

Ransom, Revenge, and  
Heroic Identity in the  
*Iliad*

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# Contents

<i>Preface and Acknowledgments</i>	page vii
INTRODUCTION <b>Compensation and Heroic Identity</b>	1
CHAPTER 1 <b>Ransom and Revenge: Poetics and Politics of Compensation</b>	13
CHAPTER 2 <b>Agamemnon and Chryses: Between King and Father</b>	40
CHAPTER 3 <b>The Quarrel: Men Who Would Be King</b>	54
CHAPTER 4 <b>The Embassy to Achilles: In the Name of the Father</b>	71
CHAPTER 5 <b>Achilleus and Priam: Between King and Father</b>	109
CHAPTER 6 <b>Unlimited <i>Poinē</i>: Poetry as Practice</b>	134
APPENDIX 1 <b>Catalog of Compensation Themes</b>	147
APPENDIX 2 <b>Arrangement of Compensation Themes</b>	179
<i>Notes</i>	183
<i>Abbreviations</i>	215
<i>References</i>	217
<i>Index of Homeric Passages</i>	229
<i>General Index</i>	233

INTRODUCTION

# Compensation and Heroic Identity

If we accept this book [*Iliad* 9] as original, we must regard Achilles as really inexorable . . .

Walter Leaf

Book 9 is, in the final analysis, the diamond in the jewel studded crown of Homer.

Wolfgang Schadewaldt

The embassy to Achilles in *Iliad* Book 9 has probably sparked more commentary and lively debate than any other passage in the poem.<sup>1</sup> The events themselves unfold straightforwardly enough. Nightfall at the end of Book 8 finds the Achaians hemmed in around their ships, desperate for a reprieve from Hektor's onslaught, and the Trojans camped on the plain, hopeful of victory on the coming day. As Book 9 opens, Agamemnon is urging the dispirited Achaians to beat an inglorious retreat. At Nestor's prompting, he determines instead to solicit Achilles' return by offering him goods, including Briseis, the girl whom the Greek commander had taken by force. Three emissaries – Odysseus, Phoinix, and Aias – convey the offer of goods and entreat the angry hero to reenter the fighting. Achilles refuses. Upon returning to Agamemnon's shelter, Odysseus declares the mission failed: "[Achilleus] refuses you and refuses your gifts" (9.679). And so the embassy and the Book conclude without advancing the course of the war significantly.<sup>2</sup>

*Iliad* Book 9 is widely regarded in contemporary Homeric scholarship as the interpretive key to the poem, the linchpin to its plot and tragic vision.<sup>3</sup> But Book 9 has not always been held in such esteem. In fact, the

consensus that it is pivotal emerged out of a debate over whether it is even fully integrated into the poem and, if so, what it contributes.<sup>4</sup> The history of the so-called Homeric question will be familiar to many readers, but it is worth revisiting briefly because it elucidates a thematic link between compensation and heroic identity. Moreover, it furnishes an account of how a prevailing modern conception of Achilles' heroic identity and, by extension, Homer's peerless ingenuity evolved.<sup>5</sup>

Difficulty with Book 9 arises primarily from a seeming contradiction between the events of the embassy and Achilles' words the next day, in Books 11 and 16. There he claims he is still awaiting supplication, gifts, and the return of Briseis and, further, that he would have already returned to the fighting had Agamemnon treated him kindly (11.609–10; 16.84–86 and 16.69–73). The Alexandrian scholars, the earliest text critics of Homer, did not detect any inconsistency between these passages. At least they did not betray as much by marking the lines in question as spurious. The apparent contradiction has, however, attracted the attention of Analysts, scholars who attempt to isolate a putative ur-text of the *Iliad* from subsequent accretions. Walter Leaf, for example, declares Achilles' words in Book 11 “meaningless” in light of the embassy's supplication; Gilbert Murray likewise judges them incongruous with Agamemnon's offer of “princely atonement” in Book 9.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, on the premise that the embassy conveys supplication and compensation, Analysts have maintained that Book 9 cannot be integrated satisfactorily into the *Iliad*.<sup>7</sup> They therefore banish it from reconstructions of the ur-text, or Wrath poem.

