The Iliad Study Guide

The Iliad by Homer

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

For all practical purposes, Western literature begins with the *Iliad.* The *Epic* of *Gilgamesh,* while at least 1,000 years older, is neither as well-known nor as influential as Homer's work. We still use expressions like "Achilles' heel," "Trojan horse," or "the face that launched a thousand ships," all with roots in the *Iliad* or the mythic cycle on which it is based, nearly 3,000 years after the poem was written. And at least in terms of the number of copies to survive from antiquity, the poems of Homer are second only to the Bible in popularity.

Although *"Iliad"* means "the story of Ilion," or Troy, the poem has much more to say about Achilles and Hector than it does about Troy. As the first word of the Greek text suggests ("Rage! Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus's son Achilles"), this poem has a lot to do with anger. Honor, glory, and fate are also frequent themes.

Among the things for which the *Iliad* is most famous are its use of epithets, or formulaic phrases to describe an individual, an object, or even some events. Also noteworthy is the poem's masterful use of similes.

For more than 1,500 years the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* set the standard by which epic poetry, if not all poetry of any kind, was judged. The epic form in poetry has not been widely practiced since the appearance of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in 1667, but the story of the fall of Troy has remained a perennial favorite to the present day.

Author Biography

Everything we know about Homer is either traditional, mythical, or some kind of an educated guess. Tradition tells us, probably following the *Odyssey* and one of the so-called "Homeric Hymns" from the middle of the seventh century BC, that Homer, like his own character Demodocus from the *Odyssey,* was a blind bard or singer of tales.

At least seven different places claimed that Homer was born on their soil in the ancient world. The two with the strongest claims are the Island of Chios and the city of Smyrna (modern Izmir, in Turkey). Because he records many details of Ionian geography and seems to know less about other areas (like western Greece, where the *Odyssey* is set), and because the most common dialect in Homer's Greek is Ionic, most scholars now believe that Homer probably lived and worked in Ionia, the region along what is now the west coast of Turkey.

We can only guess at the time when Homer lived and wrote. Some ancient writers believed that Homer lived relatively close to the time of the events he described. The fifth-century historian Herodotus, on the other hand (*Histories,* II.53), said that Homer could not possibly have lived more than 400 years before his own time. The rediscovery of writing by the Greeks around 750 BC and the development, at about the same time, of some of the fighting techniques described in the *Iliad* have led scholars to assign Homer to the middle or late part of the eighth century BC.

Accurate dating of Homer's poems is impossible, but it is generally thought that the *Iliad* is older than the *Odyssey,* as that work displays some more "advanced" stylistic features. Both poems had to have been completed before the Peisistratid dynasty came to power in Athens in the sixth century BC, because it is known that a member of that family commissioned a "standard edition" of the poems. Also, during the sixth century BC, both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were recited in full at the Great Panathenaia, a religious festival in honor of Athena, which was observed in Athens.

There have been any number of controversies about Homer since his time: beginning with contention over just exactly where and when he was born, lived, and died. Others have questioned whether Homer existed at all, and whether a poet named Homer actually "wrote" the poems attributed to him, or merely culled them from popular folklore.

The question of whether the same person produced both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* has also been debated. The English poet and critic Samuel Butler (1835-1902) suggested that the *Odyssey* was the work of a woman, but this view did not gain wide acceptance.

Most scholars, at least, agree that there was an epic poet named Homer, and that this poet was instrumental in producing the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in their known forms.

Plot Summary

The Background of the Story

The goddess Eris (Discord) was not invited to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (Achilles' parents), so in revenge she threw a golden apple inscribed "for the fairest" into the banquet hall, knowing it would cause trouble. All the goddesses present claimed it for themselves, but the choice came down to three—Aphrodite, Athena, and Hera. They asked Zeus to make the final decision, but he wisely refused.

Instead, Zeus sent them to Mount Ida, where the handsome youth Paris was tending his father's flocks. Priam had sent the prince away from Troy because of a prophecy that Paris would one day bring doom to the city. Each of the three goddesses offers Paris a bribe If he will name her the fairest: Hera promises to make him lord of Europe and Asia; Athena promises to make him a great military leader and let him rampage all over Greece; and Aphrodite promises that he will have the most beautiful woman in the world for his wife. Paris picks Aphrodite. From then on both Hera and Athena are dead-set against him, and against the Trojans in general.

The most beautiful woman in the world at the time is Helen, a daughter of Zeus and Leda. Helen is already married—to Menelaus, the king of Sparta. Helen's adoptive father Tyndareus had required all the men who wanted to marry her swear a solemn oath that they would all come to the assistance of Helen's eventual husband should he ever need their help.

Pans visits Menelaus in Sparta and abducts Helen, taking her back to Troy with him, seemingly with her active cooperation. Paris also takes a large part of Menelaus' fortune. This was a serious breach of the laws of hospitality, which held that guests and hosts) owed very specific obligations to each other. In particular, the male guest was obligated to respect the property and wife of his host as he would his own.

Menelaus, his brother Agamemnon, and all the rest of Helen's original suitors, invite others to join them on an expedition to Troy to recover Helen. An armada of some 1,200 ships eventually sails to Troy, where the Achaeans fight for years to take the city, and engage in skirmishes and plundering raids on nearby regions. The story opens in the tenth year of the war.

Book 1: The Wrath of Achilles

Agamemnon offends Chryses, the priest of Apollo, by refusing to ransom back his daughter. Apollo sends a plague on the Achaeans in retribution. At a gathering of the whole army, Agamemnon agrees to give the girl back but demands another woman as compensation, and takes Briseis, Achilles' concubine.

Achilles is enraged, and pulls his whole army out of the war. In addition, he prays to his mother, the goddess Thetis, to beg Zeus to avenge his dishonor by supporting the Trojans against the Achaean forces. Zeus agrees, though not without angering his wife, Hera.

Book 2: Agamemnon's Dream and the Catalogue of Ships

Zeus sends a false prophetic dream to Agamemnon, indicating that if he will rouse the army and march on Troy, he can capture the city that very night. As a test, Agamemnon calls another assembly and suggests instead that the whole army pull up its tents and sail back home.

This turns out to be a very bad idea. The troops rush away to get ready for the voyage home and their leaders have a very hard time restoring them to order. The army is eventually mobilized for war, and a catalogue of the Achaean and Trojan forces involved in the fight follows.

Book 3: The Duel between Paris and Menelaus

In what is most likely a flashback episode, a truce is called so that Menelaus and Paris can meet in single combat, the winner to take Helen and all her treasures home with him. Solemn oaths are sworn by both sides to abide by the outcome of the duel. Helen watches the fight with King Priam from the walls of Troy, and points out the chief leaders of the opposing forces. Just as Menelaus is on the point of killing Paris, his protector, the goddess Aphrodite takes him safely out of the battle and back to his bedroom in Troy.

Book 4: The Truce is Broken

Hera schemes with some of the other gods and goddesses to break the truce. Athena tricks Pandarus, an ally of the Trojans, into shooting an arrow at Menelaus, wounding him slightly. General fighting breaks out again.

Book 5: The Aristeia

Helped by Athena, Diomedes sweeps across the battlefield, killing and wounding Trojans by the dozen. He even wounds the goddess Aphrodite when she tries to rescue her son Aeneas, and the war god Ares, when he tries to rally the Trojan forces. (Note: *"aristeia"* is a Greek word winch means "excellence" and here refers to an episode in winch a particular character demonstrates exceptional val or or merit.)

Book 6: Hector Returns to Troy

While hacking his way through the Trojans, Diomedes meets Glaucus, the grandson of a man his own grandfather had hosted—which makes them "guest-friends" who cannot harm or fight against each other. Meanwhile, Hector has gone back to Troy to urge his mother to offer a sacrifice to Athena in an attempt to win back her favor for the Trojans. He then meets his wife and baby son on the wall of Troy before getting Paris and taking him back to the battle.

Book 7: The Greeks Build a Wall

Hector and Paris return to the fighting, and Hector challenges one of the Achaeans to a duel. Ajax is chosen, but the outcome of the fight is indecisive. As night falls, arrangements are made for a truce to allow the dead on both sides to be collected and buried. During this truce, the Achaeans fortify their camp.

Book 8: The Trojans Gain the Upper Hand

When the fighting resumes after the burial truce, Zeus forbids the other gods to interfere any further in the course of the war. He himself begins actively assisting the Trojans. Things go very badly for the Achaeans all day, and they retire behind their new fortifications for the night, while the Trojans camp out on the plain before them, to be ready for battle first thing the following morning.

Book 9: The Embassy to Achilles

At the urging of several of his advisers, Agamemnon sends an embassy to Achilles and offers to give Briseis back, and promises greater rewards to come when Troy is finally conquered. Since Agamemnon has not apologized for taking Briseis, Achilles refuses to consider the offer, and instead vows to sail home with his army the next morning.

Book 10: A Night Raid

Agamemnon spends a restless night, and eventually decides to send a spy into the Trojan camp to see what can be learned. Diomedes and Odysseus are chosen from among the volunteers. They capture a Trojan spy sent to reconnoiter their own camp and, based on information they get from him, the two men kill the newly arrived Thracian king Rhesus with some of his men and make off with a team of horses.

Book 11: The Aristeia of Agamemnon

When fighting resumes the following morning, Agamemnon gets his day of glory, but eventually is wounded (as are many of the other leading fighters in his army). The

Trojans push their opponents back to the wall of the camp, and Achilles sends his friend Patroclus to find out what is happening. Nestor meets Patroclus on this errand, and urges him to get Achilles to come back to the fighting or, failing that, to borrow Achilles' armor himself and masquerade as his friend in an attempt to trick the Trojans into giving the Achaeans some breathing room.

Book 12: The Trojans Break Through

Before Patroclus can get back to Achilles's tent, the Trojans break through the fortification wall and head for the beached ships, intending to burn them and so prevent the Achaeans from returning home.

Book 13: The Battle for the Ships

The fighting rages up and down the beach, and the Achaeans are barely able to keep the Trojans away from their ships. Zeus leaves Mount Ida temporarily, and Poseidon covertly assists the Achaeans. Ajax, with Poseidon's help, manages to halt Hector's advance.

Book 14: Hera Distracts Zeus

Hera schemes to distract Zeus while Poseidon helps the Achaean forces. She entices her husband into making love on the top of Mount Ida. As the two of them sleep after their lovemaking, Poseidon continues to help the Achaeans, who drive the Trojans back from the ships. In the fighting, Ajax stuns Hector but does not quite kill him.

Book 15: The Achaeans at Bay

When Zeus wakes up and discovers what has been going on, he forces Poseidon out of the fighting. This swings the balance back toward the Trojans, who once more drive their opponents back to the ships and try to set fire to them

Book 16: Patroclus Fights and Dies

Patroclus finally gets back to Achilles, who lets his friend borrow his distinctive armor and his troops against the Trojans. Achilles warns him, however, not to pursue Hector or to get too close to the city itself. As Patroclus is putting on Achilles's armor, Hector sets fire to the first of the ships. When Patroclus and the Myrmidons enter the battle, the Trojans fall back and Patroclus has his *aristeia,* killing many Trojans, including Sarpedon, a son of Zeus himself.

Patroclus Ignores Achilles's advice and pursues Hector and the Trojans all the way back to the walls of Troy. There he is confronted by Apollo, who stuns and disarms him. The

Trojan Euphorbus wounds Patroclus, and Hector finishes him off, but not before Patroclus prophesies Hector's own impending death.

Book 17: The Aristeia of Menelaus

Hector strips Achilles' s armor from Patroclus' s body. He tries to take the body as well, but the Achaeans fight him off, led by Menelaus. Helped by Ajax, Menelaus distinguishes himself in the fighting against Hector and Aeneas.

Book 18: The Shield of Achilles

Achilles hears the news of Patroclus's death, and vows to revenge himself on Hector for the injury. His mother tells him that if he kills Hector, his own death will follow shortly, but Achilles insists he will have revenge. She asks the god Hephaestus to forge new armor for her son. Patroclus' body is recovered as Hephaestus makes a beautiful new suit of armor, including a richly worked shield, for Achilles.

Book 19: Achilles is Reconciled with Agamemnon

Prodded by Odysseus, Achilles agrees to a formal reconciliation with Agamemnon and accepts the gifts he is offered in recompense for Agamemnon's slight, but vows not to eat or drink until he has revenged Patroclus's death by killing Hector. He puts on his new armor, and his immortal horse Xanthus foretells his corning death.

Book 20: The Gods Themselves Go to Battle

Zeus gives the gods permission to interfere in the fighting again, which they do with great enthusiasm. Achilles goes on a rampage against the Trojans, and only direct divine intervention saves anyone who is unlucky enough to turn up in his path.

Book 21: Achilles and the River Scamander

Achilles continues to hack his way through the Trojan ranks. Eventually he kills so many that the river Scamander is clogged with corpses. The river god attempts to drown Achilles, but is balked by Hephaestus. Achilles eventually crosses the river and moves on toward Troy, where he is diverted by Apollo just long enough to allow the Trojans (except for Hector) to pull back behind the city walls.

Book 22: The Death of Hector

Hector stands outside the gates, debating whether to stand and fight Achilles or to retreat within the city himself. As he ponders, Achilles approaches and begins to chase

him around the city walls. After the third circuit of the city, Apollo withdraws his protection from Hector. Athena, taking the form of one of Hector's brothers, tricks him into fighting Achilles, who kills him. Still enraged, Achilles ties Hector's body to his chariot and drags it back to the Achaean camp, as Hector's family watches in horror from the walls of Troy.

Book 23: The Funeral of Patroclus

Patroclus's ghost comes to Achilles at night and asks him for a speedy burial. The next day, his friend gives him a magnificent funeral, complete with memorial games, at which Achilles presides.

Book 24: Hector's Body is Recovered and Buried

On the orders of Zeus and with the protection of Hennes, Priam makes his way to Achilles's camp at night to ransom back the body of his son. Achilles is moved to pity the old man and makes him comfortable after agreeing to accept the ransom he offers for Hector's body. Achilles guarantees the Trojans a suitable amount of time to prepare for and conduct Hector's funeral.

Book 1

Book 1 Summary

Homer's *Iliad* begins during the tenth year of the Trojan War and opens, like most epic poems, with a request for inspiration from the appropriate muse. We are told from the beginning that the story is going to be about the "rage" or "anger" of Achilles, the greatest warrior in Achaia (Greece). Homer then relates the origin of this anger.

In an earlier raid against the Trojans, two beautiful women were captured and kept as war prizes. Chryseis is awarded to Agamemnon, the commander of the Greek army, and Briseis is given to Achilles. Unfortunately, Chryseis happens to be the daughter of a priest of Apollo, and when her father, Chryses, learns she has been taken, he comes to the Achaians to offer a ransom for her return. Agamemnon drives him away harshly and refuses to return Chryseis, so Chryses appeals to Apollo, who strikes the Greeks with a plague. After the army has suffered for nine days, the goddess Hera takes pity on them, and puts the thought in the mind of Achilles to convene an assembly to discuss the matter. When the men were gathered together, Achilles convinces them to consult their own priest, Kalchas, to see what must be done to appease Apollo.

Kalchas knows Agamemnon is not going to like the answer, so before he replies he extracts a promise from Achilles to protect him. As expected, Agamemnon is furious at being named as the reason for the plague. He says he didn't return the girl when he was offered the ransom because he likes Chryseis better than he likes his own wife, but if he returns her now (without a ransom) he will not have any prize at all from the battle. Achilles reminds Agamemnon that he has had all the best prizes of battle up to the present, and that if he gives the girl back, the rest of the Greeks will see to it that he will be greatly rewarded after the next one as well. This fails to persuade Agamemnon. He warns that if he has to give up his prize, he'll take that of Achilles, or of Aias or Odysseus.

Angered, Achilles calls him shameless and greedy for profit, and threatens to take his men and his ships and go home, leaving Agamemnon to fight without his help. Agamemnon counters that he doesn't need Achilles, but he has now decided he will take Briseis, and return Chryseis to her father. This announcement makes Achilles even angrier and he is on the point of drawing his sword to kill Agamemnon. The goddess Hera sends Athena at this point to stop him, promising that someday he will receive three times the prize he is now giving up if he will put away his sword. Achilles obeys, but the heated argument continues between the two men. At this point, a wise old leader from Pylos named Nestor appeals to both of them, advising them not to dishonor each other. He suggests Agamemnon should not take Achilles' prize, and that Achilles should not be disrespectful of the sceptered king (Agamemnon) whose power was given by Zeus.

Nestor's advice is not taken by either party; after a few more words that are contentious, the two men part ways. Agamemnon makes arrangements to send Chryseis home accompanied by Odysseus, and Achilles returns to his ships. He is followed by Talthybios and Eurybates, henchmen sent by Agamemnon to bring Briseis back with them. They find Achilles brooding by the sea, and are afraid to tell him their errand. Achilles knows why they have been sent, however, and tells them he bears them no ill will, he holds only Agamemnon to blame. He tells his comrade, Patroklos to release Briseis to them, and she goes unwillingly while Achilles sits sorrowfully by the sea and calls out to his mother, who is Thetis, the sea nymph. She emerges to sit beside him as he tells her his sorrows, and when she has heard them, she promises she will speak to Zeus on behalf of Achilles as soon as the god returns from a feast in Ethiopia in twelve days.

As soon as the twelfth day comes, Thetis leaves early in the morning for Olympus to entreat Zeus. She convinces him to take the side of the Trojans against the Greeks in the war, until the Greeks return honor to Achilles, giving him back his rights. Zeus knows this course of action will not sit well with his wife, Hera, who dislikes it when he helps the Trojans. Nevertheless, he agrees to do this for Thetis, and silences Hera later when she questions him about his pact with the sea nymph.

Book 1 Analysis

Some critics have argued that Homer's legendary epic poem has been misnamed. Ilion is another name for the city of Troy and "Iliad" implies the story is "about Ilion". However, as Richard Lattimore points out in his famous translation of the *Iliad*, the actual story written by Homer is not as much about Troy as it is about the excessive anger of the main character, Achilleus (Achilles). In fact, the book centers on a period of only a few weeks toward the end of the Trojan War, and never actually concerns itself with the end of the war or the causes leading up to it.

To the ancient Greeks, this would not have been necessary anyway -- the story of the war between the Trojans and Greeks was considered history rather than legend and they were very familiar with the events surrounding it. Homer's audience would also have understood the relationships that existed among all the gods and goddesses, and he would not have needed to explain why they took sides as they did. However, it is helpful for today's readers to be aware of some basic Greek mythology before reading the Iliad, in order to appreciate it fully.

For instance, during his argument with Agamemnon, Achilles says, "I for my part did not come here for the sake of the Trojan spearmen to fight against them, since to me they have done nothing. ...but for your sake...we followed, to do you favor...to win your honor and Menelaos' from the Trojans. You forget all this, or else you care nothing..."

The ancient Greek audience would have understood that Achilles was saying he had no reason to fight the Trojans himself - he had only come to the aid of Menelaos, whose wife had been stolen by Paris of Troy. As any good Greek would have known, Paris

(also called Alexandros) had been enjoying the hospitality of Menelaos when he met and fell in love with the beautiful Helen. As soon as the opportunity presented itself, Paris took her with him back to Troy, to live as his wife. Unfortunately, for Paris, Helen had been kidnapped once before, when she was very young. Upon her return to her father in Sparta, she had many suitors, and her father convinced them all to make a pact. He proposed that they should all agree to submit to his choice of a husband for her, and that all the others would take an oath to defend the chosen bridegroom's honor against any future threat to the marriage. Menelaos, as the chosen, was able to call on this oath to reclaim Helen from Paris and raised more than a thousand ships belonging to many neighboring kings and noblemen. Agamemnon, Menelaos' brother, was put in charge of the forces, and thus began the Trojan War.

Achilles would certainly have felt that since he had unselfishly come to the aid of Agamemnon and his brother, they in turn should have shown gratitude by letting him keep his war spoils. However, expressing himself with excessive anger was hurting his cause, not helping it, and by the end of the first book, Homer has convinced his audience that Achilles still has much to learn about the importance of restraining his temper.

Book 2

Book 2 Summary

Zeus lays awake planning how best to bring honor to Achilles, and decides to send a dream to Agamemnon, tricking him into believing the Greeks will be victorious over the Trojans in the next battle. This makes Agamemnon eager to attack the Trojan forces, but first he wants to test the loyalty of his men. After telling his Greek leaders what he was really told in the dream, he gathers his men and tells them the opposite. He suggests they all return to their homelands and give up, since Zeus is never going to help them win against the Trojans. Ironically, he is right about that, but he doesn't know it, he only wants to see who will stay and fight.

The soldiers, however, are perfectly content to go home. Swept up in eagerness to be home after nine years fighting a war that has still not been won, they run to their ships and would have deserted Agamemnon in a moment, if it had not been for the intervention of Hera and Athena. The goddesses are unwilling to leave Helen in Troy, since so many Greeks have already died for the cause of bringing her back, so they go down to the men and convince Odysseus to speak to as many men of influence as possible to convince them to stay and fight. As the effort to rally the men succeeds, the goddesses are unaware they are actually aiding the will of Zeus.

Eventually the men are moved by Odysseus to return to battle, despite some opposition from a man called Thersites, described by Homer as "the ugliest man who came beneath Ilion (who ever came to Troy)." Thersites accuses Agamemnon of caring more for the spoils of battle than for the welfare of his men. Odysseus reminds the men of the prophecy from Kalchas that the Greeks would conquer Troy in the tenth year, which they have now reached. Nestor adds his voice to that of Odysseus, and reminds them that they have not yet reclaimed Helen, which is what they set out to do.

In the end, everyone makes sacrifices to their various gods for success in the upcoming battle, and Agamemnon summons the nobles, dedicating a fat ox to Zeus on behalf of them. After the nobles had feasted on what was left of the ox after burning parts of it for Zeus, Nestor suggests to Agamemnon that he gather all the men down by the vessels, in order to stir up the war god (and probably the men as well). This they do, and the rest of Book Two is an exhaustive listing of the troops and their ships, first on the Greek side and then on the Trojan.

Book 2 Analysis

Homer probably did not foresee that Thersites would prove so interesting to people in our time. *The Iliad* portrays Thersites as a brute - he is hated by Achilles and Odysseus equally, as Thersites is forever abusing these two heroes. However, beyond that, Thersites is described by Homer mostly in terms of his physical deformities. The man

Homer calls "the ugliest man who came to Troy" is also described as "bandy-legged" or "bow-legged." He is lame in one foot, with stooped shoulders that are drawn together over his chest. Above his skull was a point with sparsely growing hair. While these problems may invite our sympathies, we are meant to understand that Thersites is not all innocence. Despite the fact that he accuses Agamemnon in almost identical terms to the way Achilles had done the day before, his accusations are not given the same respect as those of Achilles. Homer gives some clues as to why. He calls him, "Thersites of the endless speech...who knew within his head many words, but disorderly; vain, and without decency..."

Still, one can't help feeling a bit sorry for him. Odysseus, who seems otherwise fair in most of his dealings, chastises Thersites, telling him not to stand alone against princes. He asserts there is no worse man than Thersites, and after giving him a harsh tongue-lashing, hits him across the back and shoulders with his scepter. Thersites doubles over in tears, frightened into sitting down. Homer goes on to say that "Sorry though the men were, they laughed over him..."

The lists of participating troops that dominates the second half of the Book is sometimes omitted completely. Their inclusion has been historically debated by scholars on the basis that it may not have been part of the original text. However, some scholars believe Homer would have considered the list important, knowing his original audience would have eagerly searched out the names of their own cities and ancient leaders, thrilled to hear them named in such a famous battle. In any case, the catalogue of participants does serve to underline the seriousness of the upcoming battle, and is evidently intended to impress the reader by its importance.

Book 3

Book 3 Summary

The Trojan plain is the battlefield where the two armies meet, and Paris, the originator of the war, throws out a challenge for any Greek warrior to fight him in man-to-man combat. Menelaos eagerly answers the challenge, happy to have a chance to fight the very man who stole his wife from him. However, Paris suddenly loses his nerve and shrinks back to lose himself among the troops. His brother, Hector is leader of the Trojan army, and is mortified by this cowardice. Hector declares to Paris that he is ashamed of him and wishes he had never been born. He chastises Paris for bringing the Trojans to the point of war over his selfishness in stealing another man's wife - a man he is now afraid to stand up against.

Paris is finally ashamed enough to meet Menelaos in the promised duel, and declares that the winner will take possession of Helen fairly. Menelaos is pleased and agrees that when one of them dies, the war is over, and the rest of the troops must accept each other as friends. He calls for two lambs - one white and one black, to be sacrificed for the Earth and the Sun God, and another for Zeus to seal the pledges.

