

*Introduction**Paola Bassino, Lilah Grace Canevaro, and  
Barbara Graziosi**The end of art is peace.*

– Seamus Heaney

In *The Harvest Bow* Seamus Heaney suggests a difficult relationship between poetry and peace, for if art reaches its aim, then it also meets its end. Two questions arise: whether the aim of art is always peace; and whether peace lacks artistry. Heaney's father makes an agricultural ornament, 'a throwaway love-knot of straw'; the son, meanwhile, needs conflict for poetry – and his poetry, unlike his father's pastime, is meant to last. Michael Longley, writing in Ireland at the same time as Heaney – from a Protestant rather than a Catholic background – makes a similar point about fathers, sons, war, and literary history. He responds to the Troubles by remembering Hector's prayer for Astyanax at *Iliad* 6.476–81:

then he kissed the babbie and dandled him in his arms and  
prayed that his son might grow up bloodier than him.<sup>1</sup>

It is when the boy is wrenched from 'between his nurse's breasts' that questions about poetry and inheritance arise. There is then, in both Heaney and Longley, a preoccupation with conflict, but also an interrogation about fathers, and what is handed down: what we keep, and what we throw away.

Western literary history is easily presented as a warlike tradition – a tradition that begins with the *Iliad*, a poem about war, and renews itself through the repetition of conflict between father and son, literary ancestor to heir.<sup>2</sup> Philip Roth, for one, sees it that way. At the beginning of *The Human Stain*, a professor enters his classroom and points out that European literature begins with a quarrel between 'Agamemnon the King

<sup>1</sup> Longley 1995: 226.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Bloom's Oedipal vision of literary history as a struggle between father and son: 1973 and 1975, with Graziosi/Greenwood 2007: 1–5. For a historian's attempt to celebrate war as the hallmark of western civilisation see Morris 2014.

of men, and great Achilles', 'a barroom brawl ... over a woman'.<sup>3</sup> The rest of the novel follows that ancient pattern: two mighty men fight for possession of a (disempowered) woman. There is, in that repetition of conflict, a claim to literary consensus.

This particular vision of literary history – conflict as a theme, consensus and canonicity as a result – can of course be challenged in various ways. Comparison offers one strategy: the Chinese *Shijing* ('Classic of Poetry'), for example, was composed at roughly the same time as the *Iliad*, attracted an equally impressive and extensive tradition of commentary, continues to hold a central position in Chinese letters, and yet is by no means as focused on conflict as the Homeric poem. This confirms that 'ire' and 'lust', to use Roth's terms in characterising both Homer and himself,<sup>4</sup> are by no means central to all literary endeavours; the *Shijing* suggests, for example, courtship, administration of the state, nature, worship, and housework.

A second strategy of criticism might focus on distinctly European, yet pacifist, attempts to rewrite ancient epic. We may think of Wenders's blind poet, wandering through the streets of divided Berlin, and asking himself:

Aber noch niemandem ist es gelungen, ein Epos des Friedens anzustimmen. Was ist denn am Frieden, daß er nicht auf die Dauer begeistert und daß sich von ihm kaum erzählen läßt? Soll ich jetzt aufgeben? Wenn ich aufgebe, dann wird die ... Menschheit ihren Erzähler verlieren. Und hat die Menschheit einmal ihren Erzähler verloren, so hat sie auch ihre Kindschaft verloren.

But so far nobody has managed to sing an epic of peace. What is it about peace that it fails to excite in the long run, and hardly allows a story to be told about it? Should I give up now? But if I give up, the story teller is lost to humanity; and if the story teller is lost, childhood is lost.<sup>5</sup>

Here a Homeric figure attempts to forge a usable past, an alternative childhood for Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Yet a third avenue of exploration can be found in feminist readings of ancient Greek poetry: we could ask what the story of the *Iliad* might become if told by Briseis, the slave over whom Achilles and Agamemnon are

<sup>3</sup> Roth 2000: 4.

<sup>4</sup> Roth 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Wenders/Handke 1998: 56–7. For a discussion of the collaboration between Wenders and Handke in the making of *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*), 1987, see Brady/Leal 2011.