Since Book 9 has traditionally been a target of Analytic criticism, it has also become central to Unitarians, critics who maintain that the text is the unified creation of one poet. Unitarian scholars have now and again launched impassioned assaults against the *effect* of the Analytic method. John Scott epitomized their sentiments when he wrote, “There can be no Homeric scholarship, no literary appreciation under such [Analytic] leadership, for Homer ceases to be a poet and his work poetry.”<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, Unitarians have conceded a discrepancy between Book 9 and Books 11 and 16, and have explained it as having occurred diachronically in the work of the same poet.<sup>9</sup> Ironically, like their Analyst forebears, they use Homer's presumed literacy to explain his errors. In this stratagem they are sometimes joined by oralists who use Homer's orality to the same end,<sup>10</sup> and by Neoanalytic scholars,<sup>11</sup> who accept that Homer draws on so many and so varied sources that narrative inconsistency is unavoidable. More generally, scholars who contend for the artistic unity of the poem have concluded that the contradiction is only apparent, resulting from a change

in the Achaians' circumstances,<sup>2</sup> diminution of Achilles' anger,<sup>3</sup> or the embassy's failure to meet Achilles' expectations.<sup>4</sup> Defense of Book 9 and the integrity of the Homeric poems has emerged most influentially, however, as an argument from unity of narrative design. In his seminal work *Homer and the Heroic Tradition*, Cedric Whitman argues that the *Iliad* evinces a structural principle of concentricity known as ring-composition.<sup>5</sup> He accordingly arranges narrative units to show balanced symmetries and antitheses in the poem. On this basis Whitman claims that Books 9 and 16 are not in conflict but are, rather, associated by ring-composition: Book 16 completes and reverses Book 9.<sup>6</sup>

The conviction that Book 9 is integral to a coherent *Iliad* has, however, presented critics with an interpretive crux: what does the embassy scene contribute? The poet must have Achilles refuse the embassy's offer or the poem would be truncated by a premature reconciliation. Insofar as scholarly tradition presumes that Agamemnon offers compensation, the enigma with which critics have had to contend is why Achilles refuses it. Finding no material explanation for Achilles' behavior, Homer's modern interpreters have by and large turned to subjective or moral explanations. Whitman, for example, reads the *Iliad* as a study in heroic psychology and the characters as embodying different character types: Achilles reifies essential values and the human spirit and, accordingly, rejects material compensation; Agamemnon presents his opposite – psychology bound by material value.<sup>7</sup> On this view, the Achilles of Book 9 faces an ethical dilemma, and the poet is chiefly interested in the psychology of the hero's wrath. The enigma is thus resolved with an appeal to the "peculiar lot and sensitivity" of Achilles.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the embassy scene's contribution is, paradoxically, Achilles' refusal of the embassy's offer. To be sure, some critics have suggested that Achilles rejects Agamemnon's compensation because it is flawed by the condition of subordination that he attaches, which could only inflame Achilles' ego.<sup>9</sup> This approach, however, remains inherently psychological, and it leaves the relationship between the compensation and the attendant condition vague.<sup>20</sup>

The conclusion that an overwhelming majority of contemporary scholars have reached is that Achilles' refusal is unreasonable – in other words, incompatible with the social rules and values of Homeric society.<sup>21</sup> Achilles' refusal of Agamemnon's gifts has, moreover, been construed as a renunciation of material compensation for honor altogether. Further, his supposed rejection of material compensation has been perceived as an expression of his disillusionment with the materialist values of his society and with an established code of behavior often identified as the

heroic code. Accordingly, prevailing opinion either judges Achilles culpable for failing to abide by the code<sup>22</sup> or, more commonly, valorizes him as a champion of essential value.<sup>23</sup> Either way, he is regarded as alienated from the beliefs and values of heroic society. Critics have even identified Achilles' refusal of Agamemnon's gifts in Book 9 qua refusal of the heroic conception of honor as Homer's great contribution to the *Iliad*:

