

How could Achilles' Fame have been Lost?*

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“Epic poetry preserves for posterity the glorious deeds of heroes”. It is more or less generally agreed that this formulation would appropriately represent the objective of epic poetry in general and Homer’s poetry in particular. It is also agreed that no one better answers this description than Achilles, the greatest of heroes, whose deeds have been preserved in the greatest of epic poems. Yet Achilles’ own view in *Iliad* 9 of the possible alternatives before him does not entirely conform with such presumptions. “For my mother Thetis the goddess of the silver feet tells me”, Achilles says, “I carry two sorts of destiny toward the day of my death. Either, if I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans, my return home is gone, but my glory (κλέος) shall be everlasting; but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers, the excellence of my glory (κλέος ἐσθλόν) is gone, but there will be a long life left for me, and my end in death will not come to me quickly”.¹

That of all the Achaean heroes it was Achilles whose fame might have fallen into oblivion, casts doubt on the validity of the widespread view that heroic deeds on the battlefield guarantee everlasting glory in posterity.² (Following T.B.L. Webster, I shall

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¹ *Il.* 9.410-416 (the English translation of the *Iliad* is by R. Lattimore).

² As formulated, for example, in R. Schmitt, *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden 1967), 67-68: “Der Ruhm, den sich der Held im Kampf erwirbt, wird ja im Verse des Dichters weiterleben”.

henceforth refer to this view as the “monument theory” of epic poetry).³ Indeed, up to the moment that Achilles pronounced his speech, his warlike exploits surpassed by far those of any other Achaean hero, and he was unanimously recognized as the greatest of the heroes who fought at Troy. Still, had he left the siege in the tenth year of the war, his fame would have been lost. I do not see how such a situation can be explained from the standpoint of the “monument theory”, and this contradiction leads us naturally to inquire into the character of the materials in Homer from which this theory has been cast.

In the conception of epic poetry represented by the “monument theory”, the key word is κλέος.⁴ Now, though it may be employed as a neutral term, κλέος is never used in Homer in a negative sense.⁵ Hence if we follow only such Homeric contexts as concern long-lasting memory of a certain subject which employ the term κλέος, we shall naturally arrive at the kind of generalization on which the “monument theory” seems to be based. Yet κλέος is not the only way to express such meanings in the Homeric poems. For example, the formula καὶ ἔσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι (something to the effect of “even men yet to be born shall hear of it”) is even more favoured

³ “Greek Theories of Art and Literature Down to 400 B.C.”, *CQ* 33 (1939), 166. To my knowledge, Webster is the only scholar to have directly questioned the relevance of the “monument theory” to Homer’s epics: he argued that the functions ascribed by this theory to poetry are carried out in Homer by the hero’s tomb and that the approach itself is relevant to post-Homeric poets rather than to Homer (*ibid.*, 173).

⁴ Certainly, it would be wrong to attach the meaning “glory” and, by implication, “song”, to all Homer’s usages of the term κλέος. Although epic songs are twice designated in Homer by the term κλέος (κλέα ἀνδρῶν *Il.* 9.189; *Od.* 8.73), it cannot be denied that, especially when the term is applied to the present, its Homeric meaning may well be simply a “rumour”. As the famous invocation of the Muses at *Il.* 2.484-87 clearly shows, the privileged realm of song begins where human witness ends. In other words, only where preservation of a given subject is rendered in terms of longevity outreaching first-hand evidence, would poetry presumably be the means by which such a subject would be perpetuated or immortalized.

⁵ After Homer as well, κλέος is only rarely used in a negative sense, see *LSJ*, s.v. κλέος.

by Homer than expressions employing the term κλέος.⁶ Moreover, the only Homeric formula expressing the idea of preservation of a given subject in posterity, καὶ ἔσσομένοισι ἀοιδῆ (“song for men yet unborn”), is an obvious derivative from this expression.⁷