In the meantime, Helen is weaving a red robe depicting scenes of the Trojan War when she is visited by the divine messenger, Iris. The messenger is disguised as Helen's sister-in-law, Laodike, and she convinces Helen to come out and watch the duel that will decide her fate. Helen is suddenly struck with homesickness for her former husband, and goes out to watch the battle, sitting down next to Priam, the old king who is her husband's father. Priam kindly tells her he doesn't blame her for the war, but holds the gods to blame, but Helen expresses sorrow for having left her former husband and children to come with Paris, and speaks harshly of her own actions. She then entertains Priam by pointing out and naming the various Greek warriors that she remembers.

When the duel begins, it does not take long for Menelaos to wound Paris, and attempt to take him captive. However, Aphrodite, the goddess of love who favors Paris, protects him by wrapping him in a thick mist and setting him down in his bedroom. She then finds Helen and summons her to his chamber. Helen is still remorseful of her actions toward Menelaos, however, and resists Aphrodite. This makes the goddess angry, and she threatens Helen and finally succeeds in bringing her back to Paris. In the bedchamber, however, Helen tells Paris what she really thinks of him. She tells him she wishes he had died in the battle, and challenges him to go back and finish fighting Menelaos. Instead, Paris answers philosophically that he may have been beaten this time, but there are gods on his side also, and next time he would win. He convinces her to drop the subject and go to bed.

In the meantime, Menelaos is frustrated that he cannot find Paris, and Agamemnon demands that the Trojans concede the victory to the Greeks, and keep their side of the

bargain by returning Helen. Book two closes as the Greeks applaud Agamemnon's speech.

Book 3 Analysis

Although Helen had gone with Paris willingly nine years before, she is beginning to realize that her selfish actions have caused a great deal of suffering to two nations. Even though the Iliad is supposed to show the results of Achilles excessive anger, Homer also can't help pointing out that the excessive selfish passion of Paris and Helen have been just as destructive. If there is a moral to this story, it would have to be about the value of self-restraint, or emotional self-control. Nearly all of the bloodshed could have been avoided if three people had not thoughtlessly followed their first impulses - impulses marked by emotional immaturity and impulsiveness.

The emotional weakness of Paris is contrasted against the strength and valor of his brother, Hector, who has a keen sense of honor and fairness. He wants to do what is right, not just what is convenient, and so he convinces his cowardly brother to return to the battlefield to keep his promise to fight Menelaos. Even though Paris succumbs to his brother's argument, he is not really sorry for his cowardice. As soon as Aphrodite removes him from the battle, he is relieved to find himself in his bedchamber, and shows no interest in what may be happening among the troops. His character is apparently as weak as ever.

Book 4

Book 4 Summary

On Mount Olympus, the gods argue over the outcome of the duel. Zeus declares that Menelaos has won, so the war should end as promised. The goddesses Hera and Athena disagree. Hera hates Troy and wants to see it completely destroyed after all her work to help the cause of the Greeks and retrieve Helen. Zeus doesn't mind this, but wants to seem reluctant so he can extract a promise from Hera. He tells Hera she can do what she wants to Troy, but she also has to promise not to protest if he ever wants to destroy a city that holds men who are dear to her. She agrees, unsuspecting, and Zeus sends Athena to stir up the men to battle again.

Athena disguises herself as a soldier and appears to a Trojan named Pandaros, telling him he will win great glory among the Trojans if he takes advantage of the truce to strike Menelaos down with an arrow, while he's not expecting it. Convinced, Pandaros shoots an arrow, but Athena only permits it to graze Menelaos, since she doesn't really want him killed. The action brings the response she hopes for, however, since Agamemnon is angered when he sees that the truce has been broken. He prepares his troops for battle, and ignites their passion for fighting, confident the gods are on his side.

When the battle begins, Apollo helps the Trojans while Athena helps the Greeks. The truce is over, and the fighting is fierce. Before the day ends, many men on both sides end up sprawled face down, dead in the dust of the battlefield.

Book 4 Analysis

The mortals appear to be almost completely at the mercy of the whims of the gods, but on a closer look, it becomes evident that the gods mainly manipulate those whose weak characters make them good targets. The gods seem to reason with those who have strong characters, as Athena did with Achilles in Book One. When the gods need to turn things to their advantage, they appeal to the vanities of men with weak characters, turning the selfish ambitions of men to the advantage of the gods.

Overall, however, Homer's view seems to be that human conflicts are played out simply as a reflection of the conflicts of the gods. The Greeks and Trojans were on the point of ending the war, but the gods are not ready for this - they still want to resolve their own struggles, so they use the men as pawns for this purpose, and stir them up to continue battling each other. This convenient worldview might have allowed the Greeks of Homer's time to hold themselves largely irresponsible for events. Men were not responsible for their wars, the gods were.

Even though the previous chapter describes Helen as showing an admirable humility in accepting on the surface at least that she is the cause of the war, she really lays most of the blame on Aphrodite, for forcing her to go with Paris. In reality, Homer doesn't hold

Helen at fault at all - Aphrodite loved Paris and wanted him to have the most beautiful woman in the world. Helen thereafter had no real choice. In Homer's view, events were totally out of her control.

Book 5

Book 5 Summary

Diomedes now emerges as the best Greek warrior in Achilles' absence, as he has the help of Athena. After vanquishing several other formidable opponents, Diomedes finds himself face to face with Pandaros, the Trojan who was convinced by Athena to break the truce in Book Four. After one unsuccessful clash with the Trojan, Diomedes is injured and calls to Athena for help, even as Pandaros is boasting to his comrades that he has hit the best of the Achaians. Athena heals Diomedes, lifting him up and encouraging him to fight. She tells him she has strengthened him, and taken away from his eyes the veil that keeps men from seeing the gods. Now he would be able to tell when the gods were helping the enemy. She warns him not to do battle with any of the immortals, however, although he is at least allowed to stab Aphrodite if it becomes necessary.

Shortly after he returns to the battle it does become necessary. He just has time to kill half a dozen men before he comes across Pandaros again, who is now reinforced by another Trojan named Aineias. Diomedes kills Pandaros and wounds Aineias, but Aphrodite interferes to save the latter, who is her son. Diomedes goes after her with his spear, and wounds her hand, causing her to shriek in pain. She borrows horses from her brother Ares and drives them quickly back to Olympus, and into the arms of her mother, Dione. Dione heals Aphrodite and consoles her, but advises her daughter to endure it all patiently, just as all the gods have endured pain from men and from each other at times.

Attention now turns to Aphrodite's brother, Ares, who is the god of war and is now assisting the Trojans against Diomedes, who is proving to be a formidable warrior. He strengthens and protects Hector so that the Trojans are able to gain ground against the Greeks. Since Diomedes can see the gods now, he counsels his companions to back down a bit, explaining that the enemy is being assisted by gods and adding that he isn't eager to fight with divinities.

As Ares continues to strengthen Hector, the Greeks are driven further and further backward which alarms the goddess Hera to the point that she convinces Athena it is time to become involved again. The two goddesses approach Zeus and ask if he is not angry at the "maniac," Ares, who is violently killing so many Greek warriors unnecessarily. They ask his permission to join the fray and drive Ares out of the battle, to even up the odds. Zeus allows this, and they waste no time. Athena joins Diomedes and helps him injure the war god badly enough so he returns, bellowing, to Olympus to complain to Zeus. His father isn't sympathetic, however. Zeus calls him a liar and tells him to stop whining, but he allows Paieon to heal him, nevertheless. With Ares out of the battle, Athena and Hera withdraw as well, leaving the mortals to fight without the help of the gods.

Book 5 Analysis

Diomedes emerges as a hero worthy of the reader's sympathy - perhaps easier to like than Achilles. He has been given his power by Athena, of course, but his strength of character seems to justify her choice of warriors. Just as those of weak character are chosen when human tools are needed for despicable acts, those of strong character seem to be chosen when human tools are needed for heroic ones.

Like the mortal men, the gods also vary in their characters. Ares seems brutal and unconcerned with human life. He seems to take pleasure in battle for battle's sake, the more physical bloodshed, the better. Aphrodite displays the same kind of obsession, but hers is focused on physical love instead of war. Interestingly, they are brother and sister, just as love and war could be considered two sides of the same coin. They are both unbalanced, and unable to care about anything other than their own purposes.

Athena, Hera, and Apollo, however, each seem to be helping in the battle out of higher concerns. They have real affection for the people involved, and seem to be interested in more altruistic values such as fairness and justice.

In a way, it is a sort of justice that Aphrodite is injured on the battlefield. It was her interference in the lives of Paris and Helen that began the war, which has lasted nearly ten years and resulted in so many lives lost among the Greeks and Trojans. She only has her hand injured, but goes crying to her mother in pain. Unfortunately, her injury doesn't seem to inspire her to think about all of the pain she has caused for others.

Book 6

Book 6 Summary

Homer describes many of the individual clashes between soldiers of the two forces as the battle continues. The fighting becomes brutal and the Greeks are doing much better without the interference of the gods. They are becoming merciless. When Menelaos is about to spare Adrestos, who has begged him to hold him for ransom instead of killing him, Agamemnon steps in and does the deed instead. He reminds Menelaos of the treatment he received from the Trojans in his own house, and urges him not to leave any of them alive. Nestor seconds this, encouraging all the men to focus on obliterating the Trojans rather than taking plunder.

The Trojans are forced to retreat, and Hector goes into the city to ask the elders and the women of Troy to sacrifice to the gods on their behalf, in hopes of turning the tide of the battle.

As soon as he leaves the field, Homer describes a new confrontation that Diomedes has with someone called Glaukos. Before attacking this warrior who seems new to him, Diomedes wants to know who he is. Glaukos doesn't give a short answer. Instead, he recites his entire genealogy, whether hoping to put off death for a few more minutes, or out of habit, it is hard to be sure. It's a good thing he rattles off his family history, however, because Diomedes realizes that some of their ancestors have been close friends, and he still has the family heirlooms that were exchanged as tokens of friendship. They exchange their own promise of friendship, and seal the oath by trading armor. Diomedes comments that there are plenty of other Trojans for him to kill, and plenty of other Greeks to satisfy Glaukos, so they should have no trouble avoiding each other's spears.

Homer then returns to following Hector, who is looking for his brother, Paris. He finds Paris in his chamber, absently fingering his bow and listening to Helen. As Hector had himself conscientiously turned down an offer of wine from his mother, he is obviously put out to find his brother lounging with his wife, and lectures him for his abandonment of his comrades on the battlefield. Paris responds that Helen had just been urging him into the fight as well, and he had just been on the point of returning. He promises to do so, and Hector leaves to find his own wife, Andromache, before going back to the battle. He is told by his housekeeper that as soon as Andromache had heard the Trojans were being driven back by the Greeks, she had hastened madly to the city walls to see if she could catch a glimpse of her husband, and she has taken their baby boy and his nurse with her.

When Hector finds his wife and son, Andromache clings tearfully to his hand and begs him to find a way to help the cause without returning to the battle. Her father and seven brothers have all been killed by Achilles in previous battles and her mother was killed by Artemis after having been spared by Achilles, and she is convinced if her husband

returns to the battle she will be left a widow and their child an orphan. Hector replies that the same thoughts are going through his mind, but he is unable to shirk his responsibility. He only hopes that he is truly dead before the Trojans are vanquished, so that he will not be forced to hear his wife crying as she is dragged off to be the slave of whatever Greek takes her as a battle prize. Hector then holds out his arms to the baby, and when he realizes the plumes on his head are frightening the child, removes his helmet and places it on the ground. He tosses his son in his arms, kisses him, and prays for Zeus to make him a great ruler. He then parts from his wife in a moving scene worthy of Hollywood, and returns to the battlefield, meeting up with Paris on the way.

Book 6 Analysis

To Homer's audience, it would have been much more exciting to hear the descriptions of the battles than it is for us today. They were familiar with the characters involved and knew many other legends about them. For instance, Aineias, who fought against Diomedes in Book Five, was the Aeneas whose legendary descendents founded Rome, and who later became the subject of Virgil's epic poem, *The Aeneid.* Even though Aineias is fighting against the Greeks in this war, he must not be considered their lifelong enemy. The Greeks and Trojans had long been allies, and had a long history of profitable trade and personal friendships, as evidenced by Diomedes' discovery about Glaukos.

Hector is portrayed as a man of exceptional character. He is plainly fair, honorable, and very sensitive to his wife and child. It is plain from Homer's foreshadowing that Hector is not going to survive this war, and the fact that he is so likeable helps the reader understand better the devastating effect the war has had on both sides.

Hector's wife, Andromache, is an interesting character as well. She was portrayed very sympathetically by Homer, and a few centuries later figured as the main character in a play by Euripedes about her life after the Trojan War and the loss of Hector.

It is ironic that Hector is the better man, but he will be lost to his family because of a war begun by his more irresponsible brother's actions. In fact, Hector has to keep reminding his brother to help fight the war, and Paris does not seem to understand how ridiculous this is. His own selfish actions have begun the war, but he is content to let all the better men of Troy die in battles that he is too weak, afraid and lazy to join.

Book 7

Book 7 Summary

There is so much needless bloodshed on each side that Athena and Apollo decide together that the violence should end. Apollo suggests that they inspire Hector to challenge the Greeks to another duel to end the fighting. This was accomplished through Helenos, another of Hector's brothers, who is a soothsayer. The gods allow Helenos to divine their plan, and he brings the idea to Hector, as a prophecy. Hector is pleased with the idea and makes the proposal, which is accepted by the Greeks. Unfortunately, they have a difficult time choosing his opponent. After a long silence, Menelaos offers to fight him, but Agamemnon stops him, knowing Hector will kill him. Again, the rest of the army hesitates until the elderly Nestor stands and shames them all with stories of the great heroes of his day. This stirs nine men to volunteer at once, including Agamemnon, Diomedes, and Odysseus. Finally, lots are cast, and a man called Aias is chosen.

Aias is glad because he thinks he can beat the Trojan, and he prays to Zeus as he dons his armor. Wisely, he prays that Zeus will let him be the victor, if there is one, but requests that if Zeus decides instead to take Hector's side, he will allow the contest to end in a draw, giving both of them equal strength and honor. In fact, they both fight valiantly, but by nightfall, there is no clear winner, and the heralds call for the contestants to break off until the next day. They agree, and exchange gifts of friendship before parting.

At the Greek camp, Agamemnon dedicates a sacrificial ox to Zeus, and the army feasts on the remains. Then Nestor stands and suggests that both sides should take a break from the war to bury their dead, and that the Greeks should also use the time to build a protective wall near the shore to protect their ships in case of a Trojan attack.

Meanwhile, the Trojans discuss returning Helen with all her possessions, in order to put an end to the war once and for all. Paris does not approve of the plan, and flatly refuses to give up Helen. However, he will go so far as to return the possessions they carried away with them, and even to add to them some of his own as gifts.

Finally, Idaios is sent down to the Greeks to inform them of Paris' proposal, and to add the request that the fighting be stopped for the purpose of burying the dead. Idaios does so, adding his own commentary to his assigned script occasionally. When he tells them Paris will return the possessions he carried away to Troy, he adds his personal wish that Paris had died before he had done it. When he informs them that Paris refuses to give back Helen, he adds that the Trojans would prefer he do it.

Diomedes answers Idaios for the Greek side, proclaiming they would not accept the possessions, or even take back Helen; the war must be fought to the end. However,

they don't begrudge taking time out for burying the dead, since the Greeks were planning to make the same request of the Trojans.

The next day this plan was followed somberly by both sides, as they collected their fallen warriors in sorrowful silence. When the Greeks had finished, they applied themselves to building the protective wall on the beach, as Nestor had proposed. Poseidon, the sea god, observes the proceedings and is insulted that the Greeks have not proposed a sacrifice to him before constructing on his beach. He complains to Zeus that there are no mortals left on earth who will let the immortals know what they are planning, or ask permission to do it. Zeus gives Poseidon permission to break the wall and cover it with sand when the war is over. For the rest of the night, thunder strokes from Zeus threatened evil, and "none was so hardy as to drink, till he had poured to the all-powerful son of Kronos."

Book 7 Analysis

The Trojans have lost their stomach for the war, but it is apparently too late to give back Helen and call it off. The Greeks have invested so much time and effort trying to win back their honor; they don't want to win by default. Their recent successes and confidence in warriors such as Diomedes have given them renewed interest in seeing the war through and at this point they are sure of being the victors. They do not seem to be much closer to calling for Achilles' return - in fact, he seems barely missed.

Despite the fact that the duel ends in a draw, there have been clues throughout the match that Hector will eventually be defeated. The first duel should have gone to the Greeks as well - and the dual duels are one of many examples of the "duality" that Homer employs throughout the epic. For instance, many of the arguments among the mortals are repeated among the gods, and vice-versa. The stealing of Helen, which begins the war, is echoed by the stealing of Achilles' war bride, Briseis, by Agamemnon. In a way, this is what precipitates the events leading to the end of the war, so it is another important duality.

Since Achilles has not even been mentioned in the story for some time now, it seems time for Zeus to take some real action on behalf of his honor, as promised. We expect Achilles to be called back to the battle to save the Greeks, but so far, Diomedes seems to be filling his shoes admirably, and other great warriors, such as Aias, seem to come forward as needed. If Zeus has meant for Achilles to be missed, up to this point the plan does not seem to be working. Something will need to change soon, if Zeus is to keep his promise.

Book 8

Book 8 Summary

Zeus assembles the gods on Mount Olympos and finally lays out his plans. He forbids the divinities to cross him - no one is allowed to help the mortals on either side. Athena respectfully agrees that they will keep out of the fighting, but tells him she is so sorry for the Greeks at having to live out this destiny, that she at least must be allowed to give good counsel to the Greeks to at least minimize their losses. Zeus smiles on this suggestion, and leaves the assembly.

When the fighting resumes, Zeus gives Hector power and allows the Trojans to gain the upper hand, forcing the Greeks back to the wall they have built on the beach. When Hera sees the Greeks are overwhelmed, she called to Poseidon to take pity on them, but Poseidon refuses to cross Zeus. Hector is on the point of burning the Greek ships, when Hera intervenes on her own by stirring Agamemnon's heart to call his army to action. Agamemnon calls out to Zeus to at least allow them to escape with their lives, to which Zeus agrees and sends an eagle as a sign, carrying a deer, which it lays at Zeus' altar. The Greeks recognize the bird as a sign from Zeus and take heart, turning on the Trojans.

This is not enough for Hera, and she speaks to a willing Athena, suggesting they dress for battle and help the Greeks regardless of Zeus. Their preparations do not go unnoticed, however, and Zeus sends his messenger, Iris, to intercept them. They return in chagrin to Olympus, angry and sorrowful, but Zeus repeats his warning that he is stronger than they are, and they must obey him. This time, Hera speaks nearly the same words Athena had spoken at the beginning of Book Eight. She will stay out of the fighting, as commanded, but they will continue to give good counsel to the Greeks so they will not all die. Zeus tells her that the next day will dawn on a still harder day for the Greeks and foretells the death of Patroklos.

Hera does not answer Zeus, and the night that falls is lit by the bonfires and sacrifices of the Trojan army.

Book 8 Analysis

Zeus is finally putting his foot down on the interference of the deities, so events can finally bring about the result he is after. To this point, there has been little to advance the cause of Achilles, since the gods have helped both sides equally, and this has only served to prolong the war.

Homer has revealed much more about Hector than almost any other single character in the story so far. It is clear that Hector begins to revel in the power he has been given by Zeus, not seeming to realize the source of it. He feels invincible and Homer portrays him as perhaps becoming a little too proud, possibly to keep his audience from

becoming too attached to a character that will eventually have to be killed off. In the meantime, however, Hector is allowed to enjoy his role as the greatest warrior in the Trojan army, and perhaps even on the entire battlefield.

Book 9

Book 9 Summary

Finally, Agamemnon is feeling enough humility over his army's losses to begin to experience a change of heart. At first, he tries reverse psychology on his men, as he did in the beginning of the story. He suggests they all give in to the will of Zeus and run away with their ships to their homeland. After a long silence, Diomedes stands up to him, inspiring the rest of the army with his own determination to stay and fight alone if necessary. He reminds them of the prophecy that Troy will certainly fall in the tenth year.

Wise Nestor is once again the first to suggest a specific course of action. He points out that it is really the absence of Achilles that is to blame for their current state. He suggests that they make amends with him, since he is a favorite of the gods, and win him back to the fight.

Agamemnon admits his folly in antagonizing Achilles. He pledges not only to return Briseis, but to add abundant, splendid gifts over and above what he has taken. Women from their Trojan spoils, citadels, race-horses - Agamemnon's list goes on and on. He even declares that Achilles can choose any of his three daughters, with whom will come a dowry such as no man ever gave with his daughter.

Nestor is sure Achilles cannot refuse such a generous peace offering. He proposes emissaries should be sent immediately to Achilles, and among them are Phoinix, Aias, and Odysseus. The men wash their hands, drink some wine, and set out on their errand.

When they come upon him, Achilles is sitting with Patroklos, playing a lyre and singing about famous men and their exploits. After sharing a meal, each ambassador takes a turn explaining their errand by making a speech, and receiving a speech in reply from Achilles. Unfortunately, in the end Achilles isn't softened by Agamemnon's offer, or by the flattery of the messengers, who assure him he is needed to rescue them from the Trojan onslaught. He insists that he loved Briseis as much as Menelaos loved Helen, for whom the war was fought in the first place. In addition, Thetis, his mother, has told Achilles he has two possible destinies. If he stays to fight the Trojans, he will not return home, but his glory will be everlasting. However, if he returns home, he doesn't get the glory but will have a long life. He has begun to think that he'd rather have the long life than the glory, and in fact, counsels the rest of them to make the same choice.

This speech stuns his visitors to silence, until Phoinix bursts into tears out of fear for the future of the Greeks. He urges Achilles to let go of his anger, using every argument he can think of. Achilles is unmoved, and offers Phoenix a ride back home to Phthia the next day. Phoenix, who is a family retainer, or employee of Achilles, agrees, and the rest return to Agamemnon with a report of the evening's outcome.

At first Agamemnon and his men are stricken by the news from Achilles, and all are silent. However, eventually Diomedes speaks, declaring that the offer of innumerable gifts have only driven Achilles deeper into his pride. He recommends they pay him no more attention, and assures them Achilles will fight again when the time comes.

Book 9 Analysis

Homer refers to Diomedes as a "breaker of horses," which is an interesting insight. Breaking a horse involves a great deal of intuition and understanding of a horse's psyche, and Diomedes shows similar insight in his interpretation of Achilles' response.

The men are more than surprised that Achilles would choose a long life over great glory. This in itself opens a window into the ancient Greek mind-set. Their lives were based on a heroic code that identified life as being less important than honor, and now Achilles was questioning a major tenet of Greek thought. It is no wonder the entire Greek army is shocked into silence when Achilles appears to be throwing away his chance at unparalleled honor.

Perhaps because of his disbelief that someone could really mean what Achilles has said, Diomedes is able to encourage the army with the hope that Achilles will change his mind, and he first rouses their will to fight and then sends them off to bed to get a good night's sleep in preparation for the next day's battle.

Book 10

Book 10 Summary

Agamemnon is unable to sleep, and decides to awaken Nestor to see if they can work out a plan to regain the upper hand. Menelaos is also restless, and rises to find his brother donning his armor. The two decide to also awaken Aias, Diomedes, Odysseus and Idomeneus with the thought of sending someone to spy on the Trojan camp. Diomedes volunteers first, and chooses Odysseus to accompany him.

A similar course of action has been settled on in the Trojan camp as well, but Dolon is chosen to go alone. The result is that when the opposing spies meet between the camps, Dolon is outnumbered and is overcome with terror. The Trojan begs the two Greek spies to spare him and offers them a ransom. Odysseus tells him not to think about death, but to give him information instead. Dolon is happy to do this, and recites every detail he can think of about the Trojan and Thracian encampments and preparations. Diomedes then kills the Trojan after learning everything he can tell them.

Armed with Dolon's information, Diomedes and Odysseus find the Thracian camp, killing as many as they can, including the Thracian King, Rhesus. Taking the King's famous horses, the two men obey Athena's warning to leave the camp before they are discovered.

When they return to the Greek camp, Diomedes and Odysseus are joyously welcomed. They bathe, anoint themselves with olive oil and sit down to dine after pouring out a wine offering to Athena.

Book 10 Analysis

Each army stoops to spying on each other in the night. The Trojans have been advancing against the Greeks and have become complacent. They send only one spy alone in the dark to the enemy camp, and it is not even one of their outstanding soldiers. Dolon is described as "an evil man to look upon" but "swift footed." When he is captured, he spends much of his time gibbering in fear and chattering his teeth. Not the typical response of a hardened warrior.

The Greeks, in contrast, have lost ground and know they must be very careful. Despite his self-confidence and prowess, Diomedes doesn't overestimate himself. He wisely takes Odysseus with him.