[T]he analytical method gives us insight into how Homer transformed the character of Achilles from a rather simple person, angry over the loss of Briseis, who sulks in his tent until his friend is killed, and is ultimately forced to rejoin the heroic society he was angry with, to a man who is driven to question, and eventually to reject, the values upon which that society is based.<sup>24</sup>

In sum, a dispute over compositional integrity has led many critics who argue for the narrative coherence of the *Iliad* to defend Book 9 as making a fundamental contribution to the thematic development of the poem. At the same time, identification of Agamemnon's gifts as compensation has induced them by and large to interpret Achilles' refusal, and thus his heroic identity, in ethical and psychological terms. These convergent trends in Homeric studies have produced a vast body of scholarship that pronounces the embassy scene not just integral, but pivotal to our *Iliad*, in that it transforms an otherwise traditional hero into a nontraditional one, a traditional poet into a singular innovator who transcends poetic tradition, and a traditional poem into literature. Or as Jasper Griffin puts it, "The refusal of Achilles to yield is the central fact in the creation of the *Iliad* from the traditional plot of the hero's withdrawal and triumphant return."<sup>25</sup>

The foregoing survey of Homeric scholarship has offered a historical account of an approach to the *Iliad* that has been with us for a long time and has influenced academic and popular interpretation alike. Most of these views assume a common problem – "Achilles rejects material compensation" – and adopt subjective approaches to resolve it. As a result, an "essential" conception of Achilles' heroic identity has been all but naturalized for modern readers. This raises the question of to what extent mainstream twentieth-century scholarship on Achilles and a presumed crisis in his heroic identity imported a modern interest in psychology and romantic ideals of originality and, as a result, created a hero in our own image.<sup>26</sup> The logical conclusion of this approach seems to be that we share a fundamental worldview with Achilles and, by extension, with Homer: Achilles comes to represent "us"; Agamemnon

and the normative pressures of heroic society “them.” On this view, what “we” share with Homer and Achilles is a hierarchical valuation of the essential over the material and innovation over tradition. One must wonder, however, whether Homer or his audience would subscribe to either of those hierarchies.

Two objections come immediately to mind. The first is that the conventional claim that the epic poet sang the truth of a distant heroic past requires that he deny that he *ever* innovates.<sup>27</sup> And this assertion is no mere conceit; it is fundamental to the poet’s claim of authenticity and validity in an oral and traditional society. Thus, oralist approaches that build on the pioneering work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord offer a different and, to my mind, more satisfactory account of matters in that they take into consideration what a poet working within the system thinks he is doing.<sup>28</sup> Traditional poetry, of course, admits of change in language and content, but it does so, according to oralist interpretation, precisely because each performance entails a recomposition of the poet’s inherited material.<sup>29</sup> Instead of positing a hierarchical opposition between innovation and tradition, oralists contend that “innovation takes place within the tradition.”<sup>30</sup> And as a result “we can consider Homer a master poet *without* abandoning our belief that he works *within* a traditional performance medium.”<sup>31</sup>

A second objection is that, while there may be value in exploring the psychology of Homer’s characters, it is all but impossible to explore Homeric psychology apart from the sociocultural background of Homeric society.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, the critic cannot ascertain the nature of Achilles’ wrath and refusal of the embassy’s offer and cannot infer the extent to which Homer may privilege the essential over the material without knowing the vocabulary, forms, and social meanings of compensation in Homer. As important, one must also know what a slight is and whether domination is an expected social goal. Arthur Adkins’ work on honor and value in Homeric society laid indispensable semantic and social groundwork for investigating these questions.<sup>33</sup> Subsequent anthropological studies by Thomas Beidelman and Walter Donlan, among others, have shown that Homeric society comprises a fluid *timē* (honor)-based system in which rank is under constant negotiation and in which elite warriors try to establish status in relation to one another through agonistic exchange.<sup>34</sup> In such a fluid hierarchy, Agamemnon’s gifts may be understood as part of a strategy of domination: a “gift-attack.”<sup>35</sup> By showing that Achilles’ refusal is consistent with the status economies of heroic society, social-anthropological approaches have seriously undermined the

material/essential hierarchy as an explanation for Achilles' behavior. Oralist approaches have furthered understanding of these matters by pointing out profound connections between poetic and cultural themes in oral and traditional societies.<sup>6</sup>

