

Making and Unmaking: The Achaean Wall and the Limits of Fictionality in Homeric Criticism*

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SUMMARY: The Achaean wall is a curious object that appears in *Iliad* 7 only to disappear in book 12 with a vehemence that is unique in the Homeric landscape. Puzzling in every other respect, is the wall even a single, coherent object? While the Alexandrians and their successors accepted Nestor's proposal and the construction of the wall as genuinely Homeric, modern critics of the analytic persuasion assume it must be an interpolation. This essay takes its cues from the ancient sources, which I believe indicate the most fruitful way of reading the episode and the wall generally—namely, as an object lesson in Homeric fictionality and its limits in the minds of successive readers of the Homeric poems.

Thanks to the poet's eloquence, the Achaean wall in some way *is*, having emerged out of nothing, while the real Troy, which formerly *was*, in the course of time came to naught, having vanished.

Eustathius on *Il.* 7.452

DURING THE FINAL YEAR OF THE TROJAN WAR, TWO DAYS INTO BATTLE AND SOME fourteen days into the *Iliad*, a quasi-truce is declared on both sides, agreed to by Ajax and Hector (7.279–312). At the assembly that evening, Nestor presents a plan before the Achaeans that will shape much of the remainder of the epic. First, he extends the idea of a truce. Then he appends to this thought the idea of a new defensive fortification (7.336–43). The plan is unanimously adopted, and one hundred verses on, even before day breaks, the defensive structure that would later come to be known as the Achaean wall is built. Yet

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no sooner is the wall's construction underway than the plans for its future destruction are hatched as well. Poseidon immediately objects to the project of the Greek wall, fearing that it will eclipse the fame of the greater Trojan wall that he had built together with Apollo (7.451–53). The gods convene, and Zeus assures Poseidon that his own fame will be secure (7.458). At the start of book 12 that promise is made good, and the Achaean wall is washed away by the gods into physical oblivion. The account of this latter event is all the more striking given its extreme violence and the way it occurs in a unique flash-forward to a point soon after the end of the Trojan War, well outside the narrative boundaries of the *Iliad* (12.13–33). The wall that suddenly was is no more, having completed its complicated life cycle.

For centuries, scholars have been at sixes and sevens trying to make sense of the Achaean wall as a textual object. Denys Page was not the first to label Nestor's speech "untimely" and an "absurdity," though in finding a drastic way to explain it out of existence he did break new ground.¹ A flurry of commentary before and since has been drawn to the odd status of the Achaean wall, which has become a nagging, if not exactly central, issue in Homeric criticism, touching on everything from questions of multiple authorship and interpolation to the very status of orality and writing themselves. Lying behind each of these approaches has been the assumption that the Achaean wall is an embarrassing textual object to be explained away rather than a fictional object to be understood in its own right. But what if the solution to the problem of the Achaean wall is to be sought for not in its embarrassing presence but in its very status as an object and in its arbitrary character—that is, as an object that can be made and unmade at will? Examining the problem of the wall from this perspective can reveal a good deal about the tolerance in ancient and modern criticism for the limits of fictionality in Homeric poetry and for the capacity of an epic poet to invent fictional realities, and even to invent their destruction.

I. HOW TO MAKE SOMETHING FROM NOTHING

From Thucydides to the present day, the Achaean wall has consistently troubled Homer's readers. Scholars in particular have been drawn to the incongruousness of this detail—both its tardiness in the plot but also the very fact of the wall itself, which is puzzling in the extreme. As Strabo complains, why build a wall now, in the tenth year of the war? Both the timing of the wall's construction and the fact that the Greeks had camped out so close to

¹ Page 1959: 332, 333.

Troy for so long unprotected by any such fortification are a sign of witlessness (ἀπόνεια, 13.1.36). But military tactics aside, it is the mere presence of the wall that is most troubling of all, for the wall is disorienting in itself, an object almost uncannily familiar and yet strangely out of place. The Achaeans came to attack a wall, not to build one, let alone to defend one (oddly reversing roles with the Trojans). Why are they seemingly duplicating Troy on a smaller scale—creating their own “great wall,” as Zeus himself observes (7.463)—and all of this shortly before the Trojan wall is fated to fall?

While Achilles’ unexpected withdrawal from battle might account for some of the facts connected with the wall, it does not account for all of them, in particular the odder details that color its narration. The Greek wall disturbs, both in the way it suddenly appears (in a single day), a monument looming out of place on the Trojan plain, indeed seemingly built out of the rubble of cremated heroes (7.435–37),² and then in the spectacular way it disappears, vengefully obliterated without a trace early in book 12. What is the poet trying to conceal, and why does he go to such elaborate lengths to conceal it, only to draw attention to the concealment, by resorting to a kind of *deus ex machina* (ὥσπερ ἀπὸ μηχανῆς, Σ BT *Il.* 7.445 *ex.*)?

The Achaean wall is a curious thing indeed. Is it even a coherent object? It can appear ridiculously feeble in sheer physical terms, especially given its defensive function: built hurriedly, and under the cover of night at that, it seems thrown together.³ At times, a mere human can topple it, as Sarpedon does with such alarming ease when he tears off battlements with his bare hands (12.397–99) or as Hector does when breaches the wall at 13.679–84.⁴ On the other hand, or rather viewed in another light, the wall appears more like a city than a defensive structure, given its size and architectural details—indeed, like a virtual copy of Troy. It is equipped with lofty towers⁵ (possibly seven in

² Unless *Il.* 7.334–35 is an interpolation (West 1969: 259; Kirk 1990 *ad loc.*). See below.

³ At least, in the eyes of the scholia. Cf. Σ BT *Il.* 12.397–98 *ex.*, calling the battlements “unsound” (σαθρά).

⁴ One could argue that these scenes enhance the exploits of the heroes (who are, after all, demi-gods [*Il.* 12.23], Sarpedon literally so), rather than underscoring the fragility of the wall. So viewed, they would mark not exceptions but accommodations to momentary narrative requirements. (In Hector’s case, the wall is low-lying, hence vulnerable, where he attacks it.) But the scholia do not construe the matter thus, and perhaps we should not do so either. Thus, Hainsworth 1993 on *Il.* 12.258–60, echoing the scholia (previous note): “A hastily improvised defense completed in one day.”

⁵ Πύργος ὑψηλός is normally said of cities. At *Il.* 3.384 the expression is used to describe Troy (cf. also 18.274–75); everywhere else in the poem it is applied to the

all),⁶ parapets, bastions (possibly stepped), battlements, vertical supports, and bolted gates, all of logs and large stones.⁷ It is surrounded by a wide ditch and sharp stakes. In places, it is referred to as “great” (μέγα, 7.463; 12.12; 12.257; 13.50; 13.87; cf. 7.444: μέγα ἔργον), “wide” (εὐρύ, 12.5),⁸ and “well built” (ἐϋδμητος, 12.36; 12.137; 12.154: ἐϋδμήτων ἀπὸ πύργων), the latter being a term that is elsewhere reserved for Troy (e.g., *Il.* 16.700; 21.516; 22.195),⁹ just as “wide wall” is used only of the Achaean wall at *Il.* 12.5 and of the Trojan wall at *Il.* 21.447. The parallels with Troy will prove relevant below.

The wall of the Achaeans may at times seem at once too diminutive and too grand, but for the most part it seems to be just what it is, a hastily built defensive work, and consequently blown out of all proportion to its significance, as Poseidon famously worries (7.451–53). And while the Alexandrians or their successors seem to have accepted the proposal and construction of the Greek wall in *Iliad* 7 as genuinely Homeric,¹⁰ modern readers of the analytic persuasion, starting with Gottfried Hermann and culminating in Denys Page,

Achaean wall. Cf. further *Od.* 6.263, where it is applied to the city of the Phaeacians. For comparisons of the Achaean wall to a city, see Dio Chrys. *Or.* 11.76 (μᾶλλον ὥς αὐτοὶ πολιορκησόμενοι παρεσκευάζοντο); Scodel 1982 (Babel); Singor 1992: 411 (seven-gated Thebes); Hainsworth 1993: 345 on *Il.* 12.258–60; and below.

⁶See Singor 1992, esp. 403, pointing to *Il.* 9.85 and 10.126–27, and finding some support in a minority opinion among the ancient scholia (Σ *A Il.* 7.339 *Ariston/Did.* (?) and Eust. *Il.* 689.38 = 2.491.19 van der Valk, on *Il.* 7.438). References to Eustathius are to the Rome edition of 1542 followed by van der Valk’s edition of 1971. A digital copy of the Rome edition (*Iliad* volumes) is now available online through the Mandeville Special Collections Library of UC San Diego, thanks to the kind efforts of Lynda Claassen, Colleen Garcia, and Roger Smith (see <http://roger.ucsd.edu/record=b3458146~S9>).

⁷*Il.* 12.28–29; 12.258–60; 12.177–78; 12.258–60; 12.291; 12.340; 12.397–98; 12.444–61. See Hainsworth on *Il.* 12.258–60 for a convenient account of the wall.

⁸The ditch around the Achaean wall is called “wide” and “great” at *Il.* 7.441 and 9.350 and “wide” at 12.53. Translations of the *Iliad* throughout are by Lattimore 1951.

⁹With the exception of *Il.* 1.448, where it is applied to βωμός. Moreover, in the *Iliad* the formulaic expression ἐϋδμητ- + ἀπό/ἐπί/ὑπό + πύργ- (sg./pl.) in final position is unique to the Achaean wall and to Troy—and this can hardly be a coincidence. In the *Odyssey* the term presents a different set of associations, which only reinforces the impression of purposeful design in the *Iliad*. A further sign of the wall’s careful construction: “they built well-fitting gates within [the walls]” (πύλας ἐνεποίηον εὖ ἀραρυίας, *Il.* 7.438 ~ *Il.* 7.339); and verbs of effort, such as θέσαν μογέοντες (*Il.* 12.29).

¹⁰Cf. Eust. *Il.* 689.56 = 2.493.5–6: “Note too that the Greek wall is accepted by the ancients as a Homeric fiction (πλάσμα ... Ὀμηρικόν).”

try to make the detail vanish even more thoroughly than the Olympians did: senseless and absurd, the whole scene must be an interpolation.¹¹

Of greater interest to me than the many editorial particulars and puzzles concerning the main passages in books 7 and 12 is the status of the Achaean wall itself as an object and as a critical obstacle—less the authenticity of the wall as an *episode* than the claims the wall makes to carrying a certain ontological status as a Homeric *object*, which is to say, first as a poetic object in its own right, and then as an object of criticism. For at stake in the wall, I believe, and underlying all the debates around it, is its basic status as a fictional object, and by extension its exemplary role vis-à-vis fictional objects generally in the Homeric poems. The Achaean wall cannot help but have this claim to interest just by virtue of being an object that once so magnificently and palpably and uniquely—but also, so curiously and suddenly—*was* and then so utterly *is no more*. All of this conspires to make the wall a highly contestable object, and continues to make it of interest to us today. Even so, the ancient commentators often did a better job than their modern counterparts in confronting the wall by tying its logic to its fictional status. At least, that is what I hope to show in what follows, in recreating the context for the ancient debates and their modern descendants. A quick rundown of some of the major arguments found in antiquity follows.

