



Homer's Cosmic Fabrication: Choice and Design in the Iliad (American Philological Association American Classical Studies)

Bruce Heiden

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Although scholars routinely state that the *Iliad* is an "oral poem," since very near the time of its composition the great epic has circulated as a text stabilized in writing. Thus whether or not it is in some sense "oral poetry," the *Iliad* undoubtedly has features that render it quite satisfactory to readers and reading. But the question of what these features might be has been difficult for modern Homeric scholarship even to frame, much less address, within the research paradigm of "oral poetics."

In *Homer's Cosmic Fabrication* Bruce Heiden delineates a new approach aimed at evaluating what the *Iliad* furnishes to readers that makes it comprehensible and engaging. His program conceptualizes the act of reading as a flexible repertoire of cognitive functions that a reader might deploy in collaboration with the poem's signs. By positing certain functions hypothetically and applying them to the poem, Heiden's experiments uncover the kind and degree of suitable "reading material" the poem provides.

These analyses reveal that the trajectory of events in the *Iliad* manifests the central agency of one character, Zeus, and that the transmitted articulation of the epic into chapter-like "books" conforms to distinct narrative subtrajectories. The analyses also show, however, that the fixed sequence of "books" functions suitably as a design that cues attention to the major crises in the story, as well as to themes that develop its significance. The transmitted arrangement therefore furnishes an implicit cognitive map that both eases comprehension of the storyline and indicates previously unexplored pathways of interpretation. Through *Homer's Cosmic Fabrication* enthusiasts of the *Iliad* will gain enhanced understanding of the epic's poetic design and the philosophical rewards it offers to thoughtful study.

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