SPACE AND TIME IN ANCIENT GREEK NARRATIVE

ALEX C. PURVES

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SPACE AND TIME IN ANCIENT GREEK NARRATIVE

In this wide-ranging survey of ancient Greek narrative from archaic epic to classical prose, Alex C. Purves shows how stories unfold in space as well as in time. She traces a shift in authorial perspective, from a godlike overview to the more focused outlook of human beings caught up in a developing plot, inspired by advances in cartography, travel, and geometry. Her analysis of the temporal and spatial dimensions of ancient narrative leads to new interpretations of important texts by Homer, Herodotus, and Xenophon, among others, showing previously unnoticed connections between epic and prose. Drawing on the methods of classical philology, narrative theory, and cultural geography, Purves recovers a poetics of spatial representation that lies at the core of the Greeks' conception of their plots.

Alex C. Purves is assistant professor of classics at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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For Lionel and Orlando

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INTRODUCTION: THE PERFECT SURVEYOR

> A Poet is as much to say as a maker. And our English name well conformes with the Greeke word: for of ποιεῖν to make, they call a maker Poeta. . . .
>
> Otherwise how was it possible that Homer being but a poore priuate man, and as some say, in his later age blind, should so exactly set foorth and describe, as if he had bene a most excellent Captaine or Generall, the order and array of battels, the conduct of whole armies, the sieges and assaults of cities and townes? Or as some . . . perfect Surueyour in Court, the order, sumptuousnesse and magnificence of royal bankets, feasts, weddings, and enteruewes?
>
> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*

THE ARTE OF ENGLISH POESIE OPENS BY PRAISING HOMER AND HIS ability to "set forth and describe" the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, comparing it to the practical abilities of a general or a "perfect surveyor."[1] Having commented on the etymology of the Classical word for poet, Puttenham goes on to describe poetry in terms that relate to the practice of making, marking, planning, and measuring out an object or place. The conceit of the poet as a perfect surveyor is a useful one with which to introduce the topic of this book, for it draws a parallel between narrative and place, asking us to imagine the poem as a kind of literary landscape that we might survey in our mind's eye, as if it were a vista. My concern in this book will be to try to articulate the different forms that such a "view" of a plot might take.

I begin in this introduction by setting out some of the ways in which Homer encourages his audience to "see" his poem. In the chapters that follow, I argue that in the movement from Homeric epic to Classical prose it is possible to identify two sets of competing discourses informing the notion of a literary work's shape, space, or view. The first aspires to the fantastic (and, in human terms, impossible) way that the Muses are imagined to see in the *Iliad.* This viewpoint can be labeled protocartographic because of its affinities not only to early versions of *mappae mundi*, such as the Shield of Achilles, but also to the invention of cartography in the Greek world and, in particular, its uses in literature from the sixth and fifth centuries BCE.[2] The second discourse is more closely aligned with prose and the practice of investigating through walking. It takes the road as its dominant metaphor and sets forth a view of the plot that is sequential rather than simultaneous, requiring time to reach the end. I call this second way of seeing countercartographic, because it thematically and sometimes literally rejects the poetics of the map.[3]

---

[1] Puttenham 1988, 1.1–2.

Puttenham was not alone in his fascination with the "blind" Homer's ability to open up a vista for us, to create a poetic landscape that is viewable in the mind's eye.[4] In the fifth century, Metrodorus of Lampsacus famously saw the *Iliad* as a model of the cosmos, with the heroes standing in for its different spatial components.[5] Thus the chase of Hector by Achilles around the walls of Troy could be conceptualized, as if one were standing back and looking at the poem from a distance, as the circuit of the moon and sun around the earth. Later on, Crates understood the *Iliad* to have the form of a sphere. By this he meant not just that the sphere was a dominant motif in the narrative, but that it was intrinsic to the shape of the poem itself.[6]

Crates' and Metrodorus's interpretations of Homer may exist on the fringes of mainstream ancient literary criticism, yet they express the popular idea that a poem can be viewed in the mind's eye as if it were a landscape or a picture of the whole. The sentiment is clearly articulated by Aristotle (*Poet.* 23.1459a30–4):

> διὸ ὥσπερ εἴπομεν ἤδη καὶ ταύτῃ θεσπέσιος ἂν φανείη Ὅμηρος παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους, τῷ μηδὲ τὸν πόλεμον καίπερ ἔχοντα ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος

---

[2] On the Shield of Achilles as an early map, cf. Hardie 1985; Dilke 1985, 20, 55–6; Harley and Woodward 1987, 130–2.

[3] The concepts of the protocartographic and countercartographic viewpoints were suggested to me by Karen Bassi, and I have used them throughout the book as a means of organizing the difference between two competing ways of seeing in early Greek narrative.