<sup>6</sup> The script specifies that the old poet is Homer, though this remains implicit in the film: Wenders/Handke 1998.

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fighting.<sup>7</sup> As it happens, Simone Weil asked herself precisely that question, and answered that ‘in a life so bleak, no emotion can germinate and animate [a slave] except love for the master’.<sup>8</sup> More generally, in her important essay ‘The *Iliad* or the Poem of Force’, Weil focuses on the treatment of bodies, whether alive or dead, and asks how they become things – through killing, enslavement, but also casual thoughtlessness. When Achilles brushes Priam aside at *Il.* 24.507–12, Weil argues that he is ‘as uninhibited in his attitudes and actions as if, instead of a suppliant, an inanimate object had touched his knees’.<sup>9</sup> She concludes that for those ‘who perceive force, today as yesterday, at the very centre of human history, the *Iliad* is the purest and loveliest of mirrors’.<sup>10</sup> Weil was writing about the *Iliad* as a Jewish intellectual in 1939. The possibility of taking the poem as a mirror, however, is already suggested within the *Iliad* itself. Right at the centre of the plot, and while the war rages all around her, Helen weaves a robe depicting ‘the struggles that the horse-breaking Trojans and the bronze-shirted Achaeans were undergoing for her sake, at the hands of Ares’ (3.126–8). Helen repeatedly makes it clear that she regrets the war and hates herself for it – and yet considers it a good subject for artistic representation.

This volume explores the possibilities of representing conflict, and of creating consensus, in early Greek hexameter poetry. Against the grand visions of western literary history outlined above, and the equally grand strategies it is possible to adopt in criticising them, the chapters in this volume offer detailed, close readings of ancient texts. This is done in the conviction that early Greek hexameter poems offer important insights on conflict and consensus – specifically as themes of, and responses to, poetry. All contributors to this volume have core research interests in early Greek literature, and they all presented initial versions of their chapters at a conference held in Durham in 2012. That conference made it possible for editors, contributors, and audiences to articulate areas of scholarly consensus – and indeed conflict – in their own methods and conclusions: we are grateful to the Department of Classics and Ancient History and the Institute of Advanced Study, Durham University, for enabling contributors to meet and discuss their work face to face. Differences of approach

<sup>7</sup> For a fictional account of the *Iliad* that takes into account Briseis’ perspective, see Hauser 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Weil 2003: 49.

<sup>9</sup> Weil 2003: 48.

<sup>10</sup> Weil 2003: 45.

are outlined below, but should not distract from three general points of agreement.

The Greeks bequeathed a rich and diverse tradition of early hexameter poetry: the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the poems attributed to Hesiod, the *Homeric Hymns* to the gods, and many other heroic poems that have reached us in summaries and brief quotations share the same metre, language, and techniques of composition. When looking ‘at the beginning of European literature’, therefore, it is important to consider the early hexameter tradition in all its breadth and variety – rather than focus on the *Iliad* alone. The many poems considered here offer, in fact, an important context within which to articulate an interpretation of the *Iliad*. The precise relationship between the different early hexameter poems remains a matter of debate (see below), but a commitment to reading them in relation to one another is shared.

The second point is that all the poems discussed depict conflict between parties who should actually get along: Achilles and Agamemnon are supposed to be fighting on the same side of the war, after all; the end of the *Odyssey* depicts a civil conflict that is averted only through divine intervention (a failure of plausibility and plot that irked Aristotle);<sup>11</sup> Hesiod’s *Theogony* reveals a chain of cataclysmic conflicts between generations of gods, divine beings who are supposed to be ‘easy living’, ῥεῖα ζῶντες. Many *Homeric Hymns* recount the story of how the birth of a new god threatens the divine order (for example, as discussed in this volume, how Hermes challenges Apollo as soon as he is born, or how all the gods want to marry Aphrodite as soon as they set eyes on her). Finally, Hesiod’s *Works and Days* takes its cue from a regrettable fight between brothers. Greek epic poets did not engage with the possibilities of pacifism. Conflict was a fact of life, which poetry could at best mirror with unflinching clarity. Some conflicts, however, were explicitly presented as avoidable and even unacceptable. It is remarkable that many of the most important conflicts in early Greek hexameter poetry fall precisely into that category. This fact should make us pause before drawing general conclusions about conflict, consensus, and their role in narrative art. While it is true that ‘conflict followed by consensus is a universal feature of storytelling’ (as Marks notes on p. 158), not all conflicts are as intricate