When at *Iliad* 22.304-305 Hector says that before he dies he will accomplish something great “whereof men yet to be born shall hear” (καὶ ἔσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι), it is clear that the same idea could be expressed just as well by the term κλέος. But consider *Iliad* 2.119-22, where Agamemnon says that the shame of the Achaeans’ retreat from Troy will become known even to men yet unborn (αἰσχρὸν γὰρ τόδε γ’ ἐστὶ καὶ ἔσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι), or *Odyssey* 21.253-55, where Eurymachus says that the suitors’ inability to draw Odysseus’ bow will bring disgrace upon them, of which even men yet unborn will hear (ἐλεγχείη δὲ καὶ ἔσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι). Although these two passages also express the idea of the preservation of a given subject in posterity, their negative connotations preclude the terms κλέος from being employed in either of them.⁸ In other words, the expressions employing the term κλέος account for only part of Homer’s means of expressing that some subject is worth preservation in posterity. Consequently, the “monument theory” of epic poetry proves to be based on a generalization of only part of the relevant material in Homer.⁹

⁶ See *Il.* 2.119; 22.305; *Od.* 11.76, 21.255, 24.433; cf. also καὶ ἔσσομένησιν ὀπίσσω at *Od.* 11.433.

⁷ *Od.* 3.204 (v.l. καὶ ἔσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι), 8.580. Cf. also ἀοιδίμοι ἔσσομένοισιν at *Il.* 6.358.

⁸ Other such passages are *Od.* 11.432-33, 24.433-35 and, in application to poetry, 24.194-202. The latter passage makes the limitations on the usage of the term κλέος especially clear: although both Penelope’s and Clytaemnestra’s story are said to supply the subject for a song, it is only in Penelope’s case that the term κλέος appears, see οἱ κλέος οὔ ποτ’ ὀλεῖται at v. 196.

⁹ This difficulty was envisaged by Gregory Nagy, who proposed distinguishing between “song of glorification”, which alone preserves κλέος, and song dealing with evil deeds, misfortune, or defeat, see his *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter* (Cambridge, Mass. 1974), 261: “what you experienced may indeed be unforgettable (ἄλαστα), so that singers will always

There is thus reason to suppose that if we consider, in addition to the κλέος-expressions, the Homeric expressions of the idea of perpetuating a given subject in posterity which do not employ the term κλέος, the picture of what Homer regarded as worth perpetuation would become quite different from the one emerging from the “monument theory”. What conception of epic poetry could indeed correspond to the idea that not only glorious and heroic deeds can be preserved in songs? As a possible answer, Werner Jaeger’s educational theory can be considered. According to Jaeger, Homer’s poetry “chooses and presents its truth in accordance with a definitive ideal”, and its objective is training of mind and character by means of exemplary life-patterns from the past.¹⁰ It is evident that this explanation of what was regarded by Homer as worth preservation in poetry, accounting as it does not only for praiseworthy but also for reprehensible deeds, is indeed much more flexible than that proposed by the “monument theory”. The problem, however, is that it can hardly account for all the Homeric materials concerning the subject.¹¹

Another approach was proposed by Hermann Fränkel. Fränkel noticed that what is expected to be preserved in song is designated both by Helen in the *Iliad* and by Alcinous in the *Odyssey* as “evil fate”, “doom”, and “ruin”, and that these and similar characteristics are often applied by Homer to the major epic subjects like the Trojan

sing of it, but it is not κλέος ἄφθιτον ...”. Helpful as it is for delimiting the specific sphere of κλέος, the distinction ceases to be relevant when one wishes to establish what is generally seen by Homer as worth preservation in poetry: actually, it only emphasises the fact that glorious deeds are no more than a particular case of what is seen as worth preservation.

¹⁰ *Paideia* I, trans. G. Highet (Oxford 1947), 36, cf. also pp. 40-41.

¹¹ Both W. Kraus, “Die Auffassung des Dichterberufs im frühen Griechentum”, *WS* 68 (1955), 70, and G. Lanata, *Poetica pre-platonica* (Florence 1963), 15, argue that the Penelope-Clytaemnestra opposition at *Od.* 24.194-202 is the only passage regarding which the educational theory can be considered relevant. That this would be too rigid an approach has been shown by W.J. Verdenius, who draws attention also to other cases in Homer where “the glorification of the past has an educational by-purpose”; see “The Principles of Greek Literary Criticism”, *Mnemosyne* 36 (1983), 34.

war or the Return of the Achaeans.¹² Proceeding from this observation, he came to the conclusion that "what the Homeric singer aimed at was to arouse feelings of fear and pity through imagined participation in tragic events" and that, therefore, "only what is sorrowful is worth preservation in song".¹³ Accounting as it does for ethically neutral as well as for praiseworthy and reprehensible acts, the approach that derives song from human suffering fits in better with the complex and many-sided character of Homer's poetry than the "monumental" and educational theories, reminding us that "in the Homeric poems glory is not a simple and straightforward thing, won by heroic deeds" and that "we are far from the unreflective heroism of the Germanic lays".¹⁴ Here too, however, the question, is whether the approach is comprehensive.

