Speaker 1: I'd like to welcome you all to this year's Martin Ostwald Memorial Lecture. These annual lectures are dedicated to the memory of Martin Ostwald, an extraordinarily prominent and influential classicist who taught at Swarthmore for over 30 years and jointly at the University of Pennsylvania for 20 of those years.

The classics department would like to thank everyone who has helped us to establish this fund for the annual lecture and especially John [Maricola 00:00:26] for his generosity and ongoing friendship with our department.

Some of you knew Martin very well. In fact, many people in this room were taught by Martin Ostwald or are the son of Martin Ostwald. Among us, Todd [inaudible 00:00:47] Ostwald is today's speaker, Jim Porter. But some of you may not be as familiar with his life and his work. I thought I would say a few things about Martin's life and in honor of today's lecture, a few things about the role that Homer played in Martin's early life in Germany.

This speech that Martin's father made at Martin's Bar Mitzvah in 1934 focused on a quotation from the Iliad and this is what Martin's father said:

Today I remember a sentence so vividly as if I had heard it for the first time yesterday. It consists of the words of the ancient poet, Homer, addressed by old [Hippatacus 00:01:29] to his son [Glaucus 00:01:31] to accompany him on his journey to aid the ancient Greeks who are threatened by the Trojans. The father's advice runs, "Always be the best and hold your head above others and not bring shame upon the generations of your fathers." This does not mean that you should incapacitate your fellow human being with an ambition that knows no bound. What this sentence says that you should acquire competent knowledge in school and in the profession, which you will soon have to choose. This competence is the weapon with which you will have to fight the struggle for your daily existence, fight it honestly and decently but also emphatically.

The father's advice took hold. In his memories, Martin talks about a time that his parents had considered sending him away to school in Frankfurt but decided against it because the school offered no Greek or Latin. As Martin explains, "In the last analysis, I have to be grateful that I was able to stay at the [gumlasium 00:02:33] for once we started reading Homer, first some Odyssey and the Fifth Year and later some Iliad, I knew that I was hooked on Greek for life. As a matter of fact, I was so hooked that I read more than double our daily assignment and kept on reading Homer in bed at night, switching the light on again after my parents had switched it off. But I was far from imagining that I would ever be able to go on to university to study classics."

Forced to leave his parents behind in Germany, Martin and his brother were able to immigrate to England and were then sent to a detention camp in Canada. Following his release, Martin went on to study classics at the University of Toronto and the Committee on Social Thought at University of Chicago. Martin taught at Wesleyan and Columbia before coming to Swarthmore and University of Pennsylvania. He published prolifically and some of his most well known publications included translation of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, a handbook on the meters of Greek and roman poetry and several books on Greek constitutional theory. Martin was much beloved by colleagues and students alike for his teaching, his scholarship and his refined, old world sensibility. Helen North speaks for many who stayed with Martin and passed his legacy onto their own students when she says, "He taught us how to read Greek and he showed us what it is to love it."

Our speaker today, Jim Porter, is himself an influential scholar and teacher and studied with Martin as an undergraduate here at Swarthmore, which I think you can see. There he is with Martin and who is that other man? That is Ralph Rosen. [inaudible 00:04:21] earning staff chair in literature and professor of rhetoric and classics at UC Berkeley. He's a classicist of remarkable range and profound influence. His numerous books and articles deal with philosophical topics, materialism, aesthetics, ethics, Nietzsche, classical reception, history of philology, critical theory, history and theory of subjectivity, interactions between politics, culture and critique. His most recent book, The Sublime in Antiquity, has been described by one reviewer as quote, "An epic marking book, a work of incredible scholarship and assiduous attention to detail. I'm tempted to say," the quotation, "I'm tempted to say that The Sublime in Antiquity is such a towering achievement that it may spell the end of classical scholarship as we know it, much the way Elliot and Pound considered Ulysses the end of the novel. The Sublime in Antiquity seems to contain the entire history of its tradition within it."

This year, Jim received Guggenheim fellowship for the current academic year and this past May, he delivered the [Grave 00:05:32] Lectures at Cambridge on the topic of thinking through Homer. His forthcoming book on the invention and reception of Homer from antiquity to the present is called, Homer: The Very Idea. We're delighted to catch him at a time when he still working on his Homer project and very grateful that he accepts our invitation. Please [inaudible 00:05:51] welcoming, Jim Porter.

Jim Porter: So I want to begin by thanking the classics department for existing and still existing and for this incredible honor to, in the name of Martin Ostwald who is my favorite teacher here at Swarthmore when I was here and who's not responsible for me going into academia but for going into classics. I think the one thing that he inspired me most to emulate was his passion and devotion to classics so that's the best thing that a teacher can do.

There'll be one other point in the course of this talk where you'll see a direct connection that I make with Martin in a slightly different vein, towards the end. First of all, the talk will be about 53 minutes as soon as I get off of this introduction. This comes from a book, a chapter of my book, which is called Homer: The Very Idea. Let me just give you a snapshot of what the book is about so you have some context and then we'll start in on this particular chapter, which is called What Did Homer See in the book.

My focus in the book is not on Homer as a text. Actually ... okay. Or that has been read or adapted but on Homer as a cultural phenomenon, concept and point of concern and fascination around which whole disciplines, [tannins 00:07:44] of literature and entire bodies of knowledge have come to be organized over the millennia. Can you hear me okay?