[4] On the difference between things perceived with the mind's eye and the bodily eye, see Bühler 1990, 137–57.

[5] The gods represented the "arrangement of the elements" (στοιχείων διακοσμήσεις) relating to the human body (such as the liver and spleen). DK 61A3. See further Califf 2003.

[6] See Porter 1992 for discussion and sources.

> ἐπιχειρῆσαι ποιεῖν ὅλον· λίαν γὰρ ἂν μέγας καὶ οὐκ εὐσύνοπτος ἔμελλεν ἔσεσθαι ὁ μῦθος, ἢ τῷ μεγέθει μετριάζοντα καταπεπλεγμένον τῇ ποικιλίᾳ.
>
> Just as we said before, Homer would appear to speak in a divine way (*thespesios*) compared to the rest, in that he did not attempt to make the war a whole, even though it had a beginning and an end. For the plot would otherwise have been too large and not easily seen at one time (*ouk eusynoptos*), or, if scaled down in length, too closely woven with detail (*poikilia*).

Later readers of the *Iliad* subscribed to a similar concept. As Goethe wrote to Schiller in the spring of 1798 (Von Sachsen 1893, bd. 13, 140):[7]

> Your letter, as you wished, has found me amidst the *Iliad*, to which I always gladly return, as one always will, exactly as if one found oneself in a hot air balloon, held aloft over all earthly things and truly in the intervening space in which the gods travel to and fro. . . .

In 1775, Robert Wood wrote a treatise entitled *On the Original Genius of Homer*, in which he also compared his vantage point as a reader to that of the Homeric gods (135):

> When I attempted to follow the steps of these poetical journies [of the gods], in my eye, from Mount Ida, and other elevated situations on the Aeolian and Ionian side of the Aegean sea; I could take in so many of them as to form a tolerable picture of the whole.

While Richard Jebb in "A Tour in the Troad" (1883) comments on Homer's almost supernatural ability to conjure up an entire world before our eyes, by placing the poet in the role of a god looking down from a great height (520):[8]

> And it is in taking a bird's-eye view from a height, not in looking around one on the level, that the comprehensive truth of Homeric topography is most vividly grasped. Homer is as his own Zeus or his own Poseidon, not as one of the mortals warring on the lower ground.

---

[7] Cf. Goethe's description of "true poetry" in Trunz 1981: "Wie ein Luftballon hebt sie uns mit dem Ballast, der uns anhängt, in höhere Regionen, und läßt die verwirrten Irrgänge der Erde in Vogelperspektive vor uns entwickelt daliegen." Schadewaldt 1959, 368.

[8] I thank James Porter for alerting me to the passages from Wood and Jebb here, as well as the Nietzsche passage that follows. See further Porter 2004.

These readers either implicitly or explicitly take their cue from the Olympians who appear to watch the Achaeans and Trojans simultaneously and from a single point of view at certain key moments in the *Iliad* (8.51–2, 11.80–3; 13.10–14):[9]

> αὐτὸς δ᾽ ἐν κορυφῇσι καθέζετο κύδει γαίων,
> εἰσορόων Τρώων τε πόλιν καὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν.
>
> [Zeus] himself sat on the peak of the mountain, glorying in his splendor,
> looking down on the city of the Trojans and the ships of the Achaeans
>
> ὁ δὲ νόσφι λιασθεὶς
> τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάνευθε καθέζετο κύδει γαίων,
> εἰσορόων Τρώων τε πόλιν καὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν
> χαλκοῦ τε στεροπήν, ὀλλύντας τ᾽ ὀλλυμένους τε.
>
> [Zeus] having turned away
> sat apart from the other gods glorying in his splendor,
> looking down on the city of the Trojans and the ships of the Achaeans,
> the flashing of weapons, and men killing and being killed.
>
> Οὐδ᾽ ἀλαοσκοπιὴν εἶχε κρείων ἐνοσίχθων·
> καὶ γὰρ ὃ θαυμάζων ἧστο πτόλεμόν τε μάχην τε
> ὑψοῦ ἐπ᾽ ἀκροτάτης κορυφῆς Σάμου ὑληέσσης
> Θρηϊκίης· ἔνθεν γὰρ ἐφαίνετο πᾶσα μὲν Ἴδη,
> φαίνετο δὲ Πριάμοιο πόλις καὶ νῆες Ἀχαιῶν.
>
> Neither did the mighty shaker of the earth keep blind watch
> for he sat marveling at the fighting and the battle,
> high up on the loftiest peak of woody Samos,
> in Thrace. From that point all of Ida was visible,
> and the city of Priam and the ships of the Achaeans were visible.