At *Iliad* 2.324-29, Odysseus reminds the rest of the Achaeans of the great portent which they witnessed at Aulis at the very beginning of the Trojan expedition and adduces the words said on the occasion by Calchas the soothsayer: "Zeus of the counsels has shown us this great portent: a thing late, late to be accomplished, whose glory shall perish never (ὄψιμον, ὄψιτέλεστον, ὄου κλέος οὔποτ' ὀλείται). As this snake has eaten the sparrow herself with her children, eight of them, and the mother was the ninth, who bore them, so for years as many as this shall we fight in this place and in the tenth year we shall take the city of the wide ways". It can be seen that the statement that the portent's fame will never be lost accords with none of the principles purporting to account for Homer's idea of what is worth preservation in song. The portent at Aulis was not the act of a hero aiming at everlasting glory in posterity; it can serve neither as an authoritative example nor as a warning; nor can it be envisaged as an embodiment of human suffering. It is simply an event. Still, it is obviously regarded by Homer as worthy of the same everlasting fame as the glorious deeds and tragic fates of the most prominent of

¹² *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, trans. M. Hadas and J. Willis (New York-London 1962), 14-15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15. See also C.W. Macleod, *Homer: Iliad, Book xxiv* (Cambridge 1982), 1-8 and *Collected Essays* (Oxford 1983), 11-12.

¹⁴ J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford 1980), 96. On Homer's concept of heroism as compared to other heroic traditions see now R. Renehan, "The *Heldentod* in Homer: One Heroic Ideal", *CP* 82 (1987), 99-116.

his heroes. Shall we infer from this that what Homer saw as worth preservation in song was merely what has happened? Obviously, such a principle would be the comprehensive one we are looking for. But if the totality of the epic songs amounted to the totality of events that had happened, that is, if the epic corpus was regarded, as A.W. Gomme put it, as "chronicles",¹⁵ the entire issue of Achilles' choice would make no sense at all. Indeed, if what is preserved for posterity is simply what happened, Achilles' returning home would be even more an "event" than his remaining at Troy; still, in that case his fame would not have been preserved. Achilles' case plainly indicates that Homer did have a principle in mind determining which events of the past should be preserved for posterity.¹⁶

II

Thus far, in our attempts to arrive at a general definition of the subjects which Homer says are worth preserving for posterity, we have only obtained negative results. Indeed, the only thing which can be said with certainty at this stage is that neither heroic deeds nor moral examples nor human suffering nor, finally, chronological documentation of past events can supply a basis for generalization. Maybe the simplest way to arrive at the common denominator we are looking for is to assemble all the relevant instances and try to assess what they have in common. Here is the full list:¹⁷ (1) Helen and Paris; (2)

¹⁵ *The Greek Attitude to Poetry and History* (Berkeley 1951), 2-3.

¹⁶ I think it plausible that Achilles' account of his alternative fates is an innovation: in the rest of the *Iliad* it is taken for granted that Achilles is doomed to die young, see M.M. Willcock, "Ad hoc invention in the *Iliad*", *HSCP* 81 (1977), 48-49. Innovatory, however, still does not mean untraditional nor, moreover, anti-traditional and, as M.W. Edwards reminds us in his recent book, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (Baltimore-London 1987), 224, the idea is not unparalleled. Note also that the whole idea is actually enshrined in the Homeric formula κλέος οὔποτ' ὀλεῖται, which is so phrased as to admit of two options for the preservation of one's fame, namely, that it can be either lost or not. On this and the related expressions see M. Finkelberg, "Is κλέος ἄφθιτον a Homeric formula?" *CQ* 36 (1986), 1-5.

¹⁷ Apart from the subjects which Homer explicitly says will be preserved by poetry, we shall deal only with those whose future preservation is presented

Departure from Aulis; (3) Death of Hector; (4) Doom of the Achaeans and Troy; (5) Odysseus in Phaeacia; (6) Penelope's Virtue; (7) The Killing of the Suitors; (8) Clytaemnestra's Perfidy; (9) Orestes' Revenge; (10) Retreat of the Achaeans from Troy (unaccomplished); (11) Paris' Death at Menelaus's hands (unaccomplished); (12) Achilles' Remaining at Troy (an alternative). We can see now that these are more or less the main components of the Trojan saga, from the cyclic *Cypria* via the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, to the cyclic *Nosti*. If all the subjects referred to by Homer as worthy of preservation had been like these, we would have faced a real *aporia*: insofar as the subjects which are treated as worth preservation for posterity are the very subjects that have actually been preserved, there can be no way to define the principle according to which these subjects were selected.