This book attempts to advance the discussion of compensation and heroic identity in Homer along oralist and sociological lines. I take an interdisciplinary approach, commonly referred to as 'cultural poetics', that employs philology and analysis of oral poetics to distinguish traditional themes and formal patterns of compensation in Homer, narratology to expose the development of the theme in the *Iliad*, and anthropological models for analyzing the social meanings and politics of compensation in Homeric society. Further, this approach attempts to take account of poetic discourse and cultural history as reciprocal intertexts; that is, it takes performance of oral poetry seriously as one of several interested discourses competing to construct a social world.<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, this study first takes up the definitions and social meanings of compensation in the *Iliad*. Here we must reckon with Greek, for there is no single word in the Homeric vocabulary for compensation. There are several, however, that regularly signify compensatory exchange or that may do so in certain contexts. And as important, they operate within a coherent and unified system; hence we are justified in using the rubric compensation. Take, for example, the terms used for Agamemnon's offer in the embattled Book 9. Agamemnon calls the goods *apoina* (9.120), a word that, for the moment, shall remain untranslated because we have yet to establish its meaning. Odysseus refers to them as *dōra* (gifts, 9.261), as does Phoinix (9.35). Aias alludes to them, obliquely, as *poinë* (9.63 and 63), another word that shall remain untranslated for the reason just given. At no time, however, do the emissaries use Agamemnon's term, *apoina*. Achilles, for his part, says that he hates Agamemnon's *dōra* (gifts, 9.378). To further complicate matters, Achilles claims on the following afternoon that he is still awaiting supplication, appropriate treatment, the return of Briseis, and *dōra* (gifts, 16.86). That this sort of verbal precision and subtle cross-referencing are within the grasp of an orally composing poet and an aural audience has been well documented in previous oralist scholarship. Verbal imprecision at this critical juncture in the narrative is, moreover, highly unlikely, especially where it concerns compensation, a theme with which the poem begins and ends.

If *apoina*, *poinë*, and *dōra* mean the same thing – if they are formulaic alternatives for the same essential meaning and are also interchangeable in the Homeric social economy – we may conclude that Agamemnon

offers compensation for wrong done to Achilles, however flawed it may be by reason of the condition he attaches or the obligation the gifts impose. On this view, the embassy presents Achilles with a *candid* version of Agamemnon's offer and urges it upon him as acceptable by the standards of their society. Accordingly, Achilles' behavior in Book 9 may be explained as rejecting Agamemnon's offer of compensation against reason (as per the essentialist tradition); rejecting Agamemnon's offer of compensation because it contains an implicit gift attack to which the embassy is *oblivious*; or rejecting Agamemnon's offer of compensation because it contains an explicit gift attack in which the embassy is *openly complicitous*. But these explanations all prove unsatisfactory. The first fails to account for Achilles' apparent regression to materialism the next day. The second and the third fail to account for the embassy's pointed omission of Agamemnon's own assertion of authority over Achilles and the omission of his explicit term *apoina*, which one might reasonably expect to hear somewhere in the embassy speeches. The third is further belied by the persuasive force Phoinix and Aias can bring to bear on Achilles by appealing to friendship (*philotēs*), even after he exposes Agamemnon's stratagem.

If, on the other hand, *apoina*, *poinē*, and *dōra* do not mean the same thing in Homer and the heroic social economy, then the embassy is prevaricating. Or, put in social terms, the embassy attaches different and shifting definitions to Agamemnon's goods with a view to manipulating their symbolic function in a high-stakes game. If such is the case, as this book aims to demonstrate, the problem in Book 9 is not why Achilles refuses compensation, a term in any event too generic for the Homeric vocabulary, even if it can designate an underlying system. The problem is what Agamemnon, the embassy, and Achilles mean by the words they use and what the stakes in this tournament of definitions are. Only when this problem is resolved will we have a basis from which to analyze Achilles' rejection of Agamemnon's offer and the implications of that rejection for his heroic identity; for Achilles is as much a player in the game of definitions as any of the other characters.

