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Homer: The Very Idea. By JAMES J. PORTER. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021. Pp. vii + 277. Cloth, \$27.50. ISBN-13: 978-0-226-67589-3.

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Porter reimagines the boundaries of Classical reception by examining the constructions of Homer as an idea and the reception of the epics. The goal of this study isn't to provide an answer to the Homeric question of who wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* but to explore the sources that have constructed Homer's identity and contributed to the mystique surrounding him. Porter successfully argues that the sources and traditions surrounding Homer reflect a cultural product and not one rooted in historicity. In other words, identifying the points in time that Homer's identity was fixed reflects the cultural emphasis in literature and art of the time.

The book is organized into five chapters that are titled with Homeric questions of interest for each one: 1) Why Homer? 2) Who was Homer? 3) Apotheosis or Apostasy? 4) What did Homer see? and 5) Why War? In chapter one, Porter begins with an exploration on the reasons why Homer has and continues to incite the imagination of the literary world while implying that Homer has been constructed as the founder of the Western literary tradition instead of actually being it. Porter's strongest and most provocative assertion in this section is that Homer is very much alive in our modern literary world, but that the narrative that Western Civilization began with him is very much dead. In the next chapter, Porter demonstrates that visual depictions of Homer throughout antiquity and modernity are reflective of the culture that produced them. Porter argues that visual representations exemplify a desire to encapsulate Homer as an idea while simultaneously reducing him to nothing by disregarding any historicity.

The third chapter challenges notions of Homer's unwavering divine-literary status in the West by providing literary evidence that debases Homer's cultural status. Porter assumes the reader reveres Homer and establishes Homer's divine status through physical evidence such as frescoes and statues. Yet, Porter provides literary evidence to demonstrate criticisms surrounding Homer primarily through the responses of classical philosophers such as Plato, Xenophanes, and Aristotle - classical writers who viewed Homer as morally and spiritually debasing. Finally, the last two chapters deal less with the reception of Homer and focus on how the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have inspired different forms of scholarship. Chapter 4 dives into the myth and historical reality of Troy and the interpretation the epics have inspired in the public and academic imagination. Chapter 5 takes a closer look at the epics to explore why the aspects of war in the poem have been neglected by the literary world.

Taken as a whole, Porter's book successfully demonstrates the value that is to be gained from reception studies while challenging notions that reception may only be reserved for literary texts. Porter is concerned with Homer's reception not as an individual, but as an idea that has been exploited to almost legitimize and validate the cultural goals of writers, sculptors, philosophers, and painters. Porter doesn't merely identify these fascinations but also argues what the greater implications are. For example, he effectively argues that "The Apotheosis of Homer" by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres epitomizes the formidable desire to cling onto an idea of Homer while exposing the reality that no fixed or historical reality of Homer will ever exist.

Yet, Porter's end product often reads as disorganized and as a hasty amalgamation of evidence. By not emphasizing a certain time period, Porter inevitably provides a disarray of examples that don't read as connected by a certain theme, as he would hope, but rather as handpicked to serve his argument. There is no unity in the book and the reader often is left scrambling to understand why evidence from antiquity is emphasized in one section and not modernity, or vice-versa, for example. The predicament is further highlighted by the book being splint into themes and not any form of chronology that would provide a single narrative of a historical time period. The book seeks to be expansive, but it is not possible to overview all the

Homeric material spanning from antiquity to modernity in a single study, despite claiming the ambition to do so.

Overall, the book should be taken as introductory material for the study of reception as research in the field of Classics. Porter's methods carry potential for other reception studies. Despite the hasty arrangement, *Homer: The Very Idea* demonstrates that traditional narratives of knowledge that Homer as an idea produces can be identified and explained through a critical lens. Porter refrains from providing a grand narrative for Homer's reception and illuminates the complexities and nuances of any singular interaction with Homer. The book raises more questions than it answers but it nonetheless can serve as a point of departure for a more time-specific and theme-specific study into the idea of Homer. What is most compelling about Porter's study is his ability to breakdown traditional narratives of Homer tied to the founding of the Western literary tradition as products of later cultural ideals while simultaneously demonstrating that Homer's value in the past and present culture is his ability to produce said culture. In other words, Porter doesn't kill Homer's place in the literary world but locates the place he demands in the field of Classical reception.