II. LITERAL-MINDED ARGUMENTS IN THE ANCIENT SCHOLIA: A SURVEY

1. *Arguments from Chronology*

Homer's poems were constantly plundered for information on the date of Homer's life and times, and the Achaean wall episode was no exception. On the contrary, the passage was felt in some quarters to be a gold mine of data on Homer's life. Here, an odd calculation was at work: the scholia had to put two contrasting kinds of reality into the balance—the fictitious life of the wall (for this was universally taken as a given) and the historical life of the poet (for this was never doubted). Thus, one scholium (Σ T *Il.* 12.3–35 *ex.*) works backwards from the destruction of the wall, hoping to construe the passage in book 12 as evidence for the date of the poet, on the widely held assumption that Homer lived not long after the Trojan War (presumably, anywhere from 60 to 140 years after the fall of Troy). How else can one account for the way

¹¹ Hermann 1827–77: 8.387; Page 1959: 315–24. For intervening bibliography, see Bolling 1925: 92. Page's view is the most extreme: he declared all of book 7 from v. 327 on to be a fourth-century Athenian invention.

Homer handled the wall's cataclysmic destruction except by tying this scenario to the wall's absence in Homer's own day? Here, at last, is what Homer feared and so must conceal: not merely the wall's fictionality, but any tell-tale traces of the wall's alleged former existence—a double expunction, so to speak. It is as though Homer was keen to disarm the worry that the wall, built in an *ad hoc* fashion though it was (αὐτοσχεδῶς ᾠκοδομημένον), would not have had a chance to appear to collapse with historical time and so to vanish from sight: there wasn't time enough for it to collapse on its own.

That is why, the scholiast reasons, Homer resorted, like a guilty forger and only a generation or two after the war's end, to the desperate expedient of demolishing the Achaean wall completely and without a trace, not only wrecking the monument but also submerging it and covering the place it once occupied with sand in the bargain, in order to explain the absence of the Achaean wall in his own day while covering up every trace of his own poetic invention as well. And if the concern was to get rid of every last bit of evidence, it wasn't enough to have nature do the deed. The poet had to bring in the agency of the gods—and not just Poseidon alone, but with Apollo pitching in and with Zeus raining furiously down on the side too. What is so bizarre in all this effort is not the timing, but the wastefulness involved. The scholium concedes that Homer took these great pains for one reason alone: so as not to be vulnerable to inquiry into a vestige of *something that never existed from the start* (οὐ δυνάμενος δὲ ἔχνος τι ἀπαιτηθῆναι τοῦ μὴ γενομένου)! Homer must literally cover his tracks. There will be more to say about these paradoxes below.

2. Arguments from Logic, Language, and Character

Worse still, as Porphyry and one of my undergraduates both astutely wondered, why, if the Achaeans took a day to build the wall, did the gods need nine days to destroy it? The discrepancy appears “absurd” and “inexplicable” (ἄλογον).¹² Needless to say, even here the grammarians had a neat if unacceptable solution. Callistratus, followed by Crates of Mallos, sought to emend the text at *Il.* 12.25 from ἐννῆμαρ (“for nine days”) to ἐν δ' ἡμαρ (“in one day”), claiming that Homer never uses the expression “for nine days” by itself, but always balances it with a phrase like “but on the tenth day ...”¹³

Those who weren't content with this semantic argument (λύσις ἐκ τῆς λέξεως) tried other arguments. One of these was a matter of hair-splitting:

¹² Porph. *Quaest. Hom.* 174.31 Schrader, on *Il.* 12.25.

¹³ *Ibid.* 174.27–30; see Eust. *Il.* ad loc., 890.34 = 3.347.6 on Crates. The alternative solution ἐκ τῆς λέξεως softens this approach: nine is not meant literally; rather, Homer “is inclined to” (εὐεπιπτώως, a hapax) use ἐννῆμαρ (*ibid.* 174.33); cf. Σ T *Il.* 12.25 ex.: εὐεπίφορος. Thanks to David Blank for discussion of these terms.

the gods did not in fact take nine days to destroy the wall; they needed this much time to cover the place it occupied with water in order to root out its foundations and sweep them into the sea (Porph. *Quaest. Hom.* 174.16–18 Schrader, possibly Porphyry’s own suggestion). Another explanation is rather empty, the more so as it is merely a different way of stating more or less the same thing (as so many of the learned explanations are). It is one of expediency: because Homer felt he needed, at the time, to abolish completely the wall he had invented (τὸ τεῖχος πλασθὲν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ), he pulled out all the stops and “made the duration of its demolition last as long as he did.” Whence, I assume, the name for this solution, which is a rare species of its kind: ἀπὸ τοῦ καιροῦ, meaning a solution based on considerations of the moment—the relevant factor here being Homer’s own sudden narrative urgency (*ibid.* 174.34–175.1 Schrader). This urgency, as we shall see, is closely related to the palpable fictionality of Homer’s procedures in the eyes of the commentators, all signs of which Homer (they felt) was equally eager to abolish.

A different kind of explanation, likewise preserved in Porphyry (174.23–26 Schrader; cf. 175.1–3), is a moral one based on the principle of decorum (a solution “from character”): the *teichopoia* of the Achaeans wasn’t a serious subject for Homer to dwell on; it wasn’t befitting (εὐπρεπές) for warriors to play the part of construction workers; but *teichopoia* was an eminently worthy undertaking (μεγαλοπρεπής) for the gods, the builders of Troy, as was their destruction of the wall with tools and by hand.

3. Arguments from Loose Ends and Other Inconsistencies

i. The Achaean Corpses

The Achaean wall presents a number of inconsistencies and uncertainties which continue to trouble commentators even today. Only a few representative examples need to be discussed here. First, there was the question whether the Achaean corpses were burnt and buried on the spot or whether their bones were ferried back to the mainland. The text seems to call for both actions at once, confusingly (*Il.* 7.333–38):

... then must we burn [the bodies] a little apart from
the ships, so that each whose duty it is may carry the bones back
to a man’s children, when we go home to the land of our fathers. 335
And let us gather and pile one single mound (τύμβον) on the corpse-pyre
indiscriminately (ἄκριτον) from the plain, and build fast upon it
towered ramparts, to be a defence (εἶλαρ) of ourselves and our vessels.

Aristarchus athetized lines 334–35, which editors continue to regard as interpolated (see West 1969: 259; Kirk 1990 ad loc.). Likewise, the meaning of

ἄκριτον in 7.337 (~ 7.436) was and remains uncertain.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the placement of the wall is not: it is both a bulwark and a haphazard tomb. Hence one of the alternative Hellenistic titles of *Iliad* 7, which reads, *The Collection of the Corpses* (Νεκρῶν ἀναίρεσις).¹⁵

ii. How Many Walls?

Then there was the problem of when the Achaeans first built their defensive works, a much more involved question, which brought in its train a second problem: how many walls are at issue at any given moment in Homer's text? Though neither problem arises within the tradition of Homeric commentary proper, they do crop up outside that tradition, starting with Thucydides, whose account of the Trojan expedition (1.11.1) suggested to Denys Page that the Greeks built their defensive fortification immediately upon landfall after a successful victory, and therefore that the Thucydidean account was based on a different tradition from Homer's:

ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἀφικόμενοι μάχη ἐκράτησαν (δῆλον δέ· τὸ γὰρ ἔρυσμα τῷ
στρατοπέδῳ οὐκ ἂν ἐτειχίσαντο)

After [the Greeks] arrived and obtained a victory (and a victory there must have been, or the fortifications of the naval camp could never have been built) ...
(trans. Crawley 1874, adapted).

Page opted for a fourth-century interpolation of the wall episode in *Iliad* 7.¹⁶ A slightly different thought occurred to the author of the scholium on Thuc. 1.11.1:

¹⁴“Undiscriminated” in relation to the material (i.e., arbitrarily chosen earth), or “in relation to [the] individual corpses” contained in the burial mound (i.e., a *polyandron*)? The second phrase is from Kirk 1990 on 7.336–37 (paraphrasing Aristonicus Σ A Il. 7.334–35) and endorsed by him. Porphyry (on 6.252 = 99b.15–20 Schrader; cf. Σ T Il. 7.336–7a1 *Nic./Porph.*) tried a few alternatives, including “indistinguishable from the plain.” The echo (and contrast) between ἄκριτον in 7.436 and κριτός in 7.434 (“chosen,” “hand-picked” soldiers to build the wall) seems deliberate, even as it raises further questions: only a select few of the Achaean host are required to build the enormous wall that will encircle the Greek camp (see Kirk 1990 on 7.434)? The scholiasts do not trouble themselves with this detail. (Unless they understood the select few to have been chosen to build the funeral pyre alone, as the bT-scholium on 7.434 did.)

¹⁵The other title is *The Duel [Monomachia] Between Hector and Ajax*. See Kirk 1990: 230; cf. 277, where he concludes that the Hellenistic titles “suggest that versions were around *without* the wall-building.” I do not see how this conclusion has to follow. All the evidence goes the other way in any case.

¹⁶See n18 below.

ἔρυμα νῦν λέγει οὐχ ὅπερ ἐν τῇ ἡ' λέγει Ὅμηρος γενέσθαι, ἀλλὰ πρότερον μικρότερον διὰ τὰς τῶν βαρβάρων ἐπιδρομάς.

Here, he [Thucydides] is speaking of a defensive wall, not the one that Homer, in *Iliad* 7 [v. 337], says came into existence, but [an] earlier, smaller [wall], [built] on account of attacks from the enemy.

This is the scholiast's way of reconciling Thucydides with Homer—namely, by positing two different defensive works and referring Thucydides' text to one of these and Homer's to the other. But the solution of Page, and possibly that of Thucydides, does not square well with the scholium's, which gives attacks, not an initial victory, as the grounds for the earlier defensive structure. And nothing anywhere matches Page's description of "the solid and spectacular monument (*sic*) of a successful landing-operation," by which he means to designate the Greek wall.¹⁷ Reaching for a source outside Homer is possible but risky: the *Cypria* speaks of an initial victory but no wall; what other evidence for the Trojan expedition existed outside the cyclic tradition is unknown.¹⁸ A simpler solution is to acknowledge no discrepancy at all in Thucydides, but merely an explanation by him of how the Greeks managed to lay the groundwork for the wall that everyone in antiquity, apart from the one scholium on his sentence, knew as the Achaean wall from *Iliad* 7.¹⁹

¹⁷ Page 1959: 319. Page immediately adds, "That is in fact [Thucydides'] argument: and it is beyond cavil"—but not a single element of his description (just quoted), which is a pastiche from various sources of evidence, is beyond cavil.

¹⁸ For various guesses, see Page 1959: 318, 337n28; West 1969: 256–57; Kloss 2001. Page's fanciful reading of Thucydides was demolished by West 1969; cf. also Davison 1965. Outstanding questions surround Hdt. 2.118 (ἐκβᾶσαν δὲ ἐς γῆν καὶ ἰδρυθεῖσαν τὴν στρατιὴν πέμπειν ἐς τὸ Ἴλιον ἀγγέλους): (i) whether it is even relevant (no fortifications are mentioned); (ii) whether it ultimately derives from the *Cypria*; and (iii) whether Thucydides is referring to Herodotus (or his source). See, e.g., Bolling 1925: 93; Page 1959: 337n28; Finkelberg 2002: 154–56.