Speaker 1: Yes.

Jim Porter: Good. Underlying this history is the problem ... so in that sense, it's not in reception history, it's more a question of what did Homer do to people, the idea of Homer. Underlying this history is a problem that was best put my Nietzsche in 1869 when he asked ... oh, sorry. That's not ... let me see. I wonder if I did the right one. Homer, here, this is the best representation of the idea of Homer that I've found. It's a study for the previous picture by [inaudible 00:08:28] which is the most famous modern representation of Homer. This is a study of it. His question was, "Has a person in Homer been made out of a concept or a concept made out of a person?" That's, I think, a good way at getting at what drives the Homer question in its ancient and modern forms. Today's lecture will concentrate on one aspect of this problem, which is named in the title.

I don't know how to make this black.

Speaker 1: Make the image go away?

Jim Porter: Yeah, just for a moment, I'll come back. I should know. Okay. Okay, that's it. Okay, great. Too distracting.

In a letter allegedly composed by [Iscanes 00:09:24] the fourth century athenian order, the author describes some of the adventures he had on a sight seeing visit to Troy while he was in exile from Athens after having suffered a political setback at the hands of his rival [inaudible 00:09:39]. The letter is as much about his rambunctious traveling companion, Cimon as it is about himself, and it begins like this, text 1A:

You can't imagine what that fellow, Cimon made us go through and every town and harbor that we visited, ignoring both laws and common decency. I had come to Troy eager to see both the landscape and the sea but I'll keep quiet and won't write about what I saw there since I would never have done with the topic, and I don't want to appear to be lacking in taste by filling your ears with empty prattle like a poet. After we spent several days at Troy and still hadn't had enough of gazing at the famous graves, my idea was to stay until I could see all the items mentioned in the epics and connect it to the heroes. The day came when a host of Trojans were trying to arrange weddings for their daughters, at least those who were the right age.

An erotic escapade follows whereby our fine fellow, Cimon, makes lewd advances on an innocent young bride to be who is bathing in the Scamander by disguising himself as the river god, an embarrassing [inaudible 00:10:50] process. Iscanes complains or boasts that he would not be able to run through all of Cimon's tricks, "Even if I had 10 tons," as one be. He's quoting from Homer's preamble to the massive catalog of ships in book two of the Iliad.

A few days later when an angry mob approaches their front door, Iscanes and his companion make for the sea in an attempt to flee from the Troad but they are stopped by an adverse wind, much like Agamemnon's fleet on route to Troy, now in reverse though not before Cimon takes stock of the situation.

"Anyway," he says, "it seems to me that the events at Troy aren't wholly horrible and tragic. We should make light of it all and stage the Scamander story as a comedy." Speaker continues now to leave with his travel companion, "I suspect you'll find my story at least worth a chuckle," and there the letter ends.

The letter is a forgery dating perhaps to the second century CE and belonging to a large corpus of fictional letters by famous personalities from the past. It's value lies not in its connection with Iscanes who was no more than a device but in its being an index of the grip that Homer's Troy could exercise over later Greeks and Romans. It was one thing to read Homer and quite another to visit the site of the Trojan war, the tour the landscape for oneself, the make the rounds of the grave sites of the various heroes and heroines who are said to have been buried on the Trojan peninsula known as the Troad. Ajax, [Intellicus 00:12:25], Patroclus, Hector, Paris, and [Encices 00:12:29] each had a tomb. Well, Achilles had as many as three tombs in the vicinity and to inspect relics from the war, [inaudible 00:12:37] statue of Athena described in Iliad six, the weaponry of various kinds that was said to have belonged to different heroes, the lyre of Paris, but not that of Achilles which was nowhere to be found and so on.

To visit Troy was to revisit Homer. It was literally to relive the now long gone and dead past and to see the landscape as it must have appeared to Homer's eyes and in this way, bring Homer himself back to life. But it was also to engage in what was a cliché already, even in antiquity. Describing Homer, Troy's environments was a topic that had been done to death well before the second century CE although this did nothing to lessen the urge to take in the sights of first or second hand or prevent the flow of future descriptions of Troy, real or imagined. Readers, literary critics, travelers, antiquarians, political leaders and archeologists all have had an equal stake in the prospect of picturing Troy. Put simply, Homer could not be imagined without this prospect and the reverse was equally true. The possibility that the one could validate the other was and remains today and overwhelming source of attraction.

Behind the historicising impulse lies the assumption that it is in principle possible to map Homer onto Troy and to arrive at this kind of correlation between the two bodies of evidence, indeed just to conceive its possibility, one has to ask what did Homer see? The question so simple in appearance and yet so central, not only to the idea of Homer but also to the very idea of Troy and circulation then or now has proved devilishly difficult to unpack.

The question, what did Homer see, has piqued and tormented the minds of Homer's audiences ever since Homer existed at least as an object of thought. The reasons for this fascination and its frustration are several. The most immediate of these has to do with the nature of Homeric poetry. The Homeric accounts of the Trojan war and its aftermath were felt possibly uniquely for their genre to be so vivid and compelling that they could transport audiences to the very scene of the action, rendering them firsthand witnesses to the events by proxy. The trouble with this impression has played [inaudible 00:15:06] ion was quick to note though he was hardly the first to do so is that it is an illusion.