Fortunately, however, among the subjects regarded as deserving perpetuation Homer occasionally refers to hypothetical situations, that is, events that could have happened but eventually did not. A good example of such a hypothetical situation is the episode of the

in terms of longevity beyond the reach of firsthand evidence (see n. 4). Actually, the discussion is confined to the expressions καὶ ἔσσομένοισιν ἀοιδῆ and the like (*Il.* 6.357-8; *Od.* 3.204, 8.580, 24.194-202), καὶ ἔσσομένοισιν πυθέσθαι and the like (see n. 6 above), κλέος οὔ ποτ' ὀλεῖται (*Il.* 2.325; *Od.* 24.196; *cf. Il.* 7.91), ἄσβεστον κλέος εἶη (*Od.* 7.331, *cf.* 4.584), and the expressions employing the term ὀπίγονος in the sense relevant to our subject (*Il.* 3.353, 16.31; *Od.* 1.392, 3.200). My criteria of selection rule out such passages as, for example, *Il.* 8.181, Hector's remark that there should be a memory (μνημοσύνη) of his setting fire to the ships of Achaeans: this case is taken as relevant to poetry by G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore-London 1979), 17, but note that Phoenix' reminiscence of Meleager's wrath is rendered in the same terms (see μέμνημαι at *Il.* 9.527). Another such case is *Il.* 10.212, Nestor's statement that he who volunteers to penetrate into the Trojan camp will get the "heaven-high" fame (ὑπουράνιον κλέος): when κλέος is described by Homer in such "spatial" terms, it usually means widespread reputation in the present, *cf.* τῆς νῦν κλέος οὐρανὸν ἵκει at *Il.* 8.192 (of Nestor's shield), τοῦ δὲ νῦν γε μέγιστον ὑπουράνιον κλέος ἐστίν at *Od.* 9.264 (of Agamemnon), τῆς τότε ἄρα κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἵκανε at *Od.* 8.74 (of Demodocus' song). I do not mean that such passages are necessarily irrelevant to poetry, but since it is impossible to prove the opposite it seems wise to exclude them from the present discussion.

Διάπειρα in *Iliad* 2. Agamemnon intends to test his men by proposing to return home without taking Troy. Contrary to his expectations, the Achaeans rush to the ships, eager to depart immediately. While trying to stop them, Agamemnon says, *inter alia*, that the shame of their retreat will be known even to men yet unborn (v. 119: καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι). It is significant in this connection that, although the *Iliad* often refers to shameful behaviour in war, it is only in this instance that such shame is expected to be perpetuated. What makes this case different? To obtain the answer, we should take into account what would have happened had the Achaeans indeed left Troy in the tenth year of the war. Obviously, this premature withdrawal, had it been carried out, would have brought the Trojan war to an end.¹⁸ Now, if a retreat that does not bring about a dramatic turn in the course of events is not considered worth preservation in posterity, whereas the retreat that does, or would, cause such a dramatic turn is so considered, we should infer that only events possessing far-reaching consequences were seen by Homer as deserving to become the subjects of epic songs and thus to be immortalized.

Thus, with the assistance of a hypothetical situation relating to an event that never actually took place, we can distinguish between the canonized nomenclature of the episodes constituting the Trojan saga and the poet's ideas that lie beyond this nomenclature; for, as a matter of fact, if we apply the conclusions obtained as a result of our analysis of a hypothetical situation to the other situations regarded as worth preservation, we shall see that the conclusion holds good in the real cases as well.