This is similar to Hesiod's account of how Zeus sees in the *Works and Days:* πάντα ἰδὼν Διὸς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ πάντα νοήσας ("The eye of Zeus sees all things and notices all things").[10]

Clearly, there is an element of fantasy at play here. Homer is not divine, yet these authors hint at the possibility that the poet is able to present the topography of his plot synoptically because he has some kind of special access to the way that the immortals see. This is also the impression that Aristotle gives when discussing the *Iliad* in the *Poetics*, as we saw a few pages earlier, when he called Homer divine in speech (θεσπέσιος) for his ability to make the poem "easily seen at one time" (εὐσύνοπτος). One might note briefly that it is in fact quite difficult to form a clear mental picture of the scenes taking place on the Trojan plain in the poem.[11] Yet the idea that the *Iliad* really did present itself as a perfectly surveyable whole was pervasive enough for Nietzsche to refute it emphatically in his inaugural lecture on Homer and Classical Philology, delivered at the University of Basel in 1869 (Kennedy 1924: 164–5):

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[9] Cf. Scodel 2008, 123. At *Il.* 13.3–9 Zeus turns his eyes away from the battle to look toward distant lands; at *Il.* 15.4–12, he wakes up and immediately surveys the scene on the battlefield, taking in large- and small-scale events.

[10] Hes. *Op.* 267–9. Cf. M. L. West 1978, ad loc.; Sol. 13.17 states that Zeus oversees the end of all things (Ζεὺς πάντων ἐφορᾷ τέλος).

> The design of an epic such as the *Iliad* is not an entire whole, not an organism; but a number of pieces strung together, a collection of reflections arranged in accordance with aesthetic rules. It is certainly the standard of an artist's greatness to note what he can take in with a single glance (*zugleich mit einem Gesamtblick überschauen*) and set out in rhythmical form. The infinite profusion of images and incidents (*Bildern und Szenen*) in the Homeric epic must force us to admit that such a wide range of vision (*einen solchen Gesamtblick*) is next to impossible.

Nietzsche challenges the myth that the Homeric epic can somehow be seen in its entirety in a single glance, although he acknowledges the appeal of this concept. It might even be said that Homer, through passages such as the invocation to the Muses before the Catalogue of Ships, is looking back to the possibility of an epic narrative that he himself is not capable of. As Andersson has remarked: "we might assume that [the gods'] constant view from above would provide some focus on the battlefield. It never does" (1976, 23). Yet it is hard to resist the allure of the god's-eye view in the *Iliad*. Because the poem repeatedly hints that others can view its "images and incidents" synoptically (the gods looking down from Ida, Samos, or Olympus; the Muses who inspire the poet; the Teichoskopia; Helen weaving her tapestry of the numerous battles between the Achaeans and the Trojans; the crafting of so many different scenes onto a single shield for Achilles), we are drawn into the illusion that, in our mind's eye, we – and "Homer" – actually do see the poem in that way.[12]

---

[11] Andersson states that "unsurveyability is . . . an inherent feature of the epic" (1976, 21). For an alternative assessment of the *Iliad*'s clarity of space, see Lowe 2000, 112–13. Thornton 1984, 150–63, gives excellent detail on the topography of the plain. I discuss the bird's-eye view in Homer in Ch. 1.

[12] As Nietzsche argued, the myth of "what Homer saw" is inextricably bound up with the myth of who "Homer" is. Unitarian readings are thus more susceptible to

This is a fascinating problem because it clarifies the relevance of topography and form to the unity of a poem at the same time as it suggests that a poem becomes thinkable, as a whole, by virtue of its being viewable.[13] As the examples from Puttenham, Wood, Jebb, and Aristotle indicate, the ideal of the perfectly shaped and viewable plot is expressed through an alliance of supernatural affinity and technical skill or craft.[14] The plot mirrors the viewpoint of the gods because the poet can be considered a "perfect surveyor" (Puttenham), at the same time as he can be commended for his sophistication in composing his story (Aristotle).

What Homer himself says about his own art in the invocation to the Muses before the Catalogue of Ships is that he has absolutely no (οὐδέ τι) access to all the things (πάντα) that the Muses see (*Il.* 2.484–6):

> Ἔσπετε νῦν μοι, Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ’ ἔχουσαι –
> ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαί ἐστε, πάρεστέ τε, ἴστέ τε πάντα,
> ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν –
> οἵ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοίρανοι ἦσαν·
>
> Tell me now Muses, who have your homes on Olympus –
> for you are goddesses, and are present, and know/have seen all things,
> while we hear only fame but know/have seen nothing at all –
> who were the leaders and the lords of the Achaeans.

This juxtaposition of microscopic and the macroscopic levels of detail (from *ti*, potentially the very smallest amount, to *panta*, the very largest) has a lot to do with how a particular scene or subject matter is visually

---

constructing the notion of a unitary and complete vision (poetic genius) coming from a single man. See further Notopoulos 1964, 57–9, who argues that the paratactic style of oral poetics "is an additive process and thus leads away from the organic concept of literature" embedded in Aristotle's notion of the *eusynoptic* (58).