When the Greek spies are told by Dolon that the Thracians are "newly come" to help the Trojans, they decide to raid their camp, and manage to leave it almost entirely in shambles, killing their King and his men and taking their amazing horses - which Dolon had described as the finest and biggest horses he had ever seen. Such horses and fresh, new troops would surely have demoralized the Greek army if they had met them

for the first time on the battlefield the next day. Fortunately for the Greeks, however, two men in the middle of the night have disabled the Thracian force and scored a psychological victory for the Greeks.

Diomedes and Odysseus have succeeded in greatly raising the morale of their army, and increasing their chances of better days ahead on the battlefield.

Book 11

Book 11 Summary

Dawn rises from her bed and Zeus sends the goddess of Hate down to the Greeks to stir up the battle. At first, Agamemnon is doing very well on the field, slaughtering many Trojans and causing them to retreat. Zeus sends Iris to tell Hector to pull back until Agamemnon is wounded, and then the power will swing in Hector's favor.

Eventually Agamemnon is wounded by Coon, son of Antenor. He calls for a chariot to take him back to the ships, and Hector begins to advance as Zeus had promised. Soon, nearly all the best Greek warriors have been wounded or incapacitated, while Achilles watches the battle from his ship. He becomes curious about the state of the battle, and sends his close friend, Patroklos to Nestor to gather information.

When Nestor learns why Achilles has sent him, he wonders aloud why he should care about the wounded when he has been absent from the battle. Nestor lists the fallen wounded to Patroklos, tells him an inspirational story from his youth, and then asks Patroklos to try again to convince Achilles to fight. Further, Nestor suggests that if Achilles still refuses, Patroklos himself should come out dressed in Achilles armor. Perhaps then the Trojans would be frightened enough to retreat. Patroklos is stirred by Nestor's words, and runs back toward Achilles' ships. On the way, he comes upon Eurypylos, who has been wounded in the thigh. Patroklos pauses to help him. He washes the wound, stops the flow of blood, and applies a bitter root to ease the pain.

Book 11 Analysis

In case the absence of Achilles was not enough, the Greeks have lost most of their best warriors. Achilles can see from his vantage point that Zeus is doing as Thetis asked, and he is beginning to realize it is time to forgive Agamemnon. He is still hesitating, but his conscience is beginning to bother him - he asks the names of the wounded, and seems concerned, even though his pride is still holding him back.

Patroklos is Achilles' closest friend, but even he has been able to have little impact on the warrior's actions. Contrasted to Achilles, Patroklos is tender-hearted and easily entreated. Even though he has told Nestor he must hurry back to Achilles, he can't pass the wounded Eurypylos without stopping to tend to his wounds.

Book 12

Book 12 Summary

While Patroklos still doctors Eurypylos, the Trojans continue to beat the Greeks back toward the wall they have built (without Poseidon's permission, Homer underlines, again). The Trojans are unable to attack the wall itself because their chariots and horses cannot cross the ditch that runs alongside. Poulydamas suggests to Hector that the men dismount and leave their horses by the ditch while they cross on foot. This brilliant plan is put into action, with Hector leading the way.

As they try to cross the ditch, a bird sign appears to the Trojans. It's an eagle, flying high and carrying a giant, red snake. Still alive, the snake writhes and strikes the eagle on the chest and neck, causing the eagle to let it drop. This is interpreted by Poulydamas as being a bad sign for the Trojans. He tells Hector that the Trojans will break through the wall, but they will not return from the ships so easily - the Greeks will cut them down by their vessels.

Hector is not pleased by the interpretation and declares he doesn't trust in birds. Nevertheless, as the fighting continues several unsuccessful attempts are made at breaking through the wall until Hector leads the Trojans and gains entrance. The Greeks give way before them and the Trojans swarm in, Greeks scattering in terror, making for their ships.

Book 12 Analysis

The first words of the *Iliad* indicate that Homer's intent is to show the "anger of Achilles." While that is certainly a major theme, the anger of Achilles is inextricably entwined with his pride. It is the pride that sustains his anger, and keeps him from relenting from it. Similarly, pride emerges as a major fault underlying nearly all the disasters encountered by Trojans and Greeks alike so far. Agamemnon's pride is obvious from the beginning of his disagreement with Achilles. Paris' pride kept him from putting an early end to the war, which he could have done at any time by returning Helen. Hector's pride will kill him, because he will do anything to avoid seeming cowardly. Now, Hector refuses to believe in the omen of the eagle - he wants to believe the Trojans will win in the end, and so he plunges ahead toward his destruction, his pride preventing him from backing down.

Even Asias, who refuses to believe he must dismount his chariot to make it over the ditch finds himself in dire straits because of pride. Altogether, pride seems to be emerging as the universal theme, even more strongly than the anger of Achilles, who still has not joined the battle, even though the Greeks are being pushed all the way back to their ships. That is where Achilles has been sitting, nursing his anger and pride.

Book 13

Book 13 Summary

Now that the Greeks have been driven back to their ships by the Trojans, Zeus leaves the battle on auto-pilot, while he casts his eyes over the rest of his territory. He isn't concerned about taking his eyes off the battlefield, because he is confident none of the other gods will have the temerity to interfere while he is otherwise engaged. This confidence may be misplaced since Hera and Athena have already disobeyed him, but as Zeus is the most powerful of the gods, he persists in believing no one will cross him.

Poseidon is the brother of Zeus, however, and nearly as powerful, so he is the next of the lesser gods to disobey and intervene in the war. He disguises himself as the soothsayer, Kalchas, and appears to the two Aiases, or Aiantes (Great Ajax and little Ajax.). He flatters them that they remember the spirit of war craft and not that of shivering panic like the rest. It is up to them to save the Greeks. Thanks to his inspiration, they and their men fight heroically and keep the Trojans at bay.

Poseidon is moved to intervene further when he sees that his grandson, Amphimachos killed by Hector. The sea god appears in disguise to Idomeneus and inspires him to work further "disaster" against the Trojans. Menelaos is also inspired by seeing the successes of the other men, and fights valiantly.

On the Trojan side, Hector has been advised by Poulydamas to concentrate his forces for more strength. He does his best to follow this instruction. When Hector returns to the fighting, he is challenged by Aias, who tells him he will not succeed in breaking up their ships. In fact, Aias says, it won't be long before the Trojans are fleeing before the Greeks. As he says this, another bird sign appears in the sky. As usual, Hector dismisses the sign, and holds on to his belief that the Trojans will win.

Book 13 Analysis

The reader who takes the time to read Homer thoroughly is rewarded by regular glimpses into his sense of humor. Many of the tongue-in-cheek passages are ignored by critics as being superfluous, or unnecessary to the plot. A prime example is the conversation between Idomeneus and Meriones in Book Thirteen. They run into each other far behind the front lines, after each has returned to his shelter to retrieve more weapons. Poseidon has just spoken to Idomeneus and encouraged him not to hang back from the fighting, so this may have made Idomeneus a little sensitive to being thought cowardly. When he runs into Meriones, each seems defensive about what the other may be thinking to find him there. Idomeneus speaks first, asking why Meriones has left the fighting. Feigning concern, he asks, "Have you been hit somewhere? Does pain of a spear's head afflict you...For my part, my desire is to fight, not sit away in the shelters." Meriones justifies himself by saying he has returned to bring back a spear.

Idomeneus brags, "You will find one spear, and twenty spears, if you want them, standing against the shining inward wall in my shelter, Trojan spears I win from men that I kill, for my way is not to fight my battles standing far away from my enemies..." The two men beat their chests a little longer before returning to the battle, just to impress their fearlessness on each other (and most importantly themselves).

Book 14

Book 14 Summary

Nestor meets with Agamemnon, Diomedes, and Odysseus, who were all wounded in Book Eleven, to discuss what they might do now that they are wounded and cannot fight. Agamemnon is discouraged and suggests the best thing would be for them to gradually move all the ships out into the sea, so that at nightfall they can all abandon the war and go home.

Odysseus is indignant that Agamemnon would even let such words escape his teeth, and Agamemnon is hurt but asks if anyone has any better ideas. Diomedes, the youngest among them, speaks. He suggests they all go to the battlefield, holding themselves out of reach of arrows to avoid becoming further wounded, but remaining clearly visible to their own troops to drive them forward. The others agree, and Agamemnon leads them on their way. Poseidon then appears to Agamemnon, encouraging him and his army further.

Hera is happy to see Poseidon's interference, but is concerned Zeus might discover it. She decides to go to him and beguile him to keep his attention away from the battle, intending to lull him into a deep sleep with the help of the appropriate god of sleep. This she does and the Greeks continue to dominate the battlefield. Aias wounds Hector with a large stone, causing him to withdraw from the battle to regain his strength, further weakening the Trojan army.

Book 14 Analysis

Agamemnon seems to have a hard time remaining focused. Every time things begin to look bleak, he is ready to give up, and has to be reminded of their reason for fighting. Fortunately, he has good advisors who look out for his best interest and the best interest of the army and are able to encourage him when his leadership responsibilities become too much for him. He is afraid his men are harboring the same resentments Achilles has expressed to him, and doesn't want to be the cause of the Greeks losing their honor and the war. Agamemnon is a complex character and very realistic because he has very common failings that exist alongside his uncommon strengths.

Book 15

Book 15 Summary

As the Trojans assess their losses in terror, Zeus awakens and realizes Hera's treachery. She disavows responsibility, and tells him that if it had been up to her, Poseidon would have obeyed Zeus. He is mollified by this, and finally explains his plan more fully to her so she can help convince the rest of the gods to back it, instead of fighting against it. He tells her that Apollo must breathe strength into Hector again so the Trojans can drive the Greeks back to their ships again. When Achilles sees them there, he will be angry enough to send his friend, Patroklos into the fight in his place. Hector will then kill Patroklos, which will make Achilles so angry he will finally kill Hector. Once Achilles is in the fight, they will drive the Trojans continuously until Troy is captured.

Hera goes back to Olympus tell the other gods of the plan, knowing they won't all be pleased, but reminding them they must obey him. Meanwhile, Zeus makes Poseidon withdraw from helping the Greeks, and sends Apollo to heal Hector. The advantage now begins to turn to the Trojans. Patroklos, who is still taking care of Eurypylos, notices the battle tide has changed and turns Eurypylos over to his henchmen so he can go to Achilles. He hopes to try once more to convince Achilles to fight.

In the meantime, the Trojans succeed in driving the Greeks back to their ships, setting fire to some of them, while Aias defends the rest of the ships by striding from deck to deck with a long spear, wounding anyone who dares to come near.

Book 15 Analysis

As Patroklos hurries from Eurypylos to speak to Achilles, he is hurrying to his own death. At this point it is probably still possible for Achilles to relent and join the fight himself, but even the most hopeful reader must realize that is unlikely, considering the strength of his pride so far.

The lesser gods are finally falling in line behind Zeus, like it or not. One can only wonder why Zeus didn't level with them from the beginning - perhaps the battle would not have been so prolonged. The most likely explanation is that he was testing the obedience of the gods, knowing any interference was not going to change matters in the end. Now the other gods know this, and have an interest in following the orders of Zeus so that further casualties will be minimized by a quicker end to the conflict.

Book 16

Book 16 Summary

Patroklos speaks to Achilles, in tears at the destruction of the Greek ships and his friend's refusal to fight. He tells Achilles his parents must have been the gray sea and the towering rocks to make his heart so stony. However, Patroklos considers that Achilles may be holding back because of the prophecy his mother revealed to him. He pleads that if this is the case, Achilles will at least give Patroklos his armor and let him go out in his stead.

Achilles denies that there is any such prophecy in his mind - he is still angry over Agamemnon's actions in the matter of Briseis. However, he claims that he is ready to let it be in the past, but he must stick by his word that he would not give over his anger until the fighting came all the way up to his own ships. Still, he allows Patroklos to take his armor and go in his place, and even musters his men to join in. However, he insists that Patroklos must leave the fight once he has helped push the Trojans away from the ships.

As the Trojans set fire to more ships, Achilles tells Patroklos and his men to hurry to the aid of the Greeks. He helps Patroklos get into his armor, but keeps his favorite spear. Patroklos leaves and Achilles pours out a wine offering to Zeus, asking two things for his friend, Patroklos: success and safety. He doesn't know that only the first request will be granted.

The Trojans are struck with fear when the see Patroklos in the armor of Achilles, as they are fooled as Patroklos intended. They are driven back and pinned between the ships and the wall, where Patroklos kills the son of Zeus, Sarpedon. Hector is able to rally his troops temporarily against the Greeks, but Zeus intervenes and the Trojans retreat. Patroklos follows them, caught up in the battle and he kills many men as they are beaten back to their city. Before he can storm the walls of Troy, however, Apollo reminds him it is not his fate to take the city. The god then encourages Hector to attack Patroklos. Patroklos has been made vulnerable because Apollo has struck off his armor and splintered the spear in his hands, so that Hector is finally able to kill him.

In his last words, Patroklos tells Hector his victory was given by Zeus and Apollo, who had stripped off his armor. He adds that Hector himself will not live long - death and destiny are already standing next to him.

Book 16 Analysis

Many of Homer's similes point out how little human nature changes. When Achilles' men, the Myrmidons, go out to battle, Homer writes that they "came streaming out like wasps at the wayside when little boys have got into the habit of making them angry by always teasing them..."

As Patroklos enters the fight, the epic approaches its climax, which culminates in his death. With this turn of events, the story takes on a much darker tone, as do the characters themselves. For example, even though Patroklos was destined to die for an important purpose, his own actions almost seem meant to justify his death. He has disobeyed Achilles by pursuing the Trojans far past the beach wall, and seems to have been taking far too much pleasure in his role as the great warrior, Achilles. He has also killed the son of Zeus, and so his death, though decided upon before that event, is a fitting payment. On the flip side, by killing Sarpedon Patroklos has also had his revenge on Zeus for plotting his death.

Zeus, in fairness, cannot intervene to save his son from Patroklos. Hera points out that the other gods would want the same consideration, so he tearfully allows fate to take her course. Nothing seems to be turning out very well for any of the characters - even the gods share in the tragedy.

Book 17

Book 17 Summary

Menelaos sees Patroklos go down and goes to him to protect the body and armor from Trojan spoilers. A battle develops over his body, until Hector finally wins the armor of Achilles. Zeus allows him to have it, knowing Hector will not be wearing it long.

Achilles is still unaware of what has happened, as a bitter fight continues over his friend's body. Another battle erupts over his horses, which are weeping for the fallen Patroklos. Zeus notices them mourning and pities them, becoming determined that Hector will not have them. He breathes strength into them so they can make it back to the ships and away from the fighting.

Zeus strengthens the Trojans again because he intends for them to push back again toward Achilles. In the meantime, Menelaos sends Antilochos back to the ships to give Achilles the news of his friend's death. Menelaos does not really believe Achilles will come, however, because he no longer has any armor to protect him.

Despite the Trojan strength and the ferocity of the battle still going on around them, the Greeks are able to maintain possession of Patroklos' body, and Menelaos and Aias carry it out of the battle and back toward the ships.

Book 17 Analysis

When one warrior killed another on the ancient battlefield, the conqueror would take the dead man's armor, and any other possessions that were on his body. These were tokens of glory and proof of the warrior's success, so the more spoils acquired, the more glory came with them. On the other hand, no warrior wanted his armor stripped from him after death, as it showed his failure to all who would see his belongings in the possession of his conqueror. This is the underlying reason for the bitter fight that erupts over Patroklos and his armor. It is highly important to the Greeks that his body be taken back to their camp, to be respectfully treated. It is equally important to the Trojans to have proof of their victory.

Since Hector has been the one to kill Patroklos, he will be the target of Achilles' anger when he comes onto the battlefield. There is little doubt that his will be the hand under which Hector will die.

Book 18

Book 18 Summary

Patroklos has not returned, so Achilles knows he has probably disobeyed his warnings. When Antilochos arrives and tells him what has happened, Achilles grieves bitterly, crying so loud his mother hears him from the depths of the sea, and comes to grieve with him. He tells her he is going to throw himself into the battle and dedicate himself to avenging his friend by going after Hector, who killed him. His mother tearfully reminds him that he is telling her she must lose him soon too, since it is foretold that his death would follow Hector's. Achilles accepts this as just, since he wasn't standing by his friend when he died. He believes that if he hadn't stayed too long out of the fighting, Patroklos may have lived.

His mother realizes she will not change his mind, but points out that his armor is now with the Trojans. She tells him not to go into the war until she comes back to him at dawn with a new set of armor from the god of fire.

After his mother leaves, Hera sends Iris to tell Achilles to stand where the Trojans will see him so that he can defend his friend's body, which is being fought over again. Athena makes him even more visible with a cloud lit by fire above his head, and makes his voice as loud as a trumpet. The Trojans are frightened away but Achilles sees the body for the first time and weeps, as Hera sends the sun god away early to end the fighting for the day.

The Trojans, alarmed at the return of Achilles, discuss their plans for the next day. Their seer advises them to retreat, but Hector's pride will not allow it.

Meanwhile, Thetis is in the fire god's workshop arranging for her son's new armor. When it is finished, the fire god, Hephaistos, lays it before her and she sweeps down from Olympos carrying it with her.

Book 18 Analysis

Events are unfolding as Zeus has planned - Achilles is finally moved to throw himself into the fight wholeheartedly, and the gods are now allowed to come to his aid, as the tide is destined to turn in favor of the Greeks. He has also experienced the result of his too-great pride and anger in a very personal and terrible way.

Achilles' new armor is a gift from the fire god, who owes a favor to his mother, Thetis. It is covered in symbolism contrasting world scenes of war and peace, suffering and beauty. The lesson is one that Achilles has recently learned: that peace and understanding are the better alternative to war and suffering.

Book 19

Book 19 Summary

Thetis returns to her son with his new armor and tries to comfort him by promising to preserve the body of Patroklos. She also advises him to reconcile with Agamemnon, which he does. Both men accept blame for what has happened, and Agamemnon renews his offer of gifts and the return of Briseis. However, Achilles is eager to fight, and says Agamemnon is free to either give him these things, or not, but that their attention should now be on winning the war. In fact, he refuses even to eat or drink until he has fought the enemy.

Zeus sends Athena with Ambrosia for Achilles, so he will not be too weakened to fight and Achilles arms himself for battle. When he is ready, and his horses are yoked to his chariot, he raises his voice and calls each horse by name, instructing them to return him to the Greeks when they are done fighting, unlike their treatment of Patroklos. At this unjust charge, Hera gives the horse, Xanthos, a voice, and he answers his master. He promises to keep Achilles safe this time, but reminds him that when it's time for him to die it won't be their fault, just as the death of Patroklos wasn't. The gods are responsible and the blame can't be laid on the horses.

Book 19 Analysis

The horses are not the first ones in this Book to lay responsibility for tragedy on the gods. Agamemnon says nearly the same thing when he "apologizes" to Achilles for taking Briseis away from him. He says he couldn't have done anything differently; the gods made him do it. While the gods are certainly heavily involved in the events of Homer's epic, Agamemnon's assertion is a convenient excuse, much like Flip Wilson's famous comedy line in modern times: "The Devil made me do it." Nevertheless, the two men put their differences behind them and Achilles determines to avenge the death of Patroklos.

Book 20

Book 20 Summary

All the divinities are summoned by Zeus to Mt. Olympos, where they are told they can now interfere in the battle on either side in whatever way they wish. This is what they have all been waiting for.

On the battlefield, Achilles is straining to meet Hector, but Apollo disguises himself as Lykaon, a son of Troy's king, Priam and heckles Aineias into going against Achilles instead. Aineias is not eager to do it, pointing out that he had come up against Achilles before and was almost killed by him. Apollo reminds him that his mother was as much a goddess as Achilles' mother, so he should have nothing to fear from Achilles. In fact, the mother of Aineias was supposed to have been Aphrodite herself, daughter of Zeus, which makes her a higher goddess than the mother of Achilles, who is only the daughter of Poseidon.

Apollo's taunting works, and Aineias confronts Achilles, first by reeling off his genealogy, and then by thrusting his spear into Achilles' new shield. The shield holds, since it was created by a god, and Achilles goes after his opponent with vigor. Poseidon is concerned that Achilles may kill Aineias, whose destiny requires him to live, so he intervenes and carries the Trojan from the field while Achilles goes in search of other victims.

As Achilles is stirring his army to fight, Hector is doing the same on the Trojan side, and he is as eager to meet Achilles as the Greek is to meet him. Apollo forbids Hector to fight him alone, but Achilles kills Hector's brother and the Trojan can no longer stand and watch. He goes after Achilles, and is almost killed more than once, but Apollo saves him each time. Achilles sees that his efforts are having no effect and tells Hector that he knows the gods are aiding him. Still, he threatens to try again later, and moves on, killing several more men. Homer comments that Achilles is straining to win glory, "his invincible hands spattered with bloody filth."

Book 20 Analysis

The reason Zeus gives for allowing the gods to enter the battle, is that Achilles is so intent on vengeance now and the Trojans so afraid of him, that he is afraid worse may happen to the Trojans than destiny has in store for them. Something like this almost does occur to Aineias, in fact, as Achilles comes close to killing him. Homer knows of the Roman claim that their people are descended from Aineias, so he writes that Poseidon knows Aineias is supposed to live and become lord of all Trojans and father of a long dynasty. Later, the poet Virgil will read this line of Homer's and use it as the basis of his own great work, *The Aeneid*.

On the Greek side, so far the gods are standing back to watch the battle, except for the rather unusual occasion when Poseidon, who actually favors the Greeks, steps in to help the Trojan, Aineias. For the most part, however, he and the others are not yet interfering since Achilles is fighting mightily, and doesn't really need them.

Even though the gods who favor the Trojans have immediately jumped in to help their side, the Trojans are still suffering great losses in the face of Achilles' anger. Homer hints here that Achilles really hasn't changed much, as pride and anger are still driving him. He is "straining" to win glory, and we are told in line 468 that he is "in a strong fury."

Book 21

Book 21 Summary

Achilles continues an almost murderous rampage, splitting the Trojans and driving some toward Troy and the rest toward the River. He concentrates on those at the river, killing as he goes, and then decides to choose twelve men to kill as a vengeance for the death of Patroklos. Leading them out of the water, he had them bound and led away to his ships to be dealt with later. Turning back to kill more men, he is merciless, and ends up glutting the river with blood and bodies. The river god, Xanthus, has had enough. He complains to Achilles and begs him to stop, but Achilles refuses. He continues to fill the river with his dead, until Xanthus comes after him with huge waves in retaliation. Achilles desperately tries to escape the river, but finally has to cry out to Zeus for help. Several gods come to his aid to subdue the river god and his fellow stream god, Simoeis, and he is finally subdued by Hera and the god of fire, Hephaistos. Athena and Poseidon urge Achilles to concentrate on pushing the battle to Troy and vanquishing Hector.

By this time, the gods themselves are so caught up in the action that they get carried away and begin fighting each other. Their battles continue until Hera injures Artemis, who runs to Olympos to complain to Zeus, and is shortly followed by most of the rest of the disgruntled gods. Apollo remains, however, and goes to Troy to check the strength of the walls in case the Greeks try to storm them. By then, Trojan warriors are already fleeing into the city, so Apollo creates a diversion on the battlefield to distract Achilles. He takes the form of Agenor; the Trojan Achilles is presently fighting, and substitutes himself for the mortal, who he removes in a mist to safety. Apollo then goads Achilles into chasing him all over the plain to give the rest of the Trojans time to enter the gates.

Book 21 Analysis

The Theomachy, or battle of the gods, is really begun by the fight between the gods of fire and water - natural enemies. Apollo and Hermes are too dignified to join the skirmish, but the usually sedate Hera and Athena join in and behave like spoiled children along with the rest. Their battle provides some comic relief from the dark tone Achilles' fighting has taken on.

Achilles has lost any shred of compassion he may ever have had for his victims. Patroklos, who has been referred to as his "strong and gentle" friend, is no longer around to exert his gentle influence on Achilles, which may in the past have served to temper his rage. He is no longer interested in respecting the custom of taking an opponent by the knees in supplication. When his opponents attempt this, he ignores their pleas for mercy and coldly obliterates them.

Book 22

Book 22 Summary

Safe in their city, the Trojans take a much needed break - except for Hector, who waits alone outside the gates to meet his fate. Apollo reveals that it is he Achilles chases, instead of Agenor, which naturally angers the Greek. He stalks away and the aged Trojan king, Priam, is the first to see him approaching the city gates. He begs his son, Hector, to shut himself up inside the gates like everyone else, but Hector believes his only option is to fight Achilles. Nevertheless, when Achilles arrives Hector is gripped by fear and tries to escape. Achilles is right behind him and chases him along the city wall. Zeus wavers for a moment, feeling sorry for Hector and wondering whether he should save him from his destiny, but Athena scorns this thought, and he tells her to do what she thinks is best and hold back no longer.