There, Socrates interrogates the rhapsode Ion who is a standing for the whole of the Ionian rhapsodic tradition, hence his name, about his frame of mind whenever he is reciting Homer to his audience and he's picturing the events for himself and for his listeners. This is Text 2A. "When you recite well and most amaze your audience, does your mind imagine itself in a state of enthusiasm present at the actual events you describe in Ithaca or Troy or whatever the poem requires." Ion confirms the suspicion. He does imagine that he's being transported to Ithaca or Troy whenever he sings Homer but when he is pressed further by Socrates, he confesses that even in the throes of performance, he's perfectly aware that he's manipulating his hearers, all for money as it turns out, text 2B, and that he is carefully calibrating his voice and gestures to their tears or awe in the here and now. So much for divine inspiration.

And as Ion falls victim to Plato's skepticism, so to does Homer. The clear implication is that Homer caught in the same chain of dependencies as Ion is imagining and not seeing what he narrates and the same holds for the audience in his thrall to listen to Homer, Plato insists, is not to see a thing. It is to be blinded by song.

We can be sure that Plato has Homer in his sights because he is in fact glossing Homer's own diction. For example, the language of the catalog of ships that we saw quoted by pseudo-Iscanes a moment ago. 3A. "Tell me, now [inaudible 00:17:03] homes on Olympus for you who are goddesses, are there and you know have seeing all things and we have heard only the rumor of it and no, nothing." As a poet gears up to describe the battle raging around the Greek ships later on in book 12, he acknowledges once again that it would be too hard for me to describe all these things as if I were a god, 3B. Homer emphatically is not a god but he does have the ear of the muses who are there, present in their minds at the scene of the past and so too present to Homer as he sings his songs which are also theirs. But once again, what did Homer actually see?

The most widely accepted answer in antiquity is that Homer saw nothing at all, at least not at first hand, and the verses just quoted were [inaudible 00:18:01] as proof, text four from a life of Homer. Why did it matter what Homer saw? Evidently it did. The author of text four is inserting himself into an ongoing debate that ripple through much of the ancient literature and that makes it matter to us. Whether or not Homer was an eyewitness to the events at Troy, he was a key witness and indeed, the primary witness whose testimony was consulted for verification of historical and topographical details more than any other author. To fulfill this role, Homer had to be located in space and time in some proximity to Troy all of which is reflected in the biographical tradition that seems to have existed at the end of the sixth century, this is text five.

It is probably significant that only a tiny handful of ancient writers insisted that Homer lived at the time of the Trojan war. This circumspection, it can only be that, suggests more deeply seated doubts. Homer was for the most part considered at best a remote witness to what he's saying. In the ancient middle ground consensus guesstimate pegged his lifetime to around 160 years after the fall of Troy, somewhere between lifetime and 400 years after Troy fell. The key factor was that the memory of Troy should still be fresh and that Homer should be positioned close to the events of Troy chronologically and geographically. It's stake was more than securing the identity of a newly emergent pan-Hellenic Homer which all the cities around Troy that claimed Homer as being his homeland. The various claimants were responding to a genuine problem, one that was palpable in the poems themselves, namely the question of Homer's reliability in his report or reportage about Troy which persisted long after Homer's pan-Hellenism was established.

How trustworthy a narrator was Homer in fact? Modern scholarship typically assures us that Homer's knowledge was vouchsafed by the muses. Plato didn't buy this argument and neither did others, both long before him and long after him and we'll come to these naysayers in a moment. Further complicating the picture, though I believe it is merely one more symptom of it, was the conceit that Homer was blind. Assuming that Homer's characteristics were invented post-festum, an assumption I'm happy to make, that's to say Homer's identity was probably invented after the fact, blindness seems a rather odd choice if the concern was to see in Homer a credible link to the past.

While being blind might have been a mark in some instances of divine inspiration, prophecy first and foremost, it was not an automatic feature of either seers or bards in antiquity nor was it automatically a positive one. None of the other singers we hear about in Homer is blind apart from Demodocus in the Odyssey and possibly Thamyris who's mentioned in the Iliad but whose impairment, whatever it was, came as a punishment from the gods and not as a gift. Hesiod was sighted and yet legend had it that Homer was blind.

We hear about a blind singer from [inaudible 00:21:37] for the first time in the Delian Hymn to Apollo from the archaic period. Thucydides and others took this to refer to Homer. Where did the idea come from? The picture of Demodocus the bard who appears in Odyssey eight is the standard reply. This was certainly Eustathius' view. He calls Homer's picture a self portrait, this is text 6A, in the ancient learned Homeric scholars, Scholia shared the same view, 6B. Blinded by the muses in exchange for the gift of song, Demodocus sings at the court of [inaudible 00:22:12] who are said to live on the farthest edges of the world in complete isolation from the rest of humanity and despite the remoteness of his location and his physical disability, Demodocus sings authoritatively about events at Troy. That authority is vouchsafe by Odysseus himself who praises the singer for his uncanny knowledge 6A. "You sing the [inaudible 00:22:37] venture as if you somehow had been there yourself or heard it from someone who was." I know I'm treading over ground that many of you know already but there's a point to it, you'll see.

The remark is good advertising for Odysseus as the songs pertain to him but it is even better advertising for Homer as his poetry now has firsthand verification from Odysseus. Homer need not have been an eyewitness to the events that he accounted. He might as well have been blind and that is how most of antiquity pictured him.