Since internal characters – and indeed Iliadic tradition itself – compete to determine the meanings of compensation, the definitions and social meanings of compensation in the *Iliad* must be searched out first within the poem instead of being culled broadly from Archaic Greek poetry and society. Indeed, for the critic to impose composite terms and conventions on the *Iliad* would only implicate him or her in these contests. Moreover, although compensation as a social institution in Homeric society must

bear resemblance to a known system in Greek societies, the *Iliad* develops the theme to such an extent, and in such a way, that it does not simply reflect historical practice. For example, the Homeric topos of the suppliant exile has been recognized as a convenient narrative device for moving characters from one place to another;<sup>38</sup> hence it may present a poetic distortion of laws and procedures concerning exile for homicide in Archaic Greece. Further, since the *Iliad* refers infrequently to bloodshed outside of battle, the theme of compensation does not overlap significantly with that of manslaughter.<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, this study does not encompass the theme of the suppliant exile in the *Iliad* or compensation in Archaic Greek poetry and practice in general. In sum, the *Iliad* develops the theme of compensation programmatically enough that it may not be conflated with other poetic traditions or historical institutions and then interpreted through the lens of the composite. Where they seem truly apposite, however, narrative, poetic, and legal traditions from the ancient Mediterranean are marshaled as *comparanda*, and Archaic Greek poetic traditions and cultural history as *intertexts*.

For these reasons, the approach here taken begins by analyzing traditional themes in the *Iliad* in which terms signifying compensation regularly appear.<sup>40</sup> But definitions of key terms may not be readily found in the major episodes involving Achilles where they are so hotly contested. Instead, Iliadic typologies are most firmly established in a series of discrete themes that depict unproblematic exchanges of compensation. A catalog of these scenes appears in appendix 1 and is cross-referenced in the text (numbers in brackets refer the reader to catalog entries). These discrete themes are distributed broadly throughout the *Iliad* and are key structuring devices in the poem. It is against the background of these self-contained scenes that Homer projects the narrative of loss and compensation involving Achilles here called the ‘monumental compensation theme’.

Chapter 1 of this book furnishes a detailed formal description of discrete compensation themes in the *Iliad* and analysis of how compensation functions in the social economy of Homeric society. Chapters 2 through 5 examine the monumental compensation theme as unfolding against that background. These two operations, representing synchronic and diachronic analysis from the standpoint of reception, enable the modern reader to map the synthetic experience of an oral/aural performance of the *Iliad* onto the text. The terms ‘synchronic’ and ‘diachronic’ are here used in two ways. Synchronic refers to the intra- and intertextual poetic systems as well as to the generalized sociocultural knowledge a Homeric audience would draw on during a real-time performance of the poem. Diachronic refers

to the relation of a given performance of the *Iliad* to all other previous performances. The term diachronic is also used to denote the chronological cross-references an audience would make from one episode to the next during a single performance of the poem. In this book, I do not attempt to uncover a historical development of the compensation theme in (diachronic) Iliadic tradition, but instead explore how it is deployed at the textualization stage of the poem.

A Homeric audience, intimately familiar with the epic repertoire and with other poetic traditions, would be able to make synchronic and diachronic comparisons, from the opening scene on, because the narrative is inherited and traditional. In fact, the traditional audience of an oral performance would have a store of poetic and practical knowledge that Richard Martin describes as “the mental equivalent of a CD-ROM player full of phrases and scenes.”<sup>41</sup> As a result, they could intuitively make inferences about meaning and cultivate expectations of the narrative and its traditional themes, which the poet may fulfill or subvert. Comparing and contrasting Homeric compensation themes with their own real-life institutions, rituals, and practices would further enhance audience expectation and enjoyment of the performance. Modern readers, however, lack the traditional and cultural nexus to read Homeric epic both synchronically and diachronically, to make formal and social inferences, and to cultivate thematic expectations, all *intuitively*. The oralist method adopted here – analyzing the (diachronic) story of Achilles’ wrath against a (synchronic) background of discrete themes – is thus an attempt to supply through close reading some of what escapes intuition.