Athena tells Achilles to stop and catch his breath, so she will have a moment to speak to Hector and convince him to stand up and fight against the Greek. Achilles obeys, and she next goes to Hector disguised as his brother, Deiphobos and convinces Hector to fight by pretending that if he needs Deiphobos, he will be waiting nearby to help.

The ruse works, but when Hector loses his spear and is left without one he calls out for Deiphobos in vain. He suddenly understands what has happened, and realizes it was a trick from Athena to bring him to his death. He accepts this, and decides at least to die valiantly. Pulling out his sword, he goes for Achilles and is met in the throat by his opponent's spear. Dying, but still able to speak, he begs Achilles will return his body to Troy, but Achilles cruelly refuses. Hector's dying words are a warning that Hector may become the gods' curse upon Achilles, when it is his turn to be destroyed by Paris and Apollo in the Skaian gates of Troy.

Far from worrying about this pronouncement, Achilles sets out purposely to devise the most shameful treatment for Hector he can think of. He makes holes in the tendons between the ankle and heel, and drew thongs through them, fastening them to his chariot. With Hector's head dragging the ground, he hauls him back to the Greek camp in full view of Hector's parents and all the occupants of Troy.

Andromache learns of his fate and rushes out to see what has happened. The breath is knocked out of her when she sees him being dragged behind Achilles' chariot, and the other women of Troy lift her up to revive her. When she has her breath back, she utters a long and moving lament for husband and her son's lost father.

Book 22 Analysis

Pride again rears its ugly head and brings tragic results. Achilles is proud and merciless, but Hector's pride also contributes to the tragedy. He stands outside the gates in order to repair his personal honor, not because it is somehow better for the Trojans. The most

unselfish course could arguably have been to sacrifice his own honor and save his life so his army would still have a leader to keep it together. He ignores the counsel of his father and mother, even though he is gripped by fear. He can't bear the thought of being considered a coward, and his mind busily considers which course of action will bring him the most glory.

Andromache's lament in this book is one of the most moving passages in the entire poem. In heart-rending detail, she imagines the existence her son is sure to suffer without a father. In lines 491 - 495 Homer's Andromache imagines her son as "He bows his head before every man, his cheeks are bewept, he goes, needy, a boy among his father's companions, and tugs at this man by the mantle, that man by the tunic and they pity him, and one gives him a tiny drink from a goblet, enough to moisten his lips, not enough to moisten his palate." The last line refers to more than just a literal drink - but more importantly to the thirst that a boy has for a relationship with his father. He only gets a taste of what it would be like from the other men in his life, but it isn't enough to fulfill his longing.

Book 23

Book 23 Summary

Now that Patroklos has been avenged, Achilles is ready to bury him properly. He refuses to wash the soil and blood of the battlefield from his body until he has lit the funeral pyre under him and buried his ashes, which he proposes to do in the morning. Exhausted, Achilles falls asleep on the beach.

As he sleeps, Patroklos appears to him in a dream, and asks him to bury him as quickly as possible, as he must wander beside the gates of Hades until he has been cremated and buried. He also reminds Achilles that his own fate is to die under the Trojan walls, and asks to have their bones laid together in the same urn, just as they grew up together in the same house when they were children.

The funeral preparations are elaborate. Achilles cuts off a lock of his hair, which he had grown long to give as a sacrifice with fifty rams to the river Spercheios if he returned home alive. This was according to a vow his father had made to the river god. Now Achilles knows he will not be returning home and declares he would rather give his lock of hair into the keeping of Patroklos. He lays the lock of hair in Patroklos' hands, and the body is laid on the funeral pyre along with an assortment of other sacrifices, including the twelve prisoners he had brought back from the battlefield.

He refuses to add Hector to the pyre, however, preferring to give him to the dogs to feast on. Aphrodite refuses to let the dogs near the body, however. She anoints Hector's corpse with rosy immortal oil so when Achilles drags him around, the skin will not tear, and Apollo protects Hector from the effects of the sun.

When the wind gods have helped Achilles light the funeral pyre, the fire rages until nearly dawn, when there are only embers left. These are finally put out with wine, and the bones of Patroklos are placed in an urn. The urn is buried in a small mound, which will be expanded later when the war is over. In the meantime, it is time for funeral games to honor the dead. There are eight events, and Achilles provides the prizes for the winners. The last event, spear throwing, is won by the King, Agamemnon.

Book 23 Analysis

Achilles is still ruled by his emotions, the chief of which is anger. When he had rejoined the war after his friend's death, he planned to bring back twelve Trojan soldiers to sacrifice on the funeral pyre. When he chose and bound them at the river's battle, he sent them back to the ships in the keeping of some of his soldiers. However, it is hard to imagine he still intends to do this now that time has passed and his anger has been spent on so many Trojans, including his chief enemy, Hector. Nevertheless, he is still bitter and angry enough to kill these twelve prisoners and sacrifice them on the pyre.

Nothing seems to abate the anger of Achilles, which may be one of the reasons he will have to die.

He has accepted the fact that he will die, of course, and this is best displayed when Homer describes Achilles' actions in cutting off the lock of hair to place in the hands of Patroklos. The lock was meant to be taken back to his homeland and sacrificed to the river god, but Achilles knows he isn't going home. In fact, he may even realize that his intent anger that drives his vengeance is the reason he is not going home, but he is prepared to even give his own life up in order to let his anger run its course, however futile the exercise may be.

The funeral games are a marked contrast to the funeral rites that preceded them. The grim scene around the pyre, the treatment of Hector's body, and the brutal slaying of twelve Trojans by the still battle-encrusted Achilles, is followed by a light, civilized set of good-natured games. The gods influence the games just as they did the battles, and there are moments when Achilles seems a different man - a kind, generous and gracious contradiction to the cruel and merciless warrior.

Book 24

Book 24 Summary

The games end, and each man returns to his ship. Achilles, however, still weeps over his friend and sleep eludes him as he lies tossing and turning. Then he gets up, yokes his horses to his chariot, and vents his feelings by dragging Hector around a bit before throwing him face down again in the dust.

Apollo protects the body through all of these maneuvers so it isn't mutilated, but by now the gods are losing patience with Achilles, and his treatment of Hector's corpse. Finally, Apollo scolds the rest of the gods for not intervening. He is outraged that after the many sacrifices Hector made to them all, none of the gods can stir themselves to save the body so his family will have something to look upon and mourn.

Eventually, Thetis is summoned to go to Achilles. She tells him that the gods are frowning upon his actions and that Zeus himself is angry that Achilles madness keeps him from ransoming Hector to his family. Achilles bends to the will of the gods and Iris is sent to Priam with the message that he will be allowed to ransom his son's body.

Priam is hesitant, not trusting Achilles, but despite his wife's plea that he stay within the gates of the city, Priam selects ransom gifts and gets his chariot and a wagon ready. Before leaving, he pours out a libation to Zeus and asks for safety. Zeus sends a bird sign to show his assent, and Priam leaves Troy. On the plain, Priam meets Hermes who is disguised as one of Achilles' warriors, and has been sent to guide the elderly king safely through the Greek encampment. Hermes tells Priam that his son's body has not been mutilated, and that the spear wounds have been healed by the gods. When they arrive at Achilles' shelter, Hermes reveals himself to Priam and advises him to clasp the knees of Achilles in the supplication posture when he goes in.

Priam obeys the suggestion, and entreats Achilles to be merciful to him in memory of his own father. The elderly king reminds Achilles he has already killed most of his sons and Achilles shows a rare pity and the two grieve together for a while over their losses. Achilles expresses a new understanding of the suffering he has caused, as he begins to realize what he has taken from this elderly nobleman, and thinks of his own father and the fact that he will never return home.

While his servants anoint Hector's body and get it ready to return to Troy, Achilles invites Priam to eat with him. During dinner Achilles asks how long Priam needs for Hector's funeral, so he can hold back the Greek forces. Priam asks for eleven days, and Achilles promises to hold off the attack for that period.

Priam goes to sleep in a bed that has been prepared for him outside the house, while Achilles sleeps in his shelter next to Briseis "of the fair coloring", who has been returned to him.

During the night, Hermes comes to Priam and advises him not to linger sleeping in the Greek camp. He reminds the king that if Agamemnon found him there, the sons he left in Troy would be required to pay three times Hector's ransom in order to get Priam back. Priam takes his advice and Hermes drives him back through the encampment, staying with him until they are safely outside.

When Priam arrives in Troy with his son, he is met at the gates by all the Trojans who have been alerted to their return by Priam's daughter, Kassandra, who sees them approaching. The final section of Homer's epic is concerned with the lamentations of Hector's loved ones, including a touching one by Helen, who feels the loss of the only real friend she has had in Troy.

The funeral rites are held, and Hector's body is burned. On the eleventh day, following his burial, a feast is held in Priam's palace. The last line of the poem says, "Such was their burial of Hector, breaker of horses."

Book 24 Analysis

Achilles is restless and can find no satisfaction as he tries to mourn Patroklos. He mourns his best childhood friend, who is almost a brother, in the only way he knows how to do anything - in bitter anger. Nothing satisfies him however. He is merciless on the battlefield; he brutally kills Hector. He is pitiless, and desecrates Hector's body, even after (or perhaps because) Hector begged him to respect his corpse. He piles the funeral pyre of Patroklos with sacrifices and dead bodies, but he still can't be at peace.

It is not until the gods intervene and convince him to return Hector's body that he finally finds peace in, of all things, kindness and empathy. This change is brought on by Priam, who is an elderly man, very like Achilles' father. Finally, Achilles begins to put himself in the shoes of his enemies, and it is only then that he begins to find peace and acceptance.

Appropriately, Homer ends his story with Hector's funeral, and surrounds the events with great tenderness, showing the high regard everyone had for him. In a sense, the peaceful sorrow of Hector's funeral contradicts the violent and bitter funeral Achilles had for Patroklos. However, the story ends with this, because Achilles has at last found the same peace by dealing kindly with Priam and making atonement by the worthy act of returning Hector's body.

It is interesting to contrast the first line of the poem: "Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilles and its devastation, which put pains thousand fold upon the Achaians," with the last: "Such was their burial of Hector, breaker of horses." The first line speaks of the thing which brought such sorrow to Achilles - his anger - and the last speaks of the thing that finally brought him peace - his gift to the Trojans of a funeral for Hector.

Characters

Achilles

Son of the mortal Peleus and the sea goddess Thetis, Achilles is the best warrior at Troy. He leads the *Myrmidons* (from the Greek word for "ant," as their ancestors were created by Zeus from ants after a plague had depopulated part of the kingdom of Achilles' grandfather, Aeacus).

His mother dipped the baby Achilles in the River Styx, which made him invulnerable. But she forgot to dip the heel by which she held him, which left one place where a weapon could injure him: hence an "Achilles' heel" is a weak or vulnerable spot.

Thetis knew that her son was destined either to go to Troy, where he would die gloriously as a young man, or to live a long (but dull) life ruling over his people at home. To keep him out of the army, Thetis sent Achilles away to another king's court dressed as a woman, but Odysseus tracked him down there and convinced him to join the army in spite of his mother's pleas. Knowing that his time is short, Achilles wants to make the most of it and is very sensitive to any suggestion that he is not the best, most respected man of his age—which leads to the conflict with Agamemnon that starts the poem.

Later Greek tradition held that Achilles and Patroclus were lovers as well as friends, not an uncommon practice in classical times. Bernard Knox suggests, in his introduction to Robert Fagles's translation of the *Iliad* (1990), that "the text gives no warrant" for this assertion, but other critics disagree. There are a number of instances in the poem where Achilles' words or actions indicate, though they do not necessarily prove the existence of, a level of attachment that is beyond mere friendship (e.g., XVIII.22 ff., XIX.4-5, XIX.319-2I, and XXIII.144ff.).

Knox is correct, however, to note that Achilles is godlike in more than just appearance. For most of the poem, Achilles behaves more like one of the gods—petulant, self-absorbed, touchy, and well-nigh implacable when angry—than his fellow human beings. His words to Hector, just before he kills him, "to hack your flesh away and eat it raw" (XXII.347) recall Hera's attitude toward the Trojans, as described by Zeus, at the beginning of the poem (IV.35-36). It is only after Hector's death that Achilles becomes human again, a transformation that is completed when Priam comes to ransom Hector's body.

After killing Hector, Achilles and the Achaeans make headway against the Trojans once more. Achilles, however, does not live to see the city fall: he is killed by Paris (with the help of Apollo) shortly before the Achaeans resort to the "Trojan Horse" to gain access to the city by night.

Achilleus

See Achilles

Aeacides

See Achilles

Aeneas

Son of Anchises and the goddess Aphrodite, Aeneas is a minor character in the *Iliad,* where he is portrayed as a fighter to be reckoned with (especially in Books 5 and 20), and at least once is described (VI 75f.) as Hector's equal in "both war and counsel," though apparently not everyone agreed with that assessment (see XIII.460).

Legend had it that Aeneas was the only member of the Trojan royal family to survive the sack of the city (see XX.302), and that he and his companions sailed westward. The Romans eventually claimed him as the ancestor of their race and the founder of their nation, as described by Vergil in the *Aeneid,* an epic poem in Latin.

Agamemnon

Son of Atreus, brother of Menelaus, and king of Mycenae, Agamemnon is in overall command of the Achaean forces at Troy. His position is emphasized in the original Greek by the fact that the epithet *anax andron* ("lord of men"), which appears nearly 60 times in the *Iliad,* is for all intents and purposes used only in reference to Agamemnon (the five exceptions are all forced by the rules of the meter).

Homer portrays Agamemnon as a good fighter, a proud and passionate man, and a fair tactician, but somewhat vacillating and relatively easily discouraged. He does seem to harbor at least a little resentment of the fact that, while he is in command, it is Achilles who gets most of the glory (just as Achilles seems to resent the fact that he does all the work, yet Agamemnon gets most of the material spoils of war).

In the Greek myths, Agamemnon seems a driven man: he sacrifices one of his own daughters to Artemis to ensure a favorable wind for the army on its way to Troy, he insults the best fighter in his army and refuses to be reconciled until his forces stand on the brink of disaster, and, at least in some traditions, on his return home from the war, he allows himself to be treated almost like one of the gods. These are all characteristics of what the Greeks called *hubris* ("arrogance," 'overweening pride") or *Ate* (what we might now call "temporary insanity"), and they are Agamemnon's chief failings in life.

The Greeks explained these personality defects by appealing to the curse that was supposed to be on the house of Pelops (Agamemnon's grandfather), in retribution for a

sacrilegious murder he committed while wooing his wife. The curse came home to rest on Agamemnon when he was murdered (according to Homer in the *Odyssey,* by Aegisthus, his cousin and the lover of Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra; according to Aeschylus in his play *Agamemnon,* by Clytemnestra herself) upon his return home from Troy. Agamemnon's young son Orestes, too young to go to Troy, eventually avenged his father's death by killing his mother and her lover, which forms the subject of the remaining two plays in Aeschylus' tragic cycle, the *Oresteia.*

Aias

See Ajax

Aineias

See Aeneas

Ajax (Oilean, the Lesser)

When this character is in company with Ajax the Greater (Telamonian Ajax), Homer will sometimes refer to the two of them as "Aiantes," the plural form in Greek of the name" Ajax." As this expression, though perhaps confusing, is more graceful than "the two Ajaxes," it is often used by translators.

Son of Oileus and leader of the Locrians at Troy. Shipwrecked on his way home after the war, he boasts of having escaped the sea in spite of the gods and is drowned by the sea god Poseidon.

Ajax (Telamonian, the Greater)

When this character is in company with Ajax the Lesser Homer will sometimes refer to the two of them as "Aiantes," the plural form in Greek of the name "Ajax." As this expression, though perhaps confusing, is more graceful than "the two Ajaxes," it is often used by translators.

Son of Telamon and grandson of Aeacus (who was also grandfather of Achilles), Telemonian Ajax was king of Salamis, an island off the coast of Attica and not far from Athens that would later be the site of a major naval battle between the Greeks and Persians under Xerxes in 480 BC. One of the bravest and strongest fighters at Troy, he is nevertheless portrayed by Homer as somewhat obstinate and rather plodding, as if all he knew was fighting and nothing else.

It should be noted, though, that he does all his own fighting without divine aid. Diomedes, Achilles, Odysseus, and the others are all helped by one or another of the gods at some time III the poem: it is only Telemonian Ajax who muddles along (and rather well at that) on his own merits.

At the funeral games after Achilles's death, he and Odysseus competed for Achilles's armor and weapons. When they were awarded to Odysseus, Telemonian Ajax sulked and, in a fit of madness, slaughtered a flock of sheep in the belief that they were his enemies. When he discovers what he had done, he falls on his sword, unable to live with the shame. His death forms the subject of a tragedy by Sophocles.

Ajax the Lesser

See Ajax (Oilean)

Akhilleus

See Achilles

Alexandros

See Paris

Andromache

Daughter of Eetion and wife of Hector; mother of Astyanax (also called "Scamandrius," his real name; "Astyanax" is a Greek word that means "lord of the [lower] town," and is more a princely title than a name). After Hector's death, she marries the seer Helenus. When the city falls to the Achaeans, her son is killed and she is given as a prize to Achilles' son Neoptolemus.

Antenor

One of the elders of Troy and a counselor of King Priam. He is perhaps best known in the *Iliad* for having fathered many sons who turn up throughout the poem.

Aphrodite

Aphrodite is the Greek goddess of love. According to Homer, she is the daughter of Zeus and Dione; the poet Hesiod (who likely lived and wrote not long after Homer's time), however, claims that she sprang from the foam *(aphros* in Greek) of the sea, as seen in Sandro Botticelli' s painting *The Birth* of *Venus* (circa 1485). She is married, though not faithful, to Hephaestus, god of fire and smithcraft. Among her many lovers was the god of war, Ares; another was the Trojan prince Anchises, the father of Aeneas. For this reason she favors the Trojans over the Achaeans in the Trojan war.

It could be said that Aphrodite is at least partially responsible for the war. Paris named her as the most beautiful of the goddesses, and the reward she promised him was the

"right" to have the most beautiful woman in the world for his wife—Helen, who just happened to be married to another man. Menelaus was understandably upset when Paris ran off (or made off) with his wife, but such considerations did not apparently carry much weight with Aphrodite.

Nor should we expect them to. Aphrodite's main concern is the physical attraction, and the actions that result from it, between lover and beloved: this is the source of her power, and it is, as with all the gods in their respective spheres of influence, the thing she cares about most of all. Other concerns are secondary, if indeed they are noticed at all. This is why, after rescuing Paris from the duel with Menelaus in Book 3, she sends him off to bed with Helen, and also why she gives Helen a good scare when she questions the goddess' orders to go to her lover.

Apollo

The son of Zeus and Leto, and twin brother of Artemis, Apollo is the god of archery, prophecy, music (especially the lyre, the stringed instrument that Achilles plays in Book 9), medicine, light (sometimes, though not in Homer, Apollo is identified with the sun), and youth. Plagues and other diseases, and sometimes a peaceful death in old age, were often explained as being the result of arrows shot by Apollo (for men), or by his sister Artemis (for women). Although he also worked with Poseidon at building the walls of Troy and was cheated out of his proper payment, he supports the Trojan side in the war.

Ares

The son of Zeus and Hera, Ares is the god of war (or, more precisely, of warlike. frenzy). He is more of a name in the *Iliad* than an actual character (as, for example, in the epithet "beloved of Ares"). When he actually does appear, however, Homer's characterization of him is quite negative. This attitude seems to have been fairly common in Greek mythology.

Ares is portrayed as a bully, someone who delights in causing trouble for the sheer enjoyment of watching what he stirs up, and more of a braggart than a man of deeds. He is not well-liked even among the gods, all of whom laugh at him when he is wounded by Diomedes in Book 5. Even his own parents seem to think poorly of him

Artemis

Daughter of Zeus and Leto, twin sister of Apollo, Artemis is a virgin goddess of the hunt, the moon, and, in some traditions, of childbirth and young things. With her brother, she supports the Trojan side. Plagues and other diseases, and sometimes a peaceful death in old age, were often explained as being the result of arrows shot by Artemis (for women), or by her brother Apollo (for men).

Athena

The daughter of Zeus and Metis, whom Zeus (following In the tradition of his own father, Cronus) swallowed when it was revealed that she would someday bear a son who would be lord of heaven and thus usurp Zeus' place. She was born, full-grown and in armor, from the head of Zeus after Hephaestus (or, in some traditions, Prometheus) split it open with an axe to relieve his headache.

Athena was revered as the patron goddess of Athens (where the temple known as the Parthenon was dedicated to her In her aspect as *Athena Polias,* protectress of the city), but also as a goddess of war, wisdom and cleverness (her mother's name means "Scheme" or "Trick"), and crafts, especially weaving and spinning. She exploits her position as Zeus's favorite daughter, and seems to be able to pacify him when no one else can. She favors the Achaean side in the war, and is especially devoted to Odysseus.

Athene

See Athena

Atreides

See Agamemnon

Atrides

See Agamemnon

Calchas

The son of Thestor, Calchas is a highly respected seer or prophet accompanying the Achaean forces. In addition to being the one to provoke Agamemnon by telling him it is his fault that Apollo is angry with the army, Calchas is said to have been the prophet who foretold the necessity of sacrificing Agamemnon's daughter, Iphigeneia, to Artemis in return for a fair wind on the way to Troy.

Cassandra

Daughter of Priam and Hecuba, Apollo fell in love with her and gave her the gift of prophecy. When she rejected his advances, he gave her a companion" gift": even though her prophecies are always true, no one ever believes her. After the fall of Troy, she is taken as a slave and concubine by Agamemnon, and is killed with him on his return to Mycenae.

Chryses

A priest of Apollo, he comes to Agamemnon seeking to ransom his daughter, taken in a raid on their City. When Agamemnon refuses to accept the offered ransom, Chryses prays to Apollo, who inflicts a plague on the army as a punishment. Once the girl is returned safely, he again prays to Apollo, who lifts the plague.

Clytemnestra

Daughter of Tyndareus (who was also Helen's adoptive father) and unfaithful wife of Agamemnon. She takes a lover, Agamemnon's cousin and foster brother Aegisthus, during her husband's absence and with him plots to murder Agamemnon on his return from Troy. In some traditions she kills Agamemnon herself (by muffling him with a cloak or blanket in the bath and bludgeoning him with an axe), while in others she merely incites Aegisthus to do it for her (which is the tradition Homer follows in the *Odyssey).* She is eventually killed by her own son, Orestes, in vengeance for his father's death.

Diomedes

Son of Tydeus and king of Tiryns and Argos, Diomedes is one of the principal fighters in Agamemnon's army, ranking second only to Achilles. He and Ajax the Greater bear the brunt of the fighting after Achilles withdraws to sulk in his camp. The bulk of the action in Books 5 and 6 centers on Diomedes.

Homer depicts Diomedes as an honorable man, though high-spirited and impetuous at times. Later tradition held that Aphrodite, in retribution for his having wounded her as she tried to shield her grandson Aeneas in battle, caused Diomedes' wife to be unfaithful to him while he was away at Troy. When he returned home and found out about her infidelity, he left home in disgust and was believed to have gone to Italy, where he founded several cities, died, and was eventually buried near the Apulian coast, in the so-called "Islands of Diomedes."

Hades

In Homer, the name refers almost exclusively to a place and not a person. The name itself appears to be composed of the Greek words for "not" and "seeing," and so could be translated as "The Unseen" (place or person).

The place was believed to be beneath the ground. It is not so much a place of punishment, the equivalent of Hell, as it is a place of darkness in which the dead lead an existence that is quite literally a shadow of their former lives. Homer seems not to have been aware of the tradition that within Hades there was a brighter region of Hades (the Elysian Fields) for the souls of virtuous people, but he does mention *Tartarus,* the traditional place of punishment for particularly wicked persons.

The person Hades is mentioned only very rarely in Homer. Hades was the third son, with Zeus and Poseidon, of Cronus and Rhea. After Zeus had done away with their father, and the three brothers cast lots to divide up the world between them. Zeus got the sky, Poseidon got the sea, and Hades got the underworld.

Hector

Son of Priam and Hecuba, husband of Andromache, and father of Scamandrius (also called Astyanax), prince of Troy and leader of the Trojan forces. As Achilles is for the Achaeans, so is Hector the preeminent fighter on the Trojan side.

Hector is, if perhaps less dashing, a brighter and more human character than Achilles for many readers. He is staunchly devoted to his wife and son, his parents, and above all, to his city and his homeland. Unlike Achilles, Hector knows exactly what he is fighting for, and it is the very life of his city, his family, and his people. More importantly, he fights on for those things even though he knows, or at the very least suspects, that the cause is doomed.