[13] The remarks of Owen (1947, 188) are instructive: "The poet's method, just considered as a piece of literary engineering, may be described as the device of the single plane." Owen's plane overlaps with the Trojan plain (189: "we are thus enabled to see it all without straying from the battlefield"), leading to a point that is similar to Aristotle's in the *Poetics*. See further Auerbach [1953] 2003, 3–23 on the notions of background and foreground in Homeric style, and Ch. 1.

[14] *Poietês* is first used for the figure of the poet at Hdt. 2.53 (P. Murray 1996, 8, note 21). Some scholars argue that craft has little or no relevance to the Homeric poet (Svenbro 1976, 193–212; Ford 1992, 31–9; Finkelberg 1998, 100–30). Others see it as an important component of the poet's skill (M. L. West 1973, 179; P. Murray 1981, 98–9; Gentili 1988, 5–7, 236–7, note 4; Pratt 1993, 68, note 23; Nagy [1979] 1999, 296–300). What concerns me here is the clearly stated relationship between the epic *plot* and words to do with crafting or making (e.g., τεκταίνομαι, ἀρτύ[ν]ω, ὑφαίνω, τεύχω). Cf. *Il.* 3.212, 6.187, 357–8, 10.17–19; *Od.* 3.132, 152; 11.363–6, 368, 13.439, 14.131–2; 17.382–5, 24.197–8; Hes. fr. dub. 357 M–W.

framed. To be in control of one's literary landscape is also to be able to count up its elements and measure its distances and magnitudes. The finer the level of detail and complexity, the more *poikilos* (variegated) the view. This, in turn, slows down the time of the viewing and the tempo of the story line. If a narrator commits to this way of viewing, how then to fit the view of the whole into a limited frame? On the other hand, if one were to give an account of the whole, how would it be possible to do so except in the most general terms and without giving names and details? Homer acknowledges that it is possible for the Muses to see both the all and the detail at the same time, but he goes on in this passage to negate any possibility that *he* can narrate the *plêthus* (2.488), the great number of Achaeans who first came to Troy.

The terms of Homer's self-deprecation are suggestive. He proceeds to fashion a hypothetical part-mechanical, part-mathematical version of himself by multiplying and metallizing the ordinary aspects of his human body (*Il.* 2.488–90):

> πληθὺν δ᾽ οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ᾽ ὀνομήνω,
> οὐδ᾽ εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ᾽ εἶεν,
> φωνὴ δ᾽ ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη,
> εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι, Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
> θυγατέρες, μνησαίαθ᾽ ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον·
>
> I could not tell nor name the multitude,
> not even if I had ten tongues and ten mouths,
> an unbreakable voice, and a heart of bronze inside me,
> unless the Olympian Muses, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus,
> should bring to my mind how many men came under Troy.

Like the robotic girls in Hephaestus's workshop who are able to move untiringly and attend to the gods' every need (*Il.* 18.417–20), the poet uses metal to suggest perdurance but also a kind of supernatural artistry, where technical and magical skill converge in order to create a "heart of bronze."[15] The voice (*phônê*) is here described using the adjective "unbreakable" (*arrêktos*), which is used elsewhere in Homer only to refer to crafted objects – the gods' metal bonds, a rope (*peirar*), Aeolus's bronze wall, the Achaean wall – that need to be divinely made in order to be effective.[16] By attributing to himself a partly immortal, partly manufactured voice and heart, Homer attempts to bridge the gap between his own limited knowledge base and the ability to recount the vast mass (*plêthus*) of the Achaeans.

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[15] Cf. the fashioning of Pandora (Hes. *Theog.* 571–84; *Op.* 60–82).

[16] *Il.* 13.37, 360; 14.56, 68; 15.20; *Od.* 8.275; 10.4. The Achaean wall, the only object described as *arrêktos* but *not* made by the gods, fails to live up to its adjective (*Il.* 14.56).

There is more to be said about the confluence of the technical or practical arts and the supernatural in this key passage on Homeric *poêsis*. By imaginatively multiplying his body by ten, Homer attempts to quantify the *plêthus* using a simple principle of arithmetic. If the number of Achaeans were divided into ten sets that could be narrated simultaneously, would they then fit within the poet's artistic range? Could the vast number of men who first sailed to Troy be ordered and recounted if reconfigured within mathematical proportions? We should not be too quick to dismiss Homer's multiplication by ten here as only hyperbolic numbering or the magical use of a formulaic number.[17] The number ten *is* often a formulaic rather than a quantitative number in Homer, but in Book 2 it weaves its own intratextual thread.[18]