We shall begin with the *Iliad*. The portent in Aulis, whose fame "shall never perish", is said to be "late-come" (ὄψιμον) and "of late fulfilment" (ὄψιτέλεστον). It can be seen that these characteristics are also relevant to the Aulis episode as a whole: inasmuch as the Achaeans' departure for Troy will virtually be fulfilled only with the end of the ten-year war, this event itself is also "of late fulfilment". In view of this, it seems reasonable to suggest, together with the scholiast, that the words κλέος οὔποτ' ὀλεῖται refer not only to

¹⁸ Cf. *Il.* 2.155-56: "Ἐνθα κεν Ἀργείοισιν ὑπέρμορα νόστος ἐτύχθη, εἰ μὴ Ἀθηναίην Ἥρη κτλ. See also n. 20 below.

the portent but also to the events for which it stands.¹⁹ Furthermore, considering that no other portent in Homer is said to be remembered forever, it is reasonable to suggest that it is not the portent's mere occurrence, but its occurrence simultaneously with so significant an event as the beginning of the Trojan war, that guarantees, in Homer's eyes, that the fame of this particular portent will be remembered in posterity.

At *Iliad* 3.351-54, Menelaus says that if Paris is defeated by him, this will prevent men in the future from repeating his crime (ὄφρα τις ἐρρίγησι καὶ ὀψιγόνων ἀνθρώπων/ ξεινοδόκον κακὰ ῥέξαι). Again, had the Menelaus-Paris single combat, which by agreement was to determine the result of the war, reached a decisive conclusion, the Trojan war would have ended; like the retreat of the Achaeans, this combat, too, represents an "historical option" which did not actually happen.²⁰ In view of this, it may reasonably be suggested that what was to make Paris' punishment by Menelaus so memorable was, above all, its association with so significant a prospect as the end of the war.

At *Iliad* 22.304-305, having realized the inevitability of his death at Achilles' hands, Hector intends to accomplish "something great (μέγα ... τι) whereof men yet to be born shall hear". With these words he attacks Achilles with his sword, but Achilles strikes him first with his spear. This can hardly be defined as the greatest of Hector's feats. But Hector's death was indeed one of the great events of the Trojan war. Hence, even if his behaviour at such a moment had been shameful, it is very likely that posterity would still have heard about his fatal combat with Achilles. Hector's behaviour

¹⁹ Schol. BL to *Il.* 3.325: τὸ τοῦ πολέμου κλέος ἢ τὸ τοῦ σημείου. Cf. also H. Maehler, *Die Auffassung des Dichterberufs im frühen Griechentum* (Göttingen 1963), 11: "Der Ruhm gilt nicht so sehr dem Zeichen als vielmehr dem Geschehen".

²⁰ Such introduction of unrealized options (termed by K. Reinhardt "das 'Fast'" and by B. Fenik "the 'almost' situation") is characteristic of Homer's technique of plot-making. See K. Reinhardt, *Die Ilias und ihr Dichter* (Göttingen 1961), 107-120, and B. Fenik, "Stylization and Variety", in *Homer, Tradition and Invention*, ed. B. Fenik (Leiden 1978), 80-81.

at the moment of his death could only determine how, not whether, he should enter into the memory of posterity.

The most illuminating case, however, is Helen. “Us two”, Helen says of Paris and herself in *Iliad* 6.357-58, “on whom Zeus set a vile destiny (κακὸν μῶρον), so that hereafter we shall be made into things of song for the men of the future”. It seems unlikely to me that Helen’s (and Homer’s) confidence about the perpetuation of Helen’s story issued, as is argued by some scholars, from the tragic character of her fate. After all, Helen’s fate can hardly be considered more tragic than, say, that of Andromache. Nevertheless, as the latter ponders what will happen to her after Hector’s death and the fall of Troy, she envisages no prospect that her suffering will make her famous in posterity.²¹ Rather, it is her being the cause of the Trojan war that guarantees that Helen’s personal fate should supply the subject for future song.

Thus all the cases of the preservation of a given subject in posterity mentioned in the *Iliad* (apart from that of Achilles, which will be treated separately) seem to be closely associated with crucial stages in the history of the Trojan war. Helen as a person stands for the very reason of this war; the Aulis episode signifies its actual beginning just as Hector’s death stands for its logical end, so to speak; finally, the Achaeans’ intention to abandon Troy and the Menelaus-Paris combat represent, each in its own way, unrealized options for the war’s solution.