Another difference between Hector and Achilles is that while Achilles is both described as, and acts like, the gods, Hector is very much a human being. Achilles is god-like in his rage and eventually in his fighting prowess, and only seems to recover his humanity at the very end of the poem, after Patroclus' death and especially after Priam comes to beg Hector's body from his killer. Hector, on the other hand, never loses his human qualities. He does occasionally become angry, but his rage is never as all-encompassing or as blinding as that of Achilles. In defeat no less than in victory, Hector is a man of honor and dignity. Even his implicit intention (XVII.125-127) to defile Patroclus' body, while perhaps offensive to our modern sensibilities, was no more than a standard practice (or at least a standard threat) in heroic warfare—quite unlike Achilles' eventual treatment of Hector's own body, which even the gods admit goes too far.

Hector may have the distinction of being the first great tragic figure in Western literature. He fights for a cause that he does not approve of and that he knows (though he rarely admits it) is doomed. All his successes are only temporary—the last great respite for the Trojans before their city is destroyed. Worse still, we know, as Hector does not, that he owes his success more to the will of Zeus in answer to the prayer of Achilles, than to his own efforts.

Nevertheless, in the face of all that he must endure, both in the present and anticipated in the future, Hector retains a quiet dignity and nobility of character that represents humanity at its best.

Hecuba

Daughter of Dymas and wife of Priam, she is the mother of Hector, Paris, and Cassandra, among others. When Troy falls, she is given to Odysseus as a prize and has to watch as her daughter Polyxena is sacrificed at the tomb of Achilles. She is the

central character in two surviving plays of Euripides (ca. 480-406 BC), the *Hecuba,* which is undated, and *The Trojan Women* (415 BC).

Hekabe

See Hecuba

Hektor

See Hector

Helen

Daughter of Zeus and the human woman Leda, whom Zeus raped and impregnated while in the form of a swan. Every man In the Greek world (or so the myths suggest) wanted to marry Helen. Her foster father Tyndareus took the advice of Odysseus and had all her suitors swear a solemn oath to protect her even after her eventual marriage. And of course, after she married Menelaus, Paris abducts Helen. The Trojan War results when her husband and erstwhile suitors lay seige to Troy in order to recover her.

Helen is something of an enigma in Homer's poetry, and perhaps In Homer's mind as well. She seems to have gone along with Paris of her own free will, but perhaps under the compulsion of the goddess Aphrodite, who is known to fill mortals with uncontrollable lust in keeping with her nature. Yet she also seems both to regret her choice to accompany Paris back to Troy and the suffering that her choice to do so has visited on Troy and its people. Further, she seems happy to be reunited with Menelaus.

In keeping with her lineage as a daughter of Zeus, Helen has more in common with the goddesses Athena and Aphrodite than her human counterparts Andromache and Hecuba. It is difficult to Imagine either of them standing up to a goddess, as Helen does to Aphrodite, for example. Nor does it seem likely that either woman would ever speak to a man in quite the biting words that Helen has for Pans after Aphrodite has rescued him from the duel with Menelaus.

Hephaestus

Son of Zeus and Hera (or, according to Hesiod, of Hera alone, out of spite after Zeus given birth to Athena by himself), Hephaestus is the god of fire and the arts related to it, such as smithcraft. He is lame (in Homer, the result of being thrown off Olympus for taking Hera's side in a quarrel with

Zeus), and he is a source of amusement to the gods in addition to being their master craftsman. He makes thunderbolts for Zeus, houses and furniture for the other gods,

and forges a new suit of armor for Achilles after Hector strips the old one from Patroclus's body.

Hephaistos

See Hephaestus

Hera

Daughter of Cronus and Rhea, sister of Zeus and also his wife, Hera is goddess of marriage and childbirth. She is known for her jealousy of Zeus and her intrigues against him and his many human mistresses and illegitimate children. In the *Iliad* Hera is a partisan of the Achaeans, both because their main cities are under her protection but also because she is angry at the Trojans because of Paris' decision to give the golden apple marked "for the fairest" to Aphrodite.

Iris

Iris, the goddess of the rainbow and messenger of the gods, is the daughter of Thaumas and Electra, and married to Zephyrus, god of the west wind.

Kalchas

See Calchas

Kalkhas

See Calchas

Kassandra

See Cassandra

Klytaimestra

See Clytemnestra

Menelaos

See Menelaus

Menelaus

Son of Atreus and brother of Agamemnon, Menelaus is king of Sparta and the husband of Helen. Menelaus could be described, with some accuracy, as the "Mr. Average" of the *Iliad.* One might have expected him to be the leader of the Achaean forces, not his brother AgamemnonHelen was his wife, after all, and Sparta was at least roughly on a par with Mycenae in terms of wealth and power.

Yet Agamemnon has what Menelaus seems to lack: the ability to inspire people to follow him. Menelaus's fighting skills are only average, as Homer shows them to us. He is nowhere near the tactician his brother is, and certainly not on a level with Odysseus in that regard or the ability to hold an audience spellbound with his rhetoric. He does not even seem to be terribly bitter about having his wife spirited away from under his nose. Of course he is angry about the wrongs he suffers at Paris's hands, but even in his prayer to Zeus before he fights Paris, Menelaeus seems more annoyed that Paris has broken the rules of etiquette than outraged that a guest in his house has abducted his wife and has been living with her as her lover. Unlike his brother and many of the other Achaean kings, Menelaus enjoys a quick and safe return home after the war, with Helen and all his rightful possessions restored, and more besides from the spoils of Troy.

Nestor

The only son of Neleus to survive, Nestor is the elderly king of Pylos, where it is said (1.250-52) that he has reigned already over two generations and is now ruling over the third. Nestor's role is that of the elder statesman and advisor. He does tend to be somewhat long-winded and given to telling stories about his remarkable feats in the old days, but his advice is almost always well-received, even though it sometimes has rather dire consequences (as, for example, when Patroclus takes his advice and borrows Achilles' armor).

After the fall of Troy, Nestor returns safely home to Pylos. He plays an important role in the *Odyssey* as well, where he serves as an advisor and host to Odysseus' son Telemachus.

Odysseus

Son of Laertes and Anticleia, Odysseus is king of Ithaca in the western part of what is now Greece. Odysseus had been one of the suitors for Helen's hand in marriage, but decided his chances were not good and married Penelope instead. It was his advice that caused Helen's stepfather Tyndareus to bind all her prospective suitors with an oath of mutual assistance if something should befall her eventual husband after the marriage.

Odysseus is renowned, in the *Iliad* and throughout literature and myth since, as a devious, clever man, better at dreaming up schemes and convincing people to go along

With them, than as a slogger in the infantry or a fighter to be feared in Individual combat. He is no slouch at warfare, it is simply not what he is best at. Agamemnon seems to rely on Odysseus to do most of his planning for him, and the trickier bits of negotiation on his behalf as well. Even the Trojans are somewhat in awe of his rhetorical skills: Antenor compares the words falling from Odysseus' lips to the flakes of snow in a winter blizzard (III.222), and suggests that his words make up for the deficiencies of his manner and appearance.

Yet for all his scheming, Odysseus is portrayed as a man of honor, somewhat cool and calculating, and boundlessly energetic. The night raid in Book 10, where Odysseus and Diomedes first promise to spare Dolon's life and then kill him anyway, then slaughter a dozen men in their sleep, seems quite out of character with the Odysseus presented elsewhere in the poem. This discrepancy of character has led some scholars to suspect that this book (or at least parts of it) may have been added later by another writer.

Oilean

See Ajax

Paris

Son of Priam and Hecuba and a prince of Troy, Paris was the subject of a prophecy which foretold that he would one day bring great troubles to the Trojans. In an attempt to avoid this prophecy (which, as usually happens in Greek mythology, only made certain that it came true), Priam sent Paris out of the city to tend some of his flocks on Mount Ida. There he was confronted by the goddesses Athena, Aphrodite, and Hera, who wanted him to judge which of them was most beautiful. Paris chose Aphrodite, who awarded him the right to take the most beautiful of all mortal women, Helen, for his wife.

There was, however, one small problem: she was already married to Menelaeus. In an age when women were thought of essentially as property, this was not an Insurmountable obstacle. What made it worse was that Paris actually visited Menelaus's home in Sparta, incurring certain quasi-sacred obligations under the laws of hospitality —one of which was that he could not rob his host. But that is just what Pans does. While Helen seems to have come along of her own free will, Pans also loots Menelaus's storehouses, carrying off a number of unspecified "treasures" along with Helen.

Pans is not well-liked In the *Iliad:* his own father is ashamed of him, his eldest brother can hardly endure the sight of him (III.39ff.), and even Helen has some sharp words for him in the aftermath of his abortive duel with Menelaus. Paris is not known for his bravery in battle, and in fact is most talented as an archer—something the Greeks felt was a job for weaklings and cowards

Yet Paris eventually brings down the great Achilles (with some help from the gods). In an ironic twist of fate, Paris himself is wounded by a poisoned arrow not long before the end of the war.

Patroclus

Homer does not give much detail about Patroclus or his ancestry. His father was Menoetius, who had sailed with the hero Jason on the *Argo* during the quest for the Golden Fleece.

Homer's poem places both Patroclus and his father In the house of Peleus, as Nestor recalls his arrival with Odysseus on a "recruiting" mission in Book 11, to find "the hero Menoetius inside, and you [Patroclus], Achilles beside you, and Peleus the aged horseman," all engaged in sacrificing an ox to Zeus. That same narrative suggests that Patroclus was sent to Troy at least In part as a check on Achilles' impetuosity, someone with a cooler head who could talk sense to the hero when no one else could.

From what we see of him In Homer, Patroclus is compassionate, caring, strong, brave, and levelheaded: except when Zeus sends a "huge blind fury" (XVI.685-6) upon him, and he forgets Achilles' command not to pursue Hector, once he has driven the Trojans away from the Achaean ships. As a result of this fury, Patroclus is first disarmed and stripped of his armor by Apollo, wounded by Euphorbus' spear, and finally killed by Hector.

Patroklos

See Patroclus

Pelides

See Achilles

Phoenix

Son of Amyntor, he quarrels with his father (and, in some versions of the story, was blinded by him, then cured by the centaur Chiron) and was taken In by Peleus, who made him king of the Dolopians. Phoenix helps raise Peleus's son Achilles, and eventually accompanies him to Troy. Phoenix dies on the way home and is buried by Neoptolemus.

Phoinix

See Phoenix

Poseidon

Son of Cronus and Rhea, and brother of Zeus and Hades, Poseidon is the god of the sea, earthquake, and horses. He is typically portrayed as a stately, older figure, though one capable of great passion and bluster (not unlike the storms at sea that were said to be caused by his anger).

Generally placid, when provoked he can be ruthless. Along with Apollo, he built the walls of Troy for King Laomedon. When Laomedon refused to pay them for their labors, Poseidon sent a sea monster to threaten the city. Laomedon promised his famous horses to the hero Heracles If he would kill the monster for him, but reneged on that promise as well, whereupon Heracles led an expedition against Troy and leveled it (an event that is referred to in passing in the *Iliad).* Still upset because of his treatment at the hands of an earlier Trojan king, Poseidon favors the Achaean side in the war.

Priam

The son of Laomedon and husband of Hecuba, Priam is king of Troy at the time of the Achaean expedition against the city. He is often referred to, but appears rather infrequently in the poem.

When he does appear, however, Homer portrays him as a kindly older gentleman, courteous to everyone and trying to do his best despite his age and weakened condition. One might expect him to be bitter, but there is little indication of this in Homer's characterization. Indeed, he treats Helen, whom he could rightly be expected to despise, considering what she had brought upon him and his city, like a favorite daughter and refuses to let others maltreat her, at least in his presence.

There is something tragic in Priam's character as portrayed by Homer. He mourns for his dead children, and none more so than Hector, the greatest and apparently best-loved of all. Yet he never relinquishes his dignity, even when he finds himself in the unheard-of position of a guest in the home (however temporary) of the man who killed Hector, and whom he has to beg in order to recover Hector's body.

Priam knows, or at least suspects, that his city will eventually fall to the Achaeans, with their superior force. He refuses to dwell on that unpleasant fate, or allow it to cloud his judgment, however. One tradition held that he was killed by Achilles' son Neoptolemus during the sack of Troy. In William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet,* a traveling actor recites a dramatic scene in which Phyrrus kills Priam.

Smintheus

See Apollo

Thetis

A sea nymph and daughter of Neleus (whom Homer calls the "Old Man" of the sea). She was married to a mortal, which is somewhat unusual in Greek mythology, though not unheard-of.

There are differing stories of how she came to be married to Peleus. The first (and more common) version is that both Zeus and Poseidon were both in love with her, but stopped courting her when they learned of a prophecy to the effect that any son she bore would be greater than his father. She was then married off to Peleus at a grand banquet to which all the gods were invited except Discord.

The other version is that Thetis was raised by Hera and, out of love for her foster mother, refused to give in to Zeus's demands. Angered by her rejection, Zeus marries her to a mortal as punishment.

Tritogeneia

See Athena

Tydides

See Diomedes

Ulysses

See Odysseus

Zeus

The son of Cronus and Rhea, both brother and husband of Hera, brother of Poseidon and Hades, Zeus is the king of the gods and the god of sky, storm, and thunder. Homer says he is the eldest child of his parents, though his is a minority opinion: elsewhere Zeus is said to be the youngest child, who was hidden away by his mother before eventually overthrowing his father.

Scholars of ancient religion have long thought that Zeus represents a fusion of a multitude of local "head gods," which may explain the numerous children he is said to have fathered, and the equally numerous women (mortal and immortal alike) with whom he is said to have dallied. As with the other gods, Zeus is portrayed in the *Iliad* as, essentially, a larger-than-life human being, with augmented powers and knowledge but all of the passions, quirks, and shortcomings of any person. Zeus is, however, given a little more in the way of dignity and majesty than some of the other Homeric gods.

One characteristic of the other Homeric gods that Zeus does not share is caprice. While he grants some prayers and denies others, there is no sense that he is doing so merely on a whim. And while he will occasionally resort to threats of violence (as with Hera, for example), he seems generally to prefer to govern by rule of law and, to some degree, common consent among the other gods.

Richmond Lattimore, in the introduction to his translation of the *Iliad,* categorically states that Zeus can do as he pleases and is not subject to fate. On the other hand, Bernard Knox, in his introduction to the Fagles translation, says that the relationship between Zeus and fate "is a subtle one." A mere five lines into the poem, we are told that "the will of Zeus was moving toward fulfilment," suggesting that the whole course of the war was an act of Zeus's will: yet the discussion of Sarpedon's death in Book 16 seems to imply that Zeus could act in opposition to fate, but chooses not to in order to avoid the inevitable chaos that his action would cause. There is even some indication, as at XX.30 (where Zeus says of Achilles, "I fear that he may raze the walls contrary to destiny"), that humans can sometimes act contrary to destiny. It may be that the correct answer is not whether Zeus is or is not subject to fate, but that he is In fact both

Themes

Anger and Hatred

As the first words of the Greek original suggests, anger—rage—is a very important theme in the *Iliad.* That specific term is only used in reference to three people: Achilles (five times), Apollo (three times), and Zeus (three times), and twice of the gods in general. Yet the emotion is widespread: the Trojans, for example, are angry with the Achaeans for making war on them; the Achaeans, in turn, are angry with the Trojans for harboring Paris and refusing to give Helen back to her rightful husband. Hera and Athena are angry at (or even hate) the Trojans generally, and Paris specifically, because he chose Aphrodite over them as the most beautiful even before the war began.

Betrayal

Related to the themes of anger and hatred in the *Iliad* is the issue of betrayal. Achilles feels betrayed when Agamemnon belittles him in front of the whole army. Pandarus betrays the terms of the truce (and infuriates the Achaeans) by shooting and slightly wounding Menelaus in Book 3. Helen betrays her husband Menelaus by going off with Paris, and then betrays Paris by returning complacently to Menelaus after the many years of terrible warfare. Paris betrays the sacred obligations of a guest toward a host when he took Helen away with him to Troy.

Fate and Chance

The concept of fate, or destiny, is explicitly mentioned at least 40 times in the *Iliad.* It is used in such formulaic expressions as "red death and strong fate seized his eyes." It gets its most notable and extended treatment, however, in Book 16 (lines 433 and following) when Zeus is pondering whether to save his son Sarpedon from his fated death at Patroclus's hands. It is also an important part of the "subtext" of the poem, the "story behind the story" or what can be read "between the lines."

It is not entirely certain just how fate works In Homer's thinking. Most of the time (as when Zeus balances "two fateful portions of death" in his scales, or when Achilles talks about the two different possible outcomes of his life in Book 9), It seems that a man's fate is set at birth and cannot be changed, even by the gods. In the Sarpedon story, however, Hera's words at XVI.444 and following seem to imply that Zeus could meddle With destiny, but that he chooses not to out of fear either of the ridicule of the other gods or the chaos that might result.

Honor

Virtually everyone in the *Iliad* puts a very high value on the concept of honor. This is especially true of the gods, who get very upset if a mortal skimps on a sacrifice, or forgets it altogether, or as in the case of Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite—if a mortal names one of them as possessing qualities in greater abundance than another. It is also true of the major heroes—Achilles and Agamemnon in particular. Indeed, Achilles considers a life of glory and everlasting honor that ends in battle at Troy preferable to a long, dull (at least In his opinion) life of respect at home.

Love

Love is one of the subtler themes in the *Iliad,* but also one of the most powerful. In Chryses' actions at the opening of Book 1, or those of Hecuba and Priam in Books 22 and 24, we see eloquent testimony to the love of parents for their children. The tender scene between Hector and Andromache at the end of Book 6 is one of the most poignant depictions of the love between husband and wife in Western literature, as well as one of the oldest. And no matter what other relationships there may have been between them, no one could fail to notice the loving friendship expressed by Achilles and Patroclus for one another.

Helen, while perhaps the obvious character to consider in this context, remains something of a mystery. She certainly seems fond of Priam and at least those Trojans who do not hate or shun her. Her apparent love for both her lover Paris and her husband Menelaus has been seen as fickleness or caprice by some, but Homer and his audience would most likely have taken it to represent the workings of Aphrodite—who is, after all, the goddess of love and passion and thus stands for a power that frequently overwhelms rational thought and other, "lesser" considerations.

Patriotism

Ironically, most of the patriotism that is found in the *Iliad* is on the part of the Trojans. It is a favorite rallying tactic of Hector's, as for example when he rebukes the seer Polydamas for predicting an eventual defeat for the Trojans and counseling a retreat with the words, "Fight for your country that is the best, the only omen!" (XII.243, Fagles' translation). This is not to Imply that Homer thought more of the Trojans than the Greeks, merely that the Greeks of Homer's day had only begun to develop a sense of themselves as a single nation—perhaps at least in part through Homer's own work, which describes, as Thucydides observed some centuries later, the first action taken In common by the Greekspeaking peoples.

Peer Pressure (Shame)

Peer pressure is found virtually everywhere in the world of the *Iliad.* Consider, for example, the gambit used twice by Hera and once by Athena to get Zeus to do what they want: "Do as you please . . . but none of the deathless gods will ever praise you" (IV.29, XV1.443, and XXII.181). Menelaus' debate with himself as he tries to prevent the Trojans from making off with Patroclus' body at XVII.90ff. is in a similar vein, as is the fairly common tactic of "encouraging" a reluctant soldier by pointing out the potential consequences to his reputation of being found with a wound in the back. Even Helen pleads the need to avoid the ridicule of the Trojan women when she tells Aphrodite that she will not rush off to make love to Paris after Aphrodite has rescued him from the duel with Menelaus (III.406ff.).

Revenge

Revenge is another theme which requires a little bit of reading between the lines. There are numerous places in the poem where one fighting man prepares or threatens to kill another to revenge another death, or an insult or offense. Achilles is fairly open about his desire for revenge on Agamemnon for his insults, and on Hector for having killed Patroclus.

Revenge also drives the hatred of Athena and Hera for the Trojans (they want revenge on Paris), and of Poseidon for the city and its Inhabitants (he was cheated out of his proper payment for helping to build the city's walls).

Style

Meter

English meter involves patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables. Greek meter, on the other hand, involves patterns of long and short syllables in which, as a general rule, two short syllables equal one long syllable. Greek poetry does not rhyme, although it uses of alliteration and assonance (repeated use of the same or similar consonant patterns and vowel patterns, respectively).

The *Iliad* is written in dactylic hexameters, which is the "standard" form for epic poetry: in fact, this particular meter is sometimes referred to as "epic meter" or "epic hexameter." *Hexameter* means that there are six elements, or "feet," in each line; *dactylic* refers to the particular metrical pattern of each foot: in this case, the basic pattern is one long syllable followed by two short ones, although variations on that basic pattern are allowed. The final foot in each line, for example, is almost always a spondee (two long syllables, instead of one long and two short ones). Homer will sometimes vary the meter to suit the action being described, using more dactyls when things are moving quickly (horses galloping, for example), and more spondees when things are slow or sad (as, for example, at I 3, where "strong souls by thousands" are "hurled down to Hades").

Simile

One of the techniques for which the *Iliad* is justifiably famous is its use of similes, or comparisons. Hardly a scene goes by that does not Include at least one simile. Moreover, for a poem where most of the action takes place on the battlefield, most of the similes are drawn from peacetime and its occupations: the ranks of the armies are compared to rows of grain in a field, for example.

Homer's similies are drawn from common place everyday objects and occurrences in the lives of his audience. Consider the following passage from Book 11, when the Trojans are driving Ajax back towards his own lines:

as when country-dwelling men and their dogs have driven a tawny lion away from the cattle pen. . . as when boys are driving a sluggish donkey past a cornfield and many sticks have been broken across his back, but he gets In anyway and mows down the deep grain. . . (XI.54748; 557-59).

Two different similes are used to describe the same action, and both images would have been familiar and evocative to anyone with fields and flocks to tend.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing, the practice of "hinting" at future developments in the plot either explicitly (in the form of prophecies, etc.) or implicitly, through indirect hints, is fairly common in the *Iliad.* It is not uncommon (and this is in line with Greek religious beliefs current at the time of Homer) for the dying to make some kind of a prophecy—usually (as, for example, at XXII.355-60 when the dying Hector foretells the death of Achilles), though not always, involving the impending death of the person responsible.

One example of a more subtle form of foreshadowing can be seen in the name of Achilles' home country, Phthia This name is very similar to the Greek verb *phthio,* which means "decay, wane, waste away, perish." In fact, the technical term for tuberculosis ("consumption," as it used to be known in English) was once *phthisis,* from this same verb. Achilles, who will die in the prime of his youth, comes from a place whose name might be translated "Deathville."

Flashbacks

This technique, where a character in the present moment recalls an earlier event, is in its infancy in the *Iliad.* It is thought that the events in Book 3 represent an extended flashback, even though they hare not explicitly labeled as such. It is otherwise difficult to imagine how, after nine years of war, King Priam would be unable to recognize the chief leaders of the Achaean forces, and why no one had thought of having the two interested parties fight in single combat to decide the war's outcome.

Ring Composition

Ring composition is a technique most often seen in poetry, where the writer "comes full circle," or "comes around" again to a particular theme, statement, or event at the end of a work (or significant segment of a work) that was featured at the beginning of the same work (or part of the work). In the case of the *Iliad,* the poem starts with a ransom and a quarrel in Book I, continues with a figurative muster of the armed forces (Book II), followed by a duel (Book III). In Book XXII we have another duel, this time between Achilles and Hector, which is followed by a literal mustering of the armies for Patroclus's funeral games in Book XXIII. The poem ends in Book XXIV with the ransom of Hector's body from Achilles by Priam, thus "coming back around" again to the place where the action started.

Historical Context

The Bronze Age

The Trojan War and its aftermath took place in the late Bronze Age, which began around 1550 BC. This is the date assigned to the wealthy burial sites found by Heinrich Schliemann in Grave Circle A at Mycenae in 1873. For this reason, the period is sometimes also called the Mycenaean era. This was a time of relative stability though not, of course, without its conflicts, wars, and raids. The dominant powers in the eastern Mediterranean were the Hittites in the central part of what is now Turkey, the Egyptians in what we now call the Middle East, and, apparently, the Mycenaean kings in Greece and the surrounding islands.

These three "great kings" all ruled over literate (at least to the extent of being able to keep records and official documents, even if they left us no "literature" to speak of), apparently complex, societies (complete with bureaucrats, if the Linear B tablets found at Pylos and elsewhere are any indication). They engaged in diplomacy with each other and with numerous smaller kingdoms on the edges of their territory that served as buffer zones between them and could be compelled to provide both military and economic support under the terms of the treaties that bound them to the particular kingdom with which they were allied. These secondary kingdoms were also prime targets for raids by other "great kings" and foreign invaders, especially those that were relatively distant from their protectors' centers of authority and military strong points.