First, the recollection of the prophecy involving the snake swallowing nine birds indicates, for the first time in the poem, that the Achaeans are fated to take Troy "in the tenth year" (they are now in the ninth, 2.329). Second, Agamemnon tells Nestor that *if there were only ten* Achaeans like him they would have captured Troy long ago (2.372–4). This concept of numbering the Achaeans by the power of ten (especially in reference to their ability to take Ilium) develops a theme that Agamemnon set in motion earlier in the book, when he attempted to count up all the Achaeans by ordering them into tens (2.123–30):

> εἴ περ γάρ κ’ ἐθέλοιμεν Ἀχαιοί τε Τρῶές τε,
> ὅρκια πιστὰ ταμόντες, ἀριθμηθήμεναι ἄμφω,
> Τρῶας μὲν λέξασθαι ἐφέστιοι ὅσσοι ἔασιν,
> ἡμεῖς δ’ ἐς δεκάδας διακοσμηθεῖμεν Ἀχαιοί,
> Τρώων δ’ ἄνδρα ἕκαστοι ἑλοίμεθα οἰνοχοεύειν,
> πολλαί κεν δεκάδες δευοίατο οἰνοχόοιο.
> τόσσον ἐγώ φημι πλέας ἔμμεναι υἷας Ἀχαιῶν
> Τρώων, οἳ ναίουσι κατὰ πτόλιν·

---

[17] See Martin 1989, 224 on *Il.* 9.379–80. The number ten can impart the idea of impossibility (cf. *Il.* 8.418). On the notion of the formulaic or magical number, see Rubincam 2003, 449. Ford 1992, 79–82 discusses the impossibility of counting up to the amount that the Muses see with reference to Kant's mathematical sublime.

[18] The tenth day or year, incorporated into the model of "9 + 1" is a common epic device (e.g., *Il.* 1.54, 6.175, 9.479, 24.612; *Od.* 7.253, 9.83, 10.29, 12.447, 14.314; cf. M. L. West 1966, ad *Theog.* 636). Note that it occurs not only in the overall time frame of the *Iliad* but also in the days allotted for the burial of Hector (24.665, 785). In this light, it is interesting to observe that to reach the number ten (the tenth year, tenth day, etc.) is to reach the end.

> For if we both, Achaeans and Trojans, agreed
> to make faithful oaths and both have our numbers calculated –
> if as many Trojans as who live in the city were counted,
> and we Achaeans arranged ourselves into tens,
> then if we, each group of ten of us, chose a single man of the
> Trojans to pour our wine,
> still there would be many groups of ten left over without a wine
> steward.
> By that much I say the sons of the Achaeans outnumber
> the Trojans who inhabit the city.

Here, just as in Homer's invocation, dividing the number of Achaeans into tens is not enough to render them quantifiable. Their number is too large to be brought into an ordered proportion, as the similes comparing them to flies, leaves, and other uncountable things, as well as the resemblance of their number to sand or leaves elsewhere in Book 2, confirms.[19] In the end, although neither mathematics nor metal (nor even the two combined) adds up to a divine point of view ("*Not even if* I had ten tongues . . . and a heart of bronze"), they are still presented as the human poet's best resources at approximating one. The invocation to the Muses before the Catalogue of Ships makes clear that Homer is no immortal and will never see as the Muses do (2.486–7). Yet at the same time, it proposes solutions to Homer's poetic limitations through various technical and practical avenues.

Once Homer has dispensed with the idea of performing the *plêthus* by means of a quasi-mechanical superbody, he states that he will list instead the leaders and "all of the ships as well" (*Il.* 2.491–3):

> εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι, Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
> θυγατέρες, μνησαίαθ᾽ ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον·
> ἀρχοὺς αὖ νηῶν ἐρέω νῆάς τε προπάσας.

> Unless the Olympian Muses, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus,
> should bring to my mind how many men came under Troy.
> But I will tell of the leaders of the ships and all of the ships as well.

He then recites the Catalogue of Ships, a brilliant feat of memorization and enumeration whose arrangement traces a geographical route through mainland Greece.[20] Scholars have argued that this route works as a memory path that the poet is able to visualize and follow in the process of counting out the ships and their leaders in order (*katalegein*).[21]

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[19] *Il.* 2.87ff., esp. 455–83, 800.

[20] Giovannini 1969, 51–71; Kirk 1985, ad loc.

This is as close as Homer comes to translating the vision of the Muses into words, and his ordered partitioning and framing of their perspective within the catalogue form successfully imparts an impression of both the detail and the whole. Indeed, although the Muses saw much more, and – in this case – many more men, than Homer can put into speech, the Catalogue of Ships is already a considerable length. In the *Odyssey*, Homer occasionally indicates how long an unabridged translation of the Muses' vision might take to narrate or what it might sound like. Thus Odysseus is said to recount *everything* about his journey to Penelope (*katalexai hapanta*, *Od.* 23.309), fulfilling one fantasy of epic storytelling in the supernaturally long and magical night created by Athena.[22] Alternatively, the Sirens claim that they know everything (*idmen . . . pant' hossa*) that happened at Troy and everything else (*idmen d' hossa*) that happens on the broad earth, and that the traveler might hear them sing it and still return home happy to his family. But the rotting corpses on their island suggest, by contrast, a nightmarish outcome for humans who succumb to the Muses' vision (*Od.* 12.39–54, 166–200).