<sup>11</sup> At *Poetics* 1454a37–b2, Aristotle argues that ‘the outcome of each story should be the result of the plot’ and not depend on divine intervention: he uses Euripides’ *Medea* and the conclusion of the embarkation scene in *Iliad* 2 as his examples; though it is clear that he also found the end of the *Odyssey* problematic because it played to the lower instincts of audiences who want to see the good characters flourish and the evil ones perish (*Poetics* 1453a30–5).

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and intractable as those discussed in this volume. We are not confronted with straightforward clashes of good and evil, say, but rather with situations that invite nuanced assessment.

A third point that animates the collection concerns the early reception of epic: we know that the conflicts depicted in the poems actually generated consensus among audiences. The reason why we have the poems of Homer and Hesiod is that people agreed on their value. Here the case of the Epic Cycle, discussed in Chapter 7, is revealing, since those poems did not achieve canonical status (except as a loose cycle around the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*), and are now largely lost. Throughout the book, then, conflict and consensus are explored from a dual perspective: as thematic concerns in the poems, and as forces shaping their early reception. The overall approach resembles that adopted in a recent monograph written by David Elmer, which was an inspiration for our conference. In *The Poetics of Consent: Collective Decision Making and the Iliad* (Baltimore, 2013), Elmer investigates the reception of deliberative speeches in the *Iliad* as a clue for how the poem itself was received by early audiences. His analysis offers an important parallel to the work presented here.

There are, however, also some differences between Elmer's monograph and the overall aims and approach that characterise this volume. The first difference concerns range, and has already been outlined: whereas Elmer focuses on the *Iliad*, this collection explores conflict and consensus across the range of early hexameter poetry available to us. Contributors also adopt a broader range of methodologies. Elmer grounds his work in formulaic analysis, and in particular the use of the verb ἐπαινέω. Contributors to this collection investigate a wider range of terms, and demonstrate that an exploration of values is not restricted to an investigation of specific set words or formulae. In this respect, recent scholarship on Homeric society proves useful, in that it provides a broad analysis of social norms and patterns of behaviour, ranging from universal human traits, to specific cultural values, to the ways in which individual characters interpret those values.<sup>12</sup> Thus, for example, Fisher and van Wees open their study of competition in the ancient world with the observation that 'competitive-ness is pervasive in even the simplest societies studied by anthropologists', and then move on to discuss specific ancient cultures.<sup>13</sup> Allan and Cairns,

<sup>12</sup> For a good summary of Homeric society, see Osborne 2004; van Wees 1992 offers an important analysis of conflict in Homeric society, on which we rely.

<sup>13</sup> Fisher/van Wees 2011: ix. Conflict and consensus were the terms of a heated debate in the 1970s, when sociologists attempted to identify the most basic and universal impetus shaping society: for a lucid assessment, see Bernard 1983.

in their contribution to that volume, narrow down the focus to the *Iliad* and discuss ‘the ways in which communal norms and values underpin the strategies of the characters and steer the responses of an audience’.<sup>14</sup> What this collection adds to current work on Homeric society is an appreciation of poetry itself as a social mechanism stemming from competition, and designed to promote consensus.