In chapter 1 it is shown that the discrete themes present compensation as a coherent system that is thematically and semantically unified. The thematic unity of the social system is in fact mirrored in the semantic unity of the words that most frequently signify it: *apoina* and *poinē*. The similarity between the two Greek words is no coincidence, since both derive from a single Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root, *\*k<sup>w</sup>ey(H<sub>1</sub>)*.<sup>42</sup> The Homeric term *apoina* denotes ‘ransom’, and *poinē* ‘reparation’ and ‘revenge’ alike. The Homeric terms are here employed to avoid the conflation that inheres in the English term ‘ransom’, which can mean both redemption of a captive and the blood price paid by a homicide. The term ‘compensation’ is used to refer to the unified system.

*Apoina* (ransom) and *poinē* (reparation or revenge) are not, however, simply conflated in Homeric usage. The *Iliad* tradition exploits their transparent etymological unity to present a unified theme, and the distinction between the two words to present two consistent and firmly demarcated

formal types. The difference in Homeric *apoina* and *poinë* is not merely semantic, for the two types will be seen to have significantly different symbolic functions in the status economy of Homeric society. Payments of *apoina*, for example, do not entail the same loss of status as payments of *poinë*. We may thus infer that when Agamemnon designates the goods he offers in Book 9 *apoina*, it is part of a rhetorical strategy for negotiating his and Achilles' relative status. Critics have, on the one hand, largely ignored the unified social and semantic network, treating *apoina* and *poinë* as separate objects of inquiry. At the same time, however, they have selectively failed to recognize the Homeric distinction between the two words, presuming that Agamemnon's use of *apoina* in Book 9 is just another way of saying *poinë*.<sup>43</sup>

Chapters 2 through 5 reveal that each episode in the poem's monumental compensation theme involves *apoina* (ransom). In fact, the principal conflict of the poem, between Agamemnon and Achilles, centers on definitions and in Book 9 turns on the distinction between *apoina* and *poinë*. Compensation thus emerges as the locus of a struggle for dominance based on a strategy of competing definitions and aggressive arrogation of roles. Although Achilles feels he is owed *poinë* for the seizure of Briseis, Agamemnon offers him *apoina*. Accordingly, Achilles in Books 11 and 16 can legitimately discount the previous offer, since Agamemnon's gifts are inevitably unacceptable in form and function. Further, the compensation theme is developed in the poem to present Agamemnon's refusal of Chryses' *apoina* as epitomizing a social dysfunction and as initiating a sequence of rejections of *apoina*, including Achilles' refusal of Agamemnon's in Book 9 and Hektor's in Book 22, with increasingly disastrous consequences. The exchange of *apoina* for Hektor's body in Book 24 emerges as a real resolution to this social condition. Hence, Priam's *apoina* play a more crucial role than is commonly supposed.

Chapter 6 turns to the cultural framework in which the thematics of compensation in the *Iliad* operate. It should be seen that Homer explores Achilles' wrath not as an existential or ethical phenomenon that turns on his rejection of material compensation and the materialist values of heroic society, but as a reaction to perceived manipulation and abuse of a social system that is otherwise acceptable to him. As a result, the presumed hierarchy of essential over material and innovation over tradition erodes as an explanation for Achilles' behavior and for Homer's poetry. On this view, the quarrel, its aftermath, and its ultimate resolution have less to do with heroic psychology than with a conflict between competing visions of the social world and less to do with Achilles' essential identity than

with competing constructions of the hero's thematic and cultural identity, both *in the Iliad* and *by the Iliad* through the very fact of its performance.<sup>44</sup>