Let us turn now to the *Odyssey*. It may seem that, as distinct from the *Iliad*, the setting of this poem is hardly suited to any sort of “historical” explanation. Indeed, Clytaemnestra’s perfidy, Orestes’ revenge, Alcinous’ hospitality, the constancy of Penelope — all referred to as worth preservation in posterity — seem to fall short of the standards of historical significance set in the *Iliad*. We can hardly expect, however, that Homer’s criteria of historical significance would be identical to ours: it is sufficient for our purpose that the aftermath of the Trojan war, the Returns, was clearly seen by him as just significant a subject as the war itself (*cf.* n. 29 below). If we take this into account, we shall see that in the *Odyssey*, too, every-

²¹ *Il.* 24.725-45, *cf.* also 22.477-507 and 6.447-65. If Andromache’s fate was a matter of interest, this was due to the fact of her being Hector’s wife rather than to her suffering.

thing expected to be preserved in posterity is inseparable from great events, which in that poem are, instead of the crucial stages of the Trojan war, the significant developments in the homeland at the time of the Trojan heroes' return. Thus Clytaemnestra's perfidy, crowned as it was with Agamemnon's murder, cannot be separated from the palace revolution and dethronement of the ruling dynasty in Argos, just as Orestes' virtue is an integral part of the restoration.²² Penelope's constancy too, representing as it does the necessary condition for the restoration of Odysseus' rule over Ithaca,²³ is an ὀφειτέλεστον factor in the poem's plot rather than simply a demonstration of didactic virtue.

The same is true of the suitors. Their behaviour is characterised as blameworthy throughout the poem; still, it is only at *Odyssey* 21.253-55, in the bow episode, that the suitors' disrepute is expected to be preserved in posterity (καὶ ἔσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι). Now the bow episode, from the beginning explicitly referred to as φόνου ἀρχή (v. 4), introduces the killing of the suitors by Odysseus and is thus inseparable from the restoration of the latter's reign over Ithaca: that is to say, a great event catches the suitors at the moment of their inability to draw Odysseus' bow, and it is together with this disgrace that they are to enter into the memory of posterity.²⁴

Two other cases concern Odysseus' sojourn in Phaeacia. At *Odyssey* 7.331-33, Odysseus says that if Alcinous' promise to give him an escort is fulfilled, Alcinous' fame will be imperishable, while he himself will return home (τοῦ μὲν κεν ἐπὶ ζείδωρον ἄρουραν/ ἄσβεστον κλέος εἴη, ἐγὼ δέ κε πατρίδ' ἰκοίμην).

²² *Od.* 3.204, 24.194-202, *cf.* also 1.302, 3.200, 11.432-34.

²³ Inasmuch as the marriage with Odysseus' widow is generally seen in the poem as legitimizing accession to the kingship of Ithaca; see M.I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (London 1954), 97-99; M. Finkelberg, "Royal Succession in Heroic Greece", *CQ* 41 (1991), 306-7.

²⁴ This is also true of the unaccomplished revenge of the suitors' kinsmen, the shame of which is referred to at *Od.* 24.433 as expected to become known to posterity. Odysseus' restoration of his rule directly depends on whether or not this revenge will be successful (*cf.* Finley [n. 23], 83-84), so that its preservation, whether in the form of honour or in that of shame, is guaranteed.

This is one of the clearest examples of how the participation of a given subject in a significant event can condition its preservation in posterity. Indeed, the syntax makes it perfectly clear that Alcinous' fame and Odysseus' return reciprocate each other: "he on the one hand ... I on the other hand ...". Alcinous and his Phaeacians certainly do not owe their existence to the *Odyssey*; yet their "inextinguishable fame" is conditioned on their assistance in the return of the great Odysseus.²⁵ And finally, at *Odyssey* 8.579-80 Alcinous says that the doom and ruin of the Achaeans and Troy have been fashioned by the gods "that there might be a song in the ears of men yet unborn" (καὶ ἔσσομένοισιν ἀοιδῆ). Alcinous' remark, to which we shall return, is especially important in that it shows that, according to Homer, all the participants of the Trojan war, and not only its protagonists, would receive a share in the future song.

Thus, just as in the *Iliad*, the subjects in the *Odyssey* which are expected to be preserved in posterity cannot be separated from significant events. Above all, it is two such events, Agamemnon's return to Argos and Odysseus' return to Ithaca, that the *Odyssey* poet had in mind.

III

We have now examined all the subjects about which it is explicitly said in Homer that they are to be preserved in posterity. In every case, association of such subjects with events of great significance in the Trojan saga has been established. The question now is whether such a pattern is in itself sufficient to justify the inference that the participation by a given subject in a significant event is, according to Homer, the sole guarantee of the subject's preservation in posterity. To argue that this is so, we must have proof that in Homer's eyes all these subjects would otherwise have perished. It seems to me that the case of Achilles' choice provides such a demonstration.