Essentially, the process of canonisation involves competition between poems: some establish themselves, while others fail to sustain interest. The *Iliad* employs a variety of strategies in order to subsume, and to an extent suppress, other poems and narratives about the Trojan War.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, cooperation is also involved in the processes of canonisation. The *Odyssey*, for example, avoids treading on the narrative territory of the *Iliad*, a phenomenon generally known as ‘Monro’s law’.<sup>16</sup> The Hesiodic poems likewise create a clearly defined corpus. The *Works and Days* competitively corrects the *Theogony*, and precisely on the issue of competition (Ἔρις, Strife) – of which, we are told, there are in fact two kinds. One is bad, because it leads to conflict, the other good, because it increases quality – including poetic quality:

- Οὐκ ἄρα μῶνον ἔην Ἐρίδων γένος, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ γαῖαν  
 εἰσὶ δύο· τὴν μὲν κεν ἐπαινῆσαι νοήσας,  
 ἥ δ’ ἐπιωμητὴ διὰ δ’ ἀνδρα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν.  
 ἦ μὲν γὰρ πόλεμόν τε κακὸν καὶ δῆριν ὀφέλλει,  
 15 σχετλὴν οὔτις τὴν γε φιλεῖ βροτός, ἀλλ’ ὑπ’ ἀνάγκης  
 ἀθανάτων βουλήσιν Ἔριν τιμῶσι βαρεῖαν.  
 τὴν δ’ ἑτέραν προτέραν μὲν ἐγείνατο Νύξ ἐρεβεννή,  
 θῆκε δὲ μιν Κρονίδης ὑψίζυγος, αἰθέρι ναίων,  
 γαίης ἐν ῥίζησι, καὶ ἀνδράσι πολλὸν ἀμείνω·  
 20 ἦτε καὶ ἀπάλαμόν περ ὁμῶς ἐπὶ ἔργον ἔχειρεν.  
 εἰς ἕτερον γὰρ τίς τε ἰδὼν ἔργοιο χατίζει  
 πλούσιον, ὃς σπεύδει μὲν ἀρώμεναι ἡδὲ φυτεύειν  
 οἶκόν τ’ εὖ θέσθαι· ζηλοῖ δὲ τε γείτονα γείτων  
 εἰς ἄφενος σπεύδοντ’· ἀγαθὴ δ’ Ἔρις ἦδε βροτοῖσιν.  
 25 καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέει καὶ τέκτονι τέκτων,  
 καὶ πτωχὸς πτωχῷ φθονέει καὶ ἀοιδὸς ἀοιδῷ.

So there was not just one birth of Strifes after all, but upon the earth there are two Strifes. One of these a man would praise once he got to know it, but the other is blameworthy; and they have thoroughly opposed spirits. For the one fosters evil war and conflict – cruel one, no mortal loves that one, but it is by

<sup>14</sup> Allan/Cairns 2011: 113; see also Cairns 2001.

<sup>15</sup> See Graziosi 2016a: ch. 6.

<sup>16</sup> On Monro’s law see e.g. Rutherford 1982.

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necessity that they honour the oppressive Strife, by the plans of the immortals. But the other one gloomy Night bore first; and Cronus' high-throned son, who dwells in the aether, set it in the roots of the earth, and it is much better for men. It rouses even the helpless man to work. For a man who is not working but who looks at some other man, a rich one who is hastening to plough and plant and set his house in order, he envies him, one neighbour envying his neighbour who is hastening towards wealth: and this Strife is good for mortals. And potter is angry with potter, and builder with builder, and beggar begrudges beggar, and poet poet.<sup>17</sup>

*Works and Days* 11–26

Clearly, the *Works and Days* takes its cue from the *Theogony*, where the genealogy of Ἐπίς is explained at 225–32, and so the two poems are linked through productive competition rather than all-out conflict.