The development of the monumental theme allows us to infer an alignment between compensation and the Greek cultural opposition of cunning intelligence and force, or *mētis* and *biē*.<sup>45</sup> It is a cliché of Homeric interpretation that the *Iliad* is a poem of force. But, as we shall see, Achilles is responsible in Book 1 for an act of *mētis* (cunning intelligence) that controls the plot of the poem until Patroklos' death. His rejection of Agamemnon's *apoina* in Book 9 nonetheless aligns him thematically with ambiguous *biē* (force) that is gendered as feminine and associated with pursuit of extraordinary revenge, destruction of one's own people, and inversion of cultural order. In Book 24 it is only another act of extreme self-restraint on his part, which the poem figures as *mētis*, that allows closure to occur. On this view, the ransom of Hektor's corpse in the *Iliad* is, thematically, inversely related to the slaughter of the suitors in the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* can thus be seen to celebrate Achilles as a culture hero who ultimately mediates between *mētis* and *biē*, in contrast to Agamemnon explicitly and to Odysseus implicitly. And the poet performing the *Iliad* bestows on its hero the *poiñē* for his death that only epic song can give: *kleos apthiton* (unfading glory).

This brings us to the issue of oral performance of traditional poetry as social practice and, hence, to the relation between Homeric society and Greek societies. Recent research has compiled compelling evidence that Homeric epic integrates the race of heroes, by definition creatures of a paradigmatic dimension in the past, into a society sufficiently coherent to refract – not, I emphasize, reflect – a real world.<sup>46</sup> Even the inconsistencies Homeric society displays are not unlike systemic contradictions in real societies.<sup>47</sup> But the historical realities most closely approximated in Homeric institutions and relations are the subject of ongoing and lively debate.<sup>48</sup> For reasons I discuss subsequently, this study does not take up the search for a historical Homeric society. The reading of the *Iliad* offered here is, however, congruent with a growing body of scholarship that places the *textualization stage* of Homeric epic – an issue different from but related to that of a historical Homeric society – well into the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E.<sup>49</sup> It is also compatible with Gregory Nagy's evolutionary model of textualization, which posits a fluid state in the late eighth century, a more formative and Panhellenic stage from the eighth to the sixth centuries, and a definitive stage in the sixth century.<sup>50</sup>

On this view, Homeric society is sufficiently coherent to be plausible and is, moreover, recognizable for the Homeric audience. It is not fictive

and freestanding, but it is also not a reflection of any single stage of Greek social formation. In fact, if the oral textualization model is correct or if the Homeric poems are Panhellenic texts, they *cannot* reflect a particular historical period or localized institutions and procedures (e.g., for selection of officials and communal decision making, written laws, or other constitutional features that developed in seventh and sixth-century *poleis*).<sup>3</sup> Kurt Raafflaub accordingly describes Homeric society as Panhellenic in the (synchronic) sense that “it allow[s] broad recognition and identification” but is not, for that, “more fictitious or less historical.”<sup>4</sup> I do not mean to say that Homeric society, even insofar as it is coherent and recognizable, *corresponds* to a social reality known to the poet and his audience, Panhellenic or otherwise. It is instead an interested ideological refraction, and therefore represents not real (historical) conditions of existence but the imaginary relation of a group to those conditions.<sup>5</sup> Put another way, a performance of the *Iliad* represents an attempt to appropriate a heroic past and to reproduce a recognizable heroic social world that may be deployed in the competition to construct a Panhellenic social world and the Homeric audience as social subjects.<sup>6</sup> And though the interests that Homeric epic asserts are those of an elite, the perspectives of elites are not necessarily monolithic; they may accommodate competing interests, especially in periods of conflict over social formation. But any conclusions to be drawn here are necessarily tentative and speculative.

And so, to return to the topic of this book, we may say that the *Iliad* deploys the compensation theme in the construction of heroic identity and, by extension, of Greek social identity, through critical appropriation of Iliadic tradition. Inasmuch as traditional poetry is continually recomposed in performance to fit the audience, our *Iliad* brings to light some of the social concerns of poet and audience during the textualization stage of the poem. Indeed, the poem itself emerges as a performance medium for managing social tension through ritual reenactment of archetypal events and refraction of historical realities.