Trade was flourishing, and, given the uncertainties of shipping and other means of transportation, together with a relatively low level of technological advancement (at least when considered by modem standards), quite surprisingly so. Distinctive Mycenaean pottery, whether as art pieces intended for display and ceremonial use, or purely for transporting trade goods like oil, grain, or perfume, is found all over the Mediterranean basin in staggering quantities throughout this period.

Military tactics were largely as we see them depicted in the *Iliad:* face-to-face combat between individuals or small groups of men, with little in the way of coordinated effort. It does seem, however, from wall paintings and other archaeological finds, that chariots were used for fighting ahead of the infantry, and not just for transporting people around the battlefield, as Horner describes their use.

The Trojan War, if it took place at all, came very near the end of this flourishing civilization. The Greeks, using generational calculations, set the date of the war at around 1184 BC; modem scholarship, based on archaeological evidence at Troy and other sites, puts it some 75 years earlier, around 1250 BC. But the traditional victors at Troy did not have very long to enjoy their victory.

The Dark Age

For reasons that are not fully understood, this civilization begins to die out around 1220 BC with the mysterious destruction and subsequent abandonment of Pylos. That event ushers in a period of decline that lasts until roughly 1050 BC, when the Mycenaean civilization literally fades away into nothingness.

Whatever its causes, the disappearance of the Mycenaean civilization marked the start of about 250 years of very difficult times in Greece, aptly referred to as the Dark Age. This period has its end with the traditional date of the first Olympiad in 776 BC, very close to the time when we think Horner lived. Of this Dark Age we know almost nothing except what we can deduce from the period immediately following and the scanty evidence in the archaeological record.

Writing was lost, and with it, most trade seems to have disappeared except on a purely local or regional basis at best. Archaeologists working in this period report finding very little in the way of "luxury" goods like fancy pottery—when they can find anything at all. There may have been as much as a 75% decrease in population from Bronze Age levels.

The Iron Age

Beginning around the 11th century BC, the Greeks began to use iron in place of bronze, to cremate their dead as opposed to burying them intact, and to establish colonies along the west coast of what is now Turkey. By Horner's day, roughly the middle of the eighth century BC, these trends were well-established and things were beginning to look up again.

Writing was just beginning to be rediscovered using a new alphabet borrowed from the Phoenicians, and foreign trade was improving: helped in no small part by the colonies along the Ionian coast which, while typically independent of their mother cities, nevertheless tended to remain on friendly terms with them. The population was again on the rise, which spurred another wave of colonization, this time chiefly toward the west (Sicily, parts of Italy, and the south of France).

At least on the Greek mainland, the era of kings was rapidly drawing to a close. By the beginning of the eighth century, the nobles had taken the reins of power from the kings almost everywhere and were ruling over family groups or tribes in what would come to be called the *polis,* or city-state.

Largely because of the decorations found on pottery from the period, this era has come to be known as the Geometric period, but increasing regularity was a feature of more than just the decorative arts. It was in this period that the beginnings of a Greek national identity come to the fore (prompting and/or prompted by the founding of the Olympic games and the dissemination of Horner's works, among other things). More coordinated military tactics were beginning to be used, the *"hoplite"* formation—a line of men with

shields overlapping—alluded to by Horner at XII.105, XVI.2I0f.XVI1.352f., and XX.361-2, which is shown on a wine bowl found at Veii and dating to around 650 BC.

Religious practices were also becoming more standardized at this juncture. While the Homeric heroes sometimes (as with the propitiatory sacrifice to Apollo in Book 1) go to specific places for religious observances, the majority seem to be family— or group—centered rituals that take place wherever the family or group may happen to be at the moment of the ritual, and archaeological evidence from the Bronze Age tends to confirm this view.

Actual temples, like the one vaguely described in Book 6 when Hecuba goes to lay a robe on the knees of the statue of Athena, have not been identified in the archaeological record much before the ninth century BC, and become much more frequent thereafter.

After Homer's day, while the population, wealth, commerce, and industry of Greece were generally on the rise, the political pendulum swung back and forth from more aristocratic and democratic models to varying forms of one-man rule until just before the dawn of the Golden Age in the fifth century BC.

Critical Overview

The critical reputation of the *Iliad* is perhaps best demonstrated by noting that it is generally regarded as the first work of true "literature" in Western culture. This is significant not only because the poem stands at the head of the list, as It were, but also because it had to beat out a fair amount of competition to achieve that status.

By the middle of the sixth century BC, around the same time as the Peisistratids in Athens ordered the first "standard edition" of Homer's works to be made, there were at least SIX other epic poems treating various parts of the Trojan War story. Most of these were fairly short, but the *Cypria,* which covered everything from the decision of the gods to cause the war through Agamemnon's quarrel with Achilles that begins Homer's work, was at least half as long as the *Iliad.* Unlike the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* however, none of the other poems in this "epic cycle" has survived except in fragmentary quotations in later authors. They simply could not measure up to Homer's standard.

Certainly by the beginning of the sixth century, and possibly late in the seventh, there was already a group of poet/performers calling themselves the

Homeridae ("Sons of Homer"). This group may have been the forerunner of the *rhapsodes,* trained Singers who, while they did apparently compose and improvise works of their own, were best known for performing Homer's poetry. At least on Plato's authority, the rhapsodes seem to have begun taking liberties with the poems (see *Ion* 530d), which may have led the Peisistratids to have the "official" text written down for the judges at the Great Panathenaia (a religious festival in honor of Athena held every four years), which included a contest for the rhapsodes which required them, presumably in shifts and over several days, to recite the whole of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.*

For most people, those public performances were probably their major form of exposure to Homer's work. For the educated class, however, knowing one's Homer quickly became the sign of culture and refinement. Homer is mentioned by name at least 600 times in surviving Greek literature, in texts that range from history to philosophy, religion, and even legal speeches. Aristotle holds him up not only as the "supreme poet in the serious style" *(Poetics* 1448b20), but also as the forerunner of both tragedy and comedy. Herodotus *(Histories* 11.53) even credits Homer, along with his near contemporary Hesiod, with being the one who gave Greek religion its standard forms: the names, spheres and functions, descriptions and descent of the gods.

The one dissenting voice in the ancient world seems to have been that of Plato. Although he quotes Homer on more than one occasion, and even lampoons the rhapsodes and their "beautification" or embellishment of the standard text in his dialogue *Ion,* in the *Republic,* his lengthy discussion of the ideal state and the education of its leaders, Plato dismisses Homer as a mere "imitator" and excludes him (and poets generally) from his educational program (which was never implemented).

Homer was frequently imitated in the classical world, whether by the authors of the other poems in the epic cycle or lampooned as he was by Aristophanes in several of his plays (especially the *Birds* and the *Clouds),* yet his work was never equalled. Several Roman poets (chiefly Vergil, Ovid, and Lucretius) wrote epic works, and even used Homer's own epic hexameter line, but their works are not quite on the same level with Homer's originals.

Interest in Homer continued well into the Chris tian era, as evidenced by Macrobius' *Saturnalia* (dated to the early part of the fifth century AD), where educated Romans still know their Greek, and spend an evening discussing the relative merits of Homer's treatment of the Troy story in comparison with Vergil's. With the fall of Rome in AD 455, however, Homer and his works fell into disrepute for roughly one thousand years, until the scholars of the Renaissance "rediscovered" classical antiquity and learned to read Greek again. The story of Troy, however, remained popular throughout the period, and was widely known: there are accounts of the war in several languages, including Anglo-Saxon, Norman French, and English. It was from Caxton's *Recuyell* of *the Historyes* of *Troye* (circa 1475), not Homer's original work, that Shakespeare got his "facts" and details as he was writing *Troilus and Cressida* in 1602.

With the Renaissance came a revival of interest in Homer and his texts, which were first published in the modem era in Florence in 1488. This interest was further sparked in the 18th century when F. A. Wolf first proposed the "Homeric Question" (simply stated: "Who wrote what, and when?"), and again in the latter part of the 19th century and into the 20th with the excavations of Schliemann, Dorpfeld, and Blegen at Troy and Evans at Knossos, the work of Milman Parry and Adam Parry on the transmission of oral poetry like Homer's original sources, and the decipherment of Linear B In 1952 by Michael Ventris.

It is thought that Milton was significantly influenced by Homer in composing *Paradise Lost,* and he certainly provided inspiration for later poets such as Tennyson and Byron, though their works are narrower in scope and execution than Homer's. The *Iliad* continues to enjoy the critical acclaim and popular interest that have been associated with it throughout most of the two and a half millennia since it was first composed.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, Spires discusses some extra-literary concerns, including the historical and cultural importance of the Iliad*, both in its own time and in the centuries that followed.*

In one sense, it is unjust to give Homer all the credit for the *Iliad,* since it is all but certain that he had at least some "help" in composing it. Whether he merely cobbled together shorter poems into one epic work, or whether he improvised the majority of the *Iliad* from a pre-existing repertoire of themes, epithets, and episodes, Homer had the benefit of several centuries' worth of material to draw upon in composing his own poem.

Looked at from another perspective, however, it is no less unjust to refuse Homer the credit for his work. Surely there were other artists, now lost in the distant past, on whom Homer drew for inspiration, technique, or source material. Yet it is his artistry that made the poem "sing," if you will. If we compare Homer to Ella Fitzgerald, for example (a metaphor which I owe to Michael Silk's commentary on the *Iliad),* no one would deny that some credit is due to the original author of the piece being "interpreted" or improvised upon, and some as well to the inventors and refiners of the art itself: yet it is indisputably Fitzgerald's artistry (or Homer's) that makes the piece something more than an exercise in musical theory or poetic technique.

While the Greeks would certainly have considered the poem an artistic creation, they saw more in it than merely great literature. For them, it contained elements of both history and religion as well. Herodotus and Thucydides both accept Homer as an historical source, to some degree, and archaeologists have found evidence of votive offerings and literal "hero-worship" at sites connected with the poem (Mycenae, for example, and at the tomb of Achilles even down to the days of Julius Caesar) that date back at least to the eighth century BC.

For centuries, Greek culture was saturated with the *Iliad.* The wealthy aristocracy were accustomed to hearing parts of the poem, or at least the Troy cycle, in private performances at dinner parties and other functions. By the time of the Golden Age in the fifth century BC, Homer was a standard part of the school curriculum and was widely quoted in later literature. At least in Athens the *Iliad* was recited, in full, every four years at the Great Panathenaia, giving everyone regular opportunities to experience the poem in performance.

In order to understand the original importance of the poem, it is vital to remember that the modern conception of "history" was first put forward by Herodotus in the middle of the fifth century BC, some three hundred years after Homer. Lacking a written historical record, the only route to immortality for the Greeks of Homer's day was either through the memory of the gods or of an artist: one could never be certain about the survival of one's family line in a world where disease, famine, and war were much more common than they are in ours. As Sarpedon says to Glaucus (XII.322-328, my translation):

O my friend, If we could get through this war, live forever and be both ageless and Immortal, I would neither myself fight in the front rank, nor command you to fight where men win glory: But now, seeing as the dooms of death stand all around in their thousands, which no mortal can either flee or escape, let us go on and grasp glory for ourselves, or yield it to others.

This is also the impetus behind the repeated invocations to the Muses scattered throughout the poem. (Especially revealing in this context is II.48485, the beginning of the Catalogue' of Ships: "Tell me now, 0 Muses who have homes on Olympus: for you are goddesses, you are everywhere, and you know all things. ")

It is harder for us to get in touch with this mind set, living as we do in an age where all sorts of records and identifications follow us around for most of our lives, and, in many cases, well afterward. Yet we do still yearn to be remembered for something more than just having "lived and moved and had our being" here for a period of time, to borrow a phrase from Scripture.

That is enough to explain why the *Iliad* was important to the Greeks, in Homer's time and afterward. Why is it Important to us, nearly three millennia later? Why do people still read this poem? Of course, because it is good literature: but what makes it not only good, but even popular?

The continued popularity of the poem is due to several factors. Chief among them are, first, the richness of its imagery, coupled with a certain sparseness of detail that allows the Imagination of the reader (or, originally, the listener) to fill in the outlines left by the poet, thus inviting "audience participation" in the work, as It were; second, the balanced treatment it gives to both sides; and lastly, the excellent portrait of the human condition offered by the protagonists, Achilles and Hector.

The chief rule in poetry, as one of my teachers once described it, is "show, don't tell"—and Homer is a master at this tactic. From the ubiquitous descriptive epithets up through the frequent similes and metaphors, to such masterful scenes as the bed of flowers put forth by the earth on Mount Ida when Hera seduces Zeus to draw his attention away from the war (XIV.345ff.), or the intricacies of Achilles' new shield which occupies the latter half of Book 18, the *Iliad* is a richly woven tapestry of descriptive detail.

But like any good poet, Homer uses images that would have been familiar to his audience (though, as with those used by Jesus in his parables, they may be less so to us today), and he uses them to sketch a scene, no more. Consider, for example, that we have almost no description of Troy itself beyond the very general formulaic expressions "well-built," and "wide-wayed," and the detail that it contains a high place where there are temples to the gods. The rest is left to our imagination to supply.

It would have been very easy, in writing about the Trojan War, to play up or favor one side over the other (as later accounts did), but Homer opts for the middle road instead. More Trojans than Achaeans are killed, but in all other respects, the poet treats both sides equally. There is nobility and savagery on both sides: even the gods are fairly

equally divided, if we hold Zeus and Ares to be fairly impartial, or at least alternatively favoring both sides. This keeps the poem from becoming a cheap bit of nationalistic propaganda, but it also says something, I think, about the nature of war itself: a supposition that is strengthened by the repeated use of peacetime imagery to describe the events of war. We are invited to consider that war afflicts both the victors and the vanquished, though in differing degrees, of course, and to remember all the good things in life that war destroys.

This balance is also found in Homer's treatment of the two protagonists, Achilles and Hector, who serve as both literal and metaphorical "bookends" to the poem. Achilles is the first person, and Hector the last, to be named in the poem, in the first and last lines, respectively. Achilles is mentioned by name 322 times, and Hector, 447 (probably because Achilles "sits it out" for the majority of the poem, while Hector continues to fight).

Achilles is better in war than Hector, but Hector clearly outshines Achilles in the activities of peace. Granted, we do not have an opportunity to see Achilles in the kind of peacetime activities like Hector's interlude with Andromache in Book 6, Achilles' main concern seems to be with war. Hector, on the other hand, is quite clearly a man of peace who had rather be doing anything but fighting: he fights because he must, and because it is expected of him (see, for example, VI. 441-45 and 526-29).

At the beginning of the poem, Achilles is godlike in more than just the name. His rage is boundless, his fury is all-consuming: we see in him all the worst characteristics of humankind, all on a par with those of the divine characters of the poem. With Hector, we see the reverse: it is the exception for him to become enraged, and if anger does come upon him, it goes as quickly as it comes. He embodies all or most of the good qualities of humanity, and the better aspects of the gods.

It is in Hector's direction that Achilles moves throughout the course of the poem. He does not reach that goal until his rage has destroyed Hector, however: it may be that Homer was again making a moral point about the destructive tendencies of war in showing us how it destroys all that is good in us.

Yet Hector is not without flaws of his own. He rounds on Polydamas and refuses to heed his (usually sound) advice on several occasions (especially XII.231ff.). What is more, he and Achilles seem to share the same major flaw—an over-developed concern about what other people think of them although it is expressed in different ways.

Achilles' need for the regard of others is explicit: he says repeatedly that he is concerned about his reputation, both while he is yet alive and in years to come after his death. He knows he will die whether or not he fights at Troy, but if he is denied his rightful honors, he seems to feel that he has lost everything, and all his efforts have been in vain. As he tells Odysseus (IX.315-22, my translation):

I do not think that I will be persuaded by Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, nor by the rest of the Danaans, Since there was no gratitude rendered for fighting on and on against

[your] enemies, Without end The fate for one who hangs back and for one who fights well is the same, the coward and the brave man are held in a single honor. The man who has done much dies Just the same as the man who has done nothing nor is there any advantage for me, now that my heart has suffered such pains, in forever holding out my life as bait in the fighting

Homer depicts Hector's need for others' respect more sketchily than Achilles', but it is there. Feeling as he does about the cause of the war (see VI.280-85 and 325ff.), surely Hector could have refused to fight in it, or prevailed on his brother (directly or indirectly, through Priam) to give Helen and the looted treasures back. Why, then, does he fight on? Homer hints at the answer twice in Book 6, at the opening of Hector's speech to Andromache (441-45), and the close of his speech to Paris (52629): he would be unable to hold up his head In Troy if he failed to fight, even in a war he felt to be unworthy.

In his portraits of Hector and Achilles, Homer shows us the best and the worst of humanity, set against the background of the war that eventually destroys them both. Neither one learns the lesson of self-respect in time to save himself: and that is the true tragedy of the *Iliad.*

Source: Michael J Spires, for *Epics for Students,* Gale Research, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Gray looks in the Iliad *for clues to Homer's attitude toward the epic hero and the Greek heroic code. Gray suggests that in the character of Achilles, Homer has created a new and different type of epic hero' one who breaks rules and promises, and even feels compassion for his enemies.*

The *Iliad* is not about the Trojan War; that war lasted ten years and the central actions of the poem occupy only a few weeks. War brutalizes men and women, wounds their bodies and minds, enslaves and kills them. This is Homer's message as he focuses on one hero, Achilleus, to demonstrate wrath's destruction of self and others. Achilleus' moral journey in the *Iliad* brings him face to face with his own humanity, leading him to a startling and essentially unheroic act of generosity toward his enemy. When he gives Priam the dead and mutilated body of Hektor, Achilleus stands for a few moments on the threshold of a different civilization, as Homer shows wrath dissolved through compassion, and human feeling overcoming the stringent heroic code of conformity.

A hero is one who willingly and eagerly confronts death, and three Greek words embody the heroic code: *aristos, arete,* and *aristeia Aristos* is being the best at whatever is called for by the situation: in wartime, killing; in peacetime, husbandry; in seamanship, steering. To be known as the best requires *aristeia*— exploits which gain for the warrior the prestige of having comrades consider him possessed of *arete,* merit. *Arete* can only be bestowed by others, not by self. In the world of the *Iliad* what the world thinks of you is far more important than what you think of yourself. Indeed, it is what you think of yourself. Fame and glory, *kleos,* can only be achieved through action. This is why the withdrawal of Achilleus from the battle is such a devastating decision: without exploits he has no identity and can only sit in his shelter singing about fame and glory instead of achieving it. Achilleus is no longer *aristos,* the best of the Achaians, when Agamemnon succeeds in depriving him of Briseis. The girl, along with tripods, spears, and other parseus tells Achilleus of Agamemnon's offer of gifts if he will return to the battle. In response, Achilleus rejects the heroic code once again. We are all going to die, he says, both the brave and the weak, so it matters little whether you do a great deal or nothing. Look at me, how I've fought harder than anyone, and how I have nothing. And what was I fighting for, why are the Argives fighting the Trojans? For Helen? What is so special about Helen?

In a dramatic rejection of the heroic code, Achilleus questions the sexual cause of the war, finding it unworthy of dying for. He has alienated himself from the war and has had time to question the standards of his society. Returning to the battle only after the death of Patroklos, Achilleus slays Hektor and then mutilates the body. That behavior is properly heroic. But then, in another brave defection from the heroic code, Achilleus takes a stance of compassion toward his enemy: he gives the body of Hektor to Priam for proper burial, a rite that will not only ensure the eternal peace of a spirit Achilleus has reason to condemn to a restless eternity, but will also give the body a continuing temporal fame in a burial marker. Achilleus ceases his erasure of the identity of Hektor.

In this first great work of Western literature, Homer shows war destroying not only cities and civilizations but the souls of men. War turns men into things, objects without pity. What difference does it make? Achilleus asks. We are all going to die. And he plunges his sword through the neck of the naked and defenseless young son of Priam.

Hektor, prince and defender of the city of Troy, becomes for the reader a more complete human being than does Achilleus. The latter deals primarily with other warriors, whereas Hektor is seen responding to his mother, Hekuba, his sister-in-law, Helen, and his wife, Andromache. Hektor is revealed through these three women, and they reveal themselves, especially by their positions when, in Book 6, Hektor returns to the city for respite from the fighting. These scenes gain for Hektor a sympathetic response from us that might otherwise have been reserved solely for Achilleus.

Hektor's first encounter is with his mother (the present Queen of Troy); this woman does not bury herself deep within the palace, but, herself a fierce warrior who can cry out that she would like to eat the liver of Achilleus raw, she comes rushing to greet her son. However, her first words to Hektor are not of comfort but of reprimand: she demands to know what he is doing behind the city walls, away from the fighting. No mother to coddle her children, she immediately commands Hektor to offer a libation of wine to Zeus for victory in battle, and only then does she suggest that Hektor may drink some of the wine himself. But only to restore his energy for battle. This stem Queen of Troy is equal to the Spartan enemies besieging the walls of her city. How different she is from Thetis; Achilleus' mother treats him like a little baby before his final battle with Hektor.

Hektor continues on to the palace of his brother, where he finds Paris and Helen (the former Queen of Sparta) in a most appropriate place, her bedroom. Paris is polishing his battle gear rather than fighting with it, and Helen is berating him, projecting the blame for the war on the gods, and referring to herself as a vile bitch. When she suggests that future poets will, as they indeed have done, make songs about her and perpetuate her fame, one wonders whether she really does resent her "misfortune." The lady protests at great length, and she responds to Hektor with much more tenderness and regard than she does to Paris. And Hektor, for all the ten years of suffering Helen has caused, treats her with the respect due a former Queen of Sparta. (To be fair to Helen, it must be remembered that women of this period had no more control over their fate than did those in the male-dominated Athenian "Golden Age.")

When Hektor goes searching for his wife (whom destiny will prevent from becoming Queen of Troy in the future), he finds her in a place that reveals her character as the wife of a prince who is slated to be the future King of Troy: she is standing on the city wall, from which she can watch the battle. There she reminds Hektor that Achilleus had killed her father as well as her seven brothers, and was responsible for the death of her mother. Hektor, then, she tells him, is both father, brother, mother, and husband to her. Indeed, when she loses Hektor to the sword of Achilleus, she loses everything in the world. Both she and Hektor know Achilleus is the greater warrior; they realize Hektor is going to die. He knows the city of Troy will perish and that Andromache and his son will be lost. Although he may at times deny it, Hektor returns to the battle knowing that he will die; this is his heroic grandeur. But, before he goes, he reaches out for his baby son,

who, not recognizing his father in plumed helmet and battle gear, cries out in fear and terror. Homer shows that war is not just glorious action bringing fame and honor to the participants; it is also a mechanism turning men into creatures from whom even their children draw back in fright. There are neither good men nor bad men in the *Iliad;* this is the humanity of Homer, who, Hellenic himself, doesn't favor Hellenes over Trojans.

Homer is given credit for anthropomorphism, for providing the gods and goddesses with human traits. He endowed them with richly human characteristics, turning Ares into the blood-thirsty young god of war, Aphrodite into the "flighty" goddess of love, Hera into a jealous and conniving wife, and Athena and Apollo into grandiose, superhuman beings. To Homer's listeners, as well as to many in the following generations, these divine gods and goddesses constituted their religious beliefs, and their participation in the two Homeric poems was real—the gods controlled and directed the events. The modern reader, however, can choose among a variety of ways of reading the poem: the gods and goddesses are actually real and present; they are external symbols for the internal emotions, desires, and drives of men and women, of their good and bad luck; or, they are both at the same time.

In the first instance the reader can suspend his disbelief in ancient Hellenic religion and enter into the spirit of the times. In the second—the symbolic reading—the reader can consider that everything that happens to the heroes in the *Iliad* could have happened without the actions of the gods, since they are personifications of the fears and aspirations of the heroes. If a hero is suddenly filled with courage, or overcomes his opponent, or has good luck, or lets out a war cry that terrifies the enemy, then a god or goddess is given the credit. Even Apollo's stunning of Patroklos, and Athena's return of a spear to Achilleus—two occurrences often cited as indisputable evidence of divine intervention—can be considered as symbols for human actions.

However, in reading imaginative literature it is possible to have the best of both worlds: the imaginative reader need not consider the two readings mutually exclusive, need not choose between the actually divine and the symbolically divine. Indeed, this dual function is expressed by Diomedes when he is speaking about Achilleus' rejection of the embassy: "He will fight when the heart in his breast urges him, and the god arouses him." The single combat between Menelaos and Paris and its aftermath illustrate this dual role of the Olympians in Homer.