¹⁹ An alternative suggestion is that Thucydides is referring not to any wall in particular, but only to a defensive structure that any encampment would have required. Cf. Page 1959: 336n27; Hornblower 1991–2008: 1.36. This merely blurs the problem, which derives from a clash between rational historical explanation and poetic tradition. That is, Thucydides is not the place to look for a reading of Homer. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 11.75 superficially seems like a possible allusion to the Thucydidean tradition (the wall is built after a second landfall, under the cover of darkness), but it is probably not this at all: Dio is compressing the timeline, deceptively. That Dio is influenced by the main tradition of the scholia is evident from 11.76, where he puts into the mouths of the Egyptians the Aristotelian claim, in the form of a denial that Homer said that the wall ever existed (τὸ δὲ τεῖχος οὐ φασιν αὐτὸν γενόμενον λέγειν), while pointing to its obliteration in *Il.* 12 (ὅτι πεποίηκεν ὕστερον Ἀπόλλωνα καὶ Ποσειδῶνα τοὺς ποταμοὺς ἐφιέντας ἐπ' αὐτὸ καὶ ἀφανίσαντας) as proof!

But there is yet another reason why the problem of multiple walls seems to be an artifact of empirically minded ancient and modern-day scholia alone, but not of readers generally. For it is tempting to invoke an argument that was eloquently expressed by Malcolm Davies in an essay on the imagination of Homer's audience and the lack of realism of the poems (Davies 1986, esp. 71–73). What we (or any audience) behold in the *Iliad* in some respects just *is* the first year of the campaign at Troy—a kind of fictional *as-if* presentation of the war's prosecution—while in other respects it is not. We know very well that this is the tenth year, that the end is drawing near, that Troy will soon fall. But the *feeling* we have is that the war just recently began, not least because it is unfolding *for us* for the very first time (a feeling that is renewed no matter how often we revisit the poem). Given this ruse of fiction, the wall, depending on one's view of it, could appear to be a last-minute act of desperation or a prudential measure carried out *de rigueur* at the start of any military campaign. No textual surgery is required.²⁰

Nevertheless, once the doubts were sown, they proved difficult to dislodge. The notion that there was more than one Achaean wall has invited a host of speculations, so much so that the question now literally ghosts Homeric scholarship. References in the poem to a wall instantly conjure up, in the minds of some, the shadowy memory of a possible second wall built immediately after the landfall of the Achaeans, but also the likelihood of multiple authorship, competing compositional layers, and later interpolations. Different scenarios have been invented to accommodate these possibilities, usually starting with an original poem *sans* any trace of the wall's construction episode, but with traces of the wall having already been built (this is extrapolated, fancifully, out of *Il.* 9.349–50)²¹; next, elements from other versions of the epic (some other Wrath poem) which do contain the construction episode are thought to have been smuggled into our poem, contaminating it; finally, a full-scale building episode is imagined to have been brought in at some point down the line so as to justify, *ex post facto*, the otherwise inexplicable presence of the wall (so Page 1959: 338n32, in the wake of earlier scholarship; see West 1969: 257).

Differently Caiazza 2001, as well as Trachsel 2007: 427–28, who moreover misrenders οὐ φασιν αὐτὸν γινόμενον as referring to the “unfinished” state of the wall (as does Cohoon in the Loeb translation), which entirely misses the ironies of the scholia. Correctly, Vagnone 2003: 73: “negano invece ch’egli dica che il muro è realmente esistito.” Thanks to Larry Kim for last-minute bibliography and feedback on my reading of Dio.

²⁰ Cf. Bolling 1925: 93n3: “The arrangement for this truce [in *Il.* 7] must have been such as to make Thucydides feel it necessary to argue that the Greeks did win the battle.”

²¹ See West 1969: 257.

This last phase comes in different flavors, as illustrated by Kirk 1990: 278, who goes on to add that the culprit is not “Homer himself,” but “another αοιδός, a close follower perhaps, rather than ... a fully-fledged rhapsodic elaborator whose uncertainties of taste might have shown up more clearly” (289).

A speculation like this plainly takes commentary beyond the pale of scholarship and into the realm of clairvoyance. But neither does it broach the full limit of interpretive possibilities. For, suppose there was an earlier wall in one version of the cycle (now lost)? Then we have at least two walls to contend with in our labelings (see Maitland 1999: 6 on *Il.* 9.350: “This may be wall one again,” and on *Il.* 12.1–33: “Again, it is not clear whether this is wall one or wall two”). The flaws of this approach are patent,²² but they are endemic to any attempt to prise apart supposed layers of composition from our perch in the present. F. A. Wolf fell victim to this sort of interpretive practice, and so have many others since. But the approach is of little value in the present case. Quite simply, if prior versions of the wall existed, Aristotle and others did not know them. And anyway, it is far from clear that Thucydides’ text can be taken as proof of anything.²³ For all we know Thucydides *is* referring to the wall of book 7 (*pace* West and others), thanks to the way the wall could appear in the imagination of Homer’s audiences, namely as a defensive work thrown up in the first year of the Greek expedition.

The question of one wall/many walls has principally concerned the physical appearance of the Achaean wall. The latter problem is, by contrast, of considerable interest, and it is one that exercised the ancient commentators to no end as they sought to picture the wall’s three dimensions in their minds. Homer’s text was felt to be either too vague in places or else the details it did offer failed to add up to a consistent whole. Actual physical dimensions were impossible to derive from Homer’s various accounts.²⁴ But this was nothing new. Homer was notoriously difficult to map out geographically and in other

²² See Kloss 2001, esp. 328n11, for a lengthy critique. *Il.* 14.30–32 are another false lead; see Leaf 1900 on 14.31; West 1969: 256n1; Janko 1992 on 14.31–32.

²³ At least, not as we have it. Emendations have been proposed, none universally accepted. See Gomme 1959–81: 1.116. Murray 1934: 243, too, is unhappy with the various “flaws” (inconsistencies) that he finds in the portrayal of the wall we have. His suggestion that two versions of the poem existed in the fifth century, one with a fortified camp, one without it (243), whatever its other merits or demerits, cannot be brought to bear on the Thucydidean text (297). His hypothesis is in fact inferred from Thuc. 1.11.1, so the entire construction is circular at best.

²⁴ See, e.g., the desperations of Eust. *Il.* 888.34–42 = 3.340.15–341.1; Aristarchus (*Σ Il.* 12.258a *Ariston.*; cf. *Σ A Il.* 14.35a *Ariston.*); Hainsworth 1993: 345; the crux of *Il.* 8.213–15 (*Σ A Il.* 8.213a¹ *Did./ex.*); see Leaf 1900 on 8.213 for full discussion.

ways. The difficulties are best summed up by Strabo's earlier complaints, first about the disproportion between Troy's ruinous condition in the present and the unfettered prolixity (πολλολογία) that commentators "nonetheless" show in their zeal to explicate the site, and then about Homer's own lack of precision: "Homer ... leaves us to guess about most things" (13.1.1; trans. Jones 1939; cf. 13.1.2)! There will be more to say below about the various impressions that the wall has made upon readers of the *Iliad*.

iii. *The Council of the Gods*

A further vexed question in the Achaean wall episode was whether the assembly of the gods in which Zeus conciliates a panicked Poseidon (7.442–63) was a later addition, as all three Alexandrian commentators, Zenodotus, Aristophanes, and Aristarchus, felt it was ("an unusual consensus," Bolling 1925: 99), as do several modern editors and scholars also (see Kirk 1990 ad loc.).

4. *Summary*

Such were the principle concerns raised in the ancient scholarly traditions whenever the Achaean wall was read in a literal fashion. But what seems to trouble the ancients most of all is the suggestion that the wall's destruction looks to be a way of explaining away the wall's absence in Homer's own day—and, *a fortiori*, in their own. That this is anxiety-provoking is plain from the scholia, who transfer that anxiety onto the poet, as if Homer had resorted to the expedient of demolishing completely and without a trace something that never existed to begin with (τὸ μὴ γινόμενον, Σ T *Il.* 12.3–35 ex.). And so we might be tempted to conclude that what is troubling was both the encounter with an absence of extraordinary proportions and then the seeming fictionality of what cannot be verified "today."

Plainly, literal-minded readings of the wall get off on the wrong foot. But even more plainly, involved in the Achaean wall is not "the solid and spectacular monument of a successful landing-operation" that Page wants Thucydides to have imagined, but something far more intriguing—a spectacular and monumental *obliteration*. It is this darker side of Homer's creation that gives the Achaean wall its haunting quality, and its depth.

III. POETIC AND METAPOETIC READINGS IN THE SCHOLIA: THE ACHAEAN WALL AS AN *ERSATZ* TROY

Other readings in the scholia are more satisfying. Instead of trying to explain away the evident fictionality of the Achaean wall, they embrace it in all of its glorious poeticality, and then look for poetic motives in Homer's text. Some of the readings discussed above do this implicitly, while others are more explicit about this.

A good example is the bT-scholia to *Il.* 12.3–35, where it is argued that Homer is preparing us for things to come by putting us in mind of the final siege of Troy and, implicitly, the eventual obliteration of that greater wall. The language deserves closer inspection (Σ bT *Il.* 12.3–35 *ex.*):

ἀναγκαίως οὖν τὴν πεδιάδα μάχην ἐπὶ τειχομαχίαν μεταφέρειν βούλεται·
τούτου γὰρ χάριν καὶ ἀνέπλασε τὴν τειχοποιΐαν ὁ ποιητής, ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἀγῶνας
κινήσαι ἐπὶ τῇ τειχομαχίᾳ. τοῦτο μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ τοῦ Τρωϊκοῦ τείχους ἀμήχανον·
θεοποίητον γάρ.

[Homer] wished to move [or “transfer”] the battle on the plain over to the *teichomachia* out of necessity. For this reason the poet also fabricated [sc. “invented”] the construction of the wall, so as to move the contests over to the *teichomachia*. This was impossible to do at the Trojan wall, for that wall was divinely made.

An odd phrase here is the emphatic expression ἀναγκαίως. It reminds us of the pressing urgency of Homer’s solution ἀπὸ τοῦ καιροῦ discussed earlier. But whence comes the compulsion here? We may begin to glimpse an answer in the next scholium on the same set of lines: ὑπὲρ δὲ τοῦ μηδὲ ταύτην καταλιπεῖν τὴν ἰδέαν ἐπὶ τῷ τῶν Ἑλλήνων τείχει τὴν τειχομαχίαν ποιεῖ, “So as to omit not even this genre [viz. of battle scene, i.e., *teichomachia*]²⁵ he made the *Teichomachia* [take place] by the wall of the Greeks” (Σ T 12.3–35 *ex.*). The reasoning here seems to be that Homer felt a poetic need to include a *teichomachia* in his poem: such was the “necessity” he felt. To be sure, there is another way to understand the urgency of the moment and the meaning of ἀναγκαίως: the major heroes are wounded and out of commission; the wall allows the action to be extended in their absence.²⁶ Perhaps so, but then the circularity remains: did Homer dispatch the leaders in order to be able to have his *teichomachia*? If so, he was obeying a larger poetic logic all the same. The resort to an argument from impossibility runs aground on the same circular reasoning. It may be true that a *teichomachia* at the Trojan wall would have been futile, even blasphemous, because the wall was immortal. But why did Homer feel the need to make reference, through poetic allusion, to an assault on Troy?

Here we can only speculate, just like the scholiasts. Let us assume for a moment that ἀμήχανον is double-voiced: the impossibility the term implies touches both the unbreachable nature of the Trojan wall, owing to its divine

²⁵ Eustathius’s parallel phrasing reads τοιαύτην ἰδέαν πολέμου (*Il.* 888.48–49 = 3.341.5–6). I owe this clarifying parallel to Martin Schmidt.