This kind of one-upmanship characterises the whole tradition, and not just the poems that became canonical. All early Greek hexameter compositions share a specific rhythm, and we know that formulae were honed over generations in order to enable singers to compose and re-compose in performance, to the rhythm of the hexameter. Singers vied with each other, and yet together developed a shared poetic language.<sup>18</sup> Their formulations contained a vision of the world, and an understanding of its history: Zeus is 'son of Cronus' and 'father of gods and men'; the heroes are 'godlike', and much stronger than 'men such as they are nowadays', ordinary mortals who eat bread.<sup>19</sup> Each poem explicitly and carefully indicates its place within a shared understanding of how the world developed. The *Theogony* starts at the very beginning of everything; the Homeric epics are set in the age of the heroes; and Hesiod's *Works and Days* describes the present, a back-breaking age when men have to work the land for a living. The chapters in this volume follow the development of the cosmos as presented in the hexameter tradition, starting when the gods were born (Part I), moving on to the age of the heroes (Part II), and ending with the world of early audiences, when Homer and Hesiod competed in wisdom at the funeral games of Amphidamas (Part III). It was on that occasion that Homer was acclaimed as the best poet by popular consensus, even while Hesiod won the contest, on the ground that he celebrated peace (i.e. agriculture) rather than war. And so we return full-circle to

<sup>17</sup> Translation by Most 2006.

<sup>18</sup> See Parry 1971, together with the discussion of his legacy offered in Graziosi/Haubold 2005: 49–51.

<sup>19</sup> The expressions 'son of Cronus', 'father of gods and men', and 'godlike' are ubiquitous; for heroes stronger than 'men such as they are nowadays' see *Il.* 5.302–4, 12.445–9, and 20.285–7.



that ‘throwaway love-knot of straw’, an agricultural ornament made by Heaney’s father, while his son sought conflict and poetic fame.

As noted above, issues of conflict and consensus in early hexameter poetry have generally been studied as aspects of ‘Homeric society’. This volume, rather than focusing on social norms – whether those of real-life archaic Greek communities, or of an imagined heroic society – deals primarily with poetics and, indeed, metapoetics. Conflict and consensus are approached simultaneously as subjects of poetic representation, and as responses to poetry. In line with this overall approach, some key issues appear in several chapters: the relationship between internal and external audiences, competition inside the narrative and competing narratives, local as opposed to Panhellenic traditions and accounts, canonicity, and narrative closure. Contributors sometimes take different views, and we have not – as editors – tried to dictate a unified approach. What we have done, rather, is ensure that contributors spell out their methodological assumptions, so that readers can make up their own mind (see, for example, the two discussions of the end of the *Theogony* in Chapters 1 and 2, Thomas’s position on a possible first context of performance for the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* in Chapter 3, Lavigne’s argument on the complementarity of epic and iambus in Chapter 6, and Marks’s discussion of local versus Panhellenic traditions of epic in Chapter 7).

The fundamental issue that all contributors and, indeed, readers need to confront is whether early Greek hexameter poetry is best seen as a collection of fixed texts or as a fluid performance tradition. Clearly, both views are possible: what we have are fixed texts, after all; yet those texts draw from a tradition of oral composition, and recomposition, in performance. Scholars differ on where they draw the line, and depending on their decisions, different interpretations arise. Thus, for example, Monro’s law shows that the *Odyssey* is aware of the *Iliad*, but many would argue the reverse is also the case, and thus offer intertextual readings of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.<sup>20</sup> Or again, some readers attempt to pinpoint the endings of specific poems, while others are prepared to consider that poems may be open to additions and extensions.

The first chapter in this volume tackles head-on the issue of narrative closure, through a comparison of Hesiod’s *Theogony* and the Babylonian epic of creation, the *Enūma eliš*. Similarities between these two texts have often been noted, and explanations for them explored in terms of possible routes of transmission, and hence a shared heritage.<sup>21</sup> Haubold

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Pucci 1987.

<sup>21</sup> Walcot 1966, West 1997: 276–86, Rutherford 2009.