After ten years of battle it has been decided to resolve the conflict through single combat between Menelaos, Helen's first husband, and Paris, Helen's second husband. (This is one of a number of incidents in the poem which seem likely to have oc curred earlier in the war.) In the first moments of the contest Menelaos throws his spear at Paris and misses the body. He then grabs Paris by the helmet, spins him around until Paris falls, and begins to drag him away by the helmet. Aphrodite, however, the protectress of Paris, breaks the chin strap holding the helmet, and Menelaos strides on, carrying only the helmet. Thus, what was accident, a worn chin strap breaking and saving Paris, is attributed to the intervention of a goddess. Paris escapes through a cloud of dust, carried off by Aphrodite and deposited gently in the bed of Helen. The goddess is given credit for spiriting Paris away from the battle, whereas it could also be

read as an act of apparent cowardice on his part. Aphrodite leads Helen to the bedroom—or perhaps she is led by her own lust. What happens next in that bed is a startling precursor of the link between sex and death in succeeding literature. Paris, turning to Helen, tells her he has never before felt such passion for her. Although this may be a formulaic statement always uttered at each instance of lovemaking in epic poetry of this period, it appears Homer is suggesting that the exciting stimuli of danger and imminent death have served to increase Paris' sexual excitement.

At this early stage of Greek civilization, the concept of *dike,* justice, is inconsistent and rudimentary. Although the *Iliad* has been read by some as a poem about divine justice—Zeus' punishment of Troy in retribution for Paris' abduction of Helen—the gods and goddesses themselves are all too humanly fickle, wrathful, inconsistent, and ambiguous in their behavior for a reading of the poem as one concerned primarily with divine justice; the poet, after all, opens by telling the listener that his poem is about the "wrath of Achilleus."

Dike in the *Iliad* consists of getting one's own fair share of war booty, food, or land—the share due a hero who risks his life. And the wrath of Achilleus is first stirred when he is deprived of part of his "fair portion," the captive Briseis. Among men, brute force determines justice: Agamemnon has more warriors than Achilleus and can thus have his way, and Achilleus can only resort to withdrawing from the war and thus causing vital losses to Agamemnon.

Divine justice seems to be based on favoritism and whim, and Judeo-Christian concepts of an allknowing God must be set aside for a Zeus who seems not always to know the future. In order to determine which of two battling warriors will die, Zeus places their death portions on the scale; the heavier one will die that day. In spite of teaching at one point that the gods listen to those who obey them, the *Iliad* shows Zeus granting some prayers and denying others. Zeus has two urns, one of evils and one of blessings, and he mingles gifts from the two urns to be distributed to an individual without regard for merit. The definition of human life seems to be that it is always a mixture of both good and bad experiences for every human being, that those experiences are not always merited, and that all must die. Heroes who forget their human nature and begin to act like deathless gods are soon reminded of their mortality.

In the Homeric poems two kinds of *dike* exist side by side; one for wartime and another for peacetime. In wartime a hero's experiences are usually the result of force or chance; in the city at peace on the shield of Achilleus, the poet presents a different concept of justice. When two men disagree, they go to arbitrators, elders of the city who listen to the men's cases as well as to the voice of the people; two talents of gold are given to the judge who speaks the best opinion. Homer portrays justice and love and dancing in the city at peace, but only destruction and death in the city at war. There is no arbitration in war, no peaceful solution, no restitution through the payment of a blood price, but only desecration by dogs and vultures. Deliberation and arbitration result in recompense for the killing of a man in the city at peace, whereas the victorious warrior on the battlefield always rejects the payment promised by the defeated warrior for his proper burial. In the *Odyssey,* Odysseus conquers the suitors through cunning rather than brute force, and

his victory over them, as we shall see, is one that rights a civic injustice. In the two Homeric poems it appears that war is a time when justice is subject to irrational, arbitrary, and hasty determinations, and peace a time for reflection and rational deliberation.

Homer seldom relents in showing the brutality of war. Within a hundred lines at the beginning of Book 5, various fighters are struck in the back by a spear that drives on through the chest; pierced by a spear through the right shoulder; struck in the right buttock by a spear that plunges in under the bone and through the bladder; struck in the back of the head by a spear that drives on through the teeth and under the tongue until the spearhead sticks out through the warrior's mouth and he falls, gripping the spear between his teeth; struck by a spear that severs the arm, which then drops bleeding to the ground.

By using similes from experiences common to everyone at that time, Homer succeeds in making battle vivid to those in his audience who may never have been to war. He likens combat to lions attacking sheep, to the fury of thunderstorms, to lightning and raging forest fires: the comparisons are always to destructive elements or to violent animals. Heroes may achieve glory and fame on the battlefield, but war itself is brutal and degrading. On the point of death, a warrior pleads pitifully for mercy he knows is not forthcoming, while the hero stands crowing and vaunting over him, spearhead pointed at the sprawled warrior's chest.

Striking illustrations of Homer's technique of using familiar comparisons occur in Book 2. He first shows the visual aspects of war: the battle is like a raging forest fire running across mountaintops whose glorious bronze light dazzles all the way up to the heavens. He next compares the sounds of battle to flying geese and cranes, to the throated sound of swans and their wings as, when they are settling, meadows echo with their clashing swarms. The sound is also like horses' hooves thundering. Next he presents the kinetic movement, the impetus of thrusting armies, comparing them to swarming insects frantically buzzing around the milk pails in a sheepfold. The leaders of the armies are compared to goatherds separating and organizing goats, to the strongest ox of the herd, to a chief bull who stands out among the cattle. A touching comparison occurs when Apollo leads the Trojans in their destruction of the ramparts of the Achaians; Homer sings that they do this as easily as a little boy at the seashore amuses himself by trampling his carefully built sand towers with his feet.

Homer frequently employs what we would call a cinematic approach in dealing with large battles, photographing from a distance, then moving to the foreground, and only at the last showing a close-up of two specific warriors. At the beginning of the battle, . . . [in] Book 4, he gives an overview of two armies surging toward each other, and the comparison is to sea surf pounding in toward the shore, driven by the wind. The cries of the oncoming army sound from a distance, and the cries are compared to those of sheep waiting to be milked and yearning for their lambs. . . . [Later] the camera moves in closer to show still-unidentified men killing and being killed, and, Homer sings, blood running along the ground like rivers rushing down from mountain streams. The sound of armies clashing is like thunder. Having provided a long view followed by a move to the

foreground, the poet is now ready for a close-up of a distinct individual: "Antilochos was first to kill a chief man of the Trojans."

One of the chief men of the Achaians is Patroklos, the dearly beloved friend of Achilleus. Patroklos is so youthful, so guileless, so saddened by the sufferings of others, that, given Achilleus' protective attitude toward him, it is necessary to remind ourselves that Patroklos is the older of the two: he has been sent along to protect *Achilleus.*

Patroklos initiates the final climactic scenes of the story. Moved by the sight of his wounded comrades, Patroklos—his name means glory to the fathers—pleads with Achilleus to allow him to reenter the fighting. Thus, clad in the armor of Achilleus, he goes forth only to be killed by Hektor. In an ironic foreshadowing of the final battle between Hektor and Achilleus, Patroklos, wearing the armor of Achilleus, is surrogate for that greater warrior. In larger terms, Achilleus experiences his own death, as well as that of his dear friend. "Die all," Achilleus shouts at a later point. And they will die all, including Achilleus, as he symbolically dies in the *Iliad* when he kills Hektor, a warrior clad in the armor of Achilleus that he stripped from Patroklos. Achilleus knows the prophecy that he is to die shortly after the death of Hektor; he thus embraces his own death when he kills Hektor, especially so since the armor makes that warrior another surrogate Achilleus. Like Patroklos, Achilleus also requires three instruments of death—in his case, Patroklos, Hektor, and finally, Paris—the actual killer.

Odysseus is a different breed of Iliadic warrior. The skill of the hero of Homer's second epic is not in brute force but in crafty strategies. Odysseus is intelligent and resourceful, descriptions not applied to other warriors. From the very beginning, in Book 2, he seems to take charge through speech and persuasion when decisions are to be made. And when Agamemnon finally gives in to the fact that he needs Achilleus, it is Odysseus who is put in charge of the embassy to persuade Achilleus to return. This embassy in Book 9 consists of the wily Odysseus, the older and respected Phoinix, and Ajax, that plain-spoken, tough, honest warrior. Each has his own approach to the unyielding Achilleus.

Odysseus speaks first, repeating the speech Agamemnon has delivered to him, promising numerous gifts to Achilleus if he will come to their aid. Odysseus cleverly omits the one part of Agamemnon's speech that would have much of fended Achilleus: Achilleus should yield to him because he is the kinglier of the two. Achilleus is unpersuaded; there is a standoff between the *metis,* cunning, of Odysseus and the *hie,* might, of Achilleus. Both *metis* and *hie* are needed to win the Trojan War. In the *Iliad* they are represented by the characters of Odysseus and Achilleus, whereas in the *Odyssey,* melded as they are into one hero, Hellenic awareness takes a sophisticated step forward in the realization that man needs to have both *metis* and *hie* to be *aristos,* the best.

Phoinix next recounts a somewhat lengthy but pointed story about a warrior, Meleagros, who also withdrew from battle and, in spite of the failure of the army without him, refused the entreaties of mother, sisters, and friends to return to the fight. He succumbed only to the pleas of his wife, Kleopatra. Phoinix is being even more subtle than he perhaps realizes. He knows Patroklos is Achilleus' dearest friend, that only

Patroklos could possibly persuade him, and he has chosen this particular story because the name Kleopatra is Patroklos in reverse, and he hopes the echo will set up some kind of emotional response in Achilleus. Kleopatra is the only one who is successful in persuading her husband, Meleagros, to put on his armor and return to the battle: Homer is here brilliantly foreshadowing Achilleus' return to the war because of Patroklos: the dead body of Patroklos becomes the ultimate persuasive force.

Finally, . . . the blunt Ajax speaks, and doesn't try to be psychologically clever or wily; he is incapable of either. He speaks directly: We're not getting anywhere with this stubborn and proud man, he is so hard that he doesn't even listen to his friends, and he is being selfish. This short, direct appeal succeeds more than the others—at least enough for Achilleus to promise to return to the battle should the Trojans fight their way up to the ships.

Achilleus is a new and different epic hero; he breaks rules, forswears sacred oaths, is moved by compassion for the enemy. The partially successful embassy to Achilleus is a stage in his development which reaches a climax in Priam's own embassy to Achilleus to plead for the mutilated body of his son.

The war and the world have come to a halt with the death of Hektor. Fol1owing the funeral games for Patroklos, Achilleus spends twelve days Without sleep, alternately rolling in the dirt, weeping over the death of Patroklos, and tossing and throwing the body of Hektor in the dust as though it were some despoiled rag doll. Even the gods are upset by his behavior: Apollo complains that Achilleus doesn't even feel helpful shame about what he is doing, and that he has destroyed pity by tying Hektor's body to horses and dragging it around the tomb of Patroklos. Thetis, Achilleus' immortal mother, descends and urges him to return the body. Although this external appearance can be interpreted as the internal promptings of Achilleus' spirit to give up his wrath, he does say that he will, for ransom, turn over the body. The emotional scene in which he offers Hektor's corpse to Priam shows that this action is for reasons other than ransom.

Within the walls of Troy, Priam prepares for his journey to Achilleus, much against the fears of Hekuba, who argues. . . that Achilleus cannot be trusted, will show no pity, and is an "eater of raw meat." Despite her warnings, Priam sets out on a strange, eerie, frightening journey past the great tomb of Dos, alongside a river, and into the darkness. Zeus sends Hermes down to guide him, and even though Hermes appears to him as a young man, Priam is so frightened that his hair stands on end. Hermes questions him, asking why he is traveling through the immortal black night. Conducting him to the barricades protecting Achilleus' dwelling, Hermes casts sleep on the sentries.

All of the components of a fearful journey to Hades are here, as Priam travels past tombs and rivers through an immortal black night in which Hermes, who guides souls to Hades, casts sleep on watchdogs. This can only be a symbolic journey to Hades to visit Achilleus, who has truly become King of the Dead. And his dwelling is no ordinary battlefield shelter, but an imposing structure worthy of tills symbolic King of Hades.

Priam enters alone, falls to the ground, clasps the knees and kisses the hands of Achilleus. Moved by the tears of the groaning father, the hero of the *Iliad* weeps at the thought of his own father's devastation had the body of Achilleus lain on a battlefield to be ravaged by wild dogs and vultures. As Priam and Achilleus shed tears of sadness and loss in recognition of their common human condition, Achilleus, in a heroic thrust through the heroic code, agrees to return the body of Hektor, slayer of his dear friend and companion Patroklos. The days of wrath thus end with a compassionate human rather than heroic gesture.

Source: Wallace Gray, "Homer: *Iliad,"* In *Homer to Joyce,* Macmillan Publishing Co., 1985, pp. 1-16

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Griffin looks at the ways in which the Diad *deals with a past mythic age in which the gods involved themselves in the lives* of *godlike, heroic humans.*

With small exceptions, the serious poetry of Greece is concerned with the myths; and the subject of Greek mythology is the heroes. These are two obvious facts. Epic dealt with the "deeds of gods and men," and so did the choral lyric, while even the personal lyric is full of mythical narratives and excursions. Tragedy, too, tended to restrict itself to the mythical period, although the *Capture* of *Miletus,* by Phrynichus, and the *Persians,* by Aeschylus, show that this was not actually a rule. The mythical period was quite a short one, two or three generations about the time of the Theban and Trojan wars; the rest of the past, however vivid or striking in the memory, was felt to be different, and inappropriate for serious poetic treatment. Hence no tragedies about Pisistratus or Periander, the colonizing period, or the Lelantine War.

There was something special about that time. Heroes, we read, were bigger and stronger than we are—a hero of Homer could pick up and throw a rock which "nowadays two of the best men in a city could barely hoist on to a waggon" —but that is not the important thing. In that time gods intervened openly in human affairs, and it is their passionate concern and personal participation which marks heroic events as possessing significance. Aeschylus, brooding upon the morality of war and conquest, writes about King Agamemnon; Euripides, brooding upon the relation of the sexes, writes about Jason and Medea. An event like the murder of a husband by his' wife, or a question like that of civil disobedience, is raised to the level at which it can be "seen" and taken seriously, when a poet writes of Clytemnestra or Antigone. In the epic, the divine presence and concern ensure that the story of Paris and Helen is a tragedy, not a mere spicy tale, and that the fall of Troy is not just one more disaster but an event of moral significance. The gods find nothing so enthralling as the spectacle of human heroism and suffering; their attention marks its importance, but equally their superiority marks its smallness in another perspective. The heroes were nearer to the gods than later men. "Born of Zeus," "nourished by Zeus," "honoured by Zeus"; these are standard epithets for Homeric kings and princes, and not less interesting are "loved by Zeus" and "god-like."

"Like Zeus in counsel," "the equal of Ares," "a man equal to the gods," "god-like," "resembling the Immortals," "divine," "with the appearance of a god," "honoured by his people like a god"—no reader of Homer needs to be told that these and other such epithets are among the commonest in the poems. Heroines, too, "have beauty from the goddesses" or "look like a goddess in face," and can be compared to Artemis or Aphrodite. A hero may be compared to several gods at once, as when Agamemnon is said to be "in eyes and head like Zeus who delights in thunder, in girdle like Ares, in chest like Poseidon." Priam says of his son Hector that "he was a god among men, and did not seem like the son of a mortal man but of a god." But these passages suggest

complications, for Agamemnon is being led to disaster by Zeus, while Hector is dead, his body in the power of his ruthless enemy. What is it to be "god-like"?

There is one great difference between gods and men. Gods are deathless and ageless, while men are mortal. When Apollo thrusts Diomede back into the limits of his mortality, he shouts, "Reflect, son of Tydeus, and fall back; do not try to be the equal of the gods. Never is the race of immortal gods on a level with earthbound men" When Achilles is misled into attacking Apollo, the god says, "Son of Peleus, why do you pursue me, when you are a mortal and I a deathless god?" He declines to fight with Poseidon "for the sake of mortal men, wretched creatures, who one day flourish and another day are gone." The heroes who are "god-like" are subject to death, and we see them die. The epithets which belong to them as heroes contrast poignantly with their human fate. Sometimes the effect seems so light that it is not certain whether it is meant to be felt at all: as when in the boxing match the only challenger for the formidable Epeius is "Euryalus, that man equal to a god" —who is promptly knocked out and helped off by his friends, "with feet dragging, spitting out thick blood, with his head lolling to one side." Similarly light is the stress in a passage like that where Briseis tells the tragic story of her life: Achilles slew her husband and destroyed "the city of divine Mynes." The attentive listener is aware of a certain faint resonance, in the first case of irony, in the second of pathos.

More positively striking, perhaps, are such passages as those where old Nestor indulges himself In reminiscences of his great exploit in youth: "Would that I were young, as I was when I slew god-like Ereuthalion," and "Ereuthalion was their champion, a man the equal of gods. . . he was the biggest and strongest man I ever slew." Ereuthalion was a Goliath-figure whom nobody but the youthful Nestor dared to face; his great stature and terrifying power are dwelt upon by his slayer, who adds "He lay sprawling, far in both directions." He was like a god—but I slew him. The emphasis becomes, I think, clearly deliberate when we read of Paris, when he has gaily challenged any Achaean champion and Menelaus has appeared to fight him, that "When Paris, beautiful as a god, saw him appear, his spirit was dashed, and he slunk back into the ranks to avoid his fate. . . . So did he slip back into the body of the haughty Trojans, Paris as beautiful as a god, in fear of Atreus' son." For the poet makes it very clear that the beauty of Paris is what characterizes him, and is at variance with his lack of heroism: Hector at once rebukes him as "Evil Paris, great in beauty, woman-mad, seducer " and adds that "Your music and your gifts from Aphrodite, your hair and your beauty, would not help you when Menelaus brought you down in the dust."

But the poet can find deeper notes of pathos and significance in this way. When "the god-like Sarpedon" is dead, his body fought over by the two armies, "then not even a discerning man would have recognized god-like Sarpedon, for he was covered with weapons and blood and dirt, from his head right down to his feet." Zeus, his father, keeps his shining eyes fixed on the struggle over the body of his son, unrecognizable in blood and dirt; that is all that remains of the handsome warrior Sarpedon, who in life was like a god. The epithet helps to bring out the human pathos, and also to underline the contrast of the human, even at its greatest and most attractive, and the really divine. When Achilles has killed Hector, he starts a paean of triumph over his body: "We have

won a great victory: we have slain the god-like Hector, whom the Trojans adored like a god in Troy." Here the epithet, and the idea of adoration by one's fellow citizens, become a triumphant taunt, in which what was largely left implicit in the boasts of Nestor is fully developed. It becomes pathetic explicitly when Hecuba laments her son: "You were my pride night and day, and you were the defender of all the men and women of Troy, who hailed you like a god. Alive, you were their great glory; but now death and fate have caught you." The greatness of his fall and her loss emerge in this touching claim.

In the light of these passages I think it is clear that we are also to see force in the epithet "godlike" when it is used in the context of Hector' s body being dishonoured by Achilles. Thus the poet tells us that after Achilles' triumphant paean "he wrought acts of humiliation on god-like Hector," piercing Ins ankles and dragging through the dust of his own country "Ins head that before was comely." The immediate juxtaposition of "god-like Hector" and "acts of humiliation" enables the poet to bring out, without sentimentality, the pathos of the greatest possible fall for a man, from god-like stature to humiliation and helplessness. I find the same technique repeatedly in the last book of the *Iliad.* "Achilles in his rage was abusing god-like Hector, and all the gods, looking on, felt pity for him." "He has tied god-like Hector to his chariot, having robbed him of his life, and is dragging him round the tomb of his friend. That is not right or good for him; we gods may grow angry with him, for all his strength; for he is abusing dumb earth in his rage" so says Apollo, and we see in the speech of the god the full name of man, at once capable of being "god-like" and also doomed to be "dumb earth." A last and rather different example: when Patroclus is called by Achilles to go on the mission which will lead to his return to battle and to his death, the poet, with unequalled economy and power, presents him in one line: "He came out, the equal of Ares; and that was the beginning of his doom." His greatness and his fragility emphasize and reflect upon each other.

The love of the gods for men is not less capable of bearing a range of emotional overtones. That great gods "loved" great kings was an age-old part of the belief of Egypt and the kingdoms of the Levant. There it was a simple and unambiguous conception. The god would be on our side and would frustrate the knavish tricks of our enemies; our king was the special favourite of mighty forces, and rebellion against him was as wicked as war against him was futile. Such an idea is to be found In Homer, as when Odysseus warns the Achaeans not to provoke their king Agamemnon: "Great is the anger of kings nourished by Zeus: their honours come from Zeus, and Zeus the Counsellor loves them." But the subject of the epic is not a simple and one-sided narration of "our" king's career of conquest, like an Assyrian or Egyptian historical inscription. Zeus honours Troy, he tells us himself, more than any other city under the starry heaven, and he loves Hector and his own son Sarpedon, on the Trojan side, no less than he loves Achilles and Patroclus, their slayers. And he loves Achilles, the opponent of Agamemnon, more than he loves the sceptred king himself, as Agamemnon is forced to learn.

Zeus loves Hector and Sarpedon, Patroclus and Achilles; but by the end of the *Iliad* three of the four are dead, and the fourth is to be slain very soon. He loves Troy, yet Troy will fall. He loves Agamemnon, but he sends a lying dream to him to deceive and defeat him. Odysseus, indeed, loved by Zeus and Athena, will survive, but that is the

exception rather than the rule in the Homeric poems, and even he reproaches his patron goddess bitterly for her failure to protect him in his sufferings. Aphrodite claims that she has "loved exceedingly" the Helen whom she forces against her will into the shameless embrace of Paris:

"Do not provoke me, wretch, lest I be angry and forsake you, and hate you even as I have exceedingly loved you; between both sides, Trojans and Achaeans, I shall devise bitter suffering for you, and you will come to a miserable end" So she spoke, and Helen, daughter of Zeus, was afraid. She followed in silence, shielding her face with her shining robe, and none of the Trojan women saw her; the goddess led the way.

That is what it might be like to be loved by a god.

Even the greatest of the sons of Zeus, Heracles himself, "who was the dearest of men to Zeus," did not for that escape suffering and disaster. Peleus, Hera tells us, was dear above all men to the immortal gods and all the gods attended his wedding to Thetis, but now he is alone and miserable, far away from his only son, who will never come home. Amphiaraus was "loved exceedingly by aegis-bearing Zeus and by Apollo, with all kinds of love; yet he did not reach the threshold of old age, but died at Thebes by reason of a woman's gifts"— betrayed to death by his wife for a bribe. The poet of the *Odyssey* tells us with inimitable objectivity that the Singer Demodocus was blind: "the Muse loved him exceedingly, and she gave him both good and evil; she robbed him of his sight, but she gave him sweet singing." The ancients believed that Homer was a blind man, and that belief adds to the poignancy of his representation of another singer, his counterpart in his epic.

Zeus is a father to men, and Athena sometimes looks after a favourite "like a mother"; Zeus is said to "care for and pity" Priam in his misery. It has often been emphasized that the gods of Homer love the strong and successful, not the weak and poor, but it is wrong to think that means a straightforward idealizing of successful power and force. The gods love great heroes, but that love does not protect them from defeat and death. The heroes who engross the attention of the poet of the *Iliad* are those who are doomed —Sarpedon, Patroclus, Hector, Achilles; they it is whom the gods love, and who will exchange their strength and brilliance for the cold and darkness of death. As they come nearer to that terrible transition, the shining eyes of Zeus are fixed on them all the more attentively; he loves them because they are doomed. They in their mortal blindness cannot know, as the god allows them temporary triumph, that in his long-term plan they must die, the victories of Hector and Patroclus, which show Zeus' love for them, are in that perspective only a stage in their planned defeat and death.

The hero who is most often compared with the gods is Achilles. But not only is he said to be "godlike," but also we observe In action how like the gods he is, and above all how like Zeus himself. He has sacked twenty-three cities in the Troad, he boasts, and he numbers "Sacker of Cities" among his formulaic titles: Zeus "has brought down the towers of many cities and will bring down many more." His quarrel with Agamemnon over his "honour" . . . is reflected in heaven when Poseidon resents the claim of Zeus to higher rank. Zeus rubs in his quelling of Hera's attempted mutiny by saying, "In the

morning, if you wish, you will see the paramount son of Cronus destroy the Argive host yet more, ox-eyed Lady Hera." In the same words Achilles tells the envoys of Agamemnon that despite all their pleas he will go home: "Tomorrow ... you will see, if you wish, and if you are Interested, my ships sailing at dawn on the Hellespont." He possesses a special cup, from which no man drinks but himself, and libations are poured to no god but Zeus. He is urged to "be like the gods," whose prepotent power does not prevent them from relenting and giving way to suppliants, but his nature is god-like in a different sense. Patroclus, who knows him better than any other man, says "You know what he is like, he is terrible. He may well blame the innocent." We remember what Iris says that Zeus will do, if his will is crossed: "He will come to Olympus to cast us into confusion; he will seize in succession on the guilty and the innocent.' The poet even creates a parallel between the bringing of the mourning figure of Thetis before the gods on Olympus and the appearance of the mourning Priam before Achilles. In both scenes the Incomer emerges from the darkness, dressed in mourning, and finds the other in the light, sitting at ease and drinking; the gods press a wine-cup into Thetis' hand; Achilles insists that Priam eat and drink with him.