²⁶ As Ruth Scodel reminds me (*privatim*).

status,²⁷ and the unbreachable constraints on Homer's narrative, owing to the fictional limits of the tradition, but also, in retrospect, owing to the self-imposed constraints on his own narrative framework. Homer has created the equivalent of Aristotle's later notion of τὰ ἔξω τοῦ μύθου (though it may be that the influence works the other way round)—namely, of events which can be named from within the plot but which are not shown and are not integral to it. Just as the Trojan wall could not be breached, so too Homer's poem must fight shy of breaching Troy. But Homer was not content to steer clear of the greater Teichomachia: he wished simultaneously to *invoke* it. The episode of the Achaean wall does this admirably by conjuring up the very idea—which is to say, the generic idea (ιδέα)—of the assault on Troy.

That it does, at least for the scholiasts, is most evidently supported by the verb they use to describe the Greeks' action of wall-building: ἀντιτεχνίζοντες, "building a counter-wall" (Σ bT *Il.* 7.445 *ex.*).²⁸ Further suggestions derive from the text of the *Iliad* itself, as we began to note earlier. The wall is called "wide" (εὐρύ) at *Il.* 12.5, and a μέγα τεῖχος at *Il.* 12.12 (repeating *Il.* 7.463 and reminiscent of μέγα ἔργον at *Il.* 7.444), where its demolition is paired with the fall of the *polis* of Troy (*Il.* 12.15–16). And if Eustathius deploys the word πυργοποιῖα (the building of towers [or a "towered" or "towering construction"]) as a synonym for τεichoποιῖα (689.62 = 2.493.15), the impetus for this is to be found in the "lofty towers" (πύργους ὑψηλοῦς) that are said to flank or border the Achaean wall at *Il.* 7.338.²⁹ The Achaean wall, in its visual appearances, seems larger than it needs to have been in order to achieve its more modest aim of providing a defensive bulwark. The impression is only enhanced thanks to the imprecision of the details that are provided. And whenever the wall, in its appearances, does surpass its practical requirements, it recalls nothing so much as Troy (see section I above). The wall bulks large in the imagination, in other words. And that is precisely the point. In its phantasmatic dimensions, the Achaean wall is inordinately proportioned: it cannot help but conjure up something greater than itself, as it instantly does—something greater and grander than even Troy.

²⁷ Troy is said to be ἄρρηκτος at *Il.* 21.447, though admittedly μάλιστα ἀμβατός ... καὶ ἐπιδρομον near the fig tree at *Il.* 6.433–34 (possibly where Aeacus built his portion of the wall; see Leaf 1900 and Kirk 1990: 218). This vulnerability is mirrored in the Achaean wall at 13.682–84 (see n4 above), as Boyd 1995: 196 well points out.

²⁸ It is also worth noting that τεichoμαχία and τεichoμαχεῖν can conjure up the attack on Troy, at least in Philostr. *Her.* 33.27; 33.30. It is also worth noting that the Greeks had hoped their wall would be ἄρρηκτος (*Il.* 14.56 ~ 14.68), which it proves not to be. Nevertheless, the term is applied in the poem only to the Greek wall and to Troy (see previous note) and to divine objects generally (see Purves 2010: 7n16).

²⁹ See n5 above.

This disproportion, I want to suggest, is not so much the cause as it is the effect of Poseidon's outburst (*Il.* 7.446–53) when he first notices that the wall exists, a reaction that in every other respect is utterly incomprehensible (7.451–53):

τοῦ δ' ἦτοι κλέος ἔσται ὅσον τ' ἐπικίδναται ἡώς·
τοῦ δ' ἐπιλήσονται τὸ ἐγὼ καὶ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων
ἦρω Λαομέδοντι πολίσσαμεν ἀθλήσαντε.

Now the fame of this will last as long as dawnlight is scattered,
and men will forget that wall which I and Phoibos Apollo
built with our hard work for the hero Laomedon's city.

Why *is* this god so worked up about the violence that the mere fact of the wall's existence seems to do to his honor? What is he threatened by? His worry seems “misplaced” (Scodel 1982: 34). The scholium to 7.445 likewise betrays difficulties with the scene. The lemma given is Poseidon's reaction, but there is more to the scholia's puzzlement than the mere incomprehensibility of god's emotional outburst. We have seen bits and pieces of this reading above (Σ bT *Il.* 7.445 *ex.*):

τοῖσι δὲ μύθων ἦρχε Ποσειδάων· ἀναιρῆσαι τὸ πλάσμα τοῦ
τείχους σπουδάζων ὁ ποιητῆς ὥσπερ ἀπὸ μηχανῆς βοήθειαν πορίζεται εἰς
τὸ μηδὲνα ἐπιζητεῖν ὕστερον τὰ τῶν τειχῶν ἔχνη. οὐδενὶ δὲ ἡρμοττεν ἡ
κατηγορία ἢ Ποσειδῶνι καὶ Ἀπόλλωνι, ἀντιτειχιζόντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων τῷ
Τρωϊκῷ τείχει. καὶ ὁ μὲν Ἀπόλλων οὐ λαλεῖ—ἡ γὰρ ἂν εἶπεν ἡ “Ἥρα “εἴη κεν
καὶ τοῦτο τεὸν ἔπος” [*Il.* 24.56]—Ποσειδῶν δὲ Ἑλληνικὸς ὢν θεὸς δοκεῖ
ἀπαθῶς τῶν Ἑλλήνων κατηγορεῖν.

“And Poseidon began speaking among them”: Being eager to remove [lit. “destroy”] the fiction of the wall, the poet contrives a way out using a kind of a *deus ex machina* [i.e., by conjuring up the divine destruction of the wall], so that no one will seek out traces of the walls [viz. “wall”] later on. The charge [against the Greeks] suited no one but Poseidon or Apollo, since it was the Greeks who were building the counter-wall [LS]: “erecting counter-fortifications”] to the Trojan wall [and hence of the gods only Poseidon or Apollo, the architects of the Trojan wall, were in a position to take offense to any challenges to that greater wall]. But Apollo doesn't say a word—for indeed Hera would say, “That's just the sort of thing *you* would say [being anti-Greek]” (*Il.* 24.56)—while Poseidon, though a pro-Greek god, seems to be accusing the Greeks ἀπαθῶς [mss.: ἀμαθῶς Cobet³⁰].

³⁰ Cobet 1876: 432: “*sensu vacuum est ἀπαθῶς, Legendum: ἀμαθῶς*” (*sic*).

Ἀπαθῶς, accepted by Erbse, is curious, and difficult to render. “Being unmoved” seems singularly inapt for the context: Poseidon is rather beside himself at the moment. Cobet’s emendation, ἀμαθῶς, makes sense if we take it to mean “being ignorant of the obvious difference between the two walls,” which the god is treating as effectively equal, though in that case the contrast between the two gods would be lost.³¹ In our modern eyes, at least, the difference is plain as day, and Poseidon is acting irrationally. As it turns out, the differences between the two walls may not be quite so obvious as one might wish them to be, as I hope is becoming apparent. Indeed, Poseidon’s instincts about the equivalence between the two walls will prove not only correct, but also determinative in the end. Ἀμαθῶς cannot stand.

A second possibility is that ἀπαθῶς should be taken to mean “with impunity.”³² The reasoning here is that though Poseidon opposes the wall and successfully lobbies for its destruction, he does not oppose the Greeks, nor does he do any damage to the wall until after the war is over. Being pro-Greek, he can accuse the Greeks with impunity, unlike Apollo, who cannot.

A third and perhaps likelier option is that ἀπαθῶς means “without emotional cost” or “feeling” for the Greeks: the pro-Greek god Poseidon is acting with the wrong emotions in the present case, and uncharacteristically so.³³ That he is acting in this way is one of the sources of puzzlement for the author of the commentary, who is seeking to understand Homer’s strategy here. Homer’s motivation is clear enough: he wants to eliminate all signs of his own handiwork, and so he invokes the gods in book 12 to solve his problems for him. But then he oddly inserts this scene in book 7, which, while it motivates the divine destruction he wants, also shows Poseidon acting inconsistently, as though he lacked all feeling for the Greeks whom he otherwise favors. The scholium accordingly exhibits perplexity, not with the motive behind Homer’s literary stratagem, which is being taken fully on board, but with its execution in these lines. As mentioned earlier, Zenodotus, Aristophanes, and Aristarchus all athetized the assembly of the gods in which Poseidon aired his complaint (Σ AT II. 7.443–64 *Did.*). The present scholium is laboring under the same suspicion.

³¹ I am grateful to Hugh Lloyd-Jones for driving home the force of Cobet’s emendation to me in conversation, and to Martin Schmidt (*per litt.*) for showing me why the emendation ultimately fails.

³² As suggested by Ruth Scodel (*privatim*).

³³ Cf. Σ T II. 7.450 *ex.*: “This proves that, though fond of the Greeks (προσφιλῆς τοῖς Ἕλλησιν), the god shows them no forbearance (οὐ νέμει συγγνώμην).”

Not content with any of these approaches, Eustathius seeks to make better sense of the appearances of Homer's text by offering a deeper analysis of Poseidon's response. In a way, Eustathius's reading pertains not so much to the fear that Poseidon gives voice to as to the reality that his fear produces—namely, the underlying equivalence between the two walls, that of the Achaeans and that of Troy. Eustathius (on *Il.* 7.452) is crystal clear about this, even as he confirms Poseidon's worst fears and proves that Poseidon was not acting irrationally at all (690.60–63 = 2.498.12–15):

σημείωσαι δὲ καὶ ὅτι ἐνταῦθα εἰς ἴσον ἄγει ὁ ποιητὴς τὸ ἑαυτοῦ πλαστὸν
τεῖχος τῷ ἱστορικῷ καὶ ἀληθεῖ τῷ τῆς Τροίας. κλέος γὰρ μόνον καὶ
ἀμφοτέρων φέρεται, πραγματικῶς δὲ οὐδέτερον φαίνεται, ἤδη δὲ καὶ
εὐκλεέστερον τὸ Ὀμηρικόν.

Note that here the poet renders his own imaginary wall equal to the historical and true wall of Troy. For only the fame of both echoes on, but in reality neither one is visible, while the Homeric [i.e., Achaean] wall is the more famous [of the two].

Then follows a remark worthy of Gorgias in his paradoxical treatise *On Not Being* (690.63–64 = 2.498.15–17), which also appears in the epigraph to this essay:

αὐτὸ μὲν γὰρ διὰ τὴν τοῦ ποιητοῦ λογιότητα ἐκ μὴ ὄντος ἐστὶ τρόπον τινά,
ἡ δὲ ἀληθὴς Τροία τῇ τοῦ χρόνου φορᾷ ἐκ τοῦ ὄντος ἦλθεν εἰς τὸ μηδέν,
ἀφανισθεῖσα.

Thanks to the poet's eloquence, the Achaean wall in some way *is*, having emerged out of nothing, while the real Troy, which formerly *was*, in the course of time came to naught, having vanished.