²⁵ Cf. Diod. Sic. 4.72.4: "To Phaeax was born Alcinous, who brought about the return of Odysseus to Ithaca" (trans. C.H. Oldfather). The only other case when one's κλέος is expected to be ἄσβεστον is the κλέος of Agamemnon which is to be preserved by his tomb, see *Od.* 4.584 and n. 32 below.

By all standards, Achilles was the greatest of the Achaean heroes of the generation of the Trojan war. Still, as reported in *Iliad* 9, had he left Troy and returned home, his fame would have been lost. Again, like the unaccomplished retreat of the Achaeans, this is an option that is ultimately not taken, but this time the alternative is not the preservation but the deletion of one's fame from the memory of posterity. Let us, then, imagine again what would have happened had Achilles indeed left the Trojan campaign in the tenth year of the war. The most obvious answer is that he would not have killed Hector and, consequently, not influenced the war's course in the way he actually did. Now an Achilles who did not kill Hector may be compared to a Helen who did not elope with Paris. It is doubtful indeed whether Helen's position as queen of Sparta and the most beautiful of the Achaean women would have sufficed to give her more prominent representation in poetry than something like "she surpassed all the girls of her own age for beauty and accomplishments and wit".²⁶ That the same could have been true of Achilles can be inferred from Patroclus' words to Achilles at *Iliad* 16.31-32: τί σευ ἄλλος ὀνήσεται ὀψίγονός περ/αἶ κε μὴ Ἀργείοισιν ἀεικέα λοιγὸν ἀμύνης;²⁷ Patroclus' words clearly imply that, by abstaining from participation in the war, Achilles is losing his *raison d'être* from the point of view of others, including posterity.

Note that, while the preservation of the memory of every individual subject is directly conditioned by its role in the Trojan war, no such justification is ever applied to the war itself. As far as Homer is concerned, the everlasting glory of the Trojan events is axiomatic.²⁸

²⁶ *Il.* 13.431-32, of Anchises' daughter Hippodameia when her husband is killed by Idomeneus.

²⁷ "What other men born hereafter shall be advantaged unless you beat aside from the Argives this shameful destruction?" (trans. R. Lattimore). Ebeling, *s.v.* ὀψίγονος, proposes *quid juvabis posteros?* as an equivalent to this rather puzzling remark; the rendering given is *LSJ, s.v.* ὀνύνημι is "what good will others have of thee?, *i.e.*, what good will you have done them?" *Cf.* also Erbse, "Ilias und 'Patroklie'", *Hermes* 111 (1983), 13.

²⁸ The justification of the historical significance of the Trojan war can be found in the cyclic *Cypria* and the Hesiodic corpus: the Trojan and Theban wars were the two events that closed the Heroic Age; both were designed by Zeus in order to destroy the generation of the heroes, see *Cypria* fr. 1 Allen, *Hes. Op.* 156-73 and fr. 204.95-119 Merkelbach-West. This explains why

In the *Odyssey*, where the war as such is already viewed as part of the heroic past, “The Doom of the Achaeans and Troy” engages everybody’s attention, including that of the gods themselves. The inhabitants of Ithaca, of Phaeacia, of the Island of Aeolia are eager to listen to songs and stories about Troy (which, in fact, are the only songs and stories they listen to), and this is the very subject that is included in the Sirens’ promise of bestowing a knowledge greater than the human — a promise nobody can resist.²⁹ That only a savage like Polyphemus can remain ignorant of the Trojan war — as well, indeed, as of any other mark of human civilization — shows clearly enough that acquaintance with the Trojan saga was regarded as one of the cultural codes that united the civilized world.³⁰ And the crowning demonstration of the supreme significance of the Trojan saga is found, of course, in the avowal of both Helen in the *Iliad* and Alcinous in the *Odyssey* that the evil fate of all those involved in the war was ultimately imposed by the gods only to supply song for future generations. That is to say, for Homer, as also for generations of Greeks after him, the history of the Trojan war amounted to the history of the past as such.

At *Odyssey* 8.579-90, Homer has Alcinous say that the doom and ruin of the Achaeans and Troy were fashioned by the gods in order to provide song for posterity. One can infer from these words

the subject of the Returns was envisaged as no less significant than the Trojan war as such.

