

Stephen Halliwell (St. Andrews), *Greece & Rome* 51 (2004) 255:

“... a book which builds an enterprising bridge between ancient poetry and modern thought. The French philosopher and religious thinker Simone Weil wrote her essay ‘*L’Iliade* ou le poème de la force,’ at the start of the second World War; it was first published in French, pseudonymously, in 1940–1, and appeared in English as early as 1945. (Weil died in 1943, at the age of only thirty-four; most of her prolific writings were printed posthumously.) James Holoka has produced a bilingual edition of the essay, with a new translation by himself and a thirty-five page commentary which analyses the argument and adduces relevant literature both ancient and modern. Weil’s essay, coloured by a Christian-Platonist spiritualism that is peculiarly her own, has probably been cited with appreciation more often by Anglophone than by French Homerists in the past twenty-five years. But praise of its ethical commitment and sensitivity has to be tempered by doubts about whether its thesis that the epic paints an unconditionally negative picture of war (showing, above all, that violence ‘kills’ those who use it) does full justice to the poem’s complex values. Holoka’s edition is an informative contextualization of a fascinating if idiosyncratic piece of mid-twentieth-century Homeric reception.”