The same overdetermined sense of "all" is to be found in Herodotus's description of cartography (Hdt. 5.49: *hapasês*, *pasa*, *pantês*) and his description of Xerxes' political yearnings to subsume all (*panta*) the world under his domain (7.8γ.1–2). In Xenophon's *Anabasis*, the sheer number (*plêthos polu*, 3.2.16) of the king's men approaching in battle provides an overwhelming visual impact on the narrator, while in his *Oeconomicus* the ability to record the place of each thing (*hekastos*) in infinite detail offers the reader an idealized version of the *oikos* in its entirety. In each of these cases, as we will explore in the following chapters, a delicate balancing act is in play between achieving comprehensiveness and unity, on the one hand, and imparting detail and variation, on the other.

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[21] Minchin 2001, 84–7. On the catalogue as "ordered enumeration," see Minton 1960, 1962, as a "full, exact account" Bakker 1997a, 56, note 5. See further Krischer 1971, 102–4; Edwards 1980; Ford 1992, 75–6.

[22] Cf. *Od.* 11.373, where Alcinous calls the night of Odysseus's storytelling "endless," and by contrast, *Od.* 4.240–3, where Helen tells Telemachus that she could not name all (*panta*) Odysseus's trials, just this one (*all' hoion tode*), or *Od.* 11.516–19, where Odysseus uses the same device in relating all the men killed by Neoptolemus to Achilles (*pantas . . . all' hoion ton . . .*). Cf. *Od.* 7.341–4, 11.328–31, 17.513–17; Worman 2002, 56–65.

The terms of this balancing act are often negotiated at the point where the supernatural ideal of absolute and infinite (cartographic) vision meets, or almost meets, with the human attempt to count up to infinity or to measure and account for the world through man-made inventions or technologies. Thus, in the case of Herodotus, I argue that the Pythia's divine ability to count up all the grains of sand in the world and the measures (*metra*) of the sea (1.47.3) is countered by Herodotus's own use of *metra*, as in his empirical measurement of the Black Sea, for example (4.85.2–86.4).[23] Like the first combined map and prose treatise, called a *perimetron* (DK 12A1), Herodotus appears here to be adapting epic's programmatic meaning of *metra* to the new discourse of the prose author who sees not through the gods, but rather through his own scientific enquiry, or *historiê*.[24] It is no accident, I suggest, that the prose authors – in seeking to differentiate themselves from the epic perspective of the Muses – readjust the generic dimensions of *metra* to fit their own methodology.

Many of these authors' explorations into how measurement or arithmetic might provide a sense of surveyability of the whole originate from fields such as science, geometry, mathematics, or agriculture, and they often circle back to a key set of questions having to do with land and its relationship to literature. How is the literary plot like a territory or demarcated area? How does poetic form or style relate to a shape that has physical dimensions, or that can be mapped out on the ground? What is the relationship between visualizing a poem in the mind's eye and looking out over an imaginary landscape?[25]

In the *Iliad*, Homer uses various technical metaphors in order to give shape and a sense of space to his plot.[26] Some of these are well known: Helen's web uses the art of weaving to provide a spatial tableau of the *Iliad* (3.123–38); the manufacture of the Shield of Achilles uses metallurgy to set a picture of the cosmos within a single frame. Scholars have commented on the mimetic nature of both of these activities to the composition of the *Iliad* itself.[27] Other applications of technical skill to space within the poem appear on a smaller scale, such as in the simile when a farmer measures out the area of a field (*Il.* 12.421–2):

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[23] Hartog 1988, 342.

[24] Anaximander was said to have been the first to draw an outline (*perimetron*) of the earth and sea, as discussed in Ch. 3.

[25] The literary models of graph, diagram, and tree have recently been explored by Moretti 2005. On the relationship of literary models to maps, cf. Moretti 1998. On literature and spatial form, Frank 1945.

[26] It is relevant that Homer depicts the gods "fashioning" and "constructing" plots within the poems, using crafting vocabulary such as *teuchô* and *artuô* (Ford 1992, 37–9). Note also the "plan" of Zeus at *Il.* 1.5.