²⁹ *Od.* 12.189-90: ἴδμεν γάρ τοι πάνθ’ ὅσ’ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείη/ Ἀργεῖοι Τρῶές τε θεῶν ἰότητι μόγησαν. See further M. Finkelberg, “Enchantment and Other Effects of Poetry in the Homeric *Odyssey*”, *Scripta Classica Israelica* 8/9 (1988), 1-10.

³⁰ *Od.* 9.258-80. I can hardly improve on the presentation of this episode given recently by Diskin Clay, “The Archaeology of the Temple to Juno in Carthage”, *CP* 83 (1988), 199: “Odysseus claims with confidence that he will be recognized as an Achaean, come from Troy, and that he and his men can boast that they are a part of the army of Agamemnon, ‘whose epic fame is greatest under the vault of heaven, at least for now’ (9.264 τοῦ δὴ νῦν μέγιστον ὑπουράνιον κλέος ἐστί). In the face of this claim, with its clear implication that the *Iliad* has spread throughout the world, the Cyclops is silent. And he is silent, too, about Odysseus’ wanderings and the epic poetry of the *Odyssey* (cf. 9.259-62). His ignorance of Homeric poetry is total”.

that it was Homer's contention that everyone who was involved in the war would receive his or her share in the song. This is not to say, however, that every participant in the war would be treated equally. There is indeed a great difference between those who remained hardly more than names in the catalogues and those few protagonists who exerted decisive influence on the course of the war. After all, "song", promised to all, is a far weaker term than the "everlasting fame" individually promised to Achilles. Consider that the conception of our *Iliad* is based on the presumption that the death of Hector would amount to the fall of Troy. The *Iliad* thus placed Achilles at a strategic position within the Trojan saga: as long as Hector lived Troy would not fall, and it was Achilles who killed Hector. But Troy was destined to fall. This means that if Achilles had not been there Hector would have had to be killed by somebody else.³¹

Had Achilles returned home, the history of the Trojan war would have been remembered differently, this time without Achilles as its key figure. It can be assumed that, living peacefully in Phthia, Achilles still would not have been lost to the rumour of his contemporaries, and his fame would not have been lost also in the sense that it would have been preserved by his tomb. But this is also true of such a minor character as Odysseus' companion Elpenor.³² It can also be assumed that Achilles' warlike record up to the moment of his departure would have sufficed to guarantee him some minor part in the poetic account of the Trojan saga, and his name, like the names of other minor warriors, would certainly have emerged in the battle scenes and catalogues. But he would not have obtained everlasting fame. If I am correct, the reason for this would be that, had

³¹ Unless, of course, Hector himself was invented with the sole purpose of glorifying Achilles, a question which is of no relevance here.

³² See *Od.* 11.75-76, *cf.* 10.552-53. Apart from song, the hero's tomb is the only other means of perpetuating one's fame, see, *e.g.*, *Il.* 7.91; *Od.* 4.584, 11.75-76, 24.80-94. But there is no evidence in Homer that the tomb can preserve one's fame instead of the song, or vice versa. Rather, Telemachus' firm belief that, since his father has no tomb, his fame is lost (*Od.* 1.234-41, *cf.* also 5.306-311), notwithstanding the fact that preservation of Odysseus' fame by other means is guaranteed by his role in the Trojan war, proves the opposite.

Achilles left Troy, he would have missed his chance to become a significant figure in Greek historical memory.³³

There can be little doubt that the Homeric epics originated in heroic lays whose main objective was to praise the military exploits of the Greek chieftains; however, not only in their structure and ethos but also, as I hope to have shown, in their purpose, they are far removed from songs of military prowess which properly belong to a much earlier stage in the epic tradition. To treat them on the same plane would do little justice to either form of heroic poetry. This is not to say, of course, that military exploits were of no interest to the poet. Yet heroic deeds, tragic fates and praiseworthy or reprehensible acts were regarded by him as preserved in song not in their own right but by virtue of their being part of events that determined the course of history. Without fulfilling this condition, like Achilles' fame, they would have been lost to posterity.

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³³ Compare the case of Philoctetes, who did not even participate in the ten-year war, but whose place in the war's history was guaranteed by the simple fact that, without his joining the Achaeans at the last moment, Troy would not have fallen (in that he kills Paris, Philoctetes seems to play the central part in the *Ilias parva*); see *Homeri opera* V, ed. T.W. Allen, p. 106.23-27.