Eustathius's comments, while paradoxical, are not meant as a parody of Homer, of the Achaean wall episode, or even of the critical tradition surrounding the wall: this is simply not his style. Rather, he has put his finger on a distinctive feature of fictional objects, and in a typically Greek way at that. We might compare what Philostratus says of another fictional (or mythical) entity in Homer: "the gardens of Tantalus exist and yet do not exist" (VA 4.25). Similarly, Helen's phantom, itself an emblem for poetic fiction, could at times appear to have more reality than Helen herself, according to the tradition that followed in Homer's wake (in Stesichorus, Gorgias, Euripides, and later Dio Chrysostom). As it happens, ontological ambiguity appears to be a generic trait of fictionality worldwide. As Roman Jakobson once famously put it, "The supremacy of poetic function over referential function does not

obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous ... [This] is cogently exposed in the preambles to fairy tales of various peoples, for instance, in the usual exordium of the Majorca storytellers: ‘Aixo era y no era’ (It was and it was not)” (Jakobson 1960: 371). It is possible that Eustathius was thinking more specifically of a passage from Plato, which is equally striking as a general definition of poetry, and no less caught up in quasi-metaphysical claims: “‘Poetry’ (ποίησις) has a very wide range, when it is used to mean ‘creativity.’ After all, everything that is responsible for *creating something out of nothing* (ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ ὄν ἰόντι) is a kind of poetry” (Pl. *Symp.* 205b8–c1; trans. Nehamas and Woodruff 1989).

There are, of course, a host of other poetic (constructed) objects in Homer which one could adduce as comparable to the Achaean wall: Helen’s tapestry in *Iliad* 3³⁴; the shield of Achilles³⁵; the raft of Odysseus³⁶; the brooch of Odysseus³⁷; Hephaestus’s daedalic handiwork³⁸; the shroud of Laertes; and so on. All these are truly poetic objects in that they point to their own manufacture (to their coming into being from nothing, as it were) while simultaneously betokening the *poiēsis* of Homer’s epic. Some of these objects drew critical notice in antiquity for these very reasons, perhaps none more arrestingly than Helen’s tapestry, about which a scholium says, ἀξιόχρεων ἀρχέτυπον ἀνέπλασεν ὁ ποιητὴς τῆς ἰδίας ποιήσεως, “[in this object,] the poet created a remarkable paradigm of his own poetry” (Σ bT *Il.* 3.126–27 *ex.*).⁴⁰ But why has the Achaean wall attracted so much attention? The difference between the wall and these other objects of Homer’s fiction is that the wall is made and then brutally unmade before our eyes. That is, unlike these other objects which signify poetic creation, the Achaean wall is both made and then obliterated. As Eustathius says, it passes into and then out of being, and it does so with a startling abruptness that cannot help but call attention to itself. Though it, Homer shows himself to be a maker, not only of things, but of *their destruction*.⁴¹ The scholia reflect this peculiar kind of (un)making in their language,⁴²

³⁴ Clader 1976: 6–9.

³⁵ Hardie 1985; Porter 1992: 91–92, 113 at n112.

³⁶ Rosen 1990: 103–4; Dougherty 2001; Porter 2010: 268–70.

³⁷ Prier 1989: 32; Porter 2010: 446–48.

³⁸ Philipp 1968.

³⁹ Winkler 1990.

⁴⁰ Cf. Eust. on *Il.* 18.607–8, 1167.30–31 = 4.272.19–21, on the shield: καὶ ὅρα φυσικὰ ποιητικὰ πάρισα, ἐκφράσει πρέποντα, τὸ “ποταμοῖο,” “Ὠκεανοῖο,” “ποιητοῖο,” κτλ.; further, [Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* 216.

⁴¹ Homer is not unique in this regard; see Porter 2010: 513–19.

⁴² One example is a text discussed above (p. 7): τοσοῦτον χρόνον ἐποίησε τῆς καθαιρέσεως, “[Homer] *made* the duration of the *demolition* [of the wall] last as long as

most interestingly by displacing the destruction onto Homer's own fictional creation, as will be seen in a moment. But we must first return to Eustathius.

Eustathius's observation that the Achaean wall is "more famous" than the Trojan wall is stunning, to say the least. But perhaps Poseidon is only to blame for the grievance he has, after all, not only voiced but also caused. If it were not for Poseidon's complaint, the Achaean wall would have been the occasion for some splendid battle scenes, but would it for that reason alone have achieved more fame than Troy, never mind parity with Troy? Poseidon's complaints help consolidate the fame of the wall he fears in two ways: first constatively, by virtue of his verbal equation of the two walls, and then—or already, which is to say, performatively—by virtue of adding his words and thoughts to the indelible medium of immortal song. For, just by expressing his fear, even if it is (or was) ungrounded, Poseidon renders the wall poetically memorable and lasting: the Achaean wall will live on forever as a feared or simply famed object, regardless of its actual qualities. That is, just because Poseidon *says* the wall will put his own Trojan wall in the shade, this does not mean that it will do so: he could be irrationally fearful and wrong without being prophetically right.

What is more, and as it turns out, Poseidon's complaints unleash the monumental destruction of the Achaean wall, intended as an appeasement of his worries. Once again, this Olympian overcompensation has exactly the reverse effect of its intended purpose. Instead of minimizing the memory of the Trojan anti- or counter-wall, Poseidon provokes the sympathy of Zeus, who takes drastic conciliatory measures, by promising to remove the Greek wall from the face of the earth forever (7.459–63).⁴³

The monumental obliteration of the Achaean wall, rather than erasing its memory and fame, quite the contrary ensures that the same wall will go down in the annals of memory as one of the most unforgettable and most famous walls that was ever—or better yet *never*—constructed. Not even the Trojan wall, assumed to be historically real, suffered such an unforgettable annihilation: though it may have been divinely made (θεοποίητον), it was destroyed by mere men, albeit with the aid of the gods. By contrast, the

he did" (Porph. *Quaest. Hom.* 175.1 Schrader). As will emerge below, this is a *variatio* on a famous comment by Aristotle on the wall.

⁴³ Zeus, we should note, never promises to obliterate the fame of the Achaean wall, but only to obliterate the wall itself. Instead, he assures Poseidon that Poseidon's *own* fame will stay secure (σὸν δ' ἥτοι κλέος ἔσται ὅσον τ' ἐπικίδναται ἡώς, 7.458), by means of a subtle but critical variation on Poseidon's original complaint (τοῦ δ' ἥτοι κλέος ἔσται ὅσον τ' ἐπικίδναται ἡώς, 7.451). Poseidon is (perhaps too precipitously) satisfied with this assuagement.

Achaean wall was humanly made, but it took three gods, eight rivers, nine days, an earthquake, and an ocean to destroy it. What is so strange in all of this is the weird performative antilogic that is so furiously at work here. For let us suppose that Poseidon was *dead wrong* about his prophecy regarding the Achaean wall—suppose the wall was never destined to eclipse Troy in fame as he claimed it would (7.451–53). Nevertheless, by assuming (or pretending) that the wall was bound to a fate of eternal fame, Poseidon triggered off a chain of events that produced the reality he feared, and his prediction proved true in the end. As a result, the Achaean wall suffered a cataclysmic obliteration that Troy (literally) never knew.

This much can be read out of the Homeric text. These considerations, plus the spectacular account of *Il.* 12.13–33, do lend some support to Eustathius's claim that the Achaean wall is "more renowned" than the Trojan wall. But of even greater interest than this apparently misplaced praise is the epithet with which Eustathius chooses to brand the Greek wall. For at issue in his text is not the *Achaean* wall, but the *Homeric* wall (καὶ εὐκλεέστερον τὸ Ὅμηρικόν). Might this suggest that the Homeric version of the *Iliad*—our version—distinguished itself from all prior narrations of the war precisely by omitting the story of the sack of Troy and by substituting in its place its prefiguration in the form of a central *teichomachia* around the (possibly never before witnessed) Achaean wall? We should recall that the arguments for a pre-*Iliadic* Achaean wall have to be extrapolated out of the thin air of the *Iliad*, and are otherwise unprovable. Even if the wall tradition preexisted the *Iliad*, we could easily imagine how the final author of the poem promoted the wall to a role of unparalleled significance in his version of the story—for instance, by introducing the construction of the wall in book 7 and either inventing or playing up its obliteration in book 12, and possibly equating the Greek wall with Troy. On either scenario, Poseidon's expression of fear in book 7 should be taken not as a literal fearfulness on the part of a god (which would indeed be illogical, as the scholia recognize), but rather as a kind of metapoetical highlighting on the part of a poet eager—σπουδάζων, indeed—to draw attention to one of the major criterial differences between his own poem and the traditional (cyclic or other) versions of the epic material. On this view, Poseidon would be serving not only as a metapoetical billboard, but also as a singularly poor "reader" of Homer, failing as he does to grasp the difference between the two walls and the function of that difference as marking the difference between the two kinds of epic—in other words, as complaining about a difference where he ought in fact to be *celebrating* one.

Lest we imagine that Eustathius is alone, we should consider a number of other points, starting with another scholium, this time back in *Iliad* 7 (Σ bT *Il.* 7.451a ex.):

τοῦ δ' ἤτοι κλέος ἔσται, <ὅσῃν τ' ἐπικίδναται ἡώς>:
ἴσως διὰ τὴν ποίησιν αὐτοῦ· διὰ γὰρ ταύτην τὸ τεῖχος ἀοιδιμὸν ἔστιν, οὐ
δομηθὲν τοῖς Ἕλλησιν, ἀλλ' Ὀμήρῳ γενόμενον ἔνεκεν τῆς ἐπ' αὐτῷ μάχης.

"Now the fame of this will last <as long as dawnlight is scattered>": Probably owing to the making (ποίησις) of it; for it is on this account that the wall is a famous object of song, not as something made by the Greeks, but as an object that was brought into existence by Homer for the sake of the battle to be waged over it.

The question to ask is, What are we being asked to hear in the word ποίησις? The answer seems fairly obvious from the scholium itself: "poetry," which in the case of the *Iliad* shares, as if by contiguity, many of the features of construction with one of its more prominent objective correlatives, the wall of the Achaeans, or rather *Homer's* wall of the Achaeans.⁴⁴ Not only are both constructed things. The poem as we have it is unthinkable without the Achaean wall—it would simply not be the same poem were the wall to be removed. The action literally turns on the axis of the wall; indeed, the wall's presence allows the plot to change directions literally by one hundred and eighty degrees, as we shall see in a moment. But first to the question of Homer's wall.

To begin with, the functional identity of the Achaean wall with the plot of the *Iliad* seems evident if we consider a passage like *Il.* 12.9–12, which states that the wall would "stand firm" for "as long as Hector was still alive, and Achilles was angry (καὶ μῆνι' Ἀχιλλεύς)" and Troy remained untaken. The statement is inexact, as is often noted,⁴⁵ and it stands corrected in the next few verses: the Achaean wall will in fact fall shortly after Troy is taken. But the rhetoric of the statement is what counts, and its rhetorical truth: the poetic life of the Achaean wall is (roughly) coextensive with the life of the *Iliad*, as even the scholia note.⁴⁶ Both last for a little short of two months during the last flickering moments of the Trojan War, and no longer. This is all the more true especially if the Achaean wall has no narrative life outside the *Iliad*. Beyond this narrative frame, the wall and the war are dispensable. Their fates, in other words, are intertwined. Indeed, after Homer, if not before him, the one is unimaginable without the other.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Cf. ποιεῖν in *Il.* 7.435 and ἐνεποίησιν in 7.438 (the two phrases in fact form an echoing pair: ἔνα ποιεῖν, 7.435). Εὖ ἀραρυίας (*Il.* 7.438) is a marked way of expressing artisanal craftsmanship, as in *Il.* 24.318; *Od.* 22.128 ~ *Od.* 23.42.