ἀλλ᾽ ὥς τ᾽ ἀμφ᾽ οὔροισι δύ᾽ ἀνέρε δηριάασθον,
μέτρ᾽ ἐν χερσὶν ἔχοντες, ἐπιξύνῳ ἐν ἀρούρῃ

But as two men contend over boundary lines,
with measuring ropes in their hands, in a common field

or when distances are marked in agricultural terms (*Il.* 10.351–3):[28]

ἀλλ᾽ ὅτε δή ῥ᾽ ἀπέην ὅσσόν τ᾽ ἐπὶ οὖρα πέλονται
ἡμιόνων – αἱ γάρ τε βοῶν προφερέστεραί εἰσιν
ἑλκέμεναι νειοῖο βαθείης πηκτὸν ἄροτρον –

But when he had gone on as far as the distance of
ploughing mules – for they are better than oxen
at dragging the well-worked plough through the depth of the field –

or by the conventions of athletics and competition (*Il.* 23.431–2):

ὅσσα δὲ δίσκου οὖρα κατωμαδίοιο πέλονται,
ὅν τ᾽ αἰζηὸς ἀφῆκεν ἀνὴρ πειρώμενος ἥβης,

As far as the distance of a discus thrown from the shoulder,
which a lusty young man testing the strength of his youth releases

Each of these examples marks boundaries (*oura*) and negotiates distance, placing in the mind of the audience various set areas of space against which they can measure the dimensions of the *Iliad*.

When Puttenham calls Homer the "perfect surueyour," he reminds us that the poet centers his plot on a limited area of land (the Trojan plain) that can be fully accounted for, and also that he repeatedly presents his audience with the illusion of absolute scopic authority.[29] Without this, the *Iliad* would have lost its celebrated unity and would not be as easily thinkable as a single, viewable whole. Yet the Muses, the perfect surveyors *par excellence* of the poem, present an ideal that is also a paradox, since for Homer to see as they see would result in the narrative breaking out of form and time. The impossible, infinite, and boundless nature of immortality can be co-opted for its synoptic possibilities by the poet only once it has been set in proportion through human mechanics and measurement.

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[27] On Helen's web, see Bergren 2008, 43–57, and the scholia ad *Il.* 3.126–7, where the poet is said to have modeled (ἀνέπλασεν) in the web a figure or archetype (ἀρχέτυπον) of his own poem (Erbse 1969; Bergren 2008, 48). Scheid and Svenbro's rejection of the metaphor is unconvincing (1996, 116). On the shield, see Hardie 1985, esp. 15ff.; Hubbard 1992, with further bibliography; Taplin 1998, 107, writes of the shield that it is "as though Homer has allowed us temporarily to stand back from the poem and see it in its place – like a 'detail' from the reproduction of a painting – within a larger landscape, a landscape which is usually blotted from sight by the all-consuming narrative in the foreground."

[28] Cf. *Il.* 23.431; *Od.* 8.124. Aristarchus was impressed with Homer's agricultural expertise in this simile (Hainsworth 1993, ad loc.).

The invocation of the Muses in *Iliad* 2 articulates the reader's desire for unity and the impulse to see narrative as a single and complete object, as if from the Muses' perspective.[30] This idea of the poem as an "object" that can be "seen" is complemented by the role of the god's-eye view in the plot of the poem. Both of these approaches bring us close to formalism, a way of reading that suggests that good literature has an ordered shape that can be abstracted and admired for its timeless qualities.[31] As a method of literary analysis, formalism has been criticized for stripping away all aspects of process and temporality, leaving an ideal and unchanging artifact.[32] This has often proven to be the case whether we think about form in verbal terms, through an examination of rhetoric and style, or in visual terms, as the spatial or geometric arrangement of the whole. Gallagher outlines the differences and similarities between these two notions (2000, 231):

> Form as an arrangement or structure seems molar, an outline of the whole; form as style seems molecular, an enlargement of a detail. Form as structure comes into view only from a distance; form as style

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[29] The word surveyor ("surueyour") encompasses several meanings, especially in this period. Puttenham might be invoking here the meaning of "an officer who superintended the preparation and serving of food" (Whigham and Rebhorn 2007, 94, note 14), which relates nicely to Agamemnon's imaginary role as a "surveyor" at a feast for all the Achaeans and Trojans. The more common use of the term in the sixteenth century denotes oversight of the lands and boundaries of an estate or the practical surveying of land (*OED* s.v. 1.d, 1.e, 3.a).

[30] Even though the view of the "whole" *Iliad*, all at once, would be too much for the reader to take in. See Ford for further discussion of this paradox (1992, 57–89).

[31] On the differing "shapes" of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, see Thalmann 1984, 1–77; on the "shapeliness" or *kosmos* of Homeric art, Walsh 1984, 3–21.

[32] The same criticism has been leveled against narratology, although – as with formalism – several scholars have been working with versions of narrative theory that do not depend on static models. See, e.g., G. Stewart 2008.

