

§26. Nastes



Then he encountered a son of Priam, Dardanus' scion,
 fleeing away from the river – Lycaon, a youth he had taken
 once already himself, and had brought 'gainst his will from his father's
 orchard, making a raid one night. He was cutting the new-grown
 shoots of a wild fig tree with the keen bronze for rims for a chariot.
 Evil came on him all unexpected – the godlike Achilles.
 On that other occasion, he sold him to prosperous Lemnos,
 taking him there on his ships, and a scion of Jason had bought him . . .

– *Iliad 21:34-37*

Looking back for just a moment at *Iliad 2*, the rest of which we will get to presently (§10), we find, as the next-to-last of the 16 Trojan contingents, this entry on the Carians, plus something that looks a lot like a Homeric addition:

Nest came Nastes, leader of Carians, rough-voiced speakers,
 owning Miletus and Phthires, a mountain of limitless leafage,
 Mycale's toppling steepes and the far-famed floods of Maeander.
 all these Nastes commanded, his brother Amphimachus with him.
 Nastes, now, and his brother were glorious sons of Nomion.
 Golden of garment, he came like a girl to the field of the battle.
 Fond man! sure it availed him to ward off grievous destruction
 noway, since the hands of the fleet-footed Aeacid quelled him
 there in the river; his gold was the spoil of wise-hearted Achilles.

This can only refer to the scene in *Iliad 21* where Achilles fights the river. That passage *does not mention Nastes*. It then seems that Homer takes us into his confidence about what will happen to a character, *but then it doesn't happen*. This is one of those flaws that have disturbed readers, ancient and modern. Does Homer lie? The usual explanation is that he just forgot. As Horace put it,¹

indignor quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus
 or in the usual translation, "Homer nods."

An effort has been made to see such unfulfilled predictions as an intentional literary device.² Nastes himself is perhaps the only example. We may be better off with Horace's verdict, and conclude that one detail of Homer's first plan for the Menis simply got lost, in the final working-out of that plan.

¹Ars Poetica 358, "I am offended whenever good old Homer dozes off." So are many since Horace's time, whence the many efforts to explain them away.

²Morrison **Misdirection** 110-118.

Then Homer, somewhere along the line, decided to do something else in that furious scene on the banks of Scamander. Does anyone replace girl-like Nastes in that role? Perhaps we have instead girl-like Lycaon, who does nothing but beg for mercy, only to be killed and slung into the river.

Readers may judge for themselves the effect of this piece by checking out 21:34-127 – a serious statement, requiring a full 9 minutes in performance.

That interlude, for such it is in form, ends with this farewell (122-127):

“There now! Rest thee amid them, the fish that will lick, peradventure,
blood from thy wounds, but with no great tenderness; nor shall thy mother
lay thee upon thy bier, and weep over thee. Nay, the Scamander,
eddying on, shall bear thee away to the sea’s broad bosom.
Leaping along the waves, full many a fish to the darksome
ripple shall dart up, to taste that snow-white fat of Lycaon.

He denies, or ridicules, every sentiment owing the dead. And next, Achilles addresses himself no longer to dead Lycaon, but to *all* the Trojans, who are equally his enemies (128-135):

Perish ye so, till we come to the town of Ilium holy,
ye in your flight, and I in pursuit, making havoc behind you.
Naught shall avail you, indeed, with its eddies of silver, the river
fair in his flow, unto whom long time ye have sacrificed many
bullocks, and whole-hoofed horses alive ye have thrown to his eddies.
Nay, even so ye shall die by an evil fate, until all ye
pay for Patroclus’ death, for the slaughter of heroes Achaeans
slain by the swift-faring ships, while I was aloof from the battle.”

Perhaps this larger encounter, a weak foe representing all the slain Greeks, in the end appealed to our poet more than his earlier thought. His “nodding,” here, would then be only a failure to go back and correct his early prediction.

Sloppy proofreading, but maybe not much worse than that.

Let us then agree to solve this and a hundred similar problems all at once. We accept that a certain amount of sloppiness may fairly be ascribed to Homer. He is not an exemplary proofreader. These cases where his carelessness must be conceded will at least help to define what can fairly be expected, by way of editorial niceties, in the parts of the Iliad which Homer himself wrote.

May one observe, in conclusion, that if Homer, back in Id 21, had intended that Achilles should finish his career in Id 24 with a display of heart-rending sentiment for the dead,³ he has chosen an extremely strange way to prepare the reader for that conclusion?

³Heart-rending it surely is. Once at dinner at the home of Homerist George Dimock, something moved the host to set forth on a paraphrase of Iliad 24. It was very affecting; no one present will ever forget it. But emotion is still not evidence.