⁴⁵ As, e.g., by Leaf 1900 on 12.9; see Scodel 1982: 46–47.

⁴⁶ E.g., Σ T *Il.* 12.9–12 ex.: ἐν βραχεὶ τὸ κεφάλαιον τῆς συγγραφῆς ἐξέθετο.

⁴⁷ This proximity is behind the reasoning of those who defend the Achaean wall against the arguments for its excision by Page and others. For one defense, see West 1969, esp.

The presence of the Achaean wall could, accordingly, be explained by reference to what we might call narrative completeness. Homer's epic, being no more than a slice of the Trojan cycle, nonetheless has to gesture to the larger tradition to which it belongs, which translates into a depiction (or in the present case, a referencing) of the first beginnings of the war (its *archai*), in the raising of the army, and its final moments (its *telos*), in the sack of Troy. Here, Homer's compulsion (cf. ἀναγκάιος) is to integrate his poem into a larger teleology, by presenting the image of Troy's sacking before the fact, but well short of that fact.⁴⁸ The Achaean wall is a *virtual image* of Troy. It presents a glimpse of the future end without consummating that end from within the poem proper, much the same way Hector's death prefigures the unwitnessed death of Achilles and the end of the Trojan conflict—or, we might also add, much the way Poseidon's complaints about the Achaeans anticipate his later complaints about the Trojans, likewise in a dialogue with Apollo, in a scene that will also result in the destruction of a wall, namely Troy's (21.435–60). Homer's compositional method appears to require this kind of architectonic balance.⁴⁹ But if all this is so, then we would have to say (though Eustathius

255, where he points out that the wall exists in order to be fought over, that the Greek fortifications are mentioned again “in every book from the eight to the eighteenth” and into the twenty-fourth, and that the ms. title of book 12 is *Teichomachia* (see also p. 259, for further integrations). Further, West 1995: 212, as well as Thornton 1984: 48–56, with more elaborate narrative and structural considerations. Boyd 1995 observes that Aristotle fr. 162 Rose (to be discussed in the next section) could imply that the Achaean wall was unique to Homer's version within the epic tradition (which is also the view of West 1995). I am suggesting that Homer *advertises* this invention (or at the very least the promotion of the significance of the wall) as his signature creation.

⁴⁸ Hence, too, the wealth of allusions to the impossible (narratologically speaking) sacking of Troy throughout the poem, most famously in book 16, which lies behind the arresting of Patroclus's forward motion (16.698–701 ~ 18.454–56). Achilles' warning to Patroclus (16.90) sounds very like Poseidon's complaint about a greater glory potentially being lost in book 7 over the wall: ἀτιμότερον δέ με θήσεις. The Trojan wall may not be taken before it is fated; to do so is not merely to move “beyond fate” (ὕπὲρ αἴσαν, *Il.* 16.780; ὑπὲρ μόνον, *Il.* 21.517; ὑπέρμνον, *Il.* 20.30); it is to violate the self-imposed narrative laws of the *Iliad* itself. But neither can the Achaean wall be destroyed within the *Iliad* proper. Their two fates are mutually—poetically—tied to each other. See further Rosenmeyer 1955: 254 on Zeus's *boulē*, albeit in another context (Aeschylean tragedy): “Zeus *teleios* is a symbol of the plot as a whole in its sweep toward the climax.” The same thought can be taken to apply to Homer: the plan of Zeus is at some level—metapoetically speaking—equivalent to the plot of the narrative in the epic.

⁴⁹ Thanks to Maria Pantelia for bringing home this last point. Cf. Silk 1987: 37 (who compares *Il.* 18.96).

does not) that Homer has gone to extraordinary lengths just to be able to prefigure, through the rhetorical device (σχῆμα) of *proanaphōnēsis* (anticipation), the *telos* of Troy in the middle of the *Iliad* (Eust. on *Il.* 12.17, 889.38–43 = 3.343.21–26). Indeed, Eustathius finds all of this to be in perfectly good order: Homer has proceeded εὐμεθόδως.⁵⁰

IV. ARISTOTLE'S SOLUTION: THE FICTIONS OF HOMER, OR THE LADY VANISHES

While it is perhaps not immediately apparent, what all these scholia share on all sides of the issues is an affinity with Aristotle's earlier attempt to construe the episode of the Achaean wall's sacking by the gods, for it seems that he was the first to adumbrate a connection with the poem as a whole.

Aristotle inaugurated the sanest line on the problem, ancient or modern, but also the most daring: the Achaean wall is a non-problem, he says, or at least it is a self-effacing one, *just because the wall never existed to begin with*; it is a pure fiction: "The poet who made it up (ὁ πλάσας) also made it vanish (ἡφάνισεν)" (fr. 162 Rose = fr. 402 Gigon = Strabo 13.1.36). No other critic after Aristotle is as blandly complacent about Homer's fictionalization of the Achaean wall. But then, Aristotle was willing to countenance the fact calmly, and in the face of Plato's objections, that Homer "taught the rest of the poets how to lie" (*Poet.* 24.1460a18–19). On the other hand, we have no further context for this bare fragment from Aristotle, apart from Strabo's quotation of it. Seeing how Strabo quotes it in the course of the ever-troublesome question concerning the true location of Troy, it is just possible to infer that the ancient tradition that preserved the debates over Troy also preserved Aristotle's

⁵⁰ Ruth Scodel (*privatim*) suggests that Homer is proceeding in good Homeric fashion in one further way, by keeping within the bounds of modest decorum. On this view, Homer's practice is never to innovate radically beyond earlier tradition, and if he does, then never to boast of the innovation. In the present instance, Poseidon's fear (which would be a fear concerning one such radical innovation) is quickly undercut by Zeus's response (in effect saying, "don't worry, the Achaean wall is nugatory"; cf. Eust. *Il.* 690.10 = 2.494.8: it is οὐδενόσωπον), and so the aggrandizing of the wall is modestly balanced out, at least in book 7. (The same would perhaps apply to *Il.* 15.360–66, where Apollo smashes through the wall as a boy wrecks sand towers on the sea-shore—a seeming contradiction to the catastrophic wrecking scene of *Il.* 12.13–33, but also its foreshadowing. Though see Janko 1992: 226–27, for a suggestion on how to harmonize this and other similar passages.) On the other hand, is balance really achieved? The nugatory wall requires a spectacular *aphanismos*. It would seem that Homer here is manipulating the device of modest decorum, if that is what he is doing, to his own credit in the end. See below for a more extensive suggestion.

fragment. From here, one might infer that the question of the location of the two walls was intimately connected in this same topographical literature, whether or not this was the seat of its original context in Aristotle (and there is no reason to suppose it was). Indeed, some of the Aristarchean material that found its way into the scholia may have derived from his treatise *On the Naval Station* (Σ A Il. 12.258a *Ariston.*) rather than from his lemmatic commentaries or editions of Homer proper.⁵¹

However he came to discuss it, Aristotle read the episode of the Achaean wall as a twofold allusion. First, the traceless obliteration of the wall alluded to facts about the past that could no longer be verified by Homer or his audiences. But secondly, the memory of what was no more—that is, poetic memory *tout court*—alluded to the poem's own poetics. In this ancient tradition, the wall was plainly emblematic of the obliteration of Troy itself (which on some accounts was taken to be traceless),⁵² but also of the event's susceptibility to fictional manipulation. The implications for a theory of fictionality in ancient poetics deserve to be teased out of this tradition.⁵³ That Homer's readers were capable of contemplating the sheer fictionality of Homer's poetry before Aristotle has been doubted in the past, though the countervailing evidence is sufficiently powerful to assure us of the contrary.⁵⁴ After Xenophanes fr. 1.22 W. (concerning Homer's fictions, or $\pi\lambda\acute{\alpha}\sigma\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$), the earliest instances of denial "from fiction" come from within the allegorical tradition. Allegoresis is by definition a reading that works against construing the surface fictions of a text in a literal fashion: it is inherently skeptical of these. One of the most striking but least discussed examples of this tendency stems from the fifth-century pupil of Anaxagoras, the philosopher Metrodorus of Lampsacus, who in his writing *On Homer* argued that "none of the [gods] and heroes actually exists ($\text{o}\ddot{\upsilon}\delta\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \delta\nu\tau\omicron\varsigma$)," because they are in reality names for natural elements (DK 61A3 = Tatianus *Ad Gr.* 21). Allegory is, to be sure, a special case. And Aristotle is not an allegorical reader of Homer. But once the link with literalism was ruptured (and we should remember that Theagenes of Rhegium had already

⁵¹ See Porter 1992: 107–9.

⁵² The question was vexed and remains so today (Hertel 2003; briefly, Porter 2004: 326–27). Suffice it to say that the location of Troy would not have been contentious in antiquity if Troy's remains were indubitable and available for all to see.

⁵³ Surprisingly, the Achaean Wall is by-passed in studies of ancient fiction and ancient literary scholia on Homer (see next note).

⁵⁴ Rösler 1980; Finkelberg 1998. Both are skeptical about the awareness of fictionality in the archaic period; neither discusses the Achaean wall in Homer or in his later reception, let alone Metrodorus of Lampsacus. For further studies of ancient fiction related to Homer, see Bowersock 1994 (s.v. "Homer"); Hunter 2009; Nünlist 2009; Kim 2010.

embarked on allegorical defenses of Homer in the late sixth century), Homer's text was vulnerable to all kinds of interpretive freedoms—that is, assuming this sort of link was ever firmly in place to begin with.

Later grammarians, as we have seen, perpetuated the anxieties that Aristotle sought to eliminate with a single meta-stroke. How much fictional power could be accorded to Homer? How openly could it be displayed, or acknowledged? Thus, we find a conflation of the two kinds of making, τὴν τειχομαχίαν ποιεῖν (the poetic fashioning of the *teichomachia*, or the battle at the Achaean wall) with τειχοποιῖα (the construction of the wall),⁵⁵ running in parallel with, and counter to, Homer's later desire to “remove” or “destroy” (ἀναιρῆσαι) his own “fiction” (construction) of the wall (Σ bT 7.455). Once again, it only takes a second breath to draw the last bit of implication from this insight, and to leap to the conclusion that Homer fabricated Troy, in other words that the whole myth of Troy is a monumental falsehood. But Aristotle doesn't exactly say this, nor does any other ancient we know of either.

Instead, the scholia dance gingerly around the margins of the abyss of fiction, occasionally peeping down into it, but quickly withdrawing their gaze, not infrequently with a mixture of pleasure and guilt. The fictionality of the Achaean wall is typically conceded (Eust. *Il.* 689.58 = 2.493.8; Σ bT *Il.* 12.3–35 ex.), doubtless on Aristotle's authority, and often in order to subserve various kinds of subsidiary arguments. Arguments for one purpose tend to become contaminated with others, above all those having to do with fictionality. For instance, in the exegetical bT-scholium to *Il.* 7.445 discussed above (section III), two themes have become intertwined: that of the wall's *destruction* and that of its *fictionality* (ἀναιρῆσαι τὸ πλάσμα τοῦ τείχους σπουδάζων ὁ ποιητής, “being eager to *destroy the fiction* of the wall”).⁵⁶ This was the implied reading of Aristotle, too: if Homer had the capacity to make up an object, he had the capacity to unmake it.⁵⁷

Similarly, Σ bT *Il.* 12.3–35 ex.: ἐπεὶ δὲ αὐτὸς ἀνήγειρε τὸ τεῖχος, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἠφάνισεν αὐτό, τὸν ἔλεγχον συναφανίζων, “Because he *erected* the wall himself, for this reason he also *made it vanish/destroyed it, making vanish/*

⁵⁵ Σ bT *Il.* 12.3–35 ex. (quoted on pp. 13 above).

