separately and together. Such explorations might take two paths. The first, similar to my work here, could consider the works as the locus of reception and investigate how they make meaning from the Homeric poems and the effects that they have on our interpretation of the

Iliad and the *Odyssey*. The second path would embrace the multiple meanings of “reception” that I discussed in the first chapter and investigate how readers respond to these works in relation to Homer’s epics. There are certainly market forces at play in the continuing publication of Homeric receptions—they are popular enough that there are many to choose from. How and why readers enjoy these texts is a question worth pursuing under the banner of Classical reception studies. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to consider the authors of these works themselves as readers who receive Homer, and examine the similarities and differences between them and their works. There seems to be an impulse to “complete” Homer, that is, to adapt and retell both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In recent years, Miller has published *Circe* and Oswald has published *Nobody* (2019), both of which engage with the *Odyssey*. Many of the authors of historical fantasy that I mentioned in Chapter 2 make entire careers out of retelling Greek and other ancient myths. In all of these areas, I suggest that an approach that balances Martindale’s and Goldhill’s approaches to reception will yield the best results.

The simile immediately following Hector’s death in Oswald’s *Memorial* is a reflection on the brief and transitory nature of life:

Like leaves who could write a history of leaves
The wind blows their ghosts to the ground
And the Spring breathes new leaf into the woods
Thousands of names thousands of leaves
When you remember them remember this
Dead bodies are their lineage
Which matter no more than the leaves (Oswald 73)

While Oswald asserts that the dead bodies do not matter, she also implores the reader to remember the thousands of names and the people these names belonged to. We might also think of the reception of the *Iliad* as resembling a tree from which thousands of leaves have been blown to the ground. The memory of each of these receptions is present when we encounter both the *Iliad* itself and any other reception. Just as spring brings new life to trees, so too do new receptions reinvigorate the *Iliad*. Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, Malouf's *Ransom*, and Oswald's *Memorial* enact this destruction and creation through engaging with *nekyia* and *katabasis*, bringing new perspectives to the epic that are 'both new and a return' (Malouf 211).

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