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takes a different approach here, focusing on how the texts differ – not just in terms of narrative detail, but also in relation to other Greek and Babylonian poems. He argues that the *Enūma eliš* plays down the possibility of direct conflict between father and son: Marduk becomes supreme god after his father and grandfather failed in an enterprise that had nothing to do with him, but was rather aimed at defeating the primordial female Tīāmat. The Babylonian poem ends with final and perfect kingship, and with the veneration of Marduk: it is no coincidence that it was performed at the most important state ritual in ancient Babylon. In the *Theogony*, by contrast, Uranus and Cronus actively try to prevent their first-born son from succeeding them – and this is also true of Zeus, when he finally establishes his rule. The *Theogony*'s interest in Zeus's subsequent role as 'father of gods and men' makes space for open-ended genealogical explorations. It is difficult to tell where exactly the *Theogony* ends, therefore, and the *Catalogue of Women* seamlessly extends its narrative, taking it all the way down to the generations who fought in the Theban and the Trojan Wars. Haubold argues that the emphasis on final order, harmony, and consensus in the *Enūma eliš* is bought at the cost of sidelining other Babylonian narrative traditions. The *Theogony*, by contrast, is more explicit about intergenerational conflict, and simultaneously more open in its relationship with other early hexameter poems.

It is easy to see where the Homeric poems slot within the broad genealogical account provided by the Hesiodic corpus, but this does not mean that there is perfect compatibility between different narratives. Chapter 2 focuses on the main cosmogonic principle that shapes the Greek tradition – sex – and tackles an issue over which Homer and Hesiod certainly disagree: the birth of Aphrodite. According to Hesiod, the goddess is born out of the castrated genitals of Uranus; Homer, by contrast, presents her as the daughter of Zeus and Dione. Given that both poets were considered experts on the gods, the chapter asks what ancient Greek audiences made of these conflicting accounts of Aphrodite, and reads the shorter *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* as a careful act of mediation between them. The analysis offered moves away from structuralist approaches to Greek religion, and towards a more committed reading of early hexameter epic as a source of theological insight.<sup>22</sup> The argument is that timing – in the history of the cosmos, but also in individual human lives – fundamentally affects how Aphrodite is portrayed.

<sup>22</sup> New approaches, which explore how the gods worked beyond the social and political structures of the ancient city, are now beginning to emerge: see, for example, Kindt 2012.

In Chapter 3, Thomas traces the cosmogonic movement from conflict to consensus in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*. He identifies a surprisingly vast array of strategies used to secure an understanding between the newborn Hermes and his older half-brother Apollo, whose cows the baby god steals at the beginning of the poem. Self-help, deception, linguistic and paralinguistic humour, gift exchanges, an appeal to Zeus as father and cosmic ruler, formal arbitration, legal formulae, and even some aspects of interstate diplomacy all play a part in establishing good relations between the divine siblings. Thomas takes a broadly historicist approach, not only by identifying ancient techniques of conflict resolution (and associated ancient patterns of emotion), but also by taking into account a likely context for the composition of the hymn: performance at Olympia, where Hermes and Apollo shared an altar. He then investigates how the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* stole from its older poetic ‘brother’, the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. The consecutive placement of the two hymns in the medieval manuscripts reflects, in his reading, a close engagement not only in the Alexandrian reception but at the time of composition and performance. What is more, the intertextual relationship between the two hymns is itself characterised by a movement from conflict, or rather one-upmanship, to compromise and accommodation – particularly concerning the lyre.

Apollo’s lyre becomes an important instrument of peace and harmony on Olympus (as the end of the first book of the *Iliad* demonstrates), and music performs a similar role among people on earth. The second section in this volume focuses on the mortal descendants of the gods, and more specifically on the heroes who fought at Troy, asking two related questions: how heroic conflicts are presented in poetry, and how they are received in the context of early performances. In Chapter 4, Kelly offers a detailed reading of *Iliad* 23, arguing that the book has not received convincing treatment in scholarship. Often dismissed as an interlude, the Funeral Games for Patroclus offer an extended reflection on the main theme explored in the poem: Achilles’ anger. Kelly suggests that the sheer scale of the games, as well as their place in the poem, clearly signal their importance in the architecture of the *Iliad*. He then offers an investigation of how Achilles negotiates rank, personal merit, and distribution of prizes at the funeral for his comrade. Several details suggest that he still has not relinquished his anger (and the beginning of Book 24 confirms that). More importantly, his behaviour shows just how difficult and precarious the basis for consensus can be: when Achilles needs to exercise the same kind of regulatory power which Agamemnon so badly abused in Book 1, his own decisions seem far from straightforward. As we reach the