Imagining Homer in this way created more problems than it solved. That Homer's blindness disturbed readers is apparent from the wavering of his biographers who struggled to make sense of its implications. The net result of these struggles was a plethora of Homers each equipped with a different life, a set of circumstances that could be variously called upon to explain what could be known or never known about Homer and his world. For some writers, Homer was blind at birth. For others, he only gradually developed blindness and for yet others, he was never blind at all. The simple truth is that antiquity conceived of Homer in a contradictory fashion as someone who was both blind and sighted. Visual representations could deceive the eye into believing that the blind bard was seeing and some of these show him reading.

Homer had at some level to be able to see, blind or not. An epigram in the Greek anthology underscores this confusion. This is 6D. You would not think he was like a blind man to look at him this is a [inaudible 00:24:24] these characteristics fed into other presumed facts concerning his life that might be used to explain the reach and the limits of his knowledge. Homer could be imagined as a traveler, a tourist, a poor itinerant beggar or a clever and informed ethnographer with wide experience of the world who blind or not studied the people and places he visited. These are all collected in text seven under the label of historia or research. And who probably made written notes of everything that he learned. All of this, embarrassingly enough, that's a quotation from A Life, by the way, simply to make up for his native ignorance about the past and in the process, the poem came to resemble no one so much as his own wandering inquisitive and observant Odysseus, seven A through B.

Or else moving full circle on the other direction, the biographers themselves who spent their lives conducting painstaking research, historia, into Homer's life and times whether they traveled from their armchairs or by land and sea, no doubt taking copious notes as they did either way, 7C.

Evidently, the real problem was not whether Homer was or was not sighted but how he came by his information and here the various accounts removed by common impulse, one that would eventually lead to the modern experiment with Homeric archeology. Let's dub this an impulse to mundane empiricism. It was not enough that Homer should enjoy divine communications to compensate for his ignorance of epic reality, Homer and the world he depicted must be grounded in empirical reality and the effort must be conducted in the absence of the muses with an emphatically mortal art. Later, readers and critics repeatedly noted how the poets descriptions of events, objects, characters and scenes are produced with such elaborate detail that it seems as if he were an eyewitness or as though he were present at the scenes that he records, this is in eight A to C.

This language is, of course, lifted directly from home as is the notion of a spectacle with its implied onlooker, whether Homer or a standing for us. By the same token. Troy must be imagined to have been real just as Homer must have been imagined himself to have been a flesh and blood individual. The empirical impulse is at work in the biographical tradition too. The muses may be divine creatures but Homer had to be one of us, fragile, vulnerable, subject to human limits and finally, to death.

Readers, literary critics in particular, followed suit. They recognized that Homer was by his own account as ignorant of the facts as were later readers but that he was no less eager than they to align his poems with reality or at least with a sense of reality. He achieved this effect of the real through the very brilliance of his visualizations and by embedding a virtual onlooker into the scenes. At these moments, which is to say at every moment, the reader is invited or rather obliged to occupy the position of the internal spectator to assume his point of view and then to act as a witness to the events being described, resulting impression is one of co-presence, immediacy and intimacy. So, for example, when Hera soars over parts of Greece in Iliad 14, Homer gets her itinerary by running through the placenames of her flyover in, as it were, real time. One of the Scholia there's learning commentaries on Homer from the Hellenistic age, comments in 9A, the reader's mind tracing Hera's path is given over to an imagination and a view of these places, [inaudible 00:28:30]

As if sharing the view of what Homer sees, the reader is made into a co-witness if not a co-conspirator. This as if quality is a powerful poetic device. It underwrites imaginative transferences but also safely disavows them. Readers and critics were well aware of the distances separating themselves from the experience of the poems, hence the cautious nature of their observations which are hedged about with caveats and hypotheticals as if being one of these. This distance too was thought to have its mirror in Homer who was conceived as a creative artist who did not merely reflect reality because he also created reality.

This is one reason why we can say that the later commentators are sly but not naïve readers. Homer for them is a master manipulator of poetic effects as he had to be since he did not directly witness what he describes. Sensitive to the charge that Homer seemed to know too much about what he never saw, literary scholars typically rescued the poet from criticism by appealing to his plausibility, his realism, his posture of restless curiosity about the world. Deliberate if skillfully achieved point of collusion was responsible for producing as if first person knowledge. Wherever the cautious hypotheticals are dropped, bolder statements take their place as in 9B. Homer watched create in our minds the appearance or the illusion, the doxa of truth.

At times, achieving poetic illusion requires Homer to work against and not with the reader by concealing things from view, most of all his own artfulness. The ad hoc invention and destruction of the Achaean wall from Iliad seven is a case and point, 9C. It had to be literally removed from view, the Scholia reason, lest Homer's contemporaries should go looking for its physical traces, not find them, and suspect his duplicity. Another example, when Achilles nearly drowns in his battle with the Scamander river, an implausible scene for a post-Homeric reader, 9D, the hearer has no opportunity [inaudible 00:30:53] writes, Scholia writes, to consider whether the description is true or not. So quickly and effectively does Homer's artistry work.

The upshot of these and similar considerations is that vividness does not guarantee precision but at most an as if precision. Of course, the reader is ultimately a collaborator in this illusion. She knows better than to press the facts of the situation too hard. We may call this a readerly blindness.