⁵⁶ Cf. Σ T *Il.* 7.443–64c ex.: ἀναιρῶν, ὃ ἐπλάσατο (a calque on Aristotle). Cf. also the language of Dio Chrys. *Or.* 11.76 (quoted in n19 above): πεποίηκεν ... ἀφανίσαντας, which once again captures the paradoxes of making a fictional unmaking.

⁵⁷ So Eust. on *Il.* 7.445–65, 690.15–17 = 2.494.16–19, where, however, the rest of the poetry is taken to encompass historically reality (τὰ ὄντως γενόμενα). But see below on Eustathius and allegory. Cf. the D-scholium to *Il.* 12.4 (van Thiel): ἵνα μὴ ἐλέγχηται αὐτοῦ τὸ ψεῦδος ὡς μὴ γεναμένου [ZY : γενομένου QXA] ὑπὸ τῶν μεταγενεστέρων.

destroying the evidence/the means of disproof *along with it*.”⁵⁸ Here, the contamination is patent in the doubling up of the verbs for making vanish/destroying (which plainly depend on Aristotle’s language in the fragment quoted by Strabo). Logic and language pile up here. There is, moreover, an ambiguity in the term ἔλεγχον: does Homer want to conceal the evidence for the wall, or does he want to elude the charge of having fabricated the wall from whole cloth? In metapoetical terms, Homer ought to be *boasting* of his accomplishment, proud to foreground his fiction, indeed his signature contribution to the tradition. The confusion of the scholiasts is perhaps tangible in the way they construe Homer as an author. For in their reconstruction of Homer’s devious thinking, they imagine Homer *as a strategically deceiving author* (though this self-effacement by Homer may reflect his modesty towards the tradition noted earlier).⁵⁹ Nor does he, in a sense, have much of a real choice: as Sartre says somewhere about erasure, namely that you can erase something but you cannot erase your erasure, so too here: for Homer, to conceal the evidence of the wall on the ground, as it were, is to leave evidence for the act of concealment in the text. The logic is strained, but if so, then it is the strained logic of fiction that the scholiasts are coping with in this entire episode of the Achaean wall. All of these questions involve us in the problem of the properties of fictional objects, as no one knew better than Eustathius: “The Achaean wall in some way *is*, having emerged out of nothing.” In the terms of that unsurpassed literary theorist, Alfred Hitchcock, the wall has the exact status of a MacGuffin.⁶⁰ Only, at this point Homer is playing not with real entities but with the outlines of entities, and even less than that—mere phantom objects. To make the wall vanish is to conceal, not so much the evidence for its former existence, as the *absence* of any such evidence. But it is, at the same time, to *produce* this absence and to make it palpable in the text. Not for nothing is the wall of the Achaeans called a ψευδοτεῖχος—a pseudo- or fictive wall—by Eustathius.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Eust. on *Il.* 12.4–5, 888.53 = 3.341.8–9 picks up the same verb and the same argument again: συναφανίζων.

⁵⁹ Martin Schmidt (*per litt.*) points out further parallel language for eluding detection at Σ D to *Il.* 14.287 ZYQ (van Thiel): [...] τ ό τ ’ ... : διὰ τούτου [sc. “τότ’”] ἀνήρηνκε τὸ ψεῦδος, ὥστε μὴ ζητεῖν.

⁶⁰ A MacGuffin is an impossible, nonexistent, and empty object, the effects of which are nonetheless real. See Porter 2004: 330 with n32.

⁶¹ Eust. *Il.* 889.23 = 3.342.26. The word also happens to be a hapax.

V. PHILOSTRATUS AS HOMERIC CRITIC

If Aristotle's fragment is the first preserved hint of a discussion concerning the Achaean wall, the last literary remembrance (apart from Porphyry and Eustathius) is a little discussed source, but one that is uniquely suited to expose the problem of fiction in Homer. The source is Philostratus's *Heroicus*, in which the narrator, a vinedresser and self-appointed tender of a shrine to Protesilaus, gives a version of the events at Troy that, received from none other than Protesilaus himself, stands Homer's epic on its head in several respects. The text at one point reads (*Her.* 27.7–9):

You should also know other matters about Sthenelus: that no wall was built by the Achaeans at Troy (ὡς τεῖχος μὲν οὐδὲν τοῖς Ἀχαιοῖς ἐξεποιήθη ἐν Τροίᾳ), nor was there any protection for either the ships or the booty, but these were invented by Homer as songs of the siege, on account of which the wall was also put together/invented by him (ἀλλὰ τειχομαχίας ᾧ δαὶ ταῦτα Ὀμήρῳ ἐπενοήθησαν, δι' ἃς καὶ τὸ τεῖχος αὐτῷ ξυνετέθη). At any rate, the impetus for building the wall (τειχοποιΐας) is generally agreed to have come to Agamemnon when Achilles was raging. Sthenelus is thought to have declared his opposition to this first of all when he said, "I, of course, am more fit for pulling down walls than for erecting them (ἐγὼ μέντοι ἐπιτηδειότερος τείχη καθαίρειν ἢ ἐγείρειν)." Diomedes also [allegedly] opposed building the wall and said that Achilles was being deemed worthy of great deeds "if we should shut ourselves in for the rest of the time while he rages!" Ajax is said to have remarked, eyeing the king like a bull, "Coward! What then are our shields for?" Sthenelus rejected the hollow horse as well, alleging that this was not a battle at the city walls but a theft altogether of battle (οὐ τειχομαχίαν τοῦτο φάσκων εἶναι, ἀλλὰ κλοπὴν τῆς μάχης).⁶²

The passage is sprinkled with the language of the grammarians and their learned debates, which Philostratus is surely spoofing.⁶³ Protesilaus, after all, poses as someone who carefully scours Homer's poems for their faults (25.1). Overall, we might say that Philostratus has taken claims out of the commentative literature and literalized them, by putting them into the mouths of vari-

⁶² Translations of the *Heroicus* here and below are adapted from Maclean and Aitken 2001.

⁶³ Bowie 1994: 184: "[The *Heroicus*] caters to the same sort of reading public that pored over commentaries on the Homeric poems to resolve omissions, uncertainties and contradictions in the poet's story." See further Grossardt 2006 ad loc. (2.532–35), who notices the more relevant scholia and related ancient literary parallels.

ous heroes, to humorous effect.⁶⁴ For the critical admission that the Achaean wall was a *plasma*, or poetic fiction invented by Homer, Philostratus playfully pretends to substitute Protesilaus's aggressively anti-Homeric view, which challenges Homer's representation of the Trojan War on every conceivable detail. "No wall was built (ἐξεποιήθη) by the Achaeans at Troy." And yet the tag, "the wall was also put together (ξυνετέθη) by [Homer]," places the accent just where it belongs: first, on the verb for Homer's making, which is one of poetic making⁶⁵; and secondly, on the equivocation that is implied (there was no wall, and yet there was), which is the equivocation of fiction—or else of sophistry.⁶⁶ How convenient to be able to challenge Homer so authoritatively on a learned detail when you were an eye-witness and a foot-soldier in the Trojan army! The joke is doubled, inasmuch as the criticism seems to come totally out of the blue in the course of a defense of Sthenelus, an unsung Homeric hero in Protesilaus's eyes. Sthenelus's connection with the Achaean wall is gratuitous (he is nowhere mentioned by Homer in this regard), and therefore all the more apt: in a sense, the frailty of the connection merely highlights the arbitrariness of his choice by Protesilaus/Philostratus as a counterweight to Achilles in the *Heroicus*. As one of the Epigonoι, fairly obscure and irrelevant on the face of things, and promoted to the first rank by a hero (Protesilaus) who dies before the action even begins in the *Iliad*, Sthenelus is an eminently useful personage to retrieve in a Second Sophistic revisionist context, especially as a counter to Homer's Achilleocentric epic.

To be sure, Philostratus's view of Homer is presented tongue-in-cheek, and it is fairly complex. He has Protesilaus sing Homer's praises earlier on in rather traditional terms (25.2–9), even as he has him fault Homer, likewise in traditional terms (25.10–12). But the criticisms of the Achaean wall fall under a different category, which we might call a criticism from "fictionality," which is more unusual in the ancient literature on Homer (though vague precedents might be found in Eratosthenes, Strabo, or some of the scholia). The genre

⁶⁴ A case in point is that where the scholia use the excuse that it was unseemly for heroes to build defensive bulwarks when their proper job was to win glory on the battlefield, thus accounting for the hasty, improvised construction and (therefore, in principle) easy destruction of the wall (an argument repeated in Eustathius), Protesilaus has Sthenelus impersonate the same claim ("I, of course, am more fit for pulling down walls than for erecting them") and repeats the indignation of the other heroes at the task of building enjoined upon them by Homer.

⁶⁵ See Grossardt 2006 ad loc. on the ambiguity of the term.

⁶⁶ Thus, Grossardt 2006: 2.532 (on 27.7–8) mirrors the confusion of the text, but only partly, when he writes that "the existence of the wall is radically denied." It is also radically asserted, as a fictional object. See Philostr. VA 4.25 (quoted in section III above).

seems to have flourished among imperial authors: Lucian and Dio and, earlier, the Neronian fabulist Ptolemy Chennus (the “Quail”), are outstanding examples of this kind of criticism, or rather *outré* revisionism.⁶⁷ Much of this deserves to be seen as an extension of earlier (sixth- and fifth-century) traditions of skepticism towards literal readings of Homer, of the sort that were signaled above (principally, philosophical critiques from fiction and allegory), though literary precedents cannot be discounted either (especially Stesichorus and Pindar; cf. *Nem.* 7.20–24).

A few paragraphs after revising the episode of the Achaean wall, Philostratus withdraws his charge that Homer was merely fictionalizing. Discussing a handful of verses spoken by Diomedes, he writes, “[Protesilaus] said that Homer had spoken these words like a fellow soldier, and not as a composer of fiction (οὐχ ὡς ὑποτιθέμενον), but as though he himself had been present with the Achaeans at Troy” (27.12). The language here likewise recalls the language of the Homeric commentaries: Homer fabricated the Achaean wall, οὐχ ἴστορων πρᾶγμα γένόμενον ἀλλ’ ὡς γενόμενον ἐκτιθέμενος, οὐδὲ λέγων ἀληθῶς, τὰ εἰκότα δὲ ὑποτιθέμενος, “not recording the matter as a true event, but presenting it as a quasi-event, nor speaking truthfully, but using probable suppositions” (Eust. on *Il.* 7.441, 689.57–58 = 2.493.8–9).⁶⁸

Philostratus’s backtracking is significant. Having ascribed so much fiction to Homer (most of the *Odyssey*, in 25.13–16), Protesilaus is in danger of creating total skepticism in his audience. How much of Homer’s poems is a matter of invention, and how much is based on credible fact? Creating just this kind of uncertainty is presumably Philostratus’s point. The *Heroicus* thus treads a tightrope between the extremes of fact and fancy. Whence the assurances of 43.4, which ultimately assure us of nothing: “Protesilaus testifies that Homer did not invent (μὴ ὑποτεθεῖσθαι) these things, but that he made a narrative of deeds that happened and were genuine, except for a few of them, which he rather seems to transform purposefully so that his poetry appears elaborate and more pleasurable.” An extreme symptom of these infectious worries is

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Lucian *Ver. hist.* 2.20–24; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 11 (see n19 above); Phot. *Bib.* 146a–153b, 51–72 Henry, with Bowersock 1994: 1–27 and Trachsel 2007: 442–46.