> requires unusually close proximity. . . . Both versions of form may be said to arrest narrative flow, one by generalizing an enduring pattern toward which the moments contribute and the other by freezing a moment for analysis.

But, as several scholars, including Gallagher, have argued, the consideration of form and time need not be mutually exclusive. This is especially true when the mechanics of production are taken into account.[33] Both Helen's web and Hephaestus's shield in the *Iliad* are depicted in the process of being made, using the imperfect tense.[34] This emphasis on duration counteracts the synchronizing effect of studying a form, shape, or image out of the context of its production. The movement of time and its relationship to the shape of the narrative will be of central importance throughout this book, especially when we consider the image of narrative as an *animate* form that moves through time.

Alongside the formalist study of literature we should also mention the relevance to this study of Peter Brooks's work on the concept of the plot. Brooks describes how the English word "plot" expresses a spatial or topographical idea at the heart of narrative (1984, 12):

> There may be a subterranean logic connecting [the] heterogeneous meanings [of the English word plot]. Common to the original sense of the word is the idea of boundedness, demarcation, the drawing of lines to mark off and order. This easily extends to the chart or diagram of the demarcated area, which in turn modulates to the outline of the literary work. We might think here of the geometrical expression, plotting points, or curves, on a graph by means of coordinates, as a way of locating something, perhaps oneself.

Here and elsewhere in his analysis, Brooks uncovers an allegiance between narrative structure and the ground.[35] We begin with geometry and measurement, and from there move on to the idea of a circumscribed area that converges with the way we classify and shape a literary plot. Brooks's discussion will be useful for the way in which it brings to light different versions of the measured area of land, ground plan, diagram, or scheme that shape the plots that we will consider in this book.[36]

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[33] Cf. Turner 2006 (I owe this reference to James Porter), 16, who quotes De Man 1983, 31: "The idea of totality suggests closed forms that strive for ordered and consistent systems and have an almost irresistible tendency to transform themselves into objective structures. Yet, the temporal factor, so persistently forgotten, should remind us that the form is never anything but a process on the way to its completion."

[34] As noted by Bergren 2008, 46–7, for Helen's web and Giuliani 2003, 40–1, for Achilles' shield.

[35] Cornford 1957, 15–17 draws a parallel topographical meaning for the word *moira*. More recently, Turner has shown how the term plot or "plat" in the early modern period applied not only to geometrical ground plans and military strategy (from the French *complot*) but also to the three-dimensional structure of the "platform" of the stage (2006, 21–5). On the idea of the classical plot, see Lowe 2000, esp. 61–78. Brooks's interest in the stories that can emerge in and through space connects him to

Plot's spatial legacy is pervasive in ancient Greek thought, where songs might be conceived as pathways, *logoi* as routes, writing as the movement of oxen turning back and forth across a field with a plough (*boustrophedon*), narratives as pictures or landscapes, and plots even as living creatures that take up set areas of space. Aristotle conceptualizes both the sentence (*lexis* or *periodos*) and the plot (*muthos*) in terms of terrain, as if both occupied a measured or fixed area of ground. In his formulation, as we will discuss in the following chapters, it is as if the plot were a place that could be looked at, traveled across, or remembered as a landscape in the mind. The correspondence between plot and topography is expressed in the Greek world through spaces that range in structure and scale from the room to the cosmos, from the circuit of a racetrack to a march across Asia Minor. The ways in which characters in ancient Greek texts conceptualize and make sense of space provide us with insights into the structures of their narrative and enable us to see more clearly the workings and parameters of their plots.

The *Iliad* and its reception lay the foundations for the central questions that I ask of other texts in the book. I began this introduction by investigating a fundamental problem posed both by Homer and by later readers of his poem: how to "see" the *Iliad* as a single, synoptic whole, as the Muses do. I then went on to give an account of the way that we might understand the concept of literature having a "form" that is viewable in the mind's eye, especially in relation to the various practical and spatial metaphors that give it shape. In the last third of this introduction, it remains for me to explain how all of this fits into a diachronic scheme. In other words, how does the *Iliad* set the stage for the relationship between space and plot in the literature that follows it?

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a well-established theme in literary criticism. See e.g., Bakhtin, who has shown how the "chronotope" of the road informs the course of the literary plot, or De Certeau for his tracking of the "narrative paths" that walkers make as they move from one part of the city to another (Bakhtin 1981; Brooks 1984; De Certeau 1984, 91–110).

[36] Brooks quotes the following definitions from the American Heritage Dictionary: "1. (a) A small piece of ground, generally used for a specific purpose. (b) A measured area of ground; lot. 2. A ground plan, as for a building; chart; diagram. 3. The series of events consisting of an outline of the action of a narrative or drama. 4. A secret plan to accomplish a hostile or illegal purpose; scheme" (1984, 11–12).