As it turns out, Homer's blindness is rarely counted an asset in the ancient traditions and I know I'm going to hear lots of objections but he's divinely infused with inspiration. That's not how he was always read. Equivalent to a confession of ignorance if not of total fabrication and outright lying, Homer's being blind made him more and not less vulnerable to criticism and it did so at the very core of his qualities as a poet. "To be blind as Homer," quotation mark, was a stock phrase of content in some quarters of antiquity. For instance in [inaudible 00:32:03] who elsewhere has Zeus accused Homer of being a lying man and a fraud?

In his 36 [erasion 00:32:11] Dio accuses those who are obsessed with Homer with displaying a kind of ophthalmia. In his Trojan [erasion 00:32:18] he spells out what this means, this is 10A. As a remote witness to the past, Homer has had to resort to lies while his readers could not see the true light either. 10B. Not that they found this disagreeable in the least because there's a comfort in not seeing or knowing or rather to permitting oneself to not see or know truth.

As it happens, the tradition in which Homer's blindness was not a badge of honor but a blemish stretch back at least to the early sixth century. Let's connect some of these threads. [Disicarus 00:32:52] in the late sixth century claims to have blasphemed Helen by falsely claiming that she had eloped to Troy as Homer had said and then was punished by Helen with blindness for the lies, Disicarus was. Upon recanting, Disicarus regained his eyesight. He thus learned to see what Homer never did. This is text 11A. The sly but explosive innuendo implied already in Plato is made explicit in the anonymous roman life of Homer. It was Homer's blindness that Disicarus had revealed.

With this full on assault of Homer's poetic authority and credibility, Disicarus set a mighty precedent. His accusation was repeated with countless variations by Homer's many detractors. Plato and Dio were among these as was pejorative connotation of blindness. Behind everything was a lingering problem, Homer's fame rested on the striking visual clarity and absolute immediacy of his descriptions and yet how could the experience of his poetry be reconciled with the fact of his blindness? The concern was real and neither the appeal to the muses nor the example of Demodocus sufficed to put it to rest. Instead, the question, what did Homer see, proved to be an exasperating problem with no clear answer and Disicarus was clearly exploiting this uncertainty.

This counter tradition to which he belongs, Disicarus belongs, is vital and strange but it consistently recognizes that homers blindness is symbolic and not only physical. Homers legendary disgrace at the hands of fisher boys who teased him with a riddle about what he couldn't see or understand is an early example, this is text 12A where the boys are said to have fooled Homer by saying when they were asked, there were fishermen, went off fishing, Homer saw them or heard them, it's not clear whether he was seeing at the time and he asked them, "What did you catch?" And they said back, "The ones we saw and caught. We are leaving behind the ones we did not see or catch, we are carrying with us," the answer being lice. How could Homer have known? It's a cool joke and worse if live never actually existed.

The episode probably circulated in popular form long before Heraclitus retailed it at the end of the sixth century and it continued to flourish long after [Alsitimus 00:35:30] made it canonical in the fourth century. The story marks the limits of what Homer can see and therefore know. Heraclitus' version preserved by Hippolytus underscores the fact that Homer was hopelessly blind to the reality of appearances, it was a metaphysical argument, 12A. In Alsitimus' version, the implications are more fully spelled out and in these and similar contexts where the riddles repeated and it is ad nauseam throughout the rest of antiquity including visual representations.

This is from Pompeii, house of epigrams and this is a drawing from the 19th century made of it, recreation if what it was. Homer's being here, rubbing his chin at the fisher boys. Here he seems to have eyes but it's not clear that this is just a recreation by the draftsman who made this or whether he really did in that picture.

In these and similar contexts where the riddle is repeated including visual representations, Homer's presented as a mere hapless mortal. The encounter with the fisher boys typically occasions his death, depression and death. And as anything about a fiduciary with solid ties to the divine. Physical and mental or epistemic blindness were genuine concerns and they reflected the trouble conscious that came with experiencing Homer. Homer must give us a window onto reality, but how much trust could one place in what he claimed to see? The worries are mirrored elsewhere. Dio, for instance, conjures up the Heraclitean fragment at the start of his Trojan erasion, this is text 10B, but without referring to it because perhaps Homer's poetry just is this riddle and his blindness has been transferred to his readers. The point is that Homer's blindness was one of the more conspicuous ways in which these concerns bubbled up to the surface.

A few more examples will help to reinforce the point. According to one of the lives, Homer developed his eye ailments in Ithaca, a somewhat inauspicious coincidence as it turns out. While he was convalescing, he inquired into and learned about the story of Odysseus from the local inhabitants, 13A, and then he grew blind. According to a somewhat darker version of the same story, 13B, Homer summoned from the dead the shade of Odysseus himself by means of a blood offering, hoping to learn about the Trojan war from someone who was really there, one who still had a fresh recall of the facts as newly departed souls always do. The price for this precious information was a promise from the poet to aggrandize the hero, Odysseus, even if this meant promulgating alternative facts about him. The Odyssey was the result.

This is one more instance of the Homer lies motif. Homer [inaudible 00:38:36] is equivalent means, [inaudible 00:38:39] in Greek means to lie, apparently. Cleverly reworked now as a Mephistophelian bargain made by the poet to compensate for his ignorance of epic reality. We might note that the muses are irrelevant on this telling of Homeric inspiration. The ghost of Odysseus is now Homer's muse as is active field work, historia again.