⁶⁸ It is worth pointing out that for Eustathius the problem of fictionality in Homer is somewhat moot, because at some level his poems are capable of being read allegorically from top to bottom, and at the level of allegory, everything literal is fictional, as we saw. Thus, the destruction of the Achaean wall, categorized as *mythikē*, is an “ἀνίγμᾶ [allegory] of the fact that nothing happens without the gods (ἀθεεῖ)” (690.20 = 2.495.2). An example of this is [Heracl.] *Probl.* 38, treating 12.13–33 “philosophically” in naturalistic terms, as an earthquake.

the way they spread to Homer's own identity. For, given the insecurities of the tradition, doubts touching the very existence of *Homer himself* are inevitable, and accordingly these have to be allayed too: "For he existed, my guest, the poet Homer existed and sang twenty-four years after the Trojan War, as some say; but others say ..." (43.7; cf. 43.5). But these concerns are endemic to the very idea of Homer in the ancient world.⁶⁹

VI. THE WALL'S MANY APPEARANCES: A POSSIBLE SOLUTION

Before concluding, I want to venture a solution of my own concerning the puzzle of the Achaean wall. This has to do with the various and conflicting ways in which the wall appears in Homer's text. Above, we noted how discrepancies in Homer's accounts of the physical dimensions and layout of the Achaean wall have troubled ancient and modern commentators alike. At times, the Achaean wall seems a paltry, flimsy thing that heroes can topple seemingly at will. At other times, the wall seems more like a city, with its magnificent, stately towers.⁷⁰ Indeed, its glorious destruction in book 12 seems "more appropriate to the sweeping away of Troy itself than a mere rampart" (Maitland 1999: 10). It is probably wrongheaded to attempt to identify different avatars of the Achaean wall in the *Iliad*. Nevertheless, scouring the descriptions of the wall like an Analyst for clues to their differences is useful in one respect, as Maitland's last comment already begins to suggest. "There is ... a discrepancy between the style of wall described in Book 12 and the ditch and rampart referred to elsewhere" (Maitland 1999: 7). This too is overstated. Elements of grandeur, of a μέγα τεῖχος, are present in book 7. The real problem is that the Achaean wall just is *discrepant with itself*. It is an object that fails to add up to a coherent whole. That is, the wall was not meant to be an object that could ever be pulled into a coherent focus. So much for the Achaean wall seen objectively. Subjectively speaking, we would want to say that *at different moments* the wall is visualized in what might be described as *different "styles,"* and this difference in description by itself suffices to give the impression of a plurality of walls in Homer's text. Whether this kind of suppleness in description can be found elsewhere in Homer is a question that would be worth pursuing, but its powers go without saying.

⁶⁹ See Porter 2004.

⁷⁰ See Hainsworth on *Il.* 12.258–60: "The substantial foundations and superstructure described in these verses are more appropriate to permanent town-walls than to an improvised field work." See also n5 above.

We might go on to speculate why this should be so: why does Homer create this kind of “object” in his text? Narrative requirements are certainly a factor. Whenever Homer needs to create a bit of drama, he presents the wall as vulnerable, susceptible to breaching, an emergency shelter hurriedly thrown together and barely holding up under attack.⁷¹ Whenever he wishes to conjure up the idea (and *ιδέα*) of the greater *Teichomachia* (against Troy), he magnifies the wall’s dimensions and brings out its lexical proximity to Troy.⁷² Nor are the two narrative options exclusive poles. At times they can coexist in a weird oscillation. For Hector, the wall of the Achaeans is both strong and weak: *νήπιοι, οἳ ἄρα δὴ τάδε τείχεα μηχανόωντο / ἄβλήχρ’ οὐδενόσωρα· τὰ δ’ οὐ μένος ἄμὸν ἐρύξει* (“fools, who designed with care these fortifications, / flimsy things, not worth a thought, which will not beat my strength”), though this is admittedly the bluster of a soldier trying to set his men on fire, even if it contains a kernel of truth on both sides (8.177–78).

This is not all. First, consider how some of the most intricate and impressive details of the architectural construction of the wall appear in the scenes of its greatest destruction (for instance, in 12.13–33 and 258–60). The contrasts are both jarring and powerful, and they contribute greatly to the drama in these two passages, above all at the start of book 12. This reinforces the point made above about the wall’s being a self-discrepant object: nowhere is the Achaean wall grander and more spectacular in its appearances than in its moments of greatest vulnerability. Secondly, and along the same lines, the wall’s obliteration coincides with a marked departure from custom by the poet, when he unexpectedly steps out of his habitual perspective on the visualized past as a contemporary eye-witness⁷³ and momentarily looks back on his narrative from the retrospective view of the present-day: *πολλὰ βοάγρια καὶ τρυφάλειαι / κάππεσον ἐν κονίησι καὶ ἡμιθέων γένος ἀνδρῶν*, “much ox-hide armour and helmets were tumbled / in the river mud, and many of the race of the half-god mortals” (12.22–23). Here, Homer speaks of the Homeric warriors, for the first and last time in both poems, as “a race of *hēmitheoi*.” That is, they

⁷¹ Cf. Janko 1992: 227: the wall “is sometimes a barrier, sometimes not, as need or characterization requires.” Similarly, Thornton 1984: 157–59, who observes a “tension of purposes” in the wall’s characterization (159).

⁷² One result of this transformation was already noted: role-reversal, whereby the Greeks become Trojans and the Trojans Greeks—a lesson that Vergil would learn and adapt in his own way (*Aen.* 2.387–441), with all kinds of interesting implications, one being (it could be argued) his offering of the reversal of roles as a perfect image of war’s futility.

⁷³ See Bakker 2005 for an excellent assessment of ancient and modern views of Homeric *enargeia*.

appear already legendary, as a different breed of creatures: divinized, they are walled off in a remote past. Indeed, the entire scene is framed by a wholly different, even elevated, sense of time. It is colored by what Reinhardt calls “das Pathos des Zeitbewußtseins.”⁷⁴ Finally, as Reinhardt goes on to observe, this moment of the *Iliad* is structurally significant, as it happens to occur at the virtual mid-point of the poem. One can speak of the poet’s modesty if one so wishes. But there is nothing immodest about this gesture.⁷⁵ Is he marking his invention with a temporal *sphragis*? If so, he is pulling out all the stops—literally so. We have already seen how central to the action of the *Iliad* the Achaean wall is. Here, Homer is pointing to the centrality of the wall in a most remarkable way, by pointing to its absence.

VII. CONCLUSION: THE ACHAEAN WALL AS A SUBLIME OBJECT

A high proportion of the ancient discussions of the Achaean wall descend, or seem to descend, from Aristotle.⁷⁶ The unexpected persistence of this influence into a work like Philostratus’s *Heroicus* tells us that with the episode of the wall we are having to do with something like a primal scene of criticism, and not a haphazard survival. Above, I gave a few different reasons to back up this suspicion: the Achaean wall is a fictional object *par excellence*, and it touches on a nerve in epic fiction and criticism inasmuch as it consciously models itself as a second (or *ersatz*) Troy. That Troy was implicated in the problem helps explain the powerful fascination that this puzzle—the spectacular appearance and disappearance of the Achaean wall—held for the ancients. Both Troy and the Achaean wall suffered terrible destructions, and what is more, they stood as a material correlative of human destruction.⁷⁷ Like the watery obliteration imagined by Achilles at the hands of the river Scamander in *Iliad* 22, which would be an “antifuneral” that produces an “antimonument,” the Achaean wall is itself a kind of anti-monument.⁷⁸ Its obliteration is not only absolute; it is also a great marvel that was never beheld. But the Achaean wall is more than an anti-monument. It is a sublime monument that stands opposite to Troy as a kind of *anti-Troy*, its uncanny double, at times resembling

⁷⁴ Reinhardt 1961: 269. Cf. Schadewaldt 1966: 118n1; Scodel 1982: 34–36.

⁷⁵ Here I find myself in agreement with De Jong 2006.

⁷⁶ For arguments about Aristotle’s general influence on the scholia (a contested issue in the history of Alexandrian scholarship), see Richardson 1980; Schironi 2009.

⁷⁷ Cf. Lynn-George 1988: 257; Bassi 2005; De Jong 2006, esp. 188–202; Grethlein 2008.

⁷⁸ Redfield 1994: 167, 183; Ford 1992: 153.

Troy, at times its shabby reflection. Either way, it is built on the rubble of fallen corpses, and therefore a tumulus (7.336–37). The Achaean wall is, in other words, a deeply strange object that defeats our expectations. Yet it is not a symbol of the impermanence of things pure and simple, let alone of writing or song. Rather, it is a *sublime* object that is endowed with an indelible *kleos*, a lasting fame that lives on, not even if the wall vanishes, but precisely *because* the wall vanishes—for as long as the memory that recalls it persists, wanted or not.⁷⁹

At another level, the Achaean wall is a metapoetic object that exhibits the full force of Homer's creative powers, which is to say, of a poet who can make and unmake objects at will. We tend to overlook this darker side of poetics: for even more significant than a poet's capacity to create an object is his or her capacity to destroy it. As Karl Reinhardt so aptly put it a half-century ago, "[d]ie dichterische Phantasie gebietet über Sein und Nichtsein" (Reinhardt 1961: 268). Reinhardt may not have known that he was echoing Eustathius (he seems to have been thinking of Aristotle fr. 162 Rose). Homer was remembered not only as the greatest of the Greek poets, but also as the most violent—that is, not only as the most creative (inventive, fanciful, imaginative) of poets, but also as the most destructive.⁸⁰ Taken together, all these issues inevitably raise questions about fiction that reach well beyond the episode's boundaries. Nevertheless, given this background, the Achaean wall could not help exhibit the staying power it enjoyed in the Greek critical imagination.

Fictionality was not openly allowed in the ancient critical traditions, and therefore the pleasures it afforded had to be stolen, displaced, and disputed as well. But as we have also seen, there were complicating factors that interfered with the pure pleasure of a fictional appreciation of Homer. It was not just that Troy signified so horrifically. It was also that the Achaean wall was something that came from nothing, and that bore the signs of this negation in itself—a terrifying prospect no matter how one looked at it. Homer was both traumatic *and* pleasurable. He could even be both of these at once. And that alone might be enough to provoke concern in the mind of an ancient commentator. Given the similarity of the two walls and their parallel fates, but

⁷⁹ See Žižek 1989 on sublime objects.

⁸⁰ In this respect, Homer and Poseidon are one. Poseidon, after all, has two notable traits in the *Iliad*. The famed builder of Troy, he is also the Earthshaker who levels whatever his trident touches. Plainly, a deeper reading that traced the traumatic violence of Homer's epic would proceed in an ethical direction, following the cues of Weil 1953 and Horkheimer and Adorno 1969. My focus in the present essay has been more limited. It has concerned the life and death of things, not persons.

also either event's susceptibility to fictional manipulation, the contamination of allusions from one to the other was inevitable. The scholia's literal-minded anxieties, with their energetic defenses of the impossible (the nakedly fictive), might in that case be a rationalization masking concerns of a deeper kind. Investing the same events with a sublime aura is another way of taming these same anxieties—and the one we are most familiar with today.

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