But above all it is in being irresponsible and arbitrary that kings resemble gods. Achilles, we have seen, is apt to blame the innocent. The conduct to be expected of a king is viewed in the same light, and with the same apprehension, in both epics. Calchas asks In advance for a guarantee of protection before he names Agamemnon as the cause of the plague, "for a king is too powerful when he is angry with a man of lower rank: even If he digests his wrath for a time, yet he keeps his anger in his heart thereafter, to pay him out." In the same way we hear of Zeus: "if the Olympian does not bring It to pass at once, he brings it out in the end, and men pay for it dearly." Penelope describes the normal kingly behaviour, to which Odysseus was such an exception: "This is the custom of god-like kings: one man he will hate, another he will love—but Odysseus never did violence at all to any man." The gods, in their superior power, can be arbitrary. Kings, placed on the pinnacle of mortal power, try to emulate them. Agamemnon tries to treat Achilles with mere force, as he tried with the suppliant Chryses. In both cases a greater force defeats him. Achilles is asked to be like the gods and yield; he might have replied that he emulated the gods at least as well in refusing to yield to prayer. We see in the *Iliad* Zeus accept the sacrifices but reject the prayer of the Achaeans for an early victory, reject the prayer of both sides for a negotiated peace, disregard the passionate prayer of Asius, and plan disaster for the Achaeans though they pour anxious libations to him all night long; and we see Athena reject the prayers of the women of Troy. The motives which impel the gods to intervene in human affairs are personal and arbitrary, all-too-human in fact. Men try to act in the same way and come to grief, for Achilles, god-like beyond any other hero and indulging his passionate and arbitrary will in rejecting prayers which he knows to be right, causes the death of Patroclus and wishes only to die himself. While he lives, the hero is god-like and loved by the gods. In his martial rage, the high point and essence of his existence, he is like a lion, a wild boar, a storm, a river in flood, a raging forest fire, a bright star from a dark cloud; his armour blazes like the sun, his eyes flash fire, his breast is filled with irresistible fury, his limbs are light and active. The mere sight of his onset and the sound of his great battle-cry are enough to fill enemy heroes with panic. Encouraged by gods, even "thrust on by the mighty hand of Zeus," he mows down opponents like a reaper in a cornfield, like a wind scattering

the foam of the sea, like a great dolphin swallowing little fishes. Men fall and are crushed under his chariot wheels, and he drives on, his chariot rattling over them. He challenges his opponent to single combat with insults and exults over his body, so that the defeated must die with the taunts of the victor in his ears. He then aims to strip off his armour and abolish his identity by depriving him in death of burial, and leaving his corpse to be mauled by scavenging animals and birds.

"To be alive and to see the light of the sun" is in the Homeric poems a regular phrase, along with "while I have breath in my lungs and my knees are active." To die, conversely, is to "leave the light of the sun" and to "go into the dark," or to have one's knees or limbs "undone." The *Iliad* is full of detailed accounts of the moment of death of the warrior. The poet dislikes any account of men being gravely wounded but not dying; a wounded man either dies quickly or recovers and fights again. The incurable Philoctetes is left far from Troy, groaning on the island of Lemnos; the Achaean chieftains wounded in Book IT are healed and will return to battle. This works with the removal of chance as a possible cause of a hero's death (no arrow at a venture can kill a Homeric hero as Ahab or Harold were killed), and the virtual suppression of trickery and treason, and the fact that, in the poem, prisoners are no longer taken, all suppliants being killed. The effect of all this stylization is to concentrate attention as exclusively as possible on the position of the hero, face to face with his destiny at the hands of another hero: either he must kill or be killed, dying a heroic death.

When a hero dies, dark night covers him, he is seized by hateful darkness; he is robbed of his sweet life, his soul rushes forth from the wound; it goes down to Hades bewailing its fate, leaving behind its youth and strength. The doom of death covers his eyes and nostrils, his armour rings upon him, he breathes out his life in the dust, hateful fate swallows him up, he gluts the god of war with his blood. Stabbed in the back, he lies in the dust, stretching out his hands to his friends; wounded in the bladder, he crouches breathing his last, and lies stretched out on the earth like a worm. With a spear driven through his eye he collapses, arms spread wide, and his killer cuts off and brandishes his head; he lies on his back in the dust, breathing his last, while all his guts pour from his wound to the earth; he dies bellowing with pain, clutching the bloody earth, or biting the cold bronze which has severed his tongue, or wounded between the navel and the genitals, "where the wound is most painful for poor mortal men," writhing like a roped bull about the spear.

His eyes are knocked out and fall bloody before his feet in the dust; stabbed In the act of begging for his life, his liver slides out and his lap is filled with his blood; the spear is thrust into his mouth, splitting his white bones, and filling his eye sockets with blood which spouts at his mouth and nose; hit in the head, his blood and brains rush from the wound. Wounded in the arm and helpless, he awaits his slayer, seeing death before him; his prayer for life rejected, he crouches with arms spread out waiting for the death-stroke. After death his corpse may be driven over by chariots, his hands and head may be lopped off, all his enemies may surround his corpse and stab it at their leisure, his body may be thrown into the river and gnawed by fishes, or he unrecognizable in the melee. His soul goes down to a dark and comfortless world, to a shadowy and senseless existence, forever banished from the light and warmth and activity of this life.

That is what the hero faces every time he goes into battle. It is clear in Homer that the soldier would, In general, prefer not to fight. Not only do the Achaeans rush for the ships and home, the moment they see a chance, but the rank and file need constant and elaborate appeals and commands to keep them In the field, and even heroes have at times to reason themselves into a fighting mood, and at others to be rebuked by their superiors or their comrades. Women attempt to hold them back from the battlefield, as we see in Book 6, where Hecuba, Helen, and Andromache in turn try to detain Hector in the safe and comfortable women's realm, but the true hero, like Hector, must reject the temptation and go. We are not dealing with berserkers in the pages of Homer, whatever Mycenaean warriors may have been like in reality. Self-respect, respect for public opinion, the conscious determination to be a good man—these motives drive the hero to risk his life; and the crowning paradox of the hero, the idea of inevitable death itself. "If we were to be ageless and immortal once we had survived this war," says Sarpedon to Glaucus, "then I should not fight in the fore-front myself, nor should I be sending you into the battle where men win glory. But in fact countless dooms of death surround us, and no mortal man can escape or avoid them: so let us go, either to yield victory to another or to win it ourselves." If the hero were really god-like, if he were exempt, as the gods are, from age and death, then he would not be a hero at all. It is the pressure of mortality which imposes on men the compulsion to have virtues; the gods, exempt from that pressure, are, with perfect consistency, less "virtuous" than men. They do not need the supreme human virtue of courage, since even if they are wounded In battle they can be instantly cured; and since they make no sacrifice for each other, as Hector does for his wife and child and Odysseus for his, their marriages, too, seem lacking in the depth and truth of human marriage. We see no union on Olympus which has anything of the quality of those of Hector and of Odysseus.

Death is constantly present in the hero's thoughts. Hector knows that Troy will fall, and hopes only that he will be dead and buried first. Before his duel with Ajax he makes careful provision for the burial and memorial to be allotted to the man defeated. Achilles describes his life, fighting and ravaging the Troad, "constantly exposing my own life In battle," and in his speech to Lycaon he says "I too am subject to death and cruel fate: there will be a morning or an evening or a noonday, when someone will take my life in battle, hitting me With a spear or an arrow from the bow-string." No hero, not even the greatest, is spared the shameful experience of fear. Hector runs from Achilles; Ajax is put to flight, "trembling and looking at the crowd of men like a wild beast"; Achilles himself is alarmed by Agenor's spear, and later, reduced by the attack of the River Scamander to seeing a miserable death apparently unavoidable, he is told by Poseidon, "Do not tremble too much nor be afraid." We have seen that in some ways the fighting described by Homer is highly stylized, and that it omits some of the characteristic horrors of war. Yet the audience remains convinced that in fact the poet has done full Justice to its nature, that its frightfulness has not been palliated or smoothed over. That effect is achieved, in great part, because the poet insists on presenting death in its full significance as the end, unsoftened by any posthumous consolation or reward; in depicting it dispassionately and fully in all its forms; and showing that even heroes fear and hate it. The hero is granted by the poet the single privilege of dying a hero's death, not a random or undignified one, but that death haunts his thoughts in life and gives his existence at once its limitations and its definition.

It is in accordance with this overriding interest in human life, In its quality as intense and glorious yet transitory, and its position poised between the eternal brightness of heaven and the unchanging darkness of the world of the dead, that the Homeric poems are interested in death far more than they are in fighting. Homeric duels are short; heroes do not hack away at each other, exhausting all their strength and cunning, as do the heroes of Germanic epic or the knights of Malory. Recent work has emphasized the brevity and standardized character of these encounters. When a hero's time of doom has arrived, his strength is no use to him. The armour is struck from the shoulders of Patroclus by a god; Athena secretly gives back to Achilles the spear with which he has missed Hector, "and Hector, shepherd of the people, did not notice"—while as for his doomed opponent, when his death was foreshadowed by the Scales of Zeus, then "Phoebus Apollo abandoned him." In many killings the victim seems rather to wait passively for his death than to be killed fighting. The most powerful descriptions of death in battle are like that of Hector, recognizing that "the gods have called me to my death. .. now my destiny has caught me," and resolving to die fighting; Patroclus, disarmed and exposed helpless to death; Lycaon, arms outstretched, seeing death before him. Achilles, too, though the poem does not show his death, accepts and faces It; for this is what interests the poet very much, the sight of a hero succeeding in facing his own death. It is to produce and emphasize this situation that Homeric fighting is stylized as it is, when it might for instance have been developed much more as blow-by-blow accounts for the expert, interested in the technical details of fighting. The chariot race in Book 23 is treated much more in that manner. Walter Marg called the *Iliad'* 'the poem of death." I think it will be more appropriate to call it the poem of life and death: of the contrast and transition between the two. This is what the poet is concerned to emphasize, and on this he concentrates his energies and our gaze. It is part of the greatness of Achilles that he is able to contemplate and accept his own death more fully and more passionately than any other hero.

Source: Jasper Griffin, "Death and the God-Like Hero," in *Homer on Life and Death,* Clarendon Press, 1980, pp. 81-102.

Adaptations

There have been no films made that are directly based on the *Iliad.* There have been several films based wholly or in part on other aspects of the Troy legends, including Michael Cacoyannis' *The Trojan Women* in 1971 and *Iphigeneia* in 1977.

In 1985, the British Broadcasting Corporation produced a television series, starring Michael Wood, entitled *In Search* of *the Trojan War.* The companion volume to this series was published by the BBC in 1986.

Penguin Highbridge Audio put out an audiocassette version of Robert Fagles' translation of the *Iliad* in 1992 (six cassettes and a companion book). They also have a combined audio version of Fagles' translations of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.* Harper Audio brought out a cassette version of Richmond Lattimore's translation, read by Anthony Quayle (1996). Norton offers a partial rendition of the *Iliad* in its Greek original, read by Stephen Daitz (1990).

A number of films have distinctly Homeric quali ties or make some reference to Homer and/or themes from his works. In the 1975 film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail,* for example, crusading knights plot to get inside a castle by concealing themselves within a gigantic wooden rabbit they construct and leave outside the castle walls (however, they forget to hide inside their "Trojan Rabbit"). In 1993's *Sommersby,* the Richard Gere character, an Odysseus-like figure who returns home from war after many years, actually reads the *Iliad* to his son. Gere's character can also be seen as something of a Hector figure, who fights for his country (and eventually dies for it), even though he knows the cause is ultimately hopeless.

The Perseus Project on the World Wide Web, administered by the Classics Department at Tufts University, is an excellent on-line resource for studying the classics or classical texts. The URL for the project's homepage is http:// www.perseus.tufts.edu Among the things you can find on this site are the original Greek (the Oxford Classical Texts version) and the Murray translation (from the Loeb Classical Library edition) of the *Iliad,* which you can find by selecting the "Texts Greek/English" button from the main site map, and then choosing either the "Ancient Greek texts" or the "English translations of Greek texts" link and selecting Homer as the author and the *Iliad* as the text. Many of the names in the translation have hypertext links (just click on the name and It will take you to the relevant information) to further information and sources relevant to that person, place, or concept. The Perseus material is also available (Macintosh format only, but a Windows version is in the works) on CD-ROM from Yale University Press.

If you want to look for other WWW resources on the *Iliad* or other classics-related people, places, or things, a good place to start is with Alan Liu's "Voice of the Shuttle" classical studies page at http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/shuttle/classics.html. He has a broad collection of information and links to other sites relevant to the classics and classical literature.

Topics for Further Study

What role do the gods play in the *Iliad?* Compare and contrast this role with the role of the divine in a contemporary religious tradition (your own or another that interests you).

In his book *Homer: The Poet* of *the Iliad,* Mark Edwards writes: "From the very first lines, Homer will raise the origins of human suffering." What does Homer conclude about those Origins? Contrast Homer's conclusions about "the origins of human suffering" with the precepts of modern psychology or anthropology.

Consider the interaction between Glaucus and Diomedes that begins at line 119 of Book 6. Compare this story with the story of Baucis and Philemon in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book 8, 619ff.), the story of Abraham at the oak of Mamre (Genesis 18:1-8), or the reception of Telemachus by Nestor *(Odyssey,* Book 3, 31ff.) or Menelaus *(Odyssey,* Book 4, 30ff.). What can you conclude about the proper relationship between hosts and guests from these stories? Does Diomedes treat his guest-friend fairly? How does Homer comment on their interaction?

Pay careful attention to the treatment Homer gives the character of Helen. Do you think Helen really regrets leaving Menelaus, or is she making it up? How do you think Homer wanted his audience to look at Helen? What does the way in which her character is portrayed suggest to you about the role of women in Homeric society?

Consider the following passage, taken from Pericles' funeral oration for the Athenian dead in the first year of the Peloponnesian War (431-430 BC), as recorded by the historian Thucydides *(The Peloponnesian War,* Book II, chapters 42 and 43, adapted from the Crawley translation published in 1982 by the Modern Library): "For there is Justice in the claim that steadfastness in his country's battles should be as a cloak to cover a man's other Imperfections; for the good action has blotted out the bad, and his merit as a citizen more than outweighed his demerits as an individual. . . .These men, therefore, died in a manner befitting an Athenian. . . The offering of their lives in a common enterprise gained for each of these men a fame that never grows old; instead of a tomb in which to lay their bones to rest, they gained the most noble of all shrines, in which their glory is placed, to be remembered on every occasion which calls for a commemoration of that glory, whether by word or action. For heroes have the whole earth for their tomb; and in lands far from their own, where the column with its epitaph declares it, there is enshrined in every breast an unwritten record, with no tablet to preserve it except that of the heart." Do you agree with Pericles that excellence in war (or other civic service) should "make up" for a person's shortcomings? Why or not? What do you think Pericles might have said about some of the Homeric heroes such as Hector, Achilles, Patroclus, or Agamemnon?

Compare and Contrast

Late Bronze Age (the time of the Trojan War): Burial is by inhumation. The bodies of the dead are laid to rest, often with grave goods and weapons, at least among the upper classes, in dug graves, stone-walled tombs (called "cist graves"), or *tholos* tombs built in the shape of a beehive, often under a hill.

Iron Age (Homer's own time): The bodies of the dead are cremated and the remains are collected in an urn (often richly decorated), which is then buried in a specially dug pit. In the case of very important burials, a hill (or "tumulus") of earth or stone is raised above the grave, and the spot may further be marked with a column or other grave marker.

Late twentieth century: The majority of burials are inhumation, though growing numbers of people choose cremation.

Late Bronze Age: Writing is known, although mainly in cumbersome, syllabic forms such as Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Mycenaean Linear A and B scripts, or the Hittite/Akkadian cuneiform. Literacy is probably restricted to the highest levels of the aristocracy and a professional class of scribes, bureaucrats, diplomats, etc.

Iron Age: Literacy, at least in the Greek-speaking world, is only beginning to be rediscovered, using a different alphabet, where each letter represents a particular sound and not an entire syllable. Literacy is still most likely restricted to the upper classes and some professionals, like rhapsodes and some artists.

Late twentieth century: The majority of people are able to read and write well enough to conduct their own business affairs.

Late Bronze Age: Trade, although extremely difficult and time-consuming, is fairly widespread. There is some evidence to suggest, for example, that the city of Mycenae was built where it stands because the location allowed its rulers to control several important trade routes and gain revenue from taxes they imposed on such trade.

Iron Age: The scale of trade is reduced, now that the "great kings" are no longer around to secure the longer and more valuable trade routes, though goods are beginning to move more freely again.

Late twentieth century: Trade is conducted on a woldwide scale, using mass transportation and instantaneous communications-means that were simply not possible in the ancient world.

Late Bronze Age: Chariots are used as an integral part of the fighting force, often as a spearhead to break through the enemy's infantry or to shield one's own troops from those of the opponent. Infantry tactics are almost non-existent, with combat being almost exclusively of the individual, hand-to-hand variety described in *the Iliad.*

Iron Age: Chariots, which are very expensive to build and maintain, are rare. Coordinated infantry tactics (called *hoplite* tactics), where groups of men fight and defend themselves in a structured formation (which Homer alludes to a few times in the *Iliad)* are beginning to be developed.

Late twentieth century: War today is carried out almost exclusively by trained professionals of both genders, in an almost complete contrast to the ancient methods of warfare. Tactics are coordinated, usually well behind the lines, to a degree unimaginable to Homer or his contemporaries. Where warriors in the ancient world often got close enough to learn the lineage of the men they fought and killed (or were killed by), modern soldiers may go through an entire war without ever seeing an opponent face-to-face.

What Do I Read Next?

The *Odyssey* is the other epic poem credited to Homer, and was probably written some time after the *Iliad.* It describes the 10 years of Odysseus's wandering, trying to get home after the Trojan War has ended, and events in his absence from his home in Ithaca.

Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* (Mentor, 1942) is an excellent (and fun) basic introduction to Greek and Roman mythology, and includes a section on the Trojan War. Her treatment of the Norse myths is a little sketchy, but nevertheless interesting and engaging.

The *Aeneid* of Vergil (70-19 B.C.) is an epic poem in Latin that describes the wanderings of Aeneas and his group of Trojan and allied refugees following the fall of Troy. After many stops along the way (including a visit to the underworld), Aeneas and his people land in Italy and settle not far from the city that will eventually become Rome.

The *Oresteia* is a cycle of three tragic plays *(Agamemnon, Choephori (The Libation-Bearers,)* and *Eumenides)* by Aeschylus (525-456 BC), produced in Athens in 458 BC. It describes the events surrounding the homecoming of Agamemnon at the end of the Trojan War, and subsequent troubles those events cause his household.

Both Sophocles (496-406 BC) and Euripides (ca. 480-406 BC) also wrote tragedies that draw from the myths about the Trojan War. Excellent translations can be found in *The Complete Greek Tragedies,* edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore for the University of Chicago Press. Two of Sophocles' plays are relevant, and both are contained in the second volume of his plays in the Grenel Lattimore series. They are the *Ajax,* whose date is uncertain, and the *Philoctetes,* produced in 409 BC.

Euripides *wrote* at least seven plays that include characters or events from the Trojan War. Volume II of his plays in the Grene/Lattimore series contains both the *Helen* (412 BC) and the undated *Iphigeneia in Tauris.* Volume III contains *The Trojan Women* (415 BC) and two undated plays, *Andromache* and *Hecuba.* Volume IV has both the *Orestes* (408 BC) and the posthumously produced *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (405 BC, possibly containing some material by Euripides's son).

For some modern fictional treatments of the Trojan War, see Marion Zimmer Bradley's 1987 novel *Firebrand,* which tells the story from the perspective of Cassandra, Priam's ill-fated prophetic daughter; and British author Rex Warner's 1996 book *Greeks and Trojans,* based mainly on the *Iliad.*

Michael Wood's book *In Search* of *the Trojan War,* a 1986 companion volume to the 1985 BBC television series of the same name, is an excellent overview of the history (and some of the controversies and problems involved in our understanding of that history) behind the Trojan War as It has come down to us in Homer's work and elsewhere.

David A. Traill's *Schliemann* of *Troy: Treasure and Deceit* (1995), is a recent critical biography of the German businessman/archaeologist who discovered and excavated the sites of Troy, Mycenae, and Tiryns, among others.

Further Study

Biers, William R. *The Archaeology* of *Greece. An Introduction,* Cornell University Press, 1980.

A good basic introduction to Greek archaeology. Many illustrations.

Camps, William A. *An Introduction to Homer.* Oxford University Press, 1980

A solid introduction to Homer and his poetry, with ample citations from the texts of both poems.

Easterling, P. E., and Knox, B. M. W, editors, *The Cambridge History* of *Classical Literature,* Volume I, Part I, "Early Greek Poetry." Cambridge University Press, 1989

A brief, though somewhat technical, overview of the earliest Greek Writers to have survived. This volume is the first in a series by Cambridge that covers the whole history of Greek literature through the Hellenistic period and into the empire

Edwards, Mark W. *Homer. Poet* of *the Iliad* Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

A fairly technical work, but a good literary analysis.

Hammond, N. G. L. *A History* of *Greece to* 322 *BC,* third edition. Oxford University Press, 1986.

The standard history of Greece before the time of Alexander. The print is small and the text fairly dense, but it remains a worthwhile resource to consult.

Harvey, Paul, compiler. *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature.* Oxford University Press, 1984.

A very useful ready-reference tool for basic facts, names, and dates

Herodotus. *The Persian Wars,* translated by George Rawlinson; introduction by Francis R. B. Godolphin. Modern Library, 1942

Although not very recent, among the best translations of Herodotus. Although he was technically writing about the war between the Greeks and the Persians, as he is discussing the origins of the war Herodotus covers quite a lot of other ground, and offers some fascinating (and often fanciful) historical details, including several references to Homer and his works

Homer. *The Iliad,* translated by Robert Fagles; introduction and notes by Bernard Knox Viking, 1990.

One of the most recent and critically acclaimed translations of the *Iliad,* Fagles offers a rendition in blank verse that is somewhat more free than Lattimore's or Fitzgerald's translations, but without diluting the poetic character of the epic. Knox's introduction is well-written and very informative

—. *Homeri Opera,* 3d edition, volumes 1 and 2, edited by David B. Monro and Thomas W. Allen. Oxford University Press, 1920.

The standard edition of the original Greek text. —. *The Iliad* of *Homer,* translated by Richmond Lattimore University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Lattimore's translation reproduces Homer's original line structure much better than any other verse translation known to me, yet without sacrificing either the ease of reading or the flow of the translation it remains my personal favorite

—. *The Iliad,* translated by Robert Fitzgerald An chor, 1975.

A rather loose verse translation of the poem. Some readers may find Fitzgerald's direct transliteration of the Greek names confusing.

Knox, Bernard, editor *The Norton Book* of *Classical Literature.* W.W Norton, 1993.

More a book of selected passages from famous works of classical literature, it nevertheless contains some basic information about the authors and works it discusses.

Levi, Peter. *The Pelican History* of *Greek Literature.* Penguin, 1985.

A good basic reference for Greek literature generally, and one that does not require a knowledge of Greek.

Reynolds, L D., and Wilson, N. G. *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission* of *Greek and Latin Literature,* 2nd edition Oxford University *Press,* 1974

A rather technical work dealing with books and the "book trade" in antiquity, and the process by which ancient texts have come down to us from the classical world

Silk, Michael. *Homer. The Iliad* (Landmarks of World Literature series). Cambridge University Press, 1987.

A convenient, affordable, pocket-sized overview of the work and its author.

Solomon, Jon D. "In the Wake of *Cleopatra:* The Ancient World in the Cinema Since 1963," *Classical Journal,* Vol. 91, no. 2, 1996, pp 113-40.

A chronology with basic information on film and television productions which are based on or which mention works from classical antiquity.

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War,* translated by Richard Crawley; revised with an introduction by T. E Wick. Modern Library, 1982.

One of the best translations of Thucydides into English, even given its age. Very readable.

Wood, Michael *In Search* of *the Trojan War.* British Broadcasting Corporation, 1986.

The companion volume to the BBC series of the same name. Easy to read, lavishly Illustrated, and Wood is careful to note when he is engaging in speculation and what the consensus of scholarly opinion may be on any given point

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Epics for Students (EfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, EfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of EfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of EfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in EfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by EfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

EfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Epics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Epics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Epics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from EfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from EfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Epics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Epics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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