According to another life, Homer visited the tomb of Achilles like a tourist and he asked to behold the hero just as he was when he donned the armor of Hephaestus. When Achilles appeared, we read, Homer was blinded by the dazzle of the armor. In return, he was honored by [inaudible 00:39:23] Thetis and the muses with the gift of poetry. Not bad. The parallel to Demodocus notwithstanding, in this story we see enacted before our eyes the very same lesson that Plato had so astutely made in the Ion. The nearer you approach Homeric reality and the more vividly it appears to you, the less of it you will be able to see.

To be sure, not everyone agreed with Disicarus and Plato or the second sophistic progeny. Denials of Homer's blindness could be as vehement as the accusations they were meant to fend off. Toward the end of antiquity, Proclus, the great neo-platonic philosopher, sought to defend Homer against the charge, 14A. Those who had stated that Homer was blind seemed to me to be mentally blind themselves for he saw more clearly than any man ever. But Proclus has in mind was Homer's 20/20 metaphysical vision, not his talent for empirical perception. Not to be outdone and wishing to cover his bases, [Leutian 00:40:26] declared that he had empirical proof that Homer was not blind as people say. He could tell at a glance when he first laid eyes on Homer in the underworld because the answer was self evident, he didn't need to ask.

The debates about whether and what Homer saw are a sign of how troubling and how irresolvable the question actually was. Whatever its origins, we can be sure of one thing, Homer's blindness was a sign not only of what Homer may never have seen with his own eyes but also what the audiences could never ascertain. The idea of blindness was a way of capturing the gap between what Homer knew, what he said in his poems and what could be known by a reader. The source of endless anxieties, that gap was inescapably real and it could never be completely closed, not least because Homer's blindness or indeed, any other effect about him could not be established with certainty. In other words, Homer's legendary blindness was a topos rather than a fact and its purpose in life so to speak was to index the range of uncertainties and doubts that suddenly collected around the figure of Homer.

In this light, we can say that Homer's being blind was not an accident of the tradition. On the contrary, it incarnated the most sensitive issues that came with hearing and reading Homer. The real question was not whether Homer was blind but to what extent we are whenever we view the past through the eyes of Homer. Okay.

Now we move on to another section of the paper but I'm going to do one thing really quickly first. Make sure that I have the right version here.

Compounding these uncertainties and inseparable from them was another complex of problems, as intricate as the Homeric question in its ancient form which we may call the Trojan question. Like its Homeric counterpart, the question about Troy was really a bundle of interrelated problems that were subject to relentless speculation and debate at least from the end of the fifth century and they continue to be debated today. Where was the Homeric Troy located before it was destroyed? What, if anything, was left be seen of Troy's citadel and its fortifications in the centuries after it fell? And finally, could Homer have ever have seen Troy? Do these questions modern archeology added one more, can Homer's Troy be identified with the bronze age settlement site that was unearthed in 1870 by Schliemann at his [inaudible 00:42:58] and that was formally known as ileum.

Much hung on these questions. Either Troy was still standing at the time when Homer produced his songs or else it had fallen and was in ruins. The choice was a stark but also a momentous one. If Homer did not see Troy fall, what could anyone know about Troy? A treacherous circularity resulted. Knowledge about Troy could not be confirmed without knowledge about Homer all aged through some light and considerably more darkness on the other. But it was this circularity that heightened the attraction and value of Homer who came to represent what Troy's destruction also came to represent, an idea of something that not only could no longer be seen and remains permanently lost to culture, whether we call this a heroic age, an ideal of unattainable poetic excellence or just a vague sense of some irretrievably lost past which can be more painful sometimes than something we know we lost.

A two fold contradiction resulted. On the one hand, Homer became a proxy for the witnessing gaze of his later heroes and readers as someone who stood closer to their experience than to the heroic era he portrayed. On the other, Homer's poems became the most precious relic of this past, a past to which he himself belonged as one more but all but vanished relic. It was only natural then that Homer, the narrator of Troy, should become inseparably linked to the violent destruction of Troy. Indeed, in some ancient stories about the emergence of the Homeric corpus, the poems which were once whole were said to have been scattered by floods, earthquakes and fire until they resurfaced finally again in random quantities like archeological relics. Homer may have been partly salvaged from obliteration to what degree was never entirely clear but the destruction of Troy was complete and the key term here is [offenismas 00:45:04] which is a hyperbole for what actually happened to Troy. There were ruins available but it was considered in the imaginary of the Greeks and Romans as a complete obliteration, text 15.

And the memory of Troy was traumatic for the ancient world and in different ways it has remained this for the modern world. in some, what Homer testified to was the very fact of this cultural loss, far more than the loss past itself. The destruction of Troy in Homer's poems which in any case is never actually given to us to witness, we never see Troy fall, is hardly at the center of either of his poems except in Absentia and yet in that form, it is ever present to the mind. The effect is less one of anticipation than of unparalleled poignancy. Characters constantly refer to the fall of Troy that's to come.

Without this sense of destruction, the Iliad would lack a future and the Odyssey would lack a past. With it, both poems were endowed with an aura of tragic or just desperate finality and I'd also add, I don't know if I say this but I would just say that Homer would not be Homer if it weren't for the fate of Troy and the same is true for Troy. Though I don't have time to flesh out the argument for you now, let me simply add one more chilling factor to consider, suppose for a moment that Homer is recording not a singular event in history but rather a singular inexplicability and an unaccountable loss with no known but only an imaginable origin.

There's one historical event that fits the bill as none other can. What today is known as the massive systems collapse that swept across the Aegean and East Mediterranean sometime around 1200 BCE wiping out bronze age palaces in Greece on Crete, Cyprus, the Lavant and in Asia minor and ushering in an era of steep decline that threw these civilizations back into a prehistoric state. A hint that we are on the right track comes in Iliad four, text 16A where Hera darkly offers Zeus the trade. Zeus may sack otherly, Argus and Sparta and Mycenae of the wide ways, those were her darling cities. Whenever he liked so long as he agrees now to visit horrible war again on the Achaeans and Trojans.

And to quote, "A Trojan war would have been a perfect way to commemorate this end as it might have appeared to a Greek in the late iron age for its stake in the destruction of Troy is not just a conflict between two peoples or the end of a city but the end of mythical time itself." This is brought disturbingly to the fore at the beginning of Iliad 12, 16B which is surely the strangest moment in the entire poem, which I won't go into but its at that moment that nine gods, four gods and nine rivers conspired to wipe out the alluvial plane of [inaudible 00:48:11] taking with it the Greek wall which is really ersatz for the Trojan wall. And in covering it over as if nothing had happened.

The catalog of ships is another reminder of this vanished presence. It is a virtual map of what is known as the Mycenaean world, albeit hazily and badly reconstructed. Highly stylized and poetically designed, the catalog portrays the political geography of a later archaic age and jumbles that up of an earlier bronze age. For these reasons, the catalog is suggestive and not indicative of any historical reality. On the contrary, it shows all the signs of a projection. It was organizers around the anachronistic myth of a pan-Hellenic assault on Asia minor, one that was conceivable only starting at the late eighth century when the idea of Greek-ness was just beginning to take shape.

Like an anamorphic image or screen memory for that matter, in Freud's terms, the catalog contains in its very distortions, the truth of its traumatic core. Homer's Troy, meanwhile, is the place where all this significance gets collected and condensed, which is in turn, as I mentioned, deflected onto the Greek wall, the latter representing in its crumbling and finally vanished materiality, a distorted memory of Troy while both come to stand in for an irreparable and unknowable loss, a loss that could be barely imagined.

So I'm condensing quite a bit there but that's the section on Troy. Now I'm going to fast forward at this point to [Borhes 00:49:53] we can make one last glance back on the tradition by confronting it in an unexpected place, namely in Jorge Luis Borges' short story, The Immortal from 1947. The story is a frame narrative, a series of stories within a story although this hardly hints at its complexity. The outer most framing tale, set in London in 1929, concerns a manuscript that was found in a copy of the last volume of pope's translation of the Iliad and sold by a certain antique dealer, Joseph [inaudible 00:50:29] of Smyrna. The manuscript tells the tale of a wanderer who sets off on a fabulous odyssey through space and time in search of the secret city of the immortals, which was washed by a river whose waters grant immortality.

It is unclear what the innermost narrator is after, whether it is immortality or just a glimpse of the city or whether to attain one of these goals he must attain the other. When finally he reaches his destination, it turns out that the dark river, the river is the dark [aseepas 00:51:02] that runs down from Mount Ida on the Troad and its mentioned, actually, in the Trojan catalog in the Iliad and its also one of the eight rivers, I thought it was nine, that was ... who wrote this? That were used by the gods to flood the Trojan [crosstalk 00:51:20] it was nine days, eight rivers. Yeah. And the vertiginous city of the immortals must therefore be Troy, a possibility I believe that has escaped notice until now.

But the narrator has yet to find the city, he's merely found where it must lie. Obsessed with the idea of glimpsing the city but unable to reach it from above, the narrator seeks refuge in a circular chamber below where by chance he encounters the city in its subterranean boughs. The spectacle is Escher-esque, this is text 17. There were nine doors in the cellar, eight led to a labyrinth that treacherously returned to the same chamber. The ninth through another labyrinth led to a second circular chamber equal to the first. I do not know the total number of these chambers, mine is fortune and anxiety multiplied them.

Eventually he finds an egress and he seems to behold a palace below, although what he actually sees is an object that refuses to come into focus. Surrounding a little courtyard, soars upward a single building of irregular form and variable height that is adorned heterogeneously with different cupolas and columns. Mirroring the labyrinth of its foundations below, it too is an inextricable place of senseless complexity and of enormous antiquity abounding in, quoting here, "dead end corridors, high unattainable windows, portentous doors, which led to a cell or a pit, incredible inverted stairways whose steps and balustrades hung downwards," end of quote. While other stairways clung airily to the side of a monumental wall. The city now fills the narrator not only with boundless fascination but with what he calls sacred horror.

He rightfully describes this structure as, "mad and as a kind of parody or inversion and also temple of the irrational gods," end of quote, who built it. Reflecting on the experience later on, the story is this reflection, the narrator no longer knows whether the details he remembers having seen are, quote, "a transcription of reality or other forms, which unhinge my thoughts," end of quote. With this confession, the narrator indicates that he has been assimilated to the inhabitants of the city and fully habituated to this doubtful world.

Nine centuries earlier we're told, and this is the backstory to the city, the original city was raised by the immortals themselves who then proceeded to erect it again with the relics of its own ruins. Once they destroyed and rebuilt their city, they promptly forgot it and went to dwell in their caves. "And all of this in order that they might live in thought," he writes, "in pure speculation." And thus absorbed in thought, they hardly perceive the physical world.

I'm getting closer to the end here. What are we to make of the immortal city? It is Troy but not exactly. Rather, it is the vertiginous idea of Troy and it is this that as much as it contains in its heaping confusions every possible version of Troy, past or present, amalgamated into one, a disturbingly over rich memory trace. But how different is that, in fact, from Homer's Troy? Homer's Troy, too, is either a physical place that has been made into a mental construct and idea or a mental construct that has been assigned to a place and put into the form of an architectural image. In other words, Borges's construct is the image of Troy as this is reflected in Homer's mind and in the minds of all those who've come after him.

The parallels are unavoidable and clearly marked out for us. Homer's Troy begins its life when it vanishes. Thereafter, Troy must be reconstructed out of the relics of its ruins, which are not made of stones, Homer's Troy being the city of the immortal version of it, which are made not of stones but of ideas, imaginings and words. Every reader of Homer performs this act of reconstruction by playing the part of an archeologist, that is, by burrowing into time. Literally climbing down into the vaults and chambers [inaudible 00:55:47] site of Troy then recreating an image of the past on top of these foundations and finally inhabiting it mentally in what might be termed a Homeric archaeo-poetics.

Archeologists are of course readers too but with one difference. They literalize what readers of Homer perform in their imaginations. Their labors are a materialization of a commonly shared fantasy. A materialization but also a nuancing. The Troy of the archeologists, as we saw ... did we see that? Has been divided into nine subterranean strata. If you read the book you would have seen that. Each one a doorway to a different Troy. Borges speaks of nine Troys. While those layers, the nine large layers, [inaudible 00:56:39] layers and then those layers are subdivided into further and finer strata. Troy two with its seven sub-layers, Troy six A to H, Troy seven A, B, one to three, possibly B four, scholars disagreed. Some of these further analyzed into earlier lane as in seven B three lane and so on.

All of this complexity is likewise reflected in Borges dizzying confusions and rather accurately at that. Most of the divisions just named were in place after Carl Blegen's excavations at Troy, which finished in 1938 and so they would have been familiar to Borges in 1949. Since then, the numbers have only proliferated further but these additions were foreseen by Borges too.

These would have been foreseen by Borges too. Let me find my sentence. Oh. His image, Borges' image is incalculably complex but where does this leave Homer? Borges answer is as involved as his view of Troy. Just as each of the proliferating layers or levels creates a different Troy, so too does each of the many possible Troys correspond in a powerfully compressed simultaneity to one or all of the many possible Homers. Now Homer lived around 700 BCE. The Homers of oral tradition, before or after his time, some of whom may have seen the bronze age side of Troy if this was its real name. The blind Homer, the seeing Homer, the Homer of Virgil, the Homer of Alexander Pope, the Homer of Schliemann and so on.

And this too is reflected in Borges' fiction. Every character named by him, there's seven all told including that narrator himself is a candidate for being Homer. Each is characterize by, he says, singularly vague features. It's kind of a strange formation, formulation, and the lines dividing each of the characters are equally obscured. "These things, the story of the immortals," he says, the narrator, "were told to me by Homer as one would speak to a child," the narrator writes before revealing himself at the end of the tale to be Homer. That's text eight. "I have been Homer, shortly I shall be no one like Ulysses. Shortly I shall be all men. I shall be dead." Needless to say, Borges, the modern blind bard, felt a particular affinity with the figure of Homer and needless to say Homer is as much an anachronistic construction of post-festum as Troy.

All right, one last point and then I'll be done. Borges, pastiche of Homer, would be incomplete were we to fail to take up one more troubling speculation, one that I believe Martin Ostwald would especially have appreciated. Let me indulge your patient for just one moment. The fact that Borges wrote the story just after the second world war can hardly be an accident. This was a time when the Iliad was being read as an allegory of the Nazi destruction of western civilization and of Jews in particular. I'm thinking here of Horkheimer and Adorno, Arbach, [Fae 00:59:55] [Besbilav 00:59:56] and others.

Confirming this suspicion is little noticed fact that the name of Borges main protagonist, Joseph [inaudible 01:00:06] is a name given by legend to the wandering Jew. As a native of Smyrna, one of Homer's alleged birthplaces, Borges' [inaudible 01:00:17] combines at least two roles, that of an eternally reborn Homer and that of a Sephardic Greek jew who was fluent in salonicas Spanish as he says, a dialectic approximate to a latino and who wanders the globe in various guises and reincarnations. He is Homer the wandering jew.

Borges is faithfully recapitulating Homeric tradition but he's not improving on it in anyway, not even with the notion that Homer was a jew for this was likewise part of Homer's identity, at least from the early 18th century on and I have two titles in text 18 which you may not know about. Borges is not rewriting the tradition. It is the tradition that writes Borges and with the result that his Homer is very like the Homer of antiquity, a poet who lives in the shadow of catastrophe. It is this catastrophe that multiplied Homer in a scatter of fragments, each one tied to the remains of Troy. A life of Troy has not been found but Borges story is as good a candidate as any. What the immortal demonstrates is what we've seen today, namely that Troy and Homer have no life but only an afterlife and neither one nor the other can be coherently imagined, let alone seen. "Only words remain," the narrator writers, but words that have been so profusely overwritten all in the name of seeing what Homer saw that they are no longer